Chapter Two: The Intersection of People, Place and History: Background Literature

The Humanist Tradition

This study arises from the humanist tradition within cultural geography, which is concerned with the relationship between people and place. John K. Wright's recommendation to use the imagination to illuminate the "the subjective geographical conceptions of the world about them which exist in the minds of countless ordinary folk" (Wright 1947, p. 11) is generally accepted to be the first call for a humanist approach. David Lowenthal continued this theme, encouraging the study of "the everyday life of man on earth" (Lowenthal 1961, p. 241). Yi-Fu Tuan, the "principal contemporary architect" of humanist geography (Enitrikin, quoted in Monaghan 2001) states that "Humanist geography achieves an understanding of the human world by studying people's …geographical behavior as well as their feelings and ideas in regard to space and place" (Tuan 1976, p. 266). The subject matter of this study is derived from the three building blocks of humanist geography identified by David Ley, anthropocentrism, the allocation of human consciousness to a significant position in theory; intersubjectivity, the inherently social nature of experience; and the context of an individual's biography, the interchange between subject and a multidimensional environment (Ley 1978, p. 293).

Much of the inspiration for this work came from the writing of Yi-Fu Tuan. The breadth of learning and observations of humanity that characterize his work have long fascinated me, and led me to create an empirical study that would explore the connection between people and place about which he writes so eloquently. Ironically however, I

have found, as has Paul C. Adams that Tuan's role in my work has been "less to inspire direct imitation than to inspire people to do things that don't look exactly or much like his work" (quoted in Monaghan 2001). The humanist tradition (as represented by Tuan's work) is a stance rather than a theoretical framework, and as such it lost ground as the drive for critical social theory dominated geography in the 1990s. Today, the importance of humanist geography is increasingly highlighted by the fact that as globalization affects local places, those unique and idiosyncratic characteristics that differentiate local places from the increasingly placeless norm become more important. A recent volume edited by three of Tuan's former students, Textures of Place: Exploring Humanist Geographies, carries this work forward (Paul C. Adams, Steven Hoelscher et al. 2001) and marks the first publication in more than twenty years of a volume focused on humanist geography. Although many of the articles in this volume are influenced by critical social theory, my own work is grounded in the earlier hermeneutical tradition of humanist geography.

The practice of humanist geography often has phenomenology as its philosophical base. The individual and personal experiences of place explored in this study can best be understood by attempting to discover each person's everyday lifeworld, a world that is both right before our eyes and yet obscured by the fact that it is taken-for-granted and not consciously perceived. The works of David Ley, Anne Buttimer and Edward Relph have provided me with an understanding of phenomenological inquiry, which requires the researcher to attempt to view the lifeworld of another person through that person's perspective (Ley 1977), (Buttimer 1976), (Relph 1985). Scholars who pursue phenomenological inquiry employ qualitative methods that encourage flexible research design (Miles and Huberman 1984). The approach of this study and the scholarly works

on which it is based will be explained in detail in the next chapter, which describes the methodology of the study.

Sense of Place

Lowenthal was one of the first geographers to respond to Wright's call for an examination of the subjective view of the world held by "ordinary folk" (Wright 1947). His examination of the way that individuals form a personal view of the world, and the differences that exist between personal views and a shared, collective vision of the world proved useful to me as I considered both the individual and collective nature of Hillsborough's sense of place (Lowenthal 1961). Lowenthal described the formation of an individual's view of the world that results from experiences and memories, including memories that have been lost from conscious memory. These individual perceptions are shaped by society and culture. However, it is only because our private milieus have similarities that we are able to arrive at a consensus world view. Each individual has a view of the world that is idiosyncratic, and this will be more varied and textured than the consensually shared view of the world, which is created from an overlapping of the portions of the individual's world view that can be communicated with others. Each person's interior view of the world is often "inchoate, diffuse and irrational" but a consensus view, by virtue of the fact that is it shared with others, must be "conscious and communicable" (Lowenthal 1961, p. 249). This shared world view changes over time, both as the world changes and as our ideas about the world change. Therefore every generation of geographers need to construct a new vision of the world. This study addresses a change in the consensus of opinion about place that was both generational

and that coincided in time with a change in political and social power (from insider to incomer).

