13 Like a Child in a Supermarket

Locational Meanings and Locational Socialisation Revisited

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"Have you ever seen a mother after a wandering child has unloaded one entire supermarket shelf onto the floor?", Lyn Lofland asks in *The World of Strangers* (1973: 102). Her question invites us to consider two related concepts, both of which address the relationship between space and cultural knowledge: first, *locational socialisation* refers to a process through which we learn to code and understand particular locations: a supermarket is a place to shop, not to play – as opposed to a playground, which is where one can play, but one is expected to share the slides and climbing frames with others. Second, *locational meanings* are those bodies of knowledge which are transmitted through the process of locational socialisation. Lofland argues that understanding these meanings turns us into competent users of supermarkets, catholic churches, children's playgrounds or illegal casinos. At the same time, the meanings of places are subject to change through their use.

While Lofland's book has deservedly achieved the status of a classic in urban sociology, this discussion of space and cultural learning has gone all but unnoticed. The concept of locational socialisation has only been picked up by the sociologist Melinda Milligan (1998, 2003) and with locational meanings, the trail has gone completely cold. In this essay, I explore the possibility of re-introducing these concepts into the cultural analysis of space and place. What can we learn from the study of locational meanings and locational socialisation? How do these concepts differ from other culturalist perspectives in the study of space, like those summarised by Borer (2006)? I will show that the concepts have explanatory power and practical value for both sociologists and urban planners since they allow us to understand the various kinds of sociability taking place in various places. Locational meanings can make us obey rules without the formal impetus to do so, but they can also make us transgress institutionalised expectations. Underlying these concepts is the process of *recognition*: places have meanings, both discursive and practical, which must be recognised for the place to be understood, made meaningful, and for a shared interaction order to emerge. While recognition is a work that must be done by individuals, it's not an individual work – it's a cultural work. As such, it is amenable to change and intervention. Rebuilding places by changing their locational meanings or altering the paths of locational socialisation may be easier than rebuilding them with bricks and mortar – but it can be equally effective.

In this chapter, I first use my own empirical work on shopping malls to explore the usefulness of the concept. Second, I situate the concepts within the contemporary discussions of space, place and culture. In the second half of the paper, I review some studies in the interactionist tradition to demonstrate how they relate to Lofland's concepts. I conclude the paper with a proposition to carve out a distinct theoretical space for locational meanings and locational socialisation and I sketch out empirical challenges related to the contemporary study of these phenomena.

Shopping Malls

The interest in shopping malls as specific kinds of urban spaces has increased rapidly over the past 25 years, following the discussions of privatisation, right to the city and the shifting of research focus towards issues of inclusion and exclusion (Kohn 2004, Mitchell 2003). For many sociologists and geographers, malls became poster spaces for these developments. Researchers have described various means of control of conduct, including strict house rules (Helten & Fischer 2004, Pospěch 2016) enforced by private security services (Abaza 2001, Flint 2006), aggressive use of surveillance and CCTV systems (Helten & Fischer 2004, Saetnan, Lomell & Wiecek 2004) and targeted design solutions (Manzo 2005). These measures are orchestrated to create a tight, controllable and predictable space which excludes non-consumers, minorities and various groups of Others who may be seen as problematic for the commercial profit of mall owners (Staeheli & Mitchell 2006). As shopping malls are a global phenomenon, typically run by global companies, similar developments were observed around the world (Abaza 2001, Erkip 2003, Pospěch 2016).

In my own research on the post-2000 boom of shopping malls in the Czech Republic (Pospěch 2015, 2016, 2017), I observed similar phenomena: strict exclusionary measures, supported by excessive house rules and ever-present surveillance. Yet, beyond them, images and representations were communicated which reached beyond the brute force of these control measures. In their promotion and self-understanding, mall managers referred to malls as "family spaces". In an ostensible opposition to the purportedly dirty and dangerous cities, malls were presented as safe, comfortable and clean spaces where "the world is still in order" (Pospěch 2017: 76). The language of family-friendliness was also wrapped around control measures: the presence of CCTV was justified with reference to cases "when a child falls from an escalator", alarm buttons were there for children who get lost in the building and ban on taking photographs was explained by the claim that "like in any other family, if someone comes to your child and starts taking pictures (…), you wouldn't like it. Therefore, we like to know who and for what purposes is taking pictures of our centre." (Pospěch 2017: 74).

