

# What is Sense of Place?

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As noted in the call for this year's papers, "*Sense of place* has become a buzzword used to justify everything from a warm fuzzy appreciation of a natural landscape to the selling of homesites in urban sprawl. The truth is we probably have no single "sense of place;" instead, we bring to the places we live a whole set of cultural preconceptions that shape the way we respond to the place, and in some measure reshape the place to fit those preconceptions...." This lack of a common definition or understanding of sense of place, results both from the fact that it has become a buzzword used to suit various purposes, and from the interdisciplinary nature of the concept. To provide a little background for the use of the term, I will review some of the definitions used by various social scientists, and then review my own contribution to that literature by summarizing and expanding on a few of the ideas presented at last year's Headwaters Conference.

## What the Social Scientists Say

Let's begin with some definitions. Following is a list of five definitions from five different fields. These examples are not meant to be an exhaustive list of all the definitions used by various disciplines, rather they are a sample of the diversity and commonalities among definitions. Hopefully, as a group, they address most of the aspects commonly associated with the concept *sense of place*, also referred to as *place attachment*, *topophilia*, *insidedness*, and *community sentiment* (1).

**Anthropology:** Setha Low, "Symbolic Ties that Bind: Place Attachments in the Plaza" (2)  
"*Place attachment* is the symbolic relationship formed by people giving culturally shared emotional/affective meanings to a particular space or piece of land that provides the basis for the individual's and group's understanding of and relation to the environment.... Thus, place attachment is more than an emotional and cognitive experience, and includes cultural beliefs and practices that link people to place."

**Environmental Psychology:** Fritz Steele, *The Sense of Place* (3)

"*Sense of Place*: the particular experience of a person in a particular setting (feeling stimulated, excited, joyous, expansive, and so forth)."

"*Spirit of Place*: the combination of characteristics that gives some locations a special 'feel' or personality (such as a spirit of mystery or of identity with a person or group)."

"*Setting*: a person's immediate surroundings, including both physical and social elements."

**Geography:** Yi-Fu Tuan, *Topophilia* (4)

“*Topophilia* is the affective bond between people and place or setting.” Such ties vary in intensity, subtlety, and mode of expression. Responses to the environment may be aesthetic, tactile, or emotional.

**Landscape Architecture/History:** John Brinckerhoff Jackson, *A Sense of Place, a Sense of Time* (5)

“A *sense of place* is something that we ourselves create in the course of time. It is the result of habit or custom.... A sense of place is reinforced by what might be called a sense of recurring events.”

**Sociology:** David Hummon, “Community Attachment: Local Sentiment and Sense of Place” (6)

“By *sense of place*, I mean people’s subjective perceptions of their environments and their more or less conscious feelings about those environments. Sense of place is inevitably dual in nature, involving both an interpretive perspective *on* the environment and an emotional reaction *to* the environment.... Sense of place involves a personal *orientation* toward place, in which one’s understanding of place and one’s feelings about place become fused in the context of environmental meaning.”

### **Breaking Apart the Concept *Sense of Place***

Between the years of 1995 and 1999, I interviewed a variety of residents in Nevada County, California about their community attachments (7). In the course of analyzing these interviews and trying to understand their senses of place, or community attachments, I was frustrated with the concept *sense of place*. It was easy for me to understand sense of place for a person who had a strong bond with one place. I had a much harder time trying to characterize a sense of place for a person who described strong bonds with one place and very weak ones with another.

To resolve this dilemma, I examined the different aspects of the concept sense of place. It seemed to me that sense of place was actually composed of two quite different aspects. The first aspect, *relationship to place*, consists of the ways that people relate to places, or the types of bonds we have with places. The second aspect, *community attachment*, consists of the depth and types of attachments to one particular place. Rather than try to describe senses of place that encompass both of these aspects, I argue that we can create a more meaningful understanding of people’s attachments to places by thinking about *relationships to place* and *community attachments* as two separate but related aspects of sense of place.

