

# Chapter 1: Metatheoretical moments in place attachment research: Seeking clarity in diversity

Daniel R. Williams and Brett Alan Miller

## INTRODUCTION

Over fifty years of progress in place attachment research has produced many important insights as well as many competing senses of place attachment as a theoretical construct. Place constructs range from fairly specific terms such as place dependence and place identity to more general terms such as rootedness and sense of place, which all attempt to describe some aspect of place experience and attachment. These constructs are often used interchangeably, which adds to the confusion resulting from different and contested place definitions and relationships (Lewicka, 2011; Relph, 2008). Consequently, the literature abounds with expressions of concern for the apparent lack of theoretical coherence (Hernández, Hidalgo, & Ruiz, 2014). However, as Patterson and Williams (2005) have argued, such consternation over the state of conceptual development in place attachment research represents a flawed quest for unity given the underlying diversity of the many research programs involved, which are often marked by very different substantive goals and conflicting ontological, epistemological, and axiological commitments.

In this chapter, we attempt to demonstrate that, rather than being a single body of literature, research on *place attachment* forms, and benefits from, a diverse and multidisciplinary inquiry. We focus on the specific construct of place attachment as it has developed across time and disciplines as illustrative of both the richness and braided quality of place research. As an interdisciplinary boundary object, place attachment can facilitate fruitful discussion across different disciplines. But without some kind of orienting guide, the multifaceted evolution of this construct appears chaotic and incomprehensible. Going forward, for place attachment to remain relevant, an even greater awareness of the diverse origins of place concepts and constructs seems necessary.

Unfortunately these diverse origins also propagate controversies over the disciplinary ownership of place attachment as a theoretical construct. For instance, one cultural geographer reviewing the first edition of *Place Attachment* commented that: "Once again ... the vast literature on people and place published by cultural geographers [was] overlooked (more likely ignored)" (Smith, 2015, p. 389–390).

Smith even calls on “geographers to step up and defend their turf by publishing solid research on place attachment” (p. 390), such as his own subsequent anthology, *Explorations in Place Attachment* (Smith, 2018) where all of the contributions are authored by geographers. One could argue, however (e.g., Devine-Wright, 2015), that there is a surprising lack of cross-boundary interest in place attachment in geographical works. For example, Cresswell’s (2015) updated (and excellent) primer on the study of place highlights different branches of a genealogy of place rooted in geography but generally omits a vast literature on place published in cognate disciplines, notably environmental psychology (Lewicka, 2011), sociology (Gieryn, 2000; Trentelman, 2009), and environmental and natural resource management (Patterson & Williams, 2005; Stedman, 2003).

Whereas Cresswell’s genealogy underrepresents this disciplinary diversity, the rich variety of different perspectives and purposes driving place research also prevents place attachment research from fulfilling Low and Altman’s (1992) predicted path of theoretical constructs to progress toward consensus. There are many disciplinary and interdisciplinary perspectives on place attachment where scholars borrow freely across disciplines to support a specific construct in their place attachment research. The progression of ideas around place has ebbed and flowed, interweaving rather than strictly branching. The result is that various disciplines interested in place attachment have coevolved an assorted array of competing concepts that have split-off and merged back together into a morphology that looks more like a braided stream than a coherent body of work.

To reflect this reality we present the development of place attachment, not as a branching genealogy and not as headed toward convergence, but as a braided stream flowing from common origins and inspirations. And just as Denzin and Lincoln (1994) organized the history of qualitative methods into a sequence of “moments,” we attempt to demonstrate how the progression of six important metatheoretical moments shaped the complex, braided course of place attachment research (see Figure 1.1). The aim is to better illustrate the punctuated coevolution of the construct and the various substantive differences, attendant epistemologies, and metatheoretical influences of place attachment across a variety (but by no means an exhaustive list) of disciplines.

