

# Human Behavior and Environment

ADVANCES IN THEORY AND RESEARCH

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Volume 12: Place Attachment

# Place Attachment

Edited by

**IRWIN ALTMAN**

University of Utah  
Salt Lake City, Utah

and

**SETHA M. LOW**

Graduate School and University Center of  
the City University of New York  
New York, New York

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To the memory of

HAROLD M. PROSHANSKY

pioneer of environment and behavior studies,  
distinguished scholar, charismatic leader,  
friend, colleague, and mentor

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## 5

## Environmental Memories

CLARE COOPER MARCUS

Appropriation, attachment, and identity refer collectively to the idea that people invest places with meaning and significance and act in ways that reflect their bonding and linkage with places. Appropriation means that the person is transformed in the process of appropriating the environment. (Werner, Altman, & Oxley, 1985, p. 5)

Why do I remember this house as the happiest in my life? I was never really happy there. But now I realize that it was the house wherein I began to read, wholeheartedly and with pleasure. It was the first house where bookshelves appeared as a part of the building. It is a house to which I return, in a recurrent dream. I go back to the house as I now am. I put into it my chairs, my pictures, but most of all my books. I rearrange the house from top to bottom: new curtains on the windows, new pictures on the walls. But somehow the old rooms are still there—like shadows seeping through. Indestructible. Fixed. (Brogan, 1980, p. 30)

## INTRODUCTION

Many individuals' most powerful memories revolve around *places*—the house where they grew up, the secret places of childhood and adolescence, the setting where they first fell in love, the neighborhood where they established their first home, the dwelling where they raised their children, the summer home they built in the woods, the garden they first nurtured. Such memories often form rich sources of inspiration—to poets, novelists, designers, home-

CLARE COOPER MARCUS • Department of Landscape Architecture, University of California, Berkeley, California 94720.

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makers. Sometimes, too, comparisons with much-loved places of the past create dissatisfaction and sadness in the present. Occasionally, if a person is in the business of creating environments for other people (architect, interior designer, landscape architect), his or her own memories may influence, inappropriately, the designs for other people.

In this chapter, we will examine environmental memories from several viewpoints: special places of childhood recalled by young design students; the reproduction of significant childhood settings in the adult home; relations with the current home as a replay of unresolved childhood problems; and the significance of dwelling memories in old age.

A series of themes reverberate throughout: the issue of gaining control over space in order to feel a positive sense of self-identity; the issue of manipulating, molding, or decorating that space in order to create a setting of psychological comfort, which interconnects with identity or personal well-being; and the issue of continuity with significant places of the past, so that a sense of control and identity experienced at an earlier age is supported by reproducing the essence of a significant past environment.

We will briefly elaborate on each of these themes. It seems clear that control over some portion of the physical environment is a critical component of positive self-identity. For children, their bed, their "cubby" at day care, or a secret "den" in the woods may be the start of feeling there is a place that is truly theirs. In adolescence, bedroom posters, a wild decor, or deliberate disarray may be used to communicate an emerging sense of self-identity, separate from parents. The family home established for childrearing is, for most people, such a powerful communicator of identity that its loss with the onset of old age or divorce may be as large a threat to self-identity as the loss of a human relationship. Examples of all of these situations will be presented in the form of case studies.

A second theme that emerges constantly in discussing issues of place attachment, closely tied to the first, is that of manipulating or molding a space to reflect who we believe we are. Having title to a space is only the beginning—"This is John's bedroom . . . This is Gwen's desk . . . This is Stephen's locker. . . ." Decorating or personalizing this space in our own particular style is our way of saying: "This is *mine*; not any room/desk/locker, but mine . . . This is an expression of who I am." Impediments to doing this, in the form of parental, institutional, or corporate rules, can be serious inhibitors of self-expression in the physical environment, and thus of a positive sense of self-identity.

A third theme that emerges frequently during in-depth dialogues on people's emotional attachment to home, is the importance of *continuity* with important environments and people of the past. If our sense of identity develops and changes through our lives as a result of relationships with a variety of significant people and places, then it makes sense that we might wish to echo those places in the dwellings we choose, and place mementos of such people within them. These acts of anchoring ourselves to times, people, and places in our personal past are critical to our emotional well-being; they allow us to

weather the swells and storms of change that are components to a greater or lesser extent of every life path. Such continuity with the past becomes especially critical in old age.

#### ADULT MEMORIES OF THE SPECIAL PLACES OF CHILDHOOD

Childhood is that time when we begin to be conscious of self, when we begin to see ourselves as unique entities. It is not surprising, then, that many people regard that time as an almost sacred period in their lives. Since it is difficult for the mind to grasp a time period in abstract, we tend to connect with it through memories of the *places* we inhabited. For most of us, a return in later life to a dwelling or landscape where we spent our childhood years can be a highly charged experience, the more so if we find the place has changed—a house demolished, a favorite play place built over. We hold onto childhood memories of certain places as a kind of *psychic anchor*, reminding us of where we came from, of what we once were, or of how the environment nurtured us when family dynamics were strained. Whatever befalls us in later life, those memories remain; it is as though childhood is a temporal extension of the self.

As infants, we relate primarily to mother or primary caregiver. We are dependent on this other being for food, care, nurturance, protection, and love. As we start to mature into early childhood, we begin to explore the environment around us: we touch and throw and hit and crawl to discover the nature of the "stuff" around us. Gradually, with greater assurance, we begin to explore the world outside the protection of home. First under the watchful eye of an adult, and then alone in a setting that adults have created partially for our safe use (yard, garden, play area), we dig, break sticks, pick up leaves, watch insects, climb trees, and create river systems in the sandbox. We learn what the world is made of; we learn how we can manipulate it to satisfy our questioning minds, our sensing fingertips, our excitement-seeking emotions. We play at "now-you-see-me-now-you-don't"—at first through peekaboo, then by running ahead in the park and bouncing out from behind a bush, then by playing hide-and-seek with our friends, and finally, by creating a secret place (cubby, clubhouse, den, hideout) that our parents may not ever know about. We act out the inevitable process of separation via games and activities in the environment. For some people, that place of initial separation and autonomy, that secret home-away-from-home, lingers in adult life as a powerful image and nostalgic memory.

For many years, I have asked students of architecture and landscape architecture at Berkeley to draw their most fondly remembered childhood environment and then to write about this and subsequent significant places in an exercise I term "Environmental Autobiography." After reading hundreds of these essays over the years, it is clear that these earliest childhood places are powerful images, resonating into adulthood via memories, dreams, even the creative work of some adult designers.

Though most of my students grew up in the United States, approximately one-fourth are foreign students from countries as far afield as Nigeria, Germany, Italy, Cyprus, Iran, Hong Kong, Taiwan, Australia, and Indonesia. Despite the wide variety of place and type of upbringing, socioeconomic background, and culture, the themes that appeared in these essays remained essentially the same: for the great majority their fondest memories are of playing outside (rather than within the dwelling), and of creating or finding special hiding places. Asked to recall special environments of childhood, people describe specific *places* and particular emotions or *psychological processes* which these places helped to facilitate. It is appropriate to consider each of these—place and process—in turn, and to attempt to define major categories of each.

Remembered childhood places tend to fall into three categories: purpose-built adult spaces, such as culverts, shacks, porches, or closets, taken over by children for their particular use; hiding places “molded” out of the natural landscape, like nests or lairs; or places specifically constructed for play, such as tree houses or forts. We will consider examples of each of these in turn.

A young architect who grew up in a Texas city described his favorite place—a dark, scary culvert—where his experiences were in marked contrast to those in the neat and bland yard of his suburban home.

The place was Dallas, Texas. I lived across the Trinity River from the downtown business district. The culvert was for drainage in a wide grassy easement. The easement was at least a few thousand yards wide, and I knew it must stretch all the way to New York (at the age of seven my refined sense of distance had not quite bloomed).

