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Place for Personhood: Individual and Local Character in Lifestyle Migration

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Abstract

While drawing on literature of narrative interpretations of the construction of self and place-based, embodied identity, this article will explore the impact of invasive market forces on intertwined processes of person, self, and place-making. It considers how resources for these projects have changed in the face of translocal market forces and neoliberal ideals. Despite numerous proclamations of an essential placelessness to contemporary American society, place continues to be a basic part of the construction of the person. In fact, a variety of place-making practices are increasingly pursued as ways of negotiating tension between personal experience with material demands in pursuit of a livelihood in the “flexible,” post-industrial economy and prevailing cultural conventions for the good life. These personal acts become the basis for defining self-identity within sustainable, moral narratives among lifestyle migrants. This article discusses how a sense of place, understood as manifest in personal attachment to real and imagined elements of particularity in place, which individuals understand as “local character,” may support people in their ability to form lasting autobiographical accounts, expressions of individual “character” critical to personhood. Examining the notion of “property for personhood,” particularly with reference to the category of “home,” this article offers a way of interpreting meaningful connections or attachments between the character of local place and individual character in the conduct of everyday life. [Keywords: lifestyle migration, post-industrial economy, place, work, personhood, narrative, identity]

Though I didn't feel at home in suburbia, I wanted to be comfortable the way that suburbanites are comfortable . . . [but then] life really began to *come apart* for me. [Eventually] I came up here to be in land that I was in love with. It is a place that I'm in love with. It is something about the light, the atmosphere, and the green-ness of summer. It's the shape of things . . . the textures and colors (Martin, who moved in 1997)

Based on ethnographic research conducted in the Michigan's Grand Traverse region, this article explores the impact on people and places in the United States of social and structural transitions associated with post-industrial economic change and neoliberal globalization.¹ Endowed with sandy Lake Michigan beaches and towering dunes, since rapid late 19th century industrialization this Midwestern

region has attracted people who seek recuperative rest through time spent in places of great natural beauty. Like many rural places once only seasonally attractive, during the early 20th century the area became a destination for migrants looking for enduring, year-round refuge (see Bonner 1997; Jobs 2000; Murdoch and Day 1998; Pindell 1995). This fieldwork examines voluntary relocation away from metropolitan areas to rural communities high in natural amenities and rich in local history. Urban-to-rural migration documented here follows the experience of being laid off or voluntary “downshifting” from a job. In the latter, we might characterize this as opting-out of high-pressure, corporate careers in favor of work and/or family arrangements more personally meaningful and which afford a sense of personal control.

I interpret these *lifestyle migrants*' act of relocation as a strategy to negotiate tension between personal experience with material demands in pursuit of a livelihood in a “flexible” economy and prevailing moral meanings of, and cultural conventions for, the good life. While my research focuses on relocation behavior and changing conditions for work and identity in the United States, the range of migratory forms that might be categorized as lifestyle migration is broad and international. Though migration phenomenon detailed here has not been described as “lifestyle migration” in the literature in the U.S., where it is labeled “non-economic migration,” the term has found traction in describing demographically and behaviorally similar migration in Europe as evidenced by a recent edited volume by sociologists Michaela Benson and Karen O'Reilly (2009).

Under current economic conditions and imperatives, people are expected to live in a perpetual state of becoming. This may lead to a crisis of individual identity not easily remedied by jobs in the contingent workforce. Relocating to personally meaningful geographic places becomes the basis for defining self-identity within narratives essential to personhood (Hoey 2005; 2006; cf. Sennett 1998; Taylor 1989). Lifestyle migrants affirm an essential relationship between individual and local character. This article's central thread will be my focus on the notion of character as applied to understanding both person and place—their mutually constituting characteristics.

Despite those who decry apparently willful placelessness in contemporary American life (see Jasper 2000; Leach 1993), place continues to be an essential part of the intentional construction of individual identity. Anthropologist and environmental psychologist, Setha Low, states that “place is space made culturally meaningful” (1994:66). Folklorist Ken Ryden provides a definition closely tied to personhood in finding that as distinct, predictable and culturally meaningful space, place is “an essential component of individual identity . . . [and] definition of self. Its continued existence provides a reassuring sense of the world's continuity and stability” (1993:252). This article discusses how a sense of place, manifest in personal attachment to real and imagined elements of particularity in specific locations (e.g. topographical forms, architectural features, local businesses, and climatic conditions), what is commonly called *local character*, may support people in their ability to form autobiographical

accounts expressed in “moral narratives” critical to personhood (Hoey 2005).

My use of the term personhood combines an appreciation for a dialogical self as well as material aspects of the person. A dialogical self arises from the fact that frameworks for self-interpretation and behavior are shaped by culture in constant interaction and exchange between individuals and other persons in a social world. In addition to this social dimension, materiality through embodiment is a basic ontological feature of the person. Embodiment entails the way persons negotiate everyday lives through their physicality, and how they mediate, interpret, and interact with both social and physical environments (Csordas 1990; Scheper-Hughes 1994). The person is oriented in physical space, in part, by virtue of being embodied. Thus, materiality is as fundamental to human subjectivity as sociality.

While drawing on literatures (briefly reviewed later) of moral theory and narrative interpretations of the construction of self together with those that speak to place-based, embodied identity, this article explores the effect of omnipresent market forces on acts of self- and place-making, i.e. on individual and local character. I consider how social, cultural and physical resources available for a narrative project of self change within a context of post-industrial economic restructuring. Stories of lifestyle migrants exemplify how some persons deliberately attempt to “root” their accounts through attachment to place as an intentional reaction to the invasiveness of increasingly translocal market forces into longstanding American practice of defining self through career and emergence of a workplace increasingly reliant on commoditized notions of the worker.

