Making Sense of a Sense of Place

Brian Spittles

The term "sense of place" has become a ubiquitous piece of phraseology in contemporary Western culture; however its meanings are as diverse as its use is common. The primary aim of this paper is to clarify more precisely what the term "sense of place" actually means, in response to the driving thesis that its present multifarious use renders the term so amorphous in meaning, that its power of meaning is lost. First, to corroborate this supposition, examples of the term's multiple uses are portrayed, including its conflation with the related terms "spirit of place" and genius loci. Next a genealogical examination of the term "sense of place" is undertaken, beginning with its roots in the Roman terms genius and genius loci. The historical circumstances relating to the introduction of the term genius into the English language during the 14th century and genius loci during the 18th century are then appraised. The next phase of appraisal is the late 19th century emergence of the terms "sense of place" and "spirit of place" within British and American literature, and their ostensible connections and conflations with genius and genius loci. Beyond this, a post-1900 linguistic shift is investigated whereby the older terms of genius and genius loci are gradually superseded by sense of place and spirit of place. The final section proposes some practical ramifications in being more precise in the use of each of these terms and distinct definitions are suggested for each to demonstrate that such clarifying differentiation and precision of meaning is possible.
“Sense of Place” or “All Over the Place”?

One of the rewards of a study of philosophy is to strengthen our defences against abstruse theorising: we should be searching first for clarity. The important question usually is “what do we mean when we say . . . ?”, or “where have these words been before, and what aspects of our past do they trail behind them?” It is important because linguistic structures are conservative, and they pattern our thinking.¹

An experience and concept common to all cultures throughout the history of humanity is what contemporary Western society has come to call a sense of place. However, although a common phenomenon, it seems that each person’s experience of a sense of place is unique, for it is forged and influenced by his or her cultural cosmology, life circumstances, individual beliefs and bent of personality. Thus the term is pluralistic, having a diverse gamut of definitions, meanings and applications across a broad spectrum of disciplines within Western society. For example, the 2000 Habitus: A Sense of Place conference held at Curtin University, Perth, Western Australia, brought together foremost scholars from a variety of disciplines to investigate and discuss the interplay between social structures, places, people and human behaviour. Habitus, a concept developed by the French philosopher Pierre Bourdieu, is defined as “a system of durable, transposable dispositions, structured structures predisposed to function as structuring structures, that is, as principles which generate and organise practices and representations.”² In other words, habitus is the socio-cultural crucible which forms and is informed by a population’s constructed and evolving worldview, and in Bourdieu’s view, is the prime motivator of human action.³ According to Hillier and Rooksby,⁴ “habitus incorporated a strong sense of place of everyone and everything,” and as an integral component of history unfolding, is “passed on through generations.” This particular perception indicates that, not only is a sense of place intimately connected to all aspects of our lives along the macro-microcosmic social continuum, but it is also ostensibly trans-generational. Other views however, incorporate the relationship between people and environment as a central tenet of a sense of place, with Thomashow defining it as “literally the roots of ecological identity,”⁵ and proposing that “sense of place involves a personal orientation toward place, in which one’s understanding of place and one’s feelings about place become fused in the context of environmental meaning.”⁶ Thus in its present use, sense of place is literally located all over the place.

Although generally perceived to be the concern and catchcry of the “green” fringe population, such as environmentalists, exponents of sustainability, and practitioners of the arts, notions of a sense of place are
common to many of the so-called more reputable social fields, and it is frequently used in parliamentary process throughout all Australian states. For example, in his 2001 speech at the opening of the Victorian State Library’s Centenary of Federation exhibition, the then Prime Minister John Howard states that “what this exhibition I think very beautifully does . . . is to remind us of the sense of belonging and the sense of place that we each have in so many different ways.” Economics is another field where notions of a sense of place are often discussed. For instance, in the respected academic journal Economic Geography, Herod attributes the success of an industrial dispute to the fact that “workers were able to draw on a powerful sense of place and community based upon work and personal relationships built up over many years.” A search of the comprehensive, multidisciplinary and international journal archive JSTOR, reveals that the term “sense of place” is common currency amongst many disciplines, including the arts, anthropology, business, education, geography, history, law, psychology, religion and sociology.

Superficially, such a wide and diverse use of the term constitutes no problem as it reflects the natural diversity of social life; however, when considering that it is used almost universally without specific explanation as to exactly what sense of place the author is referring to, then problems can arise. In fact, George Seddon, Australia’s “sense of place man,” states that “sense of place” has become a popular concept, heard at every turn, unanalysed, and this is, for me, a problem . . . It can be a way of legitimising a set of personal and subjective evaluative criteria as if they had some externally derived authority.

In this statement, not only does Seddon highlight the necessity of analysing and more clearly defining the concept of “sense of place,” but he also (maybe inadvertently) articulates an existent conundrum implicit in the widespread, multi-meaning use of the term. It appears that the supposed “externally derived authority,” from which people seem to draw in their use of the term, does not in fact exist! In other words, ostensibly there are no “sense of place” experts, and if so, this by default makes every person who chooses to employ the term an expert in his or her own right; for who can say that this use of the term is correct, and that one is not, if no generic defining benchmark exists? Hence, in its present state, all uses of the term are valid, which runs the very real risk of rendering the term essentially impotent, by giving it so many meanings, that it becomes a meaningless piece of jargon.

In stating then that “sense of place . . . is a challenging concept to articulate,” Timothy Beatley acknowledges the complexity of the term,
however, his subsequent conclusion that “most of us know what this means in a visceral way,” though arguably correct as an amorphous generalisation, fails to tackle the confusion inherent in its free-for-all utilisation. For example, Scott Sanders makes the strong claim that having a sense of place is a “psychological necessity,” and maintains that “the result of having no sense of place is insanity.” If this is correct then it seems that fostering a sense of place is essential to our individual and social health and wellbeing; but exactly which “sense of place” is Sanders referring to? For instance, the term is chiefly used in context of interiority, or of some sense of individual-cum-community belonging, within the fabric of a certain socio-cultural-environmental complex. However, it is also used (albeit less commonly) in context of exteriority, where it refers not to a sense of belonging to or within a place, but of the sense or awareness of the atmosphere or character of a place external to the observer. For instance, Gitlin describes a sense of place as a “method for possessing and exhibiting some version of nature” in architectural or artistic form, while Griffith proposes that “the aesthetic richness” of a school campus “should convey a sense of place.” Such use prevails mainly within the fields of art and architecture, and although the term appears mostly in context of interiority at present, this is a relatively recent development, for as will be discussed in more detail later, it was originally used in context of exteriority.

Further compounding this contextual ambiguity and confusion, is the practice of using the term synonymously and interchangeably with other terms like “spirit of place” and genius loci. For example, in the title of his paper Sense of Place, Spirit of Place: Dilemmas and Possibilities, John Cameron (1998), uses both the terms “sense of place” and “spirit of place,” but doesn’t differentiate between them throughout his essay. By doing so, is he implying that they mean the same thing, and if so, why use both in the title, which infers that they are different concepts? Likewise, other academic professionals also conflate and confuse “sense of place” and “spirit of place” by using the terms interchangeably. This mixing of terms is exemplified in a different context by Garton-Smith, who claims that “at the end of the twentieth century, Perth finds itself stripped of the architectural detail which could have defined its genius loci, or sense of place”; thus implying that genius loci and sense of place mean the same thing. Academics at the University of California apparently concur with this, for they state on their website that “sense of place has several meanings,” one of which is “the ‘soul’ of a place; its genius loci,” however, according to Dubos “the phrases ‘genius loci’ and ‘spirit of place’ symbolize the forces or structures generally hidden beneath the surface of things which determine the uniqueness of each place;” thus implying that genius loci and spirit of place mean the
same thing. These are but a few examples of the confusing and interchangeable use of these terms, which leaves one wondering whether they are the same, different, or simply nonsensical?

