

Non-Places from Classical to Medieval Mediterranean. An Introduction

Bruno FERRER I HIGUERAS
University of Puerto Rico

Étienne HELMER
University of Puerto Rico

The places where we grow up and live are more than mere spaces where individuals, groups, and institutions function daily as active agents. In their vast range of material aspects and scales, they are much more than the “containers” and “foregrounds” of our lives. They influence our ways of thinking, feeling, imagining, and acting, that is, our capacity to give meaning to our relationship with the world. In this sense, both in material and symbolic terms, places inhabit us as much as we inhabit them.

Some pioneer works like, among others, the now classical Henri Lefebvre’s books, *The Right to the City* (1968) and *The Production of space* (1974), paved the way for new approaches and fields of studies regarding space and places, like spatial (in)justice and urban studies at the crossroad of geography and other social sciences.¹ More generally, the importance of approaching most aspects of our human condition in terms of space and place gave rise to a vast range of mutidisiplinary approaches in the last three decades, from archeology to anthropology and philosophy.²

In this broad context, Marc Augé’s 1992 work *Non-Places: An Introduction to Supermodernity* (London: Verso, 1995 for the English translation by J. Howe) marked a turning point, not only but especially in the examination of a more complex notion of place. In his book, Augé makes two central claims. First, he proposes an anthropological definition of real places as having “at least three characteristics in common. They want to be – people want them to be – places of identity, of relations and of history”.³ Second, his hypothesis is “that supermodernity produces non-places, meaning spaces which are not themselves

1 For instance Harvey, 1973, 1985, 1996 and 2009; Reynaud, 1981; Davis, 1990 and 2006; Smith, 1994; Soja, 2010.

2 For instance Foucault, 1994; Tuan, 1997; Bender, 2002; Warf and Arias, 2009; Berque, 2013; Helmer, 2019.

3 Augé, 1995, p. 52.