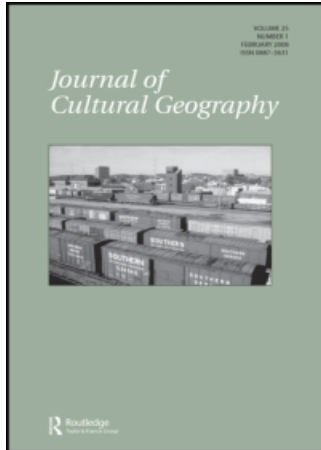


This article was downloaded by:[Cal State Univ-Northridge]  
On: 4 July 2008  
Access Details: [subscription number 791490172]  
Publisher: Routledge  
Informa Ltd Registered in England and Wales Registered Number: 1072954  
Registered office: Mortimer House, 37-41 Mortimer Street, London W1T 3JH, UK



## Journal of Cultural Geography

Publication details, including instructions for authors and subscription information:  
<http://www.informaworld.com/smpp/title~content=t790540970>

### Recalcitrant space: modeling variation in humanistic geography

Ronald A. Davidson <sup>a</sup>

<sup>a</sup> Department of Geography, California State University, Northridge, CA, USA

Online Publication Date: 01 June 2008

To cite this Article: Davidson, Ronald A. (2008) 'Recalcitrant space: modeling variation in humanistic geography', Journal of Cultural Geography, 25:2, 161 — 180

To link to this article: DOI: 10.1080/08873630802214172  
URL: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/08873630802214172>

PLEASE SCROLL DOWN FOR ARTICLE

Full terms and conditions of use: <http://www.informaworld.com/terms-and-conditions-of-access.pdf>

This article maybe used for research, teaching and private study purposes. Any substantial or systematic reproduction, re-distribution, re-selling, loan or sub-licensing, systematic supply or distribution in any form to anyone is expressly forbidden.

The publisher does not give any warranty express or implied or make any representation that the contents will be complete or accurate or up to date. The accuracy of any instructions, formulae and drug doses should be independently verified with primary sources. The publisher shall not be liable for any loss, actions, claims, proceedings, demand or costs or damages whatsoever or howsoever caused arising directly or indirectly in connection with or arising out of the use of this material.

## Recalcitrant space: modeling variation in humanistic geography

Ronald A. Davidson\*

*Department of Geography, California State University, Northridge, CA, USA*

In the past decade humanistic geography has been roundly criticized by influential geographers for offering essentialist conceptions of place. In this paper it is argued that essentialism is not intrinsic to these conceptions, and a model of 'recalcitrant space' is presented to show how amenable humanistic geographies are to constructivist adaptations that foreground variation in subjective encounters with place.

**Keywords:** humanistic geography; space; place; Yi-Fu Tuan

### Introduction

Peter Schjeldahl's poem 'To Pico' (1991) illustrates what might be described as the inexorableness of place in the human condition. The poem pays backhanded homage to Pico Boulevard in Los Angeles by presenting it as an extreme instance of a non-place – which makes it an oddly distinguished, unique sort of place. The poem, which runs two pages (mirroring Pico's own considerable length), begins:

You are one of the shadowless east-west routes  
You start or end, or neither, in breezy Santa Monica  
You are one off-ramp on the Santa Monica Freeway  
(You cede all long-distance traffic to the Santa Monica Freeway)  
You are the back door of Century City, ass-end of the Avenue of the Stars  
(p. 249)

Having thus introduced Pico's monumental non-monumentality, the poem continues as a concatenation of mostly mordant one-liner observations, including: "You dawdle through the endless blurry unnamed reaches of central L.A."; "You have a dustily marginal air"; "You look unphotographed"; "You look unintended, uncalculated, un contemplated by anyone ever until this moment." And yet: "You are poetic – obviously."

Like Gerhard Richter's faithful paintings of blurry photographs, Schjeldahl's poem carefully renders the tenuous and vague, 'blurry' sense

---

\*Ronald A. Davidson is Assistant Professor, Department of Geography, California State University, Northridge, 18111 Nordhoff Street, Northridge, CA 91330-8249, USA. Email: rdavids@csun.edu

of place of Pico – a forgettable, somewhere-in-LA swath of boulevard. One might object to the poem by arguing that Pico is a geographically fascinating, memorable and meaningful landscape for a thousand different reasons, that the poet-protagonist speaks from an uninformed outsider's perspective, and so on, but that would be missing the geographic insight of the poem: even when someone considers a place un-place-like, it is still a place to them – perhaps even one worth a long poetic ode.

Recognizing that the absence of a *genius loci* is a peculiar sort of *genius loci* underscores an important point about place. This concerns the immanence of place in lived experience, the fact that even when we are in the presence of a 'non-place' place remains a basic "condition of human experience" (Entrikin 1991, p. 1). Recognition of place as foundational of the human, and as the medium through which everyday geographic actors negotiate reality, are core themes of humanistic geography (Tuan 1974, 1977; Relph 1976; Seamon 1979; Cresswell 1996, 2004; Sack 1997).

Humanistic geography emerged in its modern disciplinary guise in the 1970s. The swift rise of the sub-field had a transformative effect on geography as a whole, opening new perspectives on human-environment relations and helping to overcome the spatial positivists' near-monopoly of prestige and authority (Entrikin 1991). Humanistic geography countered this authority with that of an ancient and enduring intellectual tradition that celebrates human creativity, intentionality and meaning. In so doing the humanists raised the concept of place, as the irreducible geographic grounds for human existence in the world, to disciplinary prominence.

Place retains its prominence in geography, yet few people today identify themselves as humanistic geographers (Lees 2002). Almost since its inception, the sub-field had had to fight an uphill battle for legitimacy in a social science discipline that demands a high degree of methodological rigor. The critics who circled against humanistic geography pointed out a number of methodological and suppositional flaws. However, by the 1990s, when the "attempted murder" (Pile 1993, p. 126) of humanistic geography was being recounted by some as having achieved its goal after all (Rose 1993; Cresswell 2004), the wound most forcefully described as mortal was the humanists' tendency to essentialize place. Contrary to the spirit and findings of such autopsies, this paper aims to defend humanistic geography – reports of whose death have been, I believe, greatly exaggerated – by presenting a humanistic model of space (and place) that resists the charge of essentialism. The model – of what is called here recalcitrant space – augments the humanistic conception of place by incorporating degrees of variation into how subjects encounter, produce and relate to place.

