

CHILDREN'S EXPERIENCE WITH PLACE

A Phenomenological Study

by

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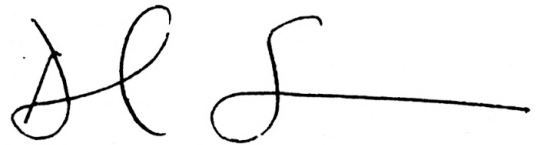
A THESIS

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ABSTRACT

This thesis presents a phenomenology of the childhood experience of place. The key question asked is, "What about the special places of childhood make them meaningful?" The study attempts to bring to light the underlying meaning of childhood place experience, drawing on in-depth interviews with twenty-five adult respondents who were asked to remember and describe their favorite place or places of middle childhood (ages 6-12). This thesis considers the significance of the experienced qualities of place in middle childhood and addresses the importance of childhood place experience in the development of the self.

Underlying the phenomenological approach to place is a distinction between space as it is objectively defined and space as it is encountered and experienced. Based on the theoretical perspectives on place provided by Relph (1976), Tuan (1977) and Norberg-Schulz (1979, 1984), this thesis explores the nature of childhood place as lived experience. The study highlights three major themes: (1) the lived geography of the place described--in terms of boundary, center and direction; (2) the identity of the place--in terms of setting, activity and meaning; and (3) the existential qualities of "insideness" that the places supported--in terms of assurance, delight and refuge.

The last chapter discusses the conceptual and design implications of the study and considers how childhood place experience can be enhanced through qualities of the physical and spatial environment. Reviewing currently designed children's environments, the chapter considers their adequacy in supporting a developing child and providing her with a rich and complete experience of place.

Dedicated to my parents for the enduring childhood they gave Sapna
and me that, in its own way, prompted this research.

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Chapter 1

PLACE AND CHILDHOOD EXPERIENCE: AN INTRODUCTION

If places are indeed a fundamental aspect of human beings existence in the world, if they are sources of identity and security for individuals, then it is important that the means of experiencing them, of creating them, and of maintaining significant places is not lost. There are many signs today that these means are disappearing, and that "placelessness"--the weakening of a distinct identity of place or a diverse experience of place (Relph, 1976, p.6)--is now a dominant force. Relph defines the condition of placelessness as "an environment without significant places and an underlying attitude that does not acknowledge significance in place" (ibid., p.143). The result is what the architect Norberg-Schulz calls a "flatscape"--an abstract geometric view of places, denuded of human meaning (as cited in Relph, 1976, p.143).

In many designed environments today, the experience of place is more superficial than it was in the past. The experience lacks the depth and richness for which we, as human beings, have a basic psycho-biological need. The trend is toward a "universal" experience of place. Every Western city looks in many ways like any other and hardly anything is a spontaneous response to the natural or human conditions of the place: "Nothing calls attention to itself, it is all remarkably unremarkable....." (ibid.). Such a trend marks a major shift in our fundamental needs of existence from a deep natural association with place to a growing sense of rootlessness.

At a time when intellectual inquiry has seemingly met an impasse, when all traditional meaning and value have been profoundly challenged and a sense of place is said to be lost in the universality and disorientation of placelessness, it would seem all too

obvious that the moment has arrived to engage in a radical quest for a new mode of architectural understanding (Casey, 1987, p.3). Ten years after Casey's statement, the predominant problems that define the built environment today are still those of disorientation and nostalgia for the security of place. Quoting Rilke, Relph says, "He who has no home now will not build one anymore" (1976, p.143). Are we echoing Heidegger's prophecy (1959, p.33) today that "Homelessness is becoming a world fate?"

This thesis focuses on the children's experience of place. Does the growing sense of rootlessness, the presence of flatscapes and the trend toward placelessness affect the experience or the significance of place to children? What does this environment mean to a child growing up in an age that supports this trend toward place? By the early twentieth century, the problems that were identified as being critical in the city were a loss of accessibility, a loss of diversity and a loss of intimacy in the designed environment. This environmental loss, as Erickson argued (Erickson, 1991), was being projected onto the child as a general nostalgia for a more stable, definite sense of place. What *is* the experience of place to a child? What is it about a place that makes it significant to a child? What does a child need from the experience of place to make it rich and meaningful?

This study on "Children's Experience with Place" is an attempt to explore some of these issues. The study does not aim at arriving at definite answers to these questions--the study of place does not justify the experience to be so simple or one-dimensional to provide these answers. This thesis is, instead, an attempt at *understanding* better how a child experiences a place meaningfully. The study, it is anticipated, might lead to a greater sensitivity to the issues of place experience, including for a designer of children's environments.

THE ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE OF THE THESIS

The thesis attempts to elicit the meaning of childhood experience of place by means of a phenomenological dialogue. Place presents itself here as a necessary condition of human existence and, in being seen as such, place is studied in the light of childhood experiences, childhood being the developmental period when it is said that place is experienced with a closeness and depth merely for what it is, without the learned biases with which adults tint their experience (Tuan, 1971, p.21).

The thesis takes the following order. Following the Introduction of Chapter 1 is Chapter 2: "Place and Childhood Experience: A Literature Review". The chapter discusses two significant theoretical bases: first, that of place; and second, that of middle childhood. *Place* is seen as an organizing element that locates space as being significant and full of personal meaning. *Middle childhood* is emphasized because this period invokes the age when one is closest to experiencing the world as it is, and the need to locate 'space' and to endow the environment with meaning is first seen at this stage of our lives (Cobb, 1972; Pearce, 1975, 1985; Chawla, 1995). Preschool children cannot explain the basis of their feelings, and their quality of place experience is colored by their primary social bonds to their mothers or caretakers (Chawla, 1995). In adolescence, place attachments become more conceptual--sometimes a memory of a vanished childhood and sometimes representative of an idealized identity (ibid.). It is in middle childhood, therefore, that place attachments are developed and at this stage that the local environment appears to be directly determined for its opportunities for individual challenge (Chawla, 1995). This was the rationale behind the choice of this particular period of development—middle childhood--as an emphasis in this study.

Chapter 3: "Exploring Childhood Experience with Place: Phenomenology as a Method of Study", discusses the methodological basis of the thesis and documents the way in which the researcher enters into a dialogue with the experience of place other than her own. The chapter reviews phenomenology as a method of studying the qualitative aspects of place and of understanding a phenomenon other than as experienced by one's self. It addresses the possibility of intersubjective corroboration--"the support of one person's experiential accounts with the accounts of others" (Seamon, 1979, p.20). Drawing on the works of other similar methodological and literary research, this chapter considers the aspects of a qualitative study of lived experience. It addresses the method of study that includes using personal in-depth interviews with adults about their memories of childhood places and using maps to describe the experience in a medium other than speech and memory.

Chapter 4:"Special Places of Childhood: A Discussion of Themes", includes the major interpretive section of the thesis and presents the qualities of the experience of childhood place that the study reveals. The chapter is an attempt to present both a view of the experience of place--as felt by the "insider"--as well as the researcher's reflective dialogue in interpreting the themes revealed. The chapter attempts to elicit the meaning of place as it emerges from the commonalities of place experience for the respondents.

Chapter 5: "Special Places of Childhood: Variations in the Experience", is a continuation of the interpretive section of the thesis. This chapter realizes the variations in the experience that would naturally emerge, as a result of the differences in environmental background, gender and age-related characteristics of the twenty-five respondents.

Chapter 6:" Place in Childhood", as a conclusion, constitutes a return to the realm of literature that supports the themes arrived at in chapters 4 and 5. This chapter is a

consideration of the design and conceptual implications of this study of childhood place experience. Based on the interpretations of the place experiences, the first section of this chapter considers the implications--both design and conceptual--primarily on the suburban childhood environment, but also, in more general terms, on children's environments, as a whole. The final section of the chapter addresses the broad conceptual implications of the study of childhood place experience. Discussing the depth of the experience, and of its significance in the development of the child in middle childhood, this section reconsiders the premise of childhood memory, as a basis for this study of place experience.

Having presented an introduction to the study of children's experience with place, the thesis in the next chapter reviews the literature that supports this study. Theoretical guidelines for the study are established, based, firstly on the behavioral and humanistic literature on the experience of place; and secondly, on the psychological-developmental literature on middle childhood.

Chapter 2

PLACE AND CHILDHOOD EXPERIENCE: A LITERATURE REVIEW

That the significance of place goes deeper than is usually assumed is apparent from Heidegger's declaration (1958, p.19) that "place 'places' man in such a way that it reveals the external bonds of his existence and at the same time, the depths of his freedom and reality."

As much as we take it for granted, being so much a part of our daily existence as it is, the experience of place is necessary, profound and complex. It is a basic human need to be in one's place. To be human is to live in a world that is filled with significant places; to be human is to have and to know your place (Relph, 1976, p.1). How is this need fulfilled? What do we as humans need in a space to perceive of it as a "place"? What do we need to "have" and to "know" our place? This chapter aims at clarifying the meaning of space, place and childhood experience. A review of the literature that supports this study is the means chosen to gather together the accepted meanings of the terms.

The study strives not to prejudge the phenomenon. Yet in order to give the study a definite focus and to avoid wandering down paths that might turn out futile and unnecessary, it is important to establish key aspects in the development of an understanding of the childhood experience of place. This study draws on the work of authors in child psychology (Cobb, 1977; Piaget, 1954, 1969; Erickson, 1951; Pearce, 1975, 1985), geography and the study of place (Relph, 1976; Tuan, 1974, 1977; Seamon, 1979, 1996) philosophy (Heidegger, 1959; Casey, 1987; Million, 1990) and architecture (Norberg-Schulz, 1971, 1984; Cooper-Marcus, 1992). The study focuses on the experience of place in childhood, more precisely at the age that psychologists define as middle childhood--the ages between infancy and adolescence--from about six years of age to twelve. The study begins by

addressing the question of what makes us perceive space as "place". The chapter progresses to address the existential qualities of place as it is lived-in and experienced. Finally, the chapter addresses the importance of place in middle childhood.

THE EXPERIENCE OF PLACE

In order to understand how one shapes one's environment and one's existence in the world, this study first examines a minor theme, that of the existential meanings of space and place. Why are not all spaces thought of as places? Space, in its most basic notion, is defined as "a three-dimensional entity that extends without bounds in all directions and is the field of physical objects and events" (Webster, 1976, p.2180). *Space is therefore what allows place "to be"*--place being a part of space. To seek a definition of place that satisfies every context of its use would be impossible, considering how much a part of our everyday language calls for the use of "place" as a word. For the purpose of this study, places are seen as "fusions of human and natural order and as significant centers of our immediate experiences of the world" (Relph, 1976, p.141). Relph, in his discussion of place (ibid.) quotes Alan Gussow who writes that "The catalyst that converts any physical location--any environment, if you will--into a place, is the process of experiencing deeply. A place is the piece of the whole environment that has been claimed by feelings." Place, therefore, focuses space and endows it with meaning. Places nest in space. They provide a niche of significance in space and relate to people, events or things (Osterreith, 1990, p.39). Places are experienced with meaning.

Why do we, as human beings feel the need to be in places or to create places? As Rapoport says (cited in Relph, 1976, p.143), "the making of places is the ordering of the world; for it differentiates the world into distinct centers and gives it a structure that both

reflects and guides our experiences." Places can be experienced at several levels of meaning. They can be seen as symbols, as geographic locations--as an outsider might look at them; they can be seen with the interested openness of a person sensitive to the place or with the apathy of a person to whom the place does not matter significantly, or with the profound unselfconsciousness that characterizes the experience of an insider--of one belonging to place--when place is experienced as part of one's self. But places can also be experienced in a direct and personal way that does not necessarily involve having to belong to the place. This is what is called "genius loci" (Norberg-Schulz, 1971, p.10)--a living ecological relationship between an observer and an environment or a person and a place (Relph, 1976, p.4).

In order to understand place, it is necessary to rediscover how we *experience* place. Phenomenological study understands place as a "constituted totality" (Million, 1990, introduction; Relph, 1976, p.47)--made up of constituents, of parts determined in such a way that they are context laden. Each constituent of place, therefore, depends on the totality and in a sense belongs to the place. These elements of place, however, do more than depend on place. More so, they inform the totality of the whole. A totality such as place is therefore simultaneously constituted by and revealed in each constituent. Two such constituents of place, by which we experience the meaning of it, are identity and orientation as Norberg-Schulz explains,

When man dwells, he is simultaneously located in space and exposed to a certain environmental character. The two psychological functions involved may be called orientation and identification. To gain an existential foothold, man has

to be able to orient himself. He has to know where he is. But he also has to identify himself with the environment, that is he has to know that he is in a certain place (1971, p.19.)

A place is distinguishable from a region or landscape by virtue of being a "focal point" within that landscape or region (Norberg-Schulz, 1971; Relph, 1986; Million, 1990). As Heidegger says (cited in Relph, 1976, p.45), "Everywhere, wherever and however we are related to beings of every kind, identity makes its claim upon us." Similarly, Erik Erickson writes (ibid.) that "The term identity connotes both a persistent sameness within oneself and a persistent sharing of some kind of characteristic with others." For a child, who is just coming to terms with her own sense of identity, of who she is in the world, how would a place be first experienced but as an identifiable focus, in the landscape of her existence? The study explores the theoretical realm set up by Edward Relph, Christian Norberg-Schulz in the way they define the factors that contribute toward our experiencing a place as such. What makes up the *structure of place*? What is it about a space that makes it present itself to us to be recognized as "place"?

The discussion of literature that follows is organized around five themes that attempt to elicit the meaning of place as we experience it. These themes move from the physically discernible qualities that make up the structure of place to the deeper emotional qualities with which we endow the place with meaning. The themes are:

1. Boundary, Center and Direction
2. Activity, Setting and Meaning
3. Involvement with Place
4. Existential Insideness

5. Home as Center

6. Home--Prospect and Refuge

1. BOUNDARY, CENTER AND DIRECTION

To be recognized as a place and as an entity by itself in the world of our existence, space needs to be recognized as a unified "thing" in our worlds. Having been identified as a whole, and independent in its being, the definition of place as Aristotle saw it (cited in Casey, 1987, p.186) is "the innermost motionless boundary of what contains". If the thing were a vessel or container, place would be coincident with the thing, for boundaries are coincident with the bounded (ibid.). It was precisely Aristotle's contention that the primary action of place is that of "containing"--"container" in Greek being *periechon*, meaning literally, a having or holding around. To be in a place is to be sheltered and sustained by its containing boundary. One is held within this boundary rather than to be dispersed by an expanding horizon of time or exposed indifferently in space (ibid.).

Being conscious of a boundary, within which a person experiences a place, orients a person in space. "Being inside is knowing where you are" (Relph, 1976, p.49). Knowing where one is spatially allows one to experience places as centers of meaning and significance: "In terms of spontaneous perception, man's space is "subjectively centered" (Norberg-Schulz, 1971, p. 18). The need for this "focus" in a place is so strong that, since remote times, man has always thought of the world as centered.

From the beginning, the center represents to man what is "known" in contrast to the unknown and somewhat frightening world around. It is the point where he acquires the position of a thinking being in space, the point where he lingers and lives in space (ibid.) In archaic and traditional societies, the world is thought of as a microcosm. At the limits of this

closed world begins the domain of the unknown and the formless. On this side there is ordered--because inhabited and organized--space, and on the other outside this familiar space there is the unknown and dangerous (Eliade, 1959, p.37). Every microcosm has a center where the sacred manifests itself in all its totality; outside of this center there is only void, nothingness (Altizer, date unknown, pg. 129).

Wherever we go, even for the shortest periods of time, we establish places around which we orient our world and our spatial activities (Seamon, 1979, p. 73). These centers give a person spatial and place identity; they locate him in the environment where he finds himself and give him a spatial focus. Centers become places for things--what Heidegger(1962) calls "regions"--taken-for-granted totalities of place through which the person quickly locates various things required for a particular task--which as Heidegger says, have the quality of "inconspicuous familiarity"--and generally go unnoticed. Not only are centers where we experience the meaningful events of our existence, but they are also points of departure from where we orient ourselves and take possession of the world (Norberg-Schulz, 1971, p.19). A place is primarily a center of action and intention, a "focus where we experience the meaningful events of our existence." (Norberg-Schulz, 1971, p.21).

Having been defined as a "totality"--an entity endowed with meaning--a place now has to be entered, and a direction to the place is thereby introduced. The direction unites the inside and the outside, more or less strongly (Norberg-Schulz, 1971, p.19), and thus the place is 'set' more definitely in a context. The place as such is also influenced by the direction the place indicates. Man's taking possession of the environment always means a departure from the place where he dwells and a journey along a path which leads him in a direction determined by his purpose and the image of the place that he has.

Besides orienting one in space physically, the natural biases of direction--the vertical

and the horizontal--acquire symbolic meaning in human beings (Tuan, 1974, p.220). The direction upward, against gravity, is then not only a feeling that guides movement but a representation of what is erected, constructed, instituted; this verticality represents human aspiration, including therefore, the risk of fall and collapse (Levi-Strauss, 1966, Harries, 1988). Prone, we surrender to nature, upright we assert our humanity and the need to rise above the real and move toward the divine. But if verticality has this unreal, mystical, lofty connotation, the horizontal direction represents man's concrete world of action. In a certain sense, all horizontal directions are equal and form a place of infinite extension (Norberg-Schulz, 1971, p.27). As much as we need to have the aspiring ideal that the vertical provides, it is on the horizontal that man chooses and creates paths that give his existential space a more particular structure. It is the direction and purpose it gives a place that makes a place significant.

2. ACTIVITY, SETTING AND MEANING

The concepts of closure, centralization, and direction work together to form a more concrete existential concept--the concept of place as it involves direction and orientation. As discussed earlier, the two primary criteria that involve an experience of place are the identity of the place and the orientation that it has. If the orientation of the place is provided by the recognition of place as a whole entity, with centers of significance and by the resulting direction indicated by these centers, then what makes each individual place significant?

According to Relph (1976, p.47), the static *physical setting*, the *activities* and the *meaning* of a place constitute the three basic elements of the identity of a place. This does not mean, of course, that place can be understood as a full comprehension of these three separate entities but that they serve to reveal some of the reason behind the identity of a

place. The three fundamental components--setting, activity and meaning--are irreducible one to the other, yet are inseparably interwoven in our experiences of places. In explicating this experience however, these three components can be identified as distinctive poles or focuses (ibid.). What is significant here is the way in which these three components are interrelated.

Physical context and the activities of a place combine to give the human equivalent of locations within the "functional circle" of animals (Cassirer, 1970). Setting and meanings combine in the direct and empathetic experience of landscapes or townscapes; activities and meaning combine in many social acts and shared histories that have little reference to physical setting. Meanings of places may be rooted in their physical setting and activities, but these meanings are not a property of them; or rather they are a property of human intentions and experiences. All of these dialectics are interrelated in a place, and their fusion constitutes the identity of a place (Relph, 1976, p.47).

Although setting and activity can at times determine the meaning of a place, and serve as a way of explicating its significance, they do not define the place in its totality. More significantly from a phenomenological approach, places are incorporated into the *intentional* structures of all human consciousness and experience: "Intentionality recognizes that all consciousness is consciousness of something--I cannot do or think except in terms of something" (Relph, 1976, p.42). Thus the objects and features of the world are always experienced in relation to their particular meaning and they cannot be separated from these meanings, for these are conferred by the very consciousness that we have of the objects (ibid.). If place is recognized as a holistic entity in our existential world and if it is identified with the person or group, then it embodies a clear distinction about where we are. It is not enough however, to merely identify a place. We also need to understand how we identify *with* the place and to understand why a place is as significant as it is.

3. INVOLVEMENT WITH PLACE

To be able to identify with place, it must present itself *for* someone or it must be *taken* by someone as their own (Dovey, cited in Million, 1990, p.53). Places must have a reason for us to endow them with meaning. Relph (1976, p.44) describes the reasons why we find place meaningful as follows: "The essence of place lies not so much in the geographies, landscapes, cities and homes, as in the experience of an *inside* as distinct from an *outside*." Relph argues that, more than anything else, this insideness is what sets place apart from space and defines a particular system of physical features, activities and meanings. To be inside a place is to belong to it and to identify with it, and the more profoundly inside you are, the stronger is this identity with place. Being inside is knowing where you are and wishing to be there (ibid. p.49).

The essence of place lies in the "largely unselfconscious intentionality that defines places as profound centers of human existence" (Relph, 1976, p.43). These centers, Relph goes on to say, are essentially the lived experience of "being inside," of belonging. The insider or inhabitant experiences himself or herself as being held within place. An insider experiences the feeling of being "somewhere away from what is outside." (Norberg-Schulz, cited in Relph, ibid.). The insider simply knows that this place is home (Relph, 1976, p.55). The outsider, on the other hand, is the one who experiences himself or herself as "being outside"--who experiences the implicit feeling that one does not belong in this place. The lived experience of place, therefore, is understood in terms of the level of insideness or outsideness that one feels in the place.

From the outside, you look upon a place as a traveller might look upon a town, from a distance; from the inside, you experience a place thoroughly--you are surrounded by it and are part of it (Relph, 1976, pp.34,5). This inside-outside polarity, according to Relph,

presents itself as a simple but basic dualism, one that is fundamental in our experience of lived space and one that provides the essence of place. The various levels of insideness are manifest in the creation of distinctive types of place experiences and offer a possibility for expressing man's humanity in place (ibid.).

Relph discusses seven modes of insideness and outsideness grounded in the various levels of experiential involvement with place. These levels of experience, move from the most profound alienation of places (the most extreme form of outsideness) to the strongest sense of place experience (the deepest form of insideness). These modes are not the only distinctive ways of experiencing places, and a number of levels probably exist between each of those modes discussed. These kinds of place experience, however, serve to describe the spectrum of possible levels of intensity with which we experience places. These modes of place experience are as follows:

- *Existential Outsideness*, the most extreme experience of outsideness, according to Relph, presents itself as a situation involving a feeling of separation from place. Place may feel alienating, unpleasant or oppressive (Seamon, 1996, p.6). Existential outsideness involves a selfconscious and reflective uninvolvedness, and a feeling of not belonging. In existential outsideness, all places assume the meaningless identity (Relph, 1976, p.51).
- *Objective Outsideness* is a situation that involves a deliberate adoption of a dispassionate attitude towards places. Places are considered selectively in terms of locations, or as spaces where objects and activities are located. A deep separation with place and person results. This mode includes a scientific approach to place and is ironically, the one often used by planners, designers and policy makers (Seamon, 1996, p.6).

- *Incidental Outsideness* is a situation where places are experienced as little more than the background for activities. Incidental outsideness, for example, applies to those places in which we are merely visitors and towards which our intentions are limited and partial (Relph, 1976, p.52).
- *Vicarious Insideness* presents itself as a condition of second-hand involvement with place--yet a deep one. This is the feeling we get of places as we experience them through the eyes of another person, or through poetry or prose or art--when we feel almost transported there (Relph, 1976, p.52; Seamon 1996, p.6).
- *Behavioral Insideness* consists of "being in a place and seeing it as a set of objects, views and activities arranged in a certain way and having certain observable qualities" (ibid.). It involves a deliberate attending to the place. It is the experience of becoming familiar with a new place--of figuring out what is where and of how things fit together to make one complete place (Seamon, 1996, p.6).
- *Empathetic Insideness* is the experience of an outsider who tries to be open to a place in order to understand it deeply. It requires interest, empathy and heartfelt concern. It represents a fading of the experience from a concern with the qualities of appearance that characterizes behavioral insideness to an emotional and empathetic involvement with place. To be inside a place empathetically is to understand that place as rich in meaning and hence to identify with it (Relph, 1976, p.54).
- *Existential Insideness* presents itself as the most fundamental form of insideness. It is the experience of place without deliberate or selfconscious reflection, yet is full with significance (ibid., p.55). It is the condition of being in a place where one *belongs* and of knowing that implicitly. Existential insideness

characterizes belonging to a place and the deep, complete identity with a place that is the very foundation of the place concept. Existential insideness is the quality that almost always describes the experience of special childhood places that remain significant enough to be remembered in adulthood. It is thus considered to be the most important to understand in this study of place and therefore is discussed in greater detail in the next section.

4. EXISTENTIAL INSIDENESS

A study of place aims at understanding its lived-qualities, in an attempt to either enhance the experience if appropriate or to avoid the experience if so desired. The most appropriate modes of experience to be studied, therefore, would be those of existential outsideness and existential insideness. The experience of existential outsideness, while often supporting placelessness, may simultaneously encourage cosmopolitan and liberal situations that help to facilitate shared understanding, tolerance and the acceptance of difference (Relph, 1996, p.14). Existential outsideness, might also be seemly to study to understand experiences of place that are traumatic and in what ways these situations can be remedied. The study of place and childhood experience of it, however, focuses on the qualities of a place that allows a person to be completely immersed in it, in the characteristic nature of childhood. It studies the qualities of a place where a child knows, implicitly, where she is, and where a child, instinctively, feels that she belongs. It is therefore, considered appropriate to study the experience of existential insideness in greater depth, for this study.

The essential nature of the meaning of place, according to Relph (1976, p.76), presents itself as a condition of existential insideness--"whereby a person is his place and a place its person" (p. 34). This presumes that the setting, the activities, the people in the

place, the reasons for what the place is special and the space within which the place is experienced--are all experienced as an indivisible whole--that of the place. The insider's world is one where processes go unnoticed and unquestioned.

Existential insideness is a possibility characterized by a deep sense of knowledge (i.e. "rootedness"); a sense of control and ownership (i.e. "appropriation"); a sense of spontaneity (i.e. "at-easeness") and an overall sense of care and support ("i.e. "warmth") (Seamon, 1979, pp.78-85). Being existentially inside a place is analogous to being "a fish in water" (Seamon, 1977, p.161, as cited in Million, 1990, p. 48) or a "snail in a shell" (Million, *ibid.*). It is an interpenetration of one's self and a place experienced prereflectively, as an "intaking", by virtue of embodied habits or movements (Tuan, 1980, p. 5; Relph, 1976, p.55). Being so much a part of one's existence, a quality of existential insideness is its obliviousness, its taken-for-grantedness. The condition is usually noticed when it is taken away. Having a place that is one's own destroyed, or going away from a place that one belongs to, or the remembering, nostalgically, of a place that one felt at ease in, are occasions that might call for a noticing of this condition of existential insideness. To support existential insideness, a place must be inhabited, cared for, and taken into possession through time.

The thesis is ultimately a study of the qualitative aspects of this experience of existential insideness. In the special places of childhood, person and place are one--each serves to enhance the other's identity. In every special place, the child knows implicitly, where she is, and that she is here where she belongs:

to be here rather than there,

to be safe rather than threatened,

to be enclosed rather than exposed" (Seamon, 1979, p.89).

5. THE HOME AS CENTER

To be inside a place existentially means to be "here" rather than "there" and to be in a place which has a quality of at-homeness--of being where one belongs and knows it. Bachelard writes that, "Our home is our corner of the world...it is our first universe....." (1969, p.4). He points out "all really inhabited space bears the essence of the notion of home." Being so much a part of our daily existence, however, the idea of "home" is rarely reflected on. What does the notion of "home" really mean, today, when we step back and look at it objectively, in an attempt to understand it?

