Place and Non-place: A Phenomenological Perspective

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Abstract The distinction between place and non-place has occupied a critical role in both the philosophy of place and human geography for the last 20 years. In a distinction that stems from Marc Augé but is traceable to Edward Relph, "place" is thought as being relationally constructed, laden with meaning, and shaped by a broader history; home being emblematic of place. "Non-place," on the other hand, is taken to mean places divested of meaning, homogenous, and largely interchangeable; airports, supermarkets, and pre-fabricated office complexes being examples. Whilst this distinction has tended to be pervasive and influential in phenomenological accounts of place, critical analysis on the relation between place and non-place has been sparse. This paper aims to (1) develop an analysis of the distinction, ambiguities, and tensions between place and non-place. (2). To question and interrogate what kind of difference is involved in this distinction. (3). To address the role intersubjectivity and affectivity plays in the "sense of place."

Let us imagine ourselves nestled within the tranquility of a French villa. The place is a retreat, seemingly remote from the concerns and anxieties of the "real world" back home. Within its homely embrace, a series of windows overlooks a forest, enclosing the villa within a world of quiet intimacy. Here and there, we discover corners to withdraw into, nooks to dwell in, and rooms to retreat to. When opening the door on the world outside the villa, far from being confronted with a world hostile to that of the sanctuary, the surrounding forest and pathways toward the beach instead reinforce the peaceful sense of place. Indeed, it is a singular place, perched above the sea, with a distinct character, and quite unlike anywhere else.

As the vacation draws to an end, as it must do, it will be necessary to leave the world of the villa in order to return home. A short drive takes us to the airport, where we are now waiting in line to check our luggage in. Unlike the space of the villa, which is characterised by alternating textures and divergent tones, the spatiality of the airport is both flat and homogenous. At no point is the fluorescent light broken up by the existence of shadows. The effect of this constancy is that the airport is deprived of

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depth. In objective terms, the distance between the villa and the airport is negligible. In experiential terms, however, the villa feels distant and ungraspable. The adjustment we must undergo in the airport is full of resistance, as though our bodies were unprepared to let go of the atmosphere of the villa. As a result, we experience the airport as an oppressive place, at odds with the villa, and having no memorable or intrinsic qualities, other than being a place we must pass through in order to get home.

1 Introduction

Our relationship to place is both complex and dynamic, involving an entire series of dimensions that continue to shape and reshape how different situations present themselves to us. Places themselves are never neutrally presented to us nor are they statically emplaced in the world. At times, they unfold with significant meaning, while at other times they become transient sites, indistinct and interchangeable. The experience of having been cloistered in a villa before being exposed to an airport is one way to draw out the contrast between different if not divergent spatial experiences. What is evident in such experiences, which are all too common, is that our perception of a given place is mediated by several factors, not least our personal history, our intersubjective relations, our bodily mood, our experience of time, and so forth. How a place appears for us is in large contingent on where we are going and where we have come from. As seen in this way, the contrast between a villa and an airport is telling. Paired together, we are immediately drawn to describing the villa as having a "sense of place," whilst the airport, in sharp contrast, appears to lack platial qualities altogether. Yet if we know what this distinction means intuitively, then understanding it at a conceptual level is a different (and more difficult) task. In this chapter, I propose to consider the ways in which a "sense of place" both appears and disappears for us. My central argument is that this distinction is not fixed in place, but instead dynamically structured by our affective mood, our pragmatic needs, and our intersubjective relations.

