Reflections on the Pedagogy of Place in Planning and Urban Design

Mahyar Arefi & Menelaos Triantafillou

Abstract

This article revisits the concept of place in planning and urban design and proposes a conceptual framework consisting of four ontological constructs of place as a set of visual attributes, product, process, and meaning. The article discusses the theoretical underpinnings of each concept and explores the advantages of a continuum between these terms to help bridge the gap between policy planning and physical design and to move toward a meaningful urban design. The study also examines the application of the proposed constructs of place to a sophomore-planning studio, focusing on the University of Cincinnati campus, which was offered at the School of Planning during the fall quarter of 2002.

Keywords: *place; pedagogy; urban design; urban planning*

The idea behind this article originates from two observations. The first is that expressions and remarks—such as "scamscapes" (Soja 1996), "theming and stage sets" (Loukaitou-Sideris and Banerjee 1998), "the obsession with design," and "the superficial aesthetics and picturesque aspects of cities" (Inam 2002, 37)—question the current practices in urban design and place making. These critiques call for a "meaningful urban design"[1] that recognizes the importance of "rich experiences, processes and evolution of cities" (Inam 2002). The second observation is that rethinking the pedagogy of place and place making will help us pave the way toward a meaningful urban design.

To this end, there are those who emphasize the visual and physical attributes of place, whereas others use broader contexts, categories, and mechanisms in their attempts to understand place. For the latter group, the study of place is grounded in the large political-economic forces that mediate and redefine the physical setting and has less to do with matters related to design and aesthetics. These approaches, in our opinion, complement each other and require the development of appropriate teaching methods.

The objective of this article is to explore new ways of engaging planners in discussions about place and to articulate its dynamics for pedagogical purposes. Debates about the pedagogy of place have both conceptual and practical dimensions. At the conceptual level, the problem is how to define place and seek appropriate teaching and learning methods that help achieve a meaningful urban design. At the practical level, the problem is whether studio teaching should continue to emphasize skill building based on the preconceived notions of urban space rather than on the multilayered notion of place. Based on these observations, we propose that planning studios should be expected to raise awareness, increase knowledge, and, to a much lesser extent, encourage generating preconceived design solutions; second, they should focus more on place and place making than on urban spaces.

Against the backdrop of the competing arguments and overlapping interpretations of place, this article is organized in three main sections. Following a discussion of the concept of place, the linkages of place to planning, and our proposal of four ontological assumptions, the article focuses on a project that began as part of a ten-week urban design studio for sophomores enrolled in the School of Planning at the University of

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Cincinnati. Our conclusion calls for the integration of the physical and nonphysical attributes of place, and discusses the pedagogical limitations of this project.

▶ Place and Planning

The concept of place plays a central role in planning. The distribution of resources and government programs are predominantly place-oriented; people's housing choices reflect not only their financial ability to compete in the private market but also their spatial preferences. Financial decisions are imbued with the politics of place at various global, regional, and local scales and even less tangible concepts such as social justice and social capital have spatial implications and consequences. Place is not, however, confined to spatial, physical, and visual attributes alone. Through everyday experience, we transform geometric space into lived space (Tuan 1977) by including values and social and cultural meaning. Place is at times unpredictable and can be understood through engagement, not through detached observation. In short, to a great extent, planning still revolves around the notion of place. This concept has, however, been ambiguous and provides us with key challenges in the education and practice of urban design.

The debates surrounding place and planning consist of two opposing schools of thought. On one hand, some have argued that the importance of place has diminished in recent decades. The adherents of this school of thought assert that the "nonplace urban realm" (Webber 1964), and the hypermobility of capital and people have rendered place and geography increasingly irrelevant. Webber's notion of "community without propinquity" highlights this point. The second school of thought, on the other hand, argues that "place matters" (Dreier, Mollenkopf, and Swanstrom 2001; Shuman 1998). The proponents of this school believe that the ubiquity of global trends, the emergence of supranational entities, and the devolution of decisions from the federal to state and local governments simultaneously foster processes of deterritorialization and reterritorialization.

These place-based processes have different redistributive effects on people, that is, some will benefit from them at the expense of others. Although such benefits typically translate into place-based investments in urban amenities, they also illustrate a widening gap in quality of life and access to economic opportunities. Hence, notwithstanding globalization, "place matters" in that it still mirrors the economic segregation and land-based inequality (Dreier et al. 2001) or the costs and benefits associated with it.

Although misgivings about the increasing or decreasing importance of place are changing our usual ways of thinking about teaching place in planning and urban design, the conventional methods of teaching are becoming increasingly problematic for a number of reasons. We still remember Herbert Gans's (1968) putative criticism of planners' approach toward place and what he termed "the fallacy of physical determinism" more than thirty years ago. He strongly criticized physical planners for entertaining the idea that place shapes people's behavior. This critique implies that planners have typically paid too much attention to physical improvements and too little to communities' socioeconomic characteristics. He has recently renewed his past claims and has called for a shift of attention in research from a space-centered view to what he calls a "use-centered view" of the sociology of space (Gans 2002, 329).

Deterministic views about place still—to a large extent—dominate how it is being taught in planning schools. Urban design and planning studios are premised on the idea that place-based improvements could improve the fate of local communities. This does not mean that the widespread place-based foci of many planning and urban design programs have no merit. On the contrary, evidence suggests that place matters in different ways, perhaps in ways that have yet to be fully appreciated and incorporated into its pedagogy. Dreier et al. (2001) discuss different aspects of the current importance of place. People's locational choices still largely depend on considerations such as the quality of school districts or housing styles. These types of approaches to the question of place have not been thoroughly integrated with how planners teach place. Determinist views about the importance of the physical attributes of place are pervasive in the planning curricula. Although such tendencies toward place also include or even emphasize the socioeconomic and political dimensions of place, students largely think about planning solutions to urban problems in physical terms.

