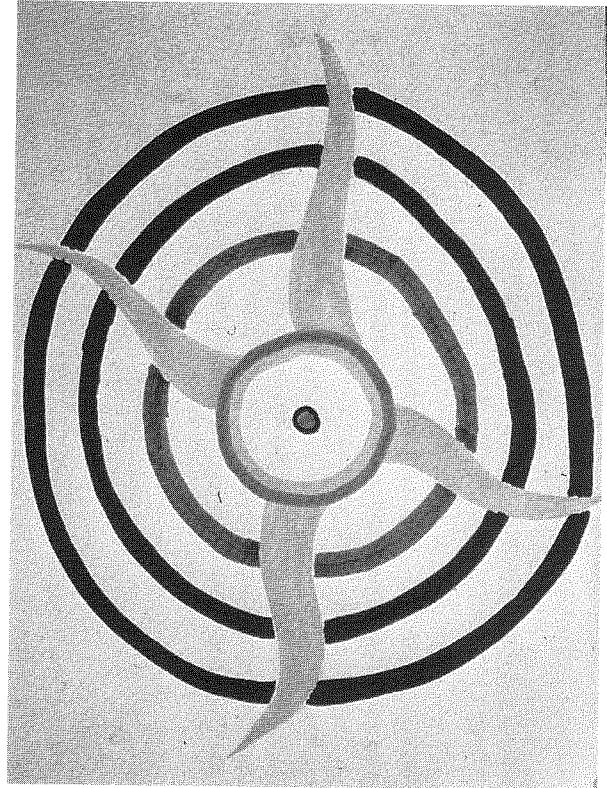


Elicitation methodology (Harding, 1974; Harding and Livesay, 1984). This anthropological interview technique begins with eliciting subjects' definition of the situation and then carrying out a content analysis—which Kupritz did by employing "domain, taxonomic and componential analysis procedures" (Spradley, 1979). To construct her interview schedule, Kupritz conducted a document search, reviewed floor plans of work areas, and studied background information on Gulfstream. After the interview, she carried out behavioral observation, physical trace observation, and photo documentation to construct a structured questionnaire asking subjects to link specific environmental characteristics they identified in the interview to their work and privacy needs.

Her behavioral observations at Gulfstream supported this analysis that being near traffic paths contributed to loss of production time. She counted "the number of times five engineers [sitting near pathways] glanced up as people walked by their desks . . . in 15- and 30-minute intervals," and found that one engineer, the worst case, glanced up twenty-two of fifty-seven times someone passed by his desk in a fifteen-minute period.

This multi-method triangulation approach gives her a particularly complete picture of a study phenomenon and the focused interview as a critical probing tool.

The following case study describing a highly specialized individual focused-interview technique to help people make better-informed housing decisions for themselves demonstrates that with ingenuity and insight, the focused interview can be a powerful research instrument.



Abstract diagram depicting one respondent's feelings about his home.

CASE STUDY

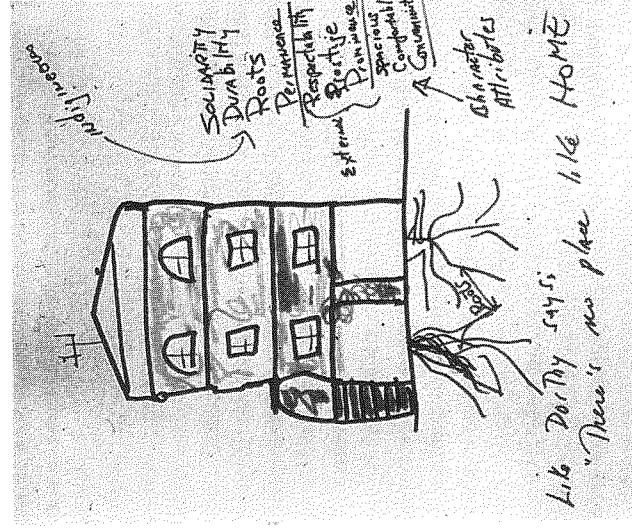
HOUSE COUNSELING

Practical Application of the House-and-Home Dialogue Interview

Trained designers do not make most design decisions that affect our daily lives. In creating a home, the inhabitant makes almost all the decisions relating to design—where to live (site selection), whether to buy or rent (tenure), how to decorate (interior design), and how to present a "face" to the neighborhood (garden design and personalization).

Environment-behavior researcher and consultant Clare Cooper Marcus employed a specially developed research tool—the house-and-home interview—in "House Counseling" sessions to help people with house problems make more informed design decisions. Participants included people torn between living in an urban area and living in the country; people who had lost their homes in a fire and could not decide whether to rebuild or move somewhere else; and couples who had different images of their "ideal home."

