A critical review on the problematic nature of 'place'

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Abstract

Since the 1970s, disciplines such as sociology, geography, anthropology, philosophy and architecture conceptualized the notion of 'place'. The discourse on place emerged from the concept of 'placelessness' and the perceived crisis of place, which was characterized by the sense of loss of meaning and identity of place. Despite numerous studies on the concept of place, it remained an ambiguous and contested domain for research due to the problematic nature of how the term 'place' is used and defined. This paper reviews the literature of the discourse on place to identify research gaps that would cast light on the problem of place. By reviewing a broad range of multi-disciplinary literature on placelessness and place, this paper argues for the need of a broad and critical approach on problemitizing place which emphasizes the importance uncovering the genealogy of the concept of place and its inter-relations to the manifestation of physical places through architecture and the built environment. This is particularly important with respect to the current development of new ways of theorization and production of place.

Keywords: Place, Placelessness, Non-place

1. Introduction

Since the 1970s, the discourse on place emerged as a significant terrain for research across disciplines such as sociology, anthropology, geography, philosophy and architecture, amongst others. There was a common perception that 'place' is in a state of crisis. This perception is characterised by a sense of 'placelessness', which has been commonly understood as a narrative of 'loss' (Augé 1996; Casey 1997; Jackson 1970; Kunstler 1993; Ley 1989; Norberg-Schulz 1969; Relph 1976). With the vast literature on the loss of identity and meaning in places, there emerged myriad of theoretical speculations of the concept of 'place'. These studies theorized place as social and cultural constructs (de Certeau 1984; Giddens 1990; Harvey 1990; Massey 1997); place as lived-experienced (Relph 1976; Tuan 1977; Casey 1996; Norberg-Schulz 1980; Harries 1997) and the post-structuralist views of the 'otherness' of place (Foucault 1986; Deleuze & Guattari 1987; Soja 1996). However, 'place' remained a problematic term due to its ambiguous and confused nature (Adams, Hoelsher & Till 2001; Rapoport 1994), its lack of historical understanding since the late 17th century (Casey 1997; Curry 2002), and the emphasis of theoretical speculations over the physical manifestations of place (Casey 1997). Despite these vigorous researches, the problematic nature of place is yet unresolved.

This paper identifies and discusses gaps that contribute to the problematic nature of the term 'place'. It begins by defining the notions of 'placelessness' and 'place' from a multi-disciplinary perspective. Subsequently, it reviews current research that highlights the problematic nature of place. Then, the paper discusses and raises the fundamental problems of place and argues for further research into the historical understanding of place, particularly the urgency to examining how was the term used historically and how was it related to the manifestation of architecture and the built environment.

2. Defining placelssness and the loss of place

2.1 The concept of placenessness

One key issue of place is derived from the discussion of the idea of 'placelessness', a term described as 'the weakening identity of places…, a situation where we neither create nor experience places' (Relph 1976, p. 90). In *Place and placelessness* (1976), Edward Relph, from a humanist geographer's perspective, highlighted the destruction of place in the present-day landscapes. Relph (1976, p. 141) offered two experienced geographies: 'there is a geography of places, characterized by variety and meaning, and there is a placeless geography, a labyrinth of endless similarities. … The prospects for a geography of places are uncertain, but one possibility is the inevitable spread of placelessness…'. The issue of placelessness is not a simple one: the lack of identities of place in the urban landscapes is characterized through different constructions of place within the built environment which Relph classified as placeless landscapes: (1) Other—directedness in places; (2) Uniformity and standardization in places; (3) Formlessness and lack of human scale and order in places; (4) Place destruction; and (5) Impermanence and instability of places (Relph 1976, pp. 118-119).

Extending the placeless geographies characterized by Relph, studies from other disciplines further define and discuss the notion of placelessness and the perceived loss of place. The loss of place is described by the anthropologist Marc Augé , in his book *Non Places: Introduction to an Anthropology of Supermodernity,* as 'non-places'. The main characteristic of 'supermodernity' is a condition of excess—the excess of time, excess of space and excess of individuals. Within this condition, Augé (1996) argued that places are being replaced by 'non-places' which was characterized as having no identity, no history and no urban relationships. Non-places are temporary spaces for circulation, communication and consumption, for example the freeways seen from car interiors, motorway restaurants/service/petrol stations, large supermarkets, duty-free shops and the passenger transit lounges of world airports.

The sense of loss is also characterized by the lack of connection between places. This was a central discussion in James Howard Kunstler's *Geography of Nowhere* (1993). Kunstler, a novelist and journalist, condemned the car-dependent suburbanization of America as 'geography of nowhere'.

According to Kunstler (1993, p. 10), since the mid 1900s eighty percent of everything ever built in America has been most depressing, brutal, ugly, unhealthy, and spiritually degrading—'the jive-plastic commuter tract home waste-lands, the Potemkin village shopping plazas with their vast parking lagoons, the Lego-block hotel complexes, the ''gourmet mansardic'' junk-food joints, the Orwellian office ''parks'' featuring buildings sheathed in the same reflective glass…the particle-board apartments rising up in every meadow and cornfield, the freeway loops around every big and little city with their clusters of discount merchandise marts…'.

From a philosophical stance, Edward Casey (1997) argued that the 'difference-of-place' has been lost in the Western monoculture resulting in the 'sameness-of-place'—places which are devoid of identity, character, nuance and history. With the lack of historical and geographical relations, masses of machine-like, impersonal and anonymous spaces were produced, rather than meaningful places. Similarly, Arefi Mahyar (1999) described this scenario as a 'narrative of loss', denoting both the loss of meaning and the loss of connectivity between locations and human interactions in places.

Mike Featherstone, in the paper 'Global and local cultures' (1993), associated the 'thinning out' of local culture to the effects of globalization. The sense of belonging, the common experiences and cultural forms which are associated to a place is crucial to the concept of local culture. Local culture is often taken to refer to the culture of a relatively small bounded space in which individuals who live there engage in daily, face to face relationships. The boundaries of local cultures are seen to have become more permeable and difficult to maintain, to the extent that some proclaim that 'everywhere is the same as everywhere else'. In other words, there is a lack of sense of place. As described by Gertrude Stein 'there's no there there' (cited in Featherstone 1993, p. 178); there is an apparent absence of affective and symbolic sedimentation into material fabric of the buildings and environment and the embodied practices of social life.

The loss of meaning in place is also related to the commodification of place. Places are reduced to commodities due to the influence of capitalism. The commodification increased the importance of place, but it hardly provides what many would regard as an authentic basis for place-bound identities (Harvey 1993, pp. 7-8). The aim to manufacture and restore meaning in place were reduced to ahistorical and ageographical processes. For example, in the 1980s, a spate of buildings in the form of shopping centers, malls, museums, marinas and theme parks emerged. These buildings produced a sense of disorientation, wonder and amazement in trying to simulate aspects of past traditions and futuristic as well as childhood fantasies (Featherstone 1993). This condition of place is described by Sorkin (1992) as 'ageographical variety' which are de-particularized, universal and generic. Place, like the 'new city', is no longer a site of community and human connection. Instead it became visually deceptive forms of simulation akin to a theme park (Sorkin 1992). These so called pseudo-places are defined by Relph as 'disneyfied, museumized and futurized', and 'subtopia' (Relph 1976). These forms of 'other directed' places do not reflect historical relations, and they are unrelated to its cultural or physical setting in which they are situated.

