



## **Being Through There Matters: Materiality, Bodies, and Movement in Urban Communication Research**

GREG DICKINSON  
Colorado State University, USA

GIORGIA AIELLO  
University of Leeds, UK

Increasingly, scholars have turned to the urban built environment as a medium of communication in its own right. The bricks and mortar of cities are communicative insofar as they shape, constrain, and ultimately also mediate the everyday lives of individuals and communities. We draw on our own and others' work in the broader field of rhetorical studies to state that "being through there" matters as a methodological approach to examining the urban built environment as a key form of mediation. Looking both backward and forward, we argue that this approach to studying the city is centered on three key concepts: materiality, bodies, and movement. This means that we must directly engage as fully embodied communication scholars with the built landscape, with temporality, and in movement. We therefore offer a number of examples to show communication scholars how to bring their own material possibilities into experiencing contact with the urban built environment, how to reconstruct urban landscapes' histories and ongoing changes, and how to integrate considerations about both direction and speed into the study of urban communication.

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Greg Dickinson: greg.dickinson@colostate.edu

Giorgia Aiello: g.aiello@leeds.ac.uk

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When codes worked up from literary texts are applied to spaces—to urban spaces, say—we remain, as may easily be shown, on the purely descriptive level. Any attempt to use such codes as a means of deciphering social space must surely reduce that space itself to the status of a *message*, and the inhabiting of it to the status of a *reading*. (Lefebvre, 1991, p. 7)

For scholars who, like us, consider space as rhetorical inducement and the built environment as a medium of communication in its own right, urban communication resides in the physical and performative dimensions of the city. We locate our main object of study in the bricks and mortar of cities and their contribution to both enabling and impeding particular actions, identities, and practices (Dickinson, 2002). Rather than examining cities as contexts or even repositories of different communicative modes and media (from language, imagery, and sound to digital networks and communication technologies), we turn to the urban built environment as a key form of mediation (Aiello, 2011, 2013). We see urban space as “the product of power-filled social relations” (Massey, 1999, p. 21) and the urban built environment as the physical, observable, and always shifting manifestation of such social relations (Thrift, 2008).

More specifically, we also consider the urban built environment as a “set of media” through which “a given social dispensation produces and reproduces itself” (Mazzarella, 2004, p. 346). Moving away from a media-centric outlook (Livingstone, 2009), mediation ought to be seen as a “process of environmental transformation which, in turn, transforms the conditions under which any future media can be produced and understood” (Couldry, 2008, p. 380). It is in this sense that the urban built environment is communicative: It contributes to transforming and reproducing major ideological and structural conditions that, quite literally, mediate the everyday lives of individuals and communities.

In this article, we attempt to outline our approach to urban communication research for scholars who intend to examine the physical characteristics of cities from a broadly rhetorical perspective and the urban built environment as a key form of mediation, in particular by focusing less on “issues of symbolism” while attending more to “the performative dimension of the site” (Blair & Michel, 2000, p. 40). The article is both retrospective and prospective in form. It looks back on the work produced by others and ourselves to extract some methodological principles from a scholarly approach that has operated more as a form of critical engagement and an intellectual orientation within the humanities rather than as sociological inquiry. The article is prospective because, by clarifying some implicit principles in our work, we can refine our approaches and, we hope, make the scholarship matter more.

Looking both backward and forward, we have realized that our approach to studying urban communication consistently circulates around three significant terms: (1) materiality, (2) bodies, and (3) movement. In a friendly revision to Carole Blair’s (2001) argument that studying material places relies on “being there,” we argue that “being through there” directs our attention to the centrality of embodied and material movement through space. “Human life,” critical geographer Thrift (2008) argues,

is based on and in movement. Indeed, it might be argued that it is the human capacity for such complex movements and the accompanying evolution of movement as an enhanced attractor that has produced the reason for much of our rhizomatic, acentred brain. (p. 5)

Our cities, our bodies, our things, and our selves are performed together, a performance that is moving (in all the richness of that word). Methodical movement through the city offers the soundest and in some senses most empirical—or at least “experimental” (Thrift, 2008)—way of studying the city as communicative.

We make this argument in two sections. In the first section, we argue that *materiality*, *bodies*, and *movement* are nodal terms for describing urban communication itself. In the second section, we describe the procedural implications of our understanding of urban communication. Of course, we cannot fully engage arguments about each of our main terms for they are laden with long and complex histories. What we can do, however, is describe our basic assumptions and how they can guide urban communication scholarship from the perspective that we have just laid out.