Across this interdisciplinary landscape, we represent some of the main branches of the place attachment literature through time as interconnected and cross-influenced (i.e., braided). Brief descriptions of the broader research paradigms affecting particular moments of place attachment research are listed across the top of the figure and across the bottom are brief descriptions of these moments. These moments represent the confluence of larger paradigm shifts occurring across empirical disciplines and the progression of place attachment to meet evolving research interests. Through this process, different research traditions influence place attachment, and in turn, research on place attachment influences the development of other subdisciplines (represented as white spaces in the figure). These branches are also reacting to a larger social landscape and major social-political developments such as globalization.

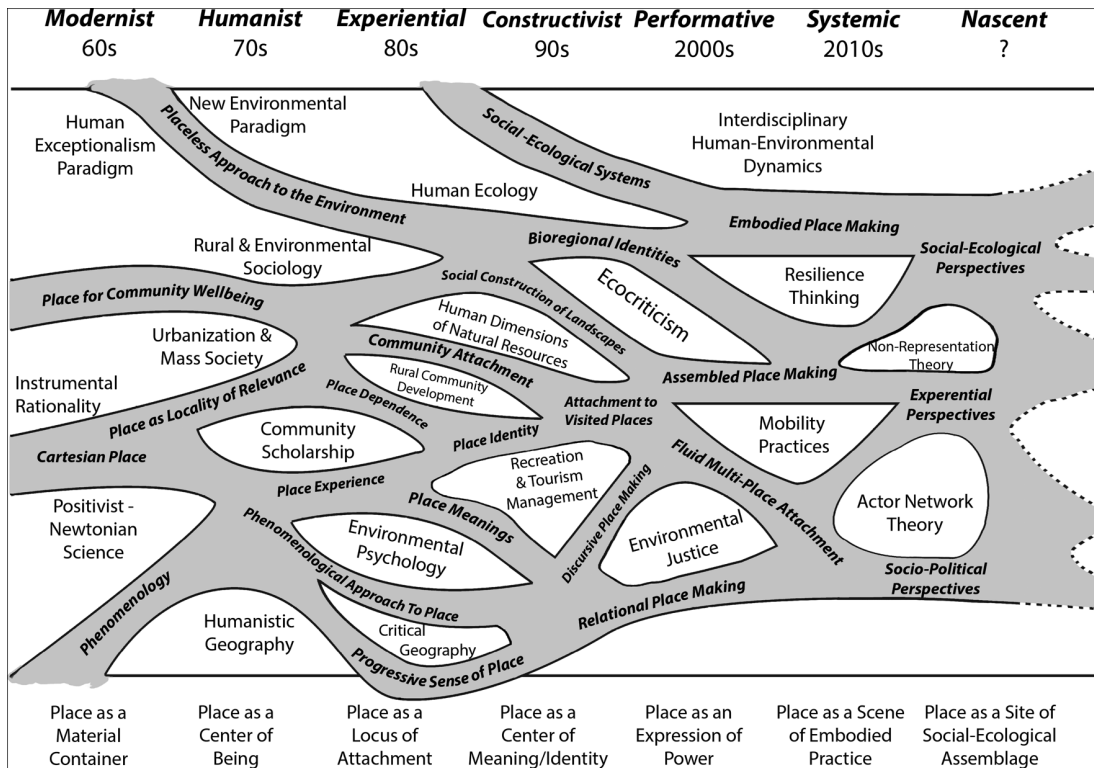


Figure 1.1  
Metatheoretical moments  
shaping place attachment  
research.

The dates are, of course, approximate. Our goal is not to provide a taxonomy of concepts and definitions. Rather, it is to interrogate how place attachment has both shaped and responded to larger metatheoretical trajectories of social science over the past half century. Although these trajectories are also influenced by parallel developments in the spatial sciences and in the humanities, we focus largely on a subset of the social sciences. Obviously, our training and positionality as US-based scholars inevitably affects how we select and organize these moments and corresponding braids. Consequently, rather than attempting to present an exhaustive depiction, we focus on how key fields were inspired by various epistemological shifts that then propelled place attachment research along. Further, a key to understanding this evolution is not to think of these moments as necessarily replacing or overriding previous ideas but more often augmenting existing ideas and adding to the diversity and complexity of place attachment research.

