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'A *Geography of Lifeworld* in Retrospect: A Response to Shaun Moores'

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## **A *Geography of Lifeworld* in Retrospect: A Response to [Shaun Moores](#)**

### **Abstract**

This essay is a response to Shaun Moores' commentary on the author's *A Geography of the Lifeworld*, an examination of the significance of the everyday spaces, places, and environment in peoples' daily lives (Seamon 1979). The author discusses a number of Moores' concerns, including the role of media in supporting or undermining physical places; the value of phenomenological method for media and communication studies; and the charge that phenomenology is hindered by an essentialist approach that presupposes the presence and significance of invariant existential structures.

**Keywords:** architecture; digital media; everyday life; experience; media use; phenomenology; physical environment; place; space

### **Introduction**

I am flattered and encouraged that media and communications scholar Shaun Moores finds value in *A Geography of the Lifeworld*, a book I wrote almost thirty years ago to explore the importance of the material and spatial environment in peoples' daily lives (Seamon 1979; hereafter *Lifeworld*).

In his commentary, Moores highlights what he sees as both negative and positive aspects of my book—that, on one hand, I unfairly criticize media as a threat to firsthand human contact and place-based communities; that, on the other hand, my phenomenological perspective and method might provide a valuable means to explore what Moores describes as “those apparently automatic *uses of media in the habitual movements of the daily round*” (Moores 2006). I want to respond to these two comments as well as to other issues that Moores raises in his commentary. First, however, let me briefly explain who I am and what *Lifeworld* is about, since my academic background and interests may at first glance seem far removed from the realm of media and communications.

### **Environmental and Architectural Phenomenology**

I am a geographer and an environment-behavior researcher in a department of architecture. My main teaching and scholarly focus relates to the nature of environmental behavior and experience, especially in relation to the built environment. I am interested in why places are important for people and how architecture and environmental design can be a vehicle for place making, especially in cities. Most often, I call my area of interest “phenomenological geography,” “phenomenological ecology,” or “environmental and architectural phenomenology” (Seamon 1993, 2000, 2004, 2007; Seamon and Mugerauer 1985; Seamon and Zajonc 1998).<sup>[1]</sup>

I became interested in this topic when I was working on my doctorate in behavioral geography at Clark University in Worcester, Massachusetts, in the late 1970s (Seamon 1987; Seamon and Buttimer 1980). My dissertation, revised and published in 1979 as *Lifeworld*, focused on a wide-ranging phenomenon that I called *everyday environmental experience*—the sum total of peoples’ firsthand involvements with their everyday places, spaces, and environments. My source of experiential descriptions was *environmental experience groups*—small groups of volunteer participants (mostly but not all students) who were willing to meet weekly to examine in their own daily experience relating to focused themes such as movement patterns, emotions relating to place, the nature of noticing and attention, the meaning of home and at-homeness, places for things, deciding where to go when, and so forth.

Through a phenomenological explication of some 1,500 personal observations provided by these environmental experience groups, I eventually arrived at three overarching themes—*movement*, *rest*, and *encounter*—that appeared to mark the essential lived core of everyday environmental experience. The section on movement examined the habitual nature of everyday environmental behaviors and argued, after French phenomenologist Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1962), that the lived foundation of these behaviors is the body as preconscious but intelligent subject. The section on rest explored people’s attachment to place and gave particular attention to at-homeness and positive affective relationships with places and environments.

The book’s third section on encounter considered the multifaceted ways in which people make or do not make attentive contact with their surroundings and explored such modes of awareness as obliviousness, noticing, watching, and more intense encounter types. In the book’s concluding section, I examined the lived relationships and interconnections among movement, rest, and encounter and argued that their threefold structure offers one simple but integrated way to envision human environmental experience conceptually and to think about design and policy implications practically.

### **Habitual Embodiment and Place Choreographies**

In his commentary, Moores devotes considerable discussion to my explication of movement, thus I want to elaborate findings on this theme so I can then respond to

Moore's comments. As indicated above, one central theme arising from the environmental experience groups was the importance of habitual movement in everyday life. Group observations suggested that, regardless of the particular environmental scale at which they happen, many movements are conducted by some preconscious impulse that guides behaviors without the person's need to be consciously aware of their happening.

