

Contributions to Hermeneutics 5

Bruce B. Janz *Editor*

Place, Space and Hermeneutics

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Tuanian Geography

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Abstract Yi-Fu Tuan is skeptical of methods, including those of hermeneutics, but his approach closely parallels the prescriptions of several hermeneutic philosophers. He seeks to empathize with all kinds of human experience by reading across various works from literature and the arts, as well as history, biography, social science, philosophy and theology. In Tuanian hermeneutic circles, geographically contingent understandings of the world propel people between a pole of experience characterized by rootedness, security and certainty, and an opposing pole characterized by outreach, expansiveness and imagination. One pole signifies stasis, the other, transformation, but elements of each pole infiltrate and animate the other. These Tuanian contrasts reveal many ways of being-in-the-world and how they mix and blend in ways that are always subtle and full of nuance. For example there is always a certain distance in what is nearby and a kind of nearness in what is far away. Tuan thereby provides a lens on the ambiguities and ambivalences that attend the human experience of dwelling in the world.

The best educators don't lead; they gesture. "Over there" they say with a wave, inspiring students to wander. There is no point in staking out a completely clear trail or specifying a destination because in the realm of thought the value of each path lies in its uniqueness. To gesture avoids redundancy.

With his 22 books and over 70 articles, Yi-Fu Tuan gestures in a direction we could call the hermeneutics of space and place. He does not attempt to formalize a hermeneutic method, mapping out a pathway for disciples. Nor does his approach mark him as a scion of any particular hermeneutic scholar such as Schleiermacher, Heidegger, Dilthey, Gadamer, or Ricoeur. Instead, what he does with surprising grace is reveal the ambiguities and ambivalences that attend the human experience of dwelling in the world along with the inseparability of self and world. Throughout his career, he has explained these relationships in terms of space and place, empathizing with the many ways in which people have balanced the opposing pulls of space and place in various cultural contexts.

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Tuan explicitly frames his work as humanist (Tuan 1976) but he is not a humanist in the sense of replacing spirituality with rationalism or treating the self as wholly autonomous. By “humanist” what he means is an approach that draws broadly on the humanities for source materials and enters into questions of “geographical knowledge, territory and place, crowding and privacy, livelihood and economics, and religion... by way of human experience, awareness, and knowledge” (Tuan 1976, 266). In Tuan’s view, humanist geography should reveal “how geographical activities and phenomena reveal the quality of human awareness” (1976, 267); it is committed to “interpreting human experience in its ambiguity, ambivalence, and complexity” (1976, 275). This program sets aside the question of methodology but in practice Tuan has achieved his humanistic goals by reading across the grain of multiple texts, seeking to empathize with all kinds of human experience in the world—glorious, run of the mill, or ghastly—while resisting the tenacious scientific impulse to isolate objective facts from subjective impressions. For these reasons it might clarify his project to call it a *humanist hermeneutic of space and place*. To consider Tuan’s contribution to the hermeneutics of place and space we will briefly situate his work relative to the discipline of geography, and particularly the agenda of geosophy; next we will explore the disparate links to hermeneutics; finally we will follow Tuan on some of his explorations.

1 Tuan and the Rest of Geography

References to “geographers such as Yi-Fu Tuan” appear frequently in surveys and histories of the discipline of geography, yet the list of accompanying names is short: Edward Relph, Anne Buttner, occasionally David Seamon, David Ley, or Graham Rowles. Tuan was clearly not the only geographer asking questions about geographical experience in the 1970s and early 1980s, but these scattered efforts never really constituted a “school.” He was an examiner on Relph’s PhD committee at the University of Toronto but this close tie was an exception to the rule. The “geographers like Tuan” charted parallel rather than intersecting paths. Tuan’s work is distinct from the others in its interest in weaving together literature and the arts, suggesting hermeneutical phenomenology as opposed to the more mainstream phenomenology of the others.

