

**Between a Rock and a Soft Place:
Postmodern-Regionalism in Canadian and American Fiction**

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Abstract

This study calls for a re-evaluation of contemporary regionalist literary theory. It argues that traditional models of the discourse have been too heavily influenced by nineteenth-century realist aesthetics and political ideologies. Because most scholars continue to interpret regionalist texts according to a resolutely empirical reading of geography, literary regionalism has fallen out of touch with the new kinds of "unrealistic," generic landscapes that now dominate North American culture in the postindustrial era. Drawing heavily on recent work by postmodern geographers such as Edward Soja, David Harvey, Michael Dear and Derek Gregory, this project updates regionalist theory by "re-placing" the artificially stabilized reading of geography that dominated the nineteenth century with a more self-consciously spatialized reading of what Soja calls our contemporary "real-and-imagined" places. By grafting together traditional regionalism and postmodern spatial theory we improve on both contributing discourses. In a "postmodern-regionalist" literary criticism, traditional regionalism sheds its reputation for theoretical naivete, while the elusive abstractions of postmodern theory gain a real-world referent, and a specific geographical index. When we "read postmodernism regionally" - - when we aggressively interrogate *where* this kind of fiction comes from and the places it represents - - we realize that the canons of postmodern fiction in Canada and the United States have been influenced by two very different spatial epistemologies. Rather than being "determined" by their real geographies, Canadian and American postmodernism have been more directly influenced by two different *readings* of geography. Works by Thomas Pynchon, Toni Morrison, and Don DeLillo demonstrate that American postmodernism often

interprets social space according to what Henri Lefebvre calls the idealistic "the illusion of transparency," while texts by Canadian postmodernists such as Robert Kroetsch, Wayne Johnston and Guy Vanderhaeghe tend to fall under Lefebvre's more materialistic "illusion of opacity." The ambiguous figure of Douglas Coupland - - a Canadian writer most critics treat as an American - - puts the spatial conventions of postmodernism in both countries in sharp relief. In an American postmodernism, dominated by generic suburban settings, regions will almost always be seen as imaginary projections, while in a Canadian postmodernism, dominated by the Prairies, regions will almost always retain some sense of their material reality.

Résumé

Cette thèse propose une réévaluation de la théorie littéraire régionaliste. Elle soutient que les modèles traditionnels de critique régionaliste ont été beaucoup trop influencés par les esthétiques réalistes du dix-neuvième siècle et les idéologies politiques. Étant donné que la plupart des critiques interprètent les textes régionalistes en adoptant une lecture résolument empirique de la géographie, le discours régionaliste contemporain est déphasé par rapport au nouveau genre de paysages "irréalistes" qui dominent désormais la culture nord-américaine dans l'ère post-industriel. S'inspirant des travaux récents des géographes post-modernes tels Edward Soja, David Harvey, Michael Dear et Derek Gregory, ce projet met à jour la théorie régionaliste en remplaçant la compréhension artificiellement stable de la géographie qui a dominé le dix-neuvième siècle par une conception spatiale plus consciente de l'existence de ce que Soja nomme des espaces "réels et imaginés". En jumelant le régionalisme traditionnel et la théorie de l'espace post-moderne, nous permettons aux deux discours de s'enrichir mutuellement. Dans une critique littéraire "post-moderne régionaliste", le régionalisme traditionnel perd sa réputation de naïveté théorique alors que les abstractions insaisissables de la théorie post-moderne gagnent un référent tangible, un index géographique précis. Lorsque nous "abordons le post-modernisme régionalement" – lorsque nous questionnons l'origine de cette forme de fiction et les endroits qu'elle représente – nous réalisons que les normes canoniques de la fiction post-moderne au Canada et aux États-Unis ont été influencées par deux épistémologies de l'espace très différentes. Plutôt que d'être déterminé par leur géographie réelle, le post-modernisme canadien et américain ont été directement influencés par deux

conceptions très différentes de la géographie. Les travaux de Thomas Pynchon, Toni Morrison et Don DeLillo démontrent que le post-modernisme américain interprète souvent l'espace social selon ce que Henri Lefebvre appelle "l'illusion (idéalisée) de la transparence", alors que les textes des auteurs post-modernes canadiens tels Robert Kroetsch, Wayne Johnston et Guy Vanderhaeghe tendent à s'aligner avec ce que Lefebvre nomme "l'illusion (plus matérialiste) de l'opacité". La figure ambiguë de Douglas Coupland – un écrivain canadien considéré par plusieurs critiques comme un Américain – met en relief les conventions spatiales du post-modernisme des deux pays. Dans le post-modernisme américain, dominé par le cadre générique des banlieues, les régions sont presque toujours vues telles des projections imaginaires, alors que dans le post-modernisme canadien, dominé par les Prairies, les régions conservent presque toujours une certaine part de leur réalité matérielle.

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Between a Rock and a Soft Place:

Postmodern Regionalism in Canadian and American Fiction

Introduction:

Certainly the term "postmodern," like any slogan widely used, has been attached to so many different kinds of intellectual, social and artistic phenomena that it can be subjected to easy ridicule as hopelessly ambiguous or empty.

- Lawrence Cahoon¹

I was simply going say that either there is only regional literature or there is none at all, and today I would like to argue that there is no such creature as regional literature.

- Rudy Wiebe²

In literary scholarship, as in many things, familiarity breeds contempt. It seems the more often we use a critical term, the more problematic it becomes. This has certainly been the case for the two words that lie at the core of the following discussion. Although "Postmodernism" and "Regionalism" have circulated in academic debate for decades (in the case of the former), and centuries (in the case of the latter), coherent definitions of either term remain frustratingly elusive. As the above quotations from Cahoon and Wiebe demonstrate, postmodernism and regionalism have been applied so nonchalantly, and to such a wide array of literary texts, that it is now nearly impossible to establish a consensus opinion on what these classifications actually mean.³ The "slogan" postmodern is now considered "hopelessly ambiguous," while the very existence of a "creature"

called regionalist literature triggers immediate suspicion. In recent years, postmodernism and regionalism have both endured periods of hostile evaluation. At different times, and for exactly opposite reasons, both have been dismissed as irrelevant in contemporary scholarship.

Regionalist literature is usually attacked by those who think it endorses a social-Darwinist doctrine of environmental determinism.⁴ Scholars such as Roberto Maria Dainotto, Frank Davey, and Eric Sundquist all claim that regionalism advocates the passive acceptance -- the "naturalizing" -- of a dangerously homogenous model of "cultural unity" (Dainotto Place and Literature 23). Aesthetically, they see regionalism as a sub-genre of nineteenth-century realism; politically, they believe it resurrects the ideology of nineteenth-century nationalism. In his chapter of The Columbia Literary History of America, a widely-cited reference text, Sundquist effaces all differences between "Realism and Regionalism" and combines them into a single monolithic genre. "Because their edges blur and their central meanings shift," he argues, the two "cannot be conveniently separated" (501). In "'All the Regions do Smilingly Revolt,'" Dainotto posits an identical connection between regionalism and nineteenth-century nationalism. He charges contemporary regionalism with re-evaluating old-fashioned "notions of authenticity" and reviving "some peculiarly nationalist ideals by passing them off as 'new' regionalist ones" ("All the Regions" 488). All three critics see regionalism as a purely mimetic art form, a literature which derives its aesthetic from "the accurate, unromanticized observation of life and nature" (Sundquist 502). For Dainotto, regionalism's misguided loyalty to this outmoded representational practice has been its

most glaring weakness. Because regionalism can not overcome its "naïve polarizations between nature and culture, rustic and industrial life, authentic and imagined communities, marginalized regions and marginalizing national centers," the discourse has fallen out of step with contemporary theory and can no longer be trusted to make a significant contribution to literary scholarship ("All the Regions" 488). At his most condescending, Dainotto describes regionalism as a "menacing and childish" pursuit, a genre that purposely ignores the complexity of contemporary reality in order to seek out an idealized, pastoral vision of "organic identity" ("All the Regions" 505).

At the opposite extreme, if regionalism is usually criticized for its aesthetic and ideological limitations, then postmodernism is often attacked for not being restricted enough. Frustrated by "the linguistic turn" in social theory and by the circuitous arguments of Derrida, Lyotard, Foucault, Rorty, and Baudrillard, many scholars now characterize postmodernism as a passing literary fad; a nihilistic, but ultimately harmless, language game that has been overwhelmed by its own "playfulness" (Alexander 11). Rather than inciting a revolutionary transformation in humanities research, critics of major reputation - - such as Christopher Norris, Fredric Jameson, Terry Eagleton, and Edward Said - - argue that postmodernism has had the opposite effect: its ascendance has ushered in a period of paralysing relativism and suffocating self-reflexivity.⁵ They believe that postmodernism's much-discussed "incredulity" towards the progressive "meta-narratives" of enlightenment thought -- and its subsequent embrace of irony, cynicism, simulation, and fragmentation -- has undermined its capacity to establish "meaningful" contact with the social and political realities of the late-twentieth and early-

twenty-first centuries (Lyotard, xxiv). Said suggests that postmodernism operates on a "principle of non-interference" and that it shies away from any aesthetic engagement with "worldly" experience (The World, The Text and The Critic 6). In Norris's classic text, What's Wrong with Postmodernism, he argues, using John Barth's famous metaphor, that postmodernism has become "Lost in the Funhouse," completely cut off from the post-war culture it wishes to critique (164). Drowned in a sea of its own highly specialized, auto-referential jargon, postmodernism has "reached a point where theory has effectively turned against itself, generating a form of extreme epistemological scepticism which reduces everything - philosophy, politics, criticism and theory alike - to a dead level of suasive or rhetorical effect" (Norris What's Wrong 4). Jameson's work strikes a similar chord. He argues that postmodernism's desire for a pure non-referentiality has had a neutering effect on its continuing relevance. In the end, a totally non-mimetic reading of postmodernism, Jameson suggests, would "amount to not much more than theorizing its own condition of possibility" (ix). He characterizes the discourse as "an antifoundationalism that really eschews all foundations altogether, a nonessentialism without even the last shred of an essence in it" (xii).

Building an entire dissertation out of such shoddy raw materials seems an unwise proposition. Combining regionalism and postmodernism might only multiply their current stock of difficulties rather than reduce it. Opinions like the ones noted above are deeply entrenched in contemporary scholarship. Rather than opening up new possibilities for regionalist or postmodernist criticism, one-dimensional *anti*-regionalist or *anti*-postmodernist arguments have restricted new applications for both terms. If a student

passively accepts these characterizations, then he or she is left with a regionalism that is hopelessly grounded and a postmodernism that is hopelessly abstract. The former can never escape its limited association with a single geographic locale, while the latter can never gain access to such a specific reality, never be usefully indexed within a set of real cultural conditions. As Herb Wyile, one of the best regionalist critics writing today, observes, theorists caught between these false extremes have been forced to "walk a fine line [. . .] between environmental deterministic conceptions of regionalism on the one hand and a deterritorializing postmodern textuality on the other" ("Regionalism, Postcolonialism" 158).

Though we continue to lack coherent working definitions for either discourse, most critics would frame the relationship between regionalism and postmodernism in the way Wyile describes. Using what might be called an "I'll-know-it-when-I-see-it" methodology, scholars have constructed a crude schematic that separates regionalism from postmodernism and ensures the two rarely come into contact. If we accept the stereotypical characterizations, it is assumed that regionalism and postmodernism are so clearly delineated, so antagonistically opposite, that they could never be mistaken or confused for each other. In this binary structure, the regionalist text is positioned at the extreme realistic pole. Regionalist writers are expected to adhere to the most basic mimetic principles: they must literally re-present - - that is, objectively and accurately *record* - - social reality. By carefully reproducing detailed portraits of faraway places, regionalist fiction performs an ethnographic or anthropological function. As it is traditionally conceived, regionalism *teaches* its cosmopolitan readership about

marginalised cultures, about strange rural societies and unusual people with odd dialects who live far from the centralizing influence of the capital city.

Postmodernism, at the opposite, non-realistic pole, denies the very possibility of such scientific certainty. As Marguerite Alexander characterises the aesthetic, postmodernism is defined by its Flights From Realism and its rejection of any coherent sense of social space. Rather than representing an external social universe that is fixed and stable, postmodernism turns its attention inward to examine the inescapable *uncertainty* inherent in narrative structure. By focussing on the web of arbitrary associations that form any language-system and the coexistence of different subject positions within one individual consciousness, postmodernism challenges the metaphysical security of established knowledge systems. For the purest postmodernist, following the teachings of Baudrillard, the real itself can only be conceived of as a representation, a simulacrum of authenticity. "It is no longer a question of imitation," Baudrillard argues, "[i]t is rather a question of substituting signs of the real for the real itself" (Simulations 4).

Not only do the regionalist and postmodernist seem to come from different worlds (one usually rural and historically conservative, the other usually urban and progressive); they also seem to project different world views (one rooted in a coherent physical reality, the other awash in a random association of disjointed signifiers). Opposed to the pastoral idyll of regionalism, postmodern literature often represents the *least* differentiated and the *most* homogenized environments in post-war culture. Instead of reporting back to a cosmopolitan urban audience, it is assumed that the writer and reader of the postmodern

text come from the same place and that they share a common set of pop-culture references. In order for a reader to understand postmodern satire -- in order to "get" its jokes and its comic parodies -- he or she must be familiar with the same mass-produced locales and the same mass-mediated cultural texts. The writer and reader must be natives of the same generic landscape and they must share the same generic experience of suburbs, strip malls, and sit-com plot lines. Because the producer and consumer of this type of fiction are so closely aligned, postmodernism is almost never called upon to perform an educational function. Rather than teaching its readers about far-off places, postmodernism represents North American postwar culture to itself.

No matter where scholars stand in this debate -- be they "pro" or "anti" regionalist, or "pro" or "anti" postmodernist -- they are rarely ambivalent about these two aesthetics. The lines are clearly drawn, and beyond a very select group, it is difficult to find a critic who would promote herself as being *both* a regionalist *and* a postmodernist. Despite the best efforts of scholars such as Wylie, David Jordan, Francesco Loriggio, Jeanette Lynes, Lisa Chalykoff, Linda Hutcheon and Neil Besner, the relationship between regionalism and postmodernism remains largely unarticulated.

Between a Rock and a Soft Place steps into this gap. Positioned at the intersection of regionalist and postmodern literary theory, this analysis hopes to establish and explore a middle ground between the brutish environmental determinism of a stereotypical regionalism and the pure referenceless abstraction of a clichéd postmodernism.⁶ Rather than being diametrically opposed, I argue that regionalism and postmodernism actually share many common assumptions about the narrative construction of place. Moreover,

when we focus specifically on regionalism and postmodernism in their Canadian and American contexts, we see the two aesthetics becoming increasingly interdependent. In their separate efforts to explore the cultural geography of post-war North America, postmodernism and regionalism have grown closer together; the stark divisions that once separated them have blurred. Writers who might once have been considered "mere" regionalists have integrated postmodern techniques into their work, while canonical postmodern authors have become increasingly interested in traditional regionalist questions.

But where, exactly, do postmodernism and regionalism meet? And how, exactly, can these antagonistic fields be made to interact productively with each other? To answer these questions, this project works towards two separate but closely related goals. The first and most important is the establishment of a new, explicitly contemporary, model for regionalist literary theory. As I have already noted, regionalism requires such an update because traditional versions of the discourse have fallen out of phase with today's cultural geography. Influential works by Jameson, Daniel Bell, and David Harvey have taught us that the spatial transformations triggered by the spread of global capitalism, and the accelerated expansion of mass- transportation and mass-communications networks in the post-war era, have together restructured the Canadian and American landscapes. No matter what iconic phrasing we use to describe these changes, the web of social forces signified by Jameson's "Late Capitalism," Bell's "Postindustrialism," or Harvey's "Post-Fordist, Flexible-accumulation" have irreversibly altered North American social space and created a whole new category of North American place.⁷ The generic sprawl of

suburbs, strip malls, expressways and office parks, in which the majority of North Americans now live and work, cannot be explored by a traditional regionalist criticism that draws so many of its geographic assumptions from a naturalized, inherently realistic understanding of nineteenth-century social space. Simply put, if contemporary North American geography shares almost nothing in common with its nineteenth-century predecessor, then literary scholars cannot continue to rely on a regionalist theory which assumes the two are identical. By redesigning regionalist criticism to better represent the "unrealistic" places that dominate today's cultural geography, we reinvent the genre. In the process, we discover that although North American geography itself has been radically reimagined in the last century, regionalism continues to play an essential role in the way that contemporary writers orient themselves in today's dramatically destabilized social spaces.

Once the need for a new regionalist theory has been established and an alternative version of the discourse constructed, this new model can then be applied to the study of Canadian and American postmodern fiction. Demonstrating how a contemporary regionalist theory can enhance our understanding of postmodern fiction is the second, more concrete, goal of the project. By "reading postmodernism regionally," we challenge the stereotypical definitions that have dominated critical debate on both terms. The combination establishes a new function for regionalist criticism and a new social context for the study of postmodernism. By focussing on the long-ignored relationship that has always existed between postmodernist fiction and the geography it represents, we uncover a cultural location, a "real" spatial index for this kind of writing. In other words, if we

look at *where* these novels come from -- the actual places that canonical Canadian and American postmodern fiction investigates -- we can craft a more tangible reading of postmodernism, one that is literally "grounded" in contemporary social space and, therefore, less elusive and less abstract. When regionalism and postmodernism are carefully grafted together, they reinforce each other's deficiencies and produce a new discursive hybrid. In a "postmodern-regionalist" literary criticism, traditional regionalism sheds its reputation for theoretical naïveté, while traditional postmodernism gains a self-consciously situated, real-world referent.

The following discussion might best be described as a comparative study of postmodern-regionalism in American and Canadian fiction. The dissertation is divided into three large sections which are, in turn, broken down into several chapter-length analyses. The first section, *Making Space for Regionalism*, outlines the theoretical foundation for the rest of the project. The second, *"Only Half There:" American Postmodern-Regionalism*, demonstrates how this new version of regionalist theory can be applied to the study of three canonical texts from the American postmodern tradition. In the third section, *The Landscape's "Permanent Imminence:" Canadian Postmodern-Regionalism*, these same observations are extended to three texts from the Canadian canon. In my conclusion, I revisit the major points of the argument and try to anticipate some of the challenges that postmodern-regionalist criticism may face in the future. In greater detail, each of the sections is structured in the following way.

Making Space for Regionalism

If a new model for regionalist literary theory is to be of any use to contemporary critics, then it must be able to explore the postmodern cultural geography that dominates North American life today. In the first section of the dissertation, I retrace the history of regionalist literary criticism in Canada and the United States and demonstrate how our traditional definitions of the discourse might be adapted to better represent contemporary social space. To reinvent itself for a new time and, more importantly, for an entirely new category of place, I argue that regionalism must abandon its exclusive, century-long affiliation with realism and, in its place, embrace the insights of contemporary spatial theory. Because this is a two-stage process, the section is divided into two chapters that roughly address the past and the possible future of regionalist criticism. Before scholars can re-evaluate regionalism today, they first need to understand the North American origins of the discourse and explore how its controversial aesthetic conventions came to be established.

As it turns out, locating the roots of the North American regionalist tradition is not a very difficult scholarly task. The origins of practically every stereotypical assumption about the aesthetic can be traced back to the nineteenth-century writings of William Dean Howells. As one of America's most influential novelists and, undoubtedly, the most important editor and critic of his generation, Howells single-handedly created the category of regionalist literature we recognize today. As the great champion of American realism, Howells was the first to establish the belief that regionalism and realism were virtually indistinguishable. In his mind, both were "scientific" genres whose ultimate goal was to provide a "true picture of life" in nineteenth-century America (Criticism and

Fiction 49). Howells's realistic-regionalism functioned almost as a type of social science and it required a disciplined commitment to the highest empirical standards. His stable of regionalist writers - - including Sarah Orne Jewett, George Washington Cable, Mary Wilkins Freeman, and Bret Harte - - were expected to record and accurately reproduce the physical facts and local curiosities of their particular places. As Everett Carter observes, Howells's "ceaseless prodding, pushing and shaping" gave birth to North American regionalism; the work of this one man guaranteed that the "entire range of the American continent came into its literature" (117).

Howells's realistic-regionalism dominated his own era and became so deeply entrenched as a critical convention that its influence has expanded rather than diminished during the twentieth century. Although many of North America's most celebrated twentieth-century authors steadily moved away from the ethnographic, pseudo-scientific readings of place Howells encouraged, regionalist critics remained remarkably loyal to this version of regionalist representation. In the twenties and thirties, for example, Mary Austin, John Crowe Ransom, Robert Penn Warren, and several other writers affiliated with the South's Fugitive/Agrarian movement tried to redefine regionalism and to distance themselves from an exclusively realistic reading of the discourse. Though Austin's efforts and this vitally important phase in the early careers of Ransom and Warren have been under-appreciated by contemporary scholars, their work in regionalist criticism was far ahead of its time. Long before postcolonialism, poststructuralism, or postmodernism defended the "otherness" or "difference" of marginalised cultures and minority perspectives, early-century regionalists had already recognized the aesthetic and

political potential of these terms. Their tentative first explorations into human geography anticipated many of the insights that now fuel the "spatial turn" in contemporary critical theory.⁸

This relationship between regionalism and spatial theory, which is only hinted at in Austin, Warren and Ransom's work, both demands and rewards our close attention. Separated by almost sixty years of North American history, early-twentieth-century literary regionalists and late-twentieth-century spatial theorists share many remarkably similar assumptions about the production and representation of geographic identity. When we bring these two groups into contact, we see that regionalist literature has always been influenced by what scholars today call the "geographical imagination," and that, in a similar way, contemporary spatial theory itself often functions as a new kind of regionalist fiction (Gregory 257). Both fields reject a nineteenth-century scientific reading of geography; in its place, they explore social space as a cultural product, an imagined geographic narrative.

The combination of regionalism and spatial theory holds a dramatic potential for regionalist literary criticism. As the title of this section suggests, by "making space for regionalism" we deny the stereotypical definitions that have limited regionalist aesthetics for more than a century. By "re-placing" Howells's nineteenth-century reading of geography with a twenty-first-century reading of social space, we establish an entirely new theoretical paradigm for regionalism. Though it seems obvious, the best way to challenge scholars' preconceptions about regionalist literature is to begin by challenging the way they conceptualize "place" itself as a cultural construct. By shifting our vision of

regionalism away from an outdated geography which still considers place only as an inert collection of physical facts, and by embracing a reading which sees social space as *both* a real topography *and* an imagined discursive product, we change the referent of the regionalist text. Regionalism shifts from a primarily *epistemological* genre (one which offers us a secure knowledge of place), and it becomes instead an *ontological* genre (one that examines the experience of "being placed" in an uncertain, discursively active terrain).

Obviously, a philosophical transformation of this magnitude demands an equivalent transformation in how we evaluate regionalist writing. If the regionalist text examines the experience of social space -- if it represents not just the physical attributes of any naturalized rural community, but also *how* such a narrative of place is developed -- then the aesthetic takes on a different role. Regionalism escapes the confines of the nineteenth-century and emerges as a new discourse, a self-consciously "spatialized" regionalism, that is much better-equipped to deal with the "unreal," man-made places of twenty-first-century North America.

A large group of cultural geographers have helped transform the way that researchers in other fields now conceptualize their relationships with social space. By reasserting the importance of space as analytical category, thinkers like Derek Gregory, Gillian Rose, Peter Haggett, Doreen Massey, Nicholas Entrikin, Michael Dear, Nigel Thrift, Steven Pile and Michael Keith, have granted a newfound academic legitimacy to traditional regionalist concerns. In Gregory's ground-breaking work, for example, he discredits "the rhetoric of scientificity" which influenced so much of Howells's

nineteenth-century regionalist thought (GI 74). Rather than completely accepting or completely denying the influence of postmodernism, contemporary geographers have been forced to grapple with the discourse and to incorporate some of its basic insights in a strategically limited way. Gregory argues that when geographers stop thinking about social space as a fixed, empirically secure reality and instead, "[make] the closures and certainties of the objectivist tradition within human geography increasingly suspect," they discover a new range of application for their research and their work becomes "much more interesting" (GI 75). By denying "the synoptic completeness" which inspired Howells, geographers restructured the study of social space in ways that have incited major break-throughs in sociology, political science, and urban planning. Though these scholars now enjoy an unprecedented influence throughout humanities research, and though Neil Smith and Cindy Katz correctly observe that everywhere in the academy "spatial concepts [are] newly in vogue," regionalist literary criticism has been left remarkably unaffected by the so-called "spatial revolution" (68).

The recent boom in spatial theory creates a potentially troubling embarrassment of riches for literary criticism. From the "personal," housebound spatiality celebrated in Bachelard's The Poetics of Space, to the "practised" everyday spatiality of de Certeau, the "heterotopias" of Foucault, the "hyper-realities" of Baudrillard and Eco, the "schizo" or "hyperspaces" of Jameson, and the "rhizomatic spaces" of Deleuze and Guatarri, the possibilities for regionalist theory are now almost too extensive. Any and all of these arguments could be used to challenge the realistic assumptions on which traditional interpretations of the discourse rest. Because so many different permutations cannot be

usefully combined into any one version of postmodern-regionalism, my engagement with spatial theory in this discussion has been purposely constrained. Most of the critical terminology I will be referencing is drawn from just two of the leading figures in this large intellectual movement.

Henri Lefebvre's seminal text, The Production of Space, and Edward Soja's re-examination and extension of these arguments in his trilogy - - Postmodern Geographies, Thirdspace, and Postmetropolis - - provide the theoretical foundation on which my readings of postmodern-regionalism rest. Using their vocabularies, I argue that the two versions of postmodern fiction that dominate Canadian and American literature are dramatically different because they interpret social space in dramatically different ways. The "illusions" of "spatial opacity and transparency" which Lefebvre explores in The Production of Space (27) and the "First" and "Secondspace epistemologies" that Soja describes in Thirdspace (74) provide us with a new way of mapping the cultural geographic index of postmodern fiction in North America. When we allow their work to influence our reading of regionalism, we see that American and Canadian postmodernists endorse opposing spatial epistemologies. Rather than being environmentally determined by their "real" geographies, postmodern writers in the United States and Canada have been more directly influenced by two different ways of conceptualizing social space; by two different readings of geography.

Understanding how contemporary writers interpret social space is essential if we are to understand how postmodern fiction orients itself in an unstable North American geography. If we accept the insights of spatial theory and begin to interpret place not as an

inert physical reality, but as a cultural construction, the vital relationship that has always existed between postmodernist fiction and geography begins to emerge. As Grady Clay's work suggests, the post-war cities, suburbs, shopping malls and office complexes where so much postmodern fiction is situated can not be studied as Real Places in any traditional sense. These mass-produced environments are not the authentic, clearly delineated rural locales on which Howells based his definitions. Instead, contemporary North American geography is dominated by its imaginary landscapes and its homogenized 'meta-locations.' The majority of Canadians and Americans live in what Clay calls "generic places [. . .] places which do not exist 'out there' but are products of the human mind" (xix).

This new type of social space challenges not just our traditional definitions of realism and regionalism, but also our standard interpretations of postmodernism. Though the relationship between postmodern fiction and its cultural geography is only beginning to be explored, many scholars have noticed an interdependence between this genre of writing and a very specific model of spatiality. To thinkers like Jarvis, Brooker and Hurm, it is not surprising that a militantly anti-realistic aesthetic should rise to prominence in North American culture at exactly the same moment that an unrealistic geography took control of the continent's social space. As Jarvis observes in Postmodern Cartographies, "there have been many "crossings" back and forth between the "geographical actuality" of the postindustrial United States and the fictional "mappings" of this space in the country's contemporary writing (11). The "spatial raw materials" and the "cartographic exercise" of postmodern fiction are closely associated (11). In an ironic inversion, it seems that

postmodernism's passionate critique of representation might actually be mimetically linked to the United States' audaciously fictional landscape.

When we study postmodern writing through the lens of a spatialized regionalist criticism, this connection between the postindustrial landscape and its fiction is brought to the foreground and a new set of interpretive possibilities emerges. Perhaps it is through its settings, rather than its styles, that postmodernism has challenged our traditional ways of understanding the relationship between fiction and reality. Perhaps postmodernism's famously elusive aesthetic is more obviously "grounded" than we have realized. In sections II and III, I argue that this is actually the case; that postmodern fiction is tied to a particular kind of place and to a unique way of interpreting geography. At least in its American and Canadian contexts, postmodernism has developed into the local-colour fiction of our unreal contemporary social spaces. It has become the regionalist literature of what James Howard Kunstler calls "the geography of nowhere" (15).

"Only Half There:" American Postmodern-Regionalism

The second section of the dissertation explores the regional index of postmodernism in the United States. With a special emphasis on Los Angeles and the many other North American suburban communities that have been modelled on its Southern Californian prototype, I argue that American postmodernism should be interpreted as a regionalist literature simply because so many of its canonical texts refer to this one location, to this specific model of social space. Without the cultural geography that Southern California helped create - - without the suburbs, strip malls, parking lots,

expressways, light industrial plants and office parks that dominated this landscape long before they were reproduced throughout the rest of the continent -- there would be no American postmodern fiction, or at least not the same type of American postmodernism that critics have constructed up to this point. Rather than being purely non-referential, American postmodern-regionalism actually represents a brand of urban and suburban social space that is "uniquely generic." Though we usually do not consider "suburbia" as a typical region of American literature, this setting does provide the preferred geography for American postmodernism. Suburbia's mass-produced, obviously simulated landscape acts as both the background and, often, even the central subject matter for many of the genre's most influential texts. Despite its many standardized reproductions, and perhaps because of them, suburban American regionalism retains a recognizable signature. Though it runs directly against the conventions of traditional regionalism, critics must eventually admit that if every place in North America is like the suburbs, then there is no place in North America quite like the suburbs.

Using Lefebvre's "illusion of spatial transparency" and Soja's adaptation of this idea in his description of "Secondspace epistemology," I argue that America's postmodern-regionalism has been dominated by an idealized, explicitly non-material reading of social space. Under the influence of this spatial epistemology, American postmodern-regionalists explore place as an imagined projection rather than a natural or permanently established material reality. Unlike their nineteenth-century predecessors who were primarily interested in the objective character of any given place, postmodern-regionalists in America today focus on the role that individual subjectivities play in the

invention of human geography. For them, regions are seen as mental constructs, designs, or imagined blue-prints for social space.

The historical roots of this non-materialist American spatial epistemology run deep. Reaching back to the utopian idealism of John Winthrop's "City Upon a Hill" sermon in 1630, an imagined interpretation of real geography has always influenced America's relationship with its landscape. From the late eighteenth-century Cartesian reforms of Jefferson's Land Ordinance Act in 1785, to the ominous nineteenth-century prophecies of Frederick Jackson Turner's Frontier Thesis in 1893, the United States has maintained a long tradition of re-reading and re-evaluating the cultural significance of its physical geography. As Phillip Fisher argues in Still the New World: American Literature in a Culture of Creative Destruction, America's geographical imagination has almost always tended towards spatial "abstractions" (31). Rather than accepting the strict causality of environmental determinism, the United States developed a more "casual" way of conceptualizing the relationship between identity and geography (44). Fisher suggests that, in America, "place" is a temporary imagined ideal that can only ever be "lightly sketched" onto the country's topography (2). Because American culture has always been the least-rooted and most-mobile culture on earth, the nation has rarely defended a metaphysically fixed sense of its own attachment to the landscape (3).

The three novels I focus on in this section - - Thomas Pynchon's The Crying of Lot 49, Toni Morrison's Jazz and Don DeLillo's Underworld - - are all set in places where an imagined geography dominates the real. Instead of being located in the small rural communities that defined nineteenth-century regionalism, these texts explore North

America's two largest cities: Los Angeles and New York. Pynchon, Morrison, and DeLillo evaluate American geography in remarkably similar ways, and each of their novels supports the idealism of Lefebvre's illusion of transparency and Soja's Secondspace epistemology. In these canonical works of American postmodernist fiction, cultural landscapes are always understood as imaginary projections. Each of the lead characters in The Crying of Lot 49, Jazz, and Underworld reads social space in the same way, guided by the same spatial epistemology. In Lot 49, for example, Pynchon's Oedipa Mass discovers that, in order to live in the Californian suburbs, she must learn to "project a world" of her own making (84). Similarly, in Jazz, Morrison's Violet Trace realizes that, in order to live in New York -- a city where the numbered street plan divides races and classes -- she too must ignore reality and "make up the world" (209). For nearly a thousand pages in DeLillo's Underworld, Nick Shay ponders the metaphysical repercussions of living in an American postmodern geography. He feels the same possibilities and discomforts as Pynchon and Morrison's protagonists. The title for this section incorporates Nick's observation that Californian social space is "only half there" (275). For DeLillo and for the other American postmodern-regionalists in this tradition, California's man-made landscape is a kind of postmodern paradise: a place so generic, it is entirely unique.

The Landscape's "Permanent Imminence:"

Canadian Postmodern-Regionalism

In the third section of the dissertation, I turn to Canadian postmodern-regionalism.

Here, using Lefebvre's "realistic illusion" and Soja's "Firstspace epistemology," I argue that Canadian postmodern fiction has been dominated by an entirely different kind of geographical imagination. Since the late 1960s and early 1970s, when Robert Kroetsch first introduced the term 'postmodernism' to the nation's criticism, Canadian writers have consistently conceptualized their relationship with geography in ways that are far more naturalistic than the American model. In most Canadian postmodern texts, the idealized spatial epistemology which dominates American postmodern-regionalism is entirely absent. In its place, Canadian fiction has been dominated by a more materialistic spatial epistemology, one that interprets geography primarily as an objective 'thing,' rather than an imagined ideal. With few exceptions, the regional landscapes of Canadian fiction are metaphysically-fixed rural realities dominated by extreme natural forces. Even at the beginning of the twenty-first century, and even in some of Canada's most postmodernist fiction, a nineteenth-century notion of environmental causality continues to dominate the country's geographical imagination.

As was the case in the United States, the historical roots of Canada's dominant spatial epistemology are also well-established. And like America's idealized geographical imagination, Canada's deterministic reading of social space affects practically every element of its cultural experience. From the earliest colonial narratives through to today's best-selling novels, the shaping power of the landscape has been a recurrent, and, some might say, an addictive theme in the most celebrated interpretations of Canadian identity. Though waves of recent scholars -- led most notably by Davey's example in "Surviving the Paraphrase" -- have tried to distance Canadian literary criticism from the "bad

sociology" and "literary determinism" of such naturalistic arguments, it remains true that a strictly materialist causality continues to hold its influence over the Canadian postmodern (6). Geographically based analyses of Canadian culture -- such as Innis's "Staples Theory," Creighton's "Laurentian Thesis," Atwood's Survival thematic or Frye's Bush Garden - - may be routinely attacked in contemporary scholarship, but they have never been invalidated nor, more importantly, replaced with more influential alternatives.

The presence of a naturalizing Firstspace epistemology in the Canadian postmodern becomes obvious when we compare the canonical works of Canadian postmodernism with the canonical works of American postmodernism. Opposite to the American tradition -- which is dominated by the imagined landscapes of suburbia and would not exist without Southern California - - most Canadian postmodernist fiction still takes place in "real" rural locales. Far from being an urban genre, the Canadian postmodern is dominated by its regions: it would not exist without the Prairies. Despite the fact that contemporary Canada is, in reality, far *more* highly suburbanized than the United States, and though the vast majority (more than eighty percent) of Canadians actually live and work in denaturalized social spaces, Canadian postmodernist fiction has almost never interrogated these types of places. Instead, in what amounts to a remarkable denial of its actual cultural geography, Canadian postmodernist fiction situates itself in places where the natural environment continues to play a deterministic role in the lives of its characters. Rather than deconstructing the metaphysical foundations on which traditional nineteenth-century regionalism was based, many of Canada's leading postmodernists have supported the defence of regionalist literatures. Following in

Kroetsch's footsteps, postmodern scholar/authors such as Wiebe and Aritha Van Herk have been among Canada's most active anthologists of regionalist fiction. Unlike their American counterparts, who rarely endorse collective geographical identities of any kind, Kroetsch, Wiebe and Van Herk have strategically tailored their readings of postmodernism to explicitly *encourage* the production of regionalist cultures.

In order to illustrate how Lefebvre's realistic illusion and Soja's Firstspace epistemology influence Canadian postmodern writing, I examine representations of Canadian and American geography in three recent postmodern novels: Wayne Johnston's The Colony of Unrequited Dreams, Guy Vanderhaeghe's The Englishman's Boy and Douglas Coupland's Girlfriend in a Coma. Using the definitions put forth by Linda Hutcheon in her canon-shaping text, The Canadian Postmodern, I argue that The Colony of Unrequited Dreams and The Englishman's Boy are text-book examples of postmodernist fiction in Canada. Because they reinterpret important events in Canadian history and self-consciously challenge the supposed objectivity of the historical record, both novels correspond almost exactly with Hutcheon's description of "historiographic metafiction" (61): The Colony of Unrequited Dreams is a fictional re-examination of Joey Smallwood's rise to power in Newfoundland politics, while The Englishman's Boy recreates the events surrounding the 1873 Cypress Hills Massacre in Saskatchewan.

My reading of these texts challenges the historical basis of Hutcheon's definition for Canadian postmodernism. Focussing instead on the spatial index of each novel, I suggest that, far from being postmodern, The Colony of Unrequited Dreams and The Englishman's Boy actually endorse a naturalistic reading of geography. Though Johnston

and Vanderhaeghe analyse Canadian history as both a cultural text and an uncertain narrative construction, these writers represent the Canadian landscape as a permanently fixed physical reality. In these "distinctly Canadian" postmodern novels, history may be a fictional, highly politicized discursive product, but there is nothing uncertain, imaginary or discursive about Canadian geography. Though they may "play" with time and, more precisely, with the temporal sequence of historical events, both texts interpret space in a far more serious, less flexible way: Johnston's Newfoundland and Vanderhaeghe's *Prairie* hold a deterministic power over their protagonists. In *The Englishman's Boy*, Vanderhaeghe's Harry Vincent believes that Canada "isn't a country at all, it's simply geography" (181), and for Johnston's Smallwood, Newfoundland's austere landscape exerts a similar influence. The title for this section refers to the awe-inspired mixture of fear and respect that Smallwood feels towards his topography. Throughout the novel, he suspects that the "permanent imminence" of the landscape guides his thoughts and actions (433). No matter how he tries to manage or avoid it, the deterministic power of the regional environment is undeniable.

If Pynchon, Morrison, and DeLillo interpreted American space as an unsubstantial imagined projection, Johnston and Vanderhaeghe inscribe a powerful environmental determinism into their portrayals of Canadian space. Though America's unreal landscape features prominently in both novels, Johnston and Vanderhaeghe's Canadian characters find it impossible to live in the United States. In *The Colony of Unrequited Dreams*, Smallwood returns to Newfoundland after his disastrous hiatus in New York City; at the conclusion of *The Englishman's Boy*, Vincent "escapes from L.A." to return home to

Saskatchewan. In both cases, the differences between a nationalized Firstspace and Secondspace epistemology are impossible to overcome. Because they cannot orient themselves in an ontologically unstable American cultural geography, Johnston and Vanderhaeghe's characters flee from the United States to re-establish themselves in a Canadian landscape that at least seems more stable and more metaphysically secure.

The last novel we discuss in this section illustrates the spatial conventions of Canadian postmodern-regionalism by dramatically transgressing them. Unlike The Englishman's Boy or The Colony of Unrequited Dreams, Douglas Coupland's Girlfriend in a Coma interprets the Canadian landscape as an imaginary projection, dominated by the same ontological instability found in American social space. Rather than situating itself on the open Prairie, or against the stark backdrop of the Newfoundland interior, Coupland sets his narrative in Canada's dominant, but least-represented social space: the suburb. Remarkably, Girlfriend in a Coma is a rare text in Canadian literature because it dares to explore the landscape where the huge majority of Canadians actually live. Vancouver's suburbia is presented as the Canadian equivalent of an Americanized, imagined place and in order to orient themselves in such a place, Coupland's characters endorse an equivalent Secondspace epistemology. For them, place can only be understood as an idea, an image, or a narrative. Similar to the American protagonists of Lot 49, Jazz and Underworld, Coupland's characters embrace the illusion of transparency. They occupy a fictional social space, and their lives are significantly unaffected by the deterministic power of the Canadian landscape that dominates so many other texts in the canon.

Though Coupland is a Canadian, he is widely recognized and even anthologized as an American postmodernist. Most of his fiction, including the best-selling Generation X, is set in the United States, and the author often promotes his "West Coast" sensibilities and his Californian readings of cultural geography (Geyh 568). At the close of this section, I argue that Coupland's Americanized understanding of postmodern-regionalism has contributed to his reputation as an American writer. Because his fiction interprets geography according to a Secondspace epistemology, it is much more closely aligned with the American postmodernism we examine in the second section, than it is with the two Canadian novels we study earlier on. Unlike Vanderhaeghe and Johnston's characters, who cannot function in American space and retreat to a more metaphysically stable Canada, Coupland's characters have no choice but to embrace the ontological instability of their Canadian suburban homes. For them, the border between the two countries provides no protection from postmodern space. Vancouver's suburban geography is an Americanized place and can only be explored with a spatial epistemology well-suited to such a geography.

Conclusion

Though the combination of regionalist literary theory and postmodern cultural geography certainly expands the range and applicability of both discourses, postmodern-regionalism is not a panacea. The hybrid I put forth in this discussion will not solve every problem that troubled postmodernism and regionalism when they were considered as separate aesthetics. In fact, postmodern-regionalism is likely to be haunted by the same

critiques that faced its original contributors. The same lack of critical consensus will continue and the same difficulties with definitions will persist. As Wylie notes, despite the best efforts of those who "attempt to reformulate regionalism within the context of poststructuralist theories of representation and marginality, regionalism's position within both poststructuralist and postmodern culture is a tenuous one" ("Ransom" 107).

Though I agree with Wylie on this point, the "reformulation" of regionalist theory and the relocation of the discourse within contemporary postmodern culture merits further study. It is inevitable that the combination of postmodernism and regionalism will be met with fierce resistance from those who wish to defend more traditional readings of both discourses. "Pure" postmodernists who remain loyal to a completely non-referential definition of the term will not easily accept the assertion that postmodern fiction has a mimetic relationship with contemporary social space. Similarly, traditional regionalists, deeply committed to the political and cultural defence of their marginalised communities, will not welcome a reinterpretation which suggests that regionalist aesthetics function just as easily in major urban centres. Though such forms of critique are predictable, they are also valid and should be given fair consideration. However, the mere threat of opposition should not be enough to derail new critical possibilities. As Soja argues throughout Thirdspace, such "ritual purifications" (4) and "simple dichotomizations" (5) often deny the existence of other alternatives only to strengthen the critical biases that are already well-entrenched in contemporary scholarship. The postmodern-regionalism I suggest here is certainly not exhaustive, and it is by no means complete. Rather, the theoretical rebalancing I advocate in section I, and the re-mapping of American and Canadian

postmodernism that takes place in sections II and III are merely the tentative first steps in what could be a much larger project. Once contemporary critics understand that postmodern fiction does have its connections to a particular kind of place, and that regionalist fiction is supported by a sophisticated literary theory, the potential for further development in both discourses will be significant. Between a Rock and a Soft Place merely asks that we be more flexible with our definitions; that we try to find a new space for regionalism and postmodernism in our contemporary cultural geography.

Notes for Introduction

Cahoone's introduction to From Modernism to Postmodernism provides three of the standard antagonist interpretations for the "hopelessly ambiguous" term postmodernism:

For some, postmodernism connotes the final escape from the stultifying legacy of modern European theology, metaphysics, authoritarianism, colonialism, racism and domination. To others it represents the attempt by disgruntled left-wing intellectuals to destroy Western civilization. To yet others it labels a goofy collection of hermetically obscure writers who are really talking about nothing at all. (1)

2. This comment is excerpted from Wiebe's response to Eli Mandel's paper, "The Regional Novel: Borderline Art" at the Calgary Conference on the Canadian novel (February 17th, 1978). In his passionate rejection of Mandel's argument, and the support offered it by Marian Engel, Frank Watt and R.L. MacDougall, Wiebe denies even the remotest possibility of a 'positive' regionalist literature. In mock-prayer, he states,

God save me from any region or type that will limit me. I trust that I dare to look at God's good world anywhere, and that must be said of any true writer. I've been at enough conferences to simply state here that for heaven's sake don't box yourself into small compartments; the imaginations of the writers of this country, if they are worth listening to at all, are their own places. No writer worthy of the name writes from one simple place any more than he or she writes about one simple person. The world is the writer's place. The infinite complexities of humanity are his or her characters. To speak of geographical regionalism in a healthy literature is balderdash. (Taking Stock 131)

3. In what seems like a coincidence, but is in fact the identical rhetorical strategy working on two different fronts, many essays on regionalism and postmodernism begin with questions that emphasize the elusive, undefinable nature of these terms. The first sentence in Frank Davey's "Toward the Ends of Regionalism" is "What is twentieth-century Canadian regionalism?" (1). W.J. Keith's Regions of the Imagination begins in the same way: "First of all," he asks, "what is a region?" (3). In postmodern criticism, we see a similar technique. One of Lyotard's most oft-cited essays is titled "Answering the question: What is Postmodernism?" and Ihab Hassan's "Toward a Concept of Postmodernism" continues the pattern. He asks, "can we really perceive a phenomenon, in Western societies generally and in their literatures particularly, that needs to be distinguished from modernism, needs to be named? If so, will the provisional rubric 'postmodernism' serve?" (586).

