



# University of HUDDERSFIELD

## University of Huddersfield Repository

Canter, David V.

In Search of Objectives: An Intellectual Autobiography

### Original Citation

Canter, David V. (1996) In Search of Objectives: An Intellectual Autobiography. In: Psychology in Action. Dartmouth Benchmark Series . Dartmouth Publishing Company, Hantshire, UK, pp. 3-22. ISBN 1855213656

This version is available at <http://eprints.hud.ac.uk/id/eprint/9221/>

The University Repository is a digital collection of the research output of the University, available on Open Access. Copyright and Moral Rights for the items on this site are retained by the individual author and/or other copyright owners. Users may access full items free of charge; copies of full text items generally can be reproduced, displayed or performed and given to third parties in any format or medium for personal research or study, educational or not-for-profit purposes without prior permission or charge, provided:

- The authors, title and full bibliographic details is credited in any copy;
- A hyperlink and/or URL is included for the original metadata page; and
- The content is not changed in any way.

For more information, including our policy and submission procedure, please contact the Repository Team at: [E.mailbox@hud.ac.uk](mailto:E.mailbox@hud.ac.uk).

<http://eprints.hud.ac.uk/>

# 1 In Search of Objectives: An Intellectual Autobiography

Early Days (1964 - 1968)

The Architectural Context (1967 - 1970)

The Japanese Experience (1969 - 1971)

Emerging Conceptualisations of Place (1970 - 1975)

The Theory of Place (1973 - 1977)

The Journal of Environmental Psychology

Fire Research (1975 - 1984)

Building Evaluations

Facet Theory

A Developing Theory of Environmental (social) Psychology

The Feasibility of Application

Broadening Horizons

## Early days

Any account of a natural process must be a simplification. The written word can only sketch the variety that is integral to growth and change. This is true whether it is a garden that is being described or a human career. But for a career there is a further distortion. The sequence of activities that intertwine to make a period in a person's life when written as a history has far more shape and direction to it than it ever has at the time, when it is being experienced.

Certainly, for me, setting out to produce an intellectual history of myself, I am aware that the history I am about to describe, as confused as it may be presented, will appear far less haphazard than it felt at the time. The arbitrariness of the

emerging story line may be gauged by considering the research contracts for which I am currently responsible. These range from studies of the experience of homeopathy to examination of the behaviour of serial murderers and rapists and include studies of safety in the steel industry and the design of psychogeriatric facilities. All these current studies have roots in my earlier work in environmental psychology, even though those roots may be confusingly entangled in a disordered undergrowth. The present chapter, therefore, is in part at least, a personal exploration through this undergrowth. It is to be hoped too that any such personal discoveries will also benefit you, the reader.

#### *Office size*

The profligate diversity of my current activities all started from an unambitious PhD on the effects of office size on worker performance. What the PhD had in common with nearly all my later work, and all my current research, is a determination to use field based methodologies to develop psychological theories about environmental actions and experience. A predilection for using multivariate statistics as an aid to the development of these theories was also present from my earliest studies.

Curiously, though, I had found my way into the study of office size from an undergraduate degree in psychology at Liverpool University. The psychology department at Liverpool was steeped in the experimental tradition of British psychology, but through the guidance of its head, L.S. Hearnshaw (cf. his history of psychology, 1987) and other members of staff, notably D.B. Bromley (as revealed clearly in his book on case study methodology, 1986) there was a productively eclectic debate about the nature of psychology and appropriate directions for its growth. I had wished to follow my personal interests in art to study empirical aesthetics for a doctorate, but the only opportunity available to me was to join the Pilkington Research Unit in Liverpool University's Department of Building Science. This multidisciplinary team was lead by an architect, Peter Manning who had written on architectural education and systematic design procedures. His objective was to develop appraisals of all aspects of a building's environment. He brought a geographer and a physicist on to the team as well as a psychologist, Brian Wells, who was studying the psychological implications of open plan offices (Manning, 1965). In effect, Brian Wells supervised my PhD, which was nonetheless registered in the Department of Psychology. Thus my existence with feet in more than one university discipline was presaged from my earliest days as a researcher.

The Pilkington Research Unit encouraged me to move away from a focus on aesthetics and look directly at the implications of office size for worker performance. At times I feel that my subsequent research has been a struggle to return to my original interest in how the physical phenomena, that are artistic productions, can have such a significant emotional impact. The office research convinced me that field research explores a different class of phenomena to those studied within the confines of the laboratory. So although there can be fruitful

interactions between laboratory and field studies they should not be misconstrued as studying the same thing.

My own interests have always been in what people do in their daily lives rather than in what they can do if a psychologist asks them. I think that this perhaps also has some roots in my experiences in student drama when I was an undergraduate. It became very clear to me that people have a huge flexibility for generating actions under training and instruction. The laboratory experiment really examines the range and limits of this flexibility.

The study of offices taught me this because I had set off to examine directly the impact of office size on the performance of clerical workers. The results showed that people in their own small offices were performing better than people in their own large offices, but that this effect disappeared when people were tested in other people's large or small offices. This was difficult to understand as a direct effect of office size on performance. But when I stopped looking at the results as revealing the effects of the office size on the workforce and started looking at them as an indication of the type of person who would accept, or stay in, a job in an office of a particular size, they made much more sense.

Looking on the subjects of the research as actively part of their context, selecting where they would work (or at least being selected), rather than passively being influenced by the room, made the results quite comprehensible (Canter, 1968). Better, more able workers were more likely to be found in the preferable smaller offices.

