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Introduction

Regionalism and the Humanities: Decline or Revival?

WENDY J. KATZ & TIMOTHY R. MAHONEY

In November 2003 nearly 150 poets, writers, geographers, musicologists, literary critics, and historians of all fields—from agriculture and architecture to women and immigration—gathered in Lincoln, Nebraska, at a national conference of the Consortium of Regional Humanities Centers to explore the general theme of “Regionalism and the Humanities.” The papers in this volume reflect the general perception shared by most of the humanists at the conference: in a modern world increasingly homogenized and standardized by the forces of globalization, the regionalist impulse is still very much alive. Once viewed as a reaction against the forces of modernism, it has emerged in a globalized world as a repackaged, more-aggressive endeavor to make a claim for the role of place and space—as opposed to gender, race, ethnicity, class, demography, or other cultural or physical distinctions—in the effort to understand ourselves and what it means to be human. What distinguishes regionalism from these other efforts at self-understanding is its focus on locating oneself in the space lived in, inhabited, made home, or traveled through. This emphasis is itself rooted in man’s fundamental interaction with nature: the land, climate, flora and fauna, and the physical environment.

Most of the essays in this collection, though they position themselves in quite diverse ways, agree that the ongoing erosion of space

and place as factors in identity formation in modern life has given regionalism its continuing impetus, indeed, its renewed urgency and vitality. In some ways, in a shrinking global life connected by instant communications and integrated into an international economy, one's sense of place or the role of one's geographic location on one's sense of identity may seem to matter less than ever before, in terms of ideas, news, and production and exchange of goods and services. Yet, as these essays attest, amid such perceived sameness, region and place—nature and custom—have come to matter even more for many people, as they struggle to hold on to that which makes them distinct. Together, they represent some of the most innovative and intriguing explorations of the history and contemporary value of regionalism in humanistic investigation.

To understand the ironies and even contradictions within this simultaneous decline and revival of regionalism, it's useful to consider the different political, social, economic, and aesthetic purposes to which theorizing about region has been put. This introduction therefore attempts to provide an interpretive framework for comparing and contrasting the regionalist analyses employed by the authors in this volume. One place to begin is by defining several related terms used in this volume: space, place, region, regionalism, regionality, local, landscape, and regional identity. Each discipline tends to wield such terms differently, but for humanists, even humanist geographers, while space evokes a more neutral quality of spaciousness, positioning oneself amid openness or an unbounded expanse of terrain, place is something constructed by people. Place is space that has been given meaning and borders, and so a location with a human-created ensemble of features.

A similar relationship exists between land and landscape, in that the term landscape always implies that the land has already been ordered and shaped by human perceptions and action. In giving a portion of the earth limits, whether creating a place or a landscape, John Findlay and Richard White rightly observe that people are also asserting control or power over the environment, as well as over other people who might have different mental concepts of the same physical

space. So the concept of a region itself—the concept of an observable uniformity of certain cultural attitudes, behaviors, and artifacts in a socially and naturally defined place and time—is itself an assertion of power. Regionalism and regionalist, then, refers to practices and agendas in cultural, political, economic, or other realms, which are identified with regional interests and affirm regional particularities or a particular regional identity. Local and localism are terms used less frequently in this volume, but suggest an even greater particularity of interest and identity, an even smaller or narrower geographic base for group or individual identity; local color and local history are often considered a subset of region and regionalism, though they share a focus on the ordinary or common person whose activities and features emerge more clearly on a smaller spatial or microhistorical level of analysis. Often it is part of the regionalist's project to describe the local as part of or imbedded within a larger set of natural or cultural relationships.¹

A regional identity then, is a sense of belonging, an awareness of similar traits among people living under similar conditions, or not coincidentally, of how their cultural patterns are distinctive in comparison to other regions or places. Such an identity is subjective by nature and so might appear either as a perception of residents (a region's consciousness of itself), or might appear among those outside a region. In either case, the assertion of a belief in a common identity and common interest across a region represents a struggle over the properties, natural or human, that determine the right to be in and possess that place, to determine its unifying elements. Any regionalist discourse, including this one, is a performance that imposes its own definitions and boundaries and aims to get people to recognize them as legitimate; any utterance about region is always an argument that either favors or hampers the chances of the region (and its ascribed traits or nature and supposed interests) acquiring recognition and so any "real" existence.² As Douglas Powell asserts in *Critical Regionalism*, to acquire a sense of place, one has to help create that place; and for him, a critical regionalism is a way to assert what the relationships among places should or ought to be, not merely to identify objective and static characteristics.³