4. In "Toward the Ends of Regionalism," Davey argues that regionalist literature is the

aesthetic representation of an environmentally deterministic political ideology. He suggests that

The reliance of regionalist ideology on environmental determinism, on a belief that the landscape has - or should have - effects on the personalities and perspectives of its inhabitants, leads to the assumption that these effects should have greater importance to the individual than do other possible grounds of identity [. . .] In a nation-state such an ideology would threaten with irrationalisms of earth and blood the unending political negotiations necessary in polity. In a regionalism, however, because this ideology is popularly concealed beneath touristic images of landscape and inarticulately authentic individuals, there appears to be no ideology. (5)

This line of argument repeats one of Davey's earlier criticisms of David Adams Richards's novel, Nights Below Station Street. In an anthologized essay entitled "Maritime Powerlessness," Davey claimed that regionalism inflicts a "discursive determinism" on its characters and that it "endorse(s) pastoral ideologies" (20, 26). Dainotto's Place and Literature follows the same path. He "denounce(s) the latent ideological construction of 'place' as a category of cultural understanding" (3) and argues that regionalist aesthetics are fuelled by "a desire for an original and free literariness that has survived the instrumental impositions of nationalism and politics alike" (9).

For a good example of an argument that attempts to locate regionalism as an *alternative* to nationalism, see New's "Beyond Nationalism: On Regionalism." Here, New suggests that contemporary critics often

look too shallowly at 'regionalism' and expect too little of it. Our sensitivity to region may at one level make us aware of place and landscape, but a sensitivity to regional nuance - that is, to the literary structures and metaphors of regions - will make us aware of the link between language and political attitude. [. . .] At its most sensitive, regional criticism can usefully remind us that literary texts, for all their artifice, do not survive as sterile verbal forms; they emerge from social contexts, and they are charged with social meaning. (17)

5. Biting critiques of postmodernism are numerous and come from many different sources. See Brodribb's Nothing Matters : A Feminist Critique of Postmodernism, Centore's Being and Becoming : A Critique of Post-modernism, Callinicos's Against Postmodernism : A Marxist Critique, and Eagleton's The Illusions of Postmodernism for just a few famous examples. Norris's ongoing battle with this discourse is worthy of special attention. Throughout the Nineties he produced a series of texts which characterize postmodernism as

a half-baked mixture of ideas picked up from the latest fashionable sources, or a series of slogans to the general effect that 'truth' and 'reality' are obsolete ideas,

that knowledge is always and everywhere a function of the epistemic will-to-power, and that history is nothing but a fictive construct out of the various 'discourses' that jostle for supremacy from one period to the next (Uncritical Theory 31)

For a good cross-section of Norris's work in this area, see his Against Relativism : Philosophy of Science, Deconstruction, and Critical Theory (1997); New Idols of the Cave : on the Limits of Anti-Realism (1997); Reclaiming Truth : Contribution to a Critique of Cultural Relativism (1996); The Truth about Postmodernism (1993); Uncritical Theory : Postmodernism, Intellectuals, and the Gulf War (1992); and What's Wrong With Postmodernism (1990)

5. My title, Between a Rock and Soft Place, sets up a false dichotomy in order to establish a third option between these two extremes. I use the term "Rock" to describe the first half of the regionalist binarism. Aligned with environmental determinism and a strictly materialist causality, "A Rock," in this usage, should summon up the notion of a completely inflexible physical reality, a non-human, anti-discursive model of place which sees little or no role for cultural forces in the creation of social space. At the other extreme, my use of the term "Soft Place" calls on the more idealistic notion of a textualised, completely flexible or entirely imaginary concept of postmodern social space. Referencing Jonathan Raban's novel, Soft City, I consider a "Soft Place" to be any cultural geography in which a strictly materialistic conception of 'real' social space has been dismissed in favour of a more fluid conception of 'imaginary' social space. Rather than a permanently established physical reality, "a Soft Place" is a flexible, continuously adapting narrative of place that can never settle into any state of definition. If we, at least in Canada, normally associate the term "Rock" with the barren rural landscapes of Newfoundland, then a "Soft Place" is the urban (and almost always late-twentieth-century urban) foil to such a natural environment. As Raban observes, rather than being shaped by the physical forces of topography and climate, the social space of the postwar city has been created by the individual imaginations of its urban inhabitants:

Decide who you are, and the city will again assume a fixed form around you. Decide what it is, and your own identity will be revealed, like a map fixed by triangulation. Cities, unlike villages and small towns, are plastic by nature. We mould them in our images: they, in their turn, shape us by the resistance they offer when we try to impose our own personal form on them. In this sense, it seems to me that living in a city is an art, and we need the vocabulary of art, of style, to describe the peculiar relation between man and material that exists in the continual creative play of urban living. The city as we imagine it, the soft city of illusion, myth, aspiration, nightmare, is as real, maybe more real than the hard city one can locate in maps and statistics [. . .] (9-10).

By combining these two terms into my title, I want to draw attention to a third possibility which combines real and imaginary strategies for understanding cultural geography.

7. Throughout this discussion, the terms "Space," and "Place" are used in very specific, but interrelated, ways. In both cases, I want to emphasize the essential role that human beings play in the imaginative construction of their social environments. As Rob Shields notes,

Failing to examine the nature of space as a cultural artifact, the realm of the spatial has often been assumed to be purely neutral and a-political, conferring neither disadvantage, nor benefit to any group. This 'empirical space' is complacently understood to be fully defined by dimensional measurements (height, width and breadth) and by trigonometric descriptions of the geometrical relationships between objects, which are thought to sit in a kind of vacuum. According to this empirico-physics model, 'space' exists (even though it is a 'nothingness';) as a given. [. . .] While the model of 'empirical space' is sometimes useful, it excludes important cultural and cognitive issues from consideration. These issues direct our attention to the manner in which 'space' is part of a culturally created system of philosophical categories. (187)

In this project, I work to free regionalist literary criticism from an "empirical" reading of space and to embrace a different interpretation which conceptualizes space as a cultural artefact. Like time, I read space as a denaturalized human invention; and just as "history" is normally understood as a particular way of indexing time, I read "place" as a particular way of indexing space. In an excellent chapter of Justice, Nature and the Geography of Difference, entitled "From Space to Place and Back Again," Harvey deftly explores the continuously shifting relationship between the two terms. Just as I accept Shields's definition of "space" above, I also endorse Harvey's definition of "place":

Places are constructed and experienced as material ecological artefacts and intricate networks of social relations. They are the focus of the imaginary, of beliefs, longings and desires (most particularly with respect to the psychological pull and push of the idea of "home"). They are an intense focus of discursive activity, filled with symbolic and representational meanings, and they are a distinctive product of institutionalized social and political-economic power. The dialectical interplay across these different moments of the social process is intricate and confusing. But it is precisely the way in which all of these moments are caught up in the common flow of the social process that in the end determines the conflictual (and oftentimes internally contradictory) process of place construction, sustenance, and deconstruction. (316)

8. See Keith and Pile's introduction to Place and the Politics of Identity, or Benko and Stroymayer's from Space and Social Theory for a good summary of the emergence of

Section I

Making Space For Regionalism

Chapter One

Replacing Regionalism

In short, the reassessment of literary regionalism, in its most cogent aspects, goes hand in hand with the reconsideration of space as an analytical category.

- Francesco Loriggio¹

1.1 Tracing the Renaissance

After nearly a century of silence -- a period in which its political relevance and theoretical sophistication have been consistently downplayed or ignored -- regionalism has reasserted itself into many of North America's most pressing social debates. In Canada, a country that has always been shaped by the ebb and flow of Maritime frustration, Western alienation, Québec nationalism, and pro-or anti-American sentiment, regionalist concerns play a central role in every political discussion. Though inter-cultural and inter-provincial tensions have been consistent themes throughout Canadian history, it could be argued that regionalism has never been more deeply ingrained in the country's political institutions than it is today. The simultaneous rise of regionally-defined protest movements in Québec and the West, combined with the collapse in support for traditional "national" parties, has produced a House of Commons that is more clearly divided than ever along ideological lines that are, in turn, indexed to "distinct" geographic constituencies: the governing Liberals are an Ontario-based party; the opposition Alliance/Reformers do not hold a seat east of Manitoba; and, for obvious reasons, the

third-place Bloc Québécois run no candidates beyond their borders. The once-dominant conservatives and once-influential NDP now struggle for national recognition and compete for the favour of a disenfranchised East-coast electorate. With long-standing arguments still raging over federal/provincial relations, international border security, municipal mergers, and aboriginal land claims, regionalism remains a pervasive force in Canadian culture.

In contemporary America, regionalism plays a different but equally significant role. Especially in the aftermath of September 11th, the United States has been forced to radically re-evaluate the significance of its "American soil." In the ongoing campaign against global terror, the sanctity of the American landscape has once again emerged as a powerful political symbol. Just weeks after the attacks on New York and Washington, the US government reorganized itself on an unprecedented scale to create the office of "Homeland" security. Significantly different from "National Security," the mission of this office and of its first Secretary, Tom Ridge, was defined in explicitly geographic terms. Rather than defending the abstract ideals of American nationalism, the office of Homeland security is responsible for defending America as a place, a physical territory with clearly established borders. Though deeply rooted socio-geographic divisions within the country still hold some influence, increased feelings of an America-wide solidarity, coupled with the current tendency towards international unilateralism, suggest that the United States (at least during the present crisis) views itself as an isolated "region of the world." More stridently than at any other time in the last fifty years, the country's collective attention has been refocused on the sheer size of its landmass. At press-

conferences that are purposely staged at the American/Canadian border - - with Niagara Falls usually prominent in the background - - officials vow to protect America's 'way of life' by protecting, first and foremost, America's geography.

Just a year before September 11th, a more subtle form of regionalism dominated American culture in a different way. After the "Florida Crisis" of the 2000 presidential election, millions of Americans were surprised to discover that regionalist concerns had been constitutionally entrenched in their electoral college system. In the days and weeks following the election, television talk-shows debated the fairness of a democratic structure that granted more significance to regional/state results than it did to the more abstract concept of the "popular vote." As the legal challenges and ballot-counting contests moved along their surreal courses, interested onlookers watched as the battle for the presidency was fought out in electoral jurisdictions that continually shrunk to smaller and smaller regional constituencies. The power to decide the election descended quickly from the national to the state to the county level, and eventually even to the individual polling station. In the end, the Supreme Court decision notwithstanding, it could have appeared that the leader of the free world had been chosen by a few thousand "confused" voters in Southern Florida. Prior to the election, not many political experts would have predicted that the distant and rather peculiar regional outposts of Palm Beach and Miami-Dade counties would play a more influential role in deciding the final results than the traditional power centres of New York City, Washington D.C., or the entire state of California.

Even the ubiquitous forces of globalization have had to reconsider their

relationship with regionalism. The recent protests against the World Trade Organization (WTO), the Organization of American States (OAS) and the Free Trade Areas of the Americas (FTAA) in Seattle, Windsor and Quebec City derived much of their energy from a resurgent tide of localist sentiment. Many of the organizations present at these demonstrations shared a commitment to regional economies, environments, and cultures. In an unlikely twist that runs counter to the predictions of most globalization experts, the spread of multinational capitalism and the promise of a smaller but more standardized "world culture" have actually made citizens more (rather than less) aware of their regional connections to place, and more self-consciously committed to their local communities. In a shrinking world, it seems regionalism's influence is only expanding. As Loriggio observes,

We live in a period that has redrawn its atlases over and over again, that is constantly reconfiguring its surroundings; and if the process we are witnessing seems to be leading toward an always greater global unity, it is also, and as blatantly, leading toward greater and greater fragmentation. The fall of the Berlin Wall occurred while the Soviet empire was breaking down; the increasingly longer reach of multinational companies, the planetarization of the economy and modes of communication has resulted not in more cohesion and/or uniformity but in the creation of trading blocs [. . .] and in the revival of the debate on identity and the politics of ethnicity. The call for a new world order in politics only rekindles our awareness of the various other macrodivisions we have been living with, and which pit North against South, underdeveloped against developed

countries, or the West against practically every other cardinal direction. (3)

Fuelled in part by the increased consideration it has gained in political and economic matters, regionalism, as a literary aesthetic, has also experienced a kind of renaissance. Without a doubt, regionalist literature is receiving more scholarly attention today than at any other time in the last century. Many of the essential readings in the field have been published in the last five to ten years and it seems the pace is only increasing. Perhaps predictably, Canadian scholars have produced some of the most sophisticated research in this area. In a country where regionalist political concerns have always been serious business, regionalist literature has emerged as a subject worthy of advanced study. Two critics in particular have been at the forefront of regionalism's resurgence in the 1990s. Since the beginning of the decade, Herb Wyile has consistently produced one insightful essay after another, while his colleague, David Jordan, has been just as prolific.² Beyond their individual efforts, regionalism has also enjoyed unprecedented institutional support from major funding agencies, scholarly journals, and publishing houses. In 1996, The Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada sponsored an International Conference on the Literature of Region and Nation, and later published its proceedings in two volumes. In 1997, The University of Toronto Press released W.H. New's Land Sliding, the first Canadian work to purposefully incorporate Lefebvre's theoretical arguments into its study of the country's regionalist literature. Sense Of Place: Re-evaluating Regionalism In Canadian And American Writing - - a groundbreaking anthology of comparative essays edited by Wyile and Christian Riegel -- arrived on the scene in 1998. In the same year, Studies in Canadian Literature devoted an

entire special issue to the question of "Writing Canadian Space." Worthy of special attention, Lisa Chalykoff's innovative deconstruction of the "Two Solitudes of Canadian Literary Regionalism" appeared in this collection.

In the United States, literary regionalism's resurgence has been even more dramatic. In the 1990s, American scholars rediscovered the regionalists in their midst, as well as those who had risen to prominence in the late nineteenth-century. A trio of influential writers -- Gary Snyder, Wendell Berry and Barry Lopez -- combined their ecological concerns and their environmentalist politics to stimulate a new wave of "bioregional" writing and criticism.³ At the same time, another group of critics looked back a hundred years to resurrect the reputations of many under-appreciated nineteenth-century regionalist writers. According to the MLA bibliography, more essays were published on writers such as Jewett, Freeman, Garland, Harte, Harris, and Chopin between 1990 and 2000 than in the previous five decades combined. In the last ten years, a range of critical editions, special journal issues, essay collections, web-sites and reader's guides have appeared. Most significantly, perhaps, W.W. Norton released its first major anthology devoted entirely to regionalist writing in 1992.⁴ Like the 1890s, the 1990s were a golden decade for regionalist criticism.

Not all recent scholarship, however, has interpreted regionalism in a positive light. Some of today's most influential commentators see the discourse's resurgence as something to fear rather than celebrate. In his widely-read Critical Inquiry essay, "'All the regions do smilingly revolt': The Literature of Place and Region," Dainotto takes direct aim at what he calls the "general regionalist euphoria" of contemporary scholarship (489).

Unimpressed by this critical renaissance, Dainotto advises his readers to be more cautious, to treat regionalism with "suspicion" and to study the term with "a colder eye" (489). He argues that regionalist aesthetics are driven by nothing less than a "totalitarian desire for purity and authenticity" (505). "The region seems to be an indestructible entity," Dainotto suggests, a perfectly untouched natural space that "transcends and survives history to remain everlastingly the same" (492). Disguised as an innocuous "nostalgia for a past state," regionalism is actually an aggressively conservative aesthetic, a discourse that not only defends an old-fashioned reading of social space, but forcefully guarantees the "survival of that past" no matter how incongruous it may seem in contemporary reality (492).

As Canada's most outspoken opponent of regionalist writing, Davey uses a similar strategy in his attacks. In a series of essays, but most stridently in "Toward the Ends of Regionalism," he draws direct connections between regionalism and social-Darwinist environmental determinism. Davey believes that regionalist writers use the naturalizing power of landscape to overwhelm all other categories of social difference and that they transform "geography into a sign that can conceal the presence of ideology" (3). He suggests that "(r)egionalisms develop the appearance of having 'natural' boundaries [...] as if these boundaries were beyond culture" (4), and that they rely "on a belief that the landscape has - or should have - effects on the personalities and perspectives of (its) inhabitants" (5). Describing "nationalism, feminism, class, ethnicity, localism or race" as other cultural discourses that are overpowered by the popularized clichés of regionalist identity, he argues that regionalism conceals its ideology "beneath touristic images of

landscape and inarticulately authentic individuals" (5). As his title suggests, Davey does not see a promising future for the discourse. As far as he is concerned, the "end of regionalism" can not come soon enough.

Though they would obviously disagree on the relative value of regionalism, critics on both sides of the debate share one deeply problematic assumption about the aesthetic. The recent surge of academic interest has definitely enlivened critical discussion and increased both the depth and the range of regionalist *scholarship*, but it has not yet made a sustained effort to update regionalist *theory* and to specifically redefine regionalism's relationship with contemporary North American culture. Though it is an everywhere accepted axiom that North American social space -- the natural and man-made cultural geography of the continent -- has been utterly transformed during the twentieth century, most contemporary scholars still work with a model of regionalist theory that draws its most important critical assumptions from an artificially stabilized, nineteenth-century reading of the discourse. Trapped in what might be described as a kind of time warp, the regionalist theory most scholars reference today is out of phase with both the cultural geography of contemporary North America and the regionalist writing that is aesthetically linked to this social space. In their rush to defend new regionalists or resuscitate the critical reputations of old ones, commentators have not yet taken the time to explicitly define twenty-first century regionalism, or to explain how such a contemporary version of the discourse differs significantly from the definition of regionalism that dominated the nineteenth-century. In the absence of any detailed investigation into the theoretical character of contemporary regionalism, it has simply been taken for granted that today's

regionalists are almost identical to their ancestors. Repeating the standard, grossly oversimplified stereotypes of nineteenth-century regionalism, most critics assume that today's regionalist theory must also rely on realist aesthetics; that it must support a pseudo-nationalistic political ideology; and that it must "naturalize" all other forms of social difference beneath the supposedly apolitical rubric of "place." As I hope to demonstrate, none of these presuppositions is accurate.

During the twentieth century, revolutionary changes in the way that Canadians and Americans live, work, travel, and communicate have altered our understanding of concepts like "place," "region" and "home." Many of the once-secure links that purportedly defined subjectivity through a non-negotiable connection to landscape have become at least partially unmoored. Because North Americans do not understand their personal, local, or national cultural geographies in the way they once did, regionalist theory itself needs to be updated; it must literally "come to terms" with the waves of spatial transformation the continent has experienced in the postwar period. If contemporary North American geography shares little in common with its nineteenth-century predecessor, then it is not surprising that contemporary North American regionalist literature demands a new way of articulating this relationship between people and places. It is only when our traditional vocabulary fails us that we comprehend our urgent need for a new one. Though the necessity of an updated theoretical paradigm is obvious, reinventing regionalism is not an easy task. Before we can reconstruct regionalist literary theory for a new kind of cultural geography, we first need to understand how our traditional model of the discourse was first created. Where do our

standard regionalist stereotypes come from and why have they been so difficult to replace?

1.2 Keeping the Past in the Present:

The Nineteenth-Century Bias of Contemporary Regionalist Criticism

Although regionalist literature has continuously adapted to the cultural geographic changes of the twentieth century, regionalist criticism in North America is still dominated by a nineteenth-century bias. In American scholarship especially, the word "regionalism" is normally used to describe a very exclusive catalogue of texts and authors. Rather than an entire genre of writing or a clearly defined set of aesthetic concerns, regionalism is seen as a temporal marker. Most critics use the term as a historical heading which identifies a precise period in the American literary tradition. Though there are, of course, important exceptions to the rule, one can generally assume that an essay about "American Regionalism" focusses on an author (or a group of authors) who rose to prominence in the aftermath of the Civil War, in the 1870s, 80s or 90s, at a time when sectionalist politics and economic reconstruction were pressing national issues. Even the most cursory survey of recent scholarship demonstrates that writers from this period are the preferred object of study in contemporary regionalist criticism. In article after article, the same names repeat with startling consistency. If we are talking about regionalism in North America, then it seems we are almost required to make some reference to Jewett or Freeman or Stowe; or to some mix of Twain, Cable, Chopin, Dunbar, Garland, Murfee, Harte, Cooke, or Harris. This is by no means an exhaustive list, but it does cover eighty percent of the regionalist

criticism being produced today.

Judith Fetterley and Marjorie Pryse's Norton anthology, American Women Regionalists: 1850-1910 (1992), Donna Campbell's Resisting Regionalism: Gender & Naturalism in American Fiction, 1885-1915 (1997), Kate McCullough's Regions of Identity : The Construction of America in Women's fiction, 1885-1914 (1999) and Stephanie Foote's Regional Fictions : Culture and Identity in Nineteenth-century American Literature (2000) provide several good examples of this trend. Along with countless other articles on nineteenth-century regionalism, these four major texts helped define the study of regionalism as a historical (rather than contemporary) field of inquiry.⁵ Though Fetterley, Pryse, Campbell, McCullough, and Foote are all aware that regionalism continues to be a cultural force in contemporary North America, their research clearly locates the apex of regionalist discourse at the close of the nineteenth century. In the introduction to their anthology, Fetterley and Pryse openly admit that every author and selection in their volume has been made according to this one "primary assumption" about regionalism (xi). In the clearest possible terms, they argue that by "creating this anthology, we are asserting the existence of a tradition among nineteenth-century American women writers that we term regionalism" (xi). Foote endorses a similar periodization. She speaks of regionalism in the past tense and argues that the aesthetic is best remembered "for its nostalgic portraits of pre-industrial rural communities and people" (3). In the same way, McCullough's work demands that literary regionalism be located "in the context of nineteenth-century discourses of racial, ethnic, sexual, regional, and national identity" (5).

It is not my intention here to disparage the scholarly value of a literary criticism that focusses exclusively on nineteenth-century examples of regionalist writing. In fact, I am a strong supporter of the work Fetterley, Pryse, Campbell, McCullough, and Foote have done. In a fairly condensed period of time, they have drawn significant attention back to a long-neglected phase in American literary history and resuscitated the reputations of many previously marginalised female writers and texts. For this achievement, I think they should be complimented rather than criticized. Considered in complete isolation, I have no quarrel with their arguments nor with the quality of their research. Instead, the major weakness I am tracing in contemporary regionalist criticism is more structural, more closely linked to the enthusiastic reception this nineteenth-century work has received and to the near complete absence of alternative regionalist perspectives in current scholarship.

As every student of literary canon formation understands, the most influential critics of any particular era can sometimes purposely, but more often accidentally, limit the potential of other readings. When one interpretation of a particular author, text or genre becomes so widely endorsed that it is accepted as "conventional wisdom," problems begin to emerge. This is, I think, what has happened with the recent regionalist resurgence. Though it was never their intention, the influence Fetterley, Pryse, Campbell, McCullough and Foote enjoy has effectively enclosed the study of regionalist writing within a fairly exclusive set of gendered and temporal limitations. By forcefully establishing one field of research, and by passionately promoting the necessity and critical legitimacy of this investigation, they have simultaneously cut off the potential for another.

With each anthology and each article that asserts that 1910, or 1915, or 1914 was the very last year that regionalism played a significant role in American literature, it becomes increasingly difficult to suggest that regionalist discourse may have an essential function in contemporary culture and criticism. Though so many of the key statements in regionalist scholarship have been made in the last decade of the twentieth century, the majority of these texts have only helped solidify the nineteenth-century preconceptions that have always reigned over the field.

Though his work approaches regionalism from the opposite extreme and clearly lacks the sophistication of Fetterley, Pryse, Campbell, McCullough and Foote, Dainotto's hostile criticism is caught in an identical nineteenth-century time warp. Published in 2000, his Place in Literature: Regions, Cultures, Communities is yet another influential regionalist text that never overcomes its nineteenth-century preconceptions about the discourse. In fact, it is Dainotto's stated aim to keep regionalism in the past and to prevent it from having any productive role in the study of contemporary literature. Early on, he establishes "(t)he fact that regionalism is not a part of our *present*" (11), but rather a "byproduct of an indisputable nineteenth-century concern with places and regions" (27). At the core of Dainotto's critique lies the belief that regionalism can only be interpreted as an old-fashioned literary styling supported by nostalgic writers and readers who long to escape the present and return to the past. "(T)he leading motive of regionalism," he suggests, is "(t)he hankering for grounded, natural, authentic values shared by a true community" (17). Frustrated by what he sees as a misguided effort to restore a contemporary version of literary naturalism, Dainotto asks,

What purpose can regionalism serve today? In a moment in which the crisis of national literature, opened by comparative and postcolonial studies, seems to have deprived literature of the possibility of a universal, "natural," and "persistent" conception of beauty, regionalism might well be a pretext for returning to a regressive notion of "authentic" aesthetic values - a post-formalist version of literariness- against the hybridity of the imagined communities. ('All the regions' 489)

Though Dainotto's rhetorical query appears to address regionalism's purpose "today," the nineteenth-century brackets he places around his discussion make it impossible for him to answer such a question. Not only does he ignore the regionalism put forth by cultural geographers like Soja, Katz, and Smith, but Dainotto's work does not even comment on a single contemporary regionalist writer. Like Fetterley, Pryse, Campbell, McCullough, and Foote, who are trying to promote new readings of regionalism, Dainotto's critique offers us little on the subject of late-twentieth century writing. By forcing regionalism into an uncomfortably exclusive aesthetic union with realist representation and a political alliance with nineteenth-century nationalism, he eliminates a contemporary index for his own arguments. When we consider the restrictions he places around his discussion, it is not surprising that the only thing outdated about Dainotto's attack on regionalism are the charges he lays against the discourse. His arguments lose almost all force when applied to contemporary North American writers who are clearly *not* under the spell of the delusionary naturalism he so badly wants to deconstruct.

The same can be said for most of the Canadian commentators who condescend to regionalism by characterizing it as a simplified or 'self-evident' literary classification that holds little potential for advanced study. If we temporarily put aside the excellent work of New, Lorrigo, Wyile, Chalykoff, and Jordan, we find there are still several important scholars who would support E.K. Brown's suspicion that regionalism is the primary "problem" of Canadian literature. In his famous pronouncement, Brown interpreted regionalism as an uncomfortable phase of Canada's literary adolescence, a stage the country's writers had to pass through before they could emerge as mature artists. He thought of regionalism as a kind of aesthetic punishment for Canadian literature, a test it would have to survive, a "purgation" (21). Writing in the 1940s, Brown claimed that although "a warm emotion for one's *petit pays* can lead to very charming art [. . .] regionalist art will fail because it stresses the superficial and the peculiar at the expense, at least, if not to the exclusion, of the fundamental and universal" (21).

Though almost sixty years have passed, this type of commentary still has its contemporary supporters. As we have seen, Davey relentlessly characterizes regionalism as a sub-genre of nature writing. Like Dainotto, he tries to invalidate regionalist theory by forcing it into an inescapable union with nineteenth-century realism and nationalism ("Maritime Powerlessness" 71). The same can be said for Donna Pennee. In her review of David Adams Richards's Nights Below Station Street, she suggests that regionalism and documentary realism are virtually indistinguishable. Claiming that "(r)eaders accustomed to some degree of self-consciousness in fiction today will find little, if anything, to interest them" in Richards's novel, Pennee argues that this text (which eventually went on

to win the 1988 Governor General's Award) has value only if "the déjà vu effect of reading a regional fictive documentary still constitutes the apex of the Canadian literary experience" (41). By unproblematically dissolving the borders between regionalism, realism, naturalism, nationalism and "fictive documentary," critics like Pennee, Davey and Dainotto carry on a tradition of misreading regionalism that reaches back more than a century. In one way or another, all of them are reiterating regionalist assumptions that find their origins in the nineteenth-century writings of William Dean Howells.

1.3 "Scientific Decorum" and "The Expression of America in Art":

The Perpetual Influence of Howellsian Regionalism

Few writers have ever dominated an era of literary history as completely as Howells dominated late-nineteenth-century American writing. As the undisputed champion of realist aesthetics in the United States and the editor of the Atlantic Monthly from 1866-1881, and later Harper's Monthly Magazine from 1886-1891, Howells, in his fiction, essays, reviews, and editorial selections, constructed a version of regionalist aesthetics that towered over his own period and continues to direct Canadian and American literature today. As Carla and Rudolf Kirk observe in their introduction to Criticism and Fiction,

Because he continued to write both reviews and essays, as well as fiction, for over fifty years; because he talked with, encouraged, criticized, and enjoyed the friendship of almost all the men and women writing in this country from 1866-1920; because his serialized novels and monthly book notices were discussed in

front parlours and clubs as well as in editorial offices, [Howells's] concept of realism is, one might say, securely built into the fabric of American fiction. (3)

That same concept of Howellsian realism is also securely built into our contemporary understanding of North American regionalism.⁶ Though he would eventually fall out of fashion with the literary establishment he helped create, Howells's definitions of regionalism have survived and even expanded their range of influence during the last century. It was Howells who forged the first problematic linkages between regionalism, realism, and nationalism; we must return to his work if we wish to free contemporary regionalism from these associations.

In one of his clearest declarations on the subject, Howells once suggested that the best fiction, whether it be regionalist or otherwise, must be able to pass what he described as the fundamental "test" of all literature:

We must ask ourselves before we ask anything else, Is it true? - true to the motives, the impulses, the principles that shape the lives of actual men and women. This truth, which necessarily includes the highest morality and the highest artistry - this truth given, the book cannot be wicked and cannot be weak; and without it all graces of style and feats of invention and cunning of construction are so many superfluities of naughtiness. [. . .] In the whole range of fiction we know of no true picture of life - that is, of human nature - which is not also a masterpiece of literature, full of divine and natural beauty. (49)

For Howells, regionalist writing was particularly well-equipped to explore the divine and natural beauty of everyday life. The regionalist authors he supported appeared

to shy away from the aesthetic excesses, the "superfluities of naughtiness," which he associated with romantic writing. More specifically, Howells believed that "the sketches and studies" provided by his female local colorists were "faithfuler and more realistic" than the submissions he received from other writers (64). There was "a solidity, an honest observation in the work of such women as Mrs. Cooke, Miss Murfee, Miss Wilkins and Miss Jewett which (left) little to be desired" (64). He praised their "direct" style, and "their free use of different local parlances" (64). These writers spoke "true American" (66), and their work was a testament to the power of an "authentic" American literature.⁷

"[L]et fiction cease to lie about life, " Howells famously proclaimed,

let it portray men and women as they are, actuated by the motives and passions in the measure we all know; let it leave off painting dolls and working them by springs and wires; let it show the different interests in their proportions; [. . .]let it not put on fine literary airs; let it speak the dialect, the language that most Americans know - the language of unaffected people everywhere - and there can be no doubt of an unlimited future, not only of delightfulness but of usefulness, for it. (51)

To produce the "useful" fiction he so desired, Howells instructed his realistically-minded local colorists to act as literary anthropologists. He trusted them with the task of recording regional cultures as accurately as possible, and demanded that they follow the strictest standards of "scientific decorum" (73). Only by mimicking the objective stance of a natural science could regionalist writers hope to achieve the highest levels of verisimilar representation.⁸ Their goal was "nothing more and nothing less than the

ruthful treatment of material" (38). Critics and writers of regionalist fiction had to go about their business with austere seriousness. They were instructed to "classify and analyze the fruits of the human mind very much as the naturalist classifies the objects of his study" (20).

Everett Carter's research places special emphasis on this relationship between nineteenth-century science and Howells's definitions of realism and regionalism. He recognizes "the Scientist" as the "New Hero" of the nineteenth-century, and argues that "Howells's was an age which saw about it everywhere the success of the empirical method" (91). As the archetypal clear-eyed observer, it was generally accepted that only a man of science could see past sentimentality and penetrate to the core of an objective reality. As Daniel Borus observes, Howells's realistic regionalism was an aesthetic adaptation of this empirical method, a genre that fed off the reading public's hunger for stories that not only entertained the imagination, but also stimulated the intellect. By fictionally surveying the continent and seemingly 'uncovering' its previously hidden local cultures, American regionalism provided its readers with secure, usable forms of knowledge. Borus claims that Howells's aesthetics "brought to literature the same concern for the mapping of society" and the "same method of observing the concrete rather than replicating the abstract" that was found in scientific discourse (14). In a world where science was fundamentally restructuring every social, cultural and religious institution, a realistic regionalism captured this transition. Borus argues that

Nineteenth century Americans [. . .] believed that their social world was in flux.

This same turbulence spawned a new set of discourses that aimed to explain more

completely the changes that industrialism had wrought. The history that featured monopolies, strikes, and mass consumption also brought into prominence new disciplines like sociology and updated established ones like history. [. . .] Linking these varied investigations was an insistence that intellectual life must rest on the compilation of facts about the external world from which trained minds could formulate laws. Rejecting the older belief that the purpose of intellectual discourse was to confirm pre-existing standards of knowledge and ratify eternal laws, the new disciplines stressed detailed and systematic observations of an external world, the components of which constituted reality. Only through conscientious adherence to a methodology patterned on that of the natural sciences could intellectuals understand how people actually behaved. (12-13)

The close affiliation Howells established between empiricist epistemology and realist/regional aesthetics survives to this day. The notion that regionalists "compile facts about the external world" or that they are committed to the "detailed and systematic observation" of foreign locales are both standard assumptions in contemporary regionalist criticism. In his 1998 essay, "'Regionalist' Fiction and the Problem of Cultural Knowledge," for example, David Martin argues that during the late-nineteenth century it was practically impossible to tell the difference between a regionalist short story and a supposedly 'scientific' ethnographic report. The two kinds of writing appeared in the same magazines and were often published side-by-side, so that a reader's attention would flow seamlessly from one on to the next. The regionalist and the ethnographer both presented themselves as "experts" on their particular places, and both displayed a similar confidence

n their ability to "teach" cosmopolitan readers about life in the country's hinterlands. As Martin observes, nineteenth-century regionalist writing

does not just portray the life of a Maine village, a mining settlement, or a Bayou community; it tries to render the inner logic of these places- what the people are like, how they live, and why. If a regionalist story has done its job, then when you put it down, you should feel like that you *know* something about that region. (37)

This pedagogic function is unmistakable in the canonical texts of the period. According to Martin, during the late-nineteenth century, regionalism and ethnography become 'virtually indistinguishable;" they "appear as nearby points, often complimentary points, and sometimes inseparable points on a single line" (37).⁹

Beyond his socio-scientific pretensions, Howells also had overtly nationalistic goals for regionalist literature. He felt that if they were combined correctly, realism, regionalism, and nationalism could form a powerful, distinctly American, aesthetic. Convinced that a stronger nation could be built by commissioning, collecting and presenting regionalist sketches, Howells demanded, without any irony, that his writers "be as American as they unconsciously can" (66). In order to create "the expression of America in art," he felt that literature had to become more "democratic" and that regionalism provided the means to such an end (67). Even the most marginalized American locale would have its fair and equal representation between the covers of a magazine edited by Howells. If the country could exist as a coherent whole in the Atlantic Monthly, the logic went, then perhaps citizens from all regions could view themselves as essential participants in the newly re-United States of America. Regionalism seemed able

to explain the differences between Americans and to rationalize the social conflicts between them. In doing so, the genre gave America a more definite sense of its own solidity and helped develop the idea of a collective national reality. Howells believed that realistic regionalism provided a "new method" for understanding the "new conditions" of an American society still in the process of defining itself (68). He thought writers from every corner of the nation were working toward a common goal of mutual understanding; that they all desired the same kind of rationalist connection. The greatest American writers, he argued, were "instinctively striving to make each part of the country and each phase of our civilization known to all the other parts" (68).

1.4 Austin and the Agrarians: The Roots of Protest

Despite the optimism of Howells's rhetoric, there was never a moment when North American regionalism, realism, and nationalism co-existed in perfect harmony. Even at the earliest stages of his project, many of the writers commissioned by Howells discovered what Jordan calls an "irreconcilable conflict" between *their* regionalist motives and *his* realist and/or nationalist aims ("Representing Regionalism" 103). Though, as we have seen, many of today's commentators continue to promote the belief that regionalism naively accepts a Howellsian version of realist aesthetics, in actual fact, the two do not combine easily or successfully. An objectively minded realism which tries to record the physical or sociological character of any given place can never gain access to the more subjective index - - the personalized "experience" of social space - - that so many regionalist artists explore. By the same token, a nationalistic search for that single

metaphysical essence which unifies all citizens of a particular country and levels the differences between them, works counter to even the most basic regionalist impulse. In her essay, "'Not in the Least American': Nineteenth-Century Literary Regionalism as UnAmerican Literature," Fetterley argues forcefully that regionalism and realism should be considered as separate aesthetics. In her opinion, regionalist texts (and especially those written by female authors) have been unfairly dominated by "the masculinist enterprise of realism" (19). Though she concedes that critics often fall back to realism as "the only game in town" when discussing the late-nineteenth century, Fetterley demonstrates that regionalism has always undermined such "realistic thinking" and that it should be considered as "a category parallel to and thus potentially of equal importance to the category of realism" (19). Contrary to what Davey, Dainotto, or Penne have argued, regionalist authors are not required to embrace environmental determinism. Regionalism does not assume that every citizen in a region should be united by a common naturalistic connection to place; and it certainly does not attempt to suppress or efface its own internal diversity. For decades, regionalist artists have tried to overthrow the dominance of these assumptions, but their arguments have never received the critical attention they merit. As far back as the 1920s and 30s, writers like Mary Austin, John Crowe Ransom, and Robert Penn Warren were already trying to destabilize these conventions and to separate regionalism from realism and nationalism.

In Austin's 1931 essay, "Regionalism in American Fiction," for example, she frames her disagreement with Howells in the clearest possible terms. Calling him by name, she blames "W.D. Howells" for the "thinning out" of American literature (101)

and claims that his "insistence on fiction shallow enough to be common to all regions [. . .] has pulled down the whole level of American fiction" (99). For Austin, regionalist writing is clearly not powered by a scientific desire to make every place knowable to every other. Such empirical investigation is not its goal; rather, difference itself is seen to have its own inherent value. Instead of viewing the sociological and geographic diversity of America as a challenge that must be overcome, Austin encourages writers and readers to appreciate the enormous fictional resource created by what she calls "our inextinguishable ignorance of each other" (99).

Austin's essay occupies a key position in this discussion because it was one of the first theoretical texts to suggest that regionalist writing did something more than transmit knowledge of place. By identifying this essential difference between a realistic 'recording' of place and a regionalist exploration into the 'experience' of social space, Austin redirected the focus of regionalist theory in a way that ran completely opposite to the Howellsian model. According to Jordan,

Austin's suggestion that authors might examine a lived experience, rather than try to quantify external phenomena, suggests an alternate approach to an aesthetic of regionalism: if we consider this distinct regional experience as the subject of fiction, we might examine ways in which fiction reflects not only distinctive external facts, but also a distinct regional existence governed by local forces. ("Representing Regionalism" 105)

It is difficult to overstate the significance of this change. Austin's alternative aesthetic moves away from the scientific posture of realism and the homogenizing politics

of nationalism. In their place, she suggests that regionalist criticism devote itself to a more ontologically based investigation, one which elevates the value of social difference, rather than diminishes it. If the "experience" of "being located" in social space is regionalism's referent, then the discourse must be at least partially interested in the subjective, imaginary character of place. Instead of asking standard anthropological socio-scientific questions, a regionalist theory focussed on the experience of social space explores the intellectual, emotional and psychological negotiations that help orient subjectivity within a particular cultural geography. Austin's regionalism interprets "place" as a verb rather than a noun: instead of trying to locate and precisely reproduce the physical features of "a place," her version of the discourse investigates how a subjectivity *"is placed"* in an uncertain discursively active terrain.

Unfortunately, like so many other regionalist critics of this era, Austin was never able to fully develop the huge potential of her most basic observations. Rather than explain exactly what an "experience" of social space entailed, she simply took for granted that anyone who had "lived deeply and experientially" in his or her own environment would be "prepared to recognize the same experience in another" (105). Instead of probing the further possibilities of her definition, Austin devotes most of her essay to critiquing the nationalistic bias of Howells's regionalism. As we have already seen, this is an important task and Austin performs it well, but in her passionate attack on nationalism, she only glosses over some of the more important questions for contemporary regionalist theory. For example, in a remarkable passage that was originally aimed at Howells but remains just as applicable today, Austin argued that "resistance" to a new version of

regionalist aesthetics might be attributed to an "intellectual laziness which flinches from the task of competently knowing not one vast, pale figure of America, but several Americas, in many subtle and significant characterizations" (98).

For contemporary readers, this argument may sound very familiar. Austin's regionalism seems to forecast some of the basic insights of postcolonial theory. In place of "one vast, pale figure of America," she suggests that there might be greater potential in a more flexible, relational model which allows for "several Americas, in many subtle and significant characterizations." It is worth re-emphasizing that these comments appear several decades before terms like "difference" and "otherness" became the touchstones of contemporary criticism. As far back as the 1910s and 20s, leading regionalists had already recognized the power of these terms and had attempted to amplify their political and cultural resonances. In 1894, one of the very first regionalist critics in America, Hamlin Garland, predicted that "difference, not similarity" would eventually be seen as the vitalizing quality of all literature, and that "the infinite range of future art" would be contained "in the space of that word, 'difference'" ("The Local Novel" 65). Though I do not think Garland should be considered a nineteenth-century precursor to Derrida, his highly politicized reading of "difference" was certainly ahead of its time.

.5 I'll Take My Stand: Politics vs. Aesthetics

Beyond Austin and Garland's work, the strongest resistance to Howellsian regionalism came from the South. In the late 20s and early 30s, a group of poets based out of Vanderbilt University in Nashville, Tennessee mounted a remarkably sophisticated

attack on both the realist aesthetics and the not-so-hidden nationalist ideology of Howells's model. Committing themselves to the re-invention of regionalism in both its Southern context and beyond, the group published a literary magazine, The Fugitive, from 1922 to 1925, and two controversial symposia. The first appeared in 1930 under the title, 'I'll Take My Stand: The South and The Agrarian Tradition, and the second, Who Owns America? A New Declaration of Independence, was released in 1936. Published during the Depression, with the shadow of the 1929 stock market crash still fresh in America's collective consciousness, both volumes promoted the benefits of an agriculturally based agrarian economy as a more stable regional alternative to the obvious uncertainty of American industrialism.

The key figures affiliated with what came to be known as "the Fugitive/Agrarian movement" challenged standard interpretations of regionalist discourse and Southern culture in general.¹⁰ They criticized the empiricist philosophy which influenced so much of Howells's work and railed against the "cult of science" and the "uncritical" dominance of "industrial logic" in American life (ITMS xii). Freely intermingling their aesthetic, political, religious, and economic observations, the Agrarians argued that a regionally indexed distinction could be drawn between "a Southern way of life" and the scientific abstraction that characterized the "American or prevailing way" of life (ITMS ix). Claiming the South could "determine itself" and that it had a "right to live its own kind of life," they argued that their region -- and, more importantly, all regions in America -- possessed not only their own histories, their own geographies, and their own economies, but also their own unique experiences of social space (ITMS x). Rather than "one vast,

able figure of America," the Agrarians, like Austin, believed that cultural geographies changed as one travelled across the continent, and that this social diversity was a valuable resource which needed to be defended from the homogenizing forces of the "machine economy" (Ransom, "Aesthetics" 54).

Though the quality of writing in I'll Take My Stand wavers dramatically, the symposium has been recognized as one of the most important texts in the history of Southern literature.¹¹ During this early period in their careers, years before Ransom, Warren, and Tate went on to become literary celebrities on the national scene, their collective attention was briefly but intensely focussed on regionalist questions. In Louise Cowan's affectionate tribute, The Fugitive Group: A Literary History, she argues that the cultural rebirth of the entire region can be traced back to the work of these three men. Along with their longtime friend and collaborator, Donald Davidson, Cowan recognizes Ransom, Warren, and Tate as "the inaugurators of the Southern literary renaissance [. . .] and] the most germinal and articulate men to ever come out of the South" (xv). John Bradbury shares the same opinion. Fueled by what he sees as a distinct "regional pride," Bradbury suggests that the group "affected a near revolution in American letters" (3).

The relative success or failure of the Fugitive/Agrarian revolution has been a subject of long-standing debate.¹² Though one may have expected that a biting critique of American capitalism would have been welcomed in 1930, I'll Take My Stand was never a best-seller. Thomas Daniel Young observes that, although the book was not completely ignored, it "was more often ridiculed than championed" (21). The symposium's great weakness was an obvious one: though I'll Take My Stand promoted itself as a work of

economic theory, there was not a single economist on its list of contributors. The four major Fugitive/Agrarians were poets and literary theorists; none of them were particularly well-qualified to make advanced economic arguments. The other essays in the collection came from sources just as dubious. Written by historians, political scientists, drama critics, journalists, psychologists, and grad students, the essays in I'll Take My Stand ranged from education reform to a generalized critique of progressive philosophy. The irony of so many genteel Southern intellectuals arguing for the redemptive potential of subsistence farming was not lost on the book's reviewers. Led by H.L. Mencken, they mocked the group, calling them 'literary' or 'typewriter farmers' (Carlson 99). The joke was not far from the truth. At the time of I'll Take My Stand's publication, only one of the Agrarians was actually living on a farm (Carlson 100).

