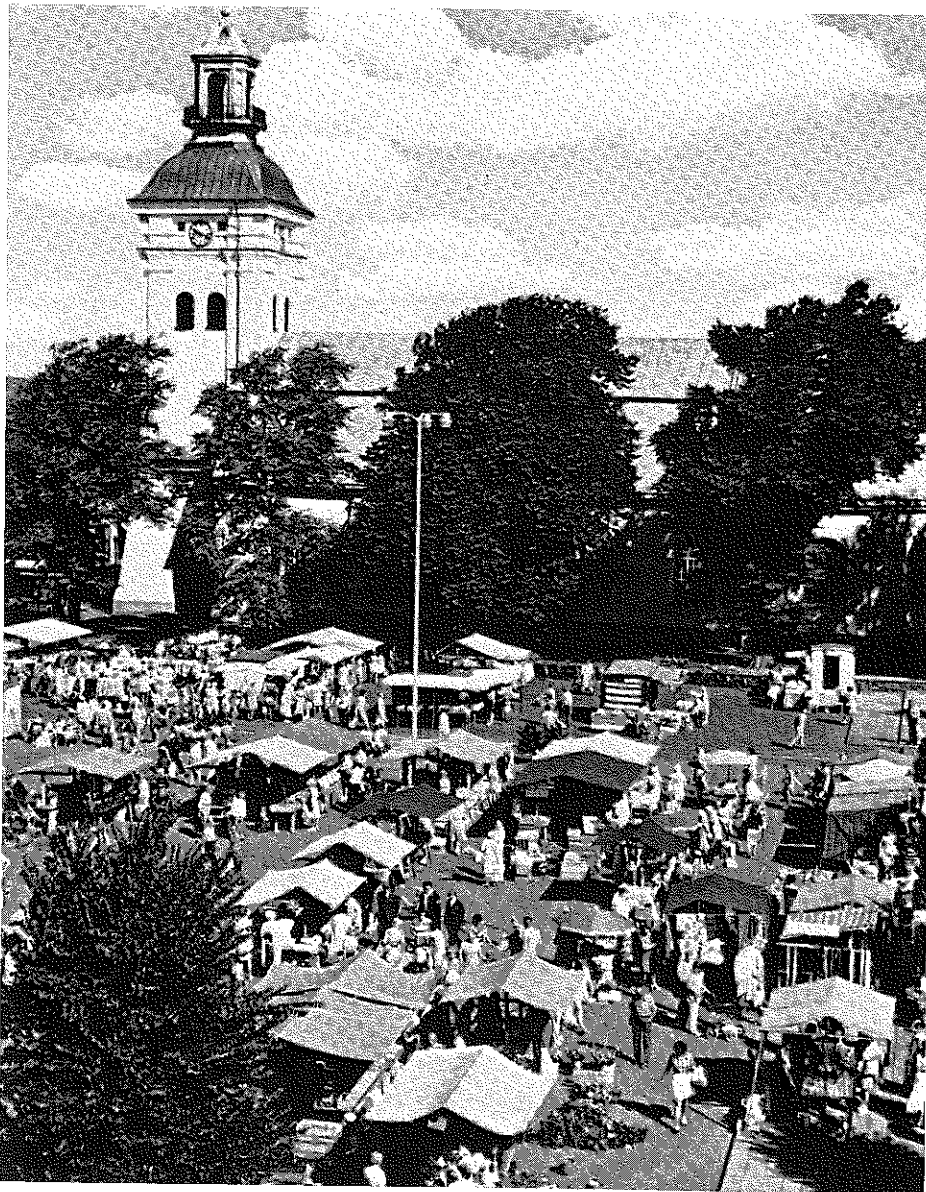


MARKETPLACE AS PLACE BALLET

A SWEDISH EXAMPLE



Varberg's outdoor market has operated in the town's central plaza for over four hundred years. Courtesy of Gunvor Carlsson.

David Seamon and
Christina Nordin

PLACE BALLET is a phenomenological notion developed in Seamon's *A Geography of the Lifeworld* to describe regularity of place founded in habit, routine, and supportive physical environment. Conducting their own daily activities, people come together in space, which takes on a sense of place. Individual participants using the same space unintentionally create a larger place with its own tempo of activity and rest, bustle and calm.

