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'INSIDERS', 'OUTSIDERS', AND THE GEOGRAPHY OF REGIONAL LIFE

Anne Buttimer

Abstract

Two distinct connotations of term 'region' have generated two distinct and often separate fields of endeavour within geography. Traditional regional geography has focused on the description of areally-circumscribed territories, while regional science (in the Anglo-American world) has tended to be more analytical and more specifically concerned with nodally-organized functional regions. Two contrasting definitions of space and time are implicit here — the former derives from a Newtonian notion of space and time as containers of objects while the latter derives from a relational notion of space-time as topological surface. For a number of sociological and ideological reasons, however, both share a perspective on knowledge and experience which could be regarded as an 'outsider' one. The 'insider's' perspective has not received much explicit attention, largely because of difficulties in generalization and a fear of 'subjectivism'. Arguments are raised to support the view that the geographer's task is the articulation of neither insider nor outsider views exclusively but rather to confront the challenge of the dialectic between the two within concrete life situations.

From a philosophical viewpoint it could be argued that objectivity demands a critical sensitivity to the logic and appropriateness of models used in research. To take any descriptive model which has appeared appropriate for particular settings and then apply it indiscriminately to other settings is one example of cultural 'subjectivism', e.g. the kind of regional geography which became a mouthpiece for national/colonial/class interests. On a logical plane, also, regional-science models appropriate for particular realms of human experience cannot be assumed to be appropriate for other realms, yet there have been many gaucheries of spatial blueprinting in realms as different as industrial, educational and health planning. It is at the practical level of everyday life, however, that the juxtaposition of these two types of regionalization often creates most confusion. On philosophical, logical, and practical grounds, it could be argued that no

* This paper is based on an impromptu presentation at the Congress of Finnish Geographers, October 22, 1977. It is therefore oriented more to pedagogical rather than to applied interests. Some implications for regional research and policy will, however, be self-evident.
long-term solution can be reached without involving the ‘insider’, viz. those whose lives are affected by changes in regional organization and administration. Until better communication between managerial and resident interest can be attained, geography cannot claim either relevance or truth.

The most urgent task for the regional geographer thus becomes one of education in the literal sense: to evoke an awareness of the values implicit in his own a priori presuppositions and then to facilitate an awareness of environment and responsibility among the audience of his work. This paper shares some insights derived from various attempts to apply this perspective in both teaching and research and also points to avenues for joint exploration by scholars attained to either ‘insider’ or ‘outsider’ stances on regional life. It concludes with a challenge, old and new, of seeking a common language which might contribute toward a harmonization of the currently diverse and fragmented strands of thought and practice within regional geography.

Few expressions rival the ‘region’ in the number and variety of meanings assumed particularly in recent years. ‘Regional geography’, however, thanks to a built-in conservative effect of school curricula, and textbooks, has held a fairly consistent image in the minds of most practitioners. It is generally associated with global descriptions of area/ly-circumscribed domains within which some measure of homogeneity is discernable and whose scale is related to the number and complexity of variables considered. Grounded in a Newtonian notion of space as container of objects these formal regions stand in marked contrast with the functionally defined regions of urban industrial organization which bespeak a relational notion of space as topological surface (cf. Aay, 1972; Norberg-Schulz, 1971). These two distinct definitions of region have never quite harmonized; textbooks tend to retain the ‘old’ model while the ‘new’ has generated, in the Anglo-American world at least, a distinct field called Regional Science. The applied spin off from these two distinct conceptions of ‘region’ and the variations in scale and content of so-called regional plans have led to much confusion and disarray in local living situations. Despite their obvious methodological and conceptual differences, however, both notions share some common strengths and limitations when applied in practice (Lefèbre, 1974).

From both pedagogical and research vantage points, therefore, some critical reflections on these common features may lead to more fruitful insight into the present and future challenge of regional geography than mere debate over their differences.