A clue to unravelling this conundrum can be found in Seddon's contention that the terms "sense of place' and 'genius loci', are assumed rather than analysed."19 This relates to his "important question" above, namely "what do we mean when we say . . . ?", or "where have these words been before, and what aspects of our past do they trail behind them'? In response to Seddon's question, this paper outlines a general history of the meanings and uses of these terms, both individually, and in relation to each other. Though not professing to be the absolute and authoritative version of things, it will provide a clearer structure for making sense of a sense of place. The word genius (and its related genius loci) is an appropriate starting place, for it is the point of origin and the taproot throughout history from which the idioms “sense of place" and “spirit of place” stem.

Roman Pantheism: From Genius to Genius Loci

Many present day users of the phrase “sense of place” are probably unaware that its origins are rooted in the Roman concept of genius. Originally, the Roman word “genius” literally translated as “begetter” and was exclusively patrilineal in its usage,20 however, it progresses through a series of expanding meanings over time. According to Barrow,

the idea of genius begins from the paterfamilias21 who in begetting children becomes the head of the family. His essential character is isolated and given a separate spirit-existence . . . His genius, therefore, is that which puts him in a special relationship to his family which went before him, and has perished, and to his family which is yet to be born of his sons . . . it is because of his genius that he, a man of flesh and blood, can be a link in that unseen chain.22

According to this description a man’s genius apparently comes into fruition with the commencement of fatherhood, and is trans-generational and amorphous in nature, a view that other author’s evidently concur with. For instance, Rose refers to genius as that “particular kind of numen which enables the [family] line to continue, generation after generation,” and defines the Roman numen as “a supernatural power or influence . . . which seems literally to signify a movement . . . [or] sign of a force or power at work."23 Similarly, Petrie claims that the “unseen powers” of Roman cosmology “never had the same definitely conceived personality that they had for the Greek: they were at best more or less colourless abstractions,”
or “numina,” while the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* purports that a man's *genius* is not his soul, but most likely his “form . . . of the family's, or clans, power of continuing itself by reproduction.” However, as with the term “sense of place,” there appears to be some discrepancy and obscurity amongst authors as to precisely what this original *genius* is. For example, in contrast to the above claim that “a man's genius is not his soul,” Glover states that “the human soul, too, is ‘a daemon in a body’—the *Genius* of the Latins,” inferring that soul and *genius* are synonymous. In another example, Bullfinch describes a man's *genius* as “a spirit who had given [him] being,” that operates as his “protector through life,” however, through his use of the relative pronoun “who,” Bullfinch seemingly portrays *genius* as a personified spirit-entity rather than a numinous force. These seeming historical contradictions and discrepancies though, probably reflect the fact that throughout Roman history the word “genius” evolves beyond its patrilineal origins to encompass a far broader spectrum of meanings and applications.

At first this transformation is incremental, extending the meaning of *genius* to include all men, for they are deemed “potentially a *paterfamilias*” regardless of their fatherhood status, while around the same time, due to Greek influence, *Juno*, the *genius*-equivalent for women, becomes manifest. This Greek influence continues to shift and shape the parameters of the meaning of *genius*, for as Dill notes,

> the daemons of the Platonic philosophers find their counterpart in the popular cult of the *genii* . . . All the phenomena of nature—every act, pursuit, or vicissitude in human life—found a spiritual patron in the Roman imagination.

Similarly, the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* states that,

> owing to the rise of individualism and also to the prevalence of Greek ideas concerning a guardian spirit, or daimon, the genius lost its original meaning and came to be a sort of personification of the individual's natural desires and appetites.

This enlarged version of an individuated *genius* expands once again to represent not only human appetites and vicissitudes, but also groups of men (or women?) sharing a common interest or activity, thus there is the *genius* of a club, a town, a legion and of divisions of the civil service. In this light Barrow contends that “the group acquires an entity of its own; the whole is more than its parts, and that mysterious extra is the genius.” Thus *genius* evolves from the microcosmic reality of being the spirit of a man’s patrilineal “begetting,” to a macrocosmic and multidimensional plethora of entities that exist in every facet of individual and collective human society. This includes
the idea of *genius* “as a sort of guardian angel, a higher self,”33 or “the tutelary god or attendant spirit allotted to every person at his birth,”34 and extends also in a sacrosanct sense to include the *genius* of the emperor, and the *genius* of major gods and goddesses. Then again, Rose asserts that beyond the earliest meaning “all else about the Genius is conjecture, for he is thickly obscured by confusion with quite a Greek figure, the personal *daimon,*”35 thus casting a shadow of doubt over the historical correctness of the above “facts.” This multifarious Roman use of *genius* is strikingly similar to the contemporary use of sense of place, and indicates the possibility that this phenomenon has been passed on like some etymological “gene” throughout history. Nevertheless, the scope of *genius* expands once again to include “a host of genii, of haunting or guarding spirits, attached to every place or scene . . . [the] genii of the secret spring or grove,”36 thus heralding the conception of the *genius loci*.

The notion of *genius loci* literally translates as “spirit of the place”; originally however, the term is not employed generically for all spirits of all places, but only as “a formula used in dedications when the suppliant was uncertain of the name of the deity to whom the sacrifice was being made.”37 Thus its use proliferates as the Roman Empire broadens its territories through the invasion of other lands, with their hordes of unknown *genii*. As a result, Roman soldiers often left dedications to the *genius loci* of these foreign places, such as the inscribed altar at present-day Carrawburgh in England that translates as saying “Texadrian and Suvevae soldiers in a detachment of the 2nd Nervian cohort set this up to the spirit of this place.”38 Although the tribes of ancient Britain have their own concepts and terminology pertaining to the spirits of places, the actual term *genius loci* disappears from their soils with the departing Romans, and does not formally find its way into the English language until many centuries later. However, *genius loci* or “spirit of the place” is the direct source from which the contemporary phrase “spirit of place” emerges, and is also centrally influential in the development of the term “sense of place.”

**The Arrival of Genius in the English Language**

Before *genius loci* enters the English language, it first emerges in the form of *genius*. According to Williams (1976, p.143), the word “genius” is introduced into the English language during the 14th century where it is used in reference to “the guardian spirit” of a person or place.39 The *Oxford English Dictionary* concurs with this view, stating that one meaning of the word “genius” is “the tutelary god or attendant spirit allotted to every person at his birth . . . [and] also the tutelary and controlling spirit similarly connected with
a place;” and as an illustrative example of one of the earliest uses of the word, it proffers a quote from the English poet John Gower’s *Confessio Amantis* (1390)—“O Genius min owne clerke, Come forth and here this manners shrifte.” There is considerable debate however amongst literary specialists as to Gower’s precise meaning in his use of “Genius,” yet Baker asserts that Gower’s meaning is directly influenced by the French theologian-poet Alain de Lille’s *De planctu naturae* (1175) and the French poet Jean de Meun’s *Roman de la Rose* (1290), both of whom characterise “Genius” as a key allegorical figure in their works. In other words, these writers depict in their poetry the allegorical character Genius, who personifies the elements of *genius* in a mini-drama of the “gods.” However, the allegorical Genius did not arise from a vacuum to find its place in medieval poetry, for these French poets were influenced by what Stiefel refers to as “the beginning of modern science” in 12th century Europe where “a small group of Western Europeans wrestled with a revolutionary idea, the systematic, rational investigation of the workings of nature.” This scientific venture included an investigation of the concept of *genius*.

According to Holmes 12th century Europe is an era of contending with “the difficulties raised by the urgent need to reconcile biblical revelation with pagan science,” while Turner purports it as an era during which scientific speculation and learning operates as a “Platonic reaction against the anti-realism” embedded in the thinking of the times. Thus, it is within the newborn bastions of free-thinking such the School of Chartres in France that the word “genius” first emerges to find currency in West European literature, for according to Wetherbee, the scholars of Chartres have an intense interest in the World Soul . . . [which] belongs neither to philosophy nor theology, but exists in a sort of *tertium quid* between the two. And it is on just such a middle ground that…Alain de Lille located the activity of such figures as . . . *Genius*. Furthermore, Baker notes that in 12th century medieval literature the tradition of the tutelary Genius is derived from two central texts of the School of Chartres, the *De deo Socrates* of Apuleius and the *De nuptiis Philologiae et Mercurii* of Martianus Capella . . . [and that] Apuleius establishes for the Middle Ages the precedent of casting Genius as a moral guide by equating this Roman god with the daemons of Platonic cosmology.