"Body-subject" is the term that Merleau-Ponty used in his *Phenomenology of Perception* to describe the intentional but taken-for-granted intelligence of the body.

"Consciousness," he wrote (Merleau-Ponty 1962: 138-39) "is being toward the thing through the intermediary of the body. A movement is learned when the body has understood it, that is, when it has incorporated it into its 'world', and to move one's body is to aim at things through it; it is to allow oneself to respond to their call.

Though Merleau-Ponty said very little about larger-scale actions of body-subject in *Phenomenology of Perception* and in his other works (see Seamon 2007, note 4), observations from the environmental experience groups pointed to its versatility as expressed in more complex movements and actions extending over time and space. One such behavior is what I then called *body ballet* and have more recently (Seamon 2007) called *body routine*—a set of integrated gestures, behaviors, and actions that sustain a particular task or aim, for example, preparing a meal, driving a car, doing home repair, and so forth. Also identified was what I labeled a *time-space routine*—a set of more or less habitual bodily actions that extends through a considerable portion of time, for example, a getting-up routine or a weekday going-to-lunch routine.

Most important for the topic of place making, group observations suggested that, in a supportive physical environment, individual time-space routines and body routines may commingle in a larger whole, contributing to an environmental dynamic that I called, after earlier observations of urban critic Jane Jacobs (1961: 50), a *place ballet*—an interaction of time-space routines and body routines rooted in space, which becomes an important place of interpersonal and communal exchanges, actions, and meanings.

Group observations suggested that place ballet may occur at all manner of environmental scales—inside, outside, at the level of neighborhood, street, public space, building interior, and so forth. Place ballet should not be envisioned as a regimented ensemble of robot-like participants moving about in mindless precision but, rather, as a fluid environmental dynamic that allows for temporal give and take as participants are present more or less regularly, at more or less the same times. Newcomers, outsiders and infrequent participants may contribute to place ballet, but its foundation is some degree of environmental and temporal regularity founded in body-subject (Seamon and Nordin 1980). Place ballet is often the lived foundation of what sociologist Ray Oldenburg (1989; Rosenbaum 2006) calls a *third place*—a public or semi-public establishment, other than home or work, where people informally gather and socialize, for example, a popular café, pub, or eatery.

## Routines, Media, and Place

In his commentary on my book, Moores gives considerable attention to the habitual nature of everyday movement because he sees the theme as an important lived structure that can establish a taken-for-granted regularity of media and communications use. He is struck, for example, by one group member's account of a weekday morning routine that includes walking to a nearby café, ordering scrambled eggs and coffee, and reading a newspaper, which "had to be the *New York Times*."

Here, the necessity of a particular newspaper is as integral to the group member's routine as the place or food order, and Moores points to researchers in media and communication studies (e.g., Bausinger 1984, Scannell 1995, 1996) who emphasize that media become most significant and successful when they become an integral part of taken-for-granted daily life, or the *lifeworld*, as phenomenologists call it. As Paddy Scannell makes the point in regard to radio and television, these two broadcasting technologies "are part of both the background and foreground of our everyday dealings with each other in a common world. They are so by virtue of the ways in which they disclose the everyday historicity of the world every day" (Scannell 1996: 5).

One thing that puzzles Moores about my book is the few times group members mention media as a regular event in their "world every day." As he points out, one other group member highlighted nightly television news as an invariant portion of daily routine but, beyond that, it is true that media of any sort were not mentioned in group observations.

Mostly obviously, this lack of inclusion can be explained by my topical area of study—i.e., the group members' daily involvement with the realm of places, spaces, and environments that were part of their everyday world, or *geographical lifeworld* as I called it. Never at any point directly did I ask group members to examine the role of media in their lives, and such observations only arose as media had some role in transforming an environment into a place through regular, "habitual" use—as with the group member's insistence that only the *New York Times* could make his café breakfast routine just right.