The references to the family also covered contradictions: malls presented themselves as "spaces for the whole family", yet not all family members were equally welcome. There were Children's corners where children could be dropped so as not to interfere with the parents' shopping and increasingly also "Men' corners", where male visitors were invited to drink coffee and watch football, while the women – the

stereotypical agents of consumption in the middle-class family – did the shopping (Pospěch 2017). Also, the mall was, ostensibly, a family space, but not the kind of family space where you can turn up unkempt, in your home outfit, and your relatives won't care. Malls are not a forgiving family. The pomposity, cleanliness and carefully organised diversity of the environment had their effect on visitors, too. In comparison to the street crowd, mall patrons were dressed smarter and the general way of behaviour seemed held back and relaxed. Parents were quick to intervene when their children started climbing into flowerpots, even without a security staff member in sight. The mall felt like a strangely obedient and conflict-free place. During my participant observation, I thought about how we behave differently in a backpacker hostel and a 5-star hotel. Perhaps this cultural halo of a place was something to focus on?

While not as numerous as those which focus on the "hard" control measures, there are also studies which notice the cultural meanings associated with mall space. An out-of-town mall is a destination and an end to our trip, Lehtonen and Mäenpää (1997) note. Once you have reached it, there is no further way through. You can relax and enjoy yourself. This observation is reminiscent of Shields' (2013) study of the Niagara Falls as a place on the margin. No one "just passes through" Niagara Falls, just like no one passes through an out-of-town mall. These places are destinations, liminal spaces (Smith 1999) which encourage out-of-the-everyday behaviour: one can "let go", "spoil oneself" and emerge fully in the ludic experience of consumption. Goss' (1993) work on the "magic of the mall" emphasises this aspect: the liminality of the mall is described as a permanent carnival in the Bakhtinian sense. Allen's concept of Ambient power (2006) aims in a similar direction: writing on Berlin's Potsdamer Platz, Allen identifies a form of power which employs atmosphere, setting and gentle manipulation of sound, lighting and material to produce a seductive effect: here, you may find yourself doing something you would not normally do, Allen notes.

From a different perspective, shopping malls have been studied as carriers of spatial meanings by Voyce. Drawing on a concept from Osborne and Rose (1999), Voyce argues: the group of shoppers thus formed (…) project their norms in the sense that the space becomes a 'political' norm through what has been called the 'spatialization of virtue' (…). This 'virtue' links the particular form of architecture and security with the view of the middle-class righteousness of the new public space. This 'virtue' of space thus both reinforces and establishes proper behaviour for the new public space (Voyce 2006: 281).

In malls, the spatialisation of virtue has been notably successful. Wehrheim's empirical work on German malls has described the latter spaces as surprisingly harmonious (Wehrheim 2007). As if to confirm the marketised family-friendliness, German patrons describe malls as "stress-free, familiar, harmonic, comprehensible and safe" (Wehrheim 2007: 278). When asked about their policing preferences, visitors suggested banning the same activities that were in fact addressed by the mall house rules. The reason for this compliance lies, according to Wehrheim, in the role of homogeneity which malls reproduce. The plurality of roles, so typical for the urban "world of strangers", is suppressed: there are no commuters running

to catch their train, no honking drivers, no joggers who will bump into you on a crowded pavement. And indeed, Wehrheim's respondents expressed greater levels of certainty over others and their roles in the mall than they did on a city street. The expected norm results in a self-reproducing normality: a normality of a place is functional for both visitors (whose surroundings are made more predictable) and for mall management (who seek to avoid all potential sources of conflict). Like any locally specific interaction order (Goffman 1983), this place-based normality offers mutual protection. For visitors, it becomes desirable to stay within the norm as it protects them against a potentially highly visible transgression.