From Roman times at least the notion of region was associated with rex (king) and regio (kingdom). Cuius princeps eius religio reminds one of the
consistently political or at least managerial connotations of regional organisation. It is not surprising to learn that geographers entered their ‘discipline-making’ era in the heyday of empire building and that they have served princes and potentates in staking out colonial territories and drafting blueprints for the administration of ‘foreign’ areas. Classical regional geography— at least the version propagated via the most acclaimed textbooks—reached its zenith within those schools which taught the children and served the practical interests of major empires. This has been just as true, I am told, in Imperial China as it was in Alexandrian Greece or Victorian England. Proceedings of various European Royal Geographical Societies leave little doubt concerning the motivation and intent of pioneering work in the discipline.

A similar generalization could also be postulated concerning regional science, which again reached its zenith in places and times where it could best serve the interests of industrial and technological development. The CBD replaced the Metropole as hub around which space was to be conquered and markets generated. Spatial connectivity within central-place hierarchies could be seen to assume the role of Roman roads and colonial trade routes, while rent gradients and density profiles supplanted former status hierarchies and sacredness in the physiognomy of inhabited space. In the context of postwar reconstruction and regional development, too, the geographer could take a more aggressive role: everyday living environments for families, workers, commercial, and retail establishments could be transformed within the framework of an overall ideology of economic growth, functional efficiency, and above all rationality (Harvey, 1973; Buttner, 1974).

From such interpretations of our history some geographers have tended to judge our immediate ancestors of having identified the field with managerial interests (Blaug, 1970; Bunge, 1969; Santos, 1975a; Samuels, 1971). A counter argument could, of course, be articulated. Positive efforts to rationalize production and to promote economic development were matched by a considerable effort to improve consumer access to markets and services (Hägerstrand, 1976; White, 1972). Regional-science methods and models were often proposed for the decentralization of secondary and tertiary activities as well as for the redistribution of welfare facilities. The groundswell of political demand for social justice and equality during the 1960’s found geographic expression in many blueprints for levelling out spatial differences in the distribution of wealth and poverty. Whose interests were actually served through this applied work is still and open question. (Buttner, 1972, 1978b; Santos, 1975b).

Both versions of regional geography could in fact be considered as ‘outsider’
perspectives: the geographer assuming the role of detached observer encouraged by conventional definitions of a scientific method to take a so-called 'objective' stance on the data which he perceived (Snow, 1959, 1961). Contrast this with the 'insider's' stance which is grounded in everyday experience of living within a particular milieu (Bollnow, 1961; Matoró, 1966; Yi-fu Tuan, 1971a, 1974, 1975, 1977; Ley and Cybriwsky, 1974; Relph, 1976; Rowles, 1978). Convention has tended to identify the insider's views as 'subjective' and the outsider's as 'objective'. Both, however, have always demonstrated a blend of both subjectivity and objectivity. Traditional geographic models have always reflected culturally relative and subjective world views. The record of traditional genre de vie should leave little question about the rationality (i.e. reasonableness and therefore objectivity) of ways in which people have known and organized their own milieu throughout history (Griaule and Dieterlen, 1965; Redfield, 1960; Richards, 1975; Tempels, 1959). It is little surprise to me, therefore, schooled as I was in the regional geography of my own homeland from 'colonial' textbooks, to discover that Reine Geographie was written by a Finn rather than by a German. J. G. Granö spoke of a milieu in which he lived and worked, tasted and felt, his immediate environment as the 'local connectedness of physical, organic, and human features' was an experimentally grounded insight. Granö's field research spanned regions far beyond his native Finland, but he wrote in a manner which attempted to combine both 'insider' and 'outsider' views. He thus exemplified the challenge of true 'objectivity', viz., to begin by sensing the nature of the 'object' in its own terms rather than forcing it in an a priori model supplied by his discipline or cultural inheritance. In the same way, one of the finest accounts of my homeland has been written by a Welshman, Professor E. E. Evans. It is indeed difficult to insist that only the native could logically have insight into the life of a region (Evans, 1956, 1975). Perhaps it is from the empathetic observer who has taken the time and effort to grasp what life is like for those who live in a region and to render an account to which they too could resonate that the best quality regional geography has come. (Vidal de la Blanche, 1911, 1922; Febvre, 1925).

