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Space & Place

Introduction

“Geography has meant different things to different people at different times and in different places” (D. Livingstone 1992, p. 7) In popular discourse, space and place are often regarded as synonymous with terms including region, area and landscape. For geographers, however, these twin terms have provided the building blocks of an intellectual and disciplinary enterprise that stretches back many centuries. Yet, as Livingstone intimates, the theoretical specification of space and place has remained a matter of some dispute, being transformed as new ways of ‘thinking geographically’ have developed. Many physical geographers remain fairly uninterested in problematizing the idea that space is straightforwardly empirical, objective and ‘mappable’. Likewise, until the 1970s, most human geographers considered space to be a neutral container, a blank canvas that is filled in by human activity. In the 1970s the humanistic geographers challenged these ideas. People like Yi-Fu Tuan were of great value in reminding geographers that people do not live in a framework of geometric relationships but a world of meaning. For example, Tuan’s poetic writings stressed that place does not have any particular scale associated with it, but is created and maintained through ‘the fields of care’ that result from people’s emotional attachment. Using the notions topophilia and topophobia to refer to the desires and fears that people associate with specific places, his work alerted geographers to the sensual, aesthetic and emotional dimensions of space. The humanistic tradition that these thinkers developed conceptualized place as subjectively defined. As such, what constituted a place was seen to be largely individualistic. Although attachments and meanings were often shared. Simply put, a place meant different things to different people.

Space

Space is a central concept in geography, used in the form of absolute, relative and relational (cognitive) space. Absolute space is an understanding of space as a distinct, physical and imminently real or empirical entity. Traditional regional geography studies the empirical entities, dependencies or vertical connections between humanity and the environment within the ‘container space’ of a particular region. Relative space has the location of, and distance between, different phenomena (horizontal connections) as the focus of geographical inquiry. Distance as measured in terms of transport costs, travel time and the mileage within a network, as well perceived distance, is given explanatory power. The meaning of relational (cognitive) space is that space and place are intrinsic parts of our being in the world – defined and measured in terms of the nature and degree of people’s values, feelings, beliefs, and perceptions about locations, districts, and regions. We relate to other people and the physical environment. Thus relational space is consciously or unconsciously embedded in our intentions and actions. (Arild Holt-Jensen 1999, p. 216, 226, 227 & P. Knox & S. Marston 2004, p. 505)

Table 1. Different Kinds of Spaces Analyzed by Human Geographers ¹

Absolute Space: <i>Mathematical Space</i>	Relative Space: <i>Socioeconomic Space</i>	Relative Space <i>Experiential/ Cultural Space</i>	Cognitive Space: <i>Behavioral Space</i>
Points	Sites	Places	Landmarks
Lines	Situations	Ways	Paths
Areas	Routes	Territories	Districts
Planes	Regions	Domains	Environments
Configurations	Distributions	Worlds	Spatial Layouts

¹ Based on H. Counclis, “Location, Place, Region and Space” in R. Abler et al., *Geography’s Inner Worlds*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1992, table 10.1, p. 231.

Place

“Place is a portion of geographical space. Sometimes defined as ‘territories of meaning’... ”
(Arild Holt-Jensen 1999, p. 224)

Space is organized into places often thought of as bounded settings in which social relations and identity are constituted. Such places may be officially recognized geographical entities or more informally organized sites of intersecting social relations, meanings and collective memory. The concept of place, the uniqueness of particular places and place-based identities are hotly contested concepts in the contemporary context of increasing globalization and the perceived threat of placelessness. Place, sense of place, and placelessness were some key concepts used in humanistic geography during the 1970s to distinguish its approach from positivist geography whose principal focus was space. Place was seen by positivists as more subjectively defined, existential and particular, while space was thought to be more universal, more abstract phenomenon, subject to scientific law. The humanistic concept of place, largely drawn from phenomenology, was concerned with individuals' attachments to particular places and the symbolic quality of popular concepts of place which link events, attitudes, and places and create a fused whole. It was concerned with meaning and contrasted the experienced richness of the idea of place with the detached sterility of the concept of space. Yi-Fu Tuan's idea is that **place** is an emotional bounded area, often the dwelling-place, to which an individual or a group has a strong emotional relationship. People can even derive their personal identity from it, they are for example Limburger or Bosschenaar, and not musician, Dutchman or Catholic. Outside this place starts the immeasurable **space**, of which the individual or group has some knowledge but does not feel at home at or have any affectionate feelings towards. The way in which people identify with a place is very different from individual to individual. There are people in Limburg or 's-Hertogenbosch who feel totally no connection to these places. They are emotionally not bound to these places and feel affection towards another place, or feel no affection to any place at all. Edward Relph described this phenomena, he constructed a continuum that has five degrees, from 'existential insideness' to 'existential outsideness'. An example of the latter is a Turkish migrant in Germany who only speaks Turkish, watches Turkish television and exclusively has relations with other Turkish people.

