REMEMBRANCE OF PLACES PAST

Adult Recollection Of Childhood
Place Experience

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this research is to explore the nature of adult remembrance of childhood experience of place. The research asks what it is like for adults to recall their childhood experiences of place, and what role childhood place experience plays in shaping adult identity.

The word ‘place’ has wide usage, and is readily understood but difficult to define. The idea of place has multiple, contested meanings, but there is agreement that it includes subjective experience of the non-human environment. However, there have been few attempts to construct a theory of place that integrates this subjectivity with environmental psychology, the scientific theory of the human experience of the non-human world. Psychoanalysis and its derivative, attachment theory, also privilege subjective experience. The thesis identifies parallels between place attachment and human attachment, and reviews recent developments in attachment theory that integrate subjective and objective epistemologies in order to arrive at a holistic description of the emergence of the self in the first three years of life. The absence of any developmental theory of place attachment and the failure of attachment theory to address place adequately is noted.

This study explores the lived experience of seven participants, five men and two women, as they remember the outdoor places of their childhood in semi-structured interviews. It undertakes a phenomenological investigation into the nature of these experiences, consisting of an individual description of each remembrance experience, phenomenological reduction, and identification of the qualities of the experience.

The analysis shows place attachment to be a complex phenomenon intricately woven into the broader fabric of participants’ lives. Participants who were able to re-immersse themselves deeply in the emotional states of childhood place experience reported those
experiences as having an important influence on their adult identity. Emotional qualities identified by phenomenological reduction as linking childhood experience and adult remembrance included place related love, grief, pleasure, imagination, familiarity and security.

A three-way discussion between place theory, attachment theory and the participants’ experiences is then undertaken. Recent advances in attachment theory demonstrate that emotions are holistic phenomena emerging from the integration of all domains of mental and physical functioning, and repeated intersubjective experiences of positive affect shared between infant and caregiver form the basis of lifelong sense of identity.

Humanistic geography establishes the emotional ground of place attachment, while phenomenological theory provides a holistic, embodied and intersubjective structure to the human experience of place. The integration of these concepts in the light of participants’ experiences of childhood place remembrance can be considered to be an initial step towards establishing a developmental theory of place.
Throughout summer in the early 1960s, crowds of people could be seen swimming at sandy beaches to be found on the bends of the middle Yarra as it meandered through suburban Melbourne. Away from the bends, long stretches of the brown river were visible between the trunks of huge river red gums threaded along the watercourse, while beneath the trees and on the adjoining river-flats, grasslands baked in the sun – an expansive landscape of khaki eucalypts and bleached gold paddocks dozing through endless hot summer afternoons. In the days before air-conditioning and coastal weekenders, the river offered the only relief from Melbourne’s February heat. On the surrounding hills, an orderly suburban landscape was rapidly filling in the remaining quarter-acre gaps. But along the floor and the lower slopes of the valley, little had changed from the 1880s when artists of the Heidelberg School rendered this landscape into iconic depictions of an Australian pastoral idyll. A patchwork of farms, sports fields, horse riding schools, golf courses, eucalypt woodlands and unused land merged into a uniform landscape of dry grass and gum. Little over a decade later, the beaches, the farms, the swimmers were all no more to be seen. Even the river had been hidden behind a dense wall of shrubby vegetation. Only the golf courses remained, irrigated bright green now. These changes can all be traced in one way or another to the impact of ever larger numbers of increasingly affluent people in the surrounding suburbs as Melbourne grew.

My childhood family home overlooked a dairy farm and one of the river beaches in this valley. Most of my childhood days not spent at school, were passed playing here, and the
transformation of this landscape coincided with my adolescence. I both witnessed and was part of the changes. In retrospect, I feel fortunate to have grown up in a place so abundant with nature’s beauty. As a child I took this landscape for granted, but I now believe that along with my family and broader cultural influences, this place has shaped who I am. I see in my childhood experience of that place, the genesis of my relationship with the natural world, a relationship which, in adulthood, I have found profoundly rewarding.

Returning to the landscape of my childhood as an adult evokes very mixed feelings for me. I feel great warmth and affection for familiar things; particular trees, certain stretches of the river where I used to swim. However, much of the landscape of my childhood has gone. The land has been incorporated into a huge linear urban park, which runs most of the length of the Yarra’s course through the suburbs of Melbourne. In the process of incorporation, the landscape of my childhood has been transformed into something very different: a landscape of mown grasslands, thickets of native shrub regrowth under remnant eucalypts, asphalt car parks and treated-pine picnic grounds. The new landscape supports much more native vegetation and greater biodiversity than it did when I was a child, and these new parklands are not unattractive. And yet, I miss the baked khaki and gold landscape of my childhood. I feel angry and resentful about these changes, even though as an environmentalist I should be celebrating this regeneration of native ecosystems and the attendant biodiversity.

1.1 Scientific Approaches to the Natural World

Towards the end of my schooling, I began to spend less time in the valley. A wider world beckoned. But the way out to that world was unclear. I had no idea of which direction to go, what career to pursue. Amongst the confusion of that period, I can recall only one clear impulse – a desire to work ‘outdoors’. Looking back, I see this impulse as a vestige of my childhood relationship with ‘the outdoors’ of the valley. (This is just one of the ways in which my childhood experience of place has shaped who I became as an adult.) At university I found myself studying science, with the vague idea of becoming a botanist. At school, I had always loved science’s storehouse of knowledge about the natural world: those wonderful secular creation stories. I loved the knowledge, hated the
method. At university, I quickly developed an intense dislike of laboratories, and the deducive, quantitative methodology of science left me cold. Experiments just never seemed to work out for me. I reduced and then abandoned my hard science commitments (maths, physics and chemistry), shifting my focus to the biological sciences. It was more than just the possibility of an outdoor career that pulled me in this direction. I was also drawn to the biological sciences because of their holistic approach to the study of the natural world. Most of all, I was drawn to ecology, where all of science’s little creation stories are woven together into grand narratives, each narrative particular to one place on earth. This approach to understanding nature by looking for patterns of organisation amongst the complexity out in the field, rather than isolating ever smaller bits in a laboratory appealed greatly.

However, long before I completed my studies, I came to realise that I was ill-suited to the scientific way of knowing the natural world. Notwithstanding the holistic approach of ecology, I was uncomfortable with an understanding of the natural world that left no room for my subjective responses and little room for physical engagement with the natural world. At the time I could not articulate these ideas. I could only see that botanists, even ecologists, seemed to spend a lot more time stuck inside laboratories than ‘outdoors’. I had only an intuitive sense rather than any rational explanation of the importance of the subjectivity and physicality I experienced in my relationship to the natural world. But it was a sense I couldn’t ignore. From the ivory tower of academic botany, I went ‘outdoors’ and rekindled a physical relationship with the natural world. I became a landscape gardener. Somehow, the physicality of this work, the centrality of my body in my relationship with the natural world seemed very important.¹

I did not, however, completely forsake the scientific approach to nature. Several years later, in the company of a gifted field naturalist, I undertook an ecological survey of the Yarra Valley. But there was a significant difference between this research and the

¹ This sense of myself as embodied has remained a core feature of my relationship with the natural world, although, for a very long time I could not articulate why. The importance of ‘embodiment’, the role the physical body plays, in developing a place attachment is argued by numerous place theorists (Merleau-Ponty, 1962; Abram, 1997; Seamon, 2000). However, the theory used to support this position in the thesis was unknown to me at the time. Rational decision making had little to do with my choosing not to pursue academic research in botany on completion of my undergraduate studies; it was pure ‘gut reaction’. It is only recently that I have arrived at a position where I can support that intuitive decision with theory.
ecological surveys I had done at university. Our research included analysis of the social factors shaping the valley landscape, something unusual for the time. After a year of this project, I emerged with a rich understanding of the social, geological and ecological processes that shaped the valley I had known so intimately as a child. But, I found this approach difficult to sustain. Somehow, even this rich perspective seemed to put nature at a distance, leaving me out of the picture, disconnected and dissatisfied.

Thomas (1983) describes in some detail the emergence of this psychological separation from the natural world during the early modern period (the 17th to 19th centuries). He argues that such an objectified view of nature was necessary for the development of the natural sciences at that time. He also suggests that scientific objectivity came at the cost of personal sense of connection or identification with the natural world. This was not a price I wished to pay. Along with my dislike of reductionist laboratory techniques, I felt uncomfortable with the alienating effects of the objectivism inherent in scientific empiricism. Somehow, I needed to include my subjective responses in my understanding of the natural world. And yet, I still loved those secular creation stories that science told me. I suppose I was interested in finding some kind of integration of subjective and objective ways of knowing.

1.2 ‘The Troubled Border’

Over time, my need to locate myself ‘outdoors’ became less urgent. I found myself becoming more interested in people; how we function psychologically and emotionally; how we communicate our subjective reality to each other. I trained as a psychotherapist, social worker, and counsellor, and have been working in this area for ten years. As it was in my relationship with the natural world, so it is in my work with people. Rather than the detached, objective approach of scientific psychology, I was drawn to the more subjective ways of understanding and working with people. I pursued those psychological approaches that emphasise an engaged, intersubjective relationship, where the clinician’s capacity to recognise, attune to, and reflect the client’s subjective experience are central to the clinical process. In the meantime, my interest in ‘the outdoors’ did not disappear, but transformed into a passion for gardening and bush regeneration. More recently, I began to merge these interests, turning my attention to the psychology of the human
relationship with the natural world by writing about my childhood subjective experience of nature and my relationship with a natural world in crisis. I found myself wondering how our childhood experiences of the natural world shape our adult identities, our sense of self and our actions towards a nature so under siege.

I found that a considerable body of work about the human relationship with the natural world had preceded my own interest, particularly in the fields of environmental psychology and philosophy, ecology, geography, nature writing and phenomenology. Much of this is interdisciplinary, often attempting to integrate diverse perspectives. And much of this theorising dealing with what gardening writer Michael Pollan calls ‘the troubled border between nature and culture’ is deeply contested. It appears the marriage of culture and nature is far more difficult in theory than it is in practice. Much of the ‘trouble’ that he mentions seems to be grounded in a deep epistemological divide. On one side of this divide, the modern empirical scientific understanding of nature seems utterly assured of the objective, material basis of reality, including human existence and the natural world. On the other side, postmodern constructivist epistemology is equally confident that reality is socially constructed, and that nature is just another social construction with no basis in material reality, because it does not believe that there is any material reality. One epistemology for nature and another for culture. It seemed to me that neither of these two epistemologies could fully encompass all aspects of the human relationship with the non-human world. However, there is a small but growing literature which recognises an ambiguity in the human condition; that we are at once cultural and biological beings, living in a world that is simultaneously material and culturally constructed. Between the strict biological determinism of sociobiology and the equally simplistic radical constructivism lies a fertile middle ground for exploring the complex dialogue between these two epistemological extremes.

I bring to this literature familiarity with both sides of the divide because of my practical experience of gardening, bush regeneration, and counselling, as well as a depth of exposure to various theories of biology, psychology and sociology. Each of these fields of knowledge can inform the others, but attempting to integrate such diversity is no easy task. I find myself dissatisfied with some of the attempts to bridge the nature/culture
divide. One such attempt is the field of ecopsychology. While making an important criticism of psychology for ignoring the role of the non-human world in human consciousness, ecopsychology fails to go beyond criticism to engage proactively with psychological theory. Instead, it offers a set of psychological exercises for developing connection and commitment to the ailing earth, making it more an ethical system than a psychology. My professional practice as a counsellor has been informed by a very different bridge-building project across a similar epistemological divide. In recent times, the integration of subjectively informed psychoanalysis and objective sciences such as developmental neurobiology and neuropsychology has resulted in a massive growth in knowledge of the intersubjective nature of human psychological and biological development as described by attachment theory.

When I stand these two fields of knowledge side by side, it strikes me that when we examine interpersonal relationships, we are dealing with the meeting of two fundamentally similar things – two human subjectivities, but when we are dealing with the human relationship with the natural world, we are dealing with a meeting of aliens. As far as I am aware, the non-human world has no subjectivity capable of reflective thought akin to our own.\(^2\) However, while the absence of a familiar intersubjectivity makes the human-nonhuman relationship fundamentally different to interpersonal relationships, as a psychotherapist, I am also struck by the similarities. Either relationship can engender powerful feelings of belonging, longing or loss. Either can heal us. The loss of either can break us. How do we make sense of a relationship where one half of the relationship appears to have no reflexive subjectivity? Malpas (1999) suggests that the appropriate way to engage with our non-human environment is a holistic approach, which unifies subjective and objective perspectives around the fundamental concept of place.

### 1.3 The Concept of Place

This concept of place assumes a central role in much of the literature describing the relationship between nature and culture. The cultural geographer, Tim Cresswell

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\(^2\) The writer David Abram (1997) argues that there is a subjectivity in the non-human world, and that within many animistic cultures, shamans enter into intersubjective relationships with the non-human world. The Modern response to Abram’s position is that he is merely describing anthropomorphic projection of human subjective experience onto the natural world. For myself, whether beings in the non-human world are capable of reflective subjectivity remains an open question, pertinent to, but well beyond the scope of this study.
describes the concept of place as ‘both simple and complicated’ (Cresswell 2004, p.1). The concept is readily grasped, yet difficult to define. I have found the concept of place valuable because it avoids the abstraction of concepts like ‘the environment’ and is more inclusive than ‘nature’ or ‘the natural world’, the term with which my own thinking about this question began. In addition, ‘place’ refers both to an objective location in the material world, and to the subjective experience of that location (Cresswell 2004, p.7). As such, place provides a unique bridge between subjectivity and objectivity, between the materialist empiricism of the sciences and post-structuralist ideas that the material world can only be known through the filter of culture, with no reality independent of the observer.

1.4 Parallels between ‘Place’ and ‘Self’

In engaging with the literature of place I have been struck by some similarities between the terms ‘place’ and ‘self’. Both words bridge this epistemological divide that has arisen between the objectivism of empirical science on the one hand and lived subjective experience on the other. ‘Self’ and ‘place’ are familiar to most people. Both words are common in everyday use. If someone speaks of ‘myself’ or ‘my place’, they assume that listeners understand what they are talking about. On closer analysis however, both words are characterised by meanings that defy simple definition. Trying to define them is a bit like trying to grasp water. Meaning slips through your fingers. Perhaps this conceptual slipperiness of the words ‘place’ and ‘self’ is part of the reason for their marginalisation from mainstream academic discourse during the early to mid 20th century. Meares (1993) refers to the ‘radical behaviourist purge’ in psychology just before the First World War, as a result of which ‘such notions as self that could not be touched or measured were banished from the curricula of academic psychology as unscientific, leaving a vacancy at the heart of that discipline’ (Meares 1993, p.2). Casey (1994, p. xiv) reports a much more longstanding neglect of place in Western philosophy. While Cosgrove (1985, p.46), Muir (1998, p.271) and others have described a process analogous to psychology’s behaviourist purge occurring in academic geography, where after the Second World War there was a push for scientific legitimacy by means of the embracing of a more positivistic philosophy. This shift led, through the 1950s and 60s, to geography’s preoccupation with space, a concept that lends itself to mathematical analysis. However,
these same authors go on to describe the emergence of humanistic geography in the 1970s as a reaction to the perceived narrowness and aridity of spatial analysis as a way of knowing the world. Humanistic geographers eschewed the objective, detached positivistic approach. Instead, they developed a place-based approach that integrated subjective experience with more objective understandings of the geographic world.

1.5 Self Psychology, Attachment Theory and the Brain

Coincidentally, at the same time (in the early 1970s) there emerged a renewed interest in a theory of the self. The psychoanalyst, Heinz Kohut elaborated self psychology, a theory of clinical psychotherapy. Self psychology positioned the self as the basic psychological structure around which experience is organised (Bacal and Newman 1990, p.226). Also, at the same time, another psychoanalytic theorist, John Bowlby, was describing the dynamics of the mother-infant relationship. Writing at the height of the ascendancy of behaviourism, when psychology eschewed any reference to subjective experience or affect as unscientific, Bowlby took the radical intellectual step of positioning the infant’s subjective experience of emotional states central to his explanation of the objective observations of the behaviours displayed by infants and young children. Bowlby’s attachment theory integrated well with self psychology, and quickly rose to the status of orthodoxy within psychology and paediatrics. It has come to be widely recognised within these fields as the most comprehensive and clinically useful account of psychological developmental processes taking place in the first few years of human life.

Much of Bowlby’s original attachment theory was framed in terms of the ‘mother-child’ relationship. The publication of the theory in the early 1970s coincided with the rise of second wave feminism, and Bowlby’s use of the word ‘mother’ provoked considerable criticism from many feminists. Initially attachment theory was seen by feminists as a form of biological determinism that amounted to mother blaming (Franzblau 1999, p.6). In response to this critique, the language of attachment theory has been changed to incorporate the use of ‘primary caregiver’ or ‘attachment figure’ instead of the word ‘mother’. While this has allowed more nuanced engagement with attachment theory by some feminists (Bliverse 1999, p.49), others continue to rely on a simplistic analysis that takes Bowlby’s early 1950s writing on the theory as representative of the current field and shows no recognition of attachment theory’s recent developments or its complexity (Cleary 1999, p.32). I have used the word ‘mother’ here to reflect the historical context of the early 1970s. Henceforward I will adhere to current accepted terminology of ‘primary caregiver’ or ‘attachment figure’.

An indication of the ubiquity of attachment theory’s influence can be recognised in a scan of various government social service documents and activities. A mental health policy monograph published by the Commonwealth Department of Health and Aged Care in 2000 lists ‘Insecure attachment’ as a risk factor potentially influencing mental health problems (Commonwealth Department of Health and Aged Care 2000, p.16). Brennan describes attachment theory as being ‘central and senior’ to child protection assessments. This has resulted in a situation where requests for ‘Attachment and Bonding Assessments’ have become so frequent in New South Wales Children’s Court that the Chief Magistrate has requested greater specificity and a curtailment of such reports (Brennan 2001, p.178). Australian Family Law Courts are urged to address attachment issues in their deliberations (Kelly and Lamb cit Brennan 2001).
development is now understood as a delicate interplay of nature and nurture, unfolding under the direction of the genetic code, in the context of the relationship with the attachment figure.

Just over a decade later, Daniel Stern (1985) effectively integrated the two theories while adding more recent developmental psychology research findings. Stern’s (1985) *The Interpersonal World of the Infant: a View from Psychoanalysis and Developmental Psychology* is an account of the emergence of the self in early childhood in the context of the attachment relationship. The great power of Stern’s seminal work is its integration of subjective and objective ways of knowing, to provide a more holistic understanding the internal and interpersonal world of the infant. In the two decades since the publication of *The Interpersonal World of the Infant*, the growth of research in this multidisciplinary field pioneered by Stern has been explosive.

Various theorists (Ciompi 1991, Damasio 1994, Rutter et al 1997, Schore 1994, Siegel 1999, Sroufe 1990) now provide broad but detailed accounts integrating self psychology, attachment theory, complexity theory, cybernetics and systems theory, developmental psychology and developmental neurobiology. This multi-disciplinary theory describes the developmental processes governing the maturation of the brain and the emergence of the mind and the self in the early years of childhood.\(^5\) Recent advances in brain imaging techniques reveal how the quality of the attachment relationship shapes not only psychological development, but also the physiological development of the infant’s brain (Perry *et al* 1995, p. 281). The radical step of moving away from a purely empirical approach by making subjective experience central to explanatory theory, and the resulting explosive growth of research and theory development have the whiff of a Kuhnian paradigm shift. The breadth and complexity of this rapidly emerging field of theory

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\(^{5}\) The naming of this body of research and theory is problematic. The field has emerged and expanded so rapidly that it is yet to attract a formal name. At least five different fields of theory and research have converged, and there are significant overlaps. For ease of reference throughout the thesis, I refer to this multidisciplinary field as attachment theory, which provides the overarching theoretical framework. Some may find this use of the term attachment theory unsatisfactory. Strictly speaking, attachment theory is more limited in scope, and the term does not truly reflect the breadth of thinking in this field. Unfortunately, I can find no more appropriate alternative.
makes 20th century behaviourist psychology appear as naïve and simplistic as the pre-Copernican cosmology of celestial spheres.

1.6 Human Attachment and Place Attachment

Parallel to human attachment, place attachment is experienced by many people as a deep love of place, and it often plays a profound role in adult sense of self or identity. The similarities are striking, but there are also significant differences. Human attachment is an intersubjective relationship between two people. Place attachment is not between two people, although it is regarded by some theorists as intersubjective. In place attachment, there is no figure equivalent to the sensitive, emotionally attuned caregiver of human attachment. Also place attachment occurs later in the human developmental process. Human attachment is strongest between 6 months and 3 years. Place attachment appears to become operational in middle childhood. Attachment theory has generated an enormous amount of richly detailed and largely coherent theory in a very short time. Certainly there are controversies and differences, but these appear to be at the edges. At the core there appears to be a well integrated theory. The same cannot be said of place theory, which by contrast seems fragmented, as though the different approaches to the study of place have had difficulty finding common ground, or even a common language. Another difference appears to be the absence of an adequate developmental theory of place attachment. There have been several attempts, but these have been based on older psychological development theories that have proved to be conceptually limited in the light of recent advances in attachment theory.

I am curious to see if the parallels between the concepts of place and self extend beyond their similar intellectual histories. Are there similar developmental processes at the root of our sense of self and our sense of place? Self psychology sees the development of the self and our capacity for emotional connection to others as being deeply grounded in the ordinary day to day embodied sensory engagement with an attachment figure. Does childhood experience of place similarly shape our adult sense of place in a similar fashion to that in which attachment shapes our adult sense of self? Can attachment theory be meaningfully integrated with place theory?

6 See footnote 2
No matter where I find myself living as an adult, I see my own sense of attachment to place as being deeply grounded in my childhood experience of the day to day embodied, sensory engagement with the Yarra Valley landscape. Also, I have found that the memory of my river and valley has assumed an increasingly important role in my inner world. I now recall that landscape and my activities in it with deep affection. I feel that my creative expression in my adult life draws deeply on my childhood experience of place. In short, I believe that my childhood experience of place has had a significant influence in shaping my adult identity, my sense of self. But how universal is this experience? When I have discussed this idea with other people I have encountered some strong responses. Many people tend to describe their recollections of childhood experiences of place as something of great value, something precious. I wonder if our sense of place and our capacity for affective ties to place are grounded in the childhood experience of an embodied engagement with place. How is our adult identity shaped by our childhood experience of place?

1.7 Overview of the Thesis

Chapter 2 explores the literature background to these questions. It begins by mapping out the epistemological basis of this study. Both empiricism and social constructivist epistemologies are found inadequate for the task of researching the holistic nature of the lived experience of remembering childhood place. An epistemological divide between the natural sciences and the social sciences is noted. Because this study researches a type of subjective experience of the objective world, an epistemology that can bridge this divide to encompass subjectivity and objectivity is required. The study then looks to the literature of attachment theory for guidance. Over the past two to three decades, attachment theorists have developed a theory that integrates subjectivist psychoanalytic theory with the objectivist sciences of developmental psychology and neurobiology. Human development is now understood as the complex interplay of biological, psychological and social processes. This holistic theory has developed new insights into the nature of memory. Also emotion and the self are now seen as emergent phenomena resulting from the integration of all the various domains of physical and mental functioning.
Then, shifting to place theory, the literature review notes the complexity of the concept of place, as well as a long history of its marginalisation from Western philosophical thought. In the mid 20th century, phenomenologists reinstated place to a position of some importance, so that now a number of different disciplines make liberal use of the word, resulting in a degree of conceptual confusion. Four broad theoretical approaches to the study of place are identified; environmental psychology, phenomenology, various theories that reduce place attachment to purely biological causes, and social constructivist theories that see place as a socio-cultural phenomenon without any basis in the material world. Parallel to these place theories, an important literary tradition of place writing is noted. Analysis of the various theories of place identifies affective, cognitive, social, individual, intrinsic and temporal components that are all interconnected aspects of a holistically structured place. In the absence of a developmental theory of place, a heterogeneous and piecemeal body of literature on children’s experience of place is reviewed and found to be lacking any unifying theoretical basis. Chapter 2 concludes with a discussion of the small body of literature on adult recollection of childhood place. While this is considered to be a complex phenomenon that can make a significant contribution to adult identity, this area too suffers from lack of an overarching theory, and I argue that it would benefit from the incorporation of recent developments in attachment theory.

Chapter 3 outlines my reasons for choosing a phenomenological methodology with which to undertake this research. Phenomenology offers the only methodology that can encompass both subjective and objective aspects of adult remembrance of childhood place. In particular, Heidegger’s hermeneutic phenomenology, moving between unprejudiced engagement with the world and the interpretation of that experience, is seen as most useful. Specific methods of phenomenological bracketing and reduction are described in detail. While this study broadly follows research methods developed by the Duquesne School of Phenomenological Psychology, two new methods of phenomenological bracketing and details of the method of phenomenological reduction used in this study are described.
Chapter 4 is composed of reduced accounts of the seven participants’ interviews. These phenomenological descriptions are made up of a combination of participants’ own words, my reduced account of their words and my observations of their non-verbal communications. Chapter 5 is my phenomenological reduction of the interviews. It begins with the two most striking aspects of the interviews; the complexity of the place experiences presented in the interviews, and the centrality and power of emotional states experienced while remembering childhood place in the interviews. Love, grief, pleasure, imagination, familiarity and security are identified as states that give meaning and value to the lived experience of remembrance of childhood place. Familiarity is a quality of place that has not previously been identified as important in the literature on children’s experience of place.

In the interviews participants displayed considerable variations in their capacity to re-enter the emotional states associated with childhood experiences of place. It is noted that those participants able to most deeply enter into the emotional aspects of childhood place experiences were also those who believed that childhood place was an important part of their adult identity. Exploration of this state of ‘deep remembrance’ suggested an underlying structure to the lived experience of adult remembrance of childhood place. Those participants able to relive childhood place experience intensely during the interview created a powerful union of childhood (past) place in the adult present, linked by the one emotional state. This suggests an intersubjective unity of adult and child through time. In Chapter 6, these results are discussed in light of the literature. A three-way engagement between the research results, attachment theory, and place theory is undertaken. It is found that, like human attachment, the origins of place attachment lie in repeated affectively positive experiences of place in childhood. In addition, the adult remembrance of childhood place has a mutually nested, holistic structure, where adult and childhood experience are unified and cannot be meaningfully separated. Parallel to this is the narrative structuring of place identified by Malpas, as well as a poetic, associative structuring of place remembrance.
In literature, place has long been recognised as playing an important role in shaping identity. Huckleberry Finn’s Mississippi, Odysseus’ Ithaca, the Dublin of Stephen Dedalus, Wordsworth’s Lakes District and Proust’s Combray; time and again, literature informs us that characters are inextricably linked to their place of origin, their geographic contexts. In contrast, the contribution of place of origin to personal identity has been largely neglected in the scientific literature of psychology. An examination of the extensive literatures of developmental psychology and environmental psychology reveals an extremely limited dialogue between these two sub-branches. The most comprehensive review of the literature, Wohlwill and Heft’s (1987) *The Physical Environment and the Development of the Child* indicates that what overlap there is deals almost exclusively with the development of perceptual processes or cognitive spatial analysis skills in children (Wohlwill and Heft 1987, pp. 281-328). Affective aspects are ignored in the overlap of developmental and environmental psychology. And yet autobiographical and fictional literature time and again present us with characters whose sense of identity has been significantly shaped by their strong emotional attachment to their place of origin. There is a significant conceptual blind spot for theoretical psychology around the subjective experience of place. In fact, subjectivity generally is an area with which the science of psychology appears to have great difficulty engaging.

2.1 The Epistemological Ground beneath the ‘Troubled Border’

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7 The word environment is used here in reference to the non-human environment. Wohlwill and Heft (1987, p. 282) note that the word ‘environment’ is used by child psychologists to refer to both the social and the physical worlds, often with little distinction, resulting in a level of confusion.
This difficulty has its roots in psychology’s strong identification as a science grounded in
the philosophy of scientific empiricism. Empiricism provides the epistemological
foundation for science and scientific methodology, a systematised approach to the
generation of new knowledge. The elaboration of empiricism and scientific methodology
in the Renaissance paved the way for the Scientific Revolution. Empiricism is based on
the belief that we can only truly know the world via the information received through our
senses (sensations), as opposed to preconceived ideas we hold in our mind (idealism).
Empiricism emphasizes the importance of sensation, but also holds that some sensations
are more important than others. It distinguishes the primary qualities of things – weight,
size and motion, which can be measured objectively, from the secondary qualities of
things such as colour, taste and smell, which are perceived subjectively and cannot be
measured.

The use of measurement allowed natural phenomena to be quantified, abstracted, and
subjected to mathematical analysis, another powerful tool for unlocking nature’s secrets.
As Galileo said, ‘The book of nature … is written in the language of mathematics’
(Galileo cited Mayr 1997, p. 4). By overlooking the particularity and qualitative aspects
of phenomena, the natural world could be measured, mathematised, and subsequently
reduced to universal laws. Scientific method based on empirical epistemology proved to
be a powerful new way of looking at the world which generated a huge growth of
knowledge about the natural world and paved the way for the industrial revolution and
the Modern period of history.

Empiricism makes a further a priori assumption of objectivism, belief in the existence of
an objective material reality.

[This material] world consists of objects that have properties and stand in
various relationships independent of human understanding. The world is
as it is, no matter what any person happens to believe about it, and there is
one correct ‘God’s-Eye-View’ about what the world is really like.

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8. The basic steps of scientific method are (i) to make direct observations of nature, (ii) develop hypothetical
explanations of those observations, (iii) make predictions based on the hypothesis, (iv) test the validity of the prediction
by experiment (Mayr 1997, p. 27).
In order to know that world empirically, it is necessary for the scientist to be an objective observer, completely separated from the natural phenomenon being investigated. Subjective impressions such as feelings and a priori ideas are explicitly excluded from consideration, as being of no value. It is understood that true knowledge of the world can only emerge from such detached observations. However, an important consequence of objectivism is that this separation results in the loss of a personal sense of connection or identification with nature.

Another limitation of empiricism is the strategy of reductionism, which seeks to explain phenomena by breaking them down into ever smaller, more fundamental components. Once this knowledge has been acquired, the whole phenomenon is understood as the sum of its parts. However, while reductionism has been useful in understanding relatively simple phenomena investigated by the physical sciences, problems arise when science investigates more complex phenomena such as living systems (Jorgensen 1992, pp. 15-16). The biologist Ernst Mayr (1997) argues that it is only very recently that the philosophy of science has come to recognise a major epistemological distinction between the life sciences and the 'exact sciences', physics, chemistry, astronomy and mechanics. Within the philosophy of science, the methodology and epistemology of all the sciences have traditionally been bundled together, under the rubric of empiricism. Mayr sees this as an accident of scientific history. At the dawn of the Scientific Revolution, when the principles of scientific methodology were being established, the pre-eminent fields of study, astronomy and mechanics, conformed fairly closely to the ideal of empirical epistemology. Being the first sciences to be elaborated, they profoundly influenced the overall concept of science (Mayr 1997, pp. 26-30).

The biological sciences, which developed later, were for centuries seen as imperfect derivatives of the physical sciences. It was not recognised for hundreds of years that the biological sciences were dealing with levels of complexity many orders of magnitude greater than those investigated by the early physical sciences that gave rise to empiricism. The development of knowledge in the physical sciences is based on the assumed validity of a set of epistemological ideas.
inappropriate to the study of organisms: these included essentialism, determinism, universalism, and reductionism. Biology, properly understood, comprises population thinking, probability, chance, pluralism, emergence and historical narratives.

Mayr 1997, p. xiii

Reductionist approaches have difficulties when reassembling the component parts back into the whole phenomenon. The sum of the parts does not always equate with the whole.

For reductionists, the problem of explanation is in principle resolved as soon as the reduction to the smallest components has been accomplished. They claim that as soon as one has completed the inventory of these components and has determined the function of each of them, it should be an easy task to explain also everything observed at higher levels of organisation. [However,] explanatory reductionism is quite unable to explain characteristics of organisms that emerge at higher levels of organisation.

Mayr 1997, pp. 17-18

Complex living systems are irreducible (Jorgensen 1992, p. 20). Mayr argues that the epistemological strategy of holism, which investigates whole phenomena or systems, is more appropriate than reductionism for the study of complex phenomena (Mayr 1997, p. 19). Holism derives from recognition of the principle of emergence, which holds that in complex systems, new characteristics emerge at higher levels of organisation. These characteristics cannot be anticipated from a thorough knowledge of the component parts in isolation (Mayr 1997, p. 19). Like Humpty-Dumpty, putting the whole back together proves much more difficult than breaking it up. The same emergent properties only manifest when the components are arranged in exactly the same way as they were previously, an impossible task in highly complex systems. It is the organisation and interaction of component parts, as well as the summation of those parts, that give rise to the characteristics of the whole system. Emergent properties can only be identified by looking at whole systems.

In contrast to empiricism, another epistemology, that of social-constructivism, privileges subjectivity as a way of knowing the world. This epistemology denies the existence of an objective material reality separate from human awareness of it. Instead, constructivism sees reality existing in a purely socio-cultural universe, and believes that we can never
truly know reality. All we can ever know are our representations, our subjective maps of reality. And any map will depend on the position of the mapmaker, the observer; not just the physical location, but also the cultural position; race, gender, class etc. In other words, reality is socially constructed, and nature is just another social construction with no basis in material reality, because there is no material reality.

Almost universal among contemporary social science commentators, shaped by postmodern theory in general and constructivist epistemologies in particular, is a profound denial of the material aspects of human existence. These epistemologies (there are several variations) hold that reality only exists in a socio-cultural universe, and that the apparent materiality of existence is both illusory and secondary to the socially constructed nature of reality. The origins of this view of reality are manifold. They include the need to distinguish social science methodologies from those of the natural sciences (Craib 1997, p. 27), the influence of early sociological theorists (Durkheim and Weber) who saw a need to counter the perceived threat of biological determinism (Singer 1999, pp. 10-11, Benton 1991, p. 12), the pre-eminence of semiotics and linguistics in postmodern epistemological theory (Bigwood 1998, p. 179), feminism’s critique of the idea of a causal relationship between biology and gender (Grosz 1994, p. ix), and the existence of a nature/culture dualism at the heart of modern philosophy. Unfortunately, when it comes to human engagement with the natural world, by denying materiality, this epistemological stance encourages theorists to arrive at positions utterly at odds with lived experience.

From such a post-modern perspective landscape seems less like a palimpsest whose ‘real’ or ‘authentic’ meanings can somehow be recovered with the correct techniques, theories or ideologies, than a flickering text displayed on the word processor screen, whose meaning can be created, extended, altered, elaborated and finally obliterated by the merest touch of a button.

Cosgrove and Daniels 1988, p. 8

However, the postmodern analysis of human experience is incomplete. In order to arrive at such a world view, social science is theorised as the study of a set of human social interactions in which the corporeal human body is deemed irrelevant (Brennan 2001, p.7), and human psychology is not embedded in nature (Murphy 1995, p.691). As though

The philosophical, epistemological, ideological and cultural divide between the natural and social sciences is profound. Most scientists believe that objectivist methodology of empiricism tells us all we need to know about the world. Constructivist epistemologies are seen as empty solipsism that tells us nothing about the world we live in. Indeed, within the natural sciences one often detects an underlying contempt for any epistemology other than objective realism. For example, Professor of Human Ecology, Paul Shepard (1994), in critiquing the postmodern idea of nature as a social construction, thunders:

as the postmodern high fashion of deconstruction declares that the text – or bits cobbled into a picture – is all there is….the vacuum of essential meaning implies that there really is no meaning. A highbrow wrecking crew confirms this from their own observations of reality – that is of conflicting texts.
Shepard 1995, pp. 24-25

The tone of moral superiority and derision here is unmistakable. More often however, postmodern critiques of science are simply ignored by scientists.

On the other side of this ideological divide, various authors identify an unwillingness within the social sciences to engage meaningfully with the natural sciences in general and biology in particular (Brennon 2001, pp. 14-22; Singer, 1999, pp. 10-11; Craib1997, p. 27; Murphy 1995, pp. 690-691; Benton 1991, pp. 7-15). The denial of the material basis of human existence has resulted in a situation where biological causation has been written out of social theory, so that ‘where the social-natural relationship has been discussed, it has been in terms of unidirectional causality from the social to the natural’
(Murphy 1995, p. 690). Brennon (2001) argues that, within sociology, any acknowledgement of a role for biological influences in social theory is seen as a tacit acceptance of determinism and a ‘form of scientistic sociology’. Within sociology, such acceptance is seen as denying any causal role to culture and as inevitably leading to deterministic social theories such as sociobiology, social Darwinism, and ultimately to eugenics, the theoretical underpinning of Nazism, as well as to the potential use of biology as a justification of oppression and discrimination (Brennon 2001, p. 4).

Historically, within sociology, biological reductionist arguments were seen as legitimising constructs, which attribute social inequality and disadvantage solely to the influence of genes and biology. Such constructs are seen as placing the responsibility for poverty, gender, and race only with the individual, shifting enquiry away from addressing broader social forces. For example, women’s inferior social position is seen to be the result of their biological capacity to bear children, rather than of patriarchal social structures (Brennon 2001, p. 32). Brennan argues that, in an over-reaction to avoid giving any further ground to biological reductionism, the biological aspects of human existence have been completely written out of sociology (Brennon 2001, p. 42). As a result of this denial of a material basis to existence, most postmodern theorists are poorly informed about scientific theory.

The unfortunate outcome of these positions, empiricism and social constructivism, is that neither side is able to meaningfully engage with the theory of the other, and so we are left with one epistemology for nature and another for culture. A central argument of this thesis is the failure of either of these two epistemologies to fully encompass all aspects of the lived experience of place. However, developing an integrated approach is challenging. It appears that the closer one approaches to this divide, the more vehemently it is upheld - perhaps by no-one more so than theoretical psychologists, whose discipline stands on the shakiest empirical foundation of all the sciences. In adopting empiricism as its underpinning philosophy, theoretical psychology has, because of reductionism become highly fragmented, because of mathmetisation, abstracted, and because of objectivism, detached. Theoretical psychology sheds little light on the subjective and holistic nature of human experience.
Conversely, clinical (applied) psychology has few problems with the subjective aspects of experience. Indeed, in working directly with people, the ‘talking cure’ assumes subjectivity. Subjective states such as emotions and sense of self are the very stuff with which clinical psychologists, psychotherapists and counsellors work (Corey 1996, p. 27, Egan 1998, p. 83, Stern 1985, p. 4). The empathic attunement used by psychotherapists is a very different type of knowledge from the objective rationalism of science. It is a holistic form of knowledge that recognises and integrates a range of different types of information. Verbal, gestural and facial expression, breathing patterns, posture, the psychotherapists’ own subjective responses, as well as their theoretical knowledge and clinical experience all provide information which the psychotherapist uses in attempting to understand the client’s subjective experience. When empathic attunement works the client does feel understood, and it is this sense of being understood that provides one of the main sources of psychological change in psychotherapy (Bachelor and Horvath 1999, p. 145).

Commentators such as Brennan (2001), Singer (1999), Craib (1997), Murphy (1995), Grosz (1994), Scott and Morgan (1993), Hayles (1992) and Benton (1991), who critique radical social constructivism, all argue for the development of a new epistemology which integrates biological and social theory, nature and culture. But historically, attempts to integrate scientific objectivism and subjectivity have been a bit like trying to mix oil and water. Basch (1988) points out that even Freud, late in his life, concluded that his attempt to provide an explanatory theory for his psychoanalytic technique based on 19th century physics and biology, had been a failure (Basch 1988, pp. 13-14). However, Basch also claims that recent advances in various fields including psychotherapy, cognitive and affective psychology, infant observation, perceptual, neurobiology, information theory and cybernetics mean that it has now become possible to develop a theory of human psychology that integrates subjective and objective ways of knowing (Basch 1988, p. 14).

2.2 Attachment Theory and the Self

Meares (1993) outlines some of the more significant developments in psychodynamic theory since Freud introduced the ‘talking cure’ in 1895. Among the most important

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9 The ‘talking cure’, an early name given to psychoanalysis, is still used as a catch-all name for psychological treatments that rely on the client speaking about their experience as opposed to medical interventions.
changes has been the emergence of the ‘self’ concept. In the early 1970s, self psychology and the British object relations school\textsuperscript{10} independently established models of psychotherapy which saw the primary goal of psychotherapy as the establishment of a functional sense of self (Meares 1993, p. 3). Both self psychology and object relations describe a theory of the structure and development of the self, providing the beginnings of an objective analogue of the subjective sense of self. Stern describes the self as ‘an invariant pattern of awareness around which experience is organised’ (Stern 1985, p. 7).

A more precise definition of the self is difficult, given its paradoxical nature. Alluding to this inherent paradox, Stern points out that, while there have been endless philosophical debates over millennia as to the exact nature of the self, we all have an intuitive grasp of the notion (Stern 1985, p. 7). It is central to human experience.

The sense of self (is a) universal phenomenon…As adults we have a very real sense of self that permeates daily social experience…We instinctively process our

\textsuperscript{10} Self psychology and British object relations school are both part of a broader tradition which has its origins in Freudian psychology. There is a somewhat confusing lineage of schools of psychotherapeutic theory identified as inheritors of the Freudian tradition. Collectively, these various sub-traditions are often described as psychodynamic. Psychodynamic psychotherapies take their collective name from the Freudian theory that psychic structure includes a dynamic unconscious in which various components of the unconscious interact outside of conscious awareness. They are distinguished from other approaches to human psychology by their adherence to this. The Freudian concept of an unconscious is that there is a part of the mind not normally accessible to conscious awareness. The mind is split between conscious awareness and the unconscious. Unconscious ideas and impulses are not dormant, but actively influencing conscious thought and behaviour (Frosh 2000, pp. 11-18). In keeping with Freud’s original emphasis, and differentiating them from other forms of psychotherapy, all of these schools theorise the intersubjective relationship between the psychotherapist and client, as well as articulating a developmental theory of how the adult personality is formed. This thesis will draw on the perspective of self psychology and British object relations, the schools resulting from the most recent split from Freudian orthodoxy. Early associates of Freud such as Carl Jung and Alfred Adler also split with Freud and went on to develop their own approaches. However, the use of these approaches would arrive at a very different analysis to the one developed here. Also, the use of Jungian psychology has already been well developed within ecopsychology.
experiences in such a way that they appear to belong to some kind of unique subjective organisation that we commonly call the sense of self.

Stern 1985, pp. 5-6

In spite of this universality, psychology as late as the 1970s had been unable to come up with a coherent explanation of the development of sense of self. Similarly, although the sense of self can be severely disturbed by certain mental illnesses, ‘until the 1970s, no major psychology could adequately explain the diminishment and fragility of the sense of existence that effect [people suffering mental illness]’ (Meares 1993, p. 1). Another major development in both Kohut’s self psychology and British object relations theory was the abandonment of Freud’s intrapsychic developmental model and its replacement with a model which focused on the formative influence of the child’s early interpersonal relationships.

As a result of this shift in orientation, the caregiver-infant interaction rapidly became an area of great interest. By the 1970s, this was an area of research and theory that John Bowlby had been pioneering for over 20 years. Bowlby had based his research on ethology, the scientific study of animal behaviour, which uses detailed naturalistic observation as its principal research tool. From his observations of infants he described a process called attachment which develops during the first year of life. Attachment refers to a set of behaviours observed in human infants and young children, by which they attempt to ensure that they remain in close proximity to particular human adults and that those adults will provide appropriate care (Bowlby 1977, pp. 203-204). Bowlby’s attachment theory (1969, 1974 and 1980) argued that attachment behaviours observed in infants have a biological basis, in that they enhance the survival chances of infants by eliciting caregiving responses from adults. Without this adult care human infants cannot survive. Bowlby argued that infants are genetically predisposed to form attachments. In a significant break with prevailing intellectual climate of the period, Bowlby linked these more ‘objective’ behavioural and biological aspects of attachment theory to subjectively experienced affective states, by claiming that the infant associates the presence of the attachment figure with feelings of security. Bowlby argued that attachment behaviour results in a specific and enduring bond, and that separation from the attachment figure leads to feelings of distress (Bowlby 1977, p. 203). A dimension of security versus
anxiety has been particularly useful in exploring differences in patterns of infant caregiver attachment (Lieberman and Slade 1997, p. 7). If the frequency or duration of separations from the caregiver is too great, the infant becomes very anxious, in expectation of further separations. However, if, at reunion, the caregiver is able to soothe and settle the distress, the infant gradually learns how to manage feelings of anxiety and distress, as well as developing a sense of security or trust in the attachment relationship (Lieberman and Slade 1997, pp. 6-7).

Attachment theory describes a ‘to and fro’ pattern of behaviour that emerges in the second year of life resulting from the tension between two complimentary motivational systems within the developing child. On the one hand, there is the approach to attachment figures born of the need to seek nurturing, comfort and a sense of security through proximity. On the other hand is the moving out and away from the caregiver, resulting from the impulse to explore the world (Marvin et al 2002, p. 3).

Infants use their attachment figures as secure bases from which to explore the object world, and as safe havens to whom they return in times of fear and distress.

Zeanah et al 1997, p. 90

Bowlby also claimed that there are differences in the quality of attachment found in different infant-carer pairs, and that the quality of attachment shapes infants’ attitudes and beliefs about others and themselves. These early attachment experiences are internalised and coalesce into mental models of self and other. The internal models developed during infancy are enduring and form the basis of aspects of adult identity, personality and future relationships (Siegel 1999, p. 14).

A decade after Bowlby published the final part of his attachment theory, Daniel Stern (1985) published a detailed theory of the emergence of the self in the context of the attachment relationship. At the very beginning of The Interpersonal World of the Infant, Stern points out the essential unknowability of the focus of his enquiry, the subjective experience of the infant. Nonetheless, he argued the need to develop an accurate working

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11 Various theorists use different names for these mental models. Bowlby calls them internal working models, Damasio uses the term dispositional representations and Siegel calls them implicit memory.
hypothesis of infantile subjective experience in order to inform our clinical models of psychopathology. In this process, he acknowledged a debt to both developmental psychology and psychoanalysis. In psychoanalysis, Stern saw a willingness to make ‘inferential leaps’ in the attempt ‘to embrace a larger clinical reality that includes life as subjectively experienced’ (Stern 1985, p. 3). However, he warned that the basic tenets of Freudian developmental theory were based solely on reconstructions drawn from adult psychoanalytical clinical reports. Some of these tenets were not supported by the newer research emerging from developmental psychology at the time. Stern argued that this disjunction between Freudian accounts of subjective reality and objective research posed a significant challenge that psychoanalytic theory had not fully addressed (Stern 1985, p. 3).

In the field of developmental psychology, Daniel Stern pointed to a massive growth of information being generated, utilising traditional scientific methodologies of observation and experiment (Stern 1985, pp.4-5). However, he also identified the limitations of these objectivist methodologies. ‘These observations themselves reveal little of what the “felt quality” of lived social experience is like’ (Stern 1985, p. 17). He argued that because of these limitations, there was a high level of complementarity between the two approaches.

Developmental psychology can enquire about the infant only as the infant is observed. To relate observed behaviour to subjective experience, one must make inferential leaps…As soon as we try to make inferences about …the actual experience of the real infant – that is, to build in qualities of subjective experience such as a sense of self – we are thrown back to our own subjective experience as the main source of inspiration…Here, then, is the problem: the subjective life of the adult is the main source of inference about the infant’s felt quality of social experience. A degree of circularity is unavoidable. Each view of the infant [adult clinical reconstruction and observational] has features the other lacks.

Stern 1985, pp. 13-17

What sets Bowlby and Stern apart from empirical developmental psychologists on the one hand and psychoanalytic theorists on the other, is that their theorising attempts to integrate objective and subjective forms of knowing.

a. Recent Interdisciplinary Developments in Attachment Theory
More recent advances in attachment theory have continued this integrative approach. By 1994, Schore could note

A paradigmatic shift away from the narrow constraints of a strict behaviourism…[that] allowed for a sanctioning of the scientific study of internal states and has created an environment that supports the generation of new methodologies that more directly access the proximal causes of overt behaviour.

Schore 1994, p. 6

Attachment theory achieved empirical legitimacy through the development of predictive experimental procedures known as the Strange Situation and the Adult Attachment Interview (Colin 1996, pp. 35, 305). The Strange Situation categorises attachment relationships into four different types depending on the infant’s response to a brief absence and then return of their attachment figure. These categories can be used to predict relationship styles later in life and are used as a basis for clinical intervention (Colin 1996, pp. 35-65). The Adult Attachment Interview is able to predict which type of attachment style a parent will develop with their child, based on their responses to a semi-structured questionnaire administered prenatally (Colin 1996, pp. 305-317). Both the Strange Situation and the Adult Attachment Interview include reference to subjective experience of each attachment style.

Stern’s (1985) integrative approach has been extended. Recent reviews of the literature point to a convergence of developmental neurobiology, developmental neurochemistry, developmental psychology, psychoanalysis and infant psychiatry into the field of attachment theory (Siegel 1999, p. 1; Schore 1994, p. 6). The resulting expanded attachment theory describes brain development as a complex interaction between genetically controlled maturational processes and environmental influences (Siegel 1999, p. 21). Various models emphasising different aspects of this process have been put forward (Ciompi 1991, Greenspan 1999, Schore 1994, Siegel 1999, Sroufe 1990, Stern 1985).

These models have in common a recognition of three complimentary processes of organisation: the biological processes of the body, the psychological processes that organise individual experience, and the social processes that regulate the relationship of the individual with other people.

Lieberman and Slade 1997, p. 3
It is now virtual orthodoxy in human development theory that the attachment relationship not only shapes the emerging self of the infant but also the developing microstructure of the infant’s brain. Individual brain cells have up to 15,000 connections with other neurons. Neurobiological studies have shown that at the time of birth the brain has a full complement of brain cells, but most of the connections between brain cells occur in the first three years after birth. However, this process of connecting the neurons is highly ‘experience dependant’, in that it is profoundly influenced by the quality of the communication in the attachment relationship (Siegel 1999, p. 13). The primary caregiver acts as a regulator not only of infant behaviour, but also of internal states, physiology and ultimately of infant brain development (Schore 1994, p. 6). Where the caregiver is emotionally available and responsive to the infant’s needs, attachment is described as secure, and development of brain microstructure is normal. Where the caregiver is emotionally unavailable, attachment is disturbed, and the process of neural connection is severely compromised (Rutter et al 1997, p. 357).

b. Emotional Regulation in the Attachment Relationship

In the attachment relationship, infant and carer are constantly communicating with each other. Sensitive caregivers construct ‘an organized system of behavioural sequences’ involving the infant (Sroufe 1990, p. 285). In the second three months of life, a coordinated, give-and-take quality of interaction between infant and caregiver emerges (Sroufe 1990, p. 285). Using gesture, vocal tone and volume, facial expression and touch, they communicate without words. The baby cries, the caregiver responds by picking up, rocking and soothing the baby. The baby settles and smiles. The caregiver smiles back. These non-verbal ‘proto-conversations’ usually culminate in expressions of mutual delight marking successful attunement and regulation (Sroufe 1990, p. 286). When the detail of these reciprocal caregiver-infant interactions is studied using synchronized slow-motion film, it becomes apparent that caregiver and baby are communicating their emotional states.

It now appears that affect is what is actually being transacted within the mother-infant dyad, and this highly efficient system of emotional communication is essentially nonverbal. Human development, including its internal neurochemical
and neurobiological mechanisms cannot be understood apart from this affect-transacting relationship.

Schore 1994, p. 7

If the caregiver has a normal sensitivity to the infant’s non-verbal signals, the caregiver and infant become deeply tuned in to each other. This emotional attunement encourages the separate states of mind of caregiver and infant to come into an alignment where

each person’s [mental] state both influences and is influenced by the other… A parent’s emotionally sensitive responses to a child’s signals…serve to amplify the child’s positive emotional states and to modulate negative states [allowing] the immature brain [to] use the mature functions of the parent’s brain to organise its own.

Siegel 1999, pp. 67-70

In essence, the caregiver functions as an external regulator of affect. This role the caregiver plays in assisting the child regulate his or her feelings is crucial. It is in this non-verbal phase of the attachment relationship that we all learn the foundation of the processes of emotional regulation12 (Trevarthen 1993, p. 149). Repeated experiences of attunement and soothing by the caregiver result in the caregiver’s regulatory function being internalised by the infant, and a lifelong association between attachment intimacy and positive affect is established (Sroufe 1990, p. 286). As these experiences become encoded in memory, attachment behaviours of the infant become motivated by the remembered pleasure of affective and physical intimacy with the caregiver. The psychoanalytic theorist, Lichtenberg (1989) calls this the Attachment-Affiliation motivational system – one of five motivational systems that underpin all human behaviours13 (Lichtenberg 1989, p. 1). As these interactional processes are internalised

12 This process of infants learning to regulate their own emotional states through emotional attunement with the caregiver is at the core of attachment theory. It was Trevarthen’s groundbreaking work, video-taping mother and infant interacting which detailed micro-behavioural ‘nuts and bolts’ of the attachment relationship. The video studies found that infants become distressed when they view a video of the caregiver’s face, or when the caregiver faces the infant but fixes their gaze away from the infant. In each case the perceived unresponsiveness of the caregiver distresses the infant. The infant then can be settled by the caregiver assuming normal mutual gaze and responsiveness. It is through the carer’s soothing behaviours, tone of voice, holding, stroking etc., that infants learns how to settle their own distress. Once settled, the infant will often smile at the caregiver who responds with a smile or warm vocalization, leading to an interplay of mutual delight (shared affect). In a sense, Trevarthen’s video work provided evidence of a working hypothesis that psychoanalysts had been using clinically for over half a century, the concept of introjection, where aspects of caregiver function are psychologically internalized by the infant. The behaviours captured by Trevarthen’s cameras are barely perceptible microbehaviours. When viewed holistically they not only communicate emotional states, they also teach the infant how to tolerate and regulate emotional states.

13 Lichtenberg has developed a ‘psychoanalytic theory of structured motivation’ to explain observed behaviours of infants and the clinical experience of those who treat people of all ages. His thesis is that
psychologically, they become hardwired into the rollout of neural connections which is occurring simultaneously (Schore 1994, p. 7).

c. Implicit Memory: Internal Working Models

Attachment relationships also influence the way memory is structured. Siegel (1999) identifies two different types of memory – implicit and explicit memory (Siegel 1999, pp. 29-33). Implicit memory is characterised by the absence of any subjective sense of remembrance. Implicit memories are formed through repeated experiences and do not require conscious attention for their formation. By the end of the first year of life, repeated experiences of interactions with the caregiver have become generalised into complementary working models of self and caregiver (Sroufe 1990, p. 293). These generalisations, known as ‘internal working models’ are the basic components of implicit memory, and the basis on which we anticipate the future (Freyd 1987, pp. 429-430; George 1994, pp. 413-414).

Internal working models refer to the inner organisation of emotion, states, actions and expectable caregiver responses. Sroufe 1990, p. 295

These are multi-modal models (models that span perceptual modalities) which link different domains of experience – somatic, emotional, perceptual or behavioural. They are the psychological structures necessary for the self-regulation of affect, and their emergence is simultaneous with the development of neural connections between the limbic system (where emotion is registered) and the neocortical areas of the brain (where thinking takes place). A secure attachment relationship, including the experience of the

While this theory has some conceptual similarities with Freud’s Drive Theory, Lichtenberg’s system is more elaborate than Freud’s use of just two basic drives the sexual drive and the aggressive drive. Also, except for the aversive system, motivation is driven by the anticipation of some form of pleasure rather than Freud’s release of tension.
parent regulating emotional distress, becomes encoded into implicit memory. By 18 months, the child is able to call to mind the memory (a mental representation) of the attachment figure in order to self-soothe emotional distress in the absence of the parent. This capacity is understood as the basis for mature emotional self-regulation (Siegel 1999, pp. 29-33).

d. Autobiographical Memory

Conversely, explicit memory requires conscious awareness for encoding and is characterised by a subjective sense of recollection. Explicit memory is further subdivided into functionally distinct forms of memory; the memory for facts (semantic memory) and the memory of self-across-time (episodic memory). Information becomes part of permanent explicit memory through a process called ‘cortical consolidation’ (ibid pp. 34-35). The mechanism of cortical consolidation is thought to involve the condensation and reorganisation of existing elements of memory into new associative linkages. Consequently, autobiographical memory is understood to involve a degree of active reconstruction and reorganisation of memory traces (Bjork cited Siegel 1999, p. 42; Damasio 1994, p. 100).