To critically examine the current practices in the pedagogy of place, these questions seem relevant: Should we focus more on place than on space? Can we teach how to design place (especially within the broader context of such forces as globalization, information technology, regional and local fragmentation, and the privatization of public space)? Who should do the teaching? How should the teaching of place and its design be done? What should the teaching include?

In this article, we will not address all these specific questions. Instead, we will establish a tentative conceptual framework that addresses various aspects of place in a planning studio setting. Conventional urban design techniques (i.e., the imageability analysis, figure-ground studies, models, and photomontages) rarely help capture the holistic nature of place. The proposed framework reflects our concerns with respect to communicating to students the importance of place

as a comprehensive concept, which transcends the visual and physical aspects of planning and urban design. Given these pedagogical constraints, we probed the application of this framework in an early sophomore-level studio while also exposing the students to conventional urban design skills. Hence, the scope of the article is exploratory and draws primarily from our observations in teaching the sophomore studio. We particularly are interested in what is considered important to know (Sholle 1992, 272) and how it is transferred.

► Four Ontological Constructs of the Pedagogy of Place

The increasing intractability of the conditions that result in the growth or decline of the city and the sensory nature of the urban experience call for the adoption of appropriate teaching procedures that help capture the dynamics of the urban landscape. Various urban theories tend to explain how urban renaissance and urban collapse are typically found side by side (Mollenkopf and Castells 1991). Furthermore, the emerging reinvented places (Banerjee 2001) carry the inscription of postmodern urban form that is entirely different from the modernist tradition (Dear 1996).

Studio teaching practices often use conventional notions of urban space based on rational problem-solving models to communicate with students. The rational model of pedagogy presupposes solutions to empirically tested and practice-driven cumulative knowledge. Although the tenets of modernism legitimated and universalized this approach in the pedagogy of urban design thirty years ago, during the past fifteen years or so, replicating solutions to contemporary urban problems under "similar" conditions has become increasingly problematic. We question teaching methods in which place is reduced to the conventional concept of urban space with its distinct outside and inside with definite physical boundaries.

The concept of place is less coherent, maybe borderless, and can come into existence for a short period of time by dressing the urban space with a new set of visual attributes (e.g., the new Times Square) or as a restructured space for visual consumption (e.g., Boyer's [1996] "city tableux"). Place also can be sold as a product (e.g., "design as a package") via new feasibility adaptive reuse programs or what Jerde (1999) calls "staged urban entertainment/retail environments," a "spatial economy process" that can result in space becoming "junkspace" (Koolhaas 2001). Space can also acquire a new, unintended temporal meaning with unforeseen activity given to it by its users (i.e., the new metro station that becomes the place for drug activity).

Planning education demands a comprehensive approach in studio teaching. For example, instead of stating in advance that the planning studio will focus on in-fill housing as a catalyst for revitalizing a distressed neighborhood, students could react more creatively when confronted with a "riddle" rather than a problem with preconceived and packaged solutions. As statements requiring thought to understand, riddles typically need to be first discovered and further articulated and explored as opposed to the preconceived solutions of the problem-solving approach. Hence, riddles could help students to explore the ambiguities associated with urban contexts through increased awareness about their dynamics.

Conventional studio teaching practices involve the mastery of certain hands-on skills. The transmission of such skills as delineated by an expert/authority and learning-by-doing models of teaching (Diaz Moore 2001) has a long-standing tradition in both architecture and urban planning. Based on this model, students are considered "empty vessels" (Crysler 1995) that not only accumulate knowledge from experts and authorities but also reproduce ideas in packages that are not well linked. In addition to its tangible aspects, place is characterized by other features that require the linkage of seemingly disjointed, reflective, idiosyncratic, and less tangible features. These dimensions transcend conventional teaching and learning models, and instead encourage the development of more experiential and reflective techniques of understanding and appreciation of place. As such, a whole host of teaching and learning stages of place from authority to learning by doing, coinvestigator, and mystical-master are conceivable.

The authority model of teaching typically applies to the visual attributes of place, whereas the learning-by-doing method of teaching views place as product based on a problem-solving approach. In the third model, place becomes a process that requires a thorough understanding of the knowledge of the forces that have shaped it throughout time. In this case, instructors and students become coinvestigators rather than experts having the ultimate authority in conveying knowledge to the student. Finally, the ambiguity and complexity associated with the meaning of place require various approaches including phenomenology, intuition, and self-reflection as important or even more important components of understanding place than its physical or visual attributes (see Table 1).

This section presents these four ontological constructs of place in planning and urban design, which are grounded in our teaching experience and research on the subject at the University of Cincinnati. In addition to discussing each construct, this section also discusses each construct's theoretical bases, key proponents, and relevant teaching styles. Each of the four categories includes subareas and mentions other specific approaches, and so the categories are by no means exclu-

Table 1.
An initial framework for the pedagogy of place in planning and urban design.

Ontology	*Related Concept/ School of Thought/Theory*	*Major Proponents*	*Learning Stages*	*Teaching Style*	*Pedagogy*
Place as a set of visual attributes	Image, townscape, picturesque, syntax, visual excitement, contradiction/complexity, iconography, visual layering, chaos	Lynch, Cullen, Jacobs, Issacs, Nasar, Hillier, Arnheim, Thiis-Evensen Venturi, Stern, Jerde, Boyer, Moughtin	(Noticing, representation)	(Authority)	Observation
Place as product	Architectural typology and archetypes, new urbanism, morphology, experience economy, staged sets, theme parks	Rossi, Krier, Duany, Plater-Zyberk, Caniggia, Maffei, Conzen, Castells, Banerjee/ Sideris, Jerde, Pine/Gilmore, Hillier, Boyer, Sorkin	(Reproduction of ideas, ideas not well-linked)	(Learning by doing)	Problem solving
Place as process	"Place still matters," "being and becoming," uneven development, political economy of place, social and cultural production of place	Dreier et al., Heidegger, Harvey, Soja, Lefebvre, Mayo, Pred, Hayden, Zukin, Castells, Koolhaas	(Well-integrated, ideas linked, reflective and well-structured)	(Coinvestigator)	Cumulative knowledge
Place as meaning	Sense of place, sacred and the profane, mythical and real place, "betweenness of place," phenomenology, territoriality, livability	Norberg-Shulz, Appleyard, Tuan, Relph, Arefi, Entrikin, Cox, Rapoport, Clay, Jackson, Day, Brassi, Hayden, Cosgrove, Whyte	(Reflective, restructured by learner-idiosyncratic, or creative)	(Mystical-master)	Values emphasized, phenomenological intuition, transcendental, mystical, riddle

sive of additional focus. Our intent is to begin with a more generalized framework that encompasses the main premises and practices in the pedagogy of place in planning and urban design.