The house-and-home dialogue interview, as this creative method is called, is aimed at sensitively exposing a basic problem many people face when making decisions about their own housing choices: the often strong and confusing feelings they have about the place where they live, have lived, or aspire to live. These positive, negative, and sometimes painfully ambivalent feelings often interfere with their decision-making. While it is common knowledge that peo-

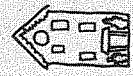


"There's no place like home."

1960s

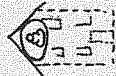


Early marriage; conventional suburban house, Ohio.



Move to "right" upper middle-class neighborhood, San Francisco. Joined right clubs; dressed fashionably; remodeled house; supported husband's legal career. Raised two children.

1970s



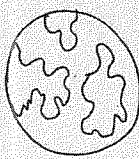
Withdrew interest from home and marriage. Retreated to own room.

Started to write... "nervous break-down... discarding old shell..."

Remodeled own room to reflect "new self." Gave away clothes; dressed more simply. Returned to graduate school.

Divorce. Gained Ph.D. Gave away possessions; remodeled and sold house.

1980s

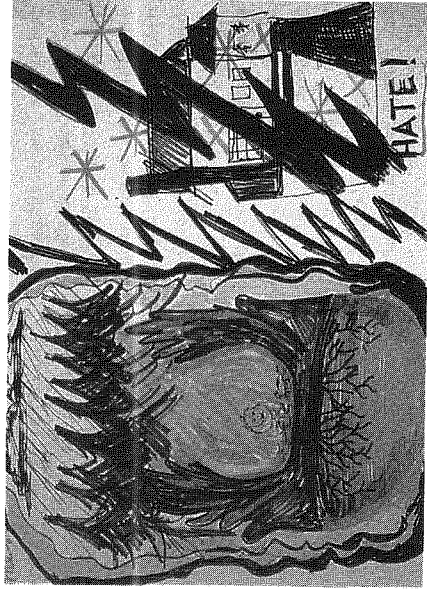


Left U.S. for two years. Became a "World wanderer...I didn't lose a home, just gained one that is larger. It has many rooms that I need to explore!"

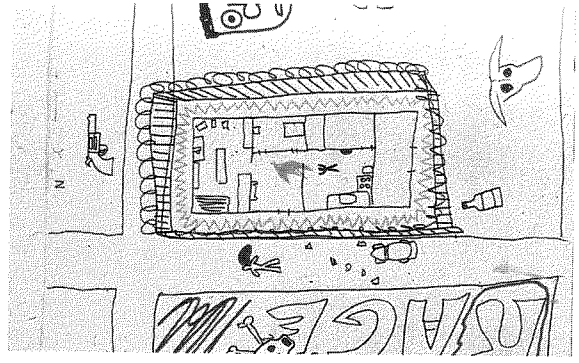
Dwellings in Sara's life.

ple hold strong feelings about where they live, until Cooper Marcus innovated her special form of focused interview, which facilitates access to these deeply held emotions, there was no clearly defined way to elicit, analyze, and understand this phenomenon. Questionnaire surveys and traditional interviews tap only the surface reasons for making such decisions: they do not get to the heart of the emotions involved.

Employing the house-and-home approach, Cooper Marcus probed long-held feelings about people's past and present living environments. As subjects gained new awareness of their feelings, they were able to make better design decisions. A young woman living in an isolated, lonely environment was able to decide to move into an urban apartment that better suited her psychological needs. An artist whose home was cluttered to the point of paralysis was able to understand the basis for this compulsive behavior. A woman who had tried unsuccessfully to locate a house to buy came to understand why she was emotionally blocked, found a house, and moved. A retired man living in a house much too large for his needs realized the roots of the emotional attachment he felt, and concluded that he could never move away. A wife whose husband had made all the decisions about the location and design of their "trophy" house understood her dislike for their current living situation. She eventually divorced her husband and moved to a setting that better supported her emotional and lifestyle needs.



"How I feel about my home."



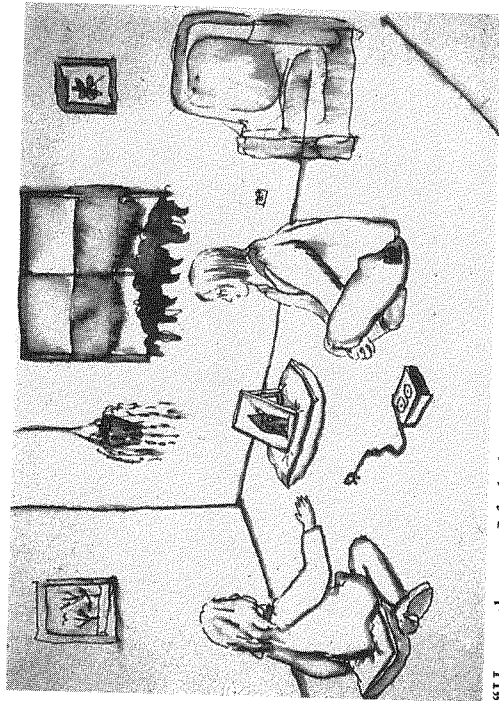
immediately often released profound emotions. While the respondents were drawing, Cooper Marcus left the room and—with their permission—looked around the houses, making note of her own feelings about each place she was about to discuss with the person living there, which became topics for an interview schedule in focused-interview terminology.

