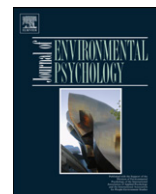




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# Historic preservation, significance, and age value: A comparative phenomenology of historic Charleston and the nearby new-urbanist community of I'On

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## ABSTRACT

While the age of physical environments is the central tenet of historic preservation, there is a lack of empirical evidence about how everyday people actually value, perceive, and experience age as an intrinsic part of an urban environment. In order to ameliorate this knowledge deficit, this study employs phenomenology to understand the lived experience of being in a “new” versus an “old” or “historic” urban residential environment. The new environment is the I'On new urbanist development in Mt. Pleasant, South Carolina, and the old environment is the location of the United States' first historic district in Charleston, South Carolina. These locations are approximately within five miles of each other. In both places, the physical characteristics of the built environment are remarkably similar in density, form, layout, and design, but the age is dramatically different. Through photo elicitation techniques and interviews, the results of this study reveal that residents of historic Charleston and I'On value their built environments in remarkably similar ways. Surprisingly, elements that evoke a strong sense of attachment tend to be landscape features, such as gates, fountains, trees, and gardens rather than buildings. The informants valued the “mystery” that they felt was part of the landscape and which consisted of layered elements such as fences, gates, and paths, such that these features (including buildings) had to be “discovered.” Lastly, the informants strongly valued landscapes that showed “people care” through regular maintenance. The essential difference in people's experience and valuation of the new environment (I'On) and the old environment (historic Charleston) is in the older environment's ability to instill creative fantasies in the minds of the informants based on a hypothetical past of their own creation. The informants in I'On did not share these kinds of meanings.

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## 1. Introduction

Historic preservation is widely acknowledged as an important endeavor because of the benefits it offers people through an enhanced sense of place. The historic core of Charleston, South Carolina—the location of the first historic district in the United States—is the epitome of an environment that gains its sense of place from the layers of several centuries of history. Charleston's landscapes, full of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century homes, induce emotional vignettes in tourist magazines for their “unique allure” of “tucked-away treasures” that are like “a secret waiting to be revealed” (Hunt, 2007, p. 87). This emotional connection with Charleston's past is far from a recent phenomenon. A number of late nineteenth and early twentieth century authors refer to the city's “rare charm” as Mildred Cram (1917) does in describing Charleston as “a beautiful house that has been lived in for countless

generations, taking on a rare and very personal quality, a patina, of inimitable luster” (p. 114). In an especially prescient passage, Cram recognizes that “Charleston's charm is two-thirds atmospheric and one-third physical” (p. 115), in recognition that much of Charleston's value derives from experiencing its places versus a detached, objective account based on descriptive facts.

Historic Charleston is not alone in eliciting an emotional response from people; indeed, as this article reveals, the *lived experience* of being in an historic place is an important aspect of why people value historic environments that is often neglected in historic preservation practice. Historic preservation doctrine,<sup>1</sup> exercised through a type of hegemonic discourse that Laurajane Smith (2006) refers to as the “Authorized Heritage Discourse” (AHD), does little to acknowledge the lifeworld in relation to the

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<sup>1</sup> Examples of historic preservation doctrine include the Venice Charter (international), English Heritage Principles of Repair (UK), the Secretary of the Interior's Standards (USA), and the National Register of Historic Places criteria for significance (USA).

experience of being in historic places. In the AHD, Smith argues, “it is the legitimacy of facts ... that is privileged and given critical attention, and not the emotional or subjective activity itself that is acknowledged” (Smith, 2006, p. 58). While a dialog on the importance of subjective values in informing historical significance has been ongoing since the mid-1990s (see Alanen & Melnick, 2000; Avrami, Mason, & Torre, 2000; Green, 1998; King, 2003; Mason, 2003; Muñoz Viñas, 2005; Pendlebury, 2009; Smith, 2006; Wells, 2007, 2010), Randy Mason (2008) suggests that preservation practice remains largely in the realm of an objective, facts based, “fabric centered” approach dominated by the values of experts instead of a “values centered” approach that recognizes stakeholder’s “full range of values ascribed to a place” (p. 83), including the meanings associated with the lifeworld. So while we recognize that people’s emotional attachment to historic places is important, preservation practitioners lack both the doctrinal directives and the methodological tools to understand this attachment (Green, 1998; Mason, 2002; Wells, 2007).

Historic preservation doctrine does acknowledge lived experience and subjective values to a limited degree, however, but its role is largely tangential in comparison to the need to base significance and authenticity on historical facts and the presence of confirmed historical building fabric. For instance, the National Park Service’s criteria for determining historical integrity, which is “the ability of a property to convey its significance” (National Park Service, 1997, p. 44), includes two criteria—feeling and association—that are related to lived experience. The National Park Service deprecates the role of these criteria in establishing historical integrity, however, with the caveat that “because feeling and association depend on individual perceptions, their retention alone is never sufficient to support eligibility of a property for the National Register” (National Park Service, 1997, p. 45). Under UNESCO guidelines, a cultural property “must meet the conditions of authenticity” in order for it to be nominated to the World Heritage List (UNESCO, 2008, paragraph 79). In addition to objective, fact based criteria, authenticity can also be “expressed” through the criterion of “spirit and feeling” of a place. UNESCO acknowledges that the assessment of spirit and feeling does not easily conform to “practical” methods based on the gathering of objective facts about a place (UNESCO, 2008, item 83, p. 22). So in summary, while the lived experience can play a role in establishing the integrity/authenticity of an historic place in existing preservation doctrine, its influence is not as important as objective, factual criteria. Moreover, as UNESCO and Mason (2002) acknowledge, there is not a clear set of methodological guidelines for how to assess subjective values associated with the historic environment, much less lived experience.

In an effort to better understand the emotional experience of being in historic places from a phenomenological perspective, this paper will explore the most subjective elements of people’s lived experience of being in a “new” and an “old” urban residential environment in order to explore the ways in which people are emotionally attached to the physical age of place. By looking at the valuation of historic places through the concept of the lifeworld—the subjective, taken-for-granted experience of being in the world—we can help inform the fundamental reasons why historic places are significant to everyday people in an effort to balance the dominance of expert/objective values in historic preservation practice. A place to begin this exploration is related to why historic places have value for people through the experience of physical age and how people perceive this age.

## 2. Age value

Age value is a term that is frequently used in historic preservation to describe how people appreciate the physical age of

places as evinced by the way building materials<sup>2</sup> naturally change and degrade over time. Fundamentally, it is age that makes a place historically authentic, as perceived oldness is a key element to this assessment. Barbara Appelbaum (2007) indicates that “an object has age value when it is old, it *looks* old, and we *like* that it looks old” (p. 104, original author’s emphasis). Alois Riegl (1996/1903) is widely credited with introducing both the term and concept of age value in his seminal work on how the appearance of physical decay in architectural monuments can be an appreciated, if not revered, aspect of objects.<sup>3</sup> While Riegl refers to age value as “imperfection, a lack of completeness, a tendency to dissolve shape and color” and “decay and disintegration” (p. 73), he did not provide specific details or examples as to how this would manifest on a particular monument, leaving it to the reader to provide an interpretation.

How, then, is physical age made manifest? The answer lies in how we feel about the way materials naturally or artificially change over time. Patina, for instance, is a “good” decay as opposed to “bad” decay. Bad decay is referred to as rust, mildew, or rot; only good decay receives the appellation of patina. The specific kind of material at hand also influences the valuation process. Generally speaking, the passage of time improves the appearance of traditional building materials such as stone, brick, and bronze while modern building materials such as concrete, aluminum, or steel appear increasingly ugly (Dekkers, 2000, p. 51). Thus, the decision if decay is patina or rust, mildew, or dirt is related to the material at hand and the perspective of the viewer. Ultimately the classification of decay into positive and negative categories is related to personal values; one person’s “damage” is another’s “romantic ruins” and such a determination is ultimately a subjective process (Muñoz Viñas, 2005, p. 104). Patina is created by humans as well as by nature: when the change is of natural origins, it tends to be used synonymously with decay or degradation; when the change is artificial through the process of patination it is either artistic embellishment or an attempt at forgery. Decay and artifice become patina when they acquire positive connotations for the interpreter of the historical object. Patina, therefore, is a valuation term uniquely affiliated with the concept of age value.

