

THE AFFECT OF OLD PLACES

Exploring the Dimensions of Place Attachment and Senescent Environments

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Introduction

Within environmental psychology and many urban planning, geography, and design contexts, place attachment is a well-known concept with useful applications. For instance, in architectural design, data from place attachment studies can help create evidence that helps inform building and landscape design decisions (e.g., Hull 1992; Lies, Kang, & Sample 2017; Severcan 2015). The goal is to use this “evidence-based design” process to create buildings and places that are better for people. In historic preservation/built heritage conservation research and practice, however, place attachment is a largely unknown and underutilized concept. This condition is likely not helped by pervasive misconceptions about this area of practice, which is the smallest amongst the built environment disciplines that include architecture, planning, and landscape architecture. A common stereotype is that built heritage conservation is largely synonymous with the practice of architecture, which is empirically false. Nearly three-quarters of historic preservation practice in the United States most closely resembles the field of environmental conservation and protection, especially in its reliance on rules and regulations to control people’s behavior toward a specific conservation goal (Wells 2018). In comparison, architectural practice focusing on historic buildings only represents about 10% of the employment market. Like environmental conservation, built heritage conservation is undergoing a realignment of its priorities to focus more on people, their meanings and values, and using these data to influence behavior (Mayes 2018). People-centered and human-centered heritage conservation seeks to balance practice between people and building and landscape fabric (Loulanski 2006; National Trust 2017; Wells 2015; Wells & Stiefel 2019).

These people-centered changes in historic preservation/built heritage conservation have resulted in an increasing interest in using applied social science methods to gather data that can be used as evidence to influence practice (Wells & Stiefel 2019). The ultimate goal is to focus on built heritage conservation as a tool for human flourishing (Jensen 2000; Wells & Lixinski 2017) in order to support the statutory goals of preservation/conservation as a public benefit. One promising area of human-centered preservation/conservation is a focus on understanding the individual’s affective relationship with historic places. While place attachment theory and method are not often used in preservation/conservation practice, they hold much promise in assuring that this activity is, indeed, in the public good and does not just benefit architects,

archaeologists, and historians. This chapter will review the current understanding about the relationship between place, space, and the individual; the relationship between affect and environmental patina; and how this perspective can benefit practice.

Understanding the Relationship Between Place, Space, Environments, and the Individual

In typical academic or professional books from the built environment disciplines, such as architecture or planning, the words space, place, and environment are often used interchangeably as if they are synonyms. It is important to recognize that these terms mean different things, especially in their relationships to people. Some of this ambiguity is due to the fact that our physical position in and relationship to the world is complicated and mediated, in part, through social, cultural, and psychological meanings and experiences. We also lack a nuanced, vernacular vocabulary to describe how our bodies interface with the world. The way in which I will define these terms—space, place, environment—are therefore through a technical perspective in order to provide a better foundation for the concepts that will follow. Refer to Table 1.1 for an overview of these concepts.

Traditionally, space is understood as a way to describe what is around our bodies in an objective, geometric way. In this sense, we can describe space in terms of the distance of things to a body or to each other, or through descriptions of volume, form, and massing. Lefebvre (1991), however, defines space socially; the cultural, political, and economic activities within space also help to define it. Moreover, each culture produces its own unique spaces that are layered in complex ways so that space influences society. This definition infuses space with social power, order, and control. Those who have the power in society to influence the production of certain spaces are therefore able to exert control over other people. For Lefebvre, space is not a static, neutral “thing” that simply exists. Instead, individuals and groups use their social power to manipulate space in order to produce predetermined social and political outcomes. Thus, there are two definitions for space: (1) neutral space as a kind of “natural” space independent of socio-cultural or psychological contexts, and (2) socially produced space. The latter definition, however, does not usually consider psychological perspectives, which “place” does.

