

Inhabitancy

Inhabiting: forming oneself as one forms the [World](#). Thus defined as a result as much as a process (Lazzarotti, 2014) the concept of "inhabiting" (or the more archaic "inhabitancy" – living in a certain place as an inhabitant, in particular in relation to the acquisition of rights – OED) relates to the geographical dimension of humanity: every collective and every individual living here and/or there, in this way or that, so as to share places and territories across the World. Thus [place](#) and [territory](#) are at once a given fact, and also what each inhabitant and each society have altered by living in them. As a result, the idea that all construct themselves in, by and with this on-going, dynamic, geographical dialogue underpins the concept of "inhabiting" in its fullest sense. Interacting with cultural dimensions (language, representations, beliefs, social norms etc.), with economic dimensions (including production relationships), and with political dimensions, as well as with those that involve the body, such as sexuality, the notion of "inhabiting" leads us to consider the geographical experience, both individually and collectively, as a dimension that is specific and essential to humanity.

This anthropological view of "inhabiting" suggests a dual implication. The first is existential: each person can be approached by way of his or her geographical dimension or dimensions, for instance by way of the places the person has frequented. The place of birth, the workplace, the place of residence, resting places and so forth, as well as the place of death, all make up the person's "identity card". Identity can also be formed by places that are present but not frequented – places of family origin, places of dreams, desired places etc. On a larger scale, manners of being in different places form a "geographical signature" that profilers sometime use as distinctive features of the individual. In contrast with one of the classic principles of classic French geography, it is now possible to form a geography of men and women, envisaged as male or female inhabitants. The second implication of "inhabiting" is political: places are not neutral stage-sets with no meaning for human relationships, they are one of the main issues. While designers and developers of places imagine the ways they will be used, or even orient them, it is never certain that the inhabitants will comply with their intentions or injunctions. This is easy to observe: tourism has been one of the main forces of change in places that were previously used quite differently. One example is the Völklingen ironworks in Germany. In some instances processes are more complicated. The questions of place generate conflict when several groups argue as to the legitimacy or conversely the inappropriateness of proposals for their usage. In the case of the Dja reserve in Cameroon, classified world heritage in 1987, the hunting traditions of the native Pygmy population became illegitimate with respect to "good" practice directives. These are issues of co-habitation, of social relationships and past histories in their geographical dimensions.. Thus "inhabiting" should not be seen as a new concept in itself, but rather as an update of the way we view one of the main foundations of humanity.

The rise to prominence of the notion of "inhabiting" since the 2000s is linked to the dynamics specific to the contemporary World, and in particular the emergence of societies in which the inhabitants are mobile. Mobility in its multiplicity and diversity is no longer an exceptional event in lifestyles based on sedentary practices, it has become a structuring component. This upheaval in relationships with space, with time, and hence with others means that we need to reappraise the modes and terms of "inhabiting". This notion aims to observe and describe the powerful geographical revolution brought about by mobility. Alongside, the emergence of the concept is also part of an epistemological movement. Reflections on tourism and the epistemology of geography in the 1990s contributed to the emergence of this definition. This reflection to some extent contributed to spreading the hypothesis of a "geographical turning-point" (Lévy, 1999). This being said, the contemporary conceptualisation of "inhabiting" belongs to an earlier intellectual history. While the origin of the word in common usage goes back to the dawn of the French language, its scientific usage was a marginal, but pluridisciplinary notion in the 20th century. It has been used by anthropologists, architects, geographers, historians, philosophers, sociologists and town planners with many different meanings and approaches.

Within this reflection, the debate on the conceptualisation of the term has been active among scientists, even to the extent of revealing splits and divisions (Collognon, Pelletier & Lazzarotti, 2015). For the Heideggerian, ontological and phenomenological school, inhabiting is "being within". The notion was used at a time when Germany was dismembered, and then interest in it altered when it was seen as extending beyond a mere matter of housing. Favouring "land" over "the World", this approach gave considerably less importance to human relationships. Along these lines, we can quote the geographers Dardel (19052), Berque (2014 among others) or Hoyaux (2002). In the view of the phenomenology of perception as expounded by Merleau-Ponty (1945) and Bachelard (1957) inhabiting is among other things a question of feelings or perceptions. In the area of the emotions and their representations, there is Tuan (1974), and alongside some aspects of cultural studies. More recently, Besse (2013) has taken up the notion to access interior worlds. Lefèbvre, stating that inhabiting is a social act, makes it a collective, so as to link it to the dynamics of production

relationships. The radical geographical movement, although not taking up the term as such, extends its meaning, as does Harvey (2001 among others). Thus "inhabiting" is seen as a struggle, as suggested by George (1994). Research in social geography to some extent contributed to this approach. Mathieu (2010), who raised the issue of the relationships that societies entertain with their living space, alongside the concept of "manners of inhabiting", explores the shared use of environments and resources. There are issues of conflict, too (Lussault, 2009). In the perspective of a (highly anthropological) sociology of precarious occupancy, Lion (2015) studied inhabitants "inhabiting" the Bois de Vincennes (a Paris green area). A final trend, probably the most recent, is based on pragmatist philosophy. Lussault defines the term as a "spatial pragmatism". This consists (Lussault 2013) in reflection starting from the observation of present realities (pragmata, things themselves). Along these lines Stock (2004) supports the idea that "inhabiting" is a matter of "making do". Lussault (2013), further defining inhabiting as "a spatiality that is typical of individuals and groups" explores the notions of a "spatial turning-point" in societies. The world, a single, original dimension of geography, is one of its most significant manifestations. Finally, the definition of "inhabiting" was strictly a theory of action in the first edition of the Dictionary of the sciences of space, while in the second edition it opened up to "ideated realities" (Lévy & Lussault, 2013).

We all inhabit the same World, but each of us inhabits it differently. It is within this geographical tension between singular and collective that inhabiting forms the human experience of the World. Thus "inhabiting", a concept belonging to deliberate, well-considered, geographical science, can help to define and name this experience that is unspoken yet not silent.

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