The Meaning and Significance of Place in Old Age

Graham D. Rowles and Miriam Bernard

How hard it is to escape from places. However carefully one goes they hold you—you leave little bits of yourself fluttering on the fences—like rags and shreds of your very life.

—Katherine Mansfield

The ache for home lives in all of us, the safe place where we can go as we are and not be questioned.

—Maya Angelou

We are shaped by the physical and social environments of our life—where we were born, where we grew up, where we live today, and where we grow old. In turn, through processes of habitation and habituation we transform the spaces of our life into places of meaning and significance within what Husserl defined as our *Lebenswelt* or life-world (Husserl, 1970/1936; Schutz & Luckmann, 1973). For each person, the outcome of this complex trans-action is a unique experience of "being-in-the-world" that evolves with each passing year (Dreyfus, 1991; Heidegger, 1962). In recent decades, the significance of the human/environment relationship, its influence on the nature of our being in the world, and its association with well-being in old age has been increasingly acknowledged as a primary component of the emergence of environmental gerontology (Kendig, 2003; Phillipson, 2004; Scheidt & Windley, 2006; Schwarz & Scheidt, 2012; Wahl & Weisman, 2003).

In this chapter, and throughout most of this book, we focus on one sub-domain of environmental gerontology. Since the 1970s, the strongly applied and theoretical focus of the field has been accompanied by a less prominent school of thought that has grappled with trying to

understand the environmental experience of growing old. Adopting an emic perspective, researchers such as Chaudhury, Howell, Peace, Rowles, Rubinstein, Smith, and Watkins have focused heavily on experiential aspects of the older adult's relationship with the environment. Specifically, these researchers have been trying to understand the meaning of place and home to older adults and the manner in which, as a result of advancing age and environmental change (both *in situ* and as a result of relocation), such meaning evolves over time. Early work by Howell (1983), O'Bryant (1982), Willcocks, Peace, and Kellaher (1987), Rowles (1978), Rubinstein (1989, 1990), and Scheidt and Norris-Baker (1999) has been complemented in recent years by contributions from Chaudhury (2008), Cutchin (2003, 2004), Evans (2009), Sixsmith (2002), and others, who have been concerned with phenomenological aspects of environmental meaning, attachments to place, and the notion of "home" (Rowles & Chaudhury, 2005). We have learned far more about the importance of "being in place" and the way in which this changes over the life course (Rowles, 1991, 2000) as well as the negative consequences and emotional issues resulting from severance (especially involuntary severance) from familiar places and objects (Castle, 2001; Danermark & Ekstrom, 1990). We have learned about the role of the surveillance zone as a significant zone of space, especially for those who are homebound (Rowles, 1981). We have been introduced to the notion of "place therapy" (Scheidt & Norris Baker, 1999). And we are beginning to understand the critical importance of the process of *casser maison* (breaking the house) as people are forced to give up the possessions of a lifetime when they relocate to a smaller dwelling (Ekerdt, Sergeant, Dingel, & Bowen, 2004; Morris, 1992). Increasingly too, research is focusing on themes of environment and personal identity in old age (Peace, Holland, & Kellaher, 2006; Rubinstein & de Medeiros, 2005).

Of course, life is also lived in the public realm. Public and shared spaces are critical environments shaping the conduct of everyday life. Our use of and identification with public spaces is an essential component of an overall sense of being in place. There are public places in which we feel safe, welcomed, and within which we can experience a sense of belonging and identification. Other public spaces are dangerous, hostile, and alienating. The design and ambiance of these spaces is a critical element in determining our ability or willingness to venture forth from the relative security of our residence. An older person may feel safe and may identify with the space of the dwelling but be fearful of engaging in a hostile changing environment outside (Balint, 1955). The interwoven relationship between perceptions of private and public spaces molds daily behavior and individual lifestyles.

Notion of "home"

CASSER MAISON

As knowledge of the subjective world of the older person has evolved, we have now reached a level of sophistication that merits a focused attempt to translate deepening insight into practical suggestions and outcomes for the design of both interior (private) and exterior (public) environments. Beyond simply acknowledging and becoming more sensitive to the meaning of place to older adults, how can we constructively use a growing knowledge base to effect change that will improve the quality of life in old age? How can we translate what we are learning about the meaning and significance of place to older people and their well-being into concrete recommendations for practice, policy, and design?