Vidal de la Blanche is quoted as having remarked that he could get more insight from sitting for a few hours in a village square than from exhaustive perusal of documentary material. The acclaim which has been accorded those classical regional monographs can be justified in terms of how appropriate the model was for describing concrete life settings within early 20c French pays: these were regions of limited size, of fairly homogeneous social and economic history and political identity, and external landscape forms actually reflected the internal characteristics of lived experience. Insider and outsider
views could be harmonized under the general programmatic formula of 'paysage, miroir de la civilisation'.

Extended to larger scales, e.g. in certain volumes of the *Géographie Universelle* series, or to settings transformed by economic or demographic change, the model lost its explicit appropriateness as a framework for integrating ecological, cultural and chorological dimensions of regional life. The changing relationship between landscape and life rendered the outsider's lens more and more opaque. With increasing levels of technological sophistication and economic growth the dialectic of formal and functional bases for regional organization also assumed shapes which could not be embraced within a unified framework. Indeed the call for 'regional integration' today may symbolize a more general malaise over fragmentation in life as well as in thought (Sorre, 1962; Roszak, 1973).

It is difficult to assess causes or effects in the story of geography's relationship to its milieu. The demise of traditional regional geography parallels the actual demise of so-called 'natural regions' just as the functional specialization within regional science appears to parallel the sectorization of life which has characterized postwar milieux. The rift between chorology and ecology in American geography certainly sundered hopes of retaining any meaningful communication between the physical and cultural dimensions of regional study. The divergent ways in which Ratzel and Hettner were interpreted in the Anglo-American world led to an exaggeration and empowerment of each: from one extreme derived a literature now considered as 'environmental determinism', and from the other a collection of regional case studies from which generalizations were rarely sought. In many ways the chorological approach which characterized studies of areal differentiation during the Interwar Period in the US could be seen as paving the way for Exceptionalism (all the rhetoric of the Schaeffer-Harshorne debate notwithstanding) and the materialistic conception of life and geography which found new energy in the so-called Quantitative Revolution (Samuels, 1971).

No doubt there has always been a va-et-vient between geographic thought and its external milieu — sometimes leading, sometimes following, ways in which mankind actually organized and perceived regional life. How one evaluates this is obviously a matter of ideological and critical judgement; the important point is to unmask it so we can discuss it openly and not bury it under a smokescreen of methodological and pedagogical verbiage. We need to become aware of the relationships between geographic thought and its total milieu and from such awareness to select a course which seems appropriate in our own particular situations (Buttimer, 1974, 1978c).

By now there should be little question about where my biases lie. I should
like to contribute toward developing a kind of regional geography which
provokes awareness of environments by those who live in them as well as by
those who study and design them. A dialectic of internal and external forces
may be discerned wherever life exists, and therefore both 'insider' and 'outsider'
perspectives are necessary (Scheler, 1961; Teilhard de Chardin, 1965).
The challenge I read in this for the geographer is to work toward a style of
research and representation which would allow each to shed its appropriate
light on the dynamics of regional life.

The question of how such a perspective may be operationalized in practice
may be of more interest than further elaboration on its philosophical rationale.
For almost ten years now I have been exploring ways in which my own
geographic research and teaching could become a means of evoking this kind
of critical environmental awareness. Within introductory courses on social
geography I have endeavoured to lead my students to a consciousness of the
various 'filters' through which the environment is experienced both by
themselves and by others. In this, I have found inspiration in the Vidalian
tradition of la géographie humaine (Vidal de la Blache, 1951; Buttmer, 1971).
Through exercises and projects students have come to realize how culturally
relative their own perspectives are and then begin to appreciate the integrity of
'foreign' ones.

The key attraction of la géographie humaine for me lay primarily in its
comprehensive horizons and the avenues it opened for an exploration of both
'insider' and 'outsider' perspectives on regional life. The notion of genre de
devie epitomized this holistic approach: it drew attention to the ideas, values,
habits, and symbols associated with livelihoods as well as to the more tangibly
measureable patterns of interaction, habitat, and land use. Both of these
levels were always related to the ecological base. It was from this threefold
stance on genre de vie (the ideational, interactional/behavioral, and ecological
dimensions) that I found inspiration for many small-scale empirical projects
with my students.