Much like Lefebvre’s social definition of space, place is not a neutral concept. But rather than taking on social meanings, place is usually understood through a psychological perspective,

TABLE 1.1 Basic concepts of space, place, and environment

	<i>Frame</i>	<i>Example</i>
Neutral, undifferentiated, architectural or scientific space	Objective, geometric, scientific	Abstract description of the world around us; description of shape, volume, and measurement of a building.
Social space	Social, Marxist	How the design of the American suburb promotes capitalism.
Place	Psychological, cultural, subjective	The feelings that a group of buildings in a certain context produce; specific cultural characteristics associated with these buildings.
Environment	Scientific, quantitative, objective	Characteristics of the surroundings around people, plants, and/or animals.

especially in terms of how someone feels about a space or how, through interpretation, the characteristics of space become known objects of value to individuals (Tuan 1977). Places can also have deep meaning to a culture, such as places of religious pilgrimage (Low 1990), but this meaning originates in an individual's relationship with and valuation of this place. A key concept of place is specificity, not only in geographic qualities, but also particular experiential and cultural experiences. A place is therefore seen, known, and felt in discrete ways, while space is abstract.

As opposed to space and place, "environment" is a word more often encountered in the context of technical jargon than in the discourse of everyday people. According to the Oxford English Dictionary, "environment" is defined as "The surroundings or conditions in which a person, animal, or plant lives or operates." As a concept, environment therefore shares much with space, but the most important difference is that the former term is always associated with living entities. Natural environments privilege plants and animals; built environments privilege people. Because our focus is on built environments, we are interested in how people perceive and are affected by both place and space. Or, in another sense, an environmental focus assumes people are embedded in place; place can be something "over there" while the environment always surrounds us.

If our goal is to understand the relationship that people have with social space, place, and the environment, it is essential to focus on people's emotions; feelings are what fundamentally makes us human. This goal is similar to understanding relationships between people by recognizing feelings and how to communicate them more effectively. While it is entirely possible (and sometimes desirable) to understand our surroundings objectively, such as when designing a structurally-sound building, abstract ideas, such as quality of life, require understanding the subjective qualities of people. This requirement exists because social space, place, and the built environment are defined by people; in other words, their essential nature can only be described through human meanings, values, and experiences. Without people, social space, place, and the built environment cannot exist. What are the ways that we can understand the human-centered aspects of our surroundings?

While there are many ways to understand social space, place, and the built environment, the focus here is on the three major concepts most commonly found in both academic and professional built environment literature: spirit of place, sense of place, and place attachment. Note that these are place-based definitions because all of them are focused on the specific qualities of a particular place and not the abstract qualities of space. Place attachment, however, because of its explicit use of concepts and theory from environmental psychology, contributes an environmental perspective.

One of the oldest concepts to address the intersection of people and place, which originates from Roman religious culture, is *genius loci* or spirit of space (Brook 2000; Walter 1988). Romans literally believed that specific "spirits" (beings in incorporeal form) lived in and guarded certain places, which lent these areas a particular feeling. Thus, when a human being visited these places, the feelings he/she experienced were understood, in part, to be due to the particular spirit that inhabited the area. While this perspective is uncommon today, the term still lives on as a way to describe the overall feeling that a place instills in people who experience it. Spirit of place is often used interchangeably with sense of place and, at times, it is difficult to articulate the specific differences between the two, although spirit of place is more commonly used in architectural, artistic, and literary discourse, whereas sense of place is more common in planning and geography circles. In heritage conservation practice, UNESCO uses "spirit and feeling" as an official criterion for listing World Heritage sites and the Québec Declaration, which guides international conservation practice, explains that "spirit of place" consists

of “elements that give meaning, value, emotion and mystery to a place” (ICOMOS 2008). Thus, in international practice associated with World Heritage, spirit of place is associated with the concept of authenticity. A simpler way of describing authenticity in this context is that it seeks to answer the question: does an older or historic place *feel real* (Plevoets & Van Cleem-poel 2019: pp. 79–95)?

Among heritage conservation organizations, however, UNESCO and ICOMOS are rather unique in their emphasis on aspects of spirit of place in helping to understand the value of historic places; in the United States, which largely operates outside of the influence of these two organizations, spirit of place is mostly absent from historic preservation scholarly and practice literature. Even in World Heritage contexts, “spirit and feeling” are typically given little consideration, as is evident in a review of World Heritage Nominations. The reason for this situation is due, in part, to a lack of a consistent methodology for enumerating the qualities of spirit of place found in historic places (Wells 2014). Conceptually, however, especially as embodied in the Québec Declaration, the way spirit of place is defined has much more in common with *sense of place*, especially in the emphasis on perception and experience and its relationship to authenticity.