## SIX KEY MOMENTS IN PLACE ATTACHMENT RESEARCH

### *Modernist metatheory*

Before the 1970s, place was often little more than a passive container of material reality and social action (Cresswell, 2013). At its apex in the early post-WWII era, the modernist metatheoretical moment comprised a constellation of hegemonic

ideas about human-environment relations that effectively minimized place as a factor in human affairs. The significance for this chapter is that this forms a common point of departure for a variety of disciplinary and cross-disciplinary discourses focused on the power of place as a social science concept, which, in the modernist metatheory, had been under-theorized, marginalized, and devalued (Agnew, 1989). Across different disciplines, the term *place* was almost completely absent from the intellectual landscape. Instead, the focus was directed toward the *environment* as something that could be decomposed into separable, substitutable, and fungible qualities each having some independent impact on perception, behavior, experience, or wellbeing (Stokols, 1990).

Modernist geographical practice was dominated by formalized spatial science, quantitative modeling (e.g., central place theory), and logical positivism fixated on location and distance. Simultaneously, interest in place was eclipsed by the transition from small-scale local communities to a larger scale “mass society” (Agnew, 1989). Additionally, modernism promoted a technocratic view of planning, development, and management in which human satisfaction and wellbeing could be managed scientifically using instrumental means-ends logic (Gee, 1994). During this period, rural sociology and community sociology defined places as social spaces where people met their daily needs with little thought to sentiment and attachments (Loomis, 1958). Likewise in anthropological writing, “places [were] equated with ethnographic locales” (Rodman, 1992, p. 640). Taken together, the modern understanding of place was to look “at the world and the people in it as objects rather than subjects” (Cresswell, 2009, p. 171).

Modernism also minimized the role of the environment in human action and wellbeing (Stokols, 1990) and regarded human civilization as both largely exempt from the limitations of nature and yet widely capable of molding the environment to meet human needs (Dunlap & Catton, 1979). However, as societal concern over environmental issues accelerated, a concomitant desire developed to interrogate environmental problems through the lens of social science. Dunlap and Catton (1979) describe this major shift in thinking as a rejection of the “human exceptionalism” paradigm<sup>1</sup> while proposing “new environmental paradigm” in the social science. Ironically, this new paradigm retained a mostly monolithic view of the environment with little significant focus on specific places (Buttel, 2002).

In psychology, growing concern for the environment led scholars to reject laboratory settings as artificial and instead examine the role of a larger, naturalistic settings on human behavior (Proshansky, Ittelson, & Rivlin, 1970). But in keeping with modernist metatheory, early work on environment and behavior tended toward functional (instrumental) framings (Wohwill, 1970). Modernist metatheory held that humans were rational actors operating within a rational world. Thus, environmental psychology drew heavily from cognitive information processing and utilitarian metaphors of rational actors as a way to refute the idea of humans as passive stimulus processors. Much of this early work focused on decomposing these settings into attributes and quantifying human perceptions, preferences, and behaviors relative to these attributes (Wohwill, 1970). A pervasive way of

operationalizing this was to adopt some form of a multi-attribute model for the assessment and evaluation of places (Gee, 1994).

A few early voices of discontent pushed back against this modernist metatheory of environment to offer a different view of place. One of the very first was Firey (1945) who documented the “retentive influence” of sentiment and symbolic properties of urban spaces such as friendship and family ties. These findings challenged what he saw as the prevailing instrumental view of space, which assumed “the only possible relationship that locational activities may bear to space is an economic one” (p. 140). Another early critique of instrumental thinking about place was Fried’s (1963) widely cited study of grieving for homes lost to urban renewal projects. Fried found that the depth of grief was primarily related to the loss of local social relationships and spatial orientations. However, it is not until the 1970s and the emergence of a humanist backlash that place starts to become more widely conceived as a particular, valued space imbued with meanings and attachments (Tuan, 1977).

