

# Outline of a Theory of Place

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Place

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Meaningful segment of  
space

A “center of meaning” and  
“field of care” (Tuan)

*Open space has no trodden paths and signposts. It has no fixed pattern or established human meaning; it is like a blank sheet on which meaning may be imposed. Enclosed and humanized space is place. Compared to space, place is a calm center of established values. Human beings require both space and place. Human lives are a dialectical movement between shelter and venture, attachment and freedom. (Tuan, 1977: 54)*

PLACE

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LOCATION

+

LOCALE

+

SENSE OF PLACE

GATHERING

/

WEAVING

/

ASSEMBLING

*[Geography] interprets the realities of areal differentiation of the world as they are found, not only in terms of the differences of thing from place to place, but also in terms of the total combination of phenomena in each place, different from those at every other place.*  
(Hartshorne, 1939: 462)

*Minimally, places gather things in their midst— where ‘things’ connote various animate and inanimate entities. Places also gather experiences and histories, even languages and thoughts. Think only of what it means to go back to a place you know, finding it full of memories and expectations, old things and new things, the familiar and the strange, and much more besides. What else is capable of this massively diversified holding action? Certainly not individual human subjects construed as sources of ‘projection’ or ‘reproduction’— not even these subjects as they draw upon their bodily and perceptual powers. The power belongs to place itself, and it is a power of gathering.*

*(Casey, 1996: 24)*

*The best way to model how place functions as a tool is to think of it along the lines of a loom. As something like a loom, place helps us weave together a wide range of components of reality. The weave itself is the landscape and the projects that the place helps support. What does it draw together? In other publications, I have argued that the major components (or spools of thread) come from three domains: the empirical, the moral and the aesthetic. All of these are part of reality, and place helps us weave these empirical, moral, and aesthetic domains together (Sack, 2003: 41).*



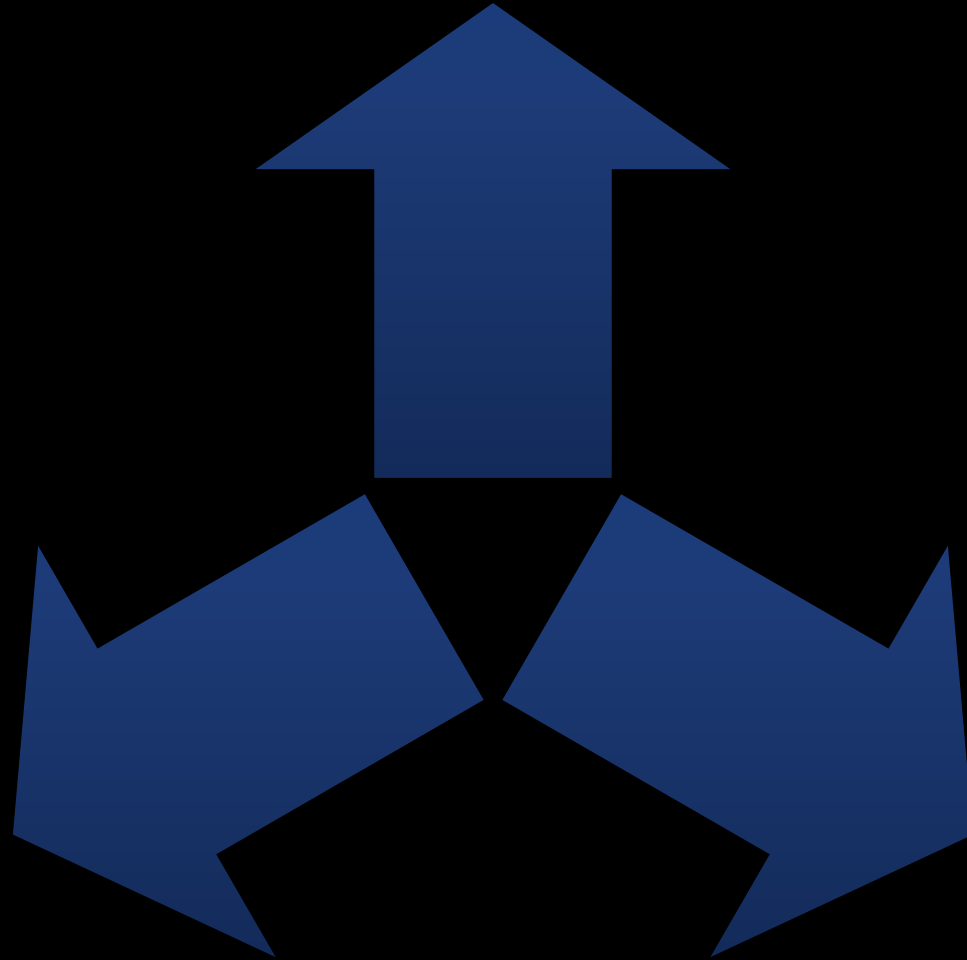
*Indeed, privileging the social in modern geography, and especially in the reductionist sense that “everything is socially constructed,” does as much disservice to geographical analysis as a whole as privileging the natural in the days of environmental determinism, or concentrating only on the mental or intellectual in some areas of humanistic geography. While one or the other may be more important for a particular situation at a particular time, none is determinate of the geographical (Sack, 1997: 2-3).*