Heidegger (1962, 1971) has perhaps discussed in most detail the situation of modern homes and at-homeness. Heidegger believes that we are forgetting how to dwell and by this forgetting we are also forgetting how to be at home and how to build homes. Dwelling says Heidegger (quoted in Seamon, 1979; Norberg-Schulz, 1980), is the process through which man makes his place of existence a home and comes into harmony with the Fourfold-- the earth, sky, the Gods and himself. To dwell is to be on earth as a mortal, which in turn means to cherish and protect and preserve and care for the place where one chooses to live. Is the ability to *dwell* more keen in children or is the need more sharply felt? By our forgetting it, do we forfeit them the ability they have to dwell, more than to exist?

As the basic character of being, "dwelling" also involves a wish to belong to the environment--to feel inside a place and to be at home. Home is a place that people inhabit; it is a place capable of providing dwelling for the biological function of the body, the capacity and comprehension of the intellect, and the needs of emotion and spirit (Laing, 1985, p.201). Home is both a repository and witness of one's life--it is human life itself.

Home is where a person finds identity, and one's own home is most often the place where the person's and the environment's identities overlap most.

A description of the existential qualities of home would not be complete without reference to the "things" of home--the objects and activities that make up the fabric of our daily existence. In Hannah Arendt's words (1958, cited *ibid.*), "The man-made world of things, the human artifice erected... becomes a home for mortal men, whose stability will endure and outlast the everchanging movement of their lives and actions, only in so much as it transcends both the sheer functionalism of things produced for their own consumption and the sheer utility of objects produced for use...because without them, the story of life that is enacted would not survive at all." Inhabiting is an act of incorporation--a situation of active, essential acquisition. In this sense, as Laing explains, inhabiting a space is essentially moving it from the strange to the familiar (1985, p.201).

The home place is full of ordinary objects. They become part of our identity through use. They are almost a part of ourselves, although they remain "too close to be seen" (Tuan, 1977, p.144). Tuan describes the essence of home thus: "Home is an intimate place. We think of the home as home and place, but enchanted images of the past are evoked not so much by the entire building, which can only be seen, as by its components and furnishings, which can be touched, and smelt....the attic and the cellar, the fireplace, the gilded mirror, a stool..." (*ibid.*). Citing Freya Stark, Tuan emphasizes the significance of the ordinary, small things of home: "In smaller, more familiar things, memory weaves her strongest enchantment, holding us at her mercy with some trifle, some echo, a tone of voice, a scent of tar and seaweed on the quay. This surely is the meaning of home--a place where every day is multiplied by all the days before it" (*ibid.*).

Just as a sense of home is sustained through the familiarity of "things" in our daily

existence, the activities we carry out habitually--also a part of our everyday lives, intermeshed with space and time--create this place we recognize as "home." In purposeful activity, space and time become oriented with respect to the active self (Tuan, 1977, p.127).

Are all our daily activities purposeful, then? Objectively, yes. Brushing one's teeth, following a route to school, and returning the same way everyday, can clearly be seen and understood in terms of ends and means. Tuan (ibid.) argues that even complicated repetitive movements turn into habit and their original intentional structure--envisaging ends and the means to achieve them--is lost. It is only when we reflect on commonplace activities of the everyday, that their original intentional structures re-emerge. Space and time rise to the surface of consciousness and become aligned with respect to goals (ibid.). The ordinary things and habits that are the threads of our daily fabric of existence, suddenly materialize in significance, in our experience of "home."

Another unselfconscious aspect of our everyday existence in dwelling, is what Merleau-Ponty (1962) calls "body-subject" (Seamon, 1979, p.41). Body-subject is the inherent capacity of the body to direct behaviors of the person intelligently, and thus function as a special kind of subject that expresses itself in a pre-conscious way usually described by words such as mechanical, automatic, habitual and involuntary (Seamon and Nordin, 1980, p.36). A key phenomenological notion relevant here is *intentionality*--the fact that all human impulses and actions do not exist unto themselves but are directed towards something and have an object (Seamon, 1982, p.124). The understanding of the experiential qualities of home is an attempt, then, to elicit the reasons behind why we feel the way we do at home. It tries to understand the intentions behind our "habitual" activities--to understand the aims behind our "natural impulses." One of these natural impulses is what geographer Appleton, refers to as his "prospect-refuge theory" (Appleton, 1977).

6. PROSPECT AND REFUGE

Intentionality is seen in Appleton's terms as a "natural symbolism" contrary to the symbolism that is "culturally defined" and easily recognizable (Appleton, 1990, p.8). Appleton argues that as homo sapiens, there exists for us a natural habitat that we are drawn towards by some force within us--a force that is as much a characteristic of the biological needs of our species as much as a need for what he calls "the pleasure-displeasure mechanism"--that is, a universal overriding force among the kind (ibid).

Appleton calls his theory "prospect and refuge"--the idea that there is a deeply-seated, biologically driven human preference for conditions of prospect and refuge within landscape settings. By "prospect," Appleton refers to the situation in which one can see over a considerable distance. By "refuge," he means a place where one can hide and watch at the same time. He argues that, in combination, these two conditions reinforce the other, creating an ability "to see without being seen." (Hildebrand, 1991, p.21). Quoting Francis Jacob, Appleton (1977, p.20) validates his argument thus: "It is an absolute necessity for an organism to perceive its environment, or at least those aspects of its environment that are related to its life requirement...." Appleton believes that, although evolution has negated the need for it, the "hunter and the hunted" instincts characterizing the "prospect and refuge" theory are still a part of human impulses.

The idea of "home" as Freud defines it (cited in Vidler, 1992, p.35), or the German word *heimlich* meaning "familiar, friendly, intimate", has the additional meaning of something withdrawn from the eyes of strangers, something concealed, secret. The idea of home has the connotation of refuge. Intimacy of home has the notion of a nest, a shell, a place into which we can withdraw if we wish. But while home offers us the solace of refuge, it also provides us the promise of the future. Being existentially inside a place that is home,

we have the security to reach out of this safe haven to have a glimpse of the broader horizon beyond. The function of "refuge" being satisfied, we may now need another mode of experience that completes the dialectic of this basic need we have of place--that of prospect.

Prospect indicates a heightening of the curiosity which is always stimulated by new understandings and possibilities (Appleton, 1977, p.35). So while refuge has to do with "hiding, sheltering or seeking protection," prospect has to do with "perceiving far horizons, particularly visual information" (ibid., p.26). As Appleton expresses this dialectic of experience, in a poem titled "Here and There" (1978, p.24):

Often the earthbound self reaches
Into the wild, unseen places
Why is reality never at home?

Only the bright-eyed child seeking,
Only the restless bird aching,
Lend to creation a semblance of care,
When we resolve this strange fever...

Appleton explains this need to seek out horizons beyond our center, once the "self" is grounded firmly in the "earth," as a psycho-biological need of the human species. His argument establishes one basis for the natural human impulses that propel our intentional activities, which, in turn, contribute to our claiming a space as a "place."

What might this prospect-refuge impulse mean for children, in whom the natural human inclination with which we experience place is stronger--being as close to the earth, as we are in childhood? Could it be that in children, the basic need for this dialectic in place, is more powerful, than it is in adults? Are children, pre-conditioned by nature, more than

adults are, to select certain spaces as preferred over others, to satisfy their basic human needs of place? More importantly, what is the relevance of this theory in the study of places that children feel at home?

A meditation upon human dwelling and places that we feel at home in reveals our primal embodied existence--our being-in-the-world. The primary center of human habitation is the home, which is incorporated and assimilated into the fabric of embodied existence. In this sense, the home is our second body (Laing, 1985, p.201). In an ideal sense, home being the center of our existence, it connotes origin and beginning. Being a center, and a refuge to return to, it also hints at the future of prospect. Space and time coexist and intermesh to define each other, and we remain existentially inside this place.

MIDDLE CHILDHOOD AND PLACE

Middle childhood--the ages between six and twelve--is the critical age of development between infancy and adolescence. It is the age when children discover the world around them, when they observe and understand relationships--both physical and social--in the universe of their existence (Cobb, 1977; Hart, 1979; Moore, 1986; Pearce, 1985). Middle childhood is the age of the development of the self and the individual's relationship to the natural world.

Searles (1959, cited in Hart, 1979, p.413) believes that: "the human being is engaged, throughout his life span, in an increasing struggle to differentiate himself, not only from his human, but also from his non-human environment, while developing in proportion, in increasingly meaningful relatedness with the latter environment, as well as his human beings." This quest for a definition of "self" and of one's existence in the universe around one's self begins in middle childhood. This period remains the basic phase of development of human levels of dynamic thought during the whole of life, and is in contrast to the period of our infancy, which must be transcended and in part repressed (Cobb, 1977). Middle childhood is an age of observation, of discovery and of understanding. It is the age when places are experienced most significantly--just for what they are, without the learned biases that they are experienced as adults or adolescents.

Middle childhood is the age when children realize their own identity as being separate from their mother's (or from their home environments). It is, as Piaget discusses in *The Construction of Reality in the Child* (Piaget, 1954), the age that constitutes the transition from a state in which objects are centered about a self which believes it directs them to a state in which the self is placed in a stable world conceived as independent of personal activity. At first the universe consists of plastic images--where the self is unable

to differentiate between its own subjectivity and the objects around it. But as the child develops, progressive assimilation and accommodation of the diversities of reality insure a gradual delimitation of the self and the external environment. This development occurs in middle childhood. From this time on, the universe is built up into an aggregate of objects connected by relations of time and space that are independent of the self as perceived by the child. Such a universe places the child as a part of a greater whole. From a postural analogy, as Moore describes this age, (1986, p. 13), the child knows herself in the "round" at this age--the control of body motion and mental activity is now more clearly within her grasp, and her attention is now focussed on things outside of her own self--and directed toward the universe of which her world is made.

Edith Cobb (1977) also discusses the evolutionary bio-cultural process that takes place in middle childhood--the interaction with the environment that a child needs to ground the thinking process at this stage of development. She talks of an "immediacy of experience of organism and environment that has been extended, extrapolated and transformed into speech as well as into systems of behavior....an image that mobilizes and fuses the spatio-temporal experience of the perceiving nervous system...., a condensation of level upon level of experience and information fused into symbol and code" (Cobb, 1977, p.12).

This process of learning from an immediate experience of the environment is also discussed in psychologist Joseph Chilton Pearce's books on the development of children: *Magical Child* (Pearce, 1975) and *The Magical Child Matures* (Pearce, 1985). The first ten years, he says, are designed for acquiring a full-dimensional knowledge of the world as it is. Intellectual growth is an increase in the ability to interact with the environment--which means a more coordinated flow of the mind, brain and body. Pearce's model of development is particularly useful in understanding a child's need for the three-dimensional spatial

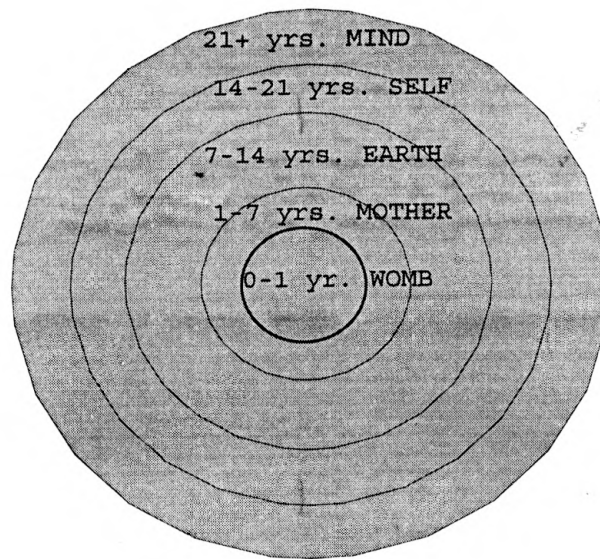


Figure 2.1: Pearce's model of Development

experience of the built environment. Pearce says that development can only take place on the foundation given by the child's actual body movements, by making sensory contact with the world of things and processes. Without a full-dimensional world view structured in the formative years of middle childhood, no earth matrix can form, no knowledge of physical survival can develop, and no basis for abstraction and creativity can arise.

As figure 2.1 illustrates, Pearce's matrices are considered as a series of concentric spheres with the earlier matrix contained within each subsequent one. Each matrix provides the individual a safe place within which to reside, a source of energy, a place from which to explore the world, specifically the subsequent matrix. Middle childhood is therefore the age at which the individual moves away from the matrix of the "mother" and into the matrix of the "earth"--or the world around him/her and then into the matrix of the "self".

This study focusses on this stage of development of the child--middle childhood--

Piaget's "concrete operational period" when, to quote Hart, "a child is now capable of logical thought and connections, to make full use of reversible cognitive operations, but only those that are still limited to real objects" (Hart, 1979, p.383). Place being considered a "real" object--or full of real objects, this study emphasizes children's involvement with place, in middle childhood. Children's participation with place--with the physical, most easily discernible element of place-- is seen most obviously in natural environments. The natural world is abundant with the real objects that occupy the realm of awareness of the child at this stage of development--while in the "earth" matrix (Pearce, 1985). In her book *The Ecology of Imagination in Childhood*, Edith Cobb (1977), emphasizes the significance of the age of middle childhood in its involvement with the natural world, and therefore with place,

There is a special period-- the little understood prepubertal halcyon middle age of childhood approximately from five or six to eleven or twelve--between the strivings of animal infancy and the storms of adolescence, when the natural world is experienced in some highly evocative way, producing in the child a sense of profound continuity with natural processes and presenting overt evidence of a biological basis of intuition. In these memories of childhood, there appears to be both a sense of continuity, an awareness of his own unique separateness and identity and also a continuity, a renewal of a relationship with nature as process. I believe this is a proverbial experience of an "aesthetic logic" both in nature's formative processes and in the gestalt-making powers of the child's own developing nervous system, aesthetic powers that overlap meaningfully in those moments of form, creating expansion and self-consciousness.

Depending on its quality, the environment engages the child in exploration and discovery, being a source of knowledge and identity of one's own self in the environment (Moore, 1986, p.13). This thesis attempts to bring to light the meaning of the almost inconspicuous but significant experience of the physical environment, in middle childhood. The study asks, "What kinds of spaces support a rich and deep experience of place in childhood?" Would the models of development discussed and therefore the experience of place remain the same for every child regardless of background and of gender? These are issues that the thesis will attempt to understand, the implications of which might eventually be translated into environmental design needs.

There is also the issue of the relationship between gender and place experience in middle childhood. Most literature on the development of children stresses gender-related differences in infancy and in adolescence but tend to regard middle childhood as one large, generalized category (Hart, 1979; Pitcher and Schulz, 1983). A major reason for this relative paucity of information on the subject is the common tendency of child development investigation to ignore sex differences in their focussed search for developmental trends (Hart, 1979, p. 369). The inference is made that there is no biological basis for a difference in spatial activities.

A few studies, however, have highlighted gender variation. For example, Tanner (1970, p.95) finds that "it is not until adolescence that boys become more adapted for the tasks of hunting, fighting and manipulating all sorts of heavy objects." On the other hand, a study by Erickson (1951) does reveal differences in block play as infants--boys tend to build tall structures while girls tend to build structures that are lower and have enclosed spaces. As Middleton says of the differences in middle childhood (cited in Pitcher and

Schulz, 1983, p.15), "If some mad sociologist should ever settle a thousand boys in a compound and give them dolls to play with and give footballs to a thousand girls, I feel certain that within a few hours, a small minority of the girls would be kicking and throwing the balls around while a majority would be cuddling them and scolding them for being naughty...And I'd bet that sixty percent of the boys would have dismembered their dolls to use the limbs and torsos for batting the heads about the compound."

Besides such speculative evidence, the only differences in gender in middle childhood are shown by statistical quantitative analyses of children at play indicating differences in peer contact, use of language and aggression (Pitcher and Schulz, 1983; Cole, 1989; Williams and Stith, 1974) . As one subsidiary aim, this study explores the issue of gender-related differences in qualitative place experience, at this age, using relevant information gleaned through the twenty five interviews. The decisions of environmental design and planning of space have a direct impact on this age group-- and if differences do exist, they might be translated into implications on these decisions.

Although the intention of this study is to explicate the commonalities of the experience of place in childhood, in order to understand the phenomenon as a whole, the last section of the thesis will address the issue of variations in the experience--variations as a result of gender, background (whether suburban or not), and of the stage of middle childhood (the earlier or latter half).

Having now established the theoretical base for this study, the next chapter discusses phenomenology as a research method and the specific way it has been applied to the study of childhood experience of place.

Chapter 3

PHENOMENOLOGY AS A METHOD OF STUDY

This chapter discusses the method used to study childhood experience of place in this thesis--phenomenology. Phenomenology is defined, in this thesis, by Relph, as being a rigorous, systematic probing of the description of the phenomenon, to "uncover and articulate the underlying structure and themes" of place, as they emerge from the researcher's "seeing, thinking and describing" (Relph, 1986, p. 6). It is an attempt understand from the inside--and not to dismiss from the outside--the whole spectrum of the experience, which we generally call reality (ibid.). It is an attempt to really look at and see a phenomenon for what it is, attempting to suspend all preconceived notions of the phenomenon. A phenomenological study is not directed toward the discovery of predictive or absolute knowledge--it is directed toward understanding (Million, 1991, p.14).

This chapter discusses phenomenological method in three sections. The first part addresses the use of phenomenology as a general method for studying lived experience other than as experienced by one's self. Secondly, the chapter reviews phenomenological methods of study that guided the process by which the researcher arrived at her own phenomenological approach. Finally, the chapter discusses the researcher's own method of studying the phenomenon of childhood experience with place.

THE NATURE OF PHENOMENOLOGY

In his discussion of the phenomenological approach as a method of research, Amedeo Giorgi says that "It is an attempt to study man rigorously and systematically without sacrificing man's uniqueness and essential characteristics. Man as he lives is the point of

departure for such a venture.... This is already a significant difference from the traditional approach in the human sciences. The latter began with a ready-made approach and reduced man to fit it, whereas a humanistic psychology (such as this is) acknowledges the relevancy of the complexity and richness of man's existence and is struggling to arrive at a method that will do it justice" (Giorgi, 1971, p.52).

Phenomenology is a method of study that involves description, interpretation and a self-critical analysis of the phenomenon. Phenomenology is a study of the lifeworld--*the Lebenswelt*-- the world as we experience it, pre-reflectively, rather than as we conceptualize or categorize or reflect on it. The lifeworld, as Husserl defined it (1970) presents itself as "the world of immediate experience," "the world as already there," as "pregiven," the world as experienced in the "natural, primordial attitude." All phenomenological human-science research involves explorations into the structure of the human lifeworld--the lived world as experienced in everyday situations and reflections. Our lived experiences and structure of meaning in terms of which these lived experiences can be described and interpreted constitute the immense complexity of the lifeworld.

Phenomenological human studies begin in lived experience and eventually turn back to it (Van Manen, 1990). What is meant by "lived experience"? Van Manen, in his *Researching Lived Experience* quotes Dilthey as suggesting that in its most basic form "lived experience involves our pre-reflective consciousness of life; a reflexive or self-given awareness which is an awareness, unaware of itself" (Van Manen, 1990. p.35). Merleau-Ponty defines the lived world in terms of what he calls "sensibility".

The sensible is precisely that medium in which there can be being without it having to be posited, the sensible appearance of the sensible, the silent

persuasion of the sensible is Being's unique way of manifesting itself ...the sensible is that: this possibility to be evident in silence, to be understood implicitly (Merleau-Ponty, 1968, p.214).

A key phenomenological notion relevant here is *intentionality*--the fact that all human impulses and actions do not exist unto themselves but are directed towards something and have an object (Seamon, 1982, p.124). A task of phenomenology is to identify the modes and range of human intentionality. The result is a presentation of human experience and behavior which is considerably more complex and rich than portraits usually provided by traditional philosophy and psychology (ibid). This thesis, therefore, begins by asking the questions "What are the kinds of places that children deem special to them?" and "What makes children claim these spaces as special places?"

An important tool in this process of phenomenological study is that of *epoche*--the suspension of belief in the experience or experienced thing (Seamon, 1979, p.20). The researcher attempts to disengage himself/herself from the "given" and thus tries to "empathize with the worlds of other people" (Buttimer, 1976, p.281; as quoted by Seamon, 1979, p.20). If epoche is conducted properly, the researcher may discover that many patterns and events which one previously ignored or deemed insignificant emerge clearly and demand examination and description (Seamon, 1979, p.21).

Children's space is probably not "space" in the way adults understand the term. It is fundamentally personal, interactive and kinaesthetic, a multi-sensorial space of action which is as oral and tactile as it is visual (Hart, 1971, pp.12, 13). The intent of the researcher in using phenomenology as a method of study lies in the belief that *understanding* environmental needs is important when dealing with situations experienced differently from

one's own. The aim in a study such as this one--that explores childhood lived experience in place--is not so much to arrive at quantifiable definite analysis of the phenomenon but more to articulate an understanding of its essence. The word essence comes from the Latin "*essentia*" meaning "to be" (Van Manen, 1990, p.35). The essence of something is that what makes a thing what it is--without which it would not be. To understand the essence of a phenomenon would be, then, to grasp its core nature. A phenomenology of the childhood experience of place would attempt to understand the very nature of place experience as it is to a child.

METHODOLOGICAL MODELS

The study draws from three previous works that were similar in method: Robin Moore's *Childhood's Domain* (1986); Roger Hart's *Children's Experience with Place* (1979); and David Seamon's *A Geography of the Lifeworld* (1979). Robin Moore and Roger Hart did extensive field studies of childhood experience of place, and although the work was of a depth that the present study cannot attempt to replicate, these two works set the intellectual tone for this thesis.

Robin Moore's work investigates children's interaction with their surroundings--his concern is with "relations between child, other people and physical habitat, and with environment-behavior phenomena that have policy implications." (p.14). Ninety-six boys and girls aged nine to twelve participated in the study--divided almost evenly among the three study sites in England. Using interviews, maps drawn by children, and field trips with the children, Moore carefully constructs an understanding of the experience of place in childhood. Besides setting the tone for the present study, Moore's work is generous in references, both literary and of organizations that are useful for future research.

Roger Hart's pioneering work in the field of children's environments has also been a valuable guide in developing my method of study. Hart's study is as much about the methodology of qualitative research as it is about the content of children's environmental experience. Hart adopted two approaches that he felt would allow him to come as close as possible to approximating a description of place as children experience it: first, a reflection of his own childhood experiences of places; and, secondly, an attempt to participate in as completely as possible with his sample of children, their direct experience of places. Through close participation in the activity of the children in the environment, he gained an empathy that helped him uncover something of the experience without destroying the "integrity of the child-landscape transaction" (p.20).

Using maps, recorded interviews with the children, photographs and field trips with the children, Hart documented the childhood experience of place. In his exhaustive field study, he explained the experience of place in terms of preferred settings, places that were disliked or feared, the range of places explored, places in terms of activities, and feelings about place and statistical analysis that examine gender differences.

His work has been a stimulating guide in developing the method of study for this thesis. More importantly, it has encouraged me to believe in the significance of the wonderfully rich childhood culture that exists in the places that often go unnoticed, and unfortunately, unprovided for, by adults designing children's environments. I acknowledge the debts I owe the work of Moore and Hart in contributing to this study of childhood experience with place.

The two works mentioned above both dealt with the issue of childhood experience with place, but they developed as a result of actual interaction with the children that they studied. In this way they differed significantly from the study that this thesis attempted to

be--being based on adult memories of childhood place. The work that contributed considerably towards this aim of interpreting an experience different than one's own was David Seamon's *A Geography of the Lifeworld* (1979). Seamon's work was based on interviews and interaction with a group of adults who described their "lifeworld" or everyday life as they experienced it and became conscious of doing so. Seamon's method of study provided me a methodological framework within which I could develop my interpretive reflections on the interview responses that I had, and on the identification of the themes that emerged from them. I am grateful to Seamon for the example his work provided me, and more significantly, for guiding me through the process of developing a method for my thesis itself, as every individual study must eventually develop for its own.

THE METHOD OF THIS THESIS

Phenomenology offers us the possibility of plausible insight that brings us in more direct contact with the world. The approach is old in the sense that, over the ages, human beings have invented artistic, philosophical, communicative and poetic languages that have sought to reunite thinking and feeling with the ground of lived experience. My purpose in this study is to describe the engagement with place that children have, or that adults still remember having as children, at the same time discovering what the experience of place is about for children. My research method was not developed completely when I started--and if it had been it would have undermined the whole purpose of this slow discovery of the phenomenon. Building on a basic framework, the study developed, both in method and in content, as it proceeded. Ultimately, one learns as much from the process as from the body of the study itself.

The study proceeded in the following five stages, each of which will be elaborated

on in the discussion that follows:

1. The selection of the respondents who participated in the study.
2. The development of the process of interviewing the respondents.
3. The interpretation of the descriptions of childhood place experience.
4. The arrival at the themes that emerged from the dialogue between researcher and place descriptions.
5. Reflection on the process and the body of work and the conclusions one understands from them.

1. The Selection of the Respondents.

This thesis is primarily an exploration into the qualitative aspects of childhood experience with place. The study could concentrate on one of two ways of examining this topic: by actually observing, interviewing and intelligently sharing with children their experience with place, or by studying adult recollections of childhood place experiences. My limited background on child-developmental psychology and the limited access I had to the first method of study, made me favor the latter.

The first step in the study process, therefore, was to choose the adults who would participate in this venture, the participation of whom would be purely voluntary. Twenty-five participants agreed to take part in this study--all of whom were adults studying (and one teaching) at Kansas State University. Almost all the respondents were students of the freshman English Expository Writing class that the university requires as a prerequisite for all incoming undergraduates.

A phenomenological study is interested in seeking out the qualities of a particular lived experience--in this case, that of the experience of place in middle childhood. In this

thesis, the meaning of the phenomenon was elicited through the interpretations of memories of childhood place experiences. It had to be remembered here that the memory of a childhood place could be biased by the experiences of adulthood. An unpleasant childhood experience might obliterate completely the memory of the place in adulthood. A happy occasion might magnify the qualities of the place that it occurred in, when remembered. A place might be remembered for only certain qualities and certain others might have been completely forgotten, however significant. The question of the accuracy of the description is a problem, therefore, with a method of study such as that used here. Could one assume that the descriptions of remembered childhood place experiences were as genuine as the experiences in childhood themselves?

Von Eckartsberg describes this problem as "selective attention"--people experience themselves in their interaction with a particular situation, but they do this selectively, filtering out certain aspects of the experience which they intentionally block from view or do not notice, or remember (Seamon, 1979, p.24). As Seamon suggests, however, "selective attention" is not, necessarily, viewed as a problem, but as a basic characteristic of human nature. It assumes that the reach of human awareness is partial and can only elucidate a portion of each experience of event or place" (ibid).

This method of study can, therefore, still be considered to provide one with information that is accurate in the sense that it is a depiction typical of the human nature of the lived experience. The study is interested, primarily, in the significant qualities of the childhood experience of place. If what is remembered of the experience is selective in attention to the actual experience, the portions that are selectively retained are probably, then, the most significant; in the sense that they are sufficiently memorable to resurface in adult memory. The thesis proceeds, therefore, with the assumption that the place descriptions

gathered by this method of study are representative of the qualities of the typical human experience of the phenomenon of childhood experience with place.