An edited volume on humanist geography showed not only his extensive influence at the turn of the twenty-first century, but also somewhat paradoxically the failure of others to echo his work (Adams et al. 2001). This is perhaps because he did not devote his attention to spelling out a prescribed research methodology. In a self-effacing explanation of his relation to the scholars mentioned above, Tuan describes himself as being less scholarly and tending “to wing it” (personal correspondence March 30, 2015). Many would protest that there is very little “winging it” in his work since he takes a great deal of care weaving together appropriate quotes and observations from novels, short stories, poems, scientific studies, historical accounts, biographies and religious writings. But perhaps Tuan’s method has

never felt to him like a method. In this light we might accept that his approach displays a skeptical view of method not unlike that of Gadamer, who in effect argued that the best hermeneutic “method” is no method (Gadamer [1960] 1989; Grondin 2003, 3). In any case, Tuan demonstrates the art of sailing across a wide array of texts and creative products without clinging to the nest of formal theory. Not only was this approach unprecedented in the 1970s, it remains an anomaly in the 2010s making Tuan, in his own words, “an oddity” (Tuan 1999, 94).

Despite its singularity, Tuan’s approach was neither unanticipated nor uncalled for. In a famous article published in geography’s flagship journal before mid-century, J. K. Wright enjoined geographers to explore *terrae incognitae*—unknown territories—lurking behind the fantastic variety of worldviews: “The imaginative perception of others, the feeling for place that many a sensitive traveler has recorded, may be keener and more accurate than ours and may often be borrowed to advantage” (1947, 10). Under the rubric of *geosophy* Wright called for efforts to gather and interpret “geographical ideas, both true and false, of all manner of people—not only geographers, but farmers and fishermen, business executives and poets, novelists and painters, Bedouins and Hottentots” (1947, 12). Acknowledging that such an endeavor must incorporate various kinds of subjectivity, Wright went a step further and challenged the assumption that subjectivity is the opposite of objectivity (1947, 5, 12). There was a rhetorical objective, as well; geosophy would help “prevent the oncoming generations of geographers from becoming too thickly encrusted in the prosaic” and make the discipline better at “firing the artistic and poetic imaginations of students and public” (Wright 1947, 15). Geographers should become “*scholars in the humanistic sense*—men widely read in the classics of geography and also in general literature and in literary criticism and history” (Wright 1947, 15 italics added). Despite Wright’s persuasion, few geographers heeded the call for geosophy until three decades later when Tuan took up the torch.

2 Tuan and Hermeneutics

Tuan seldom refers to philosophy (or geosophy for that matter) in his published works. He is happier forging ahead than trying to formalize theories. Reading across countless creative expressions of place and space, citing cleverly and strategically, he carries his readers in hermeneutic circles between text and experience, representation and world. These are not Schleiermacher’s, Heidegger’s, or Gadamer’s circles (Schleiermacher 1978; Heidegger [1927] 1962; Gadamer [1960] 1989), but nonetheless they are interpretative circuits. They are motivated by the same intent as that which underlies the proponents of hermeneutics: to tease out meanings of human life from the vast repository of human creativity—both collective and individual. Tuan’s hermeneutic circles depend on fundamental assumptions that preoccupy many geographers while bringing such assumptions to light in unusual ways. Geographically contingent understandings of the world are shown to propel people between one pole of experience characterized by rootedness, security, grounding

and certainty, and an opposing but interpenetrating pole characterized by outreach, expansiveness, possibility and imagination. This approach is suggested by titles such as *Segmented Worlds and Self*, *Morality and Imagination*, *Cosmos and Hearth*, *Dominance and Affection*, and above all, *Space and Place* (Tuan 1977, 1982, 1984, 1989, 1996). At the most abstract level, these existential dialectics involve the encounter between continuity and discontinuity (Tuan 1984) which can sound abstract, but Tuan reminds us that life always involves a body with its capacities for movement and sensory modes that selectively filter the world (Tuan 1974, 5–12, 45–58).

Just as Dilthey calls attention to historical contingency by introducing the notion of *Geisteswissenschaften* (Palmer 1969, 98–99) Tuan emphasizes the geographical contingency of human experience. Different times have distinct worldviews, like *Weltanschauungen*, but these vary, as well, from place to place. Familiar places therefore provide a foundation for understanding what lies beyond the perceived and the known, extending all of the way out to the world and the cosmos. Tuan investigates multitudinous expressions of space and place, drawing out subtle commonalities and differences in human expressions of all sorts, recalling his own discipline's various interests including geomorphology, biogeography, economic geography and cultural geography. He leads the reader back iteratively to the tensions between the expansiveness of human worldviews and their grounding in place-based experiences. There is a kinship between this project and the work of Dilthey, whose "*Ausdruck*" indicated the full gamut of ways in which the inner world has been manifested in the outer world (Dilthey [1907] 1954). Tuan likewise reads the meanings of various arts, architecture, religion, and other human achievements as manifestations of culture and human experience, but rather than offer a name or definition of the terrain he simply segues from one manifestation to another.