I entirely agree with Moores' suggestion that interested volunteers exploring their media and communications experience in group context might provide useful insights and hope, as Moores concludes, that *Lifeworld* provides one valuable guide for such a future research venture. Though establishing and conducting such shared group investigation takes persistence, commitment, and deep interest in the subject matter, the results can be gratifying and valuable because different people see things from different angles, thus one obtains a much fuller picture than if he or she is looking and trying to see alone (Seamon 2000).

## A Suspicion of Media and Communications?

I don't think that *Lifeworld's* lack of examples of "media experience," however, justifies Moores' conclusion that I am "suspicious of developments in 'mass communications.'" Strongly influenced by geographer Edward Relph's then-recently-published *Place and Placelessness* (Relph 1976), I did suggest in *Lifeworld* that "technology and mass culture destroy the uniqueness of places and promote global homogenization" (Seamon 1979: 91). My larger point, however, was that rapid societal and technological changes—increasing ever faster today (see Zimmerman and Horan 2004)—allow people to become free of the habitual embodiment to place that, before developments in modern transportation and communication, had always been an integral part of human life everywhere (Horan 2000, Rae 2004).

Relph's argument in *Place and Placelessness* was not so much that technology and mass culture necessarily destroy the uniqueness of place but that, in some ways, they can undermine that uniqueness. Throughout his writings, Relph emphasizes that, if we can understand how mass culture, including media and communications, changes place experience, sometimes for the better and sometimes for the worse, then perhaps we can find ways to maintain or recreate robust places, including situations of place ballet (Relph 1981, 1993, 1996).

On the other hand, if we continue to ignore the disintegration of robust places—whether street neighborhoods, urban districts, cities as a whole, rural towns, cultural regions, and all the rest—then there will encroach more and more of what Relph called *placelessness*—"the casual eradication of distinctive places and the making of standardized landscapes that results from an insensitivity to the significance of place" (Relph 1976, Preface).<sup>[2]</sup>

Much of my own research and writings is motivated by the existential fact that, in the past, place making generally occurred automatically and unself-consciously because human beings had to make do with their own bodily devices—i.e., walking, horseback riding, building by using local construction materials and traditional building techniques, and so forth. A crucial question is whether today we can understand *self-consciously* the workings of place and thereby create and remake places *intentionally* through policy, design, and planning, *in spite of the fact that*, in ways not imagined even fifteen years ago, digital and other new technologies allow many human needs and activities to transpire more or less anywhere at any time.

Moores' understanding of the relationship between physical place and place-as-fashioned-by-media is considerably different from mine. He emphasizes Scannell's concept of "doubling of place" (Scannell 1996)—that, through media like television, cyberspace and mobile telephones, there are opportunities "for relating instantaneously to a wide range of spatially remote others, as well as to any proximate others in the physical settings of media use" (Moores 2004, p. 23). At times, no doubt, this virtual extension of communications can benefit physical place as, for example, in a situation where that place faces an external threat and local and non-local defenders, working

through list serves and other electronic media, are able to find each other and work to protect the place.<sup>[3]</sup>

As sociologist Joshua Meyrowitz points out, however, there is also the possibility that physical places become marginalized because electronic media change the “‘situational geography’ of social life” (Meyrowitz 1985:6). In many ways, digital communications eliminate or reshape the regular face-to-face interactions and other informal and formal social structures that were a taken-for-granted part of traditional space-bound places (Relph 1993: 27-31). As Meyrowitz (1985: 308) explains, “Electronic media have combined previously distinct social settings, moved the dividing line between private and public behavior toward the private, and weakened the relationship between social situations and physical places.”