### **Relationships to Place**

Residents of Nevada County described different types of connections with place, which I have categorized into six types of relationships: biographical, spiritual, ideological, narrative, commodified, and dependent. This typology should be seen as ideal types, or analytic categories developed to facilitate understanding. The five types characterize what the people I interviewed describe as fundamental ways they relate to places. They should not be seen as descriptions of individual people. Many people are likely to have more than one relationship with a single place, and those relationships are likely to change over time. Regarding the level of analysis, people

have relationships to places as small as a favorite rock next to the river, or as large as a geographical region.

**TABLE 1 Relationships to Place**

<b>Relationship</b>	<b>Type of Bond</b>	<b>Process</b>
Biographical (9)	historical and familial	being born in and living in a place, develops over time
Spiritual	emotional, intangible	feeling a sense of belonging, simply felt rather than created
Ideological	moral and ethical	living according moral guidelines for human responsibility to place, guidelines may be religious or secular
Narrative (9)	mythical	learning about a place through stories, including: creation myths, family histories, political accounts, and fictional accounts
Commodified	cognitive (based on choice and desirability)	choosing a place based a list of desirable traits and lifestyle preferences, comparison of actual places with ideal
Dependent (9)	material	constrained by lack of choice, dependency on another person or economic opportunity

**Biographical Relationships.** The strongest and most enduring relationships described by the men and women I interviewed are attachments based on personal history with a place. I have named these biographical relationships. They are characterized by a strong sense of identification with place and a relatively long residence. In these relationships, place is an integral part of personal history. As such, biographical relationships require time to develop, and are strongest in communities in which one has spent more time. People describe their relationships in terms of cognitive, physical, and emotional connections.

**Susie:** My house has a history. My fiancée can't understand why I will have a hard time selling our house. My dad built the house. He built the rock walls. I loved being a kid when we lived in that house. We had social family time in that living room. All my brothers and sisters were older. My dad was very intellectual.

We discussed everything sitting around our dinner table. It was a wonderful time of day sitting around the table.

Now I live there with my mom, she is 85 and my two little boys. I have always been really attached to my house. I have planted all those Christmas trees in the yard. We have a tradition. We buy a living tree right before Christmas. Two have died, but we have about 12 there. We have a big Sequoia. I like that I look out my yard and I remember Christmases past.

I feel like I'm a part of this place. I'm a part of the history. When I go into the supermarket, I know so many people. I'm just really happy living here. My kids are 6th generation.

Newcomers, also develop strong ties over time:

**Natalie:** I built two houses there and bought my third. I have basically lived there half of my life, and you know, it is home. This place is just home, more than LA ever was. Although I am comfortable in big cities, this is just home. . . The San Juan Ridge is so much a part of my identity. We have mythology here. We have two celebrations, community wide celebrations. We all get together. It is the same ceremony and games and food. There is a real culture here. This place and the people are infused on my psyche.

Whether one is a long-time resident or a newcomer, spending time in a place creates memories and experiences, which become part of a person's individual and community identity.

***Spiritual Relationships.*** The second type of relationships is a spiritual connection. In contrast to biographical relationships, the men and women I interviewed also described having significant relationships to places based on something much less tangible than personal history. They describe relating to place in a profound way, of having a deep sense of belonging or resonance that is difficult to describe and is often unexpected. I have named these *spiritual relationships* because they seem to be more of a intuitive connection than an emotional, cognitive, or material connection. Although interviewees don't necessarily use the word spiritual, they do describe their relationship as a profound sense of belonging, sometimes mystical, and often intangible.

**Cathy:** I think it is beyond kind of an intellectual understanding, my attachment to this place. And it is not even emotional. You know, like when you close your eyes and you see this. When you go to sleep at night, you know in your dreams. It is beyond the kind of intelligent, cognitive working mind. This is the place that I belong. This is where I feel at home. When I am not here, I am always enjoying other places, but part of me is always ready to be back here. Or feels safest here.

