



USANDO O LUGAR PARA COMPREENDER O MUNDO DA VIDA: O EXEMPLO DO ROMANCISTA BRITÂNICO PENELOPE LIVELY EM SPIDERWEB

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USANDO O LUGAR PARA COMPREENDER O MUNDO DA VIDA: O EXEMPLO DA ROMANCISTA PENELOPE LIVELY EM SPIDERWEB

Resumo: Este artigo busca esclarecer o conceito fenomenológico de mundo da vida por meio dos temas geográficos lugar, experiência de lugar e sentido de lugar. De modo mais simples, mundo da vida se refere à experiências consideradas, por pessoas ou grupos, como dadas a priori e, portanto, não visadas. Um objetivo da pesquisa fenomenológica é examinar o mundo da vida diretamente e, com isso, identificar e esclarecer aspectos da vida humana não visados. Então, eles podem ser entendidos de modo teórico e prático. Este trabalho discute alguns princípios da fenomenologia e, então, aponta capitulações de lugar para esclarecer alguns aspectos sociais, ambientais e geográficos do mundo da vida. Para concluir essa discussão, o artigo considera a evidência descritiva da escritora britânica Penelope Lively e sua obra *Spiderweb*, um romance de 1990 que descreve as motivações de um estrangeiro para habitar um lugar – uma vila fictícia dos dias atuais no Sudoeste Britânico do Condado de Somerset.

Palavras-chave: Lar; Mundo da vida; Vivido; Penelope; Atitude natural; Fenomenologia; Fenomenologia do lugar; Lugar; Ligação com lugar; Balé do lugar.

USING PLACE TO UNDERSTAND LIFEWORLD: THE EXAMPLE OF BRITISH NOVELIST PENELOPE LIVELY'S *SPIDERWEB*

ABSTRACT: THIS ARTICLE WORKS TO CLARIFY THE PHENOMENOLOGICAL CONCEPT OF LIFEWORLD BY DRAWING ON THE GEOGRAPHICAL THEMES OF PLACE, PLACE EXPERIENCE, AND PLACE MEANING. MOST SIMPLY, *LIFEWORLD* REFERS TO A PERSON OR GROUP'S DAY-TO-DAY, TAKEN-FOR-GRANTED EXPERIENCE THAT TYPICALLY GOES UNNOTICED. ONE AIM OF PHENOMENOLOGICAL RESEARCH IS TO EXAMINE THE LIFEWORLD DIRECTLY AND THEREBY IDENTIFY AND CLARIFY TACIT, UNNOTICED ASPECTS OF HUMAN LIFE SO THAT THEY CAN BE ACCOUNTED FOR THEORETICALLY AND PRACTICALLY. THIS CHAPTER DISCUSS SOME KEY PHENOMENOLOGICAL PRINCIPLES AND THEN DRAWS ON PHENOMENOLOGICAL RENDITIONS OF PLACE TO CLARIFY SOME OF THE LIFEWORLD'S SOCIAL, ENVIRONMENTAL, AND GEOGRAPHICAL ASPECTS. TO CONCRETIZE DISCUSSION, THE ARTICLE DRAWS ON DESCRIPTIVE EVIDENCE FROM BRITISH WRITER PENELOPE LIVELY'S *SPIDERWEB*, A 1990S NOVEL DESCRIBING ONE OUTSIDER'S EFFORTS TO COME TO INHABIT A PLACE—A FICTITIOUS PRESENT-DAY VILLAGE IN THE SOUTHWESTERN BRITISH COUNTY OF SOMERSET.

KEYWORDS: HOMEWORLD; LIFEWORLD; LIVELY, PENELOPE; NATURAL ATTITUDE; PHENOMENOLOGY; PHENOMENOLOGY OF PLACE; PLACE; PLACE ATTACHMENT; PLACE BALLET.