This supposition is also supported by Starines who claims that the figure Genius was notable in the Latin literature of the twelfth century, in the French literature of the thirteenth, and in the English
literature of the fourteenth . . . [however] the underlying philosophical
doctrine in the conception of Genius was to be found in Plato’s
Timaeus and Apology.57

It is significant to note that the writer-philosopher Apuleius refers to Plato as
“my master Plato,”48 and both Timaeus and Apology inform his works, hence
he is the principal medium between the daemon of Plato’s philosophy and
the arrival of Genius in the 12th century halls of Chartres.

As noted above, throughout Roman history the meaning of genius is
influenced by Greek concepts of daemon, however, in his 2nd century works
De deo Socrates, Apuleius develops this further in his progressive logic that
firstly,

the human soul . . . even when situated in the present body,
is called, according to a certain signification, a daemon

And secondly,

the upright desire of the soul is a good daemon . . . [and] you
may call this daemon in our tongue, according to my
interpretation, a Genius, I know not whether rightly, but
certainly at my peril.49

Here Apuleius acknowledges it may not be absolutely correct to correlate the
two concepts, yet regardless of whether or not it was his intention to create
a new entity of “Genius,” it appears his Genius-daemon fusion is later
adopted by 12th century European scholars as a singular compound Genius.
Moreover, it is not made clear by Apuleius whether Genius is the soul itself,
or “the upright desire” of the soul, however Wetherbee claims that “according
to Alain de Lille [whose views are informed by Apuleius] . . . the genius (of a
thing) is its nature or the god of its nature.”50 Therefore it is possible that
Apuleius means that “Genius” is synonymous to both the soul (nature) of a
thing, and “the upright desire” of the soul (god of its nature). Regardless of
Apuleius’ exact meaning, beyond this point in De deo Socrates he continues
to discuss the various realms of daemonic existence implicit within the
multidimensional human self, but does not mention Genius, or correlate
daemon with Genius again. Interestingly, Apuleius also remarks that “Plato
asserts that a peculiar daemon is allotted to every man, who is a witness and
a guardian of his conduct in life, who, without being visible to any one, is
always present, and who is an arbitrator not only of his deeds, but also of his
thoughts.”51 Although this description correlates exactly with a later English
definition for genius, he makes this observation only in terms of a daemon,
and does not equate it to the Roman genius. It seems then that his cursory
linking of the Roman genius with the Greek daemon earlier in the same
passage is generically adopted by 12th century European scholars as “Genius” (minus the daemon counterpart), and two centuries later enters the English language in this form.

The 5th century writer Martianus Capella’s encyclopedic work *De nuptiis Philologiae et Mercurii* also plays a formative role in shaping 12th century discourse in Europe concerning the concept of *genius*. In fact Baker reasons that although Apuleius establishes the *genius*-daemon connection, he “does not clarify the relation between the tutelary spirit and the god of generation,” and further holds that “it is not unusual for both meanings of Genius to be invoked simultaneously . . . [and that] the dual meaning of Genius is transmitted to the Middle Ages through the influential Martianus Capella” who conflates the two meanings of the term.52 Conversely, Lewis states that “in Martianus Capella two separate beings are described,” namely, what Lewis refers to as “Genius A” and “Genius B”; the former being “the universal god or spirit of generation,” and the latter is “the higher self in general.”53 Regardless of whether or not Martianus Capella conflated or separately described two forms of Genius, it seems the general concept is already imbued with a certain ambiguity when taken on board by 12th century scholars, and this trend continues throughout the Renaissance era with its proliferation in literary writing about Genius. In fact, in his article *Genius as an Allegorical Figure*, which offers a comprehensive analysis of the varied references to Genius during this period, Professor Knowlton concludes that “no writer offers the same portrait of the allegorical figure Genius.”54 Be that as it may, it is not the purpose of this paper to examine each specific use of *genius* throughout history, but instead to pinpoint the key junctures in the development of the concept of *genius* in the English language, and its subsequent expansion into the terms *genius loci*, spirit of place and sense of place.

Along these lines, it is not until the 17th century a formative era in the development of the English nation state, that *genius* is adapted to also mean “a characteristic disposition or quality” of a place or establishment,55 marking a transition from the allegorical characterisation of Genius as an aspect of the self, to the recognition of a similar such *genius* embodied in places outside the self. For instance, in his *Prologue to the University of Oxford* (1681) the poet and writer John Dryden refers to “the sacred genius of this place” in context of the mysterious and immaculate ambience or “presence” of any place in nature, which artists and poets attempt to represent or replicate in their works.56 Similarly, Simpson and Weiner cite the author Michael Drayton as speaking in his book *Poly-Olbion* (1622) of “Thou Genius of the place . . . Which liued’st long before the All-earth-drowning Flood”; which clearly refers to the Genius of a place rather than that of a person.57
In Hartman’s view,

English tradition of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries concentrates on how to create a native poetry which would express the special destiny of the nation. The poetical genius should reflect the genius loci, the spirit of England’s religion, history, and countryside.58

It is near the end of this historical episode that the term genius loci finally emerges into the English language.

The English Emergence of Genius Loci

Yet here, where never muse or god did haunt,
Still may some nameless power of Nature stray,
Pleased with the reedy stream's continual chant
And purple pomp of these broad fields in May.59

There appears to be no specific record of the original introduction of genius loci into the English language, but it seemingly surfaces in literature towards the end of the 18th century; a time of considerable social and economic upheaval in England, as industrialisation and economic rationalism based on Adam Smith’s notion of the free market, dominate and supplant the former agriculturalist traditions.60 At this juncture where the predominant theme in literature “concentrates on what can be logically measured and rationally understood,” a Romantic counter-movement takes place, where authors are “attracted to the irrational mystical and supernatural world . . . [and] celebrate the freedom of nature.”61 It is within this social milieu that the term genius loci begins to appear in literature, as an extension of the already established genius, and over the ensuing century both terms are used interchangeably to consequently become indistinguishable in meaning. Although Simpson & Weiner give the contemporary definition of genius loci as “the presiding deity or spirit” of a place, and “the body of associations that are connected with, or the inspirations that may be derived from” any given place,62 this also describes the late 18th century use of both genius, and the emergent genius loci. However, by the late 1800s (and beyond) genius loci predominates, and is used to mean spirit of a place, sense of a place, sense of the spirit of a place, ambience or atmosphere of a place, muse, guardian angel, personal tutelary spirit and various other things.

Ostensibly, the first English use of genius loci is by the Scottish novelist Tobias Smollett in his book The Expedition of Humphry Clinker (1771), in
which he writes:

> The verdure of this country is not equal to that of England.—The pleasure-grounds are, in my opinion, not so well laid out according to the genius loci; nor are the lawns, and walks, and hedges kept in such delicate order.\(^{53}\)

It is apparent here that Smollett refers to the pleasure-grounds as being out of synch with the *genius loci* of the place, but rather than using *genius loci* in reference to the spirit or guardian deity of the place, it is likely Smollett is influenced by Alexander Pope’s poem *Epistle IV, To Richard Boyle, Earl of Burlington* (1731) from forty years earlier, in which Pope refers to consulting “the genius of the place” as part of a new development in architectural and landscape design thinking. In his use of *genius*, Pope refers to the natural ambience of the place, or something akin to the Roman *numen*, or pervading life force of the place, thus Smollett’s *genius loci* probably carries the same meaning. This reference of Pope’s to “the genius of the place” will be discussed in further detail later, as it marks an important crossroad in what has become the *genius loci*, spirit of place and sense of place nexus.