*...the former are referred to as processes of territorialization and the latter as processes of deterritorialization. One and the same assemblage can have components working to stabilize its identity as well as components forcing it to change or even transforming it into a different assemblage. In fact, one and the same component may participate in both processes by exercising different sets of capacities. (DeLanda, 2006: 12)*

# GATHERING/WEAVING/ASSEMBLING TERRITORIALIZATION

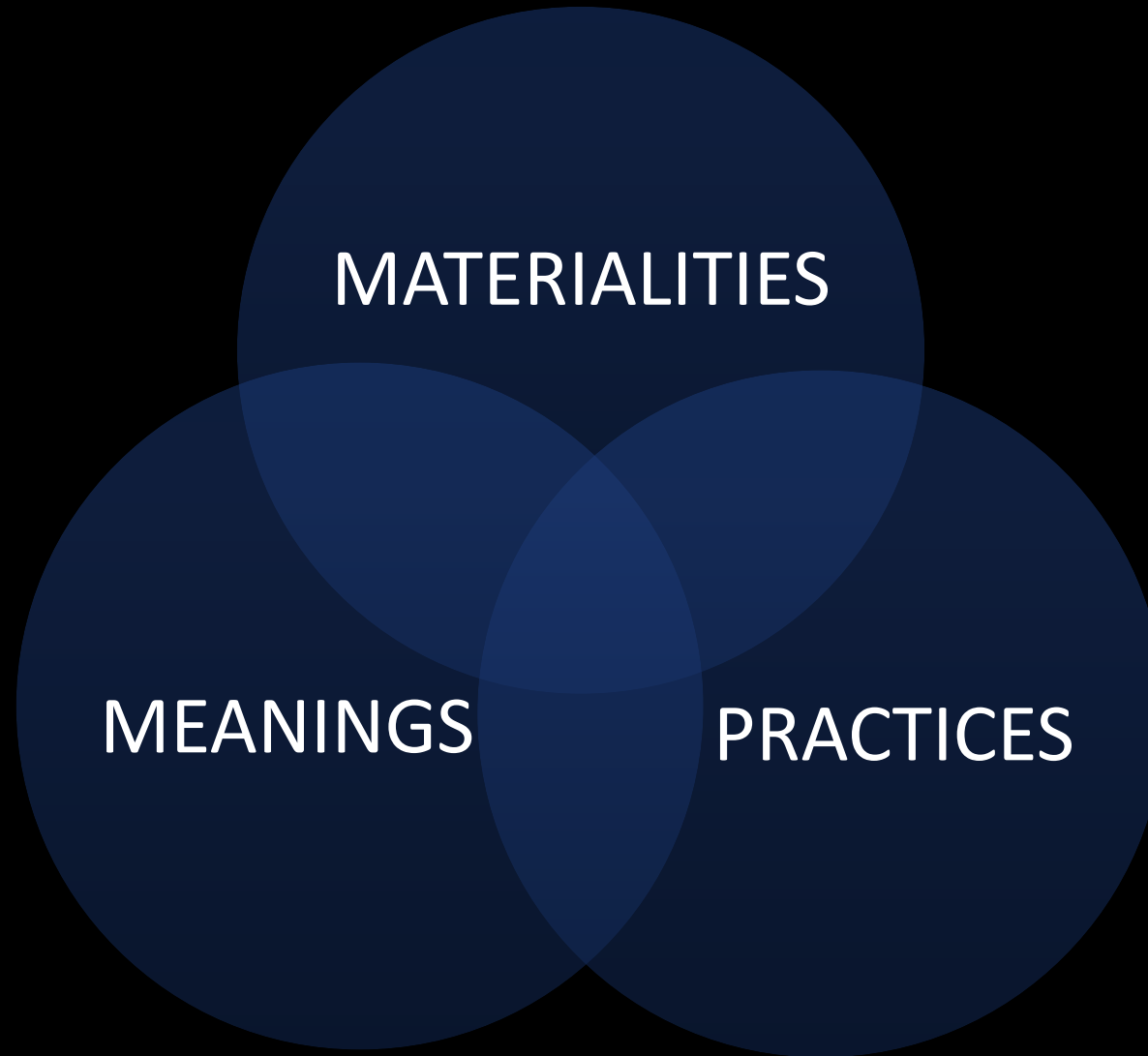


# GATHERING/WEAVING/ASSEMBLING DETERRITORIALIZATION



*So in the first place, processes of territorialization are processes that define or sharpen the spatial boundaries of actual territories, Territorialization, on the other hand, also refers to non-spatial processes which increase the internal homogeneity of a neighbourhood. Any process which either destabilizes spatial boundaries or increases internal heterogeneity is considered deterritorializing. (DeLanda, 2006: 13)*

# PLACE



*We begin in the thick of things*

(Caitlin Desilvey, 2007: 403)

*Thus it seems that we have human minds on the one hand, and a material world of landscape and artefacts on the other. That, you might think, should cover just about everything. But does it? Consider, for a moment, what is left out. Starting with landscape, does this include the sky? ... How about sunlight? Life depends on it. But if sunlight were a constituent of the material world, then we would have to admit not only that the diurnal landscape differs materially from the nocturnal one, but also that the shadow of a landscape feature, such as a rock or tree, is as much a part of the material world as the feature itself. For creatures that live in the shade, it does indeed make a difference. What, then, of the air? When you breathe, or feel the wind on your face, are you engaging with the material world? When the fog descends, and everything around you looks dim and mysterious, has the material world changed, or are you just seeing the same world differently? Does rain belong to the material world, or only the puddles that it leaves in ditches and potholes? Does falling snow join the material world only once it settles on the ground? As engineers and builders know all too well, rain and frost can break up roads and buildings. How then can we claim that roads and buildings are part of the material world, if rain and frost are not? (Ingold, 2007: 3-4)*



Meanings

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Stories

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Narratives

*...narratives about people's places in places continuously materialize the entity we call place. In its materializations, however, there are conflicts, silences, exclusions. Tales are told and their meanings wobble and shift over time. Multiple claims are made. Some stories are deemed heretical. The resulting dislocations, discontinuities, and disjunctures work to continually destabilize that which appears to be stable: a unitary, univocal place. (Price, 2004: 4)*