To be sure, where there is a concrete difference between spirit of place and sense of place, the former is understood more as an intrinsic quality while the latter relates to the *experience* one has in a place and how it is perceived (Brook 2000). Sense of place is widely credited as originating in the work of the humanistic geographers of the 1970s that explored the relationship between place and affect (or emotional states) (Rodaway 2006). In the 1980s, environmental psychologists informed their place-based theories with this work, helping to understand the importance of experiencing a place in relation to its perception and meaning (Altman & Low 1992). In other words, places have little meaning (and value) to people unless an individual can have bodily sensations (e.g., sight, sound, smell, touch) while being embedded in a particular geography (Buttimer & Seamon 1980). Through this research, there developed the idea that people can become emotionally attached to certain places, much like we can become attached to certain people. Thus, well-being is related to being in certain places, especially for long periods of time—a concept known as “rootedness” (Tuan 1980). The removal (especially permanently) of individuals from such places can result in place disruptions (Brown & Perkins 1992). An individual’s identity is also related to long-term associations with certain places (Proshansky, Fabian, & Kaminoff 1995).

Lastly, the built environment encompasses ideas from both spirit of place and sense of place with “environment” simply meaning the surroundings of people within a context of buildings, structures, and human-modified landscape elements. When used to focus on the relationship of people to their surroundings, “environment” assumes a psychological dimension. Sometimes referred to as “environmental psychology,” this particular focus on people and places is often quantitative as opposed to the qualitative aspects of spirit of place and sense of place. Within environmental psychology, there are four common, measurable aspects of an individual’s emotional attachment to places: general place attachment, place identity, place dependence, and place rootedness (Williams et al. 1995; Williams & Roggenbuck 1989; Williams & Vaske 2003). It is important to note that there are many other possible definitions, including topophilia, urban identity, sense of community, and community attachment (see Manzo & Devine-Wright 2014), but for the sake of brevity, this particular review will only focus on these widely known and time-tested concepts and concepts that can be measured. All of these aspects of attachment describe a transactional relationship between places and people, or the bi-directional way in which the environment influences people and people influence their environment (Gifford 1987).

General place attachment, or simply place attachment, is an overarching category of many types of bonds (e.g., emotion, cognition) between people and places (Altman & Low 1992). Along with place identity and place dependence, it is a fundamental way to help understand sense of place (Jorgensen & Stedman 2001, 2006). Place identity can be defined as the process by which an individual values him/herself in relation to a place; in other words, an individual's identity is influenced by how a person perceives and experiences the physical characteristics of a place (Brown & Perkins 1992; Proshansky, Fabian, & Kaminoff 1995). This quality is easy to see when people identify themselves strongly with a particular place and its characteristics, such as the city or neighborhood in which they live. Place dependence is related to whether or not a particular place could substitute for another place (Stokols & Shumaker 1981). An example would be if a neighborhood in which someone was raised could substitute for another neighborhood with essentially the same design characteristics; for most people this would not be possible and so, in this particular case, this individual would have a high degree of dependence on the place in which they were raised. Place rootedness is a type of attachment that occurs over a long period of time and requires intimate association with a particular place or places (Rowles 1980; Tuan 1977) and seems to be related to positive social interactions within a particular place (Mench & Manor 1998).

The methodologies and methods used to understand spirit of place, sense of place, and place attachment are quite diverse and employ perspectives from many disciplines. They can be broadly divided into rationalistic and empirical traditions. Put in the most direct way possible, a rationalistic perspective examines reality from inside of one's head, whereas an empirical perspective observes and records what happens, outside, in the world. A rationalistic perspective assumes reality exists in a certain way and then finds examples of it; an empirical perspective gathers evidence about a particular aspect of reality, and then uses this evidence to make a claim about reality. Fundamentally, a rationalistic perspective, while useful for theory, can be problematic because it is difficult to incorporate evidence from other people's minds to help understand aspects of reality (Lichbach 2003). Because it is based on logical deduction, which starts with a general assumption about something and then tries to find an example of that something in the world, a rationalistic perspective places little value on experience (Davis 2004). An empirical perspective, on the other hand, makes no presumptive claims or assumptions about the nature of reality before gathering evidence for a particular phenomenon; in this sense is it inductive in nature. Inductive reasoning starts by gathering evidence that represents a particular phenomenon and then, using this evidence, comes to a general principle (or theory) about reality. An empirical perspective is thus largely based on experience.