Because its value as an economic text is suspect, most of the critical attention that has been paid to I'll Take My Stand has focussed on its status as a regionalist treatise. As John Shelton Reed observes, "whatever else it may be, I'll Take My Stand is a very *southern* book" (43). Every essay in the symposium situated its discussion of agrarianism within the historical and cultural experience of the South. Because the social value and the political potential of the Agrarians' work seemed so inescapably linked to this concept of "Southernness," the symposium never attracted the national audience that many of its leading contributors sought. John Stewart argues that, in the end, the only people who really paid attention to the movement did so because "Agrarianism provided a momentary focus for a profound but inchoate concern for their region which troubled all thoughtful Southerners" (172). In the same way, Carlson claims that, for Ransom, Warren, and Tate,

"agriculture was never much more than a 'metaphor' for discussing philosophical issues," and that "their calls for a return to subsistence farming were not to be taken too seriously" (100).

For regionalist critics working today, the collapse of the Agrarian movement raises many important questions. What exactly were these "profound but inchoate" concerns that troubled all "thoughtful Southerners" in 1930? And what kinds of "philosophical issues" were Ransom, Warren and Tate trying to explore through the "metaphor" of agriculture? In his excellent analysis of this period of Southern literary history, Richard Gray suggests that the Agrarians' troubles were closely linked to the challenges of regionalist theory. He argues that the roots of the Agrarian crisis can be traced back to

the slow process of simultaneous erosion and accretion that was altering the fabric of Southern society and the structure of the Southern mind, and which, sooner or later, would have demanded some sort of response, some kind of active definition of the self *vis-a-vis* the region from writers of this intelligence and vision. (126)

If, as Gray suggests, Agrarianism was fuelled by this desire for a "regionalized" definition of the self, then the theoretical debates that eventually overwhelmed the group may have been much more sophisticated than critics have traditionally believed. Rather than being torn apart by internal bickering, the Agrarian movement may actually have been derailed by the ambiguity of regionalism itself. Although Tate, in a letter written in 1937, once claimed that his friends were perpetually "shouting to each other across immense voids," Gray suggests that the most thoughtful Agrarians were actually "conducting an inner

dialogue" on regionalism and that, in fact, they were "shouting to themselves" (134). The leading members of the group struggled with what seemed like an inescapable regionalist paradox: How could they be loyal Southerners and simultaneously advanced literary theorists? Was it possible, or even desirable, to construct a theory of regionalism that could be separated from the Southern identity? What would be gained or lost in such a transition?

Gray argues that although "their overwhelming self-consciousness may have been unfortunate for them as 'Southerners,'" the sophistication of the Agrarians' regionalism turned out to be "a blessing in disguise for them as writers" (141). Because "discontinuity" and the struggles of the "divided mind" were issues that Ransom, Warren, and Tate "knew from their own lives" and "felt upon their own pulses," the group was able to recognize both the strengths and the weaknesses of regionalist thought (Gray 134). Though they paid a heavy price, both politically and interpersonally, for their work in this area, the regionalist theory that eventually nullified the Agrarian movement is essential reading for contemporary scholars who are only now beginning to appreciate the role of spatiality in cultural criticism. As is so often the case, the end of Agrarianism was also a kind of beginning, a dramatic break from tradition that initiated a different strategy for understanding regionalist writing. It may have cost them their friendships and temporarily held back their headlong rush into a formalist literary criticism, but the regionalism the Agrarians produced was unlike anything that had ever preceded it.

1.6 "Disagreeable intellectual distance": The Agrarian Family Feud

If we were to divide the Agrarians into two groups - - the two camps on either side of Tate's "immense void" - - then Donald Davidson's work would certainly occupy the more conservative pole. As the unacknowledged editor and the driving political force behind I'll Take My Stand, Davidson's regionalist criticism was motivated by a desire to defend the South from its Northern detractors. In his militant collection of essays, Still Rebels, Still Yankees, Davidson readdressed the Civil War divisions of American culture. He argued that regionalism had to be taken up as the South's "battle cry" against "metropolitan critics" who held their "seat of power [. . .] in the great cities of the East " (267). Regionalism, he felt, revealed the hypocrisy, "the false nationalism," that Northern critics used to define the whole of American literature (276). By normalizing their own industrial culture and demonizing the Agrarian culture of the South, Northern Yankee reviewers had created the canon in their own image and somehow convinced American readers that "a novel about a plowboy [was] only a regional curiosity, but a novel about a seaboy [was] a national masterpiece" (278). Davidson believed that regionalism provided the only means to combat the homogenizing effect of such a "uniform culture" and "the levelling power of an industrial system" (273, 274). He predicted that this debate between the North and South, and between industrial and agrarian values, would "turn out to be the most important critical discussion in American history" (268).

For Davidson, the political stakes in this competition were high. In his mind, the Agrarians had to view themselves as a Southern protest movement and could not be distracted by what he saw as "minor" aesthetic disagreements. Rather than challenging

Howells's exclusively realistic interpretation of the discourse, Davidson believed there had to be a direct mimetic connection between the regional text and the world it empirically recorded. Regionalist literature had a social responsibility. It represented the South, both artistically and politically. By extension, when a critic defended the South's art, he was also defending the South's culture. Throughout his life, even after his friends had abandoned the South and his fiery brand of sectionalist politics, Davidson remained doggedly loyal to his causes. He became a fierce supporter of McCarthyism and an equally passionate opponent of school desegregation. As Mark Jancovitch observes, Davidson eventually developed into the worst kind of Southern nationalist, a man who would "champion Southern causes irrespective of the way of life they offered" (27).

In the opposite camp, though it would be wrong to characterize Ransom, Warren, and Tate as theorists first and Southerners second, it is clear that their interest in regionalism was much more abstract than Davidson's. With varying degrees of commitment, all three supported the political defence of the South, but they also wanted to explore the more general theoretical assumptions that supported regionalism. Rather than focussing exclusively on the South's literary tradition, Ransom, Warren, and Tate worked to discover how *any* work from *any* place could qualify as regionalist. They challenged the directly representational theory espoused by Howells and Davidson, and in its place suggested that regionalism might be only partially, rather than exclusively, realistic in its aesthetic. During their negotiations with the discourse, Ransom, Warren, and Tate advanced regionalist thought considerably, but they also uncovered major deficiencies in its critical vocabulary. Whenever they tried to explain the type of social

space they felt regionalist literature examined, the trio were never able to articulate their arguments. Like Austin and Garland before them, they faced the same philosophical problem. Though Ransom, Warren, and Tate were intuitively aware of the fact that the South was simultaneously a physical place *and* an imagined narrative of place, and they knew it was this interrelation of real and imagined elements that regionalism explored, the trio could never find a way to reconcile the two poles. They could never make that crucial theoretical leap into interpreting social reality itself as an unstable, discursively constructed terrain.

Consider, for example, Ransom's famous essay, "The Aesthetics of Regionalism." Published in 1934 -- four years after I'll Take My Stand and somewhere in the middle of his Agrarian commitment -- "The Aesthetics" recounts a trip Ransom made to New Mexico in the summer of 1933. The essay documents the author's effort to expand the Southern index of his own regionalism into a more generally applicable theoretical construction. At this time, Ransom was searching for an intellectually defensible model of regionalism that did not quickly disintegrate into boosterism or the type of petty political argument Davidson advocated. Throughout the piece, Ransom portrays himself as a "philosophical regionalist" trying to lift the discourse from its marginalised status (45). Comparing his theory of regionalism to some of the other "equivalent" possibilities, he writes,

Regionalism is as reasonable as non-regionalism, whatever the later may be called: cosmopolitanism, progressivism, industrialism, free trade, interregionalism, eclecticism, liberal education, the federation of the world, or

simple rootlessness; so far as the anti-regional philosophy is crystallized in such doctrines. (47)

By equating regionalism with "industrialism" or "free trade," Ransom performs a clever inversion. He transforms regionalism from a simple geographic indicator to a much more complex economic argument. Rather than viewing regionalism as a discourse that comments only on *where* people live, he uses the term to describe *how* people live, how they relate to their environments both economically and artistically. According to Ransom, regionalism can produce a better local economy and a better local art because it encourages an understanding of social space that is "less abstract" than the economic logic of "big business" (48). He claims that regionalism possesses an aesthetic potential unavailable in an over-rationalized industrial system and that "the machine economy, carried to the limit with the object of 'maximum efficiency,' is the enemy of regionalism" (54).

For Ransom, the whole history of industrialism in the United States is seen as an unrelenting attack on regionalist values. He claims that Americans suffer from a "mortal infatuation" with progressive philosophy and are consciously or unconsciously destroying the various regional identities that once made up the country (54). With obvious envy, he points to the aboriginal communities of New Mexico and argues that, unlike the rest of "white America" - - in which regionalism "is so little an experience that it is often obliged to be a theory" -- the natives are so clearly attached to their landscape that they "do not have to formulate the philosophy of regionalism"(48). As one of the few American cultures that continues to exist outside the industrial economy, the aboriginals have been

able to at least temporarily insulate themselves from its homogenizing effects.

Ransom was anything but naive in his appreciation of the relationship between regionalist aesthetics and politics. Well aware of the cultural conditions in which he was working, he demanded that Southern regionalism be more than just a Confederate nationalism in disguise or a resurrected sectionalism trying to pass itself off as advanced theory. In another 1934 essay, "Regionalism in the South," Ransom admits there are major problems associated with such overtly political versions of regionalist discourse. Nothing frustrates him more than the simplistic naturalism of environmental determinism. "What shall the Southern apologist name as the sacred essence?" he asks,

Is it the magnolias, the banjos, and pickaninnies? I cannot but sympathize with the gentlemen of the *New Republic* in detesting these pretty properties as the way of salvation. Is it the drawl of the Southern speech, and the ritardato of labor? Or is it fundamentalism, agrarianism, classicism, the Democratic party, or some other variety of abstract doctrine? It is probably a great many things at once. (108)

The tone is important here. Ransom obviously detests the idea that, taken by themselves, a banjo or a magnolia or an agrarian policy can define the South as a whole, but he accepts the notion that the simultaneous combination of *all* these physical and imaginary elements does index social space in a special way. What we recognize as the regionalism of the South is simply a different combination of real and imagined elements. Like the regionalism of aboriginal New Mexico, or all other regionalisms, the South possesses a particular physical geography in which a particular set of unstable social discourses combine in a particular way, at a particular moment. As Ransom observes,

"there cannot be a regionalism at one place without there being a general philosophy of regionalism, and a number of distinct examples" ("Regionalism in the South" 109).

Writing in 1932, Warren would come frustratingly close to outlining a similar philosophy of regionalism. In a review essay entitled, clearly enough, "Not Local Color," Warren praises regionalist writers who felt they could not "judge a situation or a society abstractly conceived, by an abstract set of values" (154). Like Austin and Ransom, Warren attacks the scientific impulse that lead some writers and critics to view the regionalist short story as little more than an anthropological report. He finds this type of writing to be theoretically unsophisticated and argues that its tendency to focus on the "merely quaint" details of place is "incomplete and unphilosophical" (154). Rather than praise the objectivity or the supposed sociological accuracy of the regionalist works he reviews, Warren draws special attention to the complexity of their narrative strategies. He recognizes that the regionalism of Elizabeth Madox Roberts's novel, A Buried Treasure, is "thoroughly self-conscious in purpose," and he warns his readers to stay alert: Roberts's regionalist prose, he suggests, is not as "innocent" as it looks (155).

In his brief commentary on Faulkner's short story collection, These Thirteen, Warren again focusses on the regionalist's technique rather than his subject matter. He observes that the collection contains some of Faulkner's finest writing, and singles out "A Rose For Emily" as "the best exhibit in the volume" (160). Warren immediately recognizes the interdependence Faulkner establishes between his characters, his plots, and his settings. In Warren's opinion, Faulkner is a successful regionalist not because he objectively translates the South into a universally intelligible text, but because he

explores the unknowability of the region, the uncertainty inherent in any experience of place. We are told that Faulkner's work possesses a "strong feeling for place [that] catches up and sustains the characters in a permanent impression " (160). In his brief side commentary on the early novels, Warren observes that "'The Sound and the Fury, 'As I Lay Dying, ' and even 'Sanctuary' - are so intimately related to their locality that one cannot conceive of their action without this element" (160). Faulkner's ability to capture this interdependence between consciousness and social space is, for Warren, "the most triumphant aspect" of his work (160).

One can only wonder how much more refined the Agrarians' regionalist theory would have been if they had only paid closer attention to Faulkner's writing at the time of its first publication. Though, in hindsight, he seems like a glaringly obvious choice, the group never turned to Faulkner's novels for examples of the regionalist writing they were trying to defend. Looking back, it may have been one of the great missed opportunities in the history of American literature. Despite the fact that they were all Southerners and close contemporaries, Faulkner and the Agrarians did not substantially influence each other during the most important phases of their careers. Even the brief paragraphs in which Warren comments on Faulkner demonstrate that the former's theory and the latter's fiction share many points of connection. Unfortunately for regionalist studies, these connections remained largely unexplored at the time.

As is the case today, the challenges of regionalist theory turned out to be far more complicated than the Agrarians had originally envisioned. Over time, the signs of frustration that had always been there became more evident. Perhaps because they had not

considered Faulkner more carefully, or because they could never completely escape the sectional politics of the South, or because Howellsian aesthetics continued to dominate discussions of the discourse, the group began to devote less and less time to regionalism and more and more time to their developing interests in literary criticism.¹³ In an unpublished letter written to Tate in 1936, Ransom privately announced the end of his commitment to Agrarian economic reform and regionalist aesthetics. It is clear that Ransom is leaving regionalism behind because the political implications of defending the South have had negative effects on his literary scholarship. "*Patriotism* has nearly eaten me up," he writes, "and I've got to get out of it" (qtd in Young 75). In later years, Warren and Tate would follow similar paths. When scholars organized reunion conferences to celebrate the significant anniversaries of I'll Take My Stand's publication, Warren would purposely identify himself only as a "contributor" to the symposium, rather than as a true "member" of the Agrarian movement.

By 1939 the break between Agrarianism and the New Criticism would be complete.¹⁴ Ransom and Warren had already left Vanderbilt to take up positions at Kenyon College and LSU, so when Tate writes to Davidson to tell him that he too is moving North for a more lucrative academic position, it is difficult not to see the pattern of philosophical and interpersonal abandonment. "Alas, it is not a rumor," writes Tate, "it is fact that I have accepted the Princeton offer" (319). Tate goes to great lengths trying to persuade Davidson that he has not accepted the job for purely financial reasons. He does not want his colleague to think he is selling out to "Yankee money," but, in the end, his protests seem half-hearted (319). The move is a major decision. Tate, like Ransom and

Warren before him, is purposely distancing himself from the South in order to develop his other interests in literary criticism. Both he and Davidson are clear about what this means for their friendship and for the future of any common academic pursuits. The ascension of the New Criticism will require the death of Agrarianism.

Davidson's response to Tate is perhaps the most revealing moment in their whole forty-year correspondence. Churning through an emotional mix of loss and scholarly outrage, Davidson laments the "disagreeable intellectual distance" that has opened up between his old group of friends (323). He writes,

It is this intellectual isolation, this lack of communion, which I feel the most. And it began before any of you left these parts. Why, is a mystery I can't solve. What fault was I guilty of? Did I just fail to keep up with the pattern of your thinking, and, though once worthy, thus become unworthy? I felt, more than once, that there was a cloud between me on one side and you, J.C.R., and perhaps more on the other side. We were all apparently as good friends as ever, yet there was this cloud. I am not speaking, of course, of mere differences of personal opinion, about this or that, at any given time, but of something more impalpable [...]. I have been almost *forced* into isolation by my own friends. (323-324)

It is difficult not to feel sympathy for Davidson during this period of loss, but despite his isolation from the group, his overview of the Agrarian movement's last days is accurate. Davidson did not "keep up with the pattern" of his friends' thinking: while they persistently tried to steer regionalist thought away from Southern politics and the objectifying pretensions of a realistic definition, he moved in the opposite direction and

refused to dilute his sectionalist commitments. The "cloud" which descended over the group was one of mutual frustration. Ransom, Warren, and Tate could not accept the limitations of a regionalism exclusively tied to the South, and Davidson was unwilling to support a more abstract model of the discourse that sought to abandon its connection with these cultural and political indices.

1.7 "But How Shall it Be Defined?": Overcoming Regionalist Inarticulacy

The regionalist theory put forth by the Agrarians carries a tremendous potential that, unfortunately, remains almost completely undeveloped. Similar to the way that Austin casually suggested that regionalism's referent was experience rather than place itself, Ransom and Warren's most radical observations often seem like tangential, off-hand remarks. In "Not Local Color," for example, Warren makes the significant suggestion that regionalists can not comprehend a place unless they consider "both time and place in a very special sense" (153). Though there is obviously a more advanced theory behind this comment, Warren never outlines how such a "special" consideration of time and place might be achieved, or why such an approach would be unique to regionalist writing. Another statement in the same essay holds similar promise, but is, again, profoundly under-theorized. Almost extemporaneously, Warren proclaims that "(f)or the writer in a tradition, whether he arrives at the conclusion logically or whether he is so beautifully balanced and sensitized that such a process is unnecessary, time and place are one thing" (154).

As we will see in the next chapter, this desire to collapse the divisions between

time and space - - or to re-prioritize the relationship between duration and location - - anticipates contemporary cultural geography's call for a new explicitly "spatialized" interpretation of culture. Though Warren's comment seems to indicate a theoretical movement in the same direction, he cuts off his own discussion before developing the idea further. For a scholar trying to locate key moments in the history of regionalist criticism, this recurrent pattern of an excellent suggestion followed by a nonexistent discussion can be very frustrating. Warren and Ransom's best insights are never developed enough to be considered coherent arguments. Though both men knew there was a crucial subjective component to regionalism that differentiated it from local color writing or purely descriptive realism, Ransom and Warren were never able to explain how this subjective element interacted with the objective conditions of physical space.

Ransom summed up the problem in "Regionalism in the South." He writes,

It is just as difficult in the South as it is elsewhere to tell precisely in what the regionalism consists. We hear it said here that the South has some characteristic arts, or a characteristic culture, or an economy, or a philosophy, or a "way of life," that sets the region apart from other regions, and we hear it asserted that pains must be taken to make this differentiation persist. But how shall it be defined? (108).

Exactly as the Agrarians struggled to articulate their core insights, contemporary scholars descend into a similar tongue-tied state whenever they attempt to explain the relationship between a located subjectivity and the objective conditions of social space. Ransom's question, first posed in 1934, continues to be the refrain of regionalist criticism

today: "How shall it be defined?" For nearly a century, regionalist criticism has been at a loss for words; nearly all of the discourse's contemporary challenges can be traced back to this one fatal weakness in its critical lexicon. As Michael Kowalewski observes, "regionalism may be condescended to by critics or simply ignored as a category because many of them simply lack a vocabulary with which to ask engaging philosophical, psychological, or aesthetic questions about what it means to dwell in a place whether actually or imaginatively" ("Writing in Place" 174). Jordan outlines the problem in a similar way when he suggests that critics who depend on terms such as the "the mystery of place" or the "indefinable air" of regionalism only "hint at the limitations of empirical observation, but they do little to clarify exactly what it is that the regionalist author is trying to represent" ("Representing Regionalism" 105). The lack of a sufficiently sophisticated critical vocabulary has been the single most influential factor in regionalism's arrested development.

Though it runs counter to most critical opinion, I think North American scholars have ignored regionalism's continuing relevance in twenty-first century criticism *not* because the discourse is too simplistic, but because it represents too much of a theoretical challenge. Rather than undertaking the arduous task of constructing an entirely new contemporary critical vocabulary for the aesthetic, we have simply set regionalism aside for the present time, or tried to retread its nineteenth-century stereotypes. Overcoming this frustrating state of inarticulacy is a major challenge for critics working today. Before we can even begin to evaluate regionalism's role in contemporary culture, we first have to find a way to talk about its function, and to explain exactly what it is that the regionalist

text is exploring. Again, Kowalewski's diagnosis of the current situation is insightful. He reminds us that "not knowing what kind of link can be established between self and environment is clearly not the same as denying that there is nothing to be known. Having doubts about the possibility of adequately defining regional identity is not the same as asserting that it does not exist" ("Writing in Place" 175).

Poised between the most objectively-minded Howellsian realism and the purest relativism of unfettered subjectivity, regionalist theory occupies an awkward middle ground that has always been difficult to describe. As Nicholas Entrikin notes in his classic text, The Betweenness of Place, any investigation into a culture's relationship with its natural and man-made geography must eventually come to terms with the interdependence of real and imagined spaces. Places are neither entirely real nor entirely imagined. Instead, the whole field of cultural geography must balance itself between these materialist and idealist polarities. Its researchers must oscillate back and forth *between* the subject and the object, *between* theory and empirical evidence, *between* existentialism and naturalism, idealism and materialism, and, ultimately, *between* the universal and the particular (Entrikin 9). Entrikin admits that

Although the general problem of the linkage between theory and experience is not unique to geography, geographers face the added complications associated with the spatial character of their concepts and the manner in which these concepts relate various kinds of phenomena. In the synthesis of heterogeneous phenomena according to their relations in space, geographers draw together elements of the world that tend to be analytically separated in the theoretical perspectives of other

sciences. (10)

As Entrikin's commentary seems to indicate, literary scholars may have a lot to learn from their colleagues in the geography department. Though the two fields rarely come into contact, they share common interpretive strategies. Tim Cresswell, one of the leaders in the current resurgence of spatial theory, sees a direct kinship between geography and literature. He observes that

Because places are meaningful and because we always exist and act in places, we are constantly engaged in acts of interpretation. This has led some to talk of places and the landscape as a text. Like a book, the landscape is created by authors, and the end product attempts to create certain meanings. But also, like a book, the people who "read" the landscape and its places can never be forced to read in only one way. (17)

Through their many studies or "readings" of the North American landscape, contemporary spatial theorists have produced a new kind of analytical apparatus, specifically designed to address the questions that have always fascinated regionalist artists. Over the last decade, work by thinkers such as Gregory, Soja, Massey, Rose and Harvey has brought the study of cultural geography to new levels of theoretical sophistication. In the process, these scholars have created their own spatial vocabularies and engaged in several passionate debates on the relationship between real and imagined spatialities.¹⁵ Though their research has been welcomed by some and criticized by others, the ascent of this new model for cultural geography has been a godsend for regionalist criticism. The words, concepts, and critical terminologies that regionalism has always

lacked are abundantly available in spatial theory. As we will see in the next chapter, when we apply this new vocabulary to traditional regionalist questions, a major transformation occurs. Rather than blindly following Howells's nineteenth-century realistic model, or descending into the muddled confusion of Agrarian inarticulacy, a self-consciously spatialized regionalist criticism is well-equipped to analyse the kind of generic landscape that now dominates North American life. Armed with a new way of conceptualizing social space and a new way of reading cultural geography, contemporary regionalist critics can finally begin to explore this new category of place which is often more imaginary than it is real.

Chapter Two: Writing Places / Reading Spaces

To help insure that the magnitude of the challenge being presented is understood, I add a much bolder assertion. In what I am convinced will eventually be considered one of the most important intellectual and political developments of the late 20th century, a growing community of scholars and citizens has, for perhaps the first time, begun to think about the spatiality of human life in much the same way that we have persistently approached life's intrinsic and richly revealing historical and social qualities: its historicity and sociality. For much too long, spatiality has been relatively peripheral to what are now called the human sciences.

Edward Soja ¹⁶

2.1 Regionalism and The New Geography

Geography textbooks are not normally considered required reading for students in literature classes. As Soja suggests, the study of social space has always been "relatively peripheral" in humanities research, so it should come as no surprise that the effects of a "spatial revolution" in cultural geography are just beginning to be felt in literary criticism.

Thanks to the ground-breaking efforts of Soja and his colleagues, the spatial concerns once marginalized in advanced research are now difficult to avoid. As Keith and Pile observe, spatiality has "taken its place [. . .] as one of the key terms in theories of conjuncture and situated knowledges;" rather than languishing on the fringes of contemporary debate, they argue that space is "becoming increasingly central to social and cultural studies (223).¹⁷ Geographical metaphors have never been more pervasive in academic writing, and scholars have never been more aware of their own cultural 'locations' and ideological 'positions.' Gregory argues that geography can no longer be 'confined to any one discipline, or even to the specialized vocabularies of the academy; it

travels instead through social practice at large and is implicated in myriad topographies of power and knowledge"(11).

Although Gregory is universally recognized as one of today's leading cultural geographers, he has gained that reputation largely by taking geography out of his own discipline and situating it within the larger contexts of critical debate. In his most celebrated work, Geographical Imaginations, he explores the under-appreciated contribution geography has made to a range of other discourses, including feminism, postcolonialism, modernism, and postmodernism. "All I seek to do," he claims, "is make a series of incisions into the conventional historiography of geography and show that its strategic episodes can be made to speak to many other histories" (14).

But how does geography speak to literature? Where do these two fields come together and how might they influence each other? At first glance, literature and geography seem irreconcilably different. Geography, dominated by the earth-bound science of geomorphology and the objectifying tendencies of cartography, does not seem like a good potential ally for a contemporary literary criticism so often focussed on the cultural or imaginative construction of place. Most non-experts still think of geography as that fact-based subject of their high-school educations. They remember it as a series of memorization tests and map replications, a class in which students learned to recite the names of capital cities and reproduce accurate sketches of their provinces, states, countries, or continents. To many, geography seems the most rigorously scientific of the social sciences, a field dominated by precise measurements and accurate reproductions.

In reality, of course, geographers and literary scholars working at the beginning of

the twenty-first century face many of the same challenges. At its core, the current re-theorization of social space is yet another response to the crisis of representation triggered by poststructuralism's critique of the Western philosophical tradition. In his discussion of "Descartes and deconstruction," Gregory explains how Derrida's arguments first came to influence geographical research. He admits that, in the beginning, deconstruction posed many "radically unsettling" challenges to geographic thought (73). Derrida's displacement of binary oppositions and his refusal to accept the authority of fixed borders or definable frontiers questioned the basic assumptions of a traditional geography based on a "cartography of objectivism," a natural order "which claimed to disclose a fundamental and enduring geometry underlying the apparent diversity and heterogeneity of the world" (70). Adapting Richard Bernstein's terminology, Gregory describes geography's response to this threat as a "Cartographic Anxiety:" if the underlying objectivist geometry of the world that traditional geography depended upon did not actually exist - - if the physical facts geography sought to represent were "projected" rather than "uncovered" - - then cartographers, like their colleagues in English, Anthropology, History or Sociology faced a similar crisis of self-definition (71). If geographers did not present objective truths about place, then what did they do?

Gregory argues that, rather than destroying the field, the "threat" of poststructuralism actually re-energized the study of geography. Deconstruction introduced "a kind of strategic reversal" into geographic research: in place of a cartography of objectivism, map-makers and spatial theorists working today normally reject any claim toward a "synoptic completeness for the human geographical project" (75). As Gregory

observes,

deconstruction displaces the binary oppositions of both categorical and dialectical thought; it frustrates the attempt to draw a perimeter, to hold the line, by showing that all these boundary commissions and policing operations are inherently 'undecidable' : that their systems can be completed only by admitting terms that call that very completeness into question. The point is not that drawing boundaries is somehow impermissible - the play that is language depends upon it - but that the permeability of those boundaries has to be constantly asserted; more than this, that the space in which they are drawn is not a simple plane. Each side folds over and implicates the other in its constitution. (72)

It is important to note that Gregory does not endorse a purely non-representational, completely deconstructivist reading of geography. Throughout Geographical Imaginations, he stresses the point that poststructuralism's influence did not usher in a period of "radical relativism" (73). Transforming the dominant model of social space from that of a "simple plane" to a multi-layered structure of interrelated discourses does not eliminate or minimize the significance of real physical or social differences. Unlike their colleagues in other fields, geographers have never been willing or able to completely abandon their relationship with a materialist sense of the real. As Gregory notes, the drawing of lines is still "permissible" and "necessary." Poststructuralism's critique did not deny geographers their ability to mark social or physical distinctions in the real world. Instead, deconstruction raised the bar. Rather than calling for "a suspension of discrimination and judgement," a geography informed by poststructuralism

subjects "the most insistently scientific and objective cartographic representations to critical scrutiny" (74). Gregory claims that the influence of this strategically-limited version of deconstruction has "not only made human geography much more interesting, but it has also brought to the foreground questions of ethics, morality, and politics in new and much less comforting ways (75). He writes:

It is perfectly true that historians have usually presented cartography as the Survey of Reason, a narrative journey of progress from darkness to enlightenment in the course of which maps become supposedly more "accurate" and more "objective." But it is also true that there is now a critical historiography, which has established the implication of maps in the construction of systems of power - knowledge.[. . .] In doing so, it has become apparent that mapping is necessarily situated, embodied, partial: *like all other practices of representation* (7). (No emphasis added)

By stressing the relationship between cartography and "*all other practices of representation*," Gregory reveals an aesthetic component to geographic research that often goes unnoticed outside the field. Exactly like writers and critics of regionalist fiction, geographers have been continually challenged to negotiate the distance between real places and their imagined representations. The contemporary cartographer's map, therefore, operates very much like the contemporary regionalist's fiction: both are aware of their own permeability. Unlike a nineteenth-century ethnographer commissioned by Howells, the contemporary cartographer and the contemporary regionalist writer never claim that their representations tell the whole story; they never argue for the "synoptic

completeness" of their work. Both realize that their fictions are necessarily "situated, embodied and partial."

Many recent scholarly texts have explored this relationship between cartography and literature.¹⁸ In his study of contemporary Australian and Canadian fiction, Territorial Disputes, Graham Huggan devotes an entire chapter to the "First Principles of Literary Cartography." He argues that in literature, maps are "frequently ambivalent" and "may either facilitate the relation between real and represented worlds or exacerbate the distinction between them" (31). Just as the Agrarians struggled with the inescapable ambiguity of their regionalist theory, Huggan suggests that the "mental maps" of literary cartography are also torn between subjective and objective readings of space. He believes that most writers shy away from "scientific accuracy" and are, instead, self-consciously aware of the fact that their representations "distort the environment they conceptualize" (16).

W.H. New's Land Sliding makes this link between geographic and literary cartography even more explicit. Using italics to demonstrate the degree to which a spatial vocabulary informs current discussions of regionalist literature (and vice-versa), New argues that

To call cultural geography an intellectual *site*, and to call the landscape a *discursive terrain*, is in some measure [. . .] to draw on the extensive semiotic theory that sees *text* as a *ground* of contestation. To the degree that 'landscape' becomes a *text*, runs this argument, it can be 'read,' turning the exercise of geographical observation - metaphorically at least - into a theatrical activity. [. . .]

The *reading of the land* is less a fixed science, then, than a social process. (10)

Transforming "the reading of the land" from "a fixed science" to "a social process" is the goal of a spatialized regionalist criticism. Like the early regionalist protests of Austin, Warren, and Ransom, current cultural geographers interpret social space as an active discursive field rather than a passive, permanently established set of physical facts. As Rob Shields observes, most contemporary theorists reject the notion of an "empirical space" that can be "complacently understood" or "fully defined by dimensional measurements" (187). Instead, they view space as "a cultural 'artifact,'" a product of social forces (187). This essential shifting in the dominant geographic and literary interpretations of space represents the continuation and, in some ways, the multi-disciplinary adaptation of a theoretical project that was first initiated by the French critic, Henri Lefebvre. As one of the first Western thinkers to "unfix" the rigidly rationalist model of space that had previously directed so much geographic and sociological research, Lefebvre's work continues to exert a strong influence over other theorists who have followed in his wake. Soja, Harvey and Jameson all recognize Lefebvre as a kind of progenitor figure and though critics of literary regionalism rarely reference his arguments, I feel certain that his work will play a major role in any contemporary reconstruction of regionalist theory.

2.2 Producing A Regionalist Space: Henri Lefebvre

More than any other twentieth-century figure, Lefebvre has been responsible for redefining the way contemporary theorists understand the concept of social space.¹⁹ His

seminal text, The Production of Space, was originally published in 1974, but it did not gain wide influence within the Anglo-American academic community until it appeared in an English translation by Donald Nicholson-Smith, seventeen years later, in 1991. The Production of Space was the first work to argue that the entire tradition of Western philosophy had been dominated by an epistemological bias which privileged "historical time" over the rational concept of "immanent" space (21). By focussing its interpretive energies almost exclusively on the dialectical nature of history, and by attempting to understand social being only as a function of the subject's position "in time," this historical bias demanded the near complete subordination of space as a category of critical analysis. Lefebvre called attention to this bias by demonstrating that the historical subject could be defined by its position in time, only because it was assumed that the "progressive" movement of history took place against the stable background of space. Dialectically speaking, time appeared to *move* only because space appeared to be *stable* or discursively *stationary*. The "restoration of time," Lefebvre argued, could only be achieved through the "fetishization of space" (21).

Lefebvre's writings effectively rescued space from this state of discursive dormancy. He denied "the strictly geometrical meaning" (1) of space posited by Cartesian logic and argued against any reading that interpreted space as "an empty abstraction" (12). For Lefebvre, space had to be understood as more than a conveniently blank void, or a neutral backdrop to define the active progress of social and historical narratives. Instead, his work demonstrated that social space was a constantly shifting field. Like history, space was dialectical, and, like history, our reading of space was influenced by cultural

and political forces. In some ways, The Production of Space can be read as a kind of spiralling text that continuously revolves around its most basic claim that "(Social) space is a (social) product" (26).²⁰

Lefebvre's work in this area has radical implications for the study of regionalist literature. By viewing space as a social product rather than a fixed object, Lefebvre denied the scientific rationalization of space that supported theories of pessimistic naturalism or environmental determinism. He believed that such a "scientific attitude" toward space mistakenly "assumed" that epistemological thinking was "structurally linked to the spatial sphere"(4). By challenging this fundamental assumption, Lefebvre demonstrated that, in fact, there was no rationalist "connection" between "scientific discourse" and spatiality (4). He argued that this model of social space was "[b]lithely indifferent to the charge of circular thinking" and that it "set up a [false] opposition between the status of space and the status of the 'subject'" (4).

For regionalist literary theory, this is a monumental observation. By critiquing the core assumption of a rationalized social space, Lefebvre's work makes it impossible to argue that regionalist writers scientifically "record" place or that they are naturally "determined" by their environments. If social space itself is never stable, then the regionalist writer can not create an objective portrait of it. And if, along the same lines, social space is actually the product of competing cultural forces - - if it is "made up" by the people who occupy it - - then the regionalist writer can not be seen as a passively predetermined figure.

According to Lefebvre, Western thinkers have been essentially fooled into these

misreadings by what he calls the "double illusion" of spatiality (27). The double illusion conceals the dialectical nature of social space by offering us only two ways of conceptualizing the relationship between the subject and spatiality. When traditional epistemology considers space at all, it understands it as either a strictly materialist reality, or a completely idealist mental construction. The collapsing of this division, and the simultaneous rejection of both halves of the double illusion, is Lefebvre's stated goal in The Production of Space. In clear terms, he argues that

Social space will be revealed in its particularity to the extent that it ceases to be indistinguishable from mental space (as defined by the philosophers and mathematicians) on the one hand, and physical space (as defined by practico-sensory activity and the perception of 'nature') on the other. What I shall be seeking to demonstrate is that such a social space is constituted neither by a collection of things or an aggregate of (sensory) data, nor by a void packed like a parcel with various contents, and that it is irreducible to a 'form' imposed upon phenomena, upon things, upon physical materiality. If I am successful, the social character of space here posited as a preliminary hypothesis, will be confirmed as we go along. (27)

For Lefebvre, the double illusion is not subtle enough to describe the true discursive complexity of space. He charges "the professional philosophers" of his day with naively over-simplifying social space and purposely "avert[ing] their gaze" away from the "abyss" which stretches "between the mental sphere on one side and the physical and social spheres on the other" (6). Here, the "mental sphere" corresponds roughly with

the idealist half of Lefebvre's double illusion, while the "physical sphere" represents the materialist half. In Lefebvre's opinion, social space cannot be described as if it exists exclusively in the mental or physical sphere. Considered by themselves, neither side of the double illusion can fully explore social space. Instead of an antagonism, Lefebvre sees an interdependence between these two epistemologies. He notes that "each side [. . .] refers back to the other, reinforces the other, and hides behind the other"(27).

The first half of Lefebvre's double illusion is described as "the illusion of spatial transparency" (27). Associated with the philosophical idealism of neo-Hegelianism and neo-Kantianism, thinkers under the influence of this epistemology assume "a rough coincidence" between "social space on the one hand and mental space - the (topological) space of thoughts and utterances - on the other" (28). Social space is considered transparent or "luminous;" it is interpreted as an "encrypted reality" that can be made "legible" or "readily decipherable" by a rational subject (28). Under the illusion of spatial transparency, such a "writing and speaking 'subject'" has the power to create and transform social space (28). Space is assumed to be inherently reasonable, therefore entirely knowable. For the idealist, no aspect of social space can be "secret," "dissimulated" or hidden: "everything can be taken in a single glance from that mental eye that illuminates whatever it contemplates" (28).

On the other side of the divide, Lefebvre associates the second half of his double illusion with the tradition of "(naturalistic and mechanistic) materialism" (30). The "illusion of opacity" or the "realistic illusion" perceives space as an imaginatively impenetrable (and therefore opaque) object. Under this "illusion of natural simplicity,"

space appears as an unknowable reality in which "'things' have more of an existence than the 'subject'" (29). Opposed to the illusion of transparency, this version of social space appeals to sentiments of "naturalness" or "substantiality" (29). The materialist embraces the transformative power of the object over the subject.

As we have seen, Lefebvre views the relationship between these two illusions as mutually supportive rather than combative. Comparing the rationalizing tendencies of the illusion of transparency to the naturalizing tendencies of the illusion of opacity, he observes,

these two illusions do not enter into antagonism with each other after the fashion of philosophical systems, which armour themselves like battleships and seek to destroy one another. On the contrary, each illusion embodies and nourishes the other. The shifting back and forth between the two, and the flickering or oscillatory effect that it produces, are thus, just as important as either of the illusions considered in isolation. Symbolisms deriving from nature can obscure the rational lucidity which the West has inherited from its history and from its successful domination of nature. The apparent translucency taken on by obscure historical and political forces in decline (the state, nationalism) can enlist images having their source in the earth or in nature, in paternity or in maternity. The rational is thus naturalized, while nature cloaks itself in nostalgias which supplant rationality. (30)

The potential regionalist ramifications of Lefebvre's thought are dramatic. The double illusion he uses to describe the study of social space can be directly applied to the

study of regionalist literature which, as we have already seen, has also been paralyzed by a similar epistemological tension. Just as the thinkers who toil under the illusion of opacity over-substantiate the materialist qualities of social space, literary critics such as Dainotto and Davey over-substantiate the materialist characteristics of regionalism. Dainotto and Davey both view regionalism as a political force "in decline" that enlists images found in nature in order to validate itself. On the other hand, critics like New and Kreisel who textualize their understanding of social space, or believe that the Canadian Prairie should be interpreted as "a state of mind" may be deluded by the opposite illusion of spatial transparency.²¹ Their work over-estimates the transformative power of the subject over the object. This comparison can be applied throughout the entire field of regionalist criticism and, as our discussion develops, we will return often to this binarism. In subsequent chapters, I will argue that contemporary American postmodern-regionalist fiction tends to interpret social space under the illusion of transparency, while contemporary Canadian postmodern regionalism is often directed by the illusion of opacity.

In his effort to simultaneously combine and reject both halves of the double illusion, Lefebvre walks a delicate line. Throughout his career, he denied an "ivory-tower conception of philosophical work," and remained remarkably committed to the "physical" and "practical realms" of social space (Harvey, "Afterword" 426). In the long series of works that led up to and through The Production of Space -- three volumes of Critique de la vie quotidienne (1947, 1962, 1981) and La vie quotidienne dans le monde moderne (1968) - - Lefebvre sustained an unwavering desire to integrate his philosophical

explorations with the pressing issues of "everyday life." He rigorously attacked the vague "generalization of the concept of *mental space*" (3) that figured so prominently in the work of many French poststructuralists, and he referred to Foucault, Derrida, Kristeva, and Barthes as a "school, whose growing renown may have something to do with its growing dogmatism" (5). Lefebvre believed that these critics fell under the illusion of spatial transparency. He accused them of "forever promoting the basic sophistry whereby the philosophico-epistemological notion of space is fetishized and the mental realm comes to envelop the social and the physical ones" (5). In Lefebvre's eyes, the purest forms of deconstruction were completely cut off from reality and stranded on the mental side of the 'abyss' between "the theoretical [. . .] realm and the practical one" (4).

For many critics, Lefebvre's most important contribution to spatial theory is his description of the "dialectical relationship which exists within the triad of the perceived, the conceived and the lived" (39). This perceived- conceived-lived triad corresponds roughly to the physical, mental, and social spheres of spatiality we have already discussed. As we saw, Lefebvre believed that the experience of social space could not be represented by a model that focussed exclusively on either the perception or conception of spatiality. Considered separately, neither the illusion of opacity nor the illusion of transparency could fully describe the condition of actually *living* in a social space. Divided between materialism and idealism, neither illusion could incorporate the strengths of the other. Lefebvre described the theoretical dilemma created by such mutual exclusivity in the following way:

The theory we need, which fails to come together because the necessary critical

moment does not occur [. . .] might well be called, by analogy, a "unitary theory:" the aim is to discover or construct a theoretical unity between "fields" which are apprehended separately[. . .] The fields we are concerned with are, first, the physical nature, the Cosmos; secondly, the mental, including logical and formal abstractions; and thirdly, the social. In other words we are concerned with logico-epistemological space, the space of social practice, [and] the space occupied by sensory phenomena. (11-12)

Lefebvre's "unitary theory" combines these last three categories of space. The perceived-conceived-lived triad strikes a balance between (1) "the space occupied by sensory phenomena," (2) "logico-epistemological space," and (3) "the space of social practice." These categories are inseparable and interdependent. Simply perceiving space (as a materialist) or conceiving space (as an idealist) is incomplete. In order to understand how a social space is lived, these first two epistemologies must be simultaneously re-combined and re-balanced into a new third strategy. The result of this recombination is Lefebvre's theoretical triad.

Yet again, we can immediately sense that these arguments will profoundly affect the study of regionalist literature. Lefebvre's quest for a "lived" spatiality - - one that might simultaneously combine perceived and conceived models - - parallels that elusive notion of "experienced place" which recurred so often in the regionalist criticism of Austin, Warren and Ransom. "Lived" space is neither "opaque" nor "transparent." It is not a catalogue of physical facts, nor a completely imagined projection. Instead, a "lived" spatiality exists in that realm where the subject interacts with the object. It is a "social

sphere" in which an imaginative consciousness orients itself within a specific set of spatial conditions. Lefebvre's model gives us a new way of exploring this relationship between place and social identity. His work injects an exhausted regionalist criticism with a surge of creative energy. Using Lefebvre's arguments and his critical terminology, regionalist critics can ask new kinds of questions about a new kind of spatialized regionalist literature. As we recall, Kowalewski had previously observed that regionalism "lack[ed] a vocabulary with which to ask engaging philosophical, psychological, or aesthetic questions about what it means to dwell in a place, whether actually or imaginatively" (174). I think The Production of Space fills this linguistic void. Lefebvre's work provides us with the first syllables and the first critical terms for that spatial vocabulary regionalist theory has always lacked.

The Production of Space wanders through a vast intellectual territory, and in that space Lefebvre does much more than simply explain the double illusion of spatiality. However, for our purposes in this discussion, we will focus most of our energy on this key component of his argument and its subsequent adaptation in other scholars' research. In the last decade, Lefebvre's influence in critical theory has been pervasive. Though academics in many different fields now reference his work, Lefebvre's most-consistent advocate in North America has always been Edward Soja. As one of the originators of "Postmodern Geography," and a founding member of the "L.A School" of urban planners, Soja was one of the first scholars to contextualize Lefebvre's readings of spatial theory within the familiar surroundings of North America's dominant cultural landscapes. By adapting Lefebvre's vocabulary to his own geographic project, Soja effectively "found a

place" for spatial theory in our contemporary built environment. In many ways, his responses to Lefebvre provide literary scholars with their best introduction to the French critic's work.

2.3 Edward Soja: Exploring North America's "Real-and-Imagined Places"

Soja's landmark trilogy - - Postmodern Geographies (1989), Thirdspace (1996) and Postmetropolis (2000) - - aggressively interrogates the spatial assumptions of contemporary North American culture. Broadly speaking, the series translates Lefebvre's theoretical inquiry into a more grounded geographical investigation of today's dominant models of social space. For regionalist literary criticism, this is a key transition because Soja's work explicitly locates its readings of spatial theory in an immediately recognizable real-world setting. He argues that "the spatial dimension of our lives has never been of greater practical and political relevance that it is today" (TS 1).

Throughout the trilogy, Soja demonstrates a clear and consistent admiration for Lefebvre. In Postmodern Geographies, he recognizes Lefebvre's "exceptional constancy" and his "imperturbable originality;" he calls Lefebvre "the primary source [. . .] for the reassertion of space in critical social theory" (40). In Thirdspace, the praise is even more effusive. The Production of Space is described as "the most important book ever written about the social and historical significance of human spatiality and the particular powers of the spatial imagination" (8). In Postmetropolis, the positive review continues. Lefebvre is credited with introducing "a trenchant new perspective on the politics and ideology of cityspace as well as the geohistory of modernity and capitalism" (101). Though his

appreciation for Lefebvre's work is undeniable, Soja does more than merely re-state the central arguments of The Production of Space. Rather than a repetition, Postmodern Geographies, Thirdspace and Postmetropolis represent a major extension of Lefebvre's theory.

