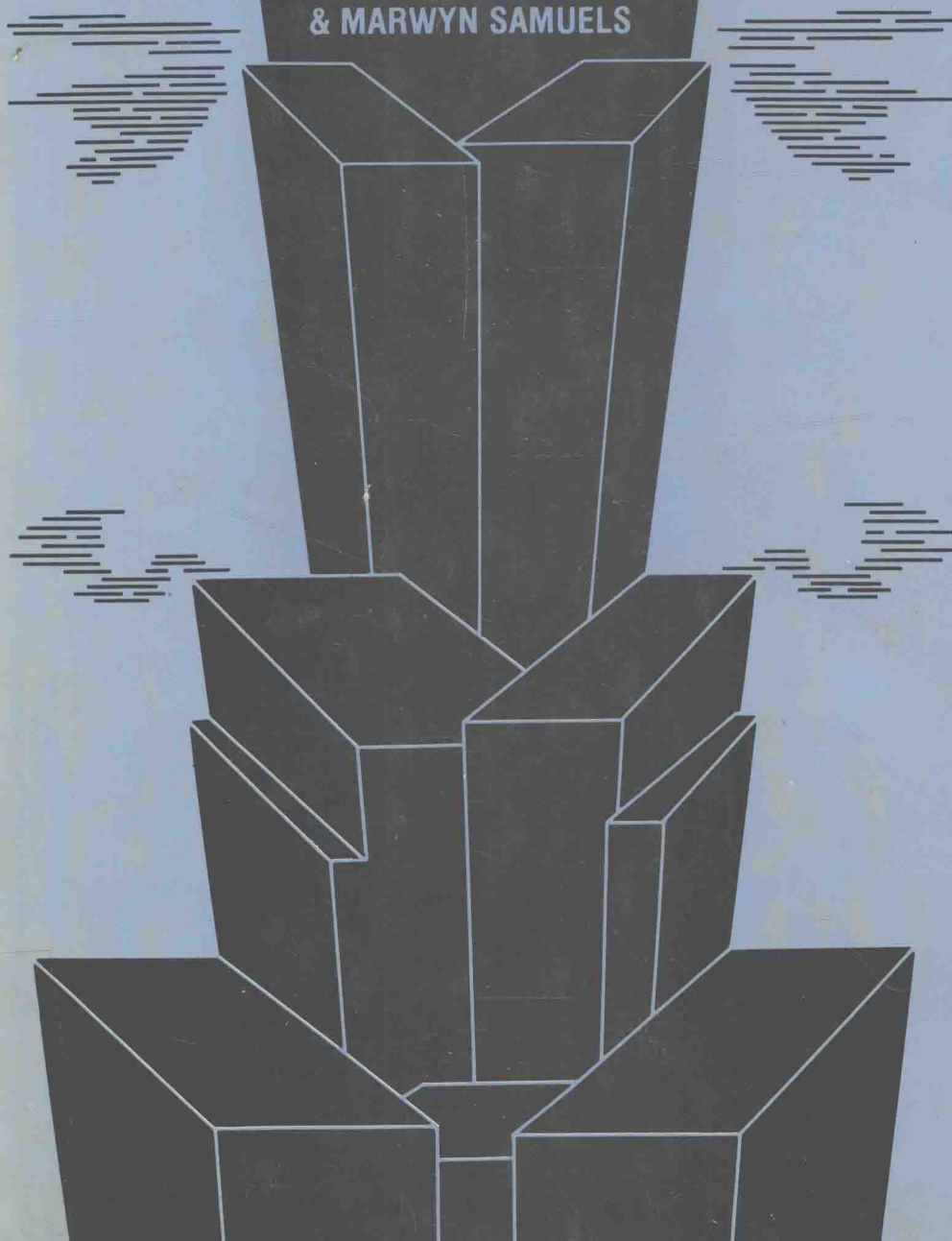


HUMANISTIC GEOGRAPHY

PROSPECTS & PROBLEMS
EDITED BY DAVID LEY
& MARWYN SAMUELS



HUMANISTIC GEOGRAPHY PROSPECTS AND PROBLEMS

Edited by
David Ley
and
Marwyn S. Samuels

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*And men go about to wonder at the heights of mountains,
and the mighty waves of the sea, and the wide sweep of rivers, and the
circuit of the ocean, and the revolution of the stars,
but themselves they consider not.*

ST. AUGUSTINE

Humanisons la géographie humaine.