In general, research in understanding spirit of place is from a rationalistic perspective, using methods from rhetorics (literary disciplines), post-structuralist philosophy, and architectural and historic preservation philosophy. While authors are quite careful in their analysis, many of their claims have never been empirically tested; they thus may or may not represent reality with fidelity (Wells & Stiefel 2019), but have still been quite influential—especially in the design of buildings and places. Research in sense of place and especially place attachment, however, is largely empirical with the former relying more on qualitative data and the later on quantitative data (see Seamon's 1982 description of "radical" empiricism from the former perspective). Common methods used in sense of place research originate from humanistic geography with phenomenology predominating as well as other qualitative methods, such as ethnographies (e.g., place attachment through a cultural lens; see Low 1990) and case studies. Research in place attachment, because of its origins in environmental psychology, is typically quantitative and includes correlational (survey) research, behavioral mapping, environmental attitude measurement, visual

preferences, simulated environments, post-occupancy evaluations, and neuroscience. While it is beyond the scope of this chapter to go into these methods in detail, the reader is directed to Manzo and Devine-Wright (2014) and Gifford (2014) for further details. More specifically, a fundamental goal of these methods is to understand the emotional relationship that people have with specific places of all kinds. Topically, these places are most commonly natural or urban places. Historic places, or places in which the advanced age of the physical environment is a defining characteristic, however, are rare in this kind of research. This lack of representation in preservation/conservation is a topic that will be discussed next.

The Psychology of Senescent Environments: Affect and Environmental Patina

Sense of place has long been used to justify the practice of historic preservation or built heritage conservation (e.g., Benton 2001; Dattel 1985; Dedek 2014; Ford 1974; Lew 1989; Rowntree 1981). Unlike research in sense of place by humanistic geographers, authors who discuss sense of place in relation to the historic environment typically adopt a tautological, rationalistic perspective: historic places have a sense of place because they are historic; people think they are historic because they have a sense of place. Moreover, there is often no “research” *per se* in helping to define sense of place for a specific historic place and no attempt to gather empirical evidence; rather, it is taken for granted that all historic places *must* have a sense of place that is universally perceived as beneficial to people. There are exceptions to this observation, including my own research (Wells 2017b; Wells & Baldwin 2012), but such deviations are rare in the literature.

Many decades ago, Philip Hubbard (1993), a geographer, made several prescient observations about the practice of built heritage conservation that remain both true and underappreciated today. First, laypeople do not seem to value historic places for their inherent historicity; rather, laypeople appreciate historic places for reasons that are antithetical to accepted practice. They then develop their own unique myths about specific historic places that connect with their *personal* history. So, while laypeople certainly recognize that such places are old, cultural and personal identity, not “historical purity” (ibid.: p. 368), are of primary importance. Second, the regulatory and planning environment, in which this historical purity is paramount, is misguided because it fails to incorporate the contemporary sociocultural values of laypeople related to place experience. Third, if the goal of built heritage conservation is to preserve sense of place, then this focus on historical purity is more likely to destroy, rather than enhance, this characteristic because it ignores the interactions laypeople have with historic places. And lastly, “townscape studies” (e.g., psychological studies of how people perceive and value historic areas) should inform built heritage conservation rules and regulations in an effort to inject the contemporary values and meanings of laypeople into conservation practice. I will explain aspects of each of these items in detail, concluding with why so little has changed to address these issues.