That is why I say psychically, it's just like there is not a differentiation of myself and place, in a way. I could not say this is where Cathy ends and her place

begins. Or this is not just her sense of place. This is HER. This is me, this place is me.

Another woman describes her spiritual connection to Nevada County as something difficult to understand without experiencing it firsthand.

**Natalie:** I feel very fortunate that I landed here. I could have ended up in Oregon, or some other part of the world. I am happy here. It is a very spiritual place, a very gracious place. You try to explain that to someone who doesn't live here, it is very difficult. They don't believe it is here. It is probably too good to be true. I was telling you about that sense of belonging, and I've found it.

Most people who describe feeling a spiritual connection speak of something they "just feel" rather than something they looked for or chose. They do not seem to require time to develop, nor do people describe them as a conscious choice. Spiritual relationship may be formed with a community or region in which a person was raised, or they may be formed with a place encountered later in life.

***Ideological Relationships.*** The third type of relationships is ideological. In contrast to spiritual relationships, which "just happen" and are not chosen, *ideological relationships* are founded on conscious values and beliefs about how humans should relate to physical places. The defining characteristic of ideological relationships is a well-articulated ideology about how to live in a place. For some this comes in the form of religious or spiritual teachings. For others, it is secular ethic of responsibility. It should be noted that all relationships to place are based on ideology, but most Americans are not self-conscious of their beliefs that provide guidelines for how to live in a place.

Among those people who have a clearly defined ideological relationship to place are members of spiritual communities. In Nevada County, the largest of those is Ananda Village, an intentional community devoted to the teachings of a renowned yoga master, Paramhansa Yogananda. People are drawn to Ananda and its sister communities because they want to live with like-minded people.

**Scott:** It is a place where you are living with like-minded folks from a spiritual standpoint. The environment supports that. It is a very very supportive environment that supports the teachings. To me that is what is most important in the community. For me it is about a spiritual community. The social relationships are an outgrowth of the shared spirituality. We share a common spiritual bond, in some cases we share work, we are all involved in areas of service. That is central to our spirituality.

In addition to those living in spiritual communities, many residents of the San Juan Ridge (8) describe it as a spiritual community. Many residents of "The Ridge" share a bioregionalist ethic with their neighbor Gary Snyder:

**Cathy:** What I didn't know is that there was a really large, tight self-aware community. It is not an intentional community, but it is what we call a self-aware community. It was much more than I ever expected.

I think part of the ridge culture is a more archetypal inter-species, inter-disciplinary. It's a better perspective. We are the newest intruders, "Thank you for letting us be here." We recognize that we are all guests here. We are all here in very tenuous ways. So it is all very tenuous. We have to remain grateful and hope we don't get wiped out by a fire.

Residents of the San Juan Ridge are not the only people in Nevada County who have developed ideological connections to their community. Some people have chosen to be conscious of their relationship to place without living in a community of like-minded people:

**Hannah:** My husband and I talked a lot about this idea of, we talk a lot about these things. About the idea of not moving anywhere temporarily. We feel like, especially when we lived in San Jose, but all the time prior to that. You know you are young, you're kind of a rolling stone, you don't own much and you are just kind of, whatever happens to you, you follow your job.

Well, we made a conscious decision a couple of years ago, right before we bought a house, that we can no longer be prostitutes to our jobs. And, and what that meant to us was that the first thing we were going to do was to BE where we were. And being a part of our community, and living there regardless. And the most important thing would be how we'd figure out how to do that. I know, a lot of people don't think about things that way, we think its ridiculous. We are really comfortable with it. If his job dried up and blew away, the first line of defense in that situation is certainly not going to be to move. So that's how much rooted we feel. We kind of think of it as living deliberately.

Although there are big differences between those people living in a spiritual community and people who have created their own ethic of relationship to place, their self-conscious relationship to place is an important similarity which is absent from mainstream American culture.