MAX SORRE

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CONTENTS

- Chapter 1 Introduction: Contexts of Modern Humanism in Geography 1
David Ley and Marwyn S. Samuels

PART ONE EPISTEMOLOGICAL ORIENTATIONS

- Overview 19
- Chapter 2 Existentialism and Human Geography 22
Marwyn S. Samuels
- Chapter 3 Social Geography and Social Action 41
David Ley
- Chapter 4 Charism and Context: The Challenge of *La Géographie Humaine* 58
Anne Buttimer
- Chapter 5 The Vidal-Durkheim Debate 77
Vincent Berdoulay
- Chapter 6 Towards a Humanized Conception of Economic Geography 91
Iain Wallace
- Chapter 7 Of Ambiguity or Far Cries from a Memorializing Mamafesta 109
Gunnar Olsson

PART TWO METHODOLOGICAL IMPLICATIONS

- Overview 121
- Chapter 8 The Historical Mind and the Practice of Geography 123
Cole Harris
- Chapter 9 Understanding the Subjective Meaning of Places 138
Edward Gibson
- Chapter 10 The Landscape Indicators School in German Geography 155
Robert Geipel
- Chapter 11 Reflections on Experiential Field Work 173
Graham D. Rowles
- Chapter 12 Literature and Geography: Implications for Geographical Research 194
Yi-Fu Tuan
- Chapter 13 Introducing the Cartography of Reality 207
Denis Wood

PART THREE SOME RESEARCH DIRECTIONS

- Overview 221
- Chapter 14 The Concepts of "Place" and "Land" in the Judaeo-Christian Tradition 224
James M. Houston
- Chapter 15 Goethe's Approach to the Natural World: Implications for Environmental Theory and Education 238
David Seamon

viii CONTENTS

- Chapter 16 The Structuring of Space in Place Names and Words for Place 251
David E. Sopher
- Chapter 17 The Social Construction of Unreality: An Interactionist Approach to the Tourist's Cognition of Environment 269
James S. Duncan
- Chapter 18 Individual and Landscape: Thoughts on China and the *Tao* of Mao 283
Marwyn S. Samuels
- Chapter 19 Knowing One's Place: "The Coloured People" and the Group Areas Act in Cape Town 297
John Western
- Chapter 20 The Urban Community Movement: Moving Toward Public Households 319
James T. Lemon

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION: CONTEXTS OF MODERN HUMANISM IN GEOGRAPHY

DAVID LEY
MARWYN S. SAMUELS

*The humanist approach to learning may prove more congenial to
the coming generation than any other viewpoint.¹*

JAMES PARSONS 1969

During the late 1960s something was brewing in the conceptual domain of social science theory and geography that brought many, if not all, the accepted paradigms and priorities of the analytical tradition under question. A movement toward or, more properly, a reawakened awareness of humanist principles and aims over and against a preoccupation with the techniques of scientific rationality began to emerge. Humanism, as it were, was rediscovered as the central concern for a geography of man.

The contexts of that rediscovery, hence the tone of modern humanism at the outset, were initially negative or, at least, broadly critical. For all its munificence, the overarching growth ethic, highlighted by an explosive technology both on the planet and in extraterrestrial space, increasingly appeared as the bearer of monumental self-destruction. The convergence of science and technology, once the Promethean harbinger of utopian society, began to emerge more as a central villain in the exhaustion and despoilation of man's own environment. The linking of scientific rationality and politics, once the hallmark of enlightened democracy, moreover, began to emerge as the chief mechanism for a stronger, if more subtle and therefore less penetrable, despotism. This was perhaps especially the case in the United States where, in the wake of race riots, the decay of central cities, the repression of dissent, and one of the most viciously divisive wars ever fought by men in the name of common ideals, many of the most cherished aspirations of enlightened Western civilization were dramatically put to the test and found wanting.