In this study not only did I need to consider the way a shared view of place is created, but I also had to examine the multiple meanings that can be assigned to the same landscape. Donald Meinig's work "The Beholding Eye: Ten Versions of the Same Scene" (Meinig 1979) describes the multiplicitous nature of the view of place. Meinig's focus is not on world view but on landscape, for which he gives a dictionary definition of that "stretch of country as seen from a single point" (Meinig 1979, p. 33). Although each person may be able to see the same features from that single point, they will organize those features into a landscape of meaning based on their own organizing ideas or concepts. Each person's view both mirrors the values that they hold and affects their quality of life. Not only will different people assign different meanings to the same landscape, but one person may read multiple meanings from a single vantage point. The tensions between insiders and incomers that I address in this study often arise from differences in the meanings assigned to the landscape.

The narratives that people make to construct place arise from their ways of seeing the landscape. Michael Curry has considered the ways that the unique nature of each place is constructed by multiple actors creating that place simultaneously (Curry 1999). He uses conversation as a metaphor for place: there can be multiple people involved, and the composition of the group can change over time. The scope of the discussion can be "large or small, brief or long lived" and "the nature of the conversation itself can change" (Curry 1999, p. 101). Each place is a composite of the places constructed by multiple actors, and of the multiple places constructed by each individual. Curry is speaking of

spatial scale when he says that one person will be in multiple places at different scales simultaneously, but I extend this concept to include time scale. To paraphrase Curry, one can be at Hillsborough's Hog Day in the 21st century and at an Indian village in the 18th century at the same time. The increasing complexity of society accentuates the problems that can arise from the multiple natures of place and this inevitably creates moral dilemmas: to which construction of place do we have responsibility? In Hillsborough the needs of the present often conflict with the desire to safeguard the remainders of the past. As the composition of the town has changed over time, the nature of the conversation about collective responsibility to place has also changed, as I examine in Chapter 6.

Many of the features of Hillsborough's landscape can be understood as part of the symbolic landscapes identified by Meinig and John Fraser Hart. Meinig's three symbolic landscapes, which are part of "the iconography of nationhood, part of the shared set of ideas and memories and feelings which bind a people together" (Meinig 1979, p. 164) are

- The New England village
- Main Street of Middle America
- California Suburbia

To these three, Hart suggests an additional symbolic landscape (Hart 1982)

- The Bypass Strip

Features of all four of these landscapes are present in Hillsborough. All of them play a role in the historic landscape—even, most surprisingly, the bypass strip. Daniel Boone Village (in the strip mall area) includes a gigantic statue of Daniel Boone and streetlights modeled on gaslights, which were selected because they were perceived to fit the historic nature of Hillsborough. Images of Middle American Main Street are common to small

town Main Streets across America (in Hillsborough's case King and Churton Streets), and even in the newer outlying developments that are Hillsborough's suburbia the street names echo the colonial period (Cornwallis Hills, Bonaparte Street) and the architecture mimics Cape Cod. Meinig's New England Village may be the source of symbolic elements that are also significant in Hillsborough. The image of the New England Village has entered the local culture both through the national media and through the incomers who have moved here from the Northeast. Joseph Wood found that the settlement ideal of the New England village was created by nineteenth-century elites who invented "a geographical past that never existed" (Wood 1991, p. 32). Similar processes seem to be at work in Hillsborough today, as evidenced by a comment made at a Historic District Commission meeting by a former resident of Connecticut describing Hillsborough as a "rural village." A story in the local newspaper also referred to Hillsborough this way (Shumaker 2000). It is not and never has been a rural village by any definition a geographer would recognize, but that image may be a part of a widely identified anti-urban bias in this country that can be traced back to the time of deTocqueville. Tuan states "people create their own historical myths" (Tuan 1976, p. 266) and the change in identity from central place (former state capital, current county seat) to rural village is myth-making in progress.

Geographers who have suggested that landscape functions as a text with symbolic features that can be read or interpreted include Barnes, Cosgrove, Curry, Duncan and Duncan, Lewis, Ley, and others. The interviews conducted during this study reveal that many of the informants do see and interpret landscape as text. Most of my informants are not trained as social scientists. Their views are idiosyncratic, and reveal much about

their own preconceptions and preoccupations—as do the readings of the august social scientists, of course. The text that an informant reads has been created by that person as a result of the interactions between himself and the landscape. The act of observation is the beginning point of the construction of the text, as the person reads the landscape through his own experience and history. Each person interprets landscape from their own worldview and this is of course informed by the wider culture. There may be shared and overlapping readings of any landscape, but because this study is concerned with the relationships between individuals and place, the interesting aspects of each reading are the way that they reveal an individual's relationship with place.