Practice

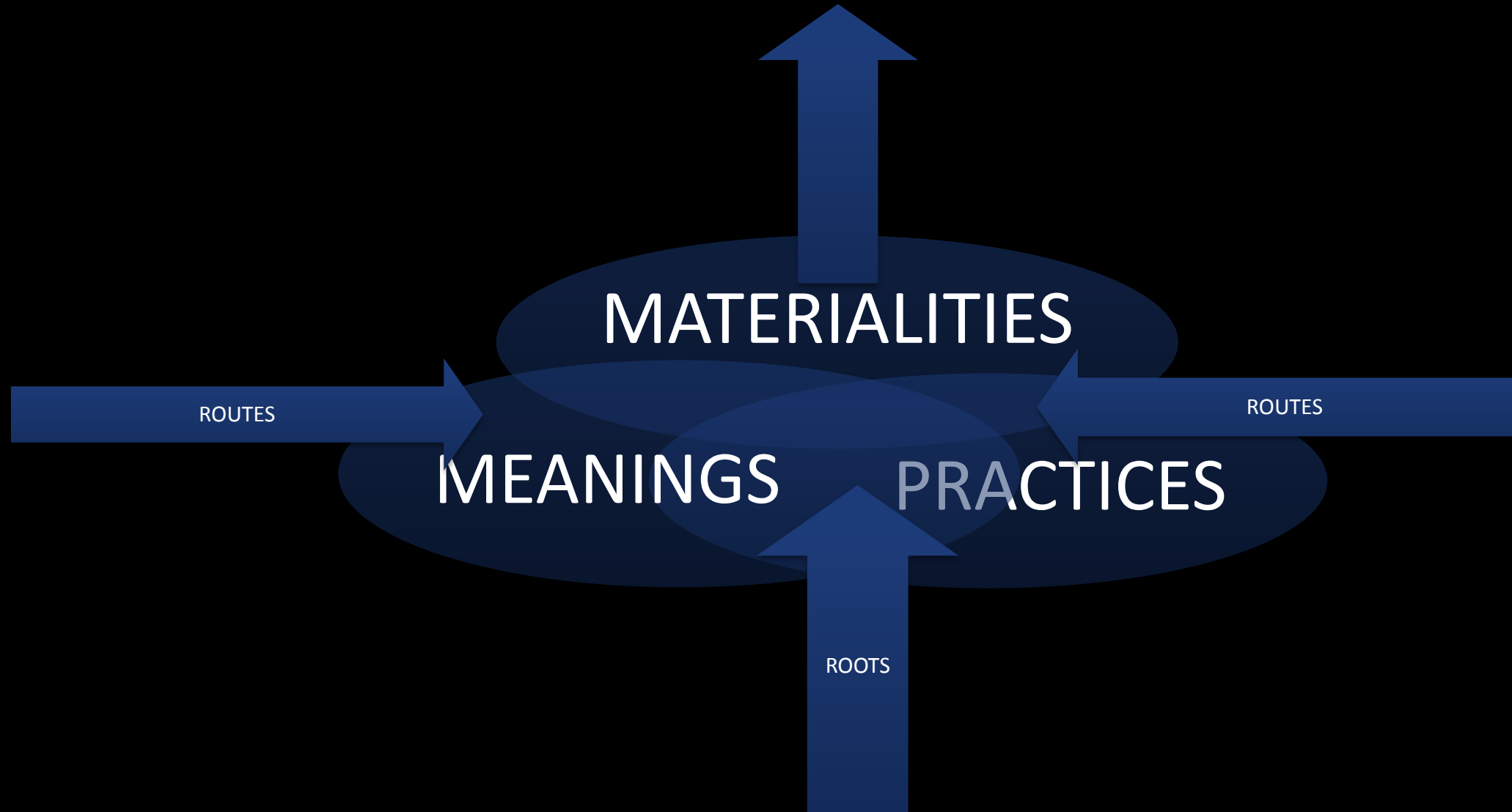
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Performance