For all the hyperbole and behavioral excesses of the period, in short, only those most insensitive to the social and intellectual nuances of their

own time and place could have lived through the 1960s and emerged without some profound doubts about the ethical base and efficacy of the goals, let alone the methods, of established authority and its supportive sciences. Indeed, that the sciences, and especially the social sciences, either reinforced the status quo or else ignored the ethical debate surrounding the intellectual community in the name of neutrality, detachment, or objectivity seemed, at least to many, an admission of academic irrelevance, not to mention the height of hypocrisy.

In the midst of this destructive milieu, at least one positive dimension of the intellectual and political furor began to emerge. The long-ignored and unfashionable issue of values and value-loaded science was reopened to examination from both within and outside the halls of academe. Christian and Jewish humanists like Jacques Ellul, Paul Tournier, and Martin Buber were joined by socialist or secular humanists like Jean-Paul Sartre, Erich Fromm, and Maurice Merleau-Ponty, and marxian humanists like Georg Lukacs and Leszek Kolakowski not merely to decry the alienating forces of modern society and its nihilism, but also to proclaim a more self-conscious, philosophically sound, and active understanding of the richness of a human existence beyond the self-limiting strictures of analytical methods and positive science.

The critique of the analytical tradition revealed the essential unidimensionality of rationalist abstractions concerning the nature of man, a unidimensionality true both of theory and of practice, of the normative and increasingly of the actual, for in the words of Herbert Marcuse, "Technological rationality has become political rationality."² The pallid rational man of theory and practice was exposed for both its intellectual and existential rigor mortis. William Alonso's humorless economic man, rather like the pale figure of Pavlovian imagination, was found to be nothing more than the alter ego of W. H. Whyte's pliable organization man,³ and both seemed hopelessly inadequate to an understanding of the profundities, let alone the everyday richness and variety, of the human experience. Thus protest was directed not only against the *actions* of a technological society but its *cognitive categories*, its alienating worldview, built around the mystical glorification of technique.

As the sciences succeeded moreover in breaking man down into compartments of specialized knowledge, as with Humpty Dumpty, not even all the methodological weapons at their command could put him back together again. Even where they tried to do so, as in a systems theoretic framework such as that of Talcott Parsons, they merely reduced man further to the demands of one or another independent variable. Certain pieces of fractured man were necessarily and always left out of the puzzle. To put man back together again with all the pieces in place, including a heart and even a soul, with feelings as well as

thoughts, and with some semblance of secular and perhaps transcendental meaning became, as it were, the centripetal goal of the twentieth-century humanist renaissance. In this regard, modern humanism had its precedent in that earlier renaissance of the fourteenth century that similarly sought to defend the variety and the integrity of human existence.

The Range and Nature of Humanism

Having already generously employed the term *humanism*, it is incumbent upon us to reflect however briefly on the essential connotations of the humanist endeavor.⁴ There are, after all, any number of possible definitions of humanism, all of which can be traced to particular schools of thought and various periods of different societies. Jewish, Christian, Muslim, Confucian, Hellenistic, scientific, marxist, existential, and many other forms of humanism appear on the map of intellectual history. Yet, for all its apparent diversity, certain historical and logical elements are held in common. As regards the modern, Western version, not the least of those elements is the historic factor that the very term itself and the intellectual, artistic, and social movement of humanism derive from a modern self-consciousness born in the fourteenth-century Italian Renaissance. Such historical limitation is not to suggest that earlier philosophies and intellectual contexts, whether in the West or the East, were any less concerned with man. On the contrary, it is only to suggest that the peculiarity of the modern concern with man is its almost forced or purposefully self-conscious tone.