### **A space for humanistic geography? Criticisms of humanistic conceptions of place**

The attack against humanistic geographers was far from just a coup by a new generation of scholars playing an old game of 'revolution and counter-revolution' in geography, as we will see (Harvey 1973). However, first it should be remembered that humanistic geography itself emerged in part as an attack against the dominance of the preceding generation of spatial positivists. To humanists, the positivist approach was dehumanizing and deterministic (Entrikin 1991). The humanists crossed hardening disciplinary boundaries to bring intention, meaning, consciousness and creativity to the forefront of their research agendas. Yet even as the humanistic approach was gaining momentum, criticisms against it began to mount.

Initial criticisms centered on the humanists' lack of a rigorous methodology. Entrikin, for example, objected that the humanists' philosophical foundations in existential phenomenology did not provide them with a means of validating the truth of their claims, rendering their work 'highly subjective' and valid only as 'criticism' of more scientific geography (Entrikin 1976, p. 630). To this was added the criticism that humanists prioritized description over explanation, and thus failed to uncover causal relations (Ley 1981a).

Subsequent critiques focused on the presumptions underwriting humanistic inquiries into place and self. Gregory's (1981) assault, for example, centered on the fact that in their enthusiasm to celebrate meaning and intention, humanists ignored the role of structure and context in constraining human action – a role that social thinkers in other disciplines (e.g. Giddens) were ambitiously investigating. Pile (1993) argued that humanists presumed a flawed model of the self. In place of the rational, coherent, integrated self that was often taken for granted, Pile's psychoanalytic interpretation incorporated the existence of the unconscious. Critical human geographers meanwhile took issue with the nostalgic mode in which 'topophilia' was explored, since the aesthetic surface of place can conceal underlying patterns of exploitation and oppression (Duncan and Duncan 2001).

One of the most lethal criticisms was that the humanists tended to essentialize place, ignoring – or at any rate insufficiently theorizing – the role of social-differentiation and power relations in studies of place (Rose 1993). Feminists, for example, found no avenues within humanistic geography to theorize "the broader social power relations which in all sorts of ways structure experiences of places" (Rose 1993, p. 44). The tendency to essentialize stems from two sources. The first is the philosophical foundations upon which humanistic geography first erected itself, phenomenology (and in particular Husserl's formulation of it). The aim of phenomenology is to reveal essential qualities of things in the lifeworld, the world as perceived

through direct, unmediated experience and prior to any theorization about it (Entrikin 1976; Seamon 1979). The second, as Buttimer (1990) pointed out, was ambition of the classical humanists to elucidate qualities of a universal humanness. Buttimer (1990, p. 1) made it clear that: “For each facet of humanness – rationality or irrationality, artistic genius or political prowess – there is a geography.” Even while she and other humanists such as Tuan distanced themselves from essentialist thinking and rigidly phenomenological approaches in the mid-1970s, humanistic writing tended to imply that places exist ‘out there’ (Rose 1993).

For this reason Tim Cresswell (2004), in a text written to educate newcomers to the discipline, carefully presented humanistic conceptions of place but then, shifting tone, curtly dismissed them. The humanists, he wrote, “fail to recognize the differences between people and their relation to place. In the search for ‘essence’ – difference’ has no place” (p. 25). Also worth mentioning is the fact that Mitchell’s year 2000 publication *Cultural Geography: A Critical Introduction* contains only one specific reference to humanism in geography, and no references to either Tuan, Buttimer, Relph or Seamon.<sup>1</sup>

However, the humanistic goal of illuminating the subjective structure of ‘geographical knowledge,’ including “feelings and ideas in regard to space and place,” remains as worthwhile today as it did when Tuan wrote those words in 1976 (p. 266) (or, indeed, when J.K. Wright foreshadowed them in 1947). Geographers who have acquired sophisticated spatial understandings that may be implicated in normative philosophical positions – those who are, in Cresswell’s words, “informed by Marxism, feminism and post-structuralism” – may “shy away from place as a concept” (Cresswell 2004, p. 26); alternately, they may develop complex, specialized conceptions of place that illuminate what they hold to be its ‘real’ nature. Either way, such work exists in a plane remote from that in which ‘uninformed’ geographical subjects comprehend, imagine and relate to place in their everyday lives. An example is Doreen Massey’s influential paper ‘A Global Sense of Place’ (1994). Cresswell (2004) highlights this paper as offering a superior alternative to the place conceptions of humanistic geography. Massey argues that places are not what people commonly assume them to be – towns, parks, theaters, homes and other such bounded and conceptually distinct locales. Instead, she urges geographers to conceive of a place in more abstract terms as a “particular constellation of social relations, meeting and weaving together at a particular locus” (p. 322). Massey’s invitation to view places as articulations of social relations is helpful, because it promotes a sensibility and an inclination to look beyond the local in order to more fully comprehend place. This can benefit not only geographers, but also people outside of the discipline because it can empower them to recognize and engage with the extra-local forces that shape their localities, as, for example, studies in community networks have shown (Longan 2002). Yet

Massey's reductive move to privilege trans-local social networks as the essence of place downplays the immediate physical environment in subjective geographies; it downplays places as they *seem*. Her approach requires the geographer to adopt a God's-eye view that can see the global circuits and flows weaving together in place. (She even uses the example of a satellite peering down at the earth's surface to get her point across.) Massey offers no avenue for exploring the everyday, lived and felt geographies of less omniscient subjects. Humanists, by contrast, explore place as it emerges from the sensory and imaginative experience of subjects ensconced within ambient environments (see, for example, Ryden 1993; Tuan 1977; de Witt 2003). An awareness of place at this level is, I believe, the main deliverable of humanistic to human geography.

It could be argued that, at bottom, humanists simply focus on the wrong thing. Ensconced within Plato's cave, they study the shadows on the wall instead of reality. Yet this criticism seems unreasonable; the humanities, whether folklore, religion, literature, the visual arts and or humanistic geography all accept as valid the project of exploring subjective understandings of the world. In so exploring humanists are forced to rely on hermeneutic modes of interpretation which lack the structure and truth verifiability of social scientific methodologies. Humanists do not remain detached from their objects of study, but strive to enter their subjects' worlds with "curiosity and respect" (Lerner 1997, p. 201). Their findings are bound to be biased, partial, suggestive – and intimate. In what Buttimer (1976, pp. 277–278) identified as the absence of inherited intellectual constructs, of "ideas and languages" suitable for describing how people know and make place, humanistic geographers sometimes rely on idiosyncratic and unruly methods, on "focused intuition" (Ley 1981b, p. 219) and writerly art. Far from being humbled by this, some practitioners aspire to make geography itself an art (Meinig 1983). One hopes that geography does not "know its place" as a social science too well to tolerate a few of them (Nisbet 1976).