Age itself is an objective physical description of an object’s or an environment’s inevitable decay over time or it can be an emotional response to said decay. More often than not, these elements are intertwined where physical perception merges into feelings that result from being in and experiencing a certain place; it can be difficult to locate where description ends and emotion begins in understanding the nature of age value. Riegl (1996/1903) wrote that “historical value ... rests on a scientific basis and therefore can only be achieved through intellectual reflection” whereas age value “addresses the emotions directly” (p. 74). Age value is therefore not equivalent to historical value, or the objective assessment of historical facts about a place; the former is directly related to place attachment—the affective bond with place—while the latter requires higher-order analytical thought processes and deliberation to grasp its significance. Thus, historical value rejects the subjective elements of experience and instead concentrates solely on the acquisition of “facts” through an intellectual enterprise.

<sup>2</sup> Plants are sometimes included in the concept of age value as in an ancient live oak tree, but this usage is contemporary.

<sup>3</sup> Riegl’s 1903 paper is required reading in most historic preservation theory courses around the world and along with John Ruskin, underpins much of rational philosophy of preservation practice.

### 3. Understanding the experience of age value through environmental phenomenology

Phenomenology was chosen for this study because of its focus on lived experience and its relevance in understanding the “foundations of meanings, things, and experiences” (Seamon, 1982, p. 119). Unlike other methodologies, phenomenology allows one to delve into the origin of perception before cognition interrupts the process and obscures fundamental feelings and subjective meanings. Because it completely relies on intuition, phenomenology is always focused on the initial, pre-cognitive, first experience (Moustakas, 1994, p. 52) and is able to reveal people's feelings for places because “emotions almost always play a role in every phenomenological experience” (Hesselgren, 1975, p. 116). Lastly, phenomenology is well suited for questions regarding the subjective significance of historical places because such places engender feelings of “awe, wonder, beauty, and identity” (Ellis, 2002, p. 54) that traditional, objective approaches to historical significance often fail to address.

While Edmund Husserl is widely credited with developing the modern concept of phenomenology in the early twentieth century (Stapleton 1983, pp. 1–6), it is his student, Martin Heidegger, who more fully explored being-in-the-world and moved beyond the purely descriptive methods of his teacher (Van Manen, 1990, pp. 25, 26). Because of his shift from Husserl's transcendentalism to existentialism, Heidegger helped provide the foundation for contemporary environmental phenomenology (Castello, 2010, p. 2). Maurice Merleau-Ponty's (1962, 1963) existential phenomenology, based on Heidegger's work, enabled the groundbreaking work on place conducted by humanistic geographers during the 1970s (e.g., Buttner, 1974; Ley, 1977; Ley & Samuels 1978; Relph, 1970; Seamon, 1979; Tuan, 1974, 1977). In particular, Edward Relph's *Place and Placelessness* (1976) stands out for its seminal inquiry into the relationship between phenomenology, geography, and sense of place and advanced the idea that “place” is more than simply a geographic location; rather, *experienced* space creates place. Relph also explored the nature of an authentic sense of place, bringing an experiential basis to a concept that, until then, was predicated on objective visual and temporal qualities of building and landscape fabric. Dovey's (1985) later study explored a similar theme, coming to the conclusion that authenticity was related to how people used space more so than simply aesthetics.

More recently, Edward Casey (1993, 1997, 2007), Jeff Malpas (1999, 2006), and Robert Mugerauer (1994, 1995) have reinforced the central importance of phenomenology in understanding place and in the process successfully defended the approach from post-structuralist challengers, such as Foucault and Derrida. Moreover, these authors have helped legitimize the ontological relationship between place and being originally explored by Heidegger where the primacy of place is essential to the experience of all human endeavors, including memory. As Malpas (1999, p. 186) describes, memory and place are related through the “ordering of the land [which] carrying on its face, in pathways, monuments and sites, [presents] a cultural memory and storehouse of ideas.” Memory, however, is not purely objective recall and involves a creative act, which Merleau-Ponty (1962, p. 242) describes as the formation of an “original past, a past which has never been a present,” where places have the potential to trigger a “false memory or visual illusion” (Malpas, 1999, p. 86). Historic places in particular are prone to elicit a sense of nostalgia—a creative, imaginative act—which is often built upon a past that never actually existed, especially when objective facts about the past are not available (Casey, 1987).

Research in environmental phenomenology can be divided into three strands: first person, existential, and hermeneutical (Seamon, 2000). While first person and hermeneutical phenomenology

emphasize the individual researcher's perspective, existential phenomenology relies on other people relating their experience of place to the researcher. Regardless of the type of phenomenology employed, all three have essential shared concepts, such as a focus on understanding the *lifeworld*, which in its simplest form is the “world as it is lived [or] experienced” (Graumann, 2002, p. 98) and, as Seamon (2000, p. 161) elaborates, “refers to the tacit context, tenor, and pace of daily life to which normally people give no reflective attention.” Phenomenology assumes that only objects in the environment toward which an individual's desire or intent is focused have meaning, a concept known as *intentionality* (de Mural, 1974, p. 3; Seamon 2000, p. 161). In conducting a phenomenological approach, the researcher becomes embedded in the subjective experience of the phenomenon, which is the opposite of positivistic approaches that seek distance and objectivity (Seamon, 1982). In order to understand the full depth of an experience, the researcher employs the *phenomenological reduction*, also known as *bracketing*, which is the process whereby the phenomena is experienced afresh, without prejudice (Casey, 2000, p. 190; Moustakas, 1994, p. 34; Seamon, 1979, p. 20; Van Manen, 1990, p. 185).

There are a number of resources on the phenomenological method or, as some authors (e.g., Graumann, 2002) advocate because of its broader scope, an approach. Examples include Moustakas (1994), and Van Manen (1990), which largely focus on hermeneutical phenomenology and Rolf Von Eckartsberg (1998), who specifically addresses existential phenomenology. Eckartsberg's three-step approach to conducting phenomenological research begins with a hypothesis about a particular phenomenon, then moves to a data gathering stage, and is followed by the analysis of the data. While the broad outline of this procedure is fairly typical for empirical research employed by an array of disciplines, the way in which these steps are defined is unique. In the first step, the problem that defines the hypothesis must have “consensual meaning” beyond individual (i.e., the researcher's) experience. In the second step, the subjects participate in the research process by supplying narratives in regard to the phenomenon under study. The final step, in which the data is “scrutinized to reveal ... their structure, meaning configuration, principle of coherence, and the circumstances of their occurrence and clustering” (Von Eckartsberg (1998), p. 22).

Examples of phenomenologies of specific places include regions (Anella, 1990; Sturm, 1990; Weiner, 1991), landscapes (Riegner, 1993; Tilley, 1994), cities (Hester, 1993; Porteous, 1989; Richardson, 1982), and even phenomenologies of specific materials of places (Tilley, 2004). While phenomenology may be “of particular relevance when dealing with the questions of significance for [historic] preservation” as Jack Elliott (2002, p. 54) advocates, there are few instances of such work in the literature. Two examples include Farmer and Knapp's (2008) study of historical interpretation programs at the West Baden Springs Hotel in West Baden, Indiana (noteworthy for its mixed-method design) and Stefanovic's (1998) comparison of the ancient town of Cavtat, Croatia and a recent suburban development in Toronto, Canada. This later study in particular has much in common with the comparison of the two places that will be presented in this paper in its description of how the ancient town has a sense of mystery and discovery absent from the much newer suburban development.

### 4. Research question and comparative cases

This study is designed to understand the lived experience of being in an historic place at the point where age value and the lifeworld intersect through the use of photo elicitation and interviews of residents from “new” and “old” environments. Ideally, these two environments should share the same physical

characteristics, but differ substantially in age. In this scenario, age value should therefore be related to experiences present in the “old” place, but not in the “new” place. Historic Charleston, South Carolina, south of Broad Street, was chosen as the case representing the old place because it of its iconic status in the history of the historic preservation movement in the United States. It was in this neighborhood where the first local historic district was established in the United States in 1931; in many people’s minds Charleston is synonymous with historic preservation. The I’On new urbanist development, located across the Cooper River from Charleston in Mt. Pleasant, South Carolina, is the new case. I’On did not exist prior to 1997 and mirrors, with remarkable fidelity, the same architectural styles and urban form that is found in historic Charleston.