In order to apply Lefebvre's theory to a North American cultural geography, Soja selectively re-reads important sections of The Productions of Space and crafts his own critical terminology. Where Lefebvre used the terms "opaque" and "transparent," or "perceived" and "conceived," to delineate respectively the two categories of space created by his double illusion, Soja uses a more direct comparison between "real" and "imagined" spaces. He also simplifies the overall shape of his discussion by using a numerical system to denote the differences between Lefebvre's perceived, conceived, and lived spheres of spatiality. For Soja, a "Firstspace epistemology" is the equivalent of Lefebvre's illusion of spatial opacity (TS 75). Both terms describe the materialist half of the epistemological divide. As Soja explains: "Firstspace epistemologies tend to privilege objectivity and materiality, and to aim toward a formal science of space" (TS 75). "[F]undamentally positivist" in its strategy, Firstspace epistemology is "impelled by the presumptions of scientism" and can be interpreted as "a form of 'social physics'" (TS 75). According to Soja, "Firstspace epistemologies become fixated on the material form of things in space: with human spatiality seen primarily as outcome or product" (TS 76). Like Lefebvre's illusion of opacity, Soja associates Firstspatial analyses with the "dangers of environmental or spatial determinism" (TS 78).

As was the case in The Production of Space, Soja's descriptions of a Firstspatial

analysis demonstrate the clear connections that exist between contemporary cultural geography and regionalist literary criticism. Traditionally, both fields have been paralysed by the same type of "epistemological dualism," and both have been dominated by the same materialist models of social physics and environmental determinism (TS 63). If we adapt Soja's vocabulary to the study of regionalism, it could be argued that most literary critics have studied regionalism only from a Firstspatial perspective. Commentators in the Howellsian realistic tradition interpret the regionalist text according to an objectivist-materialist spatial epistemology. As we have seen, Dainotto, Pennee and Davey all over-emphasize the realistic intentions of regionalist representation. They "fixate" on regionalism's materiality and argue that the discourse is naively naturalistic. Consistent with Soja's explanation, Dainotto and Davey both claim that regionalism sees human spatiality as an "outcome or product."

At the other extreme, Soja's "Secondspace epistemologies" correspond to Lefebvre's illusion of spatial transparency (TS 78). Secondspace perspectives tend to "arise in reaction to the excessive closure and enforced objectivity of mainstream Firstspace analysis, pitting the artist versus the scientist or the engineer, the idealist versus the materialist, the subjective versus the objective interpretation" (TS 78). This kind of epistemology can be recognized for its "implicit assumption that spatial knowledge is primarily produced through discursively devised representations of space, through the spatial workings of the mind" (TS 79). "Secondspace is entirely ideational," Soja argues; it is "made up of projections into the empirical world from conceived or imagined geographies" (TS 79). These idealized "projections" create a completely non-material

world, a region of the mind. As Soja observes,

in Secondspace the imagined geography tends to become the 'real' geography, with the image or representation coming to define and order the reality. Actual material forms recede into the distance as fixed dead signifiers emitting signals that are processed [. . .] through the rational (and at times irrational) workings of the human mind. (TS 79)

In Secondspace the 'rational (and at times irrational) workings of the human mind' can not only deny the existence of an external material world, but they can also completely replace that world with a carefully constructed representation.

Secondspace perspectives in regionalist criticism are more rare than the dominant Firstspace approaches, but they are gaining influence. Commentators who read regionalism according to this subjectivist-idealist epistemology emphasize the imaginary character of regionalist representation. Their essays tend to ignore the relationship between regionalist fiction and the "real" world. Wiebe's description of regionalist aesthetics provides a good example of this perspective. He argues that regionalism "is only the individual writer's imagination creating the world he can create" (129). Consistent with Soja's description of Secondspace, this model is "entirely ideational" and completely cut off from any referential connection to material reality.

In accordance with his numerically-ordered model, Soja's "Thirdspace" corresponds to Lefebvre's idea of a "lived" spatiality. It is at this point that the advantages of Soja's streamlined vocabulary emerge. Rather than trying to work with the subtle but hugely significant distinctions Lefebvre draws between "Representations of Space" and

"Representational Spaces," Soja uses the term "Thirdspace" to denote a discursive terrain in which First and Secondspace - - or real and imagined - - perspectives are combined and reconstituted. Thirdspace is Soja's third option, a different way of thinking about spatiality that moves beyond the traditional materialist-idealist dualism. Like Lefebvre's "lived" spatiality, Thirdspace demands an "ontological restructuring" of social space (TS 81). Though it "draws upon the material and mental spaces of the traditional dualism," Thirdspace also "extends well beyond them in scope, substance and meaning" (TS 11).

Both Soja and Lefebvre believe that the experience of social space is simultaneously perceived and conceived or real and imagined. To emphasize this interdependency and to combat the typical antagonism that exists between these two polarities, Soja often runs the terms "real" and "imagined" together to form one word. "(T)he exploration of Thirdspace," he suggests, "can be described and inscribed in journey's to 'real-and-imagined' (or perhaps 'realandimagined?') places" (TS 11).

This re-balancing of real and imagined space is the most important and, not surprisingly, most controversial aspect of contemporary spatial theory. Soja makes it clear that such recombinations are often opposed within the academic community. Using the ongoing debate between modernism and postmodernism as an example, he observes that most of these discussions are marked by high levels of mutual animosity. Rather than working toward any point of common contact, critics who are better characterized as "anti-modernists" or "anti-postmodernists" often polarize themselves around reductionist definitions of their opponents' positions; they engage in unnecessary "ritual purifications" that are purposely designed to "rule out any alternate possibilities" (TS 4).

As we have seen, similar divisions exist in regionalist criticism. Regionalism has its own objectivist-materialists who argue that the discourse is inescapably realistic, and its own subjectivist-idealists who argue that the aesthetic is an entirely mental construct, existing above and beyond any connection to real-world geography. Chalykoff's work accurately identifies these as the "Two Solitudes" of the regionalist debate. Quoting Soja, and focussing specifically on the Canadian experience, she argues that the "history of [. . .] literary regionalism has been dominated by a similar 'physical-mental dualism' that has prevented the field from recognizing that literary regions, like all geographic divisions, are social spaces *par excellence*" (162). Because scholars have focussed far too much attention on either the purely representative qualities of realistic regionalism or the purely imagined qualities of a mental regionalism, they have not yet realized that, especially in the twenty-first century, actual real-world places exist at the intersection of these two epistemologies. In contemporary North America, it is just as difficult to differentiate between real and imagined geographies as it is to draw the line between real and imagined literary representations of these places. Because social space itself has been radically fictionalized in the postwar era, a critique of regionalism which sees the discourse as being either too realistic, or too imaginary, seems to miss out on the most fascinating aspect of our contemporary cultural geography. As Soja suggests, the way we experience social space today has blurred those traditional divisions between realistic, authentically grounded, rural communities, and imaginary cosmopolitan urban centres. Though we are "certainly not in Kansas any more," he argues,

neither are we in old New York or Chicago. As our ability to tell the difference

between what is real and what is imagined weakens, another kind of reality - a hyperreality - flourishes and increasingly flows into everyday life. It is not the hard empirical reality of materialist science or Marxism, nor is it quite the simultaneously real-and-imagined. It is something different and, if not new, then certainly more prominent and affective in the contemporary world than ever before. (TS 239-240).

Again, we must emphasize that Soja sees contemporary urban and suburban social space as a real-world geography that literally substantiates Lefebvre's theories. The cultural landscape that dominates North America today is undeniably "something different" and today's regionalist criticism must be able to articulate and explore this difference. As our environments change, the way we read and interpret place must also adapt. Spatial theory does a service to literary criticism by demonstrating that postmodernism can no longer be understood as an abstract, elusive concept that exists only in what Lefebvre called the "mental realm." Rather, for Soja and his colleagues, the field of Postmodern Geography is tied to a "postmodern reality," a real-world transformation of our lived environments that can no longer be ignored or marginalized into "mere" theory (TS 244).

2.4 Harvey, Jameson, Dear:

Locating the Real-World Referent of North American Postmodernism

If Soja and Lefebvre are right, then the intersection of materialistic and idealistic spatial epistemologies is actually reflected in the very structure of our contemporary

social environments. The partial acceptance and rejection of the illusions of transparency and opacity suggested by Lefebvre, and the rebalancing of real-and-imagined spatiality advocated by Soja, not only provide us with a sophisticated strategy for interpreting regionalist fiction, but they also accurately describe North American cultural geography. At the beginning of the twenty-first century, our generic landscapes can no longer be conceptualized as permanently fixed physical realities, nor as completely immaterial textual constructions. As Cresswell suggests,

Places are neither totally material nor completely mental; they are combinations of the material and mental and cannot be reduced to either. A church, for instance, is a place. It is neither just a particular material artifact, nor just a set of religious ideas; it is always both. Places are duplicitous in that they cannot be reduced to the concrete or the "merely ideological;" rather they display an uneasy and fluid tension between them. (13)

The duplicitous nature of place becomes blatantly obvious in a postmodern, postindustrial North American cultural geography. In a world where the mental and material can not be effectively separated, new orientation strategies must be developed. David Harvey, Frederic Jameson, and Michael Dear are just three of the most well-known scholars who have played leading roles in this effort to reconceptualize contemporary space. Harvey's The Condition of Postmodernity, Jameson's Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism, and Dear's The Postmodern Urban Condition form yet another trilogy of essential readings in recent spatial theory. All three texts locate postmodern discourse in a very specific contemporary reality, and each sees postmodern

fiction as a mimetic representation of this social space.

As was the case with Soja's work, Harvey's The Condition of Postmodernity is also heavily indebted to Lefebvre's thought. In his Afterword to Nicholson-Smith's translation of The Production of Space, he calls Lefebvre's text an "explosive" work, one that "detonated" traditional assumptions about geography and "led towards new possibilities for thought and action" ("Afterword" 431). Harvey believes that in some measure or other, all contemporary critics "owe" their readings of spatiality to Lefebvre's "persistent voice" (CP 226).

In keeping with his enthusiastic support for Lefebvre's ideas, Harvey also argues that social space must be interpreted as a social product. He claims that "[s]patial practices derive their efficacy in social life only through the structures of the social relations within which they come into play," and that "space [. . .] cannot be understood independently of social action" (223). Because his work is so directly influenced by Lefebvre, The Condition of Postmodernity can be read as a kind of "history of space," a text that periodizes the restructuring of Western cultural geography since the mid-nineteenth century. In a remarkable synthesis of advanced theory supported by a wealth of detailed statistical evidence, Harvey argues that for the last one hundred and fifty years, North American culture has been passing through an unprecedented phase of what he calls "time-space compression" (240). Major advances in transportation and communication technologies, coupled with the spread of global capital, have undermined traditional interpretations of geographic coherence and demanded new ways of interpreting social space. As personal mobility and the pace of economic life have

increased exponentially, the rigid parameters of objective space have "collaps[ed] inward" (240) and been replaced by the "confused overlapping" of subjective spaces (241). As Harvey observes, "(t)he certainty of absolute space" has given way to "the insecurities of a shifting relative space" (261). Time-space compressions of this kind challenge our sense of personal location, and often force us to "alter, sometimes in quite radical ways, how we represent the world to ourselves" (240).

Though it may seem like the symbolic shrinking of the globe, and the aesthetic restructuring this diminution demands, represent the triumph of time over space, the processes described by Harvey actually support Lefebvre's argument for the reconsideration of space as an analytical category. As the world is brought closer together, the way we understand and represent social space becomes increasingly important. Rather than suggesting that "the significance of space is decreasing," Harvey argues that our contemporary experience proves the "converse thesis" is actually true (293). During a phase of time-space compression, the strict divisions between materialistic and idealistic spatial epistemologies break down, and critics in all fields are forced to reconsider the unacknowledged role that spatiality has always played in their work.

In postwar North America especially, time-space compression occurred at an astonishing rate and produced a new kind of cultural geography. The figures collected in B.F.L. Mitchell's reference guide, International Historical Statistics: The Americas 1750-1993, paint a remarkable portrait of socio-spatial transformation during this period. Even if we compare just the data between 1940 and 1990, these figures indicate that key advancements in transportation and communication technologies affected every sector of

North American society. During this period, Canadians and Americans were forced to reformulate almost every aspect of their relationship with geography.

In 1940, for example, there were only 28.5 million passenger cars in North America and just 22 million telephones in use. Less than 3 million people had ever flown on a commercial airplane, and the North American public would have to wait until 1950 for there to be 4 million television sets on the continent. There was no Interstate Highway system in America, and in Canada, only 28,000 kilometres of roadway were even paved. In 1990, the situation would be significantly different. In fact, when we look at this second set of figures, it seems almost unfathomable that so much spatial change could be "compressed" into such a relatively brief historical interval.

By the end of the twentieth century, the Eisenhower Interstate system covered 45,000 miles of divided highway. Recognized as one of the great engineering achievements of human history, the Interstate literally drove America's explosive post-war economic growth. Today this single highway system carries one-fifth of United States' traffic, connects 90 percent of its cities, and makes it possible to drive from Maine to California without ever stopping for a traffic light. Canada's roadbuilding achievements during the same period are also impressive. Completed in 1965, the Trans-Canada highway is the world's longest national roadway. By 1990 the total of paved road in Canada had increased by 30 times its length in 1940, and risen to more than 850, 000 kilometres. Similar exponential increases occurred in all the other indicators. In 1990 there were more than 160 million passenger cars in North America, and almost 90 million commercial vehicles. There were 200 million telephones in use: nine times more than

1940; 112 million televisions: 28 times more than 1940; and 500 million passenger flights on commercial airlines: an increase of 166 times over the 1940's level.

Combined with these changes, North Americans also transformed the way they lived and worked. 1930 was the first year that America officially became an urban nation, with the majority of its population living in cities; and, between 1940 and 1990, these centres continued to expand. Taking advantage of cheaper building materials, more efficient construction plans and the culture's increased dependence on the automobile, suburban development flourished beyond any original expectation. In 1940, Toronto's suburbs held only 243 thousand people; in 1990, that number was 3.2 million. In Los Angeles, the city that perfected the "art" of urban sprawl, those figures went from 1.4 to 15 million. In every case, the rise of a networked suburban culture was accompanied by a parallel decrease in the importance of traditional rural or urban locales. As the social significance and political power of North America's generic suburbs expanded, the rooted sense of stability that had once been associated with "the country" or, conversely, "downtown," became less and less prevalent in North American life.

Harvey argues that the drastic real-world spatial transformations which took place during this period demanded an equally drastic change in the way that artists represented their cultural environments. In a world that lacked that any metaphysically fixed sense of its own reality, writers had to cultivate new strategies to depict this new kind of space. Drawing a direct connection between postmodern writing and the social space it represents, Harvey argues that "[p]ostmodernism [. . .] ought to be looked at as mimetic of the social, economic and political practices in society" (113). Although each aesthetic

rises out of a radically different social space and represents that space in a radically different way, Harvey's work suggests that artists from the realist, modernist, and postmodernist traditions were all responding to specific phases of time-space compression. Studying them through the lens of his spatial criticism, he reads Realism, Modernism and Postmodernism as movements which represent their respective cultural geographies. In its own way, each aesthetic is linked to a very specific model of social space. Harvey contends that realist writers were the first to "feel the squeeze" of time-space compression, and that both modernism and postmodernism "derive their aesthetic from some kind of struggle with the fact of (spatial) fragmentation" (117). He sees "much more continuity than difference between the broad history of modernism and postmodernism," and argues that even the much-maligned practices of realism should be incorporated into this lineage (116). Realism's greatest weakness -- its inability to represent the "spatial simultaneity" of early time-space compression -- developed into modernism's greatest strength (20); and, in turn, modernism's greatest weakness -- its inability to rationally represent the "chaos" of contemporary time-space compression -- developed into postmodernism's strongest attribute (116). Modernist aesthetics rose to prominence when realism became spatially "inadequate" (20), and postmodernist aesthetics enjoyed their greatest influence in the aftermath of modernism's "crisis" with contemporary spatiality (116). Though Realism, Modernism, and Postmodernism explore different kinds of social space, all three draw an "experiential basis" from the cultural transformations caused by different phases of time-space compression (274).

For regionalist criticism this becomes the key point of Harvey's argument: as

social space is transformed, aesthetic movements follow and draw their experiential bases from these changes. Though this may seem like a simple observation, it has profound consequences for the study and evaluation of regionalist fiction. If, as I have argued, the regionalist text explores the structure of social space itself (rather than objectively reproducing the physical facts of a particular place), then the discourse cannot be defined by a single period of time-space compression, nor by the particular representative strategy that dominated that era. If regionalism's relationship with space is clearly not exclusively tied to the nineteenth century, then regionalist representational strategies should not be inextricably linked to the coherent world-view of realist aesthetics. Instead, a spatialized criticism reveals that regionalist literature is continually in flux, continually adapting to every fundamental restructuring of social space. This explains how it is possible to have a realistic-regionalism in the late nineteenth century, a modern-regionalism at the beginning of the twentieth, and a postmodern-regionalism in the contemporary period. All three aesthetics are linked to different phases of time-space compression, and each variety of time-space compression produces its own regionalist response.

When we establish this connection between postmodern social space and postmodern fiction, the potential for an updated regionalist criticism becomes clear. If postmodern fiction draws its "experiential basis" from this particular type of spatiality, then the relationship between postmodernism and contemporary time-space compression must be (at least in some measure) mimetic. Rather than being perfectly non-representational, postmodern writing is actually linked to its cultural geography and it is that geography, rather than the aesthetic itself, which challenges our definitions of

realistic representation. If we reorient our perspective on postmodernism - - if we study it as a regionalist literature tied to a very specific kind of social space - - we see that despite its claims to the contrary, postmodernism's radical aesthetic is actually quite traditional. Though this fiction explores a social environment that has been fundamentally destabilized and re-imagined, many of North America's leading postmodernists are still trying to represent their own regions and (accurately) capture the strange spatial character of their unrealistic geographies.

These somewhat controversial observations recast the central argument from Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism. In that text, Jameson famously proclaimed that rather than being an aesthetic choice or a "merely stylistic" option, postmodernism was actually "the cultural dominant" of North American social space (45). For Jameson, the essentially American character of postmodernism was undeniable. He argued that postmodernism was "global, yet American" (5) and that the contemporary cultural geography of the United States provided postmodernism with a "certain authenticity," and granted it a "genuine historical and socioeconomic reality" (49). As the "first specifically North American global style," postmodernism developed as a response to the continent's experience of late-capitalism and that it reflected a generic landscape produced by late-capitalist spatial forces (xx). "As paradoxical as the terms may seem," he argued, the many different versions of American postmodernism could and should "be read as peculiar new forms of realism (or at least of the mimesis of reality)" (49).

As we might expect, Jameson's observations in these areas are also heavily

influenced by Lefebvre's work. Jameson argues that only "by way of Lefebvre's conception of a new kind of spatial dialectic" will contemporary literary critics be able to "grasp the peculiarities of postmodern writing" (373). In fact, the celebrated tour through Los Angeles's Bonaventure Hotel which forms the centerpiece of Jameson's text can easily be interpreted as a Lefebvrian reading of this monument to postmodern culture. Jameson repeatedly comments on the fictional aspects of the Bonaventure's architecture; he sees the building as a new kind of real-and-imagined American social space. The Bonaventure is called "a mutation in built space itself," that offers us "some very striking lessons about the originality of postmodernist space" (38).

Though not many commentators have focussed on this aspect of Jameson's analysis, it is almost impossible to separate his reading of postmodernism from his essentially regionalist reading of contemporary American cultural geography. In the end, "the striking lessons" that the Bonaventure teaches us about "the originality of postmodernist space" are drawn from one very specific social setting. When we read Jameson's argument as a regionalist text, it becomes obvious that Southern Californian geography enjoys a privileged position in postmodern culture. In yet another example of postmodern mimesis, Jameson claims that "Los Angeles itself" is the real-world "referent" of the Bonaventure's architecture (43). The definitive postmodern building, Jameson reminds us, occupies prime real estate in Los Angeles's "new downtown;" because of this setting, the structure must "respect the vernacular" of Southern Californian urbanism (39). Like so many other postmodern texts, it seems the Bonaventure literally speaks the language of California's unreal reality. The "postmodern

hyperspace" that Jameson discovers in this locale is the geographical referent for postmodern writing (44). The place and the fiction become almost interdependent.²²

In Michael Dear's work, the same linkages between postmodern aesthetics and America's postwar urban geography are explored. His recent series - - The Postmodern Urban Condition, From Chicago to L.A., and The Spaces of Postmodernity - - examines the socio- spatial index of American postmodernism and, once again, locates its epicentre in Los Angeles. Though Dear disagrees with Jameson's committed Marxist interpretation of spatiality, he appreciates that "Jameson spent a lot of time in Los Angeles [. . .] trying to make sense of postmodern architecture"(PUC 56). For his part, Dear refuses to frame the relationship between postmodern space and postmodern art in such a directly causal way. Though he certainly admits that Los Angeles is the capital of "Postmodern Urbanism," he explores the unique character of the city in more subtle differentiations. Synthesizing insights from Soja, Harvey, Gregory, Davis, Flusty, Jencks and Garreau, he argues that Southern California's social space can only be understood as a mass- intersection of different urban visions. Like the image of traffic-clogged freeways which he uses for the cover illustration of The Power of Geography, Dear believes that Los Angeles itself exists as a nexus for competing spatialities. At any given moment the city is simultaneously an "Edge City," a "Privatopia," a "Theme Park," and a "Fortress" (Chi/LA 64). "There is probably no other place in North America," he argues, "where such an overpowering expression of the human impact on landscape can be witnessed" (Power 3).

The genre of writing that I call postmodern regionalism explores this

"overpowering" relationship between contemporary subjects and the places they produce. As Gregory, Lefebvre, Soja, Harvey, Jameson, and Dear have shown us, in the last fifty years the spatial polarities of postwar North American culture have been reversed, and our readings of geography must be able to adapt to these changes. The objective interpretations of the landscape that ruled over the nineteenth-century have been replaced by subjective reinterpretations of a social space that can never be resolutely defined or stabilized. An old fashioned, nineteenth-century reading of cultural geography simply will not work for Los Angeles, or for the many other North American places that have been reproduced in its image. Though many scholars feel that the suburb, the strip mall, the theme park, and the expressway constitute a degraded landscape unworthy of advanced study, for better or worse, these are the dominant locales of our contemporary culture. A postmodern-regionalist criticism merely admits this obvious truth, and then gets down to the business of actually examining our literary representations of these sites. Though no regions have ever been more imagined and less realistic than the ones that now dominate American life, regionalist fiction continues to thrive in the twenty-first century. Like the continent itself, it has simply taken on a different form.

Notes For Section I

1. Loriggio's "Regionalism and Theory" is one of the essential texts in the current regionalist revival. Though his essay also explores the historical roots of the discourse, Loriggio sees a unique contemporary potential for regionalist theory. "[W]hat is interesting about regionalist literature," he argues, "is that such ambivalence, the dialectic to and fro which seems peculiar to our age has been the staple ingredient of its history from the outset"(17).

2. See Wyile's "Taking the Real Home to Read" (1990); "Firing the Regional Can(n)on: Liberal Pluralism, Social Agency, and David Adams Richards' Miramichi Trilogy" (1997), co-authored with Christopher Armstrong; "Ransom Revisited: The Aesthetic of Regionalism in a Globalized Age" (1998); and "Regionalism, Postcolonialism and (Canadian) Writing: A Comparative Approach for Postnational Times" (1998). Jordan's essay "Representing Regionalism" appeared in 1993 and was soon followed by two volumes: New World Regionalism in 1994, and Regionalism Reconsidered in 1995.

3. For more on the rise of bioregionalism, see Kowalewski's "Bioregional Perspectives in American Literature."

4. The appearance of Fetterley and Pryse's American Women Regionalists 1850-1910 : A Norton Anthology (1992) was a key moment in American regionalist studies. Published by a major house with a wide distribution, the anthology legitimated regionalism as a field of research, and also helped define and promote a very particular version of regionalist aesthetics that went on to dominate most subsequent scholarship.

5. Beyond their anthologies and book-length studies, Fetterley, Pryse, Campbell, McCullough and Foote have also produced a range of articles, reviews and websites. Campbell's comprehensive site at Gonzaga University: (<http://www.gonzaga.edu/faculty/campbell>) is worthy of special attention. For other examples of the nineteenth-century focus of contemporary regionalist scholarship, see Donovan, Buonomo, Beer, Ewell, Gunning, Joseph, Howard and May.

6. In this discussion, the term "Howellsian Realism" is used to describe the peculiar brand of realist aesthetics that dominated American literature during this period. The term is necessary because, as Michael Davitt Bell ably illustrates in The Problem of American Realism, Howells's version of realist aesthetics shared almost nothing with the more theoretically advanced traditions of European or Continental realism. "I want to shut down the question of the relation of 'American realism' to the tradition of Continental realism or to some ideal model of realistic mimesis," Bell argues,

One could certainly find a study of so-called "American realism," as a number of critics have done, on a prior consideration of seminal studies by such

Continental writers as Auerbach, Lukacs, and Gombrich, and this procedure has much to recommend it. But it runs two risks I wish to avoid. First, it assumes that there is a generic tradition of "American realism," which may not be the case. And this assumption tends, in turn, to mask the true nature of what I have been calling realist thinking- by attributing to American theory (a phrase which is, in the case of "realism," virtually an oxymoron) the sophistication of Continental theory and tradition. William Dean Howells was no Auerbach, no Lukacs, and if we wish to understand Howells we must try to understand him on his terms and in his own context (5).

7. For more on the relationship between Howells, regionalism, Local Colorism, race and gender, see McCullough's chapter "The Limits of Local Color fiction." She argues convincingly that

Local Color became a marginalized literary form on the basis of (racially inflected) gender [. . .]. As a literary category, this 'woman's' subgenre has been represented as a diminished version of canonical Realism: though both attempt to represent a lived reality with an attention to detail and common life, Local Color has been dismissed as a quaint, backward-looking, and diminutive form (often short stories) written by women writing on a small scale, a form dismissed as nostalgic and concerned with loss and the rural. Canonical Realism and its heir, Naturalism, in contrast, have been valued for centering on the urban industrialized present/future (188)

8. For more on the relationship between science and nineteenth-century realism, see Bell, Carter, Boeckmann and Jones.

9. When we consider the emphasis Martin places on the relationship between ethnography and Local Colorism, it is not surprising that most of the examples he discusses are drawn from issues of the Atlantic published under Howells's direction.

10. It is important to note that, though they were closely related and shared their four most famous members, the Fugitives and the Agrarians were two separate groups. The Fugitives were a group of sixteen poets, local to Nashville, who met initially to discuss their work and, later, to publish their magazine, The Fugitive. They were: John Crowe Ransom, Donald Davidson, Allen Tate, Robert Penn Warren, Merrill Moore, Laura Riding, Jesse Wils, Alec B. Stevenson, Walter Clyde Curry, Stanley Johnson, Sidney Hirsch, James Frank, William Yandell Elliot, William Frierson, Ridley Wills and Alfred Starr. The Agrarians, on the other hand, were a group of writers and scholars gathered from different disciplines and different parts of the South. Though they were united by their common political convictions, the group never lived in the same city at the same

time. The editorial work for I'll Take My Stand was done mostly through correspondence. The twelve Agrarians who contributed essays to ITMS were: John Crowe Ransom, Donald Davidson, Allen Tate, Robert Penn Warren, Andrew Lytle, Stark Young, John Gould Fletcher, Frank Lawrence Owsley, Lyle Lanier, Herman Nixon, John Donald Wade and Henry Blue Kline. For more on the founding of The Fugitive and its membership, see Louise Cowan's The Fugitive: A Literary History. For biographies on the Agrarians see Virginia Rock's "The Twelve Southerners: Biographical Essays," an appendix to the 1962 edition of I'll Take My Stand. For a more detailed account of the relationship between the two groups, see John L. Stewart's The Burden of Time: The Fugitives and Agrarians.

11. For more on the significance of I'll Take Me Stand in the history of Southern literature, see Gray, Kreyling, Binding, Griffin, and Doyle.

12. Young's Waking Their Neighbours Up: The Nashville Agrarians Reconsidered describes some of the major philosophical and logistical challenges the movement faced. He argues, "If one were trying to assure the failure of a project, one could hardly improve on the procedure followed in putting together I'll Take My Stand. Everything about arranging for the publication of the symposium, it would seem, was wrong" (9). Though some of the key contributors shared friendships that extended throughout their lives, many other participants were only tangentially associated with each other and with the larger cause of Agrarianism. To make matters worse, most of the editorial work was done through correspondence, so the group had almost no interpersonal coherence. The controversy that erupted over the title of the symposium provides us with just one well-known example. Harper and Brothers essentially had to force the group into a partial consensus before they finally agreed to use "I'll Take My Stand" as the title for their collection. The phrase, a particularly volatile line from the Confederate marching song, "Dixie," carried overtly sectionalist connotations that some of the more moderate contributors wanted to avoid. Warren despised the lyric because he thought it unnecessarily limited the philosophical scope of the symposium and portrayed the group as little more than a bunch of angry Southern apologists. In May, 1930, he wrote to Tate, saying, "I think that the title, 'I'll Take My Stand,' is the god-damnedest thing I ever heard of; for the love of God block it if you can. Wade must be an idiot, and certainly all the rest are if they submit to it" (Clark, 185). Tate agreed with Warren, but the two of them could not convince the rest of the group to make the change. To register his protest, Tate demanded that his essay, "Remarks on the Southern Religion," be published with a footnote expressing his dissatisfaction with the title. In the note, he argued that "the general title of this book is not quite true to its aims" because it "emphasizes the fact of exclusiveness" (ITMS 155).

13. Jancovitch's The Cultural Politics of the New Criticism provides the definitive analysis of this transitional period in the lives of Ransom, Warren, Tate, and Davidson.

14. The movement from Agrarianism to New Criticism can be interpreted in at least two closely related, but significantly different ways. If we believe that Ransom, Warren and Tate moved on to more sophisticated arguments and more advanced literary theories, then it is easy to believe that they simply grew tired of the futile repetitions of the regionalist debate, and decided to give up on a line of inquiry that had already played itself out. But, if we re-evaluate our interpretation of that decision, and concentrate specifically on the regionalist phase of their careers, it is also possible to argue the opposite point. Rather than being frustratingly simple and naive, the challenges of the regionalist debate may have been too difficult to overcome. Perhaps regionalism exhausted the critical faculties of Ransom, Warren, and Tate and their movement away from the discourse can be read as the abandonment of a challenging problem that couldn't be solved at the time. In the end, it was impossible for Ransom, Warren and Tate to craft theoretical arguments that supposedly applied to all of literature and, at the same time, defend the ontologically distinct experience of Southern culture. One half of their project had to be let go.

15. For more on the internal debates within the field of cultural geography see Dear and Flusty's introduction to The Spaces of Postmodernity.

16. In the opening lines of Thirdspace, Soja suggests that

the spatial dimension of our lives has never been of greater practical or political relevance than it is today. Whether we are attempting to deal with the increasing intervention of electronic media in our daily routines; seeking ways to act politically to deal with the growing problems of poverty, racism, sexual discrimination, and environmental degradation; or trying to understand the multiplying geopolitical conflicts around the globe, we are becoming increasingly aware that we are, and always have been, intrinsically spatial beings, active participants in the social construction of our embracing spatialities (1)

17. Though Keith and Pile obviously welcome the current resurgence in spatial theory, they handle the term "space" very carefully. In their conclusion to Place and the Politics of Identity, they argue that "the spatial references in contemporary social and cultural theory are extremely complex" and can not be taken at simple face value (223). "The invocations of spatiality so common to contemporary cultural theory have much to offer geography," they suggest, "but equally the understanding of the complexity of spatiality itself is a long-standing subject of geographical interest. In part, cultural theory makes geography's familiar appear strange, just as geography can and should prompt cultural studies to reflect on its common sense spatialized vocabulary" (223).

18. Beyond New, Huggan and Jarvis, see Sanford, Conley and Gillies for more on the role of cartography and the representations of maps in literary texts. Wendy Roy's unpublished dissertation, Maps of Gender and Imperialism in Travel Writing by Anna

Jameson, Mina Hubbard, and Margaret Laurence provides a more focussed discussion of the mapping metaphor in early Canadian feminist texts.

19. In his essay, "Henri Lefebvre: Philosopher of Everyday Life," Shields suggests that Lefebvre's work

goes beyond previous philosophical debates on the nature of space, and beyond human geography, planning and architecture, which considered people and things merely 'in' space, to present a coherent theory of the development of different systems of spatiality in different historical periods, or 'historical spatializations' [. . .] These spatializations are not just physical arrangements of things, but spatial patterns of social action and routine as well as historical conceptions of space and the world. [. . .] They add up to a socio-spatial imaginary and outlook which manifests itself in our every action. (232)

For the most comprehensive treatment of Lefebvre's life and work, see Shields's Lefebvre Love and Struggle.

20. Though he definitely appreciates Lefebvre's insight, Soja, like many other readers, admits that The Production of Space is a "bewildering book, filled with unruly textual practices, bold assertions that seem to get tossed aside as the arguments develop, perplexing inconsistencies and apparent self-contradictions" (TS 8). Rather than writing his texts, Lefebvre normally dictated his arguments, so his ideas often seem to lack the coherent order of a more stable form. Because of its non-traditional structure, Soja suggests that The Production of Space should be read "as a polyphonic fugue that assertively introduce[s] its keynote themes early on and then change[s] them intentionally in contrapuntal variations that [take] radical different forms and harmonies" (TS 9).

21. See Chalykoff for a more detailed analysis of mental space in New and Kreisel's criticism.

22. The Californian regionalist index of postmodernism is easy to establish and difficult to deny. Beyond the obvious examples of Jameson, Soja and Dear, many other key figures have located their readings of the discourse in this particular social space. If, for example, we were to temporarily eliminate every text and every theorist who ever referenced Southern California's cultural geography as a way to illustrate their understanding of postmodernism, the standard canon would have to be dismantled. Practically all of the widely recognized 'big names' would have to be removed. Jacques Derrida's contribution would have to be omitted because he posits such a direct connection between poststructuralist theory and Californian geography. "The state of theory, now and from now on, isn't it California?" he asks, "[a]nd even Southern California?" (Qtd in Dear 5). Jean- Francois Lyotard's work would also have to be

deleted, because he once observed that the postmodern condition was perfectly captured "[w]hen you drive from San Diego to Santa Barbara": as a driver passes "through a zone of 'conurbation,' the opposition between a centre and a periphery disappears, as does the opposition between an inside (the city of men) and an outside (nature) ("Les Immatériaux." 53). Obviously, Jean Baudrillard's writing would also be off-limits. His discussions of Disneyland and the Precession of Simulacra are almost exclusively based on readings of the Californian experience. In one of his most famous "Postcards" from America, Baudrillard takes great pleasure in pointing out that LA's social space blurs the distinction between 'reality' and the cinematic image. He writes:

In fact, the cinema here is not where you think it is. It is certainly not to be found in the studios the tourist crowds flock to - Universal, Paramount, etc., those subdivisions of Disneyland. If you believe that the whole of the Western world is hypostasised in America, the whole of America in California, and California in MGM and Disneyland, then this is the microcosm of the West. [. . .] Where is the cinema? It is all around you outside, all over the city, that marvellous, continuous performance of films and scenarios. Everywhere but here. (55-56)

Section II

"Only Half There:" Postmodern- Regionalism in America

Chapter Three

3.1 Imagining American Geography

The erasure of place [. . .] is one of the fundamental American stories.

Phillip Fisher¹

In recent decades, some of America's leading postmodern writers have helped produce a new genre of literary regionalism that is especially well-adapted to the contemporary cultural geography of the United States. By situating their texts in the landscape created by a mass culture and by exploring the social space of a postindustrial economy, these writers have stretched the boundaries of traditional regionalist thought and re-envisioned the discourse for the twenty-first century. Rather than continuing on with the strictly realistic aesthetics that supported late nineteenth-century versions of regionalist theory, America's postmodern-regionalists approach the concept of place in a far less objective manner. They have replaced the scientific certainty of nineteenth-century ethnography with a methodology that is more fractured, more theoretically contingent, more uncertain. The writers we will be considering in this section -- Thomas Pynchon, Toni Morrison and Don DeLillo -- are interested in place primarily as an imagined construction. In their work, the ability to be physically, emotionally or psychologically "grounded" in a particular locale is understood as a function of individual imagination, rather than as an environmentally pre-determined outcome. More than any other version of regionalist theory, this American model of postmodern regionalism is fascinated by the ontological uncertainty inherent in any consideration of place. Seen through the eyes of these writers, geography is an unstable discursive terrain.

Denaturalized and unreal, contemporary American social space can no longer provide its fiction with a stable referent. Instead, each of the novels we will be looking at - - Pynchon's The Crying of Lot 49, Morrison's Jazz and DeLillo's Underworld - - conceptualizes American place as a temporary projection onto the landscape. Though we move from Pynchon's Californian suburbs, to Morrison's New York, to DeLillo's Phoenix, Arizona, the reader is never presented with a social landscape stable enough to be securely observed and catalogued. In these novels, that metaphysically fixed sense of place that once functioned as the anchor of nineteenth-century regionalist thought is cut adrift. For a postmodern regionalist, American cultural geography has no characteristic that is eternal and unchanging, no defining essence to uncover. In the contemporary United States, postmodern places are man-made rather than natural, shallow rather than deep, and fluid rather than fixed.

Using the theoretical terminology we developed in Section I, I want to argue that American postmodern-regionalism can be usefully discussed under the rubric of what Lefebvre calls "the illusion of spatial transparency."² In their use of setting, Pynchon, Morrison, and DeLillo are more interested in the imaginary construction of place than in actually representing or uncovering the "real" material character of their respective geographies. Lefebvre would say that American postmodern fiction takes place primarily in the "mental sphere" of spatiality (6). Postmodern writers explore the ideational or discursive creation of place rather than reporting on its concrete existence. Consistent with Lefebvre's description of the illusion of transparency, the lead characters in these postmodern novels interpret their worlds as products of "design;" to them, space is an

"encrypted" text, a fiction that must be continuously reinterpreted (28). Under the illusion of spatial transparency, the "image" supercedes the "real;" the subjective perspective trumps objective observation. The subject creates the social environment rather than being created by it. In the texts we will be studying, this pattern recurs as characters project their interpretations of place onto the physical landscape.

This tendency to view social space as an idealist projection, instead of a materialist fact is also the defining characteristic of what Soja describes as a "Secondspace epistemology."³ Adherents to this epistemological strategy are "immediately distinguishable by their explanatory concentration on conceived rather than perceived space and their implicit assumption that spatial knowledge is primarily produced through discursively devised representations of space, through the spatial workings of the mind" (TS 78-79). The distinction Soja draws between First and Secondspace epistemologies is unambiguous: if a Firstspace methodology is dominantly naturalistic or empiricist - - an epistemology more in line with the nineteenth-century versions of regionalism we have already looked at - - then a Secondspace methodology is directed by a much more subjective idealism. "In its purest form, Secondspace is entirely ideational," Soja writes, "made up of projections into the empirical world from conceived or imagined geographies" (TS 79). In Secondspace,

the imagined geography tends to become the "real" geography, with the image or representation coming to define and order the reality. Actual material forms recede into the distance as fixed, dead signifiers emitting signals that are processed and thus understood and explained when deemed necessary, through the

rational (and at times irrational) workings of the human mind. (TS 79)

Although Soja's writing is obviously influenced by Lefebvre, his descriptions of Secondspace are much more clearly stated than Lefebvre's explorations into the illusions of opaque and transparent spatiality. Because Soja's work is structured numerically, and because the distinctions between First and Second space are easier to follow, we will be referencing his vocabulary for the majority of this section and returning to Lefebvre's terminology only when it is most evocative. Rather than argue that postmodern regionalism often falls under the illusion of spatial transparency - - which it certainly does - - I want to make the slightly more modest claim that, in its American context, postmodern regionalism has been guided by a Secondspace epistemology. If we study writers like Pynchon, Morrison and DeLillo through the lens of a cultural geography influenced by Soja and his L.A. School colleagues, we see that The Crying of Lot 49, Jazz, and Underworld each represent a different American landscape that has been created and subsequently shaped by an idealistically influenced interpretation of space. The characters in these novels live in places that are "not quite real" in the traditional sense of nineteenth-century regionalism. Rather than taking place in the marginal rural settings that have dominated our understanding of literary regionalism for a century, these novels are situated in one or both of North America's two largest "postmetropolises": Los Angeles and New York. The protagonists we encounter realize that their stories unfold in carefully constructed social spaces. They know, or they eventually come to know, that they live in places that have been "planned" by urban theorists, by developers, by governments or by other social forces. As a result of this awareness, they can no longer

accept the assertion that their social universe has been ordered by benign natural forces.

Soja's spatialized vocabulary provides literary critics with a good theoretical shorthand to describe the environments these novels represent. When place is so obviously an idea - - an interpretation that has been blatantly projected onto the physical landscape - - authors, readers, and characters are forced to abandon the traditional interpretive strategies they once used, and conceptualize social space in a different way. A Firstspace materialist epistemology, operating in complete isolation, simply cannot comprehend a postmodern geography. Because these writers are unwilling (or unable) to accept the proposition that nature is responsible for ordering the world they live in, their late-twentieth-century regionalist texts must look to other possible explanations. They must leave behind the purest forms of empiricism and reject the simplicity of environmental determinism. In doing so, they illustrate that contemporary regionalism reflects less on the actual geography of one specific physical locale, than on the intellectual and emotional condition of "being placed" in an unstable social space. Postmodern-regionalist texts examine what Soja sees as the "essential connection between spatiality and being," the "spatialized ontology" of place (PG 119, 118).⁴ In a new kind of social landscape, a new kind of geographical imagination is required. In order to locate themselves in a postmodern geography where the meaning of place "is never primordially given or permanently fixed," characters in The Crying of Lot 49, Jazz, and Underworld must rely on their abilities to read and write the environment according to a Secondspace perspective (PG 122). As active interpreters, they must project themselves into a landscape they know is always, and already, a fiction.

3.2 - Moving From the "City Upon a Hill" to the Suburbs

Before we consider how Pynchon, Morrison, and DeLillo represent the imagined geography of late twentieth-century America, we first need to understand how such a model of social space came to be established in the first place. If American postmodernist fiction can be read as a regionalist literature, then scholars must be able to examine how these writers conceptualize their relationship with place. As I suggested in the previous section, contemporary authors in Canada and the United States have produced two very different versions of postmodernist fiction because they have inherited two very different ways of thinking about social space. Historically, the Canadian and American geographical imaginations have been dominated by different spatial epistemologies, and these distinct interpretations of landscape have helped shape the literatures of each country. By tracing the idealistic, Secondspace roots of the American tradition, we can establish a point of comparison that will be valuable in the next section when we discuss the more materialist, Firstspace inheritance of Canadian writers.

The idealistic tendencies that Soja associates with Secondspace epistemology have always been present in the American mind.⁵ Though postmodern geography is a relatively young field, scholars in other disciplines have spent decades studying the current of idealism that has shaped America's understanding of its own landscape. A range of celebrated commentators - - such as Leo Marx in his The Machine in the Garden, Roderick Nash in Wilderness and the American Mind, and Perry Miller in Errand Into the Wilderness - - have made major contributions in this area. In his work, Marx identifies

the "pastoral ideal" as a "distinctly American theory of society" and follows its continuing influence in American culture from the seventeenth to the twentieth centuries (4). In his discussions of Thoreau and Emerson, Nash argues that it is impossible to separate the Transcendentalists' understanding of landscape from "the tradition of Idealists such as Plato and Kant" (85); and Miller outlines a parallel idealistic "continuity" stretching "from the federal Puritans to Edwards to Emerson" (204). Obviously, there is nothing new, nor particularly postmodern, about a socio-spatial epistemology which views American geography as a mental projection rather than a materialist fact. Instead, it is important to realize that the imagined landscapes we encounter in Pynchon, Morrison, and DeLillo are simply the most recent results in an ongoing process of American cultural de-territorialization. From their colonial beginnings and onward, Americans have reversed the materialist trajectory of environmental determinism and, instead, recreated their social spaces according to a series of idealized visions. As many critics have noted, the quest for a perfectible utopian model of place has been a consistent element of the American imagination for centuries.⁶ In his excellent work, Place and Belonging in America, David Jacobsen argues that no nation has ever been more fascinated by the idealized image of its own geography. "America," he writes,

had to be imagined before it could be seen (even by those who were already there). And it was the Puritans who first imagined America, not as a colony, not as an expansion of a European or British enterprise, but as a wilderness, the landscape in which humankind would be reborn. [. . .] The synthesis of land, people, and civic politics would contribute greatly to the emerging idea of the

nation-state and channel the course of history, not only of America, but of the world. (27)

Frank Lentricchia, one of the leading critics of postmodern fiction, places a similar emphasis on the importance of imagined geography in American culture. He sees a direct connection between the country's historical embrace of an idealistic spatial epistemology and its contemporary engagement with postmodernism. Rather than challenging traditional rationalist currents of American thought, Lentricchia believes that postmodernism's reading of geography can be seamlessly integrated into U.S. culture. He argues that postmodernism "actually came over on the *Mayflower*" and was "the founding piece of Americana" ("Tales" 87). Like the seventeenth-century Puritan, the twentieth-century postmodernist rejects any interpretation of social space that is strictly realistic. The very concept of "America," Lentricchia argues, is based on "imagined rather than geographic space" and this vision of landscape is "the very form of postmodern desire" ("Tales" 88). He writes:

The distinction between the real and the fictional can't be sustained - not on the *Mayflower*, not while watching TV, nowhere in America, certainly not in the burgeoning variety of theories of postmodernism. The undesirability of the distinction between the real and the fictional is the key meaning, even, of being an American. To be real in America is to be in the position of the "I" who must negate I, leave I behind in a real or metaphoric Europe. So in order for America to be America the original moment of yearning for the third-person must be ceaselessly renewed. ("Tales" 88)

Although Lentricchia imagines American postmodernism and the "undesirability of the distinction between the real and the fictional" arriving on the *Mayflower* in 1620, perhaps 1630 would function as a better date for our discussion. The eleven ships in John Winthrop's convoy arrived in Massachusetts Bay in that year and essentially re-founded colonial America's relationship with its physical environment. More than any other early colonial text, the sermon Winthrop delivered on board the *Arrabella* during his trans-Atlantic crossing established the foundation for America's idealized conception of its own geography. Winthrop was one of the first American political leaders to explicitly encourage his followers to re-imagine the new landscape they were about to encounter. Although, when he first presented "A Modell of Christian Charity," he had never actually seen the continent he was describing, Winthrop nevertheless encouraged the seven hundred colonists in his charge to imagine the New World as their own, divinely granted, "special commission" (9). As a people chosen by God, they would transform the wilderness into a shining "city upon a hill" (10). With "the eyes of all people" watching them, Winthrop believed that, if his colonists held firm to their covenant, God would make them "a praise and glory," the envy of all "succeeding plantations" (10). By remaking the landscape in the image of a higher, more perfectible vision of social space, the Massachusetts Bay colonists could also make themselves an example for later generations.

