

PLACE IN CONTEXT

Rethinking Humanist Geographies

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A name etched in the smooth, black stone of a war memorial, a crowd of peasants captured in oil paint, a ghost town arrested intentionally in its decay, the planet we call home seen from the vantage point of space — these are a few of the infinite textures of place. What is compelling about these images is less what we see than our cross-sensory resonance with them: we nearly hear the muffled conversations in Brueghel's village square; we can almost feel the earth cool and round in our hand. Imagination makes other connections as well. Any or all of the images may remind us disturbingly of the passage of time and of our own finiteness. Since time and space are intangible and dauntingly infinite, we cling intellectually and emotionally to our experiences and memories of the material world that is so reassuringly solid. Upon close examination, however, this solidity dissolves: a ghost town, even a living town, is woven with strands of an imagined past and a fictional community, products of the time and society in which we live. And, as the Vietnam Veterans Memorial forcefully reminds its many visitors (each of whom interprets its powerful messages in different, and often competing, ways), social relations are profoundly heterogeneous and unendingly divisive.

A place's "texture" thus calls direct attention to the paradoxical nature of place. Although we may think of texture as a superficial layer, only "skin deep," its distinctive qualities may be profound. A surface is, after all, where subject and object merge;¹ the shape, feel, and texture of a place each provides a glimpse into the processes, structures, spaces, and histories that went into its making. Etymologically, texture is associated with both "textile" and "context." It derives from the Latin *texere*, meaning "to weave," which came to mean the thing woven (textile) and the feel of the weave (texture). But it also refers to a "weave" of an organized arrangement of words or other intangible things (context). A textile is created by bringing together many threads and, as such, represents ordered complexity. Language, too, is ordered complexity, and when we understand a word by its context we are discerning a pattern and filling in a gap, sewing together what is torn, extracting meaning not only from what is said but from the relationships this *act of saying* sets up with other statements, conditions, events, and situations.² Communication always *takes place* somewhere, in particular social and spatial contexts, and place is always "in" the

communication (in the form of place-images). Similarly, “textures of place” refers not only to surfaces, processes, and structures but also to communication acts and the multiple contexts that create and are constituted by place.

When we touch a piece of fabric, the experience tells us much about the weave of the fabric, whether it is sturdy or delicate, and about the nature of the threads, either light or heavy.³ Likewise, people’s sense of place — attached variously to a movie theater, a town, a tree, a planet — reveals a great deal about the structure of each of these places in its various contexts. Place, as a topic of investigation, highlights the weaving together of social relations and human-environment interactions. Texture’s simultaneous invocation of surface and depth provides a kind of pivot as we move through this book encountering themes as diverse as morality and imagination, attention and absence, personal and group identity, social structure, home, nature, and cosmos. The tramp and the poet, the professor and the graduate student, and all of the other identities discussed in these chapters are distinct in many respects, yet they all contribute to understanding the world and to the structure of society: they are part of the overall texture of place.

In using the title *Textures of Place* we therefore mean to highlight the geographic tradition of trying to understand the meanings and processes of place — their material and symbolic qualities — as well as the range of peoples and social relations that continuously define and create social and spatial contexts. We hasten to add that by highlighting “the geographic tradition” in our understanding of place we include work by both geographers and scholars from neighboring disciplines. Professional geographers, of course, enjoy no sole proprietorship in describing the earth in all its richness and textures: historians, anthropologists, and philosophers, among others, have made important contributions to this centuries-old project. Nevertheless, among the academic disciplines geographers have probably had most to say about the relationship between space and place, for, as Yi-Fu Tuan famously argued in the book of that same title, grappling with such a relationship lies at the core of geographical inquiry.⁴

Since Tuan’s seminal work on the nature of space and place, a groundswell of interest, excitement, and controversy has energized geographical inquiry on these concepts — by both geographers and their colleagues from across academia. What is equally evident is the incessant reconceptualizing of a “Tuanian” perspective, an approach more generally described as “humanistic geography.”⁵ In what follows we examine humanistic geography in light of contemporary theoretical and methodological debates within the discipline. Then we describe how recent theoretical discussions have placed “place” at the center of research agendas inside and outside of geography, resulting in significantly reworked conceptions of place. We conclude by introducing the chapters of this book that in a wide variety of ways seek to unravel and then reweave the many textures of place.