### Human Life and the Physical World

In short, the relationship among place, people, and electronic media is complicated, and one key question is how cyberspace and digital communications work both to sustain and to stymie physical places and human communities. On one hand, there are thinkers like architect William Mitchell, who, in some of his work, seems to suppose that sooner or later digital media and virtual environments will allow human beings to entirely dispense with physical embodiment, spatial constraints, and geographical emplacement (e.g., Mitchell 2003; but see Mitchell 1994, 1999). On the other hand, there are thinkers like architect Malcolm McCullough (2004) and organizational psychologist Thomas Horan (2000; Zimmerman and Horan 2004), who assume that place making and the physical environment will continue to play an integral role in human life. I especially like Horan’s concept of what he calls *recombinant design*—i.e., asking how digital technologies can be “spliced into the recomposition of our homes, offices, communities, and cities to achieve optimal forms of space and place” (Horan 2000: 12)

Here is where I have some disagreement with Moores: His questioning of the relative importance of the physical world in human life. He claims I give this topic too much attention, but I would respond that he gives it too little. I would argue that this physically-lived level of human experience must “be in place” so that less embodied-dependent dimensions of human experience—e.g., media experience—can occur satisfactorily and effectively.<sup>[4]</sup>

Of how much significance can the world of media be if one’s day-to-day physically-present world is in disarray? There are levels of lived importance, and I would argue that a secure, organized physical world is primary, thus my interest in ways through policy and design to make robust places happen (Seamon 2004). I like Horan’s take on this matter: “The need for human interaction is neither created nor destroyed, but merely and significantly altered by digital technologies. Rather, digital places are new leverage points

for creating new experiences and relationships that will profoundly redefine our experience of physical space” (Horan 2000: 23).

In short, let us not jettison physical place making or face-to-face interactions of people in physical place. Rather, let us ask how digital technologies, cyber-communications, and environmental design might be drawn together to strengthen physical place making, including the possibility of place ballet.<sup>[5]</sup>

### **Encounter, Communication, and Media**

Though Moores says little about it, I would argue that the most valuable part of *Lifeworld* for studies in media and communications is the section on *encounter*, by which I meant “any situation of attentive contact between the person and world at hand” (Seamon 1979: 99). Group observations indicated that this range of awareness extends from obliviousness and minimal attentive contact with the world at hand through watching, noticing, and more intense kinds of encounter where the experiencer feels a sense of “merging” with some aspect of world.

One need is thorough phenomenologies of the kinds of encounter that various media and digital communications involve. Clearly, different media, all other things being equal, change the kind and intensity of encounter that the listener, watcher, or user has with the “real” world in which the listening, watching, or use takes place.

For example, listening to the radio allows one a fair amount of flexibility and awareness in regard to the “real” world in which the listening takes place, since vision and bodily activity can be directed elsewhere as hearing attends to the broadcast. In contrast, television typically allows for less awareness to that same world, since vision as well as hearing is involved in the encounter. With the experience of cyberspace—say, surfing the Web—one’s strand of presence in the “real” world is reduced considerably further, as physical embodiment largely slips out of awareness for long stretches of time, and one’s attention becomes focused in some small “point” far inside the head. Cyberspace can be deeply “inward” and generate an experience that is entirely apart from the user’s actual world. We need thorough phenomenologies of the varying kinds and intensities of encounter enabled by different modes of broadcasting and digital communication and media.<sup>[6]</sup>

Many thinkers and commentators have written recently about how, in some ways, digital technologies appear to be reducing the range and quality of human experience, including encounter. In a Sunday *New York Times* article (February 20, 2005), for example, columnist and blogger Andrew Sullivan noted that New York City’s lively streets have lost some of their animation, partly because of the “iPod people,” who “walk down the street in their own MP3 cocoon, bumping into others, deaf to small social cues, shutting out anyone not in their bubble.” The result, Sullivan says, is that we Americans are

“narrowcasting our own lives.... Technology has given us finally a universe entirely for ourselves—where the serendipity of meeting a new stranger, or hearing a piece of music we would never choose for ourselves...are all effectively banished.... Society without the social. Others who are chosen—not met at random.”

### **A Phenomenology of Encounter and Media**

To suggest how phenomenology might explore a particular medium’s impact on encounter and place experience, I want to highlight psychologist Rainer Schönhammer’s phenomenological study that examines the experience of regular users of Walkman headsets (Schönhammer 1988, 1989). Drawing his evidence largely from interviews with Walkman users, Schönhammer emphasizes that, from a phenomenological perspective, headset experience must be understood from both *outside* and *inside*—in other words, in terms of the impression that the headset user makes on others nearby (the outside); and the experiential sense the surrounding world presents to the headset user (the inside).