2.2 Placelessness in architecture

The conditions of placelessness and the perceived narrative of loss was also a key concern in the discipline of architecture. The concept of placelessness which emerged during the 1970s is related to what is commonly referred to as 'modernism' and 'postmodernism': the former is associated with the creations of homogenous places which reflected a sense of 'nowhere-ness', while the latter is associated to the creations of 'other-directed architecture'.

In architecture, one of the issues which contributed to the issue of placelessness is the standardized place-making strategies to manipulate places for mass society and mass culture. Relph (1976) pointed to the 'technique-orientated' planning with overriding concern for functional efficacy, objective organization and manipulative planning as the cause of placelessness. Relph's work has highlighted the dangers of architecture which does not try to preserve the particular 'identity of place'.

Placelessness is an outcome of what Relph (1976), and later Dovey (1985), described as 'inauthentic' attitude towards place-making. Authenticity means a genuine and sincere attitude towards place, while inauthentic attitude to place 'is essentially no sense of place, for it involves no awareness of the deep symbolic significances of places and no appreciation of their identities. It is merely an attitude which is socially convenient and acceptable—an uncritically accepted stereotype, an intellectual of aesthetic fashion that can be adopted without real involvement' (Relph 1976, p. 90).

The notion of 'for whom do we design for' impact on the conditions of place. Jencks (1973) stressed that the rise of big metropolitan areas inhabited by what the sociologist labeled as the 'organization man'. The character of the 'orgman' was 'other-directed' rather than 'inner-directed'; he was the man in the 'Grey Flannel Suit', a member of 'The Lonely Crowd'. Similarly, Tuan (1977, p. 183) reflected on the effects of a mobile world on the experience of the figure of the business man as a symbol of this new world, pointing towards a superficial sense of place: 'He moves around so much that places for him tend to lose their special character. What are his significant places?' Jencks (1973, p. 302) described that in architecture, there was an 'inexorable movement from symbolically rich systems to impoverished ones, from cultural roles to functional ones, or just simply from place to space'.

Similarly, urban and social geographer David Ley (1989), in his paper 'Modernism, postmodernism, and the struggle for place', traced the relations of 'space' and 'place' to the discourse of modernity through an examination of the struggle over the definition and meaning of the built environment. Industrialization, urbanization and the world wars transformed the perception of architecture during the early 20th century to a dream of utilitarian forms 'fit for purpose'. Janik & Tumin (cited in Ley 1989, p. 47) stated: 'The meaning … is the use'. The establishment of 'utilitarian rationalism' as the spirit of modern movement, which removed the intangible, the metaphysical, even culture in favour for an objective and functional logic, a spirit of sincerity, purity in relation to modern age has 'created space, and not place, masses and not meaning' (Ley 1989, p. 47).

The struggle over meaning is also characterized by a wish to abandon historic styles via explorations of 'reality' unrestricted by the prior 'dogmas' and ideas of tradition—the freedom from form: forms of human interaction, dress, language, art or religion (Norberg-Schulz 1969). In response to that, diverse possibilities for architecture were explored as evidenced through movements such as the Arts and Craft, Art Nouveau, Deutsche Werkbund and the Vienna Secessionist.

The utilitarian technique was not the only approach to place-making that constituted the lack of meaning within the built environment. The counter-current rejection of autonomous places resulted from the standardized and function-oriented place-making techniques advocated the rediscovery of cultural symbols in the built environment and the reconstitution of meaning. In architecture, the postmodern period during the late 1960s was a re-enactment of the built environment described by architectural journalist and critic Charles Jencks (1981) as the 'return to place' movement. This movement was a critique against the notion of a single truth, and celebrates diversity and multiplicity, what he framed as 'postmodern' architecture. In this way, Jencks (1973) framed what would become the foundational conditions of postmodern architecture—a 'pluralistic language', an anti-deterministic, self-sustaining 'multivalence'. He made use the notion of multivalence, which he defined as the presence of multi-level of meanings and different levels of experience, as one of the ways of establishing place and giving strong identity to form.

With postmodernism, there was a re-emergence of the vernacular, traditions and history through representational forms which sought to manufacture and restore geographical and historical meanings. Against this there were several postmodern themes and solutions to restore the nature of meaning within the built environment.

One of the solutions to creating places was by re-enacting the past through revival of vernacular forms. Robert Venturi (1966, p. 18) in *Complexity and Contradiction in architecture* argued that architects should 'be guided not by habit but by a conscious sense of the past' because this is the

source of meaning and ambiguity which makes the built environments interesting and attractive. There was also an alternative trend of postmodern architecture described by Relph (1987) as 'contextual postmodernism' where new buildings replicate the main features of the surrounding structures without reproducing them exactly. The idea of historicism is also illustrated in Rowe & Koetter's 'Collage City'. The idea of 'Collage City' is based on the 'bricolage' of many different utopias which is used as a technique to knit the past and the present together (Rowe & Koetter 1966). The Swiss Canton, New England village, Dome of the Rock, and Place Vendome are characteristic examples. Rowe & Koetter (1966) pulled them together in one eclectic composition and thus has everything both ways, with a beneficent vengeance. They summarized that these mini-perfections allow 'the enjoyment of utopian poetics without our being obliged to suffer the embarrassment of utopian politics'. It became fashionable and acceptable for architects to borrow consciously from past styles. This possibility toward architecture was a 'cafeteria approach' (Relph 1987) and 'cut and paste' (Sorkin 1992) that permits visual quotations, metaphors, receptive to historical references and subtle references to famous buildings. With familiarity, architecture distanced itself from the most fundamental realities.

Another postmodern theme was the self-conscious populists who abandon the elitism of modern design theory in favor of the neon commercial highway. Architecture is merged with simulations; it is 'signatory' and responds to advertising rather than real needs and traditions of inhabitants. Venturi, Scott Brown & Izenour (1977) argued that architecture should 'learn from Las Vegas', it should develop a playful and pastiche style of 'roadside eclecticism'. This is described by Jackson (1970) as 'other-directed architecture'. This approach was a bold solution, theoretically and architecturally, in its dialogue with everyday popular culture but it invites criticism of kitsch (tasteless-ness).

The production of architecture, more specifically the postmodern places, was largely dominated by the consumer culture. As Jameson (1991) described, postmodern architecture staged itself as a kind of aesthetic populism, which has become integrated into commodity production generally. For Jameson (1983), capitalism and consumerism resulted in an emergence of pastiche and playful vernacular and representational forms in architecture. Jameson (1991) illustrated in his analysis of the Westin Bonaventure Hotel that the conception of postmodern space is 'something like a mutation in built space itself'—a new kind of space in which the perceptual habit of human has yet to comprehend.