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Humanist Geographies

More than twenty years ago, humanistic geographers explored the complexities of human action and what it meant to be “placed” in the world.⁶ In the classic collection of essays published in 1978 and entitled *Humanistic Geography*, David Ley and Marwyn Samuels described their perspective in this way:

a humanistic geography is concerned to restore and make explicit the relation between knowledge and human interests. All social constructions, be they cities or geographic knowledge, reflect the values of a society and an epoch, so that humanistic philosophies reject out of hand any false claim to objectivity and pure theory in the study of man. Such claims, most notably those of contemporary positivism, negate themselves through their lack of reflexivity, their unself-conscious espousal of value positions.⁷

Beginning with this epistemological orientation, humanistic geographers studied landscape iconography, mental maps, environmental perception, and everyday geographies; they employed a range of methods, including phenomenology, ethnography, and hermeneutics. Emulating their late-nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century counterparts (George Perkins Marsh, Vidal de la Blache, J. K. Wright), they examined literary texts, art, photography, and film.⁸ They focused on the richness of particular locales and explored the same topic in different cultural contexts. They emphasized writing well, even writing lyrically, as many tried to follow Wright’s search for “words or phrases that carry emotional connotation.”⁹ Common to many of their research agendas were some central questions: What is the nature of human experience? How do place, landscape, and space define and provide the context for this experience? How do humans make the world into a home?

Many humanistic geographers turned to phenomenology (often combined with existentialism) as the philosophical basis for their investigations of “being-in-the-world.”¹⁰ Phenomenology, as defined by Edmund Husserl, is a “philosophical science” concerned with understanding “universal and absolute” laws that govern the spiritual and psychological workings of humans. Many who rejected positivism and embraced phenomenology thus adopted an approach that was thought to reveal the true essences of human experience, including everyday interactions with place. In this way, they endeavored “to peel off successive layers of a priori judgment and to transcend all preconceptions in order to arrive at a consciousness of pure essences.”¹¹

Other humanistic geographers emphasized the *politics* of place and place-making. Concerned with the degradation of everyday environments, Edward Relph argued that “one of the first aims of a phenomenology of geography should be to retrieve these [everyday] experiences from the academic netherworld and to return them to everyone by reawakening a sense of wonder about

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the earth and its places.”¹² Ley’s work in particular focused on “taken for granted meanings” in specific social contexts. Grounding his work in symbolic interactionism and using various qualitative methods including participant observation, he tried to understand how African Americans negotiated their lives in the concrete context of Philadelphia’s inner city. For Ley, place was constructed socially and related dialectically to group identity; it became a foundational, and deeply political, concept.¹³

At the turn of the twenty-first century, geographers working within a humanities tradition (though not often self-identified as humanistic geographers) continue to explore how worlds, places, landscapes, meanings, and human experiences are socially constructed and help constitute specific cultural contexts. Continuity exists in the focal areas of interest, but the past two and a half decades have brought significant ontological, epistemological, and methodological shifts. As we discuss below, many scholars across the humanities and social sciences no longer trust the search for universal definitions; in geography one finds a shift in emphasis from theorizing place in terms of lifeworlds and dwelling (in a Heideggerian sense) to explorations that avoid such universalistic concepts. This has led some to question whether “humanistic geography” still exists. Tuan, for one, has noted that for very good reasons this term has not been used with much frequency since the late 1980s.¹⁴ Many of the younger scholars in this volume, the editors included, consider themselves cultural and/or historical geographers (albeit working within a humanities tradition) rather than humanistic geographers *per se*.¹⁵