However, it is not being suggested here that every idiosyncrasy of humanistic geography ought to be put up with as the cost of its way of doing business. The remainder of this paper focuses on the tendency of humanists to essentialize as a most serious issue – one that, if left unchecked, would perhaps render it the fatal flaw that critics such as Cresswell present it as. Therefore, the goal is to build upon the humanistic approach to place in order to bolster it in the face of the claim that it essentializes. I am motivated by the belief that the humanistic conception of place remains 'essential' – but not irreclaimably essentialist – geography.

The strategy here will be to outline a model of place that admits variation into how geographic subjects apprehend and relate to 'place' as place has been conceived by influential humanistic geographers. The model rests on constructivist epistemological foundations, and thus presumes that while reality exists 'out there' it only attains meaning 'in

here' – in human consciousness. More specifically, the constituent elements of places exist independently of our awareness of them but there is no 'placeness' about them until they enter the consciousness of geographic subjects. By focusing on variation in this the aim is to undercut the criticism that would marginalize all of humanistic geography for non-intrinsic flaws in some of its incarnations.

### **Inexorability in humanistic conceptions of place**

The model proposed simultaneously addresses what can be regarded as a second, non-intrinsic shortcoming of much humanistic writing about place, although not one that critics have rallied against. This is the assumption that spaces more or less inexorably become places over time as subjects encounter, inhabit and reflect on them. The model will introduce the concept of 'recalcitrant space' and will suggest that not all spaces are equally amenable to being transformed into places.

The starting point here is the humanistic conception of place (and space) most closely associated with Tuan (starting in 1974), but which informs the writing of Relph, Samuels and others. Congruent with their work on the subject, the study adapts the view of space as area to which a given subject (an individual or group) has developed neither emotional attachments nor objective, distanced awareness (i.e. 'sense') of (Samuels 1978). The subject has no felt connection to the area and has not formed any critical impression of it. Space in this sense lies entirely outside of human apprehension and can only be posited to exist as the antithesis to the known and/or felt world of places.

Again following Tuan (1996), place could in addition be defined as an area which a subject may not think consciously about, but to which the subject is tied by accumulated emotions and patterns of habit. The instant a subject reacts emotionally to an area, a place – however thin and ephemeral – is born. At the other end of the scale, thick accumulations of emotion can, like snowdrifts, be suffocating. On this score D. J. Waldie's memoir about life in a suburban tract house in Lakewood, California, reads like an avalanche. Lakewood was one of the innumerable, cookie-cutter, Levittown-type developments that sprang up across the country after World War II with the assistance of Federal Housing Authority mortgage financing and subdivision regulation. Waldie's parents, like millions of other young Americans, followed their dreams into these mass-produced, generic structures. Waldie's book suggests that the calculated, industrial cheapness of the houses and the suburban environments they spawned warped the lives of those within them. Yet as births, marriages, deaths, madness – the grand panoply of human existence – played out under their roofs, the houses acquired deep emotional resonance. Waldie never left the house he grew up in. He concludes his book, *Holy Land*

(1996), with a childhood memory of Good Friday mass in his church. The cross he held during the ceremony implicitly compares to his house.

While the congregation knelt and venerated the cross, the choir sang.

The hymn the choir sang was Pange Lingua, a hymn traditional for Good Friday.

Among its many verses are some addressed to the cross itself.

Dulce lignum,  
Dulces clavos,  
Dulce pondus sustinet.

Sweet the wood,  
Sweet the nails,  
Sweet the weight you bear. (p. 179)

Place as *inhabited* area invokes the Vidalian concept of *genre de vie*, entailing the loci of “routinely accepted patterns of behavior and interaction” (Buttimer 1976, p. 285). It is difficult to imagine a habit-saturated place as distinct from a meaning- or emotion-saturated one. Yet conceptually, the distinction makes sense. Habits are, by definition, fairly stable, and thus help underpin place. In turn, place underpins habits performed by the body. Casey (2001), drawing on Bourdieu, presents a conception of the ‘place-world’ that helps illustrate this view. For Casey, place and body are mutually engaged with and embedded within each other; each remains indeterminate while bearing the marks of implicitly persistent qualities of the other within itself. Casey thus highlights the *emplacement* of people as the flip side of the *inhabitation* of place.

Somewhat ironically, the ‘natural attitude’ with which people tend to inhabit places unreflectively is precisely what phenomenologists such as Seamon seek to transcend in their reductions to the lifeworld (Seamon 1979, p. 20). The interpretation of place adhered to in this paper is conspicuously anti-phenomenological on this count. Places experienced as, and through, interwoven scrimms of a priori theorization and processes of social construction are of interest precisely because they are the places that people subjectively inhabit and negotiate on a daily basis. A neighborhood is a typical example.<sup>2</sup>

The tri-axial conception of place derived from Tuan (as area imbued with emotion vs. meaning vs. as habit field) is often presented within an assumed historic narrative wherein spaces become places almost inexorably over time as subjects become increasingly familiar with them. This assumption rides on the back of the fundamental geographic awareness of how humans have changed the face of the earth while making it into a home. Places at multiple scales emanate from even the most mundane of human actions; we are “geographical leviathans,” writes Sack (1999, p. 35; see also Goss 1993). The humanistic tendency to celebrate human

creativity and intention further endorses a view of geographic subjects as inveterate, effortless place-makers.

Some spaces become places in a flash, with the naming of a hill or the reciting of an imperial claim to possession, but the humanist's focus on lived experience imparts a bias towards thinking that places come into their own gradually. "Sense of place is rarely acquired in passing," writes Tuan (1975, p. 164):

To know a place well requires long residence and deep involvement. It is possible to appreciate the visual qualities of a place with one short visit, but not how it smells on a frosty morning, how city sounds reverberate across narrow streets to expire over the broad square, or how the pavement burns through gym-shoe soles and melts bicycle tires in August. (p. 164)

Places so described resemble wine; they gain in complexity and character as time passes and as they accrue private and public memories and meanings.