Headset users often irritate people nearby, says Schönhammer, because the users seem to violate an unspoken claim of “interpersonal reciprocity”—i.e., “the certainty of common sensual presence in shared situations” (Schönhammer 1989: 130). Particularly important is the lived fact that listening and hearing are typically unavoidable for experiencers all within the same immediate space. In other words, one cannot usually “shut her ears” not to hear as one can “shut her eyes” not to see. One result is that a person reading a newspaper in the subway does not usually annoy others in the way a person may who uses earphones to close off his or her surroundings (*ibid.*, p. 133).

If, outside, headset users are regularly experienced by others as strangers because they are severed from the ordinarily matter-of-fact and shared world of sound, then, inside, headset users lose their usual taken-for-granted sense of the surroundings, which are often reported to be “like a movie” (*ibid.*, p. 136). Normally, we are always aware at some level of our world but do not see or experience it as a picture somehow apart from self but, rather, as a taken-for-granted field of which our actions are an integral but tacit part. On one hand, the headset user experiences a sense of separation and distance from the world, which becomes a kind of silent, shifting, cinematic screen. On the other hand, he or she pays attention to the music, with which movements in the world outside seem to be in sync. In one lived sense, the headset user becomes experientially separated from the world as it normally is in typical experience; in another lived sense, if he or she does give attention to the world, it appears as a kind of visual accompaniment to the music, which becomes an end in itself. In short, there has been a significant shift in the headset user’s being-in-the-world, including the nature of encounter.

Schönhammer’s study involves only headset users listening to music. Clearly, the headset listener’s lived relationship with his or her world would be in some ways different if he or she were instead listening to a “book on tape.” Similarly, different listening media—for example,

using a mobile telephone—would change this lived relationship in various ways as would the particular activity in which the user is involved as he or she is listening—for example, walking versus driving versus sitting amidst others nearby. What is needed is a thorough phenomenology of particular communication and media devices' modes and range of lived-encounter-with-surrounding-“real”-world. Schönhammer's work offers one instructive example as to how such phenomenological efforts might proceed conceptually and methodologically.

### **A Charge of Essentialism**

I end this commentary by responding to Moores' charge that *Lifeworld* is *essentialist*—i.e., that it presupposes and claims an invariant and universal human condition that will be revealed only when all “non-essentials,” including historical, cultural, and personal qualities, are stripped away, leaving behind some inescapable core of human experience. He suggests that, in focusing on the phenomenon of everyday environmental experience as a foundational existential structure, I ignore the specific temporal, social, and individual circumstances that shape particular individuals and groups' situations.

In making this criticism, Moores seems unaware of the basic phenomenological recognition that there are different dimensions of human experience and existence that *all must be incorporated* in a thorough understanding of human and societal phenomena. These dimensions include: (a) one's unique personal situation—e.g., one's gender, physical and intellectual endowments, degree of ableness, personal likes and dislikes; (b) one's unique historical, social, and cultural situation—e.g., the era and geographical locale in which one lives, his or her economic and political circumstances, his or her educational, religious, and societal background; the technological, communications, and media infrastructure that contribute to the person's or group's particular lifeworld; and (c) one's situation as a typical human being immersed in a typical human world—e.g., the integrated, threefold structure of movement, rest, and encounter as presented by *Lifeworld's* phenomenology of everyday environmental experience.

Moores is correct when he says that my focus in *Lifeworld* is general—i.e., lived qualities that contribute to what and who we are as human beings who live in a world that is partly physical, spatial, and geographical. At this broadest level, the participants in the environmental experience groups (as limited as their experiences might have been in terms of life experience and cultural/social context) are representative human beings, and their experiences speak to the typicality of human experience.