While humanistic geography may not be officially recognized as a sub-discipline or specialty group by geography organizations, many of its interests and concerns are nonetheless still relevant to geographers working in a humanities tradition today. One of the goals of this volume is to draw explicit connections between geography and the humanities, as well as to highlight the range of contemporary humanist geographies, including the emergence of what we would call “critical humanist geographies.” The “critical” label marks a maturation, rather than complete rejection, of humanistic geography insofar as it still draws heavily on its hermeneutical traditions. In the 1970s, humanistic geographers introduced the study of interpretation and meaning to challenge empiricist and positivist approaches then dominant in human geography. Anne Buttimer, for example, suggested bringing together insider/outsider views of a place through a “dialogical approach,” and Tuan proposed a reflexive approach to studying “topophilia,” arguing that to know the world is to know oneself.¹⁶ Critical humanist geographers continue to examine how signs, symbols, gestures, utterances, and local knowledges convey cultural meanings and create places. Yet they are also influenced by the more recent contributions by various social theories drawn into geography in the 1980s and 1990s, most notably from cultural materialism, feminism, and poststructuralism, and also from postmodernism and postcolonial theory.¹⁷

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After a period of intense preoccupation with critical social theory (which, of course, continues into the present), critical humanist geographers at the turn of the millennium appear to be pursuing what Benjamin Forest has described elsewhere as a contextualist approach.¹⁸ A contextualist approach pays explicit attention to place and language, while it rejects a dependence on standards of either “objective” geographic knowledge or radical antifoundationalism. It examines the various contexts — whether marked by differences in class, race, gender, sexuality, or nationality — within which individual meanings and social practices are produced, understood, and negotiated. Furthermore, as is demonstrated in this book, a wide range of qualitative methodologies are employed from a critical or contextual perspective including participant observation, descriptive ethnography, semiotic and textual analysis, in-depth case studies, and rigorous historical investigation.

Thus, while geographers presently interested in humanistic themes draw from a range of epistemologies and methodologies clearly distinct from their predecessors, they still share similar concerns, such as an interest in the everyday, a privileging of individuals’ understandings of their physical, social, and symbolic contexts, and, most significantly, the theoretical and empirical study of place. Nonetheless, humanism’s interest in revealing universal experience is tempered now with a sense of caution regarding the processes of generalization and representation. Despite claims to explore geographical differences, human subjectivity, and the creation of meaning from different philosophical positions, many humanistic geographers in the 1970s reverted to a scientific “view from nowhere,” a scholarly detachment similar — though couched in different terms — to that of the spatial analysts. This was due, in no small measure, to their search for universal essences, or truths, about “man,” a term that could not contain the breadth of geographical agents. By the mid-1980s feminist scholars pointed out that “humanists tend to show a *general* concern for the way in which ordinary people are subject to various forms of authority, rather than analyzing the specific forms of exploitation and oppression that occur.”¹⁹ Furthermore, the influence of critical social theory in the humanities during the 1980s and 1990s led to the exploration of “antifoundational” approaches in geography. Such approaches disclaimed grand theories (such as structural functionalism, Marxism, or idealism) and the implicit assumptions of the Enlightenment project, such as the stability of the human subject or the belief in universal political, intellectual, and moral virtues resulting from the public exercise of reason.²⁰

Thus, the engagement with critical social theory demanded a reevaluation of humanistic geography in the context of revised assumptions about human subjectivity, the transparency of language, and the use of descriptive categories based upon Western traditions of understanding. Today’s interest in diversity is coupled with a refusal to adopt a master discourse that can organize all that diversity. Geographical interest is shifting toward discovering both distinctive,

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unexplored ways of perceiving and understanding the world and the incommensurate and divergent nature of people's realities. Finally, as a number of essays in this book demonstrate, an interest in narrative and "storytelling," as opposed to analysis and explanation, is emerging.²¹ Although we feel that this collection draws attention to the emergence of critical humanist geographies, it is important to point out that not all of the authors in this volume would feel comfortable with such a label or even with the project it indicates.