### **Materiality**

Our first assumption is that urban communication is material. The city is made up of bricks, concrete, steel girders, fences, sidewalks, curbs, roads; it comprises honking horns, whirring wheels on macadam, chirps and tweets of urban birds, rising voices of people spilling out of pubs at closing time; it is constructed of the smells of rotting trash, vomit, frying food, fresh cut grass in an urban park in the middle of summer, or the crispness after a September rain that cools and cleans the city; its heat can rise like waves off the cities’ surfaces; its deep chill can drive the unhomed to subway grates and into layers of boxes. In short, the city is quite distinctly made of “matter.” It is composed of “things”—including humans who, Bennett (2010) argues, are little more than complexly organized things—that often mutually implicate and co-construct other things. In spite of the city’s resolute materiality, urban communication scholars attend most frequently to the symbolic rather than the material. They read architecture as though it were a text, they interview residents and tourists about their experiences, and they explore a wide variety of texts about the city. We want to suggest that, although this scholarship is powerfully important to understanding urban communication, addressing the city’s materiality is also important.

Bringing urban communication’s materiality to the forefront has three important implications. First, communication’s materiality assumes that the human being is, in large part, material. Made up of bone and sinew, activated by chemical reactions and electrical charges, nourished by food, air, and water that are processed by microbes and bacteria throughout our body, driven by activating energies, the human processes and produces suasion in and through this materiality (Condit, 2008; Dickinson, 2002). Second, communication has material consequentiality from the level of the individual through society. For example, language use makes and remakes the brain by restructuring neural pathways. Meanwhile, culturally structured and meaningful movement such as walking, sitting, or running remakes the muscles, joints, and tendons and restructures proprioceptive senses and abilities, or the body’s engagement with the surrounding material environment which translates into particular forms of muscular memory and spatial awareness (Massumi, 2002; Nöe, 2012).

As Thrift (2008) argues, “the contours and content of what happens constantly change: for example, there is no stable ‘human’ experience because the human sensorium is constantly being re-invented as the body continually adds parts to itself” (p. 2). And so, even as the material body of the human structures the possibilities of communication, communication produces materially evident structures on the body: In material ways, language is written on the body. We return to the embodied nature of urban communication later. This discussion implies that, third, even as symbolic discourse is communicative, so too are nondiscursive, material things such as buildings and sidewalks, doorknobs, and wall coverings (Bachelard, 1969). These things communicate not just because they symbolize (e.g., tall building = large phallus), but also in their very presence (Gumbrecht, 2004).

Understanding communication’s materiality requires appreciating the thing–power character (Bennett, 2004) of material organizations such as buildings, sidewalks, and urban detritus. Of course, buildings and detritus are products of humans, but this focus on agentic materiality directs attention to the ways in which material things (the paper of the candy wrapper or the steel of the tower) co-produce the culture of which they are a part. Steel may seem inanimate, but combined with human action (action made possible and structured by both discourse and biology), steel remakes the ways humans live in, make sense of, and communicate with/in the city. Likewise, the rough texture of a wall in a newly designed Starbucks draws in the coffee drinker through both symbolic and material means (Aiello & Dickinson, 2014). Certainly, the rough walls can be taken to symbolize the natural world. More important, the wall performs for eye and skin a renewed roughness and placeness of the coffee shop, arresting the eye and the hand in the here and now, suturing the material self into this very place (Aiello & Dickinson, 2014). Understanding communication as material, then, does not deny the importance of discourse or symbolization; rather, it weaves together discursive and material communication into a more complex whole that allows us to critically account for the ambience of the city (Rickert, 2013; Thrift, 2008).

### **Bodies**

Take taste for a brief example. Bourdieu (1984) argues that taste as a socially powerful judgment is built in the warp and woof of time and space. From our earliest moments, we encounter the material objects of the world—cloth, food, furniture, design. These objects, along with their social meanings, are embedded in our mind and our bodies. Weaving together the social and symbolic structures of class with the everydayness of our experiences, taste becomes a preconscious and conscious response—and judgment—to the objects of the city. Meanwhile, taste, as the sense that allows humans to enjoy food, functions in much the same way as Bourdieu’s social understanding of taste predicts. Neurobiologist Shepherd (2012) argues that taste is produced through “high level . . . processing—including systems of memory, emotion, higher cognitive processing and especially language—that give us . . . our unique human brain flavor system” (pp. 4–5). In short, taste as a social judgment and taste as a cognitive response are more similar than different. Both forms of taste involve judgments drawing on embodied precognitive and cognitive responses to the external world.