The pressure to operationalize the notion into more explicitly analytical
terms was, of course, very strong. An invitation to join a team of social
scientists and planners at the University of Glasgow (1968--70) provided this
opportunity (Forbes, et al., 1974). One of my tasks was to evaluate theory and
practice in the field of residential area design. Review of literature and plans
at that time suggested that the communications impasse between designers
and residents represented a good example of the more general issue of 'insiders'
and 'outsiders'. It certainly demanded more than just another social
scientist's impression of the built environment and logical critique of the
myths and theories from which designs were derived. What was needed most
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was some insight into the lived experience of potential residents beyond the cursory impressions which could be gained from sociological case studies. Plans were usually formulated on the basis of assumptions about the generally predictable or average characteristics of prospective occupants and designers construed their task as one which would deliver a blueprint for the 'locationally efficient' distribution of housing - its scale, architecture, and service provision. What I tried to do was to gain some insight into the experiences of families relocated from delapidated property in the old sections of the city to newly constructed high rise buildings on the periphery. My hunch was that the actual experience of moving would have awakened a consciousness of what mattered most in their relationship to environment.

Following some of the suggestions made by Max Sorre in his essays on genres de vie and social space (Sorre, 1967) and drawing inspiration also from P. H. Chombart de Lauwe's pioneering studies of working class families in Paris (Chombart de Lauwe et al., 1956) I designed a pilot study exploring these three components of residents' 'social space' in Glasgow: images of environments, activity networks, and patterns of territoriality (Buttimer, 1969, 1972a). The following model suggests ways in which I expected to gain information concerning the ways in which people evaluated their livedmilieux (Fig. 1).

Within each of the housing areas studied I hypothesized that the bases for common denominators of environmental experience would be the 'social reference systems' to which people belonged - Glasgow being a city where gang territories and denominational parishes provided a well recognized regionalization system (Shibutani, 1962; Schultz, 1962).

A typology ranging from the 'localite' to the 'urbanite' was postulated in an effort to demonstrate the varying impact of relocation on different individuals and groups (Fig. 2).

It was expected that those who had been 'localites' in their traditional home areas would have found the move to the periphery more traumatic than those who already had 'urbanite' experience of space (Fig. 3).

As in most surveys, evidence was found to support this thesis. The surprising discovery, however, was the extent to which place was a dominant theme in the ways people evaluated their new settings. 'Feeling at home' was by far the most important indicator of 'satisfaction with area', and among the measures most closely related to 'feeling at home' was the ability to circumscribe a 'home area'. In terms of regional geography one could say that the chorological and ecological dimensions of life for inner-city urban residents were more closely intertwined than sociological or planning theory had recognized.
AN OPERATIONAL MODEL OF SOCIAL SPACE
Figure 2. Idealized sketches of socio-spatial reference system.

**Social Interaction Patterns**
- **Localite**
  - High degree of overlap and coincidence among patterns of social interaction.
- **Urbanite**
  - Low degree of overlap among patterns of social interaction diffuse and non-interlocking sets of social participation.

**Activity Space**
- **Localite**
  - High degree of spatial and temporal concentration in activity orbits.
  - Networks tend to cluster unevenly within a given space.
- **Urbanite**
  - Little or no overlap among activity orbits. Networks of points scattered diffusely through the city.

**Territoriality**
- **Localite**
  - Strong sense of identification with place.
- **Urbanite**
  - Little or no sense of identification with place.

**Site Character**
- **Localite**
  - Ideal environment provides for neighborly relations, convenient expectations, services, and institutions; communal activities more important than privacy.
- **Urbanite**
  - Ideal environment would involve high quality and "status" of service provision; amenity; visual quality and accessibility to city as a whole more important than interaction with neighbors.

**Legend**
- Kin, relatives
- Occupational group
- Friends, special interest group
Figure 3. Idealized activity space profiles.