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Doing

# THE VERTICAL AND HORIZONTAL AXES

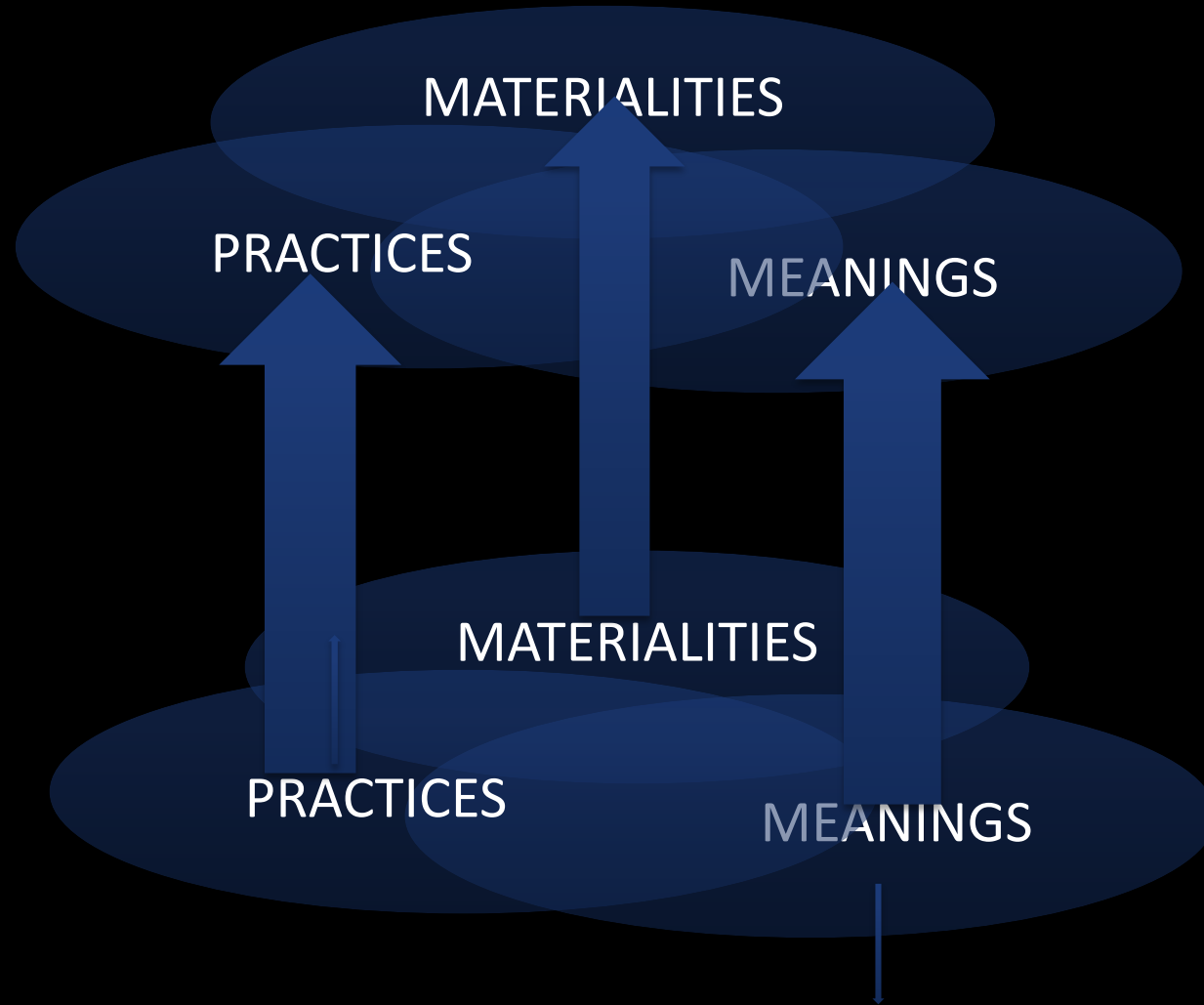


*Maybe the first [lesson] was that the very term place is problematic, implying a discrete entity, something you could put a fence around... . What we mean by place is a crossroads, a particular point of intersection of forces coming from many directions and distances. (Solnit, 2007: 1)*

*Home was the centre of the world because it was the place where a vertical line crossed with a horizontal one. The vertical line was a path leading upwards to the sky and downwards to the underworld, the horizontal line represented the traffic of the world, all the possible roads leading across the earth to other places. Thus, at home, one was nearest to the gods in the sky and the dead in the underworld. This nearness promised access to both. And at the same time, one was at the starting point and, hopefully, the returning point of all terrestrial journeys (Berger, 1984: 56)*