The memory of a place might also be altered by the current area of interest of the adult and of his or her depth of knowledge about childhood or about place. A student of child developmental psychology, for instance, drawing on his or her education of the child's psyche, might remember a childhood place for different reasons now than when it was experienced in childhood. A student of geography or a student of architectural design might remember a childhood place in the light of his or her current study interests, therefore reading much differently into a place than what it was in the reality of childhood. These kinds of adult biases would significantly alter the qualities of memories of childhood place on which the study is based. In selecting the respondents of the study, therefore, it was needed to avoid these biases, as far as possible, to get an accurate description of the childhood place, seen for what it was. It was decided that in selecting respondents from a class that was a prerequisite for all disciplines in the university, one would avoid at least some of the prejudices that would accompany selecting respondents from a particular discipline or area of interest, and in this way the responses would be as fair and unbiased a representation of people and place experiences as possible within the limits of this study.

Another issue that is addressed by the method of this study is that of the generalizations of the phenomenon based on individual descriptions of it. How can a group of twenty-five people, each with a different childhood experience of place, speak for a larger human population? Can broad claims of the experience be made from these descriptions alone? Seamon explains how phenomenology assumes a different measure of accuracy and objectivity in its acceptance of "interpersonal corroboration" (Seamon, 1979, p.23). He writes,

Phenomenologically, one person's experience speaks for the human situation at large. What is reported about experience in a small group of limited composition may genuinely reflect patterns of experience which have a bearing on a wider human sphere. At one level of human existence, each of us is unique--affecting and affected by cultural, economic and other similar groundings of life. At another plane of existence, however, we each share common characteristics....all typical human beings (ibid).

Each person's description of place is, therefore, is a reflection of the childhood experience in its typicality.

Table 3.1 gives an overview of the gender, age and environmental background characteristics of the 25 respondents. The age of each respondent was elicited in five-year periods and indicates that all the respondents were in their childhood at, approximately, the same decades of time--to avoid the differences in experience that might be present if one crossed several generations of childhood.

As the table indicates, these individuals represent an almost equal number of each gender, with twelve female and thirteen male respondents. Middle childhood is an age where, as Chapter 2 indicated, gender differences are not emphasized, with respect to the child's experience of the physical environment. It is assumed that the gender-related developmental trends that might affect the experience of place, are not yet formed at this age. This study questions that assumption, based on the experiences of these respondents.

By environmental background is meant the place of one's childhood--whether it was urban, rural or suburban. As explained earlier, the focus of the study was on the suburban childhood place experience. Therefore, as the table suggests, the majority of the respondents

Table 3.1: The Twenty-five Place Descriptions: An Overview

Gender	Age	Env. Background	Parent(s) at home/work	Place Described	Age
M	15-20	Poland-Suburban	one parent at home	Old Warsaw- a tourist historic attraction	7 to 12
F	15-20	Kansas-Suburban	both parents at home	Basement at home	uptil 6
				A tree clubhouse	7 to 12
M	15-20	Kansas-Rural	one parent at home	A river on the farm	6 to 12
M	15-20	Missouri-Suburban	one parent at home	The pool in his backyard	6 to 12
F	15-20	Texas-Suburban	one parent at home	Alcove of a house in Germany	8 to 10
				Boiler room in the basement	
F	15-20	Texas-Suburban	one parent at home	Penguin Park	6 to 12
M	15-20	Nebraska-Rural	one parent at home	Grandparents' farm	6 to 12
M	20-25	Several (mixed)	one parent at home	TV room in his grandparents' home	6 to 12
M	25*	Michigan-Urban	one parent at home	Space on the floor between his bed and the wall	3 to 12
F	20-25	Missouri-Urban	no parent at home	Neighborhood--sidewalks	7 to 12
F	25*	Israel-Suburban	no parent at home	A home she and her friend made	7,8,9
F	20-25	India-Urban	no parent at home	Grandmother's house (rural)	6 to 12
F	15-20	Kansas-Rural	one parent at home	Grandparents' home	6 to 12
M	20-25	Costa Rica- Urban	one parent at home	A house he made out of a couch	6 to 12
M	20-25	Kansas-Suburban	one parent at home	The garage in a friend's backyard	8 to 12
				The tree in the church lot	
F	25*	Israel-Suburban	one parent at home	A carousel in a deserted park	6 to 12
M	25*	Israel- Suburban	one parent at home	A Park	uptil 6
				A Playground	7 to 12
M	20-25	India-Suburban	one parent at home	The house he grew up in	6 to 12
M	20-25	Kansas-Suburban	one parent at home	The sand box in his backyard	5 to 14
F	25*	Canada-Suburban	one parent at home	The wooden playhouse in a park	6 to 12
F	20-25	Kansas-Suburban	one parent at home	A wooden swing in a field	6 to 12
M	20-25	Wisconsin-Rural	one parent at home	A treehouse	uptil 9
				A clearing in the woods	9 to 14
M	25*	England-Suburban	one parent at home	Bunker's Hill- a hill used to sled	6 to 12
F	15-20	Missouri-Rural	one parent at home	The stockyards where her grandfather worked	6 to 12
F	25*	California-Urban	one parent at home	The cardboard box that she and a friend made a spaceship in	8 to 13.

chosen were adults with suburban childhood backgrounds (fifteen interviews in all). The primary focus of the study being on *the experience of place*, it was anticipated that the group of participants chosen for the study would reveal commonalities of the experience of place.

As a contrast to these fifteen suburban childhood experiences of place, the respondents studied also included four adults from urban backgrounds and four adults from rural backgrounds. The eight non-suburban childhood backgrounds were chosen in the hope that responses might reveal certain variations due to environmental background--rural or urban versus suburban. These variations might then be translated into implications for the design of better suburban environments, learning from the experiences of the respondents with urban and rural backgrounds. The aspect that will be explored in this study is whether there were significant qualitative variations to the experience of each place, because of, or in spite of, these differences in background.

The table also indicates whether the respondent, as a child, had one parent at home, both away at work, or both at home. This information was thought to be useful in determining the kinds of places that would have been accessible to a child because of the presence of an adult. The table then lists each of the twenty-five place descriptions to hint at the range of places studied--from some totally natural "found" environments, to some completely "made"; from some environments that were designed to be stimulating and involving to some that were mere figments of the child's imagination but involving, all the same; some places being at home, and others being "different" from home; some places being outside and others within the "inside" of a place. These place experiences will be elaborated on in greater detail in the interpretive chapter that follows.

As the last column of the table indicates, almost all the places described were remembered to be experienced between the ages of six to twelve, emphasizing the relevance of the physical environment and of the experience of place at this age. As the table indicates, however, some respondents included the few years prior to middle childhood in the remembered experience, and three other instances specified different experiences from an earlier stage of middle childhood (until around nine years) and a later stage (ten to twelve years). Overall, however, most descriptions remembered the place as experienced in the age of middle childhood. As one began the study, it was expected that place would presumably be experienced in the same way, qualitatively, throughout the age of middle childhood. As the study proceeded, however, a minor variation in the experience began to surface.

Having selected the respondents for the study, the next step was to develop the framework of the interview itself, in that would help gather the information on which this thesis would be based.

2. The Developing of the Interviews

My specific method to elicit place descriptions was to conduct in-depth interviews with the twenty-five respondents about memories of the special places of their childhood. The basic interview questions were framed keeping in mind the theoretical background that the literature on place provided. As the literature review in Chapter 2 indicates, the experience of place is a much discussed phenomenon (Relph, 1976; Tuan, 1974, 1977; Seamon, 1979, 1996; Heidegger, 1959; Casey, 1987; Million, 1990). As also explained, the work on children's environments, although limited in quantity, has been strong in quality and has provided a foundation for this study (Moore, 1986; Hart, 1979; Cobb, 1977; Chawla, 1992; Cooper-Marcus, 1992).

However, to rely on one developed theoretical perspective would have again negated much of this phenomenological study, since the aim is to remain open to the phenomenon and to see it for what it is. In addition, what could have happened if I had begun with some a priori theory is that the interpretations of the study might have been a mirror of the theory already established, thereby misinterpreting some of the key themes and concealing others. Therefore, rather than developing a detailed and complete theoretical perspective before I began my interviews, I chose to proceed with the basic guidelines that I established at the start--namely the theories of Norberg-Schulz (1971, 1980), Relph (1986) and Tuan (1971) about what constitutes a "place" in the midst of physical space--of why certain spaces are endowed with meaning to become significant "places" in the world of our existence.

With the guidelines of the content of the interview established, the interview questions were developed. These questions were all open-ended. They were organized by the theoretical framework that supported this study. Each interview was tape recorded with the consent of the participant and later transcribed. An important step in this process was to ensure that the respondents could be contacted at a later date, if information needed to be verified. The interviews followed the same basic pattern for all the participants, though specific questions were included or ignored, according to the specifics of each individual interview. For instance, when one respondent spoke of his special place as being a clearing in the woods, a question that followed probed to define the "boundaries" of this space experienced as a "place." This question, however, would not follow the description of a special place that was a cardboard box closed to the outside world and just big enough for the respondent and a friend.

Table 3.2 presents the central questions of a typical interview. The italicized emphasis on certain phrases are present to draw the attention of the reader to the issue that

Table 3.2 : The Interview: Central Questions

My name is Sarita Appachu. I am a graduate student in Architecture. I am currently working on my Master's Thesis--concerned with the issue of how children experience place. I am attempting to understand what it is about a place that gives it meaning to a child. In this interview I would like to talk to you about a special place, or places of your childhood--those favorite places that had personal meaning for you, as a child.

Your participation in this interview is highly appreciated and is entirely voluntary. You may stop me at any point or refuse to answer any question that you choose not to. If I have your permission to do so, I will be recording this interview and parts of it may be quoted in my thesis, but without the use of your name.

- ◆ *At this point, I'd like you to think back to your childhood- any stage of it- and remember a 'special place'- a place that was very meaningful to you. As you think of this place, would you please draw me a rough map of the neighborhood you lived in at the time, and talk to me about it. The map does not have to be precise- just draw it as you would for a stranger who might want to visit this place etc. As you draw, would you please describe and talk about what you're drawing*

[Take notes on anything significant drawn or spoken about to go back to later. Also note any other special places remembered along the way, to talk about later.]

- ◆ *Now, where on your map was this favorite place that you mentioned? Would you please tell me about it?*

[Possible prompt questions used at this time:

How often did you go there?

With whom did you go there?]

- ◆ *Would you list out a series of words that describe this place?... anything that tells you what this place is about or of what it meant to you then.....*

[Follow up on some of the leads that this list indicates]

Questions relating to Activity, Setting and Meaning

- ◆ *What were the kinds of things that you did there?*

Did you go there alone, too? Were the things you did different then? (if applicable).

- ◆ *What was this place like, physically?*

Were there any physical qualities that made it special?

Was there a particular time of day or season that was a good time for you to go to this place? If so, why?

[Probe to see the significance of the physical setting]

- ◆ *Would you list out a series of words that describe this place?...anything that tells you what this place is about or of what it meant to you then.*

[Follow up on some of the leads that this list indicates]

Talking about feelings now, are there any words you can list that describe how this place made you feel or how you feel about this place?

[Make notes and follow up some leads that this list might indicate.]

How did you, as an individual, relate to this place? Did you go there alone, often?

Was it 'your' place, exclusively?

Is this place still significant to you?

Do you still go back? Or would you, if you could?

- ◆ *I'd like you to imagine now that if I was a stranger to this neighborhood, would this place still be an "obvious" special place to me? Why /Why not?*

Questions relating to Boundary, Center and Direction

- ◆ *In terms of physical features (for ex. a road, a stream, a hill etc), where did this place begin for you? What was its boundary, if you remember it as having one? Was it an obvious one, for a stranger, for instance?*
Do you think it had any sense of center and boundary, at all?
Were there certain spaces in this place, that were more important than others? If so, why? What did you use these spaces for?
- ◆ *How did you get to this place? (if not already mentioned).*
Were there any other ways you could use to get to this place? Was there one that was preferred ? If so, why?

Questions relating to Prospect and Refuge (if applicable)

- ◆ *Was there any sort of snugness or lookout from this place?*
What could you see from here? Or what did this look out onto?
Could you be seen from outside? How did this make you feel?
If you went there alone, was the feeling different?
- ◆ *Was the experience the same every time you went there? Was everything as expected?*
Was there a sense of unexpectedness or an element of surprise here? How did this make you feel?
- ◆ *How is this place now? How would you feel if it had changed?*

[probably walk through a situation that would emphasize how the place could change.]

- ◆ *If you imagine it and if someday you have children, would you take them back to this place if you could? Would you like them to have a place like this, too? Why?*

Thank you very much for your participation in this interview. If you have any questions, at any time, or if you would like to withdraw your participation in this study, please feel free to contact me at the address you have been given. Thanks, again.

was being explored by the questions following. The text in parentheses was used to trigger questions that extended each individual interview in directions specific to each place experience.

Drawing on Table 3.2, the basic framework of the interview is now discussed to emphasize the broad outlines that were focussed on, simultaneously attempting to remain open to the phenomenon as it revealed itself. In an attempt to get as natural and spontaneous a response as was possible with memories of place, the respondents were not informed of the content of the interview before it took place. They were only requested to volunteer to participate in a study that involved the experience of childhood places.

As Table 3.2 indicates, the first question allowed the respondent to simply remember his or her special childhood place and talk about it. This question, that dealt with the return to childhood memory and to talk about a place as remembered, was often difficult for respondents to answer because it seems that stepping back into childhood, instantaneously, is a demanding task. Once remembered, however, the responses to this question often led to more informative conversations about the place than any other question did. In several instances the place description at this stage led to the discussion of issues that were scheduled to be explored at a later point of the interview. A few responses, for instance, emphasized the physical extents and limits of the space, thereby leading to the follow-up of the questions concerning the boundary, center and direction of the place.

In addition to the descriptions, the respondents were asked to draw a map of the neighborhood they lived in at the time they experienced this place, also discussing other special places that might have existed within that world. The maps did not have to be precise--just a basic cognitive map of the place. The maps not only served to reveal certain other spaces that were important to this place yet otherwise forgotten, but also served to

determine what, in terms of physical space, was considered a special place. In some cases, maps revealed the scale of the place, in others the quality of "bounded" space, and in others, the "range" of space that constituted a special place. These aspects will be discussed in more detail in the following interpretive chapter of the thesis.

As the next group of questions indicate in Table 3.2, the step that followed the introduction to the place was to seek out the essence of the place--to help the respondent describe why it was such a significant place. The questions evoked this discussion involved with asking the respondent to list out the words that came to mind in remembering what this place was about. These words could be what the place was about physically, what it meant for the person as a child, or what it meant to remember that place. The responses to this question were a good indication of why the place had been significant to the person as a child, or what its significance was now, in remembering the place, in adulthood. A list of words summarized, both for the respondent and for the researcher, the essence of the place, in a concentrated way. In addition, allowing the respondent to list out the words that described the place often revealed aspects of the place that did not surface in the introduction to the place, but that offered leads that could be noted down and that the researcher could follow up, later, as the conversation proceeded.

As Table 3.2 indicates, the next set of questions were more specific in addressing the qualities that a place was remembered for or identified by. These questions attempted to elicit the meaning of place in these descriptions, based on Relph's theory of the three basic components of identity with place--activity, setting and meaning. How did this theory fit the childhood experience with place? What aspects, if they did, were more important than others, and what did that mean? The questions asked in this regard prompted the respondent to talk about the things done in each place and of what the place was like, physically. The

responses to this question gave the researcher a clearer picture of what the most significant aspect of the place was. This group of questions also probed to see if the place was experienced differently alone versus with others. These questions sought to establish how the place had held meaning for respondent as a child. The questions that ensued also asked if the place was still meaningful to the respondent, either in reality or in one's memory. The responses to this question gave the study the dimension of exploring the significance of the special places of childhood, in that they still held meaning for an adult who remembered them.

As the table indicates, the issue explored next was how a space was experienced physically in terms of being a bounded entity, and in terms of having a center, and a direction to it, based on Norberg-Schulz's theory of what comprised a place (1971). The questions asked in this regard were relatively straight forward and generally easy for the respondent to answer in remembering their special place. The responses to this question pointed to the relevance of the limits of the space and to the direction that leads to the space. Interestingly, the questions that prompted the respondent to remember if the place was experienced with one or more "centers" of more intense meaning than the rest of the place, often led to surprising responses that added a new dimension to the interview. In several cases, the place described would emphasize a certain aspect of the place, leading the interviewer to believe that the "center" of the place would be the aspect most spoken about. But often enough, the "centers" were places that were remembered only in thinking of the place as a whole, having been forgotten in the earlier involvement with the details of the experience. The "center" often provided important leads to questions that followed, in most cases talking about the most significant layer of meaning of that place.

As the table indicates, Appleton's (1971, 1990) theory of prospect and refuge was

the third issue that was explored in the interviews, (wherever applicable)--to see if it did indeed reveal the significance of the concept in environments that children claim as special to them. Did children, in fact, have stronger instinctive inclinations, than adults to choose spaces for themselves, that supported the basic human needs of a physical space, as Appleton defined them?

As Table 3.2 indicates, the last few questions examined why the respondent, as an adult, thought the place had been significant to him or her, as a child. Although this question did make the respondent think about the place, and in many cases, even begin to analyze the place, the responses emphasized the qualitative aspects that the place was remembered for. It was important to remember, that the study was based on descriptions of "remembered places" and not places as they were actually experienced. The last few questions let the respondent realize this fact. The responses often underlined the meaning that the place still held for the respondent, as an adult, and of the attachment that the place held in his or her memory.

Each interview proceeded in its own rhythm and time and called for responses from the researcher that were often unplanned. The interviews developed as the study progressed, learning from each of the previous interviews. The next step comprised of gathering all this information together to analyze and interpret it in terms of the meaning of place that it illuminated.

3. The Interpretations of the Descriptions

The next stage of the study was to review the interviews, get back to the participants if there was anything to be clarified, and then to interpret the responses of each of these participants. This interpretation was done in two ways--first by reading and re-reading each

individual interview until the researcher was as thoroughly familiar with them as was possible and, second, by ordering the responses by theme and attaching them to 3" x 7" index cards. In this way, the responses to similar questions could be grouped together according to common themes and variations in theme could be noted. For instance, in response to the question "Was there a sense of lookout or snugness in this place?", one response was "No, I don't think I noticed the lookout although, looking back now, I wonder why--it was at such a height and did have a potential for lookout--but I guess we just never noticed it." In contrast, another response to the same question was "We were right at the top on this tree and we could see the whole town it seems like. It was our hiding place--our secret place--and we thought no one could see us." The variations in this theme and the significance of the issue of "prospect and refuge" is evident when gathering the responses to the same question together. This thematic commonality might not have been noticed otherwise.

The interviews were studied in two stages. The first stage was to analyze the place descriptions individually, in terms of the broad theoretical issues already established. This stage helped the researcher to arrive at, first, a set of themes that discussed how a place was materially experienced--of what was perceived of physical space to make it a "place". This pointed to the fundamental experience without which, in each of these descriptions, the place could not be. Secondly, on deeper analysis and interpretation, another set of themes emerged as to what a place is identified by. Being as complex an experience as that of place, it was not possible to accurately specify what aspect the place was most remembered for. But as the discussion of the interview questions indicate, this set of themes explored whether a place was remembered primarily for the activity that it supported or rather for what it was as a physical space or for reasons that were in addition to the above, or different from them.

Finally, the descriptions revealed a set of themes that pointed towards the qualitative

experiences of the place in the way an individual identified with the place, or in the way the place fostered personal meaning for the individual. These themes explored the aspects of place that could not be defined by the first two sets of themes, but were essentially what gave the place its deepest significance to the respondent, either as a child, or in remembering the place now, as an adult.

The second stage of interpreting the interviews consisted of a cross analysis of the content of each of the descriptions against those of other interviews to find common themes running throughout. This stage addressed the issue of the different ways in which these descriptions could be categorized. In addition, this stage also pointed to the variations in the experience of place, which will be discussed in more detail in the interpretive chapter that follows. This stage used the process of "intersubjective corroboration" to validate the themes that emerged in a study as subjective and qualitative as this one.

As explained earlier in this chapter, the focus of subjective knowledge, such as this thesis uses as a basis for interpretation, is generally said to be "private" individual experience (Seamon, 1979, p.21). This is opposed to objective knowledge which is usually associated with generalizations and hypotheses which can be tested and replicated "publicly" (Buttimer, 1976, as quoted by Seamon, 1979, p.21). In this thesis, knowledge is based on "intersubjective corroboration"--the support of one person's subjective account with another's (Seamon, 1979, p.21). Certain themes that surface in one description might be echoed in others. The aim in this study is to search for these commonalities in the experience and, in this way, draw out the meaning of place that they reveal.

Cross-analyzing each interview in relation to the others brought out the commonalities in the experience that were drawn out by the process of "intersubjective corroboration." For instance, one description of place emphasized how much "at home" the

person, as a child, had felt in this place although the place was not literally home. This response was analyzed in relation to another that described a "comfortable feeling in this place--even if it was not my own home". By cross-analyzing these interviews in relation to one another and to others that supported this theme, the researcher could both validate this theme of "at-homeness" that surfaced in all of them and, also, see patterns of similarity and variation in the qualities of "at-homeness" that each place indicated.

In this way, phenomenological studies attempt to establish generalizations about human experience. As Von Eckartsberg emphasizes, "People do act as self-observers, they do pay attention to themselves in terms of their activities and experience. Why can we not use their verbal self-reports as legitimate data of their activities and experience?" (Von Eckartsberg, 1971, p.72). A simple research tool found important at this stage was to describe, myself, each of these places as the respondents' descriptions first presented themselves to me. For instance, I wrote that one place description suggested "freedom, independence, breeze, friends" while another suggested "imagination, freedom, no responsibilities, solitude". Viewing a comprehensive list of such words that described each place helped illuminate the commonalities and the differences in the whole set of place descriptions, at a cursory glance.

For the reader who is interested in the descriptions of the place experiences, Appendix A provides a summary of each of these special places of childhood described, as they were first understood by me. At the end of each of the summaries of place is the list of words that I found to be useful in describing them. The themes emerged after several attempts at reading each of the place descriptions and after waiting to become familiar enough with the content of each interview to recognize patterns of meaning that I had not noticed before. This gradual process of waiting, analyzing, and pausing gave me the

opportunity to search for the themes as they emerged, and in many cases, they were very different what I had expected themes to be.

4. Arriving at Common Themes

The themes that emerged from the place descriptions can be called the fasteners, the foci or the threads around which phenomenological description is facilitated. Sifting through the individual descriptions of place experiences to find common threads of meaning that tied them together seemed, at first, a daunting task. On continued probing, however, certain aspects of the experience expressed in one description were seen echoed in others, in slightly varying ways, but the same expression, all the same. It had to be remembered, at this stage of interpretive process, that any attempt to force an existing theoretical framework onto the respondents' descriptions, would lead to inaccurate representations of the experience and the purpose of the study--to see the phenomenon of childhood place for what it is and to understand it better because of this new "seeing"--would be lost.

As analysis and interpretation progressed, the themes ordered themselves in a way that proceeded from the more easily perceived, tactile qualities of a place to its deeper, emotional feeling-oriented qualities. Through the exploration of these themes, supported by the related literature, a phenomenological dialogue was set up--"with more and more pauses until in the end there is silence" and the experience of place is better understood, "silenced by the stillness of reflection" (Van Manen, 1990, p. 99).

The method of study was perhaps as significant in contributing to what I have gained from this study as the content of the study itself. It developed as the study progressed, becoming more developed and refined as it went along --each interview adding a fresh dimension to the whole frame. New avenues opened out at every stage and while I did

venture along a few, some were seen as probable openings to be traversed again, in the future. Overall, my attempt to describe a method of study such as this seems exceedingly inadequate. It can be described in as much as a researcher can describe his or her own self--to be understood by another who is not that person. Phenomenological research is the explication of phenomena as they present themselves to the consciousness. The themes arrived at helped me explicate the meaning of my descriptions, and to elicit the meaning of place. At this final stage, conclusions were drawn as to what can be understood from the meaning of these descriptions, interpreted, as they were, in the light of this study.

Von Eckartsberg justifies the nature of phenomenological study by arguing, "Particular ways of looking at reality yield particular worlds of knowledge. The everyday world is accessible in everyday experience through observation, description and reflection. We are all to some extent engaged in this process of trying to make sense of our participation in our world. We either do this informally, by means of some delineated theoretical orientation.....or we try to follow a descriptive phenomenological way, amplified by reflection..." (Von Eckartsberg, 1971, p.328).

Phenomenology, as a method of study in this thesis, proved to be a useful way of entering into a world of experience different from my own--into a world of childhood experience that was remembered by others. Having now discussed the methodological process and its stages, the next chapter enters into the dialogue between the researcher and the descriptions of the remembered worlds of childhood experience with place. The chapter discusses the interpretations of the interviews and the themes that emerged from them.

Chapter 4

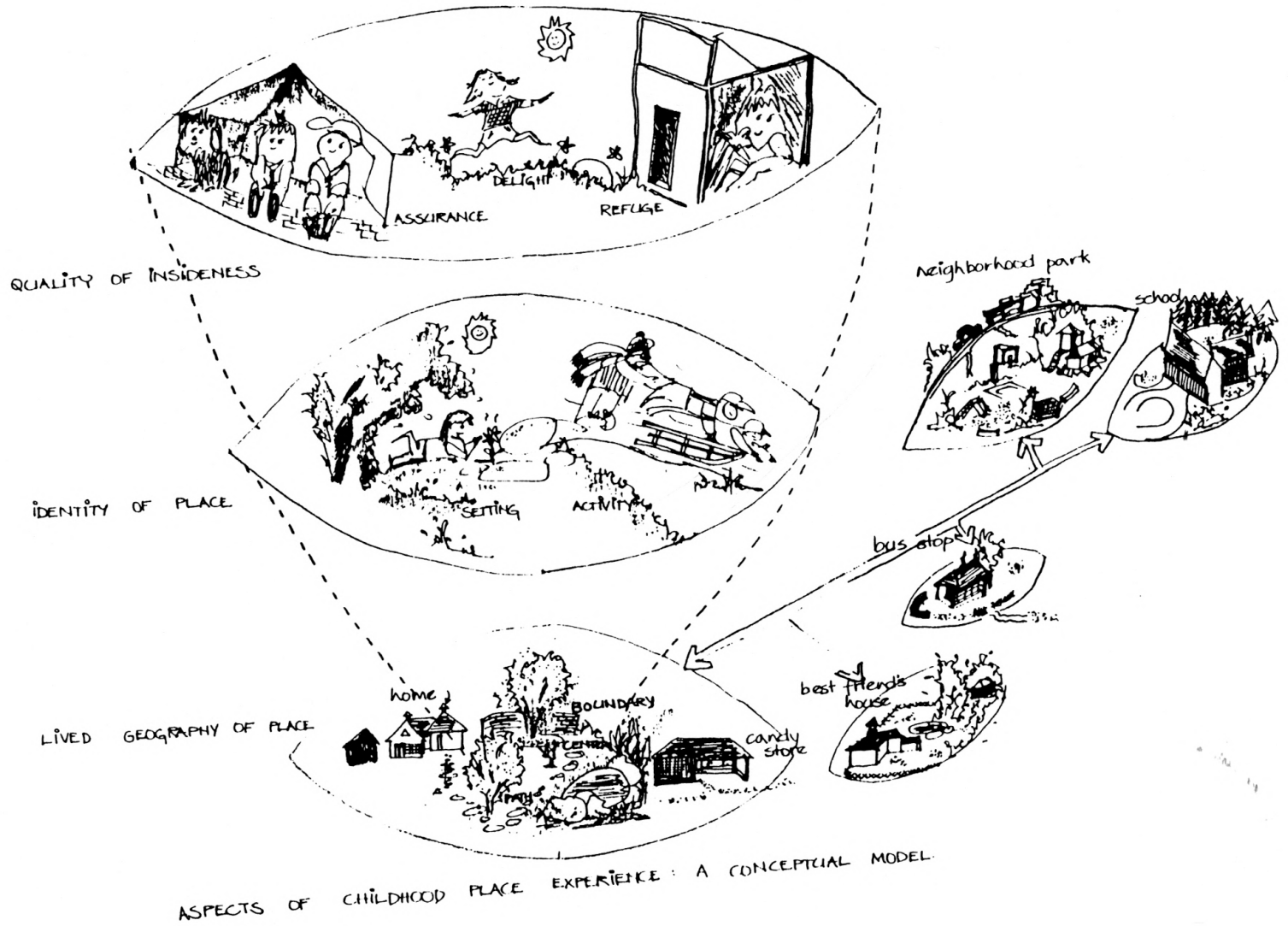
SPECIAL PLACES OF CHILDHOOD: A DISCUSSION OF THE THEMES

This chapter is a phenomenological interpretation of the place descriptions of the twenty-five respondents who participated in this study. As Table 3.1 indicates, the range of special places of childhood was as broad as the diversity of the people they represented. Some places were natural and some man-made; some places were small enough to fit just one child, while some were too big to even realize their physical limits; some places were home while others were not, and a few special places were physically inside buildings in contrast to others that were outside. Overall, every place was as different from every other as each individual who participated in this study. What could these twenty-five vastly different descriptions of place experiences reveal about the experience of childhood place, in general?