### ***Humanist metatheory***

The humanist moment represents perhaps the most germinal and impactful theoretical development in place attachment research. In fact the origins of place attachment are almost universally traced to the onset of the phenomenological perspective in the 1970s, particularly within humanistic geography and “Tuan’s (1977) now classic work [examining] the ways in which people attach meaning to place” (Manzo & Perkins, 2006, p. 337). Place in this moment is described phenomenologically as a center of “being-in-the-world” (Tuan, 1977). To counteract modernist reductionism concerning place, humanistic geographers in particular sought to elevate their understanding of place to a central role in human awareness of being in the world. Building on existential philosophy (e.g., Heidegger and Husserl), these scholars began to consider humans as subjects with intentions, feelings, emotions, and attachments to the world. Essential to this awareness was the concept of place and the recognition that people were always “somewhere” (Relph, 1976). “Geography informed by phenomenology would not simply be about the world or about people but about people-in-the-world” (Cresswell, 2013, p. 112).

This humanist moment also surfaced as a critique of global capitalism’s role in eroding the diversity and distinctiveness of places, commodifying “authentic” places, and producing “placelessness.” For instance, humanistic geographers such as Relph (1976) and architectural phenomenologists such as Norberg-Schulz (1980) were critical of expert-driven rational approaches to environmental management and design that dominated the post-WWII period. They advanced the notion that place attachment was a fundamental human need—“a secure point from which to look out on the world, a firm grasp of one’s own position in the order of things, and a significant spiritual and psychological attachment to somewhere in particular” (Relph, 1976, p. 38). In the end, humanistic geography grappled with many issues that would subsequently shape place attachment scholarship and play a central role in human geography and cognate fields. Among these are the ideas

of experience, emotion and affect, body and performance, as well as interest in interpretive and qualitative methods (Cresswell, 2013).

Cognate environmental scholarship, also motivated by disenchantment with instrumental understandings of the environment and an emerging placelessness, began investigating the role of attachment to places and communities on residential satisfaction and sense of belonging (Stokols & Shumaker, 1982). Some of these scholars were explicitly concerned about the loss of communities as systems of informal connections between community members within a “locality of relevance” (place) that was threatened by the homogenizing process of urbanization and the placeless influence of global capitalism (Warren, 1978). In this effort, community scholars and rural sociologists began refining concepts such as “neighboring” that would later be developed into concepts such as community attachment and place attachment (Trentelman, 2009).<sup>2</sup>

In retrospect, the impact of this early humanist metatheoretical moment centered as much on the importance of spatial awareness (place as a center-of-being) and the essential (invariant) structure of place experience as it did on the particular experience or sense of a given place as a locus of attachment. That is not to say actual experiences were ignored (see Seamon, 1980), but this metatheoretical turn was at least partly about the fundamental ontological nature of place in human experience. As Relph (2008, p. 36) argued (citing Malpas): “‘Place is integral to the very structure and possibility of experience’ ... and not just a product of what is encountered in experience... [and is] certainly not susceptible to quantitative excavation.” But it is this fixed, bounded, essentialist view of place that would later generate intense criticism from a social constructionist perspective (Harvey, 1996).

### ***The experiential metatheory***

The experiential moment began toward the end of the 1970s and represents an elaboration of the humanist idea, but with a stronger empirical focus on characterizing the experience of particular places, both place as a locus of attachment and as a center of meaning (Williams, 2014). The earlier humanistic turn in geography and architecture opened up new avenues of theorizing about human-environment relationships across a range of disciplines. During the 1980s various cognate disciplines, inspired by the humanist moment, were conducting empirical assessments of the subjective experience of places, particularly residential place attachment. These scholars wanted to understand the underlying psycho-social processes that produced place attachments and meanings and how they influenced satisfaction and wellbeing. But when they looked to humanist geographers, they did not find much methodological guidance (Buttimer, 1976).<sup>3</sup>

In a review from environmental psychology, Giuliani (2003) identified three contexts driving residential place attachment research during this period. The first dealt with the search for environmental quality measures sensitive to inhabitants’ needs, which is closely aligned with place dependence (Stokols & Shumaker, 1982).

