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**Media and Senses of Place:
On Situational and Phenomenological Geographies**

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Media and Senses of Place: On Situational and Phenomenological Geographies

Shaun Moores

ABSTRACT

The author offers an understanding of media uses as place-making practices of a sort. In doing so, he issues a challenge to those theorists who have linked developments in media with an emerging condition of placelessness. Engaging critically with literature in human geography, as well as with work in the field of media and communications, he explores experiential constructions of place in physical and virtual environments – focusing on the habitual and affective dimensions of place-making in daily living. With reference to new research on trans-European migration, he notes that these particular aspects of social activity that are usually taken for granted can become more evident when lifeworlds are disturbed.

1. INTRODUCTION

I want to do five things in this paper.¹ First, I want to take issue with the central thesis of a classic text in the field of media and communications – Joshua Meyrowitz's *No Sense of Place* (1985). Although he presents a convincing case there for studying transformations in 'the "situational geography" of social life' (Meyrowitz, 1985: 6), the main conclusion of his book – that developments in media are giving rise to a 'relatively placeless' world – is far less convincing. Indeed, in a piece published 20 years later, he appears to pull back from this

¹ My line of argument here is developed out of an earlier working paper in this series (Moores, 2003). Whereas I ended that paper with a discussion of Meyrowitz and Scannell on place, the ideas of those theorists provide a point of departure for this one. As will become clear, my interest is in extending their insights by engaging critically with work done many years ago in human geography. I am grateful to the late Roger Silverstone for his suggestion – made when I visited the LSE in 2003 – that I should do so. The two papers are part of a larger, ongoing project in which I am working towards a monograph on media and senses of place.

conclusion, admitting that, 'the significance of locality persists even in the face of massive social and technological changes' (Meyrowitz, 2005: 21).

Second, I want to compare Meyrowitz's no-sense-of-place thesis with a contrasting and, in my view, preferable perspective on media and place that can be found in Paddy Scannell's *Radio, Television and Modern Life* (1996). While Meyrowitz and Scannell share similar interests in the temporal and spatial arrangements of electronically mediated communication, Scannell (1996) points to the potential for a 'doubling of place' in broadcasting. More generally, Scannell's phenomenological approach, with its emphasis on the 'dailiness' of radio and television, is a productive one – even though there are certain problems with his analysis of broadcasting and its audiences.

Third, I want to look beyond literature in the field of media and communications, recovering some work done many years ago in an area known as 'phenomenological geography'. My purpose in recovering that work now – most notably David Seamon's *A Geography of the Lifeworld* (1979) – is to appropriate selected concepts for the investigation of contemporary media uses and their day-to-day social contexts. Phenomenological geographers have pioneered a theorisation of places as experiential constructions – as more than simply physical, or even virtual, locations – by focusing on practices of 'dwelling' or 'place making' in everyday environments.

Fourth, I want to offer critical comments on certain aspects of phenomenological geography, so as to facilitate a renewal of its conception of place that would allow for a fuller understanding of media uses as place-making practices. Above all, my difficulty is with the phenomenological geographers' tendency to dismiss media as the technological determinants of 'growing placelessness' – a tendency most evident in Edward Relph's *Place and Placelessness* (1976). There are clear parallels, then, between Relph's book and Meyrowitz's *No Sense of Place*, as well as close links with subsequent arguments about the growth of 'non-places' (Augé, 1995).

Fifth and finally, I want to identify research strategies for illuminating the habitual and affective dimensions of place-making in daily living. What helped the participants in Seamon's empirical research to reflect on their routine activities and emotions were those occasions during which taken-for-granted ways of doing and feeling were disrupted (Seamon, 1979). Following this basic principle, I will propose that studies of the

environmental experiences of transnational migrants – including their experiences of what Meyrowitz (1985) usefully calls 'media situations' or 'media environments' – could be one strategy for highlighting the persistent significance of place, since migration might be expected to involve a disturbance of lifeworlds.

2. SITUATIONAL GEOGRAPHY (a): *NO SENSE OF PLACE*

The theoretical framework employed by Meyrowitz (1985) is formed out of an amalgamation of separate traditions of analysis that appear, at first sight, to be incompatible. He brings together what are referred to in his book as the ideas of the 'medium theorists' with those of the 'situationists'.² More specifically, he has in mind Marshall McLuhan and Erving Goffman as the main representatives of these different traditions. Meyrowitz (1985: 4) explains that his book grew out of a long-standing 'interest in weaving these two strands of theory into one whole cloth'. In the work of McLuhan and other exponents of medium theory, Meyrowitz finds a valuable concern with media and social change – for example, with the consequences of any new medium of communication for the temporal and spatial organisation of social life. This approach is seen to be limited, though, because of its failure to address changing modes of social interaction in any detail.³ Meanwhile, in the work of Goffman and others in the situationist tradition, Meyrowitz finds an equally valuable concern with interactions and with the social situations or environments that provide a context for behaviour-in-interaction. However, he argues that the situationists' theoretical approach is limited too, because it has tended to assume a necessary link between social situations and physical locations.