Sense of mental time travel does not guarantee the reliability or accuracy of recollection…The richness of recollection we may feel in reflecting on past experiences is shaped in part by internal or external cues which can then initiate a cascade of further…sometimes unpredictable associative linkages influenced by both memory and present experience. These associated recollections and retrieval cues can become part of the reconstructed memory…The act of reactivating a representation can allow it to be stored again in a modified form.

Siegel 1999, p. 42

With each remembering, autobiographical memory is reconstructed, mingling the old with the new in unpredictable associations. This is a radical re-conception of how memory works. The lack of reliability of autobiographical memory is taken up by at least one place theorist (Chawla 1992, p. 75) with respect to the link between place and identity, and is a theme to which this discussion will return.

Explicit autobiographical memory is stored, recalled and relayed in narrative structure - the temporal sequencing of story form. Siegel (1999) maintains that the creation of
stories is fundamentally a social experience involving shared cultural rules and expectations (Siegel 1999, p. 61). Because attachment relationships are the templates on which all subsequent social relationships are based, Siegel (1999) argues they have a fundamental role in shaping both the content and process of narrative structuring of memory. Furthermore, themes reflecting the influence of unconscious mental models (implicit memory) bring coherence and continuity to narrative structuring. So, ‘the central, coherence-creating narrative process has a unifying quality that links otherwise disparate aspects of memory’ (Siegel 1999, p. 63).

e. Internal Organisation, States of Mind and the Emergent Self

Describing this coherence-creating process at the neurological level, Siegel cites research from the 1940s by the neurologist Donald Hebb, who found that any grouping of neurons that fires together repeatedly tends to fire together in future (Hebb’s Axiom) (Siegel 1999, p. 26). Activity in one neuron facilitates activity in the others, increasing the likelihood that they will fire simultaneously again, so that the entire grouping becomes associated (Damasio 1994, pp. 102-104). Hebb’s Axiom holds true at all levels of organisation, and at the macro level, neural activity clusters into regular patterns called states of mind. A ‘state of mind’ is the total pattern of brain activity at a particular time. Complexity theory holds that complex systems such as the mind/brain organise their own functioning in response to environmental change by tending toward cohesion and stability across time, as well as tending towards a state of higher organisation. At higher levels of organisation emergent properties, which are not present at lower levels of organisation, manifest (Schore 1994, pp. 63-64). In response to changes in our internal and external environments, we experience changes in our mental states over time. The integration of mental states across time provided by narrative structuring creates a sense of coherence and self organisation (Siegel 1999, pp. 315-316).

Integration is about how the mind creates a coherent self assembly of information and energy flow across time and context. Integration creates the subjective experience of self.

Siegel 1999, pp. 315-316

The self is a holistic, higher order function that emerges from the process of integration. Originally, Kohut had conceived the self as a psychic structure (Lee and Martin 1991,
p. 181). However, this idea was critiqued from within self psychology, when Stolerow et al (1987) raised concerns about the concept of self being conceptualised as an objective entity, and suggested that the self be understood as the organisation of experience, a dynamic changing state, rather than a static structure. Basch (1988) draws on systems theory to reconceptualise the self.

A system is an entity identified by its function, rather than its physical attributes; it is a stable, information-processing collective made up of a hierarchy of interacting feedback cycles. A system has continuity in time… Together, the affective and cognitive information-processing activities of the brain form such a system – here called the self system – which governs adaptation to the environment.

Basch 1988, p. 100

Furthermore, the self-system is an open system in that it can generate new information and organisation in response to environmental change. This concept of a dynamic, open system emergent from the integration of all the various physiological, neurological and psychological processes occurring within the body remains the model of how the self is conceptualised by most self psychology and attachment theorists.

Despite the 20th century dominant behaviourist doctrine of denial of the self, many prominent theorists, for example Baldwin (1897), Cooley (1902), Erikson (1950), Heider (1958), James (1890), Kelly (1954), Mead (1934), Merleau-Ponty (1964), Sander (1975), Spitz (1959), Sullivan (1953) and Vygotsky (1962), have argued that the self exists and develops through social interactions (Cicchetti and Beeghly 1990, p. 2). While many of these have argued for a language-based ontology, the recent attachment theory suggests a preverbal origin. Attachment theorists draw on the complexity theory concept of emergence to explain the ontology of the self within the attachment relationship (Ciompi, 1991, p.97). Sroufe’s (1990) ‘organisational perspective’ sees the self as the emergent apex crowning a hierarchy of increasing internal organisation.

The self should be conceived as an inner organization of attitudes, feelings, expectations and meanings which arises from an organized caregiving matrix (a dyadic organization that exists prior to the emergence of the self) and which has organizational significance for ongoing adaptation and experience. The self is organization.
As this organisation develops, Sroufe (1990) sees the self emerging from the continuity of experience and regulation of emotion that the attachment relationship provides to the infant in the face of environmental (external) and developmental (internal) change.

Repeated experiences of affective regulation (or dyssynchrony) [in the attachment relationship] are the rudimentary core of what will become the self... The core of self lies in patterns of behavioural/affective regulation, which give continuity to experience despite development and environmental change.

Sroufe 1990, pp. 191-192

The internal working model of the attachment relationship forms the basis of the self system (Sroufe 1990, p. 288). Schore (1994) emphasises that the caregiver is essential to emergence of the self, and that the attachment relationship ‘is more than merely a supporting frame, it is an essential substratum of the assembling system’ (Schore 1994, p. 63). The emerging self is understood as a generalisation or an internalized representation of repeated experiences of affect regulation occurring within the attachment relationship (Sroufe 1995, p. 293). Two aspects of these attachment interactions are critical for this internal organisation and ultimately sense of self to emerge: repetition and pleasure.

Repetition of interactional patterns is fundamental to establishing and reinforcing permanent associations between behaviour, affect and cognition, which are generalised (reduced) into internal representations.

Ciompi, 1991, p. 98

Ciompi points out the importance of positive affect, pleasure.

Functional cognitive concepts and theories are invested with positive feelings and dysfunctional ones with negative feelings. Adequately coherent behaviour over time...is also only possible with a sufficiently stable positive ‘affective investment’.

Ciompi, 1991, p. 99

The non-verbal ‘proto-conversations’ between caregiver and infant are characterised by positive affect.
Repetition of such highly organized… sequences [of interaction] commonly culminates in exchanges of mutual delight…The affect of joy or delight becomes established as a criterion for precision in the matching of interpersonal reciprocations. Such shared affect represents a reservoir of positive feelings that will be [incorporated into] the infant’s representation [of the relationship.]

Sroufe 1990, p. 286

Where a carer does not adequately recognise and respond to the infant’s communications, the attachment relationship becomes disturbed. Where these disturbances to the attachment relationship are significant, they disrupt the establishment of neural connections in those areas of the brain involved with the regulation of emotions and the sense of self. Severe disruptions to attachment are thought to lead to psychiatric difficulties known as disorders of the self (Greenspan 1999, p. 128).

f. Emotion as Integrative

Siegel suggests that emotions function as central organisers and integrators linking the various domains of mental activity. This integrative function of emotional states gives rise to the self regulation of the mind as a whole (Siegel 1999, pp. 42, 245). Emotion, as a series of integrating processes in the mind links all layers of functioning (ibid, p. 275) and this integration creates the subjective experience of self (ibid, p. 316). Siegel is not alone in assigning prominence to the emotions. Sroufe (1990, p. 281), Schore (1994, pp. 492-493) and Ciompi (1991, p. 97) all assign a central role to affect in the emergence of the self. Damasio (1998) also sees affective states as integrative, but places more emphasis on the role of the body in generating emotion. He describes emotions as organismic states (encompassing brain and body). They are summative impressions of the organism’s responses to a changing environment. Mind and identity emerge from the continuous flow of these states to provide a subjective sense of continuity in the face of constant environmental change (Damasio 1998, pp. 83-86). Although each of these theorists brings a slightly different perspective, what I find most interesting in this recent integration of attachment and neurobiological research is this new emphasis on the central role of emotion in integrating all mental processes and in the emergence and regulation of the self.
Of particular interest have been those areas within the limbic system of the brain where emotional regulation and reflective awareness (‘autonoetic consciousness’) are thought to reside….The process of emotion serves to regulate other mental processes…The integration of a wide array of functionally segregated processes, such as perception, abstract thought and motor action, may be a fundamental role of the brain. Such an integrative process may be at the core of what emotion does and indeed what emotion is…What we can now say about the neuronal functions directly related to emotion is that there is believed to be an interdependence of several important domains of mental processes: stimulus appraisal (the evaluation of meaning), neural circuit activation, social communication, bodily state and autonomic regulation each appear to be mediated by a closely linked system of neural circuits. The significance of this finding is that it explains how communication within attachment relationships is the primary experience that regulates and organises the development of those circuits in the brain that mediate self-regulation and social relatedness.

Siegel 1998, pp. 6-7

While art and literature have always attributed great significance to the emotions, the sciences have tended to shy away, because emotions do not lend themselves to empirical analysis. Damasio describes a scientific neglect of emotions curiously paralleling the 20th century neglect of place and self (Damasio 1998, p. 83). Translating these amorphous subjective phenomena into quantitative values has proven challenging to science (Russell and Snodgrass 1987, p. 246). Even arriving at a clear definition of emotion is difficult (Siegel 1999, p. 122). While clinical psychology sees the accurate empathic identification of emotional states as one of its fundamental skills (Bachelor and Horvarth 1999, p. 145), scientific psychology has largely focused on cognitive and behavioural processes, as these are more amenable to empirical analysis. However, Schore describes a paradigmatic shift away from the narrow cognitive, behaviourist approach to a mindset that has encouraged the scientific study of internal states, particularly affective states (Schore 1994, p. 6). Lichtenberg could well be speaking for all the attachment theorists cited here when he says, ‘a fundamental difference between Piaget’s epistemological approach and mine is the relative significance that I place on affect’ (Lichtenberg 1989, p. 4).

This repositioning of emotion as central represents a radical shift for empirical approaches to understanding the mind. The construction of emotion as integrative is a significant move towards a more holistic understanding of the infant brain and the emergent self from the scientific perspective. This repositioning does not imply that
cognition is dismissed as unimportant, but merely that it must share the limelight with affect. Each of these theorists stresses the importance of regulation of emotion in the emergence of the self, which is understood as the integration of affect and cognition. This integration depends on neural connections between the prefrontal cortex and the limbic system (Schore 1994, pp. 23-24; Ciompi 1991, p. 97).

The synthesis that is attachment theory incorporates empirical data and inferential explanations from an ‘incredible convergence of independent fields of study’ (Siegel 1999, p. 1), including neurobiology, systems theory, communications theory, narrative theory, self psychology, psychoanalysis, attachment theory, complexity theory, and social, perceptual and developmental psychology. While it draws on a very large number of empirical studies done over the past 25 years, the actual synthesis of attachment theory remains speculative to some degree. Although there is a large amount of common ground, each of the major theorists cited here has a slightly different interpretation of the information. Also, there are, as far as this study is concerned, significant gaps in this body of theory. One is the sole focus on the early childhood period to the exclusion of middle childhood – the period when most commentators consider that place attachment emerges. Second is the field’s tendency to focus on the relationship between the child and the attachment figure at the expense of any exploration of the child’s relationship with the wider world. Children’s relationship with the non-human world is recognised, particularly once they are mobile (toddlers). But it is thought to be of little interest, seen only as the antithesis of the attachment relationship. Of the recent attachment theorists, only Lichtenberg has given this relationship any attention in its own right. And even he sees the non-human world only as a passive object of interest. While the child’s relationship to the caregiver is theorised holistically, the child’s relationship with place is not.

Other than this aspect, the holism of this synthesis of recent attachment theory is striking. In following Bowlby’s approach of combining subjective and objective ways of knowing, attachment theory has developed a theoretical framework of enormous explanatory power. By eschewing reductive, narrowly focused empirical strategies, this field has been able to avoid a simplistic nature-nurture dichotomy and instead articulate a finely
nuanced interplay of biological and social factors shaping the development of every human being. One of the principal outcomes of this holistic approach has been a relocating of the emergent phenomena of emotion and the self to positions of prominence in psychological theory. In particular, the research indicates that it is through the joining of cognition and emotion in the processes of emotional regulation that organismic integration occurs and the sense of self emerges. As will be discussed, this holistic nature of the self, and the central role of emotion have some striking parallels with some important ideas in place theory.

2.3 Place

Place is a notion of geographic location that includes the subjective experience of human physical existence in the material world. Like the term ‘self’, ‘place’ has universal recognition; we readily grasp its meaning. Yet the exact definition of place, like that of self, is hard to pin down. As Relph (1976) points out,

we live, act and orient ourselves in a world that is richly and profoundly differentiated into places, yet at the same time we seem to have a meagre understanding of the constitution of places and the ways in which we experience them.

Relph 1976, p. 6

In a recent overview of the field of place studies, the cultural geographer Tim Cresswell suggests that some confusion occurs around place because the term stands for both a thing and a way of experiencing and understanding the world.

Looking at the world as a set of places…is both an act of defining what exists (ontology) and a particular way of seeing and knowing the world (epistemology and metaphysics)…In other words place is not simply something to be observed, researched and written about, but is itself part of the way we see, research and write.

Cresswell 2004, p. 15

In defining place, Cresswell draws on Agnew’s (1987) analysis of place as being composed of three fundamental aspects: location, locale and sense of place. Here, ‘location’ refers simply to the notion of ‘where’. By ‘locale,’ Agnew is referring to the physical form of places. Earth, environment, the world, ecosystem, are all terms that are
used to indicate our physical surroundings, but these terms are abstract, or generalised to a scale beyond the apprehension of the human senses. Place exists at a scale that can be directly perceived by the human senses. This combination of location and locale ensure the term place is specific to a particular position on earth. No two places are exactly the same. Even physically identical places are at different locations. This particularity of place distinguishes it from other more abstract terms referring to physical surroundings. It is important to note that there is an implicit assumption of the materiality of places here. As Cresswell says, ‘Places almost always have a concrete form … Even imaginary places … have an imaginary materiality’ (Cresswell 2004, p. 7).

This is an example of place as ontology, for in order to accept the material basis of place, it is necessary to accept a notion of reality that includes materiality, a notion many social constructivist theorists would challenge because they understand reality as occurring in a purely socio-cultural universe. This social constructivist epistemological position is rejected here, as being unable to adequately encompass all aspects of place, particularly the role of the corporeal body in apprehending and engaging with material place. This study subscribes to Agnew’s assumption of the materiality of place, even where that materiality is remembered or imagined rather than actual.

By ‘sense of place’, Agnew is referring to the subjective, emotional and meaning-making relationship people have to places (Cresswell 2004, p. 7). The particularity of place also refers to subjective aspects, in that no two people will have exactly the same meaning making relationship to the same place. Place relationships are particular to individual human beings. Yet the experience of place is a universal one, in that all people have some relationship to place. Agnew’s three-part definition of place gives some indication of the theoretical complexity of the notion. Similarly, Malpas (1999) from a phenomenological perspective argues that place has a complex, holistic structure comprised of mutually constituted elements of spatiality, temporality, subjectivity and objectivity, self and other (Malpas 1999, p. 163). The holistic nature of place defies an overly rigorous, reductive analysis. In fact, by referring to both an objective location in the material world, and to the subjective experience of that location, place can appear paradoxical. However, the paradox can be partially resolved by avoiding the dualism inherent in purely materialist
or purely idealist epistemologies. Malpas argues that in providing the most fundamental integration of subjectivity and objectivity, the experience of place transcends the epistemological dualism of much Western philosophy (Malpas 1999, p. 32). However, it seems that investigators of place need to be comfortable with a certain degree of conceptual uncertainty. As with a photon of light, particle or wave, look too closely at the thing and its shape changes.

Most theorists distinguish place from space, where space refers to abstract three-dimensional extension that pertains only to location and is devoid of all other qualities. Space is an idealised concept, dissociated from the material world, pure extension empty of detail, dimensionality, nothing more, continuous and infinite, homogenous and isotropic (Casey 1997, p. 200). In contrast, place is particular, qualitative and sensually apprehended. Place is imbued with meaning; space is devoid of it (Cresswell, 2004, p. 10). Cresswell also distinguishes place from the term landscape. Landscape is a visual idea, which in most definitions locates the viewer on the outside, whereas place is very much experienced from the inside (Cresswell 2004, p. 10). In spite of its being such a fundamental aspect of existence, perhaps even because it is so easily taken for granted, place has suffered a strange history of neglect in Western philosophy.

a. History of the Concept of Place

Casey traces the philosophical history of place back to the ancient Greek philosopher Archytas of Tarentum (428 – 347 BC) who attributed an absolutely fundamental role to place.

One has to grant priority to place…..Perhaps thus, it is the first of all things, since all existing things are either in place, or not without place.

Archytas cited Casey 1994, p. 13

From a high point of being ‘prior to all things’ for Aristotle, place slowly disappears from Western philosophical discussion, only to be subsumed, according to Casey (ibid, p. 14), under the rubric of space. The notion of an abstracted homogenous space appealed to both the mediaeval Christian church and the emerging sciences of the Renaissance period. Casey (1997) suggests both church and science, each with their own claims to
universality, were drawn to the universal nature of space (Casey 1997, p. xii). Certainly for the scientists of the Renaissance such as Galileo, Kepler, Newton, and Descartes, the idea of a universal, abstracted space was highly compatible with the philosophy of empiricism that sought to establish generalized, mathematical laws. A little noticed consequence of the Scientific Revolution was the total eclipse of the notion of place by that of space (Casey 1997, pp. 198-201). The concept of place disappeared from Western intellectual discussion.

The re-emergence of place as a concept of some intellectual standing can be traced to early 20th century critiques of scientism by Edmund Husserl and Alfred North Whitehead (Casey 1997, pp. 203-228). Both took issue with the body-mind, subject-object dualism underpinning scientific empiricism. In particular, it was Husserl and his intellectual descendants Martin Heidegger and Maurice Merleau-Ponty who developed and elaborated phenomenology, a philosophy which sought to replace the subject-object dichotomy of empiricism with a more holistic conception of human experience of the world (Casey 1997, pp. 228-284). Central to phenomenological thinking is the concept of intentionality which Edmund Husserl, the founding thinker of phenomenology, inherited from the Scholastic philosophers of the Middle Ages. This is the idea that consciousness is always conscious of something; there can be no consciousness that is not directed towards an object. According to Crotty (1996), the Scholastics expressed it thus: ‘Cognitum est in cognoscenti. What is known is in the knower’ (Crotty 1996, p.38). Crotty himself describes intentionality as ‘the human mind reaching out and into the objects of which it is conscious’ (Crotty 1996, p.38). He highlights this important philosophical difference from empiricists such as Locke who saw consciousness as passive. Phenomenology understands consciousness as active. Crotty also contrasts phenomenology14 with Kant’s philosophy, which held that the mind can never know things in themselves. By contrast, intentionality ‘offers human consciousness a genuine

14 Phenomenology, like psychotherapy, is composed of various different streams rather than being a monolithic body of theory. For example, on this point of unity of subject and object, Crotty (1996) states ‘This is not to suggest that subject and object are the same. We must distinguish between them. We should not collapse the object into the subject as some forms of idealism do, nor collapse the subject into the object as some forms of realism do’ (Crotty 1996, p. 39). By contrast, Abram (1996) argues that from a phenomenological perspective, any distinction between subject and object breaks down and that it is perhaps more useful to distinguish between subjectivity and intersubjectivity. In this construction, subjective phenomena arise within the body and are not shared with other subjects. These are one’s fantasies and dreams. All other phenomena, usually described as external reality, are experienced by other sensing subjects, as well as oneself. These phenomena, held in common by more than one sensing subject constitute what Abram calls an intersubjective phenomenal field (Abram 1996, pp. 36-39).
grasp on reality … [by proposing] an indissoluble union between subject and object’ (Crotty 1996, p. 38). In proposing this unity of subject and object, Husserl offered a genuine alternative epistemology to the subject-object dualism of Cartesian scientism. Rather than a knowing subject being separated from an external objective world, phenomenology posits a fundamental unity between people and the world. Husserl named this unity of subject and object the Lifeworld. He saw the Lifeworld as the world of immediate lived experience, prior to all thought about it. His phenomenology was the study of how the world presents to consciousness.

Husserl’s approach is known as ‘transcendental’ because it has no interest in the objects of the external material world, choosing to suspend belief in them. While retaining the idea of intentionality, Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty rejected Husserl’s transcendentalism by transforming phenomenology from a way of knowing the world (epistemology) to a way of being in the world (ontology). Merleau-Ponty did this by drawing attention to the central role of the body in human existence. Crucially, intentionality was no longer seen as merely a matter of cognitive consciousness, but now included the life of embodied existence. He argued that without the body there can be no perception of the Lifeworld – indeed there can be no experience whatsoever. Interestingly, Damasio (1994) coming from a recent neurobiological perspective, arrives at a similar position about the necessity of the body to consciousness and experience (Damasio 1994, pp. 223-224). Merleau-Ponty also considered reality to be a collaboration between the perceived object and the embodied perceiving subject, giving rise to a unitary holistic phenomenon (von Eckartsberg 1998, p. 12). Not only does the mind reach out and grasp the object of perception, but the object reaches into the mind of the perceiver and changes it through the act of perception. This is a vastly different conception from the empirical view of an independent, objective world completely passive in the process of perception.

The renewed recognition of place that the phenomenologists brought to philosophy was followed by a similar trend in geography. After the Second World War, in line with the tenets of empiricism, scientific geography moved towards a mathematical, reductionistic, abstracted and generalised understanding of the human relationship with the world. Spatial analysis, a form of geometry, allowed for the development of law-like
generalisations within geography. The study of the particularity of individual places came to be dismissed as unscientific ‘mere description’ (Cresswell 2004, p. 19). However, in the 1970s, humanistic geographers such as Tuan, Relph and Seamon, influenced by phenomenological theory, began to explore the concept of place as the fundamental lived human experience of being on the earth (Cresswell 2004, p. 12; Hay 2002, p. 160). In doing so they developed a universal theory of place as an alternative to the scientific concept of space. They pointed out that while the study of individual places might focus on the particulars unique to a place, all human beings come to know the world through place, so that place is a

universal and transhistorical part of the human condition. It was not so much places (in the world) that interested the humanists, but ‘place’ as an idea, a concept, and way of being-in-the-world.

Cresswell 2004, p. 20

A central concern of this humanistic notion of place was subjective experience: the sense of emotional attachment and the meaning attributed to place, so that the approach ‘enlarges the emotional range of feelings that attach to place to include care, sentiment, concern, warmth, love and sacredness (Seamon 1982, p.132). Tuan catalogued the broad sweep of human affective ties to place and the complex interplay of culture, place, perception and affect under the rubric of topophilia. More recently, utilising a Heideggerian analysis, Malpas (1999) construes place as integral to the very structure, even the possibility of experience (Malpas 1999, p. 32).

But the renaissance of place has been more widespread than simply among phenomenological-humanist geographers. The recent study of place is characterised by a diversity of approaches emanating from a wide range of disciplines that have appropriated the concept (Hidalgo and Hernandez 2001, p. 273; Low and Altman 1992, p. 3). Consequently, Muir points to a profusion of different definitions and understandings of place (Muir 1999, pp. 274-279). There are numerous variations in the terminologies for people’s relationship with place including topophilia (Tuan 1974), sense of place (Steel 1981), insidedness (Rowles, 1980), place identity (Proshansky, Fabian & Kaminoff, 1983), place attachment (Low and Altman 1992), environmental embeddedness, rootedness (Hummon 1992), and ecological identity (Thomashow 1995).
This diversity has resulted in a degree of conceptual confusion. (Jorgensen & Steedman 2001, p. 234). In order to facilitate comparison with human attachment, this enquiry will use the term ‘place attachment’ to signify the human relationship with place.

What is included in the study of place depends somewhat on the theoretical framework employed. In their 1992 review of the literature, Low and Altman (1992) identify two distinct traditions within place studies (Low and Altman 1992, p. 2). One the one hand is the phenomenological tradition of Husserl, Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty, and its derivative, the humanistic geography of theorists such as Relph, Seamon and Tuan. Phenomenologists set out to explore the deeper significance of place to human existence (Cresswell 2004, p. 22), while the humanistic geographers elaborated the subjective, emotional quality of people’s relationship to places. Places were understood as centres of meaning constructed through experience (Tuan 1975, p. 153). On the other hand, environmental psychology studies have focused on the influence of the physical environment on human cognition and behaviour. They have been typified by the positivistic research philosophy characteristic of scientific psychology. The approach is usually reductionist and empirical, separating out and investigating the roles of individual elements of the objective human-environment relationship in experimental settings. Architecture has also used the idea of place to investigate the human experience of the built environment, particularly affective ties to the home. However, in keeping with my own interest in the concept of place as referring to outdoor and natural environments, architectural ideas of place will not be explored in this study.

Riley (1992, p. 14) identifies a third tradition, which seeks to understand place attachment in terms of biological imperatives. He cites the landscape and architectural preference theories of Bloomer and Moore (1970), Appleton (1975) and Shepherd (1967), who argue that human preferences for certain types of landscape have their origins in particular survival strategies which developed in certain periods of human

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15 A major focus of phenomenological place thinking has been the concept of home. It is a concept that has been enthusiastically embraced by some architectural theorists, and usually refers to built structures. However, the place focus of this study is ‘the outdoors’ and ‘natural’ environments rather than the built environment. Where the word home is used in this study, it is because feelings often associated with domestic dwellings, security, warmth and familiarity, are applied to wider outdoor settings.
evolutionary history. These preferences are now encoded in the human genetic
inheritance, which determines human behaviour. Similarly, Walmsley and Lewis argue

not all researchers would agree that the bonding of people to place is best studied
through humanistic experiences and an emphasis on experience. An alternative view is to
be found in the argument that ‘an individual’s relations with the environment are in some
way innate’.

Walmsley and Lewis 1993. p. 120

They argue that place attachment is best understood as a subjective manifestation
of territorial behaviour, which the science of ethology theorises has its origins in the
biological necessity to defend territory in order to ensure an adequate supply of food.16
While these biological explanations of place attachment may well have some validity, in
seeking to reduce all explanation of place attachment to biological causation, they deny
any role for socio-cultural causation.

More recently, there has been ‘a shift away from understanding places in
themselves and towards an appreciation of place as a social and cultural category’
(Entrikin 1994,
p. 227). Recent studies such as those by Clayton and Opotow (2003), Harvey
(1996), Massey (1995) and Hay (1998), focus primarily on the social construction of
meaning and identity in their analysis of people’s relationship with place. Place becomes
understood as ‘a unique mixture of the relations that configure social space’ (Massey
1995 p. 61). Cultural geographers influenced by critical theory made the concept of place
more problematic by drawing attention to its political dimension. The concept of place
developed by humanistic geography and phenomenology came to be seen as reactionary,

16 This argument is an elaboration of sociobiology, a line of biological theory first introduced by E O Wilson in 1975.
Wilson defined sociobiology as ‘the systematic study of the biological basis of all social behaviour’ (Watson cit Mayr
1997, p. 203). Mayr defends sociobiology, stating that the discipline does not claim that social behaviour is
‘genetically determined’. He points out that biology distinguishes between the concepts of ‘genotype’: the totality of
 genetic information, and phenotype: the totality of characteristics of an individual resulting from the interaction of the
 genotype with the environment, and that modern biologists now recognise that ‘almost all human traits are influenced
by the interaction of [genetic] inheritance with the cultural environment’ (Mayr 1997, pp. 203-204). However,
Walmsley and Lewis’ article overlooks this qualification to focus on biological factors as the sole meaning of territorial
behaviour. It is interesting to note that Bowlby included biological causation as one level of explanation in attachment
theory. Attachment behaviours are understood as having been necessary for the survival of the human infant in
dangerous prehistoric environments. However, Bowlby’s elaboration of survival strategies developed in certain periods
of human evolutionary history constitutes a minor part of attachment theory’s explanatory power.
‘essentialist and exclusionary, based on notions of rooted authenticity that are increasingly unsustainable in the (post)modern world’ (Cresswell 2004, p. 26). In the 1980s, Marxist geographers critiqued phenomenological conceptions of place as politically regressive ‘localism’\(^{17}\) (Massey 1994, p. 9). Often, the widely accepted ‘traditional’ or ‘heritage’ meanings attributed to places were seen to correspond with the interests of those sections of society with greatest political power. Critical cultural geographers argued that by ignoring the socio-political processes by which the meaning and control of places is contested, the humanistic notion of place is a reactionary concept legitimising dominant groups and an existing social order. Hay also draws a link between phenomenological conceptions of place and conservative, even fascist political ideology (Hay 2002, pp. 166-168). This led

geographers informed by Marxism, feminism and post-structuralism to shy away from place as a concept. When they have engaged with place it has been in a critical mode – pointing out how places are socially constructed and how these constructions are founded on acts of exclusion. Cresswell 2004, p. 26

For many theorists concerned with the social construction of place, ‘the only interesting question that can then be asked is: by what social process is place constructed?’ (Harvey 1996, p. 261). The meaning attributed to particular places came to be understood as contested and all other notions of place irrelevant.\(^{18}\) Such questions about the political nature of place have a particular resonance in Australia, where arguments about immigration, Australianness and ‘Australian values’ have dominated recent political debate and where Aboriginal people have been dispossessed of their lands and excluded from the socio-political processes by which place meanings are negotiated. While these

\(^{17}\) Localism is a formulation which sees place identity as being somehow intrinsic, and emerging from a long history of local traditions.

\(^{18}\) More recently in the 1990s, Massey became concerned to rescue a broader notion of place from intellectual irrelevance, while still maintaining the idea of place as socially constructed. She proposed that the fixed, bounded, local, inward looking, regressive idea of place, be replaced with a progressive conception of place as outward looking and as process, an open system – ‘a node of intersecting social relations’ (Massey 1994, pp.146-156).
questions about the politics of place are deeply important, those theorists employing an exclusively social-constructivist epistemology ignore the physical nature of both place and human existence, holding that place has no intrinsic existence outside socially constructed meanings. With the materiality of place thus denied, the biological and affective ties to place are de-legitimised as ground for enquiry. Such a reductive position is incapable of engaging with the complex interplay of nature and culture that place represents.

Running parallel to and in fact preceding the renaissance in place theory has been a tradition of literary representation of place. Wordsworth and Proust are widely recognised as having celebrated place. Pocock traces a transition from universal medieval morality tales to ever more localised settings.

During the second quarter of the nineteenth century the novelist’s pen began more fully to depict particular localities, thereby giving rise to the genre of the English regional novel.

Pocock cit Muir 1999, p. 289

The more recent North American genre of nature writing concerns itself directly with the experience of place, rather than having place as a backdrop to a central narrative. Taking its inspiration from Henry David Thoreau’s Walden, the places depicted in this tradition tend to be ‘wild’ places such as mountains and deserts, where the presence of nature predominates over that of culture. Central to the genre is reflection on a multisensory immersion in a particular place, approached with an attitude of openness and empathy for the natural world. Such writing becomes a celebration of a particular place and of the process of engaging with that particular place. While the writing observes the natural world in great detail, it eschews scientific detachment by including accounts of subjective emotional and cognitive responses. Its thought processes tend to be associative rather than linear and analytic. Hay suggests this literature is largely unselfconscious and a-theoretical (Hay 2002, p. 153), although it may be increasingly influenced by the emerging field of ecocritical literary theory.

In their review of place studies, Low and Altman (1992) believed there was no systematic theory of place, and the field was in a phase of elaborating the diversity of meanings
attached to the idea of place. Consequently, any understanding of place rested the theoretical orientation of the enquiry (Low and Altman 1992, p. 3). At the time of writing, Low and Altman detected an increasing dialogue between environmental psychology and humanistic approaches. Fourteen years later, the split between scientific environmental psychology and subjective phenomenological accounts of place remains largely unbridged. A small number of writers have attempted to integrate subjective and objective approaches. Hiss (1991) brings environmental psychology research to explain his subjective experience of various public places around New York. Korpela (1989) investigates how young people use places for emotional regulation. From a philosophical perspective, Malpas (1999) argues that place provides a fundamental unity of subjectivity and objectivity. However the move towards holism is not universal. Certainly, place theory has seen no equivalent of the ‘incredible convergence of independent fields of study’, or the rich up-welling of research and theory development that characterise contemporary attachment theory. Theories of place remain rooted in their epistemological origins. In spite of the significant difficulty in reconciling differing theoretical constructions of place, there is nonetheless a broad consensus among place theorists that place attachment makes an important contribution to the formation of human identity and sense of self. Certainly the notion is central to many of the literary approaches to place. However, this connection has been largely overlooked by attachment theorists (Twigger-Ross and Uzzell 1996, p. 206).

b. Aspects of Place Attachment

Within the literature, eight key and not wholly separable aspects of people’s relationship to place can be identified. In reviewing the literature, I have found it useful to separate these eight aspects of place. However, there is a certain arbitrariness to such a list, as various aspects merge into one another. While the compilation of such a list has some commonalities with reductive strategies, it is not true reductionism, in that these aspects are not thought of as completely separate, determinate entities. Moreover, they are not quantitatively defined and are not mechanistically reassembled into the whole. (i) Affective Aspects: There is widespread acknowledgement in the literature of an affective, feeling or emotional aspect to place attachment. ‘Topophilia is the affective
bond between people and place or setting’ (Tuan 1974, p. 4). The humanistic geographers of the 1970s drew attention to the affective component of place. In referring to the work of this group, Guiliani and Feldman (1993) note ‘The experience of place is primarily defined by its affective character, a strong and lasting emotional attachment of the person to a location (Guiliani and Feldman 1993, p. 267). Cooper Marcus (1992) underlines the importance of affective ties to place when she suggests that loss of place can be as significant a threat to self identity as loss of human relationship (Cooper Marcus, 1992, p. 107). This aspect of place tends to be minimised in empirical environmental psychology literature; not so much because it is considered unimportant, but because the study of emotion has posed such a significant challenge to empirical science. Russell and Snodgrass (1987) highlight various difficulties the study of emotion poses for the positivistic methodologies of environmental psychology. Some of these difficulties include the heterogeneity of emotional phenomena, and the complexity and subtlety of processes linking emotion and environment.

The serious deficiencies in conceptual framework of environmental psychology’s approach to emotion restrict [it] to cataloguing effects of different environments on mood – well short of an overarching explanatory theory.

Russell and Snodgrass 1987, p. 272

Notwithstanding these difficulties, because of the importance attributed to affective bonds to place by the literary and phenomenological traditions, several researchers have proposed various measures of place attachment (Hay 1998, pp. 9-13; Jorgensen and Steedman 2001, p. 235). However, these measurement systems remain rudimentary at this time. This emphasis on a close association between affect and place has interesting parallels in the importance attributed to emotion as an integrating process within attachment theory as discussed above. The crucial integrative function of emotion identified in that field may well help explain the importance attributed to emotion in phenomenological and literary accounts of place.

(ii) Cognitive Aspects: The field of environmental psychology has generated a vast amount of information about the cognitive aspects of the human relationship with the physical environment. This situation is analogous to that of developmental psychology in the 1980s when Stern (1985) criticised its lack of insight into subjective experience.
‘These observations themselves reveal little of what the “felt quality” of lived social experience is like’ (Stern 1985, p. 17). By substituting the word ‘place’ for ‘social’, Stern’s criticism of developmental psychology is equally applicable to environmental psychology.

A great deal of environmental psychology research focuses on spatial cognition – the cognitive processes by which we locate ourselves and navigate our way through space. This literature is characterised by a narrow definition of cognitions and a reductive approach to the understanding of cognitive processes. A second area of cognitive study falls under the rubric of environmental perception research. In this field a number of competing theories that construct perception as an interactive process between person and place have replaced older ideas of perception as a passive process where environmental stimuli fall on sense organs, which then on-send the stimuli to the brain for display. These theories of environmental perception have some overlap with the focus of this study. However, because of the complexity of these theories, and the need to limit the scope of this study, they will not be explored here. One cognitive component of place attachment of interest to this study is the processes by which the relationship to place is made meaningful and how those processes contribute to identity. Tuan emphasises the notion of places as centres of meaning (1975, p. 153). The study by Proshansky et al (1982) introduced the concept of place identity, which also considered how place might be involved in the cognitive construction and maintenance of identity. Their construction of place identity as comprised of ‘cognitions about the physical environment that also serve to define who the person is’ (Proshansky et al 1982, p. 68) reflects mainstream psychology’s privileging of cognition over affect. By comparison with Attachment Theory and Self Psychology’s detailed theorising of the processes by which human attachment shapes the self, investigations of the processes by which place attachment shapes identity have been either limited to a simplistic notion of self as cognitions, or neglected completely. Twigger-Ross and Uzzell (1996), Korpela and Hartig (1996) and Korpela (1989) are notable exceptions. Korpela’s (1989) conception of

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19 The study of environmental perception has become far more sophisticated and complex in the wake of Gibson’s (1979) work. He argues that visual perception is a holistic phenomenon, and should be investigated holistically as the process of perceiving a visual field, rather than by using traditional reductionistic approaches which isolate and study the perception of individual stimuli. The emergence of holistic approaches to the study of environmental perception represents one of the most interesting developments in empirical approaches to place research, and one of the few more general moves towards epistemological integration.
a cognitive component to the use of place for emotional regulation and identity formation
has significant parallels in self psychology theory (Korpela 1989, p. 222). The study of
the thought processes by which place attachment is used to soothe and regulate emotional
distress is a research area of enormous potential.

(iii) Bodily (Corporeal) Aspects: The bodily aspects of place attachment are investigated
from an empirical perspective by the behavioural and perceptual studies of environmental
psychology. However, empirical methods can only observe the body from the outside,
and have nothing to say about the subjective experience of being embodied. On their own
they have little to tell us about the lived experience of being embodied, of being engaged
with place through the body. Beginning with Maurice Merleau-Ponty, phenomenologists
have put a much greater emphasis on the bodily nature of sensory perception than do
environmental psychologists, pointing out that it is often the pleasurable, sensual aspects
of place to which people are most clearly attached (Abram 1997, p. 48). Hiss (1994,
pp. 19-22) arrives at a similar sense of holism by integrating a bodily perspective with
environmental psychology research on the subtle influence of everyday environments
over mood. But Hiss is one of the few theorists drawing on the empirical tradition who
appears willing to grapple with this subject of sensory delight. The close relationship
between the body, pleasure and emotion has long been noted (Freud 1977, pp. 155-169;
Lowen 1975, p. 55; Boadella 1987, pp. 1-12). This aspect of the body’s engagement with
place is overlooked by empirical theorists other than Hiss.

Proshansky et al (1982, p. 39) point out that as well as sensory perception, our bodies
also allow active engagement with material place in order to satisfy our needs and desires
(agency). This active physical engagement with place and the consequent possibility of
having some level of control over place is a crucial element of Malpas’ enquiry. Agency,
the capacity to translate mental intention into action in the physical world provides a
crucial unity of subjectivity and the objective world (Malpas 1999, pp. 109-137). This
unity allows Malpas to reject constructivist arguments that external reality is essentially
unknowable. An important consequence of the social sciences’ unwillingness to engage
with biological theory (discussed above) has been the profound denial of any role for the
corporeal body in mainstream social theory (Brennan 2001, pp. 4-47). Consequently,
there is no recognition of any role for the corporeal body in social constructivist theories of place. Place theorists grounded in a social constructivist epistemology who explore social conflicts over the right to own or define the meaning of places (Massey 1995) tend to minimise or ignore the role physical engagement plays in generating a sense of place attachment. However, theorists able to comfortably straddle both constructivist epistemology and biological theory, critique disembodied social theory and call for the development of a more sophisticated social theory that can accommodate some role for the corporeal human body20 (Barker 1981, p. 54; Turner 1984, p. 49; Benton 1991, p. 23; Schilling 1991, p. 664; Hayles 1992, p. 49; Scott and Morgan 1993, p. 136; Singer 1999, pp. 10-11).

However, the construction of social reality cannot be reduced to purely biological factors either. For those theorists willing to engage with both sociological and biological theory, the body is much more than a mere site for inscription, the submissive recipient of cultural constructs. The corporeal body is understood as giving both a capacity for, and limits to, relationships with both the social and the non-human world (Brennan 2001, pp. 43-44). Every human is ‘a being whose biological organisation does not determine its behavioural dispositions, but rather grounds a rich and open space of species-specific potentials’ (Benton 1991, p. 23). What might be expected of a place constituted of both material and social realities? The recent research on neuropsychological development, discussed above, gives some idea of the theoretical complexity involved when the biological and the social realms are understood as interactive and mutually constitutive. Drawing on the work of neurobiologist Humberto Maturana, Hayles (1992) argues that the particular form of human embodiment, the sensory apparatus, the erect, bipedal posture and the complex neural processing system are all crucial to the construction of human reality (Hayles 1992, pp. 49-50). The stand-off between the social and biological sciences has meant that the research into and theorising on how such aspects of human embodiment influence the construction of human place has not even begun.

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20 One of the major postmodern critiques of scientific empiricism has been its lack of positionality; that in constructing the universal objective model of reality, the position of the observer, their culture, language, social position, and gender is deemed irrelevant. It is somewhat ironic then, that for all this insistence on positionality, social constructionism deems irrelevant the usual location of human consciousness within the corporeal body, as well as the particular physiology and form of the human body.
(iv) Intrinsic Aspects: When Low and Altman (1992) refer to the ‘place aspects of place attachment’ they are identifying the objective, material component of place attachment, rather than the subjective experience of the relationship (Low and Altman 1992, p. 5). Central to this thesis is the understanding that human existence is bound up in a physical body located in a universe composed of matter. Even the cultural geographer, Tim Cresswell (2004), deeply influenced by social constructivist theory, acknowledges the materiality of place (Cresswell 2004, p. 7). Materiality encompasses all aspects of the external environment, including spatial aspects such as scale and location, as well as the sensual qualities of particular places, and the distinction between natural and artificial (human constructed) places (Hiss 1991, p. 242).

Some theorists refer to an intrinsic quality ‘personality’ or spirit of place – independent of human apprehension (Muir 1999). Sometimes this concept assumes a mystical, non-material quality in literature.

Different places on the face of the earth have different vital effluence, different vibration, different chemical exhalation, different polarity with different stars: call it what you like. But spirit of place is a great reality.
D. H. Lawrence cited Muir 1999, p. 289

For others, spirit of place, or genius loci has a more prosaic quality. Hay (2002) cites Norberg-Schultz as exemplifying an approach which understands spirit of place as the totality of the physical characteristics, the essential nature of a place, irrespective of any human engagement. Hay contrasts this ‘place essentialism’ with the phenomenological approach which emphasises the human experience of place rather than focusing solely on the intrinsic qualities of a place. Place is created in ‘the dialectic between human observer and place’ (Hay 2002, p. 158). While most phenomenologists acknowledge the independent existence of the material world, they claim that place has no meaning outside of human engagement with that world. In the work of Merleau-Ponty, the world is an active participant in the process of perception, which is understood as a mutual attunement between the perceived and the perceiver, rather than a one-way flow of information (Abram 1997, p. 49). Theorists within the positivistic framework of scientific empiricism would disagree, arguing that there is an objective external world
which exists independent of any human understanding of it. On the other hand, as Cresswell (2004) pointed out, places can exist in imagination, independent of the material world, but qualifies this by saying that even imaginary places have an assumed materiality (Cresswell 2004, p. 7).

(v) Individual Aspects: Although rarely explicitly acknowledged in the literature, the importance of human individuality in the experience of place is usually implied. Even in the same location, no two human experiences of place are exactly the same. Human existence is characterised by a material body and a sense of self, both of which are normally experienced as coherent and separate from our environments. Physical separateness and sense of separateness are not total. The various surfaces of the body are all to some degree semi-permeable, allowing the exchange of matter and energy, and psychological health usually requires a sense of social connectedness as well as a robust sense of self. Some phenomenological theorists such as Abram (1997)\textsuperscript{21} take issue with an individualistic construction of human experience, characterising it as dualistic because it separates experience into subjective and objective domains (Abram 1997, pp. 36-39). Accounts from various fields including psychiatry, spirituality, and nature writing report experiences of loss of sense of self and a sense of merging, in the presence of nature (Chawla 1990, p. 19). However, these experiences of merging are exceptional. Normal human experience within contemporary Western culture is characterised by a high level of separateness of and coherence within physical and psychological identity.

Malpas maintains that place is more fundamental than subjective experience, and that it provides the holistic ground to experience, thereby removing the need to do away with subjectivity (Malpas 1999, p. 32). Alternatively, constructivist place theorists such as Sarbin (1983) propose that the ‘self’ is an abstraction, a by-product of linguistics, with no real underlying existence (Sarbin 1983, pp. 337-338). These challenges to the very existence of the self call to mind the paradoxical nature of the self, and raise the possibility of different levels of analysis of the construct. As Stern (1985) points out,

\textsuperscript{21} Much phenomenological writing avoids addressing the issue of the self by referring only to consciousness. The relationship of the self to consciousness is not elaborated within phenomenological literature. I find this approach an abstraction, in that it overlooks the experience of consciousness being organised around a sense of self. To use the language of phenomenology, the sense of self is an essential part of the way phenomena present themselves to consciousness.
these arguments about the nature of the self are endless (Stern 1985, p. 7). However, this enquiry is primarily concerned with the felt quality of lived experience, and for most human beings, most of the time, lived experience is organised around the sense of self. Places are experienced as supporting a discrete sense of self, because at an individual level they permit control, mastery and creativity, and provide opportunities for security, serenity and privacy, and through these, self-definition (identity) (Riley 1992, pp. 18-19).

(vi) Social Aspects: This aspect of place attachment operates at a number of levels. At the most personal level there is often a close association between the places and the people that are most important to us. Chawla (1992) notes in her typology of childhood place attachment constructed from autobiographical recollections, ‘The most common form of attachment was simple affection for place associated with family love and security’ (Chawla 1992, p.74). For many adults the rich thread of affection woven through these associations gives the remembered places of childhood an evocative power. Affection for place and affection for person become merged, sometimes indistinguishable. But social influences are wider than just nearest and dearest. As well as families, communities and whole cultures may share attachments. Although these broader cultural influences can powerfully shape individual sense of place, in childhood they are largely communicated through close personal relationships. At a theoretical level, Entrikin’s (1994) claim of a shift towards a socio-cultural conception of place has been noted previously. Consequently more recent meanings conferred on place attachment have moved away from essentialist ideas of genius loci and humanist ideas of affective ties, and to be understood as socially constructed. Cresswell (2004) describes how, from the late 1980s onwards, critical cultural geographers saw place as a concept to be analysed through the lens of social conflict (Cresswell 2004, p. 47).

These analyses of the social processes by which places are constituted are an essential part of any holistic understanding of place. However, at the extreme end of the epistemological divide discussed earlier, constructivist theorists claim that the material world is non-existent and place is purely a social construction (Cosgrove and Daniels 1998, Eder 1999). This position is incompatible with the holistic conception of place. Massey (1995) sees place as a mere context or backdrop for social interactions, ignoring
the influence of the physical context and the complex interactions between social actors and their backdrops described here (Massey 1995, pp. 56-57). Riley (1992) outlines several theories arguing the reverse proposition that cultures are shaped by their environment (Riley 1992, pp. 15-16). Walmsley and Lewis take a sociobiological perspective, arguing a biological basis to place attachment by stating

there is a strong link between territoriality and the sense of place, [and]… territoriality operates at the communal level to promote group identity and bonding.

Walmsley and Lewis cited Muir 1999, p. 283

Such reductionistic causal explanations (whether from the biological or sociological ends of the epistemological divide) run counter to the complex holistic understanding of place presented by Malpas and taken up in this study.

(vii) Holism: Place is widely acknowledged to be a complex, integrating concept. The characteristics of place cannot be understood in isolation (Altman and Low 1992, p. 4). Holistic phenomena have an integrity in their completeness that is lost when they are separated into their constituent parts. The reductionism inherent in empirical approaches to enquiry leaves them poorly equipped to investigate the holistic nature of place phenomena. Phenomenologically oriented theorists take this idea of the holism of place further. For Merleau-Ponty, holism emerges from the process of perception, understood as a continuous interchange between the perceived world and the perceiving body in which both perceived and perceiver are actively involved in relationship (Abram 1995, p. 49). For Malpas, place is not a concept that can be reduced to any single element within its structure (Malpas 1999, p. 39). It cannot be reduced to either objective physical structures located in the material world, nor to purely subjective experience independent of the material world. It is place, rather than subjectivity or objectivity, that constitutes the fundamental ground of human experience. Malpas is critical of the Cartesian scientific reduction of place to purely spatial location, because this is a fundamental conceptual separation of the material world and human experience of it. He dismisses reductionistic approaches as not being explanations.
While it is a widespread philosophical and scientific tendency to seek to reduce complex structures to more primitive levels of analysis, such reductions typically involve the shift in that which is the focus of explanation – they do not explain, therefore, so much as change the subject.

Malpas, 1999, p. 196

He is also critical of humanist geographers who see place subjectively as ‘essentially a psychological or affective notion’ (Malpas 1999, p. 30). Instead he offers a conception of place in which ‘the objects of philosophical inquiry [are] understood only through the interrelation and inter-connection of distinct, irreducible but interrelated components’ (Malpas 1999, p. 18). Drawing on the phenomenological idea that experience can only be comprehended from a location ‘here in the midst of things’, Malpas suggests the analogy of a topographical survey, whereby knowledge of a region’s topography is arrived at by triangulating a number of topographic sightings from within that region. So,

the delineation of place can only be undertaken by a process that encompasses a variety of sightings from a number of conceptual ‘landmarks’ and that also undertakes a wide-ranging, criss-crossing set of journeys over the landscape at issue – it is only through such journeying, sighting and resighting that place can be understood.

Malpas 1999, p. 41

By way of this ‘topographic’ metaphor, Malpas arrives at a complex, holistic structure of place, where the various conceptual components are mutually constituted, and cannot be understood in isolation.

The complexity of place… [is] understood as a structure comprising spatiality and temporality, subjectivity and objectivity, self and other. Indeed these elements are themselves established only in relation to each other, and so only within the topographical structure of place.

Malpas 1999, p. 163

For Malpas, the holistic structure of place provides the fundamental ground within which human existence is made possible.

(viii) Temporal Aspects: Over time, both people and places change. Where place change is rapid or abrupt, people can experience feelings of grief and loss (Low & Altman 1992, pp. 6-7; Read 1996, pp. 1-24; Riley 1992, pp. 6-17) similar to those
described by Bowlby as occurring in response to loss of human attachment figures. More recent research (Hay 1998) has begun to map out how place attachment varies across the human lifecycle. Much has been written about the way in which childhood experience of place shapes adult place attachment (Chawla 1992, Sebba 1991, Cobb 1969, and Hester & O’Donnell 1987). However, the relationship between childhood and adult experience of place appears to be highly complex, with studies of children’s experience of place producing different accounts to studies of adult recollections of childhood place experiences (Wohlwill and Heft 1987, p. 309). Memory appears to play a crucial role here. Riley (1992) alludes to the intrinsic complexity of the relationship when, in reference to Proust’s *Remembrance of Things Past*, he asks ‘Is this possible, that the greater power of place lies not in inhabiting it but in remembering it?’ (Riley 1992, p. 20). Malpas also uses Proust’s text to explore temporal aspects of place. He argues that place, like all human experience is characterised by the chronological experience of narrative structure. The complexity of the relationship between memory, identity and place is a theme to which I will return. However, one aspect of this theme requires more detailed discussion at this point because of its general neglect in the literature and that is the role of human development processes in the formation of place attachment.

### 2.4 Lack of a Developmental Theory of Place Attachment

Amongst place theorists there is almost universal agreement for ‘middle childhood being a “critical period” for the person to bond with and shape the natural world’ (Sobel 1990, p. 5). While there is an extensive body of literature detailing childhood experience of place, there have been few attempts to link childhood and adult place attachment developmentally. Consequently, discussion of the relationship between childhood developmental processes, adult identity and place lack a unifying theory. Chawla recognises the neglect of a theoretical framework regarding childhood and nature as a significant gap in the literature of place (Chawla 1992, p. 64). On the other hand, Striniste and Moore (1989) point to a general neglect of nature in psychological literature, and Twigger-Ross and Uzzel (1996) rightly point out the neglect of the physical environment by the self theorists (Twigger-Ross and Uzzel 1996, p. 206). Attachment theory has been almost entirely concerned with theorising the relationship with the attachment figure. Consequently, the complementary impulse to move away from the attachment figure and
explore that the child’s fascination with the wider world has remained largely neglected in this body of theory. To date, the broader theoretical synthesis of attachment theory, where it has shifted its attention to the environment, has focused almost entirely on the influence of the social environment, while the physical environment has been overlooked. Also this body of theory has concerned itself mainly with the early childhood period (0-5 years). Moore (1985) notes that most child development research does not reach beyond 5 years of age (Moore 1985, p. xii). Middle childhood, widely regarded by place theorists as being the period of life in which place attachment has its roots, has remained largely ignored by attachment theory.

The account of human development outlined earlier in this review describes a complex interplay of biological, psychological and social processes. Attachment theory’s account of these processes has developed remarkably over the past twenty years. Hart (1979) is the only place theorist to attempt a detailed synthesis of cognitive (Piagetian) and affective (Freudian) aspects of child development theory as they apply to children’s relationship with the non-human world. Unfortunately, the integrative work of Hart’s landmark study preceded the massive growth in attachment theory, and now appears very dated. In addition, the few recent attempts by place theorists attempting to incorporate developmental theory, (Hay 1998 and Chawla 1990), appear to be unaware of recent advances, relying instead on superseded versions of attachment theory. Chawla (1992) attempts to integrate classic Freudian theory with place theory, but is hamstrung by the limitations of Freud’s drive theory (Chawla 1992, pp. 69-70). She more usefully draws on

22 Lichtenberg (1989), the psychoanalyst who theorised the presence of a human exploration/assertion motivational system, remains the exception here.

23 There are several factors contributing to this very significant blind spot in the theory of child development. Because attachment theory emerged out of the psychoanalytic tradition, the blind spot may well be in part a reflection of Freud’s preoccupation with early childhood, at the expense of middle childhood. In classical Freudian theory, middle childhood was known as latency, considered to be a period of ‘emotional quiescence between the dramas and turmoil of childhood and adolescence’ (Rycroft 1968, p. 82). A second reason for attachment theory’s disregard of middle childhood may be that the rate of neuronal connectivity is many times greater in early childhood than in middle childhood. Consequently, early childhood has come to be widely recognised as the period of the human life cycle when clinical psychiatric intervention, in the form of prevention, is most effective (Zeanah et al 1997b, p. 168) and has become the near-solé focus of research attention. Middle childhood warrants less than two pages in Colin’s (1996, pp. 245-246) 346 page review of Attachment Theory.