In this chapter we set the stage for a set of contributors to this volume who are beginning to address these questions. We and our contributors also address a series of interrelated questions: What is the current state of knowledge about the manner in which individuals' mold and experience private spaces? How do spaces become transformed into places? How does the individual's experience of place change in old age? To what extent does environmental change (either *in situ* change resulting from the transformation of a neighborhood or a relocation necessitated by reduced personal competence) threaten our sense of being in the world and, more specifically, "being in place" or "at home"? Is such disruption inevitable, irrevocable, and irreconcilable with maintaining a sense of self and well-being in old age? How does the physical form of our environment, the objects it contains, and the social context it provides, reinforce or threaten identity and a sense of being in place?
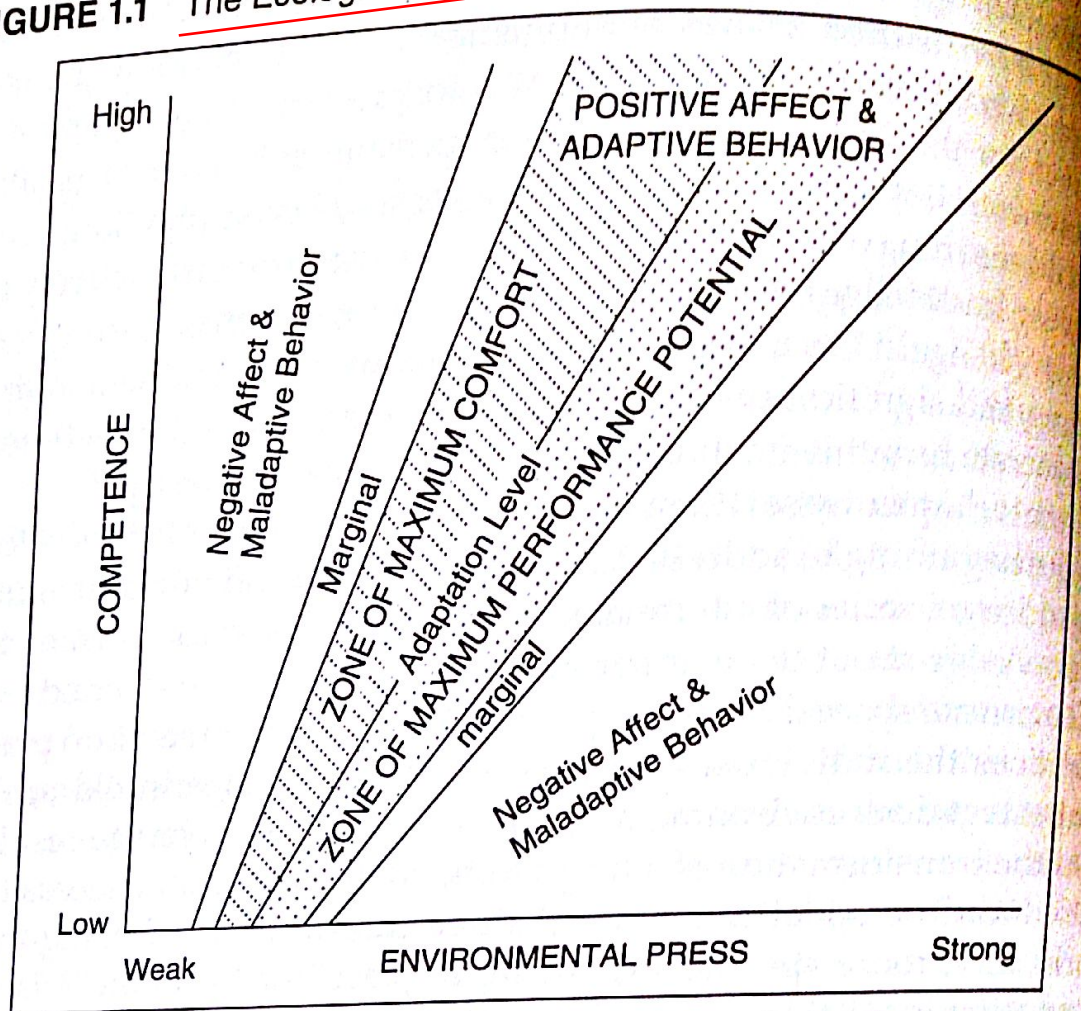
Acknowledging that private and public spaces are integrally intertwined in the fabric of individual lives, we focus in this chapter on private spaces (primarily the place of residence) over which, in most cases, the individual generally has some level of control. In Chapter 2, Sheila Peace provides the necessary complement to our treatment as she sets a context for considering public space. We begin, though, with a brief overview of developments in the field from both sides of the Atlantic.

DEVELOPMENTS IN ENVIRONMENTAL GERONTOLOGY

The roots of environmental gerontology are both theoretical and empirical. Theoretically, environmental gerontology builds on the seminal "field theory" ideas of Kurt Lewin (1951) and has been historically oriented around a simple conceptual equation: $B = f(P.E)$, where B represents Behavior, P represents Person, and E represents Environment. Early development of the field was strongly intertwined with the foundation and growth of environmental psychology in the late 1960s and 1970s (Canter & Craik, 1981; Craik, 1973; Proshansky, Ittelson, & Rivlin, 1976). During this

FIGURE 1.1 *The Ecological Model*

The figure shows a graph with COMPETENCE (Low to High) on the vertical axis and ENVIRONMENTAL PRESS (Weak to Strong) on the horizontal axis. Diagonal bands radiate from the lower left, labeled from top to bottom: "Negative Affect & Maladaptive Behavior", "Marginal", "ZONE OF MAXIMUM COMFORT", "Adaptation Level", "ZONE OF MAXIMUM PERFORMANCE POTENTIAL", "marginal", and "Negative Affect & Maladaptive Behavior". The upper right region is labeled "POSITIVE AFFECT & ADAPTIVE BEHAVIOR".

Source: Redrafted from Lawton and Nahemow (1973, p. 661).

period, a series of theoretical conceptualizations including Pastalan's "age-loss continuum" (1970) and Kahana's "environmental congruence" theory (1982), and Rowles' "hypothesis of changing emphasis" (1978) began to develop a domain in gerontology that was premised upon investigating the "fit" between older people and their environmental context. The most influential of these conceptualizations was M. Powell Lawton and Lucille Nahemow's (1973) ecological theory, which was an elaboration of the "environmental docility hypothesis" (Lawton & Simon, 1968, p. 108) that:

> The more competent the organism—in terms of health, intelligence, ego strength, social role performance, or cultural evolution—the less will be the proportion of variance in behavior attributable to physical objects or conditions around him . . . With high degrees of competence he will, in common parlance, rise above his environment. However, reduction of competence, or deprived status, heightens his behavioral dependence on external conditions.