LEGEND

- "Participation" spaces
- "Macro service-Center" spaces
- "Micro service-Center" spaces
- Journey to work

Daily
Several times a week/once a week
Once a fortnight
Once a month
Few times a year
Once a year
Too far away

TIME DISTANCE SCALE

0 10 20 30 minutes
The over-all intention underlying this project was to provoke an awareness among those who were responsible for planning that the business of making a home in the city involved more than the provision of shelter and minimum access to services. It also tried to demonstrate explicitly how certain design features actually impeded people from feeling at home in their new environments. It was not difficult to show how the criteria whereby residential environments were evaluated by residents were very different from those used by planners. Standards such as were applied to visual quality, convenience, safety, and comfort were all based on an 'outsider' perspective and premised upon sociological assumptions derived from theory or convention rather than observation.

That message was not difficult to articulate for an audience of social science colleagues and even planners; what I neglected was a serious attempt to let the residents articulate this message themselves. My own socialization in academic praxis at that stage had led me also to assume an 'outsider' or mediator role in the process — both planners and people were in a sense 'objects' of my intellectual exercise rather than subjects of a dialogue which could have led to a more long term solution to the problems of residential area design. (See also Fried, 1963; Jacobs, 1961; Coles, 1971; Friedmann, 1973).

The exercise was an eye opener in many respects. When I returned to teaching in the US my attitude toward the urban geography which I had learned at University of Washington during the heyday of the quantitative revolution had to be seriously revised. My students and I have tried in many ways to explore the lived experience worlds of urban residents. This has been a fruitful endeavour both from a research and teaching point of view. Some of these exercises could be applied in any context, e.g. to examine the isomorphism (or lack of it) between 'home areas' as defined by people and the administratively defined regions based on social area analysis or other conventional methods of urban analysis (FIREY, 1960; Miligram, 1970; Harvey, 1973).

Several Ph.D. dissertations at Clark during that period used the 'social space' model to elucidate issues of migration (Hyland, 1970), urban services, decentralization of political functions, and the evaluation of administrative regionalization systems. One particular study traced the migration of Black families from North Carolina to the Bedford-Stuyvesant section of New York and examined the contrasting influences of two types of 'social reference system' (Baptist versus 'Storefront' Churches) on the experiences of migrant families (Wilson, 1972). In courses on urban and social geography I usually invite students to think about their own home areas and the implications of
moving from one place to another. Several teachers have used this technique in grade and high schools and have found it to be a powerful catalyst for sensitivity to the complex relationships between people and place. Once having discovered this with respect to their own experiences, they are more open to explore other people’s experiences as well and this provides a fresh curiosity about world regional geography (Durrell, 1969; Kazin, 1971; Newman, 1973; Gerson and Gerson, 1976).

More recently, the notion of place has surfaced again in a variety of new contexts. One student examined the geographic expression of anarchist *genres de vie* within Spanish collectives during the period 1936–39 (Breitbart, 1975, 1977). Another has examined the environmental dimensions of stress by investigating the experiences of place which appeared to have emotional and symbolic significance (Godkin, 1977). He found that the technique of inviting stressed individuals to recapture memories of place could have significant therapeutic value as well as diagnostic insights. This corroborates much of the claims made recently in philosophical and psychological literature (Minkowski, 1933; Bollnow, 1961; Heidegger, 1971). Place also emerged as an essential factor in the environmental experience of elderly people (Rowles, 1978). In a geographic perspective, however, the meaning and significance of place cannot be fully appreciated until it is seen in the context of its horizons of movement and interaction. Rose’s dissertation on the notion of reach (Schutz, 1970, 1973) offers some provocative insight into this dynamic component of human experience (Rose, 1977).

If geographers today wished to rediscover their traditional vocation to understand the earth as ‘home’ not only for man but for all his fellow occupants of terrestrial space/time then the dialectic of *place* and *reach* could offer an exciting focus for both research and teaching in regional geography.

Since 1971 Torsten Hägerstrand and I have shared many questions and insights on this whole issue of ‘outsider’ and ‘insider’ stances on the relationships between people and milieu as well as between knowledge and experience. I shall leave it to readers’ imaginations to consider what is emerging from this dialogue between two contrasting perspectives and simply share one illustration of the way the integration of a temporal dimension has helped me to see new dimensions to the original social space model.