Yet this active, context specific, interpretation could have been difficult to glean by an experimental study in which people were asked, say, to rate slides of offices. An experimental study though, could have been touched on the wider significance of design. Its meaning to the respondent as part of their lives, rather than as a 'stimulus'.

### *Room meaning*

My origins in experimental, mechanical psychology did not fade away too rapidly. After the office research, I thought (as many researchers still do) that I could study the meanings, implied by the differences between the people found in different rooms, in a systematic, controlled way. So that when Roger Wools, an architect joined me to do a PhD under my supervision, together we continued with simple laboratory studies. We wanted to look at which aspects of buildings held particular meanings for people and used a classical, factorial experimental design in which types of furniture, ceiling angles and window sizes were modified in drawings and photographs of models (Canter and Wools, 1970).

These studies showed very clearly that people did associate sloping ceilings and easy chairs with room friendliness. But although a few doctoral students attempted to follow this idea directly, they found that it was not really possible to establish a vocabulary of forms, whereby certain physical constituents could be linked to particular responses. One reason was a methodological one. The experimental design quickly becomes very complicated and unmanageable if a large number of

aspects of form are explored.

Yet the need to explore interactions between aspects of form mean that a series of simple experiments are likely to prove inconclusive. The other reason was more closely tied to the psychological processes revealed by later studies. The meaning of the forms is probably specific to context and culture as well as relating closely to respondents' reasons for judging meaning. In other words, just as an office worker's responses are a function of their position in the organisation so the ratings of pictures relates to the particular type of experimental/subject role that the rater is taking.

This continues to be a challenging area of environmental research, but it is noteworthy that most of the people who have started to explore this avenue have moved on to quite other research questions, usually more distinctly field based. Even those who set up major laboratories to create simulations of environments to study have changed the way these simulations have been used and distanced themselves from the mechanical stimulus/response examination inherent in looking at which architectural variables 'cause' which semantic differential responses.

It was about 15 years after I supervised Roger Wools' thesis that I was able to work with Linda Groat, who, having a design training initially, asked very similar questions to Roger but who was able to benefit from the work that had been going on in the interim. In supervising her MSc (published in part in Groat, 1982, and PhD thesis (Groat, 1985) it was possible to work on non-experimental approaches to architectural meaning. Indeed the work helped to establish an approach very different from the semantic differential and the factorial design models that Roger Wools had worked with (Canter et al, 1985) and gave rise to work that was published in *Progressive Architecture* (Groat and Canter, 1987), a rare acceptance by the architectural profession of findings from an uncompromising piece of environmental psychology.

### **The architectural context**

We are all conduits for the ideas and actions of others. So that one of the illusions my personal intellectual history could create is that my actions in some way can be clearly distinguished from the actions of others. This, of course, is far from the truth. Peter Manning and Brian Wells both set the agenda for my PhD work, and although I was supervising Roger Wools he taught me much of what an architect strives for in psychological research. The research that was my main activity at the time I was working with Roger was also shaped by the perspectives of others. This was the development of building evaluation procedures and their use in the evaluation of comprehensive schools.

My work on offices was conducted as part of the 'total environment' evaluations of the Pilkington Research Unit at the University of Liverpool. That unit had pioneered the use of building appraisals as a contribution to design. Following on directly from it, Tom Markus established at Strathclyde University, in Glasgow, the Building Performance Research Unit. It was as a member of that unit that I found

myself supervising Roger Wools. In 1967 it did not seem as strange as it might today for a psychologist to join a school of architecture. The quest for interdisciplinarity was still strong and Tom Markus brought together a team with very varied backgrounds. One member of the team was Peter Whyman, and I had noted how many of the new school buildings we were studying had undergone changes to their fabric and use in the few years since they had been first occupied. He had called these modifications 'improvisations', and had noted for a number of school buildings that the changes varied from major alterations such as the addition of new classrooms to minor changes, such as the redesignation of room allocation, with sealing up doors or moving walls as more intermediary levels of change. We wondered what the consequence of all this improvisation was. A simple environmental effect hypothesis would suggest people were reacting to poor conditions. A more active hypothesis would suggest that they were positively making sense of their buildings.

It was possible to test these opposing hypotheses because we had building evaluations of the schools and we were able to derive scores for the amount of improvisation that had been carried out. The result was very clear. A significant positive correlation between degree of satisfaction and degree of improvisation. I took this to support the active hypothesis. Unfortunately, no-one has been able to replicate this study. It takes a dedicated architect and a large scale survey to make it possible, but if the result could be reproduced it would have enormous implications both for environmental psychology and for approaches to design.

Looking back, towards the end of my time at the School of Architecture at Strathclyde University my research activity had provided me with some basic principles that my subsequent research struggled to make sense of. These may be summarised as follows:

1. Environmental Psychology had to be carried out in existing environments. Too much is left unsaid and unstudied if it is moved into the abstractions of the laboratory.
2. The environment is not just a useful base for research with complex variables. It provides a context for examination that has to be studied in its own terms.
3. The environmental context cannot be approached devoid of any world view or metatheory. A perspective that searches for the role of human agency is more likely to be fruitful.
4. But human agency itself implies that people have some understanding of their environment and its significance. Examination of people's experience of environments must therefore include exploration of what is signified by them as well as how people evaluate their contribution to their own actions.