Through these constructs, place can be viewed as *a set of visual attributes*, *product*, *process*, and *meaning*. The first two categories stress the physical aspects of place, whereas the latter two focus on nonphysical characteristics. Each of these modes captures a particular aspect in the pedagogy of place. For example, although place as *product* largely emphasizes a rational, problem-solving approach to place making, *meaning* considers place as a "riddle" and adds a degree of nonrational, qualitative dimension to the physical, visual, and more palpable attributes of place.

Place as a Set of Visual Attributes

Urban designers and architects have developed various ways to represent the visual attributes of place (Thiis-Evensen 1999). The representation of the spatial organization of cities has been concomitant with increasing concerns about "visual resource management" (Blair 1980) to avoid what Arnheim (1977, 17) calls "the visual, functional, and social chaos of modern life." This attitude, according to Arnheim (1977, 17), "corresponds to seeing items of the continuous environment in isolation from their context."

The visual attributes of place are often used as parts of a shared language, which enable designers to differentiate the elements of urban form, for example streets, squares, and buildings. The study of place height, width, depth, proportions, edging, and subdivisions provides a common set of principles for differentiating the visual attributes of place and, in turn, creating "visual excitement" (Arnheim 1974).

Although experts and scholars have popularized innovative techniques of representation, such techniques do not fully lend themselves to a comprehensive understanding of place. For example, Lynch (1960, 1991), Cullen (1971), and Rapoport (1982), among others, have proposed innovative techniques to capture the uniqueness of places by depicting the elements of urban form, such as edge, node, and landmarks, or by comparing and contrasting proportions, viewshed analyses, and so on. These techniques, however, fall short of capturing other less tangible or nontangible aspects of place, for example why people feel attached to certain places and not others.

Day (2002, 155) argues, "Places speak to us." He also believes in "our first impressions of the place's 'message'," because we record things by noticing them. In our first encounter of place, we typically notice "proportions, dimensions, materials and colours to where grass is trampled to mud, walls covered with posters, and cars and bikes parked" (Day 2002, 160). These are among the more palpable aspects of place, which can be grasped without special attempts at integrating different layers of analysis and "making sense" (Moon 1999) of them. Perhaps this aspect of place seems more straightforward to teach than its other, less tangible features.

The expert formal model, which focuses on the scientific approach, familiarizes the students with learning different observation skills by adhering to the legacies of the authorities in the field. Perceived in terms of a set of visual attributes and as an objective reality, the constituting elements of place can be dissected and analyzed. Based on this approach, the instructor as the scientist systematically guides students to learn how to use Lynch's (1960) five components of place[2] (i.e., edges, landmarks, nodes, districts, and paths); Cullen's (1971) elements of townscape (i.e., serial vision, a sense of enclosure, and punctuation); or Rapoport's (1982) method of identifying the community's "fixed," "semi-fixed," or "non-fixed features."

Researchers have used this method to distinguish the common traits of different communities and cultures in terms of a set of shared physical practices, for example how settlement patterns are laid out or how building facades are designed, implemented, and decorated. From the pedagogical point of view and with respect to visual approaches to place cognition and design, the following questions serve as prompts for deeper inquiry and dialog within a studio format:

- What are effective media of representation?
- Why do attributes of a place get represented in certain ways—for example, in the community's perceptions of that place?
- Can drawings adequately represent place (and its context), and what is the role of new technology (i.e., GIS) in the representation of place?
- What about the less tangible attributes of place, such as smell and touch?

These questions draw on the merits as well as limitations associated with the use of visual attributes as an appropriate mode of inquiry about place.

Place as Product

Place as product constitutes the second ontological construct of place. This approach to architecture and city planning attempts to develop archetypes as a rational method of place making. At the close of the twentieth century, a substantial portion of the tenets of postmodern architecture, New Urbanism, and urban design looked at the past to define spatial typologies that have timeless qualities and can be applied as

solutions to contemporary urban problems (Ellin 1997). Aldo Rossi, Leon Krier, and others in Europe, as well as the architects who founded the New Urbanism movement in the United States, have influenced the education and practice of urban design by incorporating observation with the notion of urban typology. Rossi (1982), for example, associates cities with a sense of "permanence" that captures the collective memory and significance of residential districts irrespective of the replacement of individual housing units throughout time. Thus, the concept of "type" finds an added importance in architectural training, because it carries the irreducible characteristics of the constituent elements of cities. Furthermore, besides an apparatus for classification, the type serves as a catalyst for invention or, as Rossi calls it, "the essence of design."[3] Rossi (1982, 41) argues as follows:

> Type is thus a constant and manifests itself with a character of necessity. . . . Ultimately, we can say that type is the very idea of architecture, that which is closest to its essence. In spite of changes, it has always imposed itself on the "feelings and reason" as the principle of architecture and of the city.

(Arche)types and "theme parks" (Sorkin 1992) exemplify familiar outcomes of the product-oriented approach to place making. It has been customary among architects and urban designers to use typology and patterns of relationships as the key to place making. Alexander's (Alexander et al. 1977) pattern language is a case in point, in which the author has developed 253 patterns as guides for designing houses, neighborhoods, and towns.