Tuanian geography shares with hermeneutics a commitment to an inclusive notion of human expression but parts ways in drawing attention to spatial rather than temporal contingency. Tuan positions this shift as counter to phenomenology, suggesting that analyses of subjective viewpoints must be balanced by geographical empiricism: "Phenomenologists, eschewing objectivity, tend to emphasize the 'point of view' or the subjective" (Tuan 2014, 34). He questions phenomenology's success in balancing the specific with the general, the concrete with the abstract, and ultimately place with space. Tellingly, he suggests that Heidegger's work would be better if it were if more like that of a novelist than a philosopher (Tuan 2014). Integration of the subjective and objective is precisely what hermeneutical phenomenology was calling for, with *Dasein* as particularly well-known articulation of this synthesis, but Tuan's reading reflects the difference between calling for interpretation of human experience (a philosophical approach) and actually assembling particular expressions of human experience (a Tuanian approach). The latter actually fuses subjective and objective in a way the former cannot.

Tuan also offers a third option to complicate Heidegger's well-known distinction between the ready-to-hand and the present-at-hand. While the ready-to-hand is the world encountered through human utilization—the tree as lumber, the river as a source of hydrological power—and the present-at-hand is the world translated into

abstract relationships—the tree as an entry on a botanical chart, the river as part of a watershed (Wollan 2003, 37)—Tuan effectively demonstrates a third category of experience. This category is rich in emotional impact and meaning but divorced from purely utilitarian purposes; it is to encounter something as neither merely useful nor wholly abstract—the tree becomes a *center of felt meaning*, the river becomes a *focus of care*. Emphasizing this third path and showing little in the way of direct influence, Tuan's motivation nonetheless parallels Heidegger's. From a geographical point of view, what is perhaps Heidegger's most important insight may be found in his 1936 lectures "On the Origin of the Work of Art" which asserts that a work of art "holds open to man the inner struggle between earth and world" (Palmer 1969, 160). By this he means the inevitable tension between what is given as the environment "out there," and the multitudinous ways in which people have transformed their environments into worlds through material and symbolic appropriation. This active and directed quality of being, peculiar to *human* being, saturates Tuan's corpus.

Citations of philosophy are rare in Tuan's work but he does explicitly reference Maurice Merleau-Ponty whose *Phenomenology of Perception* showed the world we perceive as a direct outcome of the modes of perception we utilize to apprehend it (Madison 1992; Tuan 1971, 1976, 1977). Tuan's work is imprinted, as well, by the sensibility of Paul Ricoeur, who wrote: "To speak of a world of the text is to stress the feature belonging to every literary work of opening before it a horizon of possible experience, a world in which it would be possible to live" (Ricoeur 1991, 26). Worlds unfold through both sensation and representation. Tuan offered a brilliant summary of this situation in an early book chapter: "Sensations, perceptions, and ideas occur under two aspects: the one clear and precise, but impersonal; the other confused, ever-changing, and inexpressible, because language cannot clothe it without arresting its flux and making it into public property" (1979b, 392). Ricoeur captured a strikingly similar relationship between experience and language, place and what Relph (1976) would call placelessness: "I am not merely a situated onlooker, but a being who intends and expresses as an intentional transgression of the situation. As soon as I speak, I speak of things in their absence and in terms of their non-perceived sides" (quoted in Busch 1992, 26). Using different words, Tuan and Ricoeur both indicate that language falls short of the world-mapping task we assign to it; while Tuan shows us enforcing immutability on what always exists in flux, Ricoeur shows us enforcing visibility on what is normally invisible. In either case, a chasm or an abyss opens up between the human attempt to "map" the world and the world that is being mapped (Olsson 2010).