As this suggests, regionalism as an approach in the humanities is not necessarily an effort to produce a consensual history of a place, a period, or a people. It can equally or instead emphasize pluralism and conflict among and between competing identities. In fact, the great contribution of the humanities to the study of regions is derived from its insistence that nature matters, but matters particularly or insofar as that nature is transformed by various human categories. Accordingly, different disciplines target a range of apparently subjective and unscientific criteria for region: the political, legal, economic, and symbolic marks with which various groups of humans establish their territorial boundaries, under the assumption that these shape the region as much or more than patterns of rainfall. Annie Proulx, in “Dangerous Ground, Landscape in American Fiction,” is thus able to identify one author as a regionalist who based his literary landscapes on an artist’s paintings, but never actually saw the countryside he described.⁴

The history of regionalism has been addressed by several notable authors and collections. For example, in their introduction to their important anthology, *All Over the Map: Rethinking American Regions* (1996), Edward Ayers and Peter Onuf find the origins of regions and regionalism both in modes of thinking brought from Europe and in the structure of the federal system itself.⁵ Robert Dorman’s equally influential *Revolt of the Provinces*, though focusing on the period between the world wars, similarly traces regionalism to the desire already expressed in the colonial period for a communitarian ethos, a desire frequently revived since then.⁶ If one attends to a history of how regions have been theorized in the U.S. rather than a history of regionalism, however, a somewhat different trajectory emerges, from what could be called a nineteenth-century geographical determinism to a twentieth-century modernist “sense of place” regionalism to the even more fluid postmodern notion that region is a dynamic and relative construction. With each of these viewpoints, one moves from concentration on a sensibility available only to residents, particularly those who seem deeply rooted in the land itself, to the sensibility of ever more mobile people, who live somewhere for a while or pass through, and finally, to anyone who cares to relate his or her work to a certain

place, whether they were residents or not, the last being an issue addressed in the essay by Steve Behrendt in this collection.

At the risk of oversimplifying this shift, geographic determinism in the humanities has typically defined a region by apparently neutral or objective criteria (through the selection of factors such as water distribution or geological formation) and then given this environment credit for molding human activity and perception in certain ways. As an antebellum booster of western regional culture noted, Cincinnati's location (then the West) on east–west and north–south river transportation routes meant that it would inevitably mix the economies and characters of all the regions into a western composite, nevertheless capable of truly representing, and unifying, the nation.⁷ On one level this type of argument seems just common sense. Many assume that people living in a place with a particular topography, climate, and resources will become conditioned by it and that, in some way—economic, psychological, or otherwise—it will become part of them and shape their behavior. Such determinism, too, may be rooted, as William Slaymaker suggests, in our tendency to project ourselves into nature and become both sympathetic and empathetic with the environment we experience, though this point of view tends to be adopted more by conservationists than advocates of regional development.

For later and more influential western boosters and geographical determinists such as Frederick Jackson Turner and Walter Prescott Webb, the interaction between environment and inhabitant was more forceful. In his most deterministic moments, Turner seems to have suggested that westward moving Euro-American settlers simply “poured their plastic pioneer life into geographic moulds.”⁸ As Kurt Kinbacher characterizes Turner's hypothesis in this volume, the wilderness environment of the frontier shaped Americans anew, endowing them with the characteristics of individualism and democracy. Because Turner's theory provided fodder for American exceptionalism in a period of cultural nationalism and democratic interest in the “folk,” the result was the triumph in the 1920s of a geographical determinism whose “grand narrative” of the West both defined it as a region and credited it with shaping national character. As Robert Dorman observes,

Henry Nash Smith, the founder of American Studies and author of 1950's *Virgin Land: The American West in Symbol and Myth*, was educated in this form of regionalism.⁹

Most regionalists and western historians today, including those in this collection, eschew Turner's brand of geographical determinism as insufficiently pluralist. To Guy Reynolds, this type of regionalism leads to the view that a region consists of a certain clutch of features that mark everyone from the region in much the same way. Yet as the frequent references in this volume attest, Turner's influence is still felt, even as scholars argue that he overemphasizes place at the expense of culture, perhaps particularly disregarding the variety of cultures, among men and women, whites and nonwhites, active on the frontier. Barbara Handy-Marchello's essay on a female booster in the West is an example of how gender creates fissures in regionalism's potentially monolithic definitions of place and coherent social groups.¹⁰