Living in and communicating with and through the urban landscape draws on exactly these kinds of complex experiences. For example, beer drunk with friends in a pub after a long day’s work is a material and cultural communicative form. It interacts with the material conditions of the drinker’s body,

igniting a series of sensory responses, and performs social judgments. These responses are structured by the physical nature of the beer and the body in a particular moment, which is conditioned by responses from the past and framed by the discursive understandings of beer and conviviality. The beer has embodied consequences, and the practice of sharing a pint in the neighborhood bar materially and discursively shapes our understanding of neighborhood, work, and friendship.

To take another example, McAlister (2011) demonstrates the ways in which discursivity and materiality circulate around specifically organized bodies and sexualities in the suburban home. She argues that the heterosexual married couple "was refigured in personal narratives, advertising images, and interior design at this time in ways that defend the normative status of heterosexual marriage by incorporating its greatest threat—eroticism—into the institution itself" (McAlister, 2011, p. 281). The separation of an increasingly large master suite from the rest of the house (in particular, from the children's rooms), along with the increasingly public spaces of kitchens, living rooms, and family rooms built as unified great rooms, eroticizes the bed and bath and locates publicness in the rest of the home; in so doing, it also materializes a particular vision of the family. These houses, McAlister (2011) writes, "preserve the split that heteronormativity requires, keeping marital erotic encounters within the framework of private, normalized, family life, rather than acknowledging them for what they are: publicly mediated sex acts" (p. 294). In this way, discourse, building practices, sexuality, familial relations, and public enactments are woven together in complexly embodied and profoundly spatialized acts of communicative materiality.

### **Movement**

What is it, however, that weaves together body's weft and space's warp? The answer, for us, is movement. Walking and wandering, strolling and sitting, dallying and driving—all of these and an infinity of others are the procedures by which the city and the body weave together. Both city and human are constantly moving; indeed, action is coconstitutive of city and human (Thrift, 2008). The potentialities of material things become city or human when there is purposive action (Aiello & Dickinson, 2014; Bennett, 2010). Movement makes possible and reveals the city and the human body. The human body investigates the world as constantly varying and interrelated objects. We produce, perform, and perceive the city through our own sensorimotor skills, skills that respond to and anticipate the environment's constant change. This co-movement is the process by which we become known to ourselves and the way in which the city becomes known and knowable (Berthoz, 2000; Noë, 2012).

Nigel Thrift (2008) argues that urban and, more broadly, geographic movement shifts over time. In a trenchant rereading of Michel de Certeau's (1984) famous essay "Walking in the City," Thrift argues that de Certeau's work in many ways could not address the current posthumanist moment. Car travel and the growing range of space-remaking technology—what he calls "paratexts"—remake geographic experience from the smallest scale (the human body) to the largest (national and global geography). The wired and wireless extensions of communication, image, formulas, and calculations make up newly formulated backgrounds "which are both geophysical and also phenomenological in that they may alter our understandings of space, time, and movement" (Thrift, 2008, p. 91). Whereas Thrift places technological change as the driver of our altering sense of movement, for us, it is more reasonable to

weave together changing bodies without prioritizing one form of moving body over another (Bennett, 2010).

Thrift is certainly right that car travel demands a different understanding of the city than does walking. At the same time, cars shift our understanding of our moving bodies, our desiring bodies remake cars, even as cars remake the urban city. None of this was lost on Reyner Banham (2001) in the 1970s when he linked Los Angeles, a specific version of democracy and independence, and the great (and banal) architecture of freeways and driveways. He understood (even as de Certeau was writing about walking the city) that car/people/architecture movement remakes city, society, and person in response to and productive of embodied desires and needs. The "freeway system in its totality," Banham (2001) writes, "is now a single comprehensible place, a coherent state of mind, a complete way of life, the fourth ecology of the Angeleno" (p. 195).