In the late seventeenth century, English colonists established a settlement at the southeast corner of the Charleston peninsula along the Cooper River, just north of what is today known as White Point Gardens. Originally a small fortified, walled city, roughly bounded by present-day Cumberland, Bay, Water, and Meeting streets, the settlement rapidly expanded beyond these walls, which were demolished starting in 1717 (Rosen, 1997, pp. 11, 12, 14, 18, 30). Charleston’s urban plan featured a mostly regular grid pattern with small lots from 2000 to 3000 square feet or less (about 1/20th of an acre or less) being typical. The original plan, developed in the 1670s using London as a template, survives essentially intact to this day (pp. 12, 13). Although much of the late seventeenth and early eighteenth century fabric of the city has not survived, the basic urban footprint still retains the imprint of the colonial settlers. The neighborhood south of Broad Street is therefore still pedestrian oriented with a pattern of small, grid-like blocks with a good deal of irregularity to them, which is especially evident in the occasional haphazard street or building orientation and a plethora of hidden alleys and oddly arranged spaces.

The majority of the buildings in the study area, therefore, date between about 1780 and 1860, many of which are Charleston Single Houses, a unique style only found in the Charleston area and typified by a side piazza (i.e., porch). After the Civil War, as with most of the South, Charleston fell into a long economic decline and as a result, few houses were constructed after 1865. The economic conditions helped to preserve the existing housing stock until the 1930s when Charleston’s preservation movement began to blossom. The city of Charleston established the country’s first local historic district south of Broad Street in the general area of the old fortifications (Weyeneth, 2000, p. 13). Over the years, the local historic district grew to not only encompass the study area south of Broad Street, but north into the other areas of the city. The post-Civil War economic decline coupled with a strong preservation movement resulted in a landscape with very little modern infill—a remarkable state of affairs considering most other urban areas of the country.

I’On is a much newer community than historic Charleston and was explicitly designed as a “new urbanist” development. The goal of new urbanism is to incorporate traditional, pre-automobile design elements, such as high-density development, street grids, and a pedestrian-oriented focus, into urban design (Duany, Plater-Zyberk, & Speck, 2000, pp. 257–265; *Congress for the New Urbanism*, 2000). Critics of the movement claim that its principles are nostalgic, backwards, regressive, romantic, antiquarian, and escapist (Canizaro, 2007; Fainstein, 2000; Ingersoll, 1989; Landecker, 1996; Walters, 2007). Perhaps the strongest charge against new urbanism is that in practice many of its developments fail to comprehensively implement the complete set of principles outlined by its advocates (Grant, 2006, p. 205). In an analysis of these charges, Cliff Ellis (2002) counters that new urbanism’s empirical, historically-referential design principles instead reflect a “respect for traditional urbanism and civic life” that existed before

the automobile (p. 267). The theme of pedestrian-oriented design based on existing historical precedents has been the basis for many empiricist arguments over the past fifty years (Jacobs, 1961; Krier, 1998; Lynch, 1981); more specifically, many authors have argued that mining the past for good design is an essential process of making places that people enjoy (e.g., Gombrich, 1965; Hough, 1995; Kelbaugh, 1997; Kunstler, 1996). The essential new urbanist argument is that before World War II and certainly before the industrial age, people built environments for *people* and not automobiles.

I’On is the brainchild of Vince Graham, developer and founder of the I’On Group. Graham desired to create a new development based on the “best models of urbanism in the region including Savannah and Charleston, as well as the historic areas of lesser known coastal towns like Beaufort, Rockville, and the Old Village of Mt. Pleasant” (Graham, personal communication, 2008). According to the promotional materials for the I’On development, it was named after Jacob Bond I’On (1782–1859), a veteran of the War of 1812, who operated a plantation on the future development’s land in the first half of the nineteenth century. Planning for the I’On development commenced in May 1995 and construction of the first house began in March of 1997. Dover Kohl and Duany Plater-Zyberk & Company created the development plan that incorporated existing natural vegetation, a modified grid pattern with curved streets, and a design code (the “I’On Code”). These original plans called for 800 single-family homes, 440 multi-family units, 90,000 square feet of mixed-use retail space, and eleven thoroughfares. Due to objections from Mt. Pleasant’s city council, the multi-family units were eliminated, mixed use was reduced to 30,000 square feet, and a number of thoroughfares were eliminated (Frej & Good, 2002).

From 1997 to 2003, about 300 homes were built with original selling prices from \$160,000 to \$1.7 million (Graham, personal communication, 2008). While many older trees—especially live oaks—were saved, the majority of existing trees were cleared as a prelude to construction. As of January 2009, approximately 600 homes have been built in I’On and about 150 lots remain empty (primarily in the northwest corner of the development). Lot sizes are predominantly on the small side in comparison to a low-density suburban development (many lots are only 1/20th of an acre), but a few lots near the marshes at the north end of the development are a half acre in size. All new construction and modifications to existing buildings must adhere to the I’On code, which ensures adherence to “traditional neighborhood design” principles. In this fashion, the I’On Code functions in much the same way as design guidelines do for a local historic district, such as in historic Charleston, including design review under the purview of volunteer citizens.

Historic Charleston and I’On are very similar in terms of urban form and design. This observation should not be surprising considering that the developers of I’On readily acknowledge that historic Charleston served as a template for their community. Other than physical age, the chief difference between I’On and historic Charleston is that the latter is more dense by about a third. One way of comparing historic Charleston to I’On is by contrasting these traditionally-designed communities to the suburban development immediately to the west of I’On. Whatever differences there are between Charleston and I’On pale in comparison to this suburban development. Refer to Table 1 for a comparison of density, building footprint, orientation to the street, setback, road widths, architectural styles, and sidewalks.

The comparison between historic Charleston, I’On, and a low-density suburban development is further elucidated by figure-ground representations of these areas. In graphic form, the similarity of Charleston and I’On is remarkable, while the suburban development has little in common with the former two places.

**Table 1**  
Comparison of historic Charleston and I'On to the suburban development to the west of I'On.

|                                                        | Suburban development | Historic Charleston                                           | I'On                                                          |
|--------------------------------------------------------|----------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------|
| % of land occupied by buildings (a measure of density) | 13%                  | 41%                                                           | 33%                                                           |
| Typical building footprint                             | Square               | Rectangular                                                   | Rectangular                                                   |
| Orientation to street                                  | Random               | Always short side to street                                   | Always short side to street                                   |
| Typical setback                                        | 30–35 feet           | 0–10 feet                                                     | 0–10 feet                                                     |
| Typical road width                                     | ~22–28 feet          | ~15–20 feet                                                   | ~15–20 feet                                                   |
| Architectural styles                                   | Modern/contemporary  | Traditional with Charleston Single House styles predominating | Traditional with Charleston Single House styles predominating |
| Sidewalks                                              | Sometimes present    | Always present                                                | Always present                                                |

Refer to Figs. 1 and 2 for these figure-ground representations. Other than density, there are clear differences in the street pattern of Charleston and I'On. Charleston has a more traditional grid pattern, but it is far from a perfect grid with a number of irregularities, such as streets that bisect the grid into smaller segments at forty-five degree and ninety-degree angles. I'On was originally intended to have a more regular grid-like street pattern, but compromises to obtain a development permit resulted in the reduction of thoroughfare streets, which resulted in an overemphasized north/south travel pattern. Still, in comparison to a suburban template, there are far more thoroughfares in I'On and a semblance of a grid pattern is evident. The suburban hallmark—the cul-de-sac—is also largely absent except for the far northern end of the development. Again, while Charleston's and I'On street layout are different, they are much closer to each other than either example is to the suburban developments in the Charleston area.

The architectural styles found in many new-urbanist communities often reflect pre-World War II styles. This is also true of I'On, which contains many of the same traditional architectural styles found in historic Charleston as well as other areas in the southeast coastal regions, which means a heavy emphasis on eighteenth and nineteenth century architectural styles. I'On's designers have gone to great lengths to emulate the original historical styles in detail;

from a distance they can be difficult to distinguish from the originals. Refer to Table 2 for a comparison of architectural styles found in historic Charleston and I'On. Table 3 gives some visual representation of these styles along with an overall comparison of the urban design of both locations.

