

***Place: A Short Introduction*, by Tim Cresswell,  
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Kyonghwan Park  
Chonnam National University

The increasingly globalizing world has posited the term “place” on the center of discursive battlefield, in which different views on expanding mobility, transculturalism, and local geographic transformation are fiercely contested. On the one hand, both hyper-globalists and pessimistic defeatists promulgate the inevitability of capitalist time-space compression, subsequently insisting on the demise of place and the inauthenticity of place identities. On the other hand, such argument has effectively been counterattacked by a more realist vision of contemporary globalization, in which geographical differences at a local scale not only die away in the process of cultural homogenization but also take new significant positions at the nexus of global capital and labor flows. Despite these conflictual stances, most scholars and writers in both streams of thoughts commonly problematize place as a key container of local culture, which is incessantly threatened, intermingled, or reinvented by progressively intensive global flows of capital and labor. As such, “place is not

a specialized piece of academic terminology” although “human geography is the study of places” (p. 1).

In this context, Tim Cresswell’s *Place: A Short Introduction* extensively explores how human geographers have conceptualized and understood the notion of place by approaching various empirical evidences and concrete research examples. Mostly the author aims at associating the concept with people’s everyday life, so as to unfold the ways in which people are intricately networked with different places at multiple geographic scales. By summarizing the concept of “place” as a “meaningful location” (p.7), the author draws on John Agnew’s suggestion that place has three fundamental aspects: location (fixed objective coordinates or the notion of “where”), locale (material setting for social relations), and sense of place (subjective and emotional attachment that people have to place). Such clear definition of place is not only relevant but also conducive to understand how the term “place” is different from space and landscape, which are also key concepts in human geography.

Another trailblazing perspective on place that Tim Cresswell suggests lies in his conceptualization of place as a “way of seeing.” In other words, place can be a certain (geographic) form of epistemology. According to the author, “space is a more abstract concept than place” (p.8) and landscape is “a combined focus on the material topography of a portion of land and is an intensely visual idea” (p.10). In addition, the author argues that “place is also a way of seeing, knowing, and understanding the

world. When we look at the world as a world place, we see worlds of meaning and experience” (p.11). Through such argument, the author appropriates the concept of place for critically reviewing how contemporary postmodern views on land objectify and dehumanize people’s everyday lifeworld. In this sense, the author addresses that “this way of seeing can seem to be an act of resistance against a rationalization of the world, a way of seeing that has more space than place” (p. 11). By such association of place with resistant epistemology, Cresswell opposes to the unauthentic, placeless, and seemingly neutral exploitation of local geographic differences in places.

While the first chapter of this title extensively examines the definition, meanings, and social relevance of the problematic of “place,” the remaining four chapters provide detailed explorations and empirical explanations on place in human geography. In Chapter 2, the author explores the genealogy of place by approaching heterogeneous traditions in human geography. The first is the tradition of regional geography from the ancient Greek geographer Strabo to pioneering modern geographers, including Richard Hartshorne, Vidal de la Blache, and Carl Sauer, in which the term “place” had been used for describing regional differentiations, *genre de vie*, and cultural landscapes. The second focuses on humanistic geographers, including Yi-Fu Tuan, Anne Buttimer, David Seamon, and Edward Relph, who commonly emphasized different human experiences and types of human subjectivity. Cresswell

summarizes that these writers in general “discovered place in human geography” (p. 18) by drawing on such phenomenological notions as human “being,” lifeworld, *desein* (dwelling), and intentionality. The third tradition that Cresswell mentioned is centered on the politics of place in which radical geographers scrutinized complicated relations of power, practices, and identities in the context of global capitalism. The final view on place, which many current human geographers imbibe, is focused on poststructuralist social constructionism of place, in which such terms as representation, discourse, and positionality are appropriated for explaining “processual” notions of place.