Jacobsen's work examines the lasting influence Winthrop's idealism has had on the American geographical imagination. He argues that along with William Bradford's signing of the Mayflower Compact in 1620, Robert Cushman's "Reasons and

Considerations Touching the Lawfulness of Removing out of England into the Parts of America" (1622), and John Cotton's God's Promise to His Plantations, Winthrop's sermon helped establish the "sacred joining of a people and a land" that still characterizes America's relationship with its geography (30). Even at this earliest stage of the country's history, the mental projection of social space played an essential role in the way that Americans understood their physical surroundings. Though their actual experience of the landscape was anything but hospitable, the Puritans' idealized vision of the New World encouraged a much more positive interpretation. Despite the harshness of the climate and the physical brutality of those first New England winters, the Puritans stubbornly refused to see America as anything less than a sacred land and a safe haven. Against all evidence to the contrary, they continued to imagine their new colony as "a home from the storm, a home built by God" (Jacobsen 32). As Jacobsen notes, this apparent contradiction between a real and an imagined experience of place informs every aspect of the early Puritanical experience. He writes:

There is that curious tension in Protestantism, particularly in worldly, politically minded Protestants like the Puritans, between the desire for *movement*, to progress historically in the drive to the millennium, and the desire to *order* the world, to conquer the earthly kingdom.[. . .] We are journeying to the Promised Land, metaphorically, in the sense of some Edenic future. But that Edenic future is also located physically; we are journeying to America, where the future will be realized. (32)

In later stages of American history, this tension between a "physical" and a

"metaphorical" landscape gradually decreases. As the expanding nation gains more complete control over its territory, the sacred union between American citizens and their landscape becomes further entrenched. The founding fathers of the American republic believed that their country's promising future had been virtually guaranteed by geography. In the writings of Alexander Hamilton, James Madison, John Jay, Thomas Jefferson, and Thomas Paine, the constituent components of the American nation - - its people, its democratic institutions, its progressive ideals, and its rationalist philosophy - - are repeatedly seen as the metaphorical fruit of a perfected natural landscape. As Jacobsen notes, the founding fathers most remarkable rhetorical achievement was their ability to combine their idealized vision of nature with their respect for rationalist science. In works like The Federalist Papers, The Rights of Man, and Notes on the State of Virginia, Jay, Paine, and Jefferson were all able to forge a dialectical relationship between "scientific rationalism, with its stress on order, predictability, process and progress [. . .] on the one hand, and the sacred and primordial, even mystical quality of the land on the other" (Jacobsen 74). This same combination -- the union of rationalist and religious interpretations of the American landscape -- directs the nineteenth-century territorial acquisitions of Texas, Oregon, New Mexico, and California, and also eventually leads to the pessimism of Frederick Jackson Turner's infamous "Frontier Thesis." In 1893, Turner argued that the limitless potential of the American identity was so closely tied to the limitless potential of its geography that the symbolic exhaustion of the landscape would have an equivalently detrimental effect on the American character. Without an uncharted, and supposedly "uninhabited" supply of "new" territory, American culture would lose its

ability to re-imagine itself and its geographic identity. If, as Turner feared, "the American intellect" owed its "striking characteristics" to the frontier, then the closing of that frontier would demand a significant alteration of that character (27).

More than a century later, Turner's apprehensions seem greatly exaggerated. In the period since the Frontier Thesis was first delivered at the Chicago World's Fair, America's rate of geographical transformation has only accelerated. Rather than waning in influence, the frontier intellect - - the "practical, inventive turn of mind" that reshaped the West - - has successfully regenerated itself by creatively reimagining those parts of the country that were once considered settled (Turner 27). Even now, at the beginning of the twenty-first century, this expansive Secondspace reading of geography continues to direct America's relationship with social space. In 1999, more than three hundred and fifty years after Winthrop first delivered his sermon, the Walt Disney corporation re-appropriated his rhetoric in their marketing campaign for the "new urban" community of Celebration, Florida. In their promotional materials, Disney's salesmen claim that Celebration is "a town attempting perfection," a place where one can, in true Puritanical fashion, escape from the fallen conditions of contemporary urban life and move on to yet another new Eden.⁷ As Andrew Ross points out, Celebration is only the latest in a series of idealized American "blueprints for the pursuit of happiness," and as such, the success of its social space is "rooted in a repulsion for the existing order of things" (4).

3.3 - Phillip Fisher, Suburbia, and "American Abstraction"

Philip Fisher's 1999 volume, Still the New World: American Literature in a

Culture of Creative Destruction, reinforces this connection between America's idealistic geographical imagination and the development of planned postmetropolitan communities like Celebration. In our discussion, his work acts as a kind of bridge linking America's historical understanding of its natural environment with Soja's reading of contemporary social space. In Fisher's estimation, the postwar suburb is "the great American invention of the last hundred years" and represents the ultimate geographical culmination of a process he calls "American Abstraction" (45, 31). When suburban developers effectively took control of America's domestic sphere during the 1950s, the United States conquered one of the last remnants of its traditionally-conceived 'natural' landscape. The rise of the first standardized "Levittowns" in New Jersey, New York, and Pennsylvania, along with the explosive expansion of prefabricated communities throughout Southern California, triggered a dramatic shift in the way that contemporary Americans understood their relationships with social space. In a country where mass-produced places were becoming less and less different, it was becoming more and more difficult to assign a timeless sense of place to any particular region. As Fisher notes,

Everywhere across the varied geography and climate [of contemporary America] the suburbs are comfortably the same, equipped with the same schools and parks for children, the same shopping centres with the same stores selling Levis, Tide, and power lawn mowers; the same array of churches and car dealers, the same fraternal organizations and specialized doctors. The reduplication of housing types with identical appliances, the familiar street names with the same automobiles on those streets, anchors a modern social space that has identity from point to point.

Because of this identity it invites mobility, which becomes nearly cost-free.

Ultimately, wherever you move, the new place will be enough like the old to feel very quickly "like home." It is an interesting American invention, both semantic and literal, to live not "at home" but in a place that feels "like home." (45)

Once again, it seems that if everyplace in America is "like" the suburbs, then there is no place in America quite like the suburbs. In Fisher's analysis, we see a metaphorical reading of place stepping into the position previously reserved for an empirically "real" consideration of the physical environment. Instead of living "at home," postmetropolitan Americans live in spaces that are "like home." By definition, "the suburbs" are a placeless place, a repeatable idea of community that can exist beyond any one specific set of topographical conditions. As James Howard Kunstler puts it, the postmetropolis produces a "Geography of Nowhere," a simulated, duplicatable landscape that challenges any preconceived notion of "real" space. Joel Garreau describes the postmetropolitan phenomena of the Edge City as a marginal social space that paradoxically does *not* define itself relative to a stable centre; instead, the "Edge" is a "psychological location - a state of mind-even more than a physical place" (xiv).⁸ As we move through the postwar period, American social space is progressively stripped of its materialist character and begins to correspond more completely to a Secondspace projection.

Fisher interprets this key geographical reorientation - - the idealistic notion of place overtaking the materialist model - - as a particularly American "advancement" in community living. Against the waves of commentary that have characterized the suburb

and the postmetropolis as cultural wastelands, he enthusiastically praises suburbia as a "Cartesian democratic social space" with idealistic roots that stretch all the way back to Thomas Jefferson and the Land Ordinance Act of 1787 (45). Like Lentricchia, Fisher sees contemporary postindustrial America as the inevitable product of an American interpretation of landscape. Jefferson's Ordinance - - perhaps the most powerful example of a Secondspace projection in all of American history - - and the typical, postwar suburban housing development are both rationally conceived social spaces that can be laid over almost any variety of physical topography.⁹ In the eighteenth century, Jefferson's imagined grid instantly transformed a landscape once considered wilderness into a perfectly rationalized enlightenment space. Like the Levittown housing tracts that transformed American culture so quickly and so completely in the postwar period, the Ordinance, in one sweeping abstraction, reconfigured the American geography of its period. Without regard for the specific challenges of terrain, Jefferson's surveyors diligently carved the country into a set of regulated squares. Serving the requirements of an imagined system before the real details of topography, they were strictly instructed to reproduce the right-angles of Descartes's geometry. "The lines shall be measured with a chain," the ordinance states, "and exactly described on a plat" (428).

Though Fisher does not reference Soja's work, or, for that matter, any other cultural geographer, the "abstracting" tendencies he sees in the Land Ordinance Act and the contemporary postmetropolitan suburb do correspond to our description of a Secondspace epistemology. Both Jefferson in 1787 and the Levitts (Abraham, William and Alfred) in the 1940s and 1950s were aware that those who control the design of space

- - those who, in Lefebvre's terms, "produce" social space - - also control the social potential of that space. In his case, Jefferson's desire to project a balanced Cartesian grid onto the landscape was powered by a democratic idealism. If every self-sufficient farm in the Western territories could be platted out according to the same central organizing principle, a strong and unified nation could be built out of an infinite variety of different physical environments. A single idealistic projection could combine the distantly separated regions of America into one elegantly conceived whole: E Pluribus Unum. Jefferson's eighteenth-century goal was an ideal "medium" for democracy, a connected network of places "in which rights and opportunities were identical, a space in which the right and even the ability to move from place to place would be assured" (Fisher 44). At a different extreme, the Levitts' vision of social space was a well-timed entrepreneurial venture that took full advantage of a boom in American highway construction, a series of technological advances in prefabricated building materials, and a range of favourable mortgage rates being offered to U.S. G.I.'s newly returned from the war. By purchasing hundreds of acres of potato fields on the outskirts of New York, and by building thousands of identical "Cape Cod" homes on identical 1/4-acre lots, the Levitts effectively re-established the type of rationally conceived social space that Jefferson had imagined centuries earlier. Using economic incentives rather than democratic ideals, they ultimately achieved what Jefferson could not. As Fisher notes, no matter how much Jefferson feared it, mass-market capitalism "turned out to be the very means for achieving a Jeffersonian America" (46). Instead of "steer[ing] themselves towards a common identity by means that were[. . .] religious, ideological, cultural, historical, or linguistic," Americans chose

a path that was "fiercely economic and, in the end, profoundly dependent upon the mass production and broad distribution that capitalism created" (Fisher 37-38).

The remarkable degree of homogeneity we now associate with suburban culture is one result of this process of socio-spatial abstraction. The deterritorializing tendencies of American mass-culture guarantee that the suburbs of Denver, Detroit, San Diego, Boston or Miami - - to name just five "real world" geographies that had little in common in the eighteenth century - - are now equivalently dominated by nationally franchised restaurants and hotels, "big box" retailers, widely released Hollywood films, and network television programming. In the first decade of the twenty-first century, the topographical distinctions between American places have never been less pronounced. By using the mass market to systematically erase (or subtract) the differences between its people and places, the United States has developed a unique geographical imagination based more on mobility, transferability, and fluidity, than on stability, individuality, and permanence. Fisher sees a direct connection between this way of thinking about space and America's fascination with travel. He notes:

The history of American society is to a larger extent than most histories a history of transportation. Canals, covered wagons, the romance of the horse, the continental railroad system, the Mississippi steamboats, the interstate highway system, the Mack truck, the private passenger car, the airport system: the rapid building and rapid wearing out of a grid along which movement could occur. Place in America, by contrast, has often been casual, the crossroads of one or another system of movement. The system has always been more fundamental than

the cross points on the grid. (44)

Because the United States equates its idea of personal liberty with the ability to be physically, emotionally, and intellectually mobile, and because its economic life depends on a system of uneven development - - a system in which one location will always have a competitive advantage over another - - "place" in America has never been a static entity. Instead, geographical locales must perpetually rise or fall in terms of their relative national importance. The boom town must eventually bust. The South must fall before it can rise again. The mechanized capitals of American industrialism must give way to the software cities of the silicon valley and Seattle. Fading in and out of the country's economic reality, the "casual" American place is, once again, an ideal example of a "transparent" social space. According to Fisher, a truly American place *must* be a temporary invention, a Secondspace projection onto the landscape that will eventually be altered or edited when the economic conditions that once supported it change. The close, relatively stable connections to landscape that we traditionally associate with literary regionalism seem impossible to maintain in such a culture. If it is true that America's networks of transportation and communication have always been more important than the places they connect, what function can regionalism have in the United States?

Consistent with his appreciation for American Abstraction, Fisher believes that regionalism's significance in American culture has been grossly overestimated. Outside of the slave-holding South, which he sees as "the first 'region' in America," and "the only reason that 'regions' exist at all in the American imagination" (87), he argues that throughout the country's history, a Secondspace abstraction has won out "again and again

over the apparently dense claims" of realistic authenticity offered up by regionalism (153). In Fisher's estimation, far too much attention has been paid to the dense, supposedly stable qualities of America's "obdurate regionalism," and not enough scholarly work has been done on the abstract, mobile social spaces that actually dominate the country's geography (172).

3.4 - Learning from Los Angeles, or How the Suburbs Saved Literary

Regionalism¹⁰

In many ways, Soja and the other key theorists associated with the L.A. School (Mike Davis, Allen Scott, Charles Jencks and Dear) have helped correct this apparent imbalance in American Studies. Though he would never be considered a supporter of Fisher's "American Abstraction," nor a promoter of the mass-culture that makes suburban space a reality, Soja has probably done more than any other thinker to bring advanced scholarship back to America's abstracted, man-made places. As we have seen, the appearance of Postmodern Geographies in 1989 signalled an important shift in the way that academics approached the space of the postmetropolis. Soja's work foregrounded an undeniable fact about American geography that had been previously (perhaps even unconsciously) suppressed: although scholars may have imagined or wished for the situation to be different, in reality, postmetropolitan social space (rather than rural or urban space) was the dominant form of American cultural geography. Previous generations of commentators -- most of them influenced by the modernist teachings of the Chicago School of urban theory - - had traditionally imagined the American city as a

relatively stable central metropolis, surrounded by concentric rings of dependent communities that eventually led to a rural hinterland.¹¹ According to Ernest Burgess, one of the Chicago School's major voices, the ideal urban environment would begin downtown and then, like Chicago, it would "expand radially from its central business district" (50). Although this centralizing thesis directed much of the urban planning of the second half of the twentieth century, the model it projected did not correspond to the built environment Soja, Scott, Davis, and Dear found in Orange County. The social space they lived in - - the decentralized postmetropolis - - could not be understood as an example of classic Chicago-style urbanism. In the postwar era of flexible accumulation, a gap had opened between the theory and practice of American urban planning. Before the 1980s, Los Angeles - - the second largest urban centre in America - - was still "the least studied major city in the United States," and the country's most ubiquitous social landscape - - the suburb - - was also its most under-theorized (Dear *Chi/ L.A.* viii). Because it had been practically ignored by geographers and cultural studies experts alike, the postmetropolis barely existed as a site worthy of scholarly interest.

By selecting Los Angeles as the primary site for their explorations into the production of space in America, the L.A. School demonstrated that more traditional Chicago-style mapping strategies could not be applied to a man-made landscape that was so clearly *not* a stable reality. Adapting Lefebvre's theory to their suburban Californian geography, the L.A. School's most radical advance was to treat Los Angeles as a typical (rather than atypical) example of American social space. As Dear notes,

Just as the Chicago School emerged at a time when that city was reaching new

national prominence, Los Angeles is now making its impression on the minds of urbanists worldwide. And, like the Chicago School, their theoretical inquiries focus not only on a specific city, but also on more general questions concerning urban process [. . .] Los Angeles undoubtedly is a special place. But adherents of the Los Angeles School do not argue that the city is unique, nor necessarily a harbinger of the future, even though both viewpoints are at some level demonstrably true. Instead at a minimum they assert that Southern California is a suggestive archetype- that is somehow engaged in the rewriting of the American social contract. (PU 21)

More dramatically than any other place in the country, studying Los Angeles demonstrated that it was no longer possible to think of geography as a purely descriptive science. If, as Soja suggested, "Los Angeles (was) everywhere" and "(e)verywhere seem(ed) also to be in Los Angeles" then the city could not be interpreted as a unilinear, realistic spatial narrative (PG 222). Los Angeles's mix of urban, agricultural, and posturban geography was too audaciously unnatural. Its collection of military installations, industrial parks, vacation destinations, movie studio lots and vast housing developments created a geography so blatantly fake, so obviously "produced" by different groups of people with different goals and different visions of what social space should be, that it was simply unreasonable to think about the city as a nineteenth-century capital. Depending on how it was studied, Los Angeles could be seen as an economic centre for agriculture, oil exploration, aeronautics, military technology, software design, or show business. It could be read as one of the country's poorest cities, or one of its richest; as

one of America's most ethnically diverse communities or, after 1965 and 1992, one of its most ethnically divided. To some, L.A. represented all that was wrong with the sprawling cities of a individualist, consumer society; but for others, like Soja and Scott, Los Angeles was the "capital of the twentieth century," the physical site where the best and worst elements of American society met. It was impossible to have a coherent Chicago-style reading of Los Angeles because no single causal explanation could tell the entire story of the postmetropolis: there was no downtown to begin with, no city limit to end at, no metaphysical core to discover, no pure and unmediated 'sense of place' to contemplate.

Like Fisher, the L.A. School theorists were among the first influential American thinkers to move against the country's deeply entrenched tradition of suburban-criticism. From Lewis Mumford, to Jane Jacobs, to Kunstler, American commentators have almost always treated the suburb as the damaged space of the culture, the endlessly repeated but impossible-to-repair mistake of mid-century urban planning. In their anthology, The Intellectual Versus the City, Morton and Lucia White pull no punches. After tracing the tradition of anti-urban American thought from Benjamin Franklin to Frank Lloyd Wright, they call on contemporary planners to ensure that future cities will not be "prison[s] of unconnected cells in which people of different occupations, color, class or creed fail to understand one another on the basic human issues of social life" (238). For his part, Mumford - - who was undoubtedly the most influential urban critic of the twentieth century - - waged a life-long battle against the industrial logic that pushed cities to become sprawling metropolises. He saw the suburb as an inherently flawed social space that could not escape its own contradictions. Though it was clearly not an untouched

natural environment, the suburb simultaneously "boasted" that "it could not become a city" (Mumford 215). In The Culture of Cities (1938), Mumford famously characterized the "romantic suburb" as "a collective attempt to live a private life" and accused suburbanites of "[c]onsuming much" while they "produced little" and "created less" (215, 217).

Thirty years later, Jacobs's revolutionary The Death and Life of Great American Cities positioned itself against Mumford's dire pessimism, but still reserved its harshest criticism for low density Levitt-style suburban developments and the overly strict zoning restrictions that produced them. Jacobs claimed that by "sentimentalizing nature" the suburbs actually destroyed the thing they claimed to preserve (445). By consuming thousands of acres of previously untouched land, tracts of single- family dwellings eliminated more of the natural environment than they ever conserved. A chapter of Peter Muller's Contemporary Suburban America analyses the ways that the suburban separation of different economic classes encouraged a parallel racial segregation in American culture. Moreover, as a powerfully gendered place, John Harteley identifies suburbia as the site in which "the feminine career" was first established, and the "subjugation" of women "secured" (185). Following in Mumford's steps, Robert Fish reads the suburb as a middle class Utopia, a "monument to bourgeois civilization at its most prosperous" and, at the same time, "a testimony to bourgeois anxieties, to deeply buried fears that translate into a contempt or hatred for the 'others' who inhabit the city" (154).

The standard line of argument across all these texts is clear, and, for the most part, valid: suburbia is interpreted as an unnaturally consumptive, self-centred place - the most

extreme corruption of American social space. In intellectual and academic circles, the suburb has become a forbidden territory, a location Hartely describes as "the habitat of the social class with the lowest reputation in the entire history of class theory" (186). He accurately observes that "[s]cholars scarcely venture into suburbia except to pathologize it" (186). Kunstler's rants against the evils of urban sprawl synthesize all of these hostilities. "Eighty percent of everything ever built in America has been built in the last fifty years," he writes,

and most of it is depressing, brutal, ugly, unhealthy, and spiritually degrading - the jive plastic commuter tract home waste-lands, the Potemkin village shopping plazas with their vast parking lagoons, the Lego-block hotel complexes, the "gourmet mansardic" junk food joints, the Orwellian office "parks" featuring buildings sheathed in the same reflective glass as the sunglasses worn by the chain gang guards, the particle board garden apartments rising up in every meadow and cornfield, the freeway loops around every big and little city with their clusters of discount merchandise marts, the whole destructive, wasteful, toxic, agoraphobia-inducing spectacle that politicians proudly call "growth." (Geography 10)

Clearly, the evidence is in and the scholarly judgement against suburbia has been almost uniformly negative. Working in this kind of climate and against such a fierce tide of criticism, we can appreciate just how difficult it was for the L.A. School to re-appropriate the postmetropolis as a viable site for academic study. To achieve such a critical re-evaluation, a major theoretical adjustment had to occur. This is essentially what we see in Soja's work: instead of viewing the construction of place as the predetermined

outcome of a socio-scientific causal chain of events, the postmodern geographers of the L.A. School challenged the certainty of such a systematic logic. In Postmodern Geographies, one vision of human spatiality replaces another. The most materialistic readings of place are forced to intersect and interact with idealistic interpretations and vice versa. For Soja, no space can exist without its subjects and no subject can ever be outside of space. For Los Angeles - - a city that had been ignored by scholars because its geography was not "real" or stable enough to support advanced study -- such a reinterpretation has had significant consequences. Since the founding of the L.A. School, the postmetropolis has moved from the margins to the centre of contemporary debate. The city which incited in Kunstler feelings of "nausea," "depression" and "the pervasive aura of doom" (207), is now interpreted by Richard Weinstein as the "most complete expression " of US culture, and "the first consequential American city to separate itself decisively from European models" (22).

Though it may seem counter-intuitive, this renewed surge of interest in Los Angeles infuses regionalist literary criticism with a new kind of theoretical energy. By starting in one city and working his way outward across California and then, significantly, beyond, Soja's work demonstrates that the same indeterminate dialectical complexity found in L.A.'s social space is common to all places. No regionalism can exist without its inhabitants. No place's cultural geography is fixed, predetermined, or passive. Every location everywhere is, like Los Angeles, produced by the interaction of its subjects and the objective conditions in which they live. In a remarkable reversal, Soja illustrates that, rather than being naive or simplistic, the study of regionalism - - understood as the

relationship between individuals and the social spaces they create and inhabit - - is actually a complex and richly rewarding intellectual project. By taking the suburban spaces traditionally considered out of bounds to regionalist studies and giving them a position of prime importance, postmodern geography offers a way out of the socio-scientific dead-end that has cut off the development of regionalist criticism. In order to dismiss the materialist illusion of spatial opacity which has dominated the field since its origins, Soja selects the most man-made, least natural place on earth. By showing that the suburban postmetropolis is an active discursive construction, he proves that all places are produced in the same way. Every cultural geography possess its own spatialized ontology. Every region is alive.

As I have suggested previously, contemporary regionalist literary criticism finds itself in a state of empiricist paralysis very similar to the condition that gripped cultural geography before the L.A. School began to re-shape the field. Like traditional geographers, literary regionalists do not possess the theoretical apparatus, nor a sufficiently subtle vocabulary, to interrogate a man-made landscape. Rather than trying to puzzle out how they might approach this new category of space or, better yet, how such a space might challenge their theoretical assumptions about place, literary regionalists have essentially ignored or "pathologized" the postmetropolitan suburbs. They have simply devalued the relevance of suburban space, or else placed it beyond their range of interest. As Soja's critique demonstrates, this is a dangerous strategy to follow. Any field -- like geography or literary regionalism -- which claims to study the relationship between people and places cannot ignore the place where most people in North America live.

Literary regionalism, like geography, loses any claim to legitimacy or relevance if it cannot provide useful commentary on the domestic space that dominates the flexible-accumulation economy and the mass market culture of contemporary America.

When literary regionalism comes into contact with the postmetropolis, an interesting reaction occurs. Rather than cancelling each other out or entering into the kind of antagonism we might expect from the "urban vs. rural" or "cosmopolitan vs. provincial" debates of traditional regionalist thought, contemporary theorists of the suburb and the region actually share many of the same insights. By interpreting the suburb as a true region of American geography, we give scholarly legitimacy to that part of the social landscape which had been previously thought to be too flimsy, too fake to sustain or reward such investigation. At the same time, suburbanizing regionalism does nothing but update and improve the sophistication of contemporary regionalist theory. By denaturalizing regionalism, we give it new life. Similar to the surge that such a revelation affected in postmodern geography, the wider applications for regionalist thought begin to multiply when literary critics understand that regionalist literature is actually driven by a desire to explore the active spatialized ontology of place rather than a socio-scientific need to merely "represent" a selected geography. If regionalism can interrogate the spatial conditions of suburbia - - where everything is supposedly unreal, imaginary and subjective - -- then perhaps there are other, heretofore under-appreciated, currents of the regionalist tradition that are not as exclusively realistic as we once assumed. It may seem strange, but Soja's work proves that by studying the suburbs, we gain a better understanding of the most rural settings in North America. In order to appreciate the

complexity of "Southern," "Midwestern," or "Northeastern" writing, contemporary theorists of literary regionalism first need to travel through America's most postmodern places.

Chapter Four

4.1 "Shall I Project a World?":

Pynchon's Suburbia as The Capital of Postmodern America

If, as Soja, Scott, Davis, and Dear suggest, the Orange County Californian suburb is the definitive locale for America's postmodern geography, then Thomas Pynchon's The Crying of Lot 49 qualifies as the definitive example of America's postmodern literary regionalism. When it first appeared in 1966, Pynchon's story of Oedipa Mass and her adventures as the executrix of Pierce Inverarity's last will and testament signalled an important turning point in the history of American literature. Looking back, numerous critics now recognize Lot 49 as one of the prototypical novels of American postmodernism. Debra Castillo, for example, identifies Lot 49 as an "exemplary postmodern text" (39), while Frank Palmeri celebrates the novel's ability to capture "the beginnings of postmodern America" (994). Bernard Duyfhuizen claims that Oedipa embodies "the postmodern condition" because, like a reader of postmodern fiction, she "cannot keep all of the fragments together in one totalized story" (88).

Grant Kerry's A Companion to The Crying of Lot 49 is slightly more pragmatic with its praise. Kerry claims that Lot 49 evolved into one of the central texts in American postmodernist fiction simply because it was short enough to make the reading list for most college curriculums. Professors assigned Pynchon's book because they thought (or they hoped) their students would actually finish it. According to Kerry, Lot 49 is essential reading for any undergraduate course because it "offers a relatively painless introduction

to some of the characteristics of literary postmodernism and a glimpse of Pynchon's unique imagination" (Kerry xi).

Aside from its advantages as a tool for teaching postmodernism, Lot 49 is also one of the most important regionalist texts to be published in America in the last fifty years. Though no commentator has yet identified the novel as an explicitly regionalist work, it is difficult to deny that a very focussed consideration of social space - - in this case the Californian suburb as it existed in the mid-sixties - - informs almost every element of Pynchon's narrative. Indeed, one of the major reasons why Lot 49 initiated such a shift in American writing was because it was one of the first texts to unapologetically examine suburbia as a distinct region of American geography. Exactly like a story from "the Midwest," "the Northeast," or the more formally established category of "Southern" literature, Lot 49's regionalist setting affects almost every aspect of its plot and characterization. Oedipa's effort to orient herself within a hyper-commercialized Secondspace geography drives the novel. Her celebrated reverse-detective narrative (many critics have noted that unlike traditional detective novels, Lot 49 begins in a state of stable certainty before moving backwards into a state of confusion) is actually a tentative exercise in explorative cartography.¹² The "clues" that Oedipa pieces together are collected, first and foremost, because she simply wants to make sense of the place she inhabits. Whether or not her effort ultimately ends in failure, Oedipa sets out on her journey through Southern California because she wants to understand what is going on *here*, in a deceptively complex social space that she previously underestimated.

Regionalism and postmodernism co-mingle throughout this novel. In a formulation Harvey might appreciate, Oedipa's personal "postmodern condition" is linked to the spatial "postmodern conditions" in which she lives. Her fragmented consciousness, her ironic sense of humour, her sometimes paranoid feelings of insecurity, her uncertainty and, at least in the beginning, her apparent shallowness, are all reflected-in and supported-by the hyper-mediated Secondspace environment that surrounds her. As Maurice Couturier notes, Oedipa is trying to get past Baudrillard's "agony of the real and the rational, but, in order to do so, she must first rediscover the authentic text hidden beneath the surface of everyday reality" (5). This is the search that defines the novel: Oedipa is looking for an "authentic text," for a more substantial sense of place that might provide a metaphysical anchor for her perception of everyday suburban reality. In regionalist terms, she is searching for a stable nineteenth-century geography that she believes *must* be hidden underneath her twentieth-century social space.¹³

Of course, in the end, Oedipa never finds that certainty she set out to discover. Instead, the revelation that lies at the core of Lot 49's detective story is not the longed for security of a nineteenth-century Firstspace reality, but rather the realization that no such stability exists. Oedipa's pursuit of an objective and completely "natural" reality - - her search for a place that can persist beyond her own ability to create it - - ends in frustration. Again, Couturier describes this condition accurately. He sees Oedipa's quest as a "circular" journey and observes that ultimately "the 'real' she is looking for is of course her elusive self" (5). The connections between Oedipa's personal postmodern condition and the postmodern conditions of her environment repeat. It is impossible for

her to "uncover" a stable or coherent identity within herself if that identity must be dependant on a stable and coherent external world. Elaine Safer nicely summarizes this experience of psychological displacement: she claims that Pynchon's "characters search vainly for some form of order (no matter how strange) as a means of self-preservation" (283). Ultimately, Oedipa cannot be sure about herself because she cannot be sure about her social space.

The central question of Lot 49 - - "Shall I project a world?" - - occupies an important position in the history of postmodern-regionalism because it deftly captures this sense of contemporary socio-spatial uncertainty (84). For Oedipa -- still trying to interpret her late-twentieth century culture according to a nineteenth-century conception of space - - the question carries a threat of sinister possibility. If a world *must* be projected, if a Secondspace epistemology is, in fact, the *only* way to interpret contemporary American social space, then something has been irrevocably lost. Oedipa's (and the reader's) traditional strategies for understanding a natural reality have been overstepped. For Oedipa, this is a massive and possibly tragic realization, but for Pynchon and for the postmodern-regionalism he helped to initiate with this novel, the shift is not quite so dramatic. For Pynchon, the possibility of a stable natural reality long ago disappeared into the simulacra of an omnipresent mass culture. The nineteenth-century interpretation of cultural geography that Oedipa is using simply can not comprehend a postmodern place. Her agonized question receives a short answer in Lot 49. Must she project a world? - - Yes.

The postmodern place at the centre of this novel is the fictional Los Angeles

suburb of San Narciso. When Oedipa first encounters this landscape, she experiences a kind of cognitive crisis. As she enters a "neighbourhood that was little more than the road's skinny right-of-way lined by auto lots, escrow services, drive-ins, small office buildings and factories whose address numbers were in the 70 and then 80,000's," Oedipa observes that the whole place - - with its blacktop, its barbed wire and its pink aerospace industry buildings - - seems profoundly "unnatural" (25). She feels physically and emotionally disoriented in this environment of "beige, prefab, cinderblock office machine distributors, sealant makers, bottled gas works, fastener factories, warehouses, and whatever," and, for the first time, she begins to contemplate the forces that might have created such a world (26). It is here we see the transition beginning - - the move from a realistic regionalism into a postmodern version of the discourse. The following citation is lengthy, but this paragraph captures one of the most important moments in the novel. It is also, I think, one of the most significant descriptions of place ever to appear in American fiction.¹⁴ Here is how Oedipa surveys her new terrain:

San Narciso lay further south, near L.A. Like many named places in California it was less an identifiable city than a grouping of concepts - census tracts, special purpose bond issue districts, shopping nuclei, all over-laid with access roads to its own freeway. But it had been Pierce's domicile, and headquarters: the place he'd begun his land speculating in ten years ago, and so put down the plinth course of capital on which everything afterward had been built, however rickety or grotesque, toward the sky; and that, she supposed, would set the place apart, give it an aura. But if there was any vital difference between it and the rest of Southern

California, it was invisible on first glance. She drove into San Narciso on a Sunday, in a rented Impala. Nothing was happening. She looked down a slope, needing to squint for the sunlight, onto a vast sprawl of houses which had grown up all together, like a well-tended crop, from the dull brown earth; and she thought of the time she'd opened a transistor radio to replace a battery and seen her first printed circuit. The ordered swirl of houses and streets, from this high angle, sprang at her now with the same unexpected, astonishing clarity as the circuit card had. Though she knew even less about radios than about Southern California, there were to both outward patterns a hieroglyphic sense of concealed meaning, of an intent to communicate. There'd seemed no limit to what the printed circuit could have told her (if she had tried to find out); so in her first minute of San Narciso, a revelation also trembled just past the threshold of her understanding. Smog hung all round the horizon, the sun on the bright beige countryside was painful: she and the Chevy seemed parked at the centre of an odd, religious instant. As if, on some other frequency, or out of the eye of some whirlwind rotating too slow for her heated skin even to feel the centrifugal coolness of, words were being spoken (24-25).

Dozens of critics have commented on this passage. Molly Hite calls Pynchon's description of San Narciso "exaggerated local colour" and notes that many similar "set pieces" are scattered throughout the text of Lot 49 (76). She claims that Oedipa's quest can never escape its geographical index and that the story is grounded in the "hyperbolically banalized world" of a "sterile Orange County landscape" (73, 75). Alan

Brownlie strikes a similar chord with his observation that the novel's paranoid searching appropriately takes place against the background of the "robot-like culture of Southern California" (56); and Katherine Hayles argues that Pynchon's imagery illustrates the "decreasing range of options" that exist in an increasingly "computerized landscape" (119). David Seed understands that, in Oedipa's eyes, "San Narciso becomes charged with hidden meaning as a visual grid" (133). Following Thomas Schaub's work, most critics interpret the central metaphor of this passage - - the comparison between the swirling suburban street plan and the pattern of the radio's printed circuit - - as a literary representation of Marshall McLuhan's argument in Understanding Media. Schaub argues that, for Oedipa, the housing tract functions as both a medium and a message: like the radio circuit, the layout of the suburb is not only the conduit (the medium) through which information is transmitted, but the streets themselves seem to be speaking words, sending out a message (54).

The key term here is, of course, "seems." After their first encounters with this mass-mediated, mass-produced Secondspace geography, Oedipa and the reader are left with more questions than answers: Does the hieroglyphic street plan really conceal a meaning? Is there actually a message imbedded in the suburb? What kind of words does this landscape speak? It is not surprising that the true detective plot of the novel begins only after Oedipa has experienced this 'religious instant.' Immediately after she initiates her exploration into the possible meanings of San Narciso, she efficiently checks into the Echo Courts motel, meets Miles (the lead singer of "The Paranoids"), and is quickly seduced by Pierce's lawyer, Metzger. The next morning we are told that things "did not

delay in turning curious" and that Oedipa herself identifies her arrival in San Narciso as the logical "starting point" for her investigation (44). From this moment on, every "clue" that Oedipa discovers is drawn out of an attempt to interpret the strange world that now envelops her. The discovery of the Tristero mail system, the exploration into Pierce's newest housing development in Fangoso lagoons, even the literary research into the source material behind The Courier's Tragedy: all of these different, possibly untenable, connections that Oedipa may or may not be able to establish seem remotely plausible only because she is already searching through a landscape that is, itself, clearly a fiction, a kind of projected fantasy.

It would be difficult to imagine a better representation of a postmodern geography shaped by Secondspace epistemology than San Narciso. This is American space at its most transparent and least substantial -- a prototypical "Edge City" with an unmistakable "Geography of Nowhere." As Oedipa moves through the novel, the strangeness of this place increasingly impresses itself upon her. The physical characteristics, the real-world dimensions of San Narciso, gradually fade in their importance as she begins to think about the community as little more than just a "name," or "an incident among our climatic records of dreams and what dreams became among our accumulated daylight" (178). Though the site does have an undeniable material presence, and though it does exist as a tangible reality, Oedipa conceives of San Narciso as an idea rather than a stable topographical fact. In her mind, San Narciso is best understood as a theme park designed by Pierce. The community is the fictional precursor of places like Celebration, a real simulation. Echoing Baudrillard's description of Disneyland, Oedipa believes that the

idyllic potential of San Narciso "is presented as imaginary in order to make us believe that the rest is real, when in fact all of Los Angeles and the America surrounding it are no longer real, but of the order of the hyperreal and of simulation" (Simulations 25).

As Oedipa becomes increasingly aware that she and all the other inhabitants of San Narciso actually live inside a fiction invented by Pierce, she begins to interrogate her social space at a much more theoretical level. She begins to wonder not just about Fangoso Lagoons, or San Narciso, or Inverarity's other holdings, but about the possibility of a wider American 'reality' as well. As Duyfhuizen argues, Lot 49 is an exploration into the "hyperreality of California culture;" it is a literary expedition into a world in which "the carefully constructed look is projected and reproduced in a symbolic exchange of signs or 'realities' that are always simulations of simulations" (90). The moment Oedipa realizes that San Narciso has "no boundaries" because "[n]o one knew yet how to draw them" is the exact moment at which all of her preconceived notions about geography are re-ordered (178). Only then does she grasp the full implication of Pierce's power and his "need to possess, to alter the land, to bring new skylines [. . .] into being" (178). After she has spent weeks looking for other possible explanations, Oedipa finally comprehends her former lover's seemingly limitless capacity to shape the landscape. Only when she sees how the "boundaries" of San Narciso extend into broader spatial implications does she understand that she is actually living in the imagined projection Pierce left behind; only then does she see that his "legacy (is) America" itself (178).

In Lot 49, Oedipa is forced to execute Pierce's "will" in two different ways. At the surface, she must interpret a legal document - - the listing of Pierce's assets and his

instructions for their dispersal - - but on a more fundamental level, she is also challenged to interpret her entire social universe as the product of Inverarity's desire, his "will" to transform the world according to his own Secondspace projection. Both the legal document and the suburb are products of Pierce's intellect. They are both "texts" that were drafted numerous times before eventually being typed out, in the case of the will, or built up, in the case of San Narciso, according to his design. As Manfred Puets notes, even the name of Pierce's development "bears the stamp" of his overwhelming narcissism; the words "San Narciso" are an advertisement, a celebration of Inverarity's ability to materially structure the world according to his wishes (130).

By far the most in-depth consideration of Lot 49's relationship with its geography is found in Gurd Hurm's excellent book Fragmented Urban Images.¹⁵ In his text, Hurm outlines a series of linkages between the postmodern potential of the novel and the social space that Lot 49 represents. By supporting his discussion of "California in the 1960s" with a detailed catalogue of sociological statistics - - rates of population growth, suburban expansion, gains in state GDP, etc - - he argues that Lot 49 is inextricably situated, both physically and temporally, within a region and a period of unprecedented geographic transformation. During the sixties, California becomes the centre of the world's post-industrial economy, the American region that "most conspicuously displays the distinct form of spatially decentralized control which developed in the post-war years" (303). Pynchon's novel is set in "the booming megalapopolitan sprawl of countless single-family houses, private cars, and freeways," a place where America's "homogenized consumer culture had its center in Hollywood" (303).

For Hurm, no reading of the novel can be complete if it does not in some way grapple with Lot 49's cultural geography; no valid interpretation can ignore the importance of place in the text. He sees Oedipa as a "Slumming Suburbanite" detective (307), and thinks of her quest as a journey "to break the suburban enclosure" which insulates her from the real life of America (308). Whether or not there actually is a "real" life to discover behind the suburb is not a question Hurm considers. Instead, he focusses on Oedipa's (and Pynchon's) misguided desire to use a strictly naturalistic scientific method to study an obviously cultural phenomena. Commenting on the much-discussed thermodynamic metaphors that recur in Pynchon's early fiction, Hurm argues that although Pynchon routinely satirizes the "grotesquely serious application of science," he is also paradoxically dependent on it (320). Oedipa can never escape the scientific grid of her social space, the circuit-like swirl of the suburban development, because she relies on the scientific method to discover or invent its alternative. Yet again, this connection between real-world postmodern conditions and postmodern psychosis is re-enforced. As Hurm finally admits, "the ontological instability of the world which postmodernism perceives, may after all only be the instability of those who perceive it" (325). It is impossible to separate the two. Oedipa's ontological uncertainty about herself and the uncertainty that underlays her social environment exist symbiotically.

It is this permeating condition of emotional and intellectual insecurity which has led many critics to claim that Lot 49 - like so many other novels in the postmodern canon - seems almost overwhelmed by its own paranoia. Because Pynchon makes it impossible for his readers to settle into any comfortable sense of spatial security, we are perpetually

asked to question the stability of our perceived observations. As Patrick O'Donnell points out, Pynchon presents us with several opposing polarities that ultimately cancel each other out. Though neither side of these binarisms is satisfactory on its own, readers of Lot 49 are forced to choose between "(c)haos or totalitarian order; meaninglessness or paranoia; void or dark design" (2). Brownlie interprets Oedipa's paranoia in a more positive light. He reads Lot 49 as an extended attempt to seek out an alternative way of understanding American space and argues that the protagonists' paranoia might be more usefully understood as a form of critical thinking (Brownlie 43). Like all good conspiracy theories, Oedipa's pursuit of the Tristero system can be read as an effort to "reassess" the American national identity and re-examine "the workings of American Power structures with a critical, or perhaps more accurately, a sceptical eye" (Brownlie 43). In her article on Pynchon's "High-Tech Paranoia," Safer argues that Oedipa is uncertain about the world around her because she can never penetrate the hyper-mediated barrier that lies between her perception of reality and reality itself. According to Safer, Oedipa's quest takes place in a "highly technological world in which there are many signifiers and an unclear signified" (289). The paranoia that infiltrates the novel, and postmodernism in general, is only a symptom of a more fundamental contemporary worry; namely, "that behind the computers and the electronic circuits may be a multitude of decentred labyrinthine conspiracies whose complexity is too awesome to fathom" (290).

Arguments like these - - which try to articulate Lot 49's paranoia in political or technological terms - - seem to be missing a far more obvious option. If we read the novel as a work of postmodern regionalism, it becomes apparent that Oedipa's most pressing

worry is actually rooted in a spatial anxiety. Once she begins her search for the Tristero, and for the underlying "meaning" of San Narciso, the most terrifying thought Oedipa can consider is the possible non-existence of such a meaning. Nothing scares her more than the fact that Pierce's misguided passion may be the only thing propping up the entire stage-crafted Secondspace world in which she lives. In what might be described (even ironically) as Oedipa's "moment of truth," she performs a kind of psychological self-analysis, and concludes that there can be only four possible explanations for her socio-spatial condition. Either: (1) she really has penetrated to the true metaphysical core of San Narciso and stumbled onto a "secret richness [. . .] even a real alternative to the exitlessness [. . .] that harrows the head of everybody American;" or (2), she has been "hallucinating" all of this; or (3), she is the victim of an "expensive and elaborate" trick set up by Pierce, a plot "so labyrinthine that it must have meaning beyond just a practical joke;" or (4), finally, she is simply a "nut" who has gone "out of [her] skull" (170 - 171).

These are the thoughts that haunt Oedipa as she ponders "the great empty glare of the Oakland afternoon" (130). In the Secondspace "vacuum," or the "void" of American cultural geography, these are her only choices: a "true" alternative reality, a hallucination, an elaborate hoax, or a mental illness (171). Ultimately, Oedipa selects mental illness as the best available choice, because it is simpler to blame her condition on a run-of-the-mill paranoia than it is to actually consider the other, more sinister options. It is better for her to be "a nut" than for there to be no way out of Pierce's exitless world.