This chapter begins by asking that question. The first section below overviews the twenty-five place experiences and discusses broad similarities and differences. Following sections explore detailed patterns in the descriptions and highlight three major themes:

1. The lived geography of childhood place--the experience of boundary, center and direction in place;
2. The identity of place experience--setting, activity and meanings;
3. The existential qualities of "insideness" in the place experience-- attributes of at-homeness.

The themes and their levels of meaning are illustrated in a conceptual model of the aspects of childhood place experience, as follows.



The Twenty-five Places

Table 3.1 lists the twenty-five childhood places and indicates their diversity¹. One might expect that at least some respondents would have described places that are designed to be "special" in the environment--what "public symbols" Tuan refers to in other words, places that yield their meaning to the eye--they are obvious symbols that are statements of the society they represent and whose "specialness" is evident and known from the outside (1974, pp.236,7). Overall, as is evident from the table, these kinds of places are not in fact what children think of as special. Besides two responses (respondent 1 whose special place was "Old Warsaw", now a tourist spot and respondent 6 whose special place was "Penguin Park", an amusement park), every place can be classified into a contrasting category that Tuan refers to as "fields of care"--places that are known only after prolonged experience, having personal significance to the individual and not immediately recognizable as important by an outsider--for example, a grandparents' home (respondents 12, 13, 7 and 8).

Some places described were of the nature of anticipated special places of childhood--for example, tree houses (respondents 2, 15 and 22) and parks (respondents 17 and 20). Other places were quite extraordinary in character and less expected--for example, a carousel in a deserted playground en route to school (respondent 16) or a yellow bench that was in front of a child's house (respondent 11).

As the table indicates, the places illustrate a wide range of environmental scales. Some places were large enough so that the respondent was not aware of any physical

¹ Table 3.1, in Chapter 3, gives an overview of the places spoken of, with the background that supported them. For the reader who wishes to become more acquainted with the various kinds of places that formed the body of content for the interpretation that follows, a summary of each of the special places of childhood, as they presented themselves to the researcher, is provided in Appendix A. Below each summarized description of place is a list of words that the researcher found most appropriate in describing each of these descriptions, as the researcher understood them. These word listings pointed at the essence of the place, as it was remembered by the respondent.

boundaries, such as a grandparents' farm (respondents 7 and 13). Other places were almost unlimited in spatial limits, such as the neighborhood sidewalks (respondent 10). Yet again, other places described were smaller in scale, such as the garage in a friend's backyard (respondent 15), a "spaceship" made from a cardboard box (respondent 25), or a space between the bed and the wall (respondent 14).

Several places described were outside--for example, the clearing in the woods (respondent 22), "Bunker's Hill" (respondent 23) and the wooden swing in the field (respondent 21). Others had a feeling of being inside, although within the outdoor environment, such as depicted by the "home" in the trees (respondent 11) or the garage in a friend's backyard (respondent 15). Also present, however, were spaces that were completely inside, such as the TV room in a respondent's grandfather's house (respondent 8) or the spaces within a house in Germany (respondent 5), and even some spaces that were "inside" the interior spaces indoors, such as the spaceship in a box in the living room (respondent 25).

Correspondingly, some places were open and some were closed. Places such as the parks, the tree houses, the pool in the backyard (respondent 4) and the neighborhood sidewalks had an experience of openness in them. Other places like the home in the couch (respondent 14), the basement (respondent 2), and the alcove in the house in Germany (respondent 5) were closed spaces involving a feeling of enclosure.

Several places were natural spaces--places in the natural environment that often included trees and water. Within this natural world, however, children often made their own places. Trees were made into homes, woods were made the scene of thrilling adventure and dramatic stories were acted out in settings that supported imaginary activity, typical of this stage of child development (for example, respondents 19 and 24). As one can see from the table, however, natural spaces were not the only ones that beckoned the imagination of a

child. Meaningful places were created and experienced in environments as different as a large cardboard box, or a couch in the living room--places that to an outsider would not hint at the intensity of experience that these places supported.

As Table 3.1 and Appendix 3A suggest, almost every place was what the child made of it and was not experienced for what the place was originally intended. A setting, however, that dictated its experience of place more strongly than others was illustrated in response 18--the house the respondent grew up in and whose setting was what intrigued him and made the place special. In other words, this response was one in which his role in making this place was relatively passive. Also interesting is the fact that parks and playgrounds designed for children did not feature in this list of meaningful places, as much as one might anticipate. Even when they did, (respondents 16 and 17), they were experienced as what the respondent, as a child, made of them, and served as a backdrop for this whole intense world of experience.

Having hinted at the broad range of special place experiences described, the underlying themes in them are now discussed. The search was for the commonalities of the place experiences in an effort to understand better childhood place experience in general. The first theme discussed is these places' underlying "lived geographies."

THE LIVED GEOGRAPHY OF CHILDHOOD PLACE

--"I made this place so I found it special....."

--" I found this place first so it was primarily my own...though at times, I let my best friend share it with me.."

--"This was our place--it just belonged to our gang--it was our kingdom..."

Every place described by the respondents indicated a strong sense of the places being considered one's own. This quality was integral to every description of place and the theme that was most obviously manifest in these experiences of childhood place. The places described as special were strongly felt about, cared for, and protected as "owned" places always are.

But what makes us claim some spaces as our own? What gives space a structure so we recognize it as our special "place"? One might say that there exists a fundamental human tendency to appropriate a space as one's own, as one's territory. As Norberg-Schulz explains, "Territoriality provides the frame in which things are done" (Norberg-Schulz, 1971, p.20). The territorial instinct, by claiming certain spaces for certain functions, contributes to making these spaces, "places" where things are done. As this theme develops, we see that basic to this quality of territoriality is a sharp sense of the limits that mark the distances to be maintained. For its definition, therefore, it is apparent from the descriptions that to be experienced as a definite place--as an inside in contrast to the surrounding unknown --a place must have some sense of limit or boundary, which is also sometimes coupled with a sense of center.

Boundaries

In most childhood places, the boundary to the place is determined by the physical limits of the place. These limits are either visual or as a virtue of accessibility. "The farm was so big I couldn't really feel the boundary, but all these places were contained within the farm fence, and we did not go beyond that, so I guess that would be our boundary." said respondent 13, in describing her special place that was her grandparents' farm. The limits of the place were not really determined by visual edges as by the edges that were perceived by the respondent to be within what this place was contained. In contrast, respondent 12, whose special place was her grandmother's home, said, "The place was limited, in a sense by this compound wall [the wall that enclosed her grandmother's house and yard, in India]. Inside it had all these little places that flowed one into the other.....but it was all within this wall". Here the place was contained within its physical limits that were clearly apparent.

Descriptions like this indicate that the simplest way of perceiving a space as a whole, apparently, is as that which lies within its physically bound limits. Therefore, in the first instance cited above, it was the farm fence; and in the second, the wall around the grandmother's house, that defined each place. The place was contained within each of these boundaries.

Boundaries are also established in terms of accessibility. It seems significant that boundaries gain their importance at the age of middle childhood. This is the age when one can choose to find one's own space with a freedom of access that was unknown in infancy, and yet one needs to be able to feel comfortable with this freedom--the access lies within limits. In describing her special place which was the neighborhood she had lived in as a child, one student's response was "There was a four-lane highway here, and we couldn't cross that on our bikes,.....now across the road--there, was the museum and the zoo that we were

taken to by our parents--we didn't venture out there alone--but the rest of the neighborhood was all ours to roam around in"(respondent 10).

The range of experience in this description was determined as a virtue of access--defined by the bicycleable limits of the neighborhood. The "place" described was the whole neighborhood, but as the interview progressed, it became evident that the places that could be accessed by the respondent and her friends, easily and by choice, were the places in which they were most involved, especially the neighborhood sidewalks. This was where the place experience was more intense in contrast to the neighborhood places that the respondent was taken to by her parents. A *range of experience* is therefore developed. The range of experience, figuratively speaking, is akin to the spheres of intensity with which the entire place is experienced--some places more central to the experience, and therefore more intensely experienced, and other places fading away in concentric spheres of intensity and involvement from the more important centers.

At this age when access to places is not as limited as in infancy, there is still a strong need to be close to a familiar or safe place, yet have one's privacy. This aspect often determines one sphere of influence in the range in which a place is experienced. In describing her special place in the trees, participant 11 said, "The place was hidden and framed in by the car on one side and the trees and bushes on the other sides. It really was a 'made' place you know, it really had a boundary. But then I could see people from here, I could see my house from here, so I could have that eye-connection with my house and still be in isolation if I wanted to." Her range gave her access to a place that was far enough for her to choose privacy when she needed it, yet safely close enough to the presence of home. The place provided both the freedom of having a space of his or her own, but the knowledge that when one wants protection, it is reassuringly close at hand.

Figure 4.1 : Perceived Boundaries of Place

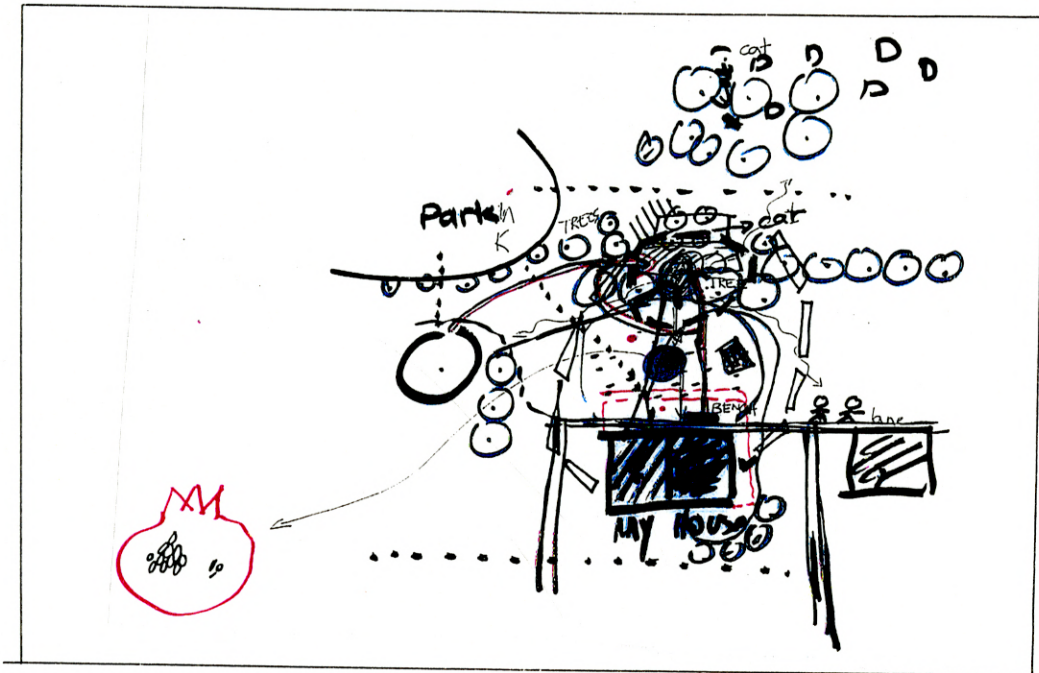
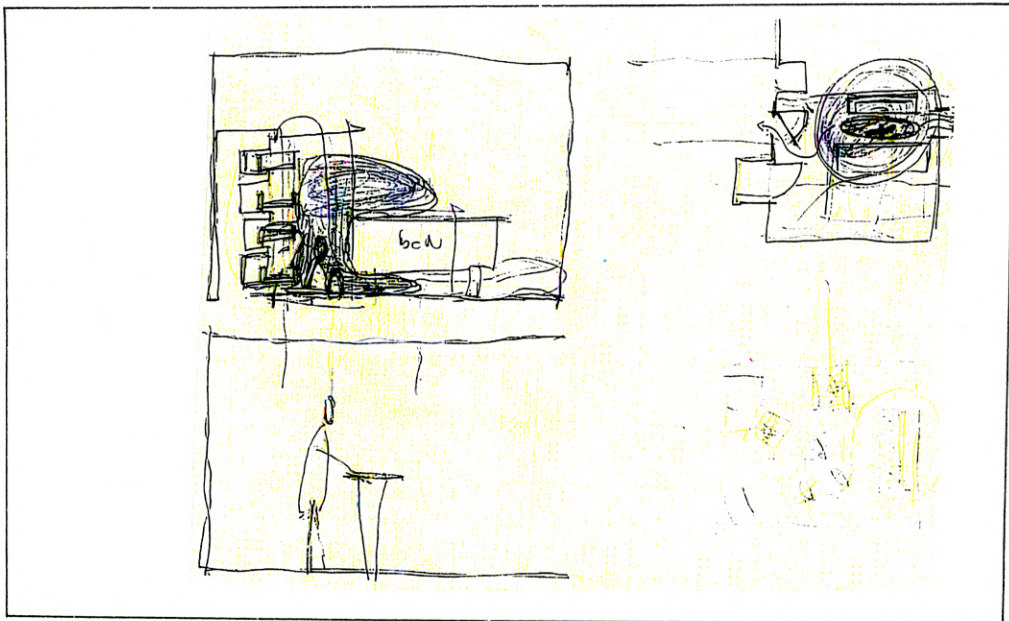


Figure 4.2 : Every Place as having a Center



Therefore, as Figure 4.1 illustrates, the range of experience in this place was most intense at the center, within the trees, but the experience extended, with a different degree of involvement, to the visual edges that were provided by the presence of her house.

Centers

The fringes of experience emphasize the significance of the actual boundary of the space or of its horizon, which, in most cases, is physically determined. In several instances, however, it was discovered that, as the boundary of a space developed into a definite entity, there were other limits that determined the range of experience in the place. There was the obvious physical or accessible limit of the place that contained it as a whole, but there were also less obvious boundaries that were not visible--that determined the center of the space where the largest sphere of significance began its "presencing" (Norberg-Schulz, 1971, p.18).

This center of experience, as was interpreted from the place descriptions, was found to be defined by a space that the child felt comfortably limited by--comfortable enough to recognize it as a whole--and comfortable enough to be in control of it. For example, for respondent 9, a theme that was echoed in several other responses surfaced--that the center of a place was determined by the scale of the physical space that the respondent, as a child, felt comfortable in controlling. As the map in Figure 4.2 indicates, the "place" did not have specific, obvious limits--it had a range of experience that included half the bed, the entire length of floor between bed and wall, and sometimes even the space under the bed. But the area that the respondent kept emphasizing in the interview (indicated by the darker portions in the drawing) was the central space where he knelt and from where he experienced his place. In this center, the respondent could be alone, and no one could come in unless they were invited by the respondent himself. In this description, where the place was experienced

in such a personal way, presumably the intensity of involvement in this central space would not have been the same if the space had been large enough for the presence of more people than the respondent could control.

Everywhere we go, we establish centers of significance--ordered space in the midst of the outside and unknown. Centers are points from where we take possession of the world. The analysis of the interviews points to places that are recognized as centers within a larger place. Some places had several centers, from where the intensity of the experience radiated out from in spheres of involvement with the place (for example, respondents 13 and 7). Other places had a single center, which was the focus of the experience of place.

Figures 4.3 - 4.6 illustrate this range of centers. Figure 4.3 is the map drawn by respondent 21 in describing her special place that was a wooden swing in a field. Her description of place emphasized this center, but as the map indicates, there were several other "centers" like the pond, the tree, and even the creek a distance beyond. Each of these centers was a focus in the entire world of experience that the respondent had in this place. Similarly, Figure 4.4 is the depiction of respondent 13's special place--her grandparents' farm. In the course of the interview, several centers of the place experience were noticed (indicated by the darker portions of the map), although, when first asked if the place had a center, what had first come to mind was the main house only

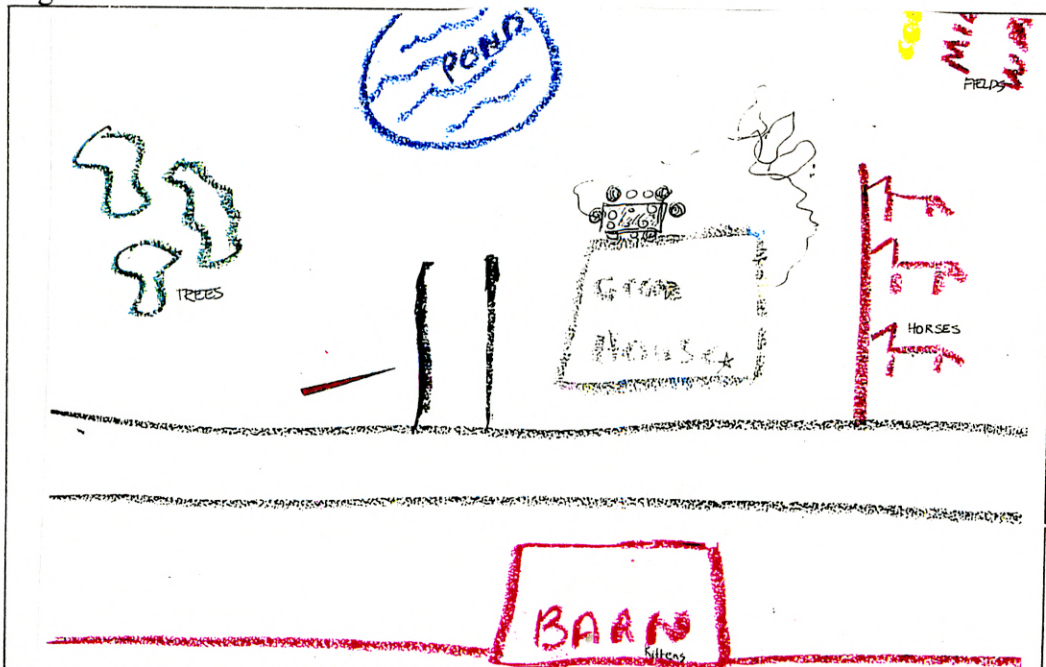
Figure 4.5 is the map drawn of respondent 8's special place--the TV room in his grandfather's home. As the drawing indicates, the "center" of this experience was the dining table space. The place was remembered as special, largely because of the associated feelings of "family closeness" and "warmth" that it generated, and in this center--the place where the

Several Significant Centers of Meaning in Place

Figure 4.3



Figure 4.4



One Significant Center in Place

Figure 4.5

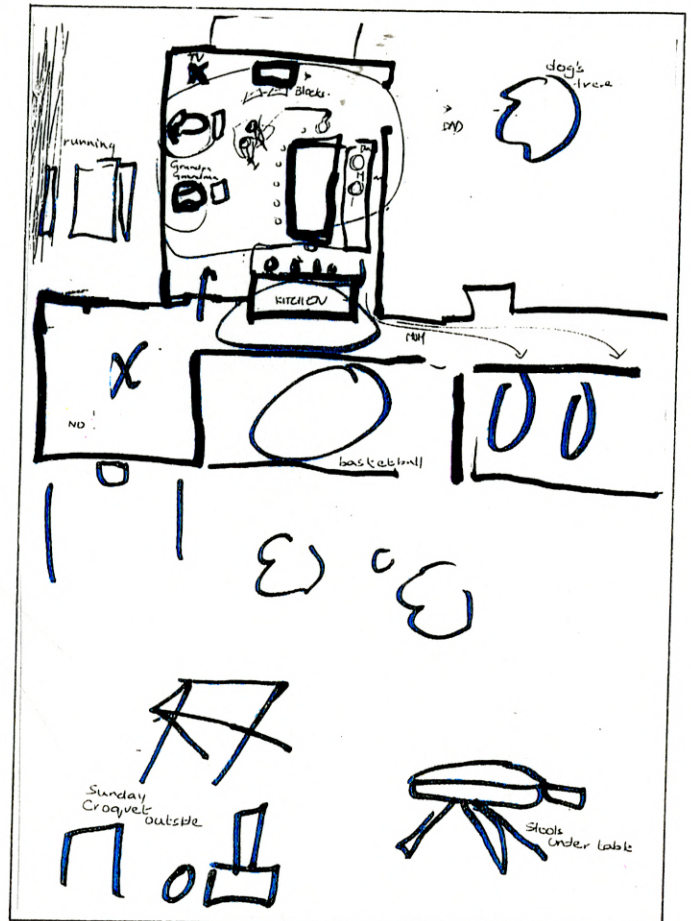
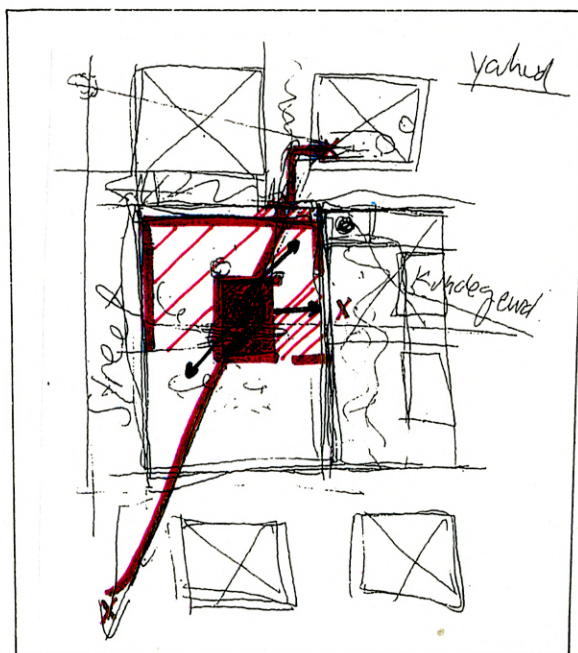


Figure 4.6



family's togetherness and sharing were emphasized--the experience of place was remembered to be the most intense. In a similar vein, respondent 16's special place--the carousel in the deserted playground had only one center. As indicated by Figure 4.6, the limits of the playground were recognized and the path to school took her across the entire length of the playground. However, the experience of this place revolved around the carousel, which was where she spent all her time when she chose to come to this place.

Direction and Path

Each place having been defined as a whole by a boundary and as having a focus of attention by the "center" or "centers" in the place, had to be approached by a path. In many instances, this path was a significant part of the experience of place, sometimes the most important. Said respondent 22 of his place, which was a clearing in the woods, "We had made trails all up to the clearing--with mounds of dirt in between to jump off of, and curves in the trail and places where we could hide along the way and pretend to be spies and snoop around on our bicycles." In this response, the activities that took place on the path and the whole process of approaching the clearing seemed more important than those of the place itself.

Besides being a significant part of the experience of the place, the path did, in several instances, prepare the person for the experience of the place, which was, then, biased by the path taken to it. "From this long stretch of highway, there was a bend in the road from where you could see the river, and from then on, we knew we were on our way to Old Warsaw"(respondent 1), said a respondent of the path that led to his special place--"Old Warsaw". The anticipation provided by the path to the place was an aspect that added a new dimension to the excitement in the experience of his special place. The path served as the

organizing axis for the elements of the place to be associated.

Being the first dimension to the experience of place, the path and the direction it leads one in, naturally influences the experience. In describing a circuitous route taken intentionally, to a "secret" place in a tree, one respondent said, "My house was here and the tree was here and instead of cutting right through the field, me and my friend would pretend like we weren't going there and then suddenly turn towards it--it was a secret place and no one was supposed to know we were going there, see?" (respondent 2). Although it was only for her friend's and her own benefit, the whole idea of moving along a "secret path" and to even pretend that someone might be watching them and shouldn't know where they were going, was part of the organizational axis the path provided for the experience of place itself.

The direction taken is determined by the purpose and image of the place that is carried with the person. Speaking of his special place, respondent 22 says that when he and his friends bicycled to the place, they usually played exciting "spy-games" and acted out "adventure" on the way to the clearing in the woods that was their "spot." But when he went there alone, he was calm and walked along the trails, picking up stuff for a project in school or some flowers for his mother, on the way.

Speaking of the direction that a path takes and leads to, the symbolic dimension of natural directions is indicated. If the horizontal represents control of the environment and the vertical represents a striving upward or a sense of transcending oneself (Tuan, 1974, pp.220, 1; Norberg-Schulz, 1971,27, Harries, 1988), the information gathered from the interviews reveals the image of a place that arises because of the direction it has. One respondent indicates the vertical direction in her experience of place in that her special place gave her a feeling of being the people that she dreamt of becoming, and of doing things beyond herself, ordinarily: "It was a very plain space for anyone else, but it made me feel

adventurous because I'd always be imagining myself in these big situations where I'd do something brave and big" (respondent 24). Another description speaks of the horizontal direction of a place--the sandbox, in that it allowed the respondent to be in control of the environment it provided him and his friends: "...if I wanted the place to be a fort one day, it was...and the next day it could be the city if we wanted that, or a car-track--we could make it be whatever we wanted it to." (respondent 19).

Several instances reveal that while the horizontal is required in an assertion of the child's self in the environment, there is a simultaneous need to go beyond oneself in the vertical. A respondent says of her place that, "the spaceship [made from a large cardboard box] was small enough to have control of it--that was good because in space one really had to be in charge and in control of everything--that's what astronauts did, you know?" So while it was important to be able to control the space, the space still supported the biggest dream of her childhood--to be one of the "first women on the moon"(respondent 25). Similarly, another description depicts a place as "it was our territory--no one else could play here unless we said they could. This also made me feel 'big'-it was a good feeling of being 'grown up'."

Once more, while it was important that the space was in one's control, it also had to let him feel something more than he felt ordinarily.

So as every place is recognized as a whole because of this basic structure of boundary and center(s), place is also given a direction and oriented in its context because of the path that leads to it--that leaves a point of departure and moves toward a goal. But what determines the way special places are identified? Why are special childhood places remembered as "the park with the neat hiding places", or as "the place where we had our sword fights", or as "grandma's and grandpa's"? What was it, beyond the primary geographic qualities, that made a space a significant place to a child?

IDENTITY OF THE PLACE EXPERIENCE

--"There was a park here, a kind of public garden, with lots of trees and bushes and neat places where you could hide."

--"This place was fun because it had the machinery that we used to make swords with--out of wood,and all the other dangerous stuff that we used to do here."