The culvert was a favorite “hidden” place for me to go. It was dark in the tunnel—darker the further you dared go in. I knew the Giant Spiders lived there, I just didn’t know how far in. About ten feet in there was a second culvert branching off. It was smaller and had metal reinforcing bars covering the opening. These had been pulled back (by the spiders?) and were twisted and rusted.

Another young man who later became a landscape architect describes his secret home designated by him and his friends as “the palace.”

There was this old shack on the hill behind Huber Park in El Cerrito, California. The shack was about to fall apart. About half the wallboards were missing. . . . Most of the roof was missing. There was nothing to sit on but the rough board floor. This old shack was totally surrounded by lush greenery, much of which extended inside through the missing wall planks. It really seemed to be out in the jungle. In reality it was only about thirty feet or less from an asphalt path which passed through the block and down to the park. A friend (Kenneth) and I would sneak back into this old shack. . . . Once inside I remember it as being lush and cool, a very tranquil setting. I have been referring to this place as a shack. But I was not attracted to it for qualities which one would relate to the word “shack.” My friend and I had a code word for it. We called it “the palace.” This word was part of a larger code which we designed to speak secretly about going to this place to smoke cigarettes. We enjoyed the opportunity to sneak away to this place for secret business.

The culvert in Texas and the shack in El Cerrito are examples of adult-made environments secretly appropriated by children; such spaces—recalled nostalgically—are frequently outside and away from the home dwelling. Some people, however, recall spaces inside the house. These people are more likely to be women, who—as girls—often have less territorial freedom than boys. A young woman recalls her hideaway:

The walk-in closet in the bedroom was my favorite hideaway. It had doors that can be opened from both the inside and the outside and a light within. The closet was large enough for three people to fit in, but I often liked to close the doors and locked myself in to play house or read books.

All these found environments, in effect, served double duty: on the one hand, they were spaces in the adult world with specific functions, and ownership; on the other hand, they were temporarily, often secretly used by children for their own purposes. It is significant that many special places of childhood are given names and form part of a “secret” language and set of activities that coexist with and in the adult world. The designation of special names is an important component of childhood appropriation of space.

A second broad category of fondly remembered childhood places are those that were consciously molded or created out of ubiquitous loose material such as dirt, sand, leaves, grass, or twigs. A young woman who grew up in a New Jersey suburb recalls a piece of unclaimed ground where she and her friend made “houses.”

“The Hill” was a pile of dirt which apparently had been dumped into the woods across the street from my friend Kathy’s house by builders. Kathy, her younger brother, two younger sisters, myself, and other neighborhood children often played there after school and during the summer. I was about ten at the time. The others were all younger. We pretended that the hill and the area around it was our “town.” We all made “houses” by raking up leaves into long piles which represented walls.

A young woman who grew up in southern California remembered nostalgically the banks of a tidal slough not far from her home.

A grassy bank on “our” side of the bay led from the bank of the houses down to the shallow water. The grass was tall enough for me to hide in most of the year and there was a deep ravine down by the water which was a perfect location for our fort and club, usually a very secretive organization of play friends, three of them. I can remember the rich smell of salt and warm sun intensifying the smell of the grass. The smell to most people was offensive, stagnant water, but to us it was paradise because it was “ours.”

The mud was the consistency of clay and was fantastic for molding objects that could be left to dry in the sun, such as secret club objects and things to use in the fort and of course our “food,” ceremonial cakes, elaborately decorated with wild flowers pressed in the mud and shell remnants. Sometimes a whole day would pass and the sun would start to set and we could hardly believe it was gone.

A third category of place was one actually constructed—such as a fort or tree house. This was a form of childhood place more frequently remembered by boys than by girls, and one that was more visible to adult eyes as a place created by and for children. A young man recalls such a place on the edge of a small California town where he grew up.

The wooded hillside provided a natural play area. Soon after moving in, I carried left-over building materials up the hill and built a tree house, which afforded a fine view of the house and back yard, but which could not be seen from below. At first my private domain, my brothers and friends eventually started building their own “forts” (as we called them) out of scrap materials under and around my tree house. We soon had quite an extensive structure up there on the hill in the trees. But we were constantly tearing down, expanding, rebuilding. The fun of having this fort was in constantly changing it, and not just enjoying it as it was. Whenever a new house was built in the neighborhood, my brothers, friends, and I would scout the building site for discarded materials, and haul them up the hill for our structure.

Having considered these broad categories of remembered places, we need to ask the question *why* are they remembered so vividly 10, 20, 30 years later? Simply stated, they were the settings of significant emotional experiences critical to the process of growing up. Stated in more academic terms, these environments were richly connected with psychological processes that are part of human development in the middle years of childhood (approximately 6–12 years). The emotion experienced and the setting inhabited become so deeply intertwined that a recollection of the place triggers memories of feelings, and vice versa.

Space is appropriated at such a time of life to claim a setting where privacy can be regulated; to look for nurturance in the natural world; to experience a sense of pride in the act of creating a place; and to imitate adult behavior—for example, by playing house, defending one’s territory, or testing one’s courage. We will consider examples of, and the reasons for, each of these processes in turn.

Perhaps the most basic and significant function of childhood hiding places is the creation of a place to be *private*—be it a blanket “fort” in the playroom, or a tree house at the bottom of the garden, or an area of flattened grass in the middle of a meadow. A niche of one’s own is often critical in the sometimes confusing world of adults, family tensions, school, and growing up; it is a place to create a fantasy world, to practice being “grown up,” or to read and think undisturbed. A young woman recalls such a place in the family garage.

We used to play in the rafters in the garage, because it was a secretive, cozy place among the brass trunks. We played here on rainy days because it was a warm spot near the roof, especially when the dryer was on. Our cat had several litters of kittens up here, which was a real attraction for us. I remember liking it up there because it was a two story place, and our house was only one story. I felt that I was above everything, hidden, and secretive. This spot was even more attractive to me later in the sixth-seventh grades, when I would retreat and write in my diary or read Nancy Drew books for hours.

A place to be private and let down one’s facade does not necessarily have to be secret; a young woman who grew up in a middle-class neighborhood of San Francisco wrote:

I felt happy, comfortable, and at ease in my room. I loved this room because of the large window and the view out to the backyards. . . . In this room I felt cheerful. . . . I rearranged the room so that my bed was by the window and laid in my bed gazing at the stars. I felt philosophical and wondered about the universe. I questioned UFO’s and the existence of other forms of life. I felt very much at peace with myself and my surroundings. . . . I felt innocent and child-like, and I would write “Good morning world” backwards on the window through the dew. At these times I contemplated life and why things or people were the way they were.

I felt some control over my life and my environment here; I could go to my room and be alone and when I needed to, I could be philosophical. I could study, I could listen to music, I could have friends over, or I could be sad. I had a place to go to be myself, whether it be happy or sad, where I did not have to put up any facades.

If our dwellings in adulthood are those settings where we are most at liberty to be ourselves, where we don’t have to “put up any facades,” then clearly this process begins in childhood. It may begin in a hidden place in the outer world, or in our own bedroom at home. This is the period in our development when our ego-self, separate from parents and other caregivers, begins to take shape. We need to claim a space where we can, when we choose, be physically alone—to fantasize, to dream, to play roles, to nurture emerging self-identity.

One significant mode of self-exploration in childhood is the actual *creation* of place—the molding or shaping of the physical environment into a setting that is an expression of one’s emerging identity, a setting in which one can take pride. A young woman who grew up close to the Berkeley campus describes her hidden childhood place, shared with friends for games of “housie.”

In the Eucalyptus Grove on the U.C. campus, there is a specific clump of tall eucalyptus trees growing very close together and separated from the shrubby riparian vegetation of Strawberry Creek. . . .