UTILIZAR EL LUGAR PARA COMPRENDER EL MUNDO DE LA VIDA: EL EJEMPLO DEL ROMÁNICO PENELOPE LIVELY EN *SPIDERWEB*

RESUMEN: ESTE ARTÍCULO BUSCA ACLARAR EL CONCEPTO FENOMENOLÓGICO DEL MUNDO DE LA VIDA A TRAVÉS DE LOS TEMAS GEOGRÁFICOS LUGAR, EXPERIENCIA DE LUGAR Y SENTIDO DE LUGAR. MÁS IMPLANTEMENTE, EL MUNDO DE LA VIDA SE REFIERE A EXPERIENCIAS CONSIDERADAS, POR PERSONAS O GRUPOS, DADAS A PRIORI Y, POR LO TANTO, NO PREVISTAS. UN OBJETIVO DE LA INVESTIGACIÓN FENOMENOLÓGICA ES EXAMINAR DIRECTAMENTE EL MUNDO DE LA VIDA Y, POR LO TANTO, IDENTIFICAR Y ACLARAR ASPECTOS DE LA VIDA HUMANA QUE NO ESTÁN DIRIGIDOS. ENTONCES, SE PUEDEN ENTENDER DE MANERA TEÓRICA Y PRÁCTICA. ESTE TRABAJO DISCUTA ALGUNOS PRINCIPIOS FENOMENOLÓGICOS Y LUEGO PUNTA LAS CAPITULACIONES DEL LUGAR PARA ACLARAR ALGUNOS ASPECTOS SOCIALES, AMBIENTALES Y GEOGRÁFICOS DEL MUNDO DE LA VIDA. PARA COMPLETAR ESTA DISCUSIÓN, EL ARTÍCULO CONSIDERA LA PRUEBA DESCRIPTIVA DEL ESCRITOR BRITÁNICO PENELOPE LIVELY Y SU OBRA *SPIDERWEB*, UN ROMANCE DE 1990 QUE DESCRIBE LAS MOTIVACIONES DE UN EXTRANJERO PARA VIVIR UN LUGAR - UNA FICTINISTÍA DE LA FÁBRICA DEL FUTURO.

PALABRAS CLAVE: CASA; MUNDO DE VIDA; VÍVIDO; PENELOPE; ACTITUD NATURAL; FENOMENOLÓGÍA; FENOMENOLÓGÍA DEL LUGAR; LUGAR; CONEXIÓN CON LUGAR; BALLET DEL LUGAR.

Introduction

In this article, I clarify the phenomenological concept of lifeworld by drawing on the geographical themes of place, place experience, and place meaning. Most simply, *lifeworld* refers to a person or group's day-to-day, taken-for-granted experience that typically goes unnoticed (BUTTIMER, 1976; FINLAY, 2011). One aim of phenomenological research is to examine the lifeworld directly and thereby identify and clarify tacit, unnoticed aspects of human life so that they can be accounted for theoretically and practically. Here, I discuss some key phenomenological principles and then draw on phenomenological renditions of place as one means to clarify some of the lifeworld's social, environmental, spatial, and geographical aspects. To concretize my discussion, I draw on descriptive evidence from British writer Penelope Lively's *Spiderweb*, a 1990s novel describing one outsider's efforts to come to inhabit a place—a fictitious present-day village in the southwestern British county of Somerset (LIVELY, 1998).

Explicating lifeworlds

As a research method, phenomenology emphasizes empathetic contact with the phenomenon being studied. How might phenomenologists facilitate a mode of openness in their work whereby the phenomenon is offered a supportive space in which it can present itself in a way whereby it is what it is most accurately and comprehensively? Phenomenologists draw on this effort of methodological openness to better understand concrete human experience and the lived reality of everyday life. As phenomenologist Max van Manen explained, a central phenomenological aim is to discern “the primordialities of meaning as we encounter and live with things and others in our lived experiences and everyday existence” (VAN MANEN, 2014, p. 28).¹

From a phenomenological perspective, the lived structure through which everyday human life and experience unfolds is the *lifeworld*—a person or group's day-to-day world of taken-for-grantedness normally unnoticed and, therefore, concealed as

¹ Introductions to phenomenology include: CERBONE, 2006; FINLAY, 2011; MORAN, 2000; SOKOLOWSKI, 2000; VAN MANEN, 2014; ZAHARI, 2019.

a phenomenon (MORAN, 2000; SEAMON, 1979; 2018). “As conscious beings,” wrote phenomenologist Dermot Moran, “we always inhabit—in a *pre-theoretical* manner—an experiential world, given in advance, on hand, and always experienced as a unity [This lifeworld] is the general structure that enables objectivity and thinghood to emerge in different ways in different cultures” (MORAN, 2000, p. 9). One aim of phenomenological study is to disclose and describe the various lived structures and dynamics of the lifeworld, which always includes geographical, spatial, and place dimensions.