Ultimately, it would probably be more accurate to describe Oedipa's condition as profound disappointment rather than paranoia. In another long passage that seems to

respond to the paragraph we discussed earlier, the hopeful wonder that Oedipa first felt when she encountered San Narciso is replaced by a deeply felt sadness. How did this happen? she asks herself. By what means did American geography become conditioned "to accept any San Narciso among its most tender flesh without a reflex or a cry" (181)? Once again, we see Oedipa reconsidering her landscape, but where she once saw the possibility of words being spoken by the printed circuit card of the Secondspace suburb, she now realizes that this environment has no metaphysical essence to communicate. Again she asks,

how had it ever happened here, with the chances once so good for diversity? For it was now like walking among the matrices of a great digital computer, the zeroes and ones twinned above, hanging like balanced mobiles right and left, ahead, thick, maybe endless. Behind the hieroglyphic street there would either be a transcendent meaning, or only the earth [. . .]. Another mode of meaning behind the obvious or none[. . .] For there either was some Tristero beyond the appearance of the legacy of America, or there was just America and if there was just America then it seemed the only way she could continue, and manage to be at all relevant to it, was as an alien, unfurrowed, assumed full circle into some paranoia. (181-182)

The most influential critical discussion of Lot 49's position within the hierarchy of American postmodernism occurs in Brian McHale's landmark text Postmodernist Fiction.¹⁶ In his consideration of the novel, McHale (moving against the stream of critical consensus) refuses to classify Oedipa's story as a true postmodern narrative. Instead, he

locates Lot 49 at the very end of a late-modernist tradition; he reads the book as one of the last intermediate steps into postmodernist fiction. McHale positions the book in such a way because he believes the "novel backs off at the last possible moment" and never crosses over from the epistemological concerns of a modernist text into the sort of ontological investigations that, for him, characterize a postmodern text (22). Pynchon's novel remains caught in the "dead-ending of epistemology;" Oedipa and the reader never discover if the Tristero actually exists, or if it is merely a figment, a groundless conspiracy theory that has been made up out of a set of clues that seemed related, but in actual fact were only coincidentally connected (25). McHale argues that the Tristero system *must* emerge as an alternative world, an alternative order of being, before Lot 49 can really qualify as a postmodernist text. The plurality of worlds that the Tristero represents can not remain just as a possibility - it must be formally asserted. Yes, McHale notes, this possibility "threatens to break through" (22), and yes, "the evidence is so finely balanced that one hesitates between the epistemological and the ontological lines of explanation" (25), but in the end there is no clear-cut victory for the postmodern ontology he is trying to find. For that obvious assertion of ontology over epistemology, McHale tells us that Pynchon's readers will have to wait for Gravity's Rainbow.

The central thesis of McHale's text - - his assertion that literary modernism is "dominated" by epistemological concerns, while postmodernism is directed by ontological questions - - is one of the most elegant descriptions of the postmodern condition available and I do not disagree with it. However, as a critic trying to formulate an alternative, more subtly nuanced classification for postmodern regionalism, I have to

challenge most of McHale's commentary on Lot 49. In my consideration of the text, I have pointed out that the ontological concerns McHale is seeking in the novel actually are there if we look in another place to find them. Though it has never been considered as a regionalist text, Pynchon's story of a Californian suburban housewife who begins to investigate the social world in which she lives qualifies as one of the most geographically sophisticated, self-consciously spatialized texts in American literature. Without a doubt, Lot 49 is a regionalist fiction. It is a text that interrogates the ontological condition of "being placed" in a fictionalized social environment that has been created by a mass culture and a flexible accumulation, post-industrial economy. We must remember that the Tristero system Oedipa is seeking is not the only ontological alternative available in the text. In fact, unlike McHale, I think the Tristero actually functions more as an epistemological safety-net. If the Tristero does actually exist - - if the eagerly awaited bidder does arrive to confirm all of Oedipa's suspicions - - then Pynchon's readers will "know" about the Tristero only because his protagonist discovered it; because she was able to "figure out" the conspiracy; able to "understand" it. These are all epistemological undertakings. If and when the bidder arrives, Oedipa's cognitive search will be rewarded and her knowledge verified. It is the other alternative - - the non-appearance of the bidder and the non-existence of the Tristero - - that we need to consider more carefully. We must realize that even if Oedipa's suspicions have all been unfounded - - even if her modernist/epistemological detective story has uncovered nothing - - she can not simply return to her secure life in the suburbs as if nothing has changed. The Tristero is actually the only epistemological option left to her. If it does not exist, then there is nothing to

underlay or explain her experience of San Narciso.

On her journey from her suburban home to the auction room, Oedipa realizes that the world she once passively accepted as stable is, in actuality, not supported by a permanent natural order. While pursuing Pierce's assets, she has found that they are everywhere, not just empirically, but ontologically as well. Inverarity's money is not only invested "in" many different places, it actually "is" many different places. The fact that one man, that Pierce, has been able to make up the entire world of San Narciso, that he, by himself, has been able to construct an entire social universe, is Oedipa's core discovery in this novel. It is this fact (and not the saving possibility the Tristero may represent) that has the most profound effect on her, and it is the representation of this fact - - the construction and interrogation of an entirely imagined Secondspace geography - - that marks this novel as such an important turning point in the history of literary regionalism. When we read Lot 49 through the lens of postmodern regionalism, we realize that the dominant action of the plot revolves around Oedipa's effort to re-orient herself in a world that has lost its realistic character.

Chapter Five

5.1 Making Room in American Space:

Toni Morrison's Jazz "Taking on a big city"

A related, but significantly different kind of socio-spatial instability exists at the core of Toni Morrison's sixth novel, Jazz. In this text we are, once again, presented with a set of characters struggling to locate themselves in an American cultural geography that seems to have no place for them. The same tension between real and imagined spatialities that we saw in Lot 49 returns to the foreground in this novel as Morrison also aggressively interrogates the empiricist assumptions of realistic space. Unlike traditional works of nineteenth-century regionalism, both Lot 49 and Jazz interpret their urban landscapes as Secondspace projections onto the physical topography of America; both view the city as a flexible narrative construction that can be re-made and re-imagined in alternative ways. The respective female protagonists of these novels also share a similar suspicion about their social environments. For Oedipa and for Jazz's Violet Trace, it is no longer possible to conceptualize the city as a stable, materialist fact. Instead, as they struggle to orient themselves in this new kind of space, Oedipa and Violet challenge traditional assumptions about the natural permanence of the world that surrounds them. As we have seen, Oedipa's famous question -- "Shall I project a world?" -- expresses this need for a Secondspace epistemology in contemporary American geography. The same sort of epistemological confusion resurfaces in Jazz when Violet asks, "What's the world for if you can't make it up the way you want it?" (209). Both questions reveal a parallel fascination with the inherent uncertainty of social space; both demand a more flexible

interpretation of imagined geography. Though there are many spatial divergences between these two novels, and Morrison's story grapples with New York's cultural environment in a way that is very different from Pynchon's engagement with Los Angeles, Jazz provides us with another excellent example of American postmodern-regionalism.

Despite their formal similarities, it is important to note the significant contrasts between these two narratives.¹⁷ Jazz and The Crying of Lot 49 utilize postmodern-regionalist techniques in different ways, and they offer different interpretations of American space. They also capture two distinct phases in America's urban development and rise out of two different sets of political conditions. If we consider the fact that Oedipa's investigation into postwar suburbia begins as a kind of recreational activity - - a game played out between Pierce and his former lover - - then, in comparison, Morrison's exploration into the cultural conditions that created Harlem as "The Capital of Black America" in the 1920's represents a much more politically charged interrogation of American space (Paquet-Deyris 210). A profound difference in tone emerges when we compare the two texts. Where Oedipa's discovery of her postmodern geography seems casually accidental and sometimes even comical, the same vision of geography is seen as a necessary goal for Morrison's characters. Unlike Pynchon, who devotes most of his energy to a critique of the economic forces that produce San Narciso, Morrison is interested in the racial injustices that are *produced by* America's tightly controlled social spaces. While Oedipa essentially stumbles into Secondspace and openly fears the loss of realistic coherence, Morrison's characters actively seek out such a realization. In order to "take on" a big city that has no place for them, they *must* cultivate a postmodern

understanding of social space. If they can not find a secure location within the Cartesian grid of "typically" American society, they must reject Cartesian theory in its entirety.

A great many critics have already noted that Jazz is Morrison's most postmodern text. Philip Page outlines the "Derridean implications" of the story and claims that "[t]he postmodern tendencies in Morrison's fiction are even more explicit in Jazz than in [all] her previous novels" (159). By connecting the word "trace" - - Violet and Joe's last name - - to Derrida's use of the term in Of Grammatology, Page argues that Morrison's novel dramatizes the poststructuralist concepts of linguistic play and *différance*. As migrating Blacks in the first decades of the twentieth century, Joe and Violet inhabit the "indescribable gap" between several different linguistic and political binarisms; their identities are constructed on such an uncertain discursive terrain that instead of possessing a coherent subjectivity, they "oscillate" back and forth between "presence" and "absence" (Page 161). Once they move North, Joe and Violet are defined by their absence from the South. They are located or mapped by where they are not.

Working in a similar vein, Marilyn Atlas uses almost identical language to argue that Jazz "plays" with the concept of geographic location "in a postmodern way" (65). In turn, Vincent O'Keefe reads the novel as a text that "challenges traditional Western epistemology in realist fiction" (331). He locates Morrison's work on the "other side of the realist tracks" and argues that the author self-consciously "counters [. . .] the godlike power, vision, and eventual disclosure of privileged knowledge" that he associates with realistic writing (331). Cyrus Pattell's recent book, Negative Liberites: Morrison, Pynchon and the Problem of Liberal Ideology, is one of the first texts to explicitly establish a

postmodern connection between Pynchon and Morrison. In his introduction, Patell emphatically defends the postmodern pedigrees of his writers. He claims that Morrison and Pynchon are "the two most celebrated American novelists of the late twentieth century" and that they are both "canonized postmodernists" (xvi).

An even larger body of criticism has developed around the consideration of Jazz as a distinctly urban novel. In their anthology, The City in African American Literature, Hakunati and Butler place Jazz at the end of a long tradition of African-American writing which has tended to embrace the urban imagination, rather than reject it. Beginning with Frederick Douglass, working their way through the Harlem Renaissance, and moving on to writers like Ellison, Wright, Baldwin, Naylor, and Reed, Hakunati and Butler argue convincingly that the canon of African-American writing represents "a substantial reversal of [the] anti-urban drive" we see in most American literature (8), and that "(t)he black writer[. . .] has usually found it inappropriate to envision an idealized non-urban space as a relief from the pressures of urban living" (11). Paquet-Deyris sees the city in Jazz as an "acting site of reconstruction" (221), an "urban vortex" (228) in which new readings of social space are made possible. She interprets urban America as a complex intersection of discourses, a physical locale in which characters can establish "a new cartography of the self" (229). In the same way, Linden Peach and Jan Furman focus their work on the physical characterization of the city in Jazz. Peach maintains that "the instability of the narrative[. . .] reflects the violence and criminality of the city" (115), while Furman argues that Morrison is "concerned with developing the city's subjective, non material identity" (96). Other commentators are more specifically engaged with the

social context of Harlem in the 1920s. Critics like Jocelyn Chadwick-Johnson, Denise Heinze and Peter Brooker all explore the oxymoronic definition of "limited freedom" that Harlem presented to migrating Blacks. Chadwick-Johnson characterizes Harlem as "a type of rhetorical paradox," because it "offered the free person of color the access to freedom while simultaneously constraining the depth and degree of that freedom" (168). She goes on to observe that "(o)nly the city, Harlem, with its ability to mean different things to different people at the same time[. . .] could contain such people and make such cultural meaning" (176). Heinze sees Harlem as "a mecca of opportunity" that simultaneously carries the threat of a "double jeopardy;" the city "allows for personal freedom" but is also "wrought with all the dangers that freedom of choice implies" (118). Brooker uses another doubling metaphor to describe Harlem's "split personality." By portraying Violet as a victim of "urban schizophrenia," he argues that Jazz is essentially the story of characters who have "missed their way" while trying to connect the rural experiences of their past with the urban experience of their present and future (205).

It is interesting to note that, despite the fact that so much of the commentary on Jazz has dealt with one of these two major issues - - either interpreting the novel as Morrison's most postmodern work or as her most self-consciously urban text - - no critic has yet suggested that there may be a direct link between the two streams of this discussion. That is to say, no commentator has ever stated explicitly that Jazz is Morrison's most postmodern novel precisely because it is also her most urban. No one has pointed out that the two most important readings of the novel actually nourish each other; that they are interdependent. Jazz's instantly recognizable postmodernism is (at least

partially) linked to the new kind of urban experience it is trying to represent; and its much discussed representation of the city is noteworthy because it is (at least partially) a remarkably postmodern portrayal of place. It may seem like an obvious point, but I do not think Jazz would be a postmodern masterpiece if it did not explicitly foreground the fact that, for African Americans living in Harlem in the 1920's, place *had to be* conceived as a fluid imaginary construction, a representation of Secondspace, rather than as a fixed Firstspace material reality. In the same way, I think it would be impossible for Morrison to present urban America as a discursively uncertain, "schizophrenic" environment if her aesthetic was tied to a traditional, realistic reading of cultural geography. In Morrison's fiction, perhaps more explicitly than anywhere else in contemporary American writing, postmodern literature seems to require its postmodern place. Jazz literally "grounds" its exploration into the ambivalence of language, the uncertainty of subjectivity, and the instability of racial identity by first exploring the ambivalence, uncertainty, and instability of an urban environment that can no longer be understood as a fixed and unchanging reality. In this text, it would be difficult to separate Morrison's regionalism from her postmodernism. When her characters move from the rural agrarian South to the urban industrial North, they are also moving from a realistic to a postmodern reading of place, from a Firstspace to a Secondspace epistemology.

Above all else, Jazz is a story about this kind of physical and philosophical migration. This is a text that records the actual experience of moving through American space in the first half of the twentieth century, while simultaneously challenging the rationalist abstraction that makes such an understanding of space possible. In one of the

more important conversations in the novel, Violet tells Felice that this movement from one place to another, and, more importantly, from one way of thinking about place to another, "messed up" her life (207). "Before I came North," she says, "I made sense and so did the world" (207).

For the reader interested in Morrison's depiction of urban space, it seems clear that Violet's life, like Oedipa's, is "messed up" because the Firstspace epistemology she once used to interpret her surroundings in the South can no longer function in Harlem, a city within a city that is clearly not a naturalistic environment. Violet can not make sense of this new world, nor find a secure place in it, because Harlem is not "real" in the strictest materialist sense of the word; it is not a secure or knowable social space. Rather, the city is another imaginary projection, an unstable product of intersecting discourses and cultural processes; it can not be counted upon to provide the kind of stability that once seemed to rule over Violet's Southern geography. Morrison's characters leave behind a history and a geography that have been fatally flawed by slavery, and they move toward a future that is more hopeful, but also more ontologically unstable. In the South, Black and White social "positions" were brutally enforced and, therefore, easily understandable. In the North, there is the potential to escape from such a rigidly defined cultural structure, but, as Violet, Joe, Alice, and Felice all realize, that potential is cloaked in uncertainty. Angelyn Mitchell claims that Jazz is a novel that explores the profound disappointment African Americans experienced when the social space they had once imagined as paradise turned out to be an unacceptable ghetto-reality. She argues that "Violet's urban life in Harlem is characterized by the alienation, isolation, and fragmentation she feels in what

should have been the promised land" (57).

The anxiousness and alienation that Violet experiences - - and the urban schizophrenia from which she suffers - - are linked to a socio-spatial insecurity that Ralph Ellison described in his evocatively titled essay, "Harlem is Nowhere."¹⁸ Building upon his axiom that "If we [African Americans] don't know *where* we are, we have little chance of knowing *who* we are" (74), Ellison argues that one can not challenge the unacceptable political and cultural conditions that African Americans live in without first challenging the unacceptable physical conditions of their social space. If Blacks are not allowed to physically inhabit a "stable, recognized place in society," then they will be "nowhere" in American reality; and if they continue to wander in Harlem's "ghetto maze" of tenements and slums, they will continue to be the "displaced person[s] of American democracy" (300). In the United States, Ellison argues, citizens with political, economic, and cultural power have used that power to reshape the environment and to create stable social spaces that are so entrenched in the material environment, they seem almost natural. Those without power, conversely, have always been forced to live on the uncertain margins of those stable social spaces. This is clearly the case for Morrison's characters: their movement from the share-cropping reality of the South to the ghetto culture of the North is simply a movement from one margin to another. For Ellison, as it is for Morrison, it is impossible to separate definitions of space from definitions of personhood. Ellison writes:

To live in Harlem is to dwell in the very bowels of the city; it is to pass a labyrinthine existence among streets that explode monotonously skyward with the

spires and crosses of churches and clutter under foot with garbage and decay[. . .] .

Overcrowded and exploited politically and economically, Harlem is the scene and symbol of the Negro's perpetual alienation in the land of his birth.[. . .] [The city possesses] a character that arises from the impact between urban slum conditions and folk sensibilities. Historically, American Negroes are caught in a vast process of change that has swept them from slavery to the condition of industrial man in a space of time so telescoped (a bare eighty-five years) that it is possible literally for them to step from feudalism into the vortex of industrialism simply by crossing the Mason-Dixon line (295- 296).

This is precisely the transition that Jazz documents: the movement from the margins of a primitive (but clearly structured) feudalism into the apparent vortex of industrial America.⁹ During the Great Migration, tens of thousands of African Americans made the journey Ellison is describing across the Mason Dixon line. Between 1910 and 1930 alone, the Black population of New York City increased by 250 percent from 91,709 to 327, 706 (Wintz, 14). This huge number of migrants left behind one clearly established set of unacceptable spatial conventions only to encounter another, less obvious form of geographical segregation in another place. No matter where they move - - from one Southern state to the next, or from the South to the Midwest, or from the South to a Northern industrial city - - Morrison's characters, and the tide of African Americans they represent, are never embraced by white culture or the geography that culture creates.

Before they ultimately realize their ability to re-invent social space, to make up the

world the way they want it, Joe and Violet are forced to recreate themselves numerous times. Because they are caught in a nineteenth-century model of American space and because they themselves embrace the Firstspace epistemology that created such a space, the couple can never find a safe position in American society. Though they continuously try to adapt themselves to every new set of social conditions they encounter, they always fail to find a home. They fail to be "real" in the traditional regionalist sense. Rather than making up the world as a Secondspace projection, they believe -- in true social Darwinist fashion -- that each new environment they enter will recreate them. Joe's experience provides us with a good example of this phenomenon. He explains that in his ongoing struggle to become a "new Negro," he has adapted to his new environment countless times: he has been a hunter, a share-cropper, a woodsman, a railroad worker, a toilet cleaner, a waiter, a hotel bed-maker, and a door-to-door salesman. He has been burned off his property in the South by "white sheets," evicted from his apartment in the tenderloin district of Manhattan by a "black rent," and badly beaten in the riots of 1917. "After those white men took that pipe around my head, I was brand new for sure," he tells us, "because they almost killed me" (128). For every physical relocation he has experienced, Joe has also suffered though a corresponding psychological transformation. As he admits, he has "changed once too often;" by continually trying to adapt to American geography, he has "made [himself] new one time too many" (129). In a world where the "[c]rackers in the South [were] mad cause Negroes were leaving," and the "crackers in the North [were] mad cause they were coming," Joe's options are severely limited (128). No matter where he goes, he will never have a position in the original plan of the place. If he continues to

interpret his social environment according to a Firstspace epistemology, he will never 'discover' a space of his own.

In Jazz, African American characters are forced to live in highly controlled social spaces over which they have little or no control. Joe and Violet live inside of a Secondspace projection that is so politically, economically and culturally well-established it appears as a permanent Firstspace reality. Like Oedipa in Lot 49, the most important transformation in Jazz occurs when Joe and Violet realize that the world they once consider fixed and immovable is, in fact, imbued with considerable flexibility. As O'Keefe notes, Morrison's characters develop a "newfound ability to escape the prerecorded grooves of the City and create their own epistemological, historical, and narrative tracks" (345). Just as Oedipa eventually learns that there is no metaphysical essence, no permanent transcendental meaning hidden behind the geography of San Narciso, Joe and Violet eventually discover that the same is true for the spaces they live in. Harlem, New York, the North, and America as a whole are a collection of cultural geographic narratives, and, as such, they can be re-interpreted and/or re-imagined. Violet explains that when she "forgot" this central truth, when she forgot her own power to "make the world up," she could no longer function in Harlem (208). Just as Pynchon associates Oedipa's anxieties about San Narciso with a form of mental illness, Violet's transition from a realistic to a postmodern reading of Harlem also leads her to a temporary insanity. She attacks Dorcas's corpse and gets thrown out of the church because she has metaphorically "lost her bearings;" she can no longer comprehend her own social universe. Violet cautions Felice not to make the same mistake. "If you don't [make up the

world the way you want it]," she says, "it will change you and it'll be your fault cause you let it" (208). This is another perfect illustration of a Secondspace epistemology challenging a Firstspace epistemology. Violet's statement denies the power of environmental determinism. At the end of the novel, Morrison's protagonist has finally realized that if she does not abandon the Firstspace epistemology of her past and embrace the Secondspace geography of her future, she will be lost, both mentally and physically, in a cityscape that is not of her own making. In an excellent quote that uses an external description of the urban landscape to describe a character's internal state of ontological indeterminacy, Violet tells Felice that before she changed her interpretation of geography, "I just ran up and down the streets wishing I was somebody else" (208).

References to the famous gridiron street plan of Manhattan abound in Jazz. As Brookner points out, Morrison's novel is undeniably regionalist in character: the narrative is a "New York fiction" and, as such, it is as regionally indexed to its specific social space as any text that ever came out of the South. Morrison foregrounds this fact by comparing not just the physical landscapes of the South and the city, but also by comparing the different ways of thinking about space that dominate these two settings. Rather than being the urban center which defines the peripheral status of the South as a region, in Morrison's eyes New York is simply another kind of space, an equivalent region, with its own specifically spatialized ontology. Scattered throughout the text are several passages in which the unnamed and ungendered narrator of Jazz pauses to reflect on the unique character of the City. In these passages, New York is always interpreted as a spatial construction, a Secondspace projection that has been carefully laid out over the landscape.

"I'm crazy about this City," the voice tells us (7):

Nobody says its pretty here; nobody says it's easy either. What it is is decisive, and if you pay attention to the street plans, all laid out, the City can't hurt you.[. . .] I like the way the City makes people think they can do what they want and get away with it[. . .] Do what you please in the City, it is there to back and frame you no matter what you do. And what goes on on its blocks and lots and side streets is anything the strong can think of and the weak will admire. All you have to do is heed the design-the way its laid out for you, considerate, mindful of where you want to go and what you might need tomorrow. (8-9)

Morrison's narrator always refers to New York as a city with a capital "C." It is a "decisive" social space, a geography that has been so carefully constructed, even the powerful and the "strong" must be "considerate" and "mindful" of it. No matter how free they imagine themselves to be, no matter how sure they are of their own abilities to re-imagine their surroundings, New Yorkers, and especially those who live in Harlem, must "heed the design" of their streetscape. Even when Joe is at his most confident, at the moment when he feels he is finally liberated from the South, he can not escape the spatial definitions of the city. "Take my word for it," the narrator observes, "he is bound to the track,"

It pulls him like a needle through the groove of a Bluebeard record. Round and Round about the town. That's the way the city spins you. Makes you do what it wants, go where the laid out roads say to. All the while letting you think you're free; that you can jump into the thickets because you feel like it. There are no

thickets here and if mowed grass is okay for you to walk on the city will let you know. You can't get off the track a city lays for you. Whatever happens, whether you get rich or stay poor, ruin your health or live to old age, you always end up back where you started. (120)

Like Joe, every character in Jazz must follow the "groove" or stick to the "track" that has been laid out for them by the clearly demarcated limitations of New York's urban plan. First adopted in 1811, twenty-six years after Jefferson's Land Ordinance, the Plan Of New York established another one of America's world-famous Cartesian social spaces. Breaking away from the more elegantly designed streetscapes of its European ancestors, or the early colonial models of cities like Savannah, Philadelphia, and Annapolis, the 1811 Plan re-imagined Manhattan according to the same rationalist vision of geography that Jefferson had employed. Unlike Pierre L'Enfant's picturesque plan for Washington D.C. which had been completed twenty years earlier in 1791, the surveyors who created New York knew that their city was destined to rise as a commercial capital rather than a political centre and that it would require a street plan that could support such economic ambitions. As Edward Spann notes, New York's plan subjugated all other civic functions in order to encourage the efficient flow of goods in a city that was "plainly commercial in character" (14). By leveling spatial obstacles, "The Greatest Grid" rationalized Manhattan, and unambiguously announced that the city was now physically and ideologically "open" for business.

Morrison's novel, set more than a century after the implementation of New York's grid, explores the cultural consequences of such a social space. Though the Manhattan of

the 1920's is wealthy, it is also a divided city. The rationalist social space designed to encourage the free flow of goods has had the opposite effect on the free movement of its citizens. In the long passages which describe Alice Manfred's journey across the New York street plan, it seems that every intersection she crosses brings her into a different cultural universe. Instead of finding herself in an urban geography more open than the South, Alice discovers Harlem to be even more restrictively defined, more tightly monitored. If Jefferson had imagined a democratic social space in which it would have been possible for a self-reliant family to move from Virginia to the Ohio valley without any dramatic readjustment of consciousness, Alice's experience reveals a very different reality. As she moves across the country, the socio-spatial divisions of American culture tighten their grip. By the time she reaches the numbered grid of New York, her relative position in society is so clearly defined by the Secondspace rules of the street plan, she finds it difficult to move beyond the well-known borders of Harlem. In the following passage, we witness the shrinking of Alice's social space. Rather than expanding infinitely outward as Jefferson projected, Alice lives in a social environment so strictly contained that its borders can be plotted out geometrically on a 1920s street map of the area.²¹

Alice had been frightened for a long time- first she was frightened of Illinois, then of Springfield, Massachusetts, then Eleventh Avenue, Third Avenue, Park Avenue. Recently she had begun to feel safe nowhere south of 110th Street and Fifth Avenue was for her the most fearful of all. That was where white men leaned out of motor cars with folded dollar bills peeping from their palms. It was where salesmen touched her and only her as though she were part of the goods they had

condescended to sell her; it was the tissue required if the management was generous enough to let you try on a blouse (but no hat) in a store. It was where she, a woman of fifty and independent means, had no surname. Where women who spoke English said, "Don't sit there, honey, you never know what they have." (54)

Illinois, Massachusetts, Eleventh Avenue, Third Avenue, Park Avenue, Fifth Avenue, 110th Street: Alice's personal geography, like Violet's and Joe's, is defined by where she is not permitted to be. Morrison's descriptions of American geography reveal the unacknowledged flaw of the New York Plan or Jefferson's Land Ordinance: though both systems of spatial organization seem expansive and unencumbered in an abstract, rationalist sense, the actual experience of living in the social universe created by these Secondspace projections is tightly controlled. Only those who make up the grid are free to re-imagine their social space. Or, as O'Keefe points out, the "City in the 1920's is only warm and protective for those who follow its white-man-made, totalitarian 'designs,' or tracks" (337). Fisher observes that there is no way to get outside of America's Cartesian conception of its own spatiality. By definition, democratic social space demands that its citizens live between the lines, that they accept a "uniformity rather than a unity;" there can be no "outsiders" in an Abstract America, Fisher argues, "no observers," no "oppositional positions" (86).

Morrison's novel moves against this abstract reading of social space by situating its narrator outside the grid of a typically American urban culture. The gossiping consciousness that recounts the story of Joe, Violet, and Dorcas originates from a point-

of-view that is clearly above or beyond the influence of New York's "plan." Jazz's narrator is an external critic, who, unlike Alice, purposely does *not* occupy a definite position within the city schematic. "I know how to take precaution," the narrator explains, "(m)ostly it's making sure no one knows all there is to know about me. Second I watch everything and everyone and try to figure out their plans, their reasonings, long before they do. You have to understand what it's like taking on a big city" (8).

In this imagined geography, the voice that knows the city is unknown by the city. The narrator remains on the margin because only a figure watching from above the grid can actively and creatively "take on a big city;" only an outside observer can recognize a Secondspace projection and re-interpret it as an open text. Jazz's narrator is poised there, between an abstracted America and its complex cultural geography, between New York's grid and the life that is lived between its lines. Because he or she seems able to see beyond (or behind) the projection, the voice can offer new readings of the environment. The narrator is the only character in the novel who notices the numerous incongruities of city living. He or she observes that spring is "the time of year when the City urges contradiction most" (117), and then adds, less than a line later, that "[r]eally there is no contradiction-rather it's a condition: the range of what an artful city can do" (118).

Although, as many critics have already noted, Morrison's narrator does not possess a definite gender, age, class, or race, this voice can be defined by its connection to social space.²² The consciousness that haphazardly presents this narrative is undeniably local. In fact, the narrator is often so focussed on the particular conditions of his or her place that the entire plot of Jazz sometimes seems like little more than a cross-section of local

color. The love-triangle, the romance, the murder, the revenge, and the reconciliation are, for the narrator, simply more stories of the city, plot lines that are lived out on the "artful" streets of the grid. In the opening paragraph of the novel, Morrison's narrator seems to think it is more important to establish the location of the unfolding drama first, before quickly flying through the "other" details of the narrative. Before the reader has any idea of what this story will be about, we are told where it takes place: "Sth. I know that woman," the narrator begins, "[s]he used to live with a flock of birds on Lennox Avenue" (3).

Through its narration and its multilayered consideration of place in American culture, Jazz confronts the fact that an overly abstracted Secondspace epistemology creates a dangerously homogenized social reality. In this novel, Morrison's characters learn to free themselves from both categories of confinement. By making the world up the way they want it, they transform the damaged social space of the urban landscape into a more liberated territory of expression. By actively "taking on" America's most famous urban plan, they crack the Secondspace code of the city and open the grid to different readings of spatial significance.

6.1 Taking "an unreal turn:"

DeLillo's Travels Through Postmodern Geography

If Lot 49 was the prototype, then perhaps Underworld is the masterpiece of American postmodern regionalism; and if Morrison's novel first exposed the cracks in a purely rationalist conception of American social space, then DeLillo's eight-hundred-page opus excavates the subterranean chasms of postmodern geography that now dominate the American landscape.²³ As was the case with both the novels we have already discussed, Underworld's analysis of postwar America is inseparably linked to its study of the nation's social space. Combining Pynchon's examination of Oedipa's domestic suburb with Morrison's narrative of a cross-country migration, DeLillo's text is simultaneously at home and out-of-place in American space. Nick Shay's life shifts back and forth between the sterile efficiency of his air-conditioned home in the desert suburbs of Phoenix, and the historical complexity of his urban past in the Bronx. DeLillo's novel effectively connects the two places we have already studied: it covers the territory from East to West, from Morrison's New York to Pynchon's California. Moving from one postmodern site to the next, DeLillo takes his readers on a guided tour of contemporary American social space. From "cities of garbage" to nuclear test sites in hollowed out mountains, "surreal" ghettos to sanitized suburbs, rooftop garden-parties to rat-infested subway tunnels, Underworld provides us with the most detailed literary examination of postmodern geography ever produced. DeLillo's characters travel through a social space that has lost all trace of its nineteenth-century stability. As Klara Sax points out,

somewhere along the way from New York in the 1950s to LA in the 1990s, American culture took "an unreal turn" (73).

As was the case with Lot 49 and Jazz, Underworld has never been studied as a regionalist novel. Despite the text's countless references to place and DeLillo's self-confessed fascination with American geography, no critic has ever interrogated this novel's unique portrayal of social space. In fact, scholarly debate has moved in exactly the opposite direction. DeLillo's most influential commentator has made a special effort to distance the author from any sort of regionalist affiliation. In his famous introduction to DeLillo's work, Lentricchia praises DeLillo for *not* being a "new-regionalist" ("The American Writer" 2). Unlike writers such as Bobbie Ann Mason, Reynolds Price, Jay McInerney, Frederick Barthelme and Raymond Carver - - authors he apparently disapproves of - - Lentricchia argues that DeLillo has "too much ambition to stay home" and that he is "not impressed" by the "representative directive" of this neo-realistic school ("The American Writer" 2). Instead of passively recording contemporary American life, DeLillo writes the so-called "novel of ideas;" he presents his readers with portraits "of overwhelming cultural density [. . .] that could not have been written before the mid-1960's ("The American Writer" 6).

For the student of postmodern-regionalism, Lentricchia's hostility seems misdirected. As Pynchon and Morrison have already demonstrated, contemporary regionalist writing is *not* necessarily led by a "representative directive," and it certainly *is* capable of engaging with the "cultural density" of American social space. Rather than separating DeLillo from regionalism, it seems that Lentricchia is actually trying to

reinforce an older aesthetic barrier between postmodernism and *realism*.²⁴ In one of his later essays, "Tales of the Electronic Tribe," this fact becomes apparent. Here, Lentricchia argues that White Noise (DeLillo's 1985 best-seller) explores a "contemporary landscape" so influenced by television that "the image *is* the landscape" (89). We are told that DeLillo's novel takes place in the "environment unintentionally produced by advanced technology" (99), and that this new kind of social space provides "the setting of a postmodern life" (100). Because this world is "less concretely in focus," "less apprehensible," and "less empirically encounterable" than traditional nineteenth-century representations of place, Lentricchia concludes that DeLillo cannot be a regionalist (89).

Obviously, I read Underworld in a somewhat different way. In our discussion, DeLillo's novels (both Underworld and White Noise) qualify as regionalist texts precisely *because* they represent this American "environment of the image" in such sophisticated ways. Like so many other critics, Lentricchia seems unable to appreciate the postmodern potential inherent in DeLillo's representations of place because his understanding of regionalism is too closely tied to a realistic Firstspace epistemology. Though he claims to be an anti-regionalist, in reality, no scholar is more fascinated by DeLillo's relationship with geography than Lentricchia. His descriptions of DeLillo's social space - - a world where "the image *is* the landscape" and the environment is "produced by advanced technology" - - are almost identical with Soja's descriptions of Secondspace, and, although the result is clearly accidental, ultimately I think Lentricchia may be one of DeLillo's best regionalist critics. How else would we describe a commentator who argues that "character is a function of setting" in DeLillo's writing, and that the author is

effectively "rewrit(ing) the classic naturalist novel" for a new era with a new conception of social space ? (99)

Many other critics have noted a similar preoccupation with setting and place in DeLillo's writing. Though Daniel Aaron, Anthony DeCurtis, Laura Barrett, and Thomas Carmichael are all aware that geography plays an important role in DeLillo's novels, none of them interprets his work as regionalist fiction. In his essay, "How to Read Don DeLillo," Aaron claims that American cities like New York, Dallas, and Washington seem to "energize" DeLillo's imagination (71). Paying attention to these and other recurrent settings, he argues that "[a] good deal goes on in office buildings, warehouses, dingy flats and bars, but [DeLillo's] camera eye ranges as well over suburbia and small towns and stretches of highway. He is never supercilious or smart-alecky about places and regions" (71). In the same way, DeCurtis contextualizes his interview with DeLillo by first describing the urban landscape he had to travel through to meet the author at his home in Westchester, New York. DeCurtis explains that the journey from Grand Central Station, to the East Side, into Harlem, across the river, through the "devastated landscape" of the Bronx, and on to "Westchester's leafy environs" offers "a capsule view of virtually the entire spectrum of American life" (45). When he finally meets DeLillo, DeCurtis again stresses the connections to place that flow through the author's work. He describes DeLillo as "a modern-day Kurtz, a literary explorer of the heart of darkness comfortably at home in the suburbs of America" (47).

Barrett and Carmichael both discuss the important role that postmodern social space plays in DeLillo's fiction, but neither of them can quite make the jump to

interpreting his work as contemporary regionalism. In a reading that applies just as well to Underworld as it does to Mao II, Barrett argues that DeLillo "presents a world in which the negotiation of unfamiliar territory - labyrinthine urban centers, vexing architecture, ambiguous images, and technological communication - compromises notions of subjectivity" (789). In both texts, "[t]he postmodern society that DeLillo describes is one of permanent dislocation" (791). Similarly, Carmichael, in his discussion of The Names, argues that in DeLillo's fiction "the site of the narrative's unfolding is always the sign and context of a particular postmodern attitude. As the scene of the dead repetitions of history and of the dispersal of the self, the city [. . .] is an exemplary sign of the anxieties of the postmodern condition" (241). Carmichael also suggests that "to consider the city in postmodern fiction is to recognize that at the level of the significant trope of place the city is the uneasy and often simultaneous projection of both the vision and the experience of postmodernity" (242).

As was the case with Morrison and Pynchon, the city in Underworld is understood as a powerful Secondspace projection onto the American landscape. The novel is actually a tale of two cities, or, more accurately, a narrative about two kinds of social space. Nick Shay's life is divided historically and geographically: he spends his childhood on the gridded network, "the mean streets" of New York's modernist city space, and his adulthood in a series of postmodern regions. As a designer of massive landfill sites, Nick travels continuously between the Western post-industrial capitals of the flexible accumulation economy. He lives in Phoenix, visits L.A. often, and easily commutes back and forth between the cities of the Southwest. In Underworld, the entry into a postmodern

regionalism is seen as a journey from New York to L.A. and Phoenix. DeLillo's regionalism moves from the Bronx to the "streets of westward dreams, the kind of place[. . .] lightward and westward, where people came to escape the hard-luck east with its gray streets and crowded flats and cabbage smells in the hallway" (90). If the South was understood as the reservoir of a realistic Firstspace geographical imagination for Morrison's migrating characters - - if it was the region where, as Violet says, their lives "made sense" - - then the Bronx performs a similar role for DeLillo. As Sister Gracie angrily points out to a busload of photo-snapping European tourists, the devastated inner city of New York is more than a surreal theme park where American poverty goes on display. It can not be captured as an image. "This is real," she shouts at the tourists, "[t]he Bronx is real" (247). For Gracie, for Nick and for DeLillo himself, it is impossible to ignore the materialist identity of this landscape.

Ruth Heyler argues that the Bronx functions as a "vital metaphor" in Underworld; that it is used as "landscape of memory" rather than an actual place (1000). Similarly, Mark Osteen believes that Nick spends the entire novel running from his "New York ghosts" (223), and that he can not connect the wasteland of the contemporary Bronx with his memory of "a lively community where everyone was connected" (225). David Cowart also frames Nick's struggle in geographic terms. He sees Nick as an environmentally determined "pure product of the Bronx," who can never quite adjust to life in Phoenix (186). No matter how we describe the relationship between these two cities or these two regions of the country, it is clear that in this novel, New York functions as the underworld of the West. For these characters, the Bronx is the well-spring of authenticity, a "real

reality" that seems better able to resist the transformative power of Secondspace epistemology. In a key conversation that takes place long after they have left New York, Nick and Klara speak nostalgically about their pasts. They agree that something essential is missing from their lives. Since leaving home and moving out to the postmodern regions of the West, their most intimate surroundings have become "vaguely . . . fictitious" (73). In one of his more painful moments, Nick comes to the startling realisation that Los Angeles "is only half there" (275). As the capital of the twentieth century and the epicentre of American postmodern culture, L.A. lacks that impenetrable realistic core he associates with his home in the East.

Marvin Lundy, the novel's great accumulator of baseball memorabilia, puts this East-West comparison into even sharper relief. In one of his many revealing side comments, Marvin tells his wife Eleanor that, other than Tommy Chan who lives in San Francisco, he has never met a collector from west of Pittsburgh. For Lundy, America's nostalgic past - - its artificially stabilized sense of its own nationalism - - is firmly entrenched in the Eastern regions of the country. He observes that the East Coast "is where all the remembering is done;" the place where, as Chan notes, people are still trying to "precisely locate the past" (322). The outdated industrial cities of the Rust Belt provide a kind of historical foundation for the new Western capitals. When Nick realizes that all the significant events of his life happened "back east," he claims that even that phrase, "back east," should never be understood as "a marker of geography;" instead, he sees it as "a reference to time, a statement about time, about all the densities of being and experience, it's time disguised" (333). For Nick, his past in New York has a socio-spatial

depth, a density that is unavailable in his current world of postmodern surfaces and Secondspace projections. The comparison between these two kinds of places is actually a comparison of two different spatialized ontologies. In Underworld, New York is continuously being juxtaposed against a postmodern West coast. As readers move East and West across American geography, they move back and forth in time. Nick's life is split between "some blurry suburban somewhere" (325) in the West and the dense complications of the East where, as his brother Matt observes, "[t]he neighbourhood's still a living thing" (202).

Though DeLillo weaves this space to space comparison into almost every section of the novel, it is dramatized most memorably in his descriptions of two baseball games. The first takes place in a still-realistic New York in 1951, while the second is staged in a postmodern Los Angeles, sometime in the 1990s. If we can understand the socio-spatial forces that transform the Brooklyn Dodgers and New York Giants of Nick's childhood into the L.A. Dodgers and San Francisco Giants of his adulthood, then we have a better sense of the changing American topography DeLillo is exploring.

In Underworld, losing a baseball game is far more dramatic than winning it. Nick does not purchase the Bobby Thomson home run ball - - the shot heard round the world - - because he wants to be a part of the greatest victory in baseball history. Instead, as he explains to the BBC producer, Jane Farrish, his desire for the ball is "all about losing" (97). As a restless traveller, Nick is, fittingly, a fan of the Dodgers. He remembers Thomson's home run as a deeply traumatic, rather than ecstatic, moment. He tells his friends that he "died inside when they (the 1951 Brooklyn Dodgers) lost," and that "it was

important to die alone" (93). Throughout Underworld, DeLillo equates the Dodgers' historic collapse with many other experiences of American loss. In one of the novel's many ironic coincidences, Nick interprets Thomson's "home run" as one of the instigating events that drove him *away* from his native New York. For him, the phrase "home run" is reversed. Shortly after the loss, Nick leaves his home and, afterwards, he is never able to return to it again in the same way. His understanding of history is so intertwined with his understanding of geography that he can not separate the two. He believes that "[n]o one could explain the Dodgers who wasn't there" (93), and he tells Jane Farrish, that the "local affiliations" of his New York past can not be explored or understood; his intimate connections to that place and time "don't travel" (94). As Osteen observes, the Thomson home-run ball is precious to Nick because it represents "the vital interlinked community and connections across races and classes that the 1951 game briefly enabled;" as a "vestige of his first life, the ball also signifies the living death that he now leads" (222).

In their migrations West, Nick and the Dodger team he once loved lose the capacity to connect their histories and geographies. Nick's friend, Simeon Biggs, realizes that Thompson's home run, and all the different levels of loss it represents in Underworld, have damaged Nick so profoundly that he "never went back" to the game, or the city, or the person he had once been (94). This transition from one kind of social space to another seems irreversible: once an authentic sense of place is lost, it can not be reclaimed. In the 1990s, as Nick and his friends eat their dinners in the air-conditioned, glass-encased restaurant of L.A.'s Dodger Stadium, they are watching the "new" Giants play the "new" Dodgers and, again, the East/ West, Firstspace / Secondspace juxtapositions could not be

more clear. Compared to the raucous New York crowd that dominates Underworld's prologue, the late twentieth- century Californian version of the Dodgers-Giants game is a parody, a simulation of a earlier historic battle. Inside the sound-proofed box of the restaurant, Nick and his friends are so completely separated from the game, they can not even hear the crowd outside. Frustrated by the whole postmodern spectacle, Glassic observes that what they are witnessing in Dodger Stadium simply "isn't reality" anymore (92). He claims that in the fifties, prior to the cold war and the socio-spatial transformations of post-industrialism, he and Nick and Simeon "had the real Dodgers and Giants" (95). Now, however, in the nineties - - in the aftermath of their collective westward migration into a postmodern geography - - they are left only with these Secondspace "holograms" of the past (95).

John Duvall provides an insightful socio-political analysis of these twinned Baseball games. He argues that DeLillo uses the us-versus-them binary of the two Dodgers-Giants confrontations to illustrate the changing relationship between the United States and the Soviet Union during the same interval. After the Soviets' second confirmed nuclear test - - the "second" shot heard round the world on October 3rd, 1951 - - America could never regain the easy national confidence of the period immediately after World War II. Like Nick, who is a cocky street-wise kid in the Bronx before the .omerun, and only a parody of himself in the decades after the Cold War, Duvall suggests that, as a nation, America's identity followed a similar trajectory. The second nuclear test established the Soviet Union as a substantial adversary, the "other" global superpower. As Duvall notes, DeLillo folds his analysis of the larger Cold War ideological rivalry into his

representations of the baseball games:

If a New Yorker's identity (at least those who were not loyal to the Yankees) in the early 1950's could be read in part by whether that individual was a Dodgers' or a Giants' fan, then American identity more fully in that same period was shaped by its opposition to the Soviet Union[. . .] In Underworld, DeLillo explores a massive irony: if America remembers October 3, 1951, it is for the Thomson home run and not its significance in Cold War history[. . .] Both the United States-Russia and the Dodgers-Giants oppositions mean something very different now than in 1951. Old Loyalties and beliefs are rendered archaic. Just as the Dodgers and the Giants left New York to tap into the lucrative West Coast market, so too has the relation between America and Russia been rewritten by market forces. (259)

The market forces that restructure the relationship between Russia and America, and that bring the Dodgers, the Giants, Nick, Matt, and Klara out of New York and into the "lucrative" West, also transform their fierce loyalties into sentimental memories. This is another pattern that repeats throughout the novel. As characters move from one spatialized ontology to another, the values and codes of conduct that functioned in the first social space can not be transferred to the second. Immediately after the crazed excitement of the crowd scene at the Polo Grounds in 1951, Underworld moves directly to the stark isolation of the Arizona desert in 1992. On consecutive pages and in consecutive scenes, DeLillo juxtaposes the "density" of one massive communal event in New York with the stark solitude of a journey through a typically Western wasteland.