Movement in the city is the way in which the city and human are co-produced. This co-production weaves together the human and the city through a knitting of time and space. The perceiving and acting human body is constantly drawing from a well of histories of movements folded together with engagement with the present and the future through prediction (Berthoz, 2000; McFarlane, 2011; Noë, 2012; Shepherd, 2012; Vannini, Waskul, & Gottschalk, 2012). For example, we use sight to guide us through the city, using signs of all sorts to make our way from one place to the next. Certainly, we read street signs to confirm we are on the right street (Lynch, 1960). We also take in the larger landscape including the height of surrounding buildings, the width of adjacent streets, the angle of the sun, the smell of slowly rotting trash, the rush of freshening breeze between the buildings, the sound of footsteps echoing off hard surfaces. We compare all of this with past experiences and use the present and past to engage the future, anticipating our next move as we produce the city and the city produces us. We draw together the visual with all of the other senses to locate selves in time and place through a constant and fully embodied engagement with the shifting surrounding landscape (Berthoz, 2000; Dickinson, 2015).

The city is constantly communicating with us, engaging us in matters mundane and sublime. But our communicating with the city is not just in the present, nor is it static. Instead,

it can also be a practice of individual or collective remembering or imagination oriented towards the past or future. While situated, the knowledge is also mobile: it is formed not simply in place but through multiple knowledges that run through and call into being various spaces. (McFarlane, 2011, p. 18)

Thus, movement is an embodied engagement with both time and space, history and geography. Movement is at once material and symbolic; it is conscious and preconscious. Indeed, Massumi (2002) asserts that embodied movement and its preconscious engagement with the world are prior to conscious understanding of positionality. In short, embodied, material movement undergirds our interaction with the city even as the city is itself always in motion (Massumi, 2002; McFarlane, 2011; Thrift, 2008).

Our argument so far has been that urban communication occurs as part of the weaving together of the (material) city and human (body) through movement. At its most basic, this embodied, material,

and woven movement is simply urban life, "teeming bare life, a being-together of existences" (Amin & Thrift, 2002, p. 28). By thinking of the city as moving material bodies, we can see the ways the city is populated by many species—including humans—and the ways the city works to discipline life "creating the subject's very bodies and forms of life" (Amin & Thrift, 2002, p. 28) including molding, managing, and remaking the human sensorium even as the human sensorium directs urban change. Much of this co-constitutive sensory movement works behind consciousness, for consciousness itself—always profoundly selective—is thin indeed. The thinness of consciousness means that consciousness surrounds itself with complex allies including nearly autonomic judgments of perceptive and proprioceptive cues, the creation and use of technologies such as cars and smartphones, and, most important, the constant weaving of these wayfinding modes (Massumi, 2002).

The communicative city, then, functions consciously and preconsciously, its messages are symbolic and aesthetic, its communicative consequence is registered on the body as affect and rendered in the mind as meaning (Gumbrecht, 2004). Engaging urban communication in this formulation raises important methodological and procedural issues. Thrift (2008) suggests a new kind of "aesthetic hearing," and McFarlane (2011) acknowledges that urban learning is tactile and textural. What is clear is that a novel approach that emphasizes materiality, bodies, and movement is needed: We call this approach "being through there." In the next pages, we work from specific examples of urban communication scholarship to elicit some provisional methodological possibilities.

### **Being Through There: Toward a Methodological Approach**

Carole Blair (2001)—the most important voice in rhetorical studies urging attention to the material performativity of the built environment—has argued for years that "being there" is a fundamental methodological consideration. As she points out, looking at images of paintings in a book is different (neither better nor worse: different) from viewing the paintings themselves in their location. Her example is the difference between experiencing images reproduced in Vivian Fryd's (1992) *Art and Empire: The Politics of Ethnicity in the United States Capitol, 1815–1860* and, on the other hand, experiencing the paintings in the Capitol itself. Writing of teaching Fryd's chapter on George Catlin's paintings of the Plains Indians in their native territories, Blair found the conversation about the chapter particularly powerful after students had visited the collection in the National Museum of American Art. The conversation had after the visit was richer, more complex, more compelling. "The students," Blair writes, "who went to the NMAA had a variety of experiences that other readers of Fryd's chapter do not have, all of them having to do with bodies and place" (p. 274). She goes on to talk about the effort needed to get to the museum, the time taken in a day to wander the galleries, and the expectations that go with visiting a museum as all shaping the students' experience. This "sacred pilgrimage" (Blair, 2001) made the images seem more real and both influenced and enriched the experience of the book chapter. Of course, reading the book and exploring the reproductions in the chapter are also experiences, but they are experiences of a different order of being there. They are the experiences of being there with the book.