*Psychology for architects*

By 1970, I had become convinced that psychology had much to offer architecture, especially architectural education. As part of my job in the school of architecture I had set up a variety of courses, so that students studied various aspects of psychology in every one of their five years. Increasingly, I had found that as the architectural psychology literature had been developing, architecture students needed some background in psychology in order to understand the advancing field of research. But none of the existing psychology texts answered their needs. I therefore set about writing *Psychology for Architects* (Canter, 1974). I mention this because, although I now regard it as being very dated in its account of psychology, it has continued to sell a few copies each year for the almost 20 years it has been in print. It therefore must continue to answer some sort of need, serving to show that psychologists can be too ambitious in what they aspire to give to designers. This book contains virtually no 'environmental psychology', just an account of psychological ideas with architecturally relevant examples.

**The Japanese experience**

I suppose, in all honesty, I was rather bemused towards the end of the BPRU work as to what direction was appropriate for my research, although with hindsight the seeds of my current work can be seen in the principles and emphases of *Building Performance* (BPRU, 1972) and other publications from the late 1960s and very early 1970s. Certainly, if in those days, I'd been asked if 20 years later, I'd be working with the Salvation Army on hostel design, I'd have said I hope so. But behaviour in fires and emergencies would have been more difficult to foresee and the current involvement with the police on offender profiling would have seemed beyond the scope of our theories and methods.

Two nascent themes already present in the late 1960s, but the significance of which I had not recognised then, can now be seen as directly pertinent to later directions that my work took. One of these themes was the drift from an individualistic to a social psychological context for considering environmental experience and meaning. The other was the need for methods for constructing theories, and the associated analysis systems, that would help in finding patterns in data harvested from 'the field'.

So that when the opportunity arose of spending a year in Japan I was, now I think, already primed to be sensitive to a number of possibilities that later dominated my research. The undemanding fellowship to Japan was of particular significance in that it shocked me into seeing the power of culture on all aspects of behaviour, especially the way people deal with each other and make use of their surroundings. By living in such a different culture it became even more clear to me that the significance of a place was not some reflection of the external physical parameters that characterise that place, but derives from the cultural framework within which people experience a place. These are reflections of the way they see

the world and think about it.

### *Ethnoscapes*

Like so many influences of that kind it was a number of years before they really surfaced openly in my publications. It was certainly one of the reasons why I was so keen to include regional reviews in the *Journal of Environmental Psychology*, a development that was clearly seen to be of value because the distinguished editors of the *Handbook of Environmental Psychology* later emulated the practice.

Even more directly the recent series of books I have established with David Stea, *Ethnoscapes: Current Challenges in the Environmental Social Sciences*, (Canter et al, 1988) make explicit the need for environmental research to embrace cultural diversity. This is not just a matter of including cross-cultural comparisons on the research agenda, but of integrating studies in different national and sub-cultural contexts within the framework of research activities. One important example of this approach is allowing research questions, for example, to be defined by local, cultural imperatives, rather than by some reference to the current intellectual fashion in North America.

This series had truly transnational roots, evolving out of meetings I had with David Stea in Indonesia and Venezuela and Martin Krampen in Germany. All three of us were aware that there was a changing mood in environment and behaviour studies being reflected in conferences around the world. Yet the old vocabulary of 'environment', 'behaviour', 'architecture', 'psychology' and so on was masking these changes. We therefore deliberately set out to coin a new term that would reflect the new sensitivities of researchers in many countries and to launch a series of books that could act as a vehicle for publishing this research.

We defined *Ethnoscapes* as:

'scholarly and/or scientific explorations of the relations between people, their activities and the places they create and/or inhabit; historical, psychological or sociological studies of the experience of places, attitudes towards them, or the processes of shaping, managing or designing them'.

Canter et al (1988) page xi

To some extent the growth of our field beyond the North Atlantic basin has naturally lead to a greater cultural diversity in the studies being carried out, with I think enormous long-term benefits to the field. The experience of living in an unfamiliar large city also alerted me to environmental psychology issues at a planning scale, which I had never really explored before. In particular I was aware that Tokyo was such a complex city to find my way around that I became interested in how that was possible. Route finding appeared an inappropriately simple-minded, and practically extremely difficult way of exploring the basis of urban navigation. I therefore started asking people to estimate 'crow flight' distances (although in one study that I supervised in Japanese this got lost in the translation and the



respondents ended up giving me shortest walking route distances).

I had begun some similar, tentative explorations in Glasgow before going to Japan, but I was surprised by how accurate people could be in a city as complex as Tokyo. On my return to Glasgow I worked with Stephen Tagg and others to explore this further (Canter and Tagg, 1975) and became aware of the power of dominant features such as the 'circle line' of Tokyo's underground system and the Thames and underground train network in London. Clearly people form some sort of composite conceptualisation of a city that they use to act on. This is more pragmatic and individualistic than Lynch's 'image' although it clearly relates to it.

### **Conceptualisations of place**

On my return from Japan I had a unique opportunity to study the Royal Hospital for Sick Children at Yorkhill in Glasgow. I was able to spend a great deal of time over six months, with assistance from students and colleagues in examining the new building at the request of the *Architects' Journal*. The editor had requested the study because he felt that a children's hospital should not look like a multi-storey office block and he wanted a psychologist to confirm this.

The intensive study I was able to do (Canter, 1972) was close to an ethnographic account of the building and quite unconstrained by any limitations as to how it should be done. I interviewed whoever I could, carried out behavioural mapping studies and got people to complete repertory grids and questionnaires. Probably the most valuable aspect of the work for me was the training it gave me in what a building is and how it is shaped by many forces. I certainly learned more about the real world or architecture in that study than I had in the previous five years in a school of architecture.