This begins to differentiate place attachment from mere positive regard for a place to a “bond, with enduring quality, directed toward a specific target, not interchangeable with the same functional quality” (Giuliani, 2003, p. 148). Second, Giuliani described how the confluence of attachment and identity built on Proshansky’s (1978) concept of place-identity comprised cognitions about the physical environment that help to define the self. The third context examined territorial attachment as a “feeling of possessiveness” toward a particular place because of its association with self-image or social identity through such mechanisms as personalization of space that intensifies affective bonds (Brown, 1987).

By the end of the 1980s, environmental psychology and human geography were both well-established fields researching place attachments. Insights from these fields and research on place more broadly also influenced the emergence of new environmental social sciences. For instance the topic of natural resource sociology in the US emerged toward the end of the 1980s with a focus on relationships between rural communities and proximate natural resource values that are inextricably place-based, along with other burgeoning natural resource social sciences (Field & Burch, 1991). Pulling as well from humanistic roots, these scholars began engaging the topic of place attachment by focusing on the relationship between specific communities and their particular places.

These different interdisciplinary braids set the stage for a significant expansion in the literature around quantitatively measuring place attachments, examining the attachment process, and more clearly articulating the antecedents and consequences of attachments, which today dominates the larger body of place attachment research (Lewicka, 2011). Although a diverse braid of qualitative work persisted throughout this period (Altman & Low, 1992; Manzo, 2003), much of this early interdisciplinary work focused on developing quantitative measurements. For example, drawing inspiration from Tuan’s (1977) distinction between space perceived as a territory for activity versus place as a locus for feelings of attachment and belonging, Williams, Patterson, Roggenbuck, and Watson (1992) developed a psychometric measure of the place attachments held by recreational visitors to parks, forests, and other wildland and tourist destinations.<sup>4</sup> This approach, which measured place dependence and place identity as two facets of place attachment, would strongly shape the way place attachment was understood and measured, including embedded assumptions about its composition and expression (Lewicka, 2011).

A lack of common definitions and the interdisciplinary nature of this moment made it difficult for scholars to take full advantage of work from outside their respective fields. When scholars coalesced around certain specific terms, they often meant parallel but slightly different things based on disciplinarily specific epistemologies or assumptions (Patterson & Williams, 2005). The dominance of quantitative approaches not only would continue through the 1990s and beyond but also lead to the constructivist critique that forms the next major theoretical development in place literature.

***Critical-constructivist metatheory***

Across academic literature, there was increased consideration of the social construction of social facts and material realities starting around the late 1980s and into the early 2000s. Although this shift does not define all place attachment literature during this time, it is a major metatheoretical moment where many new disciplines exhibit interest in place attachment research. For instance, “ecocritical” approaches to the humanities and environmental ethics (Glotfelty & Fromm, 1996) promoted explicitly place-focused concepts such as bioregional identity. Also and more generally, the humanities began to grapple with the social construction of place bonds in narratives (Lippard, 1997). A similar focus on narratives in place attachment research showed how place identities and sense of belonging to a place result in important social differences in how people view, enact, and ultimately shape and control place narratives (Dixon & Durrheim, 2000).

The narrative (discursive) approach to place attachment intersects with critical (relational) theories in geography about the politics of place. Where the phenomenological approach to place venerated place as something universally experienced, felt, and sensed (Cresswell, 2009), “critical” geographies, also born from a critique of positivist spatial science, began to point out the neglected role of social position and power in the construction of contested places (Harvey, 1996). These insights inspired some environmental psychologists to recognize that “it is not possible to adequately consider emotional relationships with places without recognizing the significant political implications of such phenomena” (Manzo, 2003, p. 54). Focusing on discursive strategies is one way to demonstrate how place meanings are socially constructed and therefore embedded in the structures of power in everyday life (Dixon & Durrheim, 2000). This added a more discursive approach that augmented cognitive views (relying on surveys and self-reports) with more narrative approaches (Stokowski, 2002).