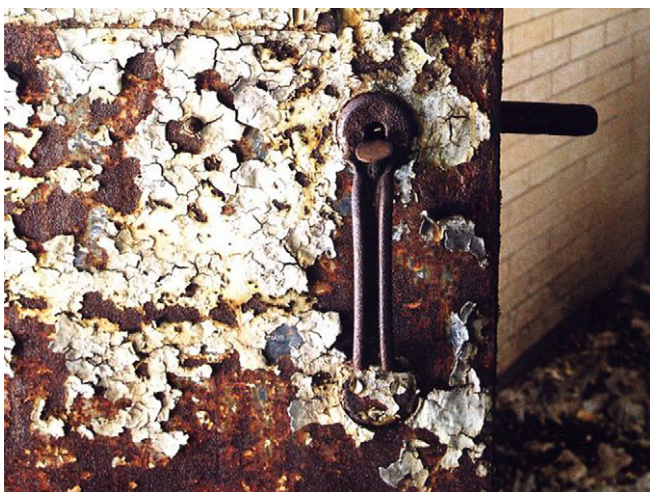
## 5. Methodology

An existential phenomenology was chosen for this study in order to understand the “foundations of meanings, things, and experiences” (Seamon, 1982, p. 119) related to the ability of the historic environment to engender “experiences of awe, wonder, beauty, and identity” (Elliott, 2002, p. 54) in individuals. Phenomenology seeks to go beyond simple description of experience through a process of interpreting and understanding meanings associated with a particular lived experience (Marshall & Rossman, 2006). Van Manen (1990) describes this process, where the researcher mediates between different meanings of that lived experience. Interviews with informants, supplemented with a photo-elicitation process, provided the majority of data for the phenomenology.

As Douglas Harper (2003) explains, “the power of the photo lies in its ability to unlock the subjectivity of those who see the image differently than the researcher” (p. 195). Photo elicitation, therefore, is a key method in understanding the subjective experience of an informant in a particular environment. Informants were provided with disposable cameras and instructions to take photographs of objects or landscapes, of any scale, in their neighborhood that were particularly meaningful to them; these instructions were purposefully left open ended as to not bias the end result. Upon being developed, the informants used their own photographs to guide the interview process. The way that photos are used in this study therefore presents a powerful form of bracketing: by giving participants cameras, the explication of meaning from the lived experience of their landscape was driven largely by the photos they collected, and thus the interview was controlled by the participants. The effect of this process was to increase the descriptive and interpretive validity (Maxwell, 1992, 2005) of the collected data by minimizing the influence of the interviewer's own perceptions and increasing confidence that this essence was obtained via the sample. In other words, informants' own photos, rather than the questions of the first author, prompted their statements. Verification of interpretive validity was also achieved by supplying informant's quotes for each theme in the analysis of the data.

In a phenomenological approach there are four aspects of sampling—events, settings, actors, and artifacts (Marshall & Rossman, 2006; Patton, 1990). This particular phenomenology is a study of the setting, with a sampling of actors in the two settings (Charleston and I'On). Over the course of the study, the first author purposefully selected and provided disposable cameras to twenty informants (ten from Charleston and ten from I'On) based on the requirement that they represent an age range from 18 to 85 with an even mix of women and men. It was also a requirement that the participants be at least part-time residents of either I'On or historic Charleston and familiar with and regularly walk in their neighborhood. The first author located informants by walking the entirety of the two study areas, looking for isolated people who were walking in and visually engaged with their neighborhood. Seven informants from historic Charleston and five informants from I'On returned their cameras and were subsequently interviewed. These informants ranged from approximately 25–75 years of age and consisted of four males and three females from Charleston and two males and three females from I'On.

The selection process captured willing participants that lived in particular settings; these individuals therefore have had relevant



**Fig. 1.** Decay or patina? The answer is open to interpretation. (Photo by the author.).



Fig. 2. Representative samples of the suburban development immediately to the west of I'On, historic Charleston, and I'On.

experiences in the particular setting of interest. Marshall and Rossman (2006) refer to this process as criterion sampling and it is a method that is also supported by Patton's (1990) concept of the purposeful sampling of information rich sources in their natural setting. Part of purposeful sampling, according to Patton, is to select

participants specifically to test new ideas. Therefore, since the goal of this study is to explore the person/place relationship in particular environments, a small sample is useful because a qualitative research design seeks to discover theory and/or relationships instead of testing them (Anfara & Mertz, 2006, p. xx).

In qualitative research, there is an emphasis on understanding how things work in their own particular settings, which is why smaller sample sizes are useful. Finding people in the setting under study is necessary in order to have more trust in the data that will come from the selected methods. Generalizability, therefore, is not a goal. The overall concept of generalizability (or what Maxwell (2005) refers to as "external generalizability" — the ability to make similar conclusions outside of the group under study) and its attendant requirement of large samples is antithetical to the many of the goals and potential contributions of qualitative research. Qualitative research instead emphasizes interpretation and understanding in lieu of external generalizability (Guba & Lincoln, 1989; Huberman & Miles, 2002). Repeatability is therefore not a goal in qualitative research, but rather it should "produce

**Table 2**  
Comparison of architectural styles found in historic Charleston and I'On.

| Style                   | Historic Charleston | I'On |
|-------------------------|---------------------|------|
| Charleston Single House | ✓                   | ✓    |
| Georgian/Federal        | ✓                   | ✓    |
| Greek Revival           | ✓                   | ✓    |
| Gothic Revival          | ✓                   | ✓    |
| Italianate              | ✓                   | ✓    |
| French Second Empire    | ✓                   | ✓    |
| Neo-Classical           | ✓                   | ✓    |
| Colonial Revival        | ✓                   | ✓    |
| Queen Anne              | ✓                   | ✓    |

**Table 3**  
Comparison of architectural styles and urban design of historic Charleston and l'On. (Photos by author).

| Historic Charleston                                                                 | l'On                                                                                 |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|    |    |
|   |   |
|  |  |

a coherent and illuminating description of and perspective on a situation that is based on and consistent with detailed study of that situation" (Huberman & Miles, 2002, p. 174).

Internal generalizability, or "generalizability within the setting or group studied" (Maxwell, 2005, 115), however, is an important

aspect of qualitative research in general and is an important criterion for the theoretical validity of this study. If, for instance, the participants were selected in a way that did not represent the broader meanings of the residents of l'On and Charleston, as would happen if only women of a certain age were selected, it would be

erroneous to generalize that all the residents of these residential areas would express similar meanings. In order to be certain of the internal generalizability of this study, two principles were employed: saturation sampling and the selection of informants that represented the demographic characteristics of the area. The former was achieved through a process of continuing to select and interview informants until no new meanings were revealed, while the latter was realized by selecting men and women that represented an age range from approximately twenty-five to sixty-five. According to the 2000 U.S. Census, over 98% of the individuals in the study areas in I'On and Charleston identify themselves as non-Hispanic and white; there was therefore no attempt to represent any minority or cultural groups in the sample as there was no available evidence that indicated such groups existed in the study areas.

The first author recorded the audio of each interview and transcribed the responses for further analysis. The analytical frameworks of Van Manen (1990), Moustakas (1994), and Von Eckartsberg (1998) were used to analyze the textual data with a focus on integrating auto-phenomenological research (through literature and personal experiences), describing expressions of meaning, and interpreting meanings within specific contexts. The goal was to develop themes as a way to describe the “structures of experience” (Van Manen, 1990, p. 79) using a “wholistic or sententious approach”, a “selective or highlighting approach,” and, where necessary a “detailed or line-by-line approach” (p. 93). As part of this method, the first author listened to the interviews repeatedly to extract particular essences from the narrative.

## 6. Results and discussion

The analysis of the data for this study is grouped into common and contrasting themes associated with historic Charleston and I'On (refer to Table 4). Common themes are based on similar meanings that informants from both I'On and historic Charleston shared while contrasting themes represent divergent meanings stemming from a common root. Overall, there were a remarkable number of common themes from the individual elements of place that had value in the way the landscape was perceived as full of mystery and discovery. The first contrasting theme of “personal memories vs. spontaneous fantasies” addresses the common meaning of a memory, but in the former case for informants in I'On, memories had a factual basis on personal experience while in historic Charleston these memories were artificial, based on an impromptu creation of hypothetical pasts. The second contrasting theme of “hypothetical futures vs. layers of the past” is based on



Fig. 3. Coveted old oaks in I'On (source: Cindy).

reading landscapes for their temporality potential; in I'On informants viewed place as holding potential for future acts of others while in Charleston, informants read the environment for clues to the past.