Beyond Smollett, there appears to be almost no other use of the term *genius loci* in literature during the latter years of the 18th century\(^ {64}\) except for Dr. Henry Harington of Bath, who wrote an article in 1782 titled *Bath Anecdotes and Characters by the Genius Loci*.\(^ {65}\) During the early 1800s, Sir Walter Scott picks up and uses the term as follows in his novel *The Antiquary* (1816):

> In the midst of this wreck of ancient books and utensils, with a gravity equal to Marius among the ruins of Carthage, sat a large black cat, which, to a superstitious eye, might have presented the *genius loci*, the tutelar demon of the apartment.\(^ {66}\)

This is a fascinating and enigmatic turn of phrase because Scott blends together several meanings within his composite use of term *genius loci*; namely, *genius loci* as a spirit of the place, as a tutelary spirit, as the “demonic” animal familiar of witchcraft, and as “spirit made flesh” in the form of a cat. Maybe by exhibiting such artistic licence Scott sets the stage for later writers to cast *genius loci* in a myriad of ways, because a few decades later it begins to appear in the *London Times* newspaper with increasing use (see Figure 1)\(^ {67}\) and multiplicity of meaning. For example, in an 1844 editorial article the column writer states that

> The introduction of the English Poor Law into Ireland . . . was . . . repugnant to the *genius loci*. Poor as the Irish are they are most beneficent. In no country in Europe is the kindly duty of
alms-giving so cheerfully and universally performed . . . With the Irish peasant the act of charity and alms is an act of religion . . . [and does not need to be] compelled by law.\textsuperscript{58}

Here \textit{genius loci} is used to signify the \textit{spirit of alms-giving} (as “an act of religion”) implicit to Irish culture. \textit{Genius loci} next appears three years later in another editorial, depicted as the \textit{force of peer group pressure} to take up drinking in the armed forces:

\begin{quote}
The curse of a soldier’s life is drunkenness . . . Not one soldier in forty has the courage to resist the . . . temptation of example . . . The \textit{genius loci} is against him. The best conducted recruit yields, after a few months, to the scoffs and persuasions of his comrades.\textsuperscript{69}
\end{quote}

\begin{figure}
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\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{figure1}
\caption{Incidence of Use of Genius Loci in the London Times: 1840 - 1989}
\end{figure}

Regardless of whether this phenomenon of taking creative license with the meaning of \textit{genius loci} can be attributed to the example set by Scott, or if the stage had been set already due to the influence of the many-faces of pre-1800 \textit{genius}, this multiplicity of meaning compounds upon itself to form a veritable kaleidoscope of \textit{genii loci} thereafter.\textsuperscript{70} Even Sherlock Holmes gets in on the act with his announcement to Dr. Watson that—“I shall sit in that room and see if its atmosphere brings me inspiration. I'm a believer in the genius loci. You smile, Friend Watson. Well, we shall see.”\textsuperscript{71} These assorted uses and meanings of the term are not limited solely to fictional literature and columns in the \textit{London Times}, but also appear in texts from a sundry of
disciplines from the late-1800s onwards, therefore, when considering that genius loci (and its preceding genius) represent the common etymological base from which both the compound nouns “sense of place” and “spirit of place” emerge, it is likely that these latter terms inherit the interchangeable conceptual confusion of the former.

The Pre-1900 Development of Sense of Place and Spirit of Place

Although it is logical to presume that the phrase “spirit of the place” derives from the literal translation of genius loci, which originally refers to the Roman guardian spirit of a place, it is difficult to isolate the source of its supposed corollary “sense of place.” In fact, when the supervisor/composer of the Sheffield Hallam University’s online English Phrase Etymological Dictionary is asked “What is the origin of the phrase ‘sense of place’?” his reply is, “I can’t find an origin.” Due to its vast and diverse uses in literature over time, and its frequent confusion with spirit of place, it is seemingly impossible to uncover the origin of sense of place; however, there is a circumstance in history where these terms apparently emerge together as distinct concepts.

According to the landscape architecture authority Professor Richard Weller, “in landscape design history, a Sense of Place can be traced to the essayist Alexander Pope, who in 1731 said one must consult the genius of the place—meaning the spirit of place.” Here Weller refers to Pope’s entreaty in his Epistle IV, To Richard Boyle, Earl of Burlington (1731).

To build, to plant, whatever you intend,
To rear the column, or the arch to bend,
To swell the terrace, or to sink the grot;
In all, let Nature never be forgot . . .
Consult the genius of the place in all.
That tells the waters or to rise, or fall.

In this verse Pope expresses his viewpoint concerning architectural and landscape design, and appears to utilise a blend of three meanings of genius, namely genius as “the tutelary and controlling spirit . . . connected with a place,” as the “distinctive character or spirit” of a place, and also “with reference to a place: the body of associations connected with, or inspirations that may be derived from it.” Additionally and importantly however, he stipulates later in his Epistle that this consultation with “the genius of the place” be negotiated via the medium of “sense;” not a rational common sense, but “Good sense, which only is the gift of Heav’n,” or a sense that “splendour borrows all her rays from.” In this manner he clearly differentiates between the capacity to exercise a particular “good sense” and
the *genius/spirit* of place that one is sensing, and it is not until later that these concepts are conflated by others. McGill exemplifies an early example of such conflation in the following passage:

> As one halts one's horse to listen, that sense of the spirit of place—perhaps more poignant in a steep-walled mountain land than elsewhere—is for the nonce in abeyance and the hearer is transported from the almost virgin upland wildwood to English manor or Scottish castle where originally these strains rang forth.\(^78\)

for she plainly merges the terms "sense of place" and "spirit of place" into a mutual representation of the same meaning. On the other hand, Pope's conceptual composition can essentially be translated as referring to "the sense of the *genius/spirit* of the place," a notion/phrase which intrinsically features the concepts and the terms sense of place, spirit of place and *genus loci*; therefore it is possible that Pope's phraseology is the logical inception point of future conflations.

In discussing Pope's reference to "sense," Yale University's Professor Emeritus of English, Maynard Mack states that,

in building and gardening, sense shows itself most surely in a concern to understand what the situation calls for: "Consult the Genius of the Place in all." If you do this respectfully, if you treat the landscape with the consideration taught by the classical and chthonic notion that every natural scene is informed by an indwelling "presence," all else will follow.\(^79\)

Thus, although Pope does not use the actual term "sense of place" in any of his writings, it is clear he refers to a certain human capacity or "sense" that can be harnessed in the fields of architecture and landscaping, as a means to attune to the *genius* of a place, in order that construction activities are informed by, imbued with and complementary to the place's natural "presence." It seems then that Weller's above statement is significant for he pinpoints "sense of place" as originating from Pope's directive to utilise one's capacity of "sense" to attune to the guidance or align with nature of the "genius of the place," or "spirit of the place," (or what Smollett refers to as *genius loci* 40 years later). It is also significant to note that even though Pope is seemingly the first to directly link "sense" and "genius" in writing, Mack argues that "none of it is strictly new, not even the influential admonition to consult the genius of the place."\(^80\) This implies that the concept of consulting with the *genius* of a place emerged prior to Pope in England, but Mack does not provide any examples to verify this. Furthermore, although Pope's allusion to applying a specific type of "sense" to attune to the *genius* of a
place is arguably unique, the broader concept of the “sense of a place” is not original. For example, during the early 17th century a difference of opinion occurs concerning a possible printing error in the wording of one of Chaucer’s poems, with some claiming he originally uses the word “Heroes” and others believing the original word is “Eros.” The dispute was never resolved, however, in his book The Workes of Our Ancient and learned English Poet, Geoffrey Chavcer (1602), the schoolmaster Thomas Speght writes that “I haue set doune Eros, i. cupid: as most agreing in my opinion with the matter” and then diplomatically concedes that “whereas some will have us read Heroes, i. noble men; I cannot dislike their opinion, for it may fity stand with the sense of the place.”81 It is not clear whether Speght uses “sense of the place” to infer that the word “Heroes” fits within the context of the sentence structure, or whether “Heroes” fits with the social atmosphere or ambience of a setting or place in Chaucer’s poem. Either way, his use of the phrase indicates that concepts and phraseology akin to the contemporary “sense of place” pre-date Pope by at least 130 years.