A frequently reproduced diagram of the ecological theory provided visual representation of environmental adaptation as the outcome of a dynamic relationship between changing individual competence (needs) and the changing constraints of the environmental context (press) (Figure 1.1).

Development of these perspectives was reinforced by growing societal concern during the 1960s and 1970s with developing special living environments for older adults. The creation and proliferation of age-segregated retirement communities, societal acceptance of sheltered housing schemes in the United Kingdom, the emergence of high-rise publicly subsidized elderly housing in the United States, and the development of a plethora of innovative alternative residential models for older adults in both North America and Western Europe, spawned the need for novel designs and assessment of the effectiveness of these approaches for accommodating a rapidly growing elderly population (Carp, 1966; Jephcott, 1971; Lawton & Hoover, 1981; Regnier & Pynoos, 1987). Many critical evaluations of the new forms of housing arrangement were undertaken by the same people who were concurrently developing the theoretical basis of environmental gerontology—Frances Carp, Tom Byerts, Leon Pastalan, M. Powell Lawton, Eva Kahana, Sandra Howell, Victor Regnier, Robert Rubinstein, and Anthony Warnes; indeed, there was a happy interweaving and concordance of theory and practice.

During the 1980s, 1990s, and the first decade of the twenty-first century, a new generation of environmental gerontologists, including Miriam Bernard, Habib Chaudhury, Malcolm Cutchin, Simon Evans, Caroline Holland, Susanne Iwarsson, Leonie Kellaher, Frank Oswald, Sheila Peace, Judith Phillips, Chris Phillipson, Thomas Scharf, Rick Scheidt, Hans-Werner Wahl, and Gerald Weisman, have come to the fore. Building on the theoretical and applied work of the pioneers, this strongly inter- and multidisciplinary cadre of researchers has provided a growing level of sophistication in reinterpreting and refining and elaborating the $B = f(P.E)$ equation. Wahl and Lang (2004) argued for elaboration of the equation through greater integration of the social component of environment. Working from the perspective of occupational therapy, Iwarsson developed the person-environment-activity model (P-E-A), which she operationalized through the housing enabler concept (Iwarsson, 2004). Cutchin, harnessing the ideas of John Dewey, developed a strongly transactional perspective focused on research showing how over time people develop "place integration" within the environments of their life (Cutchin, 2003, 2004). Peace and her colleagues provided new perspectives on inclusivity in housing and the role of environment in shaping identity in later life (Peace & Holland, 2001; Peace, Holland, & Kellaher, 2005). And Evans (2009) provided fresh insight into social well-being and the experience of community among frail people living in "housing with care." In addition, interdisciplinary collaboration from within the social and behavioral sciences has been increasingly complemented by contributions from engineers,

computer scientists, ergonomists, designers, and other technological fields.

As was the case during the early years of environmental gerontology, theoretical work has been interwoven with innovation in housing options and with increasingly sophisticated evaluations of their effectiveness (Ball et al., 2005; Peace & Holland, 2001). In particular, the emergence of universal design (Story, 1998), lifetime homes (Kelly, 2006), smart homes (Fisk, 2001), and a variety of assisted living alternatives (Golant & Hyde, 2008; Wilson, 2007; Zimmerman, Sloane, & Eckert, 2001), in association with the expansion of options such as co-housing (Brenton, 2001), has given rise to increasing interest in trying to reduce the tendency toward residential segregation that had characterized the previous generation of housing alternatives. In parallel with these developments, the mantra of aging-in-place has emerged to become a pervasive element of public policy, in association with an increasing emphasis, verging on an obsession, of enabling older adults to maintain independent living circumstances (Bookman, 2008; Rowles, 1993; Tilson, 1990). The outcome has been diversification of environmental gerontology as a heavily applied sub-field. While the late 1980s and 1990s were a period of theoretical quiescence (Schwarz, 2012), the first decade of the twenty-first century has seen the emergence of increasingly sophisticated person/environment transactional theory. It is against the backdrop of these broad trends that we now turn our attention to providing a contemporary perspective on individual experience of residential environments.

HUMAN EXPERIENCE OF THE ENVIRONMENT

Making Spaces Into Places

Life involves an ongoing process of making spaces into places with more or less success over the life course. Transforming spaces into places is a complex process that occurs on many levels. It may involve unpacking our overnight suitcase as we settle in to our hotel room and try to make ourselves comfortable for a one-night stay; we place items in accustomed locations, our socks in the top drawer and the picture we carry of our spouse on the nightstand on the left side of the bed—the side where we sleep at home. In the United States, it may involve claiming the space of our college dormitory room by placing identity-defining posters on the walls. Or it may involve a process, often extending over decades, of creating a permanent home as we decorate and redecorate our residence,

design and maintain a garden, and gradually accumulate furniture and artifacts that define the space as ours.

On every level, the process involves transforming what is at the outset a sterile and meaningless piece of geographic space, for example an empty apartment, into a place that has personal meaning in the context of our ongoing life. In the process, we are engaged in converting something that is neutral and often alien into something that is a meaningful expression of our identity. This is not a trivial pursuit, because it is a process that provides a sense of familiarity, centering, security, ownership, control, territoriality, comfort, display, and identity.