A question of character: The case of lifestyle migration

A former soft-drink company executive from Southeast Michigan, Alan would have been considered successful by widely accepted social standards for having a generous salary, benefits, and living a seemingly comfortable and well-appointed suburban life. In his account of relocation, Alan returned routinely to his sense that he had been merely “struggling along” as a person before his decision to break with his former life. He felt unable to experience states of personal integration and fulfillment (an idea to which I will return to later). Alan spoke of how choices made in his position brought him to where his “value system was being destroyed.” He concluded that continuing would only “tear him down,” as he put it, literally *dis*-integrating him. Alan described finding himself in a disorienting crisis of deeply moral dimensions that violated his fundamental values and “true self.” Getting out of this was a question of character—first of individual character and then of local character. Alan felt that he needed to live a life defined in his own terms, allowing himself to orient to an inward sense of the good, a kind of moral

horizon, and to construct a narrative consistent with an idealized vision of self.

Alan sought a physical place in the world that he believed possessed qualities of local character necessary to support his decision to start over, including qualities of slower pace, simple, nurturing, community, or traditional values

One day they told me, “You know you have to fire that guy. His wife has got a serious illness and the insurance is costing us a fortune.” There’s nothing wrong with the guy. “Well, you’ll have to find something.” It was an inhumane decision. One guy got prostate cancer and the president of the company said, “Well, he’s a goner. We don’t have to worry about him anymore.” That’s corporate America. I was trading away my value system for the job and in support of the company. You are brought up with certain morals, ethics, and values and then you find yourself in a system that is not allowing you to live your life properly. All I was doing was tearing myself down.

After breaking from commitment to career, Alan sought a physical place in the world that he believed possessed qualities of local character necessary to support his decision to start over, including commonly stated qualities of “slower pace,” “simple,” “nurturing,” “community,” or “traditional values.” Starting over for migrants like Alan entails pursuing a “potential self” through lifestyle commitment to a way of life summed up in an imagined, future self consistent with “core values” essential to individual character (Hoey 2005, 2006).

Many lifestyle migrants describe feeling “torn down,” violated and without time for either self-creation or to connect with family or community. Combining William Leach’s (1999) attempt to document the “demolition” of local place in America with Richard Sennett’s (1998) concern for the world of work and “corrosion” of individual character in a flexible economy, we might explain the source of personal disintegration as a lack of critical spatial and temporal stability.

Declining forms of community appear to further challenge many in their struggle to maintain individual character, self-constancy, and meaningful person-place connections (Bellah et al. 1996; Putnam 2000; Wuthnow 1996). Commenting on Hannah Arendt, Patricia Yaeger (1996) describes a world of shared interests, objects, and places that set conditions for individual and collective identity. According to Arendt, “to live together in the world means essentially that a world of things is between those who have it in common as a table is located between those who sit around it; the world, like every in-between, relates and separates at the same time” (quoted in Yaeger 1996:10; cf. Soja 1989). Yaeger describes how in late-capitalism, the space between people appears to have lost the capacity to gather them together, to either relate or separate them such that the world “ceases to offer the comforting illusion of dwelling in common . . . [changing] meaning-filled places into derangements of anonymous space” (Yaeger 1996:10; cf. Ryden 1993).

Katherine and John, a professional couple in their late 30s, told me how they left well-paying jobs and objectively successful days spent in the suburbs of Detroit to relocate to Northern Michigan, “take back their lives” and reconnect with “core values.” Like other lifestyle migrants,

they described feeling “dispossessed” of their suburban neighborhood and nearby office park where they worked.

Our key reasons [for moving] were to find work and lifestyle balance, to have greater community involvement, to raise a family. We wanted to work in a place where my willingness to work hard would be balanced by the need to place family first. We hated feeling *dispossessed* of the city where we worked as well as the suburb we lived in and excited at the prospect of being part of a community in both work as well as personal life. In just a few weeks, we’ve noted the difference. We have two sons, five and two and a half. [John] was working insane hours, with a long commute. Quite literally, [John] left a great salary *to take back our lives*.

Although their intent seems to express feelings of disconnect, the lack of any meaningful affective connection or attachment to place, their choice of “dispossession” hints at something deeper. It suggests being deprived a sense of security and home. They went on to describe no true sense of ownership in the same way that they lacked a sense of control in their work lives. They spoke of growing feelings of being “disorientated” or “adrift.”

Continuing with Arendt’s metaphor of a vanishing table, we see that this symbolizes a mass scale existential crisis, a widespread dispossession. Arendt depicts this situation as “a spiritualistic séance where a number of people gathered around a table might suddenly, through some magic trick, see the table vanish from their midst, so that two persons sitting opposite each other were no longer separated but also would be entirely unrelated to each other by anything tangible” (in Yaeger 1996:10). This clever image is a compelling representation of interpersonal connections that in earlier generations would have been expressed in social capital building forms of civic engagement. The apparent decline in voluntary associations, which entail interactions and gatherings that act as a common table among people, is illustrated in findings of Robert Putnam (2000) and others (e.g. Bellah et al. 1996; Wuthnow 1996).

In the next two sections, I examine the notion of *character*. When invoked in an expansive literature on place, character is typically used in conjunction with other ideas under analysis but left unexplored as a category. Following my review of character applied to personhood and place in turn, I introduce the idea of critical but vulnerable resources for self- and place-making through reflection on homelessness and placelessness as categories that may characterize the experience of contemporary life on all socioeconomic levels within the economy of late-capitalism.

Individual character

What is the meaning of character when applied to self and personhood? Here I present a conceptualization of self as narrative project within which character is an essential, enduring aspect of self through time and space. Consciousness of self, in

Western thought at least, is constituted and understood as a sharply demarcated, separate, and internal space. At the same time, a socially constituted moral space is a precondition of Western selfhood. As noted by humanist-philosopher Charles Taylor, in this notion we are selves only through having a place within this moral space as an evaluative framework. Within this frame, we have individual orientation to a culturally defined notion of “the good.” Accordingly, the self must exist among others in “webs of interlocution” (Taylor 1989:47) within a complex social and physical geography. This space of collective and consequential values is constitutive of human agency; it is where lives are lived out. Embodied emplacement within and movement through this space is an inescapable structural requirement of human agency. In short, life of the Western self entails an oriented movement through a moral, social, and physical space.