Speght is not the only writer to use the phrase “sense of the place,” for it appears sporadically throughout pre-20th century English literature,82 though chiefly in reference to a rational and objective understanding of the reality of a place, rather than an empathic and subjective perception of the “spirit” of a place. The only apparent exception to this is the English essayist Walter Horatio Pater in his treatise Appreciations, With an Essay on Style (1889), and also in his Miscellaneous Studies (1895), where he uses the phrase “sense of the place” in context of a landscape character or atmosphere.83 In both texts Pater’s reference to “sense of the place” is contextually akin to Pope’s “sense of the Genius of a place,” and although these are exceptions to the general use of the term, they possibly herald and influence the appearance of “sense of place” a few years later. Therefore, if the term “sense of place” is traceable to Pope’s 1731 Epistle, the actual concept Pope refers to is not directly transferred into the term “sense of the place,” for it is over 150 years before Pater first uses the latter term in this context.

What does occur however from the mid-1700s through to the late 1800s is the common appearance, in both English and American literature, of the phrase “spirit of the place.”84 This term is used mostly in reference to a sense of the atmosphere, ambience or “spirit” of a peopled locale such as a building, town, city or nation, and also commonly (though less frequently) in reference to a sense of the atmosphere, ambience or “spirit” of a natural landscape. Therefore, (apart from the already longstanding notion of “Genius of the place”), if a phrase immediately evolved into use from Pope’s influence, it is probably “spirit of the place,” rather than “sense of place.”
Oddly, during this era spirit of the place is scarcely used in terms of its original meaning of the guardian spirit-being of a place (or genius loci), which is probably due to the rational dictates of Enlightenment discourses. Hence, although Romantic writers do stretch the parameters of scientific belief by accepting the reality of a “spirit” or pervasive ambience in nature, their thinking seems not extend to conceiving of a “spirit of the place” as a spectral guardian-entity. Two noted exceptions to this premise are the English poet Lord Byron’s *Manfred* (1817) which portrays “the spirit of the place” as “the Witch of the Alps” who “Could make the mountain bow / And quiver to his cavern’d base” and the American writer Laura Richards who describes in her novel *Hildegarde’s Neighbors* (1895) “the spirit of the place, changed by some wizardry into bird form, crouching there amid the ruins of the forest where once it had flitted and frolicked, a gauze-winged sprite.” On the whole then, it seems the scientific language of logic successfully banishes nature spirits from existence, for if the literature of the time reflects the thinking of the time, then unlike the 12th century worldview, such spirits of the place no longer exist as pragmatic aspects of Western cosmology.

Whether or not Weller is correct in stating that the contemporary term “sense of place” is intrinsically connected to Pope’s 1731 “sense of the genius of the place,” it is not until the late 1800s that the compound noun “sense of place” formally emerges, though the term does occur in a couple of isolated circumstances prior to this. For example, its earliest use appears to be in Shakespeare’s *Othello* (1604) when the character Iago’s exclaims, “Hold, ho! Lieutenant, sir, Montano, gentlemen, Have you forgot all sense of place and duty? Hold! The general speaks to you; hold, hold, for shame!” It is also used by the writer Nathaniel Hawthorne in his 1855 travel journal when he observed that the tutor gave his pupil the best seat in the railway carriage, and in all respects provided for his comfort before thinking of his own; and this, not as a father does for his child, out of love, but from a sense of place and duty.

Intriguingly, although these texts are written 250 years apart, they both use the same phrase “sense of place and duty”; apparently referring to acting in responsible accordance with a sense of awareness of the roles of one’s social position. As such it seems neither of these examples allude to “sense of place” in context of its current dual meanings, but then again, it could be argued that they are comparable to Hillier and Rooksby’s earlier reference to the local “council and its officers” having “a clear sense of place of themselves . . . as paternalist service deliverers.” It is precisely this type of ambiguity that makes it difficult to pinpoint the term’s origin.
Apart from these isolated examples, it is not until the late 19th century that the compound noun sense of place first emerges in literature, probably as a response-cum-reaction to Britain's growth in industrialisation and modernity, the increase in environmental pollution and city populations, and a concomitant decrease in the sense of belonging people experience in nature and community. The English author Alice Meynell writes in her book *The Children* (1897):

> The daily progress of things in Spring is for children, who look close. They know the way of moss and the roots of ivy, they breathe the breath of earth immediately, direct. They have a sense of place, of persons, and of the past that may be remembered but cannot be recaptured….Such a sense of place as he got in a day within some forest, or in a week by some lake, so that a sound or odour can bring it back in after days.

What is particularly significant about sense of place in this passage is its use as a compound noun in reference to an intimate relationship between children and nature; however it is debatable as to whether or not this is unique, because Pater similarly represents the human-nature relationship a few years earlier in his use of sense of the place.

Meynell also speaks about sense of place in her next book, but significantly she gives it the title *The Spirit of Place* (1898), and in doing so sets a new precedence, for the title, and her reference to spirit of place in-text, represents the beginning of a trend in the term's use as a compound noun. Also her use of both terms in the same book is unique, and possibly constitutes a new development in the history behind their subsequent conflation. For example, in one passage she refers to,

> the spirit of place, which is to be seen in the shapes of the fields and the manner of the crops, to be felt in a prevalent wind, breathed in the breath of the earth, overheard in a far street-cry or in the tinkle of some black-smith, calls out and peals in the cathedral bells thus implying that spirit of place here is an organic convergence of the airs of nature, society and tolling bells. In another passage she writes that

> nowhere so much as in Genoa does the nervous tourist complain of church bells in the morning, and in fact he is made to hear an honest rout of them betimes. But the nervous tourist has not, perhaps, the sense of place, and the genius of place does not signal to him to go and find it among innumerable hills, where one by one, one by one, the belfries stand and play their tunes.
however, this time she uses “genius of place” in the same meaning. What is of particular interest here is that Meynell obviously differentiates between sense of place and genius/spirit of place, for the absence of the former precludes a summoning or invitation from the latter, with the former denoting an individual’s perceptive capacity, while the latter objectively signifies something seemingly independent from and external to the self.

On the other hand, even though Meynell’s “sense of place” (in her earlier book *The Children*) seems to speak of a child’s sense of the spirit, essence or ambience of a place in nature, there is some rudimentary semblance of “belonging” in her use of the term, akin to, and possibly influencing its predominant present-day meaning of interiority. If so, then although the origin of sense of place in terms of landscape design history is attributable to Pope, its contemporary use in context of belonging/interiority is arguably traceable to Meynell. Regardless as to whether or not this is so, there is an incremental shift towards interiority over the ensuing decades, where “sense” and “place” are literally compounded into a singular noun, and where person and place merge together in an overall experiential state of being and belonging. As will be discussed later, the effect of Western dualism limits this “merging,” however, the meaning (and thus the experience) of sense of place makes a gradual and definitive shift towards ontological subjectivity during the 20th century as opposed to the meaning-experience of a separated-objective perception of a place’s atmosphere, which prevails prior to the 1890s.