On the most basic level, the creation of place involves the *use* of an environment, our pattern of behavior within a setting. For example, for those who work away from home, over time we develop a familiar pattern in our use of the space of our residence—a daily routine that provides a rhythm to life. We rise at about the same time each morning, and stumble, semi-awake, to the kitchen to plug in the coffee maker, before moving to the bathroom to perform our morning ablutions. On the way back to the kitchen, the daily ritual may include pausing at our front door to pick up the mail. Returning to the kitchen, we turn on the radio or our digital reader to catch up on the news before moving to the bedroom to dress for the day. We leave for work at about the same time each day, traveling the same route and often passing and interacting with the same people. And on most working days, the pattern of the rest of the day follows a similar preordained ritual in our use of the environment. A comparable pattern of ritualized behavior in the use of interior space may be traced if we work from home and spend most of the day in this setting. Regardless of our particular lifestyle, over time we develop a level of familiarity and comfort with our daily routine such that it becomes subconscious and habitual—taken for granted.

The habituation of daily activity patterns is reinforced by cognitive *awareness* of the configuration of the inside of our residence and the regular pathways we traverse as we move through the day. Indeed, our learned comfort and familiarity with our environment may only be fully brought into consciousness when the "automatic pilot," what David Seamon (1979) terms our pre-conscious "body subject," breaks down when we bump into a piece of furniture our spouse has moved from its appointed place, or we realize with a start that we have traveled almost the whole distance to work without consciously thinking about our driving. Over time, the reassurance of routines of using space and the "mental maps" that guide our behavior provide a level of comfort

in traversing space. This may be adaptive as routine takes over from declining cognitive and sensory capability (Kastenbaum, 1980/1981; Norris-Baker & Scheidt, 1989).

Use and awareness of space are complemented as components of the way in which we transform spaces into places by the development of *emotional attachment* and a sense of ownership of known and familiar places—the corner of the locker room at the gym where we routinely change becomes "our place" (we feel a sense of intrusion when we arrive to find that someone has taken our customary locker). Attachments may become far more intense with respect to locations where significant life events transpired. The room in our residence where a relative died, the site of an accident on the way to work, the coffee shop where we first met our spouse, all, over time, become part of the rich landscape of place that forms the backdrop to the tapestry of our life and a constant source of reinforcement of identity. Each location becomes a potential cue to resurrecting in consciousness the events that transpired within it. The spaces of our life gradually become the places of our life as they become suffused with layer upon layer of meaning, sometimes recalled and sometimes merely latent, but always available as a potential source of self-affirming recollection.

Habitation of an environment over an extended period generates *temporal depth* in the experience of place through repetition of patterns of use, increasingly differentiated awareness, and the accumulation of layers of emotional attachments. This facilitates *vicarious engagement* (Rowles, 1978). In our mind's eye, it is possible to travel back in time or across space to places where we have lived (including our current residence as it was in the past) and memorable locations we have visited and to reconstruct the events that transpired in these locations. We can also traverse contemporary space and visit places far away as we use the vast reservoir of our history of involvement with place to conjure up images of what is currently transpiring in these locations. Who among us has not taken such a journey as our thoughts stray while attending a particularly boring presentation? Of course these places are not real in the sense that they constitute an accurate representation. Rather they are constructions, often honed over many years as we selectively reconstruct the places of our life in ways that reinforce identity. Over time, place gradually comes to embody the self as it provides a reservoir of experiences grounded in our life experience that we can resurrect and vicariously relive and reconfigure as we develop, refine, and reinforce our identity. As layer upon layer of meaning in place is accumulated, the outcome is a sense of being in place.

House and Home and Being at Home

For many people, the most intense expression of being in place is provided by the concept of "home" and the experience of being at home. A large and growing literature on the idea of home has included a significant amount of work on the meaning of home in old age (Rowles & Chaudhury, 2005). At the outset it is important to make two distinctions. First, we differentiate between house and home because too often the former term is confounded with the latter. As Amos Rapoport notes so cogently, there is a critical difference between a house, apartment, assisted living residence, or nursing facility, indeed any type of living space, and a "home" (Rapoport, 2005; Rowles, 2006). In and of themselves, houses and apartments have no meaning. They are merely locations—empty spaces. They can only be brought to life and assume meaning as "home" through a process of habitation or "dwelling" in which space is claimed as a part of individual or group identity. Second, our concern is with home as an expression of our relationship with a concrete entity, a physical location, a place that becomes imbued with meaning through our habitation or dwelling within its confines. While there is certainly significant conceptual overlap, we are not directly concerned with more ethereal notions of home such as are evoked at the end of life when some people refer to "going home to God."

As we have noted, bringing spaces to life and developing a sense of being at home in these spaces is a complex process involving use, awareness, and the development of emotional attachments, all filtered through ongoing processes of vicarious immersion. It involves an intimate interweaving of person and location over time that results in a sense of familiarity, comfort, and at-oneness with places that finds expression in many dimensions of a person's being in the world and is closely related to well-being. It is only with the deepening awareness and understanding of these dimensions that we are able to contemplate providing effective interventions to truly enhance quality of life by creating spaces that are supportive of human need for being in place and being at home. So what are the dimensions of being at home?