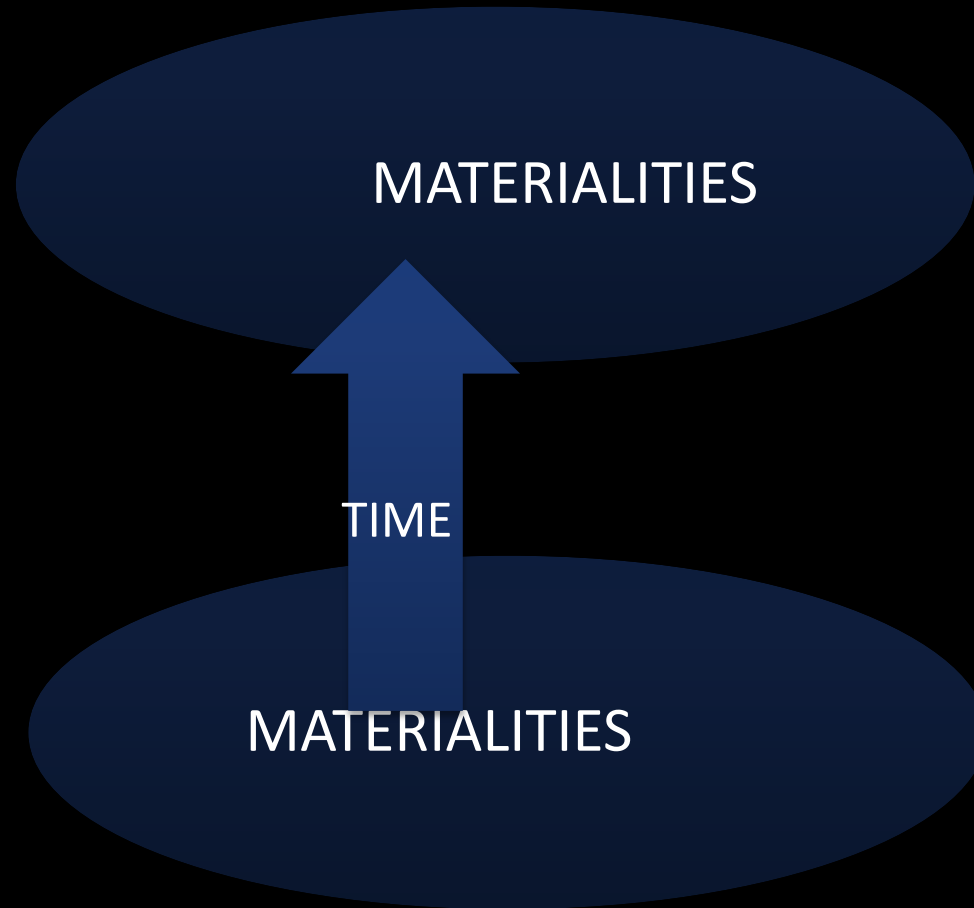
*Instead then, of thinking of places as areas with boundaries around, they can be imagined as articulated moments in networks of social relations and understandings, but where a large proportion of those relations, experiences and understandings are constructed on a far larger scale than what we happen to define for that moment as the place itself, whether than be the street, or a region or even a continent. And this in turn allows a sense of place which is extroverted, which includes a consciousness of its links with the wider world, which integrated in a positive way the global and the local. (Massey, 1994: 155)*

# TEMPORALITIES





# TEMPORALITIES 1



*Buildings stabilize social life. They give structure to social institutions, durability to social networks, persistence to behavior patterns. What we build solidifies society against time and its incessant forces for change... Brick and mortar resist intervention and permutation, as they accomplish a measure of stasis. And yet, buildings stabilize imperfectly. Some fall into ruin, others are destroyed naturally or by human hand, and most are unendingly renovated into something they were not originally.*

*(Gieryn, 2002: 35)*

*...the material landscape is the 'crowning glory of past capitalist development and a prison that inhibits the further progress of accumulation precisely because it creates spatial barriers where there were none before (Harvey, 1996 [1975]: 610).*

*Everything in the definition of macro social order he argues is due to the enrolment of nonhuman, even the simple effect of duration, of long-lasting social force, cannot be obtained without the durability of nonhumans to which human local interactions have been shifted (Latour, 1994: 51).*

*The static timeless element in the relation of Cleopatra's Needle to the Embankment is a pure illusion generated by the fact that for purposes of daily intercourse its emphasis is needless.... If we define the Needle in a sufficiently abstract manner we can say that it never changes. But a physicist who looks on that part of the life of nature as a dance of electrons, will tell you that daily it has lost some molecules and gained others, and even the plain man can see that it gets dirtier and is occasionally washed. Thus the question of change in the Needle is a mere matter of definition. The more abstract your definition, the more permanent the Needle. But whether your Needle change or be permanent, all you mean by stating that it is situated on the Charing Cross Embankment, is that amid the structure of events you know of a certain continuous limited stream of events, such that any chunk of that stream, during any hour, or any day, or any second, has the character of being the situation of Cleopatra's Needle.*

