

Place, (Relph E., 1976)

Sense of Place

The term 'sense of place' is often used to mean the same as 'spirit of place'. This is confusing.

It is more appropriate to understand 'sense of place' as the **awareness of spirit of place**, and as a faculty which **individuals** possess rather than a **property** of **environments**.

Like a sense of **judgement** or a sense of responsibility, it is a synthetic faculty which embraces and extends the various senses of perception.

A place affects us directly through our senses—by sight, hearing, touch and smell.

To this list should be added imagination, memory and purpose.

Sense of place is not a **mandatory** requirement for survival, so there are many who pay scant attention to the world around them.

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Geographer John Eyles (1985) four different senses of place

‘**apathetic**’ since those individuals had little interest in their surroundings.

‘a **social** sense of place’ because for many people places are defined chiefly by where family and friends are.

‘**instrumental**’, an attitude which regards place primarily as a resource providing goods and opportunities,

‘**nostalgic**’, which stresses heritage and old buildings.

There are considerable variations both in type and intensity of sense of place, depending on such things as familiarity, detachment, social status, gender and self-consciousness.

With wealth, for example, comes the freedom to choose places to live. In contrast, the very poor are trapped in places they can afford, or in whatever is provided for them, so that their geographical experience

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Gender

The degree to which gender effects sense of place is not entirely clear.

Architectural and geographical space are differentiated by gender in most cultures and times, and some of her conclusions must apply to place, although she does not consider this explicitly.

Women identify places more with **community** than men, who are either apathetic or see them as built forms.

Women's experience of cities, especially at night, is much more constrained than that of men because of the threat of personal violence.

It should follow that **female experience** and perception of environments differs substantially from that of men, and to that extent women's sense of place must also differ.

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Familiarity

Particularly important influence on sense of place, and makes it possible to distinguish what might be called an **insider's from an outsider's experience**, a distinction which cuts across gender and social status.

Insideness is an aspect of the sense of place which comes with knowing and being known somewhere, and is mostly unself conscious.

It can be such a key component of someone's personality that they effectively identify themselves with their place and declare they can live nowhere else.

Homesickness, local fan loyalty evoked by sports teams (even though these are mostly corporate ventures employing player-mercenaries hired from elsewhere).

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An **outsider**'s sense of place is relatively detached, and regards places chiefly in terms of ostensible and superficial characteristics.

In this, as with most aspects of place, there are considerable variations.

Different types of **outsideness** are found in the packaged experiences of **mass tourism**, in the standardized conveniences of international business travel which reduce the diverse identities of localities to comfortable familiarity, and in much professional expertise.

The latter is mostly based on general and abstract knowledge, so it is assumed that it must have relevance anywhere. When this expertise is brought to bear on places their universal properties are stressed, and specificities ignored, often with unfortunate consequences.

Hotels in...



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Outsideness need not be destructive.

A self-conscious sense of place can be cultivated and refined by improving powers of observation through the open-minded exploration of environments, and by making imaginative attempts to understand what it is like to live in a place which is not one's own.

Through such means it is possible to enter empathetically into situations where one is otherwise an outsider, and to understand them almost as their inhabitants do.

Practicing a self-conscious sense of place is an essential skill for geographers and anyone who cares about the quality of environments.

It is sometimes instinctive, but for most of us it requires, a continual effort to exercise a subtle balance of intellect, common sense, feelings and imagination

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Topophilia

Geographer Yi-fu Tuan (1 9 7 4), 'the affective bond between people and place or setting'.

It is the 'human love of place... diffuse as a concept, vivid and concrete as personal experience'

Topophilia is a gentle human emotion induced by positive attitudes or by pleasant landscapes.

Occasionally, however, when circumstances of both person and place are in a positive conjunction, topophilia can be a powerful and ecstatic experience, one which promotes great insights.

If we are to believe autobiographical accounts, mountain tops are particularly conducive to such formative moments.

Such experiences are not confined to poets; there is evidence that many people have intense topophilic encounters which provide touchstones of meaning by which much of the rest their lives are judged.

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The Italian poet Petrarch wrote about his ascent of Mont Ventoux (in Provence; elevation 1912 meters) on 26 April 1336 in a well-known letter published as one of his *Epistolae familiares* (IV, 1). In this letter, written around 1350, Petrarch claimed to be the first person since antiquity to have climbed a mountain for the view. Although the historical accuracy of his account has been questioned by modern scholars, it is often cited in discussions of the new spirit of the Renaissance.



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Topophobia

However, our environmental experiences are not all pleasant.

Even landscapes of persistent appeal can be the source of ugly and disturbing events.

The mountains which for Petrarca were so uplifting can quickly turn frightening;

there is little joy in being lost on a mountain-top in an unexpected storm.

Such unpleasant experiences of places, in which the overwhelming desire is to be somewhere else that is safe and secure, can appropriately be described as 'topophobia'—repulsion by place.

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Topophilia and Topophobia

can be understood as **good and bad** aspects of place experience.

They are not independent for they are really two facets of a single phenomenon — experience of place — in which sometimes the positive aspects are dominant and sometimes the negative, but both are always present.

The patterns within each of them, and the relationships between them, are complex and subtle, so there is little about the experience of place which is entirely unambiguous and predictable, though not everyone acknowledges this.

Place is a concept which does not fit into standard methodological and epistemological categories.

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