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PLACE

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It. *Luogo*; Fr. *Lieu*; Germ. *Ort*; Span. *Lugar*. Since the 1970s when humanistic geographers (e.g., Relph 1976) and architectural phenomenologists (e.g., Norberg-Schulz 1980) first realized the need to examine the topic in terms of its day-to-day lived dimensions, research on place has proliferated (for reviews, see Donohoe 2017; Janz 2017; Malpas 2015; Manzo, Divine-Wright 2021; Seamon 2018a). From a phenomenological perspective, place can be defined as any environmental locus in and through which individual or group actions, experiences, intentions, and meanings are drawn together spatially and temporally (Casey 2009; Malpas 2018). By this definition, a place can range in scale from a furnishing or some other environmental feature to a room, building, neighborhood, city, landscape, or region (Lewicka 2011). Place as a concept is relevant to research in aesthetics because an integral feature of specific places is their environmental atmosphere and “sense of place” marked by what the ancient Romans spoke of as *genius loci*—the specific character, ambience, and spirit of a place contributing to its effable and ineffable environmental uniqueness (Relph 1976).

Though particular kinds of environments may support different modes of place experience and place atmosphere (Smith 2018), a phenomenology of place insists that, existentially, place is not the physical environment apart from the people associated with it but, rather, the indivisible, normally unnoticed phenomenon of person-or-people-experiencing-place (Casey 2009; Malpas 2018; Seamon 2018a). This phenomenon of *lived emplacement* is typically complex, multivalent, and dynamic, incorporating generative processes through which a place and its experiences and meanings shift or stay more or less the same. In relation to aesthetics, the lived fact that human being always necessarily involves human-being-in-place (Casey 2009: 15-16) suggests that any emotional, artistic, or aesthetic bonds between people and environment require a descriptive language arising from and accurately incorporating this lived emplacement (or *displacement* in the case of negative place situations such as forced relocations or environments destroyed by natural or human-induced devastation).

BODY-SUBJECT, ROUTINES, AND PLACE BALLET

One phenomenological thinker who has made a preeminent contribution toward better understanding place and lived emplacement is the French philosopher Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1962). One of his foundational concepts is *body-subject*, which refers to the pre-cognitive, normally unnoticed, facility of the lived body to smoothly integrate its actions with the world at hand. Body-subject is the pre-reflective corporeal awareness manifested through everyday actions and behaviors and typically in synch with the spatial and physical environment in which the action unfolds (Jacobson 2010; Seamon 2018b). Drawing on the concept of body-subject, phenomenological researchers have pointed to its environmental versatility as expressed in more complex bodily routines and ensembles extending over time and space and contributing to the lived dimensions of place, including attachment grounded in habitual regularity (Jacobson 2010; Seamon 2018a; 2018b; van Eck, Pijpers 2016).

Perhaps most relevant to place research is the possibility that individuals involved in their own bodily routines can come together in time and space, thereby contributing to and participating in a larger-scale environmental ensemble that can be called a *place ballet*—an interaction of individual bodily routines rooted in a particular environment that may become an important place of interpersonal and communal exchange, meaning, and attachment (Seamon 1979; van Eck, Pijpers 2016). Examples include a well-used student lounge, a lively urban plaza, a robust city street, or a thriving city neighborhood (Jacobs 1961; Mehta 2013; van Eck, Pijpers 2016). In relation to environmental aesthetics, place ballet may be significant in that everyday habitual routines regularly happening in place are one important foundation for longer-term involvement and identity with place, which in turn sustain and are sustained by feelings of attachment and a largely pre-predicative aesthetic sensibility and appreciation grounded in the quotidian.

PLACE, ATMOSPHERE, AND SPIRIT OF PLACE

In relation to place and lived emplacement, the concept of atmosphere is central because it identifies the invisible character that makes an environment unique and confers on that environment a specific place presence and ambience often unnoticed and typically not brought forward to conscious awareness (Griffero 2017; Griffero, Tedeschini 2019; Riedel 2019). Böhme (2014: 96, 56), for example, referred to “spaces with a mood” and “that total impression that is regarded as characteristic” of a place. Similarly, Pallasmaa (2014: 20) defined atmosphere as “the overarching perceptual, sensory, and emotive impression of a space, setting, or social situation.” In relation to the lived aesthetics of places, one finds that their atmospheres are nebulous, mutable, elusive, and therefore never fully graspable or describable. They cannot be identified by vision alone but incorporate a wide range of lived qualities that include sound, smell, tactility, emotional vibrations, and an active, indeterminable presence of things, spaces, and environmental qualities.

In many ways, place atmosphere is related to *genius loci*, or “spirit of place”—the unique ambience and character of a place, for example, the “Rome-ness” of Rome or the “Catalonia-ness” of Catalonia (Relph

1976). As with discussions of atmosphere, explications of *genius loci* regularly focus on an ineffable, elusive environmental presence impossible to locate or describe precisely or completely. Novelist Lawrence Durrell (1969: 157) characterized *genius loci* as “the invisible constant in a place,” and novelist D. H. Lawrence (1923: 12) referred to *genius loci* when he wrote that different places “have different vital effluence, different vibration, different chemical exhalation, different polarity with different stars: call it what you like. But the spirit of place is a great reality...”.

ENVIRONMENTAL ENSEMBLE, PEOPLE-IN-PLACE, AND COMMON PRESENCE

To specify *genius loci* more precisely, Seamon (2018a) contended that place and place experience can be understood via the relationships among three components: *environmental ensemble*, *people-in-place*, and *common presence*. The environmental ensemble refers the material and environmental qualities of place. Although any specific place’s environmental ensemble is singular, it is an integral contributor to atmosphere because the environmental ensemble is the material ground for place experiences and place events. In turn, people-in-place relates to the human worlds associated with a particular environmental ensemble and includes individual and group actions, meanings, and situations related to that place, whether habitual and usual or intentionally planned and out of the ordinary. Via people-in-place, place atmosphere is encountered and known, though as Griffero (2017: xiv) pointed out, this awareness may be ignored, misread, taken-for-granted, or hidden from one’s conscious awareness.

Overarching both environmental ensemble and people-and-place is the less visible component of *common presence*, which refers to the material and lived “togetherness” of a place impelled by both its physical and human qualities. In this sense, the common presence of a place relates to its degree of “life” and environmental presence. Seamon argued that the relative “togetherness” of entities in space sustains an environmental “common presence” that emerges as a sensible quality shared by the entities that are a part of that space (Seamon 2018: 88). In this sense, common presence relates to the ways that the spatial togetherness, of both environmental and human components, contributes to what a real-world place is, including less comprehensible and accessible aspects like atmosphere and sense of place.

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