Humanistic studies show that people alternately associated place with safety and security (feeling at home) but also to imprisonment and isolation. The place where one lives, with its social pressure, and forced solidarity, can be perceived as suffocating. Space compared to the latter can be perceived as free and dissolute. In such a situation the dangers and threats of an unknown space are not so important.

Humanistic Geography & Yi-Fu Tuan

Humanistic Geography

Humanistic Geography is an approach to human geography distinguished by the central and active role it gives to human awareness and human agency, human consciousness and human creativity.

Humanistic Geography emerged in the Anglo-American discipline during the 1970s and was advertised as offering ‘an expansive view of what the human person is and can do’ (Tuan, 1976) and as an attempt at ‘understanding meaning, value and the human significance of life events.’ And was also an extension to behavioural geography.

Humanistic Geography tries to understand the human world, by analysing the relations between human and nature, human geographical behaviour, feelings and ideas in relation to space and place. Humanistic Geography doesn’t agree / resist against the one-sidedness of behaviouralism. The questions which both are asking are quite the same, but the answers and the method of working is different.

The behaviouralism geography uses quantitative methods, while humanistic geography uses qualitative methods.²

The explanation of these subdivisions can be found in other papers and is therefore not included in this paper.

Yi-Fu Tuan

Yi-Fu Tuan was born in China in 1930 and was educated in China, Australia, the Philippines and England (Oxford University). In 1951 he moved to the US, where he worked at several universities (Minnesota University and Wisconsin University). Due to the fact that he travelled a lot, he dealt with many cultural boundaries, which gave him a lot of experiences.

Tuan can be seen as the most influential geographer for the humanistic geography. He wrote about 15 books and published numerous papers generally of a reflective and thought-provoking kind. Very much defining ‘humanistic geography’ for a generation, Tuan redefined our understanding of human geography as the study of ‘human-environment relationships’, and in particular pursued the more fundamental questions arising from a search for the meaning of existence based on an understanding of ourselves as ‘being-in-the-world’, that is fundamentally defined by and in relation to the world and our relationship to it, both physical and emotional (an interpretation of phenomenology). (P. Hubbard e.o. 2004, p. 306, 307)

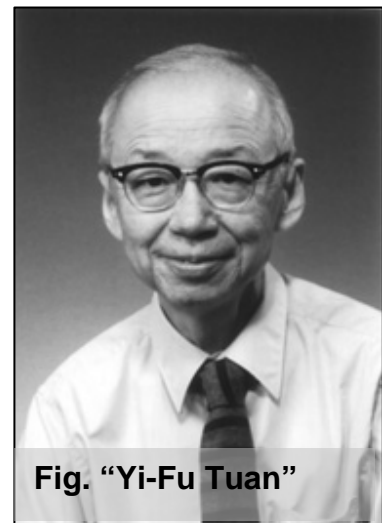


Fig. “Yi-Fu Tuan”

Tuan uses two term to describe the human emotions towards place:

- Topophilia
- Topophobia

² B. de Pater & H. van der Wusten 1996, p. 197

Topophilia

Describes the human love for a place, the affective bond between people and place. For example the place where you grew up and have your roots.

Tuan argues that this bond may vary greatly in intensity from individual to individual and that there is cultural variation in its expression.

And yet there is also a biological component of attachment to place. Topophilia often takes the form of an aestheticizing of a place or landscape. This suggests that the aesthetic is a major way in which many people relate to their environment.

Another major form of topophilia is attachment to home place which can vary in scale from the nation to the home.

Tuan suggests that such attachment can be based upon memories, or pride of ownership or creation. Topophilia, therefore, is not only a response to place, by actively produces places for people.

Topophobia

Is the opposite of 'topophilia', a repulsion of place. These can be 'landscapes of fear' (Tuan, 1980), places we might find threatening, such as barren heaths in horror stories or slums in which we feel we are intruders. For example a place where something terrible happened, when you were there or a cemetery. (R. Johnson e.o. 2000, p. 840)

Tuan also received the less critique on his work, because of his other "own" view at humanistic geography. Other geographers received much more critique on their work and views.

Identity

Introduction

Identity can be defined as the sense that people make of themselves through their subjective feelings based on their everyday experiences and wider social relations. (P. Knox & S. Marston 2004, p. 508)

The forces of new technologies, globalization and 'time-space-compression' have sought to represent localized identities as historical, regressive characteristics, and have worked to undermine the old allegiances of place and community. But the burgeoning of identity politics, and now nationalism, reveal a clear resistance to such universal strategies. Old divisions of and loyalties based around class and geographical community may have been undermined by the globalization of markets, communications networks, networks of power and capital flows: but in their place – paradoxically both as a resistance to, and at the same time a product of those global forces – we see the development of new communities of interest and belief. For instance feminism, lesbian and gay activism, black political and cultural movements have all arisen in some way from a redrawing of the boundaries of identity and community.