And so it is with urban communication. Investigations of filmic, televisual, and photographic images of the city rely on a different order of being there than does analysis based on being with the buildings. The visual-material communicative power of a skyscraper, capitol building, or residential

structure is different in a book's or a website's photograph than it is in the buildings themselves. Investigating the first may best be called a study of communication *about* the city; investigation of the buildings themselves is more properly investigation of city communication—that is, the communication produced in, by, and through the city. Being there, then, means being, as much as is possible, in the urban setting about which we are writing (we return to how to stay connected to movement and the cities when being there is not in fact possible).

Being there, however, is complicated. Being there in the presence of communication's materiality brings together the host of mediations that come from past possibilities, present experiences, and future expectations. Being there will always also mean being elsewhere and elsewhere. We know that embodied memories and expectations interlace here with there and now with then. Even presence—that is, relations of proximity and intensity—is always extended into the past and future as the preconsciously operating body judges the immediate situation through past experiences and expectations about the future (Nöe, 2012). Given that being there is always imbricated in here and there, now and then, urban communication scholars must understand both their own material bodies and the material bodies with which they interact as nodal points for communication that stretches across time and place.

Newly designed Starbucks stores, for example, use rough and reclaimed wood in a bid to create a sense of locality. This sense of locality depends on the fact that the wood is in a particular store at a particular moment, but also on the wood's movement through time and space as it traveled from a Washington State forest to a Seattle firm and was then repurposed in the walls and tables of a Seattle Starbucks. Lacing both time and place and past and present offers to the bodies of Starbucks customers a sense of place-in-time or what we have called elsewhere *locality* (Aiello & Dickinson, 2014). Any particular place-in-time is always interlaced with other places and times. In the case of these Starbucks stores, emplaced and embodied communicative creation of locality is powerfully meaningful in an era of globality when place and time seem fully abstracted and disembodied (Aiello & Dickinson, 2014). So, on the one hand, understanding this Starbucks relies on hours spent in the place, touching the wood, smelling and listening to coffee brewing. But it also depends on understanding the embodied and material movements in and out of the space as the customers move through the Seattle urban landscape. It also relies on tracing the symbolic and cultural resources the space draws on and responds to.

Understanding this particular Starbucks, then, depends on methodical, embodied movement—that is to say, the method of being *through* there. In the first instance, being through there requires using all of researchers' senses into the scholarly endeavor. In two essays about Starbucks, Dickinson (2002) and Aiello and Dickinson (2014) pay attention to how the walls feel and look, how brewing coffee smells and tastes. Likewise, Zagacki and Gallagher (2009) explore the entwinement of their and others' bodies with outdoor art. This entwinement, they argue, troubles received understandings of inside and outside. Or, differently, DeChaine (2002) brings his pulsing, dancing, musical body to the scene of live urban concerts to understand the rhetorical power of sonically produced affect. In his study, not only hearing (as suggested by Thrift, 2008) is important, but so also are the synesthetic responses to throbbing bass, stomping feet, and swaying bodies. Dissecting the songs' lyrics, the artists' description of an installation, or the text of a coffee brochure is only the palest imitation of the fully sensorial experience of a concert, an art park, or a coffee shop. These places—like the city as a whole—communicatively call on our whole

body. Methodical movement demands, then, that communication scholars pay attention to, record, and think hard about these sensory messages.

It must be noted that, in our research, we often attend to the visual dimensions of the built environment. This is because the materiality of cities is increasingly fashioned to perform cosmopolitan and world-class urban identities for the remote publics of key global marketplaces such as investment, tourism, and commerce (Aiello, 2011; Gendelman & Aiello, 2010). This entails that cities' aesthetic qualities become symbolic currency for mediatized representations aimed at promoting any given city's appeal(s). As a key performative dimension of urban space, the urban built environment ought to both "look" and "feel" good for the imagined lifestyle communities of advanced capitalism. It is in this sense that, most often, the material decisions underlying urban development and urban regeneration alike are infused with powerful discourses and overall "visions" regarding how urban space ought to be experienced and lived rather than simply built or renovated (Aiello, 2013). Ultimately, attending to the visual in relation to urban communication's materiality also contributes to making visible some of its major power relations (see Rose, 2013). In spite of the seeming primacy of vision, however, we maintain that the materiality of urban communication ought to be investigated through a variety of senses, which may be reconstructed through a combination of systematic observation and performative writing techniques such as, for example, personal narrative (Park-Fuller, 2000).