### 6.1. Common themes: the shared experience of place

Residents of historic Charleston and I'On perceived and valued their neighborhoods in surprisingly similar ways. For instance, in both places informants experienced their neighborhood in terms of discrete elements that were layered. The buildings, while important, did not play as large of a role in the experience of place as one would expect—especially in Charleston where popular media focuses primarily on historic buildings while paying far less attention to the spaces in-between the buildings. Rather, it was landscape elements that the informants most valued and which engendered the greatest degree of attachment. These shared themes are divided into three different categories: individual landscape elements; layers in the landscape, discovery, and the unexpected; and unseen effort embedded in the landscape.

#### 6.1.1. Elements of landscape

Historic Charleston and I'On are composed of varied landscape elements such as trees, fountains, gardens, iron fences, masonry walls, and ornamental gates. For instance, Sally, an I'On resident,



Fig. 4. Fountains are valued in I'On (source: Mandy).

**Table 4**  
Common and contrasting themes of I'On and historic Charleston.

|                    | I'On                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          | Historic Charleston |
|--------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------|
| Common themes      | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Individual environmental elements that have attachment value:                             <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>landscape elements: trees, fountains, gardens, iron fences and masonry walls, and ornamental gates;</li> <li>building elements: doors, windows, shutters, and especially balconies</li> </ol> </li> <li>Landscape consists of discrete layers</li> <li>Landscape has a sense of discovery</li> <li>Landscape has a sense of the unexpected (mystery)</li> <li>“Unseen effort” is embedded in the landscape</li> </ol> |                     |
| Contrasting themes | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Personal memories vs. spontaneous fantasies</li> <li>Hypothetical futures vs. layers of the past</li> </ol>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            |                     |



**Fig. 5.** In Charleston, even driveways can be gardens (source: Paul).



**Fig. 7.** Metal fences are also valued in I'On (source: Cindy).

provides an example of the importance of trees when she related that she is enamored about a particular oak tree in front of a house in her neighborhood because “it just kind of warms up the house” while Cindy marveled at how the oaks that the developers had saved cover the street in some parts of I'On (Fig. 3).

Several informants mentioned that they loved the fountains in their neighborhoods because of the sound they made. For Mary, a Charleston resident, it is a “soothing and beautiful sound.” Mandy's photograph of a fountain in I'On (Fig. 4) is a good representation of the kinds of fountains that people in Charleston and I'On enjoy to a great extent. While the fountain in I'On is in a public space, some fountains are not so easily seen and must be discovered through some modicum of effort. Some informants tried to take photographs of fountains through gates or over fences; in these cases the fountain was not always clearly evident in the photograph. This sense of discovery is an important theme which will be explored later in this paper.

Public parks and private gardens were also important to the informants, such as White Point Gardens, near the Battery in Charleston. Roger, for instance, referred to this park as “a beautiful, wonderful place to go” because of its “oak trees, with all their long trunks and big branches that were planted 250 years ago.” Sally liked the gardens in I'On because they have a “feel that you see in older neighborhoods where people have come in and planted a tree here and there as they felt like it” instead of following

a “cookie-cutter” plan. Sam, a lifelong resident of Charleston, explained that he took a photo of one of the gardens in historic Charleston because “peeking in over the fence [and] looking in” to take pictures and marvel at the scene that lay beyond is an enjoyable activity. Gardens, however, are not necessarily a formal space as Sam represented, but rather are considered by some informants as impromptu places that become gardens because of their treatment. Paul, from Charleston, described that when he took a photo of a driveway, he did so because “it looks almost like a garden even though it's a driveway” (Fig. 5). This theme of utilitarian spaces becoming esthetic ones is an important one and will be described later in detail.

Fences are another landscape element that informants mentioned with regularity. Curiously while both Charleston and I'On have wooden fences, only the metal (typically cast iron, wrought iron, or steel replicas) elicited much interest from the informants. An example is Sam who shared that the ironwork in Charleston “is so beautiful [for its] design” (Fig. 6). Metal fences in I'On are represented by the photograph taken by Cindy (Fig. 7). Masonry walls are common in historic Charleston, but they are also found to a lesser extent in I'On. For Roger, these masonry walls in Charleston are valued because “they're not a standard brick wall [because they have] different shapes and different headers and this [one] has a pillar [and] a little monument on top—it's very cool and Colonial.”



**Fig. 6.** Metal fences are valued in Charleston (source: Sam).



**Fig. 8.** A valued metal gate in I'On (source: Sally).

The informants photographed many gates in Charleston and I'On. For instance, Roger likes an elaborate gate because it is “creative and unique and beautiful” while Sally enjoyed the metal gate of her friend's home in I'On (Fig. 8). Gates, however, played a far greater role than simply their esthetic qualities. For the informants they represented a kind of mental challenge and spurred the imagination into wonder about what lay beyond the gate. Thus, the gates proved to be mental catalysts of sorts that caused an unconscious reaction to wonder about elements that could not be seen and to motivate the informant to want to explore.

The informants did talk about the buildings in their neighborhoods, but again not to the extent that landscape elements were discussed. Typically the reactions were along the lines that that a building was “gorgeous” or “charming” usually for its ornamentation and detailing. Specific elements of buildings that informants found important included doors, windows, shutters, and especially balconies. Dave described how he found a “beautiful, handsome door [that] is evocative of old Charleston, old Savanna—Antebellum times when there was a little bit of mystery in things” (Fig. 9). For Sam, Charleston's identity comes in part from the large number of buildings that have “real wood” shutters as opposed to plastic ones. He muses why more people do not consider stealing these shutters because he considered them to be so valuable.

Of all the parts from which buildings are constructed, the informants mentioned balconies most frequently. Balconies are essentially odd anachronisms in the modern world. They are not a porch and many have little function other than as a frame to look out upon the world. For the informants, however, balconies are a staging area for the imagination. Like mnemonic devices to some imaginary place, a balcony causes one's mind to drift into possibilities of alternative modes of existence. This phenomenon is what happened to Mary when she snapped a picture of a small balcony on a building (Fig. 10). While she appreciated this element because balconies are hard to find in suburbia, it was the vision that came into her head as she took the photograph that was most meaningful: “You can just imagine someone walking out there [on the balcony] with a glass of wine looking out onto the parks, like White Point Gardens which is right here.”

#### 6.1.2. Perception of the landscape as layered, which leads to discovery and the unexpected

Historic Charleston and I'On exhibit a complexity to their environment that is significantly different from a typical low density, suburban residential development. In a suburban



Fig. 10. Balconies are catalysts for the imagination (source: Mary).

residential area, homes tend to be arranged in regular patterns that share the same appearance, form, and setback. Streets are wide and curvilinear while sidewalks may be absent. Moreover, the landscape elements are far and few between—it is very easy to spot each house and there are few, if any, unexpected landscape elements and little or no layering. The landscape is homogenous, regular, expected—in other words, bland, or as informants relate to me, “boring.” Mary, from I'On, recognized that the houses in her neighborhood are “right up against each other” without large yards, but she appreciates the “tiny little gardens.” She enthusiastically described “how happy I am to be here and how wonderful it is to take walks around here. I moved here from the suburbs and it's a much better feeling.” Many informants from Charleston and I'On expressed that their neighborhoods felt better than the typical suburban neighborhood. The reasons why this was the case are related to how they experienced their environment as landscape layers that encouraged a process of mentally peeling each layer back to reveal what lay beyond. This sense of discovery often led to unexpected revelations that the informants cherished.

Paul, from Charleston, described how he finds fascination in “what's behind the frontage on the street. ... [Y]ou can peek around and you know that behind there there's probably as many interesting things as what you can see on the street” (Fig. 11). Thus, for Paul, his neighborhood is a series of layers that must be discovered and the unknown is what drives him to explore his environment:



Fig. 9. A “beautiful, handsome door [that] is evocative of ... Antebellum times” in Charleston (source: Dave).



Fig. 11. Fascination with landscape layers in Charleston (source: Paul).

“it’s a little mystery and every time you can open up a hidden door behind there and see what’s behind these houses, which I’ve had a chance to do, they’re often as fascinating as what you see on the front of the street.” Mandy, from I’On, describes a similar kind of layering effect that an ivy-covered fence provides; she wonders what is beyond the fence—it invites discovery.