If places are no longer the clear supports of our identity, they nonetheless play a potentially important part in the symbolic and physical dimension of our identifications. It is not spaces which ground identifications, but places!

National Identity

The nation refers to a group of people who share particular historical-cultural characteristics or imagine themselves to do so. Nationality refers to the condition of belonging to a nation. At its most basic, nationality can be seen as a mechanism of social classification. People know who they are and who others are. We are accustomed to seeing a person's national identity inscribed adjectivally. There are two components of national identity, according to Verdery. The first is a collective identity which refers to national characteristics and so-called national traits and may include such things as language and style of dress. This is an identity which is shared by the members of the national community. The second meaning to national identity is the individual member's sense of self as a national. An individual's feeling and self-identification as 'Dutch', 'German' or 'French' is an important component in their self-perception. It refers to a feeling of belonging to a nation.

In many instances people's national identity may be officially defined in terms of where they were born. However, people may often define themselves in different terms. Many second-generation Irish people living in Britain may see themselves as Irish. Throughout eastern Europe there are numerous nationalities resident within the borders of other states. Thus, there are many ethnic Russians living in the Baltic states of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania and in the other former member states of the USSR. Once placed there on purpose by the USSR-regime to, among other things, 'break' the national identity of these satellite states by being a large USSR-loyal part of the population of that state. Nowadays they are looked at and treated like second-rate civilians of these now independent states. Many ethnic Germans have 'returned' to Germany from Russia following the collapse of communism. They are returning to a country in which they have never lived. It follows that national identity is not simply a function of where a person is born.

Guiberau sees national identity as composed of five key elements:³

- Psychological: consciousness of forming a community
- Cultural: sharing a common culture
- Territorial: attachment to a clearly demarcated territory
- Historical: possessing a common past
- Political: claiming the right to rule itself

Obviously these five characteristics are closely interlinked. Within this milieu elements such as language, religion and social mores may take on particular significance. Many nations are seen to possess their own language, while in some the majority of members adhere to a particular religion. In these cases language or religion may be the key defining the characteristic of the nation. National identity is not some much a rational thing as it is an emotional thing, its is hard measuring this objectively. A nation is more a mental construct than a concrete reality. People may also have more than one national identity. Many Turkish people in Holland may feel a sense of both being Dutch (their country of birth) and Turkishness (the country of their parents' birth). This can be called Hybrid identity. A negative side to this hybridity is that some migrants have no sense of feeling at home, neither is the country of birth nor in the country of their parents' birth. More on this topic can be found in the paper of Heinen & Pastorini on 'Post-Colonial Approaches to Space'.

Feelings of national identity may be dormant for most of the time, but at particular moments these feelings heighten: for example during international crisis, Dutch sentiments rose due to the German occupation in WWII. But sporting events can lead to increase of people's sense of national identity as well, or even visiting an other country.

Othering / otherness

This term often used in Feminism can also be applied on national identity. For example being Flemish may be most easily articulated in terms of not being Walloon; to be Italian may be conveyed in terms of not being French. National or ethnic identity can be seen as relational. This relational position reflects wider ideas surrounding identity being viewed in relation to an 'other' or 'others' who are seen as possessing a different identity. It can be said that our identity is defined in terms of difference from the objectified other. During the colonial era 'Englishness' and 'Frenchness' could be seen in terms of supposedly 'civilized' traits not possessed by those 'others' being colonized. This process allows members of one nation to view themselves as superior to those of another, thus legitimizing anything from casual disdain, through discrimination, to genocide. The fact that the nations of Eastern Europe are seeking new enemies, obsessively reviving old national hatreds, demonstrates quite clearly that the 'other' is always the 'other' within us and that hatred of the 'other' is in the final analysis hatred of one's own enjoyment.

³ Storey 2001, p. 59

Landscape as an icon for identity

Dominant images of landscapes for outsiders and nationalizing intellectuals have been national ones. Often these are quite specific vistas turned into typifications if a ‘national landscape’ as a whole. Quaint thatched cottages in pastoral settings (England, see picture below), cypress trees topping a hill that has been grazed and ploughed for an eternity (Italy), dense village settlements surrounded by equally dense forests (Germany), and high-hedged fields with occasional stone villages (France) constitute some of the stock images of European rural landscapes conveyed in landscape painting, tourist brochures, school textbooks and orchestral music. Ideas of distinctive national pasts are conjured up for both ‘natives’ and ‘foreigners’ by these landscape images. These ‘representative landscapes’ constitute visual encapsulations of a shared past that this conveys. They can also be thought of as one way in which the social history and distinctiveness of a group of people is objectified through reference (however idealized) to the physical settings of the everyday lives of a people whom we ‘belong’, but most of whom we never meet. Yet these landscape images are both partial and recent. Not only do they come from particular localities within the boundaries of their respective of a nation-states (respectively, southern England, Tuscany, Brandenburg and Normandy), but their visualization as somehow representative of a national heritage is a modern invention, dating at the earliest to the nineteenth century. The history of these landscape images, therefore, parallels the history of the imprinting of certain national identities on to the states of modern Europe.