For most people, "home" provides a place of centering. It is a location, characteristically our residence, from which we depart and to which we return each day, a reference point from which we build our spatial world. As such it provides an anchoring point for the flow of daily life (Bollnow, 1961). Our residence as home imbues life with a sense of permanence that contrasts with the alienation of being homeless and without an inner space (Watkins & Hosier, 2005). Home is associated with a sense of ownership. In an ethological sense it is our

territory—our lair, burrow, or nest (Porteous, 1976); it provides a place of refuge from a threatening world outside and a place of privacy where we are safe and able to let down our guard, to relax, and where we are released from the constraints of the face that our culture obliges us to present to the world.

Having a home and being at home in most western societies is not without culturally imposed responsibility. We are expected to maintain our property and, if we have a garden, to exercise control over this space by ensuring that our lawn is mowed, our hedges are trimmed, and the gate is not hanging off its hinges.

The rewards of having a home, whether it be a high-rise apartment, a terraced house or a suburban residence, and being able to generate and maintain a place where we feel at home, are great. In addition to feelings of safety and comfort, home provides a place where we are in control and where we have the freedom of self-expression. Within interior space, we are free to decorate the rooms according to our whim, assemble furniture that reflects our aesthetic preference, and fill the space with artifacts and treasured possessions accumulated over our lifetime that reinforce our identity and personal history (Marcus, 1995; Rowles, Oswald, & Hunter, 2004). Outside, we can express ourselves in ways that range from an expansive lawn upon which our children play, through a productive garden where we grow herbs and vegetables, to elaborate flower beds providing a profusion of color through the changing seasons.

Ultimately, home is a place of belonging. It is a sacred place where we can simply be—where we can find ourselves through retreat from a profane world (Eliade, 1959). Nowhere is this essential function of the house as home more eloquently expressed than in the writing of Otto Bollnow (1961, p. 33), who more than 50 years ago wrote:

> Outer space is the space of openness, of danger, and abandonment. If that were the only space, then the existentialists would be correct and man would really be the eternally hunted fugitive. He needs the space of the house as an area protected and hidden, an area in which he can be relieved of continual anxious alertness, into which he can withdraw in order to return to himself. To give man this space is the highest function of the house.

Conversely, as we shall argue, to take it away is an often unknowing but generally pernicious cruelty.

Considered in concert, the dimensions of being in place and being at home reflect the essence of the way in which human beings relate to

their environmental context. While home is the most intense expression of relationship with place, the same dimensions apply to greater or lesser degree to all of the spaces of life as they are used and as relationships develop within them. Consequently, we can feel quite "at home" at our favorite table at a local restaurant, or quite alienated when patronizing a cafe that is clearly designed for an entirely different clientele, especially when we experience the embarrassment of inappropriate dress for the setting. We can mark our ownership of our house (now our home) by building a fence, or reserve our place in an airport waiting room by arranging our luggage in a defensive pose and daring anyone to invade what has become our temporary albeit ephemeral home space.

ENVIRONMENTAL EXPERIENCE IN OLD AGE

Patterns of Adjustment Within Private Space

It is now well known and documented that older adults spend an increasing proportion of their time at home, in many cases more than 80% (Baltes, Maas, Wilms, & Borschelt, 1999; Kuster, 1998). Within the home, and especially as people move into their ninth decade, increasing frailty, difficulty in moving around and climbing or descending stairs, as well as fear of falling may lead to closing off rooms and to a process of environmental centralization (Clemson, Cusick, & Fozzard, 1999; Rowles, Oswald, & Hunter, 2003; Rubinstein, 1989). Older people may spend an increasing amount of their time in a single room or on a single floor of a multilevel residence, as they accommodate to changing capability. Indeed, they may "set up," sometimes with assistance from family members, to maintain the highest possible level of independence for as long as possible by placing their favorite chair with a clear view to the outside and may surround themselves with items they need, the television remote control, their sewing project, their telephone, and food for snacks, making sure that these items are within easy reach to minimize the need for movement during the day (Rowles, 1981).

These processes are often facilitated by external support from family members, neighbors, or social services. Typical is the experience of Peggy, an older women in one of the first author's studies who was "set up" in this manner every morning by her son, who would visit before going to work and make sure that his mother was provided with a flask of coffee and a lunch prepared by his wife, and that she was comfortably ensconced in her favorite chair by the window (Rowles, 1981, 1983). Each evening he would return to conduct comparable activities to

make sure that she was set up for the night. Similarly, as people grow older in the community, they increasingly come to rely on support from neighbors and friends. In the same study, Audrey had, over the years, cultivated a relationship of "obligation" with her immediate neighbors, who would bring in her mail from the roadside mailbox, observe her window to make sure that the curtains were opened each morning, and visit frequently to provide assistance with daily chores. In some cases, neighbors may also act as a liaison with children who live far away. In less stable and less socially integrated neighborhoods, similar support may be provided by paid caregivers or by a growing array of community-based home care services.

## Patterns of Relocation: Remaking Home

Eventually, for some older adults there comes a point when they can no longer sustain themselves or be sustained in their home by family, neighbors, or social services. Characteristically, this results in the need to relocate to a new setting that provides an increasing array of supports to sustain activities of daily living (Oswald & Rowles, 2007). In the past, the options were limited. Generally, they entailed relocation from a community residence to a nursing facility. But in recent decades, a plethora of intervening opportunities have emerged, ranging from supportive housing through assisted living to an array of personal care options designed to sustain individuals in a less medically oriented and restrictive environment than the nursing facility. Consequently, the process of relocation may involve a series of moves to successively more supportive environments.