To speak of a disappearance of place invokes what is often termed "non-place" or "placelessness," concepts that have occupied a critical place in humanistic geography and spatial theory over the last several decades. Since the publication of Marc Augé's 1992 book, *Non-Places: An Introduction to Supermodernity*, the term "non-place" has come to refer to interchangeable and homogenous sites of late modernity (Augé 2008). Airports, strip malls, supermarkets, office blocks, and executive hotels are all exemplary non-places, insofar as they are defined by a lack of historical relation to their surrounding environment, together with the absence of a specific identity (p. 63). For Augé, these places are produced under the conditions of "supermodernity" and carry with them a set of thematic qualities. They are places in which non-verbal communication takes precedence, which encourage "solitary individuality," and which are defined by their ephemerality. Alongside the term "non-place," the concept of "placelessness" has also assumed a central role in contemporary discourse on the phenomenology of place, especially from the perspec-

tive of human geography, where it is employed to delineate between an authentic and inauthentic relationship to place (cf. Relph 1976). In the case of a figure such as Edward Relph, the concept of placelessness is inextricably bound with contemporary culture and society. Thus, the standardization of landscapes stems, in his evaluation, from "an insensitivity to the significance of place," which in turn can lead to the "the casual eradication of distinctive places and the making of standardized landscapes" (Preface). Far from neutrally defined, place and placelessness operate in a dialectical sense, with the latter employed as a site of critique, not only for environmental aesthetics, but also for contemporary society and culture more broadly.

There are further variations on the place/non-place, place/placelessness distinction, which I have unpacked elsewhere (Trigg 2012). There are, moreover, importance differences between the non-place and placelessness distinction. While both concepts, I think, tend to hinge on the homogeneity of place, their accents are subtly different. In the case of placelessness, the concern is tied up as much with our relations with places as it is places themselves. For someone such as Relph, for example, it is not just that places have become standardized, but so too has our relationship to the environment become distanced and disconnected. In the case of Augé's non-places, the concern falls less with our relation with airports and supermarkets—which, after all, are presented as transient places, and therefore devoid of the possibility to form enduring relations—and more with the social production of places themselves, quite apart from their phenomenological standing. Despite any such differences, what is important is that each of these terms stands in contrast to the notion of place as being imbued with certain values, not least as a centre of cohesion, belonging, and continuity. Drawing on Edward Relph, David Seamon's definition is helpful. For him, place is "any environmental locus in and through which individual or group actions, experiences, intentions, and meanings are drawn together spatially" (Seamon 2013, 11). Seamon's stance reinstates the sense of place found in Relph as involving the quality of "insideness"—a state in which a person identifies with and belongs to a place (Relph 1976). Moreover, "existential insideness" is a foundational concept for him, insomuch as it describes an "authentic" relation to place devoid of self-consciousness or pretense (55). In line with Relph, what is notable time and again in the literature is that the term "place" is loaded with an affective if not ethical value from the outset. Place is homely, and home is decidedly palatial insomuch as it serves as a point of attachment for the dweller. By contrast, the existence of non-place is not only diametrically opposed to what constitutes a genuine, authentic mode of dwelling, but also threatens the very existence of place.

2 The Problems with Non-place

While these distinctions might be helpful in terms of delineating different types of place in a broad sense, conceptual clarity nevertheless remains vague. What kind of distinction is at stake between place and non-place, or place and placelessness? For that

matter, to what extent is the subjective experience of place as placeless or a non-place even tenable? In this chapter, I will consider these questions. My response is that while I recognize the relation between what Augé terms "supermodernity" and the emergence of a certain type of spatiality, I nevertheless find the binary distinction between place and non-place (and also place and placelessness) untenable for at least two reasons.

First, from a Merleau-Pontean perspective, the bodily experience of place operates on several layers, problematizing the rigid (and often hierarchical) distinction between place and non-place (Merleau-Ponty 2012). This multidimensional analysis of bodily subjectivity renders our experience of place ambiguous, with a primordial level of spatiality operating alongside a reflective level. By contrast, what tends to be at the foreground of both classical and contemporary research on place is a prescriptive if not normative account of what constitutes a sense of place, and, accordingly, what constitutes a threat to place, quite apart from the role the body plays in the formation of place.