24 Hart cites research with 10-year-olds by Rheingold (1969) that bears remarkable parallels to Ainsworth’s ‘Strange Situation’ procedure, developed at the same time, which measures the attachment style of infants and toddlers. This research found that ‘the presence of the mother changed the strange (anxiety provoking) environment into a novel environment, one which elicits exploration’ (Hart 1979 p. 374).
the psychoanalytic concept of introjection to suggest that happily remembered childhood places can be psychologically incorporated to provide ‘an internal centre of stability and calm’ in times of stress, a process verified by her own research (Chawla 1992, p. 76). For the most part however, place theorists have largely neglected developmental theory. The general literature of place tends to assume that a mature place attachment is present fully formed in adulthood, without need of a developmental history.

This includes phenomenological theorists. I have found no discussion of developmental processes pertaining to place attachment in Merleau-Ponty. In his discussion of the complex relationship between place, identity and memory that underpins Proust’s *Remembrance of Things Past*, Malpas (1999, Chapter 8) fails to address developmental issues. Perhaps it can be said that developmental issues are implied in Malpas’ emphasis on narrative structure and some references to object relations theory. However, Malpas does not address the processes by which an adult place attachment arises. Place theorists from within environmental psychology make a similar oversight. The seminal article by Proshansky *et al* (1982) linking places to conceptions of the self does not address developmental issues. Twigger-Ross and Uzzel’s (1996) account of the role of place in identity formation is a-temporal, focusing on the influence of place on mature adult identity, but lacking any childhood development perspective (Twigger-Ross and Uzzel 1996, p. 206).

There has been some exploration of the developmental processes of middle childhood within environmental psychology. Developmental processes warrant an entire chapter in the *Handbook of Environmental Psychology* (Wohlwill and Heft 1987, pp. 281-328). This discussion describes how children’s spatial perception and cognitive capacities develop with age, but there is no exploration of how the complex relationship between place, identity, affective states and cognition develops throughout childhood. In spite of the widely recognised importance of affect in place attachment, Wohlwill and Heft’s (1987) review of the literature, *The Physical Environment and the Development of the Child*, carries no mention of affect or identity, concepts central to attachment theory (Wohlwill and Heft 1987, pp. 281-328). Much of environmental psychology appears to regard the child’s environment as little more than a source of sensory stimulation and behavioural
feedback. Affective considerations, such as the idea that children’s experience of exploration is experienced as fun, are not addressed. As Hart (1979) wryly remarks, environmental psychologists studying cognitive mapping in children would do well to ask why as well as how (Hart 1979, p. 373).

Since the late 1950s there have been a small number of attempts at a theoretical framework linking human development and the natural world. However, significant limitations to the existing developmental theories have prevented the construction of a comprehensive developmental theory of place. Thomas (1979) identifies 14 different theories of child development (Thomas 1979, p. XVI). However, within the literature of children and place, the developmental theories of Freud\(^{25}\) and Piaget\(^{26}\) have been much more influential than all others. Both of these have been critiqued as incomplete (Zeanah et al 1997b, pp. 166-167). Freud’s theory, because it focuses only on the internal world of the child, fails to account for any relationship with the external world. Piaget’s theory, because it privileges cognition over other parameters of development such as affect, perception and social skills, has been unable to account for the holistic nature of place attachment (Olwig 1991, pp. 6-7). It is only with the recent emergence of attachment theory’s more holistic theory of human development that it has become possible to articulate a developmental theory of place attachment. In spite of the incompleteness of Freud and Piaget’s developmental theories, these few early attempts at a developmental theory of place made some progress and are worth detailing as they indicate some useful directions for further research.

\(^{25}\) Freud’s theory of development emerges from his proposal of a three-tiered psychic structure. This consists of the id which seeks to gratify biological drives such as hunger, the ego which seeks to mediate between the id and the external world, and the superego which is an internalized representation of the social rules of the external world. Child development is understood in terms of the arising and resolution of a series of conflicts between these three elements of the psyche around the expending of libidinous (sexual) energy. Freud believed that the growing child experiences libidinous feelings in a series of different parts of the body. In sequence these are the mouth, the anus and the genitals, giving rise to a five stage model which included: the oral stage (0-1), the anal stage (1-2), the infantile genital stage (3-5) the latency stage (5-puberty) and the mature genital (from puberty).

\(^{26}\) Piaget conceptualised child development as the progressive cognitive organization of and adaptation to the environment (Wadsworth 1989, p. 9). He saw four factors as being necessary to development – biological maturation, active experience of the environment, social interaction, and the successful negotiation of developmental challenges to arrive at psychological equilibrium (Wadsworth 1989, p. 32). Piaget saw development as a continuum composed of four graduated stages. The stage of sensorimotor intelligence (0-2), when behaviour is primarily motoric, and there is no internal representation of events or conceptual thinking. During the next stage of preoperational thought (2-7) there is rapid development of conceptual thinking and representation including language. Reasoning is pre-logical. In the period of concrete operations (7-11) the child develops the ability to apply logical thought to concrete problems. In the stage of formal operations (11-15) the child develops the capacity for abstract thought (Wadsworth 1989, p. 25).
From within the psychoanalytic tradition, Schachtel (1959) produced an attempt at a developmental theory that gave an important role to the non-human world. In doing so, he challenged Freud’s Pleasure Principle, which holds that reduction of libidinous excitation to quiescence is the only source of gratification or pleasure. Schachtel claimed that sensory engagement with the external world is a source of pleasure.

Pleasure, even in the neonate, consists not only in the absence or decrease of excitation or return to an excitationless state, but also in sensory excitation itself… Hence pleasure and reality are not intrinsically or inevitably opposed to each other.

Schachtel 1959, p. 117

Schachtel cited the pleasure apparent in the playful exploration behaviour seen in the young of higher animal species as a demonstration of this alternate pleasure principle (Schachtel 1959, p. 271). In suggesting that this openness to the world is premised on satisfaction of physical needs and the security of the mother’s love, Schachtel (1959) preempted aspects of Bowlby’s attachment theory by a decade (Schachtel 1959, p. 263).

Searles (1959) also challenged psychoanalytic theory from within the tradition. He saw the infant as experiencing an undifferentiated attachment, not only to their mother but also to the non-human environment. For Searles, development consists of a process of increasing individuation, the differentiation of the self from both the parent and the world (Searles 1959, p. 30). With respect to the non-human world, this involves acknowledging not only one’s dependence on the world for physical survival, but also the anxiety this existential dependency arouses (Chawla 92, p. 71). Although neither Searles nor Schachtel stressed the importance of middle childhood or specifically addressed place attachment, both proposed a fundamental engagement with the external world which is absent in classical Freudian theory. More recently, Lichtenberg (1989) has identified ‘efficacy pleasure’ (mastery) as an important pleasure motivating children’s engagement with the non-human world (Lichtenberg 1989, p. 140). However, these are all very small steps. A developmental theory of place attachment as detailed as current attachment theory remains to be elaborated.
Cobb (1977) does address the period of middle childhood and place directly. Her study elaborates an idea proposed by the Romantic poet William Wordsworth, who suggested that the essence of adult creativity lies in the adult’s ability to recapture ecstatic states of a sense of union with nature experienced in childhood. Cobb extends this idea into sociobiology by proposing creative geniuses as an evolutionary phenomenon at biocultural levels, beginning with the natural genius of childhood and the ‘spirit of place’ (Cobb 1977, p. 44). Drawing on autobiographies of over 300 artists, writers and poets, Cobb set out to demonstrate this thesis and to show that the child’s wondrous experience of the natural world is universal. However, Cobb’s method has been criticised by Chawla (1986) for limiting her primary sources to autobiographies by people in the creative fields (Chawla 1986, p. 40). When Chawla repeated Cobb’s study and included a broader range of occupations study, she found that adult recollection of childhood experience of states of transcendent union with nature was far from universal.

One of the very few theorists to examine the development of place attachment across the lifecycle, Hay (1998) found that children were unselfconscious about their place attachment, and that feelings of bondedness with place grow stronger as people age (Hay 1998, p. 13). These findings do not minimise the importance of childhood place attachment. Where other studies emphasise the length of residency as the most important component of place attachment, Hay found that ‘it is not just the length of residence that is important in developing sense of place, but also the timing of that residence in the lifecycle’ (Hay 1998, p. 13). He found that younger subjects who had grown up on the Banks Peninsula had a stronger place attachment than older subjects who had a longer length of residency, but had not spent their childhood there. Although Hay does not make the connection himself, his description of children’s place attachment as ‘unselfconscious’ is consistent with the mental functioning Piaget attributes to the ‘Concrete Operations’ stage of development, which children pass through between the ages of 7 and 11. Piaget believed that children of this age have the capacity to apply logical thought to concrete material problems, but lack the capacity for abstract thought. So in middle childhood, children are unable to bring a reflective awareness to bear on their relationship with place. These findings suggest that childhood experience of place is
highly important in the formation of place attachment, but this process appears to occur at a largely unconscious level in childhood, and only becomes apparent later in life.

2.5 Themes of Children’s Experience of Place

Apart from these few attempts to construct a place attachment developmental theory, is another body of research less ambitious in scope of interest, but nonetheless of interest. These are studies limiting themselves to descriptions of various aspects of the relationship between children and place. This literature has emerged from a range of disciplines including architecture and design, developmental psychology, geography, sociology, environmental psychology and education studies. A survey of this diverse literature reveals a number of interconnected developmental themes emerging in middle childhood which are linked to place attachment.

One theme that receives wide recognition is that most children demonstrate a strong preference for natural over manmade environments (Moore 1989, p. 3; Jones and Cunningham 1999, p. 30; Moore and Young 1978, p. 90; Sebba 1991, p. 404; Kirkby 1989, p. 7; Simmons 1994, p. 201; Olwig 1989, p. 23; Chawla 1988, p. 13). Sebba argues that children have an affinity for the natural environment that reflects their developmental need to build a sense of mastery of their own body and their environment. She refers to the process of sensory integration which occurs up to the age of 10, whereby environmental information arriving through the separate sensory modes is amalgamated into one seamless sensorium. She cites the child development theorist Ayres, who sees the integration of the separate senses into as a primary developmental task.

Within every child there is a great inner drive to develop sensory integration… Nature intended this to be the time when the brain is most receptive to sensations and most able to organise them.

Ayres cited Sebba 1991, p. 411

Sebba suggests that the complexity of the natural environment offers the range of sensory experiences necessary for this integration to occur. She argues that there is a developmental imperative that children learn how to process environmental information and cites Gibson who claims that the complexity of information offered by the natural
world stimulates cognitive development, and that ‘the need to obtain information from
the environment is as strong as the need to get food’ (Gibson cited Sebba, 1991, p.411).
The idea that the natural world provides the optimum environment to support children’s
developmental processes is common. Olds (1989) states that children need the range of
movement offered by natural places in order to learn and grow properly.

Until children learn to orient their bodies in space by going up, on, under, beside,
inside and in front of things, they are likely to have difficulty with abstract
relationship… The ability to move freely in space is particularly well supported
by nature.

Olds 1989, p. 28

Similarly, Striniste and Moore (1989) recommend a variety of physical objects and
spaces for optimal sensorimotor learning, which is a primary developmental task of
middle childhood, according to Piagetian theory (Striniste and Moore 1989, p. 25).

A common theme in the literature is the growing sense of mastery that emerges from
successful negotiation of the range of developmental tasks confronting the child. As the
child develops increasing control over his or her body, they become capable of more
sophisticated acts of influence over their world.

The need to feel effective as an agent of change is…a strong factor in the healthy
development of the child. The natural environment is important in this context
because in it a child can immediately see the transformations he has effected
Olwig 1989, pp. 22-23

The sense of competence arising from successful completion of challenging activities is
accompanied by feelings of pleasure and satisfaction (Lichtenberg 1989, p. 137). While
the sense of agency supported by natural places is well recognised, the value of the
associated positive feelings to self esteem and identity formation is often overlooked in
literature influenced by Piaget’s more cognitive view of child development. Attachment
and psychoanalytic theory on the other hand sees the affective domain as underpinning
action in the world (Lichtenberg 1989, p. 140). As previously discussed, the proximity-
seeking attachment behaviour is motivated by the expectation of intimacy pleasure and
the need to organise unregulated emotional states. Linked to the proximity-seeking
behaviour that characterises the attachment relationship in the second year is a complimentary set of exploratory behaviours (Marvin \textit{et al} 2002, p. 109). However few attachment theorists have seen fit to elaborate the exploration motivational system. Lichtenberg (1989), the only recent psychoanalytic theorists to address the matter, sees the exploratory-assertive motivational system as drawing on feelings of competence pleasure. Competence pleasure results from being able to reproduce a desired outcome through acting via the body, on the external world (Lichtenberg 1989, p. 140).

David Sobel, explaining the emotional importance of special places such as cubby houses, forts and dens, draws a clear developmental link between childhood mastery of the environment and adult identity:

\textit{It is crucial for children to participate in world-making or world-shaping activities. Children need the opportunity to create and manipulate, within prescribed limits, small worlds...Experience in childhood roughs in the ego’s early sense of being able to shape the world; it is the groundwork for taking an active role in later life.}

\textit{Sobel 1990, pp. 5-8}

Many of the materials found in nature lend themselves to shaping. Kirkby also discussing the use of natural settings as refuges points out. ‘A natural setting has the degree of complexity, plasticity, and manipulability which allows a child to experience many developmentally significant play behaviours’ (Kirkby 1989, p. 7). In spite of the wide recognition of this association between the positive sense of self accompanying children’s experiences of agency and competence, and the malleability of materials found in natural places, its contribution to identity development has gone largely uninvestigated.

Another important theme arising from the relationship between child development and place is that of exploration of the landscape. Schachtel’s (1959) construction of playful exploration as a pleasurable engagement with the external world has been noted. Much of the developmental theory within environmental psychology concerns itself with children’s growing cognitive ability to orient themselves geographically (Wohlwill and Heft 1987, p. 281-328). Unfortunately, the unwillingness of this literature to address affective aspects of this activity make it sound more like hard work than fun. In
describing lived experience, most children are very clear – exploring is fun (Moore 1985, p. 74). Hart (1979) notes the lack of a satisfactory explanation by behaviourists for the exploratory behaviour displayed by children and young animals (Hart 1979, p. 373). An indication of the extent of the poverty of theory of exploration is that he had to go back to an early 19th century theorist, Froebel, to find support for his suggestion that ‘understanding the extent and diversity of the world is an important part of any child’s developing conception of his or her own existence in the universe (Hart 1979, p. 340). Hart’s hypothesis of an innate motivation to explore is supported and elaborated by Lichtenberg, who suggests that the exploratory-assertive motivational system is one of five basic human motivational systems27. Hart (1979) also cites research by Welkler (1956) who suggests that there is a critical period in childhood for the occurrence of play and exploration during which the central nervous system is especially involved in acquiring knowledge about the external environment. After this period the organism attempts to maintain the organisation it has achieved.

Hart 1979, p. 375

There is some suggestion that the experience of exploration-as-fun requires the context of a secure attachment relationship. Chawla (1990) notes the importance of a loving parental relationship in supporting exploratory behaviour. This is consistent with attachment theory as elaborated by Ainsworth using the ‘Strange Situation’ assessment procedure (Chawla 1990, p. 21). Ainsworth et al (1979) found that, in the absence of a secure attachment, children’s exploration tended to be either limited in extent and anxiety provoking, or lacking pleasure and indicative of a defensive pseudo-independence. Chawla (1990) also argues that a degree of freedom of movement in order to explore the environment is a necessary condition for the experience of ecstatic engagement with place in childhood.

Freedom was evident as a physical fact and as a state of mind. The environment itself offered freedom in the sense of potentiality – an openness to exploration and discovery in a place that beckoned enthrallingly. In most cases this quality belonged to the natural environment… Usually it was open space that the child could move through untiringly… In addition to being associated with the physical

27 See footnote 12
freedom of multi-sensory discovery, ecstatic memories were always marked with the psychological freedom of undisturbed encounters

Chawla 1990, pp. 20-21

A theme common to most of the literature of children and place is play, both as an activity linking the child to their place and as a source of pleasure. Like self and place, play is a slippery concept, readily recognised, yet difficult to define, and paradoxical (Scarlett et al 2005, p. 3). Play is essential to normal human development, and yet it is not about preparing for the future. The absence of goal orientation is one of the defining characteristics of play, along with ‘having fun, being outdoors, being with friends, choosing freely, pretending, enacting fantasy and drama and playing games (Scarlett et al 2005, p. 3). These authors compiled this list of defining characteristics directly from descriptions of play given by children. Children’s emphasis on play being outdoors is not widely reflected in the general literature on play, which makes little distinction between indoor and outdoor play.

Away from the general literature on play is a small body of environmental psychology referring to children, which emphasises the importance outdoor play. Notable in this literature, Moore’s (1986) classic study on play in outdoor places utilises children’s maps of favourite play places and on site interviews which allowed children to demonstrate how they used these places. Where most generalist accounts of play in middle childhood emphasise structured, rule governed play (Hughes 1991, Scarlett et al 2005, p. 3), Moore, by focusing on outdoor play captured a far ‘more spontaneous, free flowing activity’ (Moore 1986, p. xvi).

Play is widely acknowledged as a source of creativity and imagination (Cobb 1977, p. 13, Chawla 1992, p. 65; Porteous 1990, p. 150; Jones and Cunningham 1999, p. 31; Moore 1989, p. 4) and as already noted, the plasticity of natural places makes them well suited to imaginative play, whether this be for rehearsing social roles (Sobel 1990, p. 8; Olwig 1989, p. 24), acting out heroic fantasies (Moore 1989, p. 5; Porteous 1990, p. 150; Jones and Cunningham 1999, p. 31), or the construction of special places such as cubby-houses, forts and dens (Kirkby 1989, p. 7; Sobel 1990, p. 8). In much of the research, play emerges as a self-directed, multi-modal learning activity, devoid of specific conscious
goals. It is through play that many of the child’s developmental tasks are accomplished, resulting in a situation where play is sometimes described as the work of childhood. Jones and Cunningham (1999, p. 29-31) make the important point however, that children experience play as fun rather than work.

Most play theory, heavily influenced by Piaget, shares his emphasis on cognitive development. However, more recent works show an emerging recognition of the role of play in emotional regulation (Scarlett et al 2005, p. 57). Lichtenberg (1989), who has articulated the affective aspects of play to a greater extent than other theorists, states that when the exploratory-assertive motivational system is engaged, a child seeks stimulation and contact with the environment. Play is an expression of the exploratory-assertive motivational system and has the function of ‘learning to interact competently with the environment. In that sense play is serious business, but the affect triggered by it is a positively toned feeling of efficacy (Lichtenberg 1989, p. 145). Lichtenberg argues that play is a special form of exploratory-assertive behaviour where the usual competence pleasure is enhanced by the presence of intimacy pleasure (of playmates), resulting in the highly positive emotional state characteristic of play (Lichtenberg 1989, p. 145). With a growing range of outdoor activity in middle childhood, outdoor places increasingly become subject to feelings of mastery. As children seek out natural places in which to play, these positive feelings become associated with those places. While attachment theorists have argued the link between attachment intimacy and positive affect becomes encoded in implicit memory forming an internal working model for mature intimate relationships, no parallel link has been theorised between childhood place intimacy, positive affect and lifelong place attachment.

Drawing on Piagetian theory of cognitive development, Sebba (1991) notes that the child’s growing capacity for abstract thinking is matched by a decline in the relative

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28 Lichtenberg supports his belief that the exploratory-assertive motivational system is closely linked to the attachment-affiliative motivational system, with research showing that the play of children of bi-polar parents is disturbed because of disruptions to the attachment relationship (Lichtenberg 1989, pp. 150-152). However, his account does not fully explain the absence of strong goal orientation that characterises many play activities. Like so many other child development theorists, Lichtenberg focuses his account on the early childhood period, and does not elaborate how motivational systems might be articulated within the more complex dynamics of middle childhood. I have drawn heavily on Lichtenberg’s account of the exploratory-assertive motivational system because it addresses the affective aspects of play more fully than other theorists. However, this aspect of his theory remains not fully convincing.
importance of sensory perception as childhood progresses into adolescence, and cognitive reasoning becomes a more important source of understanding of the world. This decline is accompanied by a gradual dimming of the vividness and pleasure of sensory perception. Prior to the emergence of this cognitive dominance, the child is immersed in a sensory realm more vivid and pleasurable than at any later stage of life. With age, the senses and sensory pleasure are dulled (Sebba 1991, pp. 412-415). A number of other theorists also report this developmental phenomenon (Porteous 1990, p. 148; Cobb 1977, p. 30). In attachment theory, the positive affect of the attachment relationship is seen as fundamental to the development of identity (Stern 1985, p. 13; Sroufe 1995, p. 286). However, any developmental link between identity formation and the pleasure associated with place-based play, exploration and the sensory immersion of middle childhood, has not been systematically explored by either place theorists or self theorists. I believe this to be a fundamental oversight in the literature.

A related theme of children’s use of place for emotional or self regulation has been explored by a small number of theorists. Dovey (1990) uses a selection of excerpts from adult recollections to describe the sense of autonomy and capacity for emotional regulation her respondents derived from their childhood experiences of place (Dovey 1990, pp. 13-17). Kirkby (1989) proposes that in middle childhood, special places and protective refuges in the environment can be used to install feelings of soothing comfort and safety in a similar way to that in which the attachment figure is used in early childhood (Kirkby 1989, p. 8). Korpela’s (1989) study found adolescents used place to self regulate, and ‘mentally deal with those feelings, thoughts and images that threaten the balance of the sense of self’ (Korpela 1989, p. 243). Korpela (1981) cites Rochberg-Haltern’s account of the self emerging from the progressive internalisation of dialogue with surroundings, physical as well as social (Korpela 1981, p. 345). Korpela and Hartig (1996) describe the use of favourite places to self regulate emotional arousal (Korpela and Hartig 1996, p. 222). These ideas of Dovey, Kirkby, Korpela and Hartig are of particular interest because they overlap some of the research into the development of self regulation capacity emerging from attachment theory and self psychology. Korpela and Hartig (1996) define emotional regulation as
the process by which emotional arousal is redirected, controlled, modulated and modified to enable the individual to function adaptively in emotionally arousing situations.

Korpela and Hartig 1996, p. 222

This definition closely parallels a description of the developmental emergence of a capacity for emotional regulation through self-soothing given by the self psychologist Stanley Greenspan (1999). In his account, the infant’s learning to use the internalised representation of the mother to calm emotional arousal is a major developmental step towards regulation of the self (Greenspan 1999, pp. 123-128). In a similar vein is Chawla’s observation about adult recollection of ecstatic childhood experiences of place.

The child enjoyed the basic emotional security of his or her family’s love. Regardless of family troubles, some relative provided a fund of unconditional love, freeing the child from self-preoccupation so that he or she could give full attention to the place itself.

Chawla 1990, p. 21

As discussed above, this observation, that positive place attachment requires the presence of secure human attachment is consistent with attachment theory. It also appears to imply that interpersonal relationships are more fundamental to human experience than relationship to place. That hypothesis appears to be supported by the observed sequence of developmental processes, in that interpersonal attachment emerges in infancy, whereas place attachment emerges in middle childhood.

Can these themes of childhood place experience emerging from the literature contribute towards a developmental model of place attachment? Several theorists have made some valuable contributions towards a developmental theory of place that includes considerations of the development of the self or identity. Guiliani (1991), Guiliani and Feldman (1993) and Hay (1996) have all addressed the need to move from a static to a dynamic model of people-place relationships which allows for the possibility of significant changes in the nature of place attachment across the human lifecycle. However, all of these theorists focus on changes in the relationship to place during adulthood, neglecting the formative role of childhood. Several theorists do make steps
towards a childhood developmental model. Sobel (1990) reports the powerful role forts and dens have in shaping the self.

The creation of these worlds from … [materials of the natural environment] … gives children the opportunity to organise a world and then find places within it in which to become themselves.

Sobel 1990, pp. 5-8

Sobel also makes a crucial link between the emerging capacity for agency and identity formation, thereby providing a developmental grounding for Malpas’ ontological connection between agency and place (Sobel 1990, p. 7). Sebba (1991) draws important links between children’s relationship to the environment and the developmental drives to explore, to master the body and to integrate the senses (Sebba 1991, p. 411). Unfortunately, she offers no systematic elaboration of these interesting ideas.

Chawla’s (1992) review of the literature of childhood place attachment draws together many of the disparate elements of the literature. She also identifies some major gaps in the research, including the absence of any unifying theory (Chawla 1992, pp. 63-64). Although she refers to attachment theory, Chawla appears to be unaware of more recent developments in attachment theory. Instead, she largely falls back on classical Freudian developmental theory and her review is constrained by the limitations of that theory as outlined above. The various themes of middle childhood experience of place emerging from the literature, when drawn together, produce a composite picture of place as a very rich and complex part of childhood. One of the strongest emerging themes is that the childhood experience of place can be one of great pleasure: the delight of sensory experience when the senses are fresh and more vivid than similar experiences in adulthood; the pleasure that emerges through play with its attendant growing sense of mastery of one’s body and agency in the world and the joy of discovery as children give expression to the impulse to explore place which unfolds in all its sensuous particularity. The literature clearly points to a wealth of these childhood pleasures of place. However, few theorists make more than an oblique connection between childhood place pleasures and the emergence of adult identity.
Similarly, the theme of childhood use of place for emotional regulation shows a strong parallel with attachment theory’s concept of the attachment figure as an external regulator of emotional states. But, the connection between emotional regulation and the emergence of the self is not picked up by place researchers. It is the theorists discussing childhood place as a site of developing mastery who most clearly link place to the emergence of an adult sense of self. This sort of developmental connection can productively be applied to other themes of childhood place. I believe that by using some of the ideas emerging from more recent developments in attachment theory, it is possible to draw together the fragmented literature of childhood place in order to put together the beginnings of a unified developmental theory of place.

2.6 Adult Recollection of Childhood Experience of Place

There is a general agreement among theorists who address the phenomenon that the adult recollection of childhood experience of place can influence sense of identity, although several point out that the phenomenon is not universally experienced as important to sense of self (Chawla 1992, p. 74; Porteous 1990, p. 155). Cooper Marcus points out that for many individuals the most powerful memories revolve around places. She attributes the power of outdoor places in shaping identity to the fact that they are the sites of significant emotional processes of growing up (Cooper Marcus 1992, p. 87). As observed above, numerous theorists have noted the pleasure inherent in childhood experience of place. Yet Cooper Marcus appears to be one of the few theorists to explicitly link the process of identity formation to the positive emotional aspects of the child-place developmental themes discussed above.

The adult recollection of childhood experiences of place is a complex phenomenon. All of the previously described themes of child development and childhood experience of place are pertinent to adult recollection, as they all contribute to shaping the remembered experience. In addition, Hay (1998) points out that place attachment is not fixed in childhood, but changes throughout the adult stages of the lifecycle, so that generally, it comes to be considered as more important with age. Adding a further layer of complexity, Sebba (1991) suggests theorists cannot agree on the reliability of what is being remembered in adulthood and whether adult memories reflect actual events of
childhood or whether adult memories of the childhood experience of place represent an idealisation or interpretation of actual events. Her own results show a significant discrepancy between actual and remembered childhood experience, with 95.6% of adults recalling a preference for outdoor places as children, but only 46% of children reporting the same preference (Sebba 1991, p. 397). However, this contrasts with the findings of Moore (1985) and Hart (1975), both of whom found that over 90% of children express a preference for outdoor places. Nonetheless, Chawla agrees with Sebba that in general memory is not completely reliable. ‘Memory must be consulted with the caution that it transforms as well as informs (Chawla 1992, p. 73). This observation is congruent with Siegel’s description of the process of cortical consolidation whereby with each remembering, explicit autobiographical memory is reconstructed drawing on a somewhat unpredictable cascade of associations, which can at a later date, take on an undeserved status of remembered fact.

Chawla suggests that there can be considerable variation in the quality and form of adult memory of the childhood experience of place. She found that most of the scientists she surveyed described a very detached childhood experience of place (Chawla 1986, p. 40). Porteous (1990) notes that the recollections of politicians and business figures are characterised by a preoccupation with controlling their environment (Porteous 1990, p. 155). Chawla (1992) has developed a typology of four different forms of childhood experience of place. Affection is characterised by fond memories of place and the people in it. Transcendence occurs where there has been a profound sense of connection to nature experienced in childhood. Ambivalence is the experience where affectionate feelings for place have been compromised by the memory of social or familial injustice. Idealisation is an abstraction of childhood place experience dating from adolescence where place becomes a symbol of personal values (Chawla 1992, p. 75). It would be interesting to explore whether there are any other associations between Attachment Types generated by the Strange Situation procedure, and Chawla’s place attachment types.

In discussing Marcel Proust’s literary remembering of childhood experience of place Remembrance of Things Past, Riley (1992) adds yet another layer of complexity to the phenomenon of adult recollection of childhood experience of place when he suggests
the essential attachment is not to the landscape itself, but to its memory and relived experience. The imagined landscape has more meaning, power and importance in the role of human experience than the landscape experienced concretely.

Riley 1992, p. 20

Remembering place may have less to do with place per se and more to do with yearning for the positive emotions experienced as a child in that landscape, or possibly the rich array of emotions experienced by the adult when remembering place. It may also be possible that, given the lack of reflective capacity in childhood, the adult remembrance experience provides an opportunity to reflect on experience not subject to reflective processes in situ. Cobb (1977) argues that adult recollection of place is motivated by a wish to recapture the lost sensory vividness of childhood (Cobb 1977, p. 30). Perhaps adult remembrance also offers an opportunity through reflection to give meaning to this vivid set of experiences, thereby adding value to the overall richness of the original experience.

Malpas, in a different reading of Remembrance of Things Past, suggests that place provides a unity to experience which allows Proust not simply to reminisce, but also to recapture lost time, thereby providing unity to his life and his identity. For Malpas, self is grounded in the overarching structure of place. The social relationships that give rise to the self of attachment theory are equally grounded in place. Following Malpas, I would argue for a holistic conception of place, where it is not possible to completely isolate various elements of the experience. In such a conception of place attachment, the developmental influence of childhood experience of place reaches forward into the future just as adult recollection of childhood experience of place reaches backwards into the past. Adult and child are connected by developmental processes, narrative structuring, and the not completely reliable links of memory. However, Malpas does not explore the developmental processes by which a mature sense of identity, or self is arrived at. I suspect that much would be gained from any attempt to integrate place identity theory with recent work integrating attachment theory, self psychology and developmental psychology and neurobiology.
2.3 Conclusion

Drawing on a wide range of research fields, attachment theory has arrived at a holistic conception of the role of attachment in the development of a mature sense of self. In a break with empirical scientific tradition, this theory has stressed the importance of emotion as an integrating process. The theory describes the developing child’s ‘to and fro’ dance between the security of the attachment figure and the fascination of the outside world, place. Autobiographical and creative literature has long recognised the importance of emotional bonds with place in the development of identity. However, within attachment theory the relationship between the developing child and place has remained neglected. At the same time, place theorists have largely overlooked the role human developmental processes play in the formation of a mature place attachment, and place attachment remains a somewhat vague and contested concept. Nonetheless, with the emergence and consolidation of attachment theory, the time has come when a dialogue between these two fields of knowledge can occur in order that the developmental processes contributing to place attachment can be adequately theorised.

On my reading of the literature, a number of features of the human relationship with place do bear striking similarities with attachment relationships. Both fields encompass subjective and objective ways of knowing. The importance to both types of relationship of a holistic understanding is striking. It is the holistic conceptualization of attachment theory that recognises the self as an emergent property, arising from the integration of various domains of psychological and biological organization. Siegel describes the complex layers of biological and psychological processes that give rise to this emergent sense of self. Given the complex and holistic nature of place outlined by Malpas, I wonder if place, like self, is not an emergent concept, greater than the sum of its parts. There are other parallels. Emotion, the physical body, sensory perception and play are central to both relationships. Also, Malpas’ recognition of agency as a unifying link between subjectivity and the objective world is supported by developmental psychology’s recognition of the importance of mastery for the child’s emerging sense of self. Through attachment relationships a child learns emotional regulation: how to soothe emotional distress and use positive experiences to reinforce positive self states. Initially, the attachment figure functions as an external regulator. Over time, their role is internalised.
so that the child is progressively able to self regulate. Korpela’s work would seem to indicate that relationships with favourite places can function in a similar way, although there would appear to be a great deal more work necessary to map out how these processes operate with respect to place attachment.

Drawing on attachment theory, it can be hypothesised that some sense of self develops in the context of the childhood relationship with place, with similarities and differences to the sense of self emerging from the context of the attachment relationship. Attachment theory offers a coherent if incomplete account of the processes by which adult identity emerges from the attachment relationship. It is a body of theory able to encompass subjective and objective ways of knowing, and offers clear directions for future research. By contrast, place attachment remains a somewhat vague and contested concept. While recognising a link between adult sense of place attachment and childhood experiences of place, place theory is yet to offer a credible account of the processes by which the two phenomena are linked. Integrating these two theories would be a significant step towards the establishment of a much needed developmental theory of place.

Stern and Siegel both describe the attachment relationship as intersubjective, in that meaning is developed and shared between the two participants. Likewise, Abram suggests that an intersubjective relationship exists between the sensible thing and the perceiving body, between place and the emplaced body. It would appear that two very different types of intersubjectivity are being discussed here. The finely nuanced, empathic attachment figure responses of touch, gesture, voice and gaze, by which the infant begins to differentiate and build a sense of self, appear to be absent from the child’s relationship with place. What is the nature of the intersubjectivity of the childhood experience of place? What are the processes by which shared meaning develops between the non-human world and the human child? What are the processes by which this relationship with place becomes such a powerful psychological force, shaping our sense of self and evoking powerful emotional bonds? Although far from fully understood, the processes by which attachment relationships shape the self have been mapped out in some detail. Not so for place attachment. It remains fundamentally a mystery.
Much of this discussion has focused on parallels between the two types of attachment. However, differences between the two are also apparent. The most striking is that place attachment emerges at a later developmental age than human attachment. Also, in many ways, place appears to be the antithesis of the attachment figure; functioning as a fascinating other, drawing the child out and away from the comfort and security of the attachment relationship, into a world of excitement, risk, anxiety, play and sensual pleasure. How is it that place transforms from exciting fascinating other to something with which we identify and hold in great affection? And yet at some point, it is as though a polarity reversal occurs, so that in adulthood, place has become a source of comfort and security, almost an equivalent to the attachment figure. Place plays a role almost as an adjunct to the process of psychological separation from attachment figures. This leads Chawla to pose the question as to whether ‘place attachments should be considered merely secondary effects of social attachments or whether they have an independent existence’ (Chawla 1992, p. 63). If place is to be seen as shaping identity in its own right, what are the processes by which place shapes our sense of self?

Association has long been one of the principle tools used by psychoanalysis to explore the unconscious. Siegel’s use of Hebb’s Axiom grounds the concept of association in biological processes in a way that was not available to Freud. However, Siegel also points to a random element within the process of association. Human remembrance is not like a video replay. Association makes the act of remembering less reliable, but more mysterious, creative and vastly richer than any video replay. Place can be both the focus of play and exploration, and the background setting in which play and social activity occurs. According to Siegel’s description of memory formation, as both foreground and background, place would become part of both explicit and implicit memory. Hebb’s Axiom would suggest that through play, place becomes associated with feelings of pleasure and a positive sense of self in both implicit and explicit memory.

Why does the memory of childhood places hold such fascination for us, or at least for some of us, in adulthood? Is it the process of remembering, with its serendipitous cascade of associations that adds value to the original place experience? Hay’s contention that place attachment increases with age and length of residency might support such an idea.
about increasing the value through the reworking of memory. But his finding that the
strongest reported place attachments require the subject to have grown up locally, would
seem to support the opposing hypothesis that there is something very special intrinsic to
childhood experience of place. Or is it the quality of childhood experience itself? Do we
hunger for the experience of a distant time when our bodies were delightfully fresh,
senses were sharper and life was more intensely and immediately experienced, a time
when our place was a playground to be explored and enjoyed in play which evoked
feelings of delight, excitement, curiosity, pleasure and satisfaction? Or perhaps childhood
attachments are not directed towards place at all, and these positive feelings are less to do
with place directly and more an association to the successful engagement with
developmental tasks, or a secure family life, and place, once little more than a backdrop,
becomes a useful hook on which to hang memories and the process of remembering? To
what extent even, is childhood place created retrospectively – a childhood Garden of
Eden, an idealised world, cleansed of all darkness and pain by unreliable memory?

If childhood experience of place is shaped through adult remembering, how much is adult
place attachment shaped by childhood experience of place? What is the relationship of
remembered childhood experience of place to current adult sense of place? Is there a kind
of circular relationship, with the influence of adult remembrance reaching backwards in
time and childhood developmental processes reaching forward? And for those adults who
are not fascinated by their memories of childhood place, what is the difference? And does
it matter? Why are some people more deeply attached to place than others? If as Malpas
suggests, place is a complex integrating phenomenon, then surely the phenomenon of
adult remembrance of childhood experience of place is doubly so. It would appear that
first of all it is necessary to map out the phenomenon more fully than has previously been
done (except perhaps by one M. Proust).
CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

Phenomenology is about redeveloping this ‘capacity to see and feel what is there’. It is an attempt to regain a childlike openness in our encounter with the world.
Crotty, Phenomenology and Nursing Research

3.1 Research Approach

My memories of a childhood spent wandering the grassy flats and woodlands of the Middle Yarra are rich in detail. Like a private collection of rare and colourful paintings, these childhood images are precious to me. In the gallery of my life’s memories, they stand out as though more brightly-lit than all others. Reflecting on this phenomenon, I am curious about the value and meaning I give to these memories, and wonder how others view their memories of childhood places. This remembering and its meaning is what I have set out to investigate. But how is one to approach such a task? Childhood memories tend to be transient phenomena of unreliable accuracy, while place memories straddle that ‘troubled border’ between culture and nature. I have raised concerns over the epistemological split between the social and biological sciences, as well as the need for a holistic epistemology that can encompass both the objective material aspects and the subjective lived experience of place. I have noted the interdisciplinary dialectic that characterises recent attachment theory, where subjectivity of self psychology and psychoanalytic theory informs and is informed by empirical developmental psychology and neurobiology. This has proved to be a rich and productive approach to research and theory generation. However, such a broad interdisciplinary collaboration is beyond the
resources of a single postgraduate researcher. What other methodologies might be might be more suited?

Given the value I place on my memories, I am wary of any approach that is unable to grapple with subjective experience. Repeatedly in the literature, I encountered concerns that the positivistic empiricism that underpins scientific research is, by itself, inadequate to the task of investigating subjective human experience. The quantitative methodologies of empiricism can be useful for understanding people from the outside, but not from within the lived human experience. If we put aside quantitative methods, we turn to the qualitative research tradition, which has been criticised as ‘unscientific,… entirely personal,…full of bias,…unreliable, impressionistic, and not objective’ (Denzin and Lincoln 1994, pp. 4-5). Such criticisms are not without some legitimacy when qualitative research is compared with quantitative research using the values of empiricism. However, such criticisms fail to acknowledge the need for alternative research approaches which, unlike empiricism, are able to investigate subjectivity. Drawing on Dilthey, van Manen makes a fundamental distinction between the natural sciences and the human sciences.

Whereas natural science tends to taxonomize natural phenomena (such as in biology) and causally or probabilistically explain the behaviour of things (such as in physics), human science aims at explicating the meaning of human phenomena…… and at understanding the lived structures of meanings (such as in phenomenological studies of the lifeworld).

Van Manen 1990, p. 4

Adult recollection of childhood experience of place is a psychological phenomenon and as such falls within the sphere of human science. In this study, the phenomenon being investigated is the experience of remembering. This is not the original childhood experience of place, although this latter phenomenon is in some way contained within the adult experience of remembrance. An elusive phenomenon such as remembrance is very different in nature from the concrete material events investigated by the natural sciences, and for which positivistic empirical methodologies of quantitative research were developed.
Giorgi (1986) states that these methodologies are inappropriate for the task of investigating ‘vague and ephemeral’ aspects of experience such as psychological events. He argues that descriptive approaches and specifically phenomenological descriptions are a more appropriate way to investigate such phenomena. This is because phenomenology encompasses descriptions of both the thing being experienced and the subjective response to that thing. Such descriptions more accurately reflect lived experience (Giorgi 1986, pp. 7-9). Similarly, von Eckartsberg (1998a) points out that the deterministic methodologies of the natural sciences provide an inadequate account of human experience, in that they overlook the meaningfulness of human experience. Like Giorgi, he argues that rather than the quantitative, mechanistic approaches of the natural sciences, a more accurate reflection of human experience is achieved by use of descriptions informed and shaped by meanings of the situations in which we find ourselves (von Eckartsberg 1998a, p. 4). He argues that phenomenology offers a useful methodology for capturing and understanding lived human experience. Phenomenology is the methodological framework within which I have chosen to locate this study.

Seamon (2002) defines phenomenology as ‘exploration and description of phenomena, where phenomena refers to things or events as human beings experience them’ (Seamon 2002, p. 2). The way in which events are experienced is known as ‘lived experience’. Phenomenology explores what this lived experience is like. Phenomena are the way the world manifests in human consciousness. The crucial point is that the word ‘phenomenon’ does not merely refer to the objective thing or event, but also to the subjective experience of that thing or event. Husserl’s central insight is that consciousness is intentional and the mind reaches out and draws the object into itself, shaping and being shaped by the object to form a unified whole (Crotty 1996, p. 38). Consequently, subjective experience and the objective world are unified as an irreducible whole. This holistic way of knowing is more suited to the understanding of human experience than positivistic methodologies which split experience into subject and object. Certainly it is more suited to the investigation of complex phenomena such as place and self. Malpas (1999) points out that place requires the existence of an objective physical world and the subjective experience of that world (Malpas 1999, pp. 32-37). Also, drawing on the work of Maurice Merleau-Ponty, in language strikingly reminiscent of
Siegel, Malpas (1999) argues that the self is the equivalent to the sum total of all mental states (Malpas 1999, p. 89). This holistic conception of self and place argued by Malpas is grounded deeply within phenomenology, the tradition that would appear to be most appropriate to the requirements of this enquiry.

The original version of phenomenology elaborated by Edmund Husserl encouraged the researcher to return ‘to things themselves,’ devoid of any presuppositions, through a process known as bracketing (Crotty 1998, p. 273). Through bracketing, the phenomenologist suspends belief in the external world. ‘What is left when this belief is suspended, what remains is the phenomenon, the ‘pure appearance’ that presents itself to consciousness’ (Von Eckartsberg 1998a, p. 6). Through bracketing, the phenomenologist approaches ‘lived experience’, where lived experience is ‘our immediate, pre-reflective consciousness of life……it can never be grasped in its immediate manifestation, but only reflectively as a past presence’ (van Manen 1990, pp. 35-36). We cannot simultaneously experience and reflect. As soon as we reflect on lived experience we lose its immediacy.

–Through bracketing we come as close as is possible to the immediate present moment awareness of lived experience.

However, Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty both argued that enquiry without any presuppositions is impossible (Moran and Mooney 2002, p. 18). Instead, Heidegger combined hermeneutics, the study of interpretation, with phenomenology. Hermeneutics is the theory and practice of interpretation, the explication of meaning. Originally applied to the interpretation of written texts, phenomenologists broadened the use of the term to include the drawing of meaning from lived experience. Heidegger described the practice of his hermeneutical phenomenology as a kind of continuous circular movement between, on the one hand, an open unprejudiced engagement with the world, and on the other hand, a critical interpretive reflection on that engagement (Crotty 1998, p. 97). Seamon (2000) calls the open engagement ‘phenomenological intuiting’ after Spiegelberg, and describes the process as the researcher attempting ‘to meet the phenomenon in as free and as unprejudiced way as possible so that it can present itself and be accurately described and understood’ (Seamon 2000, p. 9). Heidegger argued that, through this process of hermeneutic circling, one might develop a deeper understanding
of the ‘human being-in-the-world’ than that derived from the positivistic methods of scientific empiricism.

Kvale (1986) describes psychoanalysis as a qualitative research method (Kvale 1986, p. 155). In a similar vein, Maione and Chenail (1999) argue

qualitative research is synonymous with the case by case way of knowing central to most therapists’ practice [in that they are both] naturalistic, descriptive, discovery-oriented [and] interpretive.

Maione and Chenail 1999, p. 57

I have been struck by a marked similarity between descriptions of Heidegger’s hermeneutic circle approach to the practice of phenomenological enquiry and my own experience of the practice of counselling and psychotherapy. Both require an empathic uncritical engagement with the subject. In phenomenology’s case, the subject is lived experience. In counselling, the subject is another person, and the capacity for engagement is central to the success of the project (Bachelor and Horvath 1999, p. 142). Both psychotherapy and phenomenology require of their practitioners the ability to reflect critically on their engagement and a capacity to move back and forth between these two positions. Maione and Chenail (1999) describe this process thus ‘In each encounter with the other or the self, therapists challenge their descriptions, interpretations and understandings based upon new evidence’ (Maione and Chenail 1999, p. 61). There are clear similarities between this process and Heidegger’s hermeneutic phenomenology described above, as well as some obvious differences, particularly in intent.

Phenomenology is not a monolithic structure, and there are numerous variations of method. However, Crotty (1996) identifies two fundamentally different phenomenological methodological approaches to interviewing. One which he terms ‘the new phenomenology’ is heavily influenced by humanistic psychology, and focuses on describing the subjective meanings respondents attribute to a particular phenomenon. This approach is cultural research on a particular group of people and Crotty characterises it as a form of subjectivism. Crotty (1996), argues the second approach, ‘classical phenomenology’ is a form of objectivism in that it attempts to isolate and describe the essential structure of a particular phenomenon. He notes that ‘Thevenaz
even calls [classical] phenomenology an extreme objectivism’ (Crotty 1996, p. 36), referring to its recognition of universal essential structures of reality.

Because the phenomenon being investigated in this study, the adult remembrance of childhood experience of place, is a psychological phenomenon rather than a direct experience of the external world, the new psychological phenomenology is considered the most appropriate phenomenological methodology for this study. This is fortuitous because

> For the most part, it has been psychologists – especially psychologists associated with… the ‘Duquesne School of Phenomenological Psychology’ – who have sought to establish reliable methods for conducting empirical phenomenological research.

Seamon 2000, p. 12

Accordingly, the research methodology of this study has been influenced by researchers of the Duquesne School, von Eckartsberg, Van Kaam, Valle, Giorgi and their followers such as Crotty and Van Manen. When addressing psychological phenomena, psychological phenomenology, like other forms of psychology, proceeds on the assumption that in a common linguistic and cultural community, ‘identically named experience refers to basically the same reality in different subjects’ (von Eckartsberg 1998a, p. 14). In my enquiry into the adult remembrance of childhood experience of place, I have chosen a research approach that is broadly grounded in what von Eckartsberg has termed existential phenomenological psychology, where existentialism looks to the unique situated experience of the individual, while phenomenology seeks essences, the universal structures of lived experience. This combined approach represents an attempt to resolve the tension between two opposing metaphysical principles, the universal and the particular. Von Eckartsberg describes existential phenomenological psychology as empirical, in that it specifies its database in contrast to existential phenomenological philosophy, which does not specify its database and is therefore speculative29 (von Eckartsberg 1998a, pp. 15-16). As a general approach to phenomenological research, Seamon (2000) argues for acceptance of methodological

29 From the proceeding discussion, it should be apparent that this phenomenological form of empiricism stands outside the objectivist empiricism of the scientific tradition.
flexibility, so that the method can be adapted to the phenomenon rather than the phenomenon adapted to the method. Accordingly, I have added several other elements to the broad approach of existential phenomenological psychology. These variations are included to account for the unique phenomenon that is adult remembrance of childhood place and will be explained as they are introduced.

3.2 Research Method

The two different approaches to phenomenological research identified by Crotty (classical and new), offer very different rationales for the selection of interview subjects. In the new phenomenology, subjects are chosen purely on the basis of their having experienced the particular phenomenon being researched and are usually presented as a representative sample of the wider group of people who have experienced the phenomenon being investigated. The selection process is far more specific in classical phenomenology. Crotty’s (1996) description of van Kaam’s classical phenomenological method of subject selection is cited in some detail here, as my own study utilises a similar classical phenomenological methodology in selecting the research subjects.

Van Kaam talks of selecting subjects for his research, which is a study of the phenomenon of being understood. There are subjects, obviously, for whom being understood is a problem. He does not chose subjects of that kind. Instead he selects ‘the best group of subjects available in our culture for the pre-scientific explication of the human experience of really feeling understood’. The phenomenon on which he is focusing is a human feeling, i.e. the sense of ‘being understood’… It is very clear that his immediate interest does not lie in determining subjective experiences… He wants to delineate a phenomenon. He chooses subjects for the sake of phenomena, not phenomena for the sake of subjects.

Crotty 1996, p. 34

The literature of place identifies a very wide range in the quality and intensity of feelings of place attachment and the importance attributed to these feelings (Chawla 1986, Hay 1998). With such a wide variation in reported place attachment sentiments, I felt that this study would be of most value if it were to ‘delineate the phenomenon’ by attempting to capture the clearest possible expressions of adult place attachment, or adult remembrance of childhood place attachment. Consequently in the selection process, I have followed classical phenomenological procedure, and attempted to select ‘the best group of subjects
available in our culture for the pre-scientific explication of the human experience’ of adult remembering of childhood place experience. Seven participants were chosen because they had previously demonstrated a significant capacity to enter deeply into and articulate the felt experience of remembering childhood places, or they had expressed strong feelings of and were seen to be advocates of adult place attachment. Participants were identified through existing networks of friends or a new network that emerged by my attending conferences on place, nature writing, and environmental education and activism.

The basic steps of phenomenological research methodology can be summarised as:

1. Identifying the phenomenon
2. Gathering descriptions of the phenomenon
3. Studying the descriptions with the aim of identifying underlying patterns
4. Presenting the findings

After von Eckartsberg 1998b, pp. 22-23

However, phenomenology is characterised by numerous elaborations and interpretations of this basic model. Von Eckartsberg (1998) details methodological similarities and differences of four influential exponents of the Duquesne School (von Eckartsberg 1998b, pp. 21-61). Such variations of method abound. Crotty (1996) and Van Manen (1990) describe further variations on the four-step model. The following represents my own hybrid methodology, broadly in line with von Eckartsberg’s model described above.

Crotty points out that the first step of phenomenological research, the starting point, requires as clear an identification of the phenomenon to be studied as possible. While the term ‘phenomenon’ is a very broad term, allowing it to encompass the full range of experience, Crotty argues that it is helpful to the research to be as precise as possible in determining the particular phenomenon to be investigated (Crotty 1996, p. 159). Various authors including Chawla (1986), Cooper Marcus (1992) and Sebba (1991) have utilised adult remembrances of childhood place in their research. Usually this data takes the form of written environmental autobiography or memoir. In my attempt to specify precisely

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30 Originally there were nine participants, five men and four women. However, one woman withdrew from the process before interview, and there was an equipment malfunction with another female participant resulting in her interview being unusable. This resulted in a gender imbalance amongst participants.
the phenomenon I was investigating, I realized that these studies tended to focus on the content of the remembrances but overlooked the process. In order to be truly phenomenological, I believe this study needed to capture both the content and the process of the interviews, and this was what I have set out to do.

For the second of Von Eckartsberg’s steps, gathering descriptions, I used a semi-structured interview format, because it allows participants great flexibility in the manner in which their accounts emerge. Seidman (1998) recommends a ‘three-separate-interviews’ format for phenomenological interviewing, where the first interview covers the subject’s life history, the second covers details of the experience and the third explores reflections on meaning. He does, however, allow for some variation of this structure (Seidman 1998, pp. 11-15). I have collapsed this structure into one interview. The interviews were subdivided into three sections analogous to Seidman’s three interviews. In the first section, subjects were asked three questions designed to elicit background biographical information as well as to warm them up by introducing them to the felt experience of remembering their childhood experiences of place.

Interview Section 1: Warm-up biographical questions

1. Can you tell me about where you grew up and what it was like there?
2. Can you tell me about your family?
3. Were there any particular special places that you remember?

The second part of the interview was designed to be that part of the interview where phenomenological bracketing occurs. In gathering descriptions of the phenomenon of adult remembrance of childhood place, I follow the approach of Crotty (1996, pp. 158-159) who gives more weight to the process of bracketing than some other phenomenological researchers. Bracketing requires that we

- Lay aside, as far as we can, all ideas, judgement, feelings, assumptions, connotations and associations that normally come into view for us when we think of this phenomenon.
- Open ourselves to the phenomenon as the object of our immediate experience.

Crotty 1996, pp. 158-159
Crotty describes this openness as surrendering where we become passive before the phenomenon and allow it to grasp us and impress itself upon us... We have no desire to dominate or control or manipulate... allowing the phenomenon to give itself to us as it is.

Crotty 1996, p. 160

Elsewhere he describes this openness as contemplation ‘which is the antithesis of discursive reasoning’ (Crotty 1996, p. 162). However, he makes the important distinction in that ‘reasoning is to be laid aside, not thought. In contemplation, our thoughts are the manifestation of the phenomenon in our consciousness (Crotty 1996, p.162). Bracketing fulfils the phenomenological imperative that enquiry returns ‘back to the things themselves.’

Crotty argues that in phenomenological research, each respondent must be a phenomenologist in that they

must engage in phenomenological seeing in relation to his or her own experience... everyone involved in phenomenological research must be a phenomenologist... they should be people who can put themselves in touch with their own immediate experience – disciplined people therefore, who can prescind from their day-to-day, taken-for-granted assumptions... and open themselves to the phenomena as they present themselves.

Crotty 1996, pp. 171-172

In this study, participants were not required to be familiar with phenomenological method. Participants for this study were selected on the basis of having written or spoken of strong adult place attachment or recollection of childhood places, rather than previous phenomenological experience. Instead, two elements were added to the semi-structured interview format to assist participants with the process of phenomenological bracketing. Von Eckartsberg (1998) describes bracketing as looking to ‘that which presents itself to our awareness, exactly as it presents itself...to consciousness’ (von Eckartsberg 1998a, p.6). He explains that the phenomenological approach centres on the experienced fact that the world presents itself to us through our stream-of-consciousness (von Eckartsberg 1998a, p. 8). Elsewhere he calls this ‘the stream of experience’ (von Eckartsberg 1998b, pp. 52-53). My own experiences as a remembering adult inform me that memories
emerge in a non-linear stream-of-consciousness – often linking some aspect of current circumstance with remembered places, activities and emotional states. With an eye to Siegel’s description of the cascade of ‘unpredictable associative linkages’ underpinning autobiographical memory, capturing this stream-of-consciousness quality of the phenomenon of remembering came to be an important aspect of the research method.

These linkages appear to be similar in quality to what Freud called ‘associations’ where ‘associations seem to play catch-as-catch-can with chance similarities and connections that are barely perceptible’ (Freud 1976, p. 124). This archaic structuring of stream of consciousness usually flows rapidly and can be quite difficult to capture for oneself, let alone record. Adding to the difficulty of mapping this flow, I have noticed that I often experience an impulse to ‘tidy up’ the flow of thoughts by organising them into some form of narrative structuring and editing out any apparently unrelated thoughts. Further compounding the difficulty of capturing the flow of associations is the fact that attempts at reflecting on the process usually interrupt the flow of associations. In an attempt to capture this rapid and capricious stream of associations, participants were instructed to attempt to follow this flow in their verbal accounts, rather than feeling obliged to answer the question asked and to limit their accounts to a coherent, logical response. Respondents were requested to attend to and describe anything that presents to consciousness in response to the questions, including somatic sensations, emotional states, fantasies, thoughts relating to contemporary experience, as well as memories elicited by the questions.