With the ability to capture this spatial and temporal movement and contingency, narrative provides coherence, continuity and meaningful connections between events and integration (or disintegration) of one’s life through time. As noted by Taylor, “because we cannot but orient ourselves to the good, and this determines our place relative to it and hence . . . the direction of our lives, we must inescapably understand our lives in narrative form, as a ‘quest’ ” (1989:51; cf. Ricoeur 1992:115, on how narrative presupposes the moral).

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Narrative and self appear inseparable as narrative arises out of everyday experience even as it gives shape to that experience (Taylor 1997). It is through narrative that individuals make sense of their lives as a story unfolding in a manner that gives meaning to past events and future directions (Ochs and Capps 1996; Hoey 2005; 2006). Having a sense of who we are as persons requires a notion of how we have arrived at this point as well as where we are going. By giving an intelligible order to events of life, narrative creates continuity from past into future, imagined lives while acting as a critical interface between self and society. Narrative orders events in a temporal and spatial orientation particular to the individual and constructed within basic patterns shared among those in a given culture (Bruner 1990; Bakhtin 1981). This is how individuals “lead a life,” moving through moral, social, and physical space while balancing the reality of diverse elements of experience and the dynamic of a variety of possible selves with a struggle for lasting unity (Taylor 1997; Ricoeur 1992). This process illustrates the inherent contingency of selfhood as a “work in progress,” as project.

Conceptualizing self as a narrative project addresses the dialectic of change and constancy, an ongoing tension between provisional or potential selves (Hochschild 1997; see Markus and Nurius 1986 on “possible selves”) and the ontological need to integrate various interpretations of self into a coherent identity. Ricoeur (1984) explains that it is through “emplotment” that the discordant, contingent nature of individual events and experiences are rendered into a coherent, comprehensible whole of narrative account. This is much more than a simple recounting; it is a synthetic search for meaning, a quest in which separate events and

experiences are unified as episodes through emplotment into a unifying story and “the unity of life considered a temporal totality” (Ricoeur 1992:147; MacIntyre 1984; Taylor 1989). Through unity of this “discordant concordance,” narrative constructs character as the enduring aspect of self, a “set of lasting dispositions by which a person is recognized” (Ricoeur 1992:121; Sennett 1998). Together with emplotment, character allows for self-constancy in identity. It is how the same subject may persist within a multiplicity of events and experiences in a narrated life. I turn next to “local character” to examine the connection between person and place in this process.

Local character

In an expansive literature on place, the term character is typically used in conjunction with other ideas under analysis but seldom explored in its own right. It is applied to suggest a category of familiar, often highly valued qualities and related perceptions at the local level meaningfully attached to aspects of natural and built environment in particular geographic locations. In consideration of community perception of “town character,” Green (1999) points to a common sense understanding, implicit in use of the term character as an “aggregate” of qualities that enable people to distinguish one thing, physical site, or person from another. Suggesting a unique quality or even “spirit,” character becomes an essential part of the idea of place and related concepts of “sense of place” and *genius loci* as well as terms that refer to a intimate bonding of person and place such as Tuan’s “topophilia” or Relph’s “existential insideness” (Altman and Low 1992; Buttimer and Seamon 1980; Hummon 1992; Relph 1976; Seamon 1982; Tuan 1974).

Discussing their concept of “place-identity” in a manner that evokes the notion of character that I employ, Proshansky (1983), Buttimer (1993), and Soja (1989) notes that construction of self is developmentally first a matter of learning to distinguish self from others as well as spaces in which a person lives, i.e. to recognize and maintain a unique character within a continuing narrative of self. Speaking on meaningful personal connection to particular locations and identity construction and its persistence, Milligan (2003) draws on Irving Goffman’s distinction between social, personal, and felt identities. Of particular importance to her discussion is “felt identity” as an individual’s “subjective sense of his [sic] own situation and his own continuity and the character that an individual comes to obtain as a result of his various social experiences” (Goffman quoted in Milligan 2003:383).

Milligan’s study of employees at a relocated coffee shop explores how individual experience is necessarily located in spaces that are at once physical realities that shape, constrain and influence social interaction while also being sites to which social meanings and beliefs are attached (Altman and Low 1992; Hay 1998; McAndrew 1998; Proshansky et al.

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1983). These sites rise above an undifferentiated plane of abstract space through being known and endowed with personal and cultural value until they become rich with layered sentiment (Ryden 1993; Tuan 1977). These are places to which people become “attached.”

The notion of place attachment draws together this constellation of ideas while incorporating, explicitly or implicitly, a concern with character. Altman and Low suggest that place attachment “is an integrating concept comprising interrelated and inseparable aspects” (1992:4). The concept is used to refer to people-place bonds based on cognition, practice, and the affective. As noted by Hay (1998) and McAndrew (1998), the literature on place attachment has developed alongside related studies of “community attachment” which have generally considered choice behavior in relocation or residential decision-making. With its emphasis on the significance of person-place bonds to identity, studies of attachment explore “disruptions” in this bonding as a way to better understand its varied dimensions under conditions believed to illuminate what might otherwise be an unselfconscious process or state (Proshansky et al. 1983). These dramatic discontinuities in person-place bonds are often referred to as displacement and typically defined as *involuntary* breaks in attachment of person to particular place. These breaks are seen as entailing a degree of loss and identity discontinuity or fragmentation (Fried 1963; 2000; Milligan 1998, 2003).

As noted by Proshansky (1983), theories of self and personhood have tended to neglect the importance of physical setting to socialization and identity and stressed constancy and stability over change. With their concern for uprootedness and change, studies of relocation and displacement encourage more dynamic and ecological models of person-place bonds and identities. These studies recognize that selfhood constitutes a complex, ongoing and negotiated process within an ever changing social and physical environment. A dynamic model of this process of person-place bonding parallels my “self as narrative project” construct. Importantly, both address the dialectic of change and constancy as well as tension between actual and potential selves (see Ricoeur 1980).