Edward Relph's influential writing on placelessness is exemplary here. For him, place is under threat in multiple ways, and to return to the original meaning of place "one must circumvent the grand delusions of technology, ideology and obscure theory that beset the late-twentieth century and that cause environments to be made and processed like sliced bread" (Relph 1993, 26). Against this, Relph directs us to search for "vital qualities that are essential" to places (26). With Relph, Augé is also suspicious of technology as both displacing and disembodying us from our immediate environment. In the preface to the second edition of *Non-Places*, he reflects on the emergence of "portable telephones," claiming "the individual can thus live rather oddly in an intellectual, music or visual environment that is wholly independent of his immediate physical surroundings" (Augé 2008, viii). Irrespective of to what extent one may or may not be sympathetic to such a view, and quite beyond whether technology, society, and modern culture alienates us from the spirit of place as Relph and Augé suggests, without attending to the body's multilayered relation to the world, any account of the formation of the place remains incomplete. Indeed, to assess whether contemporary culture and technology displaces and disembodies us requires an understanding of how the body is placed in the first instance.

The second problem with non-places stems from the lack of attention given to our affective, intersubjective, and pragmatic relations to the world. In contrast, places such as airports and service stations are framed as being already defined in advance of experience, effectively reducing place to a caricature of itself. It is worth noting, however, that the tendency to impose a determined quality on a place in advance of experiencing it is not exclusive to airports and supermarkets. Our means of navigating and getting placed in the world is contingent on the ability to project and anticipate in some minimal sense the type of place we are entering at any given moment. Indeed, the habitual rhythms of our everyday existence tend to solidify the character of a place, such that it becomes innocuously embedded in our world. Nowhere is this solidification of place clearer than in the home, which we tend to expect will conform to our anticipations in and through time. Of course, one difference between the characterization of an airport and one's home is that whereas the stability of the home is held together in a moment of idealistic desire, the supermar-

ket seems to persistently endure as supermarket irrespective of our desires. Thus, once more, in the extant literature on place and placelessness, these concepts are presented as being comparatively static, and, to some extent retaining their identity independently of our relational experience. While there has been considerable attention on how affectivity and intersubjectivity enhances our sense of home, what has been overlooked is how these aspects inform our experiences of less central places, such as supermarkets, transit terminals, and departure lounges.

Nowhere is the lack of attention on affective and intersubjective dimensions clearer than in Marc Augé's original account of non-place, where the concept itself derives from another division between space and place (Augé 2008, 64). Augé grants that there is a certain dynamism involved in this pairing, but suggests nonetheless that "place and non-place are rather like opposed polarities…they are like palimpsests on which the scrambled game of identity and relations is ceaselessly rewritten" (64). For Augé, we live in a time of "hotel chains, leisure parks, large retail outlets, and finally the complex skein of cable and wireless networks that mobilize extraterrestrial space for the purpose of a communication so peculiar that it often puts the individual in contact only with another image of himself" (64). It is true, of course, that when we begin to ask how a hotel chain differs from a villa, then we are instantly confronted with a series of complex factors, not least cultural, societal, political, aesthetical, and gendered dimensions, each of which sculpt and shape the way we experience the world consciously or otherwise. Moreover, we know from experience how certain places affect us in a way that other places do not. But whether or not this felt sense of platial differences merits the division between place and non-place is questionable. What is required is a careful analysis of how places appear to us as having a certain character and how that character then recedes. We will pursue this aim through the work of Merleau-Ponty.

3 The Bodily Experience of Place and (Non)-Place

The reason for turning to Merleau-Ponty is twofold. One, through his careful explorations of spatiality, Merleau-Ponty reveals how our experience of spatiality is predicated on different levels of bodily existence. Two, Merleau-Ponty draws to our attention the rapport between spatiality and affectivity, a dimension often overlooked in the literature on place. Time and space prohibit us from detailing the moves Merleau-Ponty makes in *Phenomenology of Perception* concerning the inseparable relation between body and world, together with the critique of intellectualism and empiricism that allows him to posit the body as a specific kind of intentionality. As such, we will proceed directly to his account of spatiality itself (Merleau-Ponty 2012, 253).