Even those often ecologically conscious historians and writers who take seriously Turner's premises about the importance of the frontier environment's uniqueness come to different conclusions: for example, that its aridity led to a hierarchical concentration of capital rather than democracy, high urbanization and depopulation rather than levelling.¹¹ So too, Proulx notes that Turner may still be ironically relevant because he was wrong. The frontier, which he defined by a population density of less than two people per square mile and which he declared closed in 1893, in fact still existed in the 1990 census—and, with continuing declining population, certainly must still exist today—in 132 counties, mostly arid, across the western states. Travel books like Dayton Duncan's *Miles from Nowhere* agree with Proulx, observing that the contemporary frontier's vast distances are attracting a new wave of pioneers and that the retirees moving to its sunny, low-tax realm are still attracted to the ideas and values of the mythic west.¹² Michael Steiner and David Wrobel, while supportive of the New Western History's inclusion of much greater human diversity in its picture of the frontier, confirm that Turner's mythic West retains its grip on American and European imaginations and so still exercises influence on the West's future development.¹³

Edward Watts in turn asserts that Turner's idea that the Midwest, as a region, emerged in a colonial framework rooted in interregional asymmetries remains useful. Because Turner sought to establish an interaction between regional or sectional stories and national ones (a process-oriented approach some construe as antiregional), his impulse was to put place—the land, climate, topography, region—and its diversity back into a history governed by a spaceless national politics. This asymmetric model understands regionalism as a form of dependence on already-existing national norms, in which a place is recognized as a region precisely because of its deviance from standards that are themselves created elsewhere—usually in eastern urban milieus that control the national market for publishing, capital, art—and so can and do equate their own region with the nation.

Like colonies, regions, then, may be produced for the eastern market, for outsiders and by outsiders, who define others' cultural peculiarities in order to enforce and reinforce "national" norms as well as a ruling elite's control over establishing those norms.¹⁴ Both the role of the federal government as a patron of "nonpartisan" regionalism and the role of the outsider—the regionalist writer or artist is almost always someone who leaves the region for a time or for good, or an outsider who immerses him or herself in a locality—are undeniable factors in the various historical flowerings of regionalism, just as the National Endowment for the Humanities has been important for its twenty-first-century revival. Willa Cather, a quintessential regionalist, emerges in the studies of both Guy Reynolds and Mark Robison as someone who understood the dependence of the Plains and the West on eastern markets. The newly arrived European settlers in the Plains or the Northwest Territory described by Kurt Kinbacher and Patrick Lucas, like Cather and the other authors and artists in this volume, similarly create regional identities while not being themselves "homegrown."

At the same time, individuals of any origin in a place may adopt regionalism as a way of achieving control over economic and political life and of resisting outside coercion or intervention. Nicolas Witschi's discussion of how a Nevada town hoaxed travelers with fake gunfights

is an innovative analysis of the tension operating within postcolonial models of regionalism: capital and imagery produced outside the region aimed to define it in ways useful to them, while inhabitants, in order to be understood, must rely on the same set of regional concepts but put them to purposes of resisting outside incursions or of resolving their own internal tensions. Ginette Aley turns not to a performative—signifying—model but to a biographic one, but she shares Witschi's aim of figuring out how a region can achieve a kind of internal representation. Like other regional historians, notably Andrew Cayton and Susan Gray, she endeavors to treat region as an autonomous entity, with its own turning points and defining moments that are not necessarily derived from national narratives.¹⁵ Warren Hofstra, in advocating this approach, notes that the National Endowment for the Humanities might have similarly benefited from dropping the externally imposed structure of its initiative to establish regional centers in the humanities, where states were assigned to various regions, in favor of allowing regions to self-identify (midwesterners, Appalachians, Angelenos, southerners, etc.). Such a tactic might indeed have helped more regional centers achieve greater regional recognition.¹⁶ Cheryll Glotfelty's essay directly, and many others in the volume indirectly, highlights this problem of regional definition, whether it is defined on a geographical basis or imposed by external agencies without taking into account the inhabitants' self-perceptions.