In the empirical investigation of environmental experience among Glasgow housewives I had used a basically cross-sectional or ‘spatial’ approach to the study of territoriality, activity networks, and environmental images (see Fig. 3). What I found, therefore, was but a snapshot at one point in time which gave little clues to the dynamics of environmental experience. From a time perspective each of these pictures could be regarded as the tip of an iceberg
— tracers of consciousness, habit, and biological continuity which reached far back in time and probably forward toward future (Minkowski, 1933). It was, in fact, their rootedness within a particular physical milieu which gave such strength to people's attachment to place and it was the habituality of interaction patterns which had made adaptation to new environments so traumatic in some cases. Graphically, the experience of residential relocation could be expressed in time-geographic language in the following way (Fig. 4).

When applying this perspective to the study of places within a city it is difficult to separate out the research and pedagogical implications. Those involved in such exploratory exercises cannot really be typified as 'subjects' or 'objects' because the research process itself is designed to provoke awareness among anyone who engages in it (Freire, 1970; Seamon, 1975, 1979).

Let me illustrate with just one other exercise in which the residents of an apartment block where I lived joined me in a study of our immediate environment. Over a period of time we all kept a record of our daily horaria noting where, when, how, and with whom we normally spent our time, and from this each of us drafted a general spatio-temporal profile. Then on one specific date we kept a very detailed account noting also emotional and physiological states throughout the day. Municipal agencies provided equipment for keeping detailed records of the external environment throughout the day — noise, air, quality, temperature, insolation, precipitation, traffic, and circulation patterns — to see whether or how the physical milieu actually affected our everyday experience of that place. The following diagram suggests the overall rationale for the study (Fig. 5).

One of the methodological aims of this study was to discover whether a clock-time metric could provide a unifying way of evaluating the experiential significance of both the physical and functional environments. It was a rather naive question to pose at the interface of physical and human geography and the diversity of 'data' collected revealed the extent of the gulf which now separates the chorological and ecological dimensions of place study. Not only were data inappropriate for assessing human experience of environment but they defied any logically defensible statistical means of reaching any composite picture. The human geographer who looks for help in understanding the physical environment of urban life faces a supermarket of specialists each using his own hardware and generating data quite unsuitable for elucidating the questions we ask.

On a more positive note the study revealed the variety of meanings which the experience of temporality could evoke. The sense of time associated with images and symbolism appears to follow a very different rhythm from the
Figure 4. Spatio-temporal perspective on residential relocation.
Figure 5. The structure of geographic enquiry.
isometrically calibrated clocktime which rules our daily routine activities (Minkowski, 1933; Natanson, 1964; Dreyfus, 1975). Clock or calendar time, besides, is not well suited for the measurement of natural rhythms within the human body or the physical (natural) environment (Dubos, 1965; Coles, 1971). This was, it seemed to me, a fundamental challenge which I could offer to my colleagues at Lund for their work to date had concentrated mainly on only one kind of temporality. To examine how routinized behaviour and technical organization of time actually harmonized with the human experience of temporality in its psychological as well as physiological dimensions could surely be an interesting horizon for joint effort.

One plausible hypothesis which could be raised here is that within each human person as well as within each lived region there is a fundamental need for these three levels of time experience to be harmonized (Dubos, 1965; Colquhoun, 1971; Fraser, et al, 1975). Taken in aggregate terms, could this not offer a fresh perspective on regional life? Within each genre de vie, for instance, could one not investigate the sense of time and understanding of Cosmos which has become registered symbolically in myth, ritual, and 'ethno-science' and then see how routine everyday activities harmonize with this as well as with the rhythms of nature in that milieu? This is by no means a fresh idea (cf. Sorre, 1962; Redfield, 1960; Sauer, 1956; Evans, 1956), but few have attempted to look at contemporary genres de vie from this comprehensive a perspective. Traditional societies with resource-based genres de vie appear to have adapted their economic and social activities to the rhythms of plant and animal life and to the ebb and tide of seasonal weather and energy resources. As technological sophistication increasingly intervenes between human productive activities and the physical milieu, clocktime gradually submerges 'nature time' until eventually in our day we are discovering the enormous price to be paid in terms of human health and ecology. In introductory courses I have encouraged students to look at different genres de vie from this holistic perspective and to begin assessing the human and environmental implications of economic development and technological change. The following schema suggests the kinds of feedback between levels of experience which are hypothesized as being necessary for equilibrium and harmony in the relationships between people and milieu. It is only a descriptive framework but several analytical directions are suggested within it. It could also be used as a framework for evaluating geographic thought, as I've tried to do in reference to the evolution of ideas in the discipline (Buttimer, 1978b) (Fig. 6).