According to Vattimo (1998), the representation of place was a familiar postmodern struggle in which originality is not systematically favored over imitation. Lyotard (1984) argued that postmodernity is a condition where the unitary logic of modernity proceeds from singularity to plurality. In this, the plurality of places was emphasized. The plurality and ambiguity of postmodern design flattened architectural spaces, reducing the three dimensional architectural space into texts and images. Space is interpreted bi-dimensionally through drawings and words (Bandini 1993). According to Jameson (1991), buildings seemed to have been designed for photography. Lefebvre stressed (cited in Leach 1996), architectural spaces are bounded to graphical representations such as plans, elevations, sections and linear perspectives. The emphasis of appearances over meanings propagated questions of representations. Architecture merely became a representation of designers' meanings or others' meanings due to commercialization of places (Rapoport 1982). Thus places became a representation of 'they' rather than 'us' (Relph 1976).

In concluding the future of late 20th century architecture, Relph (1987) suggested that that the urban landscapes were a chiaroscuro of increasingly flashing, unrelated and pointless patches, a postmodern, late-modern monotony-in-variety. Ley (1989, p. 53) argued that there is limited indication that postmodern design has yet arrived at fully convincing cultural solutions: postmodern spaces are 'symbols in a cultural void'. While postmodernism is a convincing critique for a sensitive approach towards place-making, its design solution and manifestation as yet fall short. The emphasis of façade appearance raised the possibility that solutions are primarily aesthetic. If postmodernism is part of the magic of signs, part of the cultural codes of consumption, then postmodern theory has befallen the fate

of other cultural symbols where a rebellious threat has been converted into a marketable commodity (Ley 1989). The struggle in design is another example of the fragile status of contemporary postmodernism; as Habermas (1983) acknowledged, 'the chance for this today are not very good'. Hence the struggle of postmodernism which advocated the rediscovery of cultural symbols and the reconstitution of meaning is problematic.

Although postmodern ideas sought to resolve issues of autonomous places, Benko (1997, p. 17) suggested: 'More than anything else, I see postmodern ideas offering a sociologically superficial interpretation of changes which, in fact, call for analyses that are close to, not radically different from, those employed for industrial society. In my view, the phenomena emphasized by postmodern though are more akin to crisis situations than to lasting innovations'. This argument was reinforced by Jencks in the recent edition of *The New Paradigm in Architecture: The Language of Postmodernism* (2002). He recognized that although postmodernism in architecture responded to the autonomous ways of creating place 'none of these have cleared up the problems'.

3 Defining place
3.1 Place as social and cultural constructs
Many studies of place during the 1990s sought to resolve the issue of 'placelessness' and the perceived 'loss' of place based on the idea of place as a process of spatial and cultural practice, and the emphasis on the role of people in the construction of place. Such conceptions of place emphasized the in-betweenness of places wherein space and place (de Certeau 1984; Giddens 1990; Harvey 1990), global and local (Featherstone 1993; Massey 1997), and particular and universal senses of place (Entrikin 1990) become relational and inextricably intertwined. Also, research on place argued for notions of change and process in which place is constituted through reiterative social practice. The following paragraphs provide further details on the conceptions of place stated above.

One of the emphases in the conception of place as social and cultural constructs is on the relations between space and place. Michel de Certeau, in *The Practice of Everyday Life* (1984, pp. 115-130), conceptualized the notion of place as a process of spatial practice on an everyday basis. de Certeau (1984) made distinction between space (*espace*) and place (*lieu*), and suggested that these concepts move back and forth. He defined that a place is the order in accord with which elements are distributed in relationships of coexistence; a place is an instantaneous configuration of positions; it implies an indication of stability (*being–there*). On the other hand, a space exists when one takes into consideration vectors of direction, velocities, and time variables. Thus space is composed of intersections of mobile elements, actuated by the ensemble of movements deployed within it (*operations or movement*). In short, 'space is a practiced place' (Certeau 1984, p. 117).

In *The Conditions of Postmodernity,* David Harvey (1989) argued that place is a social construct. He persuaded that 'space' and 'place' matter to capitalism, and inter-place competition is a necessary feature of capitalist modes of production. He investigated the social construction of place to demonstrate the underlying unity and interrelations of social and political aspects of place by triangulating both Marxism and Heideggarian philosophies, and argued that both theories cannot be reduced to simple oppositions of space (modernism) and place (postmodernism). He insisted that 'place' is not a 'container' which awaits to be filled, and proposed the 'Lefebvreian matrix' as a way to think through how places are constructed and experienced as material artifacts, how they are represented in discourse, and how they are used in turn as a representation of the contemporary culture. The 'Lefebvreian matrix' expressed materiality, representation and imagination as coherent and dialectic, insisting that it is only in the social practices of daily life that the ultimate significance of all forms of activities is registered. Thus the role of place in social life should prove helpful in this regard (Harvey 1993, p.5). However, Harvey's work has been criticized to have excluded other ways of knowing the world, in that his grand theoretical abstractions are insufficiently grounded in the messy complexities of the real world (Castree, cited in Kitchin, Hubbard & Valentine 2004).

Arguing from a different viewpoint to Harvey, Doreen Massey (1997) defied the insecurity of places and argued that sense of place may not necessarily be reactionary. The significance of Massey's work was not simply from its content and methodology, but, more fundamentally, from its insistence on the importance of conceptualizing space and place (Callard, cited in Kitchin, Hubbard & Valentine 2004, p. 219). Massey (1997) argued for an 'extrovert', 'progressive' and 'global sense of place'. Massey's numerous publications whose argument that the social and the spatial need to be conceptualized together stretches back to the early 1970s, have greatly affected the directions that human geography and those disciplines close to it (particularly *sociology* and cultural studies) have taken. Such conception of place emphasized the notions of change and process in which place is constituted through reiterative social practice. Massey's (1997) argument on place stressed the following: places are not static; they are processes (of social relations and interactions); place as defined by the outside (places are not about boundaries); place as site of multiple identities; and a uniqueness of place defined by its interactions.

Besides the relations between space and place, the conception of place emphasized the issues of global and local identities, which culminated in the global and local tension in the construction of place. British sociologist, Anthony Giddens (1990), related the notion of place to the global framings of everyday life through his concept of 'ontological security'. Like Harvey, Giddens discussed the relation between 'ontological security' which relates closely to the phenomenology of home and the globalization of daily life. For Giddens (1990, p. 92) the importance of local place relations rests in the necessity for ontological security—'the confidence that most human beings have in the continuity of their self-identity and the constancy of the surrounding social and materials environments of action'— within the global and local tension: 'The reassurance of the familiar , so important to a sense of ontological security, is coupled with the realization that what is comfortable and nearby is actually an expression of distant events and was 'placed into' the local environment rather than forming any organic development within it. The local shopping mall is a milieu in which a sense of ease and security is cultivated…Yet everyone who shops there is aware that most of the shops are chain stores' (Giddens 1990, p. 140-1).

