

I DON'T FEEL THAT ABOUT ENVIRONMENTAL PSYCHOLOGY TODAY. BUT I WANT TO.

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Abstract

Environmental psychology—*psycho geography* as many geographers called it—was a politically motivated attempt on the part of academicians of the late 1960s to transform their study into a form of praxis, with consequences for the choice of subjects (more naturally occurring) and methods (more ethological). In geography, theoretical foundations were perceived in the work, among others, of Carl Sauer and J. K. Wright, while William Bunge exemplified the possibilities of geography as praxis. The joint venture was exciting, not because it was new, but because it was perceived as having consequences in the world of action. This shaped the work more than anything. Contemporary work lacks these qualities. In a phrase, *it doesn't matter*. It needs to.

It's probably always obvious, but I already knew, then, in those years at Clark, that this special issue would someday be written. Not that I don't think it's premature—it is—but that, then, there was already a feeling that we were doing something that mattered, something important, something that had never been done before. A Golden Age: back then, in it, we already called it that. The least of it had to do with the marriage of psychology and geography, for it was always the tone that was more critical, the tone, the energy, the conviction that we counted for something and what we did counted for something; and maybe it was this tone, this energy, this conviction that made the *rapprochement* possible in the first place. I wasn't there in the very beginning—which must have been when Bob Kates and Saul Cohen took over the Graduate School of Geography—for I didn't arrive until 1967; but whenever the beginning had 'actually' been, nothing really happened until 1967, the tone that I want to describe didn't materialize until then; and perhaps what I want to suggest is that nothing took off until some Sixties kids met up with some politically savvy faculty. For, whatever else it was, environmental psychology—psycho-geography—was a child of its times, was a Sixties thing.

We Called It Psycho geography Then

I should probably admit right off, although I frequently reply 'environmental psychologist' when people ask me what I am, that I don't know anything about environmental psychology, that I reply as I do only because when I used to say 'psycho geographer' people just blinked, or asked, 'Is that separated by a hyphen . . . or a comma?' In a letter of 1971, responding to a paper Gordon Hinzmann and I had written tracing the history of psycho geography at Clark (Wood and Hinzmann, unpublished), Saul Cohen commented, 'We did not use the term psycho-geography until two years ago when Beck introduced it. Prior to then, Kates had started to

speak of Environmental Perception and Stea had broadened it to Environmental Behavior. Wapner continues to describe it as Environmental Psychology' (Cohen, personal communication). It's not so much that he was wrong about when 'we' first began to call it psychogeography—though I have here a copy of an *M.A. Comprehensive Exam/Psychogeography/September, 1968*, and here a handout dated 27 November 1967, from a student in David Stea's cross-listed Geography/Psychology 207a that commences, 'This obtrusive measure is part of a project I am doing for Psychogeography 207 . . . ' which is what we called it from the beginning, from September of that year, because who could say 'psychography' or 'enviropsych'?—but, no, its not so much that, as I said, as his implication that what was at stake was no more than a terminological squabble, that Kates's environmental perception, and Wapner's environmental psychology, and Stea's psychogeography all referred to the same thing. But they didn't, and the reason they didn't has everything to do with that tone, that conviction, that sense of making a difference . . .

If I came to Clark for anything, it was to make a difference. I had entered the then Western Reserve University with every intention of becoming a medieval historian. There was something about the cloistered quality of the Middle Ages as I knew them—and about the cloistered quality of doing historical research as I imagined it—that appealed to me, that had appealed to me since I could remember. But having completed in my sophomore year all the requirements for graduation in history, I found myself in English, where I had most found myself in high school. I liked the play of opinion in English, the ready debate, but there was so apparent an irrelevance in these studies of Henry James and Nathaniel Hawthorne at this time of war in Vietnam and war in the streets of America's cities, that when, in an effort to comply with a science requirement, I found myself in a course in geography, I was all the more readily seduced by its show of relevance, by its apparent power to explain what other disciplines only speculated about, by its seeming rootedness in the material stuff of the world, water, soil, minerals, food. And so, under the tutelage of Mildred Walmsley—a Clark alumna—I rather incidentally also fulfilled the requirements for graduation in geography, going so far as to take a formal minor in geology. Its relevance was everywhere, not only in my enhanced ability to make sense of my historical situation—something history never vouchsafed—but in my enhanced ability to make sense of the topic for my English thesis, an issue in the history of the detective story, the source of the split in its tradition, an Anglo-East Coast tradition following in the footsteps of Poe, a tradition emerging from some experience of the West, something to do with Mark Twain's sojourn in Nevada, with the birth of the dime novel, with space, time, culture . . . I was writing for the Department of English, but it was some sort of geography—though not the kind taught at Western Reserve—that I was dreaming of. And though I applied to graduate schools in all three disciplines, it was the increasing irrelevance of English that pushed me through history toward geography, tugged gently toward Clark by Mildred Walmsley's devotion to her alma mater and the amount of financial aid it was waving in my direction.