Interview Section 2: Stream-of-consciousness instructions:

I am going to ask you some more questions. In response, I want your answers to follow your mind wherever it goes. You might not feel that your answers are directly connected to the question. That is OK. It doesn’t matter that you don’t answer the questions directly. I want you, as far as is possible, to follow and describe your flow of thoughts and fantasies, the stream of consciousness that occurs in response to the questions.

In order to further facilitate the process of bracketing, a second variation of standard interviewing procedure was introduced in this study. A relaxation exercise was undertaken immediately prior to those questions in an attempt to elicit bracketing of the
experience of adult remembrance of childhood place (between the third and fourth questions). This was considered to be an important component of the research method, although no account of this technique could be found in the research literature (phenomenological or otherwise). The phenomenologist Merleau-Ponty argued that the objective, spatial aspect of place is experienced subjectively through our bodies (Merleau-Ponty 1962, pp. 244-250). Given that the corporeal body is fundamental to the phenomenological conception of the lived experience of place, I decided to include a procedure that directly involved the body in the interview process. The technique known as passive relaxation is similar to an exercise known as progressive relaxation used in cognitive-behavioural therapy (Payne 1995, p. 9, p. 57) and to a yoga exercise known as yoga nidra.

After being given the stream of consciousness instruction, participants are directed to close their eyes and to take their attention progressively throughout the whole of the body. The interviewer leads this process, naming each part of the body individually. The process takes about 10 minutes to complete. It is used to bring to awareness to the body thereby reinforcing the connection between mind and body. Also, participants usually enter a state of deep relaxation in which normal mental ‘chatter’ is reduced and it is in this state they are asked the bracketing questions. The intention is to arrive at Crotty’s state of contemplation by minimising analytic thought processes and inducing a state of reverie, allowing respondents to enter deeply into the felt experience of remembrance in the hope of generating a more ‘pure description’ of the stream-of-consciousness. The relaxation process occurs immediately prior to the stream-of-consciousness instructions.

Questions 4 – 12 are phrased in a manner intended to elicit a direct (pre-reflective) account of memories of childhood place as they present to consciousness. These questions ask for details of the memories and the experience of remembering but avoids asking participants to reflect on the meaning of the experience.

Interview Section 3: Bracketing questions

4. Do particular memories of being in that place as a child come to mind?
5. Can you tell me what you were doing?
6. Can you describe that place? Sounds? Smells?
7. What was it like being in that place as a child?
8. Who was there with you?
9. Is there any particular thing that stands out? How did you feel?
10. How do you feel now?
11. What is the feeling you have in your body as you recount this?
12. What is it like to have these memories now?

In the third part of the interview, respondents were asked to reflect more on the meaning of the experience they have described, particularly with respect to how they understand the relationship between their remembrance of childhood experience of place and their sense of self. This encouraged interviewees to move from the state of reverie to a more analytic frame of mind, which in turn assisted them make the transition back to their usual mode of being in the world. This third stage of the interview also served to introduce the second part of Heidegger’s Hermeneutic Circle, that of critical interpretive reflection on the phenomenological intuiting that occurred in the second part of the interview. Crotty points out that the apparently straightforward process of description is problematic.

Try as we may to get back to the pre-reflective, to the primordial, to the phenomenal object itself, we find in the end that we cannot take hold of it. It inevitably eludes our grasp. We discover that we can understand and describe it only in and through thought patterns deriving from our culture and embedded therefore in our language. For that reason, phenomenology is inescapably a hermeneutics. Our phenomenological descriptions cannot but be interpretations and constructions.

Crotty 1996, p. 166

Caution is needed to ensure that social meanings shed through the bracketing process are not re-imposed through the process of description. Language must be used carefully to minimise contamination of the bracketed experience.

Interview Section 4: Reflective questions

13. What happens to you as an adult when you recall being in that place as a child?
14. Can you tell me what is it like for you as an adult to remember your childhood experience of where you grew up?
15. How do you think the experience of growing up there has shaped who you are now?
16. How has it shaped how you respond to the places you like now?
17. What are the circumstances in which you might be more likely to have these memories?
18. Anything else you would like to add?

Interviews were recorded on audiotape, which was later transcribed.

The next stage of the research, corresponding to von Eckartsberg’s (1998b, p. 22) third step, is that of phenomenological reduction, or data analysis and interpretation. This is the most complex part of phenomenological research and many variations of this step are described in the literature. Giorgi (1975) details a systematic process for discovering the meaning in transcripts of interviews.

1. The researcher reads the entire description to get a sense of the whole…
2. The researcher reads the same description more slowly and delineates each time that a transition in meaning is perceived… [Through] this procedure one identifies a series of meaning units or constituents…
3. The researcher eliminates all redundancies but otherwise keeps all units. He then clarifies or elaborates the meaning of the constituents by relating them to each other and to the sense of the whole…
4. The researcher reflects on the given constituents…and transforms the naïve language of the subject into the language of psychological science. Each unit is systematically interrogated for what it reveals about the [phenomenon]….
5. The researcher then synthesises and integrates the insights achieved into a consistent description of the structure of [the phenomenon.]

Giorgi cited von Eckartsberg 1998b, p. 39

Each interview transcript was read in its entirety a number of times before being reduced to the accounts that are found in Chapter 4. An important feature of Giorgi’s approach is that it attempts to capture, in the subjects’ accounts, lived experience as it happens, rather than to generate retrospective accounts. This is a feature I have tried to replicate by my approach of interviewing participants as they are remembering. However, Giorgi’s approach does obscure what von Eckartsberg (1998b) regards as the important distinction between the situated structures revealed in Step 3, and the general structure revealed in Step 4 (von Eckartsberg 1998b, pp. 42-43). I was concerned that shifting from the first person account to the language of the researcher, while allowing greater universalisation, loses something of the particularity, the situatedness of subjects’ own accounts (von Eckartsberg 1998b, p. 43). In order to give weight to the situated structures of
participants’ remembrances, the interview accounts are constructed from a combination of participants’ own words, my summary of their words, and my observations of their non-verbal communications.

Von Eckartsberg (1998b) points to some lack of clarity in Giorgi’s term ‘meaning unit’ (Von Eckartsberg 1998b, p. 41). Giorgi (1975) clarifies elsewhere in his account how he uses meaning units. ‘After the natural units have been delineated, one tries to state as simply as possible the theme that dominates the natural unit.’ I found this simplification useful, because it suggests Giorgi’s overall approach as one of identifying themes. An alternative approach to reduction is that used by William Fischer in his study of the phenomenon of being anxious. Fischer uses the subjects’ own language to explicate the central themes of his study (Fisher cited Von Eckartsberg 1998b, pp. 44-49). Instead of Giorgi’s detailed analysis of the data into sub-themes (meaning units), Fischer relies on repeated readings of the subjects’ descriptions to arrive at an understanding of the phenomenon in the unique lived experience of that person. Fischer uses the same process of reading and re-reading to move from the particular situation of individual persons to the general structure (essence) of the phenomenon.

I have followed this general approach. Repeated readings of interview accounts were used to identify themes. Once themes had been identified in each individual account, they were listed in columns on a page, with one column for each participant’s list of themes. A colour-coding system was used, by which the same themes in different accounts were given the same colour, allowing them to be consolidated into general themes of the phenomenon of adult remembrance of childhood place. This step corresponds to Giorgi’s step of synthesis and integration of insights to arrive at a ‘consistent description of the structure of the phenomenon.’ This reduction resulted in the emergence of a number of emotional themes presented in Chapter 5. However reading of the accounts also identified a higher order thematic structuring which is discussed towards the end of Chapter 5.

Fischer completes his analysis with an essential description of the phenomenon, in his case the experience of being anxious, and this is an approach used by many
phenomenological researchers. Essential descriptions are brief, highly condensed statements of the core elements of the phenomenon being investigated. I do not believe such a brief, pithy statement would adequately represent the complex, holistic nature of either place or remembrance, and I have chosen not to extend the phenomenological reduction as far as an essential description. Also, both Chawla (1992) and Hay (1998) describe a wide range of types and intensities of place attachments in adults, including experiences of no apparent place attachment. This suggests that place attachment may not be a universal phenomenon. If this is the case, an essential description of the phenomenon of adult remembrance of childhood place would suggest a fundamental uniformity of experience not reflected in either the literature or the interviews themselves. Such an outcome would be inappropriate, and has been dispensed with in this study. In choosing to dispense with an essential description I am following Seamon (2000), who argues that the individual style of the researcher and the nature of the phenomenon are important in establishing research procedure (Seamon 2000, p. 12). Notwithstanding the absence of an essential description, the qualities of childhood place remembrance that emerge from the process of phenomenological reduction in Chapter 5 do constitute ‘a consistent description of the structure of [the phenomenon]’ (Giorgi cited von Eckartsberg 1998b, p. 39). In the final chapter, I take the analysis further by returning to a discussion of the literature of place and attachment theory in light of the results of the phenomenological reduction achieved in Chapter 5.
4.1 Mick Remembers

My friendship with Mick goes back 15 years, when we took time out from a psychotherapy conference to climb a waterfall together. It was this combination of the valuing of inner life implicit in psychotherapy, and enjoyment of physical engagement with the natural world that suggested him as an interview candidate for this thesis. Mick is the CEO of a Non Government Organisation in the mental health field. He is passionate about the environment, and has been highly active in the community encouraging people to take personal responsibility for carbon emission consequences of their lifestyle. Mick grew up at the base of the Port Hills on the edge of the city of Christchurch, New Zealand. Since interviewing him, I visited these 1000 meter high volcano remnants, and found they offer truly spectacular views out over Christchurch and up the east coast of the South Island, as well as out over the Canterbury Plains to the snow-capped Southern Alps. The designation ‘Hills’ is classic Kiwi understatement, borne of geological immaturity. In Australia, we would not hesitate to call topographic features of this magnitude mountains. I was stunned to realise just how far Mick regularly climbed up these hills as a boy.

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Mick begins his interview with a description of the Port Hills area that looks out to the north-east over Christchurch and the Pacific Ocean. He describes the expansiveness and grandeur of that vista which formed the backdrop to his daily life as a child. I can look over the top of the hill to where I know our home is, and then down into the city, and then
there is this big curve of coastline maybe going for 60km up the coast with lots of rivers coming out, and then there’s a big plain of about 40Ks opens up and I can see the foothills [of the Southern Alps], and I can see where the snowline is down on the mountains. He describes how from a young age he would hike up into the Port Hills and spend the day playing with a small group of his brothers and friends. It was a very long climb to get to the places where they played and they would usually take a cut lunch.

Quite often we’d take our lunch and we’d stay out, what I always experienced was being held in this vista..... Repeatedly throughout the interview, Mick refers to this childhood sense of having being ‘held’ by the landscape. Trying to describe this feeling in more detail he says. And there was sort of this big arc of the sea which we just loved looking at and there was these mountains which ran down as far as the eye could see and, I felt held by the Hills behind me. (Mick holds his arms out in a circular shape.) So it’s like, this is me here, my torso, my arms were the vista, it was this sense and behind me there is The Port Hills which sort of keep me grounded, a bit like home, they are familiar, what is known. A place in which I can be myself and express myself and explore. Thus, the Port Hills affirm and nurture his nascent sense of identity. Mick goes on to explain that all of his family shares his sense of connection to these hills, and that this sensibility is currently being passed on to the next generation of his nephews and nieces.

Mick says that he came from a very ‘boisterous, active’ family of eight boys born to conservative Catholic parents. However, he continues by contrasting his mother’s social conservatism with her adventurous attitude towards the natural environment, demonstrated by her having single-handedly taken all eight boys (then aged between 3 and 14) on a six day bush walk. He says she was quite comfortable allowing her sons to roam all day over the Port Hills, as it gave her some respite from the immediate demands of eight active boys inside the family home. This unusual level of trust in the physical environment prompts me to ask whether there had ever been any serious accidents that might have lead to a restriction of this childhood freedom of movement. Mick quietly replies that his immediate younger brother Kieran, to whom he was closest, had been killed when he was hit on the head as a result of him and Mick fooling around on a seesaw. Mick’s unhesitating directness in answering this question implies a certain sense of having come to terms with this event, but he says this was not always so. Kieran has a
strong presence in Mick’s place memories. With such a deep sense of connection to Kieran, as well as strong feelings of personal culpability, it is no surprise when Mick goes on to say he was profoundly affected by the death of his brother. In response to Kieran’s death he became a loner through his adolescence, focusing almost exclusively on developing an athletic career as a distance runner. Mick clearly indicates that the tragedy in no way diminished his sense of connection with the Hills. If anything the Hills provided some comfort and soothing, perhaps even a site for atonement. In latter years I’d run over them when I was in my athletic career, train on them and do all sorts of stuff you know, run for bloody miles over them. Here his tone has a trace of vehemence hinting at a degree of inner turmoil driving this running.

When asked about special places up in the Hills, Mick speaks of one spot covered in ‘boing-boing grass’ (Muehlenbeckia complexa)\(^3\) that is for Mick strongly associated with the memory of Kieran. Mick described how after the long, hard walk up into The Hills, he and Kieran would lie down quietly in the grass …but there was also a spot there we called the fairy Glen, and it would normally take us 3 or 4 hours to walk there and we’d be half way through our day. So we’d be pretty hungry by then, and we’d open up our sammys and we’d nestle down in this stuff and hang. And we wouldn’t say a thing for an hour or so except “Oh, did you see that?” We were just taking it in, and we felt very, I don’t know, um I know I felt very connected to him, so, it was an intimate moment, of childhood intimacy, um… at the same time a real familiarity with the environment and feeling incredibly safe and secure in that world… and I think the sky, this deep blue sky dropping down into the mountains and into the ocean. And I think for me the experience of solitude there, a great sense of solitude and of being connected to my brother and everything else seemed a long way away, except for what was present to me immediately in that vista.

\(^3\) Muehlenbeckia complexa, known to me as New Zealand wire vine is an unusual plant. It has small (approximately 1 cm.) round leaves attached to a very thin, incredibly strong stem. Muehlenbeckia has an unusual growth habit, in that the wiry stems grow through and over each other forming thick matted springy mounds. These mounds are highly elastic and resilient, able to absorb the roughest physical abuse a team of spirited boys can dish out, without showing any sign the boys had been there at all. It makes an excellent platform for the all-in wrestling matches favored by such boys. An awareness of the remarkable resilience of this plant is necessary to appreciate some of Mick’s comments about this important place. The boys’ activity of bouncing on the mounds probably gives rise to the colloquial name ‘boing-boing grass.’
Here, Mick articulates a powerful emotional response to the place he experienced as a child. Interwoven with the strong, tender, almost non-verbal connection between the two brothers, the deep sense of connection to place, is palpable; as is the profound sense of security, so soon to be shattered by tragedy. Mick also describes his emotional response to the vastness of visual place (the view) as a sense of solitude. However, this is in no way an alienated sense of aloneness. Instead, with arms flung wide in sweeping arcs, Mick expresses an emotionally expansive and robust engagement with the magnificent landscape laid out before him. This expansiveness is anchored by the child Mick’s delicate appreciation of the immediacy of the place revealed through the sense of touch. It is these tactile experiences, the enfolding of the vine, the physical contact with Kieran, the warmth of the sun, that appear to give rise to the deep sense of intimacy, connectedness and security that Mick evokes. This juxtaposition of the expansive and the immediate is a recurring theme throughout Mick’s interview.

When asked for particular memories, Mick continues expanding on his account of being cradled in the ‘boing-boing grass’, giving a sweet child-like picture of tactile intimacy with both the natural world and with his closest brother Kieran. *The experience of being on the vine and snuggled into it and feeling very contained and secure and comfy in it. So, we created a bed for ourselves so there was some sense of this is our spot, and the sense of physicality with my brother. We would cuddle up to each other, kind of close and in contact. And then the sun coming in, there was a lot of sun, so we were all nice and warm and cosy...* From the immediacy of this touching intimacy and warmth, Mick’s account of sensory awareness switches to the visual, with such a minutely detailed account of the sweeping vista, that there can be no doubt about his being profoundly immersed in memory of childhood place as he speaks. *So if I sweep from my toes, down the hill, I can see the track which we’d walked up this morning, I know all the rocks and curves there. I look out to another area and there’s a memorial there to two boys who got lost back in the 30s, and then it’s down to, I can look over the top of the hill to where I know our home is. And then down into the city and then there is this big curve of coastline maybe going for 60km up the coast with lots of rivers coming out, and then there’s a big plain of about 40Ks opens up, and I can see the foothills [of the New Zealand Alps], and I can see where the snowline is down on the mountains. Mick’s*
account here gradually, sensuously develops a movement out from the touch of sunshine on skin to the distant grandeur of snow-capped mountains.

From this richly detailed panorama, Mick’s attention moves inward to feelings of being nurtured and affirmed. *The words that keep coming to mind [are] I knew that was my part of the world. It wasn’t the sense of my part of the world that I owned it. But it was shaping my identity. It was shaping who I was, who I am. It’s a sense of being entitled to go up there, but there isn’t sense of ownership of that entitlement. There is a sense of like the soul’s being nurtured.* A little later, awareness sweeps outward again. *The smells would be a mixture of sheep shit, pine, um a certain um crispness, crispness in the smells and also in the air, it felt like clean air, sometimes in the winter months a fog would hang over it or pollution so you’re always up above that um, and the sounds, is the wind in the tussocks… It’s so familiar so familiar, yeah there’s just this rustle through the tussocks all the time. And when it would really blow you’d get down behind the tussocks. There was always birds up there, a lot of bird life. They were always diving and screeching.*

Then sensation and affect merge as he describes the kinesthetic delight of two boys exploring how their physical bodies can engage with the material world of nature, as he and Kieran exuberantly jump up and down on the ‘boing-boing grass’ (an activity which most likely gave the Muehlenbeckia vine its colloquial name.) From here, Mick’s account ranges rapidly over a cascade of linked place memories and feeling states. As though on fast-forward, Mick offers a rich, flickering festival of affect-laden images. *Sitting there and absorbing this experience with my brother……there is this experience of being held. There is the experience of being connected and some sense in this vine which shaped out ourselves which somehow gave us permission to shape out ourselves… That um testing it out and discovering and um it could provide a lot of elation, of joy and fun, and then jumping up and down on it, and it seemed to be able to repair itself quite easily... If we went up there and found some fuckin’ kids had destroyed [it], we’d feel so affronted… The experience is, it’s like this tussock’s familiar, the sounds are familiar, the bird-life’s familiar, the tracks are familiar, all the different brows, the contours and textures are familiar, but not so familiar you don’t discover something new every day you go up there. So it’s like a revelation goes on every time you go up there. It brings out an awe in me*
and a sense of ‘oh, shit look at this.’ And then you get the history of Littleton Harbour\textsuperscript{32} over the back which, we’d quite often walk over to. It was an old volcano. ‘How did that happen?’ You know a sense of curious wonder would emerge in me. A sense of wonder, a sense of awe of that. It’s pretty amazing, that would be, you know a desire to be a bit more curious. I would want to go back and discover something new.

In this passage, Mick articulates joy, anger, wonder, awe, curiosity, grief, excitement, love, solitude, gratitude, freedom, feelings of being nurtured and deeply connected, of playfulness, and a sense of the sacred. Not apparent in the written text is the richness of Mick’s non-verbal communication as he recounts these feelings. His vocal tone reinforces the meaning of words as it modulates between harsh expletive and soft whisper. Laughter warms his voice without quite interrupting the words as he recalls bouncing on the ‘boing-boing grass’.

Posture, gesture and facial expression all animate to bring an emotional presence and complexity to descriptions of events that occurred over 30 years ago. As though the vandalism had only been discovered that very day, Mick’s sense of outrage at the damage burns brightly in the interview room. The past is very much alive in the present. There is also an underlying sense that these feelings are occurring in the context of a relationship, and that this relationship is not unidirectional, but reciprocal. Interestingly, many of the feelings described here are those more commonly associated with interpersonal, human-to-human relationships, rather than person-place relationships. The diversity of emotional states colouring this childhood relationship to place is striking.

This fluid movement between brief episodic memories and the expression of a complex range of fleeting feeling states then gives way to a slower, more adult reflective attempt to bring meaning to this experience of remembrance. My attempt to explore other realms of Mick’s sensory experience – sounds, smell, kinesthetic, disrupts the sense of deep connection, and is abandoned. Mick is encouraged to return to his own experience. He immediately picks up the thread of deep emotional connection to the Port Hills, now elaborating this into a sense of having, as a child, been fed or nurtured by the Hills A great sense of gratitude for what’s there, a sense of being at home. And somehow I’m

\textsuperscript{32} Littleton Harbour lies on the opposite side of the Port Hills from Christchurch and is the site of the original British settlement in the area.
sucking this thing in, not in some sort of leech-like way, but there’s some sense of reciprocal relationship going on, where I’m just absorbing something. It just feels very unconscious, whatever it is. But I am absorbing um what is it? I’m absorbing something, God I’m absorbing something in this space and it’s, it doesn’t feel like a feeding frenzy. But it does feel like something that is profoundly nurturing.

Mick uses the present tense here, giving his account immediacy and vividness, as though he is immersed within the memory, re-experiencing it rather than merely remembering it. However, it is only the retrospectivity of remembrance that allows Mick to identify this sense of having been psychologically nurtured by the Hills as a child. At the time he was not aware of this taking place. Like it’s happening without me knowing it. ‘So it’s unconscious?’ I ask. Yeah, very unconscious, but it’s deeply nurturing, deeply rewarding and um it just, I think it’s an utter confirmation, that’s what it feels like a deep confirmation of my existence, of my right to be of a sense of um…the words that keep coming to mind I knew that was my part of the world. It wasn’t the sense of my part of the world that I owned it, but it was shaping my identity. It was shaping who I was, who I am, it’s a sense of being entitled to go up there. But there isn’t sense of ownership in that entitlement, there is a sense of like the soul’s being nurtured. Here Mick is explicit. He sees the Hills as being an important influence, shaping his identity, and for the first time, he brings a spiritual dimension to his relationship with the Hills.

When asked about how he believes his childhood experience of place has shaped his psychological development, Mick initially responds that it has given him a strong sense of being connected with the natural world, and a need to make a stand against environmental degradation. He also describes tension between continuing to live in Australia and the idea of returning to New Zealand. There is a certain restlessness…a certain pull towards returning to New Zealand, even though he has now lived more of his life in Australia than in New Zealand. He says that he feels his social world in Australia is much richer, but his connection to the natural world and sense of home is still located in New Zealand. This pull is very much rooted in the sense that New Zealand, specifically the Port Hills, is home. This is home. This is what shaped me. However, he goes beyond this idea of this place being home to attribute origins of his adult inner life
to his childhood experience of place. This linking of his inner world of the psyche and the outer world of place is another recurring theme of the interview. He spoke of an important role the Hills have played in his adult dreams and his own psychoanalysis.

Repeatedly throughout the interview, Mick attributes a powerfully influential role to the Port Hills, shaping his sense of self, his identity through a fundamental affirmation of himself and his right to exist. *Probably, where it really resonates for me, is when I really have a desire to come back to an inner core, something which as it were the well or the spring of who I am at a very body and soul level.....What it feels like is a deep confirmation of my existence, of my right to be.* And elsewhere, *it kept on shaping me and every new thing we discovered would draw out something in me that I, you know a sense of excitement, a sense of achievement, a sense of “Oh, I wonder what we’ll find today.”* So, *in that sense, it was um you know, there was trying to put a person it. You know, it was the eternally creative parent.* Mick returns to this idea of this place fulfilling a parental role throughout the interview. *I suppose it would be a return to the womb in a sense, cause you know, cause in a sense that landscape did give birth to me, in, in the sense that it was the place that I felt safest to express myself, and explore myself, and safest in my relationships, and um as I was saying earlier, somehow it was at some level a parental figure but it wasn’t at an interpersonal level.*

When asked to elaborate on what were the processes by which his childhood place shaped him, Mick replies that *the Hills are part of my story.* Throughout the interview Mick makes it very clear that the Hills are present not as mere setting or passive backdrop to the action, but as active participant, almost like another member of the family. As well as giving rise to this personal narrative, the Port Hills were woven into a shared family narrative, merging the developmental influence of the familial and natural worlds. *So, and then there were stories about experiences, you know, which we did with our brothers, and we’d go home and laugh about it and tell stories about it.* Mick identifies himself as a person who enjoys high levels of energy or *get-up-and-go* in most areas of adult life. He attributes this adult motivation and sense of agency to his having had to respond to the physical challenge The Hills provided. *I do have a reasonable amount of get-up-and-go.* *Um and you know it took a bit of get-up-and-go sometimes to get over those hills and a*
sense of determination, those sorts of things. Earlier in the interview he describes this drive as being a product of the physical challenge of athletics training in the Hills during his adolescence.

Near the end of the interview, Mick traces his adult drive back to the enormous physical challenge The Hills provided at an earlier age. Well, you’d know you’d have this fucking great valley to climb out of, when you were six years old and seven years old. You’d think ‘Christ, that’s a long way up’. And away you’d go, put your head down and you’d sweat it out for the next 45 minutes to get up to the track. Um and there was always “Ah that’s great we got there”…I never felt defeated by that landscape, whereas in many other environments I felt quite defeated. And so it presented me with so many opportunities to engage in enough challenge that I felt stretched, but not so much challenge that I was over-stretched... and felt a sense of defeat… I think [that was responsible for my] sense of ‘must do’, my get-up-and-go. I mean the physical world is where I had most of my success and achievement as a kid, because I certainly had none academically and certainly very limited socially. He also attributes an influential role to the pleasure and the love inherent in his childhood play in the Hills. In my association with those spaces, always there’s, 99% of time, there’s a lot of joy and creativity and play um, and achievement, a sense of achievement and somehow they were very loving acts and in a sense were probably where I had the most freedom as a child and yeah so produces a sense of solitude, gratitude in some way a self love, yeah.

Reflecting on the process of remembrance occurring in the interview and how it feels to talk about these memories, Mick’s response is once again complex. He said that talking about the Hills evokes a feeling of sadness because he is no longer there. He immediately goes on to say that, during the interview he experienced an emerging sense of a sacred quality in his connection to the Hills – somehow those hills are connected to my soul…you know just as I began to think about it a lot more um how bloody important it was. Elsewhere he notes a sense of excitement and aliveness and of coming home as his remembering deepens. Ah, there is a sense of um excitement and affirmation in my body and um a coming home, like a I’ve felt more grounded in my body as I’m sitting here. He

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also said, *I sort of recoil from saying it a bit, but there’s something about it producing a loving space in me*, but he does not elaborate on this quality of the remembrance process.

After the formal interview had finished and Mick was giving feedback about how he found the interview process, he said that there were times during the interview when he noticed some reluctance to speak, because he felt that he was talking about something quite sacred. In spite of this reluctance, Mick also notes that he has found the process quite valuable. *I knew it was important, you know I’ve talked about it before, but the more I talk about it, I realise how bloody important it was. And it feels like I get in touch with a memory that is nurturing me. It’s like it’s ah, it connects me a little bit more to who I am, what’s important to me, what’s shaped me. It’s like the Jewish people have this thing around their Passover, what they call amnesias… And I think, in talking about these memories is, what I gain from the experience is, the memories are still alive within me, and that’s what makes it nurturing.* The sense of giving voice to his memories as sacramental, as honouring something sacred, recurs throughout the later part of the interview. *As I sit here, it brings me back to the world of the spirit, the world of the soul.* Mick offers the idea of the external world being the ground from which an inner world grows.

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The intermeshing and overlapping of the familial and natural worlds runs through Mick’s interview from start to finish. It appears that the Port Hills have been invaluable in assisting Mick come to terms with the tragedy of his beloved brother’s death at such a young age. The Hills offered a comforting refuge through painful adolescence, as well as providing a memorial site, crucial in preserving an intimate, loving and powerful memory of Kieran. The interaction between Mick and his childhood place is, at least at some levels, reciprocal, for the Port Hills are no mere backdrop, but an active, sensuous participant in this internal memorial. In his account of his childhood relationship to place, Mick moves between a generalised memory of the wider Port Hills, and the specific memory of a place where he lay nestled in the boing-boing grass with his brother Kieran. In his remembering, Mick reports himself experiencing a rich array of emotional states. His recall of sensory impressions is detailed, his interweaving of remembered activity,
sensation, and affect is intricate, and his articulation of this complex array feeling states is nuanced and highly expressive.

There is a strong sense of Mick being deeply immersed in childhood place memory before moving to a more reflective and adult awareness in order to attribute meaning to the memories. Mick articulates an important role for childhood experience of place in giving birth to, nurturing and shaping an inner life that remains central to his adult identity. Mick is explicit that The Port Hills in many ways played a parental role in his early life. He also speaks of an important role for adult remembrance in maintaining childhood place memories. The process of remembrance enacted in the interview has for Mick a sacramental quality. The temporal aspect of the relationship between place and self appears to be powerfully two-directional for Mick.

4.2 Jane Remembers

I first became aware of Jane’s skill at portraying childhood sense of place when I came across an essay she had written for the 2004 Sense of Place Colloquium. Scenes drawn from her childhood in suburban Canberra beautifully captured a childlike sensibility, and immediately suggested her as a candidate for this study. Unfortunately she did not attend the Colloquium, and I did not meet her face to face until a year later. Jane now lives in Melbourne where she is an academic. She is also very active on an international body exploring ecocriticism, the crossover between literary criticism and ecological sensibility. She retains a strong interest in place and towards the end of her interview drew a clear link between her childhood experience of place and adult career.

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Jane begins her interview describing the place where she grew up in a somewhat detached objective fashion, as she recalls avenues of pin-oak trees and summer water
restrictions in 1960s Canberra. Soon however, as she speaks of walking into a *dark underworld of drains*, she becomes more fully engaged with the memory of her childhood places. As she describes the local creek and oval, Jane shifts into a more subjective style, sprinkling her account with colourful descriptors such as *exciting, spooked, wild, happy*, and *wonderful* – and bringing it to life with frequent laughter and smiles, evoking a richly emotional quality of childhood experience. She paints an evocative word picture of the oval as being surrounded by *quite old, well established willow trees* …*where the branches drop right down to the ground. So forming a kind of tent-like enclosure…a really magical space to go to.*

Jane describes her family life as being *happy, heavenly* and *wonderful*, within a *quiet, fairly bookish household*. She was particularly close to her older brother, 12 years her senior, and her father, an academic, who spent much of his working day at home in his book-lined study, and who she saw as *a man of great good humour and playfulness*. She describes a more ambivalent relationship with her mother, disliking her mother’s work in intellectual disability, and scared by her neurological condition – a form of epilepsy which caused unpredictable, frightening collapses. As Jane speaks of this condition she expresses a sense of horror. *She would relatively frequently have these absolutely terrifying, they weren’t fits like ordinary epileptic fits but she would faint suddenly and she was forever fainting and that would… agh! absolutely freak me out, completely terrify me. It was as if she was possessed or something…I suspected she was a witch, which is really awful.* She elaborates this sense, describing a childhood fever-induced hallucination, in which she conflates her mother and the witches from Macbeth. Jane contrasts this troubled maternal relationship with the comforting, uncomplicated relationships with her dog Lucy and brother Richard. Jane recounts how, when she was very young and had wandered off from the family home, she was found curled up under a tree with Lucy standing guard. From a very early age she saw Lucy as her comfort and protector. She then describes how she became quite depressed at age seven when the family went to England, leaving Richard and Lucy behind.

For a long time after the relaxation exercise, Jane’s eyes remain closed as she speaks. Later, after the interview concludes, she says that the first image/memory she described
after the relaxation came into my mind unbidden. I was intending to talk about other places, but this image was just there, too strong to ignore – an involuntary memory. Even before she speaks, her eyes brim with tears indicating her distress. The sense of her grief is vivid. When I reflect this distress back to her, Jane responds by describing herself at age 6 in a tree-house. However, when she does speak, she describes this tree-house and the tree, not with sadness but with a little girl’s delight. My feeling is one of grief because um I had a wonderful, quite simple tree-house, it was just a platform in the willow tree...I can see myself there with a friend and it’s summer and ...We’re having a tea party. We’ve got a little toy tea-set up the tree. And this lovely sort of mellow kind of lambent quality to the light, as it is filtered by those beautiful green leaves of the willow.

Jane then elaborates that she is feeling sad because the tree had to be cut down – and she remembers witnessing this. And yet, even as she describes witnessing the demise of the tree, an emotional distance, enters her description. The feeling of sadness is because the tree had to be cut down... But I can remember standing at the window of the lounge room, big lounge room windows, and standing and watching as they were cutting it down, and um I don’t remember if I cried at the time. I might well have done so. And I did understand why, you know as a lot of trees do, it got its roots in the drain. So you know, I appreciated why it had to go. Her reasons for not getting emotional are all very sensible – the tree’s roots were blocking the drain, and it had to go, not wanting to upset her parents with her own distress, and the tree loppers were just doing their job – but unconvincing. Momentarily, rationalisation pushes feelings into the background before Jane recaptures a more emotional sensibility as she describes visual memory of the result. But it just created such a gap, such a huge sort, of um loss, and things have been planted there since, shrubs, there’s a rockery and so on. But, when I think of it now, all I see there is the gap. It’s like it’s just, that spot will be forever bereft...There’s just a kind of greyness and bleakness at that spot.

Returning to her memory of the living willow tree, Jane expresses a child’s delight in the tree’s presence, telling of how it had been a nurturing and kindly place that held up so securely. And shifting to the present tense, she brings an immediacy to her description: there’s a softness...but there’s also that quality of light I’m recalling, also has something
luminous about it in which everything seems somewhat magical and enchanted, and charmed. As she speaks, Jane’s feeling of delight is conveyed in the lightness her vocal tone. Her eyes are closed, and her face gently relaxed, lit with the softest of smiles, capturing the very light she is describing.

She links this sense of enchantment to her childhood exposure to magical trees in the literature of Enid Blyton and Beatrix Potter, and to a sense of ultimate cosiness, nestled in the roots of a tree. *I like to shelter in cosy nooks.* She identifies with Wordsworth, who also liked places where he felt held and cushioned, and where you can have just some incredible sense of well-being and nourishment of the soul... There’s a kind of nurturing, nourishing space around you... *It’s a space of unconditional love.* Alongside this warm, cosy sense of place is a numinous sensibility. *The tree is just full of life. And humming with it... the tree itself is just humming.* By this point in the interview I have a strong impression of Jane being deeply immersed in her childhood experience of the tree: her sensuous apprehension, her emotional response of delight and wonder, and her child’s attribution of meaning to this experience of the willow all reinforce this sense.

Later in the interview, reflecting back on this memory, Jane says, *When I first found that the strongest memory I had... the tea party... (pause)... place in the tree, the most immediate thing was grief because, well what I was just conscious of was the sense of loss, but to be able to actually re-enter to some extent those places in memory gives me a kind of joyous sense. Sense of well-being.* And this pleasure is evident as Jane talks about the soft lambent light, the make-believe tea-party with her friend, nooks that offer a sense of ultimate cosiness, and an incredible sense of well being and nourishment of the soul, and the gnarled bark on a tree just humming with life. As she mentions these images her smile waxes bright. The smile wanes as she moves away from sensory detail of the memories to give information, to explain context or to bring in an adult analysis such as: *It’s more a visual, and a sort of tactile and emotional memory.*

Jane does not recall exactly who she shared her tea party with – only that it would have been one of two neighbourhood girls. As she names these two girls, again she smiles – indicating pleasure associated with the memory of these two playmates. Describing the make-believe tea-party, she assumes the pseudo ‘posh’ voice of a little girl pretending to
have high tea with ‘Lady So-and-So’. Jane is clearly enjoying the memory of her make-believe tea-party. The smile returns when Jane spoke about her beloved dog Lucy. Throughout this part of the interview she moves between very positive feelings associated with the tree and her sense of grief at its demise. She then draws a connection between this grief at the loss of the tree and her experience of being *profoundly depressed, so much so that I was put on anti-depressants… at that tender age of seven*, when the family (minus Richard and Lucy) moved to London for a year. *I mean my whole personality changed dramatically, I was such a joyous child, I was incredibly joyous and I became completely sullen and withdrawn and you know, really, really miserable.*

For Jane, the contrasting sets of feelings are closely associated with differences between the quality of the light in Canberra and London. *My memory of that place of unhappiness is of a prevailing greyness… What I remember is a sense of greyness and I think it’s part of the English climate, the quality of the light, that it got dark…I found I missed my dog and my brother. So, I think I also really, really, really missed, in fact that bright light which is so bright it’s painful. And the blue sky, the incredible blue sky…I just absolutely love it. It just fills me with the most buoyant sense of joy, like I could just leap into the air. Of particular pleasure was the way the willow trees moderated the intensity of the Australian sun, endowing the light with a special quality. [The Canberra sunlight was] almost too bright in a way and so the willow trees provided a kind of shelter from that extreme brightness which has a kind of a harshness to it. So the softness but there’s also that quality of light I’m recalling also has something luminous about it in which everything seems somewhat magical, and enchanted, and charmed, you know, as if, you know, a fairy might appear any moment. (Laughs) A wood ?? a branch. Yes, I think it’s those things. It’s a softness and it’s also this kind of luminous sense [of] something a bit magical. After this imaginative leap, Jane shifts abruptly to a more brutal world as she tells of the extreme poverty she witnessed while in London. At this point a sharpness in her voice reinforces the sense of having been shocked and appalled that such suffering could exist in the world. Human misery was something Jane had not encountered in Canberra and this contrast only added to the sense of bleakness of England. The two different places have become closely associated with two very different sets of feelings.
After a year the family returned to Canberra, but I never in a sense returned to what I left behind. Lucy had died. Richard had moved out of home, there was a severe drought and soon after their return, the beautiful willow tree was cut down. Jane then tells of a religious vision she experienced some time, perhaps a year or two, after the willow tree was cut down. She speaks of being woken by a light in her room and a vision of Jesus with a crown of thorns on his head and the wound. At this point she becomes quite distressed, her narrative interrupted as she struggles unsuccessfully to stifle her sobs.

With tears in her eyes, she describes how she saw the suffering of Jesus as symbolising the suffering of the powerless of the world – human and non-human. Despite the emotional intensity of this vision and her sense of having been called, Jane says she did not mention it to her parents, believing they would worry about her mental state, the vision coming so soon after her depressive episode. The vision initially led her to become quite religious, burning candles and incense and organising friends to sing hymns and reading the bible. But she eventually grew bored and then disillusioned with this piety. The vision also aroused in Jane a deep sense of compassion for the suffering of the powerless. Unlike the religiosity, the compassion remained one of her core values into adulthood. She then goes on to speak of a recent return to Christianity, but a Christianity more in tune with her deeply held love of nature.

Towards the end of the interview Jane describes her recollection of beach holidays at Lake Tabourie and a feeling that the expansive sense of wild nature she experienced there was absent from the sense of place she experienced in suburban Canberra. Once again, Jane is able to convey the sense of being deeply immersed in sensuous childhood experience. It was hot and summery, the sound of insects, really loud and everything shimmering in the heat. And once again Jane expresses an emotional intensity, borne of the meaning she made, as a child, of her experience, as she recognises another presence in the landscape – that of Indigenous Australians. My brother took me to this place…and there was an Aboriginal, kind of shell midden there…I was not aware of any Aboriginal history in the Canberra region. It was not talked about. I don’t know that much was known about it… And, I had this sense of this, wow, there’s this other deep, ancient history of human inhabitation here and I had a sense of, um, a mysterious, utterly mysterious sense of a very, for me profoundly other you know, presence there in that
place. Um, and just realising that this place that was kind of my home away from home, because we always went to the same place on the coast...Suddenly the homeliness of it was kind of shattered by this almost eerie sense that this had been somebody else’s home for a really long time and that was a really important experience...making me realise that, that...the way of life that I had there had entailed the destruction and the loss of place for other people. And, I think that I repressed that for quite some time, I think that was too much.

Jane goes on to link this awareness to her academic career. [An awareness, so] awful and ghastly that I couldn’t bear to examine it, might have been one reason or contributed to a certain kind of flight from Australia that I’ve taken in my academic work by becoming a Germanist. Nonetheless, she was unable to completely escape, being drawn to modern German history and the genocide of European Jews in World War II and seeing a parallel between the Holocaust and the genocide of Australian Aborigines. Elsewhere, when asked how she saw her experience of place shaping her adult identity, Jane responded, I think it’s shaped me quite profoundly. I think that the grief that I feel about habitat destruction you know, loss of species is very much informed by my childhood love of um of non-human others... The loss of the tree informs my sense of just kind of appalling grief and loss when I think of whole areas of humming life, teeming with life, varied, diverse life, and places that are home to all sorts of creatures.

At the very end of the interview, Jane reports another involuntary memory dating from her early childhood. Going back to my to my love of nooks and places where I felt held and felt nourished and nurtured, it’s just struck me and I’ve never made this connection before but I’m now haunted by another memory and it’s not, I don’t think it’s my own memory, I think it’s from people telling me that when I was, I think maybe I’d just learnt to walk or maybe I was crawling. After I was born my mother was particularly ill…and um I’ve been told I was standing at the closed door where my mother was in bed and told I couldn’t go in and I was looked after by a cockney, cockney housekeeper (laughs) quite a lot at that time and, and I suspect that, I think a psychologist would probably make a connection there. That there was a certain amount of trauma in early childhood connected with my mother’s quite serious illness and actually being told ‘No, you can’t
And I just see this little me at the closed door, crying. So, yeah, that’s just struck me for the first time. Once again tears fill her eyes, but she does not explain any further how this constructed memory was linked to her love of nooks and places where she felt held.

In discussing her experience of the interview, and the process of adult remembrance of childhood place, Jane reports very mixed feelings. I first found that the strongest memory I had [of the] place in the tree, the most immediate thing was grief because, well what I was just conscious of was the sense of loss. But to be able to actually re-enter to some extent those places in memory gives me a kind of joyous sense. Sense of well-being. She also expresses a certain frustration at the memories being fragmentary. Alongside this emotional response, Jane also describes a very physical reaction to the interview involving a pleasant release of tension in her shoulders and her stomach, and a strong sense that the childhood experience of place is embodied, is in every cell in my body in a sense and it’s just my conscious mind lagging a bit there and unable to get the full picture. But actually it’s carried with me in my body. This awareness allows her to be more accepting of the fragmentary nature of the memories. After the interview, Jane reports feeling a bit disoriented and shell-shocked by the intensity of the experience. Nonetheless, she explains that the remembering was not a negative experience, but the intensity and some of the content, the willow tree and the bedroom door scene, was unexpected. She points out that these were not recovered memories that she did not previously recall. What is new is the intensity of the experience, the integration of image and emotion, and it is clear that Jane values this intensity. I’ve always had those memories, but not with so much feeling. It’s like they’re in full colour rather than black and white. It seems important, like important stuff I didn’t know, but did.... I want to think about it some more, hold on to it somehow. What, the feeling? I ask. The feeling and the memories together.

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In the interview, Jane is able to convey a vivid sense of her emotional experience as a child. She gives the clear impression that she is re-experiencing feelings and perceptions of her childhood experiences. Her non-verbal communication – laughter, smiles, sobs, tears, adds a richness and intensity not apparent in the written account. This appears not
to be the result of artifice or skill in storytelling, but rather as a result of Jane being
deeply immersed in her memory of the experiences as she spoke. This immersion appears
to be aided by her keeping her eyes closed, shutting out present-time visual distractions.
More than once, she makes connections between different aspects of herself that appear
to be new to her. This sense of new connections is reinforced by the knowledge that two
of her images, the initial memory of the tea party in the willow-tree and the final image of
herself at her mother’s bedroom door, appear to arise without conscious intent.

There is a strong theme of loss and grief woven through Jane’s account of place. Her
account is almost a re-telling of the archetypal story of the Garden of Eden – a golden age
of joyous, at times mystical, engagement with childhood place replaced by exile from the
garden which can then never be reclaimed, even when she returns to the same location.
Love lost in the absence of her brother and dog, Lucy. As if to reinforce this loss, soon
after her return the beautiful willow tree is cut down. The early sensuous engagement
with place is overwhelmed by loss. The single image of the tea party in the willow seems
to contain all this emotional complexity. There is the immediate grief as the memory
presents itself, followed by pleasure as Jane describes the tree, and recalls her childhood
playmate, and a joyous sense of reverence as she describes the light and sense of
aliveness of the tree. Then there is a return to the grief and into childhood depression as
Jane follows the associative thread of light quality to England and back to Canberra to the
tree’s demise. The thread then leads to her childhood religious vision, linked to a deeply
felt sense of compassion for all living things apparently influenced by the reverence for
life first encountered in the willow tree.

The memory of the willow tree also shows a child Jane with a mystical sense of non-
human life, in which the adult Jane sees the origins of her present-day respect and
compassion for all non-human life. The significance attributed to the quality of the light
in the tree also carries multiple meanings. There is the transcendental association
(magical and enchanted, and charmed), as well as Jane’s intuitive recognition of the role
of low levels of ambient light in causing depression. Most importantly, the light stands as
a signifier of loss of place and all the losses associated with Jane’s move to England. In
this adult remembrance of childhood place, it is the difference between the lambent glow
inside the willow canopy and the gloomy light of London in winter that mark not only the
emotional difference between Canberra and London for the child Jane, but also an important turning point in her life.

Noticeable in Jane’s description of place is a link between quality of light and her emotional state. Her early experiences of place glow in bright Australian sunshine. England appears gloomy and grey, equated with loss and depression. Even when the willow is chopped down and we would expect a stronger, brighter light in the absence of the willow canopy, Jane reports there’s just a kind of greyness and bleakness, words she elsewhere uses to describe the English light. Unlike most of the rest of her account, Jane’s description of her witnessing of the chopping down of the tree is devoid of feeling, as though the emotional content of the memory of the tree being cut down has been disconnected and attached to the memory of the tea party.

This involuntary memory which arose immediately after the relaxation exercise appears to be a repository of compressed meaning. Not only does it appear to represent Jane’s feelings about the tree before and after its removal, it is as though the tea party memory has come to represent Jane’s removal from place and the consequent loss of her brother and her dog, to both of whom she was deeply attached. Throughout the interview Jane moves fluidly between feelings of grief, feelings of delight and joy and a more emotionally distanced, adult commentary position.

4.3 Phillip Remembers

Phillip is a Sydney academic who has published a number of essays exploring ideas around the theme of place. One of these is a series of engaging recollections of his childhood experiences of place, having some parallels with my own memories of growing up in Melbourne. Phillip still lives in the house in which he grew up as a child, and this gives his experience of place an unusual degree of continuity. I interviewed
Phillip in this family home – a Californian bungalow with art nouveau leadlight windows and dark exposed timbers on a large leafy suburban block in Gladesville.

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Phillip begins the narrative of his childhood place with a description of the chook-run and apple trees in the backyard of his family home. He then extends out geographically along his street to an overview of his Gladesville neighbourhood in the 1950s. This included the Gladesville Hospital (when it was still a functioning asylum with extensive grounds), the Parramatta River, an industrial zone of factories strung along the river, a Catholic seminary, also on extensive forested grounds, as well as residential suburban streets developed in the 1920s. One factory in particular, Meggett’s, was a favourite haunt. Phillip says that the office of Meggett’s was at one time the boyhood home of Banjo Patterson and is now a museum to the man. Hereafter, his narrative ranges associatively over this terrain. He evokes a sense of wildness in the unkempt land around the factories and the pleasure he found playing in these weedy back lots. *Around there was just wild mangroves, and lantana scrub and privet and lots of native plants too. But all sort of mingled into those strange, wild gardens that had grown up around the harbour...* [on] the land that the industrial companies once owned...*I enjoyed creeping in amongst the lantana, and hiding there and getting scratched by it, and there was a funny smell. If I ever smell lantana, I am thrown right back to childhood days.*

But he also enjoyed the more domesticated grounds of Gladesville Hospital, which *was a phenomenally beautiful place. And with these big gangs of men that they had they kept...* [on] *what was probably nearly a hundred acres of land, like a hundred acre garden. It was just spectacular. Huge arbours and big glasshouses, where they grew begonias and other annuals... and they’d be planted out in vast beds, and you know colour displays.*

Several times Phillip describes his neighbourhood as having been a huge *adventure playground* when he was growing up, and tells of how he and his friends would sneak into factories *on weekends especially, there’d be no-one there... and so there’d be great places to play, swim in the river.* At the hospital they could embellish the drama of play through fantasy, *making the place adventurous by imagining we’d have to be secret... sneak around, hide from these gangs, because we saw the nurses as guards. And they*
would all, somehow or other, be out to get us and chase us off. So we’d have to, we’d have imagined espionage events. This imaginative play with war, hide and seek and espionage themes is referred to several more times in the interview.

In response to the question about his childhood family, Phillip narrates an unusual family history. His mother died when he was eight, and his older siblings had already left home. So he grew up, effectively an only child, living with his father and maternal grandmother. Much of Phillip’s account of his family has a detached quality – as though talking about someone else’s family. The only family member to have a presence in his account is his maternal grandmother. I have this story to tell, really about growing up with my grandma…she was the one who’d send me off to school…and welcome me home from school each afternoon, because my dad would have gone off to work. So she was like a mother, and I learnt a lot about her life…She had a great pride in this house…and being a Methodist was a big thing for her. So I learnt a lot at her knee.

Phillip relates this in a very matter-of-fact fashion, giving the impression that even this relationship with his grandmother was not a particularly close one. There is no sense of him having been close to anyone in his family. In his isolation, the neighbourhood places became a refuge. I was left a lot on my own…One of things I did a lot was go off from here to nearby places. So I would go and have adventures down at Meggett’s…or in the hospital. Sometimes by myself. Over the entire interview, the family home, other than the backyard, is not mentioned. It appears that Phillip’s childhood took place largely outdoors. One place of particular importance was a farm on the hospital grounds that provided food and work for the patients. He describes with warmth how his friendship with the kindly man who managed the farm developed into a passion for agriculture and resulted in his enrolling at the newly opened James Ruse Agricultural College. I learned things like how to graft and how to, you know, seed select. And how to do a whole host of other little odd things, which really just work wonderfully for home garden…. He pursued this passion in the backyard with fruit trees and an extensive market garden. With a hint of pride in his voice, he says, I used to come home and treat our garden like a little farm. I got particularly interested in crop rotation and, I got interested in different breeds of chicken. That was the livestock end of the garden…. I’d buy different things, and I’d have
a mixed flock…. Anyhow that was a big part of growing up here. I really loved it…. I wanted to be a farmer. Phillip clearly values this unusual, utilitarian aspect of his childhood relationship with place, as well as the imaginative, adventurous childhood sense of place he enjoyed. He views himself as very fortunate to have experienced such a childhood. I was really lucky, I mean, how do you say ‘Thank you’ to an opportunity that just happens?

Phillip does not identify a single favourite place, saying instead, well there were plenty of favourite places around here. He identifies several favourites. There’s a huge bamboo patch, forest… those great big clumping bamboo forest, huge green stems on the hospital grounds and little chapels in the woods, you know, well for private meditation in the grounds of the Catholic seminary. It was peaceful in some sense, and just hanging around there was always such a pleasure. With no single favourite place coming to mind, Phillip, casting around for words, identifies some of the common qualities of the places he liked. I never, ever felt there was any danger where I played. I never ever felt that the river, that falling into the river, was dangerous, or sneaking into a place was dangerous. It was always exciting. But I never had any fears. So you’d certainly get hurt, you’d always be bashing your toes, because you’d never have any shoes on. Or falling and maybe cutting yourself, sometimes deeply. But none of those things amounted to a fear that made me not want to ever do it again. So the places that I’m trying to describe outdoors… were like old factories, or these buildings in the seminary. There were human made things there that came with our presence here but…there was no-one looking after them either…So you could run around and play in them, and then, you could go into a huge fantasy. You could be anywhere in the world. You could imagine yourself a pirate, or you could play war games, or any adventurous sense of a story could be easily conjured up from these places, and they always involved the outdoors. In this passage Phillip lays out several themes to which he returns throughout the interview. These include his sense of being safe in his environment, freedom from adult oversight, his preference for places where nature and culture were blended, place as a stimulus to imaginative fantasy, and place experiences being narratively structured. This allowed his imagination to run free, filling these half wild places with adventure stories. He also identifies that proximity and accessibility were important. This was no distant tract of
pristine wilderness. It was the immediate, ever-present, outdoors. *Camping holidays weren’t a thing we did as a family... It was the outdoors just out the back door, but it was always just out the back door.*

After the relaxation exercise Phillip recounts a vivid recollection of childhood place: a dam where as a result of a game of ‘Dare’ with several friends, he first saw a naked girl: *Linda was the very first girl I’d ever saw with no clothes on at all. I can picture her particularly white skin and that’s all...Her very Englishness was fully exposed and she wasn’t dirty in any way... She didn’t seem to have any mud from the dam on her... I can feel now still the incredible youthful arousal of this time... I mean all we did was just sort of stand, and I suppose, sort of stare, sort of looking away and looking and looking away and looking, and not knowing quite where to put your own modesty, and how to sort of account for all of your own exposed being too... And I can’t even see the other girl, but I can certainly see Linda. And I never saw Linda naked ever again... (Laughs) And I still remember her name. And she was all of 12.*

As Phillip recounts this story he explains that in memory, the particular place (the dam), the event and the attendant feelings are inextricably interwoven. *Maybe it’s something to do with... this sense of the outdoors, that has always been tinged with, or the part of it that I like best in memory is, the sense of the erotic that it evoked... Her nakedness and the place had some, like even now, [when] I do my power walking past there, if I go down and just turn my head slightly and catch a glimpse of the dam, that whole mystery... is evoked. And it was to do with me, the feelings I had, as much as it was trying to stare at Linda and not being able to stare at her, and then turning away, like the whole shemozzle of it. Fantastic feeling. The private and intensely vulnerable quality of the feelings he describes is reflected in a softening in the features of his face as he speaks. Momentarily, it is as if the young Phillip has stepped into the room, as naked as Linda, remembered. The dam remains for him a precious, tangible marker of the discovery of the erotic, one of the universal milestones on the road to adulthood. Phillip uses his awareness of this universality to hide his naked vulnerability, as he continues... I’ve always been intrigued in art by... the idea of lovers in the landscape which is one of the eternal themes of painters. That’s also evoked in film and story, the lovers in the landscape... it’s always
been fascinating for people. The art critic throws a cloak of intellect over the boy’s nakedness. But the boy has been seen.

The sense of smell provides a powerful portal into Phillip’s sense of place, both adult and childhood, as well as his sense of identity. He responds to the question on smell by admonishing himself for loving the scent of lantana, an environmental weed. He used to play in it as a boy, constructing tunnels and dens. He then makes an associative leap to recount the story of how, after living in London for some years as a young man, he walked into a glasshouse in the Kew Gardens, filled with representatives of the flora of the Sydney Basin. And I remember going into this Kew, and poong! All of a sudden, all of the smells of growing up around here came back. So the lantana couldn’t have been the only smell that I knew but I never identified all the smells of the gums and the sort banksias and the grevilleas which were also growing wildly in those places. I mean I was shocked…It was such a powerful smell, and um, really evocative, and it made me realise how deeply Australian I was. I had to be in the centre of the world and that had to be London. This is where things happened, not in the suburbs of Sydney. But when I went into that garden, I just realised I had to somehow make my way back home here…I realised where home was through a smell. I, I realised, there’s something about the smell that is to do with the Sydney Basin. Phillip makes clear here that, although he had not been conscious of this smell of the Sydney bush as a child, when it was brought to his awareness in the glasshouse, he realised that the smell had been so pervasive, it had disappeared into the background of childhood sensory awareness like an olfactory wallpaper. He realised that this smell was not just deeply familiar. It was the smell of home, and that was where he needed to be.