Tuan had already honed his explanation of the interpretive task by the late 1970s, arguing "Place is not only a fact to be explained in the broader frame of space, but it is also a reality to be clarified and understood from the perspectives of the people who have given it meaning" (1979b, 387). In this passage, the term "space" evokes a field of quantifiable relationships associated with measurable, objective attributes, a construct of spatial analysis that reduces place to location and subordinates place to space. In contrast, Tuan wants place to be understood as primary. It is an inescapable context of action. If we value place the littlest things have great value: putting

on one's socks, exchanging pleasantries with a store clerk, tending the hearth. Through such commonplace events people acquire a sense of security and are rooted in a world that is close at hand (including Heidegger's ready-to-hand). At the same time, dissatisfaction with the minutiae of daily life generates impulses that push people away from the familiar to encounter the unknown (a distancing more visceral and emotional than the present-at-hand).

In his call to understand place, Tuan sought a hybrid between explanation and understanding, and rather than entirely avoid use of "space" with its connotations of abstraction and quantification, he insisted that "space is oriented by each centre of consciousness" (Tuan 1979b, 390). Space therefore derives from place rather than vice versa yet it remains a problematic concept because it seems to exist above or beyond human subjectivity; the "question of objective reality is tantalising but unanswerable, and it may be meaningless" (Tuan 1979b, 389). To this Tuanian interest in lived experience we can add another Heideggerian argument that the "character of understanding will best be grasped not through an analytical catalogue of its attributes, nor in the full flush of its proper functioning, but when it breaks down, when it comes up against a wall, perhaps when something it must have is missing" (Palmer 1969, 133–134). Tuan follows this line of thought repeatedly by exploring what it is to be lost, disconnected, cut-off, at loose ends and adrift, or conversely claustrophobic, confined and entrapped. Significant portions of *Morality and Imagination*, *Cosmos and Hearth*, *Escapism*, and *Romantic Geography* (1989, 1996, 1998, 2013) treat these darker themes, while *Landscapes of Fear* (1979a) is almost entirely dedicated to them. Tuan admits he is a pessimist, driven to show how people heal rifts and reconnect to each other mainly because he expects the opposite and finds such acts of goodness surprising (2008, viii). The breakdown of human connectedness fascinates him, but reconnection has the appeal of the miraculous.

Tuan's approach, which he defines as "narrative-descriptive" at one point, distances him methodologically from the hermeneutic philosophers. This difference is driven by his suspicion that theory can be "so highly structured that it seems to exist in its own right, to be almost 'solid,' and thus able to cast (paradoxically) a shadow over the phenomena it is intended to illuminate" whereas he finds theory more helpful when it can "hover supportively in the background" (Tuan 1991, 686). Hermeneutic philosophers offer programmatic statements prescribing *how* to interpret the meanings of things but Tuan steps from quote to quote like rocks in a stream—texts and other creative works forming points of stasis in the swirling river of human consciousness. His writing allows meaning to emerge artfully from intertextual perambulations but self-consciously remains distinct from the literature it explores: "The first order of business for those who want to be good writers is to remove fat and adornment—those purple passages that erupt like skin rash—from their prose. Erupt like skin rash. See how easy it is to slip into poetry?" (Tuan 2002, 163).

In short, Tuan resonates at a theoretical level with various hermeneutic programs, including those of Heidegger, Dilthey, Gadamer and Ricoeur, as well as the phenomenology of Merleau-Ponty, but he avoids aligning itself with any particular theorist and in some ways he departs significantly from the hermeneutic tradition.

This is evident in the lack of fit between Tuanian notions of being in the world and his interest in a form of engagement that treats things as neither ready-to-hand nor present-at-hand. It is also indicated in Tuan's direct engagement with texts and lack of interest in prescribing how and why one *should* engage with texts. Tuan's writings can therefore be seen as demonstrating hermeneutics but not necessarily following hermeneutics.

3 Tuanian Contrasts

The defining trait of Tuan's oeuvre is its tireless effort to empathize with the fundamental contrasts of human experience. Unlike Marxian contradictions which produce tension or crisis, Tuanian contrasts are nuances: nuances of being in the world, nuances of engaging with the world, and nuances of laying claim to bits and pieces of the world. These are all finely-delineated points on the spectrum between space and place, where various ways of being-in-the-world mix and blend in surprising ways. Opposites do not remain separate but interpenetrate each other: the hearth is physically located in the cosmos even as the cosmos twinkles in the hearth.