Unless it changes in some significant way, we are almost always, in our typical human lives, unaware of our lifeworld, which we assume is *the way* that life is and must be. This typically unquestioned acceptance of the lifeworld is what phenomenology founder Edmund Husserl called the *natural attitude*, because of which we habitually assume that the world as we know and experience it is the *only* world. We “accept the world and its forms of givenness as simply *there*, ‘on hand’ for us.”² Husserl characterized the natural attitude as “naïve” because “we are normally unaware that what we are living in is precisely given to us as the result of a specific ‘attitude’. Indeed, even to *recognize* and identify the natural attitude as such is in a sense to have moved beyond it” (MORAN, 2005, p. 55). Any lifeworld is *transparent* in the sense that it is normally tacit and *just happens*, grounded in spatial-temporal situations and events more or less regular.

As I argue later in this article, one integral dimension of this lived transparency is *place, place experiences, and place meanings*, for which I explicate some holistic and binary dimensions. Before introducing that explication, however, I present the concept of lifeworld in a more grounded, real-world way by drawing on a novel by critically acclaimed British author Penelope Lively.

Concretizing lifeworlds

Lively’s 1998 *Spiderweb* provides a sobering, present-day portrait of one newcomer’s effort to become at home in England’s West Country (LIVELY, 1998). The

² Ibid., p. 7; see Husserl’s descriptions of natural attitude and lifeworld in HUSSERL, 1936/1970.

novel is mostly set in Somerset, a bucolic region that, though once perhaps an integrated lifeworld grounded in history and place, has become a diverse mix of contrasting lifeworlds, more or less different because of time, happenstance, and varying life paths—in short, “people who have always been there and people who come there fortuitously.”

³ Lively recounts the efforts of recently retired social anthropologist Stella Brentwood to make a home for herself by purchasing and settling in a cottage near the small, nondescript Somerset village of Kingston Florey.

From a lifeworld perspective, Stella’s story is compelling because she tries to become a lived part of the Somerset lifeworld rather than remain the detached observer she has been her entire professional life, studying lineage and kinship in far-flung places like Egypt, Malta, and Scotland’s Orkney Islands. How, through commitment, involvement, and affection, can she draw this chosen place inside herself so that she is *a part of* the place rather than *apart* as she has always been as professional anthropologist? Early on in the novel, she realizes that, until her present effort to make a home, she has never really felt a sense of lived connection to the communities and places she studied, which are little more than “worlds out there, richly stocked and inviting observation.” ⁴ She has never really gathered herself up into place and actually *lived* there: “Her professional life has been that of a voyeur, her interest in community has been clinical. She has wanted to know how and why people get along with each other, or fail to do so, rather than sample the arrangement herself.” ⁵

In seeking finally to *enter life* rather than just to observe it, Stella sets herself to engage her retirement place and to embrace its lifeworld: “This is where she would now live, not just for weeks or months but for the foreseeable future. For years.”⁶ She takes long walks, studies maps, drives through the countryside, reads local newspapers, and visits old buildings and places of earlier historical times. She converses with locals, shops in the small village grocery, tries to know her neighbors, and presents a talk to the local historical society. As Somerset as a place of human life comes into focus, Stella realizes

³ Ibid., pp. 1-2.

⁴ Ibid., p.15

⁵ Ibid., p. 75.

⁶ Ibid., p. 14.

that it incorporates not one but many lifeworlds that interact and overlap through subtle lived dynamics like family ties, longevity, employment, commerce, and informal interpersonal encounters.