The dissolution exists in the global framings of the everyday life. This, according to Giddens, gave the experience of place as increasingly phantasmagoric: that is to say, locales are thoroughly penetrated by and shaped in terms of social influences quite distant from them, wherein the global and the local, the familiar and strange become inextricably intertwined (Giddens 1990, p. 108).

Similar global and local tension is emphasized by Mike Featherstone (1993), in his paper 'Global and local cultures', who argued that global and local cultures are relational. According to Featherstone (1993, p. 169), although one of the effects of the process of globalization make us aware that the world itself is a locality, a singular place, one paradoxical consequence of this process is not to produce homogeneity, but to familiarize us with greater diversity, the increasing awareness of local cultures. Featherstone (1993) argued that the global and local relationship vary historically, hence the postmodern condition is best not understood as a condition which is final and eternal, but as a process. He suggested that the mediation between local and global capital creates new possibilities for place, and a careful analysis of their everyday work and liminal practice is necessary. This form of spatial uncertainly was defined by Sharon Zukin (1991) as 'liminal spaces', which are places that are transitional and short-lived because they resist specific identity, which in turn prevent their integration with places. Zukin has particularly explored this merging of urban landscape and the vernacular. She pointed out that increasingly we sense there is a difference in how we organize what we see in the city. The city is being predominantly reconstructed as a centre for postmodern consumption—what Zukin (1991) called a 'dreamscape of visual consumption'. Featherstone (1994) argued that the social relations of key players who exert power over place become contentious and problematic.

Besides the conception of place as social and cultural constructs, the notion of place was also defined in relation to the role of people in the construction of place. For example, Entrikin (1991)

argued that the significance of place in modern life is associated with the fact that as actors, we are always situated in place and period, and that the contexts of our actions contribute to our sense of identity and thus our sense of centeredness. He argued that the discourse concerning places suffers from a tension between the particular and the universal: the subjective and objective vantage points of place—what he labels as 'the betweenness of place' (Entrikin 1991). The former is a centered view in which we are all part of place and period, and the latter is a decentred view in which we seek to transcend the here and now. This gap between de-centered universalism and a centered particularism forms part of the perceived crisis of modernity.

The role of people in the construction of space also suggests that place is constructed through reiterative social and cultural process. In the renewed interest in studies of place and culture, Gupta and Ferguson (1997) stressed that associations of place, people and culture are social and historical processes that should be studied and not be taken for granted. Focus is given to social processes of place-making, conceived as embodied practices that shape identities. In anthropology, Low (1994) defined place as 'culturally meaningful space'. Low (1994) argued that although there is enough literature dealing with the problem of place, yet symbolic and experiential aspects are not given due attention, and suggested ethnography as a concept to discuss the notion of place attachment because it provides an opportunity to study the intersection of subjective and objective realities of place and focus upon the tension created.

In human geography, Allan Pred (1984) and Nigel Thrift (2000) argued against place being fixed. The sense of process and the relations of structure and human agency in place is the subject of Pred's (1984) paper, 'Place as Historically Contingent Process'. This approach is informed by structuration theory—a set of ideas primarily associated with sociologist Anthony Giddens. Thrift (2000) leaned on the works of Merleau-Ponty in terms of the role of the body in places. He argued that place needs to be understood as an embodied relationship with the world. Places are constructed by people moving in space and in this sense are never finished but constantly being reinvented.

3.2 The 'otherness' of place

Simultaneous to the understanding of place as social and cultural constructs, the conceptual thinking of place was also challenged by theories which emphasized the 'otherness' of place. The contributions of Michel Foucault to the development of history and space was in one of his epochal observations first made in a 1967 lecture entitled 'Des Espaces Authres' or 'Of other spaces'. In this lecture, Foucault outlined his notion of 'heterotopias' as the characteristic spaces of the modern world, superseding the hierarchic 'ensemble of places' of the Middle Ages and the enveloping 'space of emplacement' opened up by Galileo into an early modern, infinitely unfolding, 'space of extension' and measurement. Foucault's (1986) notion of 'heterotopias' (of other spaces) referred to real places (the lived and socially produced places) located outside of all ordinary places within a given society. 'We do not live inside a void that could be colored with diverse shades of light, we live inside a set of relations that delineates sites which are irreducible to one another and absolutely not superimposable on one another' (Foucault 1986, p. 23).

Foucault's heterotopias are constituted in every society but take quite varied forms and changes over time. Although Foucault's heterotopias opened up other possibilities, the use of the term place in his work was vague because it did not offer a clear distinction between space and place (Casey 1997). Approaching from a similar post-structuralist perspective, French theorists Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari (1987), in The '1227: Treatise on Nomadology:- the War Machine', argued for a crucial 'other' place belonging to the nomads who exist on the fringe of settled civilizations through the concepts of 'smooth' and 'striated' space. The contrast they made between 'smooth' and 'striated' space provided a way for re-thinking place. 'Striated space' is subjected to linear striation by precise paths and is projected from a fixed point of view thereby allowing for the perfect reproduction of its contents indifferently *anywhere*. 'Smooth space', by contrast, is heterogeneous and filled with

'qualitative multiplicities': 'It is a space of contact, of small tactile or manual actions of contact, rather than a visual space like Euclid's striated space' (1987, p. 371). 'Smooth space' provides room for vagabondage, for wandering and drifting between regions instead of moving straight ahead between fixed points—the nomad space. The nomad is neither here nor there, 'he or she is here/there and there/here, in between here and there, this place and that place, distributed between them, as it were'. For the nomad, 'the absolute has become the local, precisely because place is not delimited' (Delueze & Guattari 1980, p. 494).

The conception of place was also defined by Edward Soja's notion of 'thirdspace' which described and inscribed in journeys to 'real-and-imaged' places', an alternative place set in-between materiality and ideas of place (Soja 1996, p. 11). Soja's earlier conception of place emphasized on the role of culture in the making of spaces of domination and resistance where the meaning of place is fundamental in the making and remaking of identity and difference. Writing later, Soja (1996) focused on 'thirdspace', a critical strategy in which he tried to open up spatial imaginaries to ways of thinking and acting politically that responds to all binaries, to any attempt to confine thought and political action to only two alternatives, by injecting an-Other set of choices. 'Simultaneously real and imagined, the exploration of 'thirdspace' can be described and inscribed in journeys to 'real-and-imaged' places' (Soja 1996, p. 11), an alternative place set in-between materiality and ideas of place. Kitchin, Hubbard & Valentine (2004) argued that despite the breadth and length of the analysis of 'thirdspace', it remains a slippery term.

3.3 Place as 'lived-experience'

Phenomenology is one form of philosophy that attempts to give direct description of first-person experience in a lived-world drawing from writings of Martin Heidegger. This approach sought to restore the meaning and identity of place through lived-experience. While earlier writings focused on the poetic imaginations of place (Bachelard 1964) and the rooted-ness and authenticity of place (Relph 1976; Tuan 1977), recent writings on place as lived-experience emphasized bodily mobility (Seamon & Mugerauer 1985; Tuan 1999) and the interrelations between space and place (Casey 1996; Sack 1997). They do not deny that specific places are the products of society and culture, but they insist that place adds up to a lot more than that.