Place ballets may occur at various scales, indoors or out. A lounge, cafe, office building, village square, or any other situation where some users come together regularly, face-to-face, may provide a foundation for place ballet. One place ballet is the outdoor market in Varberg, a Swedish coastal town of twenty thousand people located about fifty miles south of Gothenburg. The value of place ballet for environmental theory and planning can be explored in Varberg's market ballet and in examining its role in sustaining a sense of locality and community.

Outdoor markets have existed for centuries in Sweden. They were reinforced by royal trade privileges that forbade all openly organized selling in the countryside. Varberg market has stood in the same place in the center of the town for four hundred years. It is in an open cobblestone square about the size of a football field. It is punctuated by one street, a fountain, and benches. The market operates throughout the year each Wednesday and Saturday from eight A.M. to one P.M. Sales involve one-third perishables, including fruit, vegetables, flowers, and sweets; one-third cloth and clothing, both new and used; and one-third other items, including paintings, knickknacks, and household items. The size of the market varies seasonally. It is about three times as large in summer as in winter because of weather, because some sellers work only during their summer holidays, and because tourists flock to Varberg's beaches in summer.

Elements of place ballet

The notion of place ballet was developed to explore spatial behavior phenomenologically. The conventional assumption in behavioral geography is that spatial behavior is a function of cognitive mapping. Scholars who use a phenomenological perspective, however, recognize that many

day-to-day behaviors are habitual and arise from the body, which acts intentionally but precognitively. This pre-conscious intelligence of the body, first suggested by the French phenomenologist Maurice Merleau-Ponty, can be called *body-subject*. Body-subject is the inherent capacity of the body to direct behaviors of the person intelligently, and thus function as a special kind of subject that expresses itself in a pre-conscious way usually described by words, such as, mechanical, automatic, habitual, and involuntary.

The body as subject manifests extended behaviors reaching over time and space. These behaviors are of two types: *body ballets* and *time-space routines*. A body ballet is a set of integrated gestures and movements that sustain a particular task or aim, for example, washing dishes, plowing, house building, operating machinery, potting. A time-space routine, which may incorporate body ballets, is a set of habitual body behaviors that extend over a considerable length of time. Sizeable portions of a person's day—for example, getting up, traveling to work, cleaning the house—may be organized around such routines. In a supportive physical environment, many body ballets and time-space routines can merge to create *place ballet*, which is an interaction of many time-space routines and body ballets rooted in space. The groundstone of place ballet is a regularity of human behaviors in time and space. Two underlying patterns appear in the place ballet of the Varberg market—regularity and unexpectedness.

Regularity

One aspect of regularity in the Varberg market is body ballets. These regular bodily routines exist for the market, mostly for the sellers and caretakers. One major body ballet is setting up. Sellers bring their goods and materials to construct booths. Unloading and arranging can proceed quickly and easily because the procedure is established and habitual. A particularly important aspect of setting up, especially for food and flower sellers, is display, which is done carefully and reaches the state of art in some stalls. Stands are set up regularly at the same location in the market, and generally both props and sales items are placed in the same location time after time.

This "place for everything, everything in its place" establishes a spatial continuity, both for sellers, who can thus set up quickly and efficiently; and for buyers, who are used to a particular arrangement of goods and thus can find them conveniently, using a minimum of attention and effort.

After the market opens, the main body ballets involve selling, cutting vegetables, measuring cloth, making change—all of which involve some knowledge and ability residing in body-subject. In general, these selling behaviors are simple, but some, such as arranging a bouquet on demand or weighing fruit and vegetables, require considerable skill and sensitivity. One vegetable seller, for example, explained that for regular items such as potatoes and beets she could quickly and accurately estimate weights, but for less common produce such as fresh kale and spinach a scale was required. As the market ends, there are cleaning-up and packing routines that mark the end of another market cycle.

Body ballets are generally part of time-space routines, and Varberg market reflects this pattern. Unloading, selling, cleaning, and packing are part of individual sellers' time-space routines that vary little from one market day to the next. Earliest to arrive are the food sellers, who have purchased items from traders or wholesale firms in Varberg or elsewhere. These sellers come as early as five-thirty, needing the time before market opens at eight to set up and display their produce. Later, between seven and eight, other sellers arrive and arrange their items. The vendors of clothing and heavy cloth come at this time because they have much to unload. Shortly before eight, some sellers cluster together in groups, speaking about prices and other things.