The key point here is that making such moves involves the disruption of the person's being in place or being at home and necessitates transferring or remaking a new mode of being in place. This process is complex and involves adjustment with respect to all of the dimensions of being in place that we have discussed. The process is repeated with every move (Figure 1.2).

Abandonment of a familiar home and remaking a sense of being in place and at home in a new setting is not only stressful, but also is a skill. For example, early work on retirement communities showed that some people are particularly adept at this process, having developed the capacity over their life course to easily transition from place to place (Jacobs, 1974; Osgood, 1982). Others are not. For these people, relocation is often associated with significant stress. The stresses are magnified for older adults, who tend to have a lower level of physiological reserve

FIGURE 1.2   The Experience of Relocation: Remaking Home
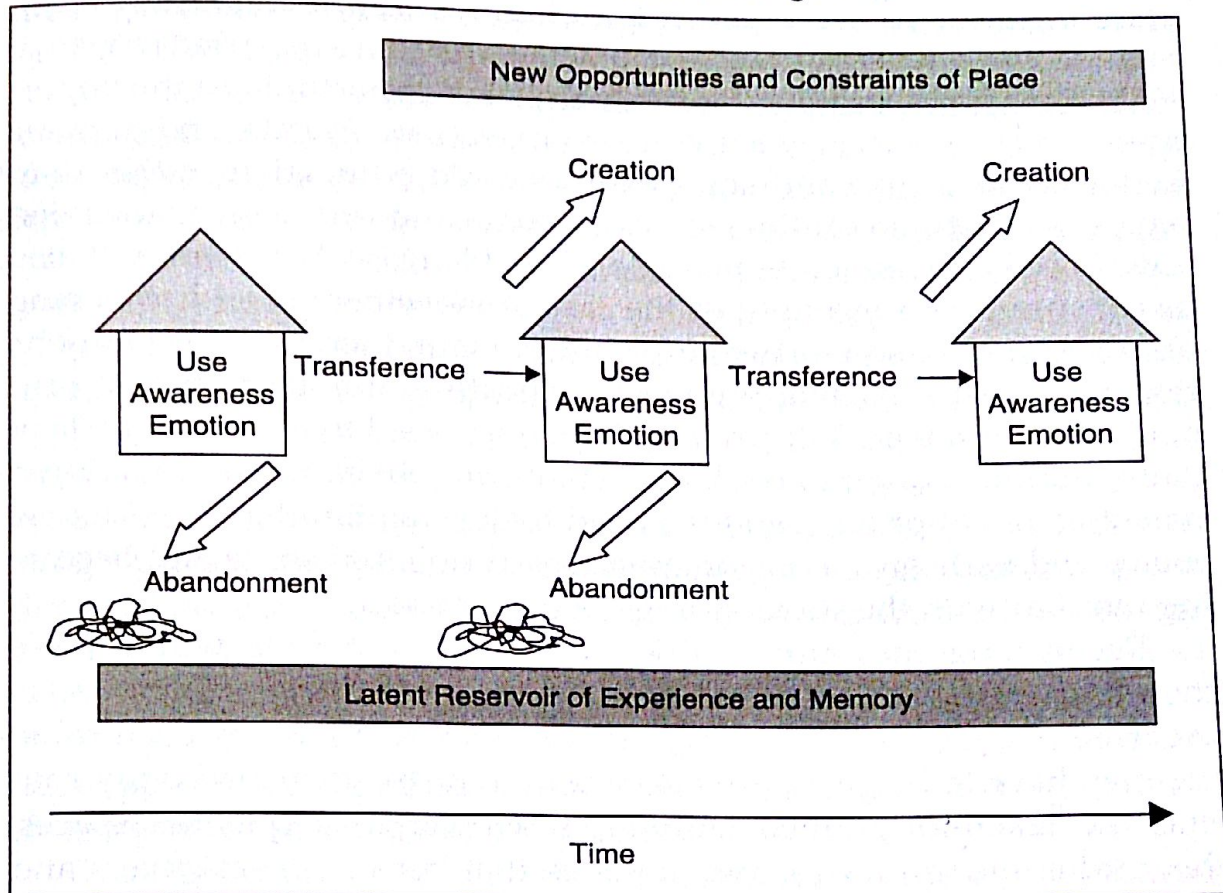
capacity and ability to adapt to environmental change. Experience is also a key factor here. Census data for 2005–2006 indicate that U.S. residents relocate, on average, 10.1 times during their life, a far cry from the relative residential inertia of previous generations. Of course, many people relocate many more times and many on fewer occasions. For a person with lifelong residence in a single dwelling or who relocates only once or twice over the course of their life, each move has the potential to be traumatic. It may involve tearing up deeply burrowed roots and abandoning a sense of being in place that is a key element of the persona. In contrast, those who relocate frequently generally, although not invariably, have less-intense associations with the abandoned locations and are more likely to have refined their place-making skills in a manner that minimizes the disruption of each move.

A key element of the process will be one of *transference*, as older people move not only themselves but also many aspects of their being in place, including the possessions they load into the moving van and the many aspects of their lifestyle and daily routine of behavior that they try to accommodate to the new setting. For example, there is evidence

that when people move to a new residence, they have a tendency to place furniture in a spatial configuration replicating the arrangement of these items in the residence from which they have departed (Toyama, 1988). Each new setting will offer many new opportunities: the opportunity to engage in new activities, to make new friends, and perhaps to devote more time and energy to preferred occupations rather than having to continue routine chores of home and self-maintenance that have become increasingly taxing and problematic. But there will also be constraints; for example, in the case of movement to assisted living or other types of supportive care environment, there will generally be the need for downsizing (giving up furniture and artifacts that cannot be accommodated in a reduced space), a need to change aspects of daily routine in order to conform with dining times at a new facility, a potential loss of privacy, and the need to develop familiarity with new routes and pathways in negotiating new residential space and becoming familiar with the surrounding neighborhood.