Paying attention, for example, to the texture of a sidewalk or street, as one of us has done, is central to understanding the rhetoric of a globalized space in Italy (Aiello, 2011). Aiello (2011) is thinking not just with her critically attuned brain but also with her eyes and her feet. And her whole body is thinking in time as well as in place. In the essay, Aiello weaves together deeply embodied memories of the smell, sight, and emotion of childhood with her experience of this space/time in the present. So too is Dickinson (1997), when he engages the myriad times that can come together in gentrified urban neighborhoods such as Old Pasadena: intersecting nostalgia for Route 66, the music of Nat King Cole posthumously remixed with his daughter Natalie King Cole, the rumbling of nearly extinct passenger trains through town, and textured (re)design of Old Pasadena leapfrogging the neighborhood's seedy immediate past to a warmly remembered more distant past. Morris (1998) writes of the crucial importance of engaging the often subterranean pasts of everyday spaces of women's experience. She argues that places accrue history and that the everyday people in places such as shopping malls use and reuse these pasts on their own terms. "History," Morris writes, "itself must count as a use that involves engaging with other women's ideas about shopping centers over time" (p. 78).

In these examples, past and present twine together as the past of the place, the past of the place's users, and the past of the communication scholar all impinge on the present. Urban communication scholarship should resist the efforts of some to flatten the importance of history when trying to engage in materialist communication studies (Condit, 2008; Johnson, 2007). Instead, understanding the temporalities of urban communication is central to the work. Methodologically, this means understanding the historical processes by which a place comes to be as a way to grapple with issues of change over time and to explore the ways the past, present, and future always work together. Digging into the time of place likely means archival work and finding photographic and written evidence of change over time. Digging into time can also mean drawing on personal histories, or exploring the ways in which place pulls the past

into itself, or considering the ways in which past experiences shape understandings of present place and frame anticipations.

This past shapes but does not determine the direction or the speed of movement, or what Dickinson and Ott (2013) have elsewhere called the vector and velocity of urban communication (see also Massumi, 2002). Morris (1998), thinking about banal and everyday spaces, investigates the ways urban and suburban spaces make use of the past to influence the rate of movement. The smoothness of a chain motel, for example, responds well to a quick glance from a speeding automobile, whereas a slower pace is requested by a more deeply (if deeply troubled) historicist hotel in the hinterlands of Australia. Drawing on Morris' work, Dickinson (1997) explores the different temporalities produced by driving, strolling, and shopping through a gentrified old town. What is more, appeals to time within the built environment often strive to shift movement using historicist or futuristic forms to draw sight and body. Writing of renewed Bologna, Aiello (2011) carefully investigates the ways the changing time appeals of a place shape the rate, direction, and amount of movement into, through, and out of a place.

Urban scholars, starting with their own embodied movement through space, should account for both the direction and the rate of movement through space. At a fast pace—that of the cruising car, for example—the fine textured materials of the city blur into a billboard of a city. The slow or nearly stopped motion of the shopper or urban analyst can dig into the diverse details blurred by the speeding car. This detailed investigation at once reveals important left-out details and distorts the city as experienced from a cab, car, or bus. Likewise, urban communication scholars can attend to the directionality built into the environment. Dickinson and Ott (2013) argue that some places create directed movement, offering visitors a strongly preferred order to the movement through the space. This ordering creates a sort of embodied narrative in which early experiences can shape and frame the next experiences. In megachurches, for example, the placement of coffee shops and book stores in the main entrance of the church conditions churchgoers to experience the service through the lenses of contemporary consumer culture (Dickinson, 2015).