As Phillip begins to name some of the places that for him typify the bush of the Sydney Basin, he is moved to tears. I don’t travel far afield often…I’d go to Hawkesbury, or we’d go to Gorrick’s Run, or to the northern beaches, and to Pittwater, and I find that this sort of sandstone, poorly nutritious soil region of Australia is my, I feel a bit weepy (pause) I suppose it’s to do with this is my home, and um and I feel like, well the tears…(His voice falters) I feel very, I try and pride myself on not being given to tears, but I feel. It’s very hard not to feel very close to crying. (His eyes well with tears). Although he tries to suppress any demonstration of vulnerability, Phillip is clearly moved as he speaks of his
love of Sydney bush. Somewhat embarrassed by his tears, he attempts to explain why it is that he is so deeply moved. He struggles to put words to an unfamiliar understanding of a deeply familiar feeling. When he does find the words, Phillip makes a passionate affirmation of personal connection to place. *I feel like I belong here, and I don’t have to make a song and dance about that…It’s like I just know this is my home. [I’m] not even proud. It’s not the right word. It’s like this is just the lot of my life. This is where I was born, [where] I’ve grown up and this is now deeply inside me…but I just love it in a way that’s like, that I’m just incredibly confident with it…I’m not frightened by it. I’m not out of my depth in it. I’m not lost in it. I’m never feeling that I’m going to be surprised by it. I’m always going to be, I suppose nourished by it…I don’t want them to sound overly special in a sense. I don’t want to sound like I’m talking about the only place on earth. Because other people would certainly have their own, other experiences.* He struggles to reconcile his sense of the ordinariness of his experience with the intensity of feeling. *It’s just this place and I don’t feel I have to sell it to anyone. I don’t have to do any work on behalf of it…It just holds me and I participate in it. In that I’m given a great emotional value in some way…I haven’t had a sense that I’m explaining it to you, cause I’ve never put it to words really.* Phillip appears to be grappling with paradox here. The experiences might be quite ordinary, but the depth of feeling evoked by the experiences is quite special.

Phillip emphasises that he is not talking about the smell of the Australian bush in general, but of the Sydney bush, which has a very particular smell, different from that of the bush in other parts of Australia. For him it is this particularity of sensory place that gives rise to the regional sense of identity he first encountered in England, and which he now applies to his own sense of identity. *You walk into the bush and so the smells are really important, and I know there are different smells…I like the drive to Canberra, when leaving Sydney…just past Campbelltown…the bush doesn’t change looking very much, but gradually you know you’re leaving a place with its particularity, and moving into another place…and it doesn’t smell the same…[I found] people in England came from places. So people would be from the north, or they’d come from Sussex or Essex or some other place, whereas we just always came from Australia. Well when I came to this place in Kew Gardens, I realised that. I thought at first ‘Oh, I’m smelling Australia’ until I
came back and realised I was actually smelling here. Because this doesn’t smell like Byron Bay or Canberra or Kempsey or Dubbo. It smells very different.

Phillip says that for him, the feeling of remembered experience is best captured by the word ‘sensual’, and most of his reported recollections of childhood place are deeply sensual. But when he describes what he means by sensual, he actually describes a range of affective states. I keep coming back to this word ‘sensual’. I can’t think of another word to describe it, it’s. The word ‘sensual’ has like, I’ve cried here too. I’ve cried today, but I’ve also I’ve had arguments with my family, lost my temper with friends and, I was divorced here and my parents died when I was young and I wished they hadn’t. So there’s not as if it isn’t without sadness and disappointment and failures and mishaps and all of those things. It’s not like it’s just joyous or a perfectly happy place, but it’s incredibly a sensual place for me. It is as though his sensory apprehension of the external physical world and his internal emotional states have been so deeply interwoven as to be conflated. This blending of the sensory and the emotional certainly characterises his account of Linda at the dam. Or, a little later, speaking of large farm animals, Phillip’s words once again concoct a rich brew of the sensual and the emotional. You’d walk over to the paddock and a great big horse’d come up to you, and you know, the way horses breathe, sort of, this huge head and the smell of them. And there’s a dairy milk and shit, dairy smell. I just love that, I just think that’s one of the most joyous things.

When reflecting on the process of recounting his memories of childhood place, Phillip is perplexed as to why his memories should evoke such a sense of sadness. I’m really conscious of feeling weepy, and sort of feel like myself moving a bit to somehow to try and, I don’t know what to do with that. I don’t know why, I mean it’s not a particularly sad story. Quite the opposite. A little later he is moved to express gratitude for his good fortune in life. But still, he can’t ignore that the telling of this story moves him to tears. He ponders whether these might be tears of gratitude, but sounds unsure of himself. Maybe this feeling has got something to do with sad, not sad, a sort of emotionally evoking sort of story. Something to do with gratitude. He appears to be on more solid ground as he returns to the theme of his ordinariness. I’m just an ordinary bloke, who lives in an ordinary house in an ordinary suburb, which is, and have had an ordinary sort
of Sydney suburban upbringing...The kids just go to the local state high school. I went to a state high school. Life’s got a massively ordinary quality to it. And yet it’s been an amazingly sensuous experience, and I want to thank something, somebody, somehow. Throughout this passage, Phillip again seems to be struggling with paradox at several levels. How can such an ordinary life be so rich in sensuous experience? Why do these wonderful sensuous memories evoke sadness?

Later, when asked to reflect on the experience of remembering childhood place in the interview, he again refers to the feeling of sadness evoked. However, this time he appears to be content to accept the feelings, without needing to have an explanation. And in this instance, sadness is only one strand of the emotional weave. Well, there is that feeling of some emotion has been brought to the surface and made me feel weepy. So that’s been evoked by memory. And also I’ve enjoyed talking it out, and I like to keep this story alive, and recognising how much this place means to me. I think place is a storytelling thing as much as it’s a place. It’s sort of material and immaterial and so reminding yourself and expanding on the story, telling the story is a part of making it rich. So there’s a good feeling to do this. Clearly it is more complicated than just being sad. He ‘enjoyed talking it out’. The experience is important and has a ‘good feeling’ to it. There is a paradoxical bitter-sweet quality about the process of remembering childhood place, along with a sense of narrative structuring to memory.

Phillip is inclined to attribute the sad undertone of his interview to his mourning of the passing of a way that he knew as a child, a life of unfettered childhood play. What I suppose was making me feel weepy is the fact that I really enjoyed all those times, and maybe partly now I’m being stingy around some of those things with my own kids, and thinking more. With kids today we’ve got a lot more stingy about what it is that we let them free to do. In making this observation, he shifts away from the personal to a more emotionally distanced intellectualised social analysis. But behind this social analysis, Phillip appears to be mourning the loss of his own boyhood sense of place, and particularly the wonderful sense of freedom and safety it encompassed, a theme he returns to repeatedly through the interview. At the same time I do feel it’s sad that the sort of chance to have this unbridled play of life [has passed], because that really turned me
into the person I am. Here, he also identifies why he keeps returning to this theme, the demise of the kind of childhood he enjoyed. The reason is his belief in the centrality of this unrestricted play-in-place in the formation of how he sees himself as an adult.

He elaborates on how this free play in the landscape of his childhood shaped him as an adult. Yeah, so freedom was a huge thing that I, the other thing that I know about the way I work with my mind. I find it reasonably easy to make associations between things, pull them into relationship and stories, connecting things and I think it had something to do with the sort of schooling I got in the outdoors, more or less [being] allowed to discover that you could do something. And it was a rich, imaginative world. Places became something else. I mean that’s how stories of kids make up their life… For Phillip, the freedom to move at will on a voyage of discovery through his childhood world gave rise to a way of thinking in adulthood, of making imaginative connections between things or ideas not logically connected. And this is something that he clearly values.

He points out that as an adult still living in the place where he grew up, the process of remembering childhood place involves a certain amount of marking the changes to place, comparing then and now. I look out now. We’re sitting on the back veranda and look out on the garden, well it’s nothing like the garden which was my farm when I was a kid, but there are pockets of it that are the same. I mean there are trees that [were planted by] my mother, who died in the very early 50s. [They] are still growing in the garden and they’re sort of remnants of the original garden still. For Phillip, place also encompasses the social world, the community of Gladesville, as well as the physical environment. And occasionally throughout the interview, this marking of the changes focuses on the social sphere. He celebrates the shift from a monocultural Anglo-Protestant community to a complex multicultural one. Gladesville in particular is not a Methodist suburb anymore, but rather, it’s a multi-cultural suburb with Muslims and Chinese and various forms of Confucian Chinese faiths, and you know different Zen Buddhists, Korean Christians. It’s just typically a multi-cultural suburb… So it’s a huge pleasure to [have] watched it, and be part of the change, and so you know, when I was a kid I never met a Chinese person.
However, when he shifts to describing this more social sense of place, Phillip’s narrative tends to shift from the particular to the general, losing its emotional intensity and its sensual immediacy. So, I’m grateful for I suppose the Australian experiment… I never had the experience of being made to feel less by virtue of class or wealth, or where I lived, which I know some people in other parts of the world may very well have had. So we were blessed by a type of, whether it was designed or not, a kind of egalitarianism that took shape almost everywhere…So that shaped me and so, I’m a bit sad because, I think… there’s a bit of a loss of sight of the work that our granddads and dads and our grandmums and mums did which was to put, you know to silently work at putting that in place.

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Overall, there is a strong sense of Phillip having really enjoyed his childhood experience of place, and that place, his Gladesville neighbourhood, was an absolutely central part of his childhood experience. The death of his mother, the absence of sibling companions in the home, even an apparent emotional distance from those family members who were around, and the loneliness that might be expected from such a childhood; none of these factors loom large in Phillip’s account of his childhood. Instead, he draws a picture of a boy who enjoyed an imaginative and sensuous experience in an interesting, richly detailed suburban/industrial/rural/bush environment. He describes a child who felt completely safe in his childhood place, reveling in the freedom from adult control.

Phillip sees place as having been central in shaping his adult identity. His quiet assurance that he is of this place, that this place has made him the man he is, is striking. Alongside this assurance is a sadness. It is when Phillip speaks of his identification with the Sydney sandstone bush that his voice falters and tears well in his eyes. There is a sense that Phillip’s strong attachment to place is inextricably linked to a mourning of the passing of his richly sensuous childhood experience-in-place. There is a marking of the changes to place, but his observation of these changes is not accompanied by the grief that characterises his reflections on the passing of his childhood experience. As though, while the places themselves have changed a little or a lot, it is the adult alteration to the quality of Phillip’s everyday experience of these same places that is most significant. And while
something of that richly sensuous childhood experience can momentarily be recaptured by *just turn[ing] my head slightly and catch[ing] a glimpse of the dam*, this is the exception rather than the rule in the adult experience of place. For Phillip, this process of remembering and retelling childhood experience of place is a way of recapturing the emotional and sensory intensity of that experience in adulthood. Throughout his retelling, there is a bitter sweet quality, as though the pleasure of recalling that intensity is balanced by mourning of its passing.

### 4.4 Neal Remembers

I first met Neal in 2003 when he was approaching the completion of his own postgraduate research as I commenced mine. He is a writer who specialises in nature writing. His books include an anthology of Australian and American nature writing, and a place-based account of living in the Blue Mountains west of Sydney and on Sydney Harbour. His writing articulates the thoughts stimulated by being in place, along with the observations of someone attuned to rhythms of the place where he lives. His writing suggested that he might be a highly appropriate interviewee. Neal grew up in Epping, a suburb in the north-west of Sydney, and at the time of the interview, July 2005, he was back, living in Sydney on a full-time basis raising a young family.

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Neal begins his account of childhood place by describing the house and the suburb in which he grew up. He briefly mentions several locations and childhood activities without giving any detail, other than to touch on the adventurous story of a local boy who broke his leg falling off a bridge and took several days to crawl to safety. His account is general with no episodic memories. He refers to a recent essay where he describes parts of the suburb as being effaced by the construction of a freeway, but acknowledges that he loves parts of this freeway as well. *I love that tunnel that cuts through the sandstone. You’re*
going right under my country when you go through there. He mentions the smell of the local creeks, elaborating this olfactory sense of place with a literary quote.

When asked about his family, Neal outlines his parents’ backgrounds, referring to his father’s childhood place experiences that have been incorporated into his own story. *So Dad has memories, and in a funny kind of way they’ve become my memories, even though I didn’t live them…of things like floods in Kempsey, the cold in Oberon and Crookwell.* He touches briefly on his mother’s passion for music and his father’s work, describing his father as a gentle man, before going into a long discussion of the family’s Methodist beliefs and practices, giving the impression of a very pious family. *I mean, I think if I had a model kind of Christian…my Mum and Dad would be people I’d have in mind… There was a lot of both the sacred and the musical about my upbringing.* And in fact, often the two were linked as he explains about his maternal grandmother. *So grandma was about, and grandma played the piano all the time, always, and only hymns (laughs).* He then makes a detailed comparison between the austere Methodist tradition of his childhood, and the symbol-rich Catholic tradition his wife follows.

When questioned about his three brothers, Neal replies that he was not close to his two younger brothers, but also concedes *I’d be hard pressed to remember too many things that I actually did with my older brother.* Any connection he felt with his brothers appears to have been through the shared family activities of sport and music. *We all played instruments…So music was critical in many ways. So was sport…We all, we played cricket and softball.* He then reveals *that the more important influences on my life belong in books, and were older than me, and were friends outside the family. Not many of them but one or two.* He speaks briefly of a close friend whose family moved to New Zealand at the start of high school. He notes, *you asked me about family memories, you know it’s often the Shellard’s house… that I’m thinking of as much as I’m thinking of my own home and my own family.* But Neal gives little sense of this friend, or the kinds of activities the two boys did together. Soon he reveals *So, I do remember lonely periods.* When questioned further about friends, he offers his first episodic memory – of a fishing trip on Lake Macquarie. Leaning forward, his vocal tone and facial expression become animated, as he recounts how they *caught a million Taylor out on the lake. This was*
terrific, and I caught the biggest. And I remember being equally scared, [and] thrilled by...sailing and...capsizing and thinking I was going to die and then thinking oh, I'm not dying, everything seems to be OK. Only now, after half an hour, does he offer a glimpse of childhood excitement and adventure. Mostly, Neal’s description of his childhood is measured, distanced, and lacking emotional expression.

Immediately after the relaxation exercise, the tone of the interview shifts. Whereas previously his account had been distanced, generalised descriptions, now his account centres around episodic memories, rich in detail. However, Neal’s emotional expressiveness remains subdued, his delivery very matter-of-fact throughout. Neal’s first memory is of a chicken having its head chopped off in preparation for a celebratory meal, possibly Christmas. I’ve got a strong image of the axe falling and the head falling, the chicken running around and the blood gushing around. More generally I’ve got a strong sense of that backyard, and it’s full in the back of vegetables... And my sense of grandpa is that it’s kind of indistinguishable from my sense of his backyard, in terms of his character and that a combination of the orderliness in that, the plants, but also the wildness that they also depend upon and also I’m thinking of his sense of humour with that incident.... This memory has a comic-horror feeling quality with an underpinning sense of orderliness.

In an associative leap from one backyard to another, all sense of order and comedy are stripped away, leaving only a nightmarish sense of horror, abandonment, and things gone horribly wrong. The place I’m thinking of now is another backyard and it belongs to my aunt and uncle...And I’d been left there... I just...I remember the backyard and being alone and something kind of happening. The image, is a bit, sort of dark, you know a storm, and something went wrong. I got lost and upset in that place and things are a bit wild, and order’s gone out the window, and you know I think what I’m recalling is a time when my parents took a little time off for themselves, probably for the first time... I’m a bit horrified about, about life really, about where I’ve been left, and there’s this sense of being abandoned. I think that’s an abandoned space, darkness. I’ve got a strong sense of it being night time somehow and a lot of rain and yeah, something, it’s a nightmarish kind of feeling. Neal says that the memory is obscure, a feeling reinforced by the sense
that he was very young at the time. (*I’m young, and I don’t have words, I don’t think, or not many.*) This picture of darkness and of being little and alone and powerless in the face of chaos has a sense of overwhelming horror – of a nightmare.

Then there’s another associative leap to a family-story-incorporated-into-personal-biographical-memory. *When I was old enough to walk and wander off but not old enough to know how to swim, I wandered off when my parents were picnicking and fell into a tidal pool, which was one of those Sydney baths, [with] seawater in them and semi-organised. But the sea came in, and my mother found me when I dropped down into the water, and pulled me up by the hair.* This time the image is devoid of feeling until the end, when Neal describes it as humorous. *My sense of that image is that it’s kind of a bit humorous. It wasn’t horrifying at the time… So it was obviously, it was life-threatening in reality. But…the sense I’ve carried around about it is that… I fell down in the water, and it was OK.* But Neal then elaborates on his anxiety about being in deep water. *I’m a bit scared of water. And I’m a bit scared of deep, deep, deep water and ocean and being in it, although I love it aesthetically.* There is an ambivalence here, seemingly marking the difference between being immersed in ocean water and looking at it from dry ground. A little later his ambivalence is gone. Neal’s anxiety about deep water is unequivocal. *At school, I hated swimming, absolutely hated it … to be in the middle lane in an Olympic swimming pool is my idea of hell, absolute hell.*

Neal then stays with this aquatic theme, as he switches to memories of summer holidays spent at the beach at North Avoca through the years of middle childhood. Here, the memories are mostly vague, generalised and *almost entirely wonderful and pleasant.* He offers a sweeping visual seascape, viewed from the safety of dry land, up on the headland. *So I’m in the house looking down… In that house we were relatively high up on the headland, looking down. So it’s, it’s expansive. I, you can see a lot, and as it were be in a lot of places all at once, because there’s, they’re open to view. Colours are the sea and quite yellow sand, golden kind of yellow sand, and a headland at both ends.* After more description like this, Neal switches to episodic memory. *I went out there and stood in rougher surf than a lot of people would have been happy [in]. I guess I got to feel quite comfortable. The surf you wanted to get to was out beyond a rip, beyond a
trench, that I guess had been washed away, and you couldn’t stand in the trench and I hated that, that scenario. But that was where the surf was, and it was good surf, and you wanted to get out to it. And I was out there…and Dad came out the join us out there. Dad was a pretty good bodysurfer, but on this occasion he got panicked and began to get carried away by the rip. And I remember trying to get to him, to help him out. Somebody, probably me, had a surfboard. Somebody helped, and we, you know, Dad, we ended up getting Dad onto the surfboard, and pulling him out where he could stand. So there was always an edginess about the sea for me. This account of being immersed in treacherous waters has immediacy and intensity, as well as a halting, slightly scrambled, incongruous quality about it. Moving between first and second person, Neal portrays himself as a competent bodysurfer and rescuer of his father. Yet an undercurrent of anxiety continually threatens to break through to the surface of the narrative.

When he returns to the safety of dry land, his narrative becomes more free-flowing and multisensorial, and distanced, as though viewed from on high. I’m hearing the kind of constancy of the sea breeze in the afternoon, and the smell also of you know of the salt and sand being carried up, and the mist being carried up, and um, the waves crashing when the surf was big, and the thrill of that…I’m constantly seeing big, wide cobalt blue kind of skies there too and that’s my sense of the amplitude of the whole thing. Yeah, space and three-dimensional space. The sky’s as much a part of that as, as, as the land is. Just knowing it was there, and it was big, and largely, apparently empty, and it was interesting to me. And my feeling about that is that I inhabited that as much as I inhabited the chair I was in, or the beach, and I could be in it without having to do anything like hang glide or be in a plane. It was a part of almost who I was. There is an flowing, airy, spacious, almost remote feel to this description – as though Neal is most comfortable with a viewed-from-the-distance sense of place. This ease then runs into an abstract, aesthetic, three-dimensional sense of place. It’s the kind of texture and the genius and the particular dynamic…It’s the whole spherical entity that is a particular place, near at hand and further afield. All belonging somehow, you know, spherically to um, some place that has colour and light and movement about it.
Staying with spaciousness and amplitude, Neal makes a further associative leap to a family holiday to Central Australia. The other striking memories for me about space, amplitude, um, are from a big holiday [when I was 12.] We had a, I guess it was three weeks, it seemed endless. My first experience of what an arid, semi arid, kind of sparsely vegetated, red dirt, red sand kind of wide expansive country. And somehow that changed my life…and ah being up on the top of Uluru, which was still called Ayer’s Rock back then, and just being able to see, you know somebody said ‘That there. They’re the Olgas (As we called them then.) out there, and that’s a hundred miles.’ I thought, ‘That’s a hundred miles! That can’t be a hundred miles.’ But my sense…was, I could be in all of those places at once, by just being there and looking, and listening and attending and feeling the wind, the kind of movement of air in there. And I guess I felt and feel still connected, in that I could in some sense perceive, but know it was, that it was there. Here is sense of place almost as revelation. Neal’s sensory apprehension of place has a distant, disembodied quality. At the same time, there is a transcendental feel, and for only the second time in the interview, his words carry an enthusiastic conviction, and a sense of connection to place. He links this enthusiasm to an emergent sense of purpose and identity as a nature writer – an identity that has become central as an adult. On that trip to the outback I know that I kept a journal assiduously, and…it occurred to me that the good stuff to write had everything to do with rocks and termite nests and the sky and the animals and…But if you found those diaries of mine again…you would find a hell a lot about landscape. While Neal already saw himself as a writer-in-waiting, now he had a subject matter. Here is place both shaping, and viewed through the identity of writer.

Then, staying with this theme of inland places, he leaps to a more haunting place memory. This is my memory: driving along in the car in semi-darkness, or dusk, looking up to…a farmhouse somewhere, and feeling this mix of desperately wanting to have a life in that house in that landscape, and also being frightened of the country, which seemed to me particularly as dusk fell, to be a bit frightening. There’s a particular kind of country…It’s that country round Goulburn, and so it’s pastoral country that’s been cleared, but it’s semi-timbered so that, ah, I still find it very beautiful particularly that country around Collector, and ah… So that kind of country and that kind of sense of longing for belonging in it. And from this ambivalent tension between fascination, longing for
belonging, and fear, emerges a creeping sense of unease, a child’s anxiety about being left alone. There is no clear narrative, just vague feelings, and a rich, imaginative projection into the landscape. *And so I can imagine inhabiting that house, and that was a scary thought, because I think where I went with that was, so my image is house, dusk, failing dark, sense of isolation a sort of feeling about well where do it, where do I get the food? Where does the food come from? What would happen if I fell over and hurt myself?... Where are the neighbours, and how, what does it mean to live in isolation from neighbours? Like, who would my friends have been? Who would they be if I lived here? And there’s a very profound sense of loneliness about, about, about my memory of that, and my sense of what it would be like to be in that place, almost as though I had been left alone, and been abandoned in that house.*

And then, once again, this theme of abandonment opens up what appears to be a child’s nightmare, a cascade of surreal imagery and horror. *I do have other memories of being home sick, and being just shit-scared about stories that were playing on the radio about a murderer. You know a murderer of children and just getting into a semi-panicked state about ‘Shit that’s him! He’s here! That’s the front door, it’s going.’ And just being horrified about that kind of thing. And I guess to some extent those, those memories specifically of, um, of you know of, of murder and that kind of horror of a child. The image I’ve got in mind, is a tabloid newspaper with a picture of a Holden ute. I don’t know why that. And a tree somewhere with a couple of articles of a child’s, children’s clothing hanging on a branch. Presumably there was a grave being dug up there, and that kind of. There’s a feeling I have, which is associated with that kind of country, semi bush timbered kind of pastoral country. So I guess...the general feeling of this is, it’s all related to my horror, of what it would mean to be a child abandoned somewhere, or taken by someone outside the suburbs into the country. You know it might mean death.*

At this point the narrative switches back again to the desert landscape of the childhood trip. There is a more childlike description of the feel of the desert sand, highlighting the absence of tactile descriptions and sensory delight in the rest of the interview. *Digging my hands into that soil on the ground and then feeling it sift, and being amazed at how fine grained some of that sand is, and how it just how cold it feels, and how soft it is,*
almost like, um, caramel or chocolate or something in texture kind of feeling. Other than this, Neal’s descriptions are entirely visual, focusing on form and colour – a more adult aesthetic. There’s a perfectly, a perfectly blue, cobalt-blue sky which lightens, (There’s something very spherical about that I guess), which lightens towards the horizon, where in one direction the Olgas are. And The Olgas are you know a colour range, mauve colour, mauve, lilac, purple, black, red, um, and there’s a softness about them, and also there’s a beauty of form. Here his account has the same strong three-dimensional/sculptural feel as the earlier view from the headland. The flatness of the landscape has a particular interest for Neal. There’s a great flatness that’s impossible to me, that just goes from this rock, that just kind of… juts up out of it. And then it’s just flat, and it’s flat, and it’s flat, and it’s incredibly like a billiard table. Although, he qualifies this. Interestingly, it’s got to have features on it. So, a dead-set level prairie, or an absolutely kind of endless plain without relief. I don’t despise it…but I’m pretty sure it wouldn’t feed me particularly. And interestingly, flat country that’s dead flat without anything, including the sea, to me, doesn’t call me into it. It actually alienates me. It roots me to the spot. Whereas country that has flatness about it, but then has a mountain range, or the Olgas there, or the cliff-face, I relax and I’m called into it. Here is a powerful sense of place-as-viewed-from-above. Only the alienating totally flat landscape roots me to the spot. The rest of the description reads as though viewed through the eye of an imaginary eagle, wheeling high above the desert.

Neal identifies aridity or what he calls the leanness of form of the desert as something he is particularly attracted to. And I love that, I love the fact that it wasn’t soft or lush somehow. It felt like home in that sense of being dead-set beautiful, and extravagant in certain ways in colour range, but absolutely spare at the same time. And arid. There’s no fat on it. There’s nothing indulgent about it. And there’s an elegance actually that belongs to all those kind of forms that have nothing more than they need to have about them somehow. So it’s exact and it’s exacting. It’s rigorous without being rigid. It is here, that Neal provides the clearest expression of place attachment in the interview. I don’t make any larger claim than, this is it for me. I want to be here. I’ve been here before maybe. I’m deeply attracted to people who live there. It seems to be country in which there’s something for me to learn.
As Neal continues, his attraction to arid landscape merges into identification. *But the kind of landscapes that not-quite-enough water makes, um, I was going to say interest me and appeal to me, but almost are me in a funny kind of way.* He points out that at the time of this desert trip he had no language for this sensibility. This is something that has come more recently through the nature writing tradition. *Looking out to the Olgas, something that’s here I desperately want, need, and also feel that I already have, and the only thing I don’t have is the name, is the name for whatever it is. Like maybe I’ve been here before and it’s me. That’s actually me I’m looking at. I’ve discovered writing since, in fact the whole nature writing tradition, with particular poems come to mind … They’re poems that express that feeling in a sense. It’s that one’s soul is actually the ground, is actually country.* As he struggles to convey meaning, his earlier longing for belonging takes on a paradoxical, oracle-like quality. *[That landscape] is actually me. I remember dimly… maybe from another geological era... Um that almost, almost like some child might have an ambition to grow up and be a writer or a rugby player or something, I had an ambition to grow up and be a landscape.*

When asked how he has found this process of remembering childhood place in the interview, Neal replies he has found it frustrating. In particular he is annoyed at being able to recall so little detail. *I feel, I’m sort of thinking, I wish I, I wish I could recall more of the detail of it. I’m conscious of a certain loss of lack of detail about it and I’m annoyed. (laughs)* He links this absence of detail to a sense that *my childhood was bland, and there was nothing. I don’t feel, that is I don’t feel great attachment to, that is, the kind of childhood place.* He then links this sense that for him the important places were not his immediate childhood environment, but far distant. *One thing that I notice… is that the real places. (There I go. The word popped up.) The real places for me are much more the ones I described to you, that aren’t my everyday places. They were journeys out [there]…Though I passed through and they’re a small part of my life in terms of time spent there, they seem kind of realer and truer, and I’m sort of happier talking about them.* This dismissal of everyday outdoor places in favour of distant places is a recurring theme. It is consistent with the content of the interview. In spite of Neal’s considerable capacity to call up place memories after the relaxation exercise, the everyday places of
North Epping are conspicuous in their complete absence. Towards the end of the
interview he acknowledges that his experience of counseling has been a sense of
disconnection from childhood. I’ve always come away [from counselling] feeling as
though there was something left that I didn’t get to. And then…being a little bit haunted
by a childhood that I lived, [but] that I don’t recall…So if there’s any sense of vagueness
or anything like that in what I’ve said to you, it could have something to do with[that.]
Overall Neal leaves the impression of a colourless, dimly recalled childhood, from which
his memories of trips away stand out like mountain peaks rising out of a low-lying fog,
clear and bright in the morning sun.

He then speaks about a different place that had enormous importance for him. Being in
my bedroom in the North Epping house, at my desk, at the study with the books on the
wall. The quite small space and with not much of an outlook…And feeling good about
that, liking that internal domestic sleeping, reading, studying kind of place…um, ah, an
interior kind of past world that’s completely different from, and disconnected from this,
these other ones that I’ve reflected upon…But inside the walls, between the window and
the door was a kind of space, including, very importantly the books on the wall and the
desk, as much as the bed. So the reading and ah, the thinking and that kind of
exploratory, ah, experience was very much part of who I was. And that was safe, and that
was good, and that was kind of. Well, that was good country…Here, Neal demonstrates a
more open affection for this interior place than in any other place description in the
interview. It is also the only time he has linked a feeling of safety to place. His childhood
sense of home and of security appears to have lain wholly within the walls of his
bedroom. From within this contracted sense of home-place emerges an expansive sense
of imaginary place, encompassing distant lands and fantasy realms. He then, speaks
fondly about the fantasy or remembered places, including his own writing, that he
constructed through imagination in the safety of his bedroom. But it’s also a bit of a
bookish person’s way of being, in a sense in that you do a fair bit of reading, and so the
places that actually turn you on, because if the writing’s any good they, they feel really
attractive, and they pull you in. Those places are never Epping or the bushland just
there. They’re Russia, I read a lot of Russian stuff. Or they’re imaginary. They’re
Narnia, or they’re Middle Earth, or they’re England. They’re the Alps, or they’re
The warmth here contrasts with the thoughtful distanced tone of much of the rest of the interview. It appears that Neal had much more affection for the interior bedroom place than for outdoor places.

Once again he presents place as viewed through the prism of identity as a writer. He says that from an early age he had a strong sense of this identity, and that this identity powerfully influenced his thinking about which places were important. *Though I had a very strong sense from early on, that a writer was what I was, and probably among writers a poet, you know a more poetic writer was the thing I really felt I was or would be. But I didn’t feel I had worthy subject matter at my doorstep around me, there… The places I needed to write about were elsewhere and I would find… While I was happy to live in a suburban space and do my thinking and writing and reading in it, I didn’t belong in it, in the sense that I felt I belonged in those other places… My sense of when I speak of childhood country, I’m not taken back nearly so much to the place I actually grew up in, as to places we travelled out into and then returned from.* Here Neal dismisses everyday places as unimportant. Again there is his sense of belonging to, and waiting for the real places, the places travelled to, beside which everyday places appear bland. It is clear from this passage that his writing identity is paramount for him, and his place identity is not only secondary, but was also profoundly shaped by his growing identity as a writer, even as a boy. This sense is reinforced when asked how his childhood experiences of place have shaped him, and he responds by talking at length about how the structure of his writing bears similarities to the form of the desert landscapes he recalls from childhood. It would seem that Neal’s world was apprehended as much through imagination as through the senses.

The early part of the interview is conversational and wordy, an intellectual commentary with little emotional content, aside from the remembered fishing trip, when Neal becomes quite expressive of recalled excitement. After the relaxation exercise, he makes associative leaps, jumping freely between memories. There is a striking contrast between the powerful imagery and emotional content of these passages, and the distanced conversational manner in which they are described. Many of his memories are notable for
their imaginative projection into the landscape. *How would it be to live in this place? Or I am this place.* Of note is the absence of any mention of everyday places, giving weight to his open dismissal of these places as unimportant. By contrast, there is a sense of Neal’s coming alive in trips away to the desert, the beach and Lake Macquarie as well as the importance given to imagined places and his sense of belonging to, and waiting for the *real country* that was definitely not North Epping.

Several memories connecting outdoor places to a theme of abandonment or immersion in water are coloured by strong feelings of anxiety. In the more haunting of these darker memories, there is ambivalence between a ‘longing for belonging’ and a fear of the twilight landscape. Most of Neal’s memories of childhood place are characterised by a very particular aesthetic. Landscapes are viewed from on high, looking out into a three-dimensional world of colour and form. Vision is far and away the dominant sense, with other sensory modes rarely mentioned. Rather than a sensory and affective immersion in place, these scenes are characterised by a distanced abstracted aesthetic sense of place.

When Neal reflects on his unusual sense of place and his longing to belong, he acknowledges his dismissal of everyday places of childhood. The places away from home were not only more real to him, they also provided inspiration and nurtured his identity as a writer. It is apparent that Neal’s sense of place identity is secondary to, and in the service of, his paramount identity as a writer. It is of the bookish environment of his bedroom that he speaks with greatest ease, affection and sense of safety. It is landscapes of the imagination that would appear to have the greatest allure for him. Nonetheless, he can attribute his love of arid landscapes to the formative experience of that childhood trip to Central Australia. Indeed it is almost as though the local landscapes of North Epping barely existed for Neal as a child, hidden behind more vivid imaginary worlds, and the vastly more intense experience of distant places.

Throughout the interview there is often a sense of disconnection or distance in Neal’s narrative; distance from place, distance from feeling, distance from memory. Near the end of the interview, he comments on this, saying he found his lack of recall of detail
frustrating, and that he has had for some time a sense of something missing from his personal narrative. He is unable to account for this sense.

4.5 Annie Remembers

Annie is an artist and mother who lives on ‘Bohara’, a large sheep property near Breadalbane, south west of Goulburn, in the Southern Highlands of New South Wales. She grew up on ‘Wandara’, an even larger property, 7,000 acres, 20 minutes drive to the west of where she now lives. Annie was suggested as a participant by an acquaintance I approached seeking interviewees who had grown up and remained in a rural location. I had not met her prior to the day of the interview and we started to get to know one another over a hot dinner shared with her family and a farm hand. At the time of my visit the property was parched, with large areas of bare ground. Annie told me they had been in drought for five years, and that it had been ten years since they had had their average rainfall.

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From the start of the interview the overriding influence of farm life and culture on Annie’s sense of place is immediately apparent. I grew up on a property. Um, it was run by my father, in conjunction with my father and grandfather and uncle. So it was quite a large place. Um it was, um, quite a prosperous time on the land, um, or we were still living as though it was. Um, you know through the 60s and 70s there was still a memory of the 50s wool boom. So it was a very busy property. There was a number of people working there. It was a world to itself really. So I guess it really had a very big effect on the way I guess I grew into the world. From an early age she took an active role, helping with the sheep. We were always as kids pretty involved on the farm. We rode horses a lot, and we helped. I was always very keen, I helped dad a lot... We did a lot of stock work mostly...mustering, checking the sheep you know lamb marking.
Her father has a very strong presence in the interview, and it is clear that Annie adored him as a child, although she is now more aware of some faults. She describes him as a gregarious, generous man who lived for the day...made good money and...spent it. There was a lot of people through [the family home,] and Friday picnic races where the wealthier farmers all got together were important. Her father owned racehorses and was president of the local racing club for a period. She recalls a very rich social life. Everyone was around their car because the whiskey was flowing. I always thought they were the most popular people there. Her mother’s role was that of a traditional farmer’s wife and mother with a reputation around the district for providing hospitality, Mum was a terrific cook and terrific at having people around. She always made a very welcoming home… Annie also had two older brothers and an older and a younger sister. In retrospect she recognises that she had a very privileged and sheltered childhood. I met a particular type of person. I thought they were the only people who existed in the world. However this privilege came at the cost of leaving her unprepared for life’s challenges. No it was just those idyllic years. Yeah. No, there’s no doubt about that. Which in a way makes growing into an adult much harder, because it’s a hell of a shock…I mean when life revealed itself in all its complexity and pain, you weren’t really ready for it. You hadn’t been prepared for, um, how tough it was.

After the relaxation exercise, Annie’s strongest place memory is on the back of a horse. The overwhelming memory that came back was being on a horse with my sister and a young boy who grew up on the place just racing on the horses. And sort of just before dusk. Yeah, you could just smell the grass and the evening coming in…the sense of movement through space, you know the emptiness, the wind, and the freedom of being on a horse that was cantering along. You know that’s the overwhelming memory of place that came back to me…just a great feeling…There is a glimpse of feeling here, of an exhilaration and a sense of spaciousness and atmosphere conveyed by a sensory array that includes, sight, touch, smell and the kinesthetic. This passage has a sensory immediacy that Annie rarely recaptures again in the interview. Horses were absolutely central to her childhood sense of place, and she speaks of them repeatedly, but more often the pleasures are hinted at rather than openly expressed, as in this passage on their smell.
Mmm, an earthy, sweet smell. Yeah, um I’m so familiar with it, I can’t remember life without that smell and it’s like um I guess it brings back a lot of associations and memories. Annie refers to numerous memories, but she communicates little of the felt qualities of those memories.

Other animals also played an important role in the child Annie’s life – a stream of delightful, snapshots of interactions with animals emerges from her narrative. It was very sensuous and touching an animal, you know their breath, um, I’d say very ah, yeah they’re very sensuous experiences…I was particularly sort of quite obsessive about animals and helping them and um yeah, touch is very much a part of it. You know we raised heaps of lambs every year on a bottle, and calves too. I can remember having a calf walking down the hall at home. And my sister said, ‘Annette, this is the limit.’ You know as the calf bellowed into her bedroom…Yeah so there was, I mean, I had a pet fox as well. And the stink of them, it’s unbelievable. However, this innocent and open engagement with life was tempered by the harsh realities of farming animals for market. As a child you think you can save the world, don’t you, and no animal should die. And as you get older a farm is about death. And so you couldn’t live on a farm. I mean that little girl grows up to be realistic, and realises that, um, those lambs are raised for meat, and um, yeah. I mean I can remember saying to dad when he used to go out, we call it a ‘killer’, I used to say to him (whispers) ‘Why can’t we just buy our meat? Why do you have to kill a sheep?’ But even whispered, the sound of innocent delight being extinguished is unmistakable. It would seem that Annie learned very young not to get too attached.

It is the responsibilities and practicalities of farm life that dominate her account. From an early age, even riding a horse was never merely innocent fun. Farm life always entailed responsibilities even for a young girl. When asked what she would be noticing from the horseback Annie replies: The first thing you always look for is a sick animal. As a child you, it’s incredible your eyes are trained, you know you can just tell from a mile off whether there’s a sick animal… if there was a lamb through the fence you’d never ride past it without correcting it or going to get help. I think you do have an incredible sense of responsibility at a young age that this place relies on you. And describing riding later,
There’s no noises. You’re moving you know at a completely different pace, you’re looking down a lot at the grass and the pasture. You know you, you really can assess it. Whereas in a vehicle it’s out there, you really can’t see it. … It’s a lot easier to work a dog from a horse than from a vehicle. You know when you’re moving sheep. Um and you’re moving at a sheep’s pace on a horse. I think it’s a much easier way of seeing the land and working with the animals…you’re definitely far more in tune with what’s around you on a horse than when you’re in a vehicle. Contained within, almost hidden by the very grown-up utilitarian sensibility, is a deeply sensuous engagement with place. It is evident here in her preference for the pace and sense of connectedness of horseback.

In her long interview, Annie says very little directly about her childhood sense of emotional connection to place, just a few key sentences, and even then she emphasises how removed from her childhood farm she now feels. When I was a child you think it’s the beginning and end of the world the farm you grow up on… Every pivotal experience I had as a child was in that environment and I feel really detached from it now. Only rarely in the interview does she clearly articulate a passionate childhood love of the farm. I mean it was always windy and cold. But it never, that was just life and it was just, I just loved it… But I’m always amazed how I’ve moved on from my childhood. Cause I was intensely engaged in the love I had for that farm. Really intense as a child. Or when describing her father asking if anyone wanted to come for a drive around the property, well I always went. I’d jump up you know because it was never boring to me…I was never bored. You know like to a lot of people a paddock is a paddock is a paddock. It was an endless source of satisfaction for me and I never got tired of scanning it for ewes getting down or… I mean it was endlessly interesting for me ah, and still is. I was really never bored sitting there with dad, looking. We just looked, you know just checked the fence and make sure there wasn’t a sheep down or um and yeah always interesting. Always seemed the most interesting place in the world to me. But these are the only direct statements of childhood attachment to place in the whole interview.

Is it possible that Annie had little connection to ‘Wandara’? Certainly, for the majority of the interview, she appears disconnected from her childhood attachment to the farm of her childhood. There are very few strong, clear expressions of childhood place attachment,
and a number of disavowals of any connection. I feel very detached from that farm now. Also, she appears to have some difficulty recalling episodic memories. Instead, a significant amount of the interview is taken up by Annie describing her life after she left ‘Wandara’, particularly her adult farm life and her art work, as though she is not comfortable discussing her childhood experience. Some inkling of why this might be so comes very early in the interview when Annie is first describing ‘Wandara’. Half of it was hilly, but where we actually lived was quite flat... If you get into any family on the land there’s always, um, complications, and that was actually only left. My grandfather only owned [the hilly part] during his lifetime. When she was twelve, her grandfather died and the hilly half of the farm that she had taken for granted for as long as she could remember was lost to her family. So when my grandfather died, unbeknownst to us kids, [the hilly part] actually went to the other side of the family. That’s why they built on the plain, because they only owned [the hilly part] while my grandfather was alive. So that was another great shock, a very interesting experience to have as a young girl. The world was never that solid. You know one minute you owned a big property, the next minute half of it had gone to some distant cousins.

When Annie speaks briefly of this distant, hilly part of the property, her manner changes. Her face becomes more animated and her voice warms. These non-verbal expressions highlight her childhood pleasure in the different terrain and the sense of adventure she experienced on jaunts to this other part of the farm [It was] very different to the paddocks around the house...It was covered in gum tree. It was sheltered and we used to have big, big mobs of ewes and lambs. We’d go over the check them. We’d muster them at lamb marking. It was an adventure. You know, we’d take our lunch...because it was sort of a couple of hours away from the house on a horse you felt like you were in another place. You know, and, there were lots of old orchards sort of on the fringes of that country. So, dirt roads, it was just a very different environment. You know you’d see people on the dirt roads, and um, our country was the biggest sort of area. Yeah, it was just so different I suppose. And I mean my grandfather always said it was overcoat warmer over there. Which it was. So you know you really notice the difference. And um, yeah it was just a wonderful adventurous experience to be over there instead of on the flat area. These words, with their sense of adventure and enthusiasm, along with her warm,
expressive delivery at this point indicate this was a special place to her. Curiously, she appears not to have been aware that she harboured different feelings towards the two different parts of the farm. When asked if the windy flats around the house were more mundane than the distant timbered hills, she responds *I don’t say I ever thought of it really like that, but as I reflect on it now, yeah [the flats were more mundane.]* The opportunity for reflection provided by the interview allows Annie to differentiate her feelings toward the two places.

She is far more acutely aware of the traumatic grief she experienced after the land was lost. Taking her by surprise the grief appears to stop her in her tracks. *Yeah, so I think it really profoundly affected me, because I was terribly attached to that country, and suddenly I had absolutely no access to it. So I think it really did have a…(pause) I don’t know, quite, you know,(pause) but, well, I think a number of things. Nothing is solid, nothing is permanent. Um, you know, you can, you own something through love really, and then it’s gone and in the end you don’t have access to it, and so the love becomes something very different, because you can’t ride over it… And um, yeah it was just a wonderful adventurous experience to be over there instead of on the flat area… The farm was never the same again. Sort of like losing a limb. You know, I mean something vital had gone. The sense of loss was complicated by the effect it had on her adored father. And, I think it affected dad so much. He was angry…It was um it was a really big loss, not only of the land but dad lost a sense of ah, he felt always aggrieved. He never seemed the same light-hearted man again…I mean it devastated my father actually. He was never the same again. The loss was also deepened by Annie’s relocation to boarding school soon after. . I went away to boarding school and I didn’t like that. So I had that sense of disjuncture in my life too. It all coincided…My whole life was destroyed. Yeah, and I felt like a stranger coming back. We used to come back for holidays so everything, mum’d make all the special things, but I felt like a visitor. So I think… going away to boarding school, the death of my grandfather, losing the property happening all at once was um a real shaping force in my life.

Annie talks of a difficult unsettled period in her life after this. She did not enjoy boarding school. Her grief and loss transformed into a bitter anger at being excluded from
inheriting property by virtue of her gender. *I felt very aggrieved as a young girl actually becoming, as an adolescent, realising that this farm belonged to the boys, and really we were just there by virtue of the fact that we were their sisters or daughters, that actually we weren’t really integral.* After she finished school she did a period of stock work in other districts, relishing the autonomy and sense of separation from her family. *But it was a real revelation to be just who you are, and not be someone’s sister or someone’s daughter or somebody’s cousin. Because, when you’re in the country you’re just a cog in that whole network. It was amazing to suddenly be introduced as ‘this is our jillaroo Annie’. [It was] absolutely liberating.* After this, she rejected her pastoralist heritage and went on to art school in Sydney where she was exposed to a far greater diversity of people and cultures than she previously knew existed. While she found this life exciting and stimulating, *I was always unsettled, really. Cause I was never, I was never of the city. And I loved good coffee and yoga classes and art galleries and... But...um there’s always something missing.* She moved on even further from farm life, and had been living in London for some years when word came that her uncle had died and her father was taking it hard. *My sister got on the phone and said ‘listen dad’s not coping you’d better get home’ And I got home. I mean I left all my stuff in London; I had every intention of going straight back. But once I got here, you know and I mean, I suppose it was a stroke of luck, ‘cause my life really started to take shape then when I came back I think...I didn’t think much about going back to London. I mean I truly just walked out the door. And I had a bloke over there and I had a pretty good life...I guess I came back and I felt like I’d come home...And I thought I could stay and look after dad and I worked on the place. I suppose that’s how, whether or not I stayed to look after him or I stayed because I just couldn’t leave, I couldn’t tell you. I mean, I think I stayed for all of those reasons. I mean I just was home.* Even so, Annie experienced a sense of disconnection from the farm. *I never expected to stay here. I mean I thought this was really good. I’ll have fun here for a few years. But I got to know Rod (her husband). But all the time I thought this was just a temporary, you know interlude and gosh I wonder what’s next.*

Instead, Annie married Rod and moved onto his property ‘Bohara’. She then describes a process of slowly becoming attached to ‘Bohara’ through her art. Initially she found herself unable to relate to the land through her painting, and it was actually through the
animals she had loved so dearly as a child that she found a way back into relationship with the land. So I started drawing horses actually. I mean I couldn’t see, I had absolutely no way in to make a painting about a paddock or fence. So horses, they were around me all the time. I just started drawing them and so gradually I suppose I’ve moved. And then I started to draw cattle and sheep, and then I could see the, it’s just a, the same, I started to be able to see trees and paddocks, and um, I simply couldn’t see them when I started. I had absolutely no connection or sense or how on earth could I make them. And there’s no way of explaining that except that’s just…yeah. Animals gave way to trees, paddocks and fenceposts, and gradually a sense of connection emerged. And slowly I came to love this place. Yeah, it’s a relationship that builds and I suppose I’ve been here 16 years now. Yeah, it’s like I know every inch of it, and I’m deeply engaged with every bit of it. But yeah it’s a gradual thing. It wasn’t something I felt the minute I drove in. I mean it’s been very much a growing thing… I mean having had such a strong sense as a child that there was only one place in the world to as an adult having found that 20 minutes away no, this is the centre of the universe. She is describing in some detail here the long and gradual process of becoming deeply familiar with, of coming deeply into relationship with the land of ‘Bohara’, with place.

Annie is very clear that it has been her painting, as well as more utilitarian activities around ‘Bohara’, that have built this new connection. When the children were young I always worked on the property. You know like painting as well as the stock work and stuff, because I worked with them around, and I’d often work within cooee of the house waiting for them to wake up. So I did a lot of painting. She says that from her husband she has learnt the discipline necessary to go out day after day – five days a week – and paint. This discipline is necessary, because the practice of painting can, contrary to popular belief, be sheer hell… I have to work. So I just keep that brush moving. However, this artistic practice seems to have been crucial in building up her deep sense of connection to place. Just that observation of being still for three hours painting. I mean I couldn’t tell you what I’m absorbing but you’re absorbing something…. I came back and did a little bit of drawing and stuff but I would say that that’s contributed to it. But I couldn’t exactly articulate how, except that just being an observer as well as a participant in the landscape has made, um yeah, made the relationship deeper. But it is
about being there, and getting to know it. I can’t imagine I’d ever lose the relationship I have here. Ironically it appears that the childhood experience of being powerless to prevent place being taken away from her was one of the factors driving Annie’s interest in art. It gave her the sense of control she did not have with respect to place. I think part of the reason that I was perhaps drawn to art, it was something I could totally create for myself. Nobody else could um, you know, take it from me, and it was a repository for all those emotions that I really felt.

She goes on to say that she slowly developed a deep sense of belonging to ‘Bohara’. When asked to describe what she means by belonging she responds, mmm, I suppose it’s just knowing it. Knowing um, knowing it intimately. Knowing what the grasses are and what the trees are. You know the way the fences are. You know, you know what to expect over the next hill. It doesn’t surprise you cause you know it’s there… everything here is familiar to me…Well I think, um, on you know, the more you get to know someone the more complex they become. It’s the same with the land. The more you know, the more you know you don’t know about it in a way. So, I mean it’s not, it’s never, ah repetitive. And I mean each day is a bit different you know. So, I think um, it’s you know, yeah, you think you know it, but it always, you’re always adding a little bit more, and it’s always going to be elusively unknowable. Here is a deep and powerful sense of adult connection to place. Even so, there is a sense of language falling short here, as though there are just not the words in our language for Annie to adequately articulate the intensity and scope of her adult relationship with place, and that she is more comfortable portraying this on canvas.

Painting is fundamental to this familiar relationship with place. To illustrate how, she distinguishes between painting landscapes and painting what she knows. I mean I’m not at all drawn to paint landscapes. I mean, I’m drawn to paint what I know. And this just happens to be what I know. So I’d say yeah it’s an absolutely essential component of my work so far and who knows where that will go. But knowing it is really, I’m painting what I know, I’m not painting the landscape. When asked what she means by ‘knowing’, Annie responds, Well I think it’s something like I’m inside it. You know, I think a landscape implies a vista that you’re painting. I’m not interested in a vista. I’m
interested in, and um, I mean like, I spent a couple of years drawing cows. I can’t draw cows now, because I sort of know something that I didn’t know when I started. And you know I’ve been drawn to paint paddocks and fence posts, and then you move on. You can’t paint it any more cause you know it in a particularly intimate way. Again, it appears our language struggles to capture the meaning she wants to convey here. For Annie, painting does this far more effectively.

It was through painting the animals that she had so loved as a child, first horses, then cows and sheep, that she developed her adult sense of place attachment. While the animals provide a strong link between the child’s and the adult’s connections to place, there are some noticeable disconnections. As an adult, Annie sees her art as being more central to her sense of place than the utilitarian sensibility that dominated her childhood. Also, she speaks passionately and knowledgeably about her adult love of gardening and soils and pasture. Greater involvement with any of these was available to her as a child, but she says she had no interest in any of these areas until she moved to ‘Bohara’. Her emotional disconnection from her childhood place attachment is striking. Near the end of the interview, Annie compares her place attachment with that of her sister. And I would say my sister still grieves for her childhood home, in a way that I don’t. Because I think I’ve just been through more transitions in a way and I don’t have that sort of, I mean I live closer to it now. But I still think there’s a part of her that feels transplanted to another farm…I’m not sure there isn’t a part of her that still feels that sort of sense of lack about what she’s left behind which maybe all wives feel. I don’t know but I certainly don’t feel that now.

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There is a sense here that unlike her sister, she has moved on; that Annie’s strong childhood attachment to place has, through circumstance, been almost completely transformed into a profound attachment to ‘Bohara’. She says that much of her childhood was spent in pleasurable, active, physical, utilitarian engagement with place. The trauma and grief over loss of ‘Wandara’, along with her removal to boarding school resulted in grief and anger and the rejection of her pastoralist identity. Then her complete break with place was followed by return and a process of coming more deeply into place. But there
is a marked disjunction between her childhood and adult place attachments. Episodic memory accounts for only a very small part of the interview. The childhood utilitarian focus on animals has been replaced by an artistic sensibility, and interest in garden, soil and pasture. However, in spite of Annie’s explicit disavowal of any feelings for her childhood place, mention of the lost hilly ‘adventurous’ part of the farm animates her account and gives a glimpse of a child passionately in love with her farm. Notwithstanding the disconnection, there is a very strong impression that Annie’s rich and sustaining adult attachment to ‘Bohara’ is grounded in a powerful childhood attachment to ‘Wandara’.

4.6 Jim Remembers

Jim is an environmental consultant and part-time farmer living on the Far South Coast of New South Wales. He is in his late sixties and has been actively involved in environmental activism and agricultural politics for many years. I had met Jim once prior to the interview, and had been struck by his expressions of love of the place where he lives – a spotted gum forest five minutes walk from the ocean. The interview took place on the back deck of his home in late winter. In the background of the tape can be heard the raucous chatter of parrots and wattle birds, and the gentle murmur of distant surf.

As Jim describes the orchard where he grew up, it is clear he delighted in the natural environment around him. *I grew up on a small farm in the Adelaide Hills about 20 miles by road from Adelaide. It was a very, very beautiful place in nature...When I was a kid a lot of the land hadn’t been cleared. And the creeks were, ran 12 months of the year and they were lined with big old trees, and there were ferns everywhere and frogs and whatever and it was just like paradise.* He then speaks in some detail about how his father and two uncles worked in loose collaboration on the three properties they had
inherited by dividing up his grandfather’s land. And they were pioneers in the area, and they cleared land and made orchards out of it, and they did it with horses and by hand…Well they used to meet most mornings and just talk about things. They’d talk about what’s going on around. You know, who’s heard what about what’s going on around the place…[They’d meet] after breakfast. And um and they’d talk about what they were going to do, how they were going to cooperate…So they would stand in a sort of a circle, and I would stand at their feet looking up at them… And I’d be looking from one to the other as they spoke. And ah it was very exciting for me. I, I just, everything they said I thought was interesting and exciting, and that’s what the world was about.

The young Jim idolised these men, most particularly his father. As a young man my heroes were my father and my three uncles…They were pioneers in the area, and they cleared land and made orchards out of it, and they did it with horses and by hand…I adored my father, and I used to go out on the orchard with him. He had a big axe and I had a little axe, and he had big rubber boots and I had little rubber boots, and we’d each have a box of matches in our pocket, because we were clearing land and burning off.

Throughout the interview, he frequently returns to his very positive relationship with his father. It is clear he enjoyed his father’s company. I’d come home from school and I’d have something, I’d have a snack in the kitchen then I’d go and find my father… I just chose to hang out with him because I liked his company and I liked doing things he was doing. It was adventurous and you know and all that sort of stuff.

As a young boy he embraced the utilitarian values of his extended family. So I actually saw myself as a farmer before I even went to school. And I drove the farm truck. Before I was eight years of age I was driving the farm truck around. There is a definite pioneering sensibility in his boyish enthusiasm for land-clearing activities. We cut down trees and we removed the stumps by various means. By the time I was a kid there were bulldozers. Earlier on they did it with winches. And we used dynamite and we’d blow the stumps out of the ground. It was great, high adventure. And we would burn. We would burn the stuff and rip up the soil and plant orchard there. That’s what we did. As Jim describes his father’s unusual practice of growing a broad range of fruit crops, so that the harvest season could be spread to avoid the need for employing pickers, his deep respect for his
father is manifest. He describes how his mother came from the city to marry his father, and hints at a maternal relationship less idyllic than that with his father. A little later he speaks of his mother as very loving but also extremely ambitious for him. He describes his family as very nurturing., I was brought up as a prince. Recognising that he was the one in the family feted for success, he concedes that this attitude of his parents probably contributed to his brother becoming distant. Jim does not identify any peers with whom he was close, either friends or family, although he does give the impression of plenty of playmates.