One currently popular variant reverses this narrative, arguing that places have thinned out and lost their singularity due to the global spread of bland, homogeneous, 'placeless' urban landscapes (Relph 1976; Casey 2001). Other scholars challenge the reversal by pointing out how even the most generic of globalized places, such as McDonald's restaurants, are adapted to the localities in which they are established (Yan 1997; see also Lewis 2000). To a 'critical' cultural geographer, such as Mitchell (2000), the important question to ask may be, who has the power to define what counts as a significant cultural difference? The humanistic geographer, by contrast, stubbornly insists that the subjective experience of the on-the-ground, 'uninformed' world traveler, who may now sample Big Macs from Seoul to Los Angeles, continues to merit investigating on its own terms.

My own objection to the humanistic approach is that it has not explored the possibility that the historic narrative itself may be flawed because there might be impediments to place-making. However, this flaw presents an opportunity to develop humanistic conceptions of place away from their tendency to essentialize. The concept of recalcitrant space, which is presented here, enhances geographic sensitivity to the differences in how people encounter space and make place. In particular, it is suggested that not all space is experienced as equally pliant, or amenable to place-making. Just as people may experience some places as strongly-defined and very place-like (i.e. bounded and distinct from their surroundings, like a school), they may experience others as persistently un-place-like in certain ways. This might occur, for example, as a consequence of the processes of globalization as Massey discusses them. Places that manifest the weavings-together of trans-local social networks may seem opaque and peculiar, creatures of incomprehensible logic, to subjects encountering them. While Massey calls for geographers to conceptualize place as these weavings together, the humanist calls for understanding how a person might feel about a place so woven together

based on their immediate sensory experience of the place. Consider again the poem 'To Pico': Perhaps one reason why Schjeldahl's protagonist describes Pico as looking "unintended, uncalculated, un contemplated by anyone ever until this moment" is that it represents a confluence of multiple, dynamic, trans-local social relations. If this is the case then Pico must be understood as the largely unintended byproduct of reverberating forces that might be dimly sensed or totally unknown to the casual visitor (or even the local). In this light 'To Pico' can be interpreted as an outburst of geographic frustration, an attempt to grasp the maddeningly elusive logics of place 'from within' – by direct sensory contact – when they are more readily decoded by reference to forces 'without:'

You are self-fulfilling prophecy  
You would taste chalky, if you had a taste  
You would smell of dry rust, if you had a smell  
You would be, if a sound, a faint, distant rattling  
You'd be grainy to the touch, of a hardness gradually crumbling  
You would be to the inner sense, and are, the paradox of a grandiose  
humility (p. 50)

This is how the place *seems* to Scheldahl's protagonist. Even lacking explicit knowledge of the distant linkages that shape and help explain Pico, the poem is, from a humanistic approach, neither 'wrong' nor geographically irrelevant. Curiously enough, what matters most in the context of this paper is the *quality* of how Pico seems. Scheldahl's protagonist deploys highly refined poetic sensibilities in order to put his finger on 'it,' to render precisely how Pico seems to him. "You are unlike swift Olympic, purposeful Santa Monica, wishful Wilshire, nerve-racking Sunset" (p. 249). In contrast to these other Los Angeles boulevards, Pico cannot be described with a simple adjective; instead it takes a two-page poem shot through with peculiar, subtle insights to convey how the place feels. The intertwined tones of exasperation and ridicule seem organic to the project. As Foucault (1972) has argued, naming and knowing are exercises of power. Yet Scheldahl's poet-protagonist hardly swaggers as he conquers: his wisecracks are linguistic spear-jabs into the dense blubber of his mammoth prey, with no single thrust likely to hit a vital organ. The thing he wants to know and name – to literally put in its place – is too vast and elusive to permit a more decisive style.

You abstractly acknowledge the sun  
You do not care  
You are Los Angeles and not Los Angeles  
You have unlimited, because unneeded, parking  
You make each pedestrian look like a thief (p. 249)

The Pico of 'To Pico' is an elusive place to the poet-protagonist in two senses: it is elusive in terms of the emotions that it evokes and the

meanings that it holds. Therefore, the poem can be read as a display of geographic heroism, a sustained effort to make a place out of a space that does not easily lend itself to that process for that subject. It was perhaps then not historically inevitable that Pico should become a place to this protagonist. (Ironically, however, because he rose to the challenge of rendering Pico as place, the result *is* like a certain kind of wine: quirky and subtle, an acquired taste.)

The remainder of this paper will elaborate on the tension between place and recalcitrant space. Recalcitrant spaces resist, in the experience of geographical subjects, becoming places. Again, it is important to emphasize that space and place do not exist objectively in the world and do not have essences. The recalcitrance which is referred to should therefore not be understood as a property of space itself, but as a quality of how geographic subjects experience particular spaces.

### **A model of recalcitrant space**

A tri-axial spatial spectrum is proposed that stretches from highly recalcitrant to highly pliant. Presented diagrammatically, this idea gives integrated expression to the human experience of space and place. In other words, the pliant-recalcitrant spectrum offers a framework for integrating place as area imbued with emotions, as area imbued with meanings and as habit fields. Because the tri-axial spectrum offers potentially infinite gradations of recalcitrance, it allows for infinite variation in how geographical subjects encounter spaces. Thus by challenging the historical assumption of humanistic geography, degrees of variation have been inserted into its conception of place.

Figure 1 represents a space that is recalcitrant in terms of meaning – it is an ‘enigmatic’ space. An example would be the space of the Basilica of Sacré-Coeur in the experience of a typical tourist as David Harvey (1979) envisions it. According to Harvey the Basilica is so thickly layered with ambiguous and contradictory meanings that many visitors would be unable to disentangle them.

... the visitor who looks at that mausoleum-like structure that is the Sacré-Coeur might well wonder what it is that is interred there. The spirit of 1789? The sins of France? The alliance between intransigent Catholicism and reactionary monarchism? The blood of martyrs like Lecomte and Clement Thomas? Or that of Eugene Varlin and the twenty thousand or so communards mercilessly slaughtered along with him?