The study helped me to develop a number of ideas for which I had been reaching. Three in particular are worth noting at this stage.

Firstly, how a building is created, the social, political and economic processes, as well as the design intentions, is very important in influencing what results. This will seem obvious to any practising architect, but it is a point that is still virtually ignored in the environmental psychology literature.

Secondly, by being able to explore in detail, with a number of people, their views and experience of the building, it became very clear what large differences there were between them in what they saw the building as being and, as a consequence, how they evaluated it. The major difference appeared to be a function of what they wanted to do in the building, what they were in the building for. This I summarised as 'Role differences in conceptualisations'.

The third idea to emerge more strongly from the Yorkhill study had been presaged a few years earlier in a paper entitled 'Should we treat building users as subjects or objects?' (Canter, 1969) in which I argued that, to get a full picture of the implications of a building, we psychologists needed to combine observation of buildings in use with explorations of the significance of those uses to the users. The intensive Yorkhill study, using a mixture of very different methods of data

collection, also forced me to accept that the experience of the building was reflected in the combination of actions and conceptualisations.

By carrying out behaviourally oriented studies following Barker's ecological perspective, in combination with personal construct studies following Kelly, it was clear that both had something to offer and any future development must find ways of combining these two very different perspectives. Barker had ignored the interpretations of the people being studied and Kelly's intense clinical perspective seemed inappropriate for the essentially public and social qualities of a building. Taken together they could leaven each other's weaknesses.

### *The theory of place*

Soon after the Yorkhill study I moved from Glasgow to Surrey, where I established the graduate programme in Environmental Psychology, the first entry of which was in 1972.

By the mid-1970s students on the MSc course were pressing for some coherent, theoretical account of where I stood in relation to environmental psychology.

The pressure from students for me to organise my ideas in a way they could grasp, together with the Japanese experience, the Yorkhill study and the distance estimation studies became the basis for an attempt at an outline of an environmental psychology theory, which became my book *The Psychology of Place* (Canter, 1977).

In writing the book it became clear to me there were two fundamental difficulties with which environmental psychology has to struggle. One is the empirical fact that the physical environment can only be shown to have any strong impact at the margins of physiological tolerance. Any other significance of variations in the environment can be readily swamped by social processes and motivation. Yet a great deal of effort and resource goes into shaping our surroundings. One task for environmental psychology is to resolve this paradox of why resources are spent on something that does not seem to produce direct measurable effects on behaviour or performance.

The second difficulty stems from the first. How can psychological involvement contribute to the improvement of our surroundings? If social processes and personal expectations are so much more important than any direct impact of the surroundings, how can we make recommendations about the form, shape or characteristics that those surroundings can take? Talking in general terms about design flexibility, individual variation and social constraints does not really give an architect anything very specific, or concrete, to go on.

In considering these issues they seemed to me to be so fundamentally difficult to resolve that the questions themselves must have some basic illogicality in them. It was out of these reflections that I began to think that taking the environment as an entity distinct from behaviour was the flaw. A unit of focus for research was needed that adjusted the emphasis. The idea of a place as that unit seemed worth exploring. This 'place' became a system that integrated physical and psychological aspects of experience. Research therefore needed to discover the structure of

places. Contribution to design became participation in the shaping of these structured systems.

### ***The Journal of Environmental Psychology***

Writing *The Psychology of Place* and the associated reading and discussion with students had alerted me to the fact that there was a strange hiatus in publications in our field. The only major journal *Environment and Behaviour* deliberately had the important objectives of communicating across disciplines and making direct contact with policy issues. Furthermore, because so many researchers carrying out applied studies, in effect, published mostly for the non-specialist who might act on their results, there were very few opportunities for researchers to present to other researchers intensive, academic accounts of their work.

I believe it is essential that we debate with each other at the most demanding intellectual levels the theories, methods and results out of which our discipline is evolving. After all, it is such internal debate that gives science its strength. But by the late 1970's although there was a reasonably sized, scholarly community in environmental psychology, the pressures to communicate with those who fund our activities tended to mask the equally important communication amongst ourselves.

I therefore proposed to Academic Press that we launch a *Journal of Environmental Psychology*. A sabbatical in 1980, at U.C. Berkeley with Ken Craik enabled us to launch the Journal by 1981. In launching it, though, we were determined that it should not ossify the field but contribute to its evolution. We therefore have been eclectic in what we take Environmental Psychology to be, and have deliberately cherished many forms of communication besides the report of empirical studies. As the Journal enters its tenth year it is curious to ponder why we did not start it 20 years ago?

### **Fire research**

My directly applicable research activities were also given a fillip in Japan when I came across a small study carried out by Masao Inui and his colleagues, which as far as I know was never published. They had interviewed people who had been in buildings on fire. I was struck by the possibility, that these Japanese building science researchers had discovered, of getting people to answer questions about a threatening and traumatic situation. As an undergraduate I had been introduced to the work of Quarantelli (1957) on disasters and learned from his studies that patterns could be found to seemingly bizarre and random behaviour, but I had not appreciated the potential significance of these studies for building design.

In the context of the Japanese Building Research Institute I began to see that the fire regulations governing the design of buildings were based upon assumptions of what people would do in a fire. Yet these assumptions were all derived from major enquiries of very unusual incidents. Very little systematic research had been done.

On my return from Japan I approached the British Fire Research Station and discovered that they, themselves, were developing an interest in human behaviour in fires and so started to support our own endeavours.