*(Whitehead, 2004: 166-167)*

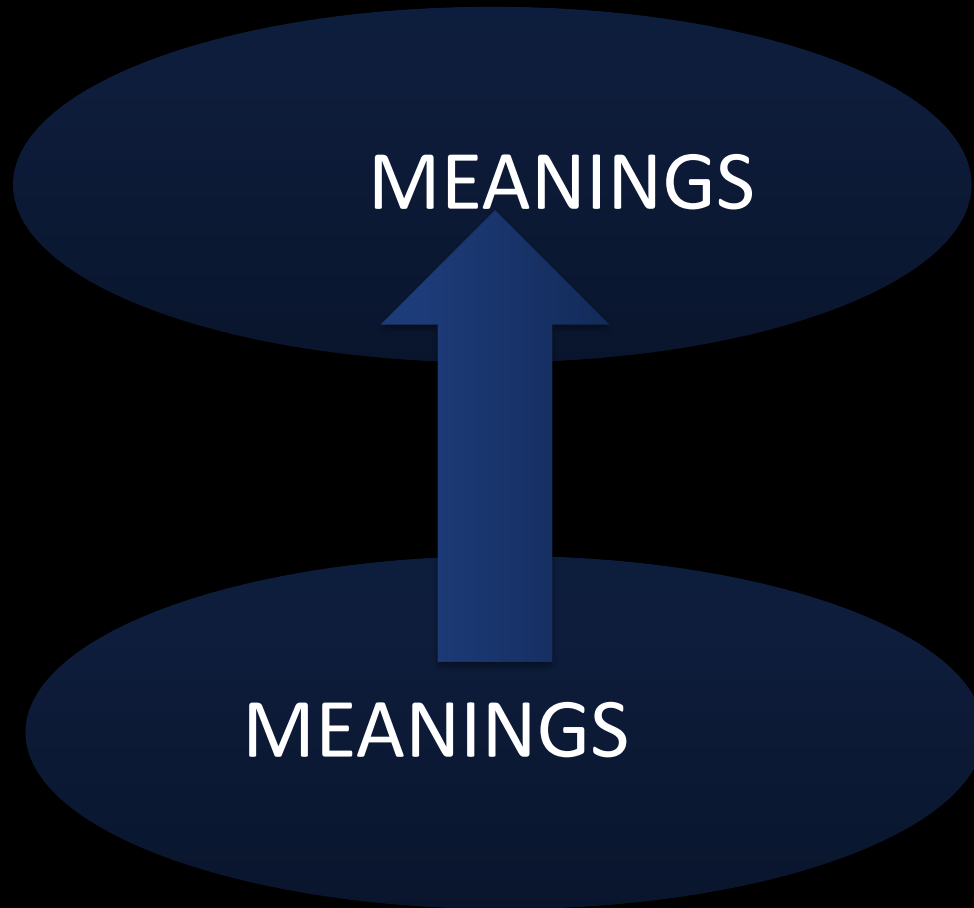
*The building becomes a place where a number of material and immaterial links meet in a node of relations, whose durability is both relative and negotiated. It is in this way that the building is able to engage and negotiate with a number of disparate realms... The building as a permeable entity becomes less an individual building block in a collection of blocks, but rather it becomes an unstable assemblage that is intimately connected to and renegotiated by the surrounding buildings, streets, communities, and economies and the world beyond.*

*(Lloyd Jenkins, 2002: 232)*

*...the materiality of the building is a relational effect, its 'thing-ness' is an achievement of a diverse network of associates and associations. It is what we might think of as a building event rather than simply a building. Conceived of in this way, a building is always being 'made' or 'unmade', always doing the work of holding together or pulling apart.*