The verbal interview starts with the picture the person drew being placed on a chair or cushion to represent the house, while the interviewee sits facing it a few feet away. The person is asked to explain what she or he thinks the picture depicts. A second question asks the person to speak to the house as if it were animate, directing his or her remarks to the house-picture and starting with the words: "House—the way I feel about you is . . ." After the interviewee feels sufficient depth and breadth of answer has been reached, the interviewer asks the person to switch places and "become" the house speaking back to them. Thus, a dialogue ensues between the person and the house in the form of role-playing. Sometimes other "characters" enter the conversation such as an influential grandfather, a deceased mother, or an estranged husband. The interviewer stays in the background, closely follows the material being revealed through the dialogue, and prompts the person to change roles when the interviewer feels a particular topic or "conversation" is completed. The drawing and other interview prompts are focused interview probes designed to move the interviewee seamlessly through the topics and allow him to express himself fully. Cooper Marcus tape-recorded the interviews for later analysis.

The house-and-home interview method has its roots in the way role-playing is employed in Gestalt therapy. In order to learn how to adapt this method as a research tool and to use it responsibly, Cooper Marcus trained with a Gestalt therapist. Since the method frequently evokes strong emotions, it should not be employed without some psychological training. However, without such training it is possible to use the general principle of role-playing to access the essence of environments that are less emotionally "loaded" than a person's home. For example, in post-occupancy evaluations of neighborhood parks in Berkeley, California, before conducting in-person interviews with park users and behavior mapping of activities in the park, landscape architecture students were asked to imagine that each park could speak and communicate the pros and cons of its current situation. Many of their one-paragraph statements were remarkably accurate in capturing the essence of the situation, which was later confirmed by the data they generated on how the parks were actually used, misused, and could be improved. Role-playing interviews appear to access a deeper knowing than is reachable using other methods, suggesting that a student looking carefully at a park or a person considering their home knows more than they think.

In the house-and-home interviews described here, when people spoke as the house, they often spoke more openly and deeply about issues than when they spoke as themselves—leading to a gasp of recognition or even tears. Speaking as a significant house or dwelling place allowed unconscious material to come into consciousness, as in a dream.

As practical applications of environment-behavior methods increasingly present themselves, and as probing methods like the house-and-home interview



"House, the way I feel about you is . . ."



The house replies: "The way I feel is . . ."

This innovative focus interview approach was originally developed as a research tool to better understand the emotional links between person and dwelling place (Cooper Marcus, 1995). Sixty randomly selected subjects were interviewed, and all interviews took place in the person's home so that they would be on "home turf." To begin the process, after being supplied with a large pad, crayons, and markers, the person was asked to put down in some graphic or pictorial form their feelings about their house.

The images people drew ranged from representational house layouts to abstract diagrams color-coded for emotion. Representing their feelings graphically allowed each person to focus on their emotions and express them non-verbally before the start of the interview. Not having to put feelings into words

are developed, they must be approached with care. In this case, it is critical that only someone with psychological training employ this interview technique. In general, however, this case study demonstrates how creativity and methodological exploration can lead to both new research and new applied research opportunities.

This case study is based on the work of Clare Cooper Marcus, Professor Emeritus, University of California, Berkeley, and Principal, Healing Landscapes, Berkeley, California.

OVERVIEW

You cannot find out how people see the world and feel about it unless you ask them. The focused interview is uniquely suited to discovering a respondent's personal definition of complex E-B situations. Skilled interviewers analyze situations to develop a guide of interview topics. The purpose of the guide is limited to reminding the interviewer of topics and issues to cover. The skilled interviewer then enables the respondent to approach and discuss these topics in her own special way.

To achieve full coverage and depth of insights, the interviewer's main tool is the probe: an indication by the interviewer to the respondent to provide more information about depth of feelings, other topics, the respondent's personal context, or details of a situation. Interviewers use probes to keep an interview flowing without directing it.

Focused-interviewing techniques are as useful with groups as with individual respondents if the interviewer knows how to keep one member of the group from dominating and can encourage diversity of opinion rather than forced consensus. Focused interviews, however, are not suited to gathering large amounts of easily comparable and quantifiable data. For this, researchers can use standardized questionnaires—the topic of the next chapter.