Gaston Bachelard (1964) offered a first refacing of place—a psychical place—through the poetic imaginations of place concerned with how poetic images are situated in the human psyche. This is, for Bachelard, a region of research called 'topoanalysis' which focuses on the placial properties of certain images, for instance the house: 'On whatever horizon we examine it, the house image would appear to have become the topography of our intimate being' (Bachelard, cited in Casey 1997, p. 288). The house, for Bachelard, is a world. It is a place-world, a world of place. Despite the new vistas opened up by the psychical poetics of imagined place, thinkers about place have shared a growing conviction that an approach such as Bachelard's neglected certain concrete aspects of place that call out for close attention in the second half of the 20th century.

Works during the 1970s extended the concept of place from a phenomenological perspective. Similar to the conception of place from a sociological point of view, the studies from the phenomenological perspective also emphasized the relations between space and place. Edward Relph's approach to place was more explicit in its philosophical commitments to phenomenology. In *Place and Placelessness*, Relph (1976) built on the everyday places which reveal the deeper significance of place to human being. He argued that space is amorphous, while place is imbued with feelings. By developing the ideas of Heidegger, Relph (1976) sought to escape the simplistic notion of place as location, and argued from a deeper sense of place by human existence and experience. He related the identity of place as something intangible—spirit of place, sense of place or genius of place ('genius loci')—which refers to character or personality of a particular place.

Similar to Relph (1976), Yi-Fu Tuan's writings *Topophilia* (1974) and *Space and Place* (1977) developed the idea of place based on human perceptions and experiences. Tuan (1977) defined place through a comparison with space: he developed a sense of space as an open arena of action and movement while place is about stopping and pausing and becoming involved. Space is amenable to abstraction, place is amenable to discussions of things.

Robert David Sack, a more recent proponent of the importance of place claimed that '[in geography] the truly important factor is place and its relationship to space'. In his work, *Homo Geographicus* or *The Geographical Self* (1997), the notion of the geographical self is emphasized through the 'concept of spatiality. It explored the power of place by developing a relational framework that consists of four major overlapping factors—forces (consisting of nature, meaning and social relation), perspectives, place and space, and self—and maps out their dynamic and complex interconnections. Sack stressed that 'places become thinned and merge with space' (1997, p. 138). This condition is a matter of what has been called 'glocalization' (globalization and localization) whereby a given locale is linked indifferently to every (or any) other place in global space (Casey 2001). Place implies space; each home is a place in space; space is a property of the natural world that can be experienced (Sack 1997). From the perspective of experience, place differs from space in terms of familiarity and time, defined by human agency.

Besides defining place in relation to space, the studies on place from a phenomenological standpoint also stressed the importance of bodily movements within place. David Seamon (1985), using phenomenology as a method of inquiry in the human sciences and environment-behavior research, discussed the notion of place and the environment based on bodily movements. He invoked the metaphor of dance to describe the sequence of preconscious acts which he calls the body-ballet. The metaphor of 'place-ballet' suggested that places are performed on a daily basis through people living their everyday life. Cresswell (2004) suggested that one thing that appears to be missing from Seamon's work is any sense of the constraints on people's performances that we would all recognize in places. The constraint and freedom became subjects of geographers influenced by structuration theory, like works of Giddens and Pred.

At the turn of the 21st century, Tuan's work Cosmos and Hearth (1999) emphasized the process of moving of bodies between places. He suggested that the skeptical cosmopolite, for all of his or her unsettledness, does at least learn about the larger world and may become more sensitive to cultural diversity than does the person who refuses to leave the hearth. The hearth stands for locality, community and ethnicity; and cosmos for space, society, or world, and cosmopolitanism. 'At basic (reflex) level, the shift is surprising if only because the life-path of a human being moves naturally from "home" to "world", from "hearth" to "cosmos"' (Tuan 1999, p. 1).

Although the conception of place advanced the knowledge of place in different ways, research issues on the conception of place lies in the way it is defined. The definition and understanding of place remained confusing and lacked specificity. This is because the concept of place mediated between notions of space and place, global and local, and universal and particular. Also, place is a fluid term due to its conception as a reiterative process of social and cultural practices. In addition, the emphasis of the discourse on place emphasized theoretical speculations over the manifestations of such theories.

3.4 Theorizing 'place' in architecture

Simultaneous to other fields of study, the discipline of architecture contributed to a body of literature that relates to the discourse on place.

3.4.1 Place-making through pattern language

Alongside the tendency of postmodern approaches which informed 'other-directed architecture' that resulted in issues of placelessness, there was a concern with the fundamental nature of architecture

and an attempt to interpret every design process as an expression of entire complex of human existence via the 'pattern language'. In the 1970s, a group of architects, planners, academics and artists led by Christopher Alexander published a two-volume work, Volume I, *The Timeless Way of Building* and Volume 2, *A Pattern Language,* providing alternative ways of creating places. The former provided the theory and instruction for the use of the language, and the latter offered a language for building and planning. One central proposition of *A Pattern Language* was that places—such as towns, streets, and buildings—are viewed as orders of connecting relationships, a network, rather than as mere objects in space. Kunstler (1993), Sime (1986), and Seamon (1998) amongst others have cited and discussed the pattern language as a method for designing good places. Alexander (1977) argued that every society which is alive and whole, will have its own unique and distinct pattern language; and further, that every individual in such a society will have a unique language, shared in part, but which as a totality is unique to the mind of the person who has it. 'Each solution is stated in such a way that it gives the essential field of relationships needed to solve the problem, but in a very general and abstract way—so that you can solve the problem yourself, in your own way, by adapting it to your preferences, and the local conditions at the place where you are making it' (Alexander, Ishikawa & Silverstein 1977, p. xiii). This approach attempts to restore the loss of connectivity between locations and human interactions in places. Despite being a method of design which emphasize on relationships within society, it gives little attention to the physical object manifested by this language.

3.4.2 Place as lived-experience: A phenomenological perspective

By the 1970s there emerged a body of literature on 'place' that were primarily based on the phenomenological views of Martin Heidegger (1971, p. 156): 'Only if we are capable of dwelling, only then can we build'. In his essay of 1954, 'Building, Dwelling, Thinking,' Heidegger provided a critical account of placelessness. Against the abstract concept of space as spatial extension, Heidegger replaced it with 'Raum' and argued for a phenomenological essence of place which depends upon clearly defined nature of its boundary, hence linking building to forms of being and dwelling. It followed that the phenomenology of place entails a primacy of lived-space over abstract conceptions of geometric space.

The phenomenological approach in architecture emphasized the importance of restoring 'identity' in the conception of place. Christian Norberg-Schulz (1969, pp. 223-224) accorded the importance of place in architecture as the search for 'meaningful architecture': 'as work of art architecture concretizes higher objects or 'values'…Only when space becomes *a system of meaningful places*, does it become alive to us'. Drawing on Heidegger, concerns of identity of place in architecture is expressed in Norberg-Schulz's (1980) studies of 'genius loci'. A place is a qualitative, total phenomenon, which cannot be reduced to any one of its properties such as spatial relations—it is a totality of 'things' (Norberg Schulz 1980).

