contributions. The issue has become one of unemployment and wages (early retirement? – they should be so lucky). Privatisation was supposed to address this issue in other countries by channelling the alleged increase in private savings into the capital markets to improve investment and economic growth. But the reforms failed here too.

Much of the evidence for reform failure in Latin America has been published before. The arguments in the next chapter on US Social Security reform are also well known. The author, Andrew Samwick, refers to eight publications which either he or Martin Feldstein, the other well-known advocate of 'reform', have published in recent years in pursuit of the creation of personal (private) retirement accounts. There is scant reference to countervailing arguments. We then learn that inadequacies in information are skewing the choice of pension scheme in Colombia, followed by the progress of privatisation in Sweden, problems with the Social Pension in Italy, the self-employed in Belgium, political obstacles to reform in Greece, financial resources for the retired in nine OECD countries, and the issue of income maintenance in widowhood.

The penultimate chapter by Martin Rein and Christina Behrendt on the role of the public/private mix in addressing poverty is interesting for the whole debate and reminds us of the editors' comments about the 'challenge'. The question has existed for some time as to whether private pensions were indeed 'supplementary' to public provision – they do not 'crowd out' the role of the state – or are 'substitutional'. It is hard to conclude, the authors argue, that as the state withdraws, the private sector is guilty of crowding out. More likely, they continue, is that the private sector acts to offset the retrenchment (p. 202). Or, the public sector has stimulated the private sector to provide pensions which the public sector has decided not to. Much hangs on the concept 'crowding out' in the definition of 'substitution'. These examples are not 'complementary' if for one reason or another they do, in fact, 'substitute'. A recognition of the dramatic volatility of stock markets, falling real rates of return and poor corporate earnings, all of which were apparent at the time of this conference, would have put the 'challenge' and 'reforms' in a different light. But the book offers no conclusion.

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Sheila Peace, Caroline Holland and Leonie Kellaher, *Environment and Identity in Later Life*, Open University Press, Maidenhead, Berkshire, 2006, 182 pp., pbk £12.99, ISBN 0 335 21511 4.

It is a pleasure to open a book which tells you straight away what it is about. No beating about the bush for page after page, desperately looking for a clue. This book simply states the case on the first page, even the first paragraph, in the very first sentences: 'Does where you are affect who you are? If so, does this relationship change in later life? This book is about placing the self in later life and the interaction between environment and identity' (p. 1). This exemplary stroke makes it so much easier also for the reviewer, who may cite rather than decipher

the authors' intentions and go on to the business of discussing whether they deliver what they promise. Well do they?

First a few words about the book, which reports an in-depth study with 54 older people, covering a variety of housing types and histories, both mainstream and special housing, in semi-rural, urban and metropolitan areas, in three local communities in mid- and South East England. Focus groups are added to these narratives. A theoretical and empirical basis is presented in the first chapter, followed by Chapter 2 on housing histories and the motivations and effects of moving or staying put. The empirical body is then laid out in Chapters 3–6, covering the different 'layers of environment' – first the public outdoors (Chapter 3), next the threshold between public and private (Chapter 4), and finally the privacy of the inside (Chapter 5). A separate chapter covers special housing (Chapter 6), while the final chapters (7 and 8) draw the elements together and integrate the findings. The reader is given a rich collection of observations, structured in theoretical frames that allow generalisations beyond the complex 'trivialities' of daily life. This said, the authors may at times have too much respect for the infinite diversity of living in place, and take too few chances in terms of generalising beyond the special case. This open approach is sympathetic, but may miss more general conclusions; after all, the world is complex enough as it is, why not try out a simpler version, and see how it works?

The raw material is in the form of (actual) case studies, and even the conclusions are summarised as (constructed) cases. I appreciate the holistic case-oriented approach, but have the feeling that a combination with a variable-oriented perspective might have added to this, for example in the evaluation of what kind of environments – and housing – are beneficial in later life and for whom. As it stands now, it is a bit much in the form of … on the one side this, on the other side that. Being a Scandinavian and a man, I may be too square to appreciate the openness, and long for some more closure. The authors are theoretically informed by first of all Rowles and Rubenstein, but also by older heroes such as Goffman and Lawton, and they use these perspectives in a way that is both informative for students, and relevant for the empirical analyses. Research reports masked as books often have problems balancing the two. Not so in this case.

Among the interesting observations – equally interesting for readers from other countries – is the great variation in types of special housing, and the blurred line between independent and institutional living, which makes it practically impossible to do comparative studies in the field. I would have liked even more about what makes an institution an 'institution'. How residential care may – and often will – remove the stuff on which the residents maintain and protect their identities, is well taken, but still, older people tend to be less resistant to the idea of moving into residential care than to moving in with a child. This observation goes to the heart of the balance between security and autonomy, which is a main theme throughout the book. I would have liked the authors to have expanded on what is possibly a key to understanding what indeed autonomy (from whom?) and security (via what?) is.

Another observation is the seemingly unsentimental attitude that many (?) older people adopt when they 'have to' move from 'home'. However important the home and surroundings have been for them, their current relationships and

sense of security seem to mean even more, and when they 'have to', some of them move light-heartedly, with no looking back. My mother of 92 is a case in point, having left her house for an adapted, much smaller flat with no regrets when she turned 85. I read between the lines that the authors understand the stayers better. Those who are attached to the things they have surrounded themselves with, than the movers, who leave much of this behind with open eyes. Some move lightly, others only with regrets, and the difference between the two may be a key to understanding the environment–identity issue better.

The final chapter tries to polish some of the findings under the headings of 'place identity' and 'time and space'. In the latter case this means how people organise their time and surroundings, giving continuity and predictability to their private world, at the same time linking them to the larger society through the carrying out of the rituals of daily life. Again, I would have liked the authors to be even more bold than they are in their generalisations. They might have followed Kaufman, whom the authors refer to in their conclusions, when she suggests 'the ageless self' as a metaphor for her study on similar matters. Anyway, judge for yourself. The book is a nice read on an important theme, with something for researchers, students and policy makers.

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John P. Wattis and Stephen Curran, *Practical Psychiatry of Old Age*, Fourth edition, Radcliffe, Oxford, 2006, 276 pp., pbk £29.95, ISBN 1 85775 796 3.

Even more than its title implies, this book is indeed practical. It tells you not just about the theory and practice of old-age psychiatry, but so much more about what working in the specialty is actually like: the family; conflicts and feuds; deducing behaviour from the state of the home; post-traumatic-stress disorder related to war experiences decades after events; unanswered and possibly unanswerable ethical dilemmas; and a somewhat cynical view of planning and delivery of services and the implementation of often unevaluated policies. These are the real-life dilemmas in everyday clinical practice and service development. The authors note the reality, often unacknowledged (especially by politicians), that *we* are the old people of the future. If everyone followed the authors' advice in aphorisms like, 'The confused person does not usually ask for help', or took heed of the importance of developing a 'personal' or 'relational' empathic route to treatment for their patients, we would be able to provide a better service, even within the financial constraints of current service provision.

The book encompasses all objectives of learning: developing knowledge, attitudes and skills. The case studies make it interactive and further enhance learning. The emphasis is on a non-ageist approach providing the same options for social, psychological and physical treatments for older people, adapting them if necessary to the older person's other needs, such as physical limitations. Many old-age mental health services have not always been equitably resourced compared to those providing care for younger adults. Useful data are given, often in