The use of traditional urban space typologies in "place making" has become a major preoccupation of planners, urban designers, and the developers. The image of a new place is marketed as the solution to many contemporary urban problems. New mixed-use developments are being promoted for their qualities to create a sense of place; place-making principles have become the key to success for public-private ventures in inner-city redevelopment projects and/or suburban town centers (Bohl 2002). One consequence of the focus on urban typologies in the education and practice of urban design is a preoccupation with a "catalog" mentality in place making. The use of computer visualization tools and telecommunications technologies makes it possible to envision the new place, to present it in virtual 3D renderings, and then to market it as a "real" place. For example, certain types of computer representation in Form Z, AutoCAD, or 3D Studio promote a catalog view of building types, spaces, and area plans with specific shapes (i.e., cubes) or with planes of greenery or outdoor rooms.

The product-oriented approach focuses on tangible aspects of place, shorter rather than longer time spans, and a specific type of clientele rather than the entire community's input. This does not mean, however, that architects' contribution to the collective place-making experience is limited to a specific clientele. In fact, to the extent that their outcomes are part of the public realm, they also continue mediating the place-making process.

Service learning[4] represents how planning educators have, in recent years, used the product orientation of place as a way to communicate with students and citizens. This approach envisions place as a final "product" with tangible attributes. By associating these attributes with specific problems, planning services are rendered to underserved communities. These services vary widely and range from housing design to community design and outreach programs (Forsyth, Lu, and McGirr 2000). Such an approach has clear teaching and learning advantages, such as familiarizing students with complexities of the real-world planning contexts, helping disadvantaged communities, group learning, and faculty involvement in local redevelopment efforts that would not be available to those communities otherwise. Some, however, have raised concerns about its downsides. These concerns involve giving "false hope about the resolution of important problems" (Forsyth et al. 2000, 237) and contend that such experiences are generally short-lived once the academic semester or quarter is over.

Place as product seeks a desired outcome and reflects a "burgeoning phenomenon" (Sideris and Banerjee 1998) that aims to transform the declining areas (i.e., downtowns) by promoting theme parks and packaged products. Conceptualizing place as product can be likened to filmmaking because it involves "theatrics" in its quest for an outcome that is "written, produced, and directed" by developers and planners. Architects and planners have for long used this method to address communities' physical problems. Times Square in New York has a distinctive character that can be described by its visual iconography. It is also, however, a product from a collaborative public-private process involving deliberate political and marketing intentions to produce the urban icon. Design principles and market-driven development have produced the existing successful place that has changed its fabric physically and perceptively.

Place as product trains students to become practitioners. A student as a practitioner believes in learning by doing. Apprenticeship, mimicking the master-practitioner relationship, and the quest for the desired result complement the conception of place as a set of visual attributes. The emphasis on the quantifiable nature of the problem is intended to help the student to plan the desired outcome by constantly comparing the existing condition to an improved situation. Such comparisons are generally made through various representation techniques. The following questions relate to the conception of place as product and provide some suggestions for its future research:

- How do we know if we have a good product through design?
- Whose decision is this: the designers, the planners, the clients, the general public, or unknown future generations?
- How can we distinguish between good- and bad-quality products? What are the measurement criteria?
- How would the market affect place as product?

Place as Process

The third aspect of the conception of place deals with the transformation of place throughout time. Places transform—grow, decline, and are often redeveloped. These processes, among others, reflect the social and political economic forces affecting place, which in turn transform its image. Zukin (2001) has vividly described the transformation of derelict industrial districts (i.e., SoHo) into cultural landscapes. Cities are increasingly adopting new revitalization strategies based on fostering cultural production rather than industrial production (Zukin 2001). What Zukin calls the "artistic modes of production" reflect the emergent urban areas as cultural hubs and "Leisure Zones," transforming the conventional perception of places that have been typically associated with crime, congestion, and dilapidated infrastructure. SoHo and the Garment District in New York exemplify successful urban transformations in the past three decades or so.

Globalization and localization also reflect a constant tension in the place-making process. The gap between these forces confuses individuals and prevents them from situating themselves in the world (Entrikin 1990, 44). Hence, as part of the local and global processes, it can be argued that places are essentially "multilayered." These layers include a wide range "from the routinized activities of every day life in an immediate built environment to the network of flows and productive forces shaping the global space economy" (Entrikin 1990, 45). These dynamics problematize the understanding of place.

Place as process is concerned with evolutionary trends. Social and physical transformation of place and attention to the political economy of place question *place as product* by examining different forces affecting place at various local, regional, and national levels. In this context, the political economy of place requires the student to act as a kind of social activist in delving into highly complex processes such as uneven development, social justice, and the social production of place. Relevant questions surrounding the urban processes include the following:

- How does the place interact with other place-shaping forces (e.g., economic, social, political, and legal)?
- How do we trace changes of place throughout time?
- Can we factor in changing qualities of place?
- How much does change have to do with planners' creativity? How much with community participation?
- How well do we understand how place is perceived and used?
- Do we presume place-making or place-shaping processes to be stable throughout time?
- How much complexity or precision is needed or desired in teaching place?

Place as Meaning

Place as meaning addresses how people perceive the built environment and impart meaning to it. Scholars have been intrigued by the ways in which people assign meaning. See, for instance, the distinction between the sacred and the profane (Cox 1968), place and placelessness (Relph 1976), mythical versus real place (Tuan 1977), authentic versus invented place (Banerjee, Forsher, and Moustafa 1996),[5] and place as "riddle" versus place as "problem."

According to Entrikin (1990, 59), "The narratives that give meaning to place contain both descriptions of experience and evaluations of this experience." Capturing these descriptions and evaluations is not easy, however, and, according to Hayden (1995, 18), "Social scientists have frequently avoided 'place' as a concept, and thus have sidetracked the sensory, aesthetic, and environmental components of the urbanized world in favor of more quantifiable research with fewer epistemological problems." Similarly, Lynch (1991, 35) has emphasized the difficulty of expressing the beliefs and values of a place in concrete terms by its inhabitants.