The principle of polar opposites united by mutual inclusion evokes what Entrikin calls "betweenness" (1991), as well, providing a foundation for self-identity. People seek out group identities and places in which they can immerse themselves, whether as part of a family, team or nation (Tuan 1982, 1998) yet despite such efforts, they feel isolated as if they were "spinning loose on [their] own axis" (Tuan 1984, 246). Perplexingly, neither the cozy familiarity of place nor the beckoning possibilities of space offers the solidity that is craved by the self. We are stretched uncomfortably between space and place and when we reach out to engage with space we fatefully plummet back into place. The Arctic explorer, Fridtjof Nansen, who spent the winter in a snow-covered hut on an arctic island found himself fantasizing about his wife and daughter back at home: "There she sits in the winter's evening, sewing by lamplight. Beside her stands a young girl with blue eyes and golden hair playing with a doll. She looks tenderly at the child and strokes her hair. Her eyes grow moist, and heavy tears fall on her sewing..." (Tuan 2013, 99). But that winter camp had to serve as home and Nansen grew profoundly attached to his cook stove and the "faint rays of light which shone from the lamp" (Tuan 2013, 100). Self is incoherent—torn between space and place.

In a rare moment of abstraction, Tuan observes that "people feel uncomfortable with things that have fuzzy edges" and therefore they frame the world in "polarized categories of the continuous and the discontinuous, the linked and the discrete" (Tuan 1984, 247–248). His implication here is that polarities are imposed on the world through our ways of inhabiting it. Dwelling is a meaningful action that draws boundaries and separates place from space. Normally he does not tell us this idea but shows it by juxtaposing excerpts from hundreds of texts. In *Space and Place* he writes: "Place is security, space is freedom: we are attached to the one and long for the other" (1977, 3). In *Cosmos and Hearth*, he writes: "Hearth, though nurturing,

can be too confining; cosmos, though liberating, can be bewildering and threatening” (1996, 2). In *Segmented Worlds and Self* he elaborates: “The problem is ... how to nurture a sense of self without losing touch with other people altogether; how to escape from the world and yet still be in the world—a world, however limited, of one’s own design, or a world over which one has some control” (1982, 169). Again and again he grapples with the dilemma of seclusion and engagement, the craving for both refuge and adventure. He not only dissects these contrary pulls by drawing on the arts and humanities, he also suggests that we use the arts and humanities to resolve the opposing pulls: “a painting or sculpture, other than the stains and scars of time, stays much the same. To it, I can return” (Tuan 2004, 22). Likewise photographs and poems function as virtual places (Tuan 2004, 23, 25, 28). This conceptual shift suggests that place animates representations in more than one way, both referentially (communication of place) and experientially (communications in place/as place), and the hermeneutic task of exploring space and place is complicated by this slippage.

Polarities of self-identity are closely tied to the forces that pull us both into and out of place. Connectedness stifles identity in conformity while isolation prevents identity, however distinct, from making a difference to others. Tuan highlights the complications of this interplay, showing how hard it may be at times to retreat enough to feel a coherent sense of self and to reach out enough to feel a sufficient sense of connection. We are caught in the middle. Yet place and space can be reassuring as our skillful encounters with both ideally allow us to strike a balance between losing ourselves in the crowd and losing ourselves in a cloistered existence—to find ourselves through the dynamic interaction of these two ways of being.

Tuan turns to literature, the arts and popular culture to demonstrate the existential pulls of space and place. Let us look a bit more carefully at how he does this. Quoting *Wind in the Willows*, he invites us to see ourselves in the figure of Mole, a retiring creature who nonetheless craves the “splendid spaces above ground,” spaces that call to him at the end of the day when he has retreated to his cozy burrow (1996, 1). The film *The Cure* (1995) offers a different vision of this polarity between cosmos and hearth. The reader is introduced to Dexter, a boy living with AIDS, and his friend, Erik.