Wehrheim's approach partly sidesteps the hard measures of social control which makes it potentially useful for analysing other settings than malls. In European cities, Christian churches provide an interesting counter-case to shopping malls. Beyond the ubiquitous metaphor of malls as "cathedrals of consumption", there are similarities: like malls, churches are visited by heterogeneous groups of people and like malls, they are tight spaces (Goffman 1963) with strict rules of conduct. Yet, there are no security guards and surveillance networks in a typical church. Perhaps, the pacification is achieved through sacredness: "Nearing the sacred place a penumbra of solemnity imposes itself on human behaviour, inviting, for example, the hushed tones, the straightened back, silent footsteps, slow breathing…" (Smith 1999: 19). Smith's understanding of sacredness is Durkheimian and not necessarily religious. Thus, one might think of similar behavioural effects in other places – including large, iconic malls. Do we not feel a certain upheaval when entering the Mall of America or the West Edmonton Mall?

From Culturalism to Interactionism

In an attempt to systematise various kinds of culturally informed analysis in urban studies, Borer has described an urban culturalist approach as a "fourth school of urban sociology" (Borer 2006). Borer's contribution addresses a neglected area in urban studies and it has rightfully earned significant attention. However, his review tends to gravitate towards a "large-scale" culture: much of the research identified as culturalist focuses on collective memories, myths and narratives and social representations pronounced on a societal- or community- scale. This range also includes the quasi-natural identities bestowed upon places by political actors, like national sites and memorials (Oláh 2015) or those produced commercially, like city branding (Vanolo 2017). Mall managers' attempts to create a representational space defined by the ideology of family-friendliness could fit here as well. Borer's thinking remains on a macro level even when discussing place identities. These, for him, can change over time "dependent on such factors as the demographics of the population inhabiting the area and its surroundings, and the fluctuation or movement of dominant industries in and out of the area" (Borer 2010: 97). The ways in which meanings and identities of places are negotiated in everyday life and reproduced through the personal experience of locational socialisation fall largely outside of this scope. Reading Borer's review, one feels compelled to ask: what about that child in the supermarket? Is this not an example of cultural work?

Borer's work on the symbolic framings of places has seen many applications in studies of the identity and reputation of place (Aptekar 2017, Zelner 2015). Smith's (1999) classification of places into sacred, profane, mundane and liminal and their associated themes of ascent, descent, normality and absurdity also fall within Borer's range, as Smith's own example of the changing meanings of *La Bastille* follows changes in framing of a place in the national imagination. If we want to get closer to the everyday practical meanings that Lofland's example of a child in a supermarket implies, we are better off with those works which focus on normative definitions of places. These include studies in cultural geography (Dixon, Levine & McAuley 2006, Valentine 1998) as well as ethnographic accounts of specific urban settings (Anderson 2010, Baumgartner 2010). Anderson's study of a locally contingent interaction order is not included in Borer's culturalist overview, yet the path from *street etiquette* to *street wisdom* is a very fitting ethnographic description of locational socialisation. Apart from inquiring about the normative definitions of a place, Anderson's and, to a lesser extent, Baumgartner's works also focus heavily on interaction among strangers in public spaces. This is an important lead, as indeed, Goffmanian and post-Goffmanian interactionist analyses contain important cues towards a re-discovery of locational meanings and locational socialisation.

Symbolic interactionism has always acknowledged the importance of culture, yet studying culture as attached to specific places rather than to interaction itself became possible only after Goffman's intervention. Goffman (1963, 1971) introduced new classes of spaces into interactionist thought, from the notorious *frontstage* and *backstage* to *stalls, shields, open regions* and *nod lines*, all of which shape interactions and carry meanings that the actors must recognise and learn to apply in order to produce a socially competent person (1967). Normality, as "interactionally produced transparency of situations" (Srubar 2007: 431), attaches itself to places and allows social life to go on in a manner of routine and trust, or, if things turn bad, to stop and stall (Misztal 2001). Goffman's perhaps most famous observation was that trivial, everyday gestures are signs – and, as signs, they carry deep meaning. In his own work, however, Goffman never allowed places to be signs, too. Rather, he sometimes stubbornly insisted on treating places as "settings" or containers in which interaction takes place (Smith 1999). Yet, his own theory has outgrown this shortcoming and some of the most interesting observations on the cultural coding of places come from Goffman's interactionist followers.