The legacy of Turner, along with some of his essentialist assumptions, also survives in the ideas of many regionalists who subscribe to a "sense of place," or a spirit that defines a particular regional perspective. The roots of contemporary notions of sense of place in regionalist studies lie in the humanist geography of Yi-Fu Tuan and other theorists of the everyday landscape, particularly John Brinckerhoff Jackson and Donald W. Meinig.¹⁷ Yi-Fu Tuan describes the transmission of the "essential" characteristics of the land via one's subjective perceptions of or interaction with the external world.¹⁸ Yi-Fu Tuan called it "topophilia," a perception of a *genii loci* of a place, and his work provided an important corrective to geographers who posed such entities as the "Great Plains," a region that can be justified

ecologically, but which exists neither as an economic nor a political unit, nor is understood as a regional identity for the vast majority of its supposed inhabitants. Yi-Fu Tuan's emphasis on how surroundings (place) provide individuals with a sense of the coherence of inner lives with the outer world, a reassuring sense that selfhood and culture are interrelated (rather than the world as alienating), has been key for writers and scholars interested in keeping nature primary without succumbing to determinism. That is, for thinkers who value rootedness, who wish to resist change, or "progress," who feel nostalgic for a home that has been destroyed, topophilia reorients American culture around environment and the importance of preserving a human relationship with that environment. Art and culture, in this formulation, help people integrate their lives with the environment and, in doing so, validate those very ordinary aspects of life that are part of daily living in a place.¹⁹

But as with Turner, this idea of a place's pervading spirit can carry the baggage of the nineteenth- and early twentieth-century conviction that human culture and human nature are determined by evolution, biology, and even national boundaries. For discussions of region are almost always implicitly also discussions of ethnicity, race, and the possibility of pluralism: of who "naturally" belongs. Or as D. H. Lawrence said in his influential mystification of American regions, "Every people is polarized in some particular locality, which is home, the homeland. Different places on the face of the earth have different vital effluence, different vibration, different chemical exhalation, different polarity with different stars: call it what you like."²⁰ In such formulations of a nation or a people as organically rooted in the land, their very blood and breath united with the natural world, it can be a short jump from regionalism to varieties of essentialism that have historical connections to ethnic cleansing and scientific as well as romantic racism, in their common assumption that cultural components can be biologically or environmentally transmitted.

Accordingly, most advocates for spirit of place also incorporate the model J. B. Jackson offers, which acknowledges that place is only created over the course of time; this acknowledgement reconfigures

Lawrence's homeland as the product of human habit and custom more than any mysterious effluence. Similarly, writers in this volume like Larry Moore, who suggest that region is the outward and visible sign of the underlying spirit of place, see this process of signification as a result of lived experience, akin to Michel de Certeau's view that "place is practiced space."²¹ Region thus becomes cultural construction, like any other feature of human identity and no more important, rather than a geographically and environmentally defined place.

If "sense of place" regionalists explore the transaction between people and a space and how people gradually create a place through their interactions and habits, then others in this volume regard a region as something less natural and more mediated from the start—a space of representation manufactured in the course of commodity exchanges or in the politics of a regional competition that is both created by locals and imposed on them by outsiders. By discarding an essentialist notion of regionalism that argues that the direction of culture is determined by a particular natural environment or that core values or characteristics define an "authentic" place or identity, contemporary scholarship has been able to demonstrate precisely how social interests determine competing identities, including those of place. Yet, if region is wholly a construction, it risks turning regionalism into a wholly imaginary framework, discounting the very real effects of life in a particular place. But considered from such a fluid, relational, even subjective perspective, regionalism and regionality are naturally dynamic, contested, unfinished, and ever changing. This conclusion is less surprising when it is understood that contemporary regionalism is far more tied to questions of identity politics than in its earlier revivals.