Humanism as a concern for or interest in the situation of man is, of course, hardly unique to the modern era. Indeed, Renaissance humanists found reason to indulge an enormous interest in classical literatures and art partly because the latter revealed its own proclivity for anthropocentrism. Still, a wide gap separates Renaissance and classical humanism on the grounds of the former's need to develop and articulate or even defend its concern for man. Classical thinkers, like their counterparts in the ancient Near East, India, and China could almost take their humanism for granted. Though they might have had a special term for "humanism" and some need to designate a "humanistic perspective" per se, the idea of an alternative, nonhumanist perspective was anathema to the dominant modes of ancient thought.

Just as the Socratic and Platonist logic insisted that all thought (i.e., philosophy as science and art) was aimed at greater self-realization, Greek art and science were almost everywhere engaged in greater human edification. Anthropocentrism prevailed in the sense that *man's*

world (i.e., the *oecumene* or “known” world) was the center of concern. Not even the gods, including Zeus himself, escaped the Greek penchant for anthropocentrism. That penchant, incidentally, seldom meant the glorification of man *sui generis*. Rather, it meant that learning or knowledge and understanding about the world and cosmos provided greater wisdom in man’s relationship to the world. The Greeks glorified wisdom, not man. In this sense, too, later Judaic and early Christian humanism (itself historically linked to Hellenism) were less concerned with the ascendancy of man than with the awakening of man to his own temporal situation. Much the same comment could be made about Chinese humanism with the addition that, in the case of Confucianists, humanism as a social ethic emphasizing cultured restraint in the manipulation of nature and man and in intrahuman relations was probably carried to its logical conclusion.

Simply phrased, humanism in its most ancient forms did not mean that man was the be-all and end-all of existence. Aristotle made it quite clear in his *Nicomachean Ethics* that any such notion was absurd (i.e., illogical). More obviously, for Judaism and Christianity, God—not man—was the beginning and end of all things. Indeed, those who would argue that Genesis I proclaims man’s supremacy in the world of God’s creation not only miss the point of Genesis II (the Fall of Man) but also the entire biblical enmity with the pagan glorification of men. At best, as witnessed in the tale of Noah, man’s position in the Hebraic hierarchy of God’s creation was that of steward over, not Lord above, existence: a position reserved for YWH Himself. Similarly, in Christian terms, only one man became divine in history and His was a unique existence. Even as His existence reminded men of their potential divinity, the message of Christian salvation, no less than Hebraic covenant, was that men were not yet worthy of glorification. Confucian humanists, though less concerned with transcendental meanings, were also little moved by thoughts of a human dominance over the earth or the notion that existence was intended to serve man’s interests alone. Indeed, it was left primarily to scientific humanism to discover the view that man is supreme. There too, however, an important debate over the meaning of humanism emerged.

Renaissance Versus Scientific Humanism

It is intriguing that the situation of late twentieth-century humanism is closely allied to that of the fourteenth-century Renaissance. They are allied not only in substance but also in context. Italian humanists, like their founding father, Petrarch, were revolutionaries in the sense that

they revolted against the decay of Christian humanism during the Middle Ages, much as twentieth-century humanists revolted against the decline of Renaissance humanism in the wake of nineteenth- and early twentieth-century science. Both, moreover, were self-conscious efforts to restore a fundamental concern with the human condition. Where Renaissance humanism sought to overcome the narrow strictures of medieval scholasticism in a newly fashioned treatment of art, literature, science, and, especially, history, twentieth-century humanism sought to overcome the narrow methodological constraints of positivist logic and science in order to pursue questions of esthetic, literary, linguistic, ethical, and historical meanings. Here too, in the twentieth century as in the fourteenth, no one program for action or paradigm of thought would suffice to describe all the manifestations of the humanist endeavor. Rather, what held humanism together was not only a predominant interest in the human subject but also a common need to articulate that interest and concern.