By combining the strengths of each tradition, Meyrowitz believes that it is possible to overcome their respective weaknesses. His theoretical framework is designed to extend the study of social interactions and situations beyond those that take shape within a shared physical location, so as to include the analysis of interactions in and with media situations or environments. One example that he offers is the situation of two people in conversation on the telephone, where the participants in the electronically mediated interpersonal communication are potentially 'closer to each other, in some respects, than they are to other

² Meyrowitz's choice of term is potentially confusing. He is not referring to the avant-garde artistic and political activists who were known as situationists, but rather to those social theorists and researchers whose focus has been on the constitution of social interactions and situations. On 'medium theory', see also Meyrowitz (1994).

³ A further limitation to this approach is its inherent 'technological determinism'. See Raymond Williams (1974) for a classic critique of such deterministic thinking, in which he clearly has McLuhan in his critical sights.

people in their physical environments' (Meyrowitz, 1985: 38). Another example, drawn from the groundbreaking work of Donald Horton and Richard Wohl (1956), is the 'para-social interaction' that can develop between television personalities and their physically absent viewers. As Meyrowitz (1985: 121) points out, this 'is a new form of interaction' when considered in broad historical terms – involving direct looks to camera and a 'simulacrum of conversational give and take' (Horton and Wohl, 1956: 215) with distant audience members. It clearly resembles some elements of physically co-present face-to-face interaction, yet belongs to the era of 'mass communication'. This focus on electronic media uses has to do precisely with their capacity to transform the geography of social situations. Electronically mediated communications transcend physical boundaries virtually instantaneously, while serving to recreate aspects of the liveness and immediacy of physical co-presence.

Meyrowitz (1985: 37) constructs a model of 'situations as information-systems', in which social situations or environments are defined by the 'inclusive notion of "patterns of access to information" ... access to each other's social performances'. Of course, this model does not rule out the sort of analysis of face-to-face interaction that Goffman was best known for, but crucially it allows for the investigation of other kinds of interaction today – when many social performances are available via media. I am sympathetic to Meyrowitz's 'inclusive' model of situations, and – up to this point – generally in agreement with his arguments. The case that he makes for exploring issues of 'situational geography', along with his wider emphasis on matters of time, space and interaction, are vitally important for the academic field of media and communications. My major disagreement with him is related to the understanding of place that he offers – to the book's no-sense-of-place thesis.

Although Meyrowitz operates with a dual definition of 'place', employing it – on occasion – to refer to someone's position within a 'social hierarchy', it is the equating of place with 'physical location' that I will concentrate on for the purposes of my current critique. This meaning of the term is evident when he calls for a theoretical move 'beyond place' – beyond those social interactions that are, in his words, 'place-bound'. It is largely in this sense of the term, too, that he suggests the world is becoming relatively placeless in comparison with previous historical periods. His bold assertion is that – in what he names the 'electronic society', primarily as a result of physical boundaries being transcended – place has lost a good deal of the social significance it used to have: 'Wherever one is now ... one may be in touch and tuned-in' (Meyrowitz, 1985: 308). Perhaps the most dramatic illustration of the no-sense-of-place thesis is his account of the changing character of prison. Whereas the

prison was once a site of 'informational isolation', he contends that, 'many prisoners now share with the larger society the privileges of radio, television, and telephone' (Meyrowitz, 1985: 117). That may be true, but to cite it as an example of some newly emerging condition of placelessness – understood for now, in his own terms, as a lessening of the significance of physical location – strikes me as problematic. To state the obvious, prisoners remain under lock and key whilst using these technologies. As he eventually concedes, 'regardless of media access, living in ... a prison cell ... and a middle class suburb are certainly not "equivalent"' (Meyrowitz, 1985: 312). Given the choice, it is hard to imagine the prisoner opting for a cell.⁴

The further problems I have with Meyrowitz's ideas about media and place can be reduced to a couple of key points which will serve to connect my discussion of his classic text with the following parts of this paper. First, the equating of place with location actually leads to a rather limited geographical conception of places. As I indicated in the introduction, phenomenological geography has helped to overcome such a limitation by proposing a broader conception of places that involves seeing them as more than locations – as experiential constructions in which environments are practically appropriated via action and emotion. Second, Meyrowitz's important thoughts on situational geography do not lead inevitably towards a no-sense-of-place thesis. On the contrary, they could equally support a view that place has the potential to be doubled or pluralised in instances of media use. I pursue that alternative view now by turning to consider aspects of Scannell's phenomenological approach to radio and television (Scannell, 1996). In particular, my concern in the next section of the paper is to extend the notion of the doubling of place that he develops in his account of broadcasting's occasional 'eventfulness'.

⁴ Interestingly, Meyrowitz (2005: 26) has now proposed that electronically mediated communication 'may even enhance some aspects of connection to physical location'. As 'the "community of interaction" becomes a mobile phenomenon' for many people, he argues, so choices about 'places to live' could well be taking on greater significance in their lives – 'based on ... variables such as weather, ... quality of schools, density of population, available entertainment' (Meyrowitz, 2005: 26) and so on.