This book not only highlights the current work of three generations of humanist geographers but also contains valuable contributions by scholars outside the academic boundaries of professional geography. By calling attention to the connections between geography and the humanities, we explicitly recognize the increasingly fluid and interdisciplinary nature of scholarship on place, of an intense and fruitful blurring of genres.²² Geography, like the humanities more generally, is passionately pluralist in approach and tolerant of divergent viewpoints, and nowhere is this synthetic interest felt more profoundly than in the study of place.

Place Matters

Questions of "place," it is noted with increasing frequency, are firmly back on the scholarly agenda. After decades of devaluation in orthodox social science — and within human geography itself — place has reemerged with an intellectual vigor that few would have predicted. "Locality," "region," "landscape," "territory," "area," and "place" have once again become keywords for empirical and theoretical study.²³ And it is not just within human geography that these terms constitute foci for inquiry. The New Western History has energized a traditional discipline with a notion of the American West as less a frontier than a dynamic set of interlocking places; scholars in American studies have found a "regrounding" in the concept of place; sociologists have written about "the geographical moment" and of place as "a cultural artifact of social conflict and cohesion"; within anthropology one reads of the "empowering place" and its "multilocality and multivocality"; philosophers have suggested a nuanced "understanding of the place-world"; and scholars of literature have turned increasingly to how place evokes and shapes art.²⁴

The interdisciplinary nature of place's scholarly renaissance is critical, for it suggests something much more expansive and vital than merely an updating of traditional regional geography or simply an extension of humanism. With its conception of place as an "element complex" — a country-by-country, or continent-by-continent, inventory of natural resources, population, economic sectors, and the like — the chorological method confined regional geography to a museum-like status, marginalized from both social sciences and the humanities.²⁵ In this view, place, as a collection of objective facts that could be analyzed scientifically, contained little room for the people who inhabit places

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and their subjective experiences. The humanist tradition within geography, as we have suggested, emphasized a concept of place dramatically at odds with this positivistic version. Works such as Tuan's *Space and Place*, Relph's *Place and Placelessness*, and Buttimer and Seamon's *The Human Experience of Space and Place* recoiled from the abstract theorizing of space as an objective entity and emphasized the subjective qualities of place. As Relph put it: "the essence of place lies in the largely unselfconscious intentionality that defines places as profound centres of human existence."²⁶ The recognition of the moral, aesthetic, and experiential aspects of place was fundamental to forging links between geography and neighboring disciplines, but its limitations (as we have noted above) prevented humanistic geography from fully engaging in the tremendous varieties and textures of place.

It is precisely "the move from 'knowing about' places in an objective way, their facts and features, to 'understanding' places, in a more empathetic way, their character and meanings," that remains the hallmark of humanistic geography.²⁷ But today's critical humanist perspective emphasizes the tensions and contradictions of place to a degree that was little described twenty years ago. Instead of the "essence of place," most scholars today interpret its "multiplicity"; rather than focusing on "human existence," they try to unearth the many ways that place impinges on identities surrounding race, ethnicity, class, gender, and sexuality; and more than simply focusing on "unselfconscious intentionality," a critical humanist interpretation of place is equally concerned with how human creativity is hemmed in by large-scale social, political, and economic structures. "Topophobia" as much as "topophilia" has captured geographical imaginations.²⁸ Thinking of places in this way "implies that they are not so much bounded areas as open and porous networks of social relations," suggests Doreen Massey. "It reinforces the idea, moreover, that [place] identities will be multiple. . . . And this in turn implies that what is to be the dominant image of any place will be a matter of contestation and will change over time."²⁹

If the study of place has received a powerful theoretical boost from the so-called cultural turn in the humanities and social sciences, its growing importance is also due to larger societal trends. Stephen Daniels makes the important point that the current focus on place is not just a current academic fad: place is central to "how the world seems to work."³⁰ This may be seen in two much observed, and contradictory, ways, both of which are related to forces of globalization. First, although popular writers, beginning with Lewis Mumford in the 1920s, have bemoaned the impact of modernization on place, their sense of urgency and frequency has increased dramatically. Suburban sprawl replacing fragile ecosystems and productive farmland, strip malls displacing corner grocery stores, Americans trading one city for another: such well-known trends have inspired writers like James Howard Kunstler and William Leach to denounce the contemporary "geography of nowhere," where place seems to have