"Not men and their moments, rather moments and their men", Goffman (1967: 2) remarks to point out how social selves are created in the interaction ritual. With some licences, this could be extended to places, too. Places are also made in moments: the moment when a mother reproaches a child for unloading a supermarket shelf on the floor is crucial for the reproduction of the meanings attached to the place. The shared definition of what a supermarket is for, and how it is to be used, is strengthened and made explicit for everyone in the room. If the mother never turned up, and neither would any other adult and if other children joined in the fun of turning an orderly supermarket into a battlefield of flying fruit and falling bottles of ketchup – then the locational meanings of the place would change gradually. At a certain point, incoming shoppers would be warned (*locational socialisation*)

that this particular place has been taken over by raging kids and can no longer be considered a regular supermarket.

Specific places are upheld by ritualised production of normal appearances (Goffman 1971). Therefore, a man running with a heavy suitcase will be coded as normal in the street, especially if it's near the railway station. In an out-of-town shopping mall, the same man will cause what Goffman calls *alarm*: did he perhaps steal something from the shops? These interactional tensions will be experienced regardless of the formal social control measures that the mall employs. This is an important observation vis-à-vis the research on shopping malls. Whether the man with the suitcase is being monitored by CCTV cameras or whether he is being followed by security personnel does not make a difference. His transgression is in conflict with the locational meanings of the place. These meanings are reproduced and strengthened by the fact that we all adjust our behaviour to them: like any local interaction order, the interaction order of the shopping mall is mutual: by observing the rules of a place, we are protecting the normality which protects ourselves, too, from the unexpected and the potentially threatening.

Post-Goffman interactionist research has brought a range of studies focusing on specific places. Trondsen's (1976) study of an art museum presents a paradigmatic example: Trondsen identifies minimum audibility, minimum visibility and civil inattention as three elements of a normative system of a museum. There are guards in the museum, Trondsen notes, but a vast majority of visitors know how to behave there – and the guards know that the visitors know. This cultural competence includes sophisticated spatial manoeuvres, such as sharing "viewing spaces" in front of paintings or a ritual "transfer of privilege", whereby the current occupant of a viewing space signals her readiness to give up her position in favour of the next approaching visitor. Apart from interactionist studies like Trondsen's, some historical works also offer insights into the everyday normativity and normality of places: consider Bale's (1993) work on sports stadiums or Loukaitou-Sideris and Ehrenfeucht's (2009) cultural history of the American sidewalk.

Within interactionist studies, the focus is typically on the normative requirements associated with place and on the interaction rituals through which compliance with these requirements is secured. Ritualisation is the strongest in places where there is a potential for contamination or conflict. It is no wonder then, that many interactionist studies focus on those places where the private body encounters the social space. It is at this boundary that the do's and don'ts are particularly strict and effective locational socialisation is necessary. Cahill's (Cahill et al. 1985) work on public bathrooms as physical and moral boundaries is an example, as well as Sassatelli's (1999) analysis of the interaction order in the gym and Scott's (2009, 2010) ethnographic studies of swimming pools, the latter aptly named "How to look good (nearly) naked: The performative regulation of the swimmer's body". In all these accounts, the framing of the body and the ritualisation of (near) nakedness is the key problem. A particular sub-genre of urban interactionism is then presented by studies of pornographic places (Donnelly 1981, Karp 1973, Sundholm 1973).

The spaces where the body and its functions meet – or threaten to meet – the public eye, are culturally vulnerable and must be clearly demarcated (Scott 2009,

Sundholm 1973). There is an array of non-human actors, including signs, portals, printed warnings and decoration patterns which emphasise the specific character of the spaces in question and the corresponding normative requirements: signs pre-pare visitors for what to expect and exclusionary measures are put in place to pre-vent the entry of men, women or under-age visitors. Kaufmann's (2006) brilliant analysis of topless behaviour on French public beaches is perhaps the best example in this area: how is it possible, Kaufmann asks, that women are going topless on the beach and no one seems to notice? For him, the answer lies in the banalization of the naked body – a large-scale interactional cover-up which can only take place in a designated space: on the beach. Looks and gestures are carefully regulated as all interactions include elements of banalization and de-erotisation of the body. Everyday life, Kaufmann notes, is a repetition of repetition. Only through a careful repetition of the proper patterns of conduct and subsequent reinforcement of its locational meanings is a "beach" as a normatively particular place established and reproduced. Not places and their moments, but moments and their places.