This dynamic is captured in work on “settlement-identity” and life stages by Feldman (1990) as well as research on voluntary and involuntary relocation and transformational stages in individual experience conducted by Brown and Perkins (1992; Hoey 2005 on liminality and identity in relocation; Winnicott 1971 on “transitional spaces”). In a similar manner, Hay’s (1998) article on the developmental context for sense of place draws on work by Levinson et al. (1978) and notes how there are shifts in a person’s life as a kind of “structure” between more stable (structure-building) and more transitional (structure-changing) periods, with the latter more frequent and prolonged in conditions of post-modernity. Hay (1998) suggests that an enduring self despite constant structural change and threat of “placelessness” (Relph 1976) requires intimacy, involvement, and commitment, all of which provide for greater identity continuity and “sustainability” through establishing an enduring character and encouraging place attachment as a kind of

“primordial sentiment” (Fried 2000; Milligan 1998; 2003; Sennett 1998). The behavior of lifestyle migrants suggests a *quest* for such intimacy and continuity through attachment to personally meaningful place.

Homelessness, placelessness, and the work of identity

Hummon’s work on attachment (1986, 1992) provides evidence to justify expanding the notion of displacement beyond near exclusive focus on involuntary disruption and loss of attachment to include the alienation, uprootedness, or dispossession that characterize stories of lifestyle migrants. As with studies of displacement, this section begins by considering disruptions to person-place bonding with the aim of better understanding and contextualizing the quest of individuals to make self-defining, structure-building, or perhaps character building attachments to place.

In his “intensity-centered” phenomenological study of urban homelessness, Robert Desjarlais found that everyday life on the street together with a variety of cultural, linguistic, and political forces, “pattern the conditions of, and the grounds for what is possible in, people’s lives” (1996:86). He is speaking of the nature and extent of *resources* or opportunities available to the person in a narrative project of selfhood (an idea to which I will return). For Desjarlais, something as basic as “experience” is only a possibility. His study finds that many homeless persons are only “struggling along” in an incomplete state of being. While experience implies “a contained, integrative, and occasionally transcendent adaptation of sensations, images, and lessons,” Desjarlais describes living in a “diffuse and external rain of distractions that prompts more a retreat from the world than an incorporation or an assimilation of its parts” (1996:88). This rain of distraction echoes Frederic Jameson’s (1984) “ceaseless rotation of elements”—a state that characterizes diverse aspects of post-modernity. Both suggest a lack of meaningful person-place bonding or sustainable attachment. This privation seriously disrupts or even disables the narrative project of selfhood discussed earlier.

At all socioeconomic levels, there is an ongoing challenge to experience in the sense suggested by Desjarlais, Jameson (1984), and Harvey (1989). According to recent research, in the face of chronic uncertainty precipitated by events such as 9/11, many Americans claim to strive for a condition of relative permanence, attachment, and security (APA 2002; Low 2001; 2003; Stein et al. 2004). Among other things, achieving perceived stability and affective attachment is a prerequisite for a sense of personal transcendence, beyond the daily grind of struggling along identified by lifestyle migrants like Alan. Despite a desire to achieve this “transcendent” state, the period of late-capitalism described by Jameson and others is marked by seemingly perpetual unsettledness, unrest, and distraction as proven by our current global economic meltdown—

conditions increasingly akin to the phenomenological world of homelessness. In the case of Desjarlais' informants, living more or less continually in a state of struggling along necessitates "holding onto" a word or some physical thing, a small possession, in order to get through the day. This holding on represents a very limited but felt connection to something tangible and relatively fixed within the physical realm (Winnicott 1971).

My work with laid-off and downshifting workers made it clear that while confidently defining oneself long-term by way of a job might have been realistic to a generation that came of age in the 1950s, when William Whyte's (1956) "Organization Man" defined devoted workers of a post-war boom, now there is no expectation of the durability of such a definition because the world of work upon which it had been based is increasingly unstable and unpredictable (Sennett 1998). In a departure from the ideal worker of a more standardized and regular industrial world of the last century, workers now must be multitasking, adaptable, and forever learning (Gini 2000). This worker is the ever adapting, multitasking "person as portfolio" (Hoey 2005, 2006; cf. Darrah 1994 on the idea of a "bundle of skills"). Gillis suggests that we have entered an era in which men and women are encouraged, regardless of age "to think of themselves in a perpetual state of becoming. We are asked to retrain, reeducate and recycle" (1996:232; cf. Martin 1994, 1999).

Far from something associated strictly with homelessness, Desjarlais' category of "struggling along" may become status quo. In Alan's account, we saw how he struggled against corrosive forces associated with a changing workplace and economy. As noted by Richard Shweder (1998), the notion of an identity crisis is no longer exclusive in its usage to the relatively short-lived turbulence of adolescence or even a culturally constructed notion of "mid-life" exigencies. The so-called mid-life crisis has become a metaphor for life at all stages as Americans attempt organize their lives around states of ongoing instability (Gillis 1996). Richard Sennett explains that when compared with any other time in history present day uncertainty is peculiar only because it exists "without any looming disaster. Instead, uncertainty is woven now into the everyday practices of a vigorous capitalism. It is meant to be normal" (1998:31). A hypermobility of persons, ideas, and capital, and hyperconnectivity to translocal media forms furthers a struggle for meaningful connection with the world and becomes the default condition (Leach 1993; Jasper 2000). While people may seek transcendence of the sort discussed by Desjarlais, experience beyond everyday struggling along, this seems increasingly difficult to achieve (see Taylor 1997).