Jim’s description of the childhood farm is positive, but vague and brief. He moves quickly into a discussion of childhood activities around the farm. The activity that occupies most of his attention is his planting at age eight of pine seedlings, which he proudly declares have grown into large trees, still standing. They’re huge, (laughing). However, when asked how he feels about being responsible for such magnificent trees, he is dismissive of any positive feelings. Oh well, you sort of take it for granted. It’s, I think it’s a different philosophy when you grow up on the land. My father had a way of talking about life and animals and things that grow that’s sort of different from people I meet who’ve come from the city. So it’s just what happened. That’s the way it is. As though his father and uncles are still looking down from above, Jim is keen to deny any urban, romantic notions of the natural world. But feelings of pride and delight in the mature pine trees slip out anyway. No, it’s not a big deal but I was quite pleased to see they were still there [when I went back].

He describes how the farm passed out of family ownership 20 years ago, while he was living overseas. He says that, unlike his sister, he did not feel any sense of loss because that’s what happens. It’s the attachment. I don’t feel attached to it, but I still love it. I love that place, I know every inch of it in a most intimate fashion you could ever imagine. Again, here is this odd disavowal of strong positive feelings and yet he immediately contradicts himself. Jim seems unaware of the contradiction in this statement. A little later in the interview, as he tells of holidays back home when he was at university exploring a bigger life in a bigger world he says, It was a very strong attachment. He briefly mentions summer holidays at the beach and their deep influence over his adult
life. I used to spend three weeks every year down there with [a friend]. Some of my strongest childhood memories are down there. ‘At the beach?’ I query. On the beach, you know swimming all day and hanging out with him and his friends. My parents took us for a holiday every year for three weeks which was a great thing they did. So hence I’m living next to the sea. I mean it’s always been very important for me to be close to the ocean. Unlike the farm, positive feelings about the beach don’t seem to be compromised by contrary family attitudes.

After the relaxation exercise, Jim provides the first detailed, sensuous description of childhood place in the interview. It was a very lovely place. It was on the side of a hill that looked down on the gully and there was a beautiful hill opposite that had native forest all over the side and top of it. And the house was surrounded by cherry trees and apple trees. It was just gorgeous. And in the spring, about now or a bit later, there were large cherry orchards just full of cherry blossoms, divine perfume and beautiful fresh grass underneath and bees, the sound of bees. It was just gorgeous. For the first time in the interview, he elaborates on the visual beauty that surrounded him in childhood, giving some sense that he is enjoying the place memories. Open delight in sensory place continues to colour his description as he moves from the visual and auditory to the olfactory. The smells of the earth and ah, specially down in the creeks and stuff, it was a particularly fertile sort of smell to it. But there were smells all the time because there was wattle blossom and blossom on apple and cherry and plum and pear trees, that each had a particular smell. And there were smells of animals around to. There was a horse, I remember the smell of the stable and the horses. And the, and, and the smell of parrots. The smell of parrot provokes an unexpected associative leap. We had a lot of parrots that used to eat the cherries. So we used to shoot parrots in large numbers at that stage. I know the smell of parrots very acutely. Jim’s account then returns to the stream of bucolic images of rural abundance. Um, but I also know the smell of the kitchen where my mother cooked, you know cooked. She had a wood stove, and, if she wasn’t cooking a meal, she’d use the heat of the stove to cook biscuits and cakes and, and meringues and all sorts of stuff. So there was always a lovely smell in the house. Here the smell of dead parrot has no value judgment, either utilitarian or romantic. It is merely another part of a child’s naïve but rich olfactory palette.
This is one of only two passages where Jim lingers over sensory details. For the most part, his place memories are prone to generalisation. When asked to identify the special qualities of the place where he grew up, he hesitates, appearing not to understand the question. He queries *Qualities of place?* He responds briefly and vaguely about some attributes of the farm before veering off to talk about his father’s skill as an orchardist.

Well it had beautiful air you know it had air and water and beautiful fertile soil. And it had, it had native forest, untouched native forest and all sorts of birds and animals and stuff. But it also had beautiful orchards with lovely fruit, and my father grew everything. Apart from growing fruit he, he grew strawberries and citrus fruit and gooseberries and raspberries and loganberries. Jim’s responses to questions about childhood place are often circumspect, bland and generalised. Even when pressed for detail about the farm, Jim does not stay long with sensory description. *It had, especially this time of year, had all sort of wild flowers, lovely native orchids, all sorts of stuff through there. And it was very beautiful actually. And it was very familiar to me. It seemed like a place where I felt totally at home and comfortable. I also felt comfortable cutting trees down. It didn’t bother me either.* Again, he appears compelled to negate any expression of sensuous delight in nature with a brutal utilitarian sensibility.

Similarly, with several notable exceptions, he has difficulty recalling details of play-in-place activities. When asked for details of how he spent his time as a child, Jim’s initial response is little more than a list of farmyard tasks. *And um and um we dug in the garden and we picked fruit and ah we um fixed things and we cleared land and we built fences.* Elsewhere, his descriptions of activities get lost in vague generalisations. Attempting to draw out more specific descriptions, I ask, ‘So what would you do on the bikes? Where would you go?’ *Everything, everything, absolutely daredevil stuff, everywhere. We rode out bikes to school. It was a mile and a half to school. So then going and coming from school was a bike thing you know. And then we used to do other, go side journeys and all sorts of stuff. ‘Sorry, what journeys?’ I query. Well side journeys, up other parts... and do other things.* But he is able to recall several play episodes which he describes with evident relish; a war game he played with friends. *I remember one day we went to elaborate preparations, actually over several days. We built up a store of arms of bows*
and arrows and little darts, put metal tips on them and all sorts of lethal things, and then got some other kids together and we had a war. We actually, we shot at each other with these things yeah. It got pretty scary and pretty exciting. Jim’s whole manner becomes more animated and his voice tone lightens as he continues to describe some other of his boyhood activities. All that sort of stuff. (Chuckles) And then we’d dare each other to do things. I ask, ‘What sort of things?’ Well there was a vertical ladder that went up to the loft. And ah the dare was to, to get up, to get higher than anyone else and with your eyes closed jump down onto the ground. Which was a very scary thing to do.

There is a sense here of Jim becoming more emotionally engaged with the memories, and enjoying the process. His body language, voice tone and use of emotionally charged words give these descriptions an emotional intensity absent from much of the interview. A different sort of delight is evident – delight in play. A few sentences later, when pressed for detail, he surprises himself with a long forgotten memory. And there was a place, which I’m not sure, was state owned, I think. It was a wilderness area and it was covered in brambles and all sorts of stuff, and we made a race track in there that no-one knew about. And it was curves, and rises and jumps and stuff. And we would go and race bikes in there. I remember doing that. I haven’t thought about that for a long time. (laughs) That was a lot of fun. Again, mirth in his voice and a smile indicate that he is enjoying this remembering.

Jim then goes on to talk about his adolescence, a period when he was travelling long distances to school, playing sport, going to theatre in Adelaide, and spending little time at the farm. Once again an emotional distance returns to his account. When asked how his experience of growing up on the orchard shaped him as an adult, he identifies how a bushfire was responsible for his decision as a teenager not to become a farmer. Oh in very big ways that influenced everything I did really. When I was in um just finished tenth grade, we had a forest fire that largely destroyed all the cherry orchards and a large part of the farm and I was there at the time…My father lost, at the age of 58, lost a large part of his life’s work. And um, and um that, that was the deciding thing for me to go and do something else…My father was sitting on a bank on a road at the back of the house and ah I went up to him to say ‘Sorry, I’m really sorry what’s happened.’ And um,
I thought I’d never seen any real weakness in him, in terms of emotional weakness or anything like that. And I thought I might see it, and he just smiled and said ‘Oh well, we’ll just have to re-plant it won’t we?’ And it was genuine. It was nothing. There was no bravado about it. At the age of 58 and he just went out with an axe and cut down the burnt trees and put them in a heap and burnt them and started re-building an orchard. And ah I just didn’t have that sort of courage…I couldn’t you know, that would have crushed me. I didn’t imagine having that sort of courage. So…I went and did something else. That was a factor, that was quite a big factor. However, this very influential event has much more to do with his relationship with his father than his relationship with the farm. Overall he does not identify any place experiences that he considers were important in shaping his adult identity.

There is one place-memory Jim recalls from his adolescence with intense vividness, which might be expected to cast a significant influence. It is an experience of intense appreciation of the natural beauty of the farm. The language is richly sensual and deeply felt. Well, it just, it had this beautiful, long, fresh sweet smelling grass, soft grass …and to lie in it was a delicious feeling. It was so nurturing and lovely and cool and fresh. And this lovely little cherry tree with fruit on it, but not quite ready to eat. And it was just a lovely sort of light, like this light here. It’s this time of year when the, when the quality of light was very beautiful. And it was just this sensation of everything in the world was perfect, everything felt perfect. And it was just for a moment I suppose, but I remembered it. It was quite special because I remembered it. He says he came to a deeper understanding of this memory later in life when he read a book by a Jungian writer. It was about the male archetype and it described how you know adolescent boys have a vision of perfection. Um and then they spend the rest of their lives trying to achieve it. He described it like a search of the Holy Grail. I know exactly where mine was. It was under a cherry tree in the early spring. It was, you know it was total perfection in every regard. But when asked if he believes this experience has shaped him in any way, Jim is dismissive. I don’t think it means very much. It’s just that I remembered that vision of perfection as something, I’m not sure that it drove my life later on really. It was just something that happened, really. The absence of any further reflection is striking. Once again, he offers up a rich description of profound sense of connection with the natural
world, only to dismiss it. He appears to be satisfied to categorise his adolescent experience as a vision of perfection, and leave it at that. Certainly he is clear he does not believe the experience had any influence over his adult sense of self.

Later in the interview Jim speaks of the interesting direction his life has taken. He studied medicine at university, and went on to have a prominent position in the medical school of a major American university. He attributes this life direction to the unconscious influence of his ambitious mother. However, he says that by his late 30s he had become very unhappy in this role, quite depressed in fact, and, after a period of intense deliberation, he walked away from this life as a successful medical academic. This period was revolutionary for him, not just because he abandoned a high status career, but also because he developed a fairly radical set of social and political values, becoming an activist in the anti-nuclear movement. Then at the age of 50 he bought a farm in the Bega area. So, I bought a farm and I, my vague notion was that I wanted to look at using land, um, economically and in an environmental sustainable way and try and I had a few ideas about that. So for ten years I was a dairy farmer...I did all the farm work, and ran the business, and did a lot of agro-politics around that dairy deregulation and all that. Much of the later part of the interview is taken up with Jim expressing his ideas and views around the theme of environmental sustainability. I think the whole of the Australian divide ought to be locked up, and everyone ought to be kicked out of it, and it ought to go back to, to natural bush, and it shouldn’t be logged. Because in the driest continent, that’s our water supply. And it’s a no-brainer, I just think it’s insane. What’s happened to the Adelaide Hills, it’s insane. You know it’s a little water supply. It’s a water catchment and they logged the forest here, and then very little water runs out of them for 30 or 40 years because there’s an enormous uptake of water [by forest regrowth].

Clearly Jim is passionate about this area, and holds some fairly radical views, very much at odds with the utilitarian ethos of land clearing of his childhood. He acknowledges the contradiction when he refers to the emergence of this newer ecological sensibility. Oh that’s come later. Yeah, because when I was a kid, I used to cut trees down and that. That was the natural thing. I didn’t have the respect for the bush I now have. He does not elaborate on the origins of this new set of values or acknowledge any childhood
delight in nature. This incongruous mix of redneck and greenie grows stronger as the interview progresses, but he appears completely untroubled by this contradiction in his values.

In fact he appears to relish the mix. Unlike in his former medical career, Jim is now very happy with his lot in life. *Oh, I’m doing what I want to do now, and I have been for a long time.* In particular, it is the practical aspects of farming that give him so much satisfaction. *Doing stuff with your hands that you can actually see, fashioning and making stuff is very satisfying.* As he says this he holds up his hand and looking at it intently slowly clenches it. *I did a whole lot of fencing last year. All of that stuff. I love doing that, I love the physical work. And actually doing it, and at the end of the day seeing a beautiful fence line. I get a lot of pleasure out of that. I don’t have to, I don’t have any hold back to getting out of bed and going and doing that stuff, and I love it, and at the end of the day I’m exhausted, physically exhausted, and I feel happy and content…I love problem solving, I love making things, I love fixing things, I love to see a result. I just, I just love doing that sort of thing.* Clearly, Jim still finds rewarding the practical activities he enjoyed as a boy. When asked if he sees a link between his love of practical activities and having grown up on a farm, he sees this aptitude as innate rather than influenced by environment. *But as a kid I liked that stuff, you know. I mean other people grow up on farms and hate that stuff. But I just love it.*

Jim also enjoys the intellectual challenge of farming. *I’m this farming person, but I think very much like a scientist and a doctor…I have a very strong diagnostic, analytic way of thinking that comes from that training…Farming is like a big research laboratory, you know. Because it’s um it’s far more challenging than medicine for instance, because it’s much more complex. And um to be a good dairy farmer, for instance, you have to be an agronomist, you know you need to be a hydrologist, you need to know all machinery and technical side of things. You need to know about, you know about animals, about animal welfare. All that sort of, you need to know a lot of things.* Here he appears to be attributing his enjoyment of the intellectual stimulation of farming to his medical training, rather than to any influence of childhood experience.
Along side his farming identity, Jim also works as a sustainability consultant. *I’m pleased to be able to do that, because it’s completely about sustainability, and it’s a model that’s totally non judgmental, and it’s very positive and constructive, and it helps companies and people to be more successful and more profitable and more sustainable. So it’s a very positive thing which I’m grateful for… And ah, I feel that what I’m doing is making a positive contribution in a way that has good energy.* These sentiments are very much at odds with the harsh, utilitarian view of the environment he articulates throughout the interview. Although there is something of a split in his attitude towards nature, Jim is able to integrate creatively other aspects of his personality in his commitment to sustainable farming practices. His love of intellectual challenge and his practical skills come together as he addresses the challenges of sustainable agriculture. *I experimented with direct-seeding of native bush which was successful… I developed a sod seeder so that you could plant grasses and pasture and stuff without, without ploughing. You could just drill directly into the soil. And so I developed that, which was for conservation sort of farming.*

Towards the end of the interview Jim talks about the place where he lives now with evident pride and pleasure. Clearly he loves it. It was this adult love of place which motivated me to request an interview in the first place. *Oh this is paradise here. This is unbelievable. This is, this is perfect. I wouldn’t want to be anywhere else.* However, he expresses little appreciation of the sensual qualities of place. Instead, he articulates a proprietorial and information-based appreciation of place. *You know, I can walk two minutes through the bush there (waving his arm towards the ocean) and be at our own private beach. (Then, pointing at the trees nearby.) This is regrowth forest you know. It was logged about 30 years ago.*

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Jims interview is an odd mix of contradictions. Throughout the interview, he gives glimpses of a child’s delight – delight in sensuous place and delight in play-in-place, usually followed by disavowal. Once he even delights his adult self by unearthing a long-forgotten memory of boyhood fun. It is only immediately after the relaxation exercise that he allows himself the space to luxuriate in sensuous detail; the sights, the smells, the
sounds of the childhood farm. Only this once is his delight in sensuous detail not cut short. These few glimpses aside, he does not appear to enter deeply into the process of recalling childhood place. For the most part, he has difficulty recalling sensory details. The place memories he describes are vague generalisations, and emotionally disconnected, as though he is speaking of someone else. In response to prompts, his place descriptions are truncated, shifting quickly to other topics. In those glimpses where memories are remembered in sharp detail or with some emotional connection to place, Jim appears compelled to dismiss their value. He places very little importance on the role of childhood place experience in shaping his adult identity. He explicitly rejects attributing any influence to his most vivid place memory. By contrast, his memories of his father are very positive, and focus on activities rather than sensory detail. In fact, most of his interview is characterised by this focus on farm activity and a utilitarian sensibility rather than sensuous perception and reflection. In spite of this leaning, he has arrived at something of an ecological sensibility in his later years, and Jim seems to be able to hold two seemingly contradictory sets of values quite comfortably.

4.7 Bluey Remembers

Bluey has been a friend since we first worked together as labourers for a landscape gardener in our early twenties. When we first met he was living in a mudbrick house he had built on the property he speaks of in the interview. He now lives with his second wife and three boys in Eltham, an outer suburb northeast of Melbourne, and works locally as a builder. He also produces occasional artworks, mostly sculpture and paintings, although this activity has been pushed somewhat into the background by the demands of parenting. When I first spoke of this research project, Bluey expressed considerable interest, mentioning that the family farm of his childhood has been very prominent in his dreams over the years. This was intriguing enough to warrant an invitation to be interviewed.

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Bluey begins his interview by stating that as a child he lived between two homes. During the week, his family lived at Brunswick, an inner suburb of Melbourne, where his father had a busy general medical practice. On weekends and holidays the family retreated to a 160-acre property at Christmas Hills northeast of Melbourne, in the foothills of the Great Dividing Range. He begins by telling how he spent his time in each place. In Brunswick, on getting home from school, he would jump on his bicycle and *ride for miles and miles and miles* around the inner suburban streets and laneways. At Christmas Hills he would just *go wandering*, losing hours in *a real world of fantasy*. Bluey describes the Christmas Hills farm as being a very beautiful, hilly property, mostly cleared for grazing, but with significant pockets of eucalypt woodland along the creeks and gullies. *Around the creeks were beautiful old, lovely old trees.* He also tells of an old farmhouse on the property that was burnt down in the bushfires of 1962, which razed the whole property and distressed his parents greatly. He was six at the time and says that he has no recollection of the devastation caused by the fires, can barely recall the old farmhouse, but clearly recalls his parents being very upset.

Bluey says he recalls as a boy spending days wandering about the property. *I would just go wandering, and um I’d basically pretend um, um I was hunting for food. Ah, I had a spear, I’d make a spear. I’d make a wooden one or when I was a bit older I’d get old fencing rods and hammer them into the ground...And I’d um bash the end down to flatten it out. So I sort of yeah, (gestures spear throwing) you know, spear and I’d, the cow turds’d be rabbits or something. I’d spear 'em. I’d just go wandering, doing that. Plus, I’d also go wandering, searching for the ultimate place to build a dwelling. Yeah, that was sort of take up a huge amount of my time. So I had little areas that were, little nooks that no-one else would really bother to go into.*

Bluey then describes his family. He was the youngest of five, three girls and two boys. He says they were close and he clearly enjoyed being in their company. *My clan was great. Oh, I felt great with my family...it was relaxed.* He says his parents liked young people and his siblings had regular friends at the property, creating a warm extended family feeling at mealtimes in the quirky shed his father built to replace the burnt-down
farmhouse. However, Bluey was also a bit of a loner, going off to wander about the property on his own. He is very clear that his solitary wandering was not an escape from his family, but rather a time of recuperation from the travails of his school life, where he struggled academically. He explains that he was ill suited to the private school where his parents, with the best of intentions, sent him for the first ten years of his school life. *I was very much in the wrong school...* I went to [a private school] which was *um, um very strongly academically based in a manner that was, um... ah... um, I don’t think I ever felt myself there.* He describes trying to fit in, but he was left feeling inadequate and unhappy when he failed to transform himself into someone he was not. He held himself responsible. *I never really asked myself if it was the wrong school for me. It was like, I’m not good enough for here.* Only in Year 11 did he make a stand and refuse to continue at the school. Instead he went to the local high school, where he found he fitted much better and became enthusiastic about school for the first time, referring to this period as *the greatest two years of my life.* But until this renaissance, Bluey used his solitary wanderings around the farm to, as he puts it, to fill himself up, to recuperate, recover emotionally, psychologically. *That property was like a saviour for me really...it kept me sane. It kept me sort of, um, it gave me a place to be me, and I didn’t feel that in my school, which was where I spent most of my time.*

Bluey then maps out very specifically some of his favourite places around the property. The first was a clearing in a five-acre patch of bush across the creek from the family’s farm, accessed by *my little path that I’d created, just cause I’d been walking through there. No no-one would ever know that it was there. That I’d, um, cross this big huge tree that had fallen across [the creek.] And there was this little clearing amongst some re-growth, some thin re-growth. I don’t think it would be very beautiful. You know it wasn’t like, it wasn’t ‘beautiful’ beautiful. But to me it was... um...That’s (strong emphasis) where I decided I was going to build my little place and I actually attempted to do that. (laughs) I got as far as cutting down four hardwood poles and setting them in the ground and one big one going across and that was about as far as it got. But it was enough to show his sister Raya, the sibling to whom he was closest emotionally and age-wise. He then speaks of another special place, *a back creek, that’d only run in the middle of winter...It was right in the back of [the farm]. No-one went there. And there was a*
part of a creek that had a little waterfall. It was probably about a metre and a bit high. But it was a waterfall…It was a literal, little waterfall. Yeah, that was a very special spot. Bluey mentions that this spot had a ‘funny’ feel to it, but does not elaborate. Instead, he refers to its beauty. When I ask what was beautiful about it, his account falters as he struggles to explain. Oh, the… ah… this, this fall, this little… is it a gully… like a gully, with naturedness to it… quite sort of, some old trees and no… there was no sign of animal tracks or, it was quite pure, I suppose as bush and this beautiful fall… little waterfall into the creek, which wouldn’t run in summer. [I would] only sort of go there in winter I suppose. I just think I really liked them…(Bluey’s hands hover limply, helpless in the air before him, reflecting his frustration with words.) But then he finds more confidence in his own preferences. I think they were good spots. I think they were lovely little spots. Um, yeah, there were definitely little pockets on the property that I liked more than the others. And I’d just um, I’d just go and explore it, I’d explore the rocks around you know, um yeah. You’d literally in some areas, I’d know every rock you know, that sort of thing.

While he might have difficulty saying why, it is clear that Bluey was very fond of and certainly very familiar with much of the farm. Such familiarity emerged from the enormous amount of time he spent wandering the property alone, content with his own company. I’d spend a huge amount of time by myself on that property…Alone, [but] never lonely. What was so fascinating for this boy? What could he possibly have been doing that was so engaging? I was totally at home…and I’d just revel in it … um it would be… um, there’d be a lot of fantasy…I’d have a lot of fantasy. As I say I’d be catching food and building houses, and so there was that… Um I… I… I think I’d say I was just, I’d be me, I’d just be me, there wasn’t anything taking that away or…yeah… And the, I did love the environment. I was very aware of the environment. And I liked it, so that made me feel good to be around that. He felt comfortable, safe, free to be himself, and he liked the place.

After the guided relaxation exercise, Bluey takes his time responding to the question about a special place. When he finally does respond, the cadence of his speech has slowed, marked by long thoughtful pauses. The rhythm and imagery, the whole feel of
his speaking is open, spacious as he talks of being up on the hill overlooking the property, before going down to join the family, his day’s wandering over. I’m outside the hayshed… and um… it’s sort of on the crest of a hill… an old tree… with an old set of harrows. I’d walk around, and check out a big pile of old telegraph poles… I think the thing that I’m feeling mostly is… I can see that I’ve got a view of the huge part of the property… And there’s the wind, wind’s blowing in the tree… The sound of the wind in the tree is strong…(Pause)...I’m just observing, and listening…(Pause)... Um, what I’m feeling at the moment, is about… it’s a feeling of (Pause)...ah, just catching the space before like going down (Pause)... before I um retreat back [to the house.]...I feel like I’ve been on a journey...just doing my round. Just wandering...Just wandering…and I’m just taking it in, before I step out of where I’ve been. (Pause)... And there’s openness, I’m taking in the openness. That’s what it is. It’s like the sound of the wind is, it’s open and it’s visually open. I can see for miles. So it’s definitely calm I’m feeling…Calm. At ease. Plus um there’s sort of an excitement there too, very alive. But at ease. (Pause)...Ah-hmm, yeah, I can’t see another soul. Just, just land (Pause)... It’s like I don’t have to (Pause)... It’s like just purely being. Whereas knowing that soon I’m gonna be amongst people, and doing nuts and bolts things, and talking you know. It’s like um, it’s (Pause)... yeah it’s taking in that feeling of just purely being… A feeling of spaciousness and ease is expressed by references to the senses of vision and hearing, and internal emotional state, as well as by the cadence of his speech. The feeling of complete immersion in place conveyed by this multimodal description is powerful, yet light.

And then the rhythm begins to change as the boy’s reverie swings into action. Yeah it’s a bit like I’m gonna be walking soon, I’m gonna be walking down that hill. So I’m going down, back to the valley as such. Mind you that hill I’d um, it was sort of a long hill down to the house. I’d walk it and I’d start running, and I’d um get a real momentum up, and I’d ah, pick out as I’d leap. I started to like leap. And that each time I’d leave the ground, I’d pick a point on the grass ahead of me to land, and that each leap I’d extend it more and more and the hill got steeper and steeper, and by the point of the last bit of that hill I would just fly. I would just be having such a momentum going, and I’d pick a point that was way beyond what I could possibly reach. But I would always reach it, and I’d feel like I’d be in the air, and I’d be like I’ve still got another two metres to go, and I’d
make it, and I’d sort of make myself make it. So, that was always something I did on that retreat. [And the feeling was] just fantastic, just fantastic. Like I was um… smiling I’d just fly, I’d fly, literally fly and I would be doing something that like I couldn’t do but I was doing it…Mmm. It felt like flying. It was like slow motion. Boyish exuberance, the sheer joy of physicality, of pushing to the limit, and exploring what his body is capable of, bursts out of this passage. Like an old fashioned train, his account gradually builds up steam, until, carried along by the momentum of his exultant leap, memory shifts to slow motion, as he does the impossible – he flies. In contrast to the oppressive school that left him feeling at best mediocre or at worst a failure, the farm reflects back to Bluey a picture of himself doing the impossible, a truly uplifting antidote to the crushing weight of school expectations.

After this, Bluey elaborates on what he would have been doing prior to arriving at the hilltop. He gives detail to the activity he calls wandering. It means literally walking. Um, visually walking, and along the way, really observing particular areas. Um, so at some points, I’d just be really aware of the greater environment and not really pinpoint anything. I’d just sort of wander, and then there’d be other points where I’d be literally observing every rock or old bit of car body, or you know like anything that was sort of intriguing me. Rocks, I just loved rocks, I was always fascinated by rocks…That waterfall had good rocks on it. Mossy rocks…I’d feel them. Here, wandering is less absorbed in fantasy, and more engaged in sensuous apprehension of the world around him, privileging neither the human nor non human world, instead favouring those things that appealed to his aesthetic sense of form. And when he does drift into fantasy, it is a very worldly variety…and um I think I used to have the whole concept of building a house was really important for me as a little kid. I think as I said I’d find spots that I’d think would be, and of course I did eventually end up building a house, with Lisa[Bluey’s first wife.] Built a little [mud-brick house] on the property. The fantasy was so grounded in the real, it eventually became reality. What is striking here is the impression that as an adult, Bluey has firmly in mind so much of the detail of his childhood activities.

When asked how the process of remembering makes him feel, Bluey responds that it makes him feel calm and aware of how important that place was. He then elaborates on
how the farm was important for him. I could be me. It was my place of um, true contemplation about you know I just, I just would do whatever I did. Whether I… I reckon I spent a lot of time not even thinking… (Pause)… and then there’d be other times where I’d be free to fantasise, and there’d be times of just wonder, you know like looking, exploring… I guess I was like I am now with my intrigue of form. I, I, I, I love things that look intriguing and balanced and material. I love the material and how they’re placed. It’s like the sculptural aspect of form, which could be a pond, (Bluey points to a garden pond he is currently building.) to the house, to um a very crisp piece of architecture. So yes, I’m intrigued, I guess, by a lot of the material that was around. Hence the rock and the… [visual] textures… Um but I think what was important was um the true sense of, of letting, it’s almost a dream state. It’s almost um, like ah letting myself go…

Bluey then shifts to talking about another dream state associated with the Christmas Hills farm. He tells of how, after the break-up of his first marriage, he began having very intense dreams about the farm. [In] these dreams [the farm] would be overrun with people. There’d be people everywhere and they shouldn’t have been there. It was like almost the first couple of dreams I had were very intense. It was a war zone on the farm, and um it was like being, they shouldn’t have been there. Being overrun… The felt quality was um, very scary, threatening, not right. He went into counselling with a Jungian therapist and began exploring the meaning of the dreams. Without a doubt the farm in those dreams represents my inner, my inner world. My world, my true at-homeness. The dreams were very important at this time in his life in that they were a central part of re-evaluating himself and his life. A lot of that was, that time was um, ah, really finding my, really honouring my needs I think, those years. So bringing out my, the fact that I’m worthy of needing, you know I do have needs and I actually, I’m worthy of having them filled… Um the, the, the dreams were, or that stage was just me getting to know myself. And ah the fact that the property was being overrun in my dream by people and over the years those dreams, I became accepting of those people. You know I came from being ‘They shouldn’t be here.’ to ‘Well they’re here. That’s all right.’… There were people living there and it was like almost village life there. But that was fine… It’s about befriending myself, becoming at ease with myself. Ah, um, and I’ve used that property because it was my sanctum.
Bluey explains, *I know that that property was like a saviour for me really...It kept me sane. It...gave me a place to be me, and I didn’t feel that in my school which was where I spent most of my time.* He points out not only that he found school a crushing alienating experience, but also that it was completely separate from the rest of his life. He had good friends at school, but because he lived a long way from the school, he did not hang out with school-mates after school nor have them over to his home. It was only when he went to the local high school that he found *I had friendships around the corner.* After he completed school he moved on to the farm, built a wood-workshop, began making furniture for a living and built a mudbrick house in which he lived with his first wife for three years. He contemplated buying the property jointly with Raya, but was not in a financial position to do this. He recalls the farm-gate made a very distinctive clanking sound when it was shut. *And I was very aware there’d be some time that I would close that[farm-gate] for the last time.*

He does not speak of any grief associated with losing the farm. Instead, he speaks of a property in rural Victoria he purchased some years after leaving Christmas Hills. *I’d go there and I’d just wander, again I’d been, [in] the four years I had that property, I got to know every bit of it. Again those rocks, you know, I like my rocks, you know. It’s a bit (pause)...Jung in his later life used to go down to [the lake, and] create, build little watercourses. That sort of thing. That sort of thing. Just, just doing. Not something useful, for a purpose.* As Bluey says this, he gestures with his hands as though he is building the watercourses, suddenly chopping his hand movements to emphasise his words. His physical animation emphasises how important this mood, this way of being, is to him. Gone is the calm, laidback, spaciousness that characterises so much of his account. The assertiveness, the passion in his manner indicates that, although it might be vague, paradoxical and difficult to pin down with words, this state, this way of being when wandering has great importance for him. *Well I think it has got a lot of meaning. But I think it’s that there is a sort of meaninglessness to it, in that it’s um, just about, just being... There is a creative aspect about it definitely. That again, [it] doesn’t have to achieve something. But there is something creative about that whole process of what it used to be like, wandering around. Um it would fill me up...Um, predominantly it would*
fill me up with spending quality time with myself, (laughing) if that makes sense…And then there’d be the other side, it would fill me up with some ideas, and you know like materials…which is much more a thinking side. But on that inner side there wasn’t anything conscious, I wasn’t consciously aware of that. I’m reflecting back now, putting words into something that I’d just do. Naturally do.

What Bluey appears to be describing here is a state of receptiveness, a form of awareness that is very open to sensory impressions but with little reflective thought, almost a meditative state. Reflective thought came later in adulthood. In trying to elaborate on this state, he returns to the scene on the hill he recalled immediately after the relaxation exercise. It’s not just pure exploration, [although] there’s definitely that in it. There’s definitely that in it. But there’s elements of just walking. And a little bit like [the relaxation exercise] where I ended up was the spot on[the hill], um just listening and still and observing. So there was definitely that in time too. Um I think there was something very important about the fact that I got to know that place so well…I’d walk the same landscape. So I became familiar with it. When asked what he means by familiar, he responds, at-home-ness, a sense of at-home-ness with um, a sense of just getting to know it which takes time. When you know every rock and every, you have to be there a lot to, for that to take place.

In explaining this at-homeness, Bluey’s account takes an unexpected turn. He recounts a story, an episodic memory, of a day when he was out with the family collecting stones from a paddock. To avoid this boring, disagreeable task, he sneaked off alone, down a track into an area of dense sapling regrowth, when suddenly he heard a huge roar…Now, that [noise] which I heard could have been a branch or a tree falling, but I heard a roar, a huge roar. And to this day I’ll tell you I saw in front of me maybe 200 metres ahead of me, through the trees, I saw this perfect vision of a castle appear, and ah, quite a magical sparkling castle. And I just turned and ran. I was so scared. I just turned and ran, ran, ran back to the trailer where everyone was and started picking up stones. And never told a soul.
Bluey goes on to detail several other experiences that defy rational explanation. He describes a nightmare of an *old hunchback, gnarled teeth, rotted teeth old man that lived in the chook-house* that occurred while he was living on the farm alone. The image was so powerful, so frightening, it sent him packing in the car to his girlfriend’s place over an hour’s drive away. It was even more disturbing when his young nephew, visiting the farm came back from the toilet by the chook-house, white as a sheet, describing exactly the same figure. Even as he recounts this story decades later, he says, *I’ve still got pins and needles in me now you know!* Even the little waterfall he mentioned earlier as a favourite place made him uneasy. [*That* little waterfall. *That was a bit scary. I felt like almost there was an eye watching me you know. That I was, being observed yeah. Mmm.* He says he tends to look for rational explanations for these sorts of experiences, but *I don’t know Paul, I think um, I think, I think environments can hold something too, very much. Um, whether that’s a you know a literally a spirit of like a of a spirit of the land or a human spirit or um don’t know, don’t know. But um, yeah, I think environments certainly hold a spirit, um, and in some spaces maybe you almost are being observed.*

Bluey then returns to the long term influence the farm has had on him, endowing him with a love of the outdoors, his claustrophobia if he is cooped up indoors for too long, and *that farm has given me that opportunity to really love land and outsideness and space and beauty of the Australian bush.* *Even though it was a cleared property, there was a lot of bush there too. Those little nooks I talk about, they weren’t pasture, that was down in the creek and down you know...* And here he pauses. Each time he mentions these timbered nooks as important, he lapses into silence, as though there are not the words to say how they are important. Instead, he generalises to the larger place, saying how the farm *topped up* his sense of self so that he could *go back into the onslaught for the rest of the week.* Pressed to describe how the farm *topped him up*, Bluey responds, *Space, definitely space. Um umm...Freedom to move...Yep and no-one around so I’m just, just space. I’d put that in big capital letters. That’s predominant. Beauty, in that I did, I was intrigued by the environment. I loved the environment. Um, I think space is the biggest one.* He then struggles to describe the pattern of his movements through space. *Yep and I don’t, it’s almost um, I wouldn’t, it’s almost ah what’s it like, it’s like um ah turning the key on a little toy and you’d let it go. (Moving his hand in a random pattern*
through the air.) So, it almost wasn’t like, ah, I’ll walk up there now. I’ll just follow my nose. Just let go. I wouldn’t orchestrate where I was going to go. It is better explained by comparing these movements with the more purposive quality of his journeys around the property as an adult. I tended to see it in a different light. I wouldn’t, I wouldn’t, in adult years I wouldn’t really wander like I did as a kid. I would be interested in stone or wood or things like that. I’d have a different you know approach, interest. But as a kid I would just be, I’d just wander. And as an adult the sense of topping himself up was not as powerful.

Then he gropes for words to describe the process of remembrance he has just been through. I found it um, um (pause) some feelings um (long pause) There’s a quietness to it, a silence to it, a feeling (small laugh) I don’t know if I’m trying to...(pause) It is, it is... Mmm, mmm, it’s um, ah (pause) yeah, I, I can’t, it’s like, it’s like, um, it’s like the whole process was, on reflection back to it now, it’s a bit like another version of painting a painting. You know without paints, it’s just that you’re doing the process. You’re doing something…There’s definitely something creative about it. I think I’d use that word strongly, it’s a quiet, it’s a very strong creative process. Um very much. Um, but not needing an end result from it...I’m not trying to achieve something. Curiously, the lack of purpose in his description of remembering parallels his earlier description of wandering as a child. He refers to his dreams again and their important role in his psychological growth as an adult. Near the end of the interview, he returns one final time to attempt to put into words the state of mind he experienced as a child. Allowing, just simply allowing. Space...Freedom, um um (pause) functioning on a mode that [is] (pause) totally present in the present...No there was no reflection, you know. There was just beingness. Maybe that, when you, when I was on the hill there, listening to the sounds after the relaxation, there’s a bit of a sense there of reflecting. When I’m up there, I’m very aware of me being there, looking and listening um on the way down to the village again as such. You know, I’m sort of, I’m reflecting there. But on the whole, before getting to that point, I’ve just been doing. I suggest this might be a state of total absorption. Initially Bluey accepts this description, but then, on reflection he qualifies this. Yeah, that’s right, yeah, yeah, yeah. Completely absorbed? That could be a hard, that can be. It sounds sometimes a harder word than I often felt, I think. It was more, I
was absorbed but it could be very, there was no, there was a lot of space in that absorbedness. You know like it wasn’t closed absorbed. Bluey appears to be making a distinction here between a form of attention intently, narrowly focused on one object, and a more fluid, open state of awareness taking in the broader array of sensuous place.

In his interview Bluey takes us to little nooks amongst eucalypt woodlands along the creek at Christmas Hills. He shows us a small waterfall that only happens in winter, and an open expansive view from the hilltop on the family farm. He maps out not only a clear picture of his childhood sense of place, but also tells the remarkable story of how his relationship with the Christmas Hills farm endowed him with a resilience in the face of a potentially very damaging experience of education. Bluey is unequivocal – the farm was his saviour from an education system that severely undermined his self-esteem. And then the reprise: childhood place as dreamscape, as self; and the extraordinary letting-go, through the dreaming, of the farm as Old Self. With magic castles, the rotten-toothed old man, and rusted car bodies, his account defies conventional logic and aesthetics. However, underpinning it all is an emotional truth, and a recall of detail of place and activity, that gives this interview a powerful integrity. Throughout the interview, there are many moments when Bluey flounders, searching for the right words to communicate his remembered experience of place. Physical gestures communicate his frustration with words. Like the patternless pattern of movement that he calls wandering, his interview meanders all over the place, but keeps returning from different directions to the same favourite places, the same ways of being, over and over until there is a powerful sense of what he is trying to say. Like the process of his childhood place-making, the process of this interview engenders familiarity. This is no mean achievement, not because Bluey is inarticulate, but because our language lacks words for so much of that which he speaks.

Postscript: After the interview was completed, Bluey mentioned he had been thinking about revisiting the property. He had not been there for more than a decade, and felt he would like to see the place again to see how it had changed. And he said he was curious to see if his uprights and crossbeam were still there. Then some months later, Bluey informed me that a few nights after the interview, he dreamt of the farm again, something
that hasn’t happened for a number of years. In this dream, he told me, the property had been bulldozed, flattened. It was a somewhat disturbing dream, and on the strength of it, we agreed to visit the property together the next time I was in Melbourne. Five months after the interview we drove out to Christmas Hills and walked the land. At first we went to the site of his construction which was near the road. We scrambled down the embankment to a small area of creek flats. He said that this spot was quite different, that when he was a child it was overgrown with blackberries. Now it was almost devoid of them, and much more open than he remembered. We found the site of his construction, but no uprights. After-all, they were stringybarks. They would have rotted out years ago.

After this we drove into the property, up to a house and knocked on the door. A young couple answered. No, they hadn’t been here long, a couple of years, but they and their kids loved this place, and they were here to stay. From their balcony we had a sweeping view of the back of the property. The mudbrick house Bluey built was still standing. But there were also a half a dozen other newer, bigger houses along the ridge. I was reminded of Bluey’s earlier dreams when the farm was ‘overrun’. But then again, most of the houses were clustered near the mudbrick house… a bit like a village. Later, Bluey remarked it felt very strange standing on someone else’s veranda looking out over the farm. No-one else was at home, so we walked up a small gully to find the waterfall. It wasn’t running. Along the way, Bluey occasionally spoke of how things used to be, or the mixed feelings he was experiencing walking this ground again. But mostly he was quiet.
CHAPTER 5
QUALITIES OF REMEMBERING CHILDOOD PLACE

The remembered past is not simply a past of perception…From their very origin, the imagination colours the paintings it will want to see again.
Gaston Bachelard, The Poetics of Space

The seven interviews offer up a broad scope of place remembrances. In several of them there is a sense of completely re-entering childhood experience, to the point where present reality fades to an insubstantial shadow world. In others, childhood place is distanced, as though viewed ‘through a glass, darkly’. In their remembrances, respondents speak of a kaleidoscope of people, activities, ideas, things and events associated with childhood places. As I immersed myself in the interviews, what I found most striking was the emotion expressed as participants recalled their childhood experience of place. As a phenomenological researcher, it seems to me that the core of the experience of remembrance of childhood place is most apparent in those moments when I feel emotionally engaged in the account being related. More than the rich images described, or even the narratives from which it can never be completely separated, it is the emotion expressed in these accounts, emotion in its intensity, its range and its complexity, that impresses and engages most powerfully. Consequently, it is the affective content that has become the central organising principle around which I have developed my understanding of the phenomenon of adult remembrance of childhood place.

Emotional connections to place are complex. In each story, childhood place is inextricably interwoven into broader biographical narrative. Individual family members,
family structure and culture, as well as the wider culture, and place itself, all interact to create a unique set of conditions in which each child experiences place. The role of family in place attachment is influential, complex and unique for each participant. And circumstances – the loss of farmland, the early death of a mother, the accidental death of a brother, an overseas trip, a desert trip, a difficult school – were all factors significantly effecting the differing experiences of place. The interviews portray a diversity of childhood experiences of place, not only because places differ, but also because place is but one amongst an array of interlocking biographical influences. Each person’s childhood experience of place is unique – a fingerprint of place. Certainly, it appears that only by including some account of family context and circumstances can the psychological complexity of childhood place experience be deeply appreciated.

Adding to this psychological complexity is the broad range of emotional states referred to within these accounts. Wandering the Port Hills of his memory, Mick gives an indication of some of this breadth in this passage. *There is the experience of being connected… Somehow or another it was a place which provided us with joy and so we were very respectful of it… Well, it was like discovering what was possible with this vine that um testing it out and then jumping up and down and on it… So it’s like we had an impact on it, but it wasn’t a permanent impact, which was sort of nice because we used to get really fucked off, if we went up there and found some fuckin’ kids had destroyed [it]. We’d feel so affronted… So it’s like it’s a revelation goes on every time you go up there, it brings out an awe in me… A sense of wonder, a sense of awe of that. It’s pretty amazing, that would be, you know a desire to be a bit more curious, I would want to go back and discover something new.* Some emotional states are common across all of the accounts, while other feelings are reported by only one participant. It has been important to develop an account of adult remembrance of childhood place that encompasses the full gamut of feelings reported by participants.

The phenomenological method attempts to identify and bring forth those qualities that distinguish the phenomenon being investigated from all other experiences. A study like this, which describes such a broad range of experience, presents a challenge. How is it possible to draw forth commonalities, the essential qualities, from such a diverse range of
accounts? In immersing myself in these accounts and staying with this central principle of emotional content, I found that a number of themes coalesced. Many of the qualities identified are not common to all respondents. Nonetheless, the themes elaborated here emerge powerfully from the interviews. As a phenomenological researcher, my task in this chapter has been firstly to identify these major themes, and then to bring forth, to capture as fully as possible the felt qualities of each of these themes that make up the lived experience of an adult remembrance of childhood place. In the phenomenological method the researcher is encouraged to seek out the essential. In this drawing out of commonalities it can be tempting to generalise, minimising difference. However, in the thematising process I have found it important not to oversimplify. Emerging themes need to reflect the psychological complexity of place attachment described above rather than minimise it.

5.1 Love and Nurturance

All respondents profess some form of love of childhood place. Articulating the quality of these feelings and capturing it on paper is actually quite challenging. Jane gives the clearest expression of love of place when she talks about the light in her place, *I just absolutely love it. It just fills me with the most buoyant sense of joy, like I could just leap into the air.* The intensity and richness of feeling is brought to life in the wonderful image of Jane leaping. For the most part, however, respondents did not give clear, direct and strong expressions of love of place. As Phillip says, *I haven’t had a sense that I’m explaining it to you, cause I’ve never put it to words really.* It is only indirectly that Phillip gives some sense of the passion with which he loves his place *I feel like I belong here...It’s like I just know this is my home, and um...This is where I was born, this is how I’ve grown up and this is now deeply inside me...but I just love it in a way that’s like, that I’m just incredibly confident with it...I’m not frightened by it. I’m not out of my depth in it. I’m not lost in it. I’m never feeling that I’m going to be surprised by it. I’m always going to be, I suppose nourished by it.* In spite of the passion apparent in this passage, Phillip struggles to reconcile the strength of these feelings with the apparent ordinariness of his experience.
Mick does not explicitly claim that he loved the Port Hills as a child. Neither does he openly state that he loved Kieran. Yet as he describes the two boys lying in their cradles of boing-boing grass in the sun, silently looking out across the vast landscape, as they munched their sandwiches, there is little doubt of the love there. As Mick’s description traverses the remembered landscape, there can be little doubt that his is a loving gaze. The attention to sensuous detail, the long, languid periods of silence call to mind a lover’s enraptured gaze. Elsewhere, Mick expresses the strength of his feelings of love for place by attributing a sacred quality to his relationship to The Port Hills. *Somehow those hills are connected to my soul…you know just as I began to think about it a lot more, um [I realise] how bloody important it was.* Jane also connects a sacred quality to her childhood love of place, although it is a more impersonal transcendent sense of the sacred than Mick’s. However, it is perhaps in the metaphor of the parent that Mick expresses most powerfully his love of place. *In a sense that landscape did give birth to me…It was at some level a parental figure but it wasn’t at an interpersonal level.*

Combining the sacred and the metaphor of the parent who provides food, *there is a sense of like the soul’s being nurtured.* Mick makes several references to the idea of being nurtured, as does Jane. Phillip speaks of *emotional nurturance* and *being nourished,* while both Mick and Annie speak of *absorbing something.* In a slightly different parental metaphor, Mick, Jane and Phillip all talk of being *held* by their childhood places. Jane is most explicit about this. *I guess what I love about the treehouse and the willow tree…[is the sense of] being held in such a way that you are not consumed or suffocated but held gently and lightly in a way so that you’ve still got room to move and to breathe and um to be in your own way. But nonetheless there’s a kind of nurturing, nourishing space around you.* Throughout the interview Mick repeats the metaphor of the parent many times. The Hills become a vast geographic parent who gives psychological birth to Mick, who holds and nurtures and ultimately soothes the torment of a boy who feels responsible for the death of his beloved brother. The sense of being psychologically nurtured, affirmed and *filled up* by the Christmas Hills farm is strongly, if indirectly expressed in Bluey’s account.
Rather than talking just about their own loving feelings towards a place, Phillip, Bluey, Mick and Jane each speak of being nurtured or nourished by place. *I’m always going to be, I suppose nourished by [this place].* Each speaks in terms of a mutual loving relationship in which an active role is attributed to place. Mick says *There’s some sense of reciprocal relationship going on…[and] there’s something about it producing a loving space in me.* And Jane: *It’s a space of unconditional love.* What is being described here? Phillip, Jane, Bluey and Mick push the limits of language and culture. Our language offers them very blunt tools to articulate their experience. Casting around for the appropriate words, they resort to metaphor, but the result is language that would be widely construed as anthropomorphic in modern Western, scientific culture. Interestingly, Phillip, Jane and Mick, in trying to articulate subtle and elusive experience, all use very similar words. Bluey avoids metaphor and yet his words have a very similar ring to those of Jane and Mick. Reframing their experience in a more scientific language, all four seem to be describing the experience of receiving of some kind of psychological benefit, a sense of wellbeing, as a result of their engagement with place. And at the heart of their experience is a sense of place being much more than passive setting. All four describe a clear sense of something being done to them, of place having not just agency, but beneficent agency. How does this happen? If the reported experience of these four people, a majority of respondents in this study is to be given credence, it raises the scientific question: what are the mechanics, the processes that give rise to this experience?

By contrast with these feelings of connection with childhood place, in a long interview Annie has very little to say about her sense of emotional attachment to ‘Wandara’, her childhood farm. ‘Wandara’ does not have a strong presence in her interview, and more than once she remarks on how disconnected from that farm she now feels. It would be easy to dismiss Annie’s childhood place attachment as of little importance, were it not for her recollection of the intense grief she suffered at the loss of half the family farm. *Sort of like losing a limb. You know, I mean something vital had gone.* A grief response of this intensity indicates that Annie was once deeply emotionally connected to her childhood farm. It is only during the interview that Annie recognises she held very different attitudes to the two parts of the farm. The distant hilly part was an exciting, *wonderful,*
adventurous experience, and its loss was devastating. Compared to this the windswept flats were mundane and easily left behind. For most respondents love of childhood place remains strong in the adult present, but for Annie love of her childhood farm is not experienced as an adult, only remembered as something she once felt a long time ago. Nonetheless, it was once a very strong connection. I was intensely engaged in the love I had for that farm. She has moved on. More than that of any of the other respondents, Annie’s sense of connection to childhood place has transformed into a deep attachment to the place where she lives as an adult. Her strong emotional connection to ‘Bohara’ is manifest in the latter part of the interview, and she compares her attachment to adult place favourably with that of her sister, who still grieves the loss of childhood place.

Neal’s love of place is somewhat obscure. Unlike other participants, he does not refer to the immediate outdoor environments of his childhood home. Instead, his childhood place memories that emerge in the interview focus on far-away places – Uluru, North Avoca Beach, and the twilight landscape along the Hume Highway past Goulburn. His sense of place is very visual. As he speaks, mental images of the sculptural vistas he describes arise freely. However, his descriptions are marked by a perplexing distance, both literal and emotional. His places are landscapes viewed from on high. Only when the desert sand runs through his hands does Neal convey a sense of intimate immersion in place. It is only towards the end of the interview that the focus of Neal’s childhood place attachment becomes clear. The place which Neal recalls with such fondness, the place he loved as a child, was his bedroom. It was here that he felt comfortable, safe and free to explore far distant places through imagination.

5.2 Grief

It is perhaps in the feelings of grief expressed by respondents that the emotional connections to place are most explicitly reflected. Some form of grief attached to loss of place is nearly universal amongst respondents, although the intensity varies considerably. Grief over loss of place often overlaps grief felt over other losses. Although there is no overt expression, Mick’s grief for a lost brother is interwoven with remembrance of The Port Hills and more generally New Zealand. To remember his childhood in The Port Hills in distant New Zealand is to remember Kieran. Jane’s grief over the hewn-down willow
tree is quite simply heart-breaking and very present in the interview room. Tears fill her eyes. Her voice falters. A solitary sob shakes her shoulders, clearly expressing the pain of losing her beloved willow, as though in memory, the tree stands for so much more than just itself. Jane’s tears were not only over the loss of the tree, but also over the loss of her brother, her dog, and loss of her special, cosy place inside the tree with its beautiful Australian light and its magical life-force. The tree also stands for a joyous, carefree childhood that once lost, could never be regained. By contrast, Annie’s grief at the loss of ‘Wandara’ is recalled as intense, but not relived in the present. Well not quite. Momentarily she stumbles on her words, as though a grief, supposedly dead, can still catch her unawares. But she recovers, and there is a sense of her having left the childhood farm behind and having moved on to a new life with a satisfying, adult place attachment.

While Phillip’s grief is present in the interview, he is perplexed by it, and unable to articulate its origins. As much as his grief is for the loss of place, Phillip, like Jane, appears to be grieving the passing of his childhood, an idyllic state of unfettered play and delight in a physical environment in which he felt so secure. Along with joy and love, grief is at the heart of his remembrance of place, and yet he is surprised and a little embarrassed by his tears, and struggles to explain them even to himself. I’m really conscious of feeling weepy and…I don’t know why, I mean it’s not a particularly sad story. While the place-related grief appears to be quite familiar to Mick, it appears to take Phillip and Jane by surprise. I’ve always had those memories, but not with so much feeling. It’s like they’re in full colour rather than black and white.

5.3 Pleasure

Parallel to the remembrance of grief-imbued place memories is a tendency for participants to focus their accounts around childhood place experiences that gave them pleasure. In fact, pleasure is the most ubiquitous felt quality to emerge from the interviews. Sometimes place-pleasure could be quite disguised. Most often, it is associated with play, which comes across as an inherently pleasurable activity. For many participants, childhood place experiences were just too much fun, and there is a joy, a reliving of the pleasure, in the act of recounting these experiences. The pleasure associated with place appears in many different guises, so much so that I have found it
necessary to differentiate six sub-categories of pleasure. These categories are not always clear-cut, and in the remembrances, these sub-types of pleasure often blend.

a. Play
Before she speaks of her tea party with her friend in the willow, the smile on Jane’s face communicates her pleasure associated with this memory. With her eyes closed, the communication is unintended, the pleasure is essentially private until she speaks. Then her assumption of the ‘posh’ accent is a mark of her re-entry into the spirit of playfulness of the original scene. The pleasure Jane expresses as she recalls the tea party is typical of the way play is recalled by participants. Play is not only fun for kids, adults also enjoy remembering play. In the interviews play is always warmly remembered, notwithstanding the wide array of play experiences described in the interviews. The variety of play is huge. Jim’s elaborate war games and other destructive activities contrast both with the constructiveness of Bluey’s house building and the care manifest in Annie’s animal orphanage. In most of the interviews play is a social activity, shared with friends or siblings. Possibly due to the focus of the interviews on place, these play companions, other than Mick’s brother Kieran and (briefly) Linda, have an indistinct presence. But it is a presence nonetheless, except for the account of Bluey, whose play was clearly a solitary activity.

Other variations in play are apparent. Jane’s play is limited to a few sites close to home. Mick, Bluey, Jim, Annie and Phillip range over a far more expansive play territory. Phillip in particular ranges over a wonderfully diverse terrain of physical environments, activities and imagination. His environments include farmlands, gardens, forest, factory grounds, wastelands, waterways and backyards. His activities include swimming, fantasy ‘espionage’ and pirate games, building rafts, sneaking into factories, backyards and chapels, his own farming and of course ‘Dares’. His childhood place presents as particularly rich and diverse. He stands in marked contrast to Neal, from whose account mention of play is virtually absent.