It Was the Late 1960s

Yet I am convinced that what happened at Clark had less to do with the quality and eclecticism of our academic backgrounds, than with *their* backgrounds, with the rest

of our lives, with my travels in southern Mexico, for instance, and my employment in a Cuyahoga valley steel mill, and my instigation of a club in Cleveland Heights where teenagers could dance to live music that was usually heard only in bars with liquor licenses. Nor am I being silly when I insist that *A Hard Day's Night*—the Beatles in general—and our discovery of The Supremes and James Brown and the Famous Flames, and Chuck Berry—unbelievable in his appearance at Clark—that these had as much to do with psychogeography at Clark as anything else, not the films and music *per se*, though they were crucial, so much as what they suggested about what was and what could be, about how it could be, about the possibilities that existed for change, that existed for being: for what happened at Clark, at least for me and those I was closest to, was above all else a change of air, an opening of windows, a smashing of academic taboos, an iconoclasm of methods . . .

It is easy to forget, but we were running from the draft, many of us. Those males who entered graduate school in '67 or later were all subject to the lottery or worse, were engaged in deceit or subterfuge, were violating the law in a dozen different ways, flagrantly, with the connivance of their friends and acquaintances. There was no time, there was no inclination for empty formalisms, for the sterility of academic conventions, for learning, much less respecting, the boundaries of geography's turf, or psychology's turf, for calling the faculty, 'Dr Stea, Dr Blaut, Dr Anderson . . .' They were David and Jim and Jeremy and if there were older students and older faculty who objected, their timorous voices were overwhelmed by the din of the shouting of the young turks, our faculty—my peers, as I conceived of them—Stea and Blaut and Anderson, certainly, but also and centrally George McCleary and Martyn Bowden, and at a distance that somehow kept him out of it, Saul Cohen. When I think of psychogeography in those first years, 1967–1970, these are those I think of, except for Saul, who seemed to me always an administrator, not a thinker, who surprised me later when he revealed, as I thought, an interest in our work for its own sake, not as grist for his bureaucrat's mill. Certainly I do not think of Joachim Wohlwill. Or Bob Kates. If he was even there in those years, he was not there for me, I didn't know he was around, never felt his presence, and if I had to guess I would guess he was off-campus, on leave someplace, off doing research, but not part of the excitement around psychogeography, around environmental psychology, around the Place Perception Project. That was David and Jim and George, and Jeremy and Martyn.

Martyn Bowden: Wright and Sauer

It is easy to forget Martyn Bowden's contribution, easy not to even see it, but in the beginning, before geosophy and perception peeled off from what would become environmental cognition and environmental psychology, before geosophy and perception determined to recast themselves as essentially historical, to not follow Yi-Fu Tuan into a growing psychological 'sophistication'—in the beginning, then, when it was still whole and fresh, Martyn was necessary, was catalytic. If I think back to what there was to read then, it is not the October 1966 number of *The Journal of Social Issues* that comes to mind (Kates and Wohlwill, 1966), or the 1967 Lowenthal collection (Lowenthal, 1967)—directories, at best, of who was who (for who could read that stuff, that academic hack writing?)—no, it is J. K. Wright who looms there, '*Terrae Incognitae: The Place of Imagination in Geography*' (Wright, 1966a),

and 'Notes on Early American Geopiety' (Wright, 1966*b*); and it was Martyn who made us read Wright, who brought him to the campus for an amazing performance of 'Mountain Gloom and Mountain Glory' (Wright, 1971), who linked the new Wright (for *Human Nature in Geography* made Wright new to us all in 1966) and Wright's geosophy ('the study of geographical knowledge from any and all points of view' (Wright, 1966*a*, p. 83)—still the best description of what we were all about) with environmental perception, with Lowenthal and Lowenthal's people (Lowenthal and Bowden, 1975), with Beck, and Lynch and his images (1960), and through Lynch, through design, to the social issues people, Parr (1966) and Wolpert and Sonnenfeld, to environmental behavior, cognition, to psychology. The tie to geography was in the beginning through Martyn, through his Wright, and his *Landscape* (which Martyn flogged but in which Stea published), and his Sauer ('The Barrens of Kentucky,' for instance, early geosophy, early perception work, but new again when republished in 1963 in *Land and Life*). If in my second semester at Clark I took Stea's Geography 207b: Behavioral Science and the Environment, I took that same semester Bowden's Geography 356b: Seminar: Perception of the Geographic Environment; and if for Stea I went to Mexico and administered questionnaires to 180 teenagers soliciting images of the city they lived in (Wood, 1969; Stea and Wood, 1970; Wood, 1971), for Bowden I read a hundred nineteenth-century dime novels, culling from them images of the plains environment in which they were set (Wood, unpublished). Stea. Bowden. That first year, when I thought of psychogeography, I thought first of all of these.