Focusing on the way places are made and remade (socially constructed) promoted a relational view of place (Massey, 1994). In this framing, social practices and narratives produce psychological accounts of relationships, which carry normative, relational, political, and material consequences (Di Masso, Dixon, & Hernández, 2017). This shift in thinking inevitably supported consideration of the social construction of physical landscapes as well. For instance, rural and community sociology began to consider how the physical environment (previously treated as an immutable anchor) was also socially constructed (Greider & Garkovich, 1994). This influenced place attachment as well as the development of natural resource sociology and environmental sociology (Field, Luloff, & Krannich, 2013). Also, this recognition led to critical, place-based topics in environmental sociology and interdisciplinary fields such as political ecology to examine the struggle for place (Yung, Freimund, & Belsky, 2003; Pellow & Nyseth Brehm, 2013).

The constructivist moment also promoted increased interdisciplinary engagement on the use and definition of place constructs such as sense of place, place attachment and identity, and community attachment (Williams & Stewart, 1998).

In cognate fields place attachment provided insights on the relationship between community and place in stakeholder environmental concerns (Eisenhauer, Krannich, & Blahna, 2000), and the challenges of disentangling “place” from “community” (Trentelman, 2009). However, the recognition of the socially constructed nature of places triggered critical impasses in attempts to consolidate terms. In this moment, the unexamined origins of particular terms and disciplinary-specific discourses were adding to confusion and inconsistency surrounding place attachment research (Patterson & Williams, 2005).

In sum, the critical-constructive moment refigured place attachment research to recognize that from the relational perspective, place does not have singular unique identities, but multiple contested ones that are continually reproduced through discourse and practice. However, two additional features suggested by Massey’s relational view of place were not as prominent in place attachment research of the 1990s. One was the recognition that place is not a fixed entity but produced through flows and mobilities, in addition to power relations. The second was that places are not bounded localities (as was typical of humanistic phenomenology), but permeable entities constituted from constellations or networks of local and global connections grounded in concrete places, practices, and performances. The constructivist (post-structural) emphasis on meaning via text, language, and discourse often overlooked the significance of material practice, movement, flow, and emotional embodiment in constituting place attachment. Also, some scholars began to question whether place was *just* a social construction uninfluenced by material reality (Stedman, 2003). Others were starting to consider the active ways that places are “conjointly constituted” through social construction and material reality (Freudenburg, Frickel, & Gramling, 1995). These concerns contributed to the next major metatheoretical moment shaping place attachment literature where *lived* performances of place are considered.

### ***The performative metatheory***

Performative metatheory takes place attachment in an even more relational and fluid direction from the critical-constructivist moment. This was in part driven by increasing awareness of how globalization was impacting relationships to place including migration (Williams & McIntyre, 2001) and underscored a view in which global flows of people, things, and ideas required a re-theorization of place attachment based less on fixed place attachment and more on how people navigate multiple, fluid attachments (Di Masso et al., 2019). The focus was not on intentionality as with phenomenology, but on the production of meaning through habitual interaction with places. In this case, place becomes a scene or venue of embodied practice. As Cresswell (2015, p. 63) notes, some humanistic geographers were interested in bodily mobility rather than rootedness to understand place, for example, recalling how routine movements produce a “place-ballet” that generates a strong sense of place and feeling of belonging (Seamon, 1980).

One of those embodied practices is mobility itself. As the new century begins some social scientists describe a “new motilities paradigm” (Sheller & Urry, 2006), which shows up in studies of attachment to multiple places and especially second homes (Gustafson, 2014). This work challenged the notion among “[h]uman geographers, environmental psychologists, and community sociologists [who] often regarded place attachment as good [while associating mobility] with uprootedness and social disintegration” (Gustafson, 2014, p. 38). In adapting to living in a globalized and mobilized world, identities and attachments may be multi-centered and deployed more like rhizomes than roots for constructing a coherent identity narrative across multiple places over one’s life-course (Williams & McIntyre, 2001).