There is also a variation along gender lines. Bluey and Mick both describe a blatant delight in physical play, pushing energetic young bodies to the limit, only to have their
exuberance firmly contained by a resilient environment. Mick’s description of bouncing on the ‘boing-boing’ grass exudes boyish vitality and playfulness. In their preferred places, boys can be as ‘silly’ as they like without offending or harming anyone. It is easy to picture them, having lost their balance, rolling about, giggling uncontrollably. And Bluey’s running, leaping and then flying down the hill has a very similar, if slightly less overwrought quality. No other accounts capture the pleasure of physical play so vividly, although it is often implied in the activities described. Jim’s bush-bashing bicycle exploits come to mind. This energetic physicality appears to be part of a particularly boyish way of being in place. This is the pleasure of physical exertion fuelled by excitement and playful aggression, as young boys immersed in heroic fantasies throw their bodies carelessly around, to have them safely contained by a bigger, stronger and gentler physical world. Neither of the women expresses such an energetic quality of pleasurable physical engagement with place.

b. Animal Relationships
Another gendered sense of childhood place emerging from the interviews is the compassionate identification with animals articulated by Annie and Jane. As children, both showed a connection with and compassion for the suffering of animals not reflected in the male accounts. Annie, in particular, describes an acute awareness of animals – able to detect a sick sheep from the far side of a paddock, rescuing various animals, including a fox, to care for them as pets and her deep sense of connection with horses. So strong is this connection that the first place memory to emerge after her relaxation exercise is an image of herself located on the back of a horse. Her request to her father that the family buy their meat from a shop instead of killing their farm animals, is one of the most touching moments in her interview. Love of her idolised father up against love for her precious pets, it is a tough moment for a little girl. Jane’s animal-related tough moment is far more drawn out. In her small family, her dog Lucy was an important companion to the little girl. The anecdote of Lucy standing guard over the lost, sleeping Jane suggests that Lucy also placed great value on their relationship. Clearly the separation from Lucy was a major contributor to Jane’s depression in England. Aside from Lucy, Jane’s identification with lifeforms is more generalised, more numenous. *The tree is just full of life. And humming with it... the tree itself is just humming.* With the exception of Phillip,
the men mention no childhood emotional connection with animals. And Phillip’s dealings with animals have a strongly utilitarian quality.

c. Sensory Pleasure
A different quality of pleasure is present in Mick’s evocations of childhood sensory perception of place. With his sweep of attention from the minutiae of immediate sensory detail through to the vast, magnificent vista, Mick’s account is redolent with joyous appreciation of all of the senses. Each of the participants describes moments of sensory pleasure. In spite of working hard to keep such feelings in check, Jim’s description of the cherry orchard drips with the pleasure of the senses. But surely it must be Jane who most vividly articulates a sense of delight in the sensory apprehension of childhood place when she exclaims this radiant azure Australian sky. I just absolutely love it, it just fills me with the most buoyant sense of joy, like I could just leap into the air... In Jane’s account, it is apparent that her delight in the sensory apprehension of childhood place afforded great pleasure. Much of this delight is conveyed in her warm vocal tone and bright smile. But in the passage just cited, sensory delight is also given powerful expression through kinesthetic metaphor. Perhaps this ‘leap of imagination’ points to a slightly different nuance of sensory pleasure, one that gives Jane’s account such power, and that is her propensity to imbue sensuous apprehension with imagination. So the softness, but there’s also that quality of light I’m recalling also has something luminous about it in which everything seems somewhat magical and enchanted, and charmed. You know as if you know a fairy might appear any moment. (Laughs) A wood ?? a branch. Yes, I think it’s those things. It’s a softness and it’s also this kind of luminous sense [of] something a bit magical. This combination of the sensuous and the imaginative is very powerful.

Bluey and Neal speak of a different, almost-adult aesthetic pleasure in the sensory apprehension of place. Focusing on the visual realm, both describe a similar pleasurable appreciation of three-dimensional, sculptural sense of place. As Neal speaks, vast flat desert landscapes with distant prominences and an overarching dome of azure blue stretch away in imagination. He makes it easy to view his landscapes, but not enter them. He conveys greatest aesthetic pleasure when standing on high ground looking out over wide expanses – from Uluru, or a coastal headland. Like Jane’s, his sensual appreciation
is enhanced with imagination. His descriptions of height, distance and three dimensional sky convey a powerful sense of the aerial world of a bird on the wing, of wonder and of the pleasure in possibility and potential. When Bluey speaks of his *intrigue of form*, his love of the solid, material world and of visual composition, focusing on discreet objects – rocks, car bodies, a set of harrows, there is a clear sense that this was a pleasing and satisfying engagement with place for the young boy. Away from the visual domain, Mick and Jane describe a pleasant tactile-kinesthetic sense of being firmly held, almost wrapped, snug and cosy in natural *nooks* and *beds*. It is a sensation that engenders a deep-felt sense of safety, security and warmth.

d. Mastery
Possibly the most understated pleasure of childhood place expressed in the interviews is the satisfaction derived from the child’s emerging sense of mastery over the external world. The puffed-out little chest, and head held high, signifying a child’s sense of accomplishment as they realise, ‘I can do this! I am good at this!’ This particular pleasure is most often evident in the farm children, and it occurs frequently. Both Annie and Jim express evident pride in how skilled they were at various farm tasks, and for both, this pride appears linked to the pleasure of receiving their fathers’ approval. Phillip’s pride in his backyard farm is more autonomous. But there is no mistaking it as he describes his mixed farm with more than a hint of pride in his voice and a broad smile on his face. Bluey’s pride in his house frame moves him to invite his sister to come and have a look – the one time he mentions bringing anyone into his solitary childhood place. His challenge to himself to jump further and further sees him *literally flying*, and achieving the sense of mastery he could never find at school. And Mick too wears a proud smile as he points out it was his ability to put his *head down and sweat it out* to meet the challenge of those enormous Port Hills that gave him his adult *get-up and go*. Neal conveys pleasure in a very different mastery of place – mastery through imagination. With his ambition to become a writer present from an early age, Neal’s imaginative forays into the environment appear to have been a source of pleasure. The remembering adults convey this pleasure with a particular more resonant, confidant vocal tone, often accompanied by a smile.
e. Adventure

One of the most fondly recalled qualities of place was the sense of adventure afforded by certain outdoor environments and activities. Adventure usually means a combination of excitement, risk taking and a certain level of drama. For Jim, the dramatic blowing up tree-stumps was high adventure. The obvious glee that Jim expresses at the destruction of trees and killing of parrots is not echoed by other participants. However, the sheer strength of positive affect associated with these memories makes them difficult to overlook. For some, the illicit nature of certain activities added a particular frisson. Phillip’s baiting of grumpy old men, his trespassing into factories, not to mention his game of Dares with Linda come to mind here. Phillip also links his adventurous feelings to the ‘wild’ character of many of the places in which he played. By this he means the absence of adult order and control in wastelands. These unkempt, unmanaged places encouraged a sense of adventure in the play, as though the neglect signified a freedom from adult interference for both nature and child.

Neal’s most unequivocally positive recollection of place is his fishing adventure when he caught a million Taylor out on the lake. This was terrific and I caught the biggest. And I remember being equally scared, [and] thrilled by...sailing and...capsizing and thinking I was going to die and then thinking oh, I’m not dying, everything seems to be OK. This memory exudes a breathless, childlike excitement that is in marked contrast to the thoughtful, measured cadence that characterises most of his interview. There is something about the excitement, drama and recklessness of adventure that is deeply appealing to children. For Annie an important part of the appeal of the favoured, hilly part of ‘Wandara’ was that it was a wonderful adventurous experience to be over there so far from home. For some children imagination is integral to this sense of adventure. Phillip imagined espionage events as he successfully evaded the prowling nurse guards of Gladesville Hospital. Adventure often involves a tolerable level of anxiety. In small doses, fear can be stimulating and enjoyable rather than overwhelming, and imagination can introduce it in manageable amounts under the child’s control. For other children, imagination was not usually necessary. The adventure was all contained in the activity, no fantasy required.
f. Freedom

Closely aligned with, but distinct from adventure, is the quality of freedom. Phillip, Jim, Annie, Jane, Bluey and Mick all speak of the pleasure resulting from a sense of childhood freedom. A sense of freedom is implied in Jane’s words as she describes a joyous, open sensibility associated with the beach. Providing a background quality to so much of the child’s experience of place, it is a subtle, yet more pervasive form of pleasure than adventure. Time and again respondents stress the importance of this sense of freedom to their childhood experience of place. They are talking about the ability to act with autonomy, free from adult oversight and interference. This autonomy of movement and activity, the freedom to go where you want to and do what you please gives the days of childhood a vast, open feel, perhaps occasionally recaptured by grown-ups on holidays. For Bluey this freedom seems to have been central to the restorative experience of the farm, the complete antithesis of the oppressive, controlling environment of the school. Freedom to simply be himself, with no demands. Freedom to move…Yep and no-one around so…just space. I’d put that in big capital letters. And freedom [to be] totally present in the present… a place to be me and I didn’t feel that in my school. Mick is saying something very similar when he says The Port Hills were a place in which I can be myself and express myself and explore. Perhaps the pleasure of this autonomy, this ‘freedom to be me’, free from adult agendas is a part of the psychological nourishment of place that both Mick and Bluey describe in their accounts.

Whether it be sensory delight, the fun of play-in-place, the gratification of mastering one’s body and the tasks of adulthood, the pleasure derived from imaginary adventures or relationships with animals, or some combination of these, it is apparent that there are so many ways for a child to enjoy place. It seems that, in the absence of major trauma, a child’s experience of place is inherently pleasurable. The undeniable impression emerging from the interviews is that childhood place was fun. Such pleasure, enjoyed on a daily or frequent basis through the years of childhood constitutes an enormous wealth of positive place experiences. It is also enjoyable for the remembering adult to recall these childhood pleasures-of-place. This childhood experience of place as pleasurable is one of the reasons why the adult process of remembering place can be so gratifying. In remembering, participants are able to relive some of the pleasures of place that they
experienced as children. These recalled pleasures of place appear to give rise to a very positive attribution towards childhood place, and the feelings of love of place expressed by so many participants. Perhaps all this pleasure-in-place is the experiential bedrock on which the edifice of adult attachment to place is built. However, for many of the participants, this pleasure stands alongside the feelings of loss and grief discussed above, endowing the overall process of remembering childhood place with a poignant, bitter-sweet quality.

5.4 Imagination

One of the defining qualities of childhood place common to many of the accounts is the child’s imaginative engagement with place. The naïve capacity to instill the material world with endless possibilities has to be one of the most endearing qualities of childhood place. When Phillip speaks of empty factories, little chapels in the woods, the forests of giant bamboo, the phenomenally beautiful grounds of Gladesville and those strange wild gardens that had grown up around the harbour, he is talking not only of sensuous place but also of place where you could go into a huge fantasy. You could be anywhere in the world, you could imagine yourself a pirate or you could play war games or any adventurous sense of a story could be easily conjured up from these places and they always involved the outdoors. The sensuous world becomes more than just backdrop. It is an active participant in the child’s world of fantasy play. Similar imaginative fantasy appears to a greater or lesser extent to have embellished the play of most respondents. Jim describes battles. Jane’s combining of the sensuous and the imaginary delivers a beautifully vivid numinous sense of magical fairyland. In fact, the sensuous characteristics and imaginary possibilities of place are intrinsic to much of the play described by participants.

While Bluey has a strong appreciation of the sensuous, he also brings an unusual quality to his play when he imaginatively enters the land around him. For a child, his imagination shows a remarkably pragmatic grounding in material reality. Rather than hunting dragons or pirates, he goes hunting for food. In order to go hunting for food, he constructs spears from fenceposts. In order to build a house, Bluey selects and harvests hardwood eucalypt poles and erects upright posts and a crossbeam. These childhood place fantasies have a
strong basis in reality, and when he does construct a house as an adult, it is on one of the sites he had chosen as a child. Like Bluey, Neal demonstrates a keen appreciation of the visual aesthetics of place, but when he enters the landscape imaginatively, he takes us far from Bluey’s pragmatics of physical survival. His is a vigorous imagination. Two very different backyards, beaches, deserts, rolling hills in the Southern Highlands, Neal gives them all a very strong visual presence, and moves between these scenes with great fluidity. But some of these childhood memories are also imbued with a disturbing emotional, at times gothic, sensibility. In a bored child’s idle fancy he wonders what it might be like to live in a distant farmhouse, *I can imagine inhabiting... [that]house, dusk, falling dark, sense of isolation... a sort of feeling about well where do I get the food? What would happen if I fell over and hurt myself? ...What does it mean to live in isolation from neighbours?...Like who would my friends have been?...and there’s a very profound sense of loneliness.* Then leaving the distant scenery altogether, Neal takes us to a tree somewhere with a couple of articles of a child’s, children’s clothing hanging on a branch. Presumably there was a grave being dug up there...and a sense of such profound abandonment, we are left feeling that car-bound-kid boredom was infinitely preferable. This sort of childhood emotional imagination was unique among participants and has a somewhat un-childlike feel. However, the way in which Neal blends memory and imagination, and his rapid shifting back and forth between scenes brings a more playful, childlike quality to the interview. Near the end of the interview, he describes how his powerful imagination was developed in his one true childhood place, his bedroom, and was honed on books of faraway and imaginary places.

5.5 Familiarity

While most participants refer to the excitement of exploration and discovery in childhood place, more emphasis is attributed to the childhood sense of familiarity with place in the interviews. Mick, Bluey, Annie, Phillip and Jim all stress that familiarity with the physical features was absolutely central to childhood experience of place. As Mick puts it, *The experience is, it’s like this tussock’s familiar, the sound’s familiar, the bird life’s familiar, the tracks are familiar, all the different brows, the contours and textures are familiar...*Several times Phillip emphasises the ‘ordinariness’ of his childhood environment, as though to suggest that it is this very ordinariness that somehow gives this...
place its drawing power in memory. The pungent, myrtaceous scent particular to the Sydney Basin flora was so ordinary, so ubiquitous and so taken for granted by Phillip that he was not even aware it was part of his childhood world, until brought to his senses in a London glasshouse. But once re-encountered so far out of context, poong! its familiarity burst into consciousness. And he is quite clear – it was this very familiarity that had the power to reach out half way around the planet and lead him back to Sydney. Attachment emerges from the familiarity of this sensuous childhood world. As with the familiar scent of a mother’s skin, the frequent repetition of sensuous place intimacy establishes love and connection.

Implied in this familiarity, but never stated, is a notion of patterning through repeated experiences of the same place. Day after day these children’s paths traversed the same territory, layering experience, building an extensive knowledge of the details of place. For the farming children, Jane and Jim, much of this movement was purposeful, with the intended completion of particular tasks directing the child’s movements. For Mick, getting up The Port Hills required a strong sense of purpose, a quality he has retained into adulthood. But once up the hill, his movements and his account lose that tight focus. Phillip (except with respect to his backyard farm) also describes a wide ranging set of movements over an extensive area of Gladesville; ranging over the 100 acre Gladesville Hospital grounds, the seminary chapels in the woods and Tarban Creek, not to mention illicit excursions into the factories lining Parramatta River, and suburban backyards. Phillip’s apparently random movements would have been directed largely by the dictates of play. Such a pattern of extensive repeated criss-crossing of the landscape gradually builds a strong sense of familiarity.

Bluey gives this apparently purposeless movement a name – wandering. And it is he who offers the greatest insight into its nature. Um, so at some points I’d just be really aware of the greater environment and not really pinpoint anything. I’d just sort of wander, and then there’d be other points where I’d be literally observing every rock or old bit of car body or you know like anything that was sort of intriguing me…I’d lose the hours. Go wandering … I’d basically pretend um, um I was hunting for food…I had little areas that were, little nooks that no-one else would really bother to go into.
Wandering, with its elements of play, fantasy, lack of focus or direction and physical-sensory engagement with the natural world appears to be the bodily manifestation of the mental stream-of-consciousness discussed in Chapter 3. The child demonstrates an unpredictable flow of movement, in which features of the environment are engaged and discarded on apparent whim as they appeal to curiosity, the senses, or playful fantasy. It is a form of engagement with place much less frequently seen in adulthood, where an overriding goal-orientation directs most physical activity. For adults, the body’s movements are usually organised around the achievement of some, often distant, outcome. However, for all its immediacy, a child’s wandering can have an unconscious purpose. In retrospect, Bluey recognises that, while wandering served no apparent practical purpose, he is emphatic that it played an important psychological function of self-affirmation and emotional regulation. He believes that his private school education would have left him psychologically damaged were it not for the opportunity for self-repair that the farm provided. For Bluey, wandering is more than a physical activity. It is a state of mind.

Whether it be the practical requirements of farm management, the spatial requirements of play, or the self-regulation needs of a developing mind, childhood experience usually includes an extensive element of repeated movement throughout place, from which emerges a deep familiarity and sense of connection with place. Although we cannot observe the movements, reports describe them as being neither wholly random nor wholly organised. Certain favourite places are visited more often and certain paths used more frequently. Bluey even makes his own path as a result of repeated journeys to his special place. But over the days, weeks and seasons of a childhood, the repeated journeys, layered one over the last, produce an intricate patternless pattern of childhood place. This is not a mental map of mere locations, but an intricate landscape of textures, forms, colours, shades of shadow and light, sounds, feeling tones, stories and memories, that is neither wholly psychological nor wholly material. It is a mental representation that stays with the individual long after they have left both place and childhood behind, recalled in dream or in wakefulness. Detail and meaning vary from person to person, but the sense of
familiarity and the consequent identification with place appears to be remarkably common across participants.

5.6 Security

Feelings of safety and security are also often part of the emotional attachment to place. Mick, Jane and Phillip make explicit statements of having felt safe as children. For Phillip, this means a sense of personal safety. He distinguishes between a sense of anxiety that is part of the excitement that comes from risk taking, and a deeper sense of anxiety arising from a sense of personal threat or danger, which he says he did not experience. *I never, ever felt there was any danger where I played. I never ever felt that the river, that falling into the river was dangerous, or sneaking into a place was dangerous, it was always exciting. But I never had any fears.* Of course, children are not always the best judges of risk and the sense of security can be quite illusory, as Mick was to discover so tragically.

But a sense of security may not only be about personal safety. When Mick says *being on the vine and snuggled into it, and feeling very contained and secure and comfy in it,* he appears to be talking about something more global than just personal safety. This feeling is also about the resilience of the relationship with place, the trust that place is always *out the backdoor,* available to meet the child’s emotional needs. A child’s life experience amounts to a few short years of the most dynamic period of change in the human lifecycle. Compared to this subjective experience, place can seem stable, unchanging, secure. And if the social world of the child is unpredictable or unreliable, place can appear solid, secure and safe, something to be relied upon. However, such feelings are implicit rather than explicit, and children’s sense of security of place often has a taken-for-granted quality that is easily overlooked.

It is only when Annie describes how her sense of trust in place was completely betrayed are we given a sense of just how deep such feelings run. *The world was never that solid [again]...Sort of like losing a limb. You know, I mean something vital had gone.* The trauma experienced when this 12 year old girl lost her beloved hilly part of the farm was so devastating that her attachment to Wandara was completely severed. The security of
her attachment had been a given. Suddenly, what was taken for granted was gone, the world was never so solid again, and Annie would never reconnect with the farm she had loved so intently as a child. By contrast, Neal nowhere expresses a sense of security with respect to outdoor places. On the contrary, many of his memories are tinged with a vague but menacing fear. Could this childhood absence of felt security outdoors be the basis of the emotional distancing and lack of immersion that characterises Neal’s account? It is only near the end of the interview, when he recalls his childhood bedroom, that memory exudes a deep sense of security and affection for place.

5.7 Emotional Connection

During the interviews, particularly in the period immediately after the relaxation exercise, some respondents enter into subjective states deeply connected with their childhood experiences of place. They appear to be so deeply immersed in remembered experience that it becomes momentarily more real than their present time surroundings. This sense of deep immersion in childhood memory gives some of the accounts enormous power and authenticity. At such moments, sensory details are recalled with great clarity and vividness, and the emotional intensity expressed by participants is striking. It is an intensity absent from other times when a more adult cognitive and reflective sensibility is evident. Often this emotional intensity is apparent in non-verbal expressions such as gesture, facial expression, and vocal tone, but not reflected in the text of interviews. Jane and Mick are particularly expressive with gesture and facial expression. Phillip and Jane are moved to tears as they speak of their beloved childhood places, and both appear surprised to be so moved. Jane suggests that while the memories are familiar, the feelings are not. I’ve always had those memories, but not with so much feeling. It’s like they’re in full colour rather than black and white. It seems important, like important stuff I didn’t know, but did.... I want to think about it some more, hold on to it somehow. ‘What, the feeling?’ I query. The feeling and the memories together. The memories have always been there. It is the depth of feeling that gives these memories vitality and presence. Presence in the sense that they overwhelm consciousness, pushing awareness of present time surroundings far into the background. Presence in the sense that the memories are given importance. I have called this state ‘deep remembrance’.
Not all participants demonstrate the same capacity for deep remembrance. Although they share a similar appreciation of the sculptural qualities of place, Bluey’s recall of detail and sense of immersion is in marked contrast to Neal’s distanced overview. It is interesting to compare Annie’s and Jane’s accounts of their remembered childhood grief over loss of place. Annie recalls the experience of losing a significant part of ‘Wandara’ as being shattering. But it is pain recalled, not relived. It is now a distant memory. When Jane remembers the loss of the willow tree, she re-enters the experience deeply. She feels the same way she did at seven. Her eyes brim with tears, her voice falters, a sob escapes. Her tears are those of a seven year old. Momentarily, her world is that of a seven year old. At this point, she is reliving the loss, and psychologically, there is a child present in the room. But the feelings do not stay fixed, and as she then speaks of the tea party with her friend in the luminous space inside the tree in which everything seems enchanted and charmed, Jane’s face, itself becomes luminous, radiant with a joyous smile. She has re-entered memory to a point where it is momentarily more real to her than the apartment in which we sit.

She does not sustain this intensity of remembrance but shifts from grief and joy to a more rational, distanced mental state in which she talks about the memory rather than from it. Childhood experience shifts from being a subjective state to being the object of a more adult reflective awareness. This movement between the two states is subtle and fluid, and Jane returns to the state of ‘deep remembrance’ throughout the interview. From the more ‘adult’ reflective, mundane state, she attributes great significance to this deep remembrance. While it is not easy to access such deeply felt remembrance, it is this emotional depth that makes the memory so important. *I have a sense that all of that is, is embodied, is in every cell in my body in a sense, and it’s just my conscious mind lagging a bit there, and unable to get the full picture. But actually it’s carried with me in my body. I suppose unconsciously in that sense it’s you know, all part of who I am beyond what I can remember or articulate.* Jane is locating memory as being held in the body, well out of normal awareness, yet shaping identity.

Phillip also has a passage of deep remembrance as he relives strong feelings of eroticism and vulnerability from a slightly older age. *I can picture her particularly white skin and*
um that’s all… I can feel now still the incredible youthful arousal of this time… Sort of looking and looking away, and looking and looking away, and looking, and not knowing quite where to put your own modesty, and how to sort of account for all of your own exposed being too. Recall of emotional detail is both intense and nuanced. He does not remain in this state of deep vulnerability for long, but also moves to a more distanced adult perspective to draw meaning from the experience. We were very, were just on the cusp of pubescence, so there was no, we were still babies, like little children. He suggests that he can re-enter, almost at will, the emotional experience by visiting the place now as an adult. If I go down[there]and just turn my head slightly and catch a glimpse of the dam that whole mystery is evoked… the whole schemozzle of it. Fantastic feeling. When, with eyes closed, Mick speaks in a low voice of the intimate moment, snuggled into the ‘boing-boing grass’ with Kieran, all nice and warm and cosy, quietly looking out over the landscape laid out below, feeling a great sense of solitude and of being connected to my brother and everything else seems a long way away, he, in fact, looks and sounds a long way away. He is deeply immersed in childhood experience.

Bluey’s most deeply emotionally connected memory is grounded in a state of deep calm and a sense of aliveness. I can see that I’ve got a view of the huge part of the property… And there’s the wind, wind’s blowing in the tree… I’m taking in the openness… I can see for miles. So it’s definitely calm I’m feeling… very alive. But at ease… I can’t see another soul. Just… just land. He takes his time in conveying the memory. There is a contemplative feel about the act of remembrance. Detail emerges slowly, hesitantly, as though the mere act of verbalising requires an effort that pulls him away from full immersion in memory. And Bluey appears reluctant to allow even this minor distance to come between himself and an experience that even in adulthood still resonates with exquisite beauty and a sense of psychological nurturance verging on spiritual. Instead, he demonstrates a capacity to remain fully immersed in memory for a sustained period.

Towards the end of the interview, he speaks again of this open expansive emotional state he experienced after the relaxation. No, there was no reflection you know. There was just beingness… I’m very aware of me being there looking and listening… I’ve just been doing. When I suggest that he is completely absorbed in his engagement with place, Bluey
qualifies this descriptor. Completely absorbed? That could be a hard… it sounds a harder word than I often felt I think. It was more, I was absorbed but… There was a lot of space in that absorbedness. It wasn't closed absorbed. He is differentiating between that outcome-oriented, narrow, sustained and intensely focused, state of mental concentration that is such a valued aspect of adult psychology on the one hand and on the other hand the meandering, free-flowing, playful state of reverie characteristic of so much childhood activity. Elsewhere, Bluey’s emphatic gestures stress that it is just doing. Not something useful, for a purpose. And he is not only describing a childhood state. He is also referring to the adult immersion in the act of remembrance he experienced after the relaxation exercise.

Earlier Bluey had provided a description of childhood immersion in place. I reckon I spent a lot of time not even thinking. Just in my… (Pause)…creating fantasy. And there’d be times of just wonder, you know like looking, exploring…I’d just be really aware of the greater environment and not really pinpoint anything. I’d just sort of wander. And then there’d be other points where I’d be literally observing every rock or old bit of car body or you know like anything that was sort of intriguing me. Rocks, I just loved rocks, I was always fascinated by rocks. I wonder if his capacity for sustained deep immersion might not here be offering us with the nearest we can come to a description of the child’s common subjective experience of place. There is something quite elusive here, something greater than just the adult’s difficulty of recapturing the child’s state of mind. There is something slippery about the state itself.

What is this elusive state? Most respondents emphasised the importance of freedom to wander through childhood place, to move physically as they pleased. Perhaps Bluey’s meandering description is pointing to the psychological equivalent of the activity of wandering – the state of reverie. Reverie is a mindset that parallels the observable behaviour of wandering; an openness to place, to modes of sensory apprehension, along with the freedom to follow whatever train of thought is most captivating, only to let it go as something else more fascinating comes into awareness, whether that be sensory awareness or fantasy. Like child’s play, the focus is on process, not outcome, whereas adult forms of play and creativity tend to be outcome oriented. A child’s reverie might
also include an openness to moving in and out of brief emotional states in a similar manner to that which Mick described. Earlier, Bluey had described his emotional state as calm along with a sense of excitement and aliveness. Here a fluid movement into curiosity and pleasure can also be recognised. Bluey’s distinction between tightly focused absorption and spacious reverie may well be an important difference between adult and child psychology.

Perhaps it is a goal-oriented-adult disdain for this state of unfocused reverie that makes the child’s subjective experience so elusive to memory. Or perhaps the mental state in which memory presents to consciousness is not compatible with the mental state necessary to communicate that experience. There does seem to be a marked disjunction when both Jane and Phillip move out of this state of deep remembrance back to the more mundane state they find necessary to communicate the meaning of the experience. Jane offers adult rationalisations for the destruction of her beloved willow, and Phillip offers an art historian’s analysis of his first erotic experience. Bluey makes the transition more easily, but far more slowly. His pauses are long and his words are few, as though each word necessary to tell his story takes him further from the immediacy of the childhood place he has just experienced. All point to a level of incompatibility between language and the experience of deep remembrance.

5.8 Importance of Childhood Place

In selecting interview candidates, I attempted to follow a classical phenomenological approach and choose people best able to articulate a strong sense of place attachment. However, there is a notable variation across the participants’ accounts. Not all participants express a strong sense of childhood place attachment, and this was not a reflection of the participants’ ability to express themselves. It is quite apparent that while some of the respondents attribute enormous significance to their memories of childhood place, others do not see remembrance of childhood place as an important part of their adult identity. In any further research a more useful criterion for candidate selection would be the value that participants attribute to their childhood experience of place rather than just place. Neal has no warm memories of familiar outdoor places informing who he is as an adult, and Jim works hard to minimise the value of his memories of childhood
place. At the other end of the spectrum, the most dramatic expression of the importance of place is the wake-up call to place identity that Phillip experienced on encountering the smell of the Sydney flora in the glasshouse at Kew Gardens. The intensity of this experience along with the particularity of the smell was enough not only to identify where home was, but also to send him packing back home.

Such dramatic experiences of the importance of childhood place are rare. More often the feeling of place identity – a recognition of the influence of childhood place over adult identity, is obscure. The feelings may run deep, but they are often diffuse, difficult to pinpoint and to articulate. Most participants struggled at times to put words to their feelings, and to explain why childhood place should be so important. Our language doesn’t help here either. We are unused to having this type of discussion, and respondents experience difficulty putting words to their feelings. Several times words fail Annie, the visual artist and Bluey the builder. Phillip apologises for his lack of words more than once. Even Mick, one of the more articulate participants, notices a certain reluctance to put words to feelings that are too tender, too precious and private to communicate.

Nonetheless, most participants are emphatic – place is important. Many can identify specific influences of childhood place. Neal sees his adult identity of nature writer as being, in part, the result of his trip to Central Australia. Mick also is able to identify how the physical challenge of the Port Hills helped to develop his strong motivation, his ‘get-up-and-go’. Bluey is able to clearly explain how the family farm helped him to survive emotionally in an education environment to which he was ill suited. That property was like a saviour for me. The property gave him the place, the freedom and the encouragement to be fully himself, things he could not find at school. In this way he explains, childhood place nurtured his psychological development. Similarly, Jane attributes her career choice and her compassion for all forms of life, in part, to the influence of childhood place. It is worth noting that those participants who experience deep remembrance of place in the interview are also those who attribute a profound importance to childhood experience of place in shaping identity. Mick, Bluey, Jane and Phillip speak of the childhood experience of place shaping adult identity quite deeply in a more essential way. A number of times throughout the interview, Mick speaks of the
important role of the Port Hills in shaping his identity. *I knew that was my part of the world. It wasn’t the sense of my part of the world that I owned it. But it was shaping my identity. It was shaping who I was, who I am …There is a sense of like the soul’s being nurtured.* But no-one can say why childhood place can be so important, other than by referring to their emotional connection to place. When he tries to explain why the Port Hills are so important to his identity, Mick can only say *somehow those hills are connected to my soul. I don’t really understand how that well but somehow they are…*

This adult attribution of importance to childhood place experience is in marked contrast to childhood attitude of place having a naïve, taken-for-granted quality. Children do not reflect on their experience of place. As Phillip says, it was just *this ordinary sense of the outdoors.* Looking back, Mick tells us he was absorbing something, but was completely unaware of it at the time. For children it seems place is no different from life or family, ‘you wake up every morning, and it’s there.’ 33 Most respondents report a childhood love of place, but attributions of great importance to childhood places are experienced retrospectively from the adult perspective. Awareness of the strong sense of connection to place is something that emerges later in life, often first identified in its absence.

It is not just childhood experience of place that is seen as important. The adult process of remembrance itself has value. Phillip says *I’ve enjoyed talking it out, and I like to, well, I like to keep this story alive. I think, I think this idea of coming from a place, and recognising how much this place just means to me.* Bluey is succinct. Remembering makes him aware of how important that place was. Mick is even more emphatic, *the more I talk about it [the more] I realise how bloody important it was.* Near the end of the interview Mick compares the act of adult remembrance to a religious sacrament. Given that he, Jane and Bluey all attribute a sacred quality to their childhood experience of place, Mick’s construction of adult remembrance as sacramental is not surprising.

By contrast, those participants who don’t express a strong emotional sense of connection to childhood place are the same ones who do not enter into states of deep remembrance. After the relaxation exercise, Neal has a series of place memories, some with vivid and

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33 This is a quote from the Small Faces song ‘Happy Days Toy Town’ *Life is just a bowl of All-bran/ You wake up every morning and it’s there.*
frightening imagery. But the descriptions are all characterised by an emotional distance in the telling, as though being viewed through the wrong end of a telescope, giving some of these remembered images an unusual abstract quality. With several notable exceptions, Jim’s memories of place lack both detail and feeling. His descriptions gloss over details, and his references to feeling states are very few. Questions designed to draw out the felt qualities of experience leave Jim perplexed as often as not. His most animated, feeling rich responses tend to involve either his father or the destruction of place. He dismisses as unimportant, the one vivid, sensually rich experience he does recall. He dismisses all place memories as being pretty or fun but essentially of no value. The anomaly here is Annie, for whom childhood place is distant, having been shed, chrysalis-like for the most powerful adult place attachment described by any of the participants.

5.9 A Two-way Temporal Relationship

In a state of deep immersion, feelings are re-experienced in the adult present much as they were in childhood, and sensory impressions are experienced with extraordinary detail and vividness. The intense feeling states of deep immersion in childhood memory create more than a bridge between past and present. Past and present become synchronous, coexisting in the one moment, as though the child is present in the room. This child is a powerful presence in the majority of the interviews, and much of the analysis of this chapter has focused on the child’s experience of place – the child’s delight, the child’s play, the child’s wandering and so forth. But I have not been interviewing children. In attempting to understand the phenomenon of an adult remembering childhood place, I have at times been subject to an odd sort of confusion. Am I witness to someone talking about the adult experience of remembrance, or to the child’s experience of place? Or both?

The relationship between remembrance and the remembered is richly complex. On the one hand is the experience of the child experiencing place. On the other hand is the experience of the adult as they recall childhood place. The child’s experience of place has an immediacy usually absent from adult experience. The adult experience is characterised by reflection, where abstract cognitive processes such as analysis, interpretation and meaning-making are applied to experience. There is a multi-layered mutual, dynamic
relationship between these two poles of remembrance. The capacity of childhood place to
influence adult identity through psychosocial developmental processes has previously
been discussed. The adult role in shaping childhood experience is more subtle. The
remembering adult selects what is recalled, how it is remembered, and how meaning is
attributed. The adult chooses certain memories to be highlighted, and given weight, while
others are neglected. Annie’s new place attachment and her adult artist identity cause her
remembered childhood place attachment to be a lifeless shadow of what it once was. Her
adult attachment to ‘Bohara’ is far more vividly expressed in the interview than her
childhood experience of ‘Wandara’. Mick’s identity as an expatriate New Zealander
helps keep alive the memory of childhood place. Jim’s pragmatic farmer identity
encourages him to dismiss sensuous memory of the cherry orchard in blossom as
unimportant. The anomaly is Neal. One would expect that to the adult nature writer
memories of everyday childhood places would be a rich source of inspiration, and yet
such memories appear unavailable to him. The adult sensibility can also give rise to new
feelings, variations on the original emotional state. The ordinary, taken-for-granted
quality of childhood place can be replaced by a deeply felt love and a sense of place
important in adulthood. The smell of Sydney bush that went unnoticed in childhood can
grow to become important enough to bring the adult back from England.

Childhood developmental process shapes the adult, and adult identity shapes the way that
childhood is remembered. However, it is in the movement between the remembered and
the rememberer, the two poles of remembrance that conjunction of adult and child
occurs. This is particularly so in the context of deep immersion, where remembering
adults profoundly enter childhood mental states. Throughout the interviews, some
respondents demonstrate a fluid movement back and forth between adult and child
sensibilities. There’s some sense of reciprocal relationship [with place] going on where
I’m just absorbing something. It just feels very unconscious whatever it is but I am
absorbing um what is it, I’m absorbing something, God I’m absorbing something…It
does feel like something that is profoundly nurturing… very unconscious, but it’s deeply
nurturing, deeply rewarding and um it just, I think it’s an utter confirmation, that’s what
it feels like a deep confirmation of my existence, of my right to be… a sense of like the
soul’s being nurtured. There is a strong impression here of Mick experiencing
simultaneously the childhood sense of place, and an adult sensibility, observing, reflecting on, and drawing meaning from that childhood sense of place.

For those participants able to integrate the immediacy of deep immersion with an adult reflective sensitivity, the interview process allowed for the emergence of a third state – a kind of intersubjective field between adult and child, inclusive of both. Participants who entered this rich and dynamic state of creative interplay between subjectivities, found the interview a deeply satisfying experience, at times verging on spiritual. Mick is explicit that there is a sacramental quality to the process of remembrance that has occurred in the interview. He compares the process of remembrance in the interview with Amnesias, a Jewish spiritual practice whereby God is made present. It is this making present of the past in the presence of the mature adult reflective capacity that allows the interview to be such a satisfying experience. However, not all participants were able to achieve this state. Annie appeared to have difficulty achieving deep immersion. Jim appeared to have difficulty integrating memory and reflective awareness. He was able to deeply enter sensuous experience of childhood place, only to dismiss it as unimportant.

Bluey describes the childhood experience of wandering as creative, as the child playing with place. However, the adult experience of remembering place is also creative, as the adult plays with memory and meaning. There is a sense in some of the interviews that something deeply creative is taking place in states of deep remembrance. There is an interesting, sometimes playful creativity in the choice of memories that present for recounting immediately after the relaxation exercise. Annie is almost apologetic that her childhood place is on the back of a horse, as though this was not an acceptable notion of what a ‘place’ should be. And yet, it is a playful and completely appropriate use of the word, in that it accurately captures her childhood experience of place. Neal’s rapid pinball-like bouncing around between widely dispersed yet thematically linked places was the most playful aspect of his interview. Jane had intended to talk about other memories, but felt impelled to go with the willow tree that presented. I had the sense that Mick’s memory of Kieran, and Phillip’s memory of his first sexual experience were not the remembered places they would have consciously chosen to describe. The traces of guilt and shame touched on as they recounted these events would normally be expected to
censor such memories from discussion. But in the state of deep remembrance there they were unexpurgated, richly detailed memories layered with emotional complexity. Across the interviews I was left with a strong impression that the process by which memories are selected for recounting is largely independent of the conscious intent of participants. The language of phenomenology seems particularly apt here. As though possessing a degree of independent agency, the memories actually do present themselves to consciousness.

Also, new understandings emerge during the interviews. In his interview Mick comes to recognise, *the more I talk about it, [the more] I realise how bloody important it was.* Presaging a shift in understanding, Phillip is perplexed by his tears over what *is not an unhappy story.* With Bluey the sense is not of a wholly new understanding, but that the requirement of rendering his experience into words has clarified and sharpened his understanding of that experience. However, it is Jane who provides the greatest sense of creative reworking of childhood place experience, as she sits emotionally raw at the conclusion of the interview, *I’ve always had those memories, but not with so much feeling. It’s like they’re in full colour rather than black and white. It seems important, like important stuff I didn’t know, but did.... I want to think about it some more, hold on to it somehow.* There is an impression here of Jane having opened up something unexpected which is yet to be fully understood and integrated. There is a richness about a process that combines the insightful reflective capacity of the adult with the immediacy of childhood experience, covering a broad spectrum of emotional and sensory experience. And at its heart, there is a sense that this process has much more in common with the open-ended creativity of child’s play, than with the goal focused, structured nature of most adult activity. No wonder it appears to Jane in full colour.

This state actually encompasses more than just remembering adult and experiencing child. The childhood places themselves, given presence by virtue of the interview process, also constitute part of this intersubjective field. Irrespective of whether or not one attributes a subjectivity to places themselves, their capacity to shape subjective experience of the participants gives them a form of agency within the intersubjective field of the remembrance. Furthermore, as interviewer and witness to these remembrances, I need to include myself in the intersubjective field created. While my mental images of
participants’ childhood places may have been sometimes lacking in detail and accuracy\textsuperscript{34}, my empathic sense of the child’s experience of place was richly detailed and hopefully reasonably accurate. Also, in setting up the interviews and in my responses, I play a role in shaping the intersubjective space. My reflection of recalled emotional states allowed participants to go deeper into remembrance. Where my responses misconstrued states or meanings, participants backtracked to clarify or simply disengaged somewhat from the process. Either response resulted in a lessening of the depth of participants’ engagement with memory, a kind of shrinking of the intersubjective field. With remembering adult, experiencing child, childhood place and interviewer all present in this shared field, not only is there a two way relationship through time, but present moment, present place and self open out to reveal a complex set of relationships with past, other place and other. This complexity is given a unity by shared emotional states. As with the individual psychological self, it is the emotional state that endows a holistic structure to the intersubjective field of adult remembrance of childhood place.

The seven interviews capture a range of different qualities of adult remembrance of childhood place. The experiences of childhood place reported in the interviews are deeply influenced by the childhood family context of each of the participants. Circumstance, family context, broader cultural context and the participant’s personality and the physical characteristics of place all contribute to the complexity and uniqueness of each account of remembered childhood place. Four of the interviewees unambiguously state that their childhood experience of place has had a profound influence on their adult sense of identity. (Two of the participants go so far as to attribute a spiritual significance to their childhood place experience and the process of remembrance.) Of the remaining three participants, Neal’s childhood place attachment was to his bedroom rather than to the outdoor places I had assumed would be the attachment focus. Annie’s childhood place attachment is remembered but also denied, apparently the result of a traumatic loss.

\textsuperscript{34} At the two childhood places I visited after the interviews I have found it interesting to contrast mental images of places that I formed during the interviews, with the pictures the places actually present. At the time of Mick’s interview I had never been to New Zealand, and my image of the Port Hills drawn from the interview lacked detail and accuracy. In my interview image, the Hills stood without Christchurch sprawled at their feet and were much smaller and greener than they are in reality. Other aspects of the view, the sweeping coastline and distant Alps, were not dissimilar to what I had envisaged from Mick’s description. My image of Bluey’s property was far more detailed and accurate because I am familiar with the country around Christmas Hills. I had imagined the scale and form of the physical landscape and the type of vegetation approximately accurately. In my mind there was less forest cover than in reality, but Bluey informed me there has been significant regrowth on the land since his family sold it. In reality the property seemed much smaller than I had imagined, but I had been imagining it through the eyes of a boy. He said it now appeared smaller to him too.
of place suffered late in childhood. However, more than any other participant, Annie’s childhood place attachment has transformed into a deep adult attachment to a similar but different place, removing the need to hold onto childhood place memories. Only for Jim does childhood place appear unimportant to his adult identity, with family and cultural influences being far more important.

The four participants who attribute great significance to childhood place experience also demonstrate a strong emotional connection to childhood place. In their remembrances, these participants display a marked capacity to deeply re-experience a broad range of emotional states originally evoked during their childhood experience of place. These emotional states are for the most part very positive, although grief over loss of place was also expressed in some of the interviews. Positive emotional states reported included feelings of love and being loved, feelings of being nurtured, various different types of pleasure-in-place, and feelings of security and familiarity. (Children’s capacity to enter the landscape was often, but not always described as a positive experience.) The feelings of security and familiarity appeared to arise from repeated experiences of the same place(s) throughout childhood. While for farm children this repetition arose from practical, goal-oriented activities, for other participants, repetition emerged from the activity of wandering, which has elements of play, physical and sensory engagement with place, curiosity and fantasy. The process-oriented mental state associated with wandering appears to be a much more common experience of childhood than of adulthood. There was also evidence in interviews that some children use place for emotional regulation.

The capacity of the majority of the participants to deeply re-enter childhood states allows the past experience of place to be re-experienced as occurring in the present during the interview. This phenomenon highlights an intersubjective field between the remembering adult and the experiencing child. In this intersubjective field, childhood experience can be seen as deeply influencing adult identity through the developmental process, while the adult shapes childhood experience through the selective process of remembrance. This intersubjective field includes the childhood place and the interviewer as well as the remembering adult and experiencing child. All four of these elements contribute to the experience of adult remembrance of childhood place.
CHAPTER 6

DISCUSSION

‘It’s a poor sort of memory that only works backwards,’ remarked the queen.
Lewis Carroll, Alice Through The Looking Glass

I came to this research with the sense that place is a relationship – a connection between oneself and a particular part of the earth. I came with an awareness that my experience of the Yarra Valley of my childhood has profoundly shaped who I am – how I see myself – in so many ways. I also brought to this research a desire to know how other people think and feel about place, both their own personal relationship to place, and the broader theoretical sense of how place is conceptualised. In this study I have been able to pursue my curiosity at both levels. I have listened to seven people speak in intimate detail of their own relationships to place. I have explored how various theorists construe place. In this chapter I draw together these two very different forms of knowing, one more objective and theoretical and one more subjective and lived.

Broadly speaking, place theorists fall into three camps: the phenomenological, the radical geographers and the environmental psychologists, who often see themselves as at odds with each other. The phenomenological tradition critiques the Cartesian dualism of science that alienates the knower from the known, person from place, and Malpas critiques the postmodern denial of an objective reality and the tendency to reduce theoretical discussion to a series of conflicting binary oppositions (Malpas 1999, pp. 10-12). Environmental psychology, in the scientific tradition, demonstrates its opposition to non-positivistic ways of understanding place by simply ignoring them and the whole
question of subjectivity. Cresswell (2005) from the radical, social constructivist position criticises the legitimacy of phenomenological conceptions of place, stating they are ‘rather short on empirical detail’ (Cresswell 2005, p. 32), a rather odd criticism coming from a social constructivist who also questions the legitimacy of the grand narrative of empirical science. Actually, the seven interviews of this study represent a clear rebuttal of Cresswell’s critique. From a phenomenological perspective, the interviews contained in this study represent the raw data of phenomenological method and add to existing studies validating phenomenological conceptions of place.

In spite of these and other differences, I find each of these three areas has something to offer, and much of my interest in this study has been to map out an integration of these positions that so often find themselves in conflict. What I find most interesting about the emerging attachment theory is its willingness to explore the meeting-ground of the subjective epistemology of psychoanalysis and self psychology, and the empiricism of developmental neuropsychology and neurobiology. This integration of subjective and objective epistemologies represents, I believe, a paradigm shift in approach to the understanding of human experience (Kuhn 1957). In this chapter, I draw on the literature to discuss the participants’ interviews, and also use the interviews to further this process of interdisciplinary integration.

6.1 The Complex Structure Of Place

When I contemplate the thing itself, the phenomenon that is adult remembrance of childhood place, there are two aspects of these collected memories of childhood experience of place that stand out. One is the unique nature of each participant’s experience of both childhood place and the remembering of childhood place. Within much of the literature of place there is a tendency towards psychological one-dimensionality. The human relationship with place is usually viewed in isolation, a stand-alone concept, stripped of any biographical context. However, the interviews all show place to be deeply and inextricably interwoven into biographical narrative. For Jane, place cannot be separated out from the memory of her family, particularly having to leave her brother and dog behind when the family went to England. For Mick, the memory of the Port Hills is deeply connected with his dead brother Kieran. Mick also says that, to a
lesser extent, his childhood relationship to place was influenced by his mother and his older brothers. For the farm kids, Jim and Annie, it was their idolised fathers who deeply influenced their childhood experience of place. While for Bluey, it was the experience of school that was most significant. A deep understanding of their childhood place attachment cannot be realised without including these and other biographical details. Conversely, for Mick, Jane, Phillip, Annie and Bluey, any biography would be seriously deficient without reference to the role of place in shaping adult identity.

![Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Model of Human Development](image)

*Fig.1. Bronfenbrenner’s Ecological Model of Human Development*

Reproduced from diagram appearing in Moore 1986, p5.

The original diagram was adapted from principles outlined in *The Ecology of Human Development*, Bronfenbrenner, 1979

The results of this study suggest a complex relationship between place and identity. Rather than a direct causal relationship, the role of place is conceptualised as one factor in dynamic conjunction with other important biographical influences, particularly family. Moore (1985) recommends use of Bronfenbrenner’s Ecological Model of Human Development (Fig.1) in order to arrive at a more holistic understanding of children’s relationship to place. However, Bronfenbrenner’s original sociological model would need
adjusting, as there is no reference to place or any material aspects of children’s environment (Moore 1985, pp. 12-13). Although, even Moore, while incorporating broader sociocultural factors into his study, includes only the sketchiest information about the families of the children who participated. Bronfenbrenner’s ecological approach, a variation of systems theory, conceptualises development as shaped by a nested structure of influences. It emphasises the need to consider the influence on a person’s development of all levels of the socio-cultural environment, from immediate family to international groups and structures. Although the relative influence of particular factors in the system will vary for different individuals, it is necessary to evaluate the influence of all factors to arrive at a holistic understanding of any individual.

Among the participants in this study, the relative importance of place in shaping an individual’s identity varies considerably. In some remembrances place has a powerful presence, in others it is barely even background. In Phillip’s account of his childhood, family members recede to mere shadows in the background, diminished by the presence of place. It is hard to imagine Bluey’s psychological development following a similar path if he had not had access to the family property, whereas one could easily picture Neal’s childhood following a similar trajectory no matter where he grew up. Of course, for any individual, such considerations are to a degree speculative – grist for the biographer’s mill. However, in light of this study, it does appear that biographers often overlook, or at best superficially address the influence of place. Even where place is given importance, the processes by which place shapes the person remain poorly understood.

Chawla (1992) and Hart (1979) are the only place theorists to give due consideration to the interplay between family and childhood place. Hart notes that the extent of children’s spatial range is determined in part by negotiations with their mothers and that these negotiations are best understood as a manifestation of the attachment relationship in middle childhood (Hart 1979, p. 46). He is one of the very few theorists to discuss attachment in the context of middle childhood. Chawla argues that positive memories of childhood place are predicated on positive childhood family relationships (Chawla 1992, p. 68). The absence of any accounts of persistently negative childhood family
relationships in the interviews sheds little light on the relationship between a personal history of chronic child abuse and adult place attachment. However Korpela’s work on adolescent’s use of special places for emotional self-regulation suggests the possibility of place being used as a refuge from abuse in a manner that endows personal resilience. Four of the study participants speak of feeling nurtured, nourished or loved by their childhood places, and it is easy to imagine these sorts of feelings being used to compensate for the experience of parental abuse or neglect. This could operate in a similar fashion to the way in which Bluey used the family farm to recover from his negative experience of school. Alternatively, a harsh or uninteresting environment could well be experienced as an extension of abuse or neglect occurring within the home. The relationship between child abuse, childhood place and resilience could well be a very productive area of future research.

Cresswell and other critical cultural geographers informed by post-structuralist thinking have little interest in the role of place in shaping identity. Harvey argues that ‘the only interesting question that can be asked is: by what social process(es) is place constructed?’ (Harvey 1996, p. 261). These theorists reduce place to a purely socially constructed phenomena. Nonetheless, their critique of humanistic notions of place has been an important development. Bronfenbrenner’s ecological model is inclusive of socio-political aspects of place, without being reduced to such an analysis.35 There are certainly examples of the social construction of place within this study. Probably the clearest example is the way in which the ‘farm kids’ Annie and Jim engage with place according to the values and practices of their farming families. Annie’s exhilaration at being on horseback is not sustained in her remembrance. Instead her account quickly shifts to a far more pragmatic view of place as she scans the paddocks for sick animals. Likewise, Jim’s occasional lapses into sensual delight appear prematurely extinguished by his commitment to a militantly insensitive utilitarianism. Both Annie’s and Jim’s attitudes can be seen as expressions of Australian rural cultural values. This culture appears to have shaped much of the way in which Annie and Jim engaged with place as children. Fathers have a much stronger presence in their remembrances than in those of other participants. Is this a reflection of family dynamics, or the patriarchal nature of Australian

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35 This study has not focused on this socio-political level of analysis, not because I see it as wrong or unnecessary, but because it already enjoys widespread legitimacy, and my interest has been to address more neglected aspects of place.
farming culture, or both? Probably both, and it is an important point to consider. However, in limiting analysis to the outer layers of Bronfenbrenner’s nested system of influences, Cresswell and other critical cultural geographers dismiss the material, biological and psychological levels of analysis.

The interviews show place to be more complex than this. There are multiple levels of analysis. The interviews describe children’s experience of place as emerging out of their embodied imaginative, sensuous, playful engagement with the physical world. Experience is shaped by an ever-changing biopsychosocial developmental process. Childhood place appears to be constructed in part from within the child’s direct relationship to place, independent of external sociocultural influences. A theme that emerged repeatedly from the interviews was the childhood valuing of freedom, and a preference for places that were outside adult control. In their favoured places, children feel free of adult influences and able to elaborate their own relationship with place. This is a theme that reoccurs throughout the naturalistic studies of both Hart (1979) and Moore (1985). With their aversion to excessive adult control, children are able to partially quarantine their place activities from wider social influences, and construct their relationship with place from within, rather than have it constructed by external cultural dictates. Each child’s relationship with place is his or her own unique creation. Place has a presence both independent of, and enmeshed in, the sociocultural world.

Malpas’ topographic concept of place is sufficiently complex to encompass much of the structural complexity revealed in the interviews. The holistic structure of place Malpas elaborates integrates the objective structure of the material world with the subjective structure of the experience of that world. Drawing on J. J. Gibson’s ecological theory of perception, Malpas suggests that one aspect of the structure of place is a nested organisation.

The smaller units are embedded in the larger units by what I call nesting. For example, canyons are nested within mountains; trees are nested within canyons; leaves are nested within trees… There are forms within forms both up and down the scale of size. Units are nested within larger units. Things are components of other things.

Gibson cit Malpas, 1999, p. 101
By virtue of nested structure, places present as internally differentiated, interconnected units. Places open out into other, smaller places. Places also intersect with one another, and are nested in a more encompassing locale. All of the participants describe smaller places nested within larger places. Possibly Mick gives the best example of this when he takes his remembrance up the scale of size from the immediacy of the cocooned place lying in the ‘boing-boing grass’ at a site known as the Fairy Dell, high up in a valley in the Port Hills, on the edge of the Canterbury Plains, looking out to the Southern Alps on the South Island of New Zealand. Phillip gives us a picture of a complex network of interconnected places within the larger place of Gladesville. In the lived experience of this nested structuring, any place presents as a bounded but open area (Malpas 1999, p. 170). This ambiguous notion results in the boundaries between places having a fuzzy, indeterminate quality. Like the edge of the visual field, the boundaries between places disappear when looked at directly.

Malpas argues that place is the fundamental ground of human experience. Consequently, the structure of personal memory and mental life both reflect this underlying nested structure of place. But this spatial ordering is also closely linked to the temporal ordering of memory (Malpas, 1999, p. 106), so that memory, the organisation of mental life, and therefore the experience of place all have a temporal character revealed through narrative structuring that stands alongside the nested spatial structure (Malpas 1999, p. 101). Place has a space-time character revealed by the coexistence of both narrative and nested structure. Narrative structuring, the chronological ordering of events, provides an integration of the human experience of place through time, and therefore a holistic unity to the human experience of place. All the remembrances in the study demonstrate a narrative coherence, consistent with Malpas’ narrative structuring of place. Mick and Phillip both refer directly to the importance of narrative in reinforcing their adult place identity. For them, autobiographical narrative and place narrative have a huge area of overlap.

6.2 Poetic Structuring

Although Malpas shares this emphasis on the narrative structuring of experience with Siegel and other attachment theorists, his topographic theory of place does not fit neatly
with attachment theory. Where Malpas sees place underpinning the coherence of narrative structuring, Siegel sees implicit memory (unconscious mental models) providing thematic coherence. For Siegel, implicit memory is derived not from place, but from the internalised generalisation of attachment relationship interactions. Also, Siegel’s description of the way in which autobiographical memories can be altered during the process of reactivating memory suggests another structure parallel to that of narrative. Similarly, the interviews demonstrate this second structuring of place memory which is not recognised by Malpas. The remembrances revealed in the interviews are often connected by what I call an associative or poetic structuring, where the connecting thread between elements is some kind of similarity, rather than the chronological sequencing of narrative structure. The connection could be thematic, emotional or even based on the similarity between places.

This poetic structuring runs parallel to, and is interwoven with, narrative structure throughout the remembrances. Neal’s interview gives the best example of poetic structuring. In the first change of scene after his relaxation exercise, his account moves from one backyard to another, backwards in time. A little later, he shifts between various memories involving water. From one of these memories, looking out over the plain of the ocean from high on a headland, the associative shift is to a place of similar aspect – looking out over the desert plain from high on Uluru. Running through much of his remembrance is a theme of anxiety related to outdoor places. Poetic structuring can also be found in other accounts. Phillip and Jim’s childhood memories often appear to shift between similar activities rather then emerging in chronological sequence. Jane’s shifts are connected by similar feeling states, her interview moving backwards in time from the grief at loss of her willow to her English depression at the loss of place, brother and dog.

This poetic structuring of place memory has much in common with a description of the remembrance process given by the geographer Roger Hart, entitled ‘Some Insights From My Own Childhood’, which appears as an appendix to his landmark study ‘Children’s Experience of Place.’