Connection to Place

The work of Edward Relph has provided much of the inspiration for this study, especially Place and Placelessness. Much of Relph's work has concerned the relationship between person and place that also is at the heart of this study. Relph has described the experiential nature of place, which each of us views through the "lens of our attitudes, experiences, and intentions, and from our own unique circumstances" (Relph 1976, p. 36). Attachment to place grows over time, and arises primarily from our interactions with other people, leading to a stronger sense of commitment and responsibility. Therefore, as we live in a place the nature of the place changes for us, and a growing sense of attachment may carry with it an increasing sense of the continuity of that place over time. Relph considered the length of time in place for each individual, but my work also considers the individual's awareness of the length of time his or her family has been in the place. Length of family association with confers a sense of permanence and continuity and plays a large role in an individual's sense of the history of the place.

Relph also examines the nature of our connection to place.

> The places to which we are most attached are literally fields of care, settings in which we have had a multiplicity of experiences and which call forth an entire complex of affections and responses. But to care for a place involves more than having a concern for it that is based on certain past experiences and future expectations—there is also a real responsibility and respect for that place both for itself and for what it is to yourself and to others. There is in fact a complete commitment to that place, a commitment that is as profound as any that a person can make (Relph 1976, p. 38).

Relph suggests that there are stages of association between complete attachment and complete unattachment. The places to which we have the most profound commitment are our "home places." These centers of attachment to place provide a sense of security and continuity for the individuals and groups fortunate enough to have this relationship to place, but Relph has observed that in our mobile society fewer and fewer people have the opportunity to form this commitment. This is one of the important distinctions between the insiders and incomers who participated in this study. Some of the incomers may indeed have home places, but those are located elsewhere and therefore the locus of their family is elsewhere also. The loss of attachment to home place is one of the features of our society that leads to a sense of placelessness.

Relph applies to sense of place the ideas of authenticity and inauthenticity drawn from phenomenology, and this provides a useful framework for considering the different senses of place experienced by insiders and incomers. He defines an authentic or unself-conscious sense of place as "above all of being inside and belonging to your place both as an individual and as a member of a community, and to know this without reflecting on it" (Relph 1976, p. 65). Some of the insiders revealed this sense of place through their complete conflation of self, place and community extending back through many

generations here, as I discuss in Chapter 5. They (and the earlier generations of their family) are the place, and the place is them.

Relph finds that the possibility of forming an authentic sense of place is "undermined by the possibility of increased spatial mobility" (Relph 1976, p. 66), and indeed the incomers who participated in this study have a very different relationship to the place. For the incomer, the development of a relationship with place is a self-conscious act based on experience and reflection. He discusses the form that the self-conscious experience of place takes, one in which the person makes "an attempt to experience all the qualities and meanings of a place both as the people living there might experience them and also in terms of their functional, aesthetic or other qualities that might not be apparent to existential insiders" (Relph 1976, p. 66). He finds that although a self-conscious relationship with place will be more superficial than an authentic sense of place, it is still possible for such a person to form an intense association with place.

The Response to Placelessness

Many scholars have chronicled the changing nature of the landscape as new places are built to standard templates instead of arising from local materials in response to local environmental conditions. Relph has considered the effect of this on the way that place is experienced. He defines placelessness as "a weakening of the identity of places to the point where they not only look alike but feel alike and offer the same bland possibilities for experience" (Relph 1976, p. 90). Mass communication (including improvements in transportation), mass culture, multi-national corporations, and central authorities are the culprits in the spread of placeless places, which are also often "virtually without time" (Relph 1976, p. 33). This is not a completely new phenomenon,

however, and Relph cites the example of the Roman Empire which imposed a uniformity of pattern on the territories that they controlled.