The recognition of multi-centered place identities leads some to reconsider the treatment of the power and politics of place. For instance, Di Masso and Dixon (2015) build on the discursive framework to consider how the production of public space in Barcelona was “entwined with other kinds of material and embodied practices – practices through which place meanings were actively performed, reproduced, and contested” (p. 46). By highlighting how “place making [is] relational, political and performative” Buizer and Turnhout (2011) describe the everyday subpolitics of “how [citizens] perform a place in discursive and material practices” in their effort to create a “protected area” (p. 532).

Within human geography, another example of performative thinking relevant to place attachment research is the development of so-called non-representational theory (Thrift, 2007, cited in Cresswell, 2015). Non-representation theory does not dismiss interpretation and representation but emphasizes events, emotions, and practices. Since place attachment is an embodied relationship to the world, places are constituted by people doing things in place and thus are constantly being performed and are never finished. For example, posting trip blogs on social media offers new online venues for people to perform leisure-related place attachments by presenting public narratives recounting their experience of and relationship to particular outdoor recreation places (Champ, Williams, & Lundy, 2013). Non-representation theory seems to sidestep the realist/constructionist divide by reframing places as moments and events of performance actively creating material reality in a constant state of becoming.

By extending the consideration of performance and agency to nonhuman entities, actor-network theory (Latour, 2005) is a more overt attempt to resolve the divide between realism/constructionism as well as other binaries (e.g., structure/agency, culture/nature, and mind/body) that continue to reemerge and weave through these metatheoretical moments. By recognizing nonhuman agency, scholars naturally began to expand their focus on agency as the product of networks and “connectedness rather than either atomistic humans or systematic structures” (Cresswell, 2013, p. 251). The nature of these connections is emergent, changing, and complex and thus place attachment is recast as an emergent phenomenon as well. Since places are an assemblage of things, agents, and connections in a complex system, a transdisciplinary approach has developed that

incorporates a larger focus on both the biophysical and social aspects of place. While many scholars still investigate place attachment using quantitative scales, notions of assemblage, networks, embodiment, and systems of attachments take on greater significance in the next moment.

### ***Systems thinking and assemblage theory***

As we write this chapter, a new metatheoretical moment grappling with the implications of systems thinking spanning the natural and social sciences is influencing the literature on place attachment. Increasingly, scholars interested in environmental issues think of place as a site of social-ecological assemblage. For instance, with the ascendancy of social-ecological systems, relational ideas of place and place-making have been heralded as ways to understand and organize sustainable conservation and other environmental practices (Masterson, Enqvist, Stedman, & Tengö, 2019; Williams, 2018) with place attachment playing a potentially important role in how people adapt to social-ecological system change (Fresque-Baxter & Armitage, 2012).

Social-ecological systems thinking arose in the late 1980s with the seminal work of Ostrom and colleagues examining collaborative place-based governance of common-pool (collective) resources (Ostrom, 1990). By the 2000s, environmental governance concepts were increasingly linked to place making in the context of social-ecological systems and polycentric governance approaches to specific places (Williams, 2018). Seeking to bridge the social-ecological divide through systems-oriented lenses of ecological psychology, Raymond, Giusti, and Barthel (2018) applied perceptual affordance theory and embodied ecosystems to argue that human-environment connections are not exclusive to the mind but include a web of relations among mind, body, culture, and the biophysical environment.

In psychology and human geography, systems thinking also shows up in assemblage theory. Originating from the philosophy of Deleuze and Guattari (1987) and the “thrown-together-ness” of Massey’s (1994) relational sense of place, assemblage theory conceptualizes place as a complex, dynamic constellation of materiality, representations, and performative practices (Cresswell, 2015). It emphasizes the interrelated socio-spatial processes of gathering, collective or distributed agency, emergence, and provisonality (Anderson & McFarlane, 2011; Di Masso & Dixon, 2015). For example, Anderson (2012) used assemblage theory to examine a “surfing wave” as a relational place. He shows how surfers, boards, and waves are “connected” together to form one coherent unit for the duration of the ride. This surfing wave becomes a place whose constituent parts are blurred into a converged entity/process. Ultimately, assemblage theory has particular relevance to place attachment because places are “gathering[s] of things, memories, stories and practices” (Cresswell, 2015, p. 53).