While every fan at the Polo Grounds seems to cherish their presence at the game, the fact "that they were there when it happened" (60), Nick, who long ago cut himself free from such complicated affiliations, observes that his trip across the desert is so lonely that he himself is "barely there" to witness it (63). Since moving West, Nick has separated himself from the ties of his previous life. He has become a "country of one," a perfectly decentred postmodern subject, completely unfettered by his old connections to place (275). As a joke, he likes to tell people that he lives "a quiet life in an unassuming house in a suburb of Phoenix. Like someone in the Witness Protection Program" (66).

Again, as was the case with Morrison and Pynchon, DeLillo provides us with many descriptions of place that illustrate the transition from a First to a Secondspace reading of regionalism. In this novel, the defining power of environmental determinism is reversed. Rather than having their lives shaped by their landscapes, most of DeLillo's characters live in social spaces that have been created by conquering any naturalistic conception of place. Nick offers his first description of Phoenix while surveying the city from the airconditioned comfort of his office. As was the case at the baseball game, he is so completely separated from the world outside his window that he can only guess at the 'real' temperature while he ponders the post-industrial sprawl of his environment:

From the shimmering bronze tower where I worked I used to gaze at the umver hills and ridges that defined the northeast view. Maybe it was a hundred and eight degrees out on the street. Maybe it was a hundred and ten, a hundred and twelve, and I looked out past the miscellaneous miles of squat box structures where you took your hearing aid to be fixed or shopped for pool supplies, the self-replicating

stretch I travelled every day, and I told myself how much I liked this place with its downtown hush and its office towers separated by open space and its parks with jogging trails and its fairy ring of hills and its residential streets of oleanders and palms and tree trunks limed white - white against the sun (25-86).

In this passage, and throughout Underworld, nature is absorbed into Secondspace. All the "organic" elements of Nick's self replicating landscape - - the features he likes so much - - are man-made. The parks, the jogging trails, the swimming pools and even the trees - - the oleanders and palms that survive only because they have been limed white "against the sun" - - are all Secondspace projections. Nothing in Nick's field of vision (except for the umver hills) is a naturalistic "product" of the environment. He alternately marvels at both the severity of the climate and the powerful geographical imagination that has been able to conquer it. The natural brutality of the desert - - perhaps the best example of purely materialist Firstspace reality still left in American geography - - is seen as a kind of foil for the other, utterly unnatural, postmodern spaces we encounter in the novel. In one of her early reflections on the role of the desert in the American imagination, Klara observes that "[i]t's so old and strong. I think it makes us feel, makes us as a culture, any technological culture, we feel we mustn't be overwhelmed by it.[. . .] So we use this place to test our weapons. It's only logical of course. And it enables us to show our mastery" (71).

In DeLillo's fiction, postmodern regions are created when technology fully masters nature and creates a new kind of social space in which none of the traditional nineteenth-century conceptions of place can function. As a missile guidance systems technician,

Nick's brother Matt also spends his adult life moving through a range of postmodern underworlds that exist beneath or beside the natural appearance of a stable American reality. Matt works in a top-secret military installation called the "Pocket" (401). Another good example of a Lefebvrian "transparent" social space, the Pocket is an imaginary reality located in "an area that is white on your map" (404). As Matt describes it,

The pocket was one of those nice tight societies that replaces the world. It was the world made personal and consistently interesting because it was what you did, and others like you, and it was self-enclosed and self-referring and you did it all together in a place and a language that were inaccessible to others (412).

Though he claims to like the "nice" tightness of the Pocket, Matt is actually troubled by the inaccessibility and the untranslatable self-referentiality of his social space. Unlike Nick, who has adapted to his Secondspace surroundings more successfully, Matt longs to reconnect somehow with a stable nineteenth-century version of nature. In a deranged effort to achieve such a union, he invites his girlfriend Janet to accompany him on a desert camping trip that takes them into the middle of a restricted air force test range. While Matt loves the open desert because it is so unlike the Pocket, Janet feels uncomfortable in such a setting. We are told that she resents the desert in "some obscure personal way" because it is "too big, too empty" and has "the audacity to be real" (449). Of course, the "audacious reality" is precisely what Matt appreciates about the landscape. He sees the desert as "a challenge to his lifelong citiness," and "a realization of some half-dreamed vision, the otherness of the West, the strange great thing that was all mixed in with nation and spaciousness, with bravery and history and who you are and what you

believe and what movies you saw growing up" (450).

Matt's interpretations of the desert fluctuate between paranoid terror and awe-struck appreciation. Although he reflects on it often, he lacks the vocabulary to explain his government's ability to completely reshape the natural environment. As he contemplates the "remote Sonoran waste," Matt repeats, almost verbatim, Soja's description of a Secondspace epistemology. He sees the desert as an empty canvas written upon by the pure force of the human imagination, another real-world landscape created by a mental projection. For Matt, the test range is "a kind of neural process remapped in the world, a hollow sort of craving lifted out of the brain cell, or wherever, and painted over with words and sky and diamondback desert" (451).

Like his brother, Matt has also toured through the most postmodern regions of the country. As a master of the technology that drives the arms race, his career has brought him into several different social spaces that could not have existed before the Cold War. He has access to those postmodern places that prop up what Baudrillard would see as the realistic illusion of the rest of America. Beyond the theme parks, the suburbs, and the shopping malls - - the typically unreal places that extend across normal American experience - - Matt is haunted by his knowledge of an entirely different spatial ontology. He knows there is a whole other military universe that exists silently, but simultaneously alongside a "normal" American reality. During their camping trip on the missile range, he tries to describe some of these places to Janet:

He told her about the mountains hollowed out in New Mexico. These were storage sites for nuclear weapons. He told her about the gouged mountain in Colorado

where huge wall screens could display the flight track of a missile launched from a base in Siberia. He knew a few things about Obyekt, the Installation, built by slave labour in a remote part of the U.S.S.R, and he told her about it - a center for bomb design. (458)

Once again, we see DeLillo stressing the denaturalized qualities of America's postmodern landscape. The missiles sites and command centres Matt has visited have been "hollowed" or "gouged" directly out of mountains. These places represent the ultimate triumph of a Secondspace epistemology over the American geographical imagination. Only the most powerful subjectivity could imagine such social spaces and then be able to project them onto or, in this case, into a Firstspace topography. It is important to realize that although the Pocket, the mountain command centres and the desert test ranges are all completely outside of America's standard experience of its own reality, they do actually exist. In a way that Howells could never have imagined, these places are real; they produce their own specific spatialized ontologies. When DeLillo's characters try to orient themselves within these real-and-imagined spatial conditions, they are feeling their way toward a postmodern regionalism. They are attempting to outline a relationship between their own decentred subjectivities and the real but denaturalized territories they live in.

If Matt examines the postmodern geography created by late twentieth-century warfare, then Nick explores a similar kind of social space produced by late twentieth century waste management. In Underworld, war and waste are never far from each other. They share and produce a common landscape, and, in a cyclical relationship, they depend

on each other. Just as war produces waste - - Klara's B-52's and Victor Maltsev's "museum of misshappens," for example - - America's battle to control the waste of its mass-culture is a type of warfare. The parallels between Matt's military sites and Nick's waste management facilities are obvious. DeLillo's detailed descriptions of massive landfills force his readers to re-examine their understanding of the American landscape. Nick's company has "built pyramids of waste above and below the earth" (106). He has "travelled to the coastal lowlands of Texas and watched men in moon suits bury drums of dangerous waste in subterranean salt beds many millions of years old, dried-out remnants of a Mesozoic ocean" (88). He has driven through "a city of high-rise garbage," down the "towering rows" of "refuse heaped many stories high" (104). In these Secondspace geographies, these unreal realities, all Nick can do is wonder about the innate human need and/or capacity to create such a landscape. Exactly as Matt saw the test range as "a neural process," or "a craving lifted out of the brain cell," Nick feels the same way when he ponders an entire city made of garbage. "Why," he asks, "did I think I was born with this experience in my brain" (104). It is fitting that, during one of his many visits to LA, Nick pays homage to the Watts Towers - - the beautiful spires of garbage that were lovingly hand crafted by Simon Rodia between 1921 and 1955. Some of these towers stand over a hundred feet tall, and as Nick contemplates the size and scope of such a project, he sees Watts as a kind of iconic monument to every anonymous American life lived out in a Californian "bungalow slum" (276). The Watts Towers, the landfills, the underground dump sites, the nuclear waste facilities, the Russian "Polygon," the trailer park in Bakersfield, the suburban home of the Demings in the 1950s: all of these are stops on

DeLillo's tour of postmodern geography.

It should not be surprising that the final stage of this journey through America's postmodern landscape moves almost entirely out of a materialist conception of physical reality and into the realm of cyberspace. The last three pages of the novel - - a mini-section entitled "Keystroke 2" - - describe Sister Edgar's after-death experience on the world-wide web. Finally free of the brute physicality that defined her life of religious service in the Bronx, Edgar is released into the infinite range of random connections that are possible on the web. In cyberspace she leaves behind the corporeal restrictions that limited her during her lifetime. Her "old body," the sensations of her "routine pain," and even the simple coarseness of "all that steam ironed fabric" disappear in this, the most contemporary example of a Secondspace place that exists without any connection to material geography (824). Apparently adrift in an electronic ether, Edgar observes that "[t]here is no space or time out here, or in here, or wherever she is" and that the web - - standing in for some technological equivalent to heaven - - may actually be the closest she will ever come to a "world without end" (825).

Many critics have commented on DeLillo's decision to use this "setting" for the conclusion of the novel, but I think Nel's reading is the most sophisticated.²⁵ He argues that through this description of Sister Edgar's afterlife in cyberspace, DeLillo reveals a desire to maintain some connection between an idealized conception of space and a materialist perception of reality. Underworld, Nel suggests, ends somewhere between these two extremes, between a completely materialist Firstspace and a completely idealized Secondspace. "Although cyberspace can be seen as a new way of thinking about

the world," he argues, "in certain ways it expresses a logical extension of the everyday distortions created by the twentieth century mass-media" (743). The random associations that rule the web are not unusual in contemporary culture. If we engage in any way with the mass media, or if we travel through a postmodern geography, these strange, non-causal connections confront us everywhere. DeLillo's work tries to represent this social environment. His descriptions of cyberspace, like his descriptions of all the other unreal places we have already discussed are still, at some level, mimetic. As Nel argues, "a landscape of incongruous juxtapositions or even the non-sequiturs of media-produced realities may not be in and of themselves hyperreal or depthless" (743). He claims that DeLillo simply "hits the pause" on the world that surrounds us, that he "freezes the frame, not to efface the material world but to challenge us to reconnect to it" (744).

Similarly, Begley suggests that "[t]he world wide web also brings us back to ground zero," back to a theoretical consideration of the relationship between real and imagined spaces (502). While on the web, Sister Edgar visits the homepage of the H-Bomb and contemplates the apocalyptic potential of a world that has become completely dematerialized. As she notes, there is "[n]o physical contact" between the subjects and surfers on the internet, nor between the H-bomb and its victims (826). Edgar is fearful of the power these imagined networks possess, worried about the way that "intersecting systems help pull us apart, leaving us vague, drained, docile, soft in our inner discourse, willing to be shaped, to be overwhelmed" (826). Cut off from any physical index, any Firstspace connection to reality, Edgar - - like Nick, who, at the end of the novel, longs for the days when he "walked real streets" and was "dumb-muscled and angry and real" - -

fears the consequences of such a complete separation from the material world (810). Like Oedipa and Violet, who each interrogated an imagined postmodern geography with their own questions, -"Shall I project a world?" and "What's the world for if you can't make it up the way you want it?" - Sister Edgar investigates the imaginary landscape of the web. She asks, "Is cyberspace a thing within the world or is it the other way around? Which contains the other, and how can you tell?" (826).

In the end, DeLillo ultimately refuses to take the final step into the purest form of American Abstraction. Though Underworld has travelled across the country and around the world in search of imaginary places and Secondspace projections, its author is unwilling to give up on his physical connection to place. In an interesting inversion of postmodern "writerly" self-consciousness, the last paragraph of Underworld actively rematerializes the process of the novel's creation. Readers are brought back to the author's desk in front of his computer screen; back to the materialist "argument of things to be seen and eaten, the apple core going sepia in the lunch tray, and the dense measures of experience in a random glance [. . .] the chipped rim of the mug that holds your yellow pencils, skewed all crazy, and the plied lives of the simplest surface" (827). DeLillo's massive novel concludes by retreading the idealist/materialist debate, by trying, once again, to imagine a "word on the screen becoming a thing in the world" (827). The word in this case is "Peace" and, for DeLillo, the concept has no value in the dematerialized realm of cyberspace unless it is first made "real" in the "raw sprawl of the city," in the social space that dominates the American landscape (827).

Conclusion

As we have seen, the relationship between subjectivity and geography informs almost every element of The Crying of lot 49, Jazz, and Underworld. Each of these novels contains a representation of American social space that challenges our traditional definitions of regionalist literature. Instead of taking place in rural locales, these stories are situated in massive urban centres. Instead of depending on a Howellsian definition of realism, their aesthetic commitments are influenced by postmodernism. Instead of supporting the teachings of environmental determinism, they deny them at every opportunity. By representing places that are the unique products of contemporary American culture, Pynchon, Morrison, and DeLillo drag regionalist discourse out of the nineteenth century and re-imagine it for a new kind of social space. All three authors and all three novels demonstrate that, although literary critics may be working with a definition of regionalism that is hopelessly old-fashioned, there is nothing outdated about the regionalist concerns of contemporary writers. Individuals who live in postindustrial, postmodern, postmetropolises must still orient their subjectivities within the horizons of these new social spaces. Rather than simply defining any single geography at any particular moment in time, scholars must understand that today's regionalist literature examines an ongoing process of spatial orientation.

I have demonstrated that, in its American context, this process of spatial orientation has been directed by an abstracted or idealistic Secondspace interpretation of geography. Oedipa, Violet, and Nick all eventually realize that their environments are dominated by imagined projections of social space rather than natural topographies. All

three characters learn to interpret American geography as an unstable discursive terrain; all three eventually project their own imagined places on to the landscape. In the next section, as we shift our consideration to Canadian postmodern regionalism, we will see how unique this American consideration of space actually is.

Notes for Section II

1. This quote is excerpted from Fisher's discussion of the American "ghost town" in Still the New World. (44)

2. In The Production of Space, the illusion of transparency is described in the following way:

Here space appears as luminous, as intelligible, as giving action free rein. What happens in space lends a miraculous quality to thought, which become incarnate by means of a *design* (in both senses of the word). The design serves as a mediator itself of great fidelity - between mental activity (invention) and social activity (realization); and it is deployed in space. The illusion of transparency goes hand in hand with a view of space as innocent, as free of traps or secret places. Anything hidden or dissimulated - and hence dangerous - is antagonistic to transparency, under whose reign everything can be taken in by a single glance from that mental eye which illuminates whatever it contemplates.

Comprehension is thus supposed, without meeting any insurmountable obstacles, to conduct what is perceived, i.e. its object, from the shadows into the light; it is supposed to effect this displacement of the object either by piercing it with a ray or converting it, after certain precautions have been taken, from a murky to a luminous state. Hence a rough coincidence is assumed to exist between social space on the one hand and mental space - the (topological) space of thoughts and utterances - on the other. By what path, and by means of what magic, is this thought to come about? The presumption is that an encrypted reality becomes readily decipherable thanks to the intervention first of speech and then of writing. It is said, and believed, that this decipherment is effected solely through transposition and through the illumination that such a strict topological change brings about. (28)

3. Soja's description of Secondspace is related, but more directly articulated:

Secondspace is the interpretive locale of the creative artist and artful architect, visually or literally re-presenting the world in the image of their subjective imaginaries; the utopian urbanist seeking social and spatial justice through the application of better ideas, good intentions, and improved social learning; the philosophical geographer contemplating the world through the visionary power of scientific epistemologies or the Kantian envisioning of geography as a way of thinking or the more imaginative "poetics" of space; the social semiologist reconstituting Secondspace as "Symbolic" space, a world of rationally interpretable signification; the design theorist seeking to capture the meanings of spatial form in abstract mental concepts. . . . The more advanced and exogenous

approaches to Secondspace derive either directly from idealist philosophies (e.g. Hegelianism) or from what might be called the idealization of epistemology, its confident representation as a masterful and complete ordering of reality. (TS 79-80)

4. Soja devotes the entire fifth chapter of Postmodern Geographies to a discussion of "spatialized ontology." In "Reassertions: Towards a Spatialized Ontology" he traces the contributions of existential and phenomenological philosophy toward a theory of "the spatiality of being." Combining the insights of Buber, Sartre, Husserl and Heidegger, he observes:

To be human is not only to create distances but to attempt to cross them, to transform primal distance through intentionality, emotion, involvement, attachment. Human spatiality is thus more than the product of our capacity to separate ourselves from the world, from a pristine Nature, to contemplate its distant plenitude and our separateness. In what may be the most basic dialectic in human existence, the primal setting at a distance is meaningless (one of existentialism's most important concepts) without its negation: the creation of meaning through relations with the world. . . . Subjectivity and objectivity thus reconnect in a dialectical tension that gives place to being, that produces a milieu, a humanized second-nature (133).

5. Beyond Marx, Nash and Müller, see Spann, Barret, Tuveson and Steigerwald for more on the influence of idealism in American thought.

6. For more on the history of American utopianism, see Mumford, Peyser, Knapp, Berlant, Khouri, Fogarty or Fellman.

7. This quote is taken from the official Disney Website for Celebration, Florida - (<http://www.celebrationfl.com>). The authors of the page claim that Celebration "take(s) the best ideas from the most successful towns of yesterday and the technology of the new millennium, and synthesize(s) them into a close-knit community that meets the needs of today's families." The end result of years of "research, study, discovery and enlightenment," Celebration is "one of the most innovative communities of the 20th century," a place where "memories of a lifetime are made." Accessed 9 June, 2002.

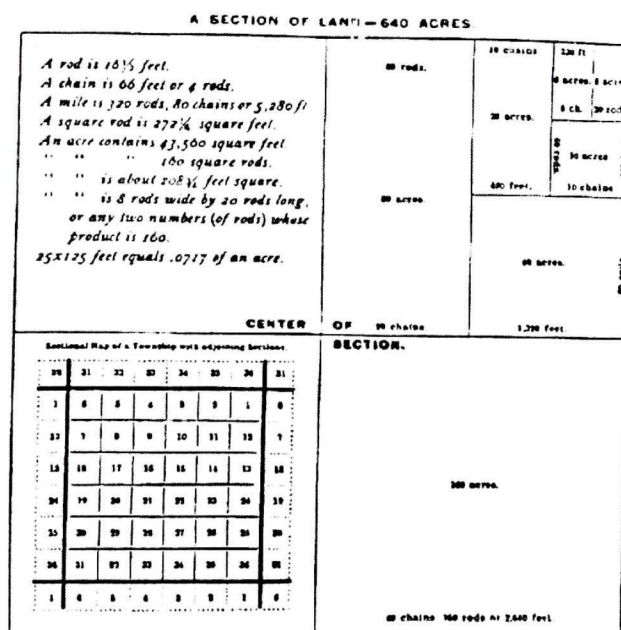
For more on Celebration as an idealized American Space, see Ross and Frantz.

8. The transformations that have occurred in Garreau's work provide an instructive illustration of the postmetropolis's increasing influence in contemporary American geography. In 1981, Garreau published The Nine Nations of North America, a text that sought to divide the continent into nine distinct regional cultures, nine 'nations' occupying the same land mass. Garreau travelled across Canada and the United States

"thinking in regionalist terms" and crafted nine different maps that purported to represent the unique social spaces of the continent (9). Some of Garreau's regionalisms corresponded more-or-less exactly with traditional American divisions - - he effectively retraced the borders of "New England," "Dixie" and "Quebec" for example - - but he also discovered other, more originally conceived regions - - such as his Westcoast "Ecotopia," his Southwestern "MexAmerica" and his "Empty Quarter" extending across the Great Plains and the Prairie provinces. As its central argument the book claims that, despite the homogenizing effects of "Federal" influence, contemporary North Americans continue to live in places that are uniquely differentiated.

Ten years later, however, in 1991, Garreau's interpretation of American geography underwent a significant revision. Edge City focussed on the postmetropolis as an American urban space that was common to every one of his previously established regions. In his introduction, Garreau reveals that Edge City was the unintended result of his research for Nine Nations. In 1981, he had set out looking for American regions that were clearly differentiated, but on his travels he had discovered that the replicated, undifferentiated space of the postmetropolis was dominant everywhere in America. In a phrase that has since become a mantra for the LA School urban theorists, Garreau observed that "every city that is growing in America is growing like Los Angeles" (12).

9. Jefferson's eighteenth-century plan for the Land Ordinance



(Plan to divide 640 acres. Leonardo Benevolo. History of Modern Architecture, 2 Vols. London: Routledge, 1971. 1:199)

....and these before and after aerial photographs of Levittown, New York in 1946

provide two good examples of American Secondspace epistemology at work. Both are idealized projections that can transform any topography into an abstracted social space.



(Before - - empty potato fields)



(After - Standardized Housing Development.
Both photographs from the Hales collection)

Herbert Gans's The Levittowners: Ways of Life and Politics in a New Suburban Community provides the classic defence of a postwar Levittown lifestyle. For a more critical evaluation, see Thomas Scott's The United States of Suburbia or Barbara Kelly's Expanding the American Dream: Building and Rebuilding Levittown. Peter Bacon Hales's Documents of an Ideal American Suburb is a website that lovingly collects 50's era photographs of Levittown and presents them as a cultural artefacts (<http://tigger.uic.edu/~pbhales/Levittown.html>). Though Hales is nostalgically appreciative of the innocence Levittown represents in American memory, he also sees the rationalist economic structure that created and maintained such a space. He argues,

From the first, Levittown appeared as much a creation of myth as one made of wood and plaster. Levitt was a master publicist, and he understood that to make his community a success, he needed to present it as a new form of ideal

American life, one that combined the idealized middle-class life of the prewar suburban communities, with the democratized life of younger, mainly urban-raised GIs and their families. (Accessed 2 July, 2002)

10. Obviously the title for this section borrows from Robert Venturi's 1972 landmark text Learning from Las Vegas. In this large-format collage of texts, images, photographs and quickly- sketched doodles, Venturi and his colleagues challenged the "heroic and original" pretensions of modernist architecture and instead championed the "ugly and ordinary" elements of the vernacular man-made commercial landscape (70). Though he is not normally considered a member of the LA School, Venturi was one of the first to bring serious scholarly attention back to the 'degraded' social spaces of America's mass culture.

11. The core arguments of both the Chicago and LA Schools are collected in two texts that share the same title. The City (1925) by Robert Park, Ernest Burgess and Roderick McKenzie is the definitive work of Chicago School sociology, while The City: Los Angeles and Urban theory at the End of the Twentieth Century, edited by Soja and Scott, collects some of the key figures in the LA School (among them Davis, Dear, Weinstein and Jencks.) Recently, Michael Dear has worked to outline the differences between these two branches of twentieth century urban theory. For a detailed investigation into the relationship between the Chicago School and the LA School, see his From Chicago to LA: Making Sense of Urban Theory.

12. As David Seed observes, "the main source of irony in *Lot 49* is that it constantly heads for a revelation which never comes" (131). For the best discussions of the novel as a reverse-detective novel see Tanner and Mendelson.

13. Couturier believes that Pynchon represents the suburb as an "intertextual place" (16). Similar to Soja's descriptions of a Secondspace geography, he argues that San Narciso is a fictional creation rather than a materialist outcome:

San Narciso is not a "real" city born of people's need to find shelter, warmth, happiness together, but a "group of concepts" The city is not real; it is textual: everything has been meticulously planned, projected in advance. The city existed on paper before it found its way onto an actual tract of land and eventually onto a map of California (15)

14. Seed interprets Lot 49's representation of Californian space by reading the novel through the lens of Pynchon's "A Journey into the Mind of Watts." In this essay which Pynchon wrote for the New York Times Magazine in 1966, the author visits the scene of the 1965 Watts race riots. Pynchon observes that although the stark suburban wasteland of Watts seems so "out in the open" and "real," it is actually a "country which lies psychologically uncounted miles further than most whites seem at present willing to

travel" (78). Seed sees a similar tension between the real and the psychological dimensions of Pynchon's fictional suburb. He claims that, "[i]n Oedipa, Pynchon enacts the self's difficulties in ordering its contemporary environment. Much of the novel's early humour grows out of the environment's unnerving tendency to startle her, and the novel's later tone becomes more sombre as Oedipa's efforts to order her experiences take their physical toll" (135).

15. Hurm's text combines a sophisticated literary interpretation of Lot 49 with a statistically detailed portrait of suburban California as it existed in the 1960's. He argues:

The contemporary landscape which *The Crying of Lot 49* presents is the cityspace of postindustrial capitalism. Pierce Inverarity is heir to Jay Gould (CL, p. 3), the notorious monopolist and exploiter in the early days of industrial capitalism, but his multiple identities (CL, p. 6) signify the trend toward deindividualized corporate power. The images of grids, webs, and tapestries time and again evoke this new quality of control. Even the counterorganizations of the Tristero are linked to its web as all access routes to them also lead to Inverarity's holdings. For Thomas Pynchon, spatial form directly express cultural and political conditions. . . . The power grid of big business thus dominates San Narciso and dictates the fate of consumer society. In its title, *The Crying of Lot 49* hints at the sale of California (and implicitly of the West, the mythic territory of freedom and prosperity) to the highest bidder among real estate speculators. by the 1960's, the grid of capitalism extends beyond a single city or region. (311)

For more on this issue of Lot 49's position in American history and geography, see Jarvis's discussion of the novel in Postmodern Cartographies.

16. Because of Postmodernist Fiction's wide readership, McHale's interpretation of Lot 49 is one of the most influential in Pynchon criticism. He argues that the novel is "classically modernist in its form" and that "it remains rigorously within this mode" (23). According to McHale, the plot of Lot 49 clearly follows a modernist trajectory because

the reader has no opportunity to view events from outside Oedipa's consciousness, no way to check on her reliability as medium for this story; the reader is bounded by the limits of her mind. But just how limited is Oedipa's consciousness? How reliable a witness is she? There are disconcerting indications from the outset that Oedipa fears her own dangerous capacity for solipsism, her tendency to believe that the external world has been fabricated by her own mind. . . . Is Oedipa projecting the Tristero? Is the postal conspiracy only a solipsistic delusion with no reality in the world outside her mind? Nothing that we know about either Oedipa or the Tristero rules out this possibility. (23)

17. From a spatial point of the view, the most striking difference between the two novels

is the type and period of American urbanism each represents. The suburban setting in Pynchon's novel is roughly contemporary with its date of publication (1966), while Morrison's 1992 novel represents metropolitan New York as it existed seventy years earlier in the 1920's.

18. In his writing Ellison often returned to spatial metaphors to describe the social experiences of African Americans. In "Harlem is Nowhere," he observes, "(t)he phrase 'I'm nowhere' expresses the feeling borne in upon many Negroes that they have no stable, recognized place in society. One's identity drifts in a capricious reality in which even the most commonly held assumptions are questionable. One "is" literally, but one is nowhere" (300).

19. For more on the representation of migration in the novel see Atlas, Mitchell, Mayer, Peterson and Dixon. Page's work also stresses this connection between identity and geographical imagination:

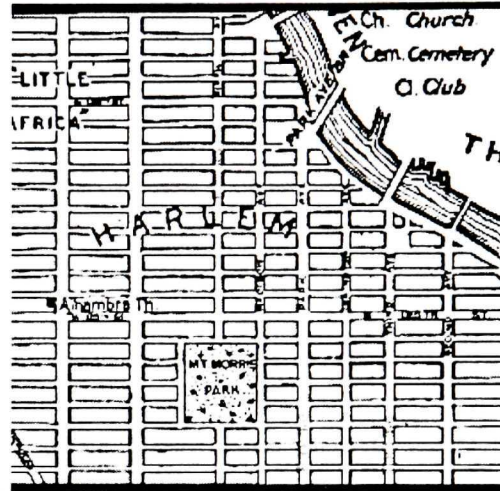
Like most of Morrison's characters, those in Jazz are bound to the track of northern, urban, African-American life. Lured from their rural southern roots by the promise of economic opportunity and racial liberation, they are hooked by the City's music and throbbing energy. But, like many Morrison characters, their identities are still linked to the roots in the rural South, which, no matter how devastating, remained the psychological home for migrating blacks (160).

20. Edward Spann's essay, "The Greatest Grid: the New York Plan of 1811," provides a good historical discussion of the economic and cultural forces that produced New York's famous rationalized streetscape. He writes:

The decades surrounding the birth of the New York Plan of 1811 constitute both an end and a beginning of urban planning in the United States. The period brought a significant shift away from earlier forms of urban design, imbued with socio-political and aesthetic concerns, to simpler and more utilitarian plans intended to facilitate the rapid urban development which occurred during the nineteenth century. In the first decades of this new century, the simple gridiron pattern of straight streets and rectangular blocks established itself as the primary basis for American city form, leaving later generations of planners to cope with its real and presumed defects. Nowhere was the triumph of the grid so decisive as in America's greatest city. In its positive and especially negative influence, the New York Grid was to be a landmark in the history of American city planning. (11)

21. The definition of Alice's social space begins on a national scale (North v. South) before descending quickly to the state (Illinois), the city (Springfield, Mass) and

eventually the street level of New York (Eleventh avenue, Third Avenue, Park Avenue, Fifth Avenue, 110th street). In this 1920's map of Manhattan, we can see the early development of Harlem as a ghettoized social space. Though New York's street plan suggests a rationalized openness, in actual fact, Alice's entire universe is rigidly contained.



Detail of Harlem. Note how the eastern border of Alice's social space contracts, moving westward from Third, to Park, to Fifth Avenue.

Upper Manhattan - Automobile Blue Book 1920 edition.
Courtesy of Perry-Castaneda Library Map Collection,
University of Texas at Austin.

22. In his overwhelmingly positive review of Jazz, Henry Louis Gates Jr. observes that "Morrison has found a way, paradoxically, to create an ensemble of *improvised* sound out of a *composed* music" (55). Speaking of the novel's indeterminate narrator, he observes that, although the voice "is neither male nor female; neither young nor old; neither rich nor poor . . . it is *alive*" (54). Gates believes that Morrison's narrator revels in the role of a Jazz-like improviser, fading in and out of the story and always returning to revise or retell the same event with a different set of details (55).

23. Begley claims that "with its kaleidoscopic perspective on post-World War II America" DeLillo's novel "might well have been called Underworlds;" it is "a plural exploration" of American culture, geography and history (479).

24. For two different interpretations on the relationship between mimetic realism and postmodernism in Underworld compare Cowart and Nel. Cowart claims that "(h)owever persuasively detailed its picture of America from 1951 to the late 1990's . . . one must not take simple mimesis as the animating principle in *Underworld*" (182). On the other hand, Nel argues that Underworld's aesthetic is purposely located directly between "a modernist 'real'" and a "'depthless postmodern;'" the novel "tries to achieve a balance between a 'modernist' sense of order, with a fixed centre (the baseball, Nick's accidental homicide), and a 'postmodern' world in which the center is mobile" (742).

25. See for example Helyer, Parrish and Carmichael.

Section III

The Landscape's 'Permanent Imminence':

Postmodern Regionalism in Canada

Chapter Seven

7.1 Keeping it Regionally Real

Canada is as timeless as winter, a nightmarish dream of what might and cannot ever be. It is so much a space culture it cannot afford a history; silence is the language of space.

- Robert Kroetsch ¹

Just as spatial theory and cultural geography can provide us with an improved understanding of regionalism and postmodernism in their American literary contexts, they can also be used to articulate the even closer association we see between the two discourses in Canadian literature. The arguments we have adapted from Soja and Lefebvre provide us with an improved conceptual apparatus and a more advanced critical vocabulary with which to interrogate the socio-spatial assumptions that underlie Canadian postmodernism. As we will see, this is a scholarly task long-overdue in Canadian criticism. More than any other nation, Canada's understanding of its postmodernist fiction is directly linked to its understanding of regionalism. As Kroetsch describes it, Canada is a "space culture," a country dominated by its timeless winter landscapes, a place where the deterministic force of geography cannot be ignored. For the last three decades, regionalist authors have been Canada's leading postmodern writers and, for almost the same amount of time, the national criticism has been dominated by what can only be called a regionalist reading of postmodern theory. Because they have developed along such a strangely interwoven path, Canadian postmodernism and Canadian

regionalism are practically interdependent today: without the unique brand of regionalism we find in Canada, there would be no Canadian postmodernism, or at least not the type of postmodernism that commentators have constructed up to this point.

Such a longstanding, close affiliation between regionalism and postmodernism has produced interesting results in Canadian literature. The combination of the two discourses creates a postmodern-regionalism that is almost diametrically opposed to the American model studied in the previous section. Where American writers adapted their regionalist tradition in order to engage with a new, more postmodern, concept of "imagined" social space, Canadian literature evolved in the opposite way: its writers adapted their understanding of postmodernism to correspond with their pre-existing regionalist concerns. In other words, if American literature remade regionalism to better represent the ontological uncertainty of its postmodern landscapes, Canadian literature remade postmodernism to better represent the marginalized, but still realistic, social space of its regions.

Unlike its American counterpart, Canadian postmodern-regionalism has been influenced by Lefebvre's illusion of spatial opacity and directed by what Soja describes as a Firstspace epistemology.² Although contemporary Canadian social space - - the real cultural geography in which the majority of Canadians actually live - - has followed a pattern of post-war development very similar to the American model, many of the canonical works of Canadian postmodernism portray the country in naturalistic or realistic terms. In what might be construed as a collective act of cultural denial, Canada's most celebrated postmodern writers have rejected Canada's dominant social space.

Instead of accurately portraying the country as one of the most highly suburbanized nations on earth, Canadian writers, editors, and critics have promoted a reading of Canadian geography that is still strongly influenced by a late-nineteenth-century realistic interpretation of social space. Though twenty-first century Canada has been produced by the same forces of post-industrial capitalism, mass-mediated culture, and mass-market consumerism that shaped twenty-first century America; and though the vast majority of Canadians actually live and work in US-style built environments - - in *Canadian* suburbs, *Canadian* office parks, and *Canadian* strip malls - - the country's postmodern literature rarely explores these kinds of places.³

In his recently publicized and very controversial critique of contemporary Canadian literature, When Words Deny the World, Steven Henighan examines this aesthetic rejection of the country's cultural geography. The final essay of his collection, "'They Can't Be About Things Here' : The Reshaping of The Canadian Novel," observes that most of the recent best-selling novels in Canadian literature - - texts such as Bonnie Burnard's A Good House, Mary Lawson's Crow Lake, Richard Wright's Clara Callan, Anne-Marie MacDonald's Fall on Your Knees and Margaret Atwood's Alias Grace - - take place *outside* of Canada's dominant urban centres. In Henighan's opinion, Canadian writers suffer from "an inability to pull our own society into focus" (207). Though the "real" Canada is dominated by an urban and suburban cultural geography, the "fictional" Canada put forth in these texts is not. "[T]he new Canada is being forged in our multi-racial, multi-ethnic, multi-linguistic cities," Henighan writes, "[b]ut where are these big, synthesizing cities' big synthesizing fictions?" (208). The man-made, "imagined"

landscapes that featured so prominently in American postmodernism have no similar presence in Canadian writing. Even while the most recent census reports that 80 percent of the Canadian population lives in an urban environment, and that more than 50 percent of Canadians live in only four metropolitan areas - - Toronto, Montreal, Vancouver, and the Calgary-Edmonton corridor - - Canadian postmodern literature continues to represent the country as a naturalized, still regionally realistic environment.⁴

It seems that no matter how completely imaginary the places they live in actually are, or how forcefully critics profess that Canadian writers are postmodern "par excellence," the majority of postmodern-regionalists working in Canada today have not come to the same ontological conclusions about space that we outlined in Pynchon, Morrison, and DeLillo's work (D'Haen and Bertens 5). With few notable exceptions - - one of which we will study in close detail - - Canadian postmodern writers have never been willing to fully abandon the spatial conventions of realistic representation and to, instead, conceptualize place as a completely dematerialized, imagined projection. In Canada, the same naturalistic reading of social space that has dominated the country's literature for a century seems to have survived the postmodern challenge to its validity, and come through that confrontation relatively unharmed. Rather than rejecting nineteenth-century realism as an old-fashioned, out-of-date interpretation of landscape no longer applicable to contemporary cultural geography, Canadian postmodern-regionalists have actually reveled in their capacity to play with the constituent components of their social space and to re-make them in new and original combinations.

Before we look at this phenomenon in closer detail, we should redefine the key

terms of the discussion. We recall that in Lefebvre's vocabulary, "the illusion of spatial opacity" represents a materialist alternative to the idealistic "illusion of spatial transparency." Interpreters who fall under the illusion of spatial opacity - - Lefebvre also calls it the realistic illusion - - focus their attention on the "naturalness" and "substantiality" of social space (29). They hold to "the mistaken belief that 'things' have more of an existence than the 'subject,'" and that an a priori physical universe exists before and beyond the imagined projections of its viewer (29). Under this illusion, "the landscape and the horizon which line the reader's path, are all taken as 'real'"(29). Closely aligned with environmental determinism and other forms of socio-scientific causality, the realistic illusion endorses the Darwinist belief that external physical conditions hold a transformative power over individual subjectivities. If, under the illusion of transparency, American postmodern-regionalists examined how their characters created (or made up) the places they inhabited, under the realistic illusion, Canadian postmodern- regionalists analyze how their characters are at least partially created by the spaces they live in.

In Soja's work, this realistic illusion is described as a "Firstspace epistemology." Interpreters guided by this set of assumptions focus their "primary attention" on "perceived space" or on "a material and materialized 'physical' spatiality that is directly comprehended in empirically measurable *configurations*" (74). According to Soja, most traditional geographic and regionalist studies focus on this physical aspect. Researchers, cartographers, and artists have used a "fundamentally positivist 'spatial science'" to interpret cultural geography (75). Because they are "captivated by such realistic illusions and impelled by the assumptions of scientism, Firstspace epistemologies become fixated

on the material form of things in space: with human spatiality seen primarily as outcome or product" (76). It is important to realize that different interpretations of social space can interact and challenge each other under a Firstspace epistemology. Disagreements over how to accurately represent the effects of environmental determinism are certainly possible, but the root cause of these effects is never in doubt. No matter how radically they differ on their readings of social space, adherents to a Firstspace epistemology agree that a stable material reality exists beyond their debate and that, through disciplined scientific investigation, this real world can be more perfectly understood. Unlike the Secondspace theorist - - who maintains that social space itself is a subjective projection which exists only as a 'thought thing' with no relation to a stable external reality - - adherents to a Firstspace epistemology never deny the material coherence of their cultural geographies.

The three novels we will be studying in this section examine the relationship between the Firstspace epistemology of Canadian postmodern-regionalism and the Secondspace epistemology of American postmodern-regionalism. In Wayne Johnston's The Colony of Unrequited Dreams, Guy Vanderhaeghe's The Englishman's Boy and Douglas Coupland's Girlfriend in a Coma, the empiricist tendencies of the Canadian geographic imagination are contrasted with the idealistic influences of its American counterpart. Each of these texts can be read as both a regionalist and a postmodernist novel, and, revealingly, each of them includes a significant border crossing scene in which the space-to-space comparison between the United States and Canada is foregrounded. Johnston's fictionalized retelling of Joey Smallwood's life follows its

protagonist from Newfoundland to New York and back again, while Vanderhaeghe and Coupland both use Los Angeles as the American locale that helps define their understanding of Canadian social space.

These three texts can, in turn, be divided into two groups that illustrate the spatial conventions of Canadian postmodern-regionalism. Johnston and Vanderhaeghe occupy the first group. Their novels can be read as perfect examples of the "historiographic metafiction" that, according to Linda Hutcheon, traditionally defines Canadian postmodernism (14). If the characters in Pynchon, Morrison and DeLillo's fiction, following an American Secondspace epistemology, understood their cultural geography as an imaginary mental projection, then the characters in Johnston and Vanderhaeghe's novels, following a Firstspace epistemology, portray Canadian regions as coherent natural realities. For the protagonists of The Colony of Unrequited Dreams and The Englishman's Boy, a deterministic vision of Canadian geography holds an undeniable influence over their actions. Rather than completely re-imagining their social spaces, these characters adapt their subjectivities to the non-negotiable conditions of their landscapes. Like most of the texts in the traditionally-conceived canon of Canadian postmodernism, Johnston and Vanderhaeghe's novels never actually reject a materialist conception of social space.

Coupland's novel, on the other hand, represents an entirely different version of Canadian postmodern-regionalism. Because it challenges (rather than endorses) a Firstspace epistemology, Girlfriend in a Coma illuminates the spatial conventions that are often taken for granted in Canadian writing. Though Coupland is a Canadian, and, in

regionalist terms, a "Western" Canadian, he has gained a significant global reputation as an *American* postmodernist. Unlike Johnston and Vanderhaeghe, and the whole cast of other Canadian historiographic metafictionists they can be associated with - - Kroetsch, Rudy Wiebe, Aritha Van Herk, and George Lowering, for example - - Coupland conceptualizes his fiction's relationship with Canadian geography in a different way. Because his suburban characters live in the same kind of imagined landscape we explored in Pynchon, Morrison, and DeLillo, Coupland's fiction seems *misplaced* in the Canadian postmodern canon. His exploration of the dominant, but least-represented, sector of Canada's cultural geography produces a Secondspace suburban narrative that shares almost nothing with the rest of Canadian postmodernism.

Inheriting Environmental Determinism in Canadian Literature

The naturalizing influence of environmental determinism has dominated so many different interpretations of the Canadian imagination that it is practically impossible now to discuss the country's history, its literature, or its national identity without also discussing its geography. From Voltaire's famous eighteenth-century observation, describing New France as an essentially worthless "quelques arpents de neige" (70), through to the boasting of the nineteenth-century *Canada First Movement* -- who saw the northern landscape as the ultimate source of the country's "healthy, hardy and virtuous dominant race" - - Canada's physical environment has been repetitively seen as a synecdoche for the country itself (Berger 6). As its national anthem and its official motto

suggest, Canada *is* its geography: "the true north strong and free," stretching "A Mari Usque ad Mare." Unlike the United States, which, from the very beginning of its colonial heritage, defined its relationship to landscape in utopian or idealistic terms, the most influential commentaries on the Canadian identity have always characterized Canada as the socio-scientific "outcome" or "result" of its geography.

The difference between these two interpretations of landscape - - both of them deeply ingrained in the history and culture of the two nations - - has received so much critical attention that it need not be rehearsed here in great detail.⁵ Examples of environmental determinism in Canadian social science and humanities research are numerous. In perhaps the two *most* influential texts in the entire history of Canadian Studies - - Harold Innis's The Fur Trade in Canada (1930) and Donald Creighton's The Commercial Empire of the St Lawrence (1937) - - both authors describe the relationship between Canadians and their physical environment in terms that closely parallel Soja's Firstspace epistemology. Creighton even goes so far as to anthropomorphize the Canadian landscape. His poetic descriptions of the Canadian Shield attribute a human agency to this stark topography, a natural 'will' to create the Canadian nation:

The Canadian Shield and the river system which seamed and which encircled it, were overwhelmingly the most important physical features of the area. They were the bone and the blood-tide of the northern economy. Rock and water complemented each other, fought each other's battles and forced each other's victories. The Shield itself, a huge lop-sided triangle, whose northern points were Labrador and the Arctic east of the Mackenzie, occupied over one-half of the land

area which was to become the Dominion of Canada. For the French and for their successors it was unescapable and domineering.[. . .] Settlement starved and shrivelled on the Shield; it offered a sullen inhospitality to those occupations which were traditional in western Europe and which had been transferred by the first immigrants to the Atlantic seaboard of North America. But from the beginning it exercised an *imperious domination* over the northerners, for though it was a harsh and exacting country, it offered lavish prizes to the restless, the ambitious and the daring. [. . .] It was upon these ancient rocks that the central emphasis of the Canadian system was placed at first, and the initial importance of the Shield is of deep significance in the history of the economy of the north.

(emphasis added 5)

As was the case with my earlier discussions of both Winthrop's "City Upon a Hill" metaphor and Turner's continentalist Frontier Thesis, I do not quote Creighton at such length because I wish to endorse his argument. Instead, quite the opposite is true. Exactly as Turner's once-dominant Frontier Thesis devolved into one of the most heavily-criticized arguments in American history, Creighton's "Laurentian Thesis" and Innis's "Staples Theory" have also fallen into contemporary disrepute. As Canadian history, geography, political science and economics became gradually less thematic, more theoretical and more self-consciously regionalized, a generation of scholars who followed in the wake of Creighton and Innis took notice of the Colonial / Anglo- Protestant / Central Canadian/ Masculine biases that informed almost every element of these arguments. For the purpose of this discussion, therefore, Canadian environmental

determinism, like its anthesis in America's Manifest Destiny, is significant not because it was or is accurate, but because it was (and, I argue, still is) so incredibly influential. It does not matter that the identities of the vast majority of urban Canadians have never been shaped by the unmediated power of the untamed Canadian landscape. What is remarkable is that, even in the face of the overwhelmingly urban character of its population, Canada's contemporary fiction retains its fascination for these rural landscapes. Even the simplest comparison of the Canadian census and the Canadian best-seller list reveals a startling truth: Canada is a nation of suburbanites that writes and reads itself as a nation of rural communities. Whether or not we should accept that Canada is the product of its geography or that, on the other hand, it exists in resistance to that geography, the fact remains that, in comparison to the United States, Canadians have always believed the natural environment plays some causal role in the creation of their country.