3. SITUATIONAL GEOGRAPHY (b): THE DOUBLING OF PLACE

There are several similarities between the perspectives of Meyrowitz (1985) and Scannell (1996). For example, in addition to the interests they share in the temporal and spatial arrangements of communication, both draw on what Meyrowitz names the situationist tradition. Scannell's theoretical reference points include Goffman's sociology of interaction, as well as ethnomethodology, conversation analysis and pragmatics – all of which have stressed, in their varied ways, the importance of context for 'the intelligibility of the social practices of everyday existence' (Scannell, 1996: 4). However, there are also significant differences between the approaches that Meyrowitz and Scannell take to media. One difference has to do with Scannell's explicit adoption of phenomenology. While Meyrowitz raises what could loosely be described as phenomenological questions about the character of modern existence, and whilst he refers in passing to the phenomenological sociology of Alfred Schutz and others – positioning them within the situationist tradition – phenomenology is not his guiding light. It is central to Scannell's project, though. More specifically, Martin Heidegger's *Being and Time* (1962) is the major point of reference for Scannell's reflections on broadcasting and its audiences. Interestingly, Heidegger (1962: 140) himself reflects briefly on radio in a wider philosophical discussion of the 'spatiality' of 'being-in-the-world', taking what was then a new medium of communication as one example of a 'push ... towards the conquest of remoteness'. Pursuing this particular line of thought, Scannell (1996: 173) considers the implications of radio and television use for listeners' and viewers' 'ways of being in the world', grounding his analysis in a detailed social history of British public service broadcasting.⁵

Another, more notable difference between the perspectives of Meyrowitz and Scannell arises directly out of the latter's interest in changed ways of being in the world. Among the 'possibilities of being' made available to audience members by radio and television, Scannell (1996: 91) argues that there is now the possibility 'of being in two places at once'. Of course, anybody can only be in one place at a time physically, yet broadcasting permits a live witnessing of remote happenings that might bring these happenings as close – experientially – as those in someone's immediate physical surroundings. Whereas Meyrowitz (1985) believes that this closeness-at-a-distance supports the no-sense-of-place thesis, Scannell (1996) proposes, instead, that the uses of radio and television may actually serve to

⁵ While Scannell's book contains much historical material, the larger context for his analysis is provided by an earlier, co-authored volume on the social history of British broadcasting (Scannell and Cardiff, 1991).

“double” reality’. The doubling-of-place argument emerges initially in a chapter devoted to the study of broadcast public events such as state ceremonies or major sporting occasions: ‘Public events now occur, simultaneously, in two different places: the place of the event itself and that in which it is watched and heard’ (Scannell, 1996: 76).⁶ Still, as he seems to imply in his book’s concluding chapter on the concept of dailiness, there is no reason to restrict this argument to a study of eventfulness alone – since what he terms the ordinary ‘magic’ of doubling is bound up more generally with ‘the liveness of radio and television’ (Scannell, 1996: 172). Even in cases where programmes are routinely pre-recorded prior to the moment of their transmission, it often remains a fundamental goal of the producers to construct that sense of liveness and immediacy – the ‘phenomenal now’ of broadcasting.

I want to suggest, indeed, that there is no need to limit the doubling-of-place argument to radio and television alone. It could be applied more widely to contemporary media uses – especially the uses of electronic media such as the telephone and the internet, because of the capacity for liveness that they share with broadcasting. Clearly, there are important differences between, say, television and the internet as information and communication technologies, but each permits an instantaneous doubling of place. In ‘real time’ social interactions conducted ‘online’, the media environments in question are typically ‘virtual realities’ rather than what Scannell calls the ‘re-presencing’ of physically remote happenings. Nevertheless, in both instances – television viewing and internet use – participants are at least doubly situated. As Lori Kendall (2002: 7) puts it in her ethnography of the users of an internet forum, ‘while participating in social interaction online, ... each participant has a physical body that remains involved in experiences separate from the interactions occurring online’. To borrow a phrase employed in another context – an account of mobile-phone talk that is given by conversation analyst Emanuel Schegloff (2002) – there are ‘two “theres” there’.

My preference, then, is for Scannell’s ideas about media and place over Meyrowitz’s, although I have proposed that the notion of doubling or pluralisation might best be seen as a way of building on Meyrowitz’s helpful discussion of situational geography (Meyrowitz, 1985). Scannell’s phenomenological turn is also of considerable interest. It enables him to approach

⁶ Daniel Dayan and Elihu Katz (1992) ask whether it is still appropriate to think of an event as ‘public’ when it is ritually performed, at least partly, ‘in private’. They answer that it is appropriate, justifying their assertion by employing the concept of a ‘diasporic ceremony’: ‘Attendance takes place in small groups congregated around the television set, concentrating on the symbolic center, keenly aware that myriad other groups are doing likewise’ (Dayan and Katz, 1992: 146).

broadcasting as the remarkable accomplishment of 'an all-day everyday service that is ready-to-hand and available', and yet available in such a way that this routinised service can appear to listeners and viewers 'as no more than a natural, ordinary, unremarkable, everyday entitlement' (Scannell, 1996: 145). Rather like Heidegger's *Being and Time*, Scannell's *Radio, Television and Modern Life* pays a good deal of attention to 'the phenomenology of familiarity' (Blattner, 2006). He regards broadcasting as a significant contributor today to the familiar, taken-for-granted character of daily living.