Studying Locational Meanings

Here we are then, back in the supermarket. The shelf of goods has been unloaded on the floor and, even though there are, like in shopping malls, CCTV cameras in operation and security guards rushing to check the damage, we do not really need them to see what's wrong. Rather, what is needed, is the mother's scolding of the poor child. By performing this act of locational socialisation, the mother acknowledges the fact that the locational meanings attached to the supermarket are intact. For the onlookers, there is no need to question the situation and their role in it. Rather, by calling the cleaning personnel or even by acting as if nothing happened, other visitors contribute their own part in re-establishing the meanings of the supermarket as a formal, organised and essentially peaceful place. A similar process takes place in a shopping mall: beyond the ostentatious security measures, there are ground-level social expectations embedded in the everyday interaction which establish what is in place and what is out of place. They relate to the over-arching imperative of family-friendliness (Pospěch 2017) but also to the cognitive codes and typifications (Berger & Luckmann 1966). When I asked mall managers about their treatment of homeless people in the mall, I got some answers which pointed to a self-exclusion, based on these typifications: homeless people don't come inside, managers informed me, because they don't feel they belong here (Pospěch 2015).

Locational meanings are bodies of knowledge which define places on the eve-ryday level but they are susceptible to institutional changes, too. The locational meanings of the Louvre Museum can be transformed by institutional interventions, such as the opening of the adjacent *Carrousel du Louvre* mall (McTavish 1998). Yet, a temporary transformation occurs also when a group of misfits decide to compete for the fastest run through the museum, like in Godard's *Bande à part*. Milligan points out this double meaning of "construction of places": In general, the permanent (or relatively permanent) physical aspects of a site are constructed

by individuals who may be thought of as the set designers of the stages for social interaction (…) The social construction of the built environment, however, is much more under the control of actors in the sense that the meanings of specific objects, including the site itself, emerge in the ongoing processes of interaction. (Milligan 1998: 2).

Milligan uses the term *interactional past* to describe a set of expectations that we attach to a place as a result of locational socialisation: "Our expectations stem from a wide range of experiences, including those that have transpired in the actual site and others elsewhere from which we have learned general lessons" (Milligan 1998: 16). These expectations serve as practical guides for decoding the conduct of others, as well as for our own conduct. In Zelner's (2015) work on the interactional maintaining of a neighbourhood's reputation, deference and demeanour rituals are identified as central in reproducing the meanings of the shared spaces in the neighbourhood.

The conceptual toolbox for studying locational meanings can also include Kärrholm's (2007) notion of *territorial stabilisation*, whereby places are perceived and coded in a certain way: a supermarket will remain a supermarket, even when future generations of children continue throwing packages of goods on the ground. Among the modes of stabilisation, Kärrholm identifies *stabilisation by sort*: A territory can be produced by way of association, where the proper usage is induced by the association of one place with another of the same 'sort' (…) For example, one might recognise a place as a 'public library' and therefore behave accordingly. (…) A certain scent, a configuration of artefacts and the sense of an atmosphere can make us recognise a certain type or sort of place (a bakery, a city hall, a restaurant, a park, a dog exercise yard, etc.) and also bring to mind some of the 'proper' and territorialised ways of behaving in this sort of place. (Kärrholm 2008: 1917).

Such typifications are very close to the original concept of locational meanings. It is also practical knowledge, one that De Certeau (1984) traces all the way back to Immanuel Kant's Faculty of judgement. On the list of theoretical affinities, a final mention should be made of Foucault's work, notably his lecture *Utopia and Literature* which Foucault opens with an example of children making tents and dens in the garden or under the covers of their parents' bed: the children's play produces a different space, a counter-space which nonetheless mirrors its surroundings (Johnson 2006: 76). Here, Foucault's idea aligns with the dynamic through which locational meanings are attached to places.