***Narrative Relationships.*** The fourth type of relationships is *narrative relationships*. We all grow up with stories of places that teach us both about the history of that place and of our relationship to it. Gary Snyder, a Nevada County resident, describes stories as an important aspect of how children learn about their place or home:

You grow up speaking a home language, a local vernacular....You hear histories of the people who are your neighbors and tales involving rocks, streams, mountains, and trees that are all within your sight. They myths of world creation tell you how that mountain was created and how that peninsula came to be there (11).

The stories that inform us about places include: creation myths, family histories, fictional accounts, local lore, moral tales, national myths, and political accounts. The role of each type of story or narrative plays a different role in different cultural contexts. Keith Basso, documents the role of moral tales among the Western Apache (12). American school children become familiar with national myths and political accounts as they learn about Thanksgiving and early American history. Native American children learn about their region through creation myths. Some of us learn connection to particular places through family histories rooted in one place for several generations while others learn connection to the larger world through family histories rooted in migration. Whatever our own personal and family history, we also learn about places and regions through fictional accounts in books, movies, and television. As Americans, we have been inundated with national myths about the history of the West. Those images in films and novels shape our perceptions and expectations about places and teach us how to relate to those places.

**Commodified Relationships.** The fifth type of relationship to place is a *commodified relationship*. The defining characteristic of the commodified relationship is choice, the ability to choose a place with the best possible combination of desirable features. In regards to personal history, commodified relationships have little or nothing to do with personal history. Because they are founded on choice and a list of desirable traits, commodified relationships typically result from dissatisfaction with one community and the quest to find a more desirable place. This relationship is based on the match between the attributes of a place and what a person thinks is an ideal place.

**Bob:** The gates weren't the draw; it was the whole package that drew us, the lake, golf course, tennis. It is a good elevation. The gates did offer prestige and security. But it was the total package. My wife would like to be more part of a town. We like Pacific Grove and might have a home there. The only thing my wife misses is being part of a real town. It is a trade-off.

I think what we have is more of what we want than other places. It's not like we haven't looked around. We lived in the North East, there is nothing there, and there is nothing in Southern California. The only other place I've considered is Carmel/Pacific Grove. It is an upscale feel but not high rises. But I don't want it twelve months of the year, for the fog. The summers are lousy. That might be a place to go for the winter if we wanted to get away.

Commodified relationships are based on the comparison of person's image of the ideal community with the physical attributes of a community. Not surprisingly a person's image of the ideal community changes across the life-course:

**Bob:** In my 20s and 30s New York was ideal, in my 40s San Francisco was ideal, and in my 50s and beyond Lake Wildwood is ideal. There is a real sense of community and you can't drive down the road without folks waving at you. It is almost like a resort because people are just reaching out for each other. You don't see that in cities and suburbs where folks are transient.

These relationships are more cognitive and physical than emotional. In this relationship to place the most significant emotional connections are to things or commodities like upscale restaurants and boutiques, and the natural environment, rather than to the larger community or relationships with other people.

Amenity migrants are the stereotypical example of people with a commodified relationship to place. In this relationship place is a commodity to be consumed, rather than a part of a person's identity and history or a sacred place. Although many newcomers arrive in Nevada County as amenity migrants, their relationship to place may be transformed over time into a biographical or ideological relationship. If, however, they continue to relate to the place as something to be consumed, newcomers are likely to move to another place if they find a place with a better list of amenities or if Nevada County changes too much and loses the qualities that attracted them to begin with.

***Dependent Relationships*** The last type of relationships is the *dependent relationship*. The defining characteristic of dependent relationships is the aspect of choice. Typically these relationships are the result of having either no choice or severe limitations on choice. Some examples are: children who are dependent on their parents and don't have a choice about where they live; elderly who have moved to be near caretakers either in their own home or in some kind of retirement facility; and people who have moved for a job or to be with a romantic partner. People who have a dependent relationship to the place, may have made a conscious choice to move, but it is typically not their first choice. This is the least prevalent type of relationship amongst my interviewees.