But Stella also sees that, entwined within the more complex lifeworld of Somerset-as-place, is an unspoken, less visible mesh of individually defined lifeworlds grounding different individuals and groups in differing ways with varying degrees of place engagement and place identity. Most broadly, she identifies two distinct substrata of Somerset's lifeworld mesh: on one hand, the all-important stratum of long-time residents deeply rooted in place; on the other hand, visitors and residents from elsewhere, like her, who "would never be truly attuned."⁷ All these lifeworlds presuppose more or less different natural attitudes that, almost entirely pre-reflective and unself-conscious, sustain one's relative place status and degree of belonging:

For there were two layers here, she saw. There was the basic and significant layer, which went back a long way—two, three, or more generations.... But grafted on to this layer was a further one, the layer of subsequent settlement—some of it transitory, some more permanent. Most transitory of all were the summer visitors, a valuable source of income for some, a confounded nuisance for others. Then there were the more abiding settlers—the retired, the owners of holiday cottages, the potters and woodcarvers and the weavers. These were digested, up to a point and depending upon their personal achievements in terms of participation and commitment.... But they would never be able to plug into the elaborate communication system which hinged upon intimate knowledge of how things stood, how things had changed and why, and what this implied in terms of expedient response and reactions.⁸

How one actualizes or does not actualize "belonging to place" is one of Lively's central themes in *Spiderweb*. On one hand, Stella realizes that really belonging somewhere requires devoted engagement: "Now was the time to prove herself. Even if she could not hope to melt into the ancient levels of this place..., there were still slots into which she could fit in the wider context. Join things, she told herself sternly....

⁷ Ibid., p. 72.

⁸ Ibid.

Participate.”⁹ On the other hand, she faces an unyielding disinterest in engaging this place: “She was comfortable enough with these surroundings, but still not certain how she had gotten here or why. In the past there had been good reason to be wherever she found herself. Now, she was where she was simply because one had to be somewhere.”

¹⁰

The insurmountable challenge for Stella is to move from detached observer to immersed-inhabitant-in-place. Partly because of unexpected, unsettling events, she cannot find in herself the personal commitment or involvement to accept and affirm her retirement place. She is unable to intertwine her lifeworld with the lifeworld of Somerset. She cannot shift from outsider to insider, never really fits in, and eventually leaves. I return to Stella’s situation shortly, but first I examine some conceptual and lived connections between lifeworld and place.¹¹

Place as wholeness

A key phenomenological assumption is that people and their worlds are integrally intertwined. If the concept of lifeworld offers one way to clarify this lived intimacy between people and world, another useful concept is *place*, which is powerful conceptually and practically because, by its very constitution, it offers a way to specify more precisely the experienced wholeness of lifeworlds.¹² Phenomenologically, place can be defined as *any environmental locus that draws human experiences, actions, and meanings together spatially and temporally* (SEAMON, 2018a, p. 2). By this definition, a place can range from an environmental element or room to a building, neighborhood, town, city, or geographical region. Phenomenologists are interested in the phenomenon of place

⁹ Ibid., p. 76.

¹⁰ Ibid., p. 133.

¹¹ I also discuss Stella’s experience as it illustrates a failure to engage in place identity; see SEAMON, 2018a, pp. 111-113.

¹² Reviews of place research include: CRESSWELL, 2014; GIERYN, 2000, 2018; JANZ, 2005, 2017; LEWICKA, 2011; MALPAS, 2015; MANZO, 2005; MANZO and DEVINE-WRIGHT, 2021; PATTERSON and WILLIAMS, 2005; TRENTELMAN, WILLIAMS, 2014; WILLIAMS and MCINTYRE, 2012. Phenomenological discussions of place include: CASEY, 1997, 2009; CHAMPION, 2018; DONOHOE, 2014, 2017; JANZ, 2005, 2017; MALPAS, 2018; MUGERAUER, 1994; RELPH, 1976, 2009, 2015, 2018; SEAMON, 2013a, 2015, 2018, 2021; STEFANOVIC, 2000, 2008; TUAN, 2014.

because it is a primary contributor to the spatial, environmental, and temporal constitution of any lifeworld. Human being is always human-being-in-place. As phenomenological philosopher Edward Casey explains, “The relationship between self and place is not just one of reciprocal influence... but also, more radically, of constitutive coingredience: each is essential to the being of the other. In effect, there is *no place without self and no self without place*” (CASEY, 2001, p. 684).