--"Grandpa's and Grandma's home was definitely my special place--where our family would get together every Sunday."

As discussed in Chapter 2, according to Relph (1976, p.47), the static physical setting, the activities and the meaning of a place constitute three basic elements of identity of a place. This does not mean, however, that a place can be understood as only a composite of these three elements but that they serve to reveal some of the significance behind the identity of a place. In this section, the interpretations of the interviews are discussed in the light of these three components of the identity of place--setting, activity and meaning. What role do they seem to play in the childhood experience of identity with place as seen in the twenty-five descriptions of place?

Setting

In every description of place, the setting was a significant remembered aspect. By "setting" is meant the physical background of the experience--the medium in which is played out the experience of place. The physical setting is what envelops the child in place and by which the experience is hedged in. Whether it was because it was determined by the activity in the place or not, the setting was described in great detail. Three aspects of this theme were

uncovered in the discovery of its nature. A first aspect was that most of the places described involved some aspect of the natural environment. A second aspect, distinct to this theme, was the sensory experience of the place. A third aspect of the physical setting was the experience of what a child thought of as beautiful.

As Table 3 indicates, in many cases, the experiential qualities of *natural settings* seemed to be the most memorable. "Every year in the winter, the field would fill up with clean, fresh snow and it was the biggest, most beautiful thing!" (respondent 23), was one description of a special place, not alone in its vivid description of nature, as part of the experience. In another description of a place, the respondent explained that, "Nature would be one word to describe my special place--all natural and peaceful and calm....and fun" (respondent 21). The natural environment seems to provide the tactile, sensory stimuli that children can breathe life into as they make "places" in their world.

Nature also seems to have a simultaneously calming and soothing effect on children--they marvel at its beauty and richness, they revel in the miracle of its changes and surprises and yet it always makes them feel at peace with themselves and the world. Speaking of a special place that was the sandbox in his yard, one respondent said, "We'd be playing here all day--enclosed by this wall behind us and the patio to the side. In front of this space, the only open space was a rose garden--a magical rose-garden--How much safer could you get? Enclosed on three sides and a rose garden on the fourth. The sun was warm, the sand felt good and the smell of the roses was always there" (respondent 19).

Depending on its *sensory quality*, the environment engages the child in exploration and in discovery of the aesthetic quality of the setting. The most striking theme that emerged in relation to the physical setting of the place was the way the place "felt." In describing his place on the floor, one respondent remembered that the floors were all of "wood--old and

good and noisy..."(respondent 9). Another place described was a "home" among the trees-- which had an almost magical quality to it, with the sunlight filtering in, making the place all "shadowy and secretive, and the ground all around it" (respondent 11). Places were thus remembered for their feel, and moods were attributed to this feel. The wooden floors were "Old and good and noisy," the home in the trees was "secretive," Old Warsaw was "happy."

Children perhaps experience the physical setting with an immediacy that becomes alien to the adult, once the character of the space is learned about. The sensory, tactile qualities of the place experience speak of a stimulation, grounded in the pure existential qualities of the place. One respondent compares his special place, which was the family room in his grandparents' house, to the room that was supposed to be the formal living room:

It was funny--that room had couches and a TV too, and it was supposedly the living room, but every time you went past it, you'd look in and say, "Oh! The room with the heads [several moose heads were mounted on its walls] and you'd walk right on by! That room was really moody. In this room, however, there were so many windows, everyone was always around, the wood was so much lighter and it was always happy and warm (respondent 8).

The setting was remembered in many cases for the awareness of its sheer *physical beauty*. "The house we lived in, in Germany--that was really neat--all that beautiful glass and wood--it was so translucent, so beautiful and so solid and old"(respondent 5). The beauty of the architecture, and the feelings of solidity of the wood and the delicate translucence of the etched glass made a favorite house in Germany memorable. In describing "Old Warsaw," a historical district of Poland, one respondent remembered, with awe, the

grandeur of the place--the great stone turrets, the fortified walls, the colors and sounds that gave the place its festive spirit (respondent 1). While describing a special place in the country, one respondent said, "I remember having a feeling that I couldn't get enough of how beautiful it was out there, when the sun was setting--just the beauty of it"(respondent 22).

Although some of these places were described for their physical beauty, most of them had a beauty that only the child saw. In describing his special place, which was the pool in his backyard, respondent 4 remembered the pool in the sunset, "when the colors were the warmest and the wind was on your face." The child seems to be "touched" by the beauty of a situation in place and the pleasure that it afforded. The aesthetic experience is the result and the reward of the interaction between child and environment, which when carried to the full, is a transformation of interaction into participation and communication--so typical of the experience of place in childhood.

Activities

A second aspect of the identity of place is the activity that the place supports. By "activity" is meant the experiences and situations in which the child is engaged in his or her special place. Respondents' descriptions indicate that activity is the most prominent reason for a place becoming significant in middle childhood--it is apparently the most powerful means of communicating with the place. Settings are more immediately remembered consciously, but, as memories are evoked of the place, also remembered are the things done in each place. In some cases places are remembered, most vividly, because of these activities. Hannah Arendt speaks of the significance of activity (1958) when she writes that, "For in every action, what is primarily intended by the doer, whether acting out of necessity or free will, is the disclosure of his own image."

Activity is, therefore, an obvious constituent of the identity of childhood place. This theme is manifest because of either the excitement of one activity that the place provided or because of the excitement that came with there being so much to do in that place. In the following explication, the theme of activity is discussed according to two aspects: first, the aspect of play as activity, and, secondly, the aspect of the imagination in activity.

The most common theme spoken about in respondents' descriptions of place related to play in the place--with friends, with a best friend, or by oneself. Although not mentioned as such, play seemed to be the most important activity of every special childhood place. When asked about the activity in a place, one response was: "What did we do there? Oh! Just walk around, climb over stuff, scare the pigs in the pigsty....just go about together in the yard doing stuff.....lots of things" (respondent 7). Play is what seemingly constitutes *existence* in the place. What one person most remembers about his place is that he "just kept building and building--something or the other, but looking back that's all we seemed to do" (respondent 22). Being so much a part of the fabric of the everyday world of the child, play was probably not even considered as a separate activity--everything done in place was more or less "play."

Places were remembered in several cases for the opportunities of play that they provided--for the fact that there was "so much to do" in the place (respondent 15). The most appealing aspect of the garage in a friend's backyard (respondent 15) was the fact that "there was so much of stuff to be done and so many things to do it with out here-- I don't ever remember being bored of doing the same thing--we were never doing the same thing!" The stimulation that an environment rich in potential for "things to do" was in several cases the reason the place was remembered as significant. In a few instances, however, the place was remembered for a single play activity that characterized the place. These single activities

apparently provided enough excitement in themselves that the need was not felt for anything more. One example is the spaceship of respondent 25 "where we spent almost all the time we had, for a few years, actually-- but we just relived the experience of preparing for our trip to the moon, every time...and then imagination took over" (respondent 25).

Another dimension to this theme of activity and play is the importance of imagination. A dimension that was less easily discernible than the actual physical play in a place, the imagination was, nonetheless, the activity with which a child busied herself. In response to the question, "Was the experience the same every time?" one reaction was, "sort of...well, we could always make up things here, find things to do and different games to play with our swords and stuff...but the church yard and the tree were always the same" (respondent 15). Another respondent said, "In a way the experience was the same because it was the same familiar place, I knew I'd meet all the same friends, I'd go into my hiding place.....but also there were always new games to play, new places to explore there, a new game to be made up....." (respondent 17).

The sweep of a child's imagination can paint magic onto what is seen, by an adult, as an "ordinary landscape." In the examples of the stockyards that respondent 24 described or that of the space between the bed and the wall that was respondent 9's special place, the place seemed plain and ordinary to an outsider, as the respondents remember it, but it was their special place--their most significant place of childhood. It was the powerful, fertile imagination of the child that transformed these environments into whatever took their fancy.

Imagination, Wordsworth says, is "that inward eye which is the bliss of solitude" and manifests itself in the vivid playscapes that a child, in her solitude, creates out of something that could otherwise be thought of as unstimulating and monotonous. How else would an eight-year-old girl spend many hours at a stretch inside a large, "empty" cardboard box with

a friend? (respondent 25). Whether engrossed in active play or in seemingly quiet but powerful imagination, a child is always immersed in the moment. Activity is conducted with an earnest seriousness that speaks of a complete, deep, personal involvement with, and participation in, place.

In several cases, activity appears to be the business that had to be done in a place. These activities followed a pattern and became akin to rituals. "We'd walk right into the stomach of the penguin and slide out of his nose; then we'd go to the red tractor and do our little thing there, and then come back to the blue kangaroo and go into him--there was a lot of stuff to be done every time we went there," said one respondent of her special place (respondent 4). The pattern was always the same and in the knowledge of its familiarity, she felt "at-home" in that place. The rituals that formed part of the experience of place were acted out in an ordered, well-known sequence that defined the experience of actually *being* in the place.

In some cases, the setting contributed to the activity--for instance, "Bunker's Hill" (respondent 23) was a hill in a field. Here, the physical setting, namely, the hill allowed the respondent and his friends to sled down its slope, which was primarily the reason why the place was remembered as special. Clearly, the setting is what determined the activity here. For other respondents the reverse is true--the activity creates the setting. For instance, one special place was the home that was built out of the cushions of a living room couch (respondent 14). Apparently, it was the activity of building the place everyday, that created the setting for the place. In most cases, either the setting, or activity, or occasionally, both contribute most strongly to the significance of the place.

In a few instances, however, the place becomes meaningful for its own sake--the

setting and activities of the place only adding to the experience. By "becoming meaningful" is meant that the place gained personal significance to the child. In describing her special place, one respondent spoke of her grandparents' home (respondent 13). This place was special because it seemed to her, like it brought the family close together every year. It also allowed the respondent to see how her father "grew up and was raised in this place", therefore giving her a perspective on her own family identity. Another place was special because it was the place where the respondent belonged but didn't live in anymore (respondent 1). This place gave him a chance to see where his roots lay, strengthening his identity with the place.

THE EXISTENTIAL QUALITIES OF "INSIDENESS" IN CHILDHOOD PLACE

--"This was the place where I felt I belonged."

--"This was my place and I felt very safe here."

--"We made this place special because it became our home."

In probing the twenty-five descriptions further, one realizes that an overriding theme in all these descriptions is the satisfying feeling of "being at home" in the place. It seemed apparent that, although the settings and activities of a place contributed to its being identified as special, there were deeper threads of meaning that had to be reached out for--to elicit the meaning of the experience of place in its totality.

From the interviews it became apparent that every place was not just identified but was strongly identified *with*. Every place was remembered with a mixture of affection and pride. For a place to become intensely meaningful to a person, it had to be taken by someone, it had to stand for someone or something, it had to be felt strongly about--it had

to be one's own. As discussed in Chapter 2, this experience presents itself in the condition that Relph defines as an "existential insideness" (Relph, 1976, p.55)-- a profound involvement with the place which is not even noticed, being so much a part of the daily fabric of one's life

Relph defines existential insideness as a condition of being in the place where one belongs. This place is experienced without deliberate and selfconscious reflection, yet is full of significance (ibid.). Every place that was described in the interviews revealed, in their relationship to the child who experienced them, an existential insideness. Tuan explains this involvement with place as a basic need in human relationships--in that they require material objects for sustenance and deepening. Therefore, we, as humans, establish "fields of care" or networks of interpersonal meaning in a physical setting (Tuan, 1974, p.241).

The most significant aspect of the place descriptions, in terms of existential insideness, was the prevailing sense of contentment that comes from knowing one is at home in a place. A glance at the places described in the interviews (table 3), indicates that special places of childhood are, however, not necessarily all at home. Out of the twenty-five special childhood places described, only five places were inside the "home" in the literal sense. Respondent 5 described the alcove in her house as her special place. Respondent 9 made a space for himself between his bed and the wall of his room, and that was his special place. The third place inside was the nook, that one person built for himself with the cushions of the couch in his living room (respondent 14). A fourth participant's special childhood place was what she considered "personal space" in the basement of her house (respondent 2). Finally, one of the respondents most significant space was the spaceship she and a friend had built from a cardboard box in their living room (respondent 25).

An analysis of the descriptions reveals that there is apparently more to the feeling

of being existentially inside a place than the place having to be "home" to the child. What was it, then, that made a child comfortable enough in a space to feel at home in it? There existed in these spaces a feeling of being completely at ease, a feeling of being content and comfortable with one's self. In all the experiences of place described, the place was *made home* for a child because of the qualities it supported.

Especially, three themes emerged as likely reasons for the significance of each of these places in supporting the experience of existential insideness. These themes will be elaborated on in detail in the following section of this chapter, in an effort to draw out the underlying meaning of childhood place experience. The three themes are as follows:

1. The assurance a child felt in each of these places,
2. The satisfaction or delight that each place gave a child, and
3. The deep sense of "insideness" or refuge that each of the places supported.

1. Assurance in Place

Special places of childhood envelop a person in their offer of assurance. One feels comfortable, at ease in them, cradled by their support. They form the "security blanket" of one's middle childhood (respondent 21), when the secure trappings of home are no longer binding and also no longer there.

An analysis of the interviews uncovered the fact that, although the majority of the places were not literally home, they were places that were *familiar*. Thirteen places were in what I call the child's *home range*--extending from a backyard, to a place on their farm or sometimes, even extending to a large-scale neighborhood. Four of the places were in what I would consider as home places, such as grandparents' houses or homes of friends or other significant people in the child's lifeworld. The most important aspect of this theme of

security in place, then, seems to be that of *comfort in the familiar*.

Familiar places are a stabilizing factor in the lifeworld of a child. A familiar place is typically an event that can be anticipated and can be looked forward to because of its predictability and the sense of control that it gives a child. The wooden playhouse that respondent 20 described was a place she and her best friend would visit every day and live out their daily ritual of "a trip to Pinto's [the ice cream store] and then lie on the roof of the house and look onto the other side." The routine was familiar and predictable. As she goes on to say, "I went to this place that I enjoyed and where I knew what I was going to do--and I went there everyday--and all day on the weekends, if I wanted to--that gave me a reassurance because it was so expected." (ibid).

The theme of reassuring predictability is also seen in respondent 12's experience of place in her grandmother's house--a place they would visit every holiday. The first thing they would do each time would be "to check and see if all the familiar faces--all the neighbors, all the same people were there, and all the same things were there." Another respondent discussed the same condition when she said of her special place that she always knew the same games would be played every holiday and the same people would be met and even the same kind of home-cooked food eaten (respondent 13). There was a kind of rhythm to these predictable routines of the everyday that were acted out in the individual's lifeworld--a kind of instinctive dance of *being*--of existing in a familiar place, of knowing what to do and doing it unconsciously.

A sense of routine and habit associated with places that were familiar, seem to have a calming influence on children. Habit is so much a part of one's existence and so much taken for granted that it becomes as invisible as the significant effect it has on one's self. The experience of place that respondent 16 provided in describing the carousel in the deserted

playground, spoke of the repeated process of going around on the carousel; respondent 3 spoke of the central activity in his place--which was the river behind his house--as just looking out at the water; respondent 9 had a time-consuming activity that involved little more than throwing a ball against a wall for hours on end. This sequential and recurrent repetition of actions and meanings created the reassuring sense of rhythm in place that provided a feeling of assurance.

Another aspect of assurance that surfaced in the descriptions was that certain places are significant because in them, the child is protected, safe and secure and is *aware* that she is. Respondent 9 says of his special place on the floor that "Right below my space was the basement, and that's where my mum would be--ironing our clothes. I was always conscious of her down there, and I knew she was always, always conscious of me--even if I was just sliding on the floor.....uncanny, I thought, but it was important." Although the place was one that he could be alone in, the consciousness of his mother downstairs seemed to be a comforting, important part of this experience of place.

Grandparents' homes are usually associated with a strong sense of safety, happiness and security--in being able to do what one wants to. In a striking description of his grandparents' home, respondent 8 says, "I'd be playing and I'd look up and say "Oh! there's Dad," and "Oh! Mum's going to the garden" and I always knew my Grandpa was behind me watching TV and my little sister would be playing in front here.... From this one space you could see and hear everyone and so know where everyone in the family was." Homes of loved ones are representative of places of safety, of care, of love, of protection. The emotional security that this gives a child is a significant aspect of the childhood experience in place.

Interestingly enough, physical presence does not always seem to be as important as

the idea of being protected. A young woman (respondent 24), for instance, remembered her special place--the stockyards that she and her grandfather would go to, together and where he'd always watch over her and make sure nothing went wrong. Later, when she visited the place, after his death, she still felt "he'd be watching over me and seeing that nothing would go wrong" and this feeling, presumably, gave her the assurance of being at-home in this place."

In middle childhood, when children are out in the world away from home and when they are vulnerable to the subtle attacks that society could make on their fragile selves, assurance in place manifests itself in a number of ways. The fact that respondent 10 liked best about her neighborhood was the fact that "all the houses were alike from the outside--no one could see how rich or how poor anyone was." There seems to be, also, a certain assurance in knowing that something is old and solid. In describing the swing that was her special place, a participant in this study speaks of the comfort that the old oak tree behind the swing gave her because it looked "old and sturdy" (respondent 21). This response is echoed in the description of the neighborhood that respondent 10 described as having the "old, solid buildings that were really used well and had been around." The setting seemed to signify, by its age, a close-knit, safe, older neighborhood. Most of the respondents interviewed, in remembering their special place, desired to provide their own children with the kind of security that an experience such as this gave them.

Another aspect of assurance in place lies in the action of appropriating a place as one's own and in the feeling of control that this appropriation gives the child. One respondent described her place in the trees as, "a place...a home that we made for ourselves and our stuff...a place like that can be very special" (respondent 11). This feeling of appropriation was echoed in respondent 14's response: "There was this big couch and I'd use

its pillows to make the walls and roof of my "home".....It was just a square space but for me it was so meaningful because I made it." The ability to create a place, to transform a bit of the world to be the way one wants it to be, to have a space one is in control of--this is a definition of one's identity in itself and provides the security that having an identity gives. In many descriptions of place, this was the first real home a child claimed as his/her own.

Author Edith Cobb explains this need to appropriate a space as one's own, by writing that (1977),

the pressure of the desire to maintain a controlling position over one's domain is a compound of the image of the body and the roles acted out by the self. Even in the simplest day to day activities, the experience of being by one's self, a "circular causal system" in one's own ecology with the capacity to add forms to or to change the very shape and nature of the environment is in itself a far more creative process, with a much more profound meaning for human beings than is generally conceded.

Apparently, children have this need to add novelty to, or to change the environment they live in--to be in control of their environment and not to be merely aware of it. Roger Hart, (1979) in his study of childhood place experiences, realized that "the experience of finding a place that was 'just for me' or 'that I built by myself' transmutes into a sense of personal uniqueness." From the place experiences described, it is apparent that these places serve well as sites of retreat--places to look at the world from and for experimenting with how to put things together. The satisfaction of being able to transform the environment successfully and the comfort in being able to make a place for one's self and in ordering the world about it assists in the development of personal order (Moore, 1986). The assurance that

comes with being in possession of a space and in control of it is an overriding theme in most of the childhood place experiences and has relation to the first-time situation of being in power over the environment.

Delight in Place

A distinct theme apparent in the twenty-five place descriptions is that of *delight* in every special childhood place. The remembrance of special places of childhood invariably brought a smile and a sense of nostalgia associated with happy memories. The theme of delight in place was manifest in several ways: there was the joy that accompanies the sheer abandon with which children typically experience place, there was the feeling of excitement that was associated with certain other places, and there was also the passive contentment that comes from just being by oneself in one's own place, not doing anything in particular.

The sheer *joie de vivre* with which a place can be experienced as a child appears, from the descriptions, to be reason for most of the delight in place that a child finds. Several places would not have been thought of as having the potential to become "special" by an adult or by a stranger to the place, but to a child it is the most significant locus in their world.

The place descriptions suggest that this is because places are experienced with a spontaneity and freshness that is typical of childhood--a quality which adults can only remember with nostalgia.

Nothing special needs to be done in place for it to become significant. As one respondent remembered, a line from a song by the rock group, "Pink Floyd" adequately described his feeling in place: "...kicking around on a piece of ground....in your hometown...ticking away the moments of a dull day." That was just what he remembered doing--kicking away the moments in the sun (respondent 18). The child experiences the

quality of what could be seen as an "ordinary" place by adults with a depth that only reveals her proximity to the earth; she experiences a place just for what it is and not because of any biases that are learned of the place which can, therefore, influence the experience. Another respondent recalling his special place, the pool in his yard, said, " Nothing really important happened there, but I was so happy every time I sat and looked out onto this place" (respondent 4). Although the pool might not have been special to an outsider, the place had profound personal meaning to the respondent, in the way that he was involved with it.

Places are also remembered for the excitement and happiness that is associated with them. As respondent 1 described his special place, one could sense the excitement the place must have held for him as a child. In describing the carnival atmosphere of his special place, "Old Warsaw", which had been a historic tourist attraction in Poland, he says, "There was so much to see, it was magic--and all that festive look, the sound of laughter and of children and of horses on the stone streets...I returned two years ago, and still the excitement welled up in me, like it used to all those years ago."

This feeling of exhilaration was echoed in several other descriptions. For instance, respondent 6 remembering "Penguin Park", said that the feeling of anticipated fun would bubble up inside her as soon as the symbol of the park--a twelve foot penguin by the side of the road--came into view, ten minutes before they reached the park itself (respondent 6). The most prominent aspect of these places was that they spelt out, for the child, the dynamic, carefree enjoyment of place that was anticipated in the experience.

Another less apparent aspect of the theme of delight in place was manifest in the passive contentment that characterized several special places. The most remembered activity in a number of cases was what seemed to the respondent as an adult as "just doing nothing except, maybe, thinking and dreaming" (respondent 14). Respondent 9 said of his place that

it was a space that he would go to in a particular frame of mind when he was not outside playing or doing anything active with other people. This space was, as he remembered, "where I had all the freedom and privacy I needed. It was no great place--just a space on the floor and I didn't really do anything exciting here--it was a passive space--but it certainly was my most significant place in my childhood." One can see that, although the place did not hold the obvious excitement that the earlier experiences of place discussed above did, it was nonetheless fulfilling in its own passive manner and gave the child a calm happiness in its experience.

The calming influence of just being in a space of one's own, passively, was reflected in the description of respondent 21, who--speaking of a wooden swing in a field--said that going to her special place generated a "sense of the peace and contentment." She explained she would go there to be alone when she was upset and "where just sitting there would seem to straighten things out and to dream." Although this may seem to an adult as a dawdling away of time, this aspect of passive contentment in place is apparently just as necessary and just as profound an experience of place as the other ways in which delight can be experienced in place. Gaston Bachelard, says of the home (1964, p 6): "if I were to be asked to name the chief benefit of the house, I should say the house shelters daydreaming--the house protects the dreamer, the house allows one to dream in peace." Is this why children seek "houses" of their own, that would allow them to dream, to *be*, in peace?

Refuge in Place

Although defining a significant portion of place meaning, the security and delight associated with childhood place do not draw out the meaning of place in its completeness.

A third theme that had a bearing on a feeling of at-homeness in place was *refuge*. In some sense, this theme is inclusive of the first two themes--security and delight in place--but it does stand on its own content, too. Special places of childhood are seen as places of refuge--refuge in the sense that a child knows he or she will be safe and secure there; refuge in the sense that a child knows that place supports a certain feeling of happiness and delight; and refuge in the sense that the place provides an asylum for the child's inner self--for the child's soul.

Knowing a place is your own, knowing that it is all yours to go to whenever you want and to be in all by yourself--can, apparently, give a child a sense of refuge and of protection that is sometimes greater than that at home. Refuge, in this sense, involves secret places, places where one could not be seen, places that were not accessible by anyone else. Respondent 14 says of his special place, the "home" made out of the couch cushions, "The more enclosed it was, the safer it felt...no one could come in unless invited by me....except for my parents and my brothers who could only peep in through this window--and only if I wanted them to." Similarly, respondent 3 had a place by the river behind his house where he found a "really neat hiding place, that no one could find me in, and that no one thought of looking for me in...and so it was the safest place I had." Secret hiding places are, therefore, a source of protection and assurance in themselves, as the above two descriptions illustrate.

The significance of a place of refuge is also evident in the fact that a child needs to keep returning to the place to be sheltered and strengthened by the protection it gives a child. Many special places described indicated that they were places that would always be visited at certain times--in some cases, almost as a ritual. One respondent talks about this aspect of needing to be in his special place at a certain time everyday: "As soon as I got back from school everyday, I would go to the couch and start building my house....When I was inside

my space, I would just think a lot about everything and I didn't do anything extraordinary there--but how ever many fun places I found after that, however many more exciting places I found after that, I always came back to this one." This response pointed not only to the aspect of return to the place but also to the fact that, however many other places may have come his way, this special place always had its claim on him and he kept returning to it (respondent 14).

Interestingly, the place descriptions reveal that a special place is usually a site where the everyday pleasures of life are given new dimensions. Things that are not possible, as yet, in the everyday world of reality are made possible in special, personal spaces. Figuratively speaking, respondent 19's description of place illustrates this fact. In his special place, the sandbox, the ordinary life of adults was acted out in miniature--little forts, empires, cities and homes were built everyday and stories of the real world acted out in the fantasy world of make believe.

A special place was also one where the undesirable aspects of everyday life were filtered out. For respondent 16, the carousel was the place she would go to for hours at a stretch. It was the only place where she could forget the responsibility of being the "older sister" of the house of five younger siblings, and where she could "finally be with herself". From a different perspective, respondent 12 echoes this feeling of a special place filtering out what she did not like about everyday life in her description of her Grandmother's house that she visited on vacation. This house, she remembered, "was a place that meant I did not have to follow the rigid structure of "school and homework" that I had to at home, but where we could just do our own thing, whenever we felt like" (respondent 12).

A special place is usually a place from where the world can be looked at, a place to retreat to when the outside world is not wanted, a place where dreams can be indulged in and reality either magnified or blocked out. It is a place where the inconspicuous and fragile self

of middle childhood is allowed to be alone with itself, so that it can *become* and *be*. Respondent 25 describes a profound experience of place that she had in the cardboard spaceship. The place, she remembered, supported her and her friends' ambitious daydreams of becoming the first women on the moon, and it nourished their indulgent world of make-believe by its separation from the outside world which might not have realized the importance of their world of fantasy. Ultimately, by providing their selves with such a deep experience of place, this cardboard box became a part of their developing identity itself. As the respondent described its significance, "I think this place was important to me and to the way everyone thought of me (or what I thought they did, then)--as being the girl who was going up to the Moon."

By its quietening influence, by its cradle of support, and by being a place where a child can dream, a special place of childhood offers a child refuge. From the interpretation of the interviews, this experience of refuge is seen as an important aspect of the development of the identity of the child as a new self, as independent of home--and as having a place of his or her own, in the world.

The connotation of the phrase "at-homeness" rings with both the familiar and the remote. The place experiences described illustrate the "everyday tangible" and yet, the "deeply archaic" character of the feeling of at-homeness (Buckley, 1971, p.198). The experience rings with a natural simplicity and yet is a veritable tangle of complexity. It is precisely because of this nearness to our existence that the theme of at-homeness exhibits a remoteness in its understanding (ibid).