This clearly is not a social scientific method offering a mode of testing hypotheses. It is, however, a deeply experiential and powerfully empirical study of communication. In our proposed method of being through there, communication scholars bring their empirical selves (which are always mediated, symbolic, material, biological, chemical, imaginative, and extended through time and space) into experiential contact with the world they are studying. This approach is experimental in the older sense that an experience is a constant trying out of internal and external realities. Perceptual experience/experiment "requires the joint operation of sensitivity to the object and also what I am calling *sensorimotor understanding*" (Nöe, 2012, p. 24). The sensorimotor understanding that is perception is an always embodied "being through there" and is, it seems to us, fundamental to the urban experience and urban communication. Our methodology of using our entire moving bodies to engage with the city is a method that attempts to empirically map the actual ways in which the city and the human weave together.

This approach, we think, is not really optional in the study of urban communication as such—it is required. Other modes of study—survey methods or social scientific versions of ethnography—may at times distance the scholar from urban communication, by turning urban communication into numbers on a

sheet or words in an audio recorder, rather than an embodied, emplaced, and temporalized experience. "Places," Edward S. Casey (1993) writes,

like bodies and landscapes, are something we experience—where experience stays true to its etymological origins of "trying out," "making a trial out of." As John Dewey emphasized, to have an experience is to make a trial, an experiment, out of living. It is to do something that requires the proof of the senses, and often much else besides. (p. 30)

Just as urban dwellers are making trials of the city and in so doing are making the city itself, thus weaving together the imaginative and the material, the present with past and future, so too should urban communication scholars make trials of the city (de Certeau, Giard, Mayol, & Tomasik, 1998).

Although we believe deeply that urban communication will benefit from this material, posthuman perspective that depends on being through there, it is also the case that very important urban communication scholarship cannot rely on embodied presence. Particularly concerning is the way an emphasis on being through there could create a deeply presentist form of urban communication scholarship. How might urbanists interested in urban pasts account for the material and moving urban communication? We admit that we do not have a particularly good answer to this. However, we are convinced that careful attention to the documentary evidence produced in/with the historical city can at least help us approach the material, embodied, and sensual city. Following the work of cultural and literary critics such as Bailey and Hentschell (2010) and the other authors in *Masculinity and the Metropolis of Vice, 1560–1660*, urban communication scholars can investigate a wide range of cultural materials not for (or not primarily for) their symbolic force but in an attempt to feel the presence effects (Gumbrecht, 2004) of the plays, novels, and lithographs. Likewise, writing about contemporary cities, the scholar who cannot visit will depend on careful, non-symbolic engagement with mediations of/in the city. The exact procedures for these kinds of studies are no more finely wrought than are those we are arguing for here. Our methodological offerings are experimental then in this final sense: The methods themselves are novel. They have, as our discussion has demonstrated, been extraordinarily productive as the recent work we have drawn on has enlivened our understanding of urban communication and, more broadly, urban life.

### **Movement Matters**

In offering being through there as a provocative procedural approach to urban communication, we are arguing for all manner of urban movement. We can move from the concreteness of the city to the abstractions of theory. We can move from past to present to future. We can move from one street corner to the next, into buildings, and out into parks. In this way, moving marries the material and the cognitive, the spatial and the temporal. Moving always is a here and a there, but it also always is in-between. This, of course, is what it means to be spatial, living, and everyday beings—we move through. We are constantly testing the city. We experiment with the city even as we experience it.

The procedures we are suggesting, then, are homologous with the ways urban residents, urban landscapes, and urban culture actually communicate (Thrift, 2008). Our job as urban communication scholars is to fully engage in the city—or more broadly, the spaces of communication—to perform the city in its many materialities. But we do so, we admit and urge, at a slight remove. For even as we are in the ongoing flow of the city, we are also taking a half a step back to bring to consciousness preconsciously rendered involvements and to make sense of proprioceptively ordered engrossments. Moving between the urban resident and the urban analyst, urban communication scholars are reading and performing the city. Taking seriously the matter, movement, being, and bodies of cities, urban communication scholars make (of) the city scholarship that matters.

This is scholarship that matters because, by moving from the city as represented and as imagined primarily through the familiar codes of symbolic communication to a city critically performed as a social space (Lefebvre, 1991), we are more fully experiencing and researching the communicative city as lived. With this move, we are better able to not only describe the city but to begin a communicative and political project. With this scholarship, the city as a local site of the (re)production of hegemonic structures is more fully apprehended and, through this apprehension, spatial hegemony may be altered and shifted. The essays and books produced out of this scholarship may not directly make this political change. However, the copformance and cocreation of the urban scholar, urban scholarship, and the urban residents' urbanity offer the hope for performances and practices that make the city more humane.

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