The search for meaningful connection to place

As suggested by accounts by Alan as well as Katherine and John, lifestyle migrants express a need to go to a place in which they feel they have or can make lasting, tangible, even transcendent attachment. As with many others who express need for connection or

reconnection, Amelia has never lived in my study area. However, having been born and raised in southern Michigan, she felt emotionally tied to perceived character of the Midwest. A middle-aged women working in software development and living in San Francisco at the time of our conversation, she sought return to self-described “psychic roots.” She explains how she arranged to leave the city and work that no longer holds her:

I spent two weeks in mid-September in Traverse City readying the antique Victorian I bought. I plan to rent it while I arrange my life so that I can eventually assume occupancy. I have developed a yearning for quiet, community, and simplicity. I have always sorely missed four seasons. I bought a wonderful book of *haiku* poetry extolling the beauties of seasonal essences and transitions. They get stamped onto your psyche. I am increasingly less willing to sacrifice basic human needs to pay the high price of looking out my window at the Golden Gate Bridge, then trying to make my way through a frustrating maze of traffic to simply visit the neighborhood store. You could say I wish to return to my psychic roots for the last third of my life—like a salmon swimming upstream. I can picture myself walking the gold and amber tree-lined street to [Grand Traverse] Bay on a somber October day.

“I am increasingly less willing to sacrifice basic human needs to pay the high price of looking out my window at the Golden Gate Bridge”

While flexibility in the economic sphere and deterritorialization of local places creates persistent instability and challenges the assumed fixity of ourselves and others, it has not thereby created subjects who are wholly disembedded. As noted by Gupta and Ferguson, instead of stopping with “the pulverization of the space of high modernity, we need to theorize how space is being *reterritorialized* in the contemporary world” (1992:19–20, emphasis added). The most telling irony of these times is that as particular places possessed of distinctive characteristics that define the local become increasingly collapsed, blurred, or indeterminate, the idea or even imagining of culturally, regionally, or otherwise distinct place appears to become even more salient and sought after.²

A case of resources: Preserving local character for individual character

The capacity to create and possess places recaptured from fragments both remembered, as in bits of personal experience that seem resonant with the character of particular geographic locations, and individually or collectively imagined becomes increasingly critical for people and places. Lifestyle migrants often speak of the great significance of elements perceived as composing unique local character in places to which they relocate and importance of preserving distinctiveness as marker of unity and difference against the homogenizing process of suburban sprawl. This rapid and largely unregulated development can

lead to a landscape of “Anytown, USA,” a term used by some lifestyle migrants to describe an indistinct development of chain stores along vast parking lots on congested, pedestrian-unfriendly streets.

Desire for belonging and concern for place preservation may be a defensive posture taken by lifestyle migrants against potentially corrosive, market-based forces. It is defense for the ability of individuals and families to construct meaningful accounts, sustainable narratives of self as the basis of individual character and collective identity. It is also a defense for places to retain unique character in the face of sweeping sameness (cf. Fried 2000; Green 1999; Milligan 2003). As corporations strive to gain power, profit, and competitive advantage through increased uniformity, placelessness, and flexibility, individuals may find greater strength, stability, and personal meaning through engagement or embodied experience with and in unique places—seeking an experience of belonging and a sense of place.

I found numerous examples in Northern Michigan where both newcomers and long-time residents fought to preserve local landmarks and what they understood to be basic elements of character. Take the case of “Fishtown.” The future of this collection of restored fishing shanties in the coastal Lake Michigan village of Leland was placed into question when the fifth-generation Carlson fishing business no longer seemed viable. Following a comprehensive treaty agreement between the State of Michigan and five Native American tribes over fishing rights, the Carlson family threatened to shutter their business and sell the entire site. Suddenly, the possibility that cherished waterfront could be grounds of a big hotel or condominium complex emerged in public consciousness.

Although locals and newcomers alike treat Fishtown as a timeless monument to a rugged frontier past held in *de facto* if not *de jure* public trust, above reach of development to change it, the controversy exposed the fragile nature of personal and collective sense of place tied to taken for granted physical expressions of local character. As a local newspaper article reflects, Fishtown is not only weathered shacks and aging boardwalks as real or imagined relics of another time, it is the ongoing business of fishing, the life of place expressed in “nets drying and smell of whitefish and chub being cleaned and smoked. It’s the sight of ruddy windblown people in yellow rubber overalls and boots jumping off boats and clomping up and down the docks” (Echlin, 2000).

Protecting certain physical aspects of place speaks directly to the question of “cultural resources” (Low 1994) available for constructing narrative accounts of individual and collective lives and resonates strongly with legal anthropologist Rosemary Coombe’s argument regarding signs. Drawing on Coombe’s analysis, we can consider how processes of commoditization in American society driven by intense marketing and fortified by legal protections, may “stifle dialogic practices—preventing [people] from using the most powerful, prevalent, and accessible forms to express identity, community and differ-

ence” (1991:1855). How have these forces led to restrictions and constraints on signification as well as circulation of a wide variety of important, taken for granted cultural forms? If human subjectivity is fundamentally dialogic, as Charles Taylor (1989) suggests, and culture, borrowing from Bakhtin (1981), is an ongoing practice of transformative meaning-making, then it is important to understand how resources available for signification may be controlled, restricted or simply lost.

Both Coombe and Low address actual and potential loss of cultural resources, including elements of perceived local character, essential to individual character. They are thus concerned with possibilities or potentialities for human subjectivity. While Low’s work speaks to the case of place as personal and public resource, Coombe refers to means of expression as critical resources and “optimal cultural conditions” for dialogic practices constitutive of personhood (1991:1866; Taylor 1989). Coombe clearly states the problem with regard to policy by stating that “if both objective social worlds and subjective desires, identities, and understandings are constructed with cultural resources, then legal attitudes toward cultural forms may have profound implications” (1991:1865–66). Low, in turn, warns that without some manner of place preservation “the contexts of culturally meaningful behaviors and processes of place-making disappear, cutting us off from our past, disrupting the present, and limiting the possibilities for the future” (Low 1994:66).

As suggested in the iconic case of Fishtown, key elements of place become not only physical landmarks in a familiar landscape but powerful local symbols that provide the substance of ideas and imaginings essential for composing self and for making the personal account, and thus the person, whole. They become the spine of autobiographical structure where lives quite literally take place. As Elizabeth Grosz suggests, “every body is marked by the history and specificity of its existence . . . [thus] it is possible to construct a biography, a history of the body, for each individual and social body” (1994:142).