I realize at this point, that the aim of this study is not so much to resolve the issues of at-homeness or the lack of it in today's environments, as it is to *understand* the experience and to see it as an opening to the deeply human dimension of the *being* of a child in place. Whether it was a field, a tree, a home or a whole made up world, special places of childhood

were seen to sustain a deep relationship with an individual, as a child. They nurtured the child by the enduring sense of at-homeness that they provided.

*"House, patch of meadow, Oh! Evening light,
Suddenly you acquire an almost human face
You are very near us, embracing and embraced"*²

²Gaston Bachelard, (1964), "The Poetics of Space."

Chapter 5

SPECIAL PLACES OF CHILDHOOD--VARIATIONS IN EXPERIENCE

The primary aim of this study has been to understand the experience of childhood places. This goal was begun in Chapter 4, by identifying the commonalities in the experiences described by the twenty-five respondents. It must also be realized, however, that every respondent is an individual with childhood circumstances different from other people's; therefore, one would expect that variations in the place experience would also surface. This chapter focuses on these variations which involve the following three key themes that follow the interpretation from Chapter 4:

1. variations in the lived geography of place (in relation to boundaries and centers in place);
2. variations in the identity of childhood place (in relation to setting and activity);
3. variations in the quality of existential insideness (in relation to refuge).

These variations in themes appeared to be related to three factors: (1) the environmental background of the respondent; (2) the gender of the respondent; and in a few instances, (3) the age of middle childhood for the respondent. Although the result of a small number of respondents, each variation is hinted at strongly. Therefore, whereas nothing conclusive can be generalized from these results, the variations point toward differences that might be examined more carefully in future research on childhood's special places.

Later tables provide the reader with an overview of these variations in experience of childhood place and indicate whether the variations were seen as a result of the environmental background of the respondent, the gender of the respondent or the age of the

respondent in middle childhood (Tables 5.1, 5.2 and 5.3). As the tables indicate, significant variations in the place experience surfaced only in the more superficial themes, such as the lived geography of place and in the ways in which a place was identified in terms of setting, activity and meaning. On the other hand, the lived experience of being existentially inside a place seemed to be essentially the same, regardless of environmental background, gender of the respondent, or age of middle childhood for the respondent.

LIVED GEOGRAPHY--VARIATIONS RELATED TO ENVIRONMENTAL BACKGROUND

As Table 3.1 indicates, three of the five descriptions of urban places spoke of one single space as a favorite childhood place. One respondent described the space on the floor between the bed and the wall (respondent 9), while a second respondent described a cardboard spaceship (respondent 25). A third respondent described the house made from couch cushions (respondent 14). The experiences were focussed, completely, on the inside of the enclosed space, the limits of which were small and well-defined, in each case, as Figure 5.1 indicates (the map drawn by respondent 14 to illustrate his experience). The act of making "places" out of these spaces, every time, immersed the child completely in them, making them oblivious to the rest of the world outside this space. There was, therefore, no real range of experience.

The fourth urban description did have a wider physical range than the above three descriptions. Respondent 10 described the sidewalks of the neighborhood, in which she had lived. Everything accessible on a bicycle fell within the boundary of this "place" experience. There was no single specific center in terms of where the experience was more intense or profound--the only center spoken of was the place where the kids met before they started out

Table 5.1: Lived Geography of Place: Variations

ASPECT OF LIVED GEOGRAPHY		Boundary	Center	Direction
VARIATIONS--ENV. BACKGROUND	Urban	minimal	single	strong
	Rural	considerable	many	strong
	Suburban	some of both	some of both	strong
VARIATIONS--GENDER	Boys	considerable	many	strong
	Girls	minimal	one/few	strong
VARIATIONS--AGE	6-9 years	some of both	some of both	strong
	9-12 years	some of both	some of both	strong

Figure 5.1: One Center in Place

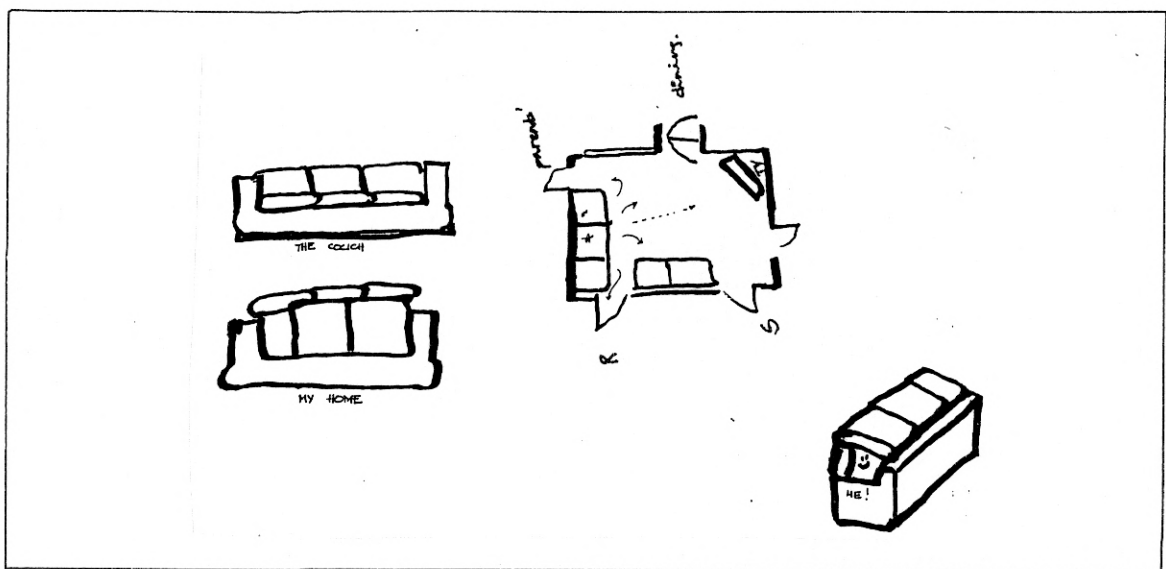
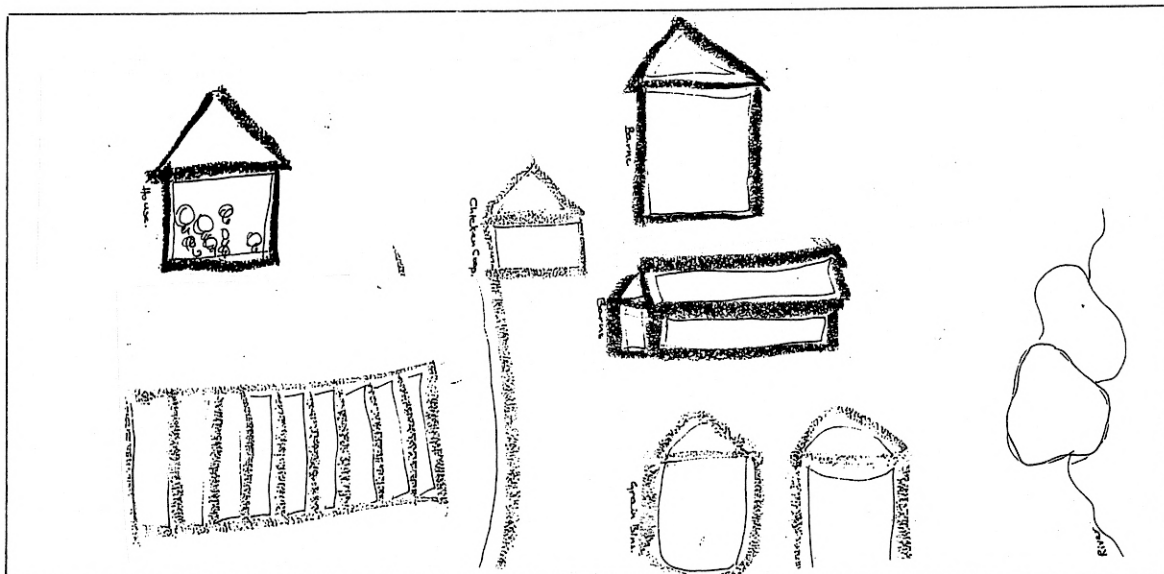


Figure 5.2: Several Centers of Meaning in Place



on this significant part of their daily existence. The activity made the place, again, and there was no "range" of experience in qualitative terms--the place was bound by the limits of access of this activity and everywhere within this place, the experience was the same. Respondent 12, who provided the fifth urban description, spoke of several centers and of a range of experience within a definite boundary from where the place began its "presencing" (respondent 12). This special place was a grandmother's house in a rural setting that was experienced only during the vacations--and in all probability was significant because it was "different" from what the child thought of as "regular."

Based on these limited modes of urban experiences, one notes that the most significant difference between them and descriptions involving rural backgrounds is that each place chosen as special, was contained within a much larger boundary than those of urban places. Obviously the access to large, open spaces is more possible in rural environments than it is in urban. Four of the places described had more than one center and a range of experience that went from the most intense, around these centers, to a less active, less immersed-in feeling of the place towards its outer limits. For instance, two of the five respondents described grandparents' farms as their special places (respondents 7 and 13). Being contained within such a large boundary, the place as a whole was, naturally, experienced with different degrees of involvement, that were most intense around the centers. As is revealed by the example in Figure 5.2--the map drawn by respondent 7--each of these experiences had several "places"--or centers of meaning--within this world of experience.

A third respondent with a rural background described, as his special place, a tree house in his backyard, which then led to the woods behind his home. As the interview proceeded, it was found that the experience of place was not limited to this single center but

to a large portion of the woods, with the paths leading through the woods being a significant part of the experience (respondent 22). The fourth respondent described as her special place, the stockyards where her grandfather worked (respondent 24). This place had more than one center--with the office being one, the place that she viewed the pastures from being another, and so forth. The fifth description of place in a rural childhood background was that of respondent 3, who described the river behind his house as his special place. This response depicted only one significant center of experience, although the range of experience in this place extended from the tree that he would watch the river from, to the river itself, including in its sphere of involvement, and the conscious presence of the house behind the place.

Four suburban environments of childhood seemed to support places that had more than one center and a wide range of experience, (for example, respondents 1, 6, 15 and 18.) Two of these individuals (respondents 1 and 6) spoke of places that were public sites or parks. A majority of the suburban environments, however, involved the places that had only one center and a relatively small range of experience--for example, respondent 16, whose special place was the carousel, or respondent 23, whose special place was "Bunker's Hill" and for whom the rest of the field, in which this hill was, served only as a backdrop to this experience. A majority of the places described were also within the home or backyard of the respondent. Therefore, in relation to the childhood places of the rural environments, these suburban experiences of place had a smaller range of experience, with less of an element of exploration, discovery and surprise that characterized the former, thus deepening their range of involvement with place.

LIVED GEOGRAPHY--VARIATIONS RELATED TO GENDER

As Table 3.1 indicates, the place experiences of boys were more general than that of

Figure 5.3: A Larger Range and More Centers in Place

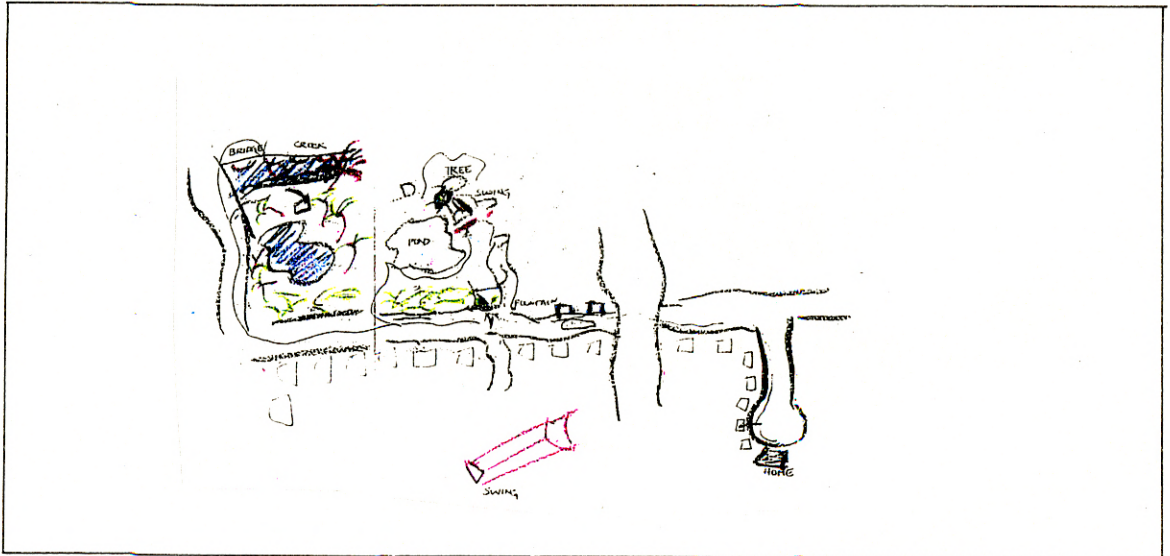
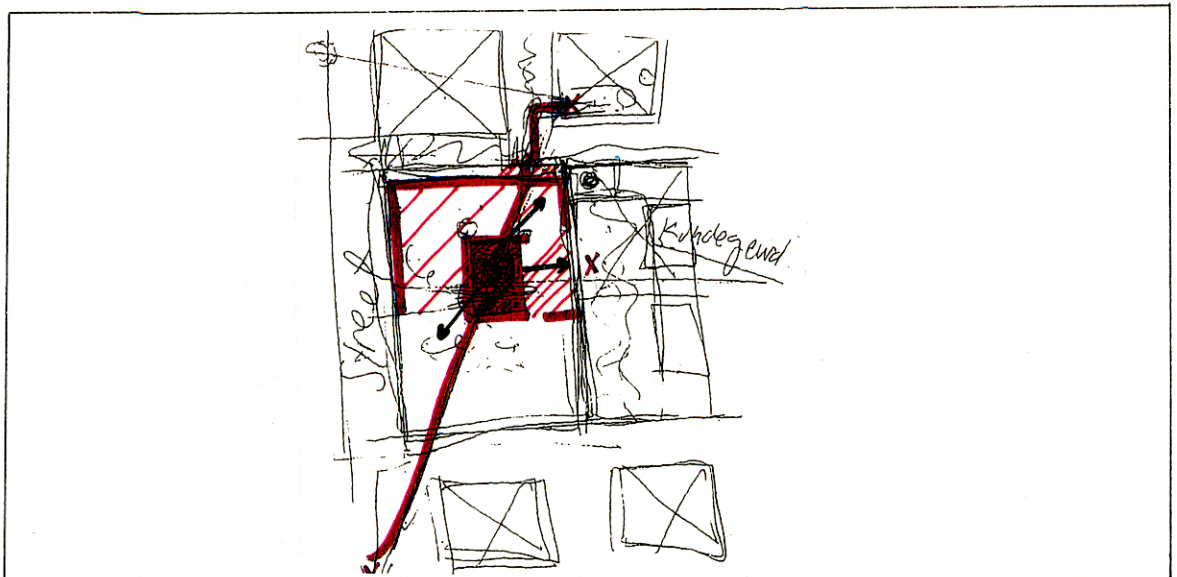


Figure 5.4: A Smaller Range and a Single Center



girls. Typically, (in 9 descriptions) these place accounts included a broader geographical range in terms of the horizons of the place experience and several centers. Figure 5.3 (the map drawn by respondent 15) illustrates this larger territory that boys claim as their special places. Respondent 15 describes the several places in his neighborhood--with two significant centers--the garage and the tree in the church lot. The places are also experienced more often with a group of friends or cousins.

In contrast, as the table indicates, girls tended to have a single, specific space as their special place, therefore having a single, intense center, and a tighter sphere of physical experience. Figure 5.4 is an example of the place described by a girl. Respondent 11 had a "home" in the trees--a place that was snugly enclosed by a secure boundary, provided by the trees on one side and the car on the other. Similarly, for instance, respondent 20 had a single center which was the roof of the wooden playhouse in a park. The place was experienced alone, or occasionally, with one or two other people.

On deeper probing, however, it became obvious that, although girls do not physically move around as wide a circle of place as boys do, they still have a wide range of place experience in that they are conscious of secondary boundaries of experience that are visual or imaginary. The descriptions of respondents 11 and 20 illustrate this fact. As respondent 11 says of her place, the home in the trees, "it had these trees on one side and the car [an old car that had been abandoned at the edge of this site] on the other..... we could see people on the path from here although they could not see us. I still an eye-connection with my house, so I knew I was not lost here." Although her "home" in the trees had a secure, small boundary, the path running alongside, on which the respondent and her friend could see people, and the visual connection with her house at the back, were all part of the experience of place. On the drawing, these boundaries are indicated by the broken lines forming circles

of experience, as the experience presented itself to the researcher. Similarly, respondent 20 and her friend had a wider sphere of experience in place than was obvious at first. Although "lying on the roof of the wooden playhouse and chewing gum" was all they seemed to do in their place, their visual boundary extended to the edges of the park, and this was an important part of the experience.

Three women, however, had childhood places with a larger range of experience, and these places were experienced with more than two other people. These were all places that were visited with cousins, every year, as a ritual (respondents 12 and 13, and respondent 6). Correspondingly, three men experienced their special childhood places alone or with just one other person (respondents 9, 14 and 3). The setting of these places, however, more than the gender seemed to prompt this variation in the experience (respondents 9, 14 and 3).

LIVED GEOGRAPHY--VARIATIONS RELATED TO AGE

The three place experiences that discuss a later stage of middle childhood all emphasize centers of meaning that go farther away from home than in the places that they experienced earlier. Figures 5.4, and 5.5 illustrate this shift in centers as characterized in the descriptions of respondent 17 and respondent 22.

This variation is anticipated, considering a child's horizons would naturally broaden to include a larger range of places in his or her world of existence, as he or she grows older. Respondent 22 says of his place, which was a clearing in the woods: "The tree house [which was his earlier special place] was at the edge of the woods, in our backyard. As we grew older, we started exploring the wood and making campfires and stuff, and spending more time here...migrating away from home." As the respondent grew up and became more familiar with her territory, her range of exploratory, accessible places became wider; and

more self-confident now, she shared her place with others.

Shift in the Special Places of Childhood as One Grows Older

Figure 5.5: Exposure to the Outside World

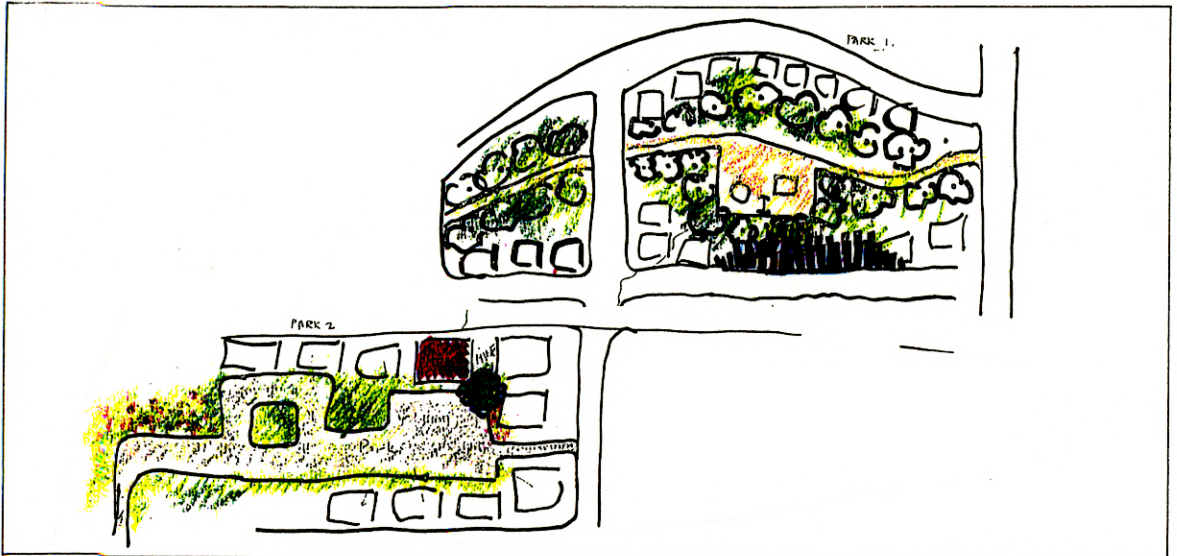
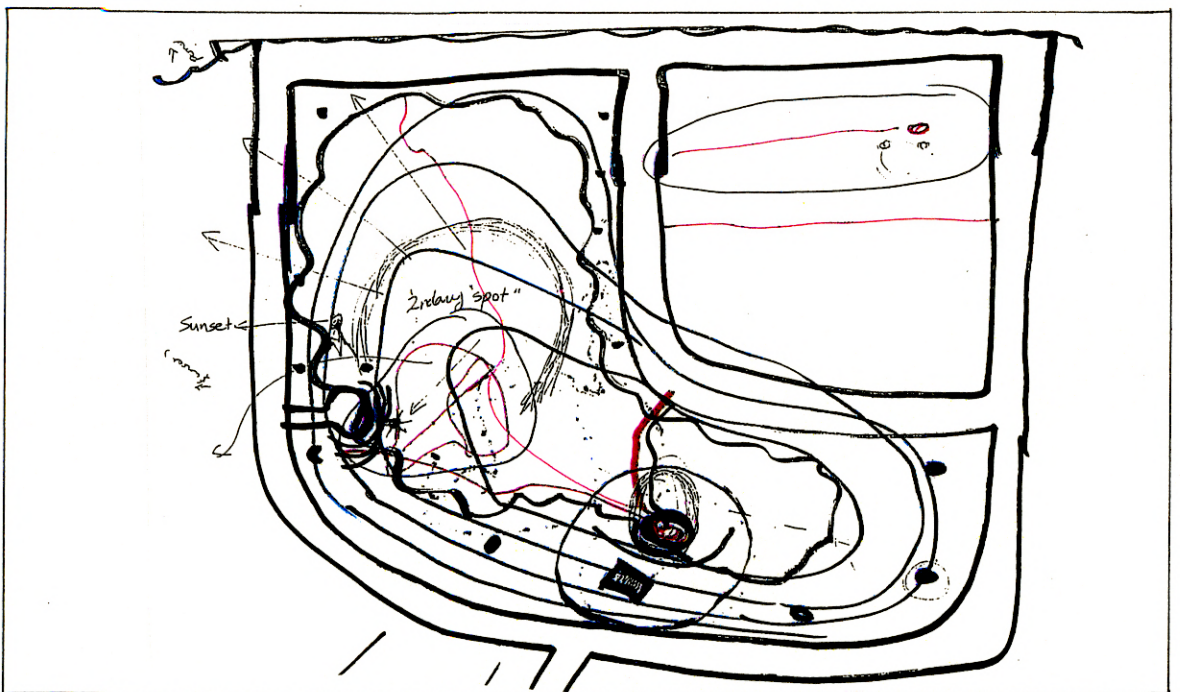


Figure 5.6: Further Away from Home



IDENTITY OF PLACE--VARIATIONS RELATED TO ENVIRONMENTAL BACKGROUND

As Table 5.2 indicates, in some cases the setting of the place seemed significant in that it determined the experience of place, while in other accounts, it was more the activity in place that gave the place meaning and by which the place was identified. In the urban childhood places described, the activity in place seemed to create its experience. This is depicted by the cardboard spaceship, the space between the bed and the wall, and the house made from cushions (respondents 25, 9 and 14, respectively.) For respondent 10, the neighborhood sidewalks--i.e., the setting--served as a backdrop to the activity, which, with its feeling of exuberance and excitement and independence, seemed to give the place meaning. For respondent 12, however, the setting of the place--her grandmother's house, which was very different from her own--was what determined the activity there. The "attic" where she and her cousins would pretend to be "spies, and act out adventure stories," the traditional, "ornate pillars" that were fascinating to be played around, and the "old-fashioned swing," all part of her grandmother's house, were the centers of activity in the place, giving the experience meaning.

In all the rural childhood places, however, it seemed that, although the activity was intense and exciting, the setting of the place seemed to determine the experience. The broad range of place contained varied experiential qualities. There was the dialectic provided by the inside and outside (grandparents' farms for respondents 13 and 7--both the house and the farm), the closed and open (the stockyards, the rooms inside and the yard outside), the experience of near and far (the tree house in the backyard and the woods farther behind), and the experience of the known (home) and the unknown (the newly discovered). Therefore, the places provided for a variation in the experience at different sub-parts or centers of this

Table 5.2: Identity of Place: Variations

SIGNIFICANT ASPECT		Setting	Activity
VARIATIONS--ENV. BACKGROUN	Urban	mixed	strong
	Rural	strong	strong
	Suburban	mixed	mixed
VARIATIONS--GENDER	Boys	mixed	strong
	Girls	strong	mixed
VARIATIONS--AGE	6-9 years	mixed	mixed
	9-12 years	mixed	mixed

world that their place was made of with a potential for exploration and the discovery of new places.

Nine place experiences in suburban environments seemed to support places where the activity seemed more significant (for example, the carousel, in respondent 16's case, or the sand-box, for respondent 19). In eight place descriptions, the setting seemed more important (for example, Penguin Park for respondent 6 and Old Warsaw for respondent 1).

From the numbers, it is obvious that, out of the fifteen descriptions, for a few of them, both the activity and setting seemed significant components of the identity of the place. In exploring this variation in experience, it was found that although activity determined the experience in many cases, the setting was important in that it served as a significant backdrop to the experience. Therefore, for both respondents 16 and 19, for instance, the experiences would have been completely different if the settings were not the carousel or the sandbox, respectively. In this way, these places differed from the urban experiences, where places were *created*, by the activity in place, itself.

Similarly, although the setting did define the experience in some places, the experience was different in nature from those of rural environments. In the latter, even if activity was an important part of the experience, the setting was important for its own sake--even if the respondent was not always doing things in the place, it still had its hold on the person. The settings in the suburban environments, in contrast, did not evoke the complete sense of immersion in place, that the rural settings did. The church lot that respondent 15 described, for instance, would not have been as important if his friends were not there and they did not act out adventure stories and sword-fights. The settings in themselves did not evoke the pride in place with which the rural experiences were laced. The exception to this pattern, however, was depicted in the descriptions of respondents 1 and 6, both of which

spoke of "public symbols"--Penguin Park and Old Warsaw. Does this mean that if the place does not have the beauty of the natural to hold a person, a high imageability of "public symbols" can still give the person a sense of pride and involvement with place?

IDENTITY OF PLACE--VARIATIONS RELATED TO GENDER

As discussed in the previous section, the geographical range of a place was, typically, larger for boys than it was for girls. With a larger range, there was, correspondingly, more activity in the place for boys, and at first glance, it seemed that places were identified by boys, primarily, for the activity they supported. (ex., for respondent 23, Bunker's Hill was remembered for the sledding opportunities it provided). In contrast, girls seemed to identify places by their setting more than by the activity the place provided (ex., for respondent 21, the wooden swing, the tree and the pond were what characterized her special place best).

On closer consideration, however, it became clear that this gender difference was not so clear. The setting seemed to support the place experience and define it, for boys, just as much as the activity in the place, although the fact was usually realized and acknowledged only later in the place descriptions. Similarly, the activity that girls indulged in were, in several cases, different from that of boys and in many instances, not the more obvious determinant of the experience, and yet it was found that the more subtle activity they indulged in--such as watching people, or dreaming, or just being very conscious of the activities in place around them, was just as important a part of the experience. The discussion of the place descriptions of respondents 11 and 20, whose places were the home in the trees and the wooden playhouse in the neighborhood park illustrate this pattern. The range of the place was larger than what was immediately obvious, and activity was just as important, although it was quieter and less physical.