Echoing the idea of dwelling, Joseph Rykwert (1981) stressed the need to return to re-thinking architecture's primal role in place-making. He critiqued that, in the approach to architecture, the quantitative outweighs the qualitative methodologies where concerns of 'how to build' prevailed 'why we build', indicating a split between doing and thinking, building and dwelling (Rykwert 1981). In later writings, Rykwert (2000) described that the identity of place should be a tangible representation of that intangible society that lives within it, 'experienced' through architecture.

Similarly, Karsten Harries (1997) argued that the ethical function of architecture is the basis for dwelling, not an ornamented and pragmatic shelter. 'When all places account the same, we no longer place ourselves and become displaced person…' (Harries 1997, p. 172). Harries contrasted the conception of space which is objective, homogenous and neutral with respect to value, and the concept of place which is regional, heterogeneous, and freighted with values.

Perez-Gomez (1998) criticized the 'genius loci' as 'an empty postmodern simulation, incapable of revelatory depth' in contemporary cities. According to Proshansky, Fabian & Kaminoff (1983), the unconscious state of phenomenological perspective implied that the full meaning of place cannot be

communicated. The critique of phenomenological approaches to place resulted in alternative ways of theorizing place such as localization and regionalism.

3.4.3 Localization and Regionalism

The skepticism of such metaphysical concepts in the practice of architecture informed the need for a bounded domain in creating architecture of resistance. In critiquing postmodern architecture as 'scenography', Kenneth Frampton (1985, p. 20) argued that a *distanciation* of architecture from both the optimization of technology and its repression into nostalgic historicism has the capacity 'to cultivate a resistant, identity-giving culture'. Appropriating the term 'critical regionalism' coined by Alex Tzonis and Liliane Lefaivre (1981), the fundamental strategy is to resist the impact of universal civilization with elements derived directly from the peculiarities of a particular place and complement the normative visual experience by readdressing the tactile range of human experience (Frampton 1985). Frampton critiqued modernists' places and suggested for a more dialectical relation with nature such as quality of the local light, or in a tectonic derived from a peculiar structural mode, or in the topography of a given site than the more abstract, formal traditions of architecture. In Frampton's words: 'The bulldozing of an irregular topography into a flat site is clearly a technocratic gesture which aspires to a condition of absolute *placelessness*, whereas the terracing of the same site to receive the stepped form of a building is an engagement in the act of 'cultivating' the site' (Frampton 1985, p. 26).

While Frampton's approach was theoretical, Chris Abel described the global and local dichotomy at a practical level. In several essays and papers written in 1980s, Abel identified a theme in architecture which involved the dual processes of globalization and localization. Focusing on Asian urban models, Abel's discussion is centered on concepts of architectural regionalism and ecologically based models of development. In his essay 'Localization versus Globalization', he examined Asian cities, Singapore and Kuala Lumpur as prime examples of study: he argued for hybridization between the local and the global as a mode of expression for place. Abel (2000, p. 191) suggested that Asian cities have been exposed to 'layer upon later of imported cultures which had been localized over time'. The global has been taken for granted and it has been paradoxical: 'In order to extend their markets into new areas, multinational corporations are increasingly finding it necessary to adapt themselves to the particular demands of local consumers, which means bending their activities and production links to suit local cultures as well as other regional factors' (Abel 2000, p. 194). For example, the architecture of Malaysia and Singapore that is now surfacing is a hybrid mix of imported and local elements.

3.4.4 Place/Power

Kim Dovey (1985) in his paper 'The quest for authenticity and the replication of environmental meaning' argued that both fakery and the quest for authenticity are symptoms of a deep crisis in modern person-environment relationships and of a mistaken belief that authenticity can be achieved through the manipulation of form. The fundamental paradox and the source of greatest ambiguity is not that inauthenticity emerges out of our very attempts to resurrect meanings of places, but results in their very destruction. The manifestation of inauthenticity in the form of fakery is a replication of meaning to find and recreate a lost authenticity, a lost world of meaning. In the rapid urban development, the re-construction of local places cannot be prevented.

In Dovey's later essay 'Place/Power' (1995) and his book *Framing Places* (1999), he offered an alternative approach to 'place' by linking place to ideology. He argued that the key problem to phenomenological approach in architecture is that it can involve a kind of 'false consciousness' to the pronounced effect of social structure and ideology of that experience: the intangibility of 'sense of place' has been widely exploited by the market to legitimize design projects as a cover for place destruction. Jameson (cited in Leach 1996) raised similar issues on instability of place by describing that it tends to slip into ideological power. Without an understanding of the ideological context, design

and research can serve to legitimate and reproduce prevailing structures of power, creating a meaningless world. Dovey (1999) argued for a framework which integrates place experience and its ideological critique, and which rejects implication of an autonomous object in the way places are framed. He argued that the built environment mediates, constructs and reproduces power relations: 'Because architecture and urban design involve transformations in the ways we frame life, because design is the imagination and production of the future, the field cannot claim autonomy from politics of social change' (1999, p. 1), in which the task of the architect is to engage with the processes of legitimization (1999, p. 194).

4.0 Existing literature on the problematic nature of 'place'

Existing research argued that the notion of place is problematic due the lack of specificity, and the confused and complex nature of how it is used. This section identifies and discusses the different views on the problematic nature of place.

4.1 Multiple meanings and uses of the term 'place'

Few studies argued that place is problematic due to its paradoxical nature as objects and social meanings or relationships (Adams, Hoelscher & Till 2001; Rapoport 1994). Place is primarily used to draw attention to certain aspects of locales, spaces, and settings—to people's affective, psychological, social, cultural and behavioral relationships with the setting. Yet the term place commonly refers both to a space, setting or physical elements and to people's evaluations of it, reactions to it, and relationships with it. The problem of place as both a product (which is tangible) and meaning (which is intangible) made it difficult to understand the term 'place'.

The confusion of the usage of the term 'place' formed the core discussion in Amos Rapoport's (1994) essay 'A Critical Look at the Concept of Place'. With a review of literature on 'place', Rapoport (1994) dismissed the term place and argued that it should not be used. He argued that the definitions of 'place', 'space' and 'placelessness' are complex and flawed: in the attempt to distinguish these terms ended up in its very own contradiction and confusion. '[The] use of 'place' is so problematical that the term should be given up. Further, I have argued that the term is not needed: by relying on already existing more useful concepts and frameworks one can do all the necessary research (contemporary, historical and cross-cultural)' (Rapoport 1994, p. 40). Despite the flawed usage of place, Rapoport (1994) proposed an alternative conceptual framework for understanding cultural landscapes. He argued that having defined the system of settings and the group (at a given time) one can then study the interaction processes and resulting relationships. Rapoport's (1994) argument that the notion of place is flawed was contradicting to Casey's (1997) position that place is an important concept, at least from a philosophical perspective. However, it pointed out that place is problematic due to the confused understanding of place as objects and relationships.