Viewing "place as meaning" is highly subjective. Cultural geographers, among others, have attempted to interpret the meaning of place by translating the stories of the collective experience and memory of place (Cosgrove and Daniels 1988; Jackson 1986). These narratives are often abstractions of the group experience or of those who participate in creating places directly.

Discrepancies emerge from the divergent goals of the cultural-humanistic geographer as a storyteller who seeks objectivity in his or her scientific pursuit versus one who participates in the place-making process and whose concerns are directed toward the choice of present and future actions and not necessarily truth and objectivity (Entrikin 1990). This dilemma has two main aspects. First, there is a normative dimension in that a place should say what it wants to "say." According to Day (2002, 159), "What a place *says* is more important than how it *looks*." Second, as mentioned previously, the interpretation of place depends on who narrates it. Obviously, the cultural geographer as an outsider has a different viewpoint—with different motives and goals—than the actual participant of place.

Hence, meaning is both abstract and value-laden depending on who interprets it. As Day has indicated, cultural practices, "values, expectations and associations, townscape languages, climate, traffic, and endless other factors differ markedly" from place to place.

Capturing these qualities is becoming increasingly difficult once planning educators consider including the other current complexities of the contemporary society in teaching and thinking about place. Living in an era of "alienated displacement from and longing for home and the possibility of a multicentered society that understands the reciprocal relationship between the two" (Lippard 1997, 20) exemplifies the current complexities of the contemporary society. Under such conditions, meaningful places call for "appreciation of difference; understanding of context; and ability to make critical comparative judgments on the basis of empathy and evidence" (Lippard 1997, 20).

Place as meaning is also associated with chronicling and documenting what long-term residents or users of a place have to say rather than relying on the researcher's expert opinions. This type of an approach requires the researcher to use different sociological methods of research, for example participant observation, ethnographic collaboration, or participatory research. As such, the design process is set up to understand the phenomenology of the place and to design on its behalf (Mugerauer 1994). Theoretically, it would be possible to capture an unbiased (or less biased) view of residents' opinions and emotional attachments to their places. The importance of such an approach is to realize that people give meaning to a place, and because this meaning is not easily detectable by an outsider, it would be important to gain insight into the human-place interaction by using ethnographic techniques.

Incorporating place as "meaning" into a planning studio or service learning experience is possible. For example, Korthagan (1993) suggests the use of photographs as a means of stimulating meaning. According to Korthagan, words that are emotive and evaluative can "illuminate meanings" (Moon 1999, 206) in the pictures. Another pedagogical approach that we have used in teaching a planning studio was letting the students communicate personal feelings and describe their favorite places in nonvisual terms, expressing how "the place feels." The students' imagined places—described via the personal expression of feelings—were later interpreted in visual and physical terms. The gradual discovery of the recommendation to improve place through personal exploration sets out to address place as a riddle and not as a problem requiring specific solutions to physical and visual issues. The important questions concerning the meaning of place involve the following:

- Is place a riddle or a problem to be solved?
- How do people assign meaning to place?
- How do we measure sense of place (or teach it)?
- What is the basis for saying, "That is a beautiful place"?

Table 1 illustrates our initial effort to list the four key constructs of place. The overlap between these approaches reflects the fluidity and flexibility of the contemporary notion of place as it transforms and reinvents the landscape. The framework is intended to bring together various considerations related to each ontological construct. The columns include the domain of knowledge, the theoretical proponents and the relevant learning and teaching styles associated with each concept. In the following section, we discuss how the four categories of place emerged from the students' study of the University of Cincinnati campus.

▶ The University Campus as a Social Setting

This section illustrates the multiple constructs of place in an example from a second-year undergraduate planning studio conducted during the fall quarter of 2002 at the University of Cincinnati. Using the university campus as a social site, this studio explored the physical and nonphysical interpretations of place. Figure 1 illustrates the building footprint of the campus and identifies its key landmarks. Although exhibiting diverse architectural style and character, students' pictures capture the incongruity of the campus buildings and illustrate the only remaining area that belongs to an earlier development period. Figure 2 depicts class consensus reached based on the four constructs of place and the integration of the physical and nonphysical components of place.

As outlined earlier, the transfer of the place-based knowledge of urban planning and urban design can be grounded in at least four ontological designations, which capture both the hands-on skills that emphasize the visual, product-oriented, and process-oriented aspects of place and the realm of meaning and reflection that is less tangible than its visual or physical dimensions.

We selected this project for two reasons: (1) our categories of place are grounded in one comprehensive example instead of several different ones, and (2) the students are typically intimately familiar with the university campus, prefer to hold social events there, and show concerted efforts for keeping it vital. Against such a backdrop, we aimed to explore the comprehensive perception of place by thirty planning sophomores, who did not necessarily share similar views on how to articulate its underlying characteristics. We were not much concerned with the originality of the design solutions that the

