

HUMANISTIC GEOGRAPHY - TUAN'S CONTRIBUTION AND FUTURE POSSIBILITIES

John Crowley

The humanistic approach in geography has frequently been criticised for being eclectic, vague and unsure of its own footing. This is borne out in the disparate writings of such noted votaries as Yi-Fu-Tuan and Anne Buttner. Indeed this vagueness seems to be the stock in trade of much of the humanistic endeavour as heretofore conceived. Words sometimes distort what one is trying to say and geographers in their search for meaning in the 'human : human' and 'human : environment' interface are most apt to recognise this difficulty. Geography as a discipline has never known itself to build fences and the medium the geographer uses to express his or herself should never be taken as given. Yet a return to a more simple conception of humanistic geography is needed; one which in part, substitutes people's own texts (or creativity) for the intuitive qualities which a writer such as Tuan brings to bear on his work.

Yi-Fu-Tuan (1987) recently reminded us that as geographers "we are intimately concerned with the way people relate to each other and the physical environment which presupposes some quality of awareness" (p. 11). A recently completed study by Kathleen Curtin (1989) brought home the richness of what lies dormant in much of Tuan's work. This study of people's beliefs in the Parish of Tournafulla in South West Limerick captured the very essence of what it means "to be" for various members of the community. It dealt its hand of deft infidelity to analysis, for contrivance would have spoiled the naturalness and spontaneity of the study. It did not bear successive approximations to life, it was life in its various colourations. There was a certain feel, a certain intimacy, which made one's presence both intrusive and yet quite separate. That gift of awareness, that gift of seeing through simplicity itself is something to be admired and desired in future studies.

The actual cadence in names such as Tead Seán Fad and Neddy of the Yard ushers the listener into a different octave composed of the rhythms of daily life. Individual people bear witness to the life of the community on their own terms. Such a study marks a return to the people's own texts. Any other means of understanding the community would be a mere impertinence, a nondescript rendering of life preventing a more thorough immersion in the language of feeling. As

Brendan Kennelly (1988) put it "life is more than logic, I am less involved with thoughts than with feelings". Reason tends to shackle and dissect such feelings whereas belief posits their wholeness and vi Explanation is only partial to moving beneath the surface of grasping what may be ephemeral but true. Tuan may not be over-impressed by this adherence to the language of feeling as opposed to thought for he sees both "at different ends of an experiential continuum and both as ways of knowing" (Tuan, 1979 p. 10). Research may be difficult because of the transient nature of feelings (they tend to bow in and out before the demands of thought). Yet to waive such insights in favour of something more certain (analytical rigour) displays a lack of faith in what geography can be:

Forgetting "to be" is a caveat which should be placed in every geographer's handbook. Detachment and objectivity are words which cringe at the sight of a word such as 'sensibility'. In educational terms Ross' recusant views have been difficult to swallow, yet they are infused with a breadth of vision which shakes us from our complacency.

"To look upon, to handle, to delight in the phenomenal world, cherishing the particular for its own sake, as its rightful due worshipping the world, such action of itself refreshes the human spirit, revives consciousness and in consequence makes us feel that our life is worth living. By encountering, embracing and acknowledging what we love, we experience ourselves as unique and individual. By the same token our inability to bless the world leaves us increasingly alienated, caloused and in our estimation worthless" (p. 10).

This inventory of feeling (to cherish, to delight in and to love) which Ross refers to passim in his writings prods the geographer towards a more adept understanding of that interaction with the phenomenal world. The world of appearances can only be pierced by the ability to understand the actual translation of felt experience into a later altogether refined arrangement of that experience. David Best referred to this 'refined arrangement' (in opposition to Ross) "as the rationality of feeling - his point being "that feelings in being seated in understanding are always answerable to reason, in that they are in principle open to the possibility of being changed by reasons given for different ways of seeing and feeling about situations" (p. 24). Students in the field need to be given time to look and stare, to listen and observe, to feel and to be. Self expression is the crowning point of this process. Yet there is something shallow about the whole

notion of the rationality of feeling. As Kennelly (1988) indicates "feeling can be another word for faith - feeling writes the poetry, logic just supplies the form".