In particular, the regionalists of the 1920s and 30s—those decades of mass migration from the farm to the city and of anti-immigration laws—with assistance from federal government programs, developed regional literature and art as an antidote or response to the forces of consumerism and standardization as well as to the universalizing and cosmopolitan aesthetics of modernist art and literature. As Charles Reagan Wilson observes, however, interest in regionalism declined during the consensus era of the 1950s, when scholars and planners stressed

the continuity and unity of experience in America and the homogenizing forces that promised to continue to bridge social divisions in the future.²² However, an anthology of interdisciplinary papers from a 1949 symposium, itself designed to show the utility of regions as a concept for research and public administration, was reissued in 1965, and the foreword by Supreme Court Justice Felix Frankfurter explains why it seemed relevant once again in an age of expanding civil rights: the goal of regionalism is recognition of the “intractable diversities among men derived from the different reactions of men to nature.”²³ In the 1960s and 1970s, and even in the 1990s when Wilson’s anthology *The New Regionalism* was published, revivals in regional studies reinvigorated both these legacies (linking regionalism to cultural and environmental diversity) in ecocritical and postmodernist forms. This resulted in the creation of some regional centers, giving regionalism a new institutional home in the academy, and a resurgence in regional and nature writing and folklore studies.

While people acted from concern about both vanishing diversity and eroding community in each of those earlier regionalist moments, from a twenty-first-century vantage point, regional life seems vibrant and alive in the 1890s, 1920s, or 1960s as compared to today. Yet to be fully breached by national or international media, markets, and mobility, different American regions seemed more grounded and surrounded by borders and markers, and were more different, parochial, or provincial—for good or bad—than they are today. As recently as the 1960s, a relatively significant percentage of goods and services consumed in local and regional markets were still made there by local and regional people in locally or regionally owned or based companies; local and regional news had some vitality; states and municipalities took care of themselves while resisting federal intervention; travel across the country from region to region retained a sense of adventure and was often fraught with difficulties; and regional differences remained more distinctive and “authentic.” The West and Southwest loomed as exotic, arid lands of opportunity. The South was a place in social turmoil with its special problem—recall that it took years for many Americans to be convinced that the civil rights

movement was a “national” as opposed to just a “southern” movement. The Midwest was the comfortable, confident, solid core of the nation. And the East remained the home of the “Establishment” that ran the country. Today regional barriers, borders, and markers of difference have all been irrevocably breached, awash in the nationalizing and globalizing flood of the economy, polity, population, and culture. And, in spite of the hardening of national borders in an age of heightened security, the forecast is for the flood to continue unabated. Indeed, it is hard to imagine when this might not be the case in the foreseeable future.

While those earlier strains of regionalist thought that concentrated on preserving the American “folk” persist today, what is emphasized by most of the essays in this volume is that regionalism, in contextualizing human endeavor spatially, draws distinctions between one’s here and another’s there as a route to attaching individuals to group identities. Larry Moore suggests that most such efforts to construct identity emerge from our natural tendency to distinguish ourselves from others by mediating the difference between us and them, self and other. Maggie Valentine affirms, “focusing on regionalism allows us to discover how we are different and how we are the same. It helps us identify who we are.”²⁴ At the most extreme, this involves negotiating between the self and the other, but for most it involves eliciting grounds for sameness as well as distinctions. Such an effort, Michael Saffle observes in his essay, is rooted in the human as well as scholarly necessity of selecting one part of reality from all of reality, as a way of making distinctions. And Behrendt (quoting William Shakespeare) notes that truisms about human imagination and behavior must find “local habitation and a name” in order to become real and that the project of the humanities—mapping the human condition—cannot be resolved without a productive tension between general and specific, cosmopolitan and provincial, global and local, national and regional, the homogenous and the distinctive, and even modernism (or postmodernism) and the “backward.”²⁵

Behrendt and other scholars see a productive dualism, a dialectic between space and place, individual freedom and social constraint,

between Kathleen Norris's literary embrace of monastic asceticism in *Dakota* and the fears of isolation expressed in the sociological study *Bowling Alone*.²⁶ But these theses and antitheses are not innocent; rather, they reveal the terms of the debate over what is sometimes still called multiculturalism, of whether the nation itself ought to be inclusive or exclusive, and to what extent. In discussing the "spatial turn" of American studies, Karen Halttunen advocates regionalism's potential to create activist scholarship, humanists who contribute to making their own communities more egalitarian and inclusive.²⁷ But she also notes the parallel presence of a long-standing tradition of promoting place in America that operates through a jeremiad about its disappearance. In these critical studies of American life, the strategy of identifying national uniqueness in terms of the land, rather than republican principles, expresses a conservative desire to set "natural" limits on individual economic and geographic mobility (particularly that of immigrants) and on individual choices, particularly moral ones, like gambling or other elements of a "decent" social order, but also on decisions about such things as natural resources. Place thus acts as a check on the individual, offering (instead of the lure of self-fulfillment) a sense of belonging to something larger, which in turn operates to stabilize communities by controlling individual interest.