A woman in her forties, moved to Nevada County three years ago because of her husband:

**Helen:** I came here because of him. And he did select this area based on a geographical search of an area that had the things that he was looking for. For where he was going to live and selected this area and then found employment here after the fact. So, I mean, he physically selected this area, and he dragged me here kicking and screaming. (laughs) I said, you know, "Don't you think San Francisco would be a better place to live dear?" He said, "NO."

Dependent relationships are primarily physical relationships. The relationship with place is typically based on the need to be near a job or another person. These relationships are noticeable lacking a positive emotional or mental connection. People in dependent relationships are often highly conscious of the differences between communities in which they have lived in the past and their current community.

## Community Attachment

A person's *community attachment* consists of their experience in a particular setting as well as their feelings about that place (13). David Hummon describes five types of *sense of place* or *community attachment*: ideological rootedness, taken for granted rootedness, place relativity, place alienation, and placelessness (14). Based on my interviews with residents of Nevada County, I have revised his typology to include: cohesive rootedness, divided rootedness, place alienation, relativity, and placelessness. Each type can be described by a person's level of



attachment, identification and involvement with the community, past experiences and future expectations, and their assessment of the place.

**TABLE 2 Revised Sense of Place Typology (15)**

SENSE OF PLACE	Satisfaction	Home as Insidedness	Local Identity	Type of Attachment	Future Desires
<b>Rootedness Cohesive</b>	high	here (physical, spiritual, emotional)	<b>strong</b>	<b>biographical spiritual ideological</b>	<b>continued residence</b>
<b>Rootedness Divided</b>	variable	here and there (physical, spiritual, emotional)	<b>split</b>	<b>biographical spiritual dependent</b>	<b>variable</b>
Place Alienation	low	there (physical, spiritual, emotional)	<b>weak</b>	<b>dependent</b>	<b>desire to leave, but unable</b>
Relativity	variable	anywhere	<b>moderate</b>	<b>commodified (biographical) (dependent)</b>	<b>to live in ideal place, wherever that may be</b>
Uncommitted Placelessness	(moderate)	anywhere/ nowhere	<b>weak</b>	<b>none</b>	<b>no specific expectations of place</b>

**Rootedness.** The strongest type of community attachment is rootedness. I have divided this category into two types *cohesive* and *divided rootedness*. I have chosen this distinction because my interviews suggest that some people have a strong attachment, identification and involvement with one community and others with two distinct communities. People with a sense of *cohesive rootedness* have a strong sense of attachment, identification, and involvement in one community. They generally have a positive assessment of the place and expect to continue living there. Mary has lived in Nevada County her whole life, strongly identifies with Grass Valley and Nevada City and expects hopes to live there until she dies:

**Betsy:** I grew up in Grass Valley, but now I live in Nevada City. There was always this rivalry between the two towns. It cracks me up. It is part of me also. Nevada City is the one that got cutesy first and has the artist colonies. As kids you could go to Nevada City to see hippies. Grass Valley has always been more proletariat; it is where the workers are from. There is a part of me that always identifies with that because I am from a working class family.

I feel really at home here. Well the thing that, you know I never really thought or understood and that Gary Snyder said—Do you know who Gary Snyder is? He’s a Pulitzer poet, prize-winning poet that lives up on the San Juan Ridge. One of the things he writes, and it made so much sense to me when I read it, was that human beings become, on their cellular level, they become simpatico with their environment after a certain amount of time. It takes five to eight years of living in an environment before your body really kind of connects with it.

But that there is just something about the Sierra Foothills, and the western Sierra, and when I get up into the high country into the granite, that it just feels really comfortable to me. I love to go visit the desert and I love to visit the ocean, but it does, it feels foreign to me. It just feels foreign.

In contrast, those people with a *divided rootedness* think of themselves in terms of two communities. They have strong attachments to two places and often have distinct identities associated with each place. Typically these people have a strong attachment to the community in which they were raised and to the community they have lived in as an adult. Tyler was born and raised in San Francisco. He has lived in Nevada County for a decade and feels strongly rooted in both places. When asked whether he feels at home in Nevada County, he replied:

**Gary:** That's a very interesting question. I was asked that recently by my wife. She says, "yes," and I say, "not yet." And I think it has a lot to do with the roots of San Francisco. She loves it here. She just loves it here, but I'm not there at home yet, saying, "this is home."