**Sense of Place and Spirit of Place: 1900 to Present Day**

From the 1800s until the 1950s, the term *genius loci* is used far more frequently than spirit of place or sense of place (see Appendix 2, Figure 2 and Figure 3), and while spirit of place and spirit of the place appear periodically and in equal proportion in novels until the 1920s, (when the former begins to supersede the latter), the term “sense of place” all but disappears for two decades. One exception, however, is in Burnett’s novel *The Shuttle* (1907) in which she depicts and accentuates the divergence between modernity and sense of place as follows:—“He held himself magnificently aloof, with that lack of modernity in his sense of place which, even at this late day, sometimes expressed itself here and there in the manner of the feudal survival.” Again, this hints at “sense of place” as a notion pertaining to some measure of interiority, or as speaking more about his sense of himself in a place, rather than his sense of a place; but the statement in a 1923 geographical journal that “one result of the extension of the Roman Empire was that ‘the Romans lost their own sense of place, and
hence national unity\textsuperscript{99} unequivocally uses the term in the context of interiority that prevails today. Here, the Romans do not lose their sense of place and national unity because they fail to adequately appreciate or attune to the spirit or atmosphere of a place, but rather, as a result of dislocation, where the symbiotic relationship between self and place which forms the fabric of their belonging is sundered, and their sense of place is lost.

Figure 2

Relative Incidence of Use of Genius Loci, Spirit of Place and Sense of Place: JSTOR Journal Archives 1885 - 1964

Be that as it may, the term seems to lay dormant again until the 1930s when it is adopted by art columnists and book reviewers, and used interchangeably with spirit of place to describe whether or not a reviewed art piece or book captures the essence or atmosphere of a depicted setting. For example, in her review of an art exhibition Breuning states that “there is conveyed a sense of place, of mood of season, of the charm of rustling trees and open country bathed in a languorous golden atmosphere,”\textsuperscript{99} while in response to another exhibition, McCausland asserts that “spirit of place rules the choice of paintings assembled.”\textsuperscript{100} These examples typify the main context of use of the terms, as they take a permanent and conflated place in literature; and as an unfolding trend until present day, these meanings are joined by others and also blended with the kaleidoscopic genius loci, forming a conflation of mixed-meanings that is all but impossible to untangle. Concerning sense of
place, the main difference between its initial use and its contemporary use is that it is yet to evolve primarily into a term of subjective interiority, but as it does, this also is reflected in the snarl of conflated meanings.

Although spirit of place and sense of place escalate in their incidence of use from the 1930s onwards, it is clearly demonstrated in Figure 2 that the phrase of choice is *genius loci* until around 1960, when it is supplanted by sense of place, which then burgeons exponentially in its use until the turn of the century (see Figure 3). In the overall space of forty years (1955–1995) the use of sense of place increases twenty fold; and whereas its incidence of use is only *half* the combined average of spirit of place and *genius loci* from 1945–1954, it increases to surpass and *double* their combined average from 1955–1964; then *triple* their combined average from 1965–1974; and continues in this manner until its peak from 1985–1994 when it is used eight times more than the combined average of spirit of place and *genius loci*. Furthermore, although its incidence of use declines from 1995–2004, its relativity to the average of spirit of place and *genius loci* increases to about tenfold. Such marked developments raise two final questions pertinent to this paper, which are ostensibly one and the same question—

Why did the term "sense of place" become so popular? And is this popularity reflective of its predominant contemporary use in context of interiority or belonging?

No doubt some broad answers to these questions rest in the advent of key recent social phenomenon such as the spread of globalisation, the expansion of neo-liberalism, and the ebbs and flows of a complexity of socio-political factors.

**Figure 3**
There are also growing concerns regarding environmental issues and matters pertaining to questions of personal purpose, belonging and meaning in a world increasingly defined by the dictates of economic rationalism. In fact, according to Hillier and Rooksby

at a state level ... the real threat to liberal democratic institutions [is] the increasing marginalisation of entire groups who are unable to identify with its values; groups of people whose sense of place is that they do not have a place in society as it currently stands.\(^{101}\)

In response to the above questions, this can be read as saying that the rise in use of sense of place is the voice of society articulating a fading sense of belonging, and is counter-proportionate to the ontological displacement and dislocation caused by the market-driven economies, politics and social policies of neo-liberalism. Be this as it may, providing detailed answers to these questions lays beyond the scope of this paper, for doing so requires a comprehensive literature review of the times to ascertain when, why and how the concept of “sense of place” took on a core meaning of interiority and subjective belonging. This in turn must be measured against a background of the era’s main socio-political events and developments, to provide an accurate picture of the circumstances precipitating the pronounced growth in the term’s application. Such a venture is the work of another paper.
Sense of Place: Of Practical Importance or Idealistic Irrelevance?

If there’s a process where we can be guided through to learn to get to the stage of making contact with the land again, we get some calling of responsibility ourselves. But if you kill this country, you kill the people. We all go down together.102

Having come full circle in this paper, the question can be posited—Is sense of place of any practical significance, and does it matter if the term is imbued with multiple meanings and conflated with other terms? The answer to the latter part of this question informs the answer to the former, for as proposed earlier, the multifarious and interchangeable use of the terms sense of place, spirit of place and genius loci essentially robs them of their clarity and vigour, making them so convoluted and amorphous that they lose their power of practical meaning. In effect they become clichéd, and consequently not taken seriously enough to be considered in the formulation of systems of governance and social policy. Indeed, this issue is addressed by Associate Professor Roger King at the 1998 “Twentieth World Congress of Philosophy” in Boston,103 where he argues that “increasing ecological knowledge, developing a sense of place, re-working the moral narratives that structure expectations and actions are goals that must be understood within a temporal framework.” In other words, the notion of fostering a sense of place needs to be translated from abstract rhetoric into concrete programs, within the broader fabric of social policy, practice and governance. Concurrently, this necessitates knowing precisely what a sense of place is, because concrete programs cannot be developed in response to a nebulous and ill-defined concept. In this light Seddon maintains that “linguistic awareness is essential to self-awareness; if it is well developed we can modify the way we see the environment and act in and on it.”104 If such awareness is essential to self-awareness, then the variable linguistics of the contemporary uses of sense of place are apparently reflective of degrees of self-ignorance, at both an individual and socio-cultural level. What is it then about sense of place that commands our refined awareness, and warrants its inclusion in the formulation of social policies and practices?

According to Edward Casey sense of place is “the bedrock of our being-in-the-world,”105 while Seddon states that “a sense of place is basic to civilization.”106 Without doubt, something foundational to both civilisation and individual ontology commands our refined awareness, and warrants its inclusion in the formulation of social policies and practices.

Another reason why it is important to clarify our use of these terms is implicit in Seddon’s warning that the concept of sense of place “should be
applied with caution, because it is a form of appropriation.° This suggests that language itself can be used as a means to appropriate the conceptual landscape of a population, or in other words, as a means to harness and shape a people’s worldview. In Foucault’s view, “shifts of power” correlate with “shifts of knowledge” throughout history,° thus language, knowledge and power are inextricably linked. One such shift of power is the advent of scientific rationalism in Western society, and although “the sciences” have benefited humanity immensely, the language of the scientific worldview has played a principal role in diminishing sense of place, through discourses that separate self and nature. Pennick refers to such discourses as “spectacle-making,” which he describes as follows:

Spectacle is perhaps the major force in modern civilization: through selective, edited representation, the process of spectacle-making serves to reduce the vibrant, pluralistic, living richness of existence to a lifeless image which is then presented as reality. Spectacle serves to remove the “object” or “specimen” from its natural state of being itself into a state of separation . . . Existence, which is a seamless continuum, is thereby represented as a disconnected assemblage of discrete and unrelated “objects” . . . Spectacle is thereby a self-referencing fiction, and like all such fictions, difficult to see for what it is. It is a closed loop that has, by accident and intention, created a specific self-perpetuating modus operandi.

In this context, sense of place is not a form of appropriation, but is instead appropriated by objectifying worldviews that fail to acknowledge the essential and vital interrelationship between self and nature, where one “treats the world as an ensouled subject rather than an inanimate object.” Subsequently, one’s sense of place (or sense of connection and belonging to the land) is atrophied to the degree that this theory of separation is embodied as truth.