There did not appear to be meaningful differences in the way a place was identified at an earlier stage of middle childhood, compared to a later stage. The variation in the descriptions of place seemed rooted at a more basic level in the choice of a place rather than what the place was identified by. It lay, apparently, at the core of the experience, and suggests varying needs that children of different ages have for a physical space, in order to make it a place.

THE EXISTENTIAL QUALITIES OF PLACE--VARIATIONS RELATED TO AGE

At the start, this thesis assumed that place would be experienced as qualitatively the same throughout the age of middle childhood (ages 6-12). As Table 3.1 indicates, however, three respondents talk of different places experienced as special at different stages of middle childhood (respondents 2, 17 and 22). Although supported by only three descriptions, as Table 5.3 indicates, the variations in the experience of the places of later middle childhood (9-12 years), as compared to those of earlier middle childhood, may imply the different developmental needs of a child, at these two ages.

The three places of early middle childhood symbolize a place for the young child's self--a personal space, a protected space. Respondent 2 described the basement of her house as her special place when she was younger: "a place that I'd go to whenever I wanted to be alone. It was dark and all my own." In contrast, the tree (her place when she was ten and above) was "down the road from our street and it was where we had our 'club.' Although it was hidden from view, we could climb all the way up to the top, and from there we could see the whole open field below us and the block where we lived."

Respondent 17 described two different parks as his special childhood places. The

Table 5.3: Existential Qualities of "Insideness" in Place: Variations

QUALITY OF "INSIDENESS"		Security	Delight	Refuge
ARIATIONS--ENV. BACKGROUND	Urban	strong	present	strong
	Rural	strong	present	strong
	Suburban	strong	present	strong
VARIATIONS--GENDER	Boys	strong	present	strong
	Girls	strong	present	strong
VARIATIONS--AGE	6-9 years	strong	present	strong
	9-12 years	strong	subdued	w/ prospect

park that he went to when he was younger had "so many trees that you couldn't even see the sky....and there were trees and bushes and a lot of neat hiding places." The park in the center of the apartment block where they lived, and that became his special place later in childhood had very different experiential qualities from the first. The latter was "right behind his backyard, with houses all around....and everyday one of us would come out here, and all the rest of us would see him from our windows, and that would be the sign for us to all meet down there."

Respondent 22 spoke of the tree house in his backyard that was his special place when he was young. In this place, he and his brothers "spent all their time, all summer long, doing something or the other inside, usually just building more stuff. This was all ours, and once every weekend, we would 'invite' our parents over for tea." The backyard led to the woods behind his house and as he grew up, his center shifted further away from home. As he explains this: "later we started using the woods more--we built campfires here and spent a lot of time here. Gradually, we migrated further away from home", when his special place became "a clearing in the woods."

The places of early middle childhood depict personal spaces that were more protected and meant for the self. Privacy was a significant part of the experience. The basement, the hiding places in the park, and the tree house (where even the respondent's parents were outsiders and had to be "invited"), were places that were very private. As the respondents' places changed however, the experience of privacy was different than what it was in early middle childhood. For respondent 2, the tree house was a secret place but approached by a path that exposed the place to the outside; for respondent 17, the place held meaning because one could be "seen" there; and for respondent 22, the clearing in the woods was a place that was too far to be intruded upon.

Privacy has been defined as "a separation of person from his social and physical environment" (Piaget and Inhelder, 1969). Apparently, the places of early middle childhood shelter the young child from the outside whenever she needs that protection. As the child grows up and becomes more confident of her place in her "social and physical environment", her needs of privacy are different, and her centers and special places shift to places that are not as enveloping in the security, and separation from the outside world that they provide. Respondent 17 remembered an important event in his place: "one day I was practicing on my skateboard and I kept running up this slope and trying to skate down, and finally when I achieved it, I heard clapping from all around me--all these people of the apartment block had been watching me and now they cheered....that was a very special thing that happened." The child is now, apparently, more confident of being "seen" and, as indicated by the description above, the experience is pleasant and provides an assuring boost to the person's developing sense of confidence in self.

The security provided by the familiar and the known (for example, the tree house in the backyard as compared to the clearing in the woods farther away), the shelter provided by the small scale of the place (for example, the hiding places in the first park as compared to the openness of the second) and the warmth of a secure place to return to (the basement, for instance) were symbols of the places of early middle childhood. Places were, apparently, seen as refuge. The places of later middle childhood however, were experienced as a dialectic of refuge and prospect. Thus, the tree was a place, therefore, where "we could see the whole open field below us, and the block where we lived, but we were hidden from view." The clearing in the woods was so far from home that it was "totally our own place, where no one else would come" so in some sense it provided refuge by its privacy and exclusiveness to the respondent. But equally important to the experience was the fact that,

many times all the respondent would do in that place, as Figure 12 illustrates, would be "to look out at all this land out in front of us" [indicated by the arrows in the map in Figure 12]. Thus, serving as prospect, the place heightens the feeling of refuge that it provides, in the knowledge of its potential for prospect. By later middle childhood, children's special places seem to be experienced as both shelter and venture, refuge and prospect. This experience of place is best depicted in Bachelard's description of a house as he quotes Spyridaki in saying,

My house is of the nature of vapor...its walls contract and expand as I desire.

At times I draw them about me like protective armor, but at others I let the walls of my house blossom out. Winds radiate from its center and gulls fly out from its windows.

(Bachelard, 1964, p.51)

The diaphanous boundary that transforms the experience of place from one where the person is protected (the tree that hid respondent 2 and her friend) to one that allows the person to interact with the outside world (the tree from where they could see the entire block they lived in) provides the dialectic that enriches the experience of place at this age. Just as in Bachelard's description, the house is first a coat of armor that shields the person from the world and then an infinite space that opens up to the rest of the universe. A place alternates between being a warm nest of refuge that is all one's own and a place that provides a sense of adventure whereby the child can step out and experience the world around her. In short, the place provides both attachment and freedom.

What can we conclude from these variations in the experience of childhood place? The interpretation developed here indicates that variations in the experience surface more at

a superficial level in relation to the physically discernible qualities of the place than at the deeper level of the emotions and feelings that give place meaning to a child. In other words, there are more significant differences in the lived geography of the place experience than there are in the experience of being "at-home" in place, or why it holds personal meaning for a person. This conclusion implies that variations in the place experience can be considered in the design of children's environments that support a rich experience of place, because they relate to universal, physical and spatial concerns that can be dealt with, rather than emotional issues that cannot be resolved by physical design decisions. Therefore, the variations indicated as a result of gender, for example, imply that a setting like a playground can be designed to accommodate both boys' need for activity, as well as girls' need for setting, the differences being, primarily, in the physical and spatial quality of the place.

How is the nature of childhood place experience understood better because of the above interpretation, both of commonalities and variations? Chapter 6 addresses this question by considering design and conceptual implications.

Chapter 6

CHILDHOOD PLACE EXPERIENCE: CONCEPTUAL AND DESIGN IMPLICATIONS

Children's capacities to relate to their world have an intimate, poetic quality. The sensitivity with which children inhabit space would be, as Heidegger calls it, "dwelling"--a process through which man makes his place of existence a home and comes into harmony with the Fourfold-- the earth, sky, the Gods and himself (as cited in Seamon, 1979; Norberg-Schulz, 1980). To dwell is to be on earth as a mortal, which in turn means to cherish and protect and preserve and care for the place where one chooses to live. The themes that describe the quality of childhood place experience illustrate the intensity with which children "dwell" in place. The quality of the place experience, apparently, depends on how children are able to "dwell," where dwelling would mean more than a rational, utilitarian act such as merely occupying place. Instead, this dwelling would involve transforming space into place (Laing, 1985, p.201).

What does this understanding of childhood place experience imply in terms of design implications for a suburban childhood environment? For most children in America, the suburban environment is the one of their childhood. Joel Garreau, in his book *Edge City* (1991), argues that the suburbs, or "edge cities, as he calls them, represent:

the third wave of our lives pushing into new frontiers in this half century. First, we moved our houses out past the traditional idea of what constituted a city--this was the suburbanization of America; ...then we wearied of returning

downtown for the necessities of life, so we moved our marketplaces out to where we lived;.....today we have moved our means of creating wealth, the essence of urbanism-- out to where most of us have lived and shopped for two generations now. That has led to the rise of the Edge City.

The definition of the "suburb" has contextually undergone a transformation from what it was when the respondents of this study were children. It has become, now, as Garreau says, an "Edge City." Nonetheless, the suburbs are still an attraction and in no small measure because they provide a good place "to bring up the children." Ironically, the suburbs are not entirely considerate of basic childhood needs in regard to the physical and spatial environment.

What do the suburbs represent as an environment to grow up in? In an effort to shelter the child from the big, bad city, and to give her a "view" of nature, yet not be inconveniently rural, what picture of reality does the suburban environment provide a child? J.M Richards, in describing a suburban afternoon says (as quoted by Ward, 1978),

Like the theatre stage, it is a self-contained world furnished with a number of properties of a kind and variety that together make up what I call the suburban style. But it is not a flat backcloth; it is a panorama in depth as well as breadth, as the spectator moves before it.... But in the same way that Alice, dreaming in front of the looking-glass found herself translated into the world beyond it, so the pilgrim visiting suburbia finds he is no longer looking at the picture from the outside. The well-furnished scene has become a kind

of well-stocked jungle--not a fearsome one, because stocked with tame trees, tame houses and tame gardens--but one from which all other worlds are shut out. Suburbia has closed in around him, and is so completely a world of its own that it is the untidy, incalculable city from which he had come, or the countryside with its frightening expanse of sky, that seem strange and unreal.

Children make do with the particular environment in which they find themselves.

This study aimed at bringing to light some of the reasons why the experience of place was deeper and richer in some places more than in others, and if the background of one's childhood makes a difference to the experience, at all? The common threads that run through the twenty-five place descriptions point toward an overall inherent universality in the intimate experience with place. Clearly, the quality of "insideness" in certain kinds of spaces lay in the experience of some subliminal modes of being, evoked by virtue of the common human nature that all the respondents shared, regardless of background or gender. There were however, variations in the experience of place, as a result of environmental background and gender. The physical and spatial implications of the interpretations are now addressed, and it is hoped that their conclusions would be meaningful in terms of designing suburban environments for children, primarily, and also, more generally, of designing places that support the place experience. These implications relate to both commonalities as well as variations in the place experience. These implications are discussed under three sections:

1. the lived geography of special childhood places;
2. the identity of special childhood places; and
3. the existential qualities of insideness in special childhood places.

The implications of the study are addressed, following the same pattern of the interpretive chapters preceding--i.e., they refer first to the lived geographical qualities of childhood place--in terms of boundaries, centers and direction; they refer, next, to the identity of the place experience in terms of setting and activity of special childhood places, and they refer, finally, to the qualities of existential insideness that the places support. Below each interpretive conclusion from the study that is considered, is a conceptual design implication that can be considered in this regard. The graphics are an attempt to further illustrate the implication and are by no means, meant to allude to actual design recommendations, in themselves. These design implications are not exhaustive, rather they are open-ended. It is realized, based on the limited number of respondents, that the results of this study are by no means conclusive. The implications are an attempt to meaningfully translate the interpretations of the study on childhood place, into qualities of the physical and spatial environment but additional research is needed to provide conclusive substantiation.

LIVED GEOGRAPHY--IMPLICATIONS

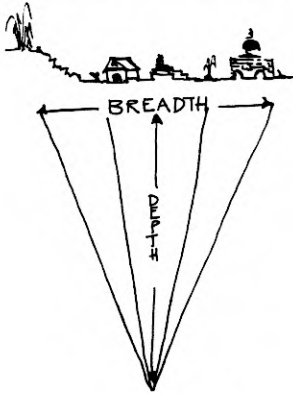
- Childhood places, that are claimed as special, have a definite sense of boundary.



In most cases, this is visually defined and encloses a geographical range of space that the child is comfortable controlling. Within this obvious boundary, there exists other more subtle boundaries usually determined by the range within which a child can maintain eye-contact with her house or is conscious of the presence of protection. These boundaries form places or centers in which the place is

experienced with different levels of intensity.

- Suburban environments appear to depict a smaller range of place experience.



They lack the breadth of the experience that characterizes the typical rural experience--in terms of the variety of experiential modes and the number of centers in place. The depth to the experience was provided by the degree of immersion in place.

Therefore, although the access to a diversity of places was missing, the imagination of the child made the place

access to diversity. experience a deep one. Would providing a child an access to
A RANGE OF EXPERIENCE. a diversity of places mean offering her a richer experience of
place?

Broad sidewalks, unplanned interstitial spaces, broader cul-de-sacs (cul-de-sacs being described as neighborhood "gang" playing spaces by a third of the respondents) designed keeping in mind their use by children are suggestions that the study recommends. These design decisions might offer a child access to an environment with greater placemaking potential--with places that can be encountered in the pattern of her daily life, on the way to school, for instance, or going by herself to a friend's home and finding a "place" on the way, that she would not have in the automobile-dependant environment that most suburban children live in today.

- Paths that led to places and that were long enough to lend an associated direction to the place, both physically and symbolically, enhanced the experience of place.

They provided the organizing axis to the experience of place, for a child. Therefore, paths to a place may also deepen the place experience.

IDENTITY OF PLACE--IMPLICATIONS

- Settings were remembered vividly when they were natural environments.

Access to the outdoors and a chance to be close to the earth would enhance the experience

of childhood place. The natural environment seems to have

the most appeal to a child when it can be accessed at will,

explored, claimed as one's own, and made places out of. The

experience of a zoo or other public exhibits of nature would

not, therefore, be a substitute for the experience of place in a

natural setting (as respondent 10 illustrates in her description,



POTENTIAL FOR PLACE MAKING
WITH FOLIAGE & WATER.

where the zoo and other places that she was taken to by her

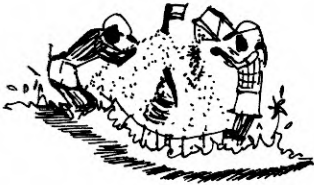
parents constituted the outermost, least-experienced sphere of

the neighborhood that was her special place).

- Natural environments seemed to have great appeal to a child for the sensory stimulation they provide. Although the designed environment cannot replace the spontaneity of the natural, it can learn from the aesthetic quality of the natural environment and provide the element of surprise, the stimulation to the senses--visual, auditory and tactile--and the rhythm and visual delight in form and color, and the recognition of change, such as in the seasons and so forth, in a setting that is designed. Places that a child can immerse herself in and whose beauty has a hold on the child are the spaces where the place experience is its strongest.
- Play is the most active concern in the place experience. From the study therefore, environments for children would be assumed to be richer, the more play they encouraged. It is noticed, however, that play does not necessarily take part in environments designed specifically for that purpose (in fact, only two descriptions--

respondents 17 and 20 spoke of playgrounds as special places). Play is indulged in in places as diverse as a pigsty (respondent 7) or a cardboard spaceship (respondent 25). Play is triggered by the presence of trees and water, as several descriptions reveal.

- Places that encourage the child to indulge in her own activity and to imagine her own setting for play are those environments where the place making is at its strongest and places experienced most intensely. The lack of places that a child can create her own setting out of, is the most obvious conclusion in regard to suburban environments. In contrast, rural environments have



PLACES THAT CAN BE MADE. no dearth of these spaces.

Being considered in this regard, interstitial spaces that are left unplanned can develop naturally into places that children make out of them. If the "junk" that children treasure and use to make places with, are aesthetically offensive to the adults in the environment, these left-over spaces need not necessarily have "junk" littered around. Left unused, with the natural materials of the earth that they are made of, they can provide interesting spaces that children would make places out of.

- An important aspect of the activity in special places was that it was, often, almost routine. To become part of a child's pattern of movement in her regular world of existence, the places that support this activity should be accessible enough for the child to return to at will. Again, the need is for spaces that are not planned for but close enough to be encountered. The importance of usable sidewalks, cul-de-sacs, leftover spaces that remain undeveloped even after the suburb has been developed, and small, neighborhood parks become important in regard to having the potential

to become "special places" of a child in the neighborhood.

- The gender-related variation in the aspect of place identity points to the need for settings that provide for the active play of boys, in groups of friends, as well as the passive activity of girls, that involve only the child alone or at times, with a best friend. For instance, while providing for the active ball games of boys, a setting such as a park should also provide for the more passive activity of girls such as watching other people play.
- The most intimate experiences of place involved situations where the child was passive and remained open and vulnerable to the place. The designed environment should, therefore, consider this important need for a child to be able to remain "passive" in a space. Contrary to the urban and recreational planner's image of children as "desiring to continually run, jump and climb," most children need and search out quiet places to be alone and do nothing (Hart, 1979, p.171). Therefore, environments for children should not only provide for obvious active play but also consider possibilities for the silent immersion in place where a child does nothing more than think, or dream and just enjoy *being* in the place.
- Special places that were "fields of care" had more personal meaning to the respondent,



as a child and later, in remembrance, than did "public symbols." From the interpretations, it was evident that public symbols, when described, provided the happiness of being in a place that spelt excitement and that gave the child a sense of geographical pride and identity. Small, familiar worlds, apparently, inexhaustibly rich in ordinary things, or fields of care, seemed more significant in that they meant more for the

in their expectedness. Places also become special in childhood because of the assurance in them that comes from knowing one is safe and protected and cared for in this place. Places become special when the child knows the place is all hers and that she is in control of the place.

Children will make places in any environment where they find themselves.

These places that children claim as special, however, need to assure the child of their security. The implications of this conclusion from the study is that if an environment is looked at for its potential in providing space for children to make places in, it has to be in territory that is familiar to the child. The place also has to allow the child to be conscious or aware of the assuring presence of a loved one or of something that symbolizes protection. In a home, for instance, a child is more likely to make a special place for herself in a family room where she can be hidden but still be aware of her family, than she would in an unfamiliar yard that had no conscious awareness of her family or home territory.

Places that are claimed as a child's own are spaces that can be appropriated and controlled.

This means, in many cases, that the scale of the space is small enough for the child to know that it is only hers and that no one else can fit in, literally speaking, unless she so desires; and also that it is small enough that she can be comfortably in control of it--and transform it into whatever she wants.

Special places of childhood are happy places.

Although impossible to translate into physical or spatial design recommendations, the implications of this conclusion are conceptual. They imply that places should be designed such that by their very nature (usually in natural environments) the child can revel in their beauty and experience delight in the place.

Places can also provide enough excitement to make the child happy but not so much that she is frightened. The child cannot experience the joy of experiencing recognized symbolic gestures, and therefore the appeal of "public symbols" is not always recognized as children to be special.

It should also be realized that a place can make a child happy if it just allows the child to *be* in it, without doing anything specific. This passive contentment that a special place provides, is probably the most important developmental aspect of the childhood place experience. A special place allows a child to dream, to imagine. It allows her to silently come to terms with reality and the world around her. It allows her to be alone and calm, away from the "noise" of the outside world or it encourages her dreams away from the possibly critical eyes of the outside world. The places that are chosen as special are not necessarily places where a child is excited and active, but almost always, a place where she can be alone and do nothing but enjoy the place.

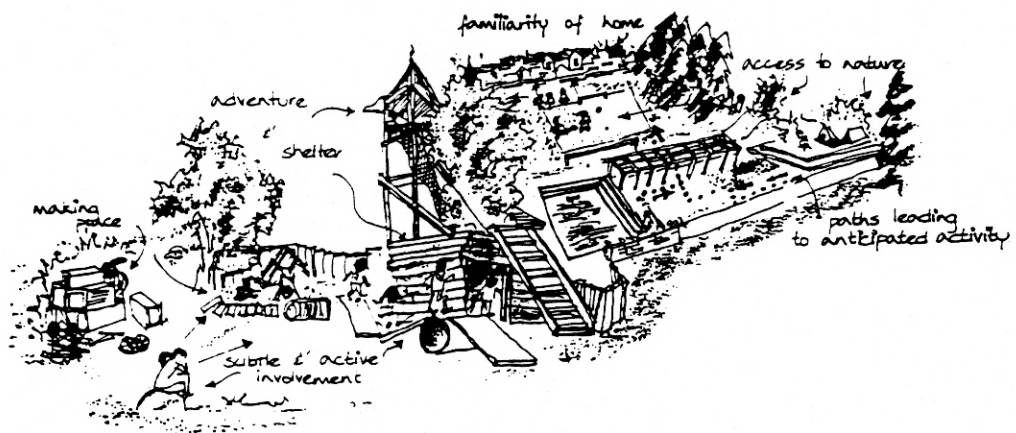
A special place is a refuge to go to when a child needs it. It is a place that a child can hide in and not be seen. As Shepard says, "loneliness is to be without a place to hide" (1967, p.35). The special places of early childhood are closed, personal spaces that focus on the inside of the space. They shelter and protect the child.

As the child grows, however, her place may need change. Refuge is now experienced with prospect. The inside of the space is emphasized because of the awareness of the outside. As Vidler says, "Our home feels more intimate in the winter. Winter reminds us of our vulnerability and defines the home as shelter" (1992, p.35). Places need to have a view of the outside now--or prospect. The child needs to become

more aware of the rest of the universe outside her own place. This defines the insideness of her place better. Again, Tuan explains, "What sensual ease compares with that of a child as he rests in the parent's arm and is read to sleep? In the curve of the human arm is comfort and security absolute, made all the more delectable by the threatening wolf in the storybook" (Tuan, 1977, p.137).

The child no longer needs to be hidden in the way of early middle childhood. Privacy is important but at a different level of experience. To be exposed and vulnerable is also to be open and free. "When we stand before the untrodden paths of prospect, we are free to roam" (Appleton, 1977, p.35). The child moves farther away from home, her range of accessible spaces increasing, and yet she needs to be seen more and needs the acceptance and approval of the outside world.

In this regard, adventure playgrounds come into their own. By providing the child sufficient stimulation of the senses, by allowing the child to create places of her own, transform a bit of her environment and claim that space as her special place, and by offering the child the dialectic of the experience of refuge and prospect, safety and adventure, shelter and venture, the adventure playground, as an environment, enhances the experience of place for a child. It is where space becomes place and time becomes occasion (Van Eyck, 1962).



THE ADVENTURE PLAYGROUND - A RICH EXPERIENCE OF PLACE.

CONCEPTUAL CONCLUSIONS

The fundamental conclusion of this study lies in the quality and significance of the place experience in childhood. Having now understood the phenomenon better, this final section of the thesis reconsiders the nature of the childhood place experience on the basis of the twenty-five place descriptions. The most easily discernible aspect of the experience points toward the *physical and spatial experiential qualities* of the special places of childhood. The depth of the experience signifies an important stage in the *development of the self* in the child, at this age. The following section of the thesis discusses these two aspects of the experience of childhood place, after which the last section reviews the aspect of the *remembered* places of childhood. This last section addresses the significance of childhood place memories as the basis of a study that attempts to understand the nature of the experience with place in childhood.

The Experiential Qualities of Childhood Place

*There was a time when meadow, grove and stream,
the earth and every common sight,
To me did seem
Apparelled in celestial light.*

*The glory and freshness of a dream.
At length Man perceives it die away
And fade into the light of common day.
(Wordsworth, 1947)*

The most obvious aspect of the childhood place experience from the twenty-five place descriptions is the depth of immersion in the physical and spatial qualities of the place. The landscape of a special place is animated to a child. The experience is grounded in the present. The place is experienced with the uncensored opening of the senses to the place as a whole. The environment is looked at for its potential to be immersed in, or for its potential to be transformed. The spatial environment invites engagement and transformative action--it challenges the child to incorporate herself in the environment. The child constructs and discovers the meaning of objects by transforming her physical environment (Tuan, 1977, p.16). Genius is an enduring measure of the intensity of this process. The wonder and novelty with which children experience space is what Edith Cobb refers to as the genius of childhood--in the sense of extreme originality and the creation of personal worlds (ibid.). Cobb compares this state of mind to the cultivated inventiveness of an adult genius, in the sense that both are in search of the making of meaning by our actions (ibid, pp.102, 3). For a child, inasmuch as it is unconscious, space becomes place through participation.

Children need this experience with place--of participating in the world around them, of imagining and fantasizing, and of being close to the world around them--in order to present themselves to the outside world and face the world as individuals. The places turned to for the purpose of this unconscious learning experience are, often, natural environments. As Shepard describes the process of place experience in childhood: "the rhythm of being with and being apart from, of coming and going, of joining and separation, in the way a child experiences nature, is a dynamic recognition of the livingness of nature--a realization of the universe of the child's existence" (Shepard, 1967, p.35).

Langer explains the quality of the experience as being an important stage in the development of the individual when she says:"In nature--in viewing the world--life is

realized as a progressive accumulation of potential acts and every realized act changes the pattern and range of what is possible; the living body is an ever-new constellation of possibilities" (Langer, 1983, p.82). While understanding herself more as different from the world around her, the child also realizes her continuity with the universe that she is a part of by participating in place. The interplay of this realization of individuation and of involvement is the vital dialectical essence of our existence, as Langer goes on to say (*ibid*, p. 132). This self-world relationship works the extremes of a great rhythm of evolution, which always turns towards more intense activity and more realized potential, as the range of the world that a child is exposed to increases.

At the stage of middle childhood, a child is grounded in the present. As Tuan explains, a child cannot appreciate a landscape painting, for instance....it requires an acquired awareness of the landscape elements, their spatial disposition and meaning (Tuan, 1977, p.16). As is evident from the place descriptions in the study, childhood's landscapes are seen for things that are not immediately obvious to the adult eye. They are given animated form. Children's tendency toward animism is enforced by the egocentric and functional view of things that is typical of the developmental stage of middle childhood (Piaget, 1954; Tuan, 1977). A child will endow objects with consciousness when she sees the necessity for them to fulfill the functions she deems appropriate. A hill that can be sledded down, for instance, is only seen for that purpose, and not for the aesthetic idealism that lies in its uprightness in the flat surroundings, for example--something that needs an acquired symbolic recognition.

Thus places become meaningful to a child. They nest in space and provide the child a window to the world around her. They provide, in Osterreith's words, "a niche of people, events and things--that are observed--and the world is better understood because of being in that one place" (Osterreith, 1985, p.39). The depth of immersion in place, the participation

in the spatial and aesthetic qualities of a special childhood place, are thus seen as unconscious modes of understanding the world, of understanding of the child as an individual in the universe of her existence.

The Quest for Self in Childhood Place Experience

Are we perhaps on the verge of grasping that the environment is ourselves, for it has given us form, and its creation is nothing but a dialogue between inside and outside.....It is through our actions and their products (the places that we make?) that we reveal ourselves to ourselves.

Olivier Marc, 1977, The Psychology of the House)

During this age of middle childhood, the self is discovered--fragile and under construction (Sobel, 1993, p.70). The experience of place in childhood points toward a profound, unnoticed quest for the understanding of self at this age. The word "quest" as the dictionary defines it, means "a seeking....pursuit....a journey in search of" (Webster, 1979:1165) and if seen as a search for identity for the self, the place experience of middle childhood, no doubt, represents a quest. The value of the quest lies not so much in the goal as in the journey itself. In the special places of childhood, the goals of the experience are always changing. By following the path this experience of place leads her through, the child discovers more about her universe and about the place of her self in it. The realization of one's individuation and differentiation from the universe, and also of one's involvement and constituent participation in the universe, brings to a child a greater understanding of her own sense of identity and a discovery of her own self.