Placeless places provide a context for comparison that is an essential element of sense of place (Relph 1976), an observation made by many of the informants of this study as they compared Hillsborough's historic sense of place with the surrounding placeless place. Social scientists, architects, and planners have all viewed the growth of placelessness as a modern problem. The fact that authentic place is created over periods of time by the people living there who feel a sense of attachment, commitment and responsibility means that it is not possible to create an authentic sense of place in new places. This has not prevented the architects and planners from trying, however. "New Urbanism" is a response to placelessness (and to other place related social problems of the modern world, less relevant to this study) (Congress for the New Urbanism 2004). Chris Wilson[1] has examined the relationship between New Urbanist interest in the revival of historic precedents and the historic landscape of Santa Fe, New Mexico.

> The reaction against modern placelessness was often cast as a call for a greater sense of place. Uses of that concept have ranged from the relatively shallow appreciation of aesthetic character or as tourism advertising images to the more spatially rooted creation of public spaces for social and civic identity…, or the cultivation of place-based identity through grassroots public history, historic preservation, and participatory public art (Wilson 2004, p. 197).

Wilson's article on Santa Fe was included in a recent volume titled Giving Preservation a History: Histories of Historic Preservation in the United States which was useful in helping me to understand the larger context as I considered issues of historic preservation in Hillsborough (discussed in Chapter 6). Such literature provided me with the means to understand the forces at work within Hillsborough, even though historic

[1] Wilson is J.B. Jackson Professor of Cultural Landscape Studies at the University of New Mexico School of Architecture and Planning in Albuquerque.

preservation is not the primary focus of this study. My study included informants who see the landscape through the lens of historic preservation, and who have been educated or indoctrinated[2] in the philosophy of historic preservation, and I contrast their views of the landscape with the views of those who are not thusly educated or indoctrinated, and who view the landscape with a different set of underlying values. Giving Preservation a History appropriately begins with an essay by Lowenthal, the geographer whose work provides the intellectual foundation for understanding the relationship between history, heritage and place (Lowenthal 1975; Lowenthal 1976; Lowenthal 1985; Lowenthal 1998; Lowenthal 2004). He makes the distinction between history, which "tells all who will listen what has happened and how things came to be as they are," and heritage which "passes on exclusive myths of origin and continuance, endowing a select group with prestige and common purpose" (Lowenthal 1998, p. 128). Both history and heritage as Lowenthal defines them shape beliefs about the past in Hillsborough, but it is heritage that drives the interest in historic preservation. Lowenthal has charted the expansion of what is considered historically significant and worth preserving. It is no longer only the structures of great antiquity, or of stirring events, or of the ruling classes that attract the interest of the preservationist. He says that as modern society has become disconnected from the past, structures formerly considered too humble or too recent are now thought to be historically significant. (In Chapter 4, I track this attitude change in Hillsborough.) Lowenthal states that "dismay at massive change stokes demands for heritage. Market forces swiftly outdate most things now made or built; migration uproots millions from familiar locales; technology transforms familiar scenes at shocking speed… Beleaguered

[2] David Lowenthal describes heritage (of which historic preservation is a component) as a "quasi-religious cult" (Lowenthal, 1998).

by loss and change, we keep our bearings only by clinging to remnants of stability" (Lowenthal 1998, p. 6). The form that the desire for heritage takes differs from one country to the next, but he finds it to be an almost universal phenomenon that has resulted from globalization. He states that

> What is involved is a cluster of trends whose premises, promises, and problems are truly global. These trends engender isolation and dislocation of self from family, family from neighborhood, neighborhood from nation, and even one-self from one's former selves. Such changes reflect manifold aspects of life--increasing longevity, family dissolution, the loss of familiar surroundings, quickened obsolescence, genocide and wholesale migration, and a growing fear of technology. They erode future expectations, heighten past awareness, and instill among millions the view that they need and are owed a heritage (Lowenthal 1998, p. 6).

Conclusion

The humanist tradition in geography recognizes the particular and idiosyncratic nature of each place, which means that every study of an individual place extends the scholarship on place. This study follows the Duncans' observation and recommendation that "the nature of attachment to place varies and such variation should be investigated empirically" (Duncan and Duncan 2001, p. 42). By describing the profound differences in attachment to place between insiders and incomers I illuminate the nature of authentic and self-conscious senses of place. Further, through examining the interactions concerning place between insiders and incomers, I illustrate not only how their world views collide and conflict, but how the contributions they make to each other result in the construction of this place. Finally, by examining in microcosm responses to the placelessness produced by globalization, I demonstrate the way a small community mobilizes its defenses to protect distinctive characteristics of place that are time-based.