I agree with Moores that, if we move to the level of cultural, social or personal experience, then the specific everyday environmental experiences for the group or person will vary greatly, and any phenomenological investigation must describe and interpret these variations and differences as they relate to the particular cultural and social patterns and processes. But I would also argue that the threefold lived structure of

movement, rest, and encounter might provide a useful conceptual means around which to examine and perhaps understand those specific environmental experiences, thus providing a way to circumvent neo-Marxist and social-constructivist conceptions that too often forfeit the phenomenon into some set of predefined social, economic, or cultural filters.<sup>[7]</sup>

My broader point is that there is no conceptual right or wrong here—rather, Moores and my differences in emphasis can be recast in terms of the different dimensions of phenomenological investigation—(a) typically human or “essential;” (b) cultural and social; or (c) individual and personal. Each of these three lived dimensions will lead to different phenomenological topics and results, though in all there will no doubt be some common threads as, for example, the significance of physical embodiment or the lived nature of encounter with things and situations in the world. In short, each of these three dimensions of lifeworld is a legitimate arena for phenomenological investigation, and one does not displace or supersede the other (as Moores seems to suggest in taking a social-constructivist position).

It would be more accurate to say that Moores appears more interested in phenomenological explication of the social and cultural dimensions of communications and media, whereas Edward Relph in *Place and Placelessness* and I in *Lifeworld* are more interested in environmental and place experience as they are in their inescapable, invariant, universal, essential typicality. Ultimately, both dimensions need phenomenological interpretation, and discoveries regarding one should offer understandings regarding the other.<sup>[8]</sup>

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[1] Most simply, phenomenology is as the description and interpretation of human experience. A major effort of phenomenology is to identify and describe broader, underlying patterns—e.g., the lived expressions of environmental embodiment—that give order and coherence to the richness and “chaos” of human experience as it is lived as everyday life. As media researcher Paddy Scannell (1996: 169) writes, “Phenomenology recovers the order of truth as residing *in* things. It is not hidden, it does not lie under or behind or beneath things.... It is what is manifest (what shows) in things and how. If this is very obvious (as it *must* be) it yet requires a particular way of seeing and understanding in order to grasp it, for it can simply be not-seen at all.” One helpful

introduction is Stewart and Mukunas 1990. Also see Scannell 1995, 1996; Relph 1981; Seamon 2000, 2007.

[2] Since Relph's pioneering study, place has become a major conceptual and practical focus for work in the humanities, human sciences, environmental studies, and the design professions. Useful discussions include: Casey 1993; Creswell 2004; Hay 2002; Janz 2006; Malpas 1999; Mugerauer 1994; Relph 1981, 1993; Seamon 2000; Stefanovic 2000. Moores criticizes much of this work as "nostalgic and conservative" because it is founded, at least in part, on Martin Heidegger's notion of "dwelling." As a counter, I would point to the work of philosopher Robert Mugerauer (1994), who provides a cogent demonstration of what Heideggerian thinking means for place making today, including its relationship to technology. Also good at demonstrating the continuing value of Heidegger's perspective for current matters involving place are Stefanovic 2000; and Relph 1981.

[3] One powerful example of electronic media's playing a decisive role in protecting local place involves a huge cement-production complex proposed in Hudson, New York, by the multinational Holcim Cement Corporation. Through local and non-local "grass-roots" efforts organized and carried out largely through list serves and emails, Holcim's proposal was eventually defeated. The story of this conflict is presented in Silverman 2006.

[4] There is a sizeable "environment-behavior" literature examining the relationship between physical and human worlds. One body of work particularly relevant to understanding the dynamics of places and place making is architectural theorist Bill Hillier's *space syntax*—a theory that argues a relationship between pathway structure and human co-presence and interaction; see Hillier 1996; Seamon 2004. Hillier's research demonstrates how particular pathway configurations contribute to lively, robust streets, on one hand; or dead, empty streets on the other.

[5] Using as his example the text-only online forum BlueSky studied by sociologist Lori Kendall (2002), Moores argues that interpersonal cyberspace involvement is another kind of place ballet. I strongly disagree, since place ballet involves the serendipitous physical co-presence of individual participants who originally come together spatially either because they are (a) on the way to somewhere else—as in the case of a robust street ballet like the one described by Jane Jacobs (1961); or (b) coming to a place because it provides some practical function—e.g., purchasing fresh produce at the weekly farmers' market (Seamon and Nordin 1980; also see Oldenburg 1989). In short, the coincidental spatial gathering of participants present for their own personal reasons generates an entirely new phenomenon that is the informal space-time regularity of place ballet.