In Chapter 3, the author approaches two thought-provoking writings on place: the first is UK feminist human geographer Doreen Massey’s monumental paper “A Global Sense of Place” published in 1991, and the second is the leading Marxist geographer David Harvey’s book chapter “From Space to Place and Back Again” in his volume *Justice, Nature, and the Geography of Difference* published in 1996. In discussing Harvey’s chapter, Cresswell regards Harvey as conceptualizing place as “a conditional form of ‘permanence’ in the flow of space and time” (p.57). In other words, because Harvey focused on the political economy of place construction under capitalism, Cresswell concludes that “the permanence of place and the mobility of capital are always in tension and places are constantly having to adapt to conditions beyond their boundaries” in Harvey’s conceptualization (p.58). On the contrary, Massey’s

paper redefines “place as an inclusive and progressive site of social life” (p.63). In this context, retreating into a romantic sense of place is reactionary. According to Cresswell, Massey thought that such reactionary vision of place should be reconfigured along with considering the impacts of globalization on place. He conclusively argues that Massey’s reconceptualization of place is characterized by “place as process,” “place as defined by the outside,” “place as site of multiple identities and histories,” and “place as defined by interactions for its uniqueness” (p.74). Despite differences in their conceptualizations, David Harvey and Doreen Massey commonly contribute to expanding and interconnecting the concept of place to a wider discipline range and social arena.

Chapter 4 engages previous discussions on place with concrete and empirical researches in human geography, which use the concept of place as an analytic tool involving people’s experiences, meanings, and material practices. The discussions include Geraldine Pratt’s and Arturo Escobar’s researches on the production of place in a mobile world; the relationship between place and memory variously exemplified by such cultural and historical geographers as Delores Hayden, Edward Casey, Andrew Charlesworth, and Gareth Hoskins; studies on geographical changes of place identities and sense of place conducted by Laura Reid, Neil Smith, and Karen Till; geographically larger-scaled researches that conceptualized regions and nations as places; and other critical researches transgressing conventional

dualism between “in place” and “out of place,” exemplified by sexuality, homelessness, and refugees. By reviewing these exemplary researches, Cresswell clearly insists that place in a contemporary world can be conceptualized as “open and a hybrid of routes rather than roots” and “a product of interconnecting flows” (p.53). His introduction was highly conducive to reflect how human geographic researches could appropriate the concept of place for socially relevant and critical studies. Although “place is not the sole property of human geographers,” Cresswell suggests that “we [geographers] are, however, in a unique position to both examine our own use of the concept and to cast a critical eye on the many ways place appears as a concept in everyday life” (p.123).

In Chapter 5, Cresswell kindly introduces key books, papers, journals and web resources on place in accordance with such themes as “place, representation, and popular culture,” “place, exclusion, and transgression,” “place and sport,” and other approaches to place, such as via ecology, planning, and architecture. The authors also provide core questions and themes for academic investigation that can be usefully employed by student projects and exercises. Undoubtedly these resources would strongly encourage both researchers and students to clearly understand what the concept of place is, what analytic advantages it contains, and how it can be relevantly problematized in human geographic researches.

As I have addressed above, Tim Cresswell’s *Place: A Short*

*Introduction* is a clear and insightful book that penetrates the ways in which the concept of place has been intellectually articulated with various researches in human geography. In relation to capitalist-led geographic processes of accumulation, especially, he successfully introduces how the concept of place can be a critical starting point from which community-level movement at “the” local scale can build more progressive and sustainable social space. In this context, Tim Cresswell, who is a professor in the Department of Geography in Royal Holloway, University of London, introduces his research agenda as “critical geosophy.” Although the book could be further developed with input from other cutting-edge social theories such as psychoanalysis, postcolonialism, and feminism, there is no doubt that it is an outstanding resource that meets both research-oriented and pedagogical purposes in the interdisciplinary field of broader locality studies. Recently, Professor Seung-Hee Shim, a passionate Korean cultural geographer teaching in Cheongju National University of Education, translated this book for Korean readers. And I firmly believe the Korean version would contribute to deepening and diversifying scholarly discussion on the notion of place in Korea, reaching far beyond the realm of human geography.