Consistent with his broader project, Merleau-Ponty's analysis of spatiality attends to the genesis of meaning and to the primordial spatiality, which underpins our second-order reflections on space. In this respect, he is critical of the depiction of space as a static Aristotelian container, which could be understood in isolation from the

subjects inhabiting and dwelling there. For him, spatiality is not a neutral backdrop, but an active field of force, defined by a global meaning, as he writes: "Space is not the milieu (real or logical) in which things are laid out, but rather the means by which the position of things becomes possible" (253–254). His phenomenology is thus archaeological in the sense that it gravitates toward sedimented layers of meaning and "relations that are beneath this world," which, if not fully thematized in experience, are nevertheless operative throughout (254). Merleau-Ponty begins this foray into spatiality by asking that we consider our experience of space "prior to any theoretical elaboration" (254). His example is the directionality of "up" and "down." To what extent are these divisions fixed in place or otherwise malleable? Merleau-Ponty takes us through an experiment, in which a subject is made to wear glasses that invert his image of the world (255). A movement of re-orientation ensues: on the first day, the subject experiences the world as inverted; on the second day, he experiences his body as inverted, yet perception itself is gradually reestablished; soon after, "the body is progressively brought upright and appears to be finally in the normal position, above all when the subject is active" until finally bodily gestures themselves become integrated into a new field of perceptual experience (255). What Merleau-Ponty wants to show with experiments such as this is the readjustment of the world back to a "normal" dimensionality is not reducible to the modification of habit nor is space something external to us, such that we adjust to it as though it were unchanged by an absolute space indifferent to our own relation. For that matter, our orientation is space is not a question of projecting "up" and "down" into an otherwise neutral world, without any constancy therein. As ever, Merleau-Ponty seeks a third-path, unveiling within the empiricist-intellectualist division a third pathway, which is more primordial than that of abstract space, as he has it: "We must seek the originary experience of space prior to the distinction between form and content" (259).

In another experiment, a subject sees a room through a mirror reflecting the room at forty-five degrees (259). In a glance, up and down are redistributed "without any motor exploration" (259). What this demonstrates, so Merleau-Ponty suggests, is that "orientation is constituted by an overall act of the perceiving subject" (259). This act occurs on a pre-reflective level, prior to being formalized in either intellectualist or empiricist terms. Merleau-Ponty speaks in this sense of "spatial levels" that are arranged and rearranged in space through the intentionality of the body, which is not always concordant with that of the "visual field" (260). It is true, of course, that my visual field can shape how I experience a room. Consciously and deliberately, I can single out objects within a room. Moreover, if I so desired, I could also assume different perspectives on a room, be it an aesthetical outlook or a technical perspective. Despite this free play of perspectives, a sense of a room's existence is not reducible to that visual field, but instead anchored in a primordial spatiality, which makes the experience of orientation and disorientation possible in the first case. As Merleau-Ponty sees it, our bodily relation to the world is multidimensional, involving different levels of bodily and spatial existence. The body that is situated in the world is not my body taken as a physical and objective thing. Rather, it is the "virtual" body that is delineated as a "system of possible actions," each of which is attuned to retaining an experience of the world as a whole.

This virtual body is a body defined by a set of pragmatic relations, such that the world is presented to me in a meaningful fashion. Indeed, for Merleau-Ponty, the "origin of space" stems from the "organic relations between the subject and space," anchored at all times with a meaningful relation to the world (262).

Merleau-Ponty's analysis of space as being structured by a primordial mode of intentionality is instructive in the sense that it reveals to us how space is "always 'already constituted'" before it has become an object of inquiry (262). To this extent, our very experience of being placeless presupposes the continuity of our orientation, such that "being is synonymous with being situated [and] we cannot dissociate being from oriented being" (263–264). What this means is that there is no primordial attunement to spatiality that is exemplified with our relation to certain places and otherwise diminished in other places. Our relationship to an airport and to a villa is each framed by a primordial level that allows for us to be placed within these environments irrespective of their specific texture.