William Leach's *A Country of Exiles* is one of the most persuasive articulations of the dangerous and "unhealthy" results for labor, for American Indians, for the public sphere generally of capitalism's atomizing influences; it proposes place as a new haven in this heartless world of cosmopolitan escapists who do not acknowledge their own social location.²⁸ A "constructed" community—of minds or of shared principles or tastes, such as one online—if it lacks a relationship to a geographic place with a history, cannot impose sufficient accountability to act as a brake on individuals. Regionalists who might define themselves as conservationist rather than conservative also often aim to instill a sense of connectedness to place as a means of creating support for environmental controls on development.

For contemporary scholars who compare what they see as the diversity of the past with modern day homogeneity, the Midwest becomes

an increasingly important source of origins. This may explain why this volume as a whole is marked by a striking absence of the two regions conventionally seen as most important to national history: New England and the South. Instead, it is dominated by the Plains/Midwest (nine essays) and the Southwest (four essays). This is due partly to the economies of travel and academic conference structure; the conference that originated these essays took place in Lincoln, Nebraska. But there is more to this emphasis than that: the Midwest and the Southwest represent two important poles of current thinking about regionalism. The Midwest is a classic example of a nonexistent region, as Aley notes; or as Kinbacher says, the Plains exposed the fault lines in previous American institutions without clearly replacing them with new ones. Instead, its endless prairie, grids, transportation corridors, and cash crops seem to have bred the genteel standardization or rationalization of social and business life that epitomize the middle-class American society that most twentieth-century humanists traditionally critiqued. But humanists who see the middle class and man-made systems as playing a role in regionalism have recently begun to embrace the Midwest's featurelessness, at least as an object of study; as Louise Erdrich ruefully confesses, if the modern writer cannot call on a sacred mountain to create a cultural identity, then mass culture and bland suburbs provide a replacement as a common reference.²⁹

The Southwest serves a very different purpose for humanist scholars of region. Its desert, as a supremely harsh environment, provides reassurance of the overriding importance of nature in a culture that otherwise flaunts its ability to escape nature, through means such as air conditioning or irrigation. The Southwest and Midwest do have in common, however, the fact that they were both home early on to an internal regionalism of boosters who specifically and self-consciously felt marginalized or alienated from centers of power; and so they promoted their regions as distinctive or superior in order to advance interests that they believed were being ignored. In trying to make sense of this long history of boosterism, which often aimed at commercializing the region for tourists and markets outside the region in just the way southwestern-style ATMs and fast food restaurants do today, Maggie

Valentine, writing on southwestern architecture, returns to the land as a more authentic source of defining characteristics, while Barbara Handy-Marchello, writing on the Northern Plains, does not. Cheryll Glotfelty's essay on Nevada literature is particularly valuable in this context of the Southwest as a more determining environment, by highlighting the ambivalent rather than adaptive responses the southwestern desert also aroused.

The regionalism reflected in these essays has relatively little interest in putting a finger in the dike holding back the flood of globalism. Rather than hunkering defensively and resisting for all the wrong reasons, they acknowledge the forces of nationalism and globalism and the efficiency, convenience, diversity, prosperity, and cosmopolitan understanding they promote or at least hope to promote. But while accepting these, they recognize, as many others have, that in the face of all these forces people still understand themselves from the perspective of the place in which they live and may want to do so more, rather than less, as material and physical life becomes more and more similar around the world. As what might be called humanist environmentalists, they seek to cultivate and enhance our appreciation of how bringing space and place into our efforts to define ourselves enriches our lives. Just as paving or building over all the land and cutting down all the forests is not necessarily considered positive progress, so too erasing all regional distinctiveness, or rampant "de-localization" leading to banal homogeneity amid touristically manufactured difference, is dreaded and disparaged by most regionalists, if not by most people.³⁰

In the end much of today's scholarly and perhaps even popular interest in regionalism is closely related to the motives that drove it in the 1850s, 1890s, 1920s, and 1960s. That is, people still feel their identity is threatened by homogenization, now inevitably represented by Wal-Mart or McDonald's, international chains that threaten to put local firms out of business, and they often look to the past and to local nature in hopes of finding a model for survival in which those economies of scale are not so inevitable, even if it means turning to marketable symbols of regional distinctiveness, like ceramic saguaros made

in China. These people find in regional systems, human and natural, a model in which markets seem to play a smaller role in determining human life so that distinctiveness and authentic selfhood can flourish.