Buyers are also involved in time-space routines. Two-thirds of customers spoken to randomly at one Saturday market said that they shopped at the market at least once a week. "You walk down unconsciously to town every bloody Saturday," said one regular, "and become fascinated 'by the game.'" Some customers explained that they had a market routine that was fairly regular in time and space: "On my free Saturday mornings, I take the eight-thirty or nine o'clock bus down to the market. I start at the cloth

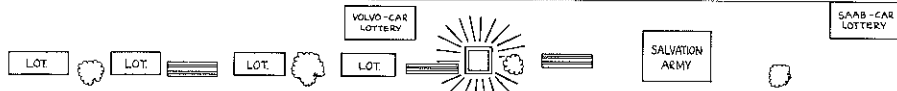
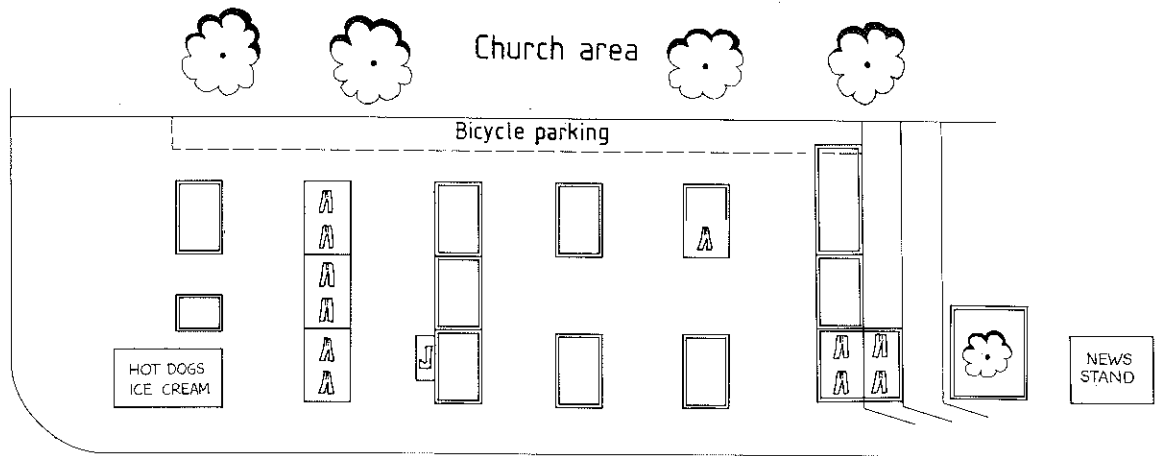
corner, looking at the merchandise sold by the girl who uses her green van as a stall. Then I look at curtains at two nearby stands. After that I might want to buy glassware, so I search for 'Glassware Bruno,' who often arrives late and cannot always get his regular place. Then I stroll around, walking everywhere. I stop and listen awhile to Eddie, the black man. I buy a ticket at the lottery stall. Often I meet people there and we chat a bit."

A second market-goer said: "My wife and I cycle down to the market at half-past nine. We park our bikes near the church. Usually, we separate to do our buying at the nearby shops, arranging to meet at the hot-dog stand when we're finished. Then we take a leisurely stroll through the market, looking to see what's there. We buy our vegetables—always at the same stand. Maybe we'll find some fine berries at one of the smaller stalls. The market usually takes about one-and-a-half hours. The last thing we do is buy fish at the nearby shop on Torggatan. By twelve we're back home."

A third market-goer, receptionist at the nearby hotel, described her pattern: "I first buy vegetables at Sixten's stall and then leave them in the hotel at my desk. I walk back to the market through the fruit and vegetable stalls to the arts-and-crafts area where I look at the handcrafted clothes. Then I walk back to buy flowers, stroll around the cloth corner, then return to my receptionist job. I do this pattern each Wednesday and Saturday on my coffee break."