Bill Bunge

They hadn't hooked me though. My commitment, my emotional commitment—for I was supposed to be studying peasant agriculture under Anderson and Blaut, not psychogeography under Bowden and Stea—came when Jeremy tacked xerox copies of two mimeographed sheets from Bill Bunge up on the bulletin board beside the student mailboxes. Headed 'The Society for Human Exploration' they were an invitation to exploit the most traditional of geographic methods in everyday environments under an altered set of perceptions: 'Geography is often defined as the study of the earth's surface as the home of man. But the view from which man's house?' It was a key word in those days, 'view'. There it was in the title of Kates's piece in *The Journal of Social Issues*, 'Stimulus and symbol: the view from the bridge' (Kates, 1966). And there it was in the title of the Appleyard, Lynch and Myer piece in *Environmental Perception and Behavior*, 'The view from the road' (Appleyard, Lynch and Myer, 1967). It was the principle operator in Wright's definition of geosophy, '... from any and all points of view' (Wright, 1966*a*, p. 83). Among all these views it was only Bunge's that connected with my desire to matter, to make a difference, and from that point forward school became for me a pursuit of what I called psychogeography, Wright's fascination fired by Bunge's sense of outrage, Bowden's topic fired by Anderson's humanism, though then, in the beginning, it was all one iconoclastic whole, any parsing is to forego that reality, to try to see the past from the future in me, or in you, but we have to see it from the futures we all became, run it backwards to that moment from which we all exploded, when it *was* whole, before the turfettes were all staked out, geosophy—thoroughly historical—over here; and environmental perception—still tied to hazards, to scenic 'resources'—over there; and off over there environmental cognition—ooh, increasingly 'heavy', increasingly

oriented toward neurophysiology, increasingly removed from the 'environment' (to say nothing of spatial cognition, tucked into an almost hidden corner, all but entirely free of 'environmental' contamination); with—yawn—environmental psychology right here, making its token gestures to the environment, but not so a *geographer* would really notice, pretty much psychology as she was, the slides in the experiments of woodlands now instead of other things—but, please, let's not go outdoors!—pretty much as she was, despite her marriage to geography, somehow as virginal as before the wedding, as before the courtship . . . Psychogeography had nothing to do with any of these, because, indiscriminately it embraced them all, got the psychologist out into the field, messy as it was (Andy Goldman, graduate student in psychology, joining the geographers in their January field camp in Puerto Rico, but the only one, to my knowledge, in all those years), opened the geographers to the role of the mind, their own at the very least, got them thinking experimentally, maybe, one or two of them, got them both to break up their paradigms a little, to relax their disciplinary rigor, which is always that of *rigor mortis*, oh, even if only so much . . . tried to, anyhow, for it was very difficult. Too difficult. And nobody even tries anymore.

Now It's the Mid-1980s

What happened to the *daring*? What happened to the *environment* in environmental psychology? You pick up a journal like this one and read a piece on environmental perception or on the environment as a source of affect or on residential satisfaction and you barely have any idea where the residents are living, you feel lucky if the author even names the site that's the source of affect—if indeed it is a site, and not a sequence of slides or a model or a video tape. Often you never learn anything of the environment being perceived, just that the signs of the regression were stable, or that general classes of vegetation predict scenic 'beauty', whatever that means, for I can assure you, the landscape architects don't have the vaguest idea. Nor do they much care. Nor do most geographers. Nor do most psychologists. Nor do I. I may have failed, but in the work I did with Stea, a psychologist, and Anderson, a geographer, for my master's degree on the image among adolescents of San Cristobal las Casas, I tried, in any case, to deal with that place as well as those perceptions, to say something about that city—about *the* city—as well as about those adolescent views—about adolescents—about the meaning each made for the other. I may have failed, but in the work I did with Beck, a psychologist, and McClery, a geographer, for my doctorate on the development of images among adolescents of the novel environments called London, Rome and Paris, I tried, in any case, to deal with those places as well as those cognitive structures, to not overlook Rome in this cognitive map, or Paris in that (Wood, 1973; Beck and Wood, 1976*a,b*; Wood and Beck, 1976). To do this meant forgoing the way of the geographer *and* forgoing the way of the psychologist, meant hacking a new way through the taboos and conventions, a way neither had gone, a way toward a *psychogeography* or an *environmental* psychology, someplace that, as Roger Hart put it in the preface to his dissertation, 'seemed at the time intuitively right, but academically innovative' (Hart, 1979, vii). When Spencer and Dixon wrote about *Environmental A*, the off-the-wall mapping 'language' Beck and I developed for our work in Europe that

... as far as it is possible to validate an instrument designed to measure subjective responses to places, *Environmental A* is an accurate, useful and an intuitively satisfying instrument of measurement. Its wider use is recommended, not only in further studies of the microgenesis of the urban image, but also in other areas of environmental perception research, so that the empirical tradition may begin to incorporate aspects of the humanistic-phenomenological approach that many researchers have now acknowledged to be important to the understanding of behaviour in the environment (Spencer and Dixon, 1983, p. 382)

I would like to suggest that they are encouraging the adoption, not of something that Beck and I created, but of a frame of mind you feel in all the Clark work of Blaut and Stea, Moore and McCleary, Beck and Hart, a frame of mind, a tone, an energy, a conviction that what they were doing mattered, that what they were doing could make a difference.

I don't feel that about environmental psychology today. But I want to.

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