Regionalism as a scholarly and cultural category works to be inclusive when it is not used to draw distinctions between the middle class who can afford the expensive local microbrew and the working class who cannot and when the regional preference for the homogeneous chain is understood as valid regionalism because it is the result not only of the area's integration into larger markets but of its relatively low wages. As Lucy Lippard pointedly observes, to romanticize rootedness or the locally made is to be blinded by the way that the wealthy or socially elevated can escape—from a place or economic necessity or their culture—and the way that the poor are tied to environments and circumstances, no matter how untenable.³¹ Equally, to deny certain populations a connection with the land can disenfranchise them economically and politically, as Sylvia Rodriguez notes of a southwestern regionalism that privileges picturesque American Indians over Mexican Americans.³²

For that matter, Glotfelty's extensive citations of twentieth-century Nevada literature represent what might have been considered middle-brow or genteel fiction in an earlier time; one wonders what Nevada's politically determined exceptionalism might have looked like had her survey, in addition to covering literary fiction set in Nevada or by Nevada writers, included category fiction (mysteries, romances, westerns, etc.) or fiction written in languages other than English. The result might have conformed more to the usual Southwest tropes—or perhaps it might have evoked a different understanding of the purposes those tropes can serve. This is because, as Andrew Cayton and Susan Gray have noted, region is a vital part of popular, not just academic, narratives of identity; and studies of regionalism, whether in art, literature, music, or history, tap into these widespread cultural ideas and stereotypes, along with all the interests and exclusions they represent.³³ At the same time, the impulse that motivates current regionalism is a broadly shared one: the desire to belong somewhere is as common as the impetus to find ways of doing so, to wield regional

art and literature and music and architecture to establish a connection to a place and community, regardless of that connection's "authenticity." Perhaps by enriching our understanding, appreciation, and indeed our tolerance and respect for this somewhat benign kind of difference, we may be better able to navigate other more intractable kinds of difference with a similar degree of understanding, appreciation, and respect. Viewed as such, cultivating regionalism lies at the center of even the most universal humanist endeavor.

Notes

1. There are numerous definitions of space and place, but for ones that emphasize power relationships, see John M. Findlay and Richard White, introduction to *Power and Place in the North American West*, ed. Richard White and John M. Findlay (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1999), ix–xx; and Virginia Scharff, "Lighting Out for the Territory: Women, Mobility, and Western Place," in *Power and Place in the North American West*, ed. Richard White and John M. Findlay (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1999), 287–303. There are good definitions of regionalism and related terms in Robert L. Dorman, *Revolt of the Provinces: The Regionalist Movement in America, 1920–1945* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1993), 1–25; Heike Schaefer, introduction to *Mary Austin's Regionalism: Reflections on Gender, Genre and Geography* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia, 2004), 1–18; Barbara Allen, "Regional Studies in American Folklore Scholarship," in *Sense of Place: American Regional Cultures*, ed. Barbara Allen and Thomas Schlereth (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1990), 1–13; and Thomas Schlereth, "Regional Culture Studies and American Culture Studies," in *Sense of Place: American Regional Cultures*, ed. Barbara Allen and Thomas Schlereth (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1990), 164–83. For discussion on the local, see June Howard, "Unraveling Regions, Unsettling Periods: Sarah Orne Jewett and American Literary History," *American Literature* 68, no. 2 (June 1996), 365–84.

2. Pierre Bourdieu, "Identity and Representation: Elements for a Critical Reflection on the Idea of Region," in *Language and Symbolic Power*, ed. John Thompson, trans. Gino Raymond and Matthew Adamson (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1991), 220–28.

3. Douglas Reichert Powell, *Critical Regionalism: Connecting Politics and Culture in the American Landscape* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007), 34–35.

4. Annie Proulx, "Dangerous Ground, Landscape in American Fiction," (this volume), 23n1.

5. Edward Ayers and Peter Onuf, introduction to *All Over the Map, Rethinking American Regions*, ed. Edward Ayers and others (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996) 1–10.

6. Dorman, *Revolt of the Provinces*, 1–25; see also Michael Steiner and David

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