The participants in BlueSky are self-selective in the sense that their interest in computers and computer programming motivates their involvement with the on-line forum. More so, since they only "meet" through words and text, there is none of the

serendipitous, bodily commingling that is central to place ballet and leads to a mode of experience and interaction that is much more unpredictable, multidimensioned, and “real” than the BlueSky cyberspace situation.

It is telling that, according to Kendall, BlueSky participants sometimes gather in face-to-face meetings but that these meetings rarely solidify into serious friendships or continuing face-to-face groups. She writes: “While BlueSky relationships are far from anonymous, the tendency of people... to emphasize their anonymity suggests that the connections fostered by online interaction, even over many years, may never feel as deep or as close as those enabled by face-to-face contact” (Kendall 2002: 165).

I do not mean to suggest here that people of common background cannot meet together in place ballet. In fact they can, and this possibility is now being used by architects and event designers in, for instance, the design of workplaces. One example is the 1997 Nortel Networks headquarters housed in an old factory building in Toronto (Horan 2000: 44). Designed around the metaphor of “city,” the building is divided into color-coded “neighborhoods” organized around various “urban landmarks” like “avenues” and “parks” and including different services like café and sandwich shop. The idea is to use such “third places” (Oldenburg 1989) within the work environment to facilitate employee interactions and perhaps generate a workplace synergy of familiarity that might not arise otherwise. This arrangement is much different from BlueSky, since employees are drawn together corporeally by professionally shared skills and interests as well as by time-space regularity and serendipity.

[6] Obviously, the mode and intensity of encounter with a particular communication medium can shift from moment to moment (see Seamon 1979: 103), though it is striking the way that some digital media—for example, computer games—can thoroughly immerse the user in virtual simulation and more or less sever his or her lived relationship with the world at hand, other than with the manual protocols required to make the simulation continue.

[7] The example here that Moores cites favorably is Simon Charlesworth’s phenomenological study of working-class residents in Rotherham, a town in South Yorkshire, England (Charlesworth 2000). I agree that this study offers some insights into a stigmatized group of people who are powerless economically and disenfranchised politically. My concern with Charlesworth’s study is that it is largely grounded conceptually in the theories of French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu, who, as Moores points out, believes that phenomenology must be “sociologized,” thus the emphasis is on predefined, imposed structures like class, capital, reproduction, and inequality (Swartz 2002).

To my mind, a much more powerful and helpful study of a group-in-place is psychiatrist Mindy Thompson Fullilove’s *Root Shock*—an implicitly phenomenological study of the traumatic impact that urban renewal has had on African-American neighborhoods in

several American cities (Fullilove 2004). Clearly, the enforced segregation of the black ghetto was racist and ethically wrong, but Fullilove demonstrates that one of the ghetto's strengths was as a place "where people shared with one another... People had in common the pressures of daily life. People had in common the struggle to survive in the face of racism. And though such pressures might turn people against one another, in those places it made for a great deal of kindness" (ibid., pp. 121-22).

Fullilove demonstrates that this "field of kindness" arose from a strong sense of place solidarity generated in part by an outside-imposed spatial boundedness (what Moores calls in his commentary "difference and exclusion"): "In the compact space of the ghetto, a tight field of activity was created, through which acts and words might pass quickly. It was possible to know of someone's pain or glory, and to respond when needed. Actions toward others were permitted and expected. They were extended with the consent of the community, and received in the same vein. This passage through the field of the community, with the consent of the community, meant that the sense of kindness was everywhere, at least within the community" (ibid., p. 123).

One of the most destructive aspects of American urban renewal was the dismantling of these fields of kindness: "The shattering of the field... had an enormous effect on kindness because kindness was passed through the field. In the aftermath of urban renewal, individuals were preoccupied with making a new life, and perhaps they could not be as kind as they had been previously. At the same time, given the loss of the field, the kindness did not extend as far as it had before. The buffering effect of kindness was lost, and the negative behaviors and attitudes that had always been present were given greater scope. Given the other difficulties that were to come, the decline in kindness, however small, triggered a downward trend in kindness over the ensuing decades" (ibid.).