Linda, Martha and I used to play “housie” here after school. Whenever the nearby lawn was cut, we’d get some of the fresh, fragrant smelling grass, and line the floors of our separate “bedrooms” and “living-room” with it. At one point, the huge trunks and exposed roots intersected to form a little platform overlooking the creek. That was my room, and I was terribly proud and fond of it.

The need to express oneself in the creation or manipulation of the physical environment is expressed in adult life in a range of activities from building one’s own home, to rearranging the furniture, to repainting a rented room, to pinning up posters in one’s office. It is a need that begins in childhood, yet one that parents and teachers of children sometimes mistakenly “support” by creating places *for* their children. An architect who had grown up in a Dallas suburb described the professional landscaping of his backyard.

The play yard I shared with my brother and sister was made "beautiful" and "ordered." A playhouse with operable windows, shutters, window box, and dutch door was built. It was white with a shake shingle roof and (I don't believe it!) an angled redwood deck. Out from the deck was a marble chip play area. Over the marble chips, hanging from a fine tree, was a rope swing with a metal disk for a seat. Ivy had been planted all around with metal edges. This house was furnished with odds and ends and toys. This had all been put in the shaded corner where the grass had failed due to the lack of adequate sunlight.

I remember this play area with mixed emotions, but primarily one of childhood misunderstanding. It was soon apparent to me that this design was cosmetic in nature and not really resultant from any needs of our childhood play. Somehow I could not fathom why I had not been consulted because I was convinced I could have done a much better job designing the area. After all, when you fall off the swing onto a bed of jagged marble chips, or try to run across them barefooted, it becomes readily apparent what a mistake the designer has made. This "maintenance-free" design had obliterated the area of lawn where we could dig in the dirt without ruining the grass lawn. Consequently I tried other means to manipulate the environment.

While playing fireman one day I had the hose and a hammer (my hatchet) and because the "whole town" was burning down, I clang-clanged over to the rear door of the garage and broke out every pane of glass, stuck in the hose and turned on the water full blast! What I "put out" was my dad, who proceeded to "set fire" to my backside.

A young man who spent countless days building, changing, and modifying a series of forts with his brothers recalls his dismay when his father—thinking he was helping—built them a more permanent structure.

After a few years of using this structure, my father, delighted with the arrangement we had created, decided to construct for us a fort up on the hill. However, this structure was carefully designed and built out of more permanent materials by an adult, and, while we enjoyed it for a short time, the simple fact that it had been built in a manner not meant for alteration quickly led us to abandon it for our old fort, where we could easily and continually manipulate our play environment.

Whether these special places of childhood were called forts, dens, houses, hideaways, or club houses, whether they were found, modified, or constructed, they all seemed to serve similar psychological and social purposes—places in which separation from adults was sought, in which fantasies could be acted out, and in which the very environment itself could be molded and shaped to one's own needs. This is the beginning of the act of dwelling, or claiming one's place. Some recall their hiding places as indeed a microcosm of home—a place to prove that a child, too, can create a house and play at adult roles. A young woman describes a special place in the yard of her suburban New Jersey home.

There was a brick well around the base of the tree, topped with a wooden bench that I turned into a play kitchen. There was enough room inside the well for me and the tree, and I would stand inside and "cook" on the wooden counter, and then serve my dishes to my imaginary friends who sat around the counter. Upstairs, the tree house was my living room with a "panoramic view of the city,"

really just my backyard. I liked playing house a lot, but only when I was alone, because that way I could be mother, father, brother, sister, dog, cousin, and everyone else. I played with my brother in the tree house, but never in my "kitchen"—that was my secret game.

A further function for these places of childhood is, then, as a setting in which one can imitate adult roles—where one can play at "families," at being "mother" or "father," or "fireman" or "cowboy." Here children can play act at skills they may need in adult life—gardening, construction, dwelling maintenance, decoration, cooking, laying claim to territory. For many children, their hiding place is the only corner of the environment that they, personally, are able to build, maintain, and modify. Sometimes when a group gets into building houses, the question of "property rights" surfaces. Is this an imitation of adult behavior—or innate territorial yearnings?

I remember that we were quite possessive about our "houses." We each had a territory staked out by piles of leaves and other junk. There were continuous battles about where one person's "house" ended and another's began. I also remember that it was a major offense to steal something from someone else's "house." I suppose the hill itself was a focal point in our environment. Nobody ever claimed the top of it for themselves. Our "houses" crept up the flanks, but the hill was more a communal place or rallying spot. It didn't belong to any one individual.

Sometimes these territorial tensions can lead to mock battles and destruction of property. A young man recalls his childhood play on some wasteland, near the edge of a small California town.

During this time we got really into building forts. I was small so I couldn't do too much but they let me help. We would divide into smaller groups and each group would build their own fort. It would take weeks; we would drag materials from the railroad yard, from our houses, from anywhere we could find them, dig holes into the hill and erect our forts. After they were up they became club-houses for the kids who built them and were the center of activity for awhile. Territorial pressures would build up and would finally erupt into a spontaneous rock fight; actually now that I think of it, they weren't that spontaneous because I remember we would stockpile rocks for a few days and then as the taunts flew we would get into the dirt clod fight. Invariably the victors of the fight would be the ones whose fort held up. The battles took a heavy toll on the structures; most of them would be total wrecks because when we ran out of rocks we would run out of what was left of our forts and go tear each other's fort down. After the fight the site would be abandoned, new alliances would be formed, and a new site somehow selected and the process begun over again.

An important component of growing up is not only the imitation of adult domestic and work behavior, but also testing oneself against real or imagined dangers in the physical world beyond one's home. The young man who grew up in a Texas suburb sought retreat, privacy, and the testing of his courage in a drainage culvert not far from his home.

It was a quiet place where I could retreat from everything. A few of my friends knew about the place or knew that I visited it (it was not exactly hidden from

view), but it was “my” place. Over a short span of years, I grew with this place. I conquered the spiders eventually and traveled great distances through the tunnels. I conquered countless foes there. I was alone there, but secure, knowing that the tunnels connected me with hundreds of others. I was nearly always silent there, but was surrounded by gurgling, trickling water, deep resonant earth sounds, and rustling leaves.

A man who grew up on a fruit farm in New England recalls a special feeling for a forested area beyond his father’s orchards, where he once got lost, but later returned to overcome his fears.

When I was 8 . . . Chip, my friend Matt and I went for a hike up in the woods. After playing Cowboys and Indians for an hour or so, we realized we were lost. First thing we did was to run to every clearing we thought we saw. This proved to be exhausting and fruitless. . . . Matt was showing signs of panic. . . . After a while we popped out onto a rock ledge about 30 feet high and 100 feet long. . . . it suddenly hit us we’d gone in a large circle. . . . We started off again, in a more stressed state and an hour later ended up at the same ledge. At this point, Matt started to cry and Chip looked very worried. I remembered not being worried but feeling like I should be because they were. . . . At this point we figured out that if we lined up select trees, we could form a straight line and continuously do this until we reached something man made. Ten minutes later . . . we wandered out into the orchard feeling like we had just found the source of the Nile. . . . The next day I went back into those woods to find my lost six-shooter. I didn’t find it but I did get lost again and wound up on that ledge, but I was able to find my way out easily using our new found technique. From that point on I’ve always had confidence about finding my way through a forest. That forest became one of my favorite walking places. As if I alone knew how to get through it.

While the quest for privacy, the experience of self-expression, or the testing of courage may be some of the most obvious psychological processes that took place in specially remembered childhood places, for a few, spaces away from home were sought as sources of nurturance and caring when these needs were not fully met within the family. A young woman, whose mother had died in early childhood, describes a secret place at the back of her house, bounded by trees and a small stream.

I remember the mud shining and wet, slicked down after a rain. It smelled special too—extremely musty, damp, and secretive. Together, the mud, the dark, and the running water encircled me.