Evidence for the inherent conflict between the values of conventional preservation/conservation experts and the values and meanings of laypeople is substantial and incontrovertible (e.g., Harrison 2013; Schofield 2014; Smith 2006). Perhaps best summarized by Laurajane Smith’s (2006) concept of the “authorized heritage discourse” (AHD), preservation/conservation practice is based on the professional values of historians, archaeologists, and architects—groups that also wrote the specific rules and regulations under which they practice. As a result, the objective historical facts that describe people and events and the formal aesthetic qualities of buildings (e.g., architectural styles) are the required, fundamental values for preservation/conservation practice. Political bodies have enshrined these professional values, across the

globe, in heritage conservation/historic preservation rules and regulations since the mid-twentieth century (Jokilehto 1999; Wells & Lixinski 2016). These rules and regulations include the designation of historic buildings and places and the way in which laypeople can legally alter their own buildings and places. Therefore, the AHD describes an official language and communication style that must be used when discussing the value of historic buildings and places. Laypeople are usually quite naïve about this requirement and therefore fail to describe places in terms of historical facts and academically correct architectural styles. Thus, in practice, the result is that many of the values and meanings that laypeople hold for the historic environment are simply ignored and discarded because they are incongruent with statutory practice (King 2009). To be sure, in the statutory environment that governs built heritage conservation, the values and meanings of laypeople are not important *unless* they are congruent with the professional values of historians, archaeologists, or architects. So, while *some* of the public's values are definitely included in practice, much is lost. Yet, too few people ask a very simple question: what are these ignored values and meanings of laypeople?

Returning to Hubbard (1993), his review was explicit in describing the role of myth-making in constructing a layperson's sense of place. What if myth was a fundamental reason laypeople valued historic buildings and places and not the objective historical facts related to places? While far from definitive, we are beginning to understand that a natural human response to the older built environment is for people to create their own fantasies and myths in response to their experience in the historic environment (Staiff 2017; Wells & Baldwin 2012). These human experiences appear to be essential for bonding people with historic places and may have no relation to objective historical fact. To be sure, many historians and architects have long feared the possibility that myth and "false" histories are important to the public; in reaction to this fear, some of these professionals adopted the perspective of forcing the public to think like them in order to avoid engaging laypeople as equals (e.g., Blaine 1992; Boito 1884; Kimball 1935; Weeks & Jandl 1996). The enshrinement of professional values in a preservation/conservation regulatory framework is, in part, driven by a fear of the plebeian, historically-inaccurate, and unsophisticated values that the public holds for historic places (Wells 2017a). In order to rectify this injustice, preservation/conservation practice should move from fearing the public's penchant for myth and instead embrace it, including incorporating it within the statutory environment (Wells & Lixinski 2017).

But just how can one incorporate the perspective of laypeople into built heritage conservation practice—especially practice driven by objective, statutory requirements? Hubbard (1993) gives us a clue that this ought to, in part, include "townscape studies." Gordon Cullen, a prominent mid-century British architect, is credited with creating these studies, which he referred to in the context of "psychological planning" (Weddle 1962: p. 239). While there does not appear to be a consensus on the method used for these kinds of studies, there is an emphasis on understanding the unique sense of place inherent to certain historic environments (e.g., Land Use Consultants 2002), although the inclusion of trained psychologists and methods from environmental psychology is far from assured. Such studies are sometimes included in required "conservation area appraisals" (United Kingdom) and "environmental assessments" (United States), but a specific, psychological focus on the environment is not required by statute—at least not in the United States, United Kingdom, Canada, or Australia. To be sure, Hubbard (1993) argues for a kind of townscape study that considers how certain environments influence the psychological perception and behavior of individuals. So, while we have a sense for what ought to be considered, there is no clear method for accomplishing it. This chapter will, therefore, focus on the "what" more than the "how" in terms of actualizing this idea.

Hubbard (1993) was optimistic at the time in which he authored his paper that research by humanistic geographers and psychologists was increasing in the area of built heritage conservation policy. This observation was momentarily true at the time his paper was published, but did not last. To be sure, the peak in this kind of research, which never achieved any kind of critical mass, was in the 1990s. In the intervening years, however, we have seen the rise of critical heritage studies, starting in earnest in the second decade of the current century. While welcome for its overall social science perspective and willingness to critique the over-emphasis on historicity in practice that Hubbard observed, it has largely failed to encompass humanistic geography and environmental psychology, instead favoring ethnographic methods. While this observation is by no means prejudicial, it means that our understanding of built heritage is still severely lacking from a psychological perspective. Moreover, critical heritage studies proponents have not yet engaged with the kind of applied research influencing built heritage conservation policy that Hubbard long ago advocated.