Reconciling the opportunities and the constraints will involve the active *creation* of a new mode of being in place and at home. Also involved is a process *of abandonment*, as much that has been central to life may have to be given up: the ease of a long-established daily routine, the taken-for-granted familiarity with often-frequented spaces, the garden nurtured over two decades that became a sanctuary and so much a part of life and identity as new plants and trees were added over the years, a network of close personal friends, strong relationships with neighbors, and, because each new space is characteristically smaller than the one given up, many of the cherished possessions accumulated over a lifetime. There is also the fear of loss of memories as the physical cues in the environment that evoked and preserved images of a daughter playing on the swing in the backyard, a spouse working at the bench in the garage, and countless other key events that took place in what was "home" are given up, become part of the detritus of life, and gradually fade from immediate consciousness to become part of a latent reservoir of experience and memories. Reconciling processes of transference, creation, and abandonment during the experience of relocating is repeated with every move.

Placing this model in the broader context of the experience of relocation and its relationship to our being in place or at home throughout the life course, there is an ongoing relationship between *proactivity*, defined as anticipating, preparing for, and making a home or planning a relocation over which one has control, and *reactivity*, defined as an experiential response to unanticipated or unwelcome relocation, generally

in situations where one has reduced or limited control (Lawton, 1990). The balance between the two processes is different at different points in the life course and over each person's lifetime relocation trajectory. For example, as a child our autonomy and involvement in planning and anticipating relocations is limited even though place attachment may be an important element of our identity and well-being (Jack, 2010). We simply react and accommodate to decisions to move made by our parents as we transfer, create, and abandon aspects of our being in place or at home during relocations over which we have little control. But as we grow older and perhaps establish our own family, assuming we have the resources to do so, we tend to become increasingly proactive in making the places of our life, in creating the kind of private and residential space in which we feel most comfortable and at home. We envisage a dream home, establish a comfortable lifestyle or mode of being in place, and gradually accumulate artifacts that reinforce our identity and our preferred mode of being in the world. Toward the end of a working life, as we envisage retirement, we may become even more proactive as we anticipate and prepare for this event, and perhaps eventually engage in retirement relocation to a residence and setting supporting our preferred mode of being in place. Striving to live a life imagined, we make our ideal home.

Our sense is that this is a common process for many people who have the necessary resources. Unfortunately, many people do not. Too many powerless older adults still live in poverty and isolation in environmentally and socially hostile neighborhoods (Minkler, 1985; Scharf et al., 2006; Scharf, Phillipson, & Smith, 2005, 2007); in Maslow's (1943) terms their lives are framed at the base of the needs hierarchy with a focus on survival rather than the element of self-actualization that results from being at home.

Even if we could envisage the opportunity for all people to create a place where they can be at home as a central motif of their life, there should be no illusion that such a state is likely to be perpetual. As we age and potentially become more environmentally vulnerable, we are likely to find ourselves in a much more reactive mode as we are obliged to accept increasing levels of care in order to remain at home or as we consider relocation to a more supportive environment. In such a setting, although we may receive all the care we need, we will invariably be forced to react to circumstances in which we have significantly reduced control and independence with a far less rich mode of being in place, and in an environment where our level of autonomy and ability to remake place is likely to be significantly diminished.

Consequences of Relocation

As we have noted, there is abundant evidence that relocation, particularly when such relocation is involuntary and—in the terms employed in this chapter—reactive, has negative consequences. Beyond the effects on mortality and morbidity so widely documented and discussed in the literature (Danermark & Ekstrom, 1990; Smith & Crome, 2000), we suggest that the fundamental issue is one not only of physical separation, but also of psychological and, specifically, experiential separation from place. To be "out of place" and "homeless," essentially the fate of many older people when they become vulnerable, is no way to spend the final months or years of life.

WHY PLACE IS IMPORTANT

We are now approaching a point where being out of place and homeless may no longer be an inevitable companion of old age. As we accumulate knowledge of the manner in which people experience space and make place, we are increasingly able to identify options for intervention that on the one hand enable people to sustain accustomed modes of being in place and at home and, on the other, ease the process of transition and remaking place when environmental change or a relocation becomes necessary. Diverse options are now available for supporting aging in place. There is growing emphasis on creating livable cities and elder-friendly neighborhoods that nurture a sense of being in place (Abbott, Carman, Carman, & Scarfo, 2009; Clark & Glicksman, 2012; Lui, Everingham, Warburton, Cuthill, & Bartlett, 2009). Design innovations, including universal design, smart home technologies, benign surveillance equipment and emerging ambient intelligence technologies, are making it easier for older adults to remain at home (Fisk, 2001; Hwang, Cummings, Sixsmith, & Sixsmith, 2011; Melenhorst, Rogers, & Fisk, 2007; Sixsmith, 2000; Story, 1998).