My feelings about being thus enclosed are ambiguous. Because much of my early life was so traumatic, I deeply appreciated feeling “cared for” by this place. But sometimes, I was afraid of my lack of control over it. For instance, I vividly remember when my good friend Laura (my ex-step-sister) and I were exploring the creek. We picked our way over the bit stones until we reached a big tunnel. Poking my head inside the tunnel, I saw a painted skeleton on the wall. I screamed, and tried to run but couldn’t because of the swift current and all the big rocks.

For this young woman, “being encircled” and “being cared for” in this place were clearly nurturing (as well as occasionally terrifying) experiences.

A young man recalls the wooded landscape of an outdoor education center in Ohio, first visited in the fifth grade.

I don’t know why I felt nor continue to feel so strongly about this place. . . . It may have been one of the first significant places that I was able to “bond” with. . . . I think it’s important for people to have such a place, even if it is thousands of miles away, where they know the place will take them back and nurture them no matter how long they have been absent. That is how I feel about the glen. Whenever I return to Ohio, usually once a year or less, I insist on returning and renewing myself there. . . . I have memories of how it has been loving at different times in my life.

Another woman, looking back on the whole landscape of her rural European childhood, remembered it as a powerful source of nurturance and support.

The sounds and smells, above all, the vegetation of a country childhood, seem like the soft pillow and quilts of our infant crib, writ large upon the landscape. Here were the trees that nurtured us, the shrubs that gave us fruits and berries, the flowers we called brothers and sisters. These were our family beyond the family, timeless scenery, imprinted in that time of acute vulnerability and openness to the world. The human family is mobile and mortal; the botanical family of childhood returns each season, indifferent to our coming and going. But we are not indifferent to it—our green womb of homecoming.

The near universality of these fondly remembered childhood places and the tone and emotion of these recollections—15 or 30 years later—suggest that they represent an experience that goes far beyond the actual act of making or finding a secret place and far deeper than the actual amount of time spent there would suggest. Places that are molded or constructed are often our first attempts to create something material outside ourselves. They are, perhaps, a physical expression of the emerging ego-self, separate from parents and family. They are our first tentative experiments in the experience of dwelling, in appropriating and personalizing a special place, and—unconsciously—in reflecting on what we have made. In later life, as we create a home as an expression of personal and social values, that reflection is more conscious.

For those who recall a special landscape or place in nature, they are perhaps reconnecting with a deep spiritual experience of connectedness with all life—an experience which many children have but suppress because of its power or mystery, or because later linear thinking relegates it to childish daydreaming. Thinking back to that precious time of childhood when we first became aware of both our self-identity and the holistic nature of life, many become conscious (perhaps for the first time) of an almost-numinous quality of that time and place. Indeed, one Jungian scholar proposes that those who, in adult life, go further in the process of individuation—becoming their own unique selves—have almost always had meaningful experiences of the unconscious in childhood.

Often secret places or private activities are involved which the child feels are uniquely his and which strengthen his sense of worth in the face of an apparently hostile environment. Such experiences, although not consciously understood . . . leave a sense that one’s personal identity has a transpersonal source of support. (Edinger, 1973, p. 295)



Thus far, we have been considering childhood environments remembered in the early years of adult life, and nostalgic attachments both to the actual place and to the psychosocial growth that occurred within it. In the next section, we will consider how older adults recall and sometimes reproduce in their current home some essence of a fondly remembered place of childhood.

#### REPRODUCING SPECIAL PLACES OF CHILDHOOD IN THE ADULT HOME

For many years, I have been investigating the emotional meaning of people's dwellings. I have used a method of interviewing based on role-playing, and where appropriate, have asked people to speak to their house as if it were animate, and then to become their house speaking back to themselves. A frequently recurring theme in these interviews is the recognition of the continuing influence of a significant childhood setting on current choices of dwelling location, dwelling form, garden design, interior decoration, and the like. The cases that follow—of Connie, Priscilla, Joe, Michael, and Lou—are drawn from over 60 interviews conducted with people in the San Francisco Bay Area between 1977 and 1990.

If our childhood is a time period that we embrace as an extension of self, then it is not surprising that many of us try to incorporate some of the environmental memories of that period into our adult homes. The choice of a dwelling that repeats some essence of a childhood home may simply represent a wish for security: "If my childhood was spent in a house like this, maybe in my adulthood I will experience some of the same nurturance by settling in a similar place." On the other hand, that original dwelling of memory was selected or created by another person and was his or her expression of self: "Grandfather chose *that* kind of place as an expression of who he was. I admire grandfather. I will choose a similar place so that I can be like him." Recreating and nurturing a relationship with a beloved family member, now gone, is often enacted via the physical environment: displaying their photograph, tending objects they once owned or trees they once planted, living in a house like the one they built or chose to live in.

#### CONNIE: AN "ENGLISH" GARDEN IN A FARAWAY LAND

Connie came to the United States as an immigrant 20 years ago, in her late twenties. After marriage and acquiring a home, she began to create a flower garden at the front of her house. She had grown up in England during the Second World War, was evacuated from London during the Blitz, and in a country setting, was taught to love gardening by an aunt. She became an avid gardener, and by 10 years old, was raising vegetables for the family and growing flowers on a tiny patch of ground in front of their house. As an adult, living in a different culture and climate, she has created an "English" garden in front

of her house, a very different kind of garden from most of those in her neighborhood. At the back, a large vegetable bed is her private preserve—she likes to work there alone and experiences a profound sense of connectedness and centering while engaging in such mundane tasks as digging and weeding. The garden and her work in it create a (largely) unconscious connection to the time and place of her childhood, when raising food for her family gave her childhood a dimension of usefulness. That almost numinous connection with earth and nature, first experienced in childhood, was being sought again as the age-old tasks of sowing, tending, harvesting were repeated in their appropriate seasons. For Connie, the garden of her adult home has permitted her to reproduce the place and activity that gave her the most profound experience of centeredness and nurturance during the impressionable and sometimes fearful wartime years of her childhood.

This phenomenon—of creating a garden that repeats some aspects of an earlier, fondly remembered place—may be more common than we think. In a study of more than a hundred gardens in new suburban tracts east of San Francisco Bay, Helena Worthen (1975) found that many people

. . . did not understand where they were. . . . People planted gardens which made them feel at home. . . . They weren't interested in discovering which plants were ecologically best suited to their gardens. A man from Oregon wanted roses, gladioli, and a blue spruce, because that was what he had grown up with. A teenaged girl, who loved "Hawaii Five-O" created a tropical jungle out front. A woman of Italian extraction planted the same vegetables her mother had grown. . . . A pleasantly daffy elderly man was cultivating a *Grevillea robusta* which he claimed was a silver birch. . . . "Oh, I'm sure it's a birch," he said. "I'm from Illinois and all we had were roses and silver birches." (pp. 17–18)

Clearly, for this man, the tree had to be a silver birch because such a tree enabled him to feel linked to the places of his formative years.

#### PRISCILLA: THE DWELLING AS A CONTAINER OF MEMORIES

For Priscilla, living alone in a rustic, one-bedroom, rented cottage in the Berkeley Hills, both her home and the surrounding neighborhood contain echoes of a New England childhood, 40 years before. When asked to describe her feelings for her current home, she says:

I feel a lot of comfort around me. Harmonious colors. Good feelings under my feet, rugs, pillows, all full of life, warmth. Things that I've grown up with as a child, I've brought back with me; I've put them into my nest. Like this lamp, which I grew up with as a child, and pictures I had a great feeling for. The old chair in the kitchen which I brought back from my mother's house two years ago; she was going to give it to the Salvation Army but was afraid they wouldn't take it. I really have a good feeling of continuity about the things which I have. I love having things which have been in the family, which have been used before, and which I can see again in a different light in a different environment, and feel as if they've been around for a long time. They have some spirit to them: rocking chair spirit, old Singer sewing machine spirit, used by a lot of people. They have a voice, they have life of their own.