The special places of our childhood provide a window to the world in which we live. In these places, the adult world is magnified or created in miniature. In some of them, the child understands reality by observation--of people, of things, and of relationships. Others offer her a new perspective of her own sense of identity by revealing her roots or the environments where her parents grew up, for instance. The emerging self is gradually given the identity that make the person the child will become.

The places that we seek out as children are usually small, private spaces. The developing self of the child needs to be protected from view of the outside world (Sobel, 1993, p.70). The secretive nature of the hiding place is significant. "The self like the metamorphosing larva of the butterfly, needs to be wrapped in a cocoon before it emerges into the light...thus the places that children seek out are places where they cannot be seen, places to begin the unfolding of the self" (ibid.). Although the statement may seem overly grand in describing of the childhood experience with place, it is nonetheless significant and the only reason we think of it as striking is because, being an unconscious mode of being, it goes unnoticed.

Historically, medieval times saw the movement of collective life that left nobody any time for solitude and privacy. In those crowded collective existences there was no room for the private sector of childhood (Aries, 1962, Wolfe, 1978). Today, in a world that places such high values on individuality, the need for privacy is more strongly felt. Privacy is seen as a way of enhancing the self, of protecting the self. As the study indicates, trends have changed from when the respondents were children and, almost always, had at least one parent at home. With the current trend of both working parents, with more time to be by one's self, and with access to a larger and different range of places without adult supervision, the consideration of places where a child can have the privacy and the placemaking potential

that she needs becomes more significant. If placelessness and a dearth of real "dwelling" characterizes the world that a child sees in private, what sense of identity of her own self would this provide?

"Everywhere, whenever and however we are related to beings, of every kind, we find identity making its claim on us" (Heidegger, 1969, p.26). The potential for place making in the world of the child and for the claiming of spaces as her own is the strongest sense of identity that the place experience can give a child. For, as Heidegger says, "What could be closer to us than what brings us nearer to where we belong....to the event of appropriation? The event of appropriation is that realm vibrating within itself through which man and Being reach each other. Appropriation has everything to do with identity" (ibid., p.37). The identity and discovery of her own self is revealed fundamentally in the places that a child makes for herself, and claims as her own.

The Swiss philosopher Carl Jung expresses poetically what one's dwelling can be-- what Clare Cooper-Marcus calls "house as a mirror of self" (Cooper-Marcus, 1995). In the place that one makes for one's self, actions are, as says Jung, a "concretization of the individuation process" (ibid, p.11; Mayo, 1992). It is what flows out of our unconscious. Jung's major emphasis was on the individuation of the self as the motive force in development. The human sense of identity and of self is insecure--it becomes more secure when "self and others" can be linked to external objects (Tuan, 1977, p.27). Thus, places that can be called one's own special place, are claimed as objects that define one's sense of self.

Whether we are conscious of it or not, our "own" places of childhood are potent statements about who we are. They represent symbols of ourselves, for as Cooper-Marcus explains it, "in childhood our primary psychological task is to develop a strong and comfortable personality with which we meet and function in this world. A child constructing

a den or a clubhouse under the hedge is doing far more than merely manipulating dirt and branches. He or she is having a powerful experience of creativity, of learning about self through molding the physical environment" (Cooper-Marcus, 1995, p.20).

Unlike Freud, for whom the symbols of the unconscious contained impulses or conflicts the conscious mind needed to conceal, Jung's perception of the unconscious was different. For him, it had both personal and collective meaning and was "like the night sky..a infinite unknown, studded with myriads of tiny sparks of light that can become the sources of illumination, insight and creativity for the process of individuation" (ibid, Mayo, 1992).

Jung defined the notion of individuation in striving toward inner wholeness. The Jungian view of the unconscious and of its significance in the childhood experience of place points toward the discovery and development of the self in this age of middle childhood. Understanding this view has been the premise for emphasizing the conclusive implication of this study--the significance of the unconscious in the discovery of self, in the special places of childhood.

The Remembered Places of Childhood

*I say Mother. And my thoughts are of You, oh, House,
Home of the lovely dark summers of my childhood.
(Bachelard, 1964, p.45).*

For most of us a return to a dwelling or landscape where we spent our childhood years can be a highly charged experience. We hold onto childhood memories of special

places as a kind of "psychic anchor," as Clare Cooper-Marcus describes it, reminding us of where we came from, of what we once were and of how the physical environment nurtured us. For each of us, it was in the environment of childhood that the person we are today began to take shape (Cooper-Marcus, 1995, p.20).

The remembrance of childhood is a recent innovation in the literary sense, evolving at the beginning of the century, when childhood began to be seen as "more than a labour unit but as being emotionally priceless" (Aries, 1962) and there was a renewed awareness of human individuality. According to Cobb, it is principally to the age of middle childhood that writers and poets return to, in memory, to renew the power or impulse to create at its very source. Childhood memory is seen as a reservoir of calm and strength within the self (Cobb, 1977, p. 77). The significance of childhood memory is illustrated by Baudelaire's defining genius as "childhood recoverable at will" (cited in Porteous, 1990).

Wordsworth and Emerson, Cobb (1977) and Chawla (1994), are sufficient literary evidence both on the remembrance of childhood place and on the significance of it, respectively. These works depict childhood memory as a creative resource that reaffirms one's own identity in adulthood, being, in Wordsworth's words, "the rekindling communion with the spirit...having the power to lift the spirit to the 'serene and blessed' mood of imaginative insight of childhood" (as cited in Chawla, 1992, p.44).

Considered in retrospect, the memory of childhood places is articulate about describing the qualities of place that made it special. In its abiding character in our memories, place is there to be re-entered. As continually available, the memory is a place in itself--a place where the past can be revived and can survive. It is the stabilizing persistence of place as a container of experience that contributes so powerfully to its own memorability (Casey, 1987, p. 186). As psycho-physical in state, the lived body puts us in

touch with the physical aspects of place--we remember what we want to and enhance them in our memories--and we forget what we think of as undesirable there.

Merleau-Ponty says (p.139), "We must avoid saying that our body is *in* space or *in* time. It *inhabits* space and time." In selecting the aspects of place that we want to remember, we only further emphasize their significance. Selective attention, therefore, in remembered childhood places, although not objectively accurate, does serve the purpose of focussing one's attention on the qualities of place that were important and that gave the place meaning. In this sense, the premise on which the study was based--the memories of childhood place experiences--did serve me well in the endeavor to understand the phenomenon of children's experience with place.

In his discussion of the spaces we love, Gaston Bachelard emphasizes the significance of our memories of childhood place,

In containing the memories of a special childhood place, the remembrance of place brings with it the security, the delight and the sense of refuge that the place is associated with, in itself. The positivity of psychological history and geography cannot serve as a touchstone for determining the real being of our childhood, for childhood is certainly greater than reality. In order to sense, across the years, our attachment for the house we were born in, dream is more powerful than thought. It is on the plane of the daydream and not on that of facts that childhood remains alive and poetically useful to us. Through this permanent childhood we maintain the poetry of the past (Bachelard, 1964, p.45).

It is significant that adult memories of childhood, even when nostalgic and romantic, seldom suggest the need to be a child but refer to a deep desire to renew the ability to perceive as a child and to participate with the whole bodily self in the forms, colors and motions, the sights and sounds of the external world of nature and artifact (Cobb, 1977, p.130). To what extent do such images of childhood place provide guidance to a new generation of child caretakers, of designers for children?

The gathered childhood place experiences that were remembered and shared by the twenty-five respondents in this study not only opened me up to their own memories and clarified their lived experience in childhood place, for me, but also helped me return to my own childhood memories and rediscover the highly charged sensual environment of "childscape", as Porteous refers to this landscape of our childhood. By turning back to a lived experience that is different from one's own can help the researcher relate to an environment that is experienced differently than as one tends to see it. A return to the vivid, sensitive landscapes of childhood may be what every designer of children's environments needs to do--to able to, in Wordsworth's words, "see a world in a grain of sand, and heaven in a wild flower."

I am aware, now more than ever, that I have only skimmed the surface of a phenomenon that is a profound and deep aspect of our lives. The remembrance of place in childhood remains a significant and powerful center even in our adult memories, a phenomenon which in itself, merits further exploration. It is realized now, that the study is just one step in understanding the childhood experience with place. Every theme revealed from the interpretations of the place experiences, opens up new avenues for future study.

The understanding of childhood place experience has opened me up to the fundamentally human experience of being in place. The implications of the study have

helped me understand better how the designer of children's environments can consider their need to feel existentially inside a place; how the designer can aid in the "homecoming" of a child in place. As architect Van Eyck explains, although architecture answers very tangible functions, its ultimate objective differs in no way fundamentally from that of any other lived expression--to express through men and for men the real essence of existence. The more tangible functions are only relevant in as far as they adjust man's environment more accurately to his elementary inclinations. The main purpose of architecture is "to assist in man's home coming" (Van Eyck, 1968, p.33).

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Appendix 3A

SUMMARIES OF THE TWENTY-FIVE PLACE EXPERIENCES

*Respondent 1 grew up in Poland, and for as long as he could remember, his special place was Old Warsaw. This was a historic part of town that was preserved as it would have been in the times before the second world war--as a tourist attraction, primarily. The place was beautiful and it had so much to it in terms of sensory experience--the sounds of music, of horses on the stone streets, of children, of busy people--of happy people on a holiday; it had the smells of food; it had the solid buildings of stone and the fascinating castles and fortified walls, and also the gay, festive colors that matched the mood of a holiday place--it had shows going on and ice cream and so many things to see and do.
(colorful, happiness, excitement, refreshing, identity, stimulating...)*

*Respondent 2 spoke of two special places--the basement of her house when she was very young (uptil she was eight or nine) and then a tree that she and her best friend claimed as their clubhouse, when she was nine till about thirteen. The basement was a place she could go to when she wanted to be alone, away from the noise of a full house and when she felt no one had enough time for her. Make believe games were a big part of the experience of this place. The half of the basement under the stairs, was enclosed, carpeted, warm--her special place--as against the colder other half that was not carpeted and didn't have light.
(secure, peaceful, make-believe, alone, sheltering...)*

*The clubhouse was a secret place that was just her's and her best friend's. They would climb up there and spend hours looking out at the block and the open field they could see in front of them, and they would be whatever their imagination prompted them to be for that day.
(secretive, grown up, imagination, see the whole world, "own"...)*

Respondent 3's special place was the river behind his house on the farm. He lived out in the country, where there were no kids or friends he could play with whenever he wanted

to--so this was a place he would come to when he needed something to do. Gradually it became a place that he'd come to, to think and to be by himself and to sort out his problems. The place was very personal--no one else knew it was his. It felt safe and comfortable--even when he did not feel so good about himself. It became a part of his everyday routine--he'd fish there, or just sit and watch the water. This was his own place--a refuge from the world outside--a place no one could find him in.
(security, refuge, beauty, pride in the place, 'own'..)

Respondent 4 lived in a suburb 65 miles north of a big city. What was farmland when his grandfather had the land was now a developed suburb--and the only areas that were still undeveloped were the places on their farm. His special place as a child was the pond at the back of his house. It was a place where the whole family would meet on Sundays--aunts, uncles and cousins; a place where the entire neighborhood would be invited to, because it was the 'best'; a place where he could be alone or with a friend, too--and it was the time he spent there that made it so special to him. There was a certain pride in the place, that the pond brought out in him--and by its sheer beauty, it had a hold on him. The pond was equipped for the activities that the respondent considered fun--it had a raft, a slide, a dock on which you could just sit and dangle your feet in the water. He would fish there, swim there all day long or sometimes just sit on a tree and watch the water.
('own', friendship, pride, 'home'.)

Respondent 5's special place was the house that she lived in when she was young. From about six till thirteen, her family lived in Germany. This was "different" from the life she was used to in America, and therefore, intriguing. The physical beauty of the home was still striking in adult memory--the huge carved wooden doors, the tiles and carpets, the translucence of the glass etc.. Her special place was the alcove--a niche in the reading room. This was a warm, secure haven that she would go to when she wanted time of her own. The space was just enough to fit herself into.
(secure, warm, small, alone, time of her own...)

Another important place in this house was the boiler room in the basement that led up to the furnace. This was essentially her sister's "place" --a beautiful tiled small space , that was the warmest in the house--more than it was hers, but she remembers the times they spent there together, one very vivid memory being of her comforting her little sister there, and it was an important place in her home.
(warm, beautiful, comfort....)

Respondent 6's special place was a park in Missouri, where her grandparents lived. This place was called Penguin Park and was visited every year, on vacation, when the family drove up to Missouri from Texas. The place was one that she went to with all her cousins and it was a routine family affair and she really looked forward to the excitement that was associated with this visit to the park. The big penguin, the red tractor, the fireman slide and the big blue kangaroo were four structures that were remembered vividly, that they visited one by one, in the same pattern every year. ("at-home", fun. colors, excitement, family, togetherness, routine...)

Respondent 7's special childhood place was his grandparents' home, too. His family moved a lot when he was young, and his grandparents' home always seemed like a predictable, familiar place to go to every holiday--a place where he would meet all his cousins and aunts and uncles, and his grandparents, of course; a place where they'd all play together, eat together and have fun together, every holiday. The significance of his being there with his family and the activities he did there--were both a large part of the reason why the place was special. There were lots of good hiding places, there were lots of things to see and do on the farm and it was a lot of fun. There was also the comfort and warmth and security of being together with the whole family. (fun, family, happiness, always there, interesting, good hiding places, cousins....)

Respondent 8 described his grandfather's place as his special place. His family moved a lot when he was young and his grandfather's place provided something constant

that he liked in his childhood--the house was different from the ones he lived in--it was more "old-fashioned"--the setting was different, being in an older neighborhood in the beautiful Washington State, and he was always on vacation there. For as long as he could remember, this was always his special place. There was so much to do in his grandfather's place. The family was always together and it was so much of fun. The special place he had here was the TV room. This is where he and his cousins spent most of their time--watching television, building blocks, playing with the stuffed toys that his grandmother made, eating, sleeping on the couch, just watching the grown-ups--sometimes, doing nothing in particular. The significance of the place changed over the years. The place had a reassuring security and happiness for him in childhood, and still does, but the place had added meaning now--being, as he feels, the closest he can get to his mother, and he can see how she grew up and the memories of her comfort him there.

(family, togetherness, cared for, fun, enjoyment, happy memories, secure..)

Respondent 9 grew up in an urban area--in a single family home with a yard. Having two sisters, he had a room to himself and it was here that he had his special place--the space between his bed and the wall-of cabinets was his special place. He spent all day here when he wasn't outside playing with his friends. In a house that was shared, there were very few spaces where you could "do your own thing" and this was one such space. Although it gave him the privacy he liked, interestingly enough, it was also important that he was conscious of his mother in the room below him, and of his sisters in their rooms or in the passage outside his room because the doors would never be shut completely. The best part about this space was that it could be manipulated--the drawers of the cabinet could be pulled out to make this a tighter space than it was if they were shut; sometimes, just the top few would be opened up to form a roof; sometimes the space below the bed was included and sometimes half the bed was, too. This was a passive space, a space that he came to when he wanted to be alone, or just do stuff, like sliding on the floor or play with his toys, or make the space different. It was just a space that he spent a lot of time being in and thinking in (personal, happy, refuge, enclosed, made, tactile, secure...)

Respondent 10 grew up in a large city and from when she was seven till about when she was twelve--the bicycle riding age--she loved the neighborhood she grew up in. The place has fond, significant, happy memories of a time she believed was important in shaping the person she's become right now. Her mother, like most of her friends', worked during the day, so she and her friends were very independent. They were free to do whatever they wanted the whole day. Almost all the time, this meant riding around the neighborhood. The sidewalks were a large part of the place description. The neighborhood itself was an old one with the charm of old houses and closely spaced buildings. The houses were all alike and this "equality", at least from the exterior--made the little girl that the respondent was, feel secure--no one had to know how rich or how poor anyone else was. It was an urban environment that the kids of the neighborhood were proud of. The neighborhood had a large university on one side, and museums and parks and a zoo on the other. These were places that they would go to with their parents. The sidewalks of the residential area was where they spent most of their time riding around or doing whatever caught their fancy. (Independence, freedom, fun, security in the familiar, pride in the neighborhood.)

Respondent 11 grew up in a kibbutz. She had a special place that she and her best friend made, as children. This was a place they found, under a tree, that was hidden from view. It had an abandoned car on one side, that provided some kind of a boundary--and this space was on what was considered her parents' territory. The place was special because they made it themselves--in fact that was their main activity there--making the place again and again. The respondent's father had a lot of "stuff" that he would leave here for want of more space in the house, like iron scrap, sculpture, old furniture etc. and so she and her friend could keep reshaping their "home" using all this stuff. The place was very significant to her--a place where she had time of her own, a place that she and her friend could be alone in and where no one else could see them. The place was a beautiful space to have a "home" in, too--it had the filtered sunlight coming in through the leaves of the tree, it was cool underneath and it was hidden from everyone else's view and it had all kinds of stuff to play

with.

(made, "own", refuge, friendship, memories.)

The next two descriptions are of Respondents 12 and 13 respectively. Both their special childhood places were their grandparents' homes and it was interesting to study them together because of the differences in the content of each of these place descriptions. Respondent 12's place was special because it was so different from the house she and her parents lived in. The whole atmosphere was different, this being in a traditional village, whereas her family lived in a large metropolitan city. The fact that her grandparents were there and that they met all their cousins and the fun and games the place meant were all part of the experience but the place was experienced in a way much different from Respondent 13's. Respondent 13's place was significant because it meant "family"--it meant seeing where her father grew up, it meant being with cousins and grandparents and uncles and aunts and it was this, she feels that has given her the security she has in the close-knit family ties she keeps. The physical characteristics of the place and the fun and activity that it provided, meant a lot, of course, but it would not have been the same kind of experience had the same people not been there. Both places had several centers of more significance than others and in both cases the entire place was special.

Both places were spaces of happy memories and coincidentally both places have not been visited in years because they are not the same anymore and it saddens both the respondents to go back again. But again, while Respondent 12's place has changed physically, in that more buildings have been built on the land that was open before and a lot of the trees have been cut down, although her grandparents still live there, she feels she can never experience "the place in its entirety again"; Respondent 13's place has not really changed physically--her grandparents do not live there anymore and so she feels the place cannot be experienced now, in the way it had been experienced when she remembered it

Respondent 12: (intrigue, fascination, respite, fun, something to look forward to, interesting....)

Respondent 13: (security, family, fun, something to look forward to)

Respondent 14 lived all his life in the large capital city of his country. When he was about seven years old, he started building a home for himself--on the couch in the living room, rearranging the cushions so he could fit in, between. This was his special place till he was about eleven or twelve. The place was all his, and since he was the smallest in the family, no one else could come in, unless he wanted them to. Once in a way, he'd invite a friend over but he usually experienced this place alone. As time went by, this place developed--he made a window on the side, and then a window on the roof, and then he started dividing up the spaces inside using towels, having used up all the cushions to build the home. The respondent spent a lot of time in this space, thinking and dreaming and building his home. This place was deep and personal and it was a place where he could be alone and just think..

(enclosure, personal, think, develop into whatever he wanted--his space.)

Respondent 15 grew up in a typical suburban neighborhood, in a single family home with a yard. His favorite place while he was growing up was his friend's yard. His garage, in particular, was where his gang would "hang out." They would spend a lot of time here, in a place they could be in, without the grown-ups, a place where they could do their own thing and a place where there was so much "stuff" to do--there were machines to cut wood--so they'd make swords and things like that and have make-believe wars and there was so much of space there to imagine and do whatever caught their fancy at the time.

(secrecy, things to do, fun, making things...)

Another special place they had, at this time, was their clubhouse, under a tree in the lot of the neighborhood church. This was a place that was bounded on every side and from where they could see out but where they themselves were hidden from sight.

("own", lookout, hidden, friends, could do stuff that you couldn't do at home...)

From when Respondent 16 was six till she was about thirteen, as she recalls, her special place was the deserted playground outside the apartment block she lived in. The

playground was "deserted," and en route to the school that she and her younger sister walked to, everyday. Her little brother went to the kindergarten opposite the playground and this is where she would wait to pick him up every evening. Being the eldest of five children, this was "her special place" where she could be alone and be without the responsibility of being "the eldest" in the family. The most significant place on the playground was the carousel that nobody used anymore, but that had been leftover from the days when the playground had been used. She would spend hours on this carousel and she has pleasant memories of her place.

(carefree, no responsibilities, happy, respite, her own..)

Respondent 17 spoke of two special places--both parks in his neighborhood. The first place was a park that he went to and that was special when he was younger--from about six to eight years. He and his friends would ride their bikes here, build things and places, slide down hills, play, skate, do everything without their parents being around. The best part of the park was the "neat, hiding places" that it had, with a lot of trees and bushes and sloping "hills." The place was "the most beautiful" in the area. There was pride in the place that was a significant part of his growing years.

(beauty, nice places to hide, security, activity, make-believe, friends...)

The second park was significant in a more personal way. By its use, it meant he and his friends were "grown-up". This park was in the center of the apartment block he and his friends lived in. It was "their" territory and their gang "ruled" here. On one hand, he did the things that made him seem "grown-up" here, but it was still significant to him that his home was reassuringly close by. (grown-up, their "own, testing ground, friends, fun, approval?..)

When Respondent 18 was five, he lived with his family in the suburbs of a relatively small city--in a house that they lived in till he was about eight, after which they moved to a large metropolis. This childhood home seems to be his special place--the whole house and its surrounds intrigued him. His father was posted to a High--Security Prison environment--and the security, the parades and the lavish house and garden that come with a job such as

this, intrigued him, at this age. Nature and the experience of it formed a big part of the memory of the experience--the breeze in the trees, the garden, the huge trees in the yard, the pond and the tiny fish in it... Besides being fascinated by the place when there were people and activity around, the respondent seemed to find very special the time he spent alone in the afternoons--when everyone else would be sleeping. It was then that he spent time just doing his own thing--or at the most kicking around some mud in the yard with his brother. There were no grown-ups then--nothing specific to do, and they could just do whatever they felt like. (fascination, ambition, freedom, happiness, nostalgia..)

Respondent 19 grew up in a suburban neighborhood with houses along a dead-end street. His special place as a child was the sandbox that his father built for them in their backyard. It was the best sandbox in the neighborhood, there was a sense of pride in that place, and all the kids of the neighborhood came to play in it--for a long time. This participant had this place right up until he was thirteen, almost. What was the greatest thing here was that he and his friends could shape the sand box into whatever caught their fancy, each time--one day it was a battlefield, the next--a city, and a farm on another day. The sand box was large enough for him and his two friends and there was still enough space for his little sister and her friend to do their own thing in there, too. The sandbox was enclosed, almost--with the house wall at the back of it, the patio to the side and bounded by the walkways to the patio and to the garage respectively. There was a feeling of security in knowing who could see you and knowing who was coming by to see you play. A rose garden was the only thing that was open in front of them, and that was a beautiful thing associated with memories of the sandbox.

(safe, memories, friendship, new form to the sandbox everyday, warmth, happiness, beauty around....)

When she was about six or seven, Respondent 20's favorite place was a wooden playhouse in the park across the street from her house. What she liked about the place was that it formed part of her daily life--everyday she and her best friend would go there and it

was almost comforting in its routine. Although it was a public park, it was their own little place while they played there everyday. They would more often climb onto the roof and lie there and watch things (which you could do only if you were "big" enough) than play inside the house. The playhouse was hidden behind some trees so no one could really see them, unless they were close to the house. They didn't really do much on top of the playhouse other than just look around. It did provide a kind of refuge from everything else--a place they could be in by themselves--and know that they could come back everyday.

(lookout, routine, comforting, own place, friendship..)

Respondent 21 grew up in the suburbs, in a typical single-family house with a yard, in a neighborhood that had been developed by her uncle. Because of this, a lot of her family lived here and she felt like the place was "hers." Her special place was a wooden swing in a field that she discovered, that had been left undeveloped. The field had a pond and a large tree on which the swing hung. It was a personal space, that she went to when she wanted to be alone--where she felt calm and peaceful. It was her "security blanket." She was hidden here but she could see the road out in front of her and whoever went down that road. She spent hours looking at the frogs in the pond, the birds and the field in front of her, swinging all the time. At times, she let her two best friends share this place. There were other places she liked in the neighborhood, the bridge, the fountain at the entrance and so forth, but none of them had the personal significance to her that this place did.

(peaceful, solace, alone, nature, fun...)

From when he was eight till he was about thirteen, respondent 22 lived out in the country, and that was where he had the best places he lived in, as he remembers them now--their home, the woods around their place, the whole setting. His special place was, at first, the tree house that his dad helped him and his brothers build. They spent all their time building more stuff in there. It was all "theirs" and once in a way they would invite their parents to "visit." The woods behind their yard was a great place to explore, too.

As he grew older, the woods became more important and his special place "moved

farther away from home" to a clearing in the woods. The beauty of nature, the solitude of the place, the fact that it was all their "own" and the make-believe situations they created out here, made this place a special place of his childhood.

(secret, "own," make-believe, beauty around, good stuff to do, personal, friends...)

From the ages of three till about seven, Respondent 23 lived in a suburb in England. His favorite place was "Bunker's Hill"--a small hill in a field that belonged to no one, but that was at the edge of the neighborhood. In the winter the field would fill up with clean, white snow and then he and his three best friends would sled down this hill. The rush of activity, the challenge that the activity proposed, and the fact that they could be alone here--without the grown-ups was an important part of the experience. Nothing else mattered--not the view from the top, not the rest of the field--just Bunker's Hill and the friends that went with him. This was such a significant part of his childhood memories that each time they moved from one place to another, the first thing the respondent would do would be to find a place that he could sled down from!

(excitement, rush of activity, a 'big' thing, ambition, friendship, freedom....)

Respondent 24 grew up in the country, and every month or so, the family would drive to the neighboring state to visit her grandparents. The respondent's special childhood place was the stockyards where her grandfather used to work. It became more significant after her grandfather passed away, because it was where she could be close to him again. The place had good memories, and served as a kind of refuge that comforted her and supported her make-believe games and let her be alone with her thoughts. Every time she went to this place, she started out at her grandfather's office--a "known" place, and then she'd work her way around the stockyard--the same way each time--sometimes just walking around and looking out to the pastures, and sometimes dreaming of ambitious things here--and imagining herself in important situation. She felt safe and "watched over" here--a feeling she had when she came here with her grandfather and that carried on, even after he had passed away.

(personal, ambitious, dreams, memories, safe, lookout, comforting....)

Respondent 25 grew up in a large metropolis. When she was about eight years old, her parents bought a huge TV. The respondent's special childhood place was the spaceship that her best friend and she made out of the box this TV came in. Ambitious as they were then, to take off to the moon, they made this box into everything they thought a spaceship would be like--complete with hand drawn instruction and control panels, holes cut out for the windows and blankets and sheets draped about the hole for darkness etc. There were other significant places in the neighborhood--in the dead-end street that they lived on--like the cul-de-sac that they made into their biking and roller skating rink--or the wall they'd scale to peep into the incense factory, or the five mile bike trail they made etc. but none of these places spoke as much of herself and her friend than this place did--or at least she thought so then. They spent hours together in this box--all the while preparing for take-off--and occasionally simulating situations that were likely to occur. The only other thing they did with this box was--when they thought they were ready, they would tie it up to the back of her mother's car, in the hope that when she drove it onto the freeway at night, they could take off into space. This was a place that they made themselves and that completely held them and their make-believe games.

(ambition, creativity, privacy, accomplishment, meaningful....)