The building hides its secrets in sepulchral silence.” (Harvey 1979, p. 381)

With its ‘silence’ the Sacré-Coeur does not cooperate in the process of place-making on one of the three axes. It frustrates the geographic structuring of the space of the Butte Montmarte into a monumental place,

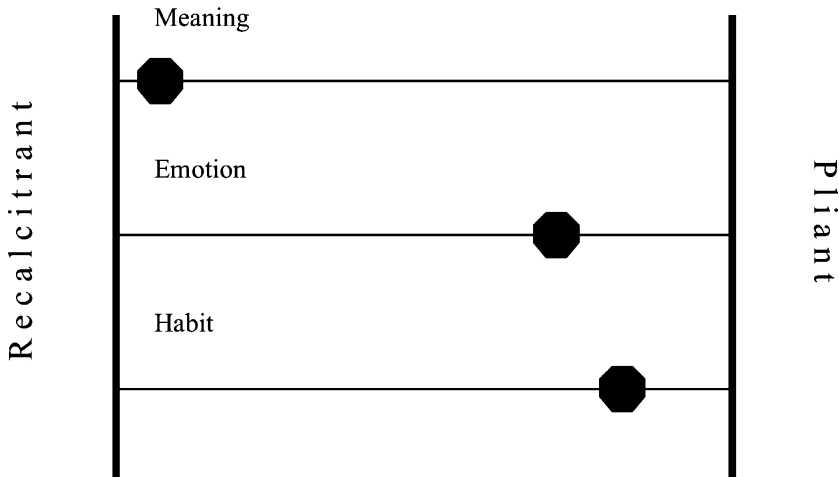


Figure 1. Enigmatic space.

one with a coherent and legible set of meanings. Pliant on two axes, it is a bear on the third not easily lassoed with symbolic meaning.

Of course, to any given subject a place can have more than one (set of) meaning(s). The sort of meaning Harvey describes derives from a combination of both intended architectural symbolism and overarching political-historical context. Yet on more mundane levels the *Sacr -Coeur* undoubtedly also has a variety of easily grasped meanings to subjects. To a workman on the crew that maintains the paint job on the building or to an ice cream vendor who plies the tourist trade at the site, the building may have obvious meanings. Hence 'recalcitrant' might describe a place's meaning in light of a given context, even while other straightforward meanings apply to the same place for the same geographical subject. Hence we observe the multiplication of place in the interior world of geographical subjects. To capture this multiplication with the model here, it is necessary to draw separate diagrams to represent how each geographic subject experiences a given space in each potentially relevant context. The ice cream vendor might find the meaning of the *Sacr -Coeur* pliant in an economic-strategy sense (it attracts a lot of tourists who buy ice cream), but recalcitrant when she reflects on its symbolic meaning. This point about the meaning applies to the other dimensions of place as well. A single place can trigger complicated arrays of emotions and it can provide the setting for multiple clusters of habits.

Each model might also need to be redrawn to account for historical changes in geographical subjects' relation to place. A given subject may experience the same space differently over time. Thus if the ice cream vendor learns more about the *Sacr -Coeur* she might arrive at a new, clearer understanding of its symbolic meaning. Subsequent investigation

may then add new, contradictory shades of meaning to the structure that undermine her previously held understanding, so that the space grows more recalcitrant on the axis of meaning, at least temporarily.

Spaces represented by Figure 2 are pliant on all three axes. They are 'adhesive spaces' that readily become clustered with emotions, habits and meanings. A mother's lap, for example, is for a particular child an emotional hearth that is habitually occupied and is, for many in society, a potent symbol of parent-child love.

Figure 3 represents the types of landscapes that Relph (1976) terms 'placeless' and which have become increasingly dominant in the contemporary urban landscape – shopping malls, chain restaurants and so on. These generic, commercialized spaces reverberate only with shallow, carefully-orchestrated emotions and meanings intended to promote a norm of guilt-free consumption (Goss 1993). Such *mise en spaces* – staged, hollow, unreal – may be highly pliant, however, along the axis of habitual behavior since they offer similar products and services and are laid out in familiar patterns the world over. Such spaces may provide comfort to world travelers, allowing them to *act* knowingly for a few minutes before they venture back to more challenging, for-them scriptless local spaces. Geographers and others, including, no doubt, many Starbucks-sipping global travelers, nonetheless regard such globalized spaces with ambivalence because they manifest Western capitalist hegemony and erode the uniqueness of local places (Sack 2003). It should be noted that such places can bring the exotic to their host societies when they first arrive. When the first McDonald's restaurant opened in Moscow, curious customers formed a line that stretched down the block. An employee using a megaphone warned them not to be offended by the peculiarities of the

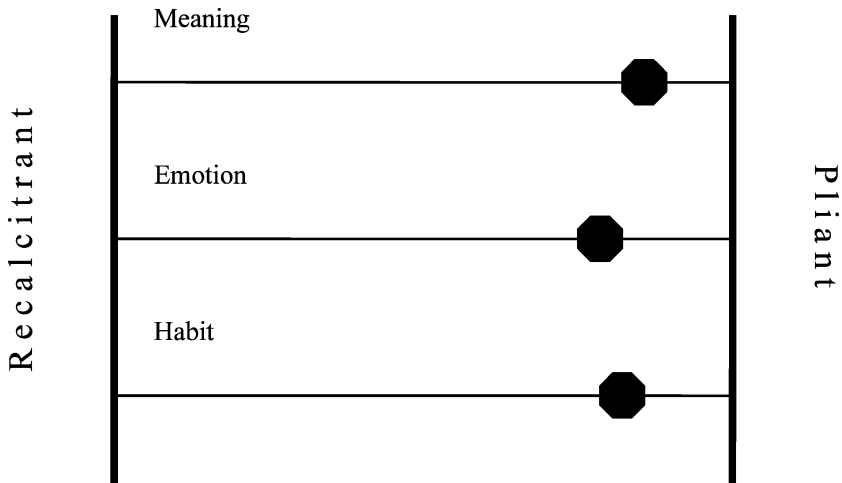


Figure 2. Adhesive space.

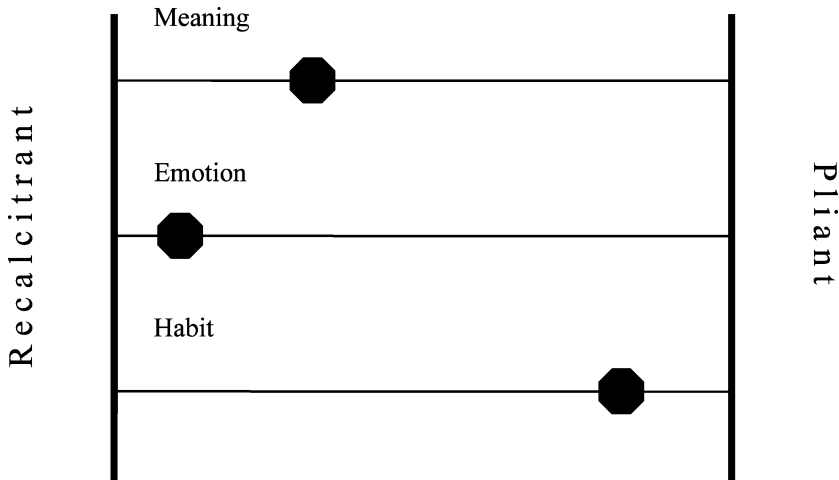


Figure 3. Mise en space.