Well I think it has a lot to do also, I mean my wife lost her mother a few years ago. So I think, Beth has, and her father passed away when she was young, so Beth has lost that semblance of her nest, her original nest. So my mother is still alive at 82, and we go down and see her in San Francisco, so I would say that my home still is San Francisco, and I think it has a lot to do with my mother still being alive. I think that when she passes on, I would think that there would be some type of letting go myself of San Francisco. And, even though my brothers are still there I would probably say this is home, because I have lost that.

In addition to having strong family ties to San Francisco, Gary also thinks of himself as a city person and could see living in either Nevada County or San Francisco in the future. His attachment to two communities is typical of people with a sense of divided rootedness. The other group of people who fits this category is commuters. If they have commuted for a number of years, they often have two distinct sets of social ties and identities in their home and work communities.

***Place Alienation.*** David Hummon's typology includes a category he calls *place alienation*. People who are alienated often have a negative assessment of the place, do not identify with the place and are not highly satisfied with the place. After listening to my interviews, it seemed to me that this category actually has several different types of people in it. Some people are alienated from a place because they have been forced to move from a place in which they were rooted to a place in which they are not, such as: children whose parents move; elderly who move to be near caretakers; and adults who move for a job or to be with a significant other. Other people may be dissatisfied because the place they love and feel rooted in has changed around them. Although I think the word displaced better describes the experiences of these people, I have chosen to use Hummon's label *place alienation* for theoretical consistency.

Kathryn is an example of a person who is displaced because she left a place in which she was rooted and has had difficulty establishing new attachments in Nevada County. She was born

in Massachusetts and lived in Florida for much of her adult life. She moved to Nevada County to be near her daughter so that when she is too old to care for herself she won't have to be dislocated then. Although she is very happy to be near her children and grandchildren, she does not really understand the appeal of Lake Wildwood:

**Kathryn:** I really don't feel at home here in Lake Wildwood, or in California. You know people here just love it because of the four seasons, but they are not really four seasons like you get on the East Coast. Some places up in the hills it seems like it, but it really doesn't compare to places that snow in the winter. I realize that this is a California perspective. If you lived in the Bay Area all your life this does seem like four seasons.

I consider myself a member of Lake Wildwood, but I really don't feel at home. I don't identify with it. If you ask me where home is, it is Concord, where I raised my kids. That is where my heart is home. Not in Florida, and certainly not here.

I would have preferred to stay in Florida. If Helen weren't here, I would have been happy to live there for the rest of my life. I really had family there and thought it was a beautiful place to live. I developed an extended family with my friends and I really miss them.

Like Kathryn, there are residents of Nevada County who have similar feelings of displacement not because they have moved, but because so many people have moved in around them. This category is characterized by the loss of a deep sense of rootedness.

**Relativity.** The fourth type of community attachment is relativity. Many people who fit into this category have lived in so many places in their life that they are not strongly rooted to any particular community. They are more likely to identify their sense of home with either their house or the world more generally than any particular community. They are also likely to identify with more than one place, such as people who are bi-coastal. They differ from people with a sense of rootedness in two ways. They feel "at home" anywhere instead of in a specific place, and their identity is not strongly tied to their community of residence. Helen feels at home in her current residence, but she could just as easily feel at home in a big city or different region of the country.

**Helen:** I have to say, that I never really selected a place to live. You know in other words, it was more where a job was, where school was, or where my parents were. You know, in other words there was never "let's see, where do I want to live? What am I looking for as far as a place to live?" None of that, you know. So, just sort of dragged along by fate, coincidences, or whatever.

I lived in New England as a child and in college. My husband got a job in Florida and we moved there. And then after Florida, my husband and I did make a decision, you know of leaving an area, and we moved to San Francisco. And, um, and then, so my-my most part of my adult life I lived in San Francisco. Then, I

started dating my current husband and he lived up here and that's how. . . I moved here because of him.