Ross (1982) plots the course of aesthetic experience in terms of Lawrence Kohlberg's stages of moral development

- (i) Uniqueness and individuality
- (ii) Authenticity and integrity
- (iii) Openness and creativity
- (iv) Fittingness and propriety
- (v) Empathy, fellow feeling, kindness (p. 86)

At stage one the child's creativity is intimately linked with his or her own egocentric ways. Each subsequent stage leads to a diminution of self; a growing awareness of the world about us, eventually leading to an empathy with and understanding of our fellow human beings. The unknown is a constant reminder of the limitations of self but it also spurs us toward that charity and kindness which both Tuan and Ross put forward as the hallmark of the developing mind "listening presupposes a forgetting of self, to attend to what is out there, it is an act of courtesy as well as of intellect" (Tuan, 1987, p. 12). Stage five then indicates a certain humility, a certain freedom from the contagion of self. At this stage aesthetic experience approaches the reciprocity which Martin Buber (1959) believed to be the ultimate goal in human relationships and understanding and which he so eloquently expressed in his work I and Thou:

"Whoever stands in relation participates in an actuality that is a being that is neither merely a part of him nor merely outside him. All actuality is an activity in which I participate without being able to appropriate it. Where there is no participation there is no actuality. Where there is self appropriation there is no actuality. The more directly the You is touched the greater the participation" (p. 112).

There can be no doubt as to the advantage of introducing such concepts as sensibility and awareness into geographical education (hence one cannot question Tuan's contribution on this count) but research can also benefit from an even greater commitment on the part of the researcher*. The geographer cum ethnographer may never even

* See Shlomo Hassan - Humanistic Geography from the perspective of M. Buber's philosophy. Prof. Geographer 36(1), 1984, 11-18.

come near that stage of reciprocity which Buber advocates (for in many respects it is impossible). Even so a great deal can be learned from his writings. Ethnography as a discipline has been in the throes of its own great upheaval. Traditional ethnographic accounts particularly those of Evans-Pritchard have signified feelings for the subject of research but never the subject's own feelings - a type of cultural exegesis which thrives on the author's own creativity while neglecting or ignoring the people's creative potential. As Crapanzano (1986) avers "all too often the ethnographer forgets the native cannot abide someone reading over his shoulder. If he does not close the book he will cast a shadow over it" (p. 76). Ethnographic research has begun to prise open these prisms of discourse, restoring a lost voice, which invariably marks a return to people's own texts. Such studies involve an even greater awareness and sharing of self while displaying an intensified loyalty or devotion to the people's inner sanctum of beliefs.

Phenomenology or people's physics as Dennet recently referred to it provides the researcher with a means to explore the lifeworld of people. It celebrates the uniqueness of the individual and the substantive nature of experience. The sentient world of feeling and being plays counterpoint to the starkness of objective fact. "Correctly conceived phenomenology does not adopt any particular position or standpoint or world-view in regard to the state of affairs. Rather it is the name for a method which allows original experiences to be seen" (Pickles, 1985, p. 2). It allows for the articulation of such experiences in their own terms and in their own context. It is through phenomenology that we come close to touching that inner reality which for so long remained tangential to geographical inquiry.

In Dennet's (1988) recent publication Why Everyone is a Novelist he propounds the view that the self (an abstractum) is formed in much the same way as a fictional character in a novel "we cannot undo those parts of our pasts that are determinative but ourselves are constantly being made more determinate as we go along in response to the way the world impinges on us" (p. 1028). The way the world is conceived is largely a reflection of what Schutz invoked as our intersubjective meaning structures "because we share that world with others". Husserl's phenomenology disavows this complicity in the creation of meaning structures. The individual stands alone, the fulcrum of his or her own world. The whole question of method is thus seen as

problematic. This is the lacuna or fundamental weakness which lies at the heart of the phenomenological approach in geography (which Pickles attests to). "The possibility of objectivity arises from this intersubjectivity. Moreover it is an objectivity capable of conveying the emotion, feeling and meaning of everyday life" (Pickles, 1985, p. 66). Even so stripped to its essentials it provides the necessary leeway or underpinning to explore fully what oftentimes seems intractable to objective science - what it means "to be".

People furnish their own means of understanding the world, their own sense of reality. Such studies as have been already mentioned are purposive to moving beneath the surface to explore that intimate sense of being..

If we remember whence life first arose
And how within us that river flows
And how the fabled shapes in dream's deep sea
Still evidence our continuity
With being's seamless garment web and thread*

(Hewitt, 1986, p. 12)

As Hewitt acknowledged immersion in this interior world poses its own difficulties - a world in the grip of an innate tension between the insider and the outsider. Yet the "being's seamless garment web and thread" is our source - a coat to be worn with a plentitude of love and understanding. Our ability to "bless the world" as geographers depends on it.

* John Hewitt Freehold and other Poems, Blackstaff Press 1986, p. 12.

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