Speaking in terms of autobiographical memory and place, Rockwell Gray asserts that “personal identity depends upon the recapture in memory of key places in which one’s life has taken place” (1989:53). Gray considers whether “take place” has significance beyond its literary usage. To say that one’s life has taken place is, in fact, “a kind of pun . . . [for] we live by occupying, by *taking possession* of, a succession of places” (ibid; emphasis added). As with Coombe’s focus on restriction in signification and circulation of cultural forms, meanings can also be restricted or imposed in the context of place through applying a “commodity logic” (Coombe, 1991:1866; see Rappaport 1994 on his notion of “disorders”). According to a fundamentally economic epistemology, what might be subjectively experienced as place, with a sense of place attachment and “possession” suggested by Gray, is conceived of as mere space in the calculus that characterizes actions of business and government.

“Something there is that doesn’t love a wall”

At the same time, many lifestyle migrants and long-time residents recognize need to preserve a common good, expressed in somewhat nebulous concepts such as “open space,” or “viewshed”

In this section, I share a legal case from my study area where issues of property and access to and control of a resource perceived of as essential to local and individual character are brought into sharp relief. One part of this case entails a basic value that—in principle—all people should have equal opportunity to acquire or display the things that compose the prevailing notion of the good life. This is central to the peculiarly American notion of freedom in which democracy is extended from the sphere of government and political participation to the realm of consumer wants and desires (Leach 1993). In theory at least, consumer democracy allows everyone the right of self-expression and affirmation through consumption of material goods or, perhaps, choice of residence—although people ultimately differ in capacity to fulfill desires as a consequence of such factors as socio-economic status.

There is mounting tension over individual and common goods within study area communities. On the one hand, I have found place promotion for private development in keeping with the ideal of a free and open market where people can choose within their means to fulfill individual desires. At the same time, many lifestyle migrants and long-time residents recognize need to preserve a common good, expressed in somewhat nebulous concepts such as “open space,” or “viewshed,” which may be sacrificed by largely unregulated growth encouraged by neo-liberal ideals.

This iconic dispute illustrates a tension between individual desires, access, and a common good. While early in the field, I learned that a Traverse City man was suing a neighbor on behalf of his neighborhood to restore a scenic view of Grand Traverse Bay long enjoyed but now blocked by a tall fence erected by the defendant who sought personal privacy. A newspaper reporter called on a locally meaningful, much repeated phrase that captures how many move to the area at the expense of salary when he asked “If a view of the Bay is half the pay . . . what’s the harm when it’s taken away?” (O’Brien 2000:1A). The ensuing court battle may be seen simply as an attempt to balance private property rights with a generalized sense of quality of life values and a common good. However, the case speaks to diminished access to a view basic to sense of place, an essential part local character, individual character, and narratives of self and community within a neighborhood.

The plaintiff’s suit describes the fence in language that carries feelings of violation heard in the accounts of lifestyle migrants. The fence is described as not less than a threat to well-being. The plaintiff’s legal complaint finds it “seriously offensive, obnoxious, and darkly oppressive.” They describe its construction as a “shameful and dastardly wrongful act . . . which significantly alters, in an extremely negative way, the status quo.” In response to the final judgment (for the defendant), the plaintiff states that views of the bay have always been

“revered” and that the fence was a “fortress-like structure” that intruded upon that reverential space by creating “long, dark shadows where there used to be sunlight” (O’Brien 2000:1A). The aggrieved loss of a valued resource, formerly available to these neighbors, highlights the connection between local and individual character and extent to which, for lifestyle migrants, resources of place are far from inert substances—as we will see next.

Embodied experience, connecting self with place

The desire to deliberately root selfhood in an actively cultivated sense of place, rather than in the domain of work, in what we might call “career,” is a basic motivation of lifestyle migrants. Now in their fifties, Joan and Peter moved from near Detroit in the mid-1990s. For a decade prior to their move, they visited and picnicked on land purchased on scenic Leelanau Peninsula with the idea of “retiring on it.” Many years before that imagined day, however, Peter’s chosen career in broadcasting began to unexpectedly change in response to broader changes in mass media in particular and the workplace in general. He felt unable to pursue his first “calling” as a journalist. Taking time to reassess his life trajectory, Joan and Peter decided to risk taking a different path. With Peter’s heretofore life-organizing career at an end, they felt freed to follow a dream of making place an essential core of everyday life, merging present self with a potential self. Cushioned by savings and equity accumulated in their long-time residence in Southeast Michigan (an acknowledged aspect of relatively privileged socioeconomic status), they took a measured risk and to find or create work for themselves and relocated to their cherished “Promised Land.”

Here we hear how Peter makes the physical place he loves an intimate part of self through “existential insideness” (Relph 1976).

I must tell you that there are not fewer than five days in a week where I come inside and say to my wife, “God damn, I feel loved.” I live at the “Bend in the Eagle Highway.” That’s where I live. Eagle Highway makes a bend just like that [gestures with his arm] right at its northern edge. That’s the address I use. I see eagles from my porch. None actually live on my land but I’ll give them the chance. I love seeing wild turkeys. I’ve seen two bobcats in six months. Those are joys. I work very hard on the place I’m at to know who first farmed it and when it was bought, the successive owners. There is a stone house on the property with walls that thick [gestures a foot in thickness]. That kept the temperature an even sixty in summer so that it can keep milk cool.

Self and place-making involve use of artifacts and place-based stories in narrative constructions that delineate particular areas of intense familiarity that organize and make surroundings meaningful. The folklorist Mary Hufford (1986:74) asserts that narrative strategies in accounts like

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Peter's provide ways for people to "surround themselves with evidence that they are at home, in a place with a usable past." Place naming, specifically use of unofficial names like their self-proclaimed address at "the Bend in the Eagle Highway," provides a sense of existential inside-ness and feeling of belonging in encoded messages both discursive as well as in landscape features, elements basic to local character that serve as grammatical units, as signs, that may be meaningless to the "outsider" (see Ryden 1993) but become essential to individual character. Feelings of place attachment elevated to a sense of ownership are encouraged through limiting entrée to a particular area in the realm of signification by use of such forms. Familiarity and intimate knowledge of place can provide basis for an implicit or explicit claim of possession, where the person "takes place" in the dual sense of process and appropriation. This claim is for stake in a basic part of self in the same way that one might claim property in one's own body—a point to which I will return in my concluding discussion of Margaret Radin's contribution to the subject of personhood and place.