American service-industry style that were on display within. “The employees inside will smile at you”, she said. “This does not mean that they are laughing at you. We smile because we are happy to serve you” (Watson 1997, p. 28).

Figure 4 represents spaces that a subject readily imbues with meanings and emotions, but in which the subject finds it difficult to establish habitual behaviors. These ‘non-Aristotelian spaces’ do not serve neatly as containers; those inside them do not easily or comfortably settle. The term is worth unpacking far enough to appreciate that Aristotle, who employed a proto-phenomenological approach to the question of what it means for something to be ‘in,’ believed that a thing’s being ‘in a place’ constituted the most basic of the many senses of the term (Casey 1997, p. 54). Such prioritizing maps neatly onto the Aristotelian cosmology in which all material things are already ‘in’ place. And yet things do not always seem this way at a personal, subjective level. The memoir of Jacobo Timerman (1981), a Jewish journalist imprisoned by Argentina’s military government in the 1970s, offers a personal account of being ‘in’ non-Aristotelian space. Timerman understood the meaning of his treatment and felt powerful emotions about it, but struggled to negotiate his confinement physically. In his tiny cell he was unable to establish patterns of movement and behaviors that could be repeated easily, without conscious effort. The cell’s narrowness, lack of a toilet and dampness required him to constantly readjust and attend to the position of his body.

The floor of the cell is permanently wet. Somewhere there’s a leak. The mattress is also wet. I have a blanket, and to prevent that from getting wet I keep it on my shoulders constantly. If I lie down with the blanket on top of me, the part of my body touching the mattress gets soaked. I discover it’s

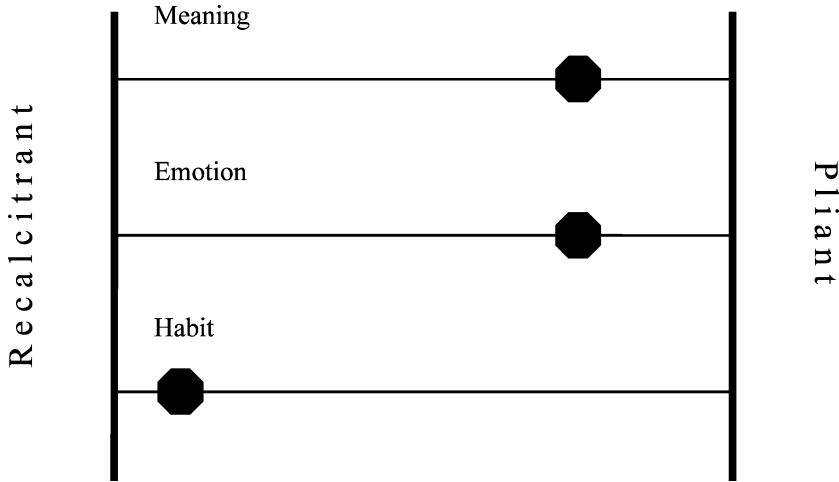


Figure 4. Non-Aristotelian space.

best to roll up the mattress so that one part of it doesn't touch the ground. In time, the top part dries. This means, though, that I can't lie down, but must sleep seated. My life goes on during this period – for how long? – either standing or seated. (Timerman, 1981, p. 3)

As made vivid by this example, non-Aristotelian space ruptures the processes, discussed earlier, by which Casey argues that place and body become mutually engaged and embedded. The prison cell resisted the 'outgoingness' of Timerman's body, utterly failing to accommodate his presence. This could be seen as a consequence of the place functioning correctly – given that its function includes causing misery.

In contrast to Timerman's tiny cell, some recalcitrant spaces are 'oceanic', overwhelming (Figure 5). This is a large category of recalcitrant space, and examples abound. Recalling again Schjeldahl's poem, Pico Boulevard starts us off by providing an elusive, impervious space in the heart of a sprawling city. Pico is "inhuman horizontal monstrous in the night." As an unbounded space blazing with lights yet fading at the extremes to darkness, Pico lacks the supportive psychic infrastructure of place, the secure finitude of a graspable totality. It is unsettling and incomplete: "You feature no haven."

From Pico Boulevard it requires but a shift in scale to discover a second example of oceanic space – the city through which it runs. As a metropolis constituted largely of free-standing houses, Los Angeles is particularly amenable to a reading informed by the phenomenology of Bachelard (1994). In his analysis of the house, Bachelard regards the 'nook' as an innermost space of protection and centeredness. But the nook is not, for Bachelard, an enclosure; it is a space of "intimate immensity," one in which the entire world is sensed and felt (quoted in

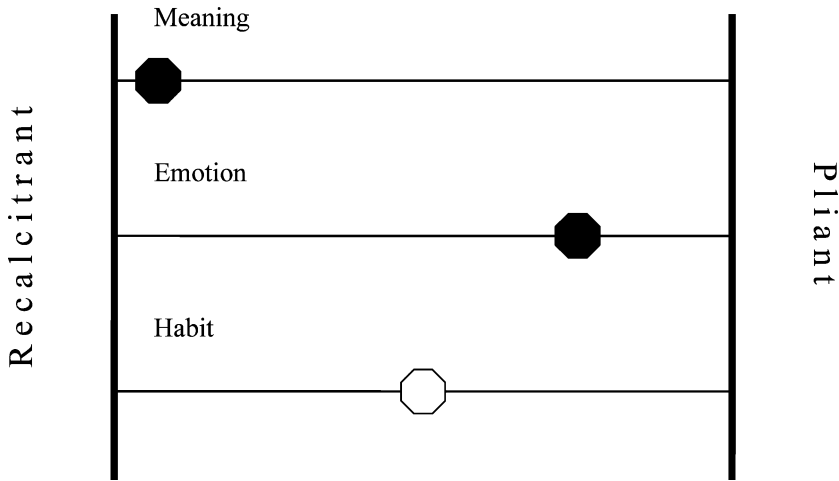


Figure 5. Oceanic space. (The Habit axis is irrelevant in this case.)