While there is much to admire in Scannell's work, his tendency to emphasise shared human experience leads him to neglect issues of social difference – issues that he need not overlook in developing a phenomenological approach. For instance, a persistent theme running through his historical studies of radio and television is the idea that public service broadcasting 'has brought into being a culture in common' (Scannell, 1989: 138). Following Scannell's phenomenological turn, this culture-in-common idea becomes inflected in particular ways – for example, when he writes of national broadcasting that all listeners and viewers are able to find their 'way about in it ... in a quite untroubled manner' (Scannell, 1996: 8). His choice of words here is interesting because he makes a clear link with Heidegger's phenomenology of familiarity – with its focus on prereflective understandings and immersion within an everyday world – but Scannell also appears to be implicitly in agreement with Meyrowitz (1985) that radio and television have an environmental quality. They offer media environments to find one's 'way about in'. However, what Scannell (1996) fails to acknowledge are the multiple paths along which different audience members actually find their way about, and perhaps feel lost and troubled from time to time in contemporary multi-channel broadcasting.⁷ In addition, there is a problematic tendency for him, just as there was for Meyrowitz, to equate places with locations. Although a concern with the experiences of listeners and viewers is evident in his discussion of the doubling of place, he does not go on to conceptualise places as experiential constructions. To reach this kind of understanding, it is necessary to take a detour out of the field of media and communications in order to explore a certain way of looking at place that has been developed within the discipline of geography.

⁷ For example, see David Morley's valuable critique of Scannell's ideas on 'sociability' (Morley, 2000). There, Morley (2000: 112) emphasises difference rather than commonality by looking at 'which forms of sociability feel foreign to whom'.

4. PHENOMENOLOGICAL GEOGRAPHY (a): ON PLACE-MAKING PRACTICES

In this section of the paper, I want to propose that Seamon's *A Geography of the Lifeworld* (1979) and other writings from the same period by human geographers with an interest in phenomenology – especially Relph (1976) and Yi-Fu Tuan (1977) – provide conceptions of place and place-making which can helpfully be recovered for the purposes of the present discussion. Although my concern ultimately will be with the relevance of these conceptions for thinking about media and communications, I also want to suggest that the time may be ripe for a careful reconsideration of the work of the phenomenological geographers within the discipline of geography itself. Their ideas now tend to be seen as outmoded and as having been superseded by later, more fashionable perspectives in social and cultural geographies.⁸ Cresswell (2006: 31) starts to put the record straight by acknowledging that Seamon's approach 'was an important precursor to contemporary work on nonrepresentational theory' of the kind being done in geography by Nigel Thrift and others. Thrift's insistence that only 'part of thinking is explicitly cognitive' (Thrift, 2004: 90), and his related interests in 'practical knowing' and 'affect' (Thrift, 2007), clearly echo Seamon's far earlier critique of notions of 'spatial cognition' in human geography (Seamon, 1979). My own view is that Seamon's approach deserves to be regarded as more than just a 'precursor' to elements of contemporary spatial theory. I would go further to argue that its close attention to the empirical detail of day-to-day lives gives it an advantage over much current theorising.

Like Scannell (1996), Seamon and fellow phenomenological geographers have drawn on aspects of Heidegger's philosophy – a short piece on questions of dwelling (Heidegger, 1993) is their preferred point of reference – but Seamon's geography is perhaps more indebted to work by another phenomenological philosopher, Maurice Merleau-Ponty. When Seamon (1979) begins to address 'lifeworld' issues, he focuses on 'everyday movements' – on corporeal mobilities that form a part of wider 'time-space routines' – borrowing from Merleau-Ponty's *Phenomenology of Perception* (1962) the observation that these routine, habitual movements are bound up with a 'prereflective knowledge' which is embodied. It is precisely this emphasis on the body and 'motor intentionality' that constitutes an extension of Heidegger's earlier thoughts on being-in-the-world (Blattner, 2006). One particular instance that Merleau-Ponty (1962: 166) cites in his book is what he calls the 'knowledge in

⁸ This perspective on phenomenological – and, more generally, on so-called 'humanistic' – geography is particularly evident in recent commentaries on place, such as those provided by Lewis Holloway and Phil Hubbard (2001) and by Tim Cresswell (2004).

the hands' of the typist, whose skilled fingers find 'where the letters are on the typewriter ... through a knowledge bred of familiarity'. Nick Crossley (2001: 122) updates Merleau-Ponty's example by offering an account of his own experience of using a computer: 'The type of knowledge I have of the keyboard is a practical, embodied knowledge, quite ... distinct from discursive knowledge.' He is aware that, away from the computer, it would not be possible for him to say where all the different keys are located – yet his fingers still move rapidly across them when he is in 'full flow'. His personal account is designed to indicate, more broadly, the social acquisition of a prereflective 'grasp' of familiar technologies and environments.⁹

Seamon (1979), with reference to specific observations made by the members of 'environmental experience groups' which he set up in a small American city, points to various kinds of situated action – from turning on an electric light switch in the house to walking or driving a well-known route through the local area – that are habitual in character. Citing Merleau-Ponty's *Phenomenology of Perception* (1962), Seamon (1979: 48-9) employs the term 'body-subject' in his discussion of these activities: 'Body-subject learns through repetition and ... becomes attached to the movements it knows.' Alongside this term, Seamon introduces the complementary concept of 'feeling-subject' to deal with the formation of an associated emotional or affective 'attachment' to one's everyday environment. Such attachments can give rise to the condition of 'at-homeness' – 'the usually unnoticed, taken-for-granted situation of being comfortable in ... the everyday world' (Seamon, 1979: 70) – and to that experience of immersion which Relph (1976) names 'existential insideness'. Taken together, it is those 'forces of body and emotion' (Seamon, 1979) that are understood to constitute senses of place.