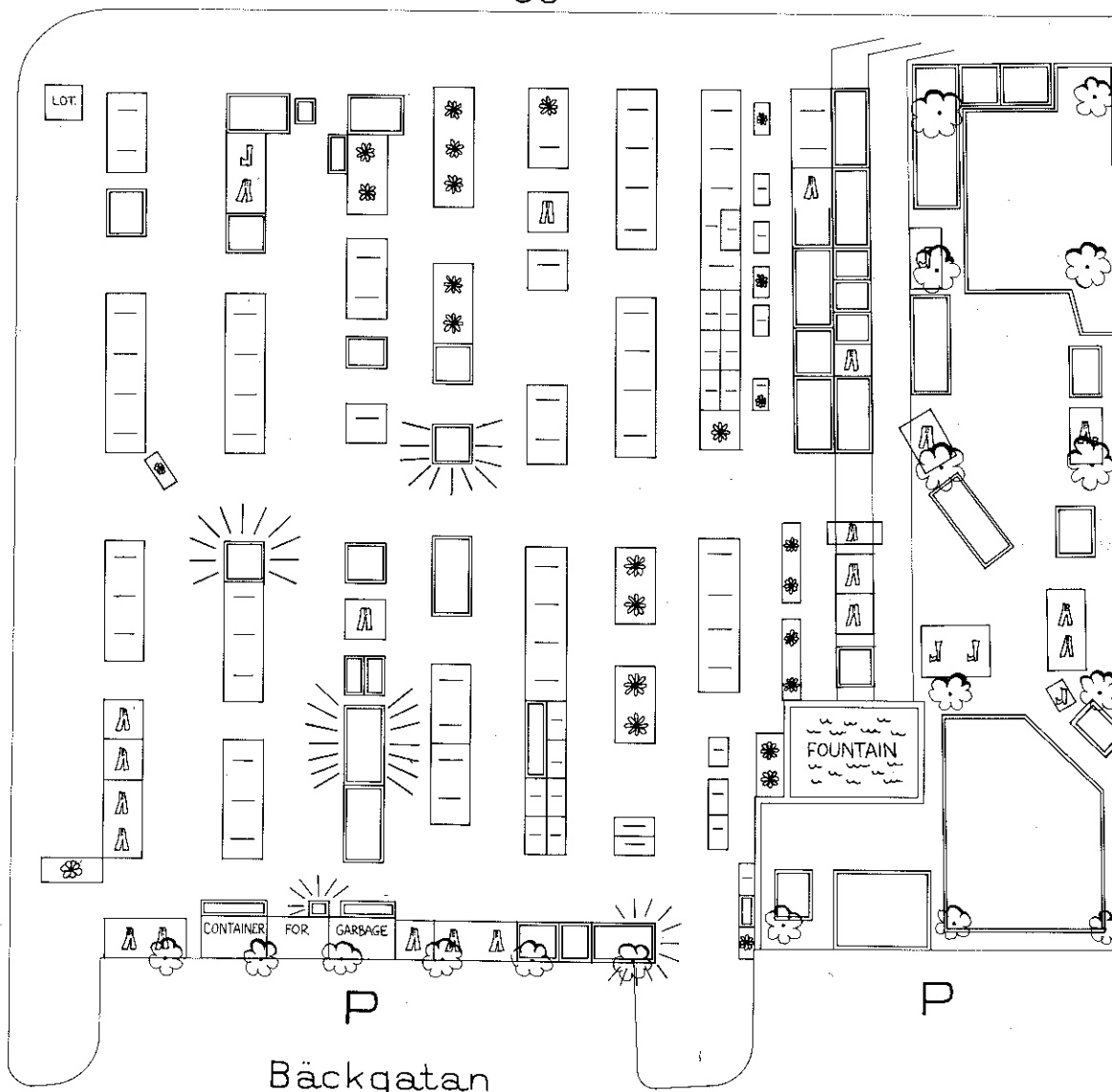
Another indication of customers' regularity is the loss of sales for sellers who change the locations of their booths. Buyer routines may be so regimented that a change in place—even a distance of two or three booths—may cause the customer to think a seller is not at the market. Here, a change in place disturbs the buyers' normal movement routine, and they are less readily able to find the booth. Sellers explain that they take this factor into account if they think about changing booth locations, which normally are

Plan of the Varberg market for a typical Saturday in July 1975.