When relocation is necessary, we are discovering that not only actual preliminary visits to the new setting but also simulated ones can ease the process of transference (Hertz, Rossetti, Koren, & Robertson, 2005; Hunt & Roll, 1987). The value of assisting individuals faced with downsizing in the process of sorting through their possessions, with a view to identifying and saving those that provide the strongest cues to ongoing identity and potential to minimize the stress of severance from familiar place, is increasingly recognized (Luborsky, Lysack, & Van Nuil, 2011). So, too, is the integral role of the family in the process

and its relationship to the creation of legacy through the handing down of possessions during the process of household disbandment (Ekerdt & Sergeant, 2006; Hunter & Rowles, 2005).

Providing support in the remaking of home is possible through the design of long-term care facilities that provide adequate space in rooms and residents' private spaces for the retention, storage, and display of familiar and treasured artifacts. Supporting residents in the remaking of home is also facilitated by staff education to increased sensitivity to the significance of being in place and the meaning of home to older residents.

Easing the negative impacts of giving up a home and sustaining a sense of continuity, can be accomplished by return visits to the abandoned residence or neighborhood or by strategies to reinforce the retention of previous social relationships—for example, maintaining membership in, and continuing to participate in and retain social ties with, one's former church. The increasingly widely utilized option of reminiscence groups in long-term care facilities also provides an important medium for vicariously reconnecting people to their past and to places that have been physically abandoned (Gibson, 2004; Haight & Webster, 1995). One particularly interesting and potentially adaptable option is provided in the work of Habib Chaudhury (2008), who demonstrates how both generic photographs of residences as well as actual photographs of former homes (obtained from family members) can provide critical environmental cuing to enable persons with Alzheimer's disease to recapture places of their past and hence retain and reinforce identity. Within this process of "photo-linking," the picture becomes a medium for re-entering and remaking place. Finally, the emergence of the Internet and the growth of social media including Facebook, MySpace, Skype, Tumblr, Reddit, and Twitter is transforming the nature of people's social relationships and modifying the ways in which lives are confined by space. Embracing aspects of contemporary social media that are becoming increasingly prominent in the lives of future older adults, offers the potential for sustaining and reinforcing existing modes of being in place and perhaps creating new modes of being in the world and at home that we have yet to imagine (Bradley & Poppen, 2003; Carter, 2005; Sum, Matthews, Pourghasem, & Hughes, 2009).

We are on the threshold of a new era in our knowledge and understanding of older people's relationship to place, an era in which environmental gerontology has the potential to use deepening understanding of the manner in which older adults relate to place as a basis for sensitive and empathic interventions to improve the quality of life
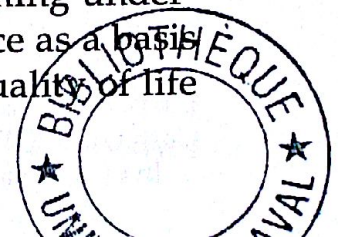
in old age. This book is a response to this opportunity. Our authors are not only contributing to the development of a more sophisticated and finely nuanced environmental gerontology, but also are helping us make progress along a path toward greater environmental sensitivity and awareness of the lived experience of older adults, which has the potential to improve quality of life for us all.

As you read the following chapters, we hope that you will ponder the many ways in which our contributors are grappling with the challenge of translating knowledge of the meaning and significance of place in old age into practical suggestions for environmental design, human service intervention, community development, and public policy. We sense that many of these suggestions are merely scratching the surface of the possible. Our hope is that you, the reader, will use this information and the insights of our contributors as a stimulus for your own thinking.

Of one thing we are sure: space matters, but place matters even more, because it captures the essence of meaning in life. To be placeless is to be alienated from the world and is a threat to identity. It is a fate that in our contemporary society confronts many people as their residential circumstances change toward the end of life. Our contributors demonstrate why this need not be so.

REFERENCES

Abbott, P. S., Carman, N., Carman, J., & Scarfo, B. (2009). *Recreating neighborhoods for successful aging.* Baltimore, MD: Health Professions Press.

Balint, M. (1955). Friendly expanses–horrid empty spaces. *International Journal of Psychoanalysis, 36,* 225–241.

Ball, M. M., Perkins, M. M., Whittington, F. J., Hollingsworth, C., King, S. V., & Combs, B. S. (2005). *Communities of care: Assisted living for African American elders.* Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins University Press.

Baltes, M. M., Maas, I., Wilms, H.-U., & Borchelt, M. (1999). Everyday competence in old and very old age: Theoretical considerations and empirical findings. In P. B. Baltes & K. U. Mayer (Eds.), *The Berlin aging study* (pp. 384–402). Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

Bollnow, O. F. (1961). Lived space. *Philosophy Today, 5*(1), 31–39.

Bookman, A. (2008). Innovative models of aging in place: Transforming our communities for an aging population. *Community, Work & Family, 11*(4), 419–438.

Bradley, N., & Poppen, W. (2003). Assistive technology, computers and internet may decrease sense of isolation for homebound elderly and disabled persons. *Technology and Disability, 15,* 19–25.

Brenton, M. (2001). Older people's cohousing communities. In S. M. Peace & C. Holland (Eds.), *Inclusive housing in an ageing society* (pp. 169–188). Bristol, UK: Policy Press.

Canter, D. V., & Craik, K. H. (1981). Environmental psychology. *Journal of Environmental Psychology, 1*(1), 1–11.

Carp, F. M. (1966). *A future for the aged.* Austin, TX: University of Texas Press.

Carter, D. (2005). Living in virtual communities: An ethnography of human relationships in cyberspace. *Information, Communication and Society, 8*(2), 148–167.

Scanned by CamScanner