The agents of every modern state aspire to have their state represented materially in the everyday lives of their subject and citizens. The persisting power of the state depends on it. Everywhere anyone might look would then reinforce the identity between state and citizen by associating the iconic inheritance of a national past with the present state and its objectives. Yet this association is harder to achieve than might at first appear. In



cases such as the English, where the past can be readily portrayed as monolithic and uniform, consensus about a national past with unbroken continuity to ‘time immemorial’ suggests that a comfortable – even casual – association is easily accomplished. Even in England, however, not all is as it seems. The visual cliché of sheep grazing in a meadow, with hedgerows separating the fields and neat villages nestling in tidy valleys, dates from the time in the nineteenth century when the landscape paintings of Constable and others gained popularity among the taste-making elite. Nevertheless, the ‘invented’ ideal of a created and ordered landscape, with deep roots in a past in which everyone also knew their place within the landscape (and the ordered society it represents), has become an important element in English national identity, irrespective of its fabulous in the 1800s.

Elsewhere in Europe, capturing popular landscape images to associate with national identities or inventing new ones has been much more difficult. The apparently straightforward English case in therefore potentially misleading. It suggests a simple historical correlation between the rise of a national state on the one hand, and a singular landscape imagery on the other, however insecure this may now be in the face of economic decline, north-south differences, a revival of Celtic

nationalism that challenge the presumptions of the English to represent something they alone now call 'British', and immigration of culturally distinctive groups unwilling to abandon their own separate identities. National-state formation elsewhere in Europe took a very different direction from that of England, although this is not to say that everywhere else it was the same. States formed in the later nineteenth century like Italy and Germany have a more local landscape, and in countries not as commercial and seafaring like England there was littler need for the memory of a national landscape, you often appreciated your homeland when you are abroad.

The idea of a national landscape, however, and also that of national identity, is more complex than the English case might make appear. A national identity involves a widely shared memory of a common past for people who have never seen or talked to one another in the flesh. This sense of belonging depends as much on forgetting as on remembering, the past being reconstructed as a trajectory to the



national present in order to guarantee a common future. National histories, monuments (war memorials, heroic statues: see picture of Mount Rushmore above), commemorations (anniversaries and parades), sites of institutionalized memories (museums, libraries and other archives) and representative landscapes are among the important instruments for ordering the national past. They give national identity a materiality it would otherwise lack. But such 'milieux' of memories must needs coexist with other memories and their identities.⁴ National identity does not sweep all others away. Some local identities as the French 'pays' or the German attachment to 'heimat' (or home place) also feed into a wider national identity. Some diasporic groups however, like may recent immigrants into Europe, retain local or religious rather than the national identities with which they are usually identified by outsiders.

“Humanistic Geography, with its emphasis on the ethical responsibility for human agency, invites studies of the social construction of meanings in different landscapes, and the inauthenticity / authenticity of particular landscapes.” (R. Johsntson e.o.2000, p. 802)

⁴ B. Graham 1998, p. 216

Placelessness

The existence of relatively homogenous and standardized landscapes which diminish the local specificity and variety of places that characterized pre-industrial societies. In the 1970s this term was associated with Humanistic Geography, particularly to the work of Edward Relph who argues that in the modern world the loss of place diversity is symptomatic of a larger loss of meaning – the ‘authentic’ attitude which characterized pre-industrial and handicraft cultures and produces the ‘sense of place’ that some claim has now been largely lost and replaces with an ‘inauthentic’ attitude. Relph offers as examples of placelessness and ‘inauthentic’ attitude which produces them: tourist landscapes, commercial strips new towns and suburbs and the international style in architecture. The purposeful elimination of a place, like for instance the destroying of the historic and symbolic bridge at Mostar during the war in the Balkans, is called ‘topocide’. Interest in postmodernity as an era, however, has led geographers to focus on globalization and ‘time-space compression’. While some assume that globalization has homogenous effects, reducing the particularity of places and increasing placelessness, others point to its uneven effects across the globe and the defensive reaction which seeks to maintain or recover place differences.



New buildings at Helmond-Brandevoort (NL), a reaction to placelessness?

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