Phenomenological geographers have viewed acts of dwelling or place-making as transformational – as a practical appropriation of the environment 'at hand'. A classic expression of this perspective is to be found in Tuan's *Space and Place* (1977). 'When space feels thoroughly familiar', he asserts, 'it has become place' (Tuan, 1977: 73). Place is thought of there as 'lived space', transformed by doings and feelings. For example, Tuan (1977: 199) writes about the gradual process of someone getting to know an initially 'strange' locality, so that eventually, 'what was ... unknown space becomes ... concrete place'. It would be quite wrong to assume, though, that phenomenological geography has

⁹ Another good example would be the knowledge in the thumbs of the text-messaging user of a mobile phone.

only addressed the construction of places at the level of individual, subjective experience. In fact, Seamon regards place-making as a largely collaborative, intersubjective project – involving complex social interactions and a meshing of time-space routines in what he chooses to call, rather romantically, ‘place choreographies’. According to his account, typical public settings for these intricate, collective performances of place are cafés, market squares and established urban neighbourhoods.

So how might the insights of the phenomenological geographers contribute to the study of media uses in daily living? My attempt to recover their ideas for this purpose, three decades on, will no doubt appear eccentric to many colleagues in the field of media and communications, where the writings of Seamon and others on place-making practices have very rarely been cited.¹⁰ Indeed, I would expect my posing of this question to come as a surprise even to those in the discipline of geography, since Seamon (1979) – picking up an argument about ‘placelessness’ originally advanced by Relph (1976) – is generally suspicious of developments in media. Seamon (1979: 91), then, claims that, ‘technology and mass culture destroy the uniqueness of places’. Nevertheless, he does also provide, in passing, some valuable empirical evidence of the ways in which everyday media uses can figure in the experiential construction of places. For instance, one environmental experience group member reported reading a certain daily newspaper each weekday morning, whilst having toast and coffee in a diner on his route to the office. That ritual practice, which became apparent to him on the odd occasions when the newspaper was not there to be read, helped to confirm, in the words of Hermann Bausinger (1984: 344), ‘that the breakfast-time world is still in order’. Similarly, Seamon (1979: 56) notes the case of somebody who regularly returned from work in the evening to eat a meal ‘in front of the seven o’clock news on television’. In each case, the medium of communication was an environmental resource that was appropriated – along with resources like food and drink – in a process of place-making, leading to the formation of routine attachments and feelings of at-homeness.

Building on Crossley’s discussion of computer use (Crossley, 2001), I could add, on a personal note, that sitting at the desk in my study – in front of the screen and surrounded by books – is one of the situations in which I feel most at home and comfortable, allowing for the occasional frustrations of academic labour. However, my point is not only about an

¹⁰ To my knowledge, Silverstone (1994) is the only other academic in this field to have made more than a passing reference to phenomenological geography. He draws on the work of Relph and Seamon – as well as Anne Buttimer (1980) – in a discussion of television, home and daily living. Relph (1976) receives a brief mention, though, in important books by Morley (2000), Nick Couldry (2000) and Terhi Rantanen (2005).

embodied knowledge of the technology or the familiarity that I have with the room as an immediate physical environment within the household. It is also about a simultaneous involvement with media situations or environments which may serve to double my sense of place. I find my way about with ease in at least some of these environments – for example, particular on-screen documents, email inboxes and web sites that are visited on a regular basis. Such electronic spaces, too, have the potential to become known, ‘concrete’ places (Tuan, 1977) in the course of frequent use – as do the printed pages of a newspaper that is ritually consumed in an ‘untroubled manner’ (Scannell, 1996).

5. PHENOMENOLOGICAL GEOGRAPHY (b): ON ‘PLACELESSNESS’ AND ‘NON-PLACES’

In my view, then, there is a series of concepts in phenomenological philosophy and geography – such as prereflective knowledge, environmental experience, body-subject, feeling-subject and at-homeness – that can help to inform the investigation of media uses and their day-to-day contexts, promising to illuminate those uses in distinctive ways. However, in order to renew the valuable insights of Seamon (1979) and others on place-making practices, it is necessary to address certain problems that are associated with this work. Most importantly, this will involve presenting a critique of Relph’s ideas on placelessness (Relph, 1976). To begin with, I want to identify further limitations of the perspective of the phenomenological geographers.

Just as Scannell (1996) neglects issues of social difference, so Seamon’s analysis of ‘everyday environmental experience’ (Seamon, 1979) has an unfortunate tendency to slip into a form of universalism. He takes the words of his group members, who were of course living in specific social and historical circumstances, as an indication of some general condition of geographical being – claiming that their descriptions ‘reflect human experience in its typicality’ (Seamon, 1979: 23). Elsewhere, he goes on to define phenomenological geography in a problematic fashion, as an area of study that ‘directs its attention to the essential nature of man’s [sic] dwelling on earth’ (Seamon, 1980: 148). Still, my contention is that this universalism or essentialism ought not to be seen as an inevitable characteristic of phenomenological inquiry. On the contrary, there is no reason why such inquiry cannot incorporate a concern with difference – thereby dealing with human experiences in their specificity and diversity. This would involve looking to, in Pierre Bourdieu’s terms, thoroughly

'sociologize' phenomenology (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992).¹¹ It is better to think, for example, of the existence of multiple, socially differentiated lifeworlds – rather than of 'the lifeworld' as a singular, ahistorical, universally shared realm of familiarity. In addition, I want to make two related, critical points. First, whilst an engagement with feelings of insideness is absolutely crucial, there is a danger that it might lead to an inward-looking conception of places – as opposed to seeing that place is always constructed within a complex 'mix of links and interconnections to' a 'beyond' (Massey, 1994: 5). Second, phenomenological geography focuses on experiences of at-homeness and belonging at the expense of dealing adequately with those of marginalisation or exclusion.¹² To be fair, Relph (1976: 51) does employ the potentially fruitful concept of 'existential outsidersness' – referring there to 'alienation, ... a sense of ... not belonging'. His application of that concept is nevertheless flawed, because of the way in which he positions it within wider arguments about the emergence of a 'placeless geography', to which this discussion now turns.