We do, however, have the beginnings of a basic understanding of the person-historic environment relationship as it applies to myth and fantasy. This relationship appears to minimally require the presence of physical age in a particular environment, which typically manifests as decay, or in a more positive sense, “patina.” This unique characteristic of what I call senescent environments, or environments chiefly characterized by their advancing age, is that as the surfaces of the built environment degrade, people have a specific emotional response to them. Moreover, this emotional response helps to bond people to specific places.

In order to understand how the physical age of a place impacted place attachment, I designed a study that compared a “new” place against an “old” place; the theory was that if the design of both places was identical (or nearly so), then any difference in place attachment should be influenced by the difference in age between the two places. This work has since been published—Wells and Baldwin (2012) and Wells (2017b)—but the study design and results are summarized here. Luckily for the study, the new urbanist movement of the past few decades has resulted in many residential neighborhoods that faithfully duplicate not only historical building styles, but even the design of complete urban environments, including building setbacks, street widths, and the overall massing of buildings (for more details, see Passell 2013). For my study, I chose the “South of Broad Street” neighborhood in Charleston, South Carolina, as the “old” place. This neighborhood is the location of the first historic district in the United States, which was established in 1931, and consists mostly of antebellum houses. The “new” place was the I’On new urbanist development in Mount Pleasant, South Carolina, in which the majority of the built environment was constructed in the twenty-first century. The design of both places—both in terms of building styles and overall urban design—was nearly identical, including in building density. In tests of photos from both locations, people had difficulty identifying which photo was from which neighborhood (see Figure 1.1 and Figure 1.2). These neighborhoods have nearly identical demographics and are within a 20-minute drive of each other.

I used a mixed-method approach, starting with a phenomenology (qualitative data) that then informed a survey instrument (quantitative). My research questions centered on understanding the differences between residents’ experiences of these two neighborhoods and differences between several dimensions of place attachment. Both the phenomenology and the survey instrument demonstrated that, overall, there was very little difference in terms of how people perceived and experienced the historic Charleston neighborhood (the “old” place) and I’On (the “new” place). The most significant difference, however, was that only in historic Charleston did residents report having a kind of vicarious experience