If we are, to use an archetypically phenomenological phrase, *always already placed*, then this does not, of course, discount that our felt experience of place can vary radically. In specific terms, certain places can induce a sense of being at ease in the world, whereas other places are liable to provoke anxiety (cf. Trigg 2013b, 2016). Think of the difference between being in your home and being in a hospital waiting room. Here, we might explain the difference in these places in terms of the situations they entail. The idea(l) of the home is that it welcomes us as a place of repose, in which we take leave of ourselves. By contrast, the anxiety of the hospital waiting derives in part from the spatiality itself. In large, however, the hospital as a place of anxiety is predicated less on the spatiality itself and more on the experience of *waiting*. Thus, if we are in the home waiting impatiently for a phone call concerning news of a missing person, then the home becomes transformed from a place of repose to a place marked by agitation. Such experience not only demonstrates the malleable quality of place, but also reinforce our invariant bodily grip on place. This pre-reflective hold on place persists in and through the different environments we encounter, even those apparently divested of a specific quality of their own.

Let us move from the hospital to the supermarket by considering another exemplary non-place: Walmart. The difference between one Walmart and another does not reside in specific cultural and historic differences between each location, as though the Walmart in Jackson, Mississippi occupied a different relation to its locale than the Walmart in Memphis, Tennessee did. Rather, their difference exists solely in the proximity or distance between them, rather than within their inherent identity. The history of a Walmart store is a history that is not localizable to a specific store; instead, the history is taken up in a homogenous history common to all branches of Walmart. The same is true of the spatial experience of Walmart. Once in a Walmart, the objective is seldom to linger or dwell, as though the place were the object of our concern. Rather, it is a place of coming-into and then departing-from with haste. There are, of course, certain exceptions to this pattern, as when the supermarket becomes a focal point for meeting others, but even within these circumstances, it is not the specificity of the place that encourages the meeting, but the context that leads people there; that is, shopping. As such, there is nothing to see and nothing to

do in one Walmart, which would otherwise be lacking in another Walmart. Throughout this homogeneity, in which one place repeats another, we remain for better or worse, in place. True, our corporeal liaison with Walmart may be insignificant if not unwelcome—the bland aisles, harsh light, and dizzying stream of customers may well get under our skin—but this insignificance and irritation only testifies to the constancy of our emplacement within the world.

This tacit alliance with place is structured in line with Merleau-Ponty's analysis of spatiality. There, a shift occurs from a focus on the perceptual and intentional relation to spatiality toward a primordial, pre-personal, and anonymous subjectivity, for whom, in Merleau-Ponty's formulation, "a world exists before I am there, and who marks out my place in that world" (265). Thus, my perception of place is only partially my own. Throughout, another layer of intentionality is at work, communicating with the world in a manner that is "more ancient than thought" (265). It is thanks to this invisible adhesion to the world, that our critical ability to reflect upon place is made possible, such that "space can magically bestow upon the landscape its spatial determinations without itself ever appearing" (265).

4 Affectivity, Mood, and Lived Space

If we are, as I say, always already placed, then how does our affective relation with place modify this relation? One of the limitations of the formulation of non-place, as it is presented in Augé and others, is the lack of attention to our complex relation to places, which can modify the felt experience of places in innumerable ways. Places such as airports and strip malls are presented as having already defined features embedded within them, irrespective of the relation we may or may not develop with places. It is for this reason that certain places are formulated as non-places *de facto*. Hence the repetition of strip malls, parking lots, airports, highways, and so forth within this literature. As seen from the perspective of humanistic geography, what these places have in common is that they are in large interchangeable and anonymous, aspects that constitute the principal threat to place (cf. Relph 1976, 143). Judged by the literature, there is a streak of determinism at work in the production of placelessness and non-place. Moreover, the subject who encounters these place is in large a neutral subject, passive (and pacified) in the face of urban space. If we took Relph's diagnoses at face value, then we might be tempted to think that a person living in suburbia would have a deficient and inauthentic way of being in place quite apart from how they actually experience their home. Indeed, what this literature tends to overlook is precisely the complexity and richness of our relations with places, and how these relations are informed at all times by specific modes of being-in-the-world.