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lost its importance. In a time when traditional social roles have collapsed, such geographical change is especially troubling because place long served as a secure anchor to stabilize personal identity.³¹ The response by marketers and developers, most notably in “neotraditional” or “New Urbanist” design, has been to create willfully contrived places that imbue “a sense of place,” or at least look as if they should. Or, put somewhat differently, “that is why every new restaurant is dripping with personality, and every new housing development is stiff with character.”³²

Second, such antimodern reactions in postmodern consumerism, David Harvey argues, go hand in hand with recent changes in modern capitalism. “Place-bound identities,” he notes, have “become more rather than less important in a world of diminishing spatial barriers to exchange, movement, and communication.”³³ At exactly the same time that critics like Kunstler decry our current state of “placelessness,” the very political-economic processes that would seem to homogenize place, in fact, increase its importance. Individual localities are ever more exposed to the vagaries of global flows of investment, population, goods, and pollution. As a result of this globalization, place managers adopt multifarious strategies to attract the kinds of flows that they find attractive (like investment capital and tourist dollars) and fend off those deemed undesirable (such as prisoners and toxic waste).³⁴ Places, Chris Philo and Gerry Kearns suggest, have long “sold themselves” — world’s fairs, the “crabgrass frontiers” of American suburbs, and the spectacular development of downtowns all attest to the well-established efforts by real estate developers, politicians, and investors of all stripes to cash in on cultural capital. What is especially intriguing today is the paradoxical acceleration of that very process. In an age of time-space compression, we are made increasingly aware, place matters.³⁵ And if place is subjected to the homogenizing techniques of mass production and marketing, a critical humanist perspective reminds us that the “product” may be appropriated in distinct ways by different individuals and their particular modes of habitation.

The Places of “Place” In Contemporary Humanist Geography

Given the posttraditional times in which writers on place find themselves, the reader of this volume should not be surprised to find that the authors’ conceptions, methodologies, and theoretical perspectives are as varied as places themselves.³⁶ But there are some shared themes, too, and below we highlight three of the most important in theorizing and interpreting the textures of place.

Experience and Identity

Perhaps the most lasting contribution of humanistic geography to the idea of place, Tim Cresswell has argued, has been the reminder that we do not live in

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an abstract framework of geometric spatial relationships: “we live in a world of meaning. We exist in and are surrounded by places.”³⁷ Yi-Fu Tuan, more than anyone, pioneered this “perspective of experience,” as he forced us to ask of a place: What is its meaning? and How is human identity structured through place?³⁸ Moreover, Tuan’s assertion that “home is an intimate place” leads directly to questions regarding the politics and processes of identity-formation.³⁹ Designating a space as “home” or “hometown” or “homeland” emphasizes the way in which one’s individual and collective identities are bound to place at multiple scales. Place and place-identity are increasingly seen as significant media through which people construct an identity — whether that construction is part of a gay identity in West Hollywood, a gender-based identity in London, or an ethnic identity in rural Scotland.⁴⁰

Imagination and Social Construction

Closely related is the view that place is socially produced and constructed and, moreover, that imagination plays a critical role in that construction. Many have followed Benedict Anderson’s provocative formulation of large-scale places such as the nation as “imagined communities.”⁴¹ Furthermore, and as the chapters of this book demonstrate, places are socially constructed and produced at an enormous variety of scales, from the body to a building like a museum, to a city or suburb, to an ecosystem like a wetland, to a nation-state, to the world or cosmos. Places, like a university, can be directly experienced and concrete, or they can be more nearly metaphorical, if equally direct — as in knowing “one’s place.” They can appear transparently “artificial” (like the images on the movie screen, which nevertheless have deep meaning for some), or they can appear “natural” (and yet be the product of considerable artifice and domination). In every instance, however, separate groups and individuals will evoke geographical imaginations in very different, and often competing, ways in the construction of place. As such, vitally important concepts like multiculturalism, racism, nation building, and environmental destruction are linked to the making of place.