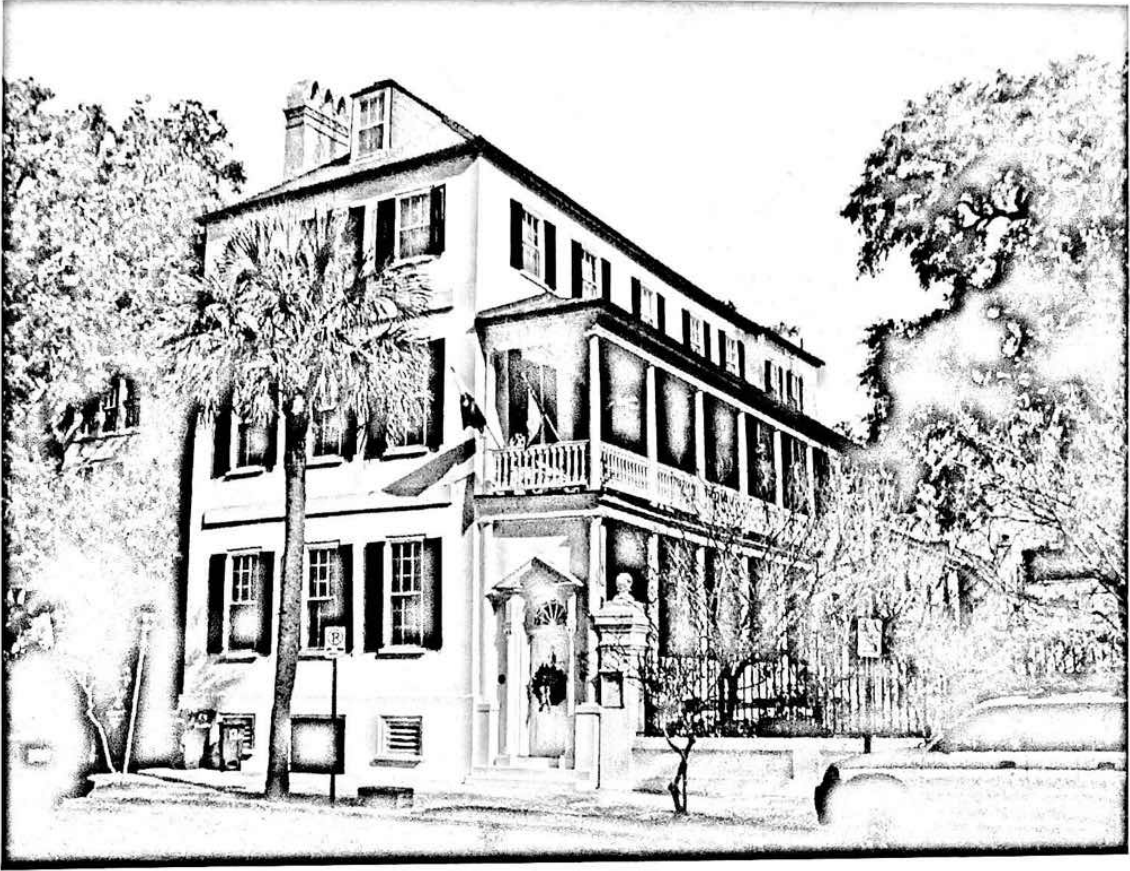


FIGURE 1.1 Representative antebellum building in historic Charleston—the “old” place
Photo by author

of the past that I refer to as a “spontaneous fantasy”; residents from l’On did not report this experience. I therefore attributed this spontaneous fantasy as a characteristic that was uniquely associated with the advanced physical age of historic Charleston in comparison to l’On.

A useful way to describe a spontaneous fantasy is through a second-person description related by the study participants. Imagine yourself walking through an older residential neighborhood, built well before World War II. While walking, you casually observe the buildings and landscapes around you. Occasionally, you look at a part of a building or some landscape feature that is close to you and, spontaneously, a vignette of the past magically appears in your mind’s eye. In this vignette, you see people from the past and what they did in this place you are currently viewing; you find the experience alluring and pleasurable. The vignette does not last long—perhaps 15 seconds or so—and it vanishes as quickly as it appeared. This experience is the spontaneous fantasy, as noted above. Three key concepts are important in characterizing the spontaneous fantasy: (1) its occurrence is not under the direct conscious control of the person who experiences it; (2) the physical age (e.g., patina) that is part of the older built environment catalyzes the experience; and (3) it is a deeply emotional experience for its participants.

Relating the spontaneous fantasy to place attachment, however, is particularly illuminating. Using a survey instrument and binary logistic regression, I was able to establish a positive correlation between the appearance of patina in an older environment, the experience of



FIGURE 1.2 Representative contemporary building in I'On—the “new” place

Photo by author

a spontaneous fantasy, and a greater degree and character of place attachment to the neighborhood in which the experience occurred (Wells 2017b). Specifically, residents of historic Charleston had a significantly greater level of general emotional attachment to their neighborhood and much higher levels of dependence and rootedness in comparison to residents from I'On. As far as I am aware, there are no other studies of this kind and which are based on similar methods from environmental psychology. Much more work needs to be done in this area to confirm if people from other geographical locations also experience spontaneous fantasies and if this experience seems to be as closely tied to environmental patina and place attachment as I have found. But these early results are definitely intriguing.

To be sure, there is very little research from a social science perspective (e.g., anthropology, sociology, psychology, geography) that attempts to understand how people perceive and value surface decay or patina in the older built environment, even though this is understood as an essential part of the concept of historical authenticity (Grossi & Brimblecombe 2004, 2005; Ruskin 1907/1849). There are, however, a few studies that have asked laypeople to value soiling of or damage to masonry surfaces—characteristics that are considered to be a part of environmental patina, at least in moderation (Vaccaro 1996). When each are present in small amounts, people have found the overall effect to improve the value of an older building (Andrew 2002; Quist et al. 2008). In sum, we know with relative certainty that there is a psychological relationship between senescent environments and changes in how people value

this environment. Beyond this basic understanding, there also appears to be a relationship between senescent environments, spontaneous fantasies, and place attachment.