Casey 1997, p. 294). In the becalmed center of the house, where the anxieties and pressures of an individual's particular life recede, one may attain a broader perspective. Now, consider Los Angeles the way it is often photographed, as a sea of houses which, at night, resemble a galaxy of stars. Each house contains its own Bachelardian nooks, loci of entire worlds. A city so envisioned is more dizzyingly oceanic than a city of massive public squares and monuments.

Literal oceanic space provides an eponymous, additional example. The historian Marcia Yonemoto (1999) writes that during the Tokugawa period of Japan (1603–1868), for example, thought systems imported from China privileged an inward-looking, landscape-oriented sensibility. An intense bonding with place at the political/cultural center traded upon the marginalization of distant environments, including the vast Pacific Ocean. The Tokugawa leadership forbade the construction of ocean-going ships, and Japanese sailors attained little knowledge of the sea in this period. Navigation around Japan was accomplished by staying within sight of the coastline and tracking a ship's progress by observing the passage of landmarks on shore. Navigation was aided by 'Sequential View Maps,' fold-out picture maps depicting towns, mountains, points, shrines and other landmarks that would be visible from the deck of a ship in coastal waters. The makers of these maps portrayed water only towards the bottom, where it was sometimes obscured by map legends and other writing. Sequential View Maps illustrate (literally) a conception of land as place and the ocean as an unknowable sum of – as oceanic – space.

In the English language the adjective 'oceanic' applies to things of such size and magnitude as to be overwhelming. In the context here, of course, overwhelming describes the feeling one has when confronted with

a space of ineffable mystery rather than inestimable physical size. Contemplation of subatomic particles may trigger the same sense of intellectual vertigo as contemplation of the stars, locating the two in equally oceanic spaces. By contrast, places – of whatever physical size – tend not to evoke such feelings. Places are “small worlds,” writes Tuan (1996, p. 455); they are geographically digested spaces, illuminated by familiar meanings and codes. The stargazer who merely counts off recognized constellations in the night sky has halted at the edge of oceanic space. Code-bearing places may be sources of comfort and orientation in the world while, as phenomenologists point out, they tend to be known to us through a scrim of a priori theorization that renders our connections to them, in their view, inauthentic. Radical geographers would note that such places assist in the hegemonic reproduction of a corporate state (Harvey 1974). The recalcitrance of oceanic space therefore resonates with both the phenomenologists’ call to transcend the ‘natural attitude’ and radical geographers’ concern for sites of potential liberation.

Somewhat paradoxically, many people believe that distant space can answer the questions that its existence begs. It is commonly assumed that the clues required to solve the most gripping puzzles of universe can only be discovered by searching the remote depths of space for data. Thus, for example, television news reports about NASA missions invariably conclude with the boilerplate comment that scientists think the missions may provide clues about the origins of the universe. However, this ritually-expressed faith in space to solve its own mysteries does not render it any less oceanic, or beyond our rational comprehension as place.

## **Conclusion**

The goal of this paper has been to defend humanistic geography against the charge that it essentializes by augmenting the humanistic conception of place. The model of recalcitrant space emphasizes variation in subjective encounters with space and place. Places are not reified things in the world with their own essences, but are subjectively understood, experienced and created through complex intersections of meanings, emotions and habitual behaviors in material locations. The geography of the subjective world of places varies from person to person and from moment to moment. Efforts to describe an unchanging essence of place are misguided. It is meaningful variation – and its sources in the labyrinth of the human mind as a given subject navigates the exterior world – that a humanistic approach is particularly well-suited, in its focus on ‘naïve’ place-understandings, its tendencies toward holism and away from restrictive theoretical approaches, its sensitivity to art and other forms of expression, to explore.

This paper ends with a final thought about recalcitrant spaces. Although they are sometimes ‘problem’ spaces to be ‘coped with,’ they also play positive roles to be appreciated. By their recalcitrant example, they can make us more sensitive to and appreciative of pliant places. More importantly, the challenges they pose to geographic subjects can inspire meaningful and productive responses. A subject may write a poem (like Schjeldahl’s on Pico), or a penetrating essay (like Harvey’s on the Sacré-Coeur), or, if the subject is a society, it may fund a space program in hopes of solving cosmic riddles. Such responses provide, in turn, further grist and justification for a continued engagement with the core themes of humanistic geography.

## Notes

1. A striking illustration of the declining status of humanistic conceptions of place among even the most sympathetic geographers can be seen by comparing two influential texts published just five years apart. The first, Agnew *et al.*’s *Human Geography: An Essential Anthology* (1996) excerpts a wide range of humanistic work spanning the twentieth century. The nearly 700-page book is divided into five sections, one of which is ‘Region, Place and Locality.’ This section contains an excerpt from Tuan’s *Space and Place: The Perspective of Experience* (1977). *Space and Place* is, of course, a landmark text in which Tuan elaborated many of his core ideas about place. That Agnew *et al.* chose to excerpt this text as ‘essential’ human geography seems unsurprising. However, what is surprising is that in 2001 Adams *et al.* made quite different editorial choices in *Textures of Place: Exploring Humanist Geographies*. *Textures* is a collection of papers inspired by and reflecting upon Tuan’s life’s work. Yet the editors distance themselves from the unmodified ‘humanistic’ label, terming the essays “critical humanist geographies” (Adams *et al.* 2001, p. xvi). The book is organized into four parts, each based on a theme identified with a particular book by Tuan. The parts are: ‘Landscapes of Dominance and Affection,’ ‘Segmented Worlds and Selves,’ ‘Moralities and Imagination’ and ‘Cosmos Versus Hearth.’ While these are all important examples of Tuan’s work, it seems odd that a work inspired by the sum of Tuan’s geographic oeuvre organized this way, and with the word ‘place’ in its title, granted neither *Space and Place* (1977) nor *Topophilia* (1974) its own section. That *Textures* contains seven papers under the rubric of ‘Landscapes of Dominance and Affection’ (one of which is titled ‘Sense of Place as a Positional Good: Locating New Bedford in Space and Time’ (Duncan and Duncan 2001)) but none under ‘Space and Place’, a vastly more influential text than Tuan’s work on “the making of pets” – is notable. Taken together, the two books document how humanistic conceptions of place underwent a significant reevaluation in geography in the late 1990s. While Tuan’s specific conception of place was presented as ‘essential’ geography in 1996, its profile had sunk to the status of permeating sub-theme within his own corpus of work by 2001.
2. In the past decade Sack (1997, 2003) has developed an alternative, and quite powerful theory of place conceived as the product of ‘strands’ from the realms of nature, social relations and meaning. While acknowledging Sack’s enormous

contributions to humanistic thinking about place, the paper here advances a constructivist perspective precisely to avoid the charge of essentialism that a realist approach – such as Sack's – might attract.