You know I don't have any place that I've already lived that I'm longing to go back to. You know, I don't feel--This is home right now. There is no place else that I feel closer. I think of myself as a Californian even though I was born on the East Coast.

In this category, people are likely to think of their house and community as home, but their sense of home is highly mobile and lacks the biographical and emotional depth of those with a sense of rootedness. The ability of individuals to feel at home anywhere and in many places is likely the result of having learned to cultivate a sense of home in a variety of different communities.

***Placelessness.*** The final category of community attachment is *placelessness*. Placelessness is characterized by a lack of place-based identification and a lack of emotional attachments to particular places. The main difference between relativity and placelessness is that in relativity people have a mobile sense of “home” and can cultivate a sense of home wherever they are, in placelessness people do not have an articulated or place-based sense of home. Michelle moved to Nevada County in 1998 and does not identify Nevada County or any other place as home.

**Michelle:** I don't have a place that is home. Maybe I just feel at home within myself. I am not a small-town kind of person, like you would think of meeting in the park and knowing everyone. I left Nashville [where she was raised] and I don't want to go back there. I just like, I feel, I like, I feel comfortable. My partner and I, we are our own little home. We are at home where we are. I thought, “oh gosh maybe there is something wrong with me that I don't feel some place is home.”

Aside from Michelle and one other woman in her forties, the only other people I interviewed who expressed little identification or emotional attachment to places were people in their late teens and twenties. Although I think this category is distinct from relativists, my interviews suggest that developing attachments to particular places is closely connected to the lifecourse. It seems to me that many young adults have yet to become attached to or develop identifications with particular places.

### **Bringing It All Together**

I hope that this discussion has helped to clarify your own understanding of your sense of place, including the relationships you have to various places as well as your attachment to the place you call home. In separating the ideas of relationships to place and community attachments, my intention was to highlight the complexity of our sense of place. Although every place has its own influence on how we relate to it, I think it is also important to remember how our relationships with and attachments to places are necessarily relational. How I feel in one

place is influenced by the positive and negative feelings I have for other places. Fritz Steele offers an excellent summary of the relational nature of senses of place (16):

Relationships between people and places are transactional:

- The relationship between people and environment is transactional: people take something (positive or negative) from and give or do things to the environment; these acts may alter the environment's influence on the people.
- I now believe the concept of place should actually be psychological or interactional, not just physical. The environment is made up of a combination of physical and social features; the sense of place is an experience created by the setting combined with what a person brings to it. In other words, to some degree we create our own place, the do not exist independent of us.
- There are, however, certain settings that have such a strong "spirit of place" that they will tend to have a similar impact on many different people. The Grand Canyon and the left bank of the Seine in Paris are excellent examples.
- Settings obviously have an impact on people, both short-term and long-term, and there are some patterns to this impact.

People have an impact through how they care for, create new social forces, and design new physical features for settings. This can be positive or negative, short-term or long-term.

## NOTES

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8. Setha Low, 1992.
9. These categories have been revised from categories described by Setha Low, 1992.
10. The San Juan Ridge, is located across the South Fork of the Yuba River, from Nevada City, the county seat. Historically inhabited by miners, loggers and ranchers, it was settled in the 1970s by a number of hippies and back-to-the-landers, most notably, the well-known poet Gary Snyder.
11. Snyder, Gary. 1995. *The Practice of the Wild*. New York: North Point Press.
12. Basso, Keith H. 1996. "Wisdom Sits in Places: Notes on a Western Apache Landscape." Pp. 53-90 in *Senses of Place*, edited by Steven Feld and Keith H. Basso. Santa Fe, NM: School of American Research Press.
13. Steele, Fritz. 1981. *The Sense of Place*. Boston: CBI Publishing Company, Inc.
14. David Hummon, 1992.
15. *ibid.*

16. Fritz Steele, 1981.