In response to this characterization of place, let us take a comparatively uncontroversial claim; namely, that our relation with the environment is neither neutral nor objective, but instead involves a multiplicity of features, which shapes the world around us. In the first case, consider how the world assumes a specific meaning for

us contingent on our particular situation in the world. If I am in the middle of a city and suddenly feel a pang of anguish that I have left the door to my home open, then in the ensuing retreat back to the home, the city itself is experienced as an obstacle, unyielding in its indifference to my quest to secure the home. Block after block, and building after building are experienced as immovable and, moreover, devoid of all specificity. Such an experience of the city—the same blocks and the same buildings—is different as to how I experience it when I first arrive. There, it presents itself to me as a rich vista of possibilities, each of which I take in slowly and pleasurably.

The spatiality of the world is delimited and defined in terms of the affordances that make themselves available to us depending on our given pragmatic needs at any given moment. Yet if our experience of spatiality is mediated at all times by a set of specific needs, at the same time these needs are situated within a more pervasive atmosphere, which shapes the way the world is presented to us in a pre-cognitive manner. Merleau-Ponty terms this *lived space* (Merleau-Ponty 2012, 293). He develops this concept by contrasting it with the "perception of space," space that is taken from a largely disinterested perspective (293). Even within this abstract analysis of space, we see already how our being-in-the-world involves an "inherence in the world" that is both structural and affective (293). Indeed, our relation with spatiality is imbued throughout with an affective dimension, thus Merleau-Ponty will write, "each explicit perception in my journey through Paris—the cafés, the faces, the poplars along the quays, the bends of the Seine—is cut out of the total being of Paris, and only serves to confirm a certain style of a certain sense of Paris" (294). To describe Paris, or any other city, is not to describe individual parts, as though they could be given in isolation. Rather, those parts exemplify and embody a "latent sense" that makes up Paris as a whole (294). The idea of Paris itself is a kind of lived spatiality, which affects how we experience the specificity of Paris in its parts. For this reason, "an initial perception without any background is inconceivable" (294).

The idea that our perceptual experience of the world is imbued with a "latent sense" together with a "certain past of the subject" has an important implication, namely; the manner in which a place appears for us derives not only from the objective properties of the place itself, but also from the specific bodily subjectivity that both perceives and interprets that place. We can think of this in the context of our villa residency. What is it that imbues this site with a "sense of place"? On the one hand, there is manifestly something in and of the place that engenders a distinctly *platial* feel. It is a singular place, full of idiosyncratic features, which distinguishes it from the broader environment. But those aspects do not reside in and of themselves, as though the nooks and crevices were waiting for the subject to animate them. Nor, however, is the sense of place superimposed through an act of imagination upon what is otherwise a neutral canvas. Rather, body and world, subject and place combine in a dialogical fashion, each shaping and affecting the other. A sense of place, then, is not an objective quality of the world itself, but instead a dynamic that emerges in a complex way.

At stake in this dynamic emergence of place is the hermeneutics of the world more broadly. That places are never given to us without mediation means that in order to understand the meaning they articulate, it is a question of interpreting them on several levels. A hermeneutics of place is the practice of carefully interpreting

how places present themselves for us, and is in this respect, a critical mode of engagement. Of course, this task is complex, given that the way in which a place becomes infused with meaning is seldom obvious. We enter a place, and are struck from the outset by its presence, which can either unnerve us or put us at ease. How a place does this is not always apparent, and to understand the genesis of a place's meaning, it requires attending not only to the specificity of the place as an objective presence in the world, but also to our own affective rapport with that presence.

We can localize this hermeneutic emergence quite precisely to our corporeal relations with the world. What is it to register a sense of place? It is, in large, to comport oneself to the world in a particular way. Upon closing my door to the world, the home greets me in a familiar and constant fashion. In response, I exhale at finally being at home, before freeing my body of the burden of the world. Exhaling, I perceive the home for what it is: an environment that can be depended upon and which I am relieved to return to. The home thus unfolds for me as a sanctuary of sorts, which renews and reinforces what I take to be a sense of place, a point that Edward Relph reinstates: "The deepest sense of place seems to be associated with being at home, being somewhere you know and are known by others, where you are familiar with the landscape and daily routines and feel responsible for how well your place works" (Relph 2009, 26). As seen in this way, the sense of place emerges as a multisensory crystallization of what we value both within ourselves and in the world.