I asked Priscilla to go back, in her imagination, to that home of her childhood: it was just outside Boston in a place which was then semirural, but is now a suburb.

Just thinking about the house is putting some sort of vibration in my body. I can feel myself sort of vibrating inside. It's *the* family house I guess that's setting up the vibrations. I lived in this house from the time I was born until I left, for college. So it had very strong roots for me. And in that house too the furniture and the furnishing were old pieces. They were pieces which had been from my father's mother. There was a sense of rootedness about the furniture, dark furniture, beautiful fabrics, old beautiful rugs. A feeling of heaviness, too. As a child I suppose that I felt tremendous security from all of these things which had been around for a while. My feeling about that house is that it was a wonderful place to be *from*! I feel very separate from it now, although I've taken some of the things from that house and put them into my own environment, which is a lighter environment. When I think back upon the house then it feels a little heavy to me. The colors may have been heavy colors. I love the fact of bringing some of those things into my life now, by having contrasting environments, contrasting fabrics, and having a contrast of old and new—that's what really interests me is having a contrast of old and new.

For Priscilla, then, an important theme in her home is one of *continuity*—of having things in her house that have been used before, that she grew up with as a child and "which I can see in a different light." When recalling with some emotion the house she grew up in, she remembers that there were pieces there too that had come from her grandmother's house. She remarked: "As a child I suppose that I felt a tremendous security from all these things which had been around for a while." The objects with which she decorates her current home environment are ever-present, material reminders of the positive, nurturing environment she experienced as a child, particularly from her mother.

Significantly, when Priscilla decided—shortly after her fiftieth birthday—to leave this much-loved cottage and buy a small house of her own, her choice was to move to Ashland, Oregon, because—among other things—the small town, the vegetation, the whole community reminded her of her New England upbringing. The need to return to our environmental roots seems especially pressing for many people in the second half of life, as old age appears on the horizon.

In past eras, the middle and upper classes in this culture often achieved a sense of continuity by staying in the same house for several generations. The house became symbolic of stability and continuity. Today, in a mobile society, very few stay all their lives in one dwelling; even fewer inherit and dwell in the house of their parents. Houses are not built to last several generations. Increasingly, continuity and memories are rooted in *things*—movable, storable, shippable—rather than in the fabric of the house itself.

Just as we need to be oriented in space, to know where we are, where we "belong," so too we have a need to be oriented in time. In childhood, we are remarkably present and future oriented; the past has little meaning, and evokes little affect compared with "what we'll do next summer," "what I'll be when I grow up." A component of maturity or of emerging self-hood as an

individual, culture, or nation is an increasing concern for the past and how that is incorporated in current identity. Thus, the women's movement or the evolution of black pride was accompanied by a reconsideration of history from a female or ethnic perspective. Similarly, a component of an individual's move from adolescence to adulthood is an increasing interest in the past (individual, family, cultural) and how he or she fits into this complex temporal schema.

In a study entitled *The Meaning of Things*, Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton (1981) asked 315 people (half upper middle class, half lower middle class) in a large U.S. city to name the most cherished objects in the home. The results indicate that the cherishing of objects full of memories increases substantially from youth to adulthood and old age. While adolescents are most likely to cherish stereos or sports equipment (egocentric, present experience), their grandparents are most likely to cherish family photos or significant items of furniture (past association and reminders of family networks). Thus, allowing an older person to bring their own furniture into an otherwise impersonal housing scheme or retirement home is critically important for establishing a sense of personal continuity. Depriving them of such objects may be cutting off a part of the self.

#### JOE: ECHOES OF A MISSOURI CHILDHOOD

Joe—a middle-aged university professor of forestry—lives with his wife and two teenage children in a modest stucco house in an older suburb of a university city. The house stands on a small 35-foot-wide lot with a short setback and no street trees; the whole block of similar houses is quite visible and exposed.

At the time of our dialogue, Joe's house was in the process of a major conversion. The house is being extended at the back to encompass an enlarged kitchen and an additional bedroom. Planning regulations allow only 50% coverage of the lot; with this addition the house will cover 49.8%. He had applied for an exception to cover more, but had been turned down. If Joe had had his way, the house would have covered virtually the whole lot. Reflecting on his profession in forestry, I naively expected that he might be interested in having a garden, or at least some trees around his house. That he is interested in neither seems to be a reflection of his own childhood environment and what he has absorbed from that time of a "suitable" image of home.

I have never enjoyed what I call yard work, and I have one of the worst yards in the neighborhood in terms of care. I don't look forward to those days when I mow the lawn. I don't anticipate the roses blooming, or flowers, or anything like that. I think this probably came out of my childhood. My family was never involved in these activities and I didn't learn to gain any pleasure from them.

I grew up with my parents and older brother in an apartment in Missouri. It was much more spacious and private than this house, but it had virtually no outdoor space. We had a small patch of grass in front of this apartment building. It was my job to mow it. It was a space that couldn't be used for anything, so I developed a negative feeling about the urban lawn. As a child, I didn't see I was

getting any benefit out of keeping it trim. I have always felt a strong separation of urban and rural space. I think I would have been very content to live in a medieval city with a wall that said—"This is the city; and this is the non-city." I feel very content in cities like Chicago or New York; they are not trying to be anything else but cities. On the other hand, I get a lot of pleasure from being out in the country or the wilderness. I have never felt a strong incentive to mix the two, even in terms of my own living space. It doesn't bother me that there aren't any trees along this street. My appreciation of the outdoors evolved from a childhood when my family did a lot of camping. We never used a garden, or even urban parks. When we were outdoors it was completely away from our home, on camping trips in the mountains or wilderness. I was either in the apartment or off on a trip. I didn't grow up with any intermediate outdoor space. I sort of see this home as part of the same pattern; if I want to do something outside I would never think of doing it outside in my backyard. So I don't really feel I'm losing anything by building over half the lot!

Influenced by a dream of his mother's to have a doctor-son, Joe began his university studies as a premed student. But two summers working for the Forest Service in Montana convinced him that a career in forestry was more to his liking. Curiously, it was again a powerful memory from childhood that influenced the direction his career took within that field.

My mother came from a large family of five children. They lived in a big house with a very large yard. They had a big vegetable garden, and she talked about it a lot when I was a child. I saw it quite often because my grandparents lived there until I was 7; it was in the same town where we lived in the apartment. My fond memories of that house, as much as anything else, turned me away from a regular career in the Forest Service.

I married in my sophomore year. After graduation, I went to work for the Forest Service in a remote part of Alaska. We had this little house out there in the wilderness, surrounded by forest. It wasn't the form of the house or its location that bothered me, but the fact that I could never *own* it. The Forest Service move their personnel quite often; it's seldom you stay in one place more than three years; then you're transferred. I realized if I stayed in the service, we would always live in government housing. It's not that they aren't *nice* houses. Many district rangers in Montana live in much larger houses than this one, and much newer. So it's not to do with the *quality* of the house, but that you can't own it. All the rangers I knew in Montana felt a certain reluctance to do anything to those houses because they didn't own them.

So I finally woke up one day and said, "Well, what are my options if I want to stay in forestry and I don't want to be moved around, and I want to make changes to my home." And it occurred to me that teaching, being a college professor, could be a very good lifestyle. . . . I could stay in forestry; go out in the field to do my research, but not be forced to move around.

And so, in a curious convoluted way, Joe's current living environment is a fascinating admixture of influences from both his parents and his grandparents homes. From his parents, he inherited a preference for urban living, for an apartment-like dwelling with little intermediate outdoor space. In those respects his current home, covering much of the lot in an urban/suburban setting, is an echo of his Missouri childhood. From his grandparents house (and his mother's recollection of *her* childhood in that home), he inherited a desire to

own a dwelling that he could change and improve and from which he would not have to move. In his modest but expanding stucco house, he has achieved an amalgam of both these sets of values, an echo of two significant places of childhood.