Despite this paper’s portrayal of the enigmatic nature of sense of place and its morass of meanings, including its conflation with spirit of place and genius loci, it is possible to elicit a rudimentary framework of specific meanings for these interrelated terms as a preliminary step towards making practical sense of a sense of place. Auguste Comte (the purported “founding father” of sociology) notes that “change must come through a change of ideas,” therefore, in order to instigate a change in Western cultural ontology, one idea that must be changed is the erroneous notion that it is acceptable to continue using sense of place frivolously. Ultimately, there is no right or wrong way to do this, however Brady provides an incisive clue towards this ends with her conviction that our experience of different places
“depends upon how we define and choose to see them. For that reason, your sense of place depends upon you.” This suggests that the power to shape our individual and collective subjective experience of sense of place rests in our clarity and choice of linguistic definition. Furthermore, this power is not in the hands of “experts on sense of place,” but belongs to each individual as a possible responsibility and a responsible possibility. Subsequently, the suggestions outlined below (see Table 1) provide a practical example of attempting to clarify the existing tangle of terminology, and though they are by no means absolute, they do demonstrate that achieving discrete definitions is possible.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Term</th>
<th>Proposed Application</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Genius loci</td>
<td>A technical term used in context of exteriority, (particularly in the fields of architecture and landscape design), that refers to the sense of the ambience or atmosphere of a given populated locale, building, garden or natural environment.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sense of the place</td>
<td>A generic term used in context of exteriority, that exclusively refers to the ambience or atmosphere of a specific place in nature (i.e. a grove), or a broad natural expanse (i.e. a mountain range).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spirit of place</td>
<td>A term used in context of exteriority that refers to the guardian or tutelary spirit of a particular place in nature.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spirit of the place</td>
<td>A term used in context of exteriority that refers to the guardian or tutelary spirit of a particular place in nature.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sense of place</td>
<td>A term used in context of interiority; that refers to some sense of individual-cum-community belonging, within the fabric of a particular socio-cultural complex. This is used only in a social context.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sense-of-place</td>
<td>A hyphenated term used in context of interiority; of some sense of individual-cum-community belonging, within the fabric of a particular socio-cultural-environmental complex. This always includes the notion and experience of a connection between self and nature, and the subjective belonging of self to &quot;country.&quot;</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Generally, these suggestions reflect the predominant contemporary use of the terms, and work to establish a framework of distinction between what have become conflated concepts. For instance, in his book *Genius Loci: Towards a Phenomenology of Architecture*, Norberg-Schulz proposes that
“economic, social, political and cultural intentions have to be concretized in a way which represents the genius loci,” while Seddon suggests that “respecting the genius loci” can play a decisive role in countering “the effects of homogenising technology.” On the whole, genius loci is used in the fields of architecture, landscape design and the arts to signify a human sense of the essence of external environments. Spirit of place however, is more often used in literature in reference to the pervasive numinous “spirit” of natural places, or in the words of D. H. Lawrence, “different places on the face of the earth have different vital effluence, different vibration, different chemical exhalation, different polarity with different stars: call it what you like. But the spirit of place is a great reality.” On the other hand, spirit of the place refers to a similar “spirit” but in a personified guardian-cum-tutelary form, and though the reality of such spirits have been debunked by Western science as the superstition of primitive peoples or the stuff of fantasy, this is a theory, a supposition, a scientifically unsubstantiated “statement of fact” that does not irrefutably disprove millennia of Indigenous knowledge which affirms the existence of such spirits. According to Irish, “in modern western culture . . . the assumption is made that nothing exists in a place other than the individual physical elements and activities. Yet, there are still a few modern western scholars who contend that the genius loci [read as spirit of the place] exists externally to an individual's subjective experience.” Whether or not a handful of Western scholars maintain a belief in the existence of nature spirits, it could be argued that millennia of Indigenous lore holds more weight than several centuries of scientific say-so, and that the veracity of the reality of spirit of the place deserves some reconsideration in halls of Western knowledge formation.

Finally, even with the above clarifying distinctions, the notion of sense of place is still fraught with ambiguity, for its meaning can be placed anywhere along the axis of both the “social/macrocosmic–social/microcosmic” continuum, and the “social-environmental” continuum. Hence, the suggestion to use sense of place as a compound noun in a purely social context of belonging or interiority, in distinction from sense-of-place as a hyphenated compound noun in a socio-cultural-environmental context of belonging or interiority, is a preliminary step towards rectifying this ambiguity. Regardless of the way this linguistic and conceptual knot is untangled, it is patently clear that sense of place is something essential to human wellbeing, and also to living in a sustainable relationship with nature, where we ourselves are part of this nature. It demands to be taken seriously, to be perceived and enunciated with clarity, and to be incorporated into the fabric of systems of governance and social policy.

The term sense of place, despite its manifold and nuanced applications
of meaning, generally appears to denote a subjective, if not spiritual, experience between people and place. Despite the conceptual gulf between the original genius of Roman antiquity as the passing of a numinous essence from one generation to the next, through to the contemporary notion of “sense of place” with its proximate connotations of connectedness or belonging, there has been a common thread throughout the evolving trajectory of this idea which essentially infers a particular “spirit” of “something.” This aside, the conflated and nebulous use of the terms genius loci, spirit of place, and sense of place ostensibly works to obfuscate what appears to be an important aspect of human perception and being. Arguably, attempts to clarify the respective meaning of these terms may enable people to better understand the existential and practical value of each, and precipitate new ways of seeing and being in the world. The above proposed examples of clarifying definitions are not prescriptive; they simply demonstrate that such differentiation is possible and proffer an illustration of what doing so might look like. Through knowing and using these terms more precisely, it is possible we may come to extend our knowledge beyond the valid, yet limited, conceptual horizons of Western positivism, rationalism and individualism. Better understanding sense of place does not negate these things but, rather, it potentially offers to bring them to earth in a life-sustaining way. This includes a holistic understanding of ourselves as physical-psychosocial-spiritual beings that are as much part of this earth as we are inhabitants.

Murdoch University
B.Spittles@murdoch.edu.au

NOTES

2 Jean Hillier and Emma Rooksby, eds. Habitus: A Sense of Place (Sydney: Ashgate, 2002), citing Bourdieu, 5.
3 Ibid., 4.


John Cameron, Articulating Australian Senses of Place (Sydney: University of Western Sydney Website Social Ecology Research Group, 2000).

Seddon, Landprints, 105-106.


Seddon, Landprints, 106.


Paterfamilias means “head of the family” (Alexander Petrie, An Introduction to Roman History, Literature and Antiquities (London: Oxford University Press; 1936), 87.)


Petrie, An Introduction, 103.


Terrot Glover, The Conflict of Religions in the Early Roman Empire (London:
Methuen & Co. Ltd., 1918), 233.


30 Encyclopaedia Britannica, *Genius*, CD-ROM.


32 Ibid.

33 Encyclopaedia Britannica, *Genius*, CD-ROM.


36 Dill, *Roman Society from Nero to Marcus Aurelius*, 386.


38 Ibid., 92.

39 Raymond Williams, *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society* (London: Fontana Press, 1976), 143.


http://www.nd.edu/Departments/Maritain/etext/hop33.htm#n_1.


46 Ibid., 282.


http://www.prometheustrust.co.uk/TTS_Catalogue/14_-Apuleius/14_-apuleius.html.

49 Ibid.

50 Ibid.

51 Ibid.


Edgar Knowlton, “Genius as an Allegorical Figure.” Modern Language Notes 39, no. 2 (1924): 89-95, 94.

Williams, Keywords, 143.


Ibid., 221.


Project Gutenberg, The Expedition of Humphry Clinker.

A search for genius loci on the Project Gutenberg website (http://www.gutenberg.org), with its extensive collection of full-text online literary classics, results in 92 “hits,” the vast majority being from 19th century literature. Amongst these, Smollett is the only pre-1800 author to use the term genius loci.

Dr. Harington became the Mayor of Bath in 1793. I was unable to obtain a copy of his article hence cannot ascertain the context in which he used genius loci.