As indicated by Casey’s emphasis on lived inseparability and intertwinement—what he perspicaciously describes as “constitutive coingredience”—place is not the physical environment distinct from the people associated with it. Rather, place is the indivisible, typically transparent phenomenon of person-or-group-experiencing-place. The phenomenologist recognizes that places are dynamic, shifting, and encountered differently by different experiencers. For example, the same physical place can invoke a wide range of place experiences and meanings existentially (as illustrated by Stella Brentwood’s progressive recognition of Somerset lifeworlds). Similarly, over time, a person or group’s experience and understandings of place may shift (for example, Stella’s effort and eventual failure to inhabit her chosen place).

Phenomenologically, place is a significant concept because, by its very constitution, it offers a way to articulate and understand *the experienced wholeness of people-in-world*. Place is a phenomenon integral to human life, holding worlds together spatially and environmentally, and thereby marking out centers of human action, experience, and meaning that in turn make place (CASEY, 2009; MALPAS, 2018; RELPH, 1976; SEAMON, 2018a). One of the most helpful thinkers for understanding the lived wholeness of place is the French phenomenologist Maurice Merleau-Ponty, who contended that the foundation of human experience is *perception*, which he interpreted as the immediate, taken-for-granted givenness of the world undergirded by the *lived body*—a body that simultaneously experiences, acts in, and is aware of a world that, typically, responds with immediate pattern, meaning, and contextual presence (MERLEAU-PONTY, 1945/1962). In turn, Merleau-Ponty related the lived body to an active, *motor* dimension of perception—what he termed *body-subject*, or pre-reflective corporeal awareness manifested through action and typically in sync with and enmeshed in the physical world in which the action unfolds (SEAMON, 1979; 2018a, 2018b).

Drawing on the concept of body-subject, other phenomenological studies have pointed to its spatial and place versatility as expressed in more complex bodily ensembles extending over time and space and contributing to a wider lived geography. In my work, for example, I have highlighted two such bodily ensembles: first, *body routines*—sets of integrated gestures, behaviors, and actions that sustain a particular task or aim, for example, planting a garden, doing laundry, setting a table, and so forth; and, second, *time-space routines*—sets of more or less habitual bodily actions that extend through a considerable portion of time, for example, a morning getting-up routine, or a Sunday-lunch routine (SEAMON, 1979). Perhaps most pertinent to the wholeness of place is the possibility that, in a supportive physical environment, individuals’ bodily routines can converge and commingle in time and space, thereby contributing to a larger-scale environmental ensemble that I have called *place ballet*—an interaction of individual bodily routines rooted in a particular environment, which often becomes an important place of interpersonal and communal exchange, meaning, and attachment, for example, a popular tavern, a favored local park, or a flourishing urban neighborhood (BROADWAY and ENGELHARDT, 2019; BROADWAY, LEGG, and BROADWAY, 2018; JACOBS, 1961; RINK, 2019; SEAMON and NORDIN, 1980; WATSON, 2009; VAN ECK and PIJPERS, 2019).

Place ballet in *Spiderweb*

In her novel, *Lively* infers direct and indirect references to place ballet. She describes how southwestern England shifts in summer as tourists and vacationers overwhelm the region. Yet “real life continues” and “People are still growing things and selling them and providing one another with services and necessities. Most of them spend most of their time in one place, contemplating the same view, locked in communion with those they see every day” (LIVELY, 1998, p. 6). Throughout the novel, *Lively* sketches the life of Somerset by inserting items from the local newspaper highlighting events like fox hunts, puppy shows, livestock sales, and entertainment venues. Intimating the presence of a Kingston Florey place ballet, *Lively* describes the importance of the village green as “the scene of various concurrent actions, most of them

mutually exclusive.”¹³ Teenagers regularly hang out at one corner of the green and ignore a gathering of mothers with small children, who in turn ignore Stella and other older users—mostly “the retired, the settlers, the colonizers.”¹⁴