Peter's words resonate with Gray's assertion that we have an "autobiographical need to re-create the past" and that "such re-creation is actually coextensive with the power of memory, *rooting* it in the [relative] stability of the spatial order" (1989:59–60, emphasis added) as a way of creating personal account. Those who make place into home by making it a literal part of themselves experience the existential insideness described by geographer Edward Relph where place is "experienced without deliberate and self-conscious reflection yet is full of significances [where the person] is part of that place and it is part of him [sic]" (1976:55).

As intuitively understood by lifestyle migrants, sense of self is determined in large part by what people do and what they do is shaped by where they are in the world (Ryden 1993). Susan's case illustrates this point. In another narrative of relocation, a single woman in her late thirties who grew up in the Midwest set out in the 1990s to "find herself" in a career with a Silicon Valley software firm. When the world of work in the high-tech boom lost its meaningfulness and began to erode Susan's faith in career for providing an enduring basis to selfhood, she reconsidered her earlier commitment to climbing the corporate ladder. She spoke lovingly of the local character of place when describing how she chose to leave behind a high paying job for a life deliberately embedded in the study area landscape. Here she clarifies her meaning of place:

[It's] the water and the dunes, the open space, the seasons. You feel part of the outdoors up here. You feel like your life is not your home, the footprint of your house, your work. You realize that it's bigger than that. It's a lot bigger than that. Your life kind of expands. It expands even into that old boat stored back in the woods. . . .

Susan's description expresses how her self became a literal part of place, how she has taken ownership of it as a part of personhood. She explains

how, through connection to place, your life can be “bigger” than home and work. This is “the something more” referred to and passionately sought by lifestyle migrants. As noted by celebrated local writer, Kathleen Stocking (1990:ix,xvxi), people sometimes seek out places to feel that they belong to something bigger. Stocking left New York City when she needed “birds and trees and the observable minutiae of seasons so I could feel my life as a stream of little movements . . . huge hills and big lakes and that sense of panorama and distance. . . .” Both Susan and Stocking describe how a person’s psychic space can be enlarged. They suggest where personhood and place are entwined in embodied experience such that physical *things*, that “old boat stored back in the woods,” as a feature of local character, becomes an acknowledged element of individual character in the composition of selfhood. Both women are talking, in part, about experiencing a kind of self integration in various elements of their lives as well as something approaching the state of “transcendence” described by Desjarlais and entirely unlike Alan’s “struggling along” (Hoey 2005). They speak to, even if only implicit in passion for local character, the need for place preservation.

Limitations

This article has dealt with desires and expectations, but has left largely unexplored the experience or long-term outcomes of choices made by lifestyle migrants. As noted in literature on lifestyle migration, idealized visions of potential selves, particularly as attached to the Rural, are not infrequently unrealistic and challenged by complexities of community life where different groups may be at odds over how local resources are defined and used (Jobes 2000; Murdoch and Day 1998). In fact, the influx of lifestyle migrants may precipitate conflicts. Individualized claims on elements of local character made to create affective, place-based identities accompanied by romanticized discourse may stand in contrast to traditional, utilitarian, and communal notions of place extant locally. This kind of conflict is, not surprisingly, typically played out along insider/outsider and class lines. While these are important issues, to which I turn my attention in other writings, they do not change the substance of my argument which deals with the attempt made by a broad category individuals to define personally meaningful identity through moral narratives of individual character shaped in deliberate attachment to elements of local character.

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Conclusion: Place for personhood

My intent has been to explore the mutually implicating impact absorbed by places and felt by people of structural and cultural changes in an emerging post-industrial economy and an increasingly market-based society in which human actions are charac-

terized as market exchanges. My understanding comes out of talking with lifestyle migrants who are articulate about how they chose to respond to challenges and opportunities. I now introduce law professor Margaret Radin's notion of "property for personhood" (1987). Radin asserts that as social scientists and concerned citizens, scholars interested in these issues need to pay close attention to how things fundamental to the person may be commodified (or conversely made inalienable). Radin's vision consists of a world where "markets would not necessarily be abolished, but market-inalienability would protect all things important to personhood" (1987:1903). While this utopian ideal is impossible to put into practice within the present socio-economic system, her proposal that recognizes and elucidates the fundamental connection between place and personhood, local and individual character.

Defining property for personhood raises the issue of potentialities for being and emerges from a fear for possible loss of cultural resources that make up this potential, both discursive and non-discursive, as discussed earlier in work of both Low and Coombe. While Radin recognizes the limits "universal non-commodification," she holds that economic or legal hegemonies characteristic of neoliberal capitalism "stifle the individual and social potential of human beings through its organization and production, distribution, and consumption, and through its concomitant creation and maintenance of the person as a self-aggrandizing profit- and preference-maximizer" (1987:1871). She refers to a kind of "human flourishing" to describe different conceptions of necessary and sufficient conditions for construction of personhood (Hoey and Fricke 2007; Taylor 1989:4). In this way, "an inferior conception of human flourishing disables us from conceptualizing the world rightly" (Radin 1987:1885).