Figure 1 illustrates the incremental escalation in the incidence of use of genius loci in the London Times from 1840-1989. It is important to portray the term’s use in one source, because during this 150 year period there is a monumental expansion in the diversity, printing and publication of literature, both fiction and non-fiction, therefore an increase in use could be attributed alone to this. Figure 1 demonstrates that, although the rise in frequency of use is hardly prolific, (only 22 appearances per decade during its peak usage), this increase is not only attributable to the phenomenon of literary expansion. It also occurs independently.


See Appendix 1 for a table of further examples of differing uses of genius loci in the London Times from 1847-1984.

72 See Appendix 2 and Endnote 96.


80 Ibid., 385.


82 For examples see the Project Gutenberg Website – *The Advancement of Learning* by Sir Francis Bacon (1605); *Leviathan* by Thomas Hobbes (1651); *Theological Essays and Other Papers* by Thomas de Quincey (1846); *Basil* by Wilkie Collins (1862); *Appreciations, With an Essay on Style* by Walter Pater (1889).

83 For examples see the Project Gutenberg Website - *The Letters of Horace Walpole* by Horace Walpole (1765); *She Stoops to Conquer* by Oliver Goldsmith (1770); *The Expedition of Humphry Clinker* by Tobias Smollett (1771); *A Bibliographical, Antiquarian and Picturesque Tour in France and Germany* by Thomas Dibdin (1829); *The Caesars* by Thomas de Quincey (1832); *Letters of a Traveller Notes of Things Seen in Europe and America* by William Bryant (1834); *Mosses from an Old Manse* by Nathaniel Hawthorne (1834); *Clotelie: A Tale of the Southern States* by William Brown (1853); *The Lovels of Arden* by Mary Braddon (1871); *Dora Thorne* by Charlotte Braeme (1876); *Life and Habit* by Samuel Butler (1877); *Hildegarde’s Neighbors* by Laura Richards (1895).

84 For examples see the Project Gutenberg Website - *The Letters of Horace Walpole* by Horace Walpole (1765); *She Stoops to Conquer* by Oliver Goldsmith (1770); *The
Expedition of Humphry Clinker by Tobias Smollett (1771); A Bibliographical, Antiquarian and Picturesque Tour in France and Germany by Thomas Dibdin (1829); The Caesars by Thomas de Quincey (1832); Letters of a Traveller Notes of Things Seen in Europe and America by William Bryant (1834); Mosses from an Old Manse by Nathaniel Hawthorne (1834); Clotelle: A Tale of the Southern States by William Brown (1853); The Lovels of Arden by Mary Braddon (1871); Dora Thorne by Charlotte Braeme (1876); Life and Habit by Samuel Butler (1877); Hildegarde's Neighbors by Laura Richards (1895).


87 I draw this conclusion after making a comprehensive search through JSTOR online journals, the London Times Digital Archive (1785-1985) and the Project Gutenberg website.


90 As proposed earlier, sense of place appears to be used in two main contexts; one “of interiority, or of some sense of individual-cum-community belonging, within the fabric of a certain socio-cultural-environmental complex . . . [and] the other of exteriority, where it refers not to a sense of belonging to or within a place, but of the sense or awareness of the atmosphere or character of a place external to the observer.”

91 Hillier and Rooksby, Habitus, 11, 12.

92 In a 1928 London Times article “A Special Correspondent” writes of his or her concern that “every day that goes past some offensive bungalow, or some abomination of a building scheme, or some horror of a wayside oil pump station, or some blatant vulgarity of an advertisement destroys not only the immediate spot where it is placed but the whole sweep of the countryside. The genius loci are banished never to come back again” (“Preservation of the Countryside,” By a Special Correspondent, London Times, October 13, 1928, 15. The Times: Digital Archive 1785 -1985. Gale Group; CD-ROM.) This view characterises a common concern paralleling the course of expanding industrialisation and modernity.


95 Ibid.

96 Appendix 2 represents the relative frequency of use of the terms “genius loci,” “spirit
of place” and “sense of place” from 1885-2004 in the JSTOR database, which consists of full-text copies of 490 journals, ranging across 34 different disciplines. Figure 2 and Figure 3 represent the same from 1885-1964 and 1965-2004 respectively. Although these terms are undoubtedly used in other literature not present in JSTOR, the graph results still provide a general and relatively accurate picture of when sense of place and spirit of place came into use, and the trend of their respective uses in relation to each other, and to *genius loci*.


102 James Sinatra and Phin Murphy, *Listen to the People, Listen to the Land*, (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1999), citing Paddy Roe and Hans Hoogland, 11.


104 Seddon, *Landprints*, 16.


110 Ibid.


Appendix 1

Examples of Various Uses of *Genius loci* in the *London Times*: 1847 - 1984

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Citation</th>
<th>Comment On Context</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>Review: Her Majesty’s Theatre</em> - “Prince Hussein, the hero of the ballet…sits…in his garden, near the statue of the Flower Fairy, the <em>genius loci</em>”. [Editor, “Editorial,” <em>London Times</em>, February 17, 1847, 6. Note all items in this table are from The Times: Digital Archive 1785 -1985. Gale Group; CD-ROM.]</td>
<td><em>Genius loci</em> as a guardian spirit of the place.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Editorial</em> - “The Senate of Luxembourg continues its labours. As long as it occupies a hall second only in splendour to our own House of Lords…it is not likely to abandon its objects or precipitate its conclusions…Perhaps it is not very surprising that the <em>genius loci</em> has imperceptibly swayed the imagination of the new occupants”. [Editor, “Editorial,” <em>London Times</em>, May 5, 1848, 4.]</td>
<td><em>Genius loci</em> as an affective quality created by the interior decorating of a hall.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Editorial</em> - “Has it ever occurred to any of our readers to visit a city church in what may be called full operation? Those who have so done can never recur to the idea without the most sleepy associations…When an incautious stranger has entered this dreamy region, if his footfall be not instantly subdued by the <em>genius loci</em>, the beadle glares at him with unspeculative eye”. [Editor, “Editorial,” <em>London Times</em>, July, 7, 1854, 9.]</td>
<td><em>Genius loci</em> as the ‘sleepy’ atmosphere of a church, which not only affects the occupants, but is also generated by them.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Dr. Dollinger on the English Reformation</em> – “I believe that the great superiority of England over other countries may be ascribed to the circumstance that there the Holy Scripture is to be found in every house; that it is, so to say, the <em>Genius loci</em> as a protective and hegemonic Spirit that is personified as the Bible.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**great genius loci, the protective saint of the homestead and the family**.  

**Regarding proposed changes to the Prisons Bill: House of Commons** – “he [Mr. Reynolds] had been inspired by the *genius loci* to adopt this policy of centralization”.  

**Preservation of the English Countryside** – “The *genii loci* are banished never to come back again”  

**The Times Crossword Puzzle** – Question: “Characteristic of the *genius loci*?”  
The solution given in the next issue is “Pride of place”.  

**Obituary for Dr. M. J. Randall, the former Head Master of Winchester** – “as the *genius loci* of those unique surroundings…his rich personality and taste filled his fine house”.  
**Article: Growing Interest in Local History** – “to reconstruct the story of their local community as a whole...demands an exact and imaginative understanding of the interplay of all those forces – geographical, agricultural, economic, social, political, religious, educational – whose peculiar combination has determined the *genius loci* of each hamlet, village, and town”.


**Genius loci** as the spirit or personality of a populated place, formed from a composite of the numerous social forces that shape a society.

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**Letter to the Editor** – “Some...modern architects seem to glory in defying the *genius loci*...It all depends on the location. On virgin sites no restraints have usually to be observed. There is no need there for architectural good manners”.


**Genius loci** as the aesthetics of design in architecture only; apparently non-existent in undeveloped natural or ‘virgin’ sites.

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An article regarding England’s Prime Minister Stanley Baldwin – “Here was a Prime Minister...who found time not only to indulge his own strong sense of local patriotism in his native town...but to evoke the *genius loci* in every other place he visited”.


**Genius loci** as the spirit of community and local patriotism.
Relative Incidence of Use of Genius Loci, Spirit of Place and Sense of Place: JSTOR Journal Archives 1885 - 2004