The first humanist of the Italian Renaissance, Petrarch, was also, in the words of Kenneth Clark, the "first modern man [who] in his curiosity, his skepticism, his restlessness, his ambition, and his self-consciousness . . . is certainly one of us."⁵ Petrarch was probably the first Western man to express a landscape sentiment and perspective upon which the modern arts and the humanist view of nature depends; namely, that a landscape viewed at a distance and an understanding of nature itself are attended by self-consciousness. Petrarch was among the first who, having climbed a mountain to gain the vista, publicly declared that vantage as being attendant to self-discovery. Having obtained the vantage of height or distance (hence, detachment) from the valley of the Rhône, he recalled that passage from St. Augustine's *Confessions*, where the latter opined that men "go about to wonder at the heights of mountains . . . but themselves they consider not." Satisfied that he had "seen enough of the mountain," Petrarch then "turned [his] inward eye upon [himself]." Kenneth Clark was, no doubt, correct when he suggested that "nothing could give a clearer idea of the state of mind which produced the landscape painting of the later middle ages" than Petrarch's rediscovery of self.⁶ But we can go a few steps further to note that the self-conscious introspection of the humanists as a whole opened a new vista on the meaning of art, literature, science, theology, and the entire panoply of undertakings in the human search for understanding.

The flowering of Renaissance humanism, its articulate defense of man, and its emphasis on the appreciation of human artifice, especially language and history, are obviously too involved for adequate interpretation here. We nevertheless should also note that, especially as the humanist endeavor began to decay into a set of self-made dogmas and a revived scholasticism, it also revealed certain contradictory tenden-

cies. Perhaps the most important of these, at least for the history of twentieth-century humanism, was the way in which Renaissance introspection became the rationale for the nihilistic humanism of modern science.

Here, too, space permits only meager assessment of the important transition from Renaissance to scientific humanism. At the outset, one can argue along with Hannah Arendt and others that the chief factor in that transition was the shift from classical anthropocentrism and its geocentric focus to the heliocentric universe of Copernicus and Galileo. That shift was humanistic inasmuch as the central thrust of the Galilean argument was not just that the earth moved around the sun but that one could rely on the *human senses*, albeit aided by the telescope, to verify the theory of a heliocentric universe. Indeed, it was Galileo's empirical proof, not the Copernican proposition itself, that the medieval Church found utterly threatening, for it smacked of pagan humanism and defied doctrinal views that the senses (not nature itself) were the source of sin.⁷ The Galilean proof was humanistic in method but not necessarily humanistic in conclusion. The heliocentric universe moved the center of attention away from the anthropocentric concerns of classical and Judaeo-Christian humanism. The empirical method, moreover, was itself only incidental to the growth of the logic of science, the foundations of which rest more comfortably on the intellectual bedrock of Cartesian rationalism. And, with Descartes, we begin to see the origins of the nihilistic humanism of modern science.

The negative connotations of scientific humanism are manifold. At the outset, the famous Cartesian formula, "I think, therefore I am," or, more simply, "To think is to be," introduced a new dimension to the history of Western humanism. It introduced a fundamental *doubt* about existence itself, not to mention an existential doubt about one's own being. Thereafter, the central issue for Western science and philosophy was the proof of existence and the verification of one's own self. Thereafter, too, the proof and verification of existence and self in the philosophy of science were necessarily and only by means of the logical method that was first developed by Descartes. That method was itself dehumanizing.

We need not here attempt to expose all the dehumanizing characteristics of the rationalist method. Certainly, at least since Descartes, quantitative reductionism has been one prominent aspect of that story. Similarly, another prominent feature is that mentioned by Spinoza in his famous rendition of the value-free pursuit of scientific truth, *non ridere, non lugere, neque destastari, sed intellegere* (not to laugh, not to lament, not to curse, but to understand). As Immanuel Kant was to make clear, once analyzed, the logic of science demanded knowledge only of phenomena (quantitatively measurable objects) and cut itself off from

considerations of the numinous realm of ethics, morality, and transcendent meanings. Teleology, the search for meaning and purpose in existence, and especially a human teleology, was set off as the business of theologians, mystics, and other none-too-reliable sorts, while science pursued the stuff of logical truths.