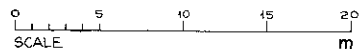


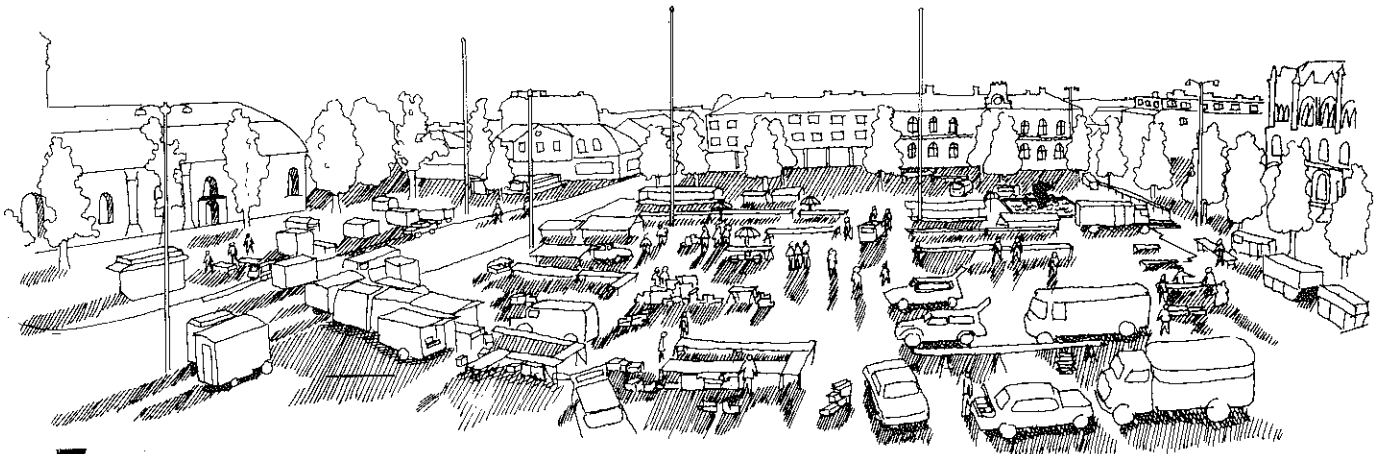
Torggatan

Kungsgatan



- FRUITS, VEGETABLES AND SWEETS
- SHOES AND STOCKINGS
- FLOWERS
- CLOTHES
- ARTS AND CRAFTS, HOUSEHOLD-WARES AND ANTIQUES





7am



11am



1pm

paid for at the beginning of the year and kept for the duration. "I don't like to change my stall location," said one seller, "unless I can move closer to the biggest flow of people in the market. When I have changed places, I've noticed it takes time for some of my old customers to find me again."

Body ballets and time-space routines, then, bring at least some buyers and sellers together regularly in place. Regularity of individual participants works in dialogue with the regularity of local history, establishing Wednesday and Saturday markets as an event in peoples' consciousness to which they look forward. The typical life of Varberg market follows a predictable sequence. At seven the market begins to take on form. Sellers and an administrator responsible for the market gather. At eight the market opens and the earliest customers arrive, seeking out the best produce. By nine the market is full, and it stays full until about eleven-thirty. By twelve-thirty, most customers have gone and sellers are leaving. At one o'clock, closing time, cleaning operations begin. The activity of a few hours earlier is no longer visible. Another market day has ended.

Unexpectedness

As a weekly event, Varberg market "unfolds," and this unfolding happens largely through a regularity of place founded in habit. Individual behaviors repeat a similar pattern, time after time, to establish a consistent time-space dynamism. The resulting continuity and expectedness offers a

groundstone of stability and taken-for-grantedness out of which a certain amount of novelty, variety, and surprise can arise. Regularity of place, in other words, fosters the possibility of unexpectedness.

Unexpectedness occurs in various ways. People meeting people is perhaps its simplest form. These meetings are coincidental and unplanned, occurring as acquaintances and friends meet at the same stall, pass each other, or sit at the same bench. When asked why they come, regular market-goers first spoke of buying or selling, but sooner or later they usually mentioned the enjoyment of meeting others: "You will meet your friends there," "You can stop and talk without obligations." Several market-goers explained that their market routine involves, first, buying, and then, walking freely around the market, looking and talking to acquaintances they happen to meet. This pattern can also involve avoiding people they don't want to see.