A significant strength of Relph's approach is his assertion that 'character' is 'imputed to landscapes by the intentionality of experience' (Relph, 1976: 123). I take this to mean that, although some architects and planners may seek to facilitate place-making, it is ultimately the inhabitants of any built or natural environment who have the capacity to constitute it as a lived space through their activities and emotions. The implication of Relph's statement is that many different environments – maybe even the prison cell in Meyrowitz's example (Meyrowitz, 1985), cited previously – could, in principle, 'become place' (Tuan, 1977) in the phenomenological sense of the word. Indeed, one of my main aims here is to extend the theory of place-making practices – to recognise the possibility that media environments might also be transformed into places. There is, however, a major contradiction in Relph's book. When he sets out his thoughts on placelessness, he overlooks the fundamental insight of phenomenological geography – the view that place is constructed experientially – by adopting versions of environmental and technological determinism.

¹¹ One important aspect of Bourdieu's sociology is an interest in phenomenological philosophy. This interest is very clear in one of Bourdieu's later discussions of 'habitus' and 'bodily knowledge' (Bourdieu, 2000), in which he refers directly to Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty. 'The agent engaged in practice knows the world but ... takes it for granted', writes Bourdieu (2000: 142-143), 'precisely because he [sic] inhabits it like ... a familiar habitat ... feels at home in the world.' At the same time, his appropriation of phenomenology involves a critical engagement with it. He believes 'one has to examine ... the social conditions that ... make possible the experience of the social world as self-evident', and accuses phenomenology of focusing on familiarity without having adequate 'means of accounting for it' (Bourdieu, 2000: 147).

¹² For a critique of Tuan, Relph and Seamon that is constructed along precisely these lines, see James Duncan and Nancy Duncan (2001), who borrow from Bourdieu's sociology in their discussion of the 'politics of exclusion'. However, I want to insist that such criticism of phenomenological geography does not, for me, invalidate its considerable insights into place-making.

For Relph (1976), placelessness is, in part, the product of particular styles of architecture and planning. The main targets are modernist, 'International Style' structures made from concrete, steel and glass – as well as suburban residential developments with their seemingly 'endless ... identical houses'. Of greatest interest to me, however, is his attempt to connect placelessness with 'mass' communication – a category in which he includes transportation systems alongside broadcasting and print media. 'Roads, railways, airports, cutting across or imposed on the landscape rather than developing with it, are not only features of placelessness in their own right', argues Relph (1976: 90), 'but ... have encouraged the spread of placelessness.' His case, then, is that the skyscraper and the modern housing estate are somehow innately placeless, 'inauthentic' features of the landscape. It is in precisely this way that he understands existential outsidership as 'not belonging' in those built environments. Similarly, contemporary travel and media technologies are linked in his argument to a condition of placelessness, without a full exploration of their routine social uses. They are thought to undermine 'authentic' place making, human contact and community (Relph, 1976).

Anthropologist Marc Augé (1995), in a more recent account of what he names the 'non-places of supermodernity', reaches the same pessimistic conclusion concerning communications and placelessness.¹³ His list of today's non-places includes 'airports and railway stations, hotel chains, and ... cable and wireless networks' (Augé, 1995: 79). For Augé, these qualify as non-places because he regards them as sites of transit and solitude rather than of collective dwelling. The problem with his definition is that he ends up in the same difficulty as Relph – because this argument, too, has its environmental and technological determinisms. Certain spaces of travel and electronically mediated communication are assumed to allow only certain – placeless – types of existence. Augé therefore fails to recognise the potential for different social groups to experience the sites on his list in quite different ways. With reference to the case of the airport, Cresswell (2006) helpfully counters Augé's general claims. He makes the crucial point that major international airports are not just locations through which the 'global kinetic elite' passes – along with less privileged passengers from 'budget airline flyers' to 'asylum seekers'. They also 'support a huge workforce whose members commute in daily patterns to and from the airport', including 'flight attendants, mechanics, check-in workers, janitors' and others (Cresswell,

¹³ It is worth noting that this is a pessimism not shared by Meyrowitz (1985). Indeed, I read his no-sense-of-place thesis as overly optimistic about social change.

2006: 223). By those workers at least, and perhaps by frequent travellers as well, airports will most likely be constructed as unique places. More specifically, his analysis is centred on Schiphol Airport, Amsterdam, where some 'homeless people' take shelter in public areas and local taxi drivers are in fierce competition for fares to the city. Borrowing a metaphor provided by Seamon (1980), Cresswell (2006: 257) goes on to characterise the routine social interactions in and around Schiphol as 'an intricate "place-ballet" of multiple movements'.