Paradox and Modernity

Despite its long-held association with stability and community, place is increasingly recognized as dynamic and fluid, as “a contested terrain.”⁴² Place may indeed hold out the promise as “an analeptic for individuality and the world’s indifference,” but, as Tuan is quick to point out, it is precisely in response to the forces of modernity that such a need has been created.⁴³ Similarly, place has been called upon both for a progressive political agenda and for its conservative opposite. Some, like Doreen Massey, see place as a crucial aspect of the politics of inclusion, where people form multiple identities and

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marginalized groups contest a dominant ideology. She has argued persuasively for the possibility of creating a “progressive sense of place,” one that meets the challenges of feminism and celebrates the politics of difference. But, as Timothy Oakes has maintained, “the paradoxical qualities of modernity can just as easily yield a place-based politics which is reactionary, exclusionary, and blatantly supportive of dominant regimes.”⁴⁴ One might go one step further and suggest that *place itself* is the source of such paradox, ambivalence, and contradiction. As the point where human subjectivity meets the forces of abstraction and objectification, place, due precisely to this critical quality of “betweenness,” is an excellent vantage point from which to study all of the dazzling and contradictory aspects of modernity, from the building of nation-states and the elaboration of capitalism, to individual consciousness and morality.⁴⁵

Contents of the Book

Textures of Place owes its origins to four special sessions at the 1998 Annual Meeting of the Association of American Geographers. Although the sessions were organized on the occasion of Yi-Fu Tuan’s retirement, the papers presented there and the contents of this book are far removed from the usual “festschrift” fare of praise and adulation. On the contrary, each author was invited to share in a critical dialogue on the meaning of place, self, and identity. Disagreement as much as consensus, we have suggested, define a contemporary critical humanist sensibility. Some of the authors are contemporaries of Tuan, some his students, and some his colleagues outside his home discipline of geography — all, however, recognize his profound influence and share a commitment to the study of place that our esteemed colleague forged.

In keeping with the title of the book, a textile metaphor, the thread, explains the order in which we will introduce the book’s chapters. To mix our metaphors a bit, as you read these chapter introductions imagine that you are overhearing a thread of conversation generated around Tuan’s well-laid table, in which each participant takes a turn and picks up the loose ends left by the prior speaker. Some agree and some disagree, but they form a continuous strand of thought. That this is not the only strand among the authors should be obvious, and indeed this is emphasized by the division of the book into four parts that follow their own logic. The parts organize ideas into loose categories strongly reminiscent of Tuan’s books: *Landscapes of Dominance and Affection*; *Segmented Worlds and Selves*; *Moralities and Imagination*; and *Cosmos versus Hearth*.⁴⁶ By providing the reader with two possible organizations — one the cluster and the other the strand — we hope to offer more insight into the ways the chapters relate.

We start with Karal Ann Marling. With rare literary skill she conveys the joy

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and magic of a public space that was lost several decades ago from the American landscape but is only now fading from collective memory. Her subject is the movie palace, the dazzling street space it created, and the alternative world it provided to several generations of Americans. These palaces have vanished not because they were tied to a medium that vanished (box office returns still increase every decade) but because they were part of a centralized urban landscape and social structure that are no more. What Marling does is help to reconstruct a collective memory of these places, linking topophilia with loss.

Miles Richardson also treats topophilia and loss, showing that this link is significant in various contexts. Places as diverse as Catholic shrines, the Vietnam Veterans Memorial, and Graceland share this tie. Here topophilia arises directly from absence, a condition many of us acknowledge by offering a presence: ourselves. We come to these places not only to see but also to bring offerings: miniature body parts, flowers, C rations, T-shirts — indeed, anything that emotionally connects us to one who is absent. Through this act, we also form bonds of solidarity with those who are present, with each other. In effect, sacred place persists in modern landscapes and forms an emotional center.