One night, Dexter woke up drenched in sweat. He had had a nightmare... that he was adrift in deep, dark space with no hope of rescue... Erik’s answer? He threw his gym shoe at Dexter and said, “Next time you find yourself in deep, dark space, ask yourself, ‘what on earth is Erik’s smelly old shoe doing on my lap?’” (Tuan 2013, 35)

The latter example demonstrates the binding power of love—love in the guise of friendship. As a geographer, Tuan’s treatment of love speaks to questions of being in space and place. Love of one’s fellow humans quite often implies a commitment to a particular place—helping overcome its flaws and heal its ailments, while suffering, if need be, from those very flaws and ailments. Socrates is an exemplary man, Tuan suggests (2008, 103) because he remained in Athens and acceded to the death penalty when he could have abandoned his community and survived. Yet in being

good, people also rise above the limitations of their personal “place” in the world, revealing a better way of existing and contributing that spirit to the places where they live.

4 Cultural Variation

Tuanian contrasts prompt very particular forms of balance in different social contexts—varying in ways that are inevitably cultural but also deeply personal. The interfolding of the near and the far, the intimate and the distant, appears with kaleidoscopic variety in Tuan’s works. He tells us that Michelangelo “slept with his workmen, four to a bed” (Tuan 1982, 73). He marvels that “cottagers of seafaring background use pocket telescopes to observe their neighbor’s activities. Distance notwithstanding the Shetlander can, from his own home, keep a neighborly eye on who is visiting whom” (Tuan 1977, 61). He reflects on the six-part Chinese television series called *River Elegy*: “China’s great symbols—Yellow River, Great Wall, and Dragon—[were] all shown to belong to a peasant and authoritarian past. By contrast, the color azure is somehow linked with the progressive forces of science and democracy... [a] blue frontier, where cultures mix and undergo rebirth...” (Tuan 1996, 66). Each example demonstrates a particular place’s balance between the existential pulls of near and far.

Tuan addresses these vital contrasts most directly in *Romantic Geography*:

What are polarized values? They include darkness and light, chaos and order, body and mind, matter and spirit, nature and culture, among others. Every culture has its own set that is subtly different from those of other cultures. With all of them, there is a family resemblance—a similar evocation of values such that one pole contains the ‘negatives’ of darkness, chaos, body, matter, and nature, and the other pole, the ‘positives’ of light, order, mind, spirit, and culture. (The inverted commas are put there as a reminder that the values are reversible.) (Tuan 2013, 9)

Do these polarities suggest struggle? While Tuan notes conflicts and contestation, he stresses the reconciliation and harmonization of extremes. For example, he mentions that the rituals of American society “undoubtedly have their high and solemn moments, but these are attenuated by the sane feeling that children’s laughter, stray balloons, and the smell of popcorn are never far away” (1993, 242). Does this point toward a universal principle or at least a constant for humankind—something akin to yin and yang? Tuan does not follow this author’s own (perhaps reductionist) impulse to consider this point; he is content to follow polarities through countless nuances evident in different times and places.

In keeping with this theme, he shows that there is distance in what is nearby and nearness in what is far away. The poem “Neighbors” by David Allan Evans is quoted in both *Humanist Geography* (Tuan 2012, 26) and in *The Good Life* (Tuan 1986, 107). A middle-aged couple is stolidly washing windows and the pane of glass between them suggests all of the barriers that can intrude and create a brittle division when the warmth has gone out of an intimate relationship: “they are waving/to

each other/with rags/not smiling.” Conversely, Tuan reminds us that “the distant view can be fond or tender rather than cool” (1993, 15). His hermeneutic circles not only juxtapose geographical proximity and distance, but at the same time they bring about a kind of folding where the extremes of near and far overlay and interpenetrate each other. Tuan suspects that close emotional relationships inevitably impose a barrier of dominance or at least mutual evasion between the self and the other. At the same time he makes a point of showing unexpected glimmers of warmth and love in the most remote places and spaces.

5 The Ethics and Politics of Binaries

Edward Soja famously called for the promotion of a “thirdspace” unifying culturally-constructed opposites. Following calls by Homi Bhabha, bell hooks, and other feminist, postcolonial, postmodernist and poststructuralist scholars to overcome exploitative dualities, and drawing most directly on Henri Lefebvre’s tripartite system—*le perçu*, *le conçu*, and *le vécu*—Soja sought to fuse “subjectivity and objectivity, the abstract and the concrete, the real and the imagined, the knowable and the unimaginable, the repetitive and the differential, structure and agency, mind and body, consciousness and the unconscious, the disciplined and the transdisciplinary, everyday life and unending history” (Soja 1996, 57). Geographers following this lead worked to deconstruct binaries (Cloke and Johnston 2005). The goal of this project is assumed to be emancipatory since binaries are blamed for perpetuating patriarchy, colonialism, capitalism and racial exploitation.