Another important site of village place ballet is the local shops, which “still had some clout as “centres for the exchange of information and opinion.”¹⁵ As one way to learn about Kingston Florey, Stella regularly shops in the village grocery nearest her cottage—an establishment run by Molly, “a product of the place” and with whom it is “neither possible or expedient to complete any transaction without a conversation.”¹⁶ After two months in her new home, Stella is asked by Molly if she is getting to know her neighbors. Molly then offers an unasked-for evaluation of the “mixed lot along the lane there.”¹⁷ She is particularly critical of the dysfunctional Hiscox family, who will play a key role in Stella’s eventual departure from Kingston Florey: “those boys—not what you might call charmers, those two, are they? Never a civil word.”¹⁸

At one point in the novel, Stella contrasts her Kingston Florey encounters with her research observations in a Malta village where old men sat regularly on a bench under a tree and where, at every street corner, “there was forever a knot of talking women.”¹⁹ This village is a perpetual place ballet, but Stella is not sure that she would wish to live like that, even though Kingston Florey might offer similar possibilities, if only she could become more deeply engaged. Independent and detached, however, Stella finds intercourse with her new world difficult: She “retreats behind her closed door and into the protective shell of her car, from which a wave and a smile will suffice.”²⁰

Place as binary: Homeworld and alienworld

If place can be examined phenomenologically as an environmental whole via

¹³ *Ibid.*, p.184.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 120.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 121.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 75.

²⁰ *Ibid.*

concepts like place ballet, it also can be considered in terms of such lived binaries as here/there, near/far, center/horizon, dwelling/journey, horizontal/vertical, insiderness/outsiderness, and so forth (RELPH, 1976; SEAMON, 2018a, pp. 52-65). Binary relationships are significant phenomenologically because environmental and place experiences often involve some continuum of lived opposites as, for example, Stella Brentwood's efforts as an outsider to become an insider to place. To illustrate one way in which a binary perspective might shed additional light on lifeworlds and places, I discuss Husserl's phenomenological explication of *homeworld/alienworld* (DONOHOE, 2011, 2014, 2017; STEINBOCK, 1994, 1995; SEAMON, 2013b).

To clarify this lived binary, one first needs to understand the lived meanings of homeworld and alienworld separately. As Husserl interpreted it, the *homeworld* is the tacit, taken-for-granted sphere of experiences, understandings, and situations marking out the world into which each of us is born and matures as children and then adults. The homeworld is always in some mode of lived mutuality with the *alienworld*, which is the world of difference and otherness but is only provided awareness because of the always already givenness of the homeworld. Phenomenological philosopher Anthony Steinbock emphasized that homeworld and alienworld are always "co-relative," "co-constitutive," and "co-generative" in the sense that neither can be regarded "as the original sphere [of lifeworld], since they are in a continual historical becoming as delimited from one another" (STEINBOCK, 1995, p. 179).

In this situation of co-constitution and co-generation, the homeworld is that lived portion of the lifeworld wherein one is most unself-consciously who one is, largely because of the happenstance of time, place, birth factors, and familial and societal circumstances. As phenomenological philosopher Jane Donohoe explained, the homeworld is "a unity of sense that is manifest in a pre-givenness of the things of the world that constitute the norm by which we judge other worlds and by which the pre-givenness of other worlds becomes given" (DONAHOE, 2014, p.12). Here, norms and normativity do not refer to some arbitrary ethical or ideological system of right and wrong or better and worse but, rather, to "a foundational standard to which other places are compared in terms of our embodied constitution of the world" (DONOHOE, 2011, p. 25). The normative significance of the homeworld is entirely relative objectively but,

subjectively, affords the taken-for-granted world view and values by which the person and group evaluate lifeworlds more or less different from their own. The homeworld incorporates one's manner of lived embodiment, and his or her lived relationships with place evoke a particular mode of comportment that "is not simply one's comportment toward this particular place, but simply one's comportment."²¹ In this sense, we always "carry with us the structure of our [homeworld] in the structure of our lived-bodies, in our typical comportment and in our practices" (STEINBOCK, 1995, p. 164).

Though still remaining in the natural attitude, we only recognize the presence of the homeworld when we find ourselves in worlds different from its tacit typicality, normativity, and taken-for-grantedness. In relation to the homeworld, the alienworld presents norms, behaviors, and situations that are more or less different from what a person in his or her homeworld takes for granted. As Steinbock explained, the homeworld plays a central role in sustaining the identity we understand as ourselves:

A homeworld is privileged because it is that through which our experiences coalesce as our own and in such a way that our world structures our experience itself. This constitutional privilege... is indifferent to whether we like it or not, or to whether it makes us happy or miserable. The point is that the norms that guide the homeworld are our norms, our way of life, as that to which we have accrued (STEINBOCK, 1995, p. 232).