Exploring my mind for memories of places, I find that following a series of rapid yet amorphous associations, singularly powerful images fill my brain. They arise
in no discernable chronological sequence and there seems to be no systematic mental strategy by which I can move onward from one image to others of the same period. Instead, no sooner have I begun to search for an immediately subsequent image or a particular scene than another place looms out of the past, replacing the world of present objects and sounds with its own contours.

Hart 1979, p. 481

Hart’s description bears strong similarities to the experience of place memory described by participants in this study. He focuses on the absence of chronological (narrative) flow, but also notes the intensity and associative flow of the memories. Narrative structure appears to be secondary to the lived experience of memory, coming as part of the need to give meaning to and communicate the raw experience of memory. In addition, the memories in the interviews often present to consciousness not as moving images requiring a chronological progression, but as a single image imbued with emotion and compressed meaning. Jane’s tea party, Phillip’s scene at the dam, Mick’s cocoon in the ‘boing-boing grass’, are all examples of deep remembrance that present as a single very powerful image. Only Bluey’s memory of standing on the hill and then running down to the house has chronological progression.

Siegel points out these associative leaps often have an unpredictable quality. His comment that the process of cortical consolidation, by which memory is made long-term, involves a degree of active reorganisation of memory traces, indicates how associative structuring contributes to both the richness and the unreliability of memory. With each remembering, the memory trace is reconstructed incorporating ‘sometimes unpredictable associative linkages influenced by both memory and present experience’ (Siegel 1999, p. 42). This characteristic of memory endows the process of remembrance with a creative aspect and contributes a degree of uncertainty and unreliability to the process of memory reactivation. The passage from which the above quote by Hart was taken begins with his description of his earliest memory of watching his brother and sister bring home a bunch of primroses for his mother. He then reveals that this memory could not be a real memory, but is a memory of the day of his birth, reconstructed from many family conversations, and that some of the ‘remembered’ details could not possibly have occurred as they appear in memory. He was writing at a time before any of the details of neuropsychology described by Siegel were known. Hart’s point is that although some of
the details are wrong, the memory accurately captures the ‘spirit’, or emotional truth of the occasion. The rudiments of the idea of internal models can be detected in these comments on the way adults remember childhood experience of place. However, although Hart drew heavily on attachment theory in his study, he did not develop this aspect of Bowlby’s theory any further.

It is informative to look at the poetic structure of place remembrance from one interview in more detail. Jane’s ‘deep remembrance’ image of the tea-party in the willow tree arises ‘unbidden’, immediately after the relaxation exercise and resonates throughout the rest of the interview. Initially, she is silent as tears fill her eyes. When she does speak, her grief transforms into a child’s delight, as she describes her playful tea-party in the beautiful willow tree. Then, as she moves to explain why the willow tree had to be cut down, an emotional distance develops, as though the adult explanation pulls her away from the felt experience of the tree’s destruction. Most of the rest of the interview consists of various associative elaborations of these two themes of sensory delight and grief, interspersed with more emotionally neutral or distanced explanations or narratives. Jane offers accounts of her pleasure in the sensuous apprehension of place that at times approach a numinous sensibility. Her grief is for the loss of her tree, her brother, her dog, the Australian light, as well as for the suffering of helpless others, her London playmate, Jesus, the Aborigines of Lake Tabourie, and at the end, most poignantly, for the loss of her mother as Jane stands, shut out, at the door to her mother’s sick room. Explanations come after the associated images to help me, the interviewer, understand the emotional charge, by providing narrative context. However, the narrative structure is secondary to the associative structure. By associative structure, I mean the way all of the ensuing images are linked to the emotional content of the first image of the willow tree tea-party. There is so much meaning in that first image, which arrives without words, let alone narrative. The remainder of the interview is an elaboration of that meaning. Clearly, remembered place has a poetic structure as well as a narrative structure.

For a simple word, representing a concept that a young child can readily grasp, ‘place’ has an extraordinarily complex structure. Currently, the literature of place draws on many different bodies of knowledge and there is no unified place theory. Only an eclectic
model such as Bronfenbrenner’s ecological model can accommodate all the different levels of analysis of place. Within this overarching model, Malpas’ structuring goes part of the way towards providing a unifying theory of place. The structure of place described by Malpas incorporates spatiality and temporality, subjectivity and objectivity, self and other. Most importantly, his theory of place reveals its holistic structure. However, these interviews reveal that remembered place has a poetic or associative structure as well as the narrative structure described by Malpas, and his theory does not elaborate on this aspect of the lived experience of place.

6.3 Emotion, Memory and Place

The second overriding impression of these interviews is the power of their emotional content. As witness to each of these spoken accounts I felt most deeply engaged when emotional states were being communicated, and least engaged when participants appeared disconnected from feeling. This is not to suggest that the interviews were avenues for raw cathartic outpourings. On the contrary, emotional expression was often most striking when characterised by a degree of hesitancy or quiet vulnerability. At such moments, the interviews resonated with the sense that something very precious and deeply held, even sacred, was being uttered. Expressions of emotion were usually characterised by subtle shadings or delicate blendings of contrary feelings, rather than the primary colours of raw emotion. Extending this metaphor, I was often left wishing our language had the same level of sophistication in differentiating emotional tones that it has for naming the hues of the painter’s palette. Often participants struggled to find the words to speak of childhood place, to name emotional ‘tones’.

However on reflection, I suspect that this difficulty with finding words may have as much to do with the very human challenge of integrating cognitive and affective processes, as with any deficiency in the language. While I have raised concerns about a longstanding neglect of emotion within mainstream psychology, I hasten to add that the reinstatement of emotion should not be seen as being at the cost of ignoring cognitive processes, for cognitive processes are essential to the regulation of, and the giving of meaning to, emotional states. As well as this quality of subtle intensity, the interviews were also marked by a range of emotions. From the destructive glee at exploding tree-stumps to
aching grief at the loss of a favourite tree, the awkward, embarrassed excitement of first
sexual stirrings, the skin-crawling cold terror of a ghostly vision, sensual delight in form
or play of light, the intimate pleasure of an animal’s breath, or the exhilaration of riding a
horse at full gallop, the breadth, intensity, subtlety and depth of feeling expressed as these
seven participants remembered childhood place gave great power to these interviews.
Affect brings these remembrances alive.

Among participants there were two noted exceptions to this principle of strong affective
content. The general absence (with noted exceptions) of strong affective content in the
interviews of Neal and Jim serves as an enlightening counterview to the other five
participants. Their presence amongst the collective response makes a strong argument
against the universality of place attachment. Participants were selected on the
understanding that a strong expressed adult place attachment would point to a strong
childhood place attachment. However, here are two participants demonstrating a very
limited emotional connection to place. Neal did demonstrate a childhood place
attachment, but it was to an indoor setting – his bedroom. The widespread recognition in
the literature of children’s preference for natural over manmade environments has been
noted. Wilson (1993) argues the existence of an innate, genetic human affiliation to other
forms of life, a preference for natural settings as opposed to human-constructed
environments (Wilson 1993, p. 31). Neal however, expresses a childhood preference for
an indoor, manmade place. His bedroom is the only place for which he expresses
affection and a sense of security. Moore in his study of children’s places found a very
small minority of children identified their favourite play places as indoors (Moore 1985,
p. 7). Neal would appear to be one of these. Jim’s connection to place is possibly more
obscure. His at times aesthetic appreciation of place often appears at odds with the
utilitarian, pioneering culture of his childhood social milieu – his extended family of
farmers. In Jim we see a socially constructed place that includes a reckless domination of
nature for utilitarian purposes in conflict with a more personal phenomenological sense of
place, occasionally manifesting as an exquisite sensibility to the beauty of place.

The attribution of significance by this study to the role of emotion in understanding place
accords with the humanistic geographers’ privileging of affective ties to place (Tuan
Tuan (1974) catalogues the various different manifestations of human affective responses to place as well as addressing the broader cultural influences and the nexus between perception and affect, but he eschews any deeper psychological analysis of these relationships. Hiss (1991), drawing on environmental psychology, catalogues a range of ways in which place influences affect. Beyond this, however, the exploration of the psychological dynamics of the relationship between place and emotion has been sadly lacking. Little has changed since Russell and Snodgrass (1987), in their review of emotion and the environment from the perspective of environmental psychology, complained that

> Understanding human interaction with the physical environment is hampered by not having a deeper understanding of basic psychological processes…about how something can influence mood.

Russell and Snodgrass 1987, p. 272

The positioning of emotion as fundamental to place conflicts with scientific psychology’s positivistic privileging of cognition and behaviour as the parameters of research in the study of the human mind. Environmental psychology continues to relegate emotion to the ‘too-hard basket’. Emotional states simply do not appear to be amenable to solely empirical methods of enquiry. And yet, an in-depth understanding of the human felt relationship to place is not unknown, although one must look widely. For example, the garden designer and writer, David Slawson argues the concept of *fuzei* developed by medieval Japanese garden designers encompasses a highly sophisticated understanding of how physical place can influence emotional states.

> The word *fuzei* is written with the Chinese characters for ‘breeze’ and ‘feeling’ and conveys the sense of ‘atmosphere’ or ‘mood’…*Fuzei* implies a poetic, quality orientated approach to design. It describes the effect on a viewer of those emanations that design produces by virtue of its particular configuration of perceptual qualities.

Slawson 1987, p. 70

Slawson details of the subjective effects of various arrangements of design elements were codified in the ‘Sakuteiki’ and ‘Senzui narabi ni yagyo no zu’, two medieval Japanese gardening texts still in use today. Anybody who has stood in the classic Japanese gardens
around Kyoto would be well aware of just how effective of this ancient body of
knowledge is as a form of applied environmental psychology. Unfortunately,
environmental psychology remains straightjacketed within objectivist methodology. The
discipline would benefit from making the same inferential leap that Stern urged on
developmental psychology 20 years ago when he suggested that branch of psychology
bring the ‘felt quality of lived experience’ to its enquiry. Hiss’s (1991) account of New
York places, integrating subjective experience with objective environmental psychology
stands as a lone voice. Slawson (1987) also describes how Japanese gardeners’ grasp of
the emotional effects of garden design requires a detailed knowledge of the feeling
effects of individual elements of garden design. But he also demonstrates that it is crucial
to have a thorough understanding of how the interplay between elements alters their
individual effects to give an overall emotional effect. In other words Japanese garden
design is understood holistically. With respect to holism, there has been a shift within
environmental psychology since Russell and Snodgrass criticised the field’s
impoverished conceptual framework. Under the influence of Gibson’s ecological theory
of perception, sections of the environmental psychology community are embracing a
more holistic approach, thinking in terms of fields of perception rather than objects.

In its description of the human developmental process, attachment theory shares the
humanistic geographers’ emphasis on the centrality of affect. My familiarity with the
developmental theory of human attachment led me to anticipate that there would be a
similar developmental conception of place attachment. But this is not the case. On the
part of a small number of environmental psychologists and geographers who recognise
and document children’s very different relationship with place to that of adults, there is
an implicit recognition of place attachment as something that changes over the course of
the human life-cycle. The ‘patternless pattern’ of wandering identified in this study, the
absence of an overriding goal orientation to behaviour and the dominance of sensory
perception are some of the ways in which children’s place relationships differ from those
of adults. However, no overarching developmental theory of place has been forthcoming.
Twigger-Ross and Uzzel (1996) and Hay (1998) are the only recent theorists to work
towards a developmental theory of place attachment, but they tend to address themselves
largely to the adult end of the life-cycle. Hay’s work is largely concerned with describing
how place attachment deepens over the human life-cycle as the length of time spent in one place increases. He recognises the importance of childhood place attachment when he suggests that deep adult attachments to a place do not occur without the adult having spent childhood in that place (Hay 1998, p. 13). However, he does not address the processes by which place attachment emerges and develops in childhood. There has really been no systematic investigation of the origin, development and maintenance of affective ties to place in environmental psychology or geography since Hart’s work in 1979. Certainly, nobody has mined the rich body of knowledge that attachment theory has generated in the 27 years since.

6.4 Place Attachment and Human Attachment

One way to begin to map out a developmental theory of place is to compare place attachment with human attachment theory, noting points of similarity and difference. It may then be possible to draw on the extensive body of infant research to explain some aspects of place attachment. The interviews in this study provide a wealth of detail about children’s experience of place as it is remembered in adulthood. They offer a valuable set of lived experience in which to ground any broad comparison between human attachment and place attachment theories.

Attachment theory postulates that communication between the caregiver and infant establishes an intersubjective field that results in a powerful affective bond between the two, and ultimately gives rise to an emergent sense of self in the infant. Infant research writers emphasise that it is the experience of pleasure, the anticipation of pleasure and the frequent repetition of warm, joyful interactions shared between caregiver and infant, that motivate the infant’s attachment, and develop the internal representations that give rise to implicit memory and ultimately to sense of self (Lichtenberg 1989, Sroufe 1990, Schore 1994, Ciompi 1991).

Such shared affect represents a reservoir of positive feelings that will be [incorporated into] the infant’s representation [of the attachment relationship] which is the template for all future affect-rich social relationships

Sroufe 1990, p. 286
In the repeated positive experiences of the attachment relationship in infancy lie the foundations of love and self.

Can the foundations of another kind of love and a further development of the self system that emerges in infancy be found in the repeated positive experiences of place in middle childhood? With the exception of Neal’s account, the interviews document both the repetition and the pleasure of childhood place experiences, as well as most participants’ belief that childhood place plays an important role in the formation of adult identity. The literature of childhood place detailed in Chapter 2 also identifies many aspects of children’s engagement with place that give rise to positive feelings. The various pleasures-of-place identified in the literature include sensory delight, mastery (efficacy pleasure), freedom, adventure, and companionship.

Childhood aesthetic pleasure in place is well captured by the interviews. Jane’s delight at the azure Australian sky is evocatively conveyed in her interview. Bluey, Neal, Phillip, Mick and, momentarily, Bill also bring to life a child’s aesthetic delight in the sensuous perception of place. At times their accounts sing with the perceived beauty of place. Neal and Jane enhance this pleasure, infusing perception with imagination. Undoubtedly the remembrances affirm the literature’s assertion that children derive great pleasure from the sensory apprehension of place. The quality of pleasure described in Chapter 5 is one of the most pervasive themes to emerge from combined interviews. And, largely, the types of pleasures described in the interviews correspond with those in the literature. Possibly, the one type of place pleasure identified in the literature but not strongly represented in the interviews is social pleasure, for while companions are mentioned in the interviews, with the exception of Mick’s brother, they did not have a major presence. Companions tended to be vague, nameless, two-dimensional entities, or else non-existent.

Within the literature play is widely recognised as inherently pleasurable, as well as being a fundamental process of child development (Scarlett et al 2005, Dockett and Lambert 1996, and Hughes 1991). From the perspective of this study, play is also considered to be an important form of place-pleasure because so many theorists report that children prefer to play in outdoor environments (Moore 1989, Jones and Cunningham 1999, Moore and
Young 1978, Kirkby 1989, Simmons 1994, Olwig 1989, Chawla 1988). The activity of play shapes the child’s experience of place, and the remembrances are richly endowed with examples of play as fun. Lichtenberg suggests that play is

in the service of learning to interact competently with the environment. In that sense, play is serious business, but the affect triggered by it is a positively toned feeling of efficacy. All play, then, involves the exploratory-motivational system.

Lichtenberg 1989, p. 145

Repetition of playful activities results in an improvement in the skills of engaging the environment and the experience of Lichtenberg’s ‘positively toned feeling of efficacy’, efficacy pleasure or the sense of mastery. A small number of theorists from different fields suggest that place experience contributes to adult identity. Chawla found that the most commonly claimed benefit of happily remembered childhood places was that they ‘form an internal centre of stability and calm’ (Chawla 1992, p. 76). Lichtenberg suggests that,

exploratory and assertive motivations, and the feelings of efficacy and competence pleasure that amplify it, are indeed significant, often underappreciated elements of self feeling.

Lichtenberg 1989, p. 127

Here is a psychoanalytic theorist attributing a level of identity formation to place attachment through feelings of mastery or agency. Without reference to developmental processes, Malpas (1999) also sees place as playing an important role in the formation of the self (Malpas 1999, pp. 163). He argues that Proust suggests a role for place in identity formation (Malpas 1999, p. 176), and he too attributes an important role to agency in self definition. This capacity to exert influence over the material world, by linking intention and action, unifies the subjective and objective worlds (Malpas 1999, p. 99). Clearly, the capacity for agency in relation to place and the development of agency through childhood engagement with place in the form of play constitute important areas of common ground between place attachment and human attachment. In this study, it is the farm children who most obviously demonstrate a sense of mastery in their childhood practising of adult

36 Lichtenberg combines exploration and assertion into the one motivational system underpinning some observed behaviours in infants.
activities. However, we also see efficacy pleasure in Bluey’s building and *hunting for food*, Mick’s climbing and later running over the Port Hills, and even in Neal’s fishing trip. Bluey’s impossible leap is a powerful example of the strong positive feelings associated with a sense of mastery.

> and I’d feel like I’d be in the air and I’d be like I’ve still got another two metres to go and I’d make it and I’d sort of make myself make it… [And the feeling was] just fantastic, just fantastic. Like I was um…(smiling) I’d just fly, I’d fly, literally fly and I would be doing something that like, I couldn’t do, but I was doing it…Mmm. It felt like flying.

All these remembered activities are not only building a sense of agency, but are also deepening attachment to place through their experience of the positive affect of efficacy pleasure.

Play theorists describe exploration as an important type of play (Hughes 1991, Scarlett et al 2005). Exploration is also given significance in attachment theory as the polar opposite of the proximity-seeking behaviours associated with attachment. Marvin et al (2002) see exploration as one half of the circular attachment behaviour pattern displayed by toddlers as they move towards and away from attachment figures (Marvin et al 2002, p. 1). When young children feel secure the exploration-assertion motivational system pushes them out into the world to engage with place. When in the course of exploration they become tired, hurt, overwhelmed or anxious, the attachment system is engaged, bringing them back to the caregiver for emotional regulation. Lichtenberg accords the exploration-assertion motivational system equal status to the attachment motivational system. However, in comparison with the detailed analysis afforded attachment behaviours, the psychological dynamics of exploration, the child’s relationship to place, has received little attention from theorists. Hart critiques environmental psychology’s lack of interest in what motivates the much-studied spatial cognition learning, and hypothesises an exploratory motivation (Hart 1979, pp 9-14). Lichtenberg and Schachtal are the only two theorists to address exploration from a psychoanalytic-attachment theory perspective. Both contend that exploration is pleasurable. Lichtenberg suggests that it is the pleasure of self-efficacy, sometimes combined with intimacy pleasure, which powers the exploratory-assertive motivational system in humans. Interestingly, exploration does not receive
much attention in the remembrances. However, the range of territory described in the interviews would have required exploration at some point in order to initially orient to a new place. Exploratory activity is also implied in the pleasurable sense of freedom reported by some participants (Jim, Phillip and Mick).

Familiarity is a form of pleasurable engagement with place that appears to have no recognition in the literature. It is almost the antithesis of exploration, in that exploration is a discovery of new place, whereas familiarity is a deepening of connection with known place through repetition. However, because of the nested structure of place, familiarity could also be understood to include an element of exploration. Under the close inspection of the wandering child, larger familiar places open out to reveal smaller, previously concealed ones. Exploration of these smaller places would necessarily increase familiarity with the containing larger place. Chapter 5 shows that a sense of familiarity with place was voiced by most participants. Familiarity arises from the repetition of the ‘patternless pattern’ of children’s ordinary movements through known place. Whether it is sitting still in one spot, or travelling from A to B, or just wandering with no particular destination, or doing some adult-directed task, or just playing, childhood experience of place largely occurs in known territory.

The lack of recognition of familiarity as an important aspect of children’s experience of place is somewhat perplexing, as even a cursory reading of literature such as Moore’s *Childhood’s Domain* portrays children as being deeply familiar with their places. Also, the widely used concept of children’s ‘favourite places’ implies familiarity. However, the idea of children’s familiarity with place is not developed in the literature.

Phenomenological methodology is recognised as having a capacity to bring attention to and investigate the everyday, taken-for-granted experiences often overlooked by other research methodologies. Possibly this study’s adoption of phenomenological methodology has been an important factor in revealing familiarity as an important and common quality of childhood place experience. In addition, the adult capacity for reflection, in bringing new understanding to childhood experience, is crucial to identifying familiarity as a valued feature of childhood place experience, even when that understanding is not complete. Phillip is not quite sure why he should be so deeply
moved by his remembrance of childhood place, but he is adamant that it is the very ordinariness, the familiarity of place, that moves him so. This childhood place familiarity, like Phillip’s smell of the Sydney Basin flora, is so ubiquitous, so unremarkable, that it goes unrecognised until seen through the reflective retrospection of adulthood, using phenomenological method.

Play, mastery, sensory delight (unsullied by abstract thought), exploration and companionship (both human and animal); collectively these are the pleasures of children’s experience of place. They constitute numerous tributaries flowing into the place equivalent of the ‘vast reservoirs of positive feelings’ that Sroufe argues are the driving force, the motivation behind human attachment. And in the familiarity borne of the ‘patternless pattern’ of wandering that is a child’s experience of place, can be seen the ‘repetition of interactional patterns’ identified by Ciompi and Sroufe as necessary for the establishment of internal representations of attachment relationships. So, here in children’s experience of place are found the two elements of human attachment relationships, positive affect and repetition, that are necessary for the establishment of implicit memory and attachment theory’s internal working models, the psychological structures necessary for self regulation, the capacity to love and ultimately, the sense of self. Why then would a similar repetition of positive affect in place not give rise to a long term place attachment, a love? It is not too great an inferential leap to suggest that, as with human attachment, the origins of long term place attachment lie in everyday repeated childhood experiences of pleasurable interactions with the Other, in this case place. The taken-for-granted quality of familiarity and the repetition of the ‘patternless pattern’ are both characteristics of Siegel’s implicit memory that gives rise to attachment theory’s internal working models, the psychological structures necessary for self regulation, the capacity to love and ultimately, a sense of self. However, to date no causal connection has been drawn between the experience of these pleasures and place attachment. I suggest that frequent repetition of affectively positive experiences of place in middle childhood is the basis of place attachment.

Since its inception, attachment theory has used a continuum of anxiety-security to evaluate the quality of attachment and classify attachment styles (Bowlby 1975, pp. 211-
Security is seen as intrinsic to good attachment. Excessive anxiety is seen as detrimental not just to the attachment relationship but also to brain development. In the interviews there are unambiguous expressions of place security from Mick, Bluey, Phillip and Jane. This feeling of security-in-place is not explicitly described in literature of childhood place, and its clear articulation by a number of participants was unanticipated. While some references to security are about personal safety, others are much more about the security of the relationship. Annie recalls experiencing a huge loss of trust when property was lost to her family. Her sense of betrayal is much more about loss of a deep sense of the security of the relationship to place than it is about any threat to personal security and safety. This shows a remarkable similarity with the way attachment security is understood as a trust in the attachment relationship, where the infant expects the attachment figure will be there as needed. When their attachment figure is unpredictable, hostile or non-attentive in response to their overtures, infants associate anxiety with the relationship. This anxiety becomes an impediment to the formation of secure attachments later in life. Neal’s remembrance is characterised both by repeated expressions of anxiety when outdoors and by a lack of obvious childhood outdoor place attachment. Along with his expressions of affection for his childhood bedroom and a warm sense of security associated with it, this constellation of affect and meaning points to a dynamic similar to human attachment security, where his secure attachment was his bedroom rather than any outdoor place.

In the original formulation of attachment theory, Bowlby described a grief reaction that securely attached children experience at prolonged separation from their attachment figure (Bowlby 1974). Read evocatively captures the intense grief adults experience at loss of place, indicating similar processes of attachment and loss to that described by Bowlby (Read 1996). However, children’s expressions of grief in response to loss of place have received little attention in the literature. In this study grief responses can be seen in Jane and Annie’s accounts of their respective separations from place at ages 7 and 12. Jane suffers a depression requiring medication, while for Annie loss of part of the farm was sort of like losing a limb. You know, I mean something vital had gone.
These intense responses to loss of place indicate that the affective attachment had already been deeply established for these girls. Bowlby’s work was ground-breaking because, at the time he began his research in the 1940s, children, particularly babies, were widely regarded within the medical profession as not having feelings. Given this study’s evidence of the presence of the strong affiliations to place that many children experience, the absence in the literature of accounts of children’s grief at loss of place tends to indicate a similar widespread adult blindness to the importance of place attachment in many children’s lives.

Infant research theory suggests that an important function of the primary caregiver is to act as an external emotional regulator until the infant can internalise this function for themselves (Trevarthen 1993, p. 149, Schore 1994, p. 6, Siegel 1999, pp. 67-70). Furthermore, it is from the resulting capacity for emotional self regulation that the core sense of self emerges (Sroufe 1990, pp. 191-192). Korpela found that place also functions as external emotional regulator across a range of emotional states (Korpela 1989, p. 254), and that such processes contribute to a consolidation of self identity (Korpela and Hartig 1996, p. 231). Amongst the interviewees, Bluey clearly states that he used the family farm to manage and overcome pervasive feelings of inadequacy and poor self esteem arising from his experience of school. Mick strongly implies that the Port Hills were a crucial part of his recovery from his profound grief response to the death of his brother.

The parallels between human attachment and place attachment appear to be significant enough to be recognised by at least one participant. Mick makes a number of direct references to a sense of being parented by place. Similarly, the wide use of the term Mother Earth signifies a broader cultural recognition of close links between the two forms of attachment. These links have been recognised both transculturally and transhistorically (Malpas 1999, p. 4). However, while these links have been widely recognised intuitively, there has been no empirical demonstration of the processes by which they operate, other than in the work of Korpela and Hartig referred to above. Most of the detail of the interactional processes of place attachment is yet to be described. The scientific study of human attachment only began with Bowlby’s initial work 60 years ago, and details of interaction between caregiver and infant in human attachment are still
being elaborated. Unfortunately, virtually no research has explored the developmental processes of how place attachment is established.

Before getting too carried away with the similarities between these two forms of attachment, it would be wise to recall some of the differences. First is the different ages at which the two forms of attachment emerge. The human infant’s strong preference for proximity with a particular attachment figure and the expression of protest and distress first appears at around nine months of age and gradually diminishes in intensity in the third year. Most theorists state that place attachment appears in middle childhood, between the ages of 8 and 12. (Interestingly, Jane’s interview suggests that she had already established a significant place attachment by age 7 when her family left for England.) Notwithstanding this lack of certainty, the emergence of human attachment predates that place attachment by around five years. Human attachment is simultaneous with the period of greatest growth of neural connectivity. By age 8, neural connectivity is occurring at a rate of many orders of magnitude less than in infancy. The brain has largely been hardwired by the time place attachment emerges.

As outlined in Chapter 3 human attachment is intrinsic to brain development, as well as the early development of emotional regulation and the self. Human attachment is also universal. It occurs across all cultures, and is fundamental to normal human psychobiological development. Where attachment is significantly disrupted, disorders of the self and the capacity for emotional regulation occur. The universality of place attachment has been disputed. Cobb claimed that all children experience a period of transcendental connection to place. However, Chawla challenged this universality, demonstrating that Cobb’s findings were a consequence of her bias in selection procedure. Chawla found a much broader range of childhood place experiences including transcendence, affection, ambivalence, idealisation, alienation (rejection) and detachment from childhood place (Chawla 1986, pp. 36-41).

Similar variations in the quality and intensity of childhood place attachment were found amongst the seven participants in this study. The majority of participants showed varying degrees of affection for childhood place, with Jane and Bluey showing elements of
transcendence. Jim demonstrated a degree of idealisation, characterised by a significant disconnection from feeling, while Neal demonstrated a marked detachment from childhood place. In one of the most interesting variations of place attachment history, Annie is the only one to express a deeply felt attachment to the place where she currently lives as an adult. All the other participants express a retrospective attachment to the place of their childhood. Even Phillip’s place attachment is to the Gladesville of his childhood, rather than the present day suburb in which he lives. His interview response calls to mind Riley’s suggestion that remembered place has more ‘meaning, power and importance in the role of human experience than the landscape experienced concretely’ (Riley 1992, p. 20). How is this difference to be understood, and what are the developmental processes by which a mature lived attachment to present place arises? Annie suffered one of the most traumatic losses of childhood place encountered in the interviews. How is it that she has arrived at her current deeply felt place attachment? There is enormous scope for developing a deeper understanding of the relationship between life experience and these qualitative differences in place attachment.

One of the most interesting distinctions between human attachment and place attachment are differences in the Other, the attachment figure. In human attachment, the attachment figure is another human being. A shared biological substrate allows for the broad intersubjective relationship necessary for the psychobiological development of the infant. Fundamental to this development is the caregiver’s capacity to deeply attune to the infant’s emotional state, and to engage in sequences of reciprocal behavioural interactions.

Repetition of such highly organised sequences of [reciprocal] interaction…commonly culminate in exchanges of mutual delight…The affect of joy or delight becomes established as the criterion for precision in the matching of interpersonal reciprocations.

Sroufe 1990, p. 286

This sophistication of attunement, reciprocity and intersubjectivity that underpins human attachment has no obvious parallel in place attachment. There is no clearly identifiable Other – no deeply attuned place-attachment figure – that can be seen engaging in sequences of reciprocal interactions. This is not to suggest there is no equivalent of the
attachment figure to be found in place. Jane and Mick certainly attribute a beneficent intent and agency to the Other – to place. However, other participants do not make this attribution. On the other hand, place has a clear presence in the intersubjective context of the interviews. Does this indicate the existence of subjectivity in place? Does it indicate an intentional subjectivity as Jane and Mick would have it? Theorists such as Abram (1997) would support their construction of place as having an intentional subjectivity. However, such place-subjectivity is rather elusive. Where is this subjectivity located? How can its presence be identified and demonstrated in objective terms? Or is it something that only emerges within the holistic context of the human relationship with the non-human, something that disappears when you try too hard to find it?

It could be argued that sentiments such as those described by Jane and Mick are examples of anthropomorphic projection of human attachment needs onto place, but it would be unwise to assume this is the case. Like the behaviourist denial of emotions and self because they were difficult to locate and measure, to say there is no place-Other because it cannot be measured would be presumptuous. The fact that it cannot be seen does not prove it is not there. After all, ‘mother love’ was intuitively recognised throughout history, but it was only in the 1980s that science developed the empirical procedures necessary to demonstrate and describe the micro-behavioural processes that constitute infant-caregiver attunement. Behaviours that had previously been dismissed as the besotted mother’s frivolous baby-talk were reconstructed as ‘highly organised sequences’, the sophisticated interplay of affective states that gives rise to attachment, emotional regulation and ultimately, the self. The issue of a subjectivity of place is complex and has not been greatly clarified by this study. One conceptual clarification does emerge. Given the complex, holistic, multi-model nature of place experience, it may be more useful to think in terms of an ‘attachment field’ rather than an attachment figure, which does make it difficult to identify and measure any reciprocal interactions that might be occurring. Also, given that there is an attachment field rather than an attachment figure, it is difficult to hypothesise similarities in the behavioural dynamics of human attachment and place attachment. Elaborating the details of this interactional process would be a very rich field for future enquiry.
There is one other curious anomaly between the two attachments. Attachment theory conceptualises early childhood security and emotional regulation as being located in the relationship with the attachment figure. By contrast, it sees place as an antithetical, intriguing, exciting and potentially dangerous Other, somewhere to explore until the child is overwhelmed, at which time he or she returns to the attachment figure for soothing (emotional regulation). However, for many people, at some point in their life, the role of childhood place undergoes a transformation from being arousing to being a comfort – from disregulator to being an attachment field that can soothe and regulate emotional distress. Is this purely the result of the ‘reservoirs of positive emotion’ achieving a certain critical capacity, or is some other process involved?

6.5 Deep Remembrance

The relaxation exercise was central to the results of the interviews. The state of deep remembrance, which has been crucial to the understanding of remembrance developed in this study, only occurred after the relaxation process. Not only does the exercise engage participants more fully with memory, it also appears to affect which memories are selected. Jane and Phillip both stated that they had intended to speak about different memories, but at the conclusion of the relaxation exercise, the particular memory they described had presented itself. Both also said that they were not conscious of selecting that memory; when the time came to speak, it was there, ready to go. In a similar fashion, Annie’s memory of place is on horseback, an unexpected and playful take on her childhood experience of place. It is as though something other than the normal self has taken charge at this point. All participants, except Jim, appeared to enter into their memories of place far more fully, into ‘deep remembrance’ after the relaxation exercise. Why does this exercise have such a significant impact on the course of the interviews?

Relaxation exercises similar to those used in the interviews are commonly used in behaviour therapy as part of the technique of systematic desensitisation. Known as progressive relaxation, the technique is used to assist clients to manage anxiety associated with specific stimuli (phobias) (Corey 1996, p. 292). However, this therapeutic technique is very much directed by the therapist towards a preordained outcome. It has little in common with the process of open exploration of participants’ experience undertaken in
this study. In seeking to explain why the relaxation exercise should be such a powerful part of the interviews I find the psychoanalytic concept of the unconscious useful.

Frosh (2002) says that psychoanalysis assumes the existence of a split in the mind. The unconscious is a part of the mind hidden from conscious awareness. It is a space of dynamic activity pushing for expression but held in check by repression and other defences. The unconscious is not subject to the rules of reality, time or reason, but ‘It is the unconscious that produces much of the warp and weft of psychic life, its richness and its confusions’ (Frosh 2002, p. 15). The process of psychoanalysis is traditionally undertaken with the client lying on the couch.

Lying on the couch encourages deep uncensored reflection and reduces the stimuli that might interfere with [clients] getting in touch with their internal conflicts and productions.

Corey 1996, p. 113

I suspect that the relaxation exercise is in some ways analogous to the experience of lying on the couch. Participants are instructed to close their eyes (reducing stimuli) and take their attention inwards. The process of leading participants’ attention to all parts of the body disrupts habituated everyday patterns of thinking, focusing awareness on an aspect of experience (body state) that is normally unconscious. Damasio (1994) argues that the interior body, in constant flux in response to external environmental change, is continuously monitored by the brain, and that feelings are summative cognitions of the entire visceral and musculo-skeletal state (Damasio 1994, p. 159). The process of taking awareness to all parts of the body may be a way of directly accessing a lower and normally unconscious level in the hierarchy organismic organisation, the raw material.

In the process of deep remembrance, some participants profoundly re-enter childhood experience. Emotional states act as memory bridges linking past and present. Delight experienced as a child is not just recalled, it is re-experienced. In this process, two present moments coexist. Those able to enter this state attribute great importance to it. Mick likens it to a sacrament. Jane says that in comparison with other memory experiences, it is like seeing the same thing in colour rather than black and white. The experience of
deep remembrance described by participants is very similar to the state of involuntary memory described by Proust that constitutes the artistic heart of ‘Remembrance of Things Past’. When Marcel stumbles on the uneven cobblestones outside the house of the Princesse de Guermantes, he is immediately thrust back in memory to a similar kinesthetic experience which took place in Venice many years previously. Not only do all the sensory impressions of the experience in the baptistry of St Mark’s return in full detail, but Marcel’s mood is immediately changed from one of melancholy gloominess to the uplifted mood he had experienced in Venice. Similarly, the taste of a tea-soaked madeleine immerses him back into the sensory impressions and happy emotional state of his childhood in Combray. It is only on discovering this capacity for deep immersion in memory that Marcel is able to overcome the creative impasse that has prevented him from pursuing his life’s path of writing.

In this study, the experience of deep remembrance functions as an intersubjective space between the child experiencing place and the remembering adult. The child’s experience (as presented by the participants) sits within the adult’s memory, and the adult's memory sits within the identity which develops out of childhood experience. Like Malpas’ nested structure of place, remembrance of childhood experience is a nested experience. The two subjectivities, the remembering adult and the child experiencing place, are mutually nested. It is impossible to separate the two without losing the intersubjective emotional bridge essential to the process of remembering. Remembrance, like place, has an irreducible holistic structure.

Much of my discussion has been focused around the impact of the chronologically forward-reaching developmental process in shaping adult identity. But what of the backward-looking link between adult and child via the regression of memory? What role does it play in the interviews and in the broader area of identity? After all, it is Marcel’s decision to recapture and document his memories of childhood place that gives both meaning to his life and a title to ‘Remembrance of Things Past’. The link between childhood place and adult identity is two-way. The influence of childhood place on adult identity via human developmental processes is clear enough. But, what is the role of backward-looking memory and what is its nature?
Firstly, the interviews demonstrate that the process of remembrance is richly complex. The poetic, associative structuring of memory, particularly deep remembrance, often results in multiple layers of meaning being embedded in a single image. Jane’s image of the willow-tree tea-party has numerous links to a range of griefs and joys that are elaborated throughout the rest of the interview. As well as these multiple connections of memory, there is the unpredictable flow of these associations as memory as presents to consciousness. This is best exemplified by Neal’s interview, which several times breaks into a rapid sequence of associated images, completely devoid of any narrative structuring. Several commentators note that memory lacks the repeatable veracity of a video replay. The phenomenologist Bachelard describes it thus:

\[
\text{The remembered past is not merely a past of perception. Since one is remembering, the past is already being designated in a reverie (dream) as an image value. From their very origin the imagination colours the paintings it will want to see again.}
\]

Bachelard 1969, p. 105

This unreliable nature of memory results from the aggregation of apparently unrelated elements which become closely associated in long-term memory, cobbled together through the operation of Hebb’s Axiom (any grouping of neurons that fires together, tends to fire together in future).

As well as this wealth of richness and uncertainty attributable to memory, the interviews also demonstrated the power of memory in the form of deep remembrance, where the remembering adult re-experiences feelings and scenes from childhood place experience, not as something that happened a long time ago, but as present-time, lived reality. The adult body manifests physical indications of the emotions in the present. This re-experiencing of childhood feelings creates a powerful conjunction of adult and child. The resulting intersubjective space is shaped and shared by the experiencing child, the remembering adult, the observing witness and childhood place itself.

These experiences of deep remembrance are characterised by the emotional logic of poetic structuring. Several participants demonstrate some difficulty moving between this
archaic state and the more mundane state of linguistic structuring necessary to find the words to communicate their experience. Bluey appears more able to sustain this deep emotional link with the past than others. His connection often comes at the expense of words, which are few, while his pauses are long. He appears to place more value on the experience of childhood place than the communication of that experience.

All participants enjoyed the process of remembrance, and several stressed how important the experience of remembrance was to them. As in Proust’s episodes of involuntary memory, not only are present-day surroundings swept from awareness by the details of remembered sensory impressions, but present time feelings are overwhelmed by the intensity of remembered emotional states. The same positive feelings of childhood place that give rise to place attachment also draw the remembering adult backwards in memory, anchoring identity in childhood. Recalled competency pleasure (mastery), sensuous pleasure (delight) and pleasant feelings of familiarity and security are experienced in the present by the remembering adult. And these pleasures have transformed into love of childhood place. It appears that to remember place is to love place. But it is not just the positive feelings that draw in the remembering adult. Feelings of nostalgia, longing and loss have a strangely compelling quality as they tug at memory’s sleeve. A bitter-sweet quality characterises the more strongly attached remembrances. Grief and loss sit side by side with love and pleasure. Such grief is readily understandable for Jane and Annie. But why is this also the case for Mick, who voluntarily walked away from childhood place in early adulthood? And what of Phillip who is perplexed by the emergence of place grief? Why is it that he feels this grief, in spite of the fact that he still lives in his childhood place?

Peter Read’s book ‘Returning to Nothing: The Meaning of Lost Places’, draws attention to the grief experienced by adults over places that have been destroyed or dramatically changed. His book, while not focused on childhood places, captures the constellation of feelings experienced by so many adults remembering childhood place: the feelings of grief, of loss and longing for lost places. However, places do not need to be destroyed, or even changed, to be lost. Long absence or exile from beloved place can be enough to evoke feelings of loss.
It is strange to drive for hours alone
Then turn off the engine and stare
At places round the billabong

They look the same but they belong
to other people now. That’s where
they’re like a lot of things. They’re gone.

Hodgins cit Read 1996, p. 111

Childhood experience of place has an immediacy and intensity less often found in adult experience. But childhood place also has the quality of being taken for granted. This occurs because, according to Piaget, in the formal operations stage of development (when childhood place attachment is strongest) cognition lacks abstract thinking and reflective awareness. At the time of their occurrence, the events of childhood were not subjected to reflective awareness. The intersubjective space of remembrance allows adult reflective capacity to illuminate childhood experience of place, which makes for a very creative process in the interviews. Place, taken for granted in childhood, acquires new meaning and importance in the light of reflective remembrance. Aspects of experience previously taken for granted, the myrtaceous smell of the Sydney flora, the sense of being nurtured by place, feelings of grief over lost place are re-experienced in ‘full colour’ emotional intensity, and take on a new significance. Deep remembrance, like childhood experience, is playful and creative. Memories present to consciousness in a serendipitous fashion with no apparent logic. Yet for the most part participants seize upon them, thoughtfully ascribing meaning. Those participants who experience deep remembrance affirm that place shapes identity. Reflective awareness allows participants to identify implicit memory (Siegel 1999) so that they are able to talk about feeling secure, nurtured, challenged or loved by childhood place.

6.6 An Integrated Place

To what extent does the preceding discussion further the process of holistic interdisciplinary integration that I mentioned at the beginning of this chapter? Bronfenbrenner’s Ecological Model provides a valuable start by setting out an overarching framework that includes the sociopolitical analysis absent from some
humanistic accounts of place. Within Bronfrenbrenner’s overarching structure, Malpas provides important elaboration of detail with his ontological concept of place, which has a structure complex enough to account for the holistic nature of place. In his conception of place, the subjective world of inner experience and the objective material world are one. They cannot be separated and still be place, and yet this is exactly what the dualism underlying so much Western thinking does. Malpas’ system unifies these two aspects of place through the concept of agency, the capacity to translate mental intention into bodily action, thereby effecting change in the material world. Within this overarching ontological structure, Malpas’ place has a nested spatial structure and a narrative temporal structure. Unlike some social constructivist concepts of place, both of these structurings of place make intuitive sense, and two participants refer to the narrative structuring that sees identity as being grounded in place. However, Malpas’ account falls short because it misses or minimises the emotional connections to place. Most of his account is presented in the abstract language of philosophy. He dismisses mere ‘emotional reminiscences’, seeing psychological accounts of place as incomplete (Malpas 1999, p. 30). For Malpas, emotional reminiscences appear to be derived from place-bound identity rather than having the status of one of his holistic conceptual ‘topographic sightings’. And in the final chapters of ‘Place and Experience’, when he abandons more abstract philosophical language, and brings his theory to analyse Proust’s account of place, place remains somewhat nondescript and emotionally bland.

This is in contrast to most of the interviews of this study in which place presents itself in an emotional context. This emotional aspect of the experience of place lends an additional structuring, separate to the narrative and nested structures identified by Malpas. The associative leaps, which I call poetic structuring, often appear to be influenced by the emotional themes of internal working models.37 Perhaps most importantly, this recognition of emotion provides a crucial link between understanding of the lived human experience of place and Malpas’ somewhat abstract theory of place.

37 The nature of mental association is complex and currently very poorly understood. While emotional themes have been shown to be important influences over the associations made by some participants, patterns contained in internal working models appear to be only one part of the mechanism by which association functions. Associative leaps also appear to sometimes be influenced by similar perceptual patterns. For example, Neal’s association of the seascape seen from the headland, and the desert as seen from Uluru, appears to be based on similarities of visual composition, a flat surface with distant prominences viewed from a height. A great amount of research remains to be done in this area, and a detailed discussion is well beyond the scope of this study. Exploration of the mechanisms of associative structuring would certainly be a useful area for future research.
Malpas recognises agency as crucial to the holistic nature of place. Taking this one step further, Basch (1988) argues:

affect is, indeed, the gateway to behaviour, and there is no action and no thought that is not affectively motivated…While affect does not have to be dramatic or in the forefront of consciousness to engender behaviour, it is always present.

Basch 1988, pp. 68-69

Bringing a psychoanalytic rather than a behaviourist lens to the understanding of agency, Basch’s insight fills in a missing link in Malpas’ structure of place – that motivation underpins agency. The motivation to act in the world is always emotional. And any holistic understanding of place must include an account of its affective components.

The further difficulty with Malpas’ theory of place is that it offers no explanation of how place identity emerges through human developmental processes. This is very different to the detailed account of identity development offered by attachment theory and self psychology. Here, sense of self emerges over time through the daily repetition of affective interplays between infant and attachment figure. The emotional regulation of the attachment figure provides an essential structuring to these experiences. For infants, repeated experiences of emotional attunement and regulation, culminating in moments of shared delight, give rise to internal organisation that provides the foundations of the sense of self. Emotions are understood as the overarching states integrating the various domains of mental and physical function in constant flux. Emotions provide an internal coherence that is experienced subjectively as sense of self.

The results of this study suggest a developmental process similar to that of human attachment gives rise to the emergence of place attachment and place identity. The phenomenological approach used here identifies children’s repeated pleasurable interactions with place in the form of play, sensory delight and efficacy pleasure. The daily layering of positive experiences of place builds an internal model of place into implicit memory and identifies it as pleasurable. Place becomes familiar, evoking feelings of security and ultimately love. The humanistic geographers’ approach of positioning emotions at centre-stage of the theory is central to the approach adopted by
this research. It is emotional states that provide a bridge across time, bringing childhood experiences of place vividly alive in a room 30, 40 or 50 years later. Like Proust’s tea-soaked madeleine incident, around which Malpas constructs much of his discussion, they are examples of deep remembrance.

Positioning emotion as central in place theory also reinforces the role of another of Malpas’ ‘topographical sightings’ – intersubjectivity. He argues that intersubjectivity is a necessary condition for objectivity, the apprehension of a shared objective world in the present. However, I see the role of intersubjectivity as going beyond this. Relived emotional states allow me as interviewer to enter empathically into participants’ remembered childhood experiences of place. Attachment theory positions emotional states as the raw material of intersubjective experience. It is through emotion that past place is made present for the remembering adult. And, in a process somewhat akin to that occurring between attachment figure and infant, emotional attunement allows a third party, a witness, to enter into an intersubjective experience of remembered childhood place. While the witness does not physically visit the remembered place, they can certainly enter into the emotional experience of that place. It is the detailed emotional content of the young Marcel’s experience of growing up in Combray, the deep remembrance triggered by the madeleine incident, that allows the reader to enter deeply into his world, and which gives Proust’s book so much of its literary power.

It might be said this intersubjective experience of remembered place occurs in imagination only; that the interview is a mental process in which the real, material place is not present, and as Malpas asserts, emotional reminiscence is an incomplete account of place. However, I disagree. The power of emotions lies in their holism. Emotions are not purely mental events, but always involve the material body (Damasio 1994). Bluey gets goose-bumps as he speaks of a place-related apparition during the interview. Jane’s tears are real enough to wet her cheeks. Much of the communication of emotional states takes place through subtle physical expression. Just as the attachment figure and baby communicate pre-verbally through use of gaze, gesture, facial expression and modulation of vocal tone, so a significant amount of the experience of place is communicated through subtle non-verbal expression.
Malpas’ topographic theory of place provides a valuable framework for understanding the structural complexity of place. Attachment theory offers a useful account of developmental processes. The participants’ accounts of the lived experience of place provide empirical support to Malpas’ theory, with the qualification that his theory overlooks the important role of emotion in the experience of place. On this point, however, the interviews lend support to humanistic geography’s attribution of a pivotal role to emotion in any understanding of the lived experience of place. Damasio’s concept of emotion as the generalised mental representation of bodily changes in response to environmental changes provides a theoretical link between emotional states and phenomenological notions of the body as the ground of lived experience of place. Thus there is substantial complementarity between the different theoretical approaches.

Much would be gained from greater integration of these approaches. Attachment theory has elaborated a detailed and holistic account of developmental processes up to the age of five years, but attachment theory offers much more than a model on which to base an account of the development of place attachment. Dating back to Bowlby and Stern, attachment theory has demonstrated a willingness to integrate objective and subjective epistemologies. Stern pointed out the fertility of traditional scientific methodologies in generating new information, while psychoanalysis offered a detailed account of subjective experience. Integrating these two ways of knowing represents a paradigm shift in psychological research, and has produced a theory that has generated a highly sophisticated, holistic conception of the early years of human life. Attachment theory has been able to embrace the empirical methods of developmental psychology and neurobiology to identify and integrate the subtle behavioural dynamics by which emotional states are communicated. It has also been able to integrate these findings with the parallel developmental processes in the brain. Unfortunately, attachment theory offers little information about psychological development in middle childhood, the period when place attachment emerges. However, it does offer an excellent model of holistic knowledge generation, a model that could well be extended to both middle childhood and place studies. In particular, attachment theory has developed some excellent tools for the study of emotional states, an area into which developmental psychology had previously
offered little insight. Environmental psychology, with its strong tradition of experimental research, could provide valuable empirical validation of a holistic theory of place. Environmental psychology, however, still has great difficulty investigating emotional states, and following the attachment theory epistemological model, would benefit from integration with subjective approaches such as that used in this study. Such an integration, which also draws on attachment theory, would be a significant step towards the elaboration of a holistic account of the emergence and development of human place attachment.

For its part, place theory provides the living, emotionally meaningful concept of place that attachment theory currently lacks. Attachment theory keeps its focus wholly on the attachment relationship. Place is identified as the antithesis of the attachment relationship, something that the child moves towards when he or she moves away from the attachment figure, and something moved away from when the child returns to the attachment figure. In this account, place is abstracted, defined only by the child’s distance from the attachment figure. For attachment theory, place has no presence in its own right, although, of course, it has a fascinating presence for the child. Lichtenberg’s recognition of the exploration-assertion motivational system could be greatly elaborated by the further recognition that place has an emotional meaning, an intersubjective presence, for the child.

There is an enormous amount of work yet to be done before the promise of this complementary interdisciplinary approach to childhood, place and remembrance can be fulfilled. The processes by which memory is reconstructed, combining past events and current experience, remains poorly understood. The neuropsychology of emotional states is in its infancy. There are huge gaps in holistic accounts of the developmental processes of middle childhood. It is known that neuronal connectivity continues to occur in middle childhood, albeit at a slower pace than in early childhood. But by comparison with early childhood, much less is known about the processes of emotional development in middle childhood. The emergence of place attachment in middle childhood has received virtually no research attention. Variations in styles of place attachment have been little studied, and correlations between personality types and place attachment styles not at all. Even at
this stage, however, the research undertaken in this thesis demonstrates not only the importance of remembrance of childhood place to particular individuals’ sense of identity, but also the power of different disciplines to contribute to a collective understanding of this important aspect of human existence.
CHAPTER 7
AFTERWORD

After months of immersion in other people’s places and abstract theory, it is a photograph on the front of ‘Returning to Nothing: The Meaning of Lost Places’ that jolts me back to my own place. The picture is of a family, a father, a boy and a girl walking through the devastation of their house in the wake of Cyclone Tracy. Father and sister have heads hung, numb with shock and disbelief, but the boy looks directly into the camera. He’s a tough-looking little customer, about ten years old. But at the moment of the photograph, with the wreckage of his home all about him, his face quivers between tears and anger. Such a look of naked vulnerability goes straight to my heart, and a tear slips down my own cheek. I know this boy, or rather, I know how he feels…..

This loss, loss of home. This mix of sadness and anger was how I felt when I came back home after so long away. Standing on top of the hill, looking out over the Yarra Valley, there it was, but it wasn’t. It was gone, changed. Where once was a somewhat shabby farm of sagging fences and that pugged and hummocky pasture peculiar to dairy country, now was an orderly park with constructed bike path, mown grass, treated pine bollards and interpretive signage. Where once was a motley herd of cows, heads down, tails swishing, as they munched their way across the open, undulating river flats, now was a dark, oppressive forest of senescing silver wattles, planted too close together, and in need of a good burn. And where once the air had carried a great quiet, punctuated by the carolling of magpies in the morning, and the occasional cawing of a crow in the dull heat of the afternoon, now it was filled with the relentless rush of a thousand cars along the
eight-lane freeway, on the far side of the river. You see, my home was gone too – devastated, I know how that tough little customer was feeling.

But all is not loss. Just across from where I stood looking out over the noisy valley is another place, the hill where my friend Des Crough and I once improvised a billy-cart out of an abandoned shopping jeep, and rode it into the ground. Up and down, up and down that hill so many times, until our legs hurt as much as our sides did from laughing. Some years later, I recall coming home from school down the road over the far side of the valley on a crowded bus. I was maybe 15, and I remember glancing out of the bus window and seeing that same place, the billy-cart hill above the river flats. And I remember noticing that the curve of the hill was quite beautiful. Not a strong feeling; subtle, like when you first notice you are attracted to someone. And I had this realisation that I loved that hillside. And it was alright to feel like that, to love that hillside. But I also had this niggling thought that this was a bit weird. Like, I hadn’t heard of anyone else loving a hillside before. So I kept it to myself. At 15 the last thing you want to be is weird. But on the bus after that, I always kept an eye out for that view of the hillside.

The valley lives on inside me. Without even closing my eyes, I can be back there, walking the paddocks, climbing the trees, swimming in the silt suspension that is the river, giving cheek to passing canoeists. But this is not ‘mere reminiscence’. The valley has a creative presence within me. This thesis is a testament to that presence. Without the memories, the experience of having grown up in that place, the thesis would not have happened, and I tend to think of it more as a collaboration than my own work. I can’t say that I understand how it all works, memory, identity and place. But I do understand it a bit more than when I started this process. It has been a fascinating, enriching journey. I am deeply indebted to the people interviewed and the places remembered here. Each has been a revelation.

The ‘elephant in the room’ of this thesis, of course, is the passing of the type of childhood that gave rise to the experiences of place remembered here. All of the participants in this study are over 40, and the childhoods they recall are of an era now gone. There is a very different experience of childhood available to kids today. For all sorts of reasons, the
sight of small groups of kids wandering, unsupervised through an unkempt landscape, is rare now. With children today spending a lot more time engaged with screens than with outdoor place, how can the ideas explored in this thesis have relevance?

The idea of place has an odd history of apparent irrelevance and denial, and it will be interesting to see what happens from here. It is becoming increasingly apparent that the techno-industrial culture that has given us all those screens is unsustainable, and that the rate of place-change is going to increase markedly in the not too distant future. While global climate change has been a broad prediction for some time now, no-one can say with any certainty exactly how the carbon will crumble. Whatever the future holds for us and our places, I believe love of place can only be a good thing, the more so if it stands on a bit more cultural and psychological understanding of our relationship with place.
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APPENDIX 1

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

- Guided relaxation exercise.

- Warm up biographical questions
  1. Can you tell me about where you grew up? What was it like there?
  2. Can you tell me about your family?
  3. Were there any particular special places that you remember?

- Instructions:
  I am going to ask you some more questions. In response, I want your answers
to follow your mind wherever it goes. You might not feel that your answers
are directly connected to the question. That is OK. It doesn’t matter that you
don’t answer the questions directly. I want you to, as far as is possible,
follow and describe your flow of thoughts, the stream of consciousness that
occurs in response to the questions.

- Core questions:
  4. Do any particular memories of your being in that place as a child come to
     mind?
  5. Can you tell me what you were doing?
  6. Can you describe that place? Sounds? Smells?
  7. What was it like being in that place as a child?
  8. Who was there with you?
  9. Is there any particular thing that stands out? How did you feel?
 10. How do you feel now?
 11. What is the feeling you have in your body as you recount this?
 12. What is it like to have these memories now?

- Reflective questions
  13. What happens to you as an adult when you recall being in that place as a
     child?
  14. Can you tell me what is it like for you as an adult to remember your
      childhood experience of where you grew up?
  15. How do you think the experience of growing up there has shaped who you
      are now?
  16. How has it shaped how you respond to the place you like now?
  17. What are the circumstances in which you might be more likely to have these
      memories?
  18. Anything else you would like to add?