Thus, the landscapes of Charleston and I’On hide various kinds of secret, unexpected, and mysterious places that help to create a sense of intrigue and a desire to explore as Ann relates for a photo (Fig. 12) of a space in-between buildings in Charleston: “This is such a little alleyway ... but [it] create[s] these quiet little secret little places.” When asked to elaborate on the kind of feeling that she associates with this secret place, she explained a childhood story about “just being able to get down there and whisper to a friend ... to have a little place that’s off the beaten path. ... You can kind of just slip in there and you really feel that you have come to some place that’s really secret and not as public.” Cindy from I’On took a photograph of her version of a secret place—a courtyard garden hidden down a long passageway. (Fig. 13).

Secrets are related to landscape layers because without the layers, there could be no hidden secrets; one is dependent upon the other. Ann also described her love for the “unexpected places” of Charleston and the sense of discovery that comes from finding such a place. The reason she loves these places is because they catalyze thoughts of wondering “how did that happen ... isn’t this wonderful and this is unusual.” These are places that make one pause, think, and ponder. While informants from Charleston and I’On both expressed their affinity for secret and unexpected places, only the informants from Charleston turned these physical elements into a reason to explore a story about a hypothetical past.

In both Charleston and I’On the sense of the unexpected is linked to an anti-suburban esthetic. In other words, elements in the



Fig. 12. “[Q]uiet little secret places” in Charleston (source: Ann).



Fig. 13. A secret courtyard in I’On (source: Cindy).

landscape are valued because they do not typically appear in a suburban residential setting of tract homes. From Sally’s perspective in I’On, “So many times you go into a community and they have landscape plan number 101. It almost looks like it’s out of some sort of book. Where [I’On] just has a feel that you see in older neighborhoods.” Historic Charleston is a place with “strange looking conditions that nobody would design on purpose,” explains Ann. These places may not look anything like the person who created it originally intended—the passage of time has significantly modified the original design. What Ann is referring to is the odd juxtapositions in historic fabric due to how the built environment gradually evolves over time because it was not planned all at once, yet even in I’On, where everything was planned together, informants remarked that they appreciated how so much of their environment had similar kinds of unexpected elements. The designers of I’On clearly knew about this element; take for instance the fact that some buildings in I’On have *faux* bricked in windows. The cheapest, easiest way to have built such homes would have been to create a flat expanse of wall; instead there is the impression that there was once a window that has now been filled with brick. In Charleston, the previous existence of this window would be assured; in I’On, however, it represents a kind of replicated, artificial organic past which is appreciated by its residents.

Lastly, the key to experiencing this sense of discovery and mystery is walking as opposed to driving. Paul, from Charleston, emphatically explained that “you can’t really see Charleston by driving down the road. You’ve got to walk, you’ve got to peek around things and when you have a chance, walk down a driveway or two and you’ll be delighted to see what’s behind [things].” This direct encounter with the environment allows vistas to unfold and new sights to come into focus slowly enough to catalyze mystery and a sense of discovery in the landscape. Moreover, only when one walks can one “peek around things” as Paul explains.

### 6.1.3. Unseen effort embedded in the landscape

Every landscape conveys an implicit degree of human effort that went into its creation. If an individual views a mountain meadow in the Rocky Mountains, she will not perceive an appreciable degree of human intervention whereas if she looks at one of the gardens in Charleston, it is easy to see that a great deal of effort went into creating and maintaining the individual elements that comprise the total composition of the garden. As we look at landscapes, we unconsciously appraise the degree of human intervention required to create and maintain these landscapes. In the dense, urban residential environments of Charleston and I'On, the landscapes have more human effort per unit of area than a typical suburban development. Paul, for instance, views historic Charleston as a place where people have maximized the utility and esthetic qualities of the landscape, by packing in a "tremendous amount of work" into the smallest area possible. This high density of landscape interventions directly equates to an increased value of a place and greater place attachment.

Closely related to perceptions of human effort in the landscape are activities that show "people care" about their homes and yards. In Charleston, for instance, many of the informants commented about how people regularly are outside shining their door knobs and knockers. This activity expresses that the residents of these homes have a concern for their neighborhood and it results in a positive feeling for the informants. People want to live in historic Charleston and I'On because people show that they have a concern for the appearance of their homes and yards. This expression is unselfconscious and was never tied to things like increased property value; rather the informants simply felt good about being in a place in which people would expend the extra effort in maintaining.

## 6.2. Contrasting themes

Several themes were important because they were uniquely associated with either Charleston or I'On, but not both places. The nature of these themes lent themselves to natural categorization into two contrasting themes based on memories and temporality. First, personal memories vs. spontaneous fantasy, which is predicated on real or actual memories versus artificial memories, and, second, hypothetical futures vs. layers of the past, which is derived from temporal approaches to how place is perceived. These contrasting themes have a direct bearing on understanding age value as they expose what is different in the experience of being in historic Charleston versus being in I'On.

### 6.2.1. Personal memories vs. spontaneous fantasy

For informants in Charleston, memories catalyzed by a place were associated with hypothetical pasts, which an informant could not have personally experienced. In I'On, elements of the environment were important because of concrete, personal experiences during an informant's lifetime. Places had definite importance because they reminded an informant of a place he or she had been before. The most common version of this phenomenon was the constant allusion to historic Charleston. Many informants in I'On liked their neighborhood because it was essentially a copy of historic Charleston. Several informants mentioned that they even bought a home in I'On because they could not afford the "real thing" in historic Charleston. A variation on this theme was expressed by Sally in relation to similarities that a part of I'On has to Venice, Italy:

I just think that these canals are really neat. I just think that there's a lot of character to them. One time they had an event here and someone was kind enough to bring canoes in and our family took a little canoe trip. We kept on going up and down

the different canals because there was just something magical about it. There's also walking paths along the canal. Maybe it's my Italian descent, but it kind of reminds me of Venice. It's not typical, I've never seen anything like this here in the neighborhood and I think it's quite unique for a neighborhood to have a canal such as this. A unique quality.

Note that Sally also mentions the personal experience her family had in this place; its meaning is two-fold: the canal is important because it reminds her of Venice and because a family event took place there. The experience is magical because it took her to a different place and time, a common theme amongst informants from both I'On as well as Charleston. The basic difference is that these sort of "magical" trips were far less common in I'On and rooted in living memory instead of in a time long, long ago as the informants from Charleston expressed.

The informants from Charleston expressed memory in manner similar to those from I'On in that the experience was deeply personal, but it lacked a basis in a factual history. Curiously, these informants did not express any meanings related to the future of their neighborhood, or the future of themselves or their children, as did the I'On informants. One reason for this might have been the strong association of historic Charleston with the past. As they expressed fanciful memories from Charleston's hypothetical past, it was clear that there was no concern about whether or not this was a "truthful" past based on an objective history, which runs counter to the traditional assessment of historical significance, where there is no room for significance based on the lifeworld. Ultimately, attachment to historic places—at least in a residential context as revealed in this study—is associated with the ability of places to catalyze the imagination through fantasies about hypothetical pasts or spontaneous fantasy.

In other words, each object in an historical landscape—be it entire landscapes, buildings, trees, or fences—may act as a trigger from which a fantasy spontaneously forms. These fantasies take form as stories about the hypothetical past activities of people and things that were in context with the object that catalyzed the fantasy. Because things are authentically old in historic Charleston and are embedded in a context of similarly aged objects, they contain this unique property to engender spontaneous fantasy. These vignettes of the past are highly subjective, lack veracity based on actual events, and are not premeditated. These experiences, therefore, are quite unlike a planned daydream which requires a significantly higher degree of cogitation. There is a connection between the intensity and frequency of these fantasies and the degree of attachment that a resident has to historic Charleston.

The words that informants use to describe their spontaneous fantasies include "intriguing," "mysterious," "charming," and "melancholy." The word charming is worth exploring because no word is used more frequently in the context of historic places, yet few have chosen to understand its real meaning in this context. According to the *American Heritage Dictionary* (2006), the etymology of "charming" is "magical spell" and "incantation." The word therefore connotes a place that instills a kind of magic on those who experience it. Informants' frequent use of the word charming in context with historic Charleston is associated with their tendency to daydream and fantasize about the past. Historic Charleston is literally "casting a spell" over the informants. This milieu is not the objective world of historical significance that is demanded by the National Register of Historic Places, but rather it is the result of the subjective lived experience of being in historic Charleston—an experience that is rarely, if ever, captured to describe the nature of historical significance.