In contrast, the disappearance of a sense of place is interwoven with the absence of these rich values. Following Relph's logic, to speak of a sense of non-place would thus mean designating a place that indicates alienation, unfamiliarity, and a profound lack of connection. Following the logic of phenomenology, on the other hand, this division is undercut by the ambiguous nature of the body's relation with place, a relation that is mediated at all times with the mood with which we attune ourselves to the world (cf. Heidegger 1996). Thus, if I arrive home when extremely tired, then it is not only that the home appears dull and obscure, but that my experience of my body and my relation to others is also permeated by an atmosphere of tiredness. The sense of place as a sense of the home's presence is underplayed and diminished, and at times the home may free itself of my connection it, becoming a unit of space I occupy rather than a meaningful home I dwell in. Does this mean that the sense of place has disappeared, as though there is something deficient in the home? Quite the contrary: any such disappearance belongs neither to the place in its objective existence nor to insularity of my own inner experience. Rather, my experience of the home as a whole is interpreted through the mood of tiredness, such that the world becomes an expression of that state. Seen in this light, the tired world—and, for that matter, the anxious or depressed world—is the expression of an existence that is consistent and continuous with "the total life of the subject," including that of non-tired existence (294).

5 Toward a Hermeneutics of the Airport

If our experience of the world is interwoven with both our pragmatic needs as well as the latent sense of a place that is taken up in the specificity of our bodily existence, then how do these invariant dimensions structure our rapport with non-places? Let us maintain our relation with the airport, an environment that is critical for both Relph and Augé. To do justice to the experience of an airport, one would need not only to describe the spatial features of the airport in cultural, social, and political terms. We would also require attending to the specificity of the body that interprets those dimensions in the first place. We would, in other words, require not only a hermeneutics of the environment, but also a hermeneutics of the body (cf. Trigg 2013a). Without attending to these dimensions, our understanding of place remains uncritical and unreflective. Let us consider this attitude in Augé.

There is no doubt that Augé sees the proliferation of airports as involving a solitary form of individualism, in which broader relations are destroyed and where "the individual feels himself to be a spectator without paying much attention to the spectacle" (Augé 2008, 70). As with Relph, Augé characterizes non-places as passive and pacifying spaces. They are spaces that encourage a voyeuristic kind of gaze, deprived of a meaningful relationship to the environment, and sealed off from the intersubjective realm. Indeed, Augé seldom speaks of other people, claiming that the "only face to be seen, the only voice to be heard…are his own" (83). More than this, within this solitary existence, non-places are spaces in which the ephemeral dweller is relieved of his or her identity, now afforded the chance to engage in the "passive joys of identity-loss, and the more active pleasure of role-playing" (83). For this reason, Augé defines "traveller's space" as the "archetype of *non-place*" (70). In sharp contrast to Augé, the British writer J.G. Ballard also reflects on the peculiar anonymity of the airport. For him, however, the scene is different. "Airports and air-fields," so he writes, "have always held a special magic, gateways to the infinite possibilities that only the sky can offer" (Ballard 1997, 26). Maintaining this felicitous tone, Ballard sees airports, not as spaces of solitary individualism, but as the site of an unusual commonality:

> Airports have become a new kind of discontinuous city, whose vast populations…are entirely transient, purposeful, and, for the most part, happy. An easy camaraderie rules the departure lounges, along with the virtual abolition of nationality—whether we are Scots or Japanese is far less important than where we are going…Air travel may well be the most important civic duty that we discharge today, erasing class and national distinctions and subsuming them within the unitary global culture of the departure lounge (26–27).