Fullilove emphasizes that the ghetto's field of care was rooted in an animated street life, including street ballet (ibid., pp. 18-19). In short, place regularity sustained responsibility for and love of place, which in turn helped make sure that place regularity continued—until derailed by urban renewal, which "replaced people-friendly blocks and structures with megablocks and megabuildings surrounded by parking lots" (ibid., p. 92).

I find Fullilove's manner of presentation and discoveries more rewarding and convincing than Charlesworth's because her interpretation much more arises from the "story" of a people and place whereas Charlesworth's interpretation seems imposed because of the arbitrariness of a Bourdieuan perspective that reduces the fullness of human life-in-place to hollow, "sociologized" principles. For example, compare the following passage from Charlesworth with the lucid descriptions from Fullilove above and then ask which understanding seems more real and in touch with the actual lives of the people of the place: "[The Rotherham working class people's] experience of class is embedded in a world that demands to be dealt with. A realm that demands an alert comportment absorbing individuals in a reality that in its injunctions, frustrations and dangers instills

forms of silent strain that sap the will. It is a mode of engagement in a realm whose possibilities are, at best, frustrating, at worst, negating, and which thus demands the forms of comportment engaged in coping. As the testimony shows, many are involved in a world that too many know nothing other than; hence what is linguistically constituted takes form within the parameters of what they expect; it follows the delineated contours of the plausible, and is held within the world as it has been imbued—a world that emerges from structures of power never seen, only felt” (Charlesworth 2000: 279).

[8] One example of how phenomenologies of these different dimensions of human life can mutually assist each other is psychologist Louise Million’s doctoral dissertation (Million 1993), which examines phenomenologically the experience of five rural Canadian families forced to leave their ranches because of the construction of a reservoir dam in southern Alberta. Drawing on the notions of insiderness and outsiderness as developed by Relph in *Place and Placelessness* to depict broad modes of place experience, Million identifies the central lived qualities of what she calls *involuntary displacement*—the families’ experience of forced relocation and resettlement. Making use of in-depth interviews with the five families, she demonstrates how place is prior to involuntary displacement with the result that this experience can be understood existentially as a forced journey marked by eight stages—(1) *becoming uneasy*, (2) *struggling to stay*, (3) *having to accept*, (4) *securing a settlement*, (5) *searching for the new*, (6) *starting over*, (7) *unsettling reminders*, and (8) *wanting to resettle*.

In delineating the lived stages in the process of losing place and attempting to resettle, Million’s study demonstrates how Relph’s modes of insiderness and outsiderness can be used developmentally for a particular social group to examine place experience and identity as they strengthen, weaken, or remain more or less continuous over time. Million’s study might also serve as one phenomenological model for Moores’ efforts at examining what he calls “transnational physical migration.” My larger point is that Relph’s phenomenological work at the “universal” level provides an invaluable conceptual mooring point for Million’s research dealing with real people in a real place. Her work, in turn, contributes texture, shading, and grounding for Relph’s broader conclusions about place. As good phenomenology should, there is reciprocity between levels and between conceptual principles and real-world lived experience.

### Biographical note

David Seamon is a Professor in the Department of Architecture at Kansas State University and is interested in a phenomenological approach to place, architecture, environmental experience, and environmental design as place making. His books include: *A Geography of the Lifeworld* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1979). *Dwelling, Place and Environment: Toward a Phenomenology of Person and World* (edited with Robert Mugerauer; New York: Columbia University Press, 1989); *Dwelling, Seeing, and*

*Designing: Toward a Phenomenological Ecology* (Albany, New York: State University of New York Press, 1993); and *Goethe's Way of Science: A Phenomenology of Nature* (edited with Arthur Zajonc, Albany, New York: State University of New York Press, 1998). He is editor of the *Environmental and Architectural Phenomenology Newsletter*.

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