If the idea of a place choreography or ballet can be applied in the study of an airport, can its application be extended yet further to describe, for instance, some situations of online interaction? Take the example of the internet forum which was the focus of ethnographic research carried out by Kendall (2002), mentioned earlier in my discussion of doubling. Although everyday activities inside this multi-user domain or 'MUD' were not those corporeal mobilities of interest to Seamon (1979), it seems reasonable – on the evidence of Kendall's observations – to suggest that regular participants were involved in a live and collaborative performance of place. Their collective dwelling was based on frequent social contact within, and occasional face-to-face meetings beyond, a media environment that they clearly felt attached to. That contact involved a close meshing of time-space routines, since many of the MUD's inhabitants were workers in the Californian IT industry, experiencing similar patterns of daily living on 'Pacific Standard Time' (Kendall, 2002). Of course, the notion of a 'virtual' place – understood as a location – is far from new, but my appropriation of Seamon's performance metaphor in this context is intended to broaden the conception of place that might be employed in studies of online interaction. At the same time, Kendall's findings offer an important reminder that 'cyberspace' has its divisions as well as its communities. At-homeness in the MUD was partly constituted through a sociability that served to marginalise or exclude 'outsiders'. In addition, she is absolutely right to ground her observations of online interaction in an appreciation of offline realities – insisting that 'each participant has a physical body' (Kendall, 2002: 7) involved in other experiences.

6. RESEARCH STRATEGIES: A DISTURBANCE OF LIFEWORLDS

This final section of the paper offers a consideration of methodological questions that flow out of the discussion so far. Which research strategies are most appropriate for an investigation of the changing situational and phenomenological geographies of social life? In particular, how can empirical research best come to grips with the usually prereflective or 'pre-cognitive' (Seamon, 1979) dimensions of place-making in everyday environments? Seamon's response to the second of these questions was to set up the environmental experience groups, in which members were invited to examine in detail – both personally and by way of 'intersubjective corroboration' – certain taken-for-granted features of their day-to-day existence: 'the significance of habit and routine, ... everyday movement in space, ... emotions related to place' (Seamon, 1979: 27-8) and so on. By adopting this strategy, he was following a basic principle of phenomenology – the idea that if lifeworld issues are to be made 'a focus of attention', it is first necessary to try to 'disengage' from what 'the phenomenologist calls the natural attitude ... the unquestioned acceptance of the things and experiences of daily living' (Seamon, 1979: 20). What his group members found, in fact, was that momentary disruptions to the familiar order of things could provide them with a degree of disengagement from 'the natural attitude' – a starting point for reflection on normally 'unquestioned' experiences.¹⁴ For example, I have referred to the case of someone for whom reading the same newspaper each morning was a ritual practice that was only noticed when the newspaper was unavailable. He reported an equivalent sense of disruption to his 'breakfast-time world' (Bausinger, 1984) when there were no seats available at the local diner.

Future empirical research could fruitfully pursue an exploration of momentary disruptions to routine. However, what if – in an attempt to throw the habitual and affective aspects of social activity into sharper relief – researchers were also to look at more prolonged periods of disturbance to lifeworlds? My proposal here is that transnational migrations, among other eventful happenings, might create such periods of disturbance since they involve a physical departure from what are usually well-known surroundings and a relocation on less familiar or even alien territory. Interestingly, Seamon (1989) himself considers experiences of migration in an insightful analysis of four literary fictions which tell the story of 19th-Century migrants

¹⁴ The same principle of studying everyday social order via minor disruptions of that order operates in the breaching experiments conducted by Harold Garfinkel (1984) – another thinker in what Meyrowitz terms the situationist tradition – although Garfinkel actually invited volunteers to initiate the disturbances, by questioning any taken-for-granted assumptions being made by others in face-to-face conversation.

who depart from Sweden to settle in Minnesota.¹⁵ Taking the contents of these historical novels as data, Seamon (1989: 228) maps out several stages in a process that he terms the migrants' 'dwelling-journey spiral' – from the initial 'decision to go' through to the 'reestablishment of dwelling' many years later on another continent. Of course, while transnational migrations may have a number of basic features in common – for instance, the capacity for a disruption and subsequent reconstruction of everyday behaviour patterns – they need to be understood in their specificity and diversity. There is no singular, ahistorical, universally shared migrant experience. Indeed, I now comment on migrations of a different sort, drawing upon selected findings from my collaborative research with Monika Metykova. This research is concerned with the '21st Century' movements of young 'Eastern Europeans' to Britain – movements that are associated with an enlargement of the European Union.¹⁶

Whereas the fictional characters featured in Seamon's analysis were leaving behind an 'old' world to relocate in a completely strange 'new' one (Seamon, 1989), young people interviewed in our research knew something of Britain's visual appearance in advance of their arrival – either through prior travel or, more often, through electronic and print media use. In addition, whereas Scandinavian migrants to North America in the 19th Century would have had no prospect of a return – except via memory and imagination – all of the interviewees saw a future return as, at the very least, a viable option. Moreover, while living in Britain, it is possible for them to maintain long-distance relationships with friends and family members and to keep in touch with news from 'home' on a regular basis. These ongoing connections are forged, in part, through routine uses of various media – principally the internet and mobile phone – but also by means of communication in the wider sense of physical transportation. It is worth noting that several interviewees referred to their use of budget-airline routes for keeping Eastern Europe within reach. Contrary to the claims made by Relph (1976) and Augé (1995), such contemporary communications do not appear to lead to a condition of placelessness and to a proliferation of non-places. For the young people in this study, at-homeness has the potential to be pluralised across national – as well as local –

¹⁵ Those fictions, in a series written by Vilhelm Moberg, 'describe sixteen Swedes from the same home parish who leave their native country and proceed to make new homes in the St Croix Valley of Minnesota' (Seamon, 1989: 228).