This research on fires has provided me with one of the strongest themes to my work over the last ten years. Yet often when I am reviewing my research I forget, initially, to mention it. I think that this is because it is unlike my other research activities in very many ways. It is field research in the most extreme form, in that the only really effective way to carry it out is to follow up incidents that have already happened.

What emerged as quite remarkable from studies of 20 or so incidents, including some very large scale ones, that my colleagues John Breaux and Jonathan Sime and I examined, was the consistency in the overall pattern of actions that occur in fatal building fires (Canter et al, 1980). In order to explain these consistencies it was necessary to ask what are the mechanisms that maintain human actions in these very unusual circumstances? The answer that I propose draws heavily on the idea of place rules and environmental roles (Canter, 1986).

The work also revealed that the early stages in any emergency are potentially very confused. The time it takes to make sense of the rapidly changing events can be what turns an emergency into a disaster. The importance of these findings was recognised by the Fire Research Station, especially because they acknowledged the widely experienced problem that alarm bells are not, usually, taken seriously. A series of studies were therefore commissioned on what we called Informative Fire Warning systems (Canter et al, 1987). Out of this work prototype computer based warning systems have been developed and installed, which have had a large impact on approaches to fire safety in buildings.

It is interesting that this work, with its roots in a fixed engineering view of provision for escape, should have matured into yet another context in which the interpretations that people make of their surroundings, and the opportunities or threats those people find, are paramount. The design developments therefore address directly ways of facilitating effective understanding and consequently more effective plans of action in threatening circumstances. This approach to design for active understanding and control, doubtless has applications to many other aspects of the environment.

## **Building evaluations**

The studies of human behaviour in fires was one strand of the contract research that I was carrying out during the mid-1970's to the mid-1980's. In parallel, my earlier involvement in building evaluations was continuing through a series of studies of housing satisfaction and evaluations of acute wards in hospitals and prison buildings (Canter and Rees, 1982, Kenny and Canter, 1981 and Canter, 1986).

These were all studies that were defined in terms of the methodology most appropriate for them. I found this increasingly unsatisfying for three reasons. One, it was difficult to see any accumulation of approach or knowledge. Each study

seemed to exist on its own, in a sort of theoretical limbo. Secondly, the questionnaire methodology sometimes seemed to so structure people's responses that many of the insights apparent in the pilot work were lost by the time that the main study was completed. Thirdly, the implications for action from the evaluation studies were not always apparent.

These three problems lead me to use the evaluation studies, increasingly, as a vehicle for developing new methodologies and a general theory of evaluation. The multiple sorting task (Canter et al, 1985) and the purposive evaluation model (Canter, 1983) were the result of that. Curiously, these rather academic developments opened the way to a much more direct, yet rather distinct, mode of involvement in the design process. These developments required a much more flexible methodology, more subtle in how it could be used to uncover interacting systems. Facet Theory increasingly provided the vehicle for this.

### **Facet Theory**

One of the other coincidences about my stay in Tokyo was that during my time there Louis Guttman visited for a month. I had been interested in the unusualness of the approach to attitude scaling that is named after Guttman and wished to explore possible developments of it with him. To my amazement I discovered that the principles inherent in Guttman scaling had evolved into a major new approach to doing scientific research.

When I met Louis Guttman in Tokyo he had probably not met anyone for a few weeks who spoke fluent English and was prepared to listen at length to his thoughts. I was therefore given the privilege of a lengthy disquisition on his theory about how science should be carried out, which he called Facet Theory. It took me a number of years to digest and understand the implications of what I was told that morning (Canter, 1985). Indeed, looking through my diary and notes for my year in Japan I can find no reference to that meeting, although I remember it clearly and Louis Guttman also mentioned it when I met him again a few years later.

What attracted me to his approach was that it did away with arbitrary levels of acceptability for 'findings' and put the creation of a lucid account of the system being studied at the forefront of scientific activity. My methodological interests, and the search for some sort of theoretical perspective that would capture the essence of an ongoing system, had pushed me further and further away from the experimental models in which I had been schooled, but I did not feel comfortable with a retreat into a type of journalistic, purely qualitative, account rendering. As I worked within the facet framework it became clearer to me that it would provide a sound methodological framework for the type of theoretical accounts I was trying to give.

Facet Theory enables me to generate models that describe initially complex phenomena in quite simple, clearly structured ways. Probably the two most fruitful uses this has been put to so far is firstly in the development of the purposive model of evaluation (Canter, 1983) and secondly in the analysis of multiple sorting

procedures (Canter et al, 1985). In both these cases a system of interrelationships is revealed upon which future elaboration is possible without having to start from scratch.

### *Purposive evaluation*

One particular contribution of the facet approach was to enable us to start building a model of environmental evaluation that would evolve from one study to the next. The first large data set we had to work with was drawn from an evaluation of hospital wards (Kenny and Canter, 1983). Initial factor analysis gave us a very patchy picture of the reactions to these wards, but when we carried out non-metric multidimensional scaling, with a faceted framework for interpretation, it became clear that the provision of care at the bedside was the metaphorical as well as the literal focus of ward evaluation. Furthermore, a clear level of interaction facet, showing the different scales of the place, from the bedside to the whole ward, was also found in the results.

This provided a testable system of relationships that was consistent with studies of attitudes in other very diverse fields. We were therefore encouraged to look for evidence of this structure in other areas. The housing satisfaction data we had collected yielded a similar structure (Canter and Rees, 1982) and Donald (1985) found evidence for the same model in office evaluation. However, because each of these studies used different questionnaires they were able to identify quite different foci for the places being studied. Such foci were the central purposes of those places as conceptualised by the respondents.