Husserl argued that people potentially change through two sorts of lived exchanges between homeworld and alienworld—what he called *appropriation* and *transgression*.²² In appropriation, we involve ourselves in situations of "the co-constitution of the alien through appropriative experience of the home."²³ Conversely, transgression involves situations of "the co-constitution of the home through the transgressive experience of the alien."²⁴ In appropriation, we encounter qualities of an alienworld *within our own homeworld*; perhaps we accept those qualities because they are helpful, inescapable, or revelatory (e.g., a daughter tells her parents she is lesbian, and

²¹ Ibid., p. 31.

²² Ibid., p.179.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Ibid.

suddenly they need to encounter and sooner or later accept into their homeworld the “alienworld” of their daughter’s gayness) (SEAMON, 2013b, pp. 162-167). In a reciprocal way, in transgressive experiences, we encounter the alienworld because we *have left our homeworld*; as in appropriation, we recognize and perhaps accept potentially necessary or helpful qualities of that alienworld (e.g., the inexperienced lesbian daughter immerses herself in the “alienworld” of gay life and comes to accept her gayness, which becomes a taken-for-granted part of her homeworld).²⁵

Steinbock described appropriation and transgression as modes of “critical comportment” that “may entail the renewal of a homeworld’s norms, revitalizing and renewing its internal sense; [this process] may even demand going against the prevalent normality, replacing old norms with a new ethical normality in an attempt to realize the homeworld more fully” (STEINBOCK, 1994, p. 214). One must emphasize, however, that appropriation and transgression can also involve the interference of alienworld values and actions that undermine the homeworld and weaken its lived integrity as a lifeworld, a situation illustrated by Stella Brentwood’s neighbors, the dysfunctional Hiscox family.

Homeworld and alienworld in *Spiderweb*

In Lively’s novel, the lived binary of homeworld/alienworld marks a central factor because of which Stella Brentwood ultimately fails in making Somerset a home. Stella describes her homeworld before retirement in terms of a “bird of passage”: “in the field she had been in the ultimate state of transience—the invisible observer, the visitor from outer space. The people in whom she was interested were there, in that place—she herself was both there and crucial apart” (LIVELY, 1998, p. 175, p. 176). In many ways, Somerset is an alienworld for Stella, particularly in the sense that it challenges her to enter into place via efforts of appropriation and transgression whereby she attempts to make Somerset’s presence a part of her lifeworld, which, reciprocally, might become a small but embedded part of Somerset’s lifeworld.

²⁵ Ibid.

Unfortunately for Stella, one of her neighbors is Karen Hiscox, her husband Ted, and their two sons. Though Stella only makes their acquaintance superficially, this family demonstrates a profoundly dysfunctional homeworld grounded in psychosis and physical and mental abuse. Forties-something Karen Hiscox is deeply disturbed psychologically, partaking in explosive verbal attacks against people by whom she feels slighted, including her husband and sons. Teenage sons Michael and Peter have absorbed her upsetting ways and are “a general cargo of resentment.”²⁶ They misunderstand Stella’s neighborly actions and eventually, out of misplaced spite, shoot and kill a shelter dog that Stella has recently adopted as one way to engage with her place.

Lively’s novel is powerful, partly for the way it depicts these two geographically adjacent but dramatically contrasting homeworlds that have no lived sense of the other. Stella sees Michael and Peter as “poor little tykes,” whereas they see Stella as an old woman who regularly makes fun of their appearance and possessions, even though all she is attempting is to be friendly to the two teenagers by greeting them when she sees them and asking what she assumes to be pertinent, non-judgmental questions about their lives.²⁷ Ironically, in trying to engage with her place through getting to know Michael and Peter, Stella unknowingly turns them against her, and they shoot the dog, which Stella has left alone in her unlocked cottage: “they’d be one up on that silly old cow forever now....”²⁸