This view was explained further by Adams, Hoelscher & Till (2001) in their anthology *Textures of Place.* They argued that a place's 'texture' calls direct attention to the paradoxical nature of place. This paradox is informed by the understanding of place as surface and depth: 'A surface is, after all, where subject and object merge' (Adams, Hoelscher & Till 2001, p. xiii). Although these studies have pointed out the reasons of place being a problematic term, they are inadequate because these arguments were made based on literature review rather than critical studies on the problematic nature of place.

Unlike Rapoport (1994) who argued that the different uses of place was problematic and should be dismissed, Harvey (1993, p. 5) regarded the generality, ambiguity and multiple meanings of place as an advantage. According to Harvey (1993), place has a range of physical, metaphorical and psychological meanings: the physical meaning is related to the different generic forms of place, such as a monument, a building, neighborhood, street, town, or even city; the metaphorical meaning such as a place in a cosmos; and psychologically in terms of knowing our place. He proposed a cross

examination on metaphorical and psychological meanings of place to understand the social construction of place which looked at two quite different answers (first Marxism, then Heideggerian), and later triangulated them to suggest a conceptual resolution to the problem. Although this research advanced the discourse of place, it emphasized the intangible aspects of place. Thus the link between the physical and the other aspects of place is not addressed.

4.2 Historical transition and the definition of place

Another problematic nature of place is the historical discontinuity and transition of the way 'place' is defined. The term place was obscure or 'hidden' due to the lack of historical continuity of place in Western thoughts. In this sense, research centered on how place was defined across history.

In the lecture 'Of Other Spaces', Foucault (1986) proposed that 'space itself has a history.' Although Foucault's writing about 'heterotopia' did not offer a clear distinction between space and place, 'what is most important is his claim that fundamental ideas of space and place vary widely from era to era—and from society to society. There are no constants in this conjoint history; 'space' and 'place' are as variable as time is usually taken to be: ever-altering, never the same'. 'If it is true that there is a genuine genealogy of space—and place—then we cannot maintain that 'place' or 'space' is simply one kind of thing, to be discovered and described once and for all' (Casey 1997, p. 298).

There were few studies on the genealogy of place which resulted from the lack of historical understanding of place since the late 17th century (Casey 1997; Curry 2002). Edward Casey's book, *The fate of place: A philosophical history* (1997), explored the history of 'place' to uncover the how the term place has been conceptualized from a philosophical perspective. It does so by delineating doctrines of place as these have emerged at critical moments of Western rumination as to the nature of space and place. Casey traced the story of how individual philosophers have regarded place as a concept or idea.

The problem of place arose out of the ascendency of 'space' and 'time' which emerged since the early modern era. Casey speculated that the conception of place at present must appear in distinctly different from that of Aristotle. 'If space did not yet exist as a concept distinct from place in Aristotle's worldview, and if place became increasingly lost in space after the demise of the classical era, in the twentieth century, we stand witness to a third peripeteia: space is now becoming absorbed into place, in the form of the "spaces"…' (Casey 1997, p. 340). In examining the philosophical history of place, Casey (1997, p. 339) argued that the difference between 'space' and 'place' is one of the best-kept secrets in philosophy, and one way of understanding modernity is by its very neglect of the space and place distinction: 'Space is two—at least two…. [S]pace forms a twosome, an even doublet, with place, its odd and incongruous other…. [Space] is now becoming absorbed into place, in the form of spaces…', in which the absolute becomes the local. Such a distinctive postmodern space may offer new ways of getting back into 'place'.

Casey's study advanced the research of place by establishing that place has a history: the ideas of place are always in transition. It also pointed out the lack of historical continuity of the ideas of place between the late 17th century and the early 20th century. Despite the genealogy of place which offered new ideas, the ambiguity of place was not cleared. Although there were attempts to distinguish space and place, the confusion occurs because both terms are seen as intertwined where one contained the other. This is consistent with other studies on place which argued for the in-betweenness of space and place (Certeau 1984; Deleuze & Guattari 1987; Harvey 1993; Sack 1997). Expanding on this, the relations between space and place has been related to binary terms such as modern and postmodern (Harvey 1993), global and local (Abel 2000; Giddens 1990; Massey 1997) and universal and particular (Entrikin 1991). The confusion and the lack of specificity of the concept of place make the term difficult to comprehend. Also, Casey's approach focuses on philosophical doctrines. This might have neglected transitions informed by other disciplines related to the discourse of place.

The use of the term place historically was also the premise of Michael Curry's research. In the essay 'Discursive displacement and the seminal ambiguity of space and place' (2002), Curry argued that the absence of the term place historically does not to imply that the concept of place has simply disappeared: the concept of place is almost ubiquitous, yet its past visibility is itself unnoticed and the term was virtually unused (Curry 2002, p. 502-3). Curry (2002) argued that the discursive displacement of place through a series of technologies of writing, surveying, mapping, and then of transportation and communication, has caused both place and space to move towards, and come to be treated, like region (what he called chorographic). He argued that in a rather less theorized form the topographic traditions of place retained, indeed, in its barest form within the oral and narrative traditions such as giving directions, describing travels and the like. In this, the author is the centre of the account. Such way describes place as 'a region', which is relational, rather than absolute. 'Or relational defined places become absolute spaces, while spaces come to be seen in relational terms, while in the case of regions, both may happen at once' (Curry 2002, p. 511). In this way, Curry (2002) proposed that 'space' and 'place' are seminally ambiguous, and suggested that the key to understand the discourse of place is through technology. He argued that the problem of conceptualizing place occurs because we tend to slip into previous discourses in diagnosing the present problems. The slippage from one discourse to another makes the understanding and conceptualization of place challenging. 'If in Hesiod's time the world was a rife with symbols, such that the snail could be seen as a sign of a sort of work to be done, and the place of the Pleiades a sign of another, it is now difficult to discuss such signs without slipping into a discourse of calendars and cardinal directions. And this is just the problem faced by the student of new technologies…whereas those technologies may be associated with a refiguring of the relationships among place, region and space, the ease of slipping from one form of discourse to another makes understanding the potential forms of such change all more difficult' (Curry 2002, p. 515).

Although Curry's emphasis was on writing, his study demonstrated that place has a history, and the ideas of place are always in transition. It also emphasized the need to contextualize the concept of place within its time. However, Curry's approach did not focus on architectural and the built environment. The approach was through narrative.

5.0 Discussion: The problem of place
Although prior and existing researches have contributed in different ways to the conceptualization of 'placelessness' and 'place', the notion of place remained a problematic area for research.