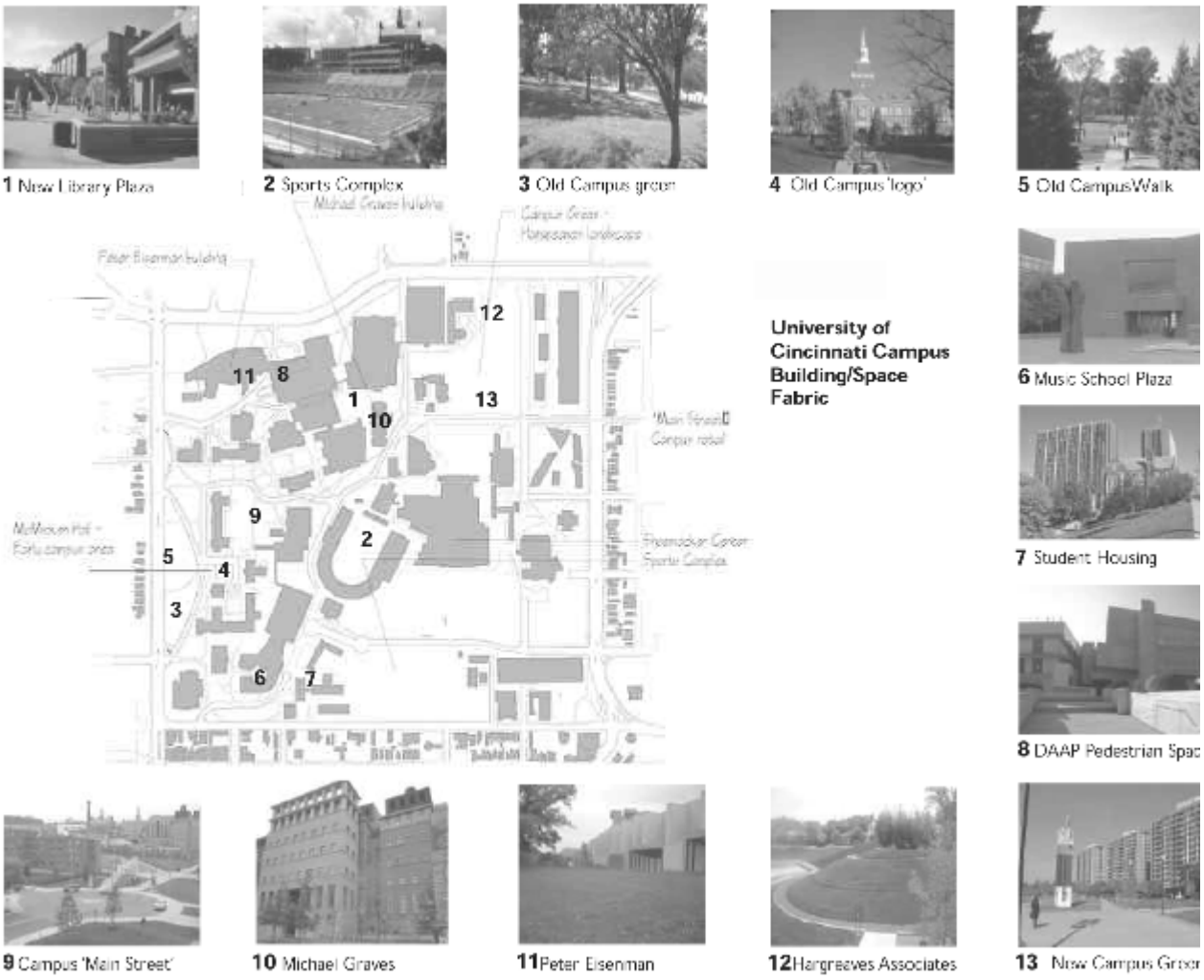

Figure 1. *University of Cincinnati campus building/space fabric.*
Source: Studio Final Report, 2002. Used with permission.

students generated as part of their studio requirements. This is not to say that their proposals lacked professional merit, because the work was particularly praised by a diverse group of referees consisting of both professional planners and faculty members from different disciplines including planning, architecture, and psychology. We do, however, acknowledge that our primary concern is to explore the ways in which the students perceived and examined place.

The students took an inventory of the campus public space and art objects, and critically examined the plan put forth for the design of the Campus Main Street project, which attempts to meet various student needs along a main corridor of campus, including "dining options, retail shops, suite-style student housing, cafes, top-of-the-line recreation facilities and modern offices for student organizations" ("Main Street" 2003). These current place-making efforts have created heated debates within the university community. Shortly after the new dean of the College of Design, Architecture, Art, and Planning (DAAP) took office, she initiated a task force with the intention of assuming a more active role in the redevelopment and design decisions for the purchase and placement of public art objects and in evaluating the future plans for the Main Street area. As part of this initiative, which received considerable positive attention by the college faculty and administration, the studio produced a document that contributed to the university's renewed commitment to transform the campus with exciting architecture and artwork.

Recognizing the importance of different aspects of place, the students embarked on examining the public life of the campus not only by celebrating "visual excitement" but also by investigating its social and cultural meaning in a broader geographical context. To accomplish these objectives, students