Much of the philosophical grounding for our recent work has come from phenomenological and existential thought but increasingly we find ourselves engaged in problems which attract the attention of critical philosophers.
Figure 6. Place and reach in spatio temporal perspective.
There are many sociological and ideological influences on the way in which conventional geography is practiced that does not resonate well with either logic or reason. Traditional regional geography, for example, has sought cartographic description and structural 'explanations' for externally manifest forms observable on the surface of the earth. The conception toward which I would like to point is the one which views the earth as 'home' not only for mankind but for all life forms. To describe and understand the earth as 'home' demands insight into the lived experience of people and the meanings ascribed to life and milieux in various places and times. Traditional models of regional geography have sought order rather than meaning. In situations like French pays where long and continuous interaction between nature and culture had created landscape order which in many ways revealed meaning this traditional approach was justified. The 'readings' of most of today's landscapes, however, cannot lean on such interferences. Philosophically speaking, the approach which deals exclusively with external order and is guided primarily by a positivist definition of knowledge could be labelled with Heidegger's term rechnendes denken — a style of thinking which separates mind and matter, subject and object, and endeavours to establish intellectual control over complexity via abstract generalization and theory. The application of such knowledge to planning has been associated with an attitude toward experience which could also fit the typification of herrschaftswissen, viz., knowledge for 'overlordship' (Heidegger, 1967). The contrasting attitude to this is besinnliches nachdenken, a style which seeks to allow reality to reveal itself, as far as possible, in its own terms. It seeks at least verstehen (empathetic understanding) rather than wissen (scientific knowledge) and ideally a gelasseneit, viz., letting things be, rather than trying to fit them into a priori conceptualizations.

The implications of such a reorientation in geographic thought are manifold. The taken-for-granted distinctions between 'subjects' and 'objects' in research as well as the separation of thought from experience could no longer be assumed. What emerges as an essential consideration is not a more rigorous set of norms to define subjectivity and objectivity but rather to recognize what hermeneutical scholars refer to as the reflexivity of thought. The ways in which geographers have construed regional life and landscape inevitably reflect the social construction of their knowledge (Berger and Luckman, 1967). In coming to an awareness of reflexivity the geographer has an enormous advantage over such disciplines as require a ceteris paribus assumption before they proceed with their actual research. The regional geographer can never ultimately make such an assumption and if full advantage is to be made of this could we not be the ones to seriously examine the relationship of
thought to experience by continuously grounding it in concrete life situations?

The challenge facing regional geography is old and new (Mikesell, 1969, 1978). It is at once encouraging and sobering to discover that Prince Kropotkin already in 1885 raised some of the same issues as are being discussed today. The state of geography in the schools of his day was in no better condition than it is in some of ours. The Special Commission discovered with amazement that of this science — the most attractive and suggestive for people of all ages — we have managed to make in our schools one of the most arid and unmeaning subjects (Kropotkin, 1885, p. 940). To reform geography, in his view, demanded a complete reform of the whole system of teachings (ibid. p. 943), it demanded a sensitivity to one’s own experience as well as to that of all humanity. And above all it should not get too narrowly confined into specialized branches:

... it is the true duty of geography to cover all this field at once and to combine in one vivid picture all separate elements of this knowledge: to represent it as an harmonious whole, all parts of which are consequences of a few general principles and are held together by their mutual relations (Kropotkin, 1885, p. 949).

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'Insiders', 'outsiders', and the geography of regional life

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