The story of Joe is an example of the powerful resonance of place values learned in childhood, transposed into a different time and setting for the purpose—perhaps barely conscious—of creating a sense of continuity, familiarity, and security in a dwelling place created as an adult.

#### MICHAEL AND LOU: PRESERVING MEMORIES OF CHILDHOOD PLACES

Two other men I interviewed seemed similarly to be reliving some aspect of their childhood environment in their current home. Michael grew up in a small Oklahoma town where his wealthy grandfather had donated a park and a water tower to the community, and had built on a prominent hill the largest and most ostentatious house in town. Michael grew up in this house absorbing a message from the house and its setting that he and his family were in some way "different." This feeling of being set apart or different has been reenacted in the homes of his adult life. He has always lived in dwellings that he and his artist friends perceived as "special and unique": a barn on a peninsula in Nova Scotia, for example; a loft in Greenwich Village; a villa in Spain; a converted factory in San Francisco. All but the Spanish villa were located high up, with commanding views out over the community.

For Lou, the most powerful influence in his life was also his grandfather. He had nostalgic memories of family reunions, birthdays, and religious festivals at this grandfather's elegant mansion in an East Coast city. Having arrived penniless from Europe, the grandfather had created a successful business, and eventually bought a house in one of the wealthiest neighborhoods of the city. His grandson was deeply impressed in childhood by this rags-to-riches epic, and he eventually inherited much of his grandfather's wealth. Perhaps not surprisingly, on moving to the West Coast, he sought out a home that incorporated the essence of his grandfather's home and which housed much of his inherited furniture.

Over a period of many years, he had brought two wives into this house, but each had reacted negatively to the dwelling and its contents. The influence of Lou's childhood dwelling on his current values is so powerful that his adult home has become a salient ego defense; despite its "interference" in two significant relationships, he is unable to let go of it. The bond that he feels to his house is a replay in current time of the intense bond he felt with his grandfather (and his house) in the impressionable years of childhood.

#### THE CURRENT HOME AS A CONTRAST TO THAT OF CHILDHOOD, OR AS A REPLAY OF UNRESOLVED CHILDHOOD PROBLEMS

Not all memories of childhood are benign. For some, whose recollections are of difficult family relations or an unpleasant physical environment, the

adult dwelling—or some aspect of its arrangement and use—may represent a conscious *contrast* to that experienced in childhood. This phenomenon also emerged quite frequently in the interviews I conducted on emotional links to the dwelling. In the next section we will look at the stories of Anita, Katey, and Nancy, who have created home settings in contrast to those of childhood; and at Robert, who is deeply immersed in an unconscious struggle with negative childhood memories of home.

#### ANITA: CREATING A BEAUTIFUL HOUSE

For Anita, growing up in a housing project in Buffalo, New York, memories are of a functional, utilitarian, and cold environment.

I grew up in a couple of houses. The first was in Buffalo, New York. I lived there until I was 13. My memory of it is, it was terribly utilitarian, terribly functional, and kind of cold. My memories of my family aren't cold, just the house itself. It was a government housing project for low income families. It was like living in a box. Real solid, but it was boxy and we had very little money so that the furnishings were very plain. I think they were hand-me-downs; I think they were from my mother's brother. I don't remember any kind of personal touches or the feeling that it was beautiful. No beauty in it. No beauty at all. Even my own room, which I longed to have beautiful. I had asthma when I grew up, and my mother had a thing about no dust. So there was nothing in it that was beautiful. There were no little things that would gather dust. There were no curtains. There were no rugs. There were no spreads. It was just plain.

Then we moved to Denver. And it was only slightly better there; but still it wasn't aesthetically beautiful. There weren't any pictures that I remember; there weren't beautiful carpets. I've got stuff all over my house that I just take such pleasure in looking at and being with and being around now. There were no plants, nothing in the houses I grew up in.

As soon as I had my own home I became interested in making my environment more beautiful. I got married when I was 21. And it started with the first small apartments that we had. My decorating them according to the way I wanted them, you know? And then the first home we bought was absolutely exquisite. Just a little tiny box of a house, in Berkeley, and I decorated it and started moving into these blue colors. Those were the colors I was attracted to. The decor has changed over the years for sure, but the kind of basics that make me feel good haven't. I like having things around me that make me feel good.

For Anita now, in her mid-forties, making her house beautiful is a major focus of her life. She earns a good living as a psychotherapist, and a considerable proportion of her earnings are spent not on entertaining, eating out, extravagant clothes, or travel but on making her interior environment "exquisite." Every piece of furniture, many of them Oriental antiques, has clearly been selected with loving care; the whole ensemble is a work of art. And this has clearly been done to nurture her own aesthetic needs for a beautiful environment, and not for "status": she rarely entertains and by her own admission is something of a social recluse. She recognizes that this focus of both financial and psychic energy on the beauty and serenity of her private home is in part a reaction to the lack of beauty she experienced as a child.

#### KATEY: FINDING HER OWN TASTE

For some people, the issue they seem to be working out in their current home is not so much a reaction to the blandness or ugliness of a childhood home, but the *control* they felt their parents extended over their personal environment. Katey's mother was an interior decorator, and though Katey kept reiterating how she admired her taste and design abilities, she clearly also felt a powerful need to assert her own taste in her present dwelling. In the house of her childhood her mother controlled everything about the environment: she designed and oversaw the rehabilitation of the house, the landscaping of the garden; she chose and arranged the furniture, selected and bought her children's and her husband's clothes. Katey was not allowed to like anything her mother didn't like.

It's such an old score. I never was allowed to like anything that my mother didn't like. I can remember when I went through my phase of mint green, and she hated it. . . . I felt guilty for liking it. And when we did my room over, it was always pretty much the colors *she* wanted. I hate gold, and by God, if my room isn't done in gold grasscloth! That just isn't me. And when she comes here, I know that she loves this place, and she talks about how terrific I am and how well I do everything. But she can make some comment about the color of a chair, and make me feel real shitty for having put it there—when I know I like it! I really respect her taste. But it's hard for me to have my own taste around her because she's such a strong person. It's hard for me to have anything around her because I have the strongest mother in the whole world.

#### NANCY: NEVER FEELING AT HOME

Nancy, now a university professor, recalls a similar overpowering presence of mother in her childhood environment.

The house where I grew up in Houston, I felt like all of it was my mother's, including my room, because she had totally decorated it, wouldn't let me do anything in it. And yet it was a place where I could go and close the door; it was the one place where I could be by myself. And I would do that a lot when I was a kid. . . . It was supposed to be an elegant guest room if someone came through. Although (chuckles) nobody ever came through! It was decorated with these heavy French fabrics that were much too hot for the Texas climate. There was a bedroom set, so all the furniture matched, and I always thought it was very ugly. And it had this wall-paper that was just terrible: roses all over everywhere, twining roses on the walls and on the ceilings, and it was as if you'd lie down and go to bed and you'd see these flowers all over. It was as if they were just enclosing you, and I hated it. I used to have these nightmares about Briar Rose being stuck among all the roses and couldn't get out. It was claustrophobic and enclosing; I felt like it had somehow enclosed me in a way that I couldn't break away from it and didn't for a long time. It was tasteful, and trying to look like it was elegant, but it felt like anything I would do would be klutzy, and anything I would try to suggest as being a decoration would be not quite right. It was annoying, as if I couldn't ever really feel at home in any part of it, even the part that was mine.

My mother and I have different tastes. If she saw *this* place she would give me something to try and make it be better. The things she has given me, I'll usually keep them for a while out of some kind of guilt, and then with great relief give them away. There was a print that she once gave me, and I had it up on the wall. I remember one day, I just went and took it down, and put it in the closet, face down. I just felt it was watching me all the time, as if that old feeling of her saying "you can't even decorate your own room," as if that was there. I wasn't going to have it because I knew the place was just fine.