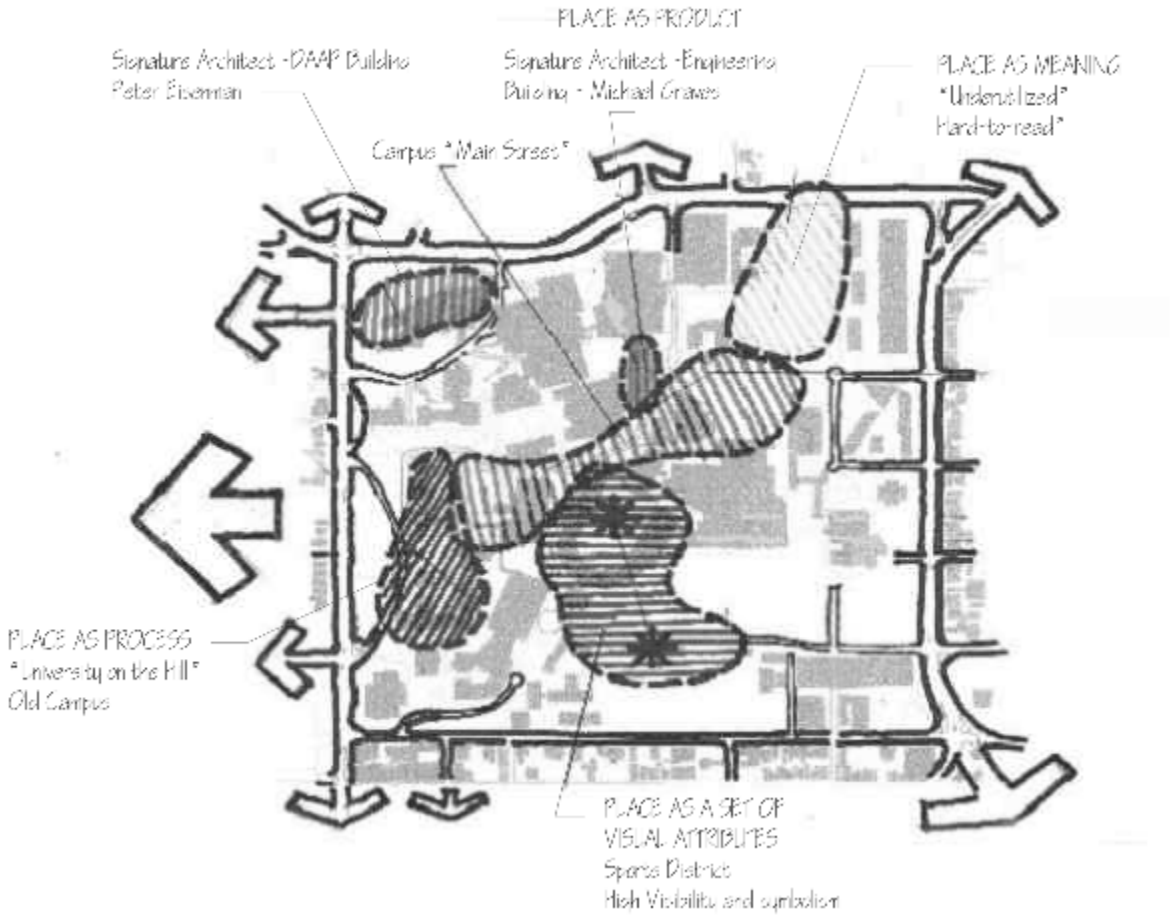

Figure 2. *Student consensus, University of Cincinnati campus place structure.*
Source: University of Cincinnati. Used with permission.

formed four subgroups for exploring different aspects of place. As a result of this group effort, they articulated the visual and nonvisual characteristics of the campus as a distinct place.

The selected jury for this project unanimously concluded that the students' analyses were interesting and thoughtful, confirmed that the students' comprehensive approach to place had merit, and helped them to solidify their personal and professional convictions. Students' familiarity with the campus helped them articulate their reactions to its weaknesses and strengths as a place. This was an important aspect of the studio, particularly knowing that the students critiqued the plan prepared by Hargreaves Associates, a renowned design firm. The students dealt with the transformation of the UC campus by examining various aspects, namely, its visual attributes, what its different subareas meant to them, and its recent development trends and processes. Based on these analyses, students ranked campus subareas as to high, medium, and low visibility.

In addition to the visibility analysis, the students conducted two other investigations concerning campus "legibility" and "permeability." They used Lynch's (1960) imageability criteria involving nodes, districts, paths, edges, and landmarks to evaluate the campus legibility and to rank it into subareas that were "easy" or "hard" to read from (both within and outside the campus). They found, for example, that parts of the campus are highly legible because the constituent elements of those areas defined a path or edge. Conversely, they ranked as low the areas where the placement of buildings hindered the visual communication to outsiders.

By using various criteria including visual and physical accessibility to place, the permeability analysis helped the students to examine the study area within a larger geographical context and explained why certain areas were rather or less inviting. They used the visual attributes of place (e.g., pavement and facade treatment, vegetation, and architectural appeal) to examine four streets bordering the campus as ways to deter-

mine how people used the major university pathways, entrances, or gateways. The students distinguished between pedestrian and auto entrances, and their recommendations included ways of enhancing them and making them more inviting with direct and unobstructed accessibility.

This exercise enabled the students to examine the visual attributes of the campus not merely in terms of aesthetics but also as an important means to other ends such as providing better access for both students and visitors, particularly during student recruitment events and campus visitation days. In addition, the students ranked the campus public space into areas of high, medium, and low permeability by using five visual attributes of place: lighting (both natural and artificial), building facades (architectural appeal and building context), landscaping elements (pavement, lighting fixtures, seating, vegetation, and the amount of green space in an area), location (the degree of building fit into the surrounding area), and artwork (the quality and quantity of art pieces). Although this exercise improved the students' visualization skills, they also realized the importance of familiarity with the nonphysical aspects of place.

Chronicling the evolution of the spatial and cultural transformation of the UC campus enriched and broadened the students' understanding of place as process. This transformation meant more to the students than merely remembering the dates when different buildings were constructed on the campus. The students explored the campus transformation and the ways it changed from a predominantly rural campus into an urban one. They noted, for example, that the 1900s-1920s marked an era in which buildings had an aura of commanding presence, known as the "University on the Hill" period characterized by an effort to position the university as an inherently American and national academy by adhering to the Jeffersonian principles of campus design and the Georgian architectural style (e.g., using symmetrical brick buildings with steep sloping roofs).

The students also noted that following a few decades of decreased campus development, the university pursued a more functional, contemporary urban setting by transforming the appearance rapidly and drastically. During the 1950s, the university acquired a more robust presence within its surrounding context due to its increased student population and the purchase of additional land for expansion. The 1970s and 1980s, however, marked the beginning of the "large building boom" (Hargreaves Associates 1991, 12), which sacrificed the integrity of the campus open space. The 1990s became an era of renewed interest in hiring world-renowned architects whose designs transformed the campus from at best a mundane architectural setting into a place that would become "an important step on a pilgrimage to the world's great architecture" (Bennett 2001, 31). The campus today portrays the emergence of place as product—a shift of emphasis from the tenets of conventional, turn-of the century Georgian and neoclassical design thinking toward theming and stage setting. The new DAAP extension designed by Peter Eisenman, the engineering building designed by Michael Graves, and the landscape designs by Hargreaves Associates exemplify the emergence of this trend in campus design.