Denis Cosgrove too addresses sacred place, but through a single image. He examines a promotional poster prepared by the Jesuit order on the five-hundredth anniversary of the birth of St. Ignatius. The image juxtaposes a silver statue of the saint and a famous photograph of the earth. In this combination Cosgrove finds a mixture of attitudes toward earth and our existence on it. On the one hand, the image is overtly imperialist in its association of Christianity with the whole world — a world rendered visible by Cold War space technology. On the other hand, the distant, celestial perspective of earth resonates with oniric (dreamlike) texts, generating a sense of awe and humility in the face of a suprahuman scale. Domination and submission are fused in one image.

James S. Duncan and Nancy G. Duncan also explore connection between an image and dominance. The image they select is not visual but mental: a collective image of a New York suburb. Bedford is a place not only of care but also of discrimination. Its residents discriminate between “us” and “them” first in a theoretical sense, determining who we are and what “our place” is like, as opposed to them and “their places.” Such distinctions, based on aesthetics and an imagined community, in turn provide justifications for exclusionary practices. Zoning laws are designed to keep out at least some of the prospective in-migrants who would threaten the inhabitants’ nostalgic sense of place.

Karen E. Till explores similar issues — mental images, idealized sense of place, and the fabrication of community — in a very different context. She finds that the layout, interior design, and exhibits of a German history museum reveal worldviews that are doubly partial — partial (incomplete) in their

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interpretation of history and geography and partial (biased) in their political and social silences. The museum attempts to script a coherent picture of several pasts, but in so doing it favors certain pasts over others and imposes a judgment on past lives. Despite its air of authority, this museum and its exhibit are not the final word; observers reinterpret the scene's "museumspeak" according to their own experiences.

Dydia DeLyser also explores museumspeak and people's interpretations of it. Her interest is in the ghost town of Bodie, which has been preserved as an open-air museum by the state of California. In a state of arrested decay, and therefore quite unlike the original Bodie, this place nevertheless evokes a sense of the West that is instantly familiar. The idealized sense of place arises through the place's sounds, smells, and sights, although these are entirely unlike the sounds, smells, and sights of the thriving mining community that once existed here. By not trying to bring the place to life, it seems that the curators better stimulate the imagination of many of the viewers.

Imagination can connect people not only through time but also across cultural divides. Steven Hoelscher traces the origins of modern multiculturalism in the "provincial cosmopolitanism" of the 1930s and 1940s. This philosophy honors or idealizes ethnic cultural differences while simultaneously envisioning a harmonious and unified society forged from that diversity. Diversity is stripped of its ethnocentrism so that this unification becomes theoretically possible. While this assumption is subject to debate — and, indeed, rests on an unspoken "whiteness" — the popularity of provincial cosmopolitanism in its time, as well as its continuing influence, indicates that the ideal blending of ethnic hearth and societal cosmos is an important element of American ideology.

Cultural difference appeared not as a virtue but as a mark of inferiority in popular writings fifty years earlier. Jonathan M. Smith's study of the nineteenth-century historian Francis Parkman reveals a worldview that applied a single scale of values to all cultures. Parkman's philosophy maintained that "the highest morality is the most effective morality," meaning that history reveals the moral condition of populations through their geographic expansion or contraction. This view of history led to the belief that society should be governed by Anglo-Saxon men of the patrician class who had accentuated their best qualities — detachment, violence, and self-reliance — as indicated by their territorial expansion in the New World and by the struggle with "raw nature."

William Howarth provides a startling contrast with this worldview — a twentieth-century vision of geography and nature. Nature has something to teach in this later formulation, but the lesson is not toughness learned through dominance; now it is the recognition of limits on human action. Geography is, for Howarth, an act that puts "a mind to land to learn what it knows." What it "knows" is process: a bear paw print filling with water, observed on a walk in the forest, is a kind of natural time-piece, a "space marking time,

Adams, Paul C. (Editor); Hoelscher, Steven (Editor); Till, Karen E. (Editor). *Textures of Place : Exploring Humanist Geographies*.

Minneapolis, MN, USA: University of Minnesota Press, 2001. p xxiv.

<http://site.ebrary.com/lib/nuim/Doc?id=10151212&ppg=25>

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