This is precisely how corporate refugees turned lifestyle migrants such as Alan, describe struggling along in a system that made it impossible for them to "live their lives properly." As Radin notes "Market rhetoric, the rhetoric of alienability of all 'goods,' is also the rhetoric of alienation of ourselves from what we can be as persons" (1987:1871). Similarly, Charles Taylor recognizes that despite this rhetoric, perhaps the most urgent and powerful clusters of demands that we would recognize as being essential to basic moral concern is "the respect for the life, integrity, and well being, even flourishing, of others" (1989:4). Radin understands that "*the terms in which human life is conceived matter to human life*" (1987:1885; emphasis added). The idea that words matter to being is an important point to make. Like Coombe, Radin is concerned with the impact of social discourse and law on potentialities for being. If the "discourse of fungibility is partially made one's own, it creates disorientation of the self that experiences the distortion of its own personhood" (1987:1907; Lane 1991, 1994).

What does it mean to experience one's self as commodity or "ignored cost?" Is this the experience of so-called disposables in the contingent, just-in-time workforce? Corporate executives have spent at least fifteen years extolling the virtue of using global markets to set the price for employees. Once viewed as a pillar of stability and corporate paternalism,

IBM has referred to their per-diem workers, in ironic reference to its focus on computer hardware, as “the peripherals.” According to one former temp: “You’re just a fixture, a borrowed thing that doesn’t belong there” (see Rogers 2000). Other companies refer to full-time staff as “core workers” to distinguish them from growing ranks of leased employees. In an age of so-called flexibility, Radin asserts that universal market discourse “transforms our world of concrete persons, whose uniqueness and individuality is expressed in specific personal attributes [i.e., character], into a world of disembodied, fungible, attribute-less entities possessing a wealth of alienable, severable ‘objects’ ” (1987:1885; Martin 1994, 1999; Strathern 1988). As noted earlier, today’s workers are asked to think of themselves as a set of disembedded skills, the *portfolio self*, rather than as a complete and integral individual with a particular, discrete job (Hoey 2006). Popular self-help books assure “New Economy” workers that the secret to personal success is to begin thinking of themselves “as a product that is being offered in the marketplace for labor” (Murray 2000:155–156).³

Similar to what we are expected to accept as persons, those responsible for marketing specific locations are also encouraged to treat physical places in much the same way. As noted by geographers Chris Philo and Gary Kearns (1993:18), places are treated “not so much as foci of attachment and concern, but as bundles of social and economic opportunity competing against one another in the open (and unregulated) market for a share of the capital investment cake.” In market discourse, particular places are regarded as little more than commodities to be consumed “that can be rendered attractive, advertised, and marketed much as capitalists would any product” (ibid). Social scientists need to appreciate “the constituents of this discourse—considering as we do the various turns that the discourse takes for different ‘actors’ in the process—and their varying practical consequences” (ibid).

Philo and Kearns’ point regarding the impact of market discourse and practice on places returns us to the existential spatiality of being and to subjectivity and objectivity. In this, Radin suggests that a better view of personhood, distinct from one inherited from the historical subject/object dichotomy and consistent with the dialogic and material understanding of personhood basic to my discussion, “does not conceive of the self as pure subjectivity standing wholly separate from an environment of pure objectivity” (1987:1904). Rather, Radin’s notion of “contextuality” asserts that both social and physical contexts should be acknowledged as integral to personal individuation. Context is fundamental not simply as surrounding information but as co-structure, or “co-text” in narrative construction of self. This asserts the existential relationship between personhood and context, person and place, and overlapping nature of individual and local character.

Conditions of flexibility and hyper-connectedness characteristic of life in the post-modern, post-industrial world offer opportunities and challenges to local and individual character, the construction of self and place. Distinct places are ever more valuable and valued. As suggested by

Preservation of places as anchors to identity, as moorings to sense of self, is critically important as a defense against the corrosion of persistent change

lifestyle migrants, preservation of places as anchors to identity, as moorings to sense of self, is critically important as a defense against the corrosion of persistent change on both distinct character of particular places and lasting character of the self. As in the case of the neighbor's fence, it is erected in violation of a sense of place with consequences for selfhood, described as nothing less than "darkly oppressive."

We have seen how lifestyle migrants recognize the importance of place for personhood. In compelling narratives of relocation, they show us how embodied experience gives them meaningful, personally constitutive connections to place, the physical landscape, and an intangible spirit of history that resides in particular places as local character. It is about something greater than themselves and of striving to find relative stability for a sense of self on which to base an individual account, a moral narrative of self, in the spatial order.

Notes

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¹Most data collection for this article took place from early 2000 to mid-2002 in adjoining Michigan counties of Grand Traverse, Leelanau, Antrim, and Benzie. Foundational data for this chapter were gathered through in-depth, open-ended ethnographic interviews with 128 in-migrants to these counties. Interviews emphasized personal background, reasons for leaving a job and relocating, the process of relocation decision making, and consequences for individual and family identity. Free-form conversations with minimal interruption allowed migrants to present detailed narrative constructions, often in extended monologues. The large number of stories gathered in this manner allowed me to consider a wide range of personal backgrounds and relocation experiences. I eventually focused on twelve representative cases. I deepened my understanding through frequent contact with four individuals and eight families who relocated during the previous five years. This involved extended follow-up conversations, participant-observation in everyday work and family life, spending time in workplaces and homes of this core group of participants. All names are pseudonyms.

²One attempt at reterritorialization, even what might be thought of as a kind of "re-enchantment," are intentionally created communities in planned developments (cf. Bellah et al. 1996; Halfacree 1998; Hoey 2007). Whereas neighborhoods once grew organically from the way people lived, some now attempt to synthesize them as a remedy to perceived social ills. So-called neo-traditional or New Urbanist projects are an interesting response to the apparent need for reterritorialization (Frantz and Collins 1999; Duany and Plater-Zyberk 1992; Calthorpe 1993).

³Melissa Fisher (2006) discusses practices of Wall Street women to define a *self-work* ethic wherein work has value insofar as it provides an opportunity to acquire marketable skills and a venue for creating a network of social ties that may be used to either hasten professional ascent or stave off sudden descent. In the wake

of the 2000 dot.com bust and heightened anxiety about work without well-defined career paths, Fisher documents how these women were constructing new definitions of success, sometimes after becoming New Economy “refugees” who sought to “rewire” their lives by creating new careers—in a manner akin to lifestyle migrants.

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