Thus, for some people, memories of childhood environments may arouse profound conflicts, revolving around the struggle to be their own person, separate from the personalities and aesthetic tastes of their parents. In extreme cases, an unresolved conflict with father or mother may be unconsciously projected onto a problematic dwelling of adulthood.

#### ROBERT: ALWAYS LEAVING HOME

Robert, an interior designer, was at the time of the interview troubled over his discontent with a house he and his wife had been living in for a year. Despite his profession, he had found it seemingly impossible to create a comfortable home. Indeed, the layout of the house made this very difficult: the largest central room which was both entry hall and living room had no less than seven door openings off it. He and his wife were forever leaving the house—to go on trips, to go biking or hiking, to go out to eat or for entertainment. Robert wanted to spend more time at home, but the reason he did not do so was a mystery to him.

In the course of the interview, Robert recalled his childhood home, where the difficulty of sharing a room with an older brother, and of finding a place to retreat from the continued presence of his mother, caused him to constantly leave the house. He found solace in the nearby forest, which he explored with his dog, and where he built a series of secret forts. As he recalled this time of his life and the feelings it evoked, Robert had one of those "A-ha!" experiences, where the connections between things become suddenly apparent. He was, as an adult, still working out an unresolved relationship with his mother and was enacting this through the continuation of a childhood pattern of leaving the house.

Many people unconsciously seek out relationships that enable them to continue (and, possibly, complete) the unresolved interpersonal emotions of childhood. Although largely unconscious, these replays of relationships with mother, father, or other significant family members are the stuff of most people's maturing and learning about themselves. Perhaps some of us also unconsciously place ourselves in conflictual environments that, enable us to work out unresolved emotional connections with significant places of childhood. All the more so when the childhood home represented the powerful self-image of a dominant family member. Until this is resolved in some way, a person in such circumstances will always be "leaving home."

Whether these recollections of childhood homes are happy or pained, they

frequently interconnect with memories of mother. This is not surprising; in this culture—as in many—mother is strongly associated with home. She, through nurturance and homemaking, is the parent with whom we most frequently associate childhood. If some aspect of our relationship with mother remains unresolved in adulthood, it is sometimes recalled or reenacted through our relationship with home. (It seems probable that if my research was concerned with satisfaction or feelings about work, many more recollections—both benign and pained—would be associated with father, or a significant male breadwinner in the family.)

#### AGING AND THE MEMORIES OF DWELLINGS

For many people, the longer they live their lives in one place, the more they become attached to it—particularly if the time spent in that place included fulfilling human relationships. The place and the people who lived with and around us become intertwined in our memories. For the elderly, the decision to make a move from the family home due to failing health is often a highly emotional experience.

In a study to understand the complexities of this, often final, move, a researcher in Sweden interviewed 14 couples and single adults just before a move into housing for the elderly, just after the move, and approximately a year later (Toyama, 1988). Their reaction to the move varied from quite positive to quite negative. Of course, personality and the ability to cope with change were pertinent factors, but also were a number of variables that are very relevant to our discussion of attachment to place.

Perhaps not surprisingly, the Swedish study indicated that if a person moved only a short geographic distance, he or she was more able to cope with the change. For example, when one elderly man moved only 150 meters from his old home to a new elderly housing project that he had seen being constructed while on his daily walk, the move was quite positive. Mr. and Mrs. Erickson also felt positively about their move, partially because it was to a neighborhood they had lived in 14 years previously and where they did not feel like strangers. And for 73-year-old Mr. Bengtsson, the move was largely positive because the elderly housing scheme was located near his childhood neighborhood.

He adapted to the new environment quite smoothly and was feeling at home in the new place within a very short time. He enjoyed his early morning walk immensely—the streets, fields, and lakeshore where he used to play brought back pleasant memories, and he even met a few old friends after an interval of over 60 years. (Toyama, 1988, p. 50)

If people were able to re-create the interior of their old home in the new apartment, and to find a parallel in the layout of rooms—and therefore in their daily routine—they were also more likely to adjust positively to the move. For example, Mr. Knutsson had a great love of nature and animals, and was happy

when his new apartment very much resembled his old home with floral patterns on sofa and bedspread, large tropical houseplants, views of landscapes, and photos of endangered animals. Similarly, Miss Lihnas, at 88, made a very positive adjustment to her new flat because of her almost daily phone conversations with a network of friends from Estonia (her native country), and because she was able to recreate the special atmosphere of her previous home of 20 years with a large collection of Estonian textiles, carpets, and handicrafts.

Conversely, Mrs. Davidsson became disoriented in her new apartment because rooms were not in the same relationship to each other, and an oblique view of the walls of a factory was much resented and compared with a much-loved view to the forest from the house where she had lived for 23 years. And the adjustment for Mr. Fedrikson and Mr. Carlsson was similarly difficult because each had made so many improvements and changes in the flats that had been home for 28 years and 40 years, respectively. For these two men, space had been appropriated even more profoundly than for those who might inhabit space in a more passive mode. Mr. Carlsson, whose flat of 40 years was an intrinsic component of his sense of identity, started to smoke heavily after the move, and his health deteriorated. His second wife, although living in the same flat for 20 years, had never felt it was "home." She, conversely, adjusted quite quickly to their new apartment; her health and looks improved after the move.

Those elderly people in the Swedish study who had a more active role in both the decision to move and the actual moving process were much more likely to adjust well. In the case of one couple, where deterioration of the husband's health motivated his wife to make arrangements for the move, and where the move was carried out by relatives to avoid further stress for the husband, the whole event backfired. The man was disoriented and very unhappy in the new apartment; he didn't understand why they had moved. He died within a month. Racked with grief and a sense of guilt, his widow avoided staying in the apartment or thinking of it as "home." She visited her adult children, traveled, refused invitations from the new owner to visit her old home of 36 years, and—significantly—spent much time at the summer home she and her husband had enjoyed for many years. Here—in a setting they had created together—she gradually adjusted to her loss. The memories it evoked, although filled with nostalgia, were also healing.

For many people, it may be hard to disentangle the positive memories of "home" as dwelling place and "home" as neighborhood. Mr. Davidsson, in good health at 77, had relied on his wife to create the cozy apartment-home they had shared for 23 years. He went along with the decision to move to a housing scheme for the elderly without any strong feelings either way. After the move, however, he was very unhappy. He sorely missed a daily walk he took in the forest behind their apartment, and the roe deer he fed there; he also missed daily casual meetings with neighbors, some of whom were good friends with whom he went fishing. After the move, he became more passive, was more socially isolated, smoked more heavily, and suffered two heart attacks during the first 6 months in their new apartment.

For Mrs. Henriksson, a widow of 85, the adjustment was equally difficult. A year after the move, she was beginning to feel at home in her flat, but not in the neighborhood; she returned to do her shopping—two subway stops away—in her old neighborhood. Although good relations and frequent contact with her grown children have helped, she misses her husband, who died 2 years prior to this move. In her old home of 40 years, she kept his room intact; when she felt tired or sad, she would go in there, sit in his chair, and "talk to him." These conversations cheered her up.

Yet he didn't follow her to the new flat. It was very hard for her just after the move. She went to her summer house every Friday and stayed there for the weekend, although it was still winter. . . . She wanted to draw back into her own world and be steeped in it. . . . at her summer house she could feel her husband's presence. He still existed there. . . . but not at the new flat. (Toyama, 1988, p. 108)

In conducting these interviews with elderly people, Toyama took photographs of the original home and produced them at the time of a second interview, 6 months or so after a move into elderly housing. He noted:

Without exception, the photos called forth deep feelings, and the subjects made many comments. Some of the subjects rearranged the decorations in their new living rooms to match the photos. (Toyama, 1988, p. 178)

On moving to a new apartment, some of the subjects had to dispose of furniture because they had less space. This was often a very difficult decision; most objects or pieces of furniture had vivid associations with people or times in the past. When furniture was passed on to a relative or close friend who understood the emotional connections it had, the separation was easier. But when objects had to be disposed of commercially, the wrench was much greater. This was the case with Mrs. Jakobsson.