¹⁶ Our research involves the transcription and analysis of lengthy conversational interviews with 20 migrants from the new EU member states in Eastern Europe. The focus of these interviews is on environmental experiences both before and after trans-European migration. At the time of the interviews in 2006-7, the migrants were living in London, Edinburgh or Newcastle. According to the available statistics, the vast majority of migrants to Britain from Eastern Europe – since EU enlargement in 2004 – have been in the 18-to-34-age range, and our interviewees were recruited from within that range. Although a method of 'group inquiry' (Seamon, 1979) is not being employed, these migrants have usually reflected on their move already – prior to interview – in dialogue with friends or family members.

boundaries as they negotiate their multiple attachments to physical and virtual environments.

Consider the case of Simona, a 20-year-old Lithuanian woman based in London. Despite having prior contact with a friend from Lithuania who was working there, her environmental experience of the city – on arrival – was one of being overwhelmed by a strange physical and human situation: 'My first impression was it's huge ... something more than I expected. ... It was so busy ... I couldn't grasp it. For me, it was like ... "Oh my God" can I stay here?' To adapt Relph's term, she initially felt an existential outsidership (Relph, 1976) in relation to London. Simona began the gradual process of reconstructing a familiar order by hanging something in her rented room which she had carried with her on the plane journey from Lithuania to London. When asked if she had arrived with any objects of emotional significance, Simona replies: 'Yeah, I had in my room [in Vilnius] this net and I would click pictures ... on that, so I brought this net and the pictures ... it's in my room now, it's always in the room where I'm living.' Indeed, this is not the only emotionally significant 'net' with 'pictures' to feature in her day-to-day existence. She has regular online interactions with friends who, like her, have left the city of Vilnius to move out of the country – sharing a web site with them on which personal photographs are now displayed. Reflecting on occasional trips back to Vilnius, she remarks that, 'walking the streets ... you feel it's your own town ... before I left, I didn't realise how attached I am'. A physical departure from well-known surroundings has enabled her to recognise feelings that were previously taken-for-granted. At the same time, after nearly two years living away from Vilnius, she says of London that, 'it kind of feels like my own place as well ... I'm already familiar with the streets'. Both in Vilnius and in those areas of London known to her, she has developed what human geographer Paul Adams (2001) calls 'a peripatetic sense of place' through routine practices of walking in urban space – corporeal mobilities that are often accompanied by sounds from her MP3 player.

Whilst I have focused on a single case, our interview material points to many comparable experiences. For example, Simona's feeling of 'outsidership' on arriving in London was also experienced by Petra, a 29-year-old Hungarian woman. In part, this had to do with a lack of confidence in speaking English, but she also felt uncomfortable both as a pedestrian and as a passenger on the tube trains – referring to 'the fact that you had to look in a different direction when you stepped off the pavement', and to her 'feeling unwell on the underground'. However, 18 months later, she states that, 'to some extent I consider myself

a Londoner ... I know how to get around'. Petra adds that on a recent visit from her parents, 'my dad told me he was so proud that I could cope in this huge city – that he would be lost'. Still, like Simona, she has strong emotions when making a trip back home – describing her heart as 'pounding, pounding, pounding' on first arriving back in Budapest. With housemates in London, she frequently visits a Hungarian news site on the internet, too – revealing that 'we are always at home in home news'. If this story about the Hungarian news site is an account of specific affective attachments to a media situation, then other interviewees reflect in interesting ways on the early stages of place making in their new physical environments. Ilija, a 27-year-old Slovenian man, shares Simona's practice of getting to know urban space on foot: 'I like, wherever I live, to walk ... I feel at home when I walk around.' When not walking around in Central London, Ilija is most comfortable there in his office at work, in a large library located nearby – it feels 'safe' and 'has a special smell', he explains – and in the bathroom of his apartment, where he has got into the habit of taking 'a long bath' at the end of each day 'because the shower is not working'. Marcin, a 28-year-old Polish man who is based in Edinburgh, speaks about the role of his new daily routine in beginning to re-establish dwelling. He observes how, for instance, on 'my way to work, every day I meet the same people ... knowing each other by sight'. His growing familiarity with Edinburgh is not only formed via physical movement, since Marcin visits a Polish-language internet portal to obtain information on different parts of the city. Finally, another environmental experience was volunteered by a fellow Pole living in Edinburgh – a 32-year-old woman named Magda. As a frequent traveller, she reports: 'Some time ago I started to feel quite familiar and quite well in airports.'

It is only possible here to provide a brief glimpse of our data. Nevertheless, what these accounts clearly demonstrate is the importance of apparently mundane social activities – such as the decoration of a rented room, chatting with friends or reading news online, and finding one's way in a city – for formations of at-homeness and belonging at different geographical scales. There is sufficient evidence here to support my claim that studies of migrant experiences, especially in the period immediately following a transnational migration, can be a valuable strategy for highlighting the persistent significance of place today.

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