*(Jane Jacobs, 2006: 11)*

# TEMPORALITIES 2



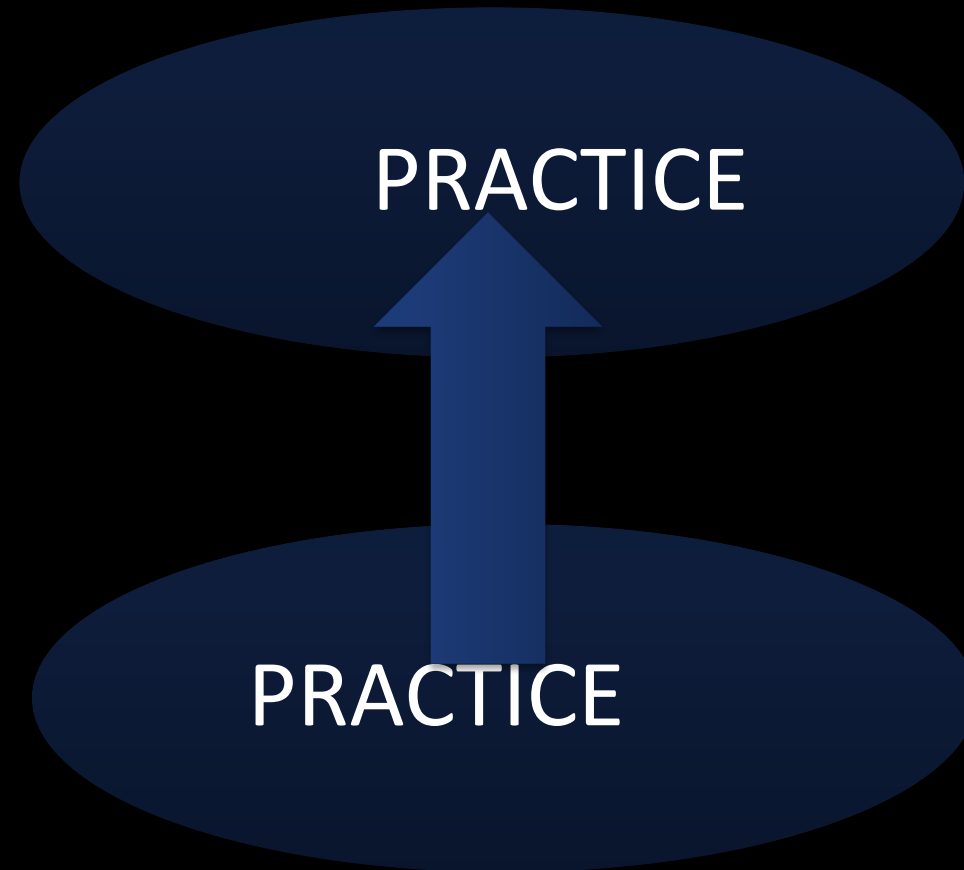
*It is the stabilizing persistence of place as a container of experiences that contributes so powerfully to its intrinsic memorability. An alert and alive memory connects spontaneously with place, finding in it features that favor and parallel its own activities. We might even say that memory is naturally place oriented or at least place-supported.*

*(Casey, 1987: 186-187)*



*Place memory encapsulates the human ability to connect with both the built and natural environments that are entwined in the cultural landscape. It is the key to the power of historic places to help citizens define their public pasts: places trigger memories for insiders, who have shared a common past, and at the same time places often can represent shared pasts to outsiders who might be interested in knowing about them in the present (Hayden, 1995: 46).*

# TEMPORALITIES 3



*Performance cannot be saved,  
recorded, documented, or otherwise  
participate in the circulation of  
representations of representation....  
Performance's being ... becomes itself  
through disappearance. (Phelan, 1993:  
146)*

*Certainly it is true that individual instances of performances disappear from the repertoire. This happens to a lesser degree than the archive. The question of disappearance in relation to the archive and the repertoire differs in kind as well as degree. The live performance can never be captured or transmitted through the archive. ... Embodied memory, because it is live, exceeds the archive's ability to capture it. But this does not mean that performance – as ritualized, formalized, or reiterative behavior – disappears. Performances also replicate themselves through their own structures and codes....Multiple forms of embodied acts are always present, though in a constant state of againness. They reconstitute themselves, transmitting communal memories, histories, and values from one group/generation to the next, Embodied and performed acts generate, record, and transmit knowledge.*

*(Taylor, 2003: 20-21)*

*The notion of the structure of a space of possibilities is crucial in assemblage theory given that, unlike properties, the capacities of an assemblage are not given, that is, they are merely possible when not exercised. But the set of possible capacities of an assemblage is not amorphous, however open-ended it may be, since different assemblages exhibit different sets of capacities. (DeLanda, 2006: 29)*

*Gathering gives to place its peculiar enduringness, allowing us to return to it again and again as the same place and not just as the same position or site...A place is generative and regenerative on its own schedule. From it experiences are born and to it human beings return for empowerment... A place is more an event than a thing to be assimilated to known categories... (Casey, 1996: 26)*

# OUTLINE OF A THEORY OF PLACE!