### *Place goals*

Other studies conducted since, as part of graduate dissertations, have found the model fruitful when applied to places as varied as neighbourhoods, city parks and training centres. This range of applications has enabled us to consider whether there are places in which there is a mixture of purposes that may be in conflict. Such an idea had already been presaged in the work Sandra Canter, a clinical psychologist, and I had done on therapeutic environments. This was summarised in the book we edited *Designing for Therapeutic Environments* (Canter and Canter, 1979). In the introduction to that book we outlined the various goals for therapeutic environments, ranging from custodial to personal enhancement.

More recent student research has shown that different groups within a hospital will have different goals and as a consequence will differ in the designs that they consider appropriate. Some of these goals may also be in conflict. Our research is therefore beginning to use the purposive model of place as a way of establishing the emphases in place goals and how conflicts between them may be resolved by approaches to management and design.

## A developing theory of environmental (social) psychology

Once the *Psychology of Place* had been published it became clear in discussions with students that there was a productive, but fundamental, ambiguity in the model sketched out in the book. In striving to develop a research focus that bridged the environment/behaviour divide I had left the 'places' being studied in limbo. It was unclear as to where they were. They were not simply physical locations, but shaped by the actions and experiences of people, but it was also argued that they were not merely mental representations of environments. They clearly have physical components that are integral constituents. So, if they are not just a part of an individual's psyche and they are not simply a physical location, the question emerges as to what they actually are.

To provide any confident answer to this would be to imply that 2000 years of philosophical debate had been resolved, but some interesting possibilities can be gleaned from taking a social psychological perspective (or even a sociological one, depending where you draw the boundaries between the disciplines) on our experience of our surroundings. Within this framework, especially as elaborated by Moscovici (Farr and Moscovici, 1984), it is recognised that many phenomena experienced as having an independent existence, whether they are for example, 'health', 'psychoanalysis', or 'unemployment', all are socially constructed so that their existence is more than the agglomeration of attitudes, or perceptions held by individuals.

My development of this view has been spurred on by the shift in the audiences that have asked me to write for them or make presentations to them. In the 1970s and early 1980s I would guess that the majority of invitations came from architectural sources, but this has given way to far more invitations from psychologists, especially social psychologists. Of course, this shift could be entirely due to what I might be able to comment on with any skill, but I think it is more a reflection of changes in the disciplines themselves. As architects have moved away from a concern with their users to a concern with form and image, so social psychology has become more environmental.

I became most strongly aware of this when Michael Argyle asked me to talk at a seminar on 'situations', which eventually emerged as a book edited by Furnham (1986). Here, at last (I thought), were social psychologists examining the context in which behaviour occurred. Unfortunately, I soon found that their experimental traditions soon destroyed this interesting exploration, treating 'situations' as independent variables to be manipulated and thereby losing the significance of the context to which Barker had drawn attention 30 years earlier.

From this experience I began to look at how the notion of place could be linked to the situational debate in psychology. My paper *Putting Situations in their Place* (Canter, 1986) was a result of this exploration. The conclusion I came to was that the search for situations, and the associated attempt to classify them and systematise their impact was really at too fine a level of detail to reveal any general structures. The concept of place, which could house a number of characteristic situations, was more likely to prove fruitful. Part of the reason for this view was that a variety of

studies of place use had produced consistent, eminently interpretable multi-variate structures. We had found, for example, that certain clusters of activities were found in certain rooms. Bedrooms, dining rooms, kitchens and so on can be characterised by what goes on within them, even though the words used to describe these rooms in different languages do not necessarily encapsulate their function as it does in English.

That people should sleep in bedrooms, eat in the room with a dining table in it, should not be too surprising. That there are a whole range of other activities and expectations that also coalesce around these actions is a clear example of the existence of 'place' systems. The questions that reveal these most strongly, though, deal with who is responsible for the furniture or activities in a room, and what is allowed or not allowed in a room. In other words the rules that structure that place.

This awareness, that the interpretable structures we were finding were reflections of place rules, took much longer to emerge than might be apparent from a reading of the *Psychology of Place*. What might be called the anthropological shift took some accepting.

From the writing of 'putting situations in their place' my attention had been drawn to the actions that are central to the definition of places, but in that paper I was uncomfortable with the apparently static qualities that this model had. Places appeared as givens, yet there are many reasons why they should not be expected to be static. Perhaps the most fundamental is the active nature of human agency in making sense of the environment and the implied coercive qualities of places that structure human experience. Furthermore our daily experience shows change and modification as characteristic of place experience, just as 'improvisation' was so prevalent in the Scottish comprehensive schools. I was therefore puzzled by the need to find a balance between the consistency of place use and experience, necessary for a social sharing, and the dynamic qualities that are part of life as it is lived.

The opportunity to chase these ideas further came from being asked to give a keynote address at the Berlin IAPS conference (Canter, 1985). For that presentation I explored the possibility that it is the interplay between the static quality of places and the dynamic, purposive nature of human action that provides the process out of which both places and actions evolve and change. I suppose this is a model of person/environment interaction shifted to a higher level of complexity. But in moving to this level I am finding that there is much more real possibility of the application of environmental psychology ideas without diluting their subtlety.