In light of such efforts, what are we to make of Tuan’s treatment of contrasts such as space and place, dominance and affection, cosmos and hearth, morality and imagination? Did Tuan actually launch geography’s binary-deconstructing efforts rather than Soja, or is he a last holdout in the pro-binary camp? Ironically, the either-or structure of this question sets up another binary that needs to be interrogated. Tuan does not exactly attack binaries nor does he exactly defend them. His microscopic scrutiny of space and place leaves nothing intact; whichever binary he chooses to focus on is revealed to be internally contradictory and fluid. Each of the positions evokes the opposing term: “On the attachment scale, points in the middle range are necessarily ambiguous, but I have come to see that the extremities are not as firm as I thought, for they contain the seed of their opposite” (Tuan 2004, 8). This parsing of Tuanian geography by Tuan himself is in line with efforts to deconstruct, destabilize, disrupt and interrogate dualities.

At the same time, Tuan’s effort lacks iconoclastic zeal; he is not an activist. When he looks around (or reads around) at all of the spaces and places of the world, he quite often likes what he sees, and his writings convey approbation:

Geography has directed my attention to the world, and I have found there, for all the inanities and horrors, much that is good and beautiful. The near total neglect of the good is an egregious fault of critical social science, making even its darkest findings, paradoxically,

less dark, if only because they are not contrasted with the bright lights that also make up the human picture. (Tuan 1999, 115)

Insofar as Tuan very often starts with dualities and he finds much that is good, this means that Tuanian contrasts are not all bad. When he considers cosmos and hearth, he revels in the calm sanctuary of the hearth while celebrating the quest to reach distant shores. Even in his gloomiest book, *Landscapes of Fear*, the concluding chapter asserts that things were worse in the past so social change is moving in the right direction. “In the larger view, the human story is one of progressive sensory and mental awareness... culture, through laborious and labyrinthine paths traversed over millennia, has greatly and variedly refined our senses and mind” (1993, 240). Progress itself depends on Tuanian contrasts between cosmos and hearth, dominance and affection, morality and imagination, space and place, so despite generating tension these contrasts are not, in themselves, problematic.

When moved to state his own moral imperative, Tuan offers the following: “To perceive truly, which I take to mean the same as perceiving justly or morally, seems to call for the power of attending to both the particular and the universal” (1989, 177). If some scholars hope to overthrow inequities and injustices, Tuan counters that the purpose of research has been for him: “salvation by geography” (1999, 90–116). This stance is indicative of a powerful moral commitment, but one that is expressed primarily as humility and openness to the world. It reveals “my temperamental inclination to see the world from another’s point of view, to grant that my opponent may have a case, however misguided” (1999, 74). Thus, unlike the majority of human geographers at the turn of the twenty-first century, Tuan does not see himself as the hero in a saga of Power versus Subversion. Instead he serves as a tour guide in world where Everyman reaches the existential poles of nearness and farness only to discover tunnels through to the opposite pole.

6 Final Thoughts

How does Tuan position *himself* between the experiential poles of space and place? By way of a self-referential gesture, he writes “My own life path shows that I am neither rooted... nor driven to tramp the world... Yet I not only understand, but can feel the tug of both positions” (Tuan 2004, 7–8). This quote appears in *Place, Art, and Self*, the same short book that articulates his personal experience of topophilia: “Death Valley is a tourist attraction. Many go there for its visual novelty—its strangeness. For me, it has always been far more. In my very first encounter with the desert, I felt as though I had met my geographical double—the objective correlative of the person I am, absent the social façade” (Tuan 2004, 19). In *Who am I*, he also speaks to this connection: “Over time, I was forced to conclude that, for me, beauty has to be inhuman—even inanimate—to be a balm to the soul. Thus my love of the desert” (Tuan 1999, 55). It is in the vast silent spaces of stone, light, wind and sand that Tuan feels comforted, nurtured, and sheltered. How ironic it is that Tuan’s

initial encounter with the existential worm hole between near and far was a morning when he woke up, young and full of life, in a place called Death Valley.

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