For much of her professional life, Stella took for granted a homeworld incorporating a detached attitude—from the places she studied and from the lifeworlds associated with those places: “The people in whom she was interested were there, in that place—she herself was both there and crucially apart. If she lived permanently anywhere, it was in a landscape of the mind.”²⁹ Successfully objectifying the homeworlds of others, however, is a much different situation objectively than subjectively dissolving one’s objectifying attitude to place and becoming deeply rooted, like Stella’s garrulous

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 176.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 194.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 197.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 176.

postman, a Somerset inhabitant by birth who “was of this place, and knew what was what.”³⁰ Yet again different is the dysfunctional insularity of the Hiscox homeworld, which takes for granted and perpetuates a damaging way of being that distrusts and despises the “alienworld” of any “different” person like Stella, for whom the Hiscox sons have no intellectual or emotional means to be interested in or trust. Once they kill her dog, Stella’s brittle lived connectedness to place is broken, and she leaves—to where, we’re not told.³¹

Understanding lifeworld and place

In this chapter, I have sought to clarify lifeworld and place and to suggest how they can be considered as lived wholes and binaries. The broader point to be made is that there are many interpretive ways to direct phenomenological studies of lifeworld and place, and I hope this chapter points toward some promising possibilities. As I have described it here, a phenomenological understanding of lifeworld and place begins with the specific experiences of specific individuals and groups in specific times and places. The aim, however, is not idiographic descriptions of particular real-world situations. Rather, these situations are a descriptive context for exploring and locating broader patterns and structures of human experience and human life.

In ending this chapter, I want to make one last crucial point about lifeworlds. One mistake made by newcomers to phenomenology is to objectify lifeworld by misunderstanding it as a thing that can be separated from the experiencer of which it is part. One can never say that he or she “has” a lifeworld. It would be more accurate to say that the lifeworld “has” us in the sense that the lifeworld is the always, already pre-given world in relation to which the experiencer has no choice but to be entwined and a part. Lifeworlds can change for better and worse, but always this change happens because of and via the lifeworld—for example, a young woman is able to break out of a

³⁰ Ibid., p. 93.

³¹ Besides the shooting of her dog, Stella experiences awkward encounters with two close friends that also probably play a role in her leaving Kingston Florey. Even as she reports her dog missing and has not yet learned of its death, she explains to one of the friends, ‘I dare say... this dog business has unnerved me.... [I]t is the fate of the poor dog that would appear to have thrown me’ (Lively, 1998, p. 208, p. 209).

limiting homeworld because aspects of her lifeworld opens horizons to education and a better life. The concept of lifeworld is difficult to grasp because it is always present but almost always hidden from conscious awareness. At times, when some aspect of the lifeworld suddenly shifts—for example, our car won't start, a computer crashes, or a friend betrays us—we realize the taken-for-granted structure and connectedness of daily life. But this realization *remains within the natural attitude*. Most of the time, daily life just happens, and the lifeworld and natural attitude remain opaque, undisclosed, and outside the realm of conscious understanding.

One aim of phenomenology is to reveal, describe, and interpret the various dimensions of lifeworld and natural attitude. Phenomenology, wrote Merleau-Ponty, “slackens the intentional threads which attach us to the world and thus brings them to our notice” (MERLEAU-PONTY, 1945/1962, p. xiii). At the same time, phenomenological discovery is not easy or immediate because so often it reveals aspects of lifeworld and place that are “strange and paradoxical”³² One need go no further than the uncanny, inopportune adjacency of Stella Brentwood and the Hiscox family—an unpredictable and unfortunate alignment of serendipity and geography that unravels one person's possibility for embracing place. “Fortune,” writes Lively, “can serve up some strange conjunctions” (LIVELY, 1998, p. 2).

Yet running beneath the ambiguity, uncertainty, and hazard of real-world human experience are essential, invariant, non-contingent structures marked by phenomenological concepts like lifeworld, natural attitude, place, and homeworld. These lived structures always and inescapably underlie human worlds, wherever, whenever, and for everyone. A primary aim of phenomenological explication is to make these lived structures available to scholarly study, practical intervention, and deepening self-understanding.

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³² Ibid.

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