She had sold some furniture to a second-hand dealer, and missed her rocking chair. . . . When the interviewer showed her photographs taken in her old apartment, she smiled (the only time she smiled during the interview) and was very glad to find her old rocking chair in one of the photos. The interviewer invited her to choose one of the photos as a memento, but she took all of them. (Toyama, 1988, p. 124)

#### FUTURE DIRECTIONS FOR RESEARCH

Memories serve to anchor us in time and space; they are one means by which we make sense of the continual becoming that is the essence of life. Reflecting on who and where we once were helps us become clearer about who we may want to be. Significantly, with the loss of memory (for example, through amnesia or dementia), people do not know who they are. Self-identity is inextricably tied to the people and settings of our past, particularly those places where we made our "mark," where an expression of our unique identity was made manifest in the material world. Since identity is for most people a

relatively abstract and ungraspable concept, some expression of it "out there" is essential to allow us—and others—to reflect on who we are. It is significant that in institutional settings, where the identity of the *group* is more important than that of the individual (for example, the military, some corporations), or where service and devotion to a higher good is deemed more important than exploration of self (for example, in some religious orders), there are strict rules against personal expression in the environment and/or in one's dress.

The significant themes that emerged in the cases discussed above include *control* over meaningful space (a hiding place in childhood, a bedroom in adolescence, a dwelling in adulthood); the *manipulation* of that space by means of actual construction, subtle changes, decoration, furnishings, modification, and so on; and the *re-creation* of some essence of significant past settings in later life. These acts—of control, manipulation, and re-creation—have important psychological consequences; we are motivated to effect these changes in order to discover, confirm, and remember who we truly are. Thus, our memories of such settings of self-expression are profoundly important reminders of self-identity, especially so at times in our lives when that very identity is weakened or threatened. Without such memories our very identity as a unique human being may be lost.

Many themes and issues are raised in the discussion of environmental memories that are worthy of further research. First, under the rubric of adult memories of childhood places, we could ask: are memories of particularly salient settings that are *outdoors* true of the population at large, or particular to those who later choose to enter one of the environmental professions? Are memories of *creating places* in childhood universally true, or are they more salient among those who choose to design places in their adult life? And, given that many people who experienced nature as children remember powerful feelings of nurturance and the interconnectedness of all life, what is the equivalent for an urban child? What other psychological processes, beyond those described above, are evoked in childhood appropriation of space?

Second, under the rubric of adult memories of childhood homes, further work is needed on why certain people choose to reproduce some essence of this home in their adult dwelling, while others choose to create a contrasting environment. The issue of gender is also intriguing. My own work on emotional connections to the dwelling raises a suggestive point: men, it seems, are more likely to replay childhood patterns in terms of the layout and form of the house (dwelling as shelter), while women are more likely to do this in relation to furniture or movable objects (dwelling as home). Several empirical studies on gender differences and the home indicate a similar pattern. When children in a New York City study were asked to draw their existing home, boys were much more likely to depict a layout plan, showing the connection of rooms quite accurately. Girls, on the other hand, were more likely to do a sketchy, sometimes inaccurate layout, but to "furnish" it with a very accurate depiction of furniture, colors, ornaments, special objects, and so on (Saegert & Maltz, 1982). In the book *The Meaning of Things*, the authors asked people to describe their home. Men talk about the work they have put into it, either directly

(plumbing, painting, renovating), or indirectly (money to buy or improve a house). The house represents *accomplishment*, the acquisition of home and the provision of shelter for the family conform to our social stereotypes of what males should do. Women—not surprisingly—primarily view home as a place of family relationships; if it supports those, they have positive feelings. Though women—like men—take pride in the work they have done on their houses, it is more likely to be decorative than structural, more to do with creating *home* than providing shelter (Csikszentmihalyi & Rochberg-Halton, 1981, p. 133).

Finally, under the rubric of aging and memories of dwelling, numbers of other studies have raised comparable issues, such as the need for continuity and familiarity in the dwelling place inhabited in old age (Boschetti, 1985; Rowles, 1978). With older persons making up one of the fastest-growing household types, it behooves us to delve further into this significant issue of place attachment. Which are the most salient environmental components of continuity—neighborhood, house location, house type, furniture, or activities (such as gardening or hobbies or daily walk)—that contribute to positive mental health? Does the supply of services to the elderly in their own homes make better sense than constructing "senior housing," not only from an economic perspective, but more importantly, from the perspective of supporting the physical and emotional health of older people?

## CONCLUSION

The subtle but powerful blending of place, object, and feeling is so complex, so personal, that it is unlikely that the process will ever be fully explained. As Riley (1979) wisely suggested in a paper entitled "Reflections on the Landscape of Memory," the remembering of a place may have less to do with the place *per se*, and more to do with yearning for the emotion or mood it once evoked.

When we recall the comfort and security of childhood's twilight backyard, is it because of a desire for direct pleasurable environmental stimulus, or because we seek the emotion once associated with place? Adult recall might show not a simple desire for the pleasure of place but a need for the nurture of support experienced there. (Riley, 1979, p. 13)

My sense is that both are equally significant: an elderly person who is moved from a much-loved home of 20 years may yearn both for its familiar rooms, views, and furniture, and for the feeling of comfort and security it evokes. A college student, hearing of the loss of the family home, may mourn both the physical place *per se*, and the emotions embedded within it. Feelings occur in space and inevitably become associated with various highly charged places; feelings cannot occur "out of space" any more than they can occur "out of time." Thus, any discussion of emotion and place must return to the observation that the two are inexplicably connected, not in a causal relationship, but in a transactional exchange, unique to each person.

In the sense that memory of place is a universal human experience, we are all alike; in the sense that a person's memories are unique, accessible, and meaningful only to that person, specific memories embedded in place cannot be fully experienced by anyone else.

To them Howard's End was a house: they could not know that to her it had been a spirit, for which she sought a spiritual heir. . . . Is it credible that the possessions of the spirit can be bequeathed at all? Has the soul offspring? A whych-elm tree, a vine, a wisp of hay with dew on it—can passion for such things be transmitted . . . ? (E. M. Forester, *Howard's End*, pp. 98–99).

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## 6

# Home as a Workplace in the Lives of Women

SHERRY BOLAND AHRENTZEN

An advertisement in the *New York Times Magazine* proclaims her as the “New Traditionalist.” She—the mother, presumably—stands with her arms around her two young children. They are surrounded by the emblems of a clean, cozy, safe, expensive home. The caption reads:

Her children think she's a little old-fashioned. They're right. She's Monica Simon, New Traditionalist—and here she is right at the center of her world. She loves to cook. She loves family dinners. She loves Christmas so much that she spends a whole week trimming the tree. She also loves her job—because it lets her contribute financially to the “family structure.”

But the everyday experiences of many women contradict these images. Home may not be a refuge but a place of violence. For many women heads of households, drooping plaster and broken windows characterize the dilapidated structures of their homes. For most women home is a “second shift” (Hochschild, 1990) after an 8-hour day at the office or factory or even the home office.

But the media is not alone in projecting a distorted vision of everyday life. Much of our research and architecture is framed by an ideology that likewise supports these images—of a division of “home life” from “work life,” of a private from public sphere. A distorted yet prevalent social ideology of women's “place” in the home can obscure viable options of living conditions and

SHERRY BOLAND AHRENTZEN • Department of Architecture, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, Milwaukee, Wisconsin 53201.

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