5.1 Place is still a confused and problematic term
Research on place since the 1980s advanced the concept of place in different ways. Place is conceptualized as something on-going and non-fixed (Deleuze & Guattari 1980; Massey 1997; Pred 1984; Seamon & Mugerauer 1985; Thrift & Crang 2000). Also, the notion of place is conceptualized through the shifts and mediations between concepts place and space (Casey 1996; Certeau 1984; Harvey 1989; Sack 1997; Tuan 1999) and global and local (Featherstone 1993; Giddens 1990; Massey 1997; Urry 1995), and the in-betweenness of place (Deleuze & Guattari, 1980; Entrikin 1991; Soja 1996). Although these studies advanced the knowledge of 'place', the lack of specificity of place makes it a confused term. The ambiguity of place is highlighted by Relph: 'One of the reasons for my apparently paradoxical reactions lies, I think, in the fact that arguments based on opposites such as global-local or socialist-capitalist do not map well onto the postmodern world. I know it is fashionable to refer to the local and the global as though these are clearly defined and opposing forces, so localities can resist the forces of globalization in order to preserve their identities, or globalization can rescue places from backwardness. This is simplistic…They are always interwoven and often ambiguous'

(Relph 2001, p. 159, 161). Place remained a problematic conceptual term because of its in-betweenness and relationship to other concepts.

Furthermore, place is a problematic term because of its changing meanings and the way it is defined historically (Casey 1997; Curry 2002). Although they contributed to the discussion on the problematic nature of place, it remained a confusing concept because of the fluid relations between the concepts of space and place. Besides that, the confused nature of place is due to its multiple uses as product and meaning (Adams, Hoelscher & Till 2001; Rapoport 1994). Despite Rapoport's argument that the term place is flawed and Adams, Hoelscher & Till's position on the paradoxical nature of place as 'texture' which suggest surface and depth, these arguments are inadequate because claims were made based on review of literatures rather than a broad and critical study on the problematic nature of place. These situations suggest that the problematic nature of place is an area of research yet to be resolved.

5.2 The taken for granted perception of placelessness and place

One of the issues in the discourse on place was the common perceptions of 'placelessness' and 'place' which are relatively unquestioned. Based on review of literature, the notion of placelessness is perceived as a 'crisis' condition, characterized by a sense of 'loss' (Augé 1996; Casey 1997; Jackson 1970; Kunstler 1993; Ley 1989; Norberg-Schulz 1969; Relph 1976). On the contrary, the notion of place was viewed as an idealized concept to resolve the issue of placelessness. It emerged as a significant concept since the 1970s which intended to 'return' something to the so-called loss of place: it was taken as an anti-thesis to the term placelessness.

While previous studies emphasized the relations between 'place' and 'space' (Casey 1996; Certeau 1984; Harvey 1989; Sack 1997; Tuan 1999), little has been mentioned on the problematic nature of place in relation to placelessness, i.e. the fundamental basis which was perceived to have informed the emergence of the idea of place. The common perception of place as an ideal concept to resolve conditions of placelessness remained unquestioned. This suggests that the common understanding of placelessness and place is taken for granted, thus representing a gap in the knowledge required to understand the problematic nature of the term place.

5.3 The gap between the conception and manifestation of the ideas of place

The disparate studies in the discourse on place identified that the different theoretical attitudes of place and the studies of the problematic nature of place centered on the place as a conceptual term. It indicates that there is lack of understanding on the relationship between the conception and manifestation of the idea of place.

The notion of placelessness is described through various conditions of 'nowhereness' and 'elsewhereness' within the context of architecture and the built environment. Despite the common understanding of place as a concept to eradicate the conditions of placelessness within the built environment, research on 'place' since the 1980s tended to focus on the theory rather than the manifestation of place. For example, there were multitude of works which attempt to conceptualize place as social and cultural processes and relationships (de Certeau 1984; Giddens 1990; Gupta & Ferguson 1997; Harvey 1990; Massey 1997; Pred 1984; Thrift 2000), place as lived-experience (Bachelard 1964; Casey 1997; Relph 1976; Seamon & Mugerauer 985; Sack 1997; Tuan 1977), and the 'otherness' of place (Deleuze & Guattari 1987; Foucault 1986; Soja 1996).

Simultaneously, the theories and writings on place within the architectural discourse demonstrated the importance of theories over physical manifestation of place. For example, Alexander's (1977) theory of pattern language emphasized social relationships, Dovey's (1999) conception of place emphasized the importance of the ideology (Dovey 1999) and works of Harries (1997), Norberg-Schulz (1980) and Rykwert (1981) conceptualized place as lived-experience. Despite the new vistas opened up by the different theories of place, they neglected certain concrete aspects of

place that requires closer attention. In this sense, the manifestation of such ideas still falls short, thus leaving a gap between the conception and manifestation of the ideas of place within architecture and the built environment.

The review also pointed out that the conceptual problem of place was due to the definition of place as objects and social meanings (Adams, Hoelscher & Till 2001; Rapoport 1994). While these studies pointed out that the confusion of place as objects (tangible) and meanings (intangible), they have not provide information on the link between the concept and manifestation of place.

In addition, there were studies on the problematic nature of place based on a philosophical (Casey 1997) and technological (Curry 2002) perspectives. Similar to other studies on the concept of place, these works emphasized the theoretical aspects of place. Thus, the gap between conception and manifestation of place poses an issue for understanding the problematic nature of the term place.

These issues suggest that the problematic nature of place is an important area for study as a way forward for re-thinking the concept of place. In this respect, the position of architecture is crucial in understanding the nature of place as a conceptual term because architecture is one form of mediator between the conceptual and the physical manifestation of place. It is through the discourse of architecture by which the theories of place can be applied and made manifest.

6.0 Conclusion

Although existing studies advanced the knowledge of place, the review reveals that the understanding of the idea of place is challenged by the following situations:

(1) There was a common perception that 'place' is in a state of crisis. This perception is characterized by a sense of 'placelessness', which has been commonly understood as a narrative of 'loss' (Augé 1996; Casey 1997; Jackson 1970; Kunstler 1993; Ley 1989; Norberg-Schulz 1969; Relph 1976).

(2) The current body of knowledge provided different concepts of place which contribute to the complexity and confused nature of the idea of place.

(3) There is insufficient research and studies directed at the manifestations of place (Casey 1997). While there were studies on the theories of place since the late 1990s, they were not being adequately applied to the practice of place-making within the built environment.

(4) Although the problematic nature of the term place has been raised, this issue remained unresolved. Research and findings which studied the problems of the term place (Casey 1997, Curry 2002, Adams, Hoelscher & Till 2001; Rapoport 1994) are inadequate to clear its ambiguities.

(5) There is a lack of research directed at the problematic nature of the term place which bridges the understanding between the conception and manifestation of the idea of place. Although the problems of place have been raised from philosophical (Casey 1997) and technological (Curry 2002) perspectives, the understanding of the problematic nature of place were not explicit from the perspective of architecture and the manifestations of place within the built environment.

These situations are reasons for the current issues within the discourse on place: firstly, the concept of place is still a confusing term due to the in-betweenness and fluidity of its definition; secondly, the common understanding of place as an idealized concept which emerged as an attempt to resolve and eradicate placelessness and the crisis of place was relatively unquestioned; and, thirdly, another issue which is relatively unexplored is the link between the conception and manifestation of the idea of place. As a way forward in re-thinking the notion of place, this paper stresses the need for an examination of the genealogy of the concept of place, and its relation to the discourse on architecture and the built environment.

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