Conclusion: Challenges for the Study of Locational Meanings and Socialisation

Drawing on Kärrholm's work, we can argue that for the existence of locational meanings and locational socialisation as well as for the analytical potential of these concepts, the issue of recognition is crucial. A certain place must be recognised as carrying specific meanings. Our ability to recognise this is related to the process of locational socialisation. Locational meanings can include a discursive level (like "family-friendliness" in my mall research) but they must always operate on

a practical level: as place-related typifications, they guide our conduct and our understanding of spaces and places and ensure the existence of a locally specific interaction order and, correspondingly, an intersubjective normality, in both specific places and specific "sorts" (Kärrholm 2008) of places. Like locational meanings, locational socialisation can have an explicit, even written form (ranging from formal house rules and prohibitive signs to tourist guides and "cultural know-how" handbooks for travelling businesspeople). Beyond this, however, lies an implicit system of meanings, rules and expectations which can only be obtained first-hand. Returning to Kaufmann's (2006) study, one must *be at a beach* to understand *how to be there*.

While both locational meanings and locational socialisation can be linked, as I described in this chapter, to other theoretical tools and approaches, there are empirical challenges which must be taken into account when we seek to use Lofland's 1973 concepts as tools in current research. While a comprehensive review of such challenges would be beyond the scope of this chapter, at least some issues deserve to be mentioned here. First, the interactionist approach, which lies at the root of Lofland's thought, has been criticised for presupposing a largely undifferentiated society with a monolithic culture. In reality, there may be competing locational meanings attached to places like shopping malls: the "cathedral of consumption" can also be a teenage hangout or a safe place for women to meet (Flint 2006), depending on the perspective of the group in question. Informal social control probably works better in a local church, frequented by members of a local community, than it does in the Montserrat Monastery, swarmed by visitors from around the world on a daily basis. Reflecting on this point, Wouters (2004) suggests that in conditions of real, or expected, social heterogeneity, formal and external social controls play a more important role, as there is not enough cultural "common ground" to rely on shared normality to do its disciplining job.

Second, recognition implies a recognisable terrain, and, consequently, a certain level of clarity in frames: when a mother scolds her child by saying "this is a supermarket, not a playground", she pre-supposes a common framing of the place: we all must be sure that this is indeed a supermarket – not a community centre which also sells food, or a food corner of an entertainment park. I am referring here to Cover's (2003) commentary on the postmodern erosion of place-based behavioural expectations. A "modernist" library is a place with an unambiguous framing, marked by rules of spatial segregation, silence and respectfulness. A hybrid, "postmodern" library, perhaps combined with a community centre and a café, may be more difficult to recognise as a correct "sort" of place which can lead to confusion in locational meanings and behavioural expectations. Third, when restoring 1970s concepts for analytical use half a century later, attention must be paid to an otherwise obvious topic of digitalisation: locational socialisation has taken new forms upon itself, with Google Street view being a paradigmatic example of a virtual space-before-space. Like a virtual 3-D tour of a flat we consider renting, the Street view is, in a Baudrillardian sense, somewhat more "real" than its real-world opposite, as it is grounded in shared sets of images, capturing for the masses of online viewers (and robotic compilators) a certain moment in a certain time, with certain

lighting and atmosphere. This shared experience can be considered more "real" than the idiosyncratic, changing-from-day-to-day experience of actually "being there". In a similar sense, postcards of Paris may seem more like "real Paris" than my five-year-old experience of the city when it was raining all the time and the *Arc de Triomphe* was covered in scaffolding.

These are but some limitations related to the use of Lofland's original concepts, and I am sure many others may emerge, both on empirical and theoretical level. Yet, I also believe that there are reasons why the terms locational meanings and locational socialisation should not be relegated to oblivion in the way they have been for nearly 50 years. For one, culture has power and locational meanings and locational socialisation play an important part in the cultural life of places. In Kaufmann's beach study, for example, visitors were placidly ignoring the naked bodies of others in their immediate vicinity, casually denying the power of what is usually considered a fundamental biological drive. They were only able to do so because of shared interactional rules and place-specific locational meanings. No wonder then, that mall visitors behave in a quiet, restrained way, even with no formal control measures in sight. Like children in supermarket, we are socialised into the meanings and normalities of places around us. Yet, unlike in Lofland's example, we are both children and mothers at the same time.

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