Spontaneous fantasy begins with a feeling of mystery when one encounters an unexpected aged object in the landscape. Ann

described this experience upon stumbling into an obelisk-like stone in the middle of a small alleyway (Fig. 14). She explained that “there are these mysterious ... things that you don’t know what they’re for, and they are intriguing for that reason. ... You feel that it’s telling a story. What it gives you is also a sense of a bit of melancholy sense, about the understanding of the people who put it there and how long it’s been since they’ve been gone or how things are overwhelmed by the passage of time.” This aspect of the landscape telling a story was echoed by Paul when he said that “it’s nice to see what these old things are and then kind of guess, ‘hmm I wonder what was there and the whole story of that?’”

Ann then described a photograph of a gas lantern on the street. Even though this was a new lantern and did not exhibit the patina of age, it was still able to “give you a little window into what life was like in another place and time. It’s like traveling into another place almost but you’re in the same physical place that you’re traveling to in another time.” The object was able to perform as a kind of time machine because it was embedded into a landscape that was able to communicate its overall age. The contextual cues of the past were all around this lantern; if it were in a new suburban residential area, it could not perform this time-machine function because its context would be destroyed.

As Dave took a photo of a small park-like area off the street (Fig. 15) he was “envision[ing] carriages coming up here and dropping their people off.” It was a vignette in his mind—a hypothetical past which may or may have not actually happened as he envisioned—but a powerful one. This time-machine like travel was very important for the informants. This aspect of the landscape had a powerful, magical allure as Dave describes, “Charleston is [like] putting yourself back in time, these places, trying to imagine the lifestyle of the time, just how people lived and behaved and what was everybody’s role and how important was everybody’s place.”



Fig. 14. Mysterious objects in Charleston's landscape (source: Ann).



Fig. 15. A fantasy of carriages in Charleston (source: Dave).

Dave painted an elaborate picture of the past which was catalyzed by ruts in some flagstone along the street:

This is Longitude Lane. What I like about it is you can see the wagon ruts coming down. They would bring down the cotton, store the cotton before they exported it and you can see how heavy those wagons were because those are slate stones from Massachusetts. They put them there so they were strong enough to hold up those wagons. Down at the end, you can see the wagon ruts but on the right there is old wall of the warehouses. ... The docks were right off from there, they would load them up when the ships came up.

In a similar vein, Roger took a photo of some steps (Fig. 16) because he imagined Civil War soldiers marching up and down the steps. The theme of the horse and buggy reappeared as he focused on a stepping stone on the sidewalk and imagined that many years ago this is where people would “get off their horse and buggy, step off it to go to their home.”

Of all the landscape and building elements in Charleston, balconies were very important to informants. While they held a good deal of esthetic appeal, they were also related to spontaneous fantasies. These stories revolve around a man, women, or a group of people from the past standing on the balcony or looking out through the balcony. One story related by Sam described “people sitting out there and just yaking and so forth with a mint julep” in an Antebellum era. Other stories involve people trying to stay cool on their balcony and waving at people as they passed below during various periods of the nineteenth century. The mere sight of a balcony on an older building seems to immediately suggest in the mind’s eye that someone from the past must have been standing there looking out upon the scene. Without any tangible evidence of what might have actually happened,



**Fig. 16.** These stairs catalyzed a story about Civil War soldiers in Charleston (source: Roger).

informants' imagination is free to wander to any number of creative possibilities.

Living in Charleston is an exotic adventure for some informants as it reminds them of an experience from a movie or a novel. For Mary, a photo of the front of a building with an allée of trees was particularly poignant in this regard as she imagined herself playing the role of some kind of character walking through the allée to the doorway of the house. Again, fantasy plays a role here, but instead of a trip to the past, the experience becomes a mental trip to an entirely fictional realm of existence. Contrast this experience to many suburban residential environments where there are insufficient visual cues in the realm of mystery and intrigue to feed and sustain such fantasies.

#### 6.2.2. Hypothetical futures vs. layers of the past

I'On and historic Charleston represent the future and the past respectively; informants read places in I'On for what promised to be there in the future and read places in Charleston to determine what was there in the past. For instance, in I'On Sally described how she took some of her photographs because she thought the places would be important for her children in the future. In talking about a photograph she took of East Lake, she described how the various play activities around this lake would "mark a place in my children's minds." Through further elaboration, this place as well as others she photographed were not directly important to her, but would be important to her children at some point in the future. Thus, these are landscapes that have hypothetical meaning for her children, not now, but sometime in the future. This kind of displaced place attachment has not been addressed in the literature to any significant degree, but one can understand that many places are important to parents because they are important to their children.

What makes this phenomenon interesting is that these places may not yet be that important to children; rather, it is the promise that these places hold for children when they become adults looking back on their childhood. Another aspect of this displacement may take the form of a parent thinking of how he or she viewed childhood and then attributing these feelings to his or her child.

For informants in Charleston, layers in the landscape held clues to what may have occurred in the past. Think of them as layers of age, with each discrete layer having some attributed date of genesis. It is possible to mentally peel back each layer in an attempt to decipher the reasons why a particular element in the landscape or a building appears as it does today. This process is an enjoyable one in which informants consciously wanted to participate. When Paul goes on walks in Charleston, for instance, he is constantly engaged in this process. In describing a large window in a building, he asked, "What was there before? How did they convert it? And how did they realize it? I'd love to go through each of these houses and get a history [of their changes]."

The deconstruction of various elements in the landscape and built environment can also be performed on a much smaller scale. Ann described how she peeled apart the layers on an old stucco wall (Fig. 17): "Here's a wall with a lot of layers on it. You get to see through all the layers—what it's really made of. ... More layers [are] interesting [because they] add richness." In peering through the layers on this building, Ann could see that it was built from brick and that each additional layer on top of the brick signified different points in time. She contrasted this experience with deconstructing a new building where "there's only one layer that's interesting on the new stucco building and that's the stucco."

Part of the experience of peeling apart buildings and landscapes into layers is the esthetic experience of decay, which is an ever-present characteristic in historic Charleston. Whether it is imperfect, flawed surfaces or ancient live oak trees pushing flagstone sidewalks apart or crumbling stucco, there is evidence of physical decay at every turn. How does this decay affect the lifeworld? What is it like being in an environment that is so different from contemporary development where materials are homogeneously new? For informants, the experience was a conflicting one. While many truly appreciated the decay—or in more positive terms, patina—the same informants expressed concern that the decay sometimes created safety hazards or was inappropriate in certain situations. They wanted the decay, but they also wished for it to be controlled and expressed in ways that fit both safety and certain esthetic precepts. There is a kind of balance to be achieved in having an environment express its age, but not to such a large



**Fig. 17.** Peeling apart a building, layer by layer in Charleston (source: Ann).

degree that the environment becomes unusable. This phenomenon is essentially one of balancing age value with identity: some decay is pleasing while too much makes the neighborhood look bad.

The appraisal of the esthetic qualities of age is a subjective matter as Dave explains: “Age sometimes can be off the wall and crumbling and there is a question of whether that is beautiful or not, [but] the dilapidation and the decadence of something—that’s very appealing.” Referring to the ferns growing at the top of a masonry pier (Fig. 18), Ann explained that she took the photo because it represented “the way the buildings are turning into vegetation,” and then gave a story rooted in a bit of fantasy: “So it’s almost like the beginnings of the jungle book, like the old cartoon, the old city, no longer inhabited except by monkeys but it’s half vegetation and half old stones.” Paul took a photo of another masonry wall as a representative example of the “decaying elegance” of Charleston because there is an “aesthetic value to have certain things that you don’t just try to have pristine. Clean is not necessarily good for all things.” He went on to explain that if all the surfaces in Charleston were clean and pristine “it would be like Disneyworld and it would be very uninteresting.” Then a conflict arises when he admits that even though he finds the wall attractive, “it needs some work.”