Unexpectedness also arises because not all buyers and sellers are regulars. Although two-thirds of the customers use the market at least once a week, the other third do not. These visitors and less frequent users provide an additional population for watching and interacting. In the same way, regular sellers may offer new items and new sellers may appear. Some, for instance, fur sellers and craftsmen, visit Varberg only once or a few times a year. These new sellers and their items provide a changing variety in the market that regular weekly sales do not. Such vari-

ety provides another source of enjoyment for the market-goer and led one regular to say, "You can never know for sure what you'll find there on a particular day."

A third kind of unexpectedness is provided by the sellers at the market who not only sell, but also talk, entertain, and amuse. These people turn their stall into a kind of stage and make jokes, sing, and perform as they demonstrate their products. At Varberg the best example is Eddie, a man from the Caribbean who sells home interior decorations. Eddie talks continuously, and around his booth is always a crowd. From them he evokes laughter and surprise. People like Eddie help make the market place an unpredictable theater in which people perform as they watch.

Implications

Varberg market is an important event for the people in Varberg and its vicinity. It is not only a set of economic exchanges, but a weekly event that adds interest, enjoyment, and human interaction to people's lives. In this sense, the market is a key element in the town's sense of community and place. Its weekly occurrence fosters exchange of both material products and human contact. One older market-goer, speaking of her relationship with sellers, summarized in particularly vivid terms the market's power to promote interaction and a sense of personal history: "At the market, there are three or four vegetable sellers that I've known since childhood. They're

By seven A.M. on Saturday in the summer (top), sellers have appropriated their usual places and begun to set up displays. Customers do not arrive until eight. At eleven A.M. (middle) the activity has reached its peak. Customers cluster around sales demonstrations and stroll among the arts and crafts. By one P.M. (bottom) most shoppers have left. A few remain to find fruit and vegetables at reduced prices. Vendors repack their goods as well as relax and talk.



my favorite people to talk with here. They're still at the same places they had when I was a child. That gives me a sense of continuity."

Varberg market may be slowly weakening. Changing attitudes toward work, opposition from local shopkeepers, competition from chain stores, impact of the automobile—these and other factors are changing the markets and making it difficult for some sellers to continue with the market trade. Consider, for example, health restrictions that have progressively limited the kinds of produce that Swedish outdoor markets can sell. In Varberg, the first item prohibited was fish in 1858. In 1944 sliced sausage and fresh meat could no longer be sold, and in 1972 fresh poultry and sausage wrapped in plastic were banned. These restrictions have damaged the market because the range of goods is reduced, and therefore customers are lost.

If Varberg market has a role in fostering and maintaining community, generating human contacts and interactions that might not otherwise occur, then efforts should be made to preserve and protect it. In this sense, the notion of place ballet has theoretical and practical value. Place ballet is a notion that joins people, time, and place. In past approaches, the person-environment relationship has generally been treated in piecemeal, mechanistic terms: place is defined as the sum of individual human behaviors. Place ballet, in contrast, interprets place as a whole greater than the sum of its parts. Its identity and dynamics are as real as the human behaviors happening in that place. Place ballet is an environmental synergy that people unknowingly create. In the case of Varberg, the market is a place grounded in economic transactions but is considerably more than those transactions.

For environmental planning, place ballet provides a notion around which to construct design and policy. What

place ballets are there? Do they work to foster community? How might they be started or strengthened? Are there limits of time and space beyond which place ballet is no longer possible? For example, in the case of Varberg, would a market held less than once a month maintain place ballet? When does a space and number of sellers become so large that the market splinters and is no longer a whole?

Perhaps the notion of place ballet is most useful for the residents themselves. People often feel intuitively the value of place ballet but generally have no formal means of description. Place ballet makes one implicit dimension of the day-to-day world more explicit. It provides a concept that might have a role in protecting, enhancing, and creating environments that generate a sense of vitality, atmosphere, and well-being. □

Further Reading

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Photographs by Christina Nordin, 1975-79.
Sketches by Kajsa Forssén.