## References

- Adams, P.C. *et al.* 2001. *Textures of place: exploring humanist geographies*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Agnew, J. *et al.*, 1996. *Human geography: an essential anthology*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Bachelard, G., 1994. *The poetics of space*, transl. by Maria Jolas. Boston: Beacon Press.
- Buttimer, A., 1976. Grasping the dynamism of the lifeworld. *Annals of the Association of American Geographers*, 66 (2), 277–292.
- Buttimer, A., 1990. Geography, humanism, and global concern. *Annals of the Association of American Geographers*, 80 (1), 1–33.
- Casey, E.S., 1997. *The fate of place: a philosophical history*. Los Angeles: University of California Press.
- Casey, E.S., 2001. Body, self, and landscape: a geophilosophical inquiry into the place-world. *In*: P.C. Adams *et al.*, eds. *Textures of place: exploring humanist geographies*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 403–425.
- Cresswell, T., 1996. *In placelout of place: geography, ideology, and transgression*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Cresswell, T., 2004. *Place: a short introduction*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- de Wit, C.W., 2003. Field methods for investigating sense of place. *The North American Geographer*, 5(1–2), 5–30.
- Duncan, J.S. and Duncan, N.G., 2001. Sense of place as a positional good: locating New Bedford in space and time. *In*: P.C. Adams *et al.*, eds. *Textures of place: exploring humanist geographies*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 41–54.
- Entrikin, J.N., 1976. Contemporary humanism in geography. *Annals of the Association of American Geographers*, 66, 615–632.
- Entrikin, J.N., 1991. *The betweenness of place: towards a geography of modernity*. Basingstoke: Macmillan Education.
- Foucault, M., 1972. *The archeology of knowledge & the discourse on language*. Trans. by A.M. Sheridan Smith, New York: Pantheon.
- Goss, J., 1993. The 'magic of the mall': an analysis of form, function, and meaning in the contemporary retail built environment. *Annals of the Association of American Geographers*, 83 (1), 18–47.
- Gregory, D., 1981. Human agency and human geography. *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*, 6, 1–18.
- Harvey, D., 1973. *Social justice and the city*. London: Edward Arnold.
- Harvey, D., 1974. What kind of geography for what kind of public policy? *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*, 63, 18–24.
- Harvey, D., 1979. Monument and myth. *Annals of the Association of American Geographers*, 69 (3), 362–381.
- Lees, L., 2002. Textures of place: exploring humanist geographies (book review). *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space*, 20, 376–378.

- Lerner, G., 1997. *Why history matters: life and thought*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Lewis, M., 2000. Global ignorance. *The Geographical Review*, 90 (4), 603–626.
- Ley, D., 1981a. Cultural/humanistic geography. *Progress in Human Geography*, 5, 249–257.
- Ley, D., 1981b. Behavioral geography and the philosophies of meaning. In: K.R. Cox and Reginald G. Gollege, eds. *Behavioral problems in geography revisited*. New York: Methuen, 209–231.
- Longan, M.W., 2002. Building a global sense of place: the community networking movement in the United States. *Urban Geography*, 23 (3), 213–236.
- Massey, D., 1994. *Space, place and gender*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Meinig, D., 1983. Geography as an art. *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*, 8, 314–328.
- Mitchell, D., 2000. *Cultural geography: a critical introduction*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Nisbet, R., 1976. *Sociology as an art form*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Pile, S., 1993. Human agency and human geography revisited: a critique of 'new models' of the self. *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*, 18, 122–139.
- Relf, E.C., 1976. *Place and placelessness*. London: Pion.
- Rose, G., 1993. *Feminism and geography: the limits of geographical knowledge*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Ryden, K., 1993. *Mapping the invisible landscape*. Iowa City: University of Iowa Press.
- Sack, R., 1997. *Homo geographicus*. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press.
- Sack, R., 1999. A sketch of a geographic theory of morality. *Annals of the Association of American Geographers*, 89, 26–44.
- Sack, R., 2003. *A geographical guide to the real and the good*. New York: Routledge.
- Samuels, M.S., 1978. Existentialism and human geography. In: D. Ley and M. S. Samuels, eds. *Humanistic geography: prospects and problems*. London: Croom Helm, 22–40.
- Schjeldahl, P., 1991. To Pico. In: M. Wilson, ed. *The hydrogen jukebox: selected writings of Peter Schjeldahl 1978–1990*. Los Angeles: University of California Press.
- Seamon, D. 1979. *A geography of the lifeworld: movement, rest, and encounter*. New York: St. Martin's Press.
- Timerman, J., 1981. *Prisoner without a name, cell without a number*. New York: Vintage Books.
- Tuan, Y-F., 1974. *Topophilia: a study of environmental perception, attitudes, and values*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall.
- Tuan, Y-F., 1975. Place, an experiential perspective. *Geographical Review*, 65, 151–165.
- Tuan, Y-F., 1976. Humanistic geography. *Annals of the Association of American Geographers*, 66(2), 266–276.
- Tuan, Y-F., 1977. *Space and place: the perspective of experience*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

- Tuan, Y-F., 1996. Space and place: humanist perspective. In: J. Agnew *et al.*, eds. *Human geography: an essential anthology*, Oxford: Blackwell, 444–457.
- Waldie, D.J., 1996. *Holy land: a suburban memoir*. New York: W.W. Norton.
- Watson, J.L., 1997. Transnationalism, localization, and fast foods in East Asia. In: J.L. Watson, ed. *Golden Arches East: McDonald's in East Asia*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1–38.
- Wright, J.K., 1947. Terrae incognitae: the place of the imagination in geography. *Annals of the Association of American Geographers*, 37, 1–15.
- Yan, Y., 1997. McDonald's in Beijing: the localization of Americana. In: J.L. Watson, ed. *Golden Arches East: McDonald's in East Asia*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 39–76.
- Yonemoto, M., 1999. Maps and metaphors of the 'small Eastern sea' in Tokugawa Japan (1603–1868). *Geographical Review*, 89(2), 169–187.