There is a difference between authentic age and replicated age; the former version has the evidence of the past imprinted on it while the latter is a rushed job, so to speak. Replicated age is a kind of “forgery process” that can be accomplished by “acids and stains and distressing things” as Dave explains. Authentic age, on the other hand, has “all the mistakes of the life of whatever it lived.” Thus, while it is possible to make things look old, we can usually still tell if they are authentically old. Without an extraordinary amount of effort in materials and labor, it is extremely difficult to imprint the organic nature of slow decay and the hard knocks of material existence into an object. With apologies to Heidegger, letting an object age naturally is a kind of authentic being toward death.

A bit of John Ruskin (1849/1989) lives in the informants. Ruskin was well-known for his diatribes expressing a desire for the expression of hand craftsmanship in objects. It was one of his major justifications to engage in historic preservation—to preserve the collective acts of craftsmen that were evident in the fabric of a building. This evidence of the work of people from the past is expressed in part by the passage of time on the surfaces of materials. We know that the handicraft before us is authentic because its surface conveys a kind of honesty to the viewer—if it looks genuinely old, then it must be authentic. Once this authenticity is established then the object can begin to catalyze a story in our minds of the craftsperson that created the object; perhaps he is

standing right before you in the mind’s eye carefully carving the surface. Thus, there is a link between craftsmanship, age, and fantasy; all three must be present.

Roger provided a good example of this phenomenon by describing how he experiences the craftsmanship of the materials from historic Charleston. First, he verifies that it expresses age, or as he describes, “it’s worn.” Then he looks for evidence that the “craftsmanship is unique” or that it expresses a character that is antithetical to contemporary fabrication. Only then can the object begin to catalyze a sense of mystery and intrigue and produce “a sort of a charming, wonderful feel. The feeling you get when you see it and you think, this is something that’s been here for 200 years and it was cool when it was built.”

## 7. Summary and conclusion

The interpreted data in this study paints a rich picture of the lifeworld of historic Charleston and l’On. By performing a separate analysis of environments whose primary difference is their age, the hope was to explore the meanings of age value. The results of this phenomenology indicate that there is indeed a difference in the experience of the informants that is due, in part, to the age of the environment. There are, however, far more commonalities than differences in the experience of these two places, largely dealing with how parts of the landscape are perceived.

Based on the meanings that the informants shared in regard to the discrete elements of the environment, attachment appears to be largely derived from landscape features rather than buildings and these meanings do not differ significantly based on whether they originated in l’On or Charleston. It is possible that buildings and their features also played an important role in attachment, but informants did not favor these elements nearly as strongly as landscape features. Informants were strongly affected by the presence of gardens, trees, fountains, iron fences, masonry walls, and gates. These landscape elements were essential for hiding various aspects of the environment, including buildings, to prevent a rapid assessment of their character and content. These elements were associated with perceiving the landscape as layers and the mental process of peeling back these layers to discover what lay beyond resulted in a sense of discovery and mystery that drove informants to explore their environments. This sense of mystery and discovery is remarkably similar to what Stefanovic (1998) described in the way she experienced the ancient town of Cavtat; what is different in the present study, however, is that the experience of an essentially new community—l’On—also engendered these same feelings, which was the opposite of the experience Stefanovic reported for a typical (i.e., non-new urbanist) suburban development in Toronto. One can therefore conclude that physical age is *not* required for catalyzing a sense of mystery or discovery in places; rather, the layered quality of the landscape is perhaps one of the most important factors.

Age was responsible for several differences in how informants experienced their respective environments, and contrary to what Relph (1976, p. 33) argues, l’On, as a contemporary place, was not necessarily perceived as being “independent of time.” While both historic Charleston and l’On engendered fantasies, the quality and quantity of these responses were different. In l’On these fantasies were directed toward the future and displaced; places were important as seen through the eyes of one’s children at some point in the future. Informants in historic Charleston expressed spontaneous fantasies far more frequently than did informants in l’On, however. These fantasies were always directed toward the past and were catalyzed by elements in the environment that either expressed great age or served as mnemonic devices about what might have existed in the past.



Fig. 18. In Charleston, “buildings are turning into vegetation” (source: Ann).

Lastly, of all of the aspects of experiencing these places, spontaneous fantasy played the largest part in creating the strongest levels of attachment. This result appears to be due to the heightened emotional state that was an important part of the experience. Thus, while attachment is both affective and cognitive, the cognitive process is far more important than perhaps many authors give credit. It is, as Gaynor Bagnall (2003, p. 88) explains, “performing reminiscence” which requires that historic places “generate emotionally authentic responses.” This attachment appears to be predicated on the appearance of patina in an environment; patina, therefore, is a kind of catalyst for attachment to historical places as informants experienced in historic Charleston and which was largely absent, for obvious reasons, in l’On. Informants in Charleston expressed greater attachment to their neighborhood than did informants in l’On because the age of Charleston resulted in stronger feelings of mystery, intrigue, and more frequent expressions of fantasies about Charleston’s past. This role of spontaneous fantasy in place attachment is an intriguing result and one that deserves greater exploration as the literature does not address it to a significant degree.

Age value, therefore, can be best described as an experience that is part of the lifeworld which is predicated on the appearance of patina. Patina belies age—it is in fact how we deduce the age of things in large measure—and in turn catalyzes spontaneous fantasy. It is spontaneous fantasy that seems to connect informants most strongly to their environment. The heightened emotional state when an informant experiences spontaneous fantasy is very important, if not fundamentally essential, in defining the degree and character of attachment to historic Charleston. If spontaneous fantasy is not only ubiquitous, but essential to why historic places are significant for people, then a strong argument can be made that the decision-making process to preserve or not preserve historic places fails to adequately address why these places are significant for everyday people.

One of the reasons for this situation is that the practice of historic preservation is predicated on doctrine rooted in a positivistic concept of significance in an effort to retain the authenticity of physical fabric and not the authenticity of the experience. It assumes that significance resides in the past and is embodied in fabric rather than existing in the present as sociocultural and experiential values (Green, 1998; Waterton, Smith, & Campbell, 2006). Merleau-Ponty (1962, p. 413) long ago recognized how historical significance not only resides in the present, but it is embodied in personal experience and not physical fabric:

This table bears traces of my past life, for I have carved my initials on it and spilt ink on it. But these traces in themselves do not refer to the past: they are present; and in so far as I find in them signs of some “previous” event, it is because I derive my sense of the past from elsewhere, because I carry this particular significance within myself.

Mason and Avrami (2002) reinforce this idea that preservation planning should not be done “for the sake of the material itself,” but rather to conserve the “values of heritage” held by all stakeholders, whether they are experts or not (p. 25). Moreover, the significance of place is more than what is contained in a National Register of Historic Places (or similar) nomination; the use of such tools lulls planners into believing that the assessment of historical value is a simple, objective, and reliable process (Mason & Avrami, 2002). Dolores Hayden (1995) similarly critiques historians and planners in the way that they represent historical facts about a place as sufficient for establishing value, while ignoring people’s “place memory” and its role in place attachment. Even so, we know little about the alternative as we lack pragmatic methods to holistically assess the subjective values that stakeholders may have for an

historic place (Mason 2002, p. 5). This study may therefore provide an example of how the lived experience can lead to a better understanding of historical significance and authenticity in order to inform the preservation planning process.

Perhaps the most important ramification of this study is how experiential authenticity and the perception of age value may be predicated more on landscape features than on individual buildings alone. This result strongly suggests that historic preservationists should be paying as much attention to landscape features as buildings, recognizing that buildings are just another element of the landscape. This is not a new theme and has been growing in interest since at least the 1970s (Jackson, 1984; Keller & Keller, 2003; Longstreth, 2008; Riley, 1992; Watson, 1982). More often than not, however, unless the historical object of attention is specifically a landscape, buildings typically receive the greatest attention in regard to resources. As Longstreth (2008, p. 2) argues, there is insufficient emphasis on the space around buildings and how that space is treated; moreover when landscape is addressed, it tends to create a homogenous, generic “Main Street” appearance that erases age and regional characteristics. In addition, critics point to the fact that the language of cultural landscape preservation has been borrowed from architectural preservation and therefore fails to comprehensively address its activities (Alanen & Melnick, 2000, p. 3). These arguments indicate a need to inform a more robust epistemology of cultural landscape preservation based on experiential authenticity and age value. Ultimately, historic preservation practice and doctrine need to understand the role that age value has in fostering place attachment through experiential authenticity. This outcome would provide the kind of empirical evidence that the field needs to substantiate its activities and how it contributes to human flourishing.

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