Implications for Preservation/Conservation Practice

In the western world, it is generally considered acceptable to use a statutory framework to protect built heritage. To be sure, the United States, United Kingdom, Canada, and Australia have hundreds of rules and regulations at the federal, state, and local levels that control people's behavior in an effort to protect historic buildings and places. But how ubiquitous is this practice across the globe? According to the UNESCO national heritage law database,¹ nearly every country in Africa, the Middle East, Asia, the Pacific, Europe, North America, Latin America, and the Caribbean has multiple laws that impact "immovable heritage" (equivalent to historic buildings, structures, and places). In total, there are nearly 500 national laws of this type. This number does not even include state or local laws. The vast majority of these laws require the use of the authorized heritage discourse (AHD), which means that "built heritage" must be conceptualized in terms of western, rationalistic preservation theory. Returning to our earlier discussion, the AHD legitimizes the professional values of historians, archaeologists, and architects while sidelining (or ignoring) the sociocultural and experiential values of laypeople. The ramification of this practice is that specific cultural groups (who represent the public) are not allowed to control the valuation and treatment of their own heritage. Instead, outside experts, who may have no connection with these peoples, are given the authority to decide for these cultural groups what is and is not important and how it should be treated. This is a social justice issue, most often discussed in the context of World Heritage (Logan 2012), but increasingly in the context of national and local laws (Gibson, Hendricks, & Wells 2019).

To reiterate, the recognition and protection of built heritage is universally supposed to be in the public good, yet the values and meanings of the public for their own heritage—unless these values are congruent with the AHD—are required, by law, to be sidelined. The fundamental cause of this social justice issue is the statutory environment, which works effectively to preserve the *status quo* (Wells & Lixinski 2017). Any attempt to bring equity to built heritage conservation must therefore address the rules and regulations which control its practice. The problem is that no one yet knows how to implement this change in a way that is cost efficient and effective (*ibid.*). Any such changes must incorporate aspects of the applied social sciences. The reason is deceptively simple: as far as we know, there is no more effective way to understand people and their meanings and values than to do so through an ethnographic, sociological, or psychological lens. This kind of problem is therefore securely in the domain of the methods commonly used in a number of the social science disciplines.

As is increasingly found in critical heritage studies research, the role of emotion in the experience and valuation of built heritage is a fundamentally human reason why such heritage is valued by laypeople (Smith & Campbell 2015; Tolia-Kelly, Waterton, & Watson 2017; Watson 2015). Viewed through a psychological perspective, this places an increasingly important impetus on understanding how people are attached to specific "historic" places. While this question has a purely academic dimension to it, more importantly, understanding how people are emotionally attached to specific historic places is one way to help inform both the recognition and treatment of historic places from a bottom-up, human-centered perspective. The inverse is equally as important: how emotionally damaging would the loss of an historic building or place be to the community that values it? Methods from environmental psychology that help us understand

place attachment and place disruption therefore have the potential to inform this critical decision-making process. Moreover, engaging in this kind of practice brings us closer to the promise of making built heritage conservation actually perform in the public good.

Conclusion

In terms of the size of the discipline, historic preservation/built heritage conservation is a minority player amongst the other built environment disciplines. Its increasing focus on people-centered and human-centered goals, however, means that it has the potential to make a societal impact that is much larger than its practitioner footprint. But to make this transition requires a better understanding of the experiential relationship people have with old places. This is especially true in revealing why it appears that environmental patina catalyzes spontaneous fantasies in people and, in doing so, has potentially profound impacts on their place attachment. Even if we are able to more fully articulate this experience using techniques from environmental psychology, the regulatory environment serves as a nearly impenetrable barrier to change in the preservation/conservation field. We need more social science researchers interested in people and built heritage—especially from psychology—to perform primary research. And we need people who can stitch the divide between law and the social sciences to bring about needed statutory reform. While built heritage conservation is supposed to be performed in the public benefit, we cannot achieve the goal if we lack a fundamental understanding of people, historic places, and emotional attachment and a way to transform this understanding into practice.

Note

- 1 See <https://en.unesco.org/cultnatlaws/list>

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