Ballard redirects the voyeuristic gaze of Augé's traveller to a look of hospitality, now freed from the demand of belonging to one particular group. It is true that Augé, in agreement with Ballard, grants that individuals can have relations with these spaces, but such a rapport is not mediated via the singularity of our complex relations with the world, but instead through disembodied words and texts, as he writes: "Certain places exist only through the words that evoke them, and in this sense they are non-places, or rather, imaginary places: banal utopias, clichés" (77).

Reduced to a set of signs and impersonal labels—Gate 20, Passport Control, Connecting Flights—the airport becomes a space of rigid determination, depriving the airport traveller of their identity, as he or she becomes part of the anonymous identity of being an airport traveller (81). Augé is no doubt an incisive commentator on the insidious power relations structuring the experience of an airport, remarking "the passenger accedes to his anonymity only when he has given proof of his identity" (82). But his characterization of non-places as deficient spaces is conceptually and phenomenologically unsound insofar as it neglects the manifold ways in which places such as airports are interpreted beyond their cultural and societal aspects.

Against Augé's reading of the airport, let us consider the role other people play in redefining our relation to places. As we have seen in Merleau-Ponty, the division between place and non-place must be considered a second-order distinction that privileges visual observation, and which is distinct from the way that space is always already constituted for us in a primordial way. We are at all times interwoven in the thick texture of place, which wraps itself around us, such that we are never truly placeless much less spaceless. Moreover, this primordial involvement with place is thematically illuminated by the meaningful and affective relations we have with places. A place is never entirely neutral, but always present as belonging to both a global mood and the pragmatic needs we have at any given moment. What is especially critical to this dynamic character is the role other people play in shaping our sense of place.

Consider the following scenario. If I am anxious and arriving at an airport in order to take a flight, then I will experience each element of the airport as either reinforcing or otherwise assuaging my anxiety. Under such circumstances, individual aspects of the airport stand out against a general mood of anxiety. Consider here the security gate. Passing through the security gate presents itself not simply as the means to get from one point to another, nor is it a necessary but inconvenient aspect of travelling, and that alone. If I am an anxious flyer, then the security gate appears for me as a barrier that simultaneously reinforces my commitment to the prospect of flying whilst also underscoring my distance from home. Having passed through the gate, the possibility of returning to life outside of the airport is diminished, and, as a result, my anxiety is heightened. Indeed, once through security, the outside world now seems all the more remote, even though in comparative terms it is close by. As a result, I experience the post-security zone of the airport as an insular world, seemingly disconnected from the surrounding world, and indeed, inhabiting a different order of life altogether.

Let us then suppose I spot a familiar person on the other side of the departure lounge. Having not seen this person in several years, with her warm welcome, my experience of the airport as unassailably remote from my home life is modified. Now, the presence of a familiar face redefines my relation to the airport. Where the place previously presented itself as uninviting and cold, now an atmosphere of familiarity is diffused throughout, countering the felt experience of anxiety, which had hitherto been the predominant affect. This newly founded atmosphere is not contained to the immediate space of the departure lounge, as though familiarity were spatially circumscribed. Rather, what is "restorative" in this encounter is that the familiarity of the other person connects the departure lounge with a life outside of the immediate space. Does this brief encounter render a non-place a place? To

phrase the relation in this way only reinforces the dualism problematic to the approach illustrated by Marc Augé and others. As intersubjectivity becomes an interspatiality, so a place such as an airport becomes a con-fused space, a layered space where paradoxical aspects are not resolved into a unified whole, but instead becomes emblematic of the ambiguous nature of our spatial experience more broadly (cf. Trigg 2017).

Such examples are by no means atypical. In their commonality, what they reveal is that our experience of a place—even those apparently as static as an airport—is dynamically present to us and never fixed according to the cultural value attached to that place. As such, to speak of place as a concept with an already fixed set of qualities is misguided. Place is not the raw canvas upon which our experiences take place. Rather, it is the means in and through which our affective and intersubjective relations are expressed. As we have sought to show in this chapter, the expressive capacity of place problematizes fixed divisions installed in a perspective manner, not least the division between place and non-place.

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