### **The feasibility of application**

The fire research was the first set of studies in which I have been involved that led clearly and directly into some aspect of policy formulation. It had the consequence of my being invited to join two government established enquiries into major fires, one for the Bradford City Football ground fire, the other set up to examine the



Kings Cross Station Underground fire. These experiences have caused me to consider what it is that psychologists may contribute. Increasingly, I am coming to the conclusion that it is not some specific facts or findings, but ways of thinking about a problem. This parallels closely the often quoted remark by Kurt Lewin that 'there is nothing so applicable as a good theory'. But there is nothing so difficult to develop and then communicate as 'a good theory'.

This attempt to communicate a way of thinking about an environmental problem domain has been followed through in a book, written as a result of the work on the Football Ground fire, *Football in its Place* (Canter et al, 1989). The book quite deliberately is used as a vehicle to develop a popular account of the relevance of environmental psychology and had as its sub-title *An environmental psychology of football grounds*. As chance would have it the book was planned to be published in the late Spring of 1989, so it was published shortly after the Hillsborough football ground disaster in which 95 people were killed.

### *Embracing the media*

The Hillsborough tragedy brought home to me how inevitable is the contact with journalism and the 'mass media' for an applied field like ours, if we really do have anything to contribute. For although, over the last few years my research activities have increasingly become of interest to Television, Radio and the newspapers it has been easy, from an academic position within a university, to dismiss all this interest as trivial or to see my involvement as merely significant as a form of advertising or self enhancement.

Yet, when our work may contribute towards the saving of lives, we have to consider seriously how our findings can be communicated to those many important audiences, who do not read academic journals or attend professional conferences. We should weigh carefully the implications of media coverage. After all, our research activities are unashamedly aimed at changing relevant actions and decisions.

The applied orientation of person/environment studies has never been in doubt. As Robert Sommer (1988), for instance, has been at pains to point out, the people outside of the academic community whom we wish not only to communicate with but also to influence, do not read articles in the *Journal of Environmental Psychology* or *Environment and Behaviour*. They read newspapers and watch television. In Great Britain they also listen to national radio.

The problem this raises is that once we do have something to say that is of general public interest there is a temptation to shape research in relation to the questions journalists ask. This is wrong. The role of the research community is to formulate ways of thinking about the world that are shaped by empirical scientific processes, not by populist or political ends. I have found the need to constantly examine what the objectives are for my research in the same way that my research has lead me to try and unravel the role of the objectives of others. This search for objectives is the central scientific quest. This is not an easy point to make to

journalists who want immediate discoveries to quote for tomorrow's publication deadlines.

### **Broadening horizons**

In writing a personal intellectual history it becomes apparent to me that recent and current research is too close to see in perspective. Its roots can be traced with some confidence, but in all honesty the long term directions in which it is leading are far from clear. Looking back, I did not think at the time and could not have guessed that my PhD research on offices would have taken me so far away from examining the effects of the environment on behaviour. At the time of the Yorkhill Hospital study I did not think that it would have led me to put such store by role differences. Nor was I aware for at least another ten years that in depth evaluation of a building in use could provide the basis for a participative design procedure.

The studies of behaviour in fires were aimed at the building regulations, so I had not appreciated how they would lead me into considerations of the management of safety in industry (Powell and Canter, 1985). Although that organisational perspective on emergencies and accidents is completely consonant with the social perspective on building design, the emphasis that the safety research has given with regard to place rules was especially unexpected.

Given all the vagaries of previous research, in which personal discoveries have overtaken initial hypotheses, the directions in which current activities will lead are difficult to predict. Nonetheless, they all reflect a drift even further away from the experimental, perceptual tradition to a much more transactional, social psychological framework. Of particular delight is the discovery that the problems of environmental research are so difficult that if some handle can be got on them then this is likely to be of value in other field based studies as well.

As a direct result of the perspectives and methodologies I have mentioned I have become involved in looking at criminal behaviour, with a direct contribution to ongoing police investigations, in some cases even making a contribution to the apprehension of a person who has murdered a number of strangers (Canter, 1989). Thinking about how a criminal may structure his objectives, in relation to the understanding he has of the environment in which he operates, turns out to be a fruitful basis for the application of the facet approach.

Even less obviously related are the studies I have been conducting on the experience of alternative medicine, most notably homeopathy (Canter, 1987). Yet here again it is the understanding and direct experience of the user that is the focus, rather than the medical impact of any particular drug. Not unlike an effective environment, it is also emerging that alternative medicine seems to be attractive because of the control over their illness it gives patients. In other words how it helps them to be more successful in achieving their daily objectives.

It may seem a long way from studies of the effect of office size on worker performance to the experience of homoeopathic medicine, but the strands tying

them together are unbroken. The search for how active, human agency interacts with the world of physical experiences is the problem of why art exists, that I was curious about as an undergraduate. Seeing these 20 years of research in this light makes me feel that, at last, I am probably ready to begin.