In the constructivist moment, the focus was on whose representation of place prevailed. Later on, the ways that those representations are preformed received greater attention. Now scholars are increasingly recognizing that in a complex world, the struggle over place is inextricably connected to larger and smaller

connected systems that distribute power and resources across scales (Williams, 2018). Not only are places affected by larger environmental processes (e.g., local consequences of global change) but also by people who are embedded in local and extra-local institutional structures. Thus, place attachment is increasingly of interest for the study of social-ecological resilience, since place attachments are not only threatened by environmental and economic change but can also facilitate adaptation strategies (Fresque-Baxter & Armitage, 2012).

From a systems perspective, many of the different braids of place attachment research have renewed relevance now. For instance, much of the early work on community and place attachment in the context of mass society in the 1970s was about the loss of local communities as systems (Warren, 1978). This view also underscores the relational idea of place from Massey as a constellation of local and more distant (global) processes. Even the earliest roots of place attachment in the phenomenological tradition revealed place as a complex ballet (Seamon, 1980). Moreover, in such systems we can still consider the agency of individuals to actively remain stationary or be mobile, to consume and produce place-based narratives and performances, and to assemble and reassemble places in rhizomatic networks. As Di Masso et al. (2019, p. 131) state:

In this way, place attachment can be viewed as an emergent property of a complex system wherein the bond at a given point in time has properties not reflected in the individual components of a system or assemblage.

## CONCLUSION

In this chapter, we have tried to document the diverse origins and complex developmental path of place attachment research. Contrary to earlier suggestions that place attachment is or ought to be converging into a singular theory, we find that the domain of place attachment has and will continue to be ontologically, epistemologically, and axiologically pluralistic, with different developments splitting off and coming back together much like a braided stream. While other interpretations of the same literature could lead to legitimately different portrayals, there is value in considering the different braids and how they intersect across the interdisciplinary landscape of place attachment research.

Having taken stock of the past, we sense some incipient structure to the nascent moment. Current place attachment research still retains key elements of the humanist and experiential tradition while adding insights on social difference and power relations, as well as assemblage and social-ecological systems thinking. Put another way, we see three major currents embedded in what is otherwise a complex, braided flow: experiential perspectives on place attachment focused on identities and emotional bonds formed from social-psychological processes; socio-political perspectives emphasizing structure and power relations in the ways that places are made, contested, and remade through local and global processes; and

social-ecological perspectives where place attachment is conjointly constituted through human and nonhuman agency in complex, nested systems.

In the space available in this chapter, it is difficult to do justice to all the various metatheoretical moments shaping place attachment. For example, there are innumerable rivulets intersecting the main branches of place attachment literature over time, and reasonable arguments could be made to position some confluences at different moments in time. Taking this metaphor even further, eddies form around debates in the literature that seem to never resolve and there are points where the literature either stagnates or deposits ideas along the way that provide fruitful soil for other disciplines. Of course all metaphors impose limitations, but we hope scholars find our attempt to unravel some of the braids useful in their own attempts to make sense of place attachment and develop new lines of research including non-western understandings of place. We intended this overview to provide a provisional roadmap (or perhaps a canoe?), for scholars to navigate and explore the intellectual terrain through which this braided stream has flowed. We think that occasionally looking back (up-stream so to speak) will make navigating the waters ahead a little easier.

## NOTES

- 1 According, the human exceptionalism paradigm that dominated social science in the modernist era treated the physical environment as mostly irrelevant to understanding social facts and phenomena.
- 2 Despite neglecting the importance of place, early environmental sociology drew heavily from rural and community sociology and environmental psychology (cf. Dunlap & Catton, 1979).
- 3 Buttner (1976, p. 278) noted how phenomenology lacked “clear operational procedures to guide the empirical investigation and should not be understood as a method but as a perspective.”
- 4 Relph (2008) regards such efforts as antithetical to the phenomenological view.

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