To be sure, as nineteenth-century science began to focus more sharply on man himself as an object of analysis, Comtean or positivist social science (blended with the liberal ideals of eighteenth-century rationalism) was inherently humanistic. That is to say, man was again the center of concern. But, even if the definition of man appeared to remain unchanged, the method deployed by the sciences to understand man began to impinge on the value of being human. In a word, man was "naturalized," which is to say, made over in the image of nature. John Stuart Mill's famous methodological statement to the effect that no special method of analysis or logic of understanding was required for the study of man as opposed to nature became, in the twentieth century, the hallmark of a logic that concluded with Max Planck's almost equally famous comment that the intent of the scientific method was to remove all anthropomorphic elements from the understanding of anything.⁸

What the modern sciences demanded by the removal of all human elements (save, of course, rationality itself) was simply an agreement that man himself must be seen as a mere product of an environment (whether physical or social), a being understandable only in terms of phenomenal relations, the meaning of which was purely semiotic. Indeed, questions of meaning beyond the strictures of symbolic logic, whether transcendental, teleological, or simply ethical, became a matter not for science but for the arts, religion, and philosophies of the irrational. The result was a parting of the ways between explanation and wisdom, and objects and subjects; science and man went separate ways, giving rise to a fundamental distinction between the sciences and the humanities.

The special irony of that distinction—and a chief source of complaint on the part of twentieth-century humanists—was that it was accomplished by men. Man, or at least modern man, increasingly appeared bent upon self-denial, or the abrogation of that part of his personality given to ethical, moral, or even crudely emotional judgments; and this at a time when the normative power of *techné* reached crisis proportions. One way or another, it was against that self-denial and against the separation of science and man that modern, twentieth-century humanism waged war. The purpose of the humanist campaign was to put man, in all his reflective capacities, back into the center of things as both a producer and a product of his world and also to augment the human experience by a more intensive, hence self-conscious, reflection upon the meaning of being human.

Modern Humanism in Geography

The results of the twentieth-century humanist campaign have been mixed, nowhere more clearly than in the realm of social science and social theory. For the most part, the campaign has been waged by means of existentialist and phenomenological epistemologies as well as a marxian humanism based partly on the early writings of Marx but also on the neo-marxist work of Georg Lukacs and Herbert Marcuse. In psychology and psychotherapy, these epistemologies find expression in the writings of Bindswanger, Maslow, Rogers, and the popularly known Rollo May. In sociology, the pioneering work of Alfred Schutz and Karl Mannheim as well as that of younger sociologists such as Peter Berger stand out for particular attention. In the broad area of economic and social commentary, Jacques Ellul has his successors in the writings of the generally orthodox Kenneth Galbraith and Robert Heilbroner, as well as the less-orthodox Theodore Roszak, Paul Ehrlich, and Ralph Brown, not to mention the participants of the Club of Rome. Similarly, the humanist campaign finds its expression in the sweeping historical-cum-philosophical critiques of Lynn White, Jr., John Passmore, Leo Marx, and William Leiss on modern man's relationship to nature.

But what of modern geography? How have the humanist tradition and especially the twentieth-century humanist campaign entered or impinged upon the work of geographers? The humanist tradition is, no doubt, deeply pervasive in that genre of geographical studies linked to Paul Vidal de la Blache and the French school. Also, some connection between humanism and geography is to be found in the literature of environmental and place consciousness. The central contributors here are readily identifiable: J. K. Wright's pioneering essays on the history of geographical lore, ideas, and impressions; the epistemological speculation and biographical studies of David Lowenthal; the historical-cultural explorations of landscape imagery and meaning in the work of Carl Sauer, Andrew Clark, Donald Meinig, and Paul Wheatley; Yi-Fu Tuan's wide-ranging examination of the intellectual, psychological, and cultural contexts of place attachments and environmental attitudes; and, as the modern variant of the Renaissance humanist, the encyclopedic yet synthetic history of Western ideas about man's relationship to nature given to us by Clarence Glacken. Were there any serious doubt as to the capacity and desire of geographers to work in the humanist mode, these examples alone suffice to render any such doubt moot.

Yet for all their verve and with the most prominent exception of Yi-Fu Tuan, these scholars do not figure conspicuously in the social science wing of geography, nor do they directly address the twentieth-century debate over humanism and scientific rationality. As Andrew