## References

- Barker, R.G. (1965), 'Explorations in Ecological Psychology', *American Psychologist*, Vol. 20, pp. 1-14.
- BPRU (1972), *Building Performance*, Applied Science Publishers, London.
- Bromley, D.B. (1986), *Case Study Method in Psychology and Related Disciplines*, Wiley, Chichester.
- Canter, D. (1966), 'On Appraising Building Appraisals', *Architects' Journal*, 21st December, pp. 881-888.
- Canter, D. (1968), 'Architecture Office Size: An Example of Psychological Research', *Architects' Journal*, pp. 881-888.
- Canter, D. (1969), *Should We Treat Building Users As Subjects Or Objects?*
- Canter, D. (ed.), RJBA Publications, London, 'Need for A Theory of Function in Architecture', *Architectural Psychology*, pp. 11-17.
- Canter, D. (1972), 'A Psychological Analysis of The Royal Hospital for Sick Children: Yorkhill Glasgow', *Architects Journal* 6th September.
- Canter, D. (1970), *Journal*, 4th February, pp. 299-302.
- Canter, D. (1974), *Psychology for Architects*, Applied Science, London, pp. 11-17.
- Canter, D. (1977), *Psychology of Place*, Architectural Press, London.
- Canter, D. (1983), 'The Purposive Evaluation of Places: A Facet Approach', *Environment and Behaviour*, Vol. 15, No.6, Sage Publications, pp. 659-698.
- Canter, D. (1985), *Facet Theory*, Springer-Verlag, New York.
- Canter, D. (1986), 'Putting Situations in their Place: Foundations for a Bridge between Social and Environmental Psychology' in Furnham, A. (ed.), *Social Behaviour in Context*, Allyn and Bacon, London.
- Canter, D. (1987), 'Research Agenda for Therapy Studies that Consider the Whole Patient', *Complementary Medicine Research*, pp. 101-113.
- Canter, D. (1988), 'Action and Place: An Existential Dialectic' in Canter, D. et al (eds), *Ethnoscapes: Current Challenges in the Environmental Social Sciences Volume 1 - Environmental Perspectives*, Avebury, Aldershot, pp. 1-17.
- Canter, D. (1989), 'Offender Profiling', *The Psychologist*, January, pp. 12-16.
- Canter, D., Breaux, J. & Sime, J. (1980), Environmental Perspectives, *The Psychologist*, pp. 12-16.
- Canter, D. (1980), 'Fires and Human Behaviour - An Introduction' in D.Canter (ed.) *Fires and Human Behaviour*, Chapter 1, pp. 1-12, Wiley, Chichester.
- Canter, D., Brown, J. & Groat, L. (1985), 'A Multiple Sorting Procedure for Studying Conceptual Systems' in *The Research Interview: Uses and Approaches*, Academic Press, London.

- Canter, M., Brown, J. & Brenner, M. (1985) (eds), *The Research Interview: Uses and Approaches*, Academic Press, London.
- Canter, D. & Canter, S. (1979) (eds), *Designing for Therapeutic Environments: A Review of Research*, Wiley, Chichester.
- Canter, D., Comber, M. & Uzzell, D. (1989), *Football in its Place: An Environmental Psychology of Football Grounds*, Routledge, London.
- Canter, D., Dramper, M. & Stead, D. (1988) (eds), *Ethnoscapcs: Current Challenges in the Environmental Social Sciences, Vol. 1 - Environmental Perspectives*.
- Canter, D., Krampen, M. & Stea, D. (1988) (eds), *Ethnoscapcs: Current Challenges in the Environmental Social Sciences, Vol. 3 - New Directions in Environmental Participation*, pp. 144-152, Avebury, Aldershot.
- Canter, D., Powell, J. & Booker, K. (1987), *Fire Warning Systems*.
- Canter, D. & Rees, K. (1982), 'A multivariate model of housing satisfaction' *International Review of Applied Psychology*, Vol. 31, pp. 145-151.
- Canter, D. & Stringer, P. (1975), *Environmental Interaction*, International Universities Press, New York.
- Canter, D. & Tagg, S. (1975), 'Distance Estimation in Cities' in *Environment and Behaviour*, Vol. 7, March.
- Canter, D. & Wools, R. (1970), A Technique for the Subjective Appraisal of Buildings, *Building Science*, Vol. 5, pp. 187-198.
- Donald, I. (1985), The Cylindrex of Place Evaluation in Canter, D. (ed.), *Facet*, Springer-Verlag, New York.
- Farr, R.M. & Moscovici, (1984) (eds), *Social Representations*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.
- Furnham, A. (1986) (ed.), *Social Behaviour in Context*, Allyn and Bacon, Boston.
- Groat, L. (1982), Meaning in Post-Modern Architecture: An Examination Using the Multiple Sorting Task, pp. 3-23.
- Groat, L. (1985), *Psychological Aspects of Contextual Compatibility in Architecture: A Study of Environmental Meaning*, PhD Dissertation, University of Surrey, England.
- Groat, L. & Canter, D. (1979), 'Does Post-Modernism Communicate?', *Progressive Architecture*, Vol. 12, pp. 84-87.
- Hearnshaw, L.S. (1987), *The Shaping of Modern Psychology*, Routledge, London.
- Kelly, G.A. (1955), *The Psychology of Personal Constructs*, Norton, New York.
- Kenny, C. & Canter, D. (1981), A Facet Structure for Nurses' Evaluations of Ward Designs, *Journal of Occupational Psychology*, Vol. 54, pp. 93-108.
- Manning, P. (1965) (ed.), *Office Design: A Study of Environment*, Department of Building Science, Liverpool.
- Omotayo, F.B. (1988), *A Cross-Cultural Comparison of Space Use in the Hausa, Ibo and Yoruba Families of Nigeria*, PhD Thesis, University of Surrey, England.
- Peled, A. & Ayalon, O. (1988), The Role of the Spatial Organisation in Family Therapy: Case Study, *Journal of Environmental Psychology*, pp. 87-107.
- Powell, J. & Canter, D. (1985), 'Quantifying the Human Contribution to Losses

in the Chemical Industry', *Journal of Environmental Psychology*, Vol. 5, pp. 37-53.

Sommer, R. (1988), The Behaviour of Panic Participants, *Sociology and Social Research*, Vol. 41, pp. 187-194.