In an attempt to explore the perception of the study area as meaning, we attempted to integrate the students' personal experiences with visual, physical (i.e., imageability), and historical analyses. Using different analyses, descriptions, and evaluations of experience, the students took an inventory of the campus (open) spaces and ranked them with respect to their functions, design, and personal perceptions. For example, they argued that the Campus Green and the Sigma Sigma Commons, which make up "UC's largest swathes of open spaces" and serve as recreation and social gathering places for various campus activities, are not "well-planned" ("Studio Final Report" 2002). They also noted that these two expansive green spaces "take up a large chunk of campus and don't give enough back for the students and faculty to enjoy." Having failed to encourage spontaneity and accommodate both formal and informal types of activities (e.g., playing Frisbee, as suggested by a number of students), these places ranked low compared to other parts of campus.

► Conclusion: Multiple Perspectives of Place

Against the backdrop of Schön's[6] (1984) "reflection-in-action" model of pedagogy, we have offered a conceptual framework that would allow us to probe the concept of place in a planning studio. The four ontological constructs of place tend to embody a comprehensive understanding of the term rather than the current emphasis on the visual character, image, and theme as the main arbiters of place making.

We sought to examine how students attempted to integrate the seemingly discrete approaches to understanding place. Students learned to synthesize four distinctively different yet complementary perspectives toward place: place as a set of visual attributes, place as product, place as process, and place as meaning. Focusing on the visual attributes, students examined the physical elements of place based on the conventional expert/authority teaching models. This experience involved various analyses including ones for legibility, imageability, per-

meability, and the proportions and edging properties, based on which the students ranked the campus areas according to their unique physical and visual attributes.

The second perspective represented the significance of place as a temporal, cultural, historical, and political phenomenon. At this stage, students chronicled the development process during each growth period as well as integrated and structured multiple layers of information (e.g., archival, historical, observation, and interviews with officials and reflection). For example, they identified the 1900s-1920s, known as "the University on the Hill" period, along with the 1950s-1960s, which marked attempts to create a more meaningful urban campus with strong ties to the surrounding neighborhoods. They interviewed the university officials and neighborhood stakeholders to understand the university-neighborhood ties in the past and in the future. The 1990s and the emergence of place as product have marked an era of global competition in teaching excellence and place making. The Colleges of Engineering designed by Michael Graves; the College of Design, Architecture, Art, and Planning by Peter Eisenman; and the UC Main Street Master Plan signify such efforts through the construction of signature architecture buildings and "theming and stage setting."

Finally, the fourth category or meaning highlighted why certain elements of place acquire a special prominence (e.g., become popular or lose their meaning). Using intuition and observation to critically examine the campus, the students questioned the architects' approach in designing its largest expanse of public space. Although recognizing the importance of design, the students noted that if "over-designed,"[7] sometimes a place could lose its intended meaning or purpose.

The application of the four constructs of place showed varying degrees of success. The young students showed a great deal of enthusiasm—even passion—in working on the visual and physical aspects of the campus. This was not the case in dealing with the more abstract concepts of process and meaning. We found that the sophomores had a difficult time with effectively distinguishing between the physical versus nonphysical aspects of place. Why did this happen? It may be that these students had little exposure to the concepts of process and meaning in their first year or that they felt that the program of study emphasized the visual and physical and they were expected to emphasize this as well. It may be that their interest in the visual and physical is what drew them to a degree in planning.

We are now beginning to think about new methods of encouraging self-discovery and exploration. It may be that it would help if this were an interdisciplinary group of students working on these projects with different students bringing different kinds of interests to the table. It may be that we have to have more emphasis on meaning. Perhaps we need to begin the studio with process and meaning (or focus on process and meaning) so that we encourage this thinking from the beginning. We also are interested in learning whether this emphasis works better in the first studios (when the students are relatively new to the field) or later studios (in which skills are already developed). We also want to look at student variation in the studio. Are there differences between female and male students, between those who are younger and older, or between minority and nonminority students?

We think the idea of four approaches to understanding place makes a significant contribution to the literature and the studio. Our four approaches can make a strong bridge to those social sciences in which there frequently is little consideration of place and can help academic planners make sure that they cover all the bases in their programs. In reviewing our work on place in a beginning/intermediate or upper-level studio, we now think we know how to better capture the imagination of sophomores, and throughout the next few years, we want to refine our use of these constructs for application in more advanced studios.

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▶ Notes

1. Purpose (rather than disciplinary divisions), relevance (i.e., driven by human values), and long-term socioeconomic development, which according to Inam (2001) characterize meaningful urban design, also constitute the crux of place making. For example, successful places not only demonstrate community values and therefore relevance, but also exhibit long-term socioeconomic viability.

2. See also Lynch's (1960) method of taking stock of a community's visual resources as "a set of journeys" or as "a set of places" in Banerjee and Southworth (1991).

3. See also Ellin's (1996, 12) discussion of Rossi and how typology helps designers to design by "analogy" through "borrowing past city and building forms without their meanings because the meanings of these forms have changed with time."

4. Combining academic coursework with activities that meet identified community needs (e.g., housing or blight), service learning can enhance student learning and academic performance, and foster civic responsibility by integrating classroom theory with practice. For more information on the various applications of service learning, see Fritz (2002).

5. The term *invented street* was first used in a study entitled "Invented Street: Public Life in Private Spaces" funded by the National Endowment for the Arts (Moustafa and Banerjee 1995). There is also a documentary video, entitled *Invented Street*, produced by Tridib Banerjee, James Forsher, and Amer Moustafa (1996).

6. According to Schön (1984, 3), the capacity for reflection or intuitive and spontaneous performance "comes into play in the

uncertain, unique, and conflict-laden situations which are so troubling to the proponents of technical rationality."

7. For a discussion on "over-design," see Laurie (1978).

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