Nowhere is this influence more obvious than in Canadian literary criticism. Here, once again, we find that, although a range of contemporary scholars have tried to distance themselves from the environmentally determined arguments of their predecessors, the relationship between geography and the Canadian identity remains one of the recurrent questions in the country's literary debates. As editors Linda Warley, John Clement Ball, and Robe Viau point out in their introduction to a special issue of Studies in Canadian Literature, "[o]ne only has to think of some of the foundational studies of Canadian literature - Northrop Frye's The Bush Garden, John Moss's Patterns of Isolation in English Canadian Fiction, Laurence Ricou's Vertical Man/ Horizontal World, Dick Harrison's

Unnamed Country and Margaret Atwood's Survival - to understand that in the Canadian literary context space and place have always mattered" (1). To this list we can easily add several more titles: Edward McCourt's The Canadian West in Fiction, D.G. Jones's Butterfly on Rock, Arnold Davidson's Coyote Country, Janice Kulyk Keefer's Under Eastern Eyes, W.H. New's Articulating West, George Woodcock's "The Meeting of Time and Space: Regionalism in Canadian Literature," Eli Mandel's "Images of Prairie Man," Henry Kreisel's "The Prairie: A State of Mind," and many others. Practically all the major voices in Canadian criticism have felt compelled to make some kind of commentary on the geographic index of the Canadian imagination and, not surprisingly, the two texts that are most often cited on this subject (either positively or negatively) were written by two of the most influential figures in the history of Canadian writing.

Even when studied in complete isolation from the rest of the Canadian canon, Northrop Frye's The Bush Garden and Margaret Atwood's Survival contain enough spatial similes and metaphors to fill a substantial catalogue. From his famous observation that Canada was first imagined as an "obstacle [. . .] to be explored only in the hope of finding a passage through it," through to his Jonah and the whale parallel - - comparing an entry into Canada to "a matter of being silently swallowed by an alien continent" - - Frye's writing continually struggles to come to terms with what he sees as a uniquely Canadian relationship between land and language (217). His claim that the Canadian identity "is less perplexed by the question 'Who am I?' than by some such riddle as 'Where is here?'" has been quoted so often that it has become another kind of academic cliché (220). Like the once-dominant images and arguments of Innis, Creighton, Turner, or Winthrop, Frye's

iconic phrasing has followed a similar downward path into contemporary disrepute.

The same can be said for Atwood's "Thematic Guide To Canadian Literature." Dominant at the moment of its publication, Survival has become another favorite target for contemporary critics. Although Atwood's study is based on an admittedly impressionistic analysis of the 'national symbols' that define America, Britain, and Canada, her decision to look toward geography as a primary source for these symbols reveals a significant spatial index to her work. Though Atwood never explicitly claims that American and Canadian literature proceed from two distinctly different readings of social space - - two different spatial epistemologies - - she does suggest that the two countries conceive of geography in ways that are related to the real-and-imagined binarism put forth by Lefebvre and Soja. For Atwood, America's symbol is, once again, "the frontier," which she describes as "a place that is new," or "a line that is always expanding, taking in or conquering virgin territory (be it The West, the rest of the world, outer space, Poverty or The Regions of the Mind" (31). This description corresponds with Lefebvre's illusion of transparency or Soja's Secondspace epistemology. American space is "new" and "always expanding" to take in different "Regions of the Mind." On the other hand, Canadian 'Survival' or 'la Survivance,' is described in terms that are more realistic and always more physical. Atwood observes that a "preoccupation with one's survival is necessarily also a preoccupation with the obstacles to that survival. In earlier writers these obstacles are external - the land, the climate and so forth" (33). This position corresponds to Lefebvre's realistic illusion or Soja's Firstspace epistemology. Again, the environmentally determined argument repeats and, again, it is important to stress that this

geographic 'explanation' of national identity is significant *not* because it provides an accurate description of Canadian culture, but rather because it illustrates a consistent way of thinking *about* Canada which has dominated humanities scholarship for decades. Across the entire range of Canadian studies research, historians, sociologists, economists, political scientists, visual artists and literary theorists have all, at one time or another, returned to the brute physicality of the Canadian landscape to find a causal explanation for the Canadian identity.

David Staines's Beyond the Provinces: Literary Canada at Century's End examines this tendency in Canadian literary criticism. He accurately observes that, throughout the twentieth century, an awe-inspired appreciation for "[t]he immensity and power" of the Canadian landscape has developed into a somewhat "obsessive theme" (6). Staines measures the changing influence of geographic imagery at different points in the country's literary history and suggests that as Canada becomes *less* dependant on clichéd landscape metaphors, its literature develops into a *more* mature state. Just as Brown argued more than fifty years earlier, Staines also sees the passage through regionalism as an awkward adolescent stage, "a necessary prelude to the development of a distinctive literature" (6). As environmental determinism fades as an important theme in novels written by influential immigrant authors such as Ondaatje, Kogowa, and Mistry, Canadian literature improves. Tracing the relevance or non-relevance of Frye's "Where is here?" query, Staines establishes three distinct phases of Canadian writing. He argues that,

Literary responses to this question invite a division of twentieth-century Canadian literature into the early, middle, and late century. Early twentieth-century attempts

to prove the question led to a mid-century denial of its relevance. Now, at century's end, the palpable absence of the question underscores a belated movement of Canada's literary identity from a clinging to the seeming periphery to a confident claim that the centre, however indefinable, is none the less unmistakably both here and nowhere and everywhere. (8)

Though Staines wishes to move the Canadian critical community away from its dependance on environmental determinism and toward a more self-consciously decentred postmodern position, his use of Frye's theme as a structuring device is still somewhat problematic. It seems that even when geography is 'palpably absent' from a Canadian novel, this absence itself should be read as one of the remarkable features of the text. The exception re-establishes the rule: a novel like Ondaatje's In the Skin of a Lion, for example, which explores an urban immigrant experience of Canada, occupies a unique position in the canon because it is so obviously *not* a "typically Canadian" rural narrative influenced by a "typically Canadian" Firstspatial reading of nature. As Staines notes, no matter how forcefully critics wish to distance themselves from such old-fashioned formulations, "[t]he immensity of Canada seems to demand a literary home in a region" (15). Even more significantly - - especially for a critic trying to move away from environmental determinism - - Staines also argues that as a "*natural consequence*" of their geography, Canadian writers "had to be regional rather than universal" (emphasis added, 15).

Such simultaneous assertions and rejections of regionalism have become common in contemporary Canadian criticism. Though, like Staines, the majority of commentators

do try to distance Canadian literature from the socio-scientific pretensions of environmental determinism, it is still impossible to deny the continuing influence of such thinking over some of our most sophisticated critics and our most postmodern writers. Even in Linda Hutcheon's canon-defining text, The Canadian Postmodern, this muted but omni-present naturalistic bias persists.

As one of the country's leading critics, and one of the few Canadian scholars with a major international reputation, Hutcheon's reading of Canadian postmodernism has been almost universally accepted as the definitive critical statement on the genre. Published in 1988, The Canadian Postmodern selected the majority of the authors and the majority of novels that still form the core of our postmodern canon. More importantly, Hutcheon's text also established a highly specialized set of critical terms that are still used to articulate a "distinctly Canadian" version of postmodern writing (1). Interpreted today from a slightly more historicized point of view, The Canadian Postmodern should be read not only as a strong piece of literary criticism, but also as perhaps the country's "first glance" at its own postmodernism, the founding text which literally "set the course" for all subsequent studies. For our purposes, it is important to note that the spatial assumptions which supported Hutcheon's work fifteen years ago still continue to influence our understanding of Canadian postmodernism today.

Though it has never been adequately analyzed or evaluated, an inherently realistic (and therefore Firstspatial) reading of cultural geography informs Hutcheon's definition for Canadian postmodernism. Throughout her argument, a deterministic interpretation of Canadian regionalism easily intermingles with her portrayal of Canadian postmodernism

without triggering any apparent conflict. According to Hutcheon, the majority of Canada's postmodern writers, as well as the country's master postmodern theorist, are all committed regionalists of one form or another. Because the fiction she wishes to classify as postmodern is already undeniably regionalist, Hutcheon's most provocative critical descriptions of a 'distinctly Canadian' postmodernism are made using traditional regionalist rhetoric. In her introduction, she aligns the entire Canadian postmodern canon with a Firstspatial reading of regionalism. "The postmodern," she argues, "has [. . .] translated the existing Canadian emphasis on regionalism in literature into a concern for the different, the local, the particular - in opposition to the uniform, the universal, the centralized" (19).

In The Canadian Postmodern, regionalism is seen as both the origin and the future of Canadian postmodernism. Hutcheon claims that "[t]he particular and the occasional have always been important to Canadian literature's regionalist focus" (19). At her most dramatic, she openly declares that

Canadian novelists have refigured the *realist regional* into the *postmodern different*: the west of Aritha Van Herk; the Maritimes of David Adams Richards; the west coast of Jack Hodgins; the southern Ontario of Matt Cohen.[. . .] To render the particular concrete, to glory in a (defining) local ex-centricity - this is the Canadian postmodern. (no emphasis added, 19)

Every statement in this passage defines Canadian postmodernism in terms that are directly opposed to the American model. This seems like a strategic decision on Hutcheon's part. In order to construct a 'distinctly Canadian' version of postmodernism,

she purposely rejects the "extreme non-representational textual play and self-reference of [American] surfiction" (2). Instead, she argues that since "Canada has never really been in synch with the US in terms of cultural history [. . .] it is perhaps unwise to look for parallels" in their two definitions of postmodernism (3). Due to Canada's "regionalist impulses" and the "ex-centric forces of Québec, the Maritimes, [and] the west," the country has always rejected "the more American model of unification, be it geographic, demographic, or ideological"(4,19). According to this formulation, regionalism and postmodernism are sequentially, and perhaps even causally, related in Canada. One is the product of the other: Canada's regionalism leads directly into its postmodernism, or, more accurately, Canadian writers make good postmodernists because they are already such good regionalists.

Though there is nothing inherently good or bad, or correct or incorrect, about this definition, it is nevertheless remarkable that despite its many qualifications and conditional clauses, Hutcheon's text ultimately affirms rather than rejects the kind of realistic representation that American postmodern writers found impossible to accept. Clearly, the obstacles between realistic regionalism and postmodernism which were so difficult to overcome in American literature are not quite so insurmountable in their Canadian contexts. Hutcheon's own italics emphasize just how easily the transition between the two genres has been. By stressing that Canadians have "refigured the *realist regional* into the *postmodern different*," she claims that Canadian postmodernism, as she defines it, will have little in common with its American counterpart. As Gerald Graff's observation suggests, from its inception, American postmodernism has been outwardly

hostile to the very possibility of realistic representation. By definition, Graff argues, American postmodernism "begins at a point beyond realism" (311). Though many American critics see postmodernism as the antithesis of realism, Hutcheon has no problem suggesting that "[t]he realist novel is not dead in Canada" and that it is, in fact, "the defining base upon which postmodern challenges operate" (21). This is not simply a minor difference between two nearly similar conceptions of postmodern writing. Rather, Canadian and American postmodernism have fundamentally opposite interpretations of realistic social space. In her definition of "historiographic metafiction" - - the critical term which has since become inseparably linked to studies of Canadian postmodernism - - Hutcheon claims that although Canadian postmodernism is "intensely self-reflexively art," it is also "*grounded* in historical, social, and political *realities*" (emphasis added, 13). These terms are hugely significant. If Canadian postmodernism is "grounded" in "reality" then, despite even the highest levels of intense self-reflexivity, it is not postmodern in a traditionally-defined American sense.

It is important to stress, again, that there is nothing problematic about this highly individualized national designation for Canadian postmodernism. As Bertens and Fokkema's anthology ably illustrates, International Postmodernism comes in many forms. Although the American cultural experience of postindustrialism has provided the reference to which all other world literatures are compared, it remains true that "[t]he varying literary and cultural conditions in this world are bound to produce endless varieties of postmodernism" (ix). Neil Besner demonstrates the critical value of such national distinctions by, once again, defining Canadian postmodernism in regionalist

terms. In his innovative reading of Alice Munro's fiction, Besner claims that her "regional genius" - - which many other critics interpret as a kind of realism - - might be more usefully considered as an example of Canadian postmodernism. He argues that

[g]iven our traditional and multiform Canadian preoccupation with time and place, Munro's versions of setting [. . .] can be profitably read as postmodern.

Postmodern in Canadian terms, that is: our authoritative version of place, of a nature full either of meaning or meaninglessness, has been significantly *displaced* in Munro's writing. (21)

Like Hutcheon, Besner also sees regionalism as a discursive site where the longstanding antagonism between realism and postmodernism might be reconciled. By putting forth a realistically regional definition of Canadian postmodernism, he is able to endorse the standard postmodern skepticism toward "master narratives" of cultural coherence and nationalist identity, *without* completely discrediting the vital connection to social space that is such an essential component of realist aesthetics. In Besner's formulation, Munro can significantly "displace" an authoritative "national" reading of Canadian culture, and "replace" it with a more accurate, more natural connection to regionalist social space. In this way, Munro qualifies as a postmodernist, not because she rejects realism out of hand or because she deconstructs our traditional assumptions about social space, but because her work is a "radical *reconstruction* of our apprehension of space - most notably, of our received notions in Canada of local (as distinct from national) place, of region, of locale, of a particular, *naturally* familiar home ground" (emphasis added, 18).

Again, in Besner's essay, we see a Canadian writer's postmodern pedigree being established through her *natural* connection to a particular place, rather than her rejection of environmental determinism. By calling attention to the cultural stereotypes that define Canadian nationalism, the postmodern places Munro presents are "all the more fascinating, more artfully real" (Besner 21). Like practically every other traditionally-defined element of Canadian culture, Canadian postmodernism is shaped by the country's "awareness of its colonial ties across the Atlantic and [its] apprehension - and 'apprehension' is probably an apt term - of [its] North American space" (Besner 17-18). In other words, Canada's "distinct" version of postmodernism is directly linked to another "apprehensive" reading of a realistically regional social space.

3.3 Back to the Source:

Robert Kroetsch and the Birth of Canadian Postmodern-Regionalism

Besner and Hutcheon's efforts to combine Canadian regionalism and postmodernism are part of an ongoing critical project that was first initiated by Robert Kroetsch. As many have noted, Kroetsch's writing represents perhaps the beginning and the end of Canadian postmodernism, and it would be difficult to overstate the influence his work has had on our national criticism.⁶ In Hutcheon's words, it is "probably redundant to call Robert Kroetsch a postmodernist;" his contributions have been so numerous and so pervasive that he alone, above all other contenders, merits the title "Mr. Canadian Postmodern"(160). The fact that Hutcheon sees the connection between Kroetsch and postmodernism as 'redundant' and that she summarizes The Canadian

Postmodern by "Concluding with Kroetsch," illustrate just how completely interdependent these two - - the man and the literary discourse - - have become in our criticism. In Canada, to be Kroetsch is to be definitively postmodern and to be postmodern is, at least in some measure, to be Kroetschian (160). Through a remarkable feat of critical cross-pollination, one writer has become the country's leading postmodern artist *and* its leading postmodern theorist. On the creative side of the balance, Kroetsch's nine novels - But We Are Exiles (1965), The Words of My Roaring (1966), The Studhorse Man (1969), Gone Indian (1973), Badlands (1975), What the Crow Said (1978), Alibi (1983), The Puppeteer (1993) and The Man From the Creeks (1998) - as well as his major poetry collections - The Stone Hammer Poems (1975), The Ledger (1975), Seed Catalogue (1977) and Completed Field Notes (1989) - are routinely studied in Canadian literature classes as the 'text book' examples of postmodern writing; while his scholarly works - - especially those essays collected in a 1983 special issue of Open Letter and his book-length Labyrinths of Voice interview- - are continuously cited as authoritative resources for postmodern critical judgement. For more than thirty years, Kroetsch has been one of Canada's most prolific writers and, over the same interval, he has also become perhaps the most 'written about' figure in our criticism.

Despite his tendency to represent himself as an academic maverick and a defender of the underappreciated region of Western Canada, there is nothing marginal about Kroetsch's position in the Canadian canon. As Margaret Turner observes, Kroetsch's personal *reputation* as a postmodernist has been much more influential than the actual examples of postmodern *writing* contained in his work. She claims that the "Kroetsch

phenomenon" has affected Canadian criticism more dramatically than "the Kroetsch texts" (57). For Turner, the self-fashioning of Kroetsch's critical persona is fascinating because even as he insists that his work should be placed outside the mainstream of Canadian writing, there is no denying his "cultural power," nor "his academic canonical status"(57). Turner encourages other critics to accept

the fact that Kroetsch's position in Canadian letters is significant and official, and not generally questioned: he has received the Governor General's Award for his fiction and a Killam fellowship to write a major work in Canadian literary criticism; his work is taught in undergraduate survey courses, Canadian literature courses, special studies of the picaresque, and courses on twentieth-century writing and metafiction. He is invited to participate on panels, in keynote sessions at academic conferences, and at writers' gatherings, as well as to give readings, to edit special editions, to give interviews and to participate in dialogues. This is in addition to his position as professor of English at the University of Manitoba.

Kroetsch's attainment of this status appears, at least from the outside, to have been accomplished fairly readily: although he talks about the "necessary doing of violence in order to get a space (for one's books) on the shelf," he also admits that "when one has been incorporated into the tradition, and appears on the shelf, then somebody else has to come along and do violence" (*Labyrinths*, 42). Certainly considerable violence would have to be done to get him *off* our shelves now. (58)

It is not my intention here to do violence to Kroetsch's reputation, but I do think that if his Firstspatial regionalist definitions of postmodernism are to provide the

foundations on which our entire national criticism is based, then they need to be examined with more care. As Turner advises, contemporary critics must be made aware that by "making his own version of the story of Canadian literature," Kroetsch has come "very close to making the Canadian literary canon in his own image. He asks questions to which he attempts his own answers - answers which he admits are tangential, evasive, and fictitious" (67).

A closer look at some of the classic works of Canadian literary scholarship reveals just how accurate this observation is. Although almost all the major voices in Canadian criticism - - Hutcheon, Robert Lecker, Frank Davey, Barbara Godard, Donna Bennett and Russell Brown, to name just a few - - have written about Kroetsch, a scan through the bibliographies of these texts reveals that the expert most often consulted on Robert Kroetsch's writing remains Robert Kroetsch himself. The majority of these works were published during a period when a newly-minted generation of Canadian literature scholars sought to establish a more theoretically sophisticated engagement with their subject. For these critics, Kroetsch's work - - with its obvious poststructuralist influences and its European flair for self-reflexive commentary - - represented an opportunity to counter preconceived stereotypes which characterized Canadian writing as a theoretically stultified, hopelessly old-fashioned literature. As Frank Davey points out, Kroetsch reinvented Canadian criticism by introducing the country to many European theorists who were yet to make their mark on our literary debates ("American" 241). More than any other scholar, Kroetsch's first readings of Derrida, Foucault, Bakhtin, and Heidegger continue to direct the country's engagement with these thinkers. His famous observation

(made in 1974) that "Canadian literature evolved directly from Victorianism into Postmodernism" without ever passing through modernism is read by Davey as "an abrupt and disruptive statement - not merely because of its cryptic form [. . .] but also because 'postmodern' was, in Canada, a virtually unknown critical term" ("American" 241). It could be argued that the situation is only slightly different today. Postmodernism may no longer be an "unknown" term in Canadian criticism, but it is still an unmistakably Kroetschian term; and when most of our scholars want to develop an understanding of postmodern discourse, they consistently return to Kroetsch as a reliable first source.

Though it has never been fully explored, a profound sense of anti-Americanism informs Kroetsch's definition of Canadian postmodernism. According to Kroetsch, the essential feature of Canadian postmodernism is its difference from the American model.⁷ Depending on your point of view, this critical binarism which effectively *creates* Canadian postmodernism by *denying* American postmodernism is either somewhat ironic or completely predictable. More than any other writer of his generation, Kroetsch's literary identity has been shaped, both positively and negatively, by strong American influences. The majority of Kroetsch's Canadian postmodern masterpieces were produced in the United States during his seventeen year tenure as a professor at SUNY Binghamton from 1961 to 1978. Classic Canadian texts such as The Studhorse Man (1969), Gone Indian (1973), Badlands (1975) and Seed Catalogue (1977) were all written in this period and Kroetsch's influence as a major critic can also be traced directly back to his Binghamton years. During this immensely productive time, Kroetsch and his SUNY colleague, the American scholar William Spanos, co-founded boundary 2: a journal of

postmodern literature. Under their direction, boundary 2 quickly became one of the world's most important forums for the early discussion of postmodernism. Its first editorial boards included Charles Altieri and Edward Said, and some of its early issues published influential essays by scholars such as Ihab Hassan, Harold Bloom, and Helen Cixous. As co-editor, Kroetsch quickly became a major figure in this critical milieu, but as Frank Davey's study of the period reveals, Kroetsch's "exile" from his home region and nation undoubtedly influenced his engagement with postmodernism. According to Davey, even at the height of his influence, Kroetsch was never interested in the broader philosophical implications of postmodern thought and never attempted "to open a space for a larger multinational field, or to seek an understanding of epistemological shifts in Western culture" ("American" 246). Rather, Davey observes that Kroetsch's primary goal was always the establishment of a uniquely Canadian version of postmodernism, one focused on "Canadian specificities;" he claims that "[t]he postmodernism [Kroetsch] finds is not one of transnational or para-national writing but of Canadian writings" ("American" 247).

If Davey's assertion is correct and Kroetsch's definitions of Canadian postmodernism actually were developed from the perspective of an American "alibi-position," this holds profound implications for the two versions of postmodern criticism which now dominate within the two countries ("American" 24). Though no scholar has ever suggested it, perhaps Canadian postmodernism is diametrically opposed to American postmodernism because it was *purposely designed* in this way. In other words, it is probably not surprising that the distinctly regional, overtly anti-American qualities that so

many contemporary critics now take for granted in Canadian postmodernism were first articulated by an exiled regional novelist, living in the United States, studying postmodernism, and trying to accommodate his understanding of these new ideas with his already pre-established commitments to a particular vision of social space. If, as Davey points out, the most remarkable feature of Kroetsch's postmodernism is its "difference from the US," then we need to examine this claim more carefully before simply accepting it as truth ("American" 247). Insightful critics often "discover" exactly what they set out to find; and though it may be difficult to accept, critics should at least consider that the majority of Canadian literature's engagement with postmodernism may be the result of one man's ongoing thirty-year-old quest. In a repeating cycle that has been fueled by the interdependency of Kroetsch's creative, critical and pedagogical work, a whole generation of scholars and writers have reproduced and rediscovered *his* uniquely regionalized version of Canadian postmodernism. Though it may seem like an overstatement, perhaps Canadian postmodernism is completely different from American postmodernism because Kroetsch - and those who followed in his footsteps - actively *wanted* it that way.

Only a handful of critics have ever openly challenged Kroetsch's readings of postmodernism or of regionalism, and even fewer have tried to position his work in a 'larger multinational field.' Revealingly, the single book-length study which does attempt such a project is hardly ever referenced in Kroetschian criticism. Diane Tiefensee's polemically argued, but incredibly well-researched volume, The Old Dualities: Deconstructing Robert Kroetsch and His Critics, courageously (and far too aggressively) takes on many of the biggest names in the Canadian critical pantheon in an effort to

discredit Kroetsch's reputation and his elevated position in our literature. Rather than rhapsodizing about the incredible complexity and the playful ambiguity of Kroetsch's theoretical arguments (a common exercise in most essays on Kroetsch), Tiefensee sees Kroetsch's vision of postmodernism as a poorly constructed, hopelessly under-theorized collection of random citations cobbled together from the major works of poststructuralist thought. In her opinion, Canadian postmodernism is nothing but "a hodgepodge of bits and pieces derived from thinkers as incompatible as, for example, Foucault, Kristeva, Bloom, and Derrida;" Kroetsch's work and those who passively accept his arguments endorse a kind of "superficial theorizing" that "more often than not, results in lazy and sloppy scholarship in the name of ground-breaking innovation" (4). Basing her charges on what she sees as the two "inseparable premises" of Canadian postmodernism, Tiefensee describes the current state of discourse in the following way: she argues

(1) that Robert Kroetsch is representative of Canadian postmodernism insofar as his work typifies the way in which postmodernism is expressed in the work of other Canadian theorists and critics; and (2) that although Kroetsch claims to resist and subvert the hegemony by which we in the Western world are governed, his writing (in his essays, reviews, and novels) and his published conversations (in interviews) reaffirms not only the modes of thought by which that hegemony operates but also the values, prejudices and violence that are part and parcel of those familiar and largely unexamined patterns of thought. (4)

Clearly, Tiefensee pulls no punches with her critique. Without even the slightest conditional clause, she relentlessly pursues Kroetsch, attacking the quality of his work

and the rigour of his philosophical engagement at every turn. She concludes that rather than embracing poststructuralist teachings, "Kroetsch's thought is caught in traditional metaphysics," and "that the tenets of postmodernism which he claims to espouse are not borne out in his work - not in his theory of Canadian literature, not in his readings of Canadian literature, not in his novels" (6). When her argument moves beyond Kroetsch and begins to trace his influence over other leading scholars of his generation, the entire CanLit community comes under similar scrutiny. Because so many critics have built their understanding of Canadian postmodernism upon the uncertain foundation laid by Kroetsch's writings, the entire discourse - - as far as Tiefertsee is concerned - - is fundamentally flawed. She claims that "despite the postmodernists' constant references to 'deconstruction' and 'undecidability,' Canadian postmodernism is not in any sense Derridean" (4-5).

My reading of Kroetsch bears none of the overt hostility that Tiefertsee seems to feel, and it is certainly not my intention here to evaluate his work - - nor the range of Canadian postmodernism as a whole - - against a set of pure Derridean standards. Whether or not Kroetsch qualifies as a "true" international postmodernist in good standing does not interest me. That being said, however, I am very interested in exactly *why* Tiefertsee sees Kroetsch as such a dramatic failure. What exactly does she think Kroetsch (in particular) and Canadian postmodernists (in general) have done wrong? How did they manage to completely misunderstand (or purposely misappropriate) the core arguments of poststructural philosophy? Interestingly, I think the answers to these questions once again lead us back to Kroetsch's regionalist discourse and his still

inherently realistic reading of Canadian social space. Although it is not a major focus in her work, Tiefensee's argument demonstrates that, rather than supporting Kroetsch's postmodernism, his regionalist attachments ultimately undermine his poststructuralist goals. In an inversion of the Hutcheon/ Besner thesis, it seems that Kroetsch can never be a pure postmodernist because he is too committed to being a good regionalist.

As we've already seen, Kroetsch, and most of the Canadian postmodern regionalists he has inspired, reference poststructuralist arguments primarily as a way to defend their marginalized social spaces from the hegemony of nationalist grand narratives. In other words, Kroetsch and many of his colleagues deconstruct national myths by building up regionalist alternatives. They wish to deny a pan-Canadian metaphysics of presence by uncovering, or in Kroetsch's terms, "unhiding," a more palatable, but still inherently realistic regionalist presence (Essays 17). This is what Tiefensee finds so troubling about Kroetsch's strategy: his work is only selectively postmodern. Kroetsch and his colleagues are more than willing to destabilize national stereotypes, but they are also committed to crafting alternative options. It is remarkable, for example, to realize how many of Canada's leading postmodern writers - - Kroetsch, Wiebe, and Van Herk, for example - - have also worked as editors of regionalist fiction anthologies. Even as they have criticized the possibility of a mythic "Canadian" narrative, they have, through their editorial work, supported the creation of regional narratives. In 1980 Kroetsch edited Sundogs: Stories from Saskatchewan and, for more than three decades, Wiebe and Van Herk have churned out one regionalist anthology after another. Wiebe released Stories From Western Canada in 1972, Stories From Pacific and Arctic

Canada in 1974, Getting Here in 1977, and (with Van Herk) More Stories from Western Canada (1980). Van Herk edited Alberta Rebound: Thirty More Stories from Alberta Writers in 1990 and Due West: 30 Great Stories From Alberta, Saskatchewan and Manitoba in 1996. Obviously these writers are just as interested in constructing regionalist narratives as they are in deconstructing nationalist mythologies. This is problematic because, as Tiefensee observes, "[r]eplacing old master narratives, old frameworks or systems, and old strategies with new ones leaves the structures of those systems intact, allowing power politics to dominate our thinking and our lives, just as they always have" (32). Despite his claims to the contrary, Kroetsch de-creates and/or unhides nationalist readings of social space only because he believes such actions open up new discursive territory in the canon. Rather than leaving such a space empty, however, or free to be filled by the random associations of postmodern play, Kroetsch quickly "replaces" nationalist readings with different regionalist possibilities. Though he claims no official authority for these readings, it is simply assumed that a regionalist interpretation will be more "accurate" in an experiential sense and definitely more "acceptable" in a political and cultural sense.

Because he retains and promotes such a nostalgic and essentially protective stance relative to his region, Kroetsch, unlike his American counterparts, can never accept a reading of the Prairie as a completely imaginary social space with no underlying metaphysical essence. In his interpretation, and in all the Canadian readings which follow his example, a highly materialized "real" sense of region survives the poststructuralist assault on its existence. Unlike the suburb which was clearly a substanceless idea

projected onto an inert landscape, the Prairie and most other examples of Canadian regions are undeniably materialized. In Canadian postmodernism, regions are real. They are a collection of physical "things:" topographies, elements, weather reports, cultural deposits and artefacts. A typical work of Canadian postmodernism - - dominated by a Firstspatial reading of geography - - may re-imagine the historical record and it may play with these cultural deposits, reconstituting them in different ways, but it will not deny the metaphysical value of these objects and it will never consider them as completely separate from a underlying narrative of place.

Nowhere is this tendency towards regionalist materialization more explicit than in Kroetsch's misappropriation of Foucault's "archaeology of knowledge" thesis. In "On Being an Alberta Writer," he credits "the great French historian" for formalizing his "understanding of the appropriateness of the archaeological method;" but in Kroetsch's hands, Foucault's lesson is radically transformed (75). Rather than arguing, as Foucault does, that the archaeological record - - with its inescapable inconsistencies, gaps and interruptions - - makes it impossible to endorse any discursive, cultural or cognitive "unities," Kroetsch repetitively uses the archaeological metaphor as part of his quest toward a coherent regionalist narrative which finds its a priori origins in the landscape itself (31). Though Foucault demands that we "dispense with 'things'" and 'depresentify' them," Kroetsch's writing perpetually returns to the regional artefact in order to establish a pure engagement with the Prairie landscape (48). As Dorothy Seaton observes, in Kroetsch's work, "[t]he sign of the land is conceptualized from the start as the site of resistance to discursive containment, this resistance understood within a larger system by

which discourse in general, like the specific discourse of the land, depends upon an initial, irrevocable, and all-affecting assumption of difference, deferral, resistance" (77). In other words, the landscape persists in Kroetsch's postmodern-regionalism as a type of transcendental signifier. It is the stable, irrevocably resistant discourse that structures his entire regionalist signifying system. The Prairie landscape itself is the Firstspatial source of his regionalism.

Kroetsch's support for a highly materialized Firstspatial reading of Canadian regionalism and postmodernism can be illustrated in almost all of his texts. Behind every comic quest in his novels - - and behind the obvious critique that dominates his characterizations of Dawe in Badlands, Demeter in The Studhorse Man, or Dorf in Alibi - - Kroetsch continuously endorses a more direct, more natural connection to the landscape as the only alternative to the ridiculous textuality of these scholarly pursuits. His postmodern protagonists always fail to discover the coherent narratives they seek, not because such an authentic "real" engagement with the landscape is impossible, but because they are going about it all wrong. Every one of these postmodern novels contains its regionally realistic alternative, a scene or characterization that reveals the comic folly that is the rest of the plot. At the conclusion of Badlands, the two Annas finally abandon Dawe's field notes and journey back up the river to its "*still and unmoving source*" in a pure glacier (266); in The Studhorse Man, Demeter, narrating the story from his bathtub full of notecards, is clearly inferior to Hazard Lepage who maintains his vital connection with nature; in Alibi, Dorf finally shakes himself free from Jack Deemer's instructions, and isolates himself in the natural environment of his lakeside cottage. In every case,

Kroetsch's postmodernism endorses, rather than nullifies, the redemptive power of nature and places his support firmly behind a regionalist environmental determinism. Tiefensee claims that a metaphysically secure notion of this natural "[p]resence constantly reasserts and reaffirms itself as Absence in Kroetsch's work" (88). Though, in the foreground, his lead characters can never find the coherence or closure they are looking for, the possibility of such a unity is always there in the background, structuring the entire text. Dawe, Demeter, and Dorf are comic characters because they over-intellectualize their engagement with social space instead of "giving up" - - in the true Canadian Firstspatial sense - - to a real engagement with nature. Kroetsch may mock his academics and his compulsive note-takers, but he never denies the metaphysical value of nature itself, and he never places his own regionalism under the same kind of critical scrutiny.

Obviously, a key disjunction exists between what Kroetsch says he is doing in his fiction and what is actually happening in his texts. Although, in his Labyrinths of Voice interview with Shirley Neuman and Robert Wilson, Kroetsch can claim that "we aren't historians, we're archeologists" and that "[w]e want to see the thing in its place [. . .and] record exactly where it's sitting, where it's found and not make any assumptions not disrupt the ground," in actual fact, his work never leaves an artefact where it is found and, instead, always pulls these fragments together to form different regionalist narratives (9). In Kroetsch's poetry especially - - in The Ledger, in Field Notes and in Seed Catalogue - - local cultural deposits are continuously re- appropriated for other narrative purposes. Printing a poem on an actual Seed Catalogue from 1917 and calling it an archaeological discovery or "[t]he mapping of the blank cool earth" is definitely not 'leaving the thing in

its place' ("The Continuing Poem" 81).⁸ Even more dramatically, again in "On Being an Alberta Writer," Kroetsch uses traditional realist terms to explain his motivation for faithfully representing the Prairie. He writes,

The feeling must come from an awareness of the authenticity of our own lives. People who feel invisible try to borrow visibility from those who are visible. To understand others is surely difficult. But to understand ourselves becomes impossible if we do not see images of ourselves in the mirror - be that mirror theatre or literature or historical writing. A local pride does not exclude the rest of the world, or other experiences; rather, it makes them possible. It creates an organizing centre. Or as [William Carlos] Williams put it, more radically: the acquiring of a local pride enables us to create our own culture - 'by lifting an environment to expression'. (75)

These are not the standard claims of a postmodern writer. The desire to "lift an environment to expression;" to "create an organizing centre;" to encourage a "local pride;" to "hold up a mirror to ourselves;" "understand ourselves;" or celebrate the "authenticity of our lives" are all noble pursuits, but they are not postmodern in any traditional sense. Indeed, as we have already seen, Kroetsch should be celebrated, not criticized, for his commitment to his community and his stubborn desire not to let his region be overwhelmed by readings that come from outside its borders. This does not mean, however, that his criticism should be used to define an entire nation's engagement with postmodern aesthetics.

Even Kroetsch's strongest supporters can see this tension between the rigour of his

theoretical engagement and his consistently regionalist goals. At a conference to celebrate Kroetsch's seventieth birthday, William Spanos himself - - Kroetsch's colleague and longtime co-editor - - lovingly recalled that while he industriously worked his way through the most challenging poststructuralist arguments, Kroetsch never felt the need to engage himself so directly. Instead, Kroetsch "played" with postmodernism, and merely "floated in and around the reference points that regulated academic life," cobbling together whatever fragments he preferred from his "erratic reading" (192, 195). In the same way, Isaias Naranjo's entirely supportive interpretation of Kroetsch's work can still readily admit that Kroetsch's reading of postmodernism is "only superficially" deconstructive (875).

The most advanced critical treatment of Kroetsch's regionalism and postmodernism takes place in Francis Kaye and Robert Thacker's excellent essay "'Gone Back to Alberta:' Robert Kroetsch Rewriting the Great Plains." In a somewhat ironic intellectual turf war, Kaye and Thacker argue that instead of being recognized as Hutcheon's "Mr. Canadian Postmodern," Kroetsch should be seen "far more urgently" as "Mr. Great Plains Postmodern" (181). For them, Kroetsch's postmodernism cannot be separated from his regionalism. Moreover, Kaye and Thacker seem willing to accept - - in a way that few other critics are - - that Kroetsch's postmodernism, in fact, *originates* in his regionalism and that, rather than being asked to define Canada's understanding of the discourse - - rather than being "Mr. Canadian Postmodern" - - his fictional and poetic project should be most usefully studied in its proper regionalist context. Instead of discrediting Kroetsch's work, Kaye and Thacker merely ask that it be situated more

precisely. Though they obviously appreciate the sophistication of his theoretical engagement, they also see the "continuities between Kroetsch's work and that of the prairie realists" (179). And though they admit that his novels would never be confused with standard nineteenth-century realism, Kaye and Thacker claim that Kroetsch's "writing becomes realistic in another way" (180). Simply put, Kroetsch is a regionalist first and a postmodernist only secondarily. His work and the Canadian postmodernism that has been built in his image never deny the deterministic influence of nature. In their conclusion, Kaye and Thacker revealingly observe that Kroetsch - - when interpreted as a traditional regionalist - - has almost no control over the setting of his work. They claim that "Kroetsch places himself in the only place he can, really - the only place his writing has ever been from, been of and been about: Alberta" (182). One could not ask for a clearer endorsement of Firstspatial environmental determinism.

Before leaving Kroetsch behind and moving on to a more careful consideration of the individual texts by Johnston, Vanderhaeghe, and Coupland, it is important to restate, as forcefully as possible, that I do not see anything inherently wrong with the Firstspatial bias of Canadian postmodernism. In this admittedly quick review of Canadian criticism, I have tried only to demonstrate the remarkable continuity of this realistic reading of regionalism. Like the Secondspatial tendencies of American postmodernism, the Firstspatial tendencies of Canadian postmodernism should not be exclusively interpreted as strengths or weaknesses. My goal is simply to demonstrate that Canadian and American readings of postmodernism are strongly influenced by different spatial epistemologies and different "geographical imaginations." It seems that Canadian

postmodernism, like Canadian nationalism itself, can not exist without some connection to the physically imposing realistic facts of its territoriality. On the other hand, American postmodernism, like American nationalism, cannot exist without some consideration of the idealistic utopian elements of its mythic identity. Any survey of the two literatures makes this clear: the standard Canadian postmodernist will hardly ever deny the influence of traditional regionalist thought, while the standard American postmodernist will hardly ever endorse it. Because they come from two countries that understand the role and the importance of geography in such fundamentally different ways, postmodern writers from Canada and the United States can be instructively studied in comparison with one another based on their different appreciation for a "pure" engagement with the physical landscape.

Chapter Eight

8.1 Rooted to the Rock:

Wayne Johnston's The Colony of Unrequited Dreams

If the distinctive feature of Canadian postmodernism is its tendency towards "historiographic metafiction," then perhaps no text published in the last ten years qualifies as a better example of the genre than Wayne Johnston's 1998 novel, The Colony of Unrequited Dreams. In its scope, its aesthetic conventions and its fascination with the uncertainty of the historical record, Johnston's reconstruction of Joey Smallwood's life meets all requirements: the novel freely departs from the established biographical "facts" of the long-serving Newfoundland premier's life; it comically undermines the objectivity of D.W. Prose's History of Newfoundland by replacing that seven-hundred and fifty page text with an ironically "condensed" fifty page summary of the same events; and its narration oscillates back and forth between two first-person points of view that interpret the same historical events from opposite perspectives. Like so many of the other texts The Canadian Postmodern does focus on - - Findley's Famous Last Words, Bowering's Burning Water, or Wiebe's The Scorched-Wood People, for example - - The Colony of Unrequited Dreams fits Hutcheon's definition perfectly:

These works are not quite historical novels in the traditional sense, for they are also very metafictional in their attention to the processes of writing, reading and interpreting. They are both self-consciously fictional but also overtly concerned with the acts (and consequences) of the reading and writing of history as well as fiction. In other words, the aesthetic and the social, the present and the past, are

not separable discourses in these novels. They represent a postmodern self-reflexivity that moves outward to the world beyond their borders - to history, biography, philosophy, religion, politics. This is not a modernist denial of the literary value of historical fact (in the name of aesthetic autonomy); nor is it a realist use of that fact to make the reality of the fictional world seem authentic. Instead, it is a critical counterpointing or dialogue between the texts of both history and art, done in such a way that it does not deny the existence or significance of either. (14)

When it was first published, The Colony of Unrequited Dreams triggered a response from the national press which replicated, almost exactly, the kind of "critical counterpointing" Hutcheon describes here. Though the vast majority of reviewers praised the novel, the book's most influential commentator attacked Johnston for his blatant misappropriation of the 'real' Joseph R. Smallwood. Writing in the Globe and Mail, Rex Murphy - - himself a prominent national representative of Newfoundland - - lambasted Johnston for what he called a poor attempt at "fictional ventriloquism" (D15). According to Murphy, Colony fails as a novel because it

drains and diminishes the Smallwood that so many Newfoundlanders still remember, producing a pastework substitute. The fictional Smallwood, the Smallwood whose thoughts and voice are rendered here, the sensitive, love-conscious and tormented Smallwood is (the adjectives are unavoidable) smaller and more wooden. Fictionizing (sic) an inner life and inventing a love interest has shorn Joey of the vigour and elemental charisma that were the magnetic signature

of the original. (D15)

Throughout his review, Murphy claims that Johnston's "fictionizing" - - especially his decision to invent the character of Sheilagh Fielding (the female journalist who functions throughout the novel as Smallwood's political, comic and romantic foil) - - misrepresents the real Smallwood. Though he admits that any writer is "free to combine and invent as he or she chooses," Murphy argues that by virtue of the same kind of allowances, readers of historiographic metafiction are "also free to feel a disappointment if the original is within reach of memory and experience and the created version is less persuasive, or compelling or present" (D15). He claims that Johnston's fiction forgets that it is completely dependent on the real Smallwood and that "[i]t is only with the real, historical Joey Smallwood that the story, the fable, of *The Colony of Unrequited Love* (sic) can oblige serious engagement" (D15).

Despite the fact that he seems unable to remember the title of the novel he is reviewing, Murphy's critique represents one standard response to historiographic fiction. In his opinion, Colony is less-than- successful because it is not 'real' enough, or loyal enough to the historical record. These charges are not particularly surprising or original; any author attempting a historical fiction would be prepared for such criticism. What makes Murphy's diatribe remarkable is not its content, but the reaction it triggered. A month later, the Globe and Mail published an angrily worded response from Wayne Johnston himself, in which the author "counterpointed" his detractor and promoted his own 'aesthetic' understanding of Smallwood. Because this exchange took place in the national press (and not in an academic journal with a more specialized audience), the

Murphy/ Johnston debate exposed a vast readership to the complexities of historiographic fiction.

In his reply, titled blatantly enough, "Truth vs Fiction," Johnston fires back at Murphy. He claims that Colony should *not* be evaluated based on its adherence to the historical record because the novel never attempts to objectively represent a specific social or temporal reality. According to Johnston, the range of critical response - - both positive and negative - - that his writing has received demonstrates "the pointlessness of attempting or expecting accuracy of this sort of novel;" in his opinion "[f]iction like the Colony of Unrequited Dreams does not pursue and is not based upon the kind of truth pursued by biographers and historians (D1). Revealingly, Johnston cites DeLillo's writing, especially Underworld and Libra, as examples of what he is trying to achieve in his own novel. Defending himself against Murphy's charge that Colony was released too soon after the death of the real Smallwood, Johnston observes that DeLillo's writing contains portraits of countless characters who "far from being dead for an 'acceptable' period of time, are still alive" (D1). He explains that his

intention in writing The Colony of Unrequited Dreams was to fashion, out of the formless infinitude of 'facts' about Smallwood and Newfoundland, a story. A novel. A work of art that would express a felt, emotional truth that adherence to an often untrustworthy and inevitably incomplete historical record would have made impossible. (D1)

Johnston advises his readers to be open to such fictional reconfigurations and more suspicious toward the supposed objectivity of historical authority. "There is no

reason for us to be so much in the thrall of our historical figures," he argues, "that we cannot suspend our disbelief when writers of fiction ring variation on their lives" (D1).

Although this very public and very clearly divided debate introduced many general readers to the complexities of historiographic metafiction, most of the commentary written about Colony focuses not on the novel's appropriation of the historical record, but on its regionalist representation of Newfoundland geography. The Murphy/ Johnston exchange - - and the standard Canadian postmodern dialogue that it replicates - - is an exceptional, rather than typical, critical response to the novel. Instead of evaluating the accuracy or fictionality of Johnston's characterization of Smallwood, the vast majority of Colony's reviewers commented on his examination of cultural geography. In a way that Lefebvre might have appreciated, readers were more interested in Colony's (re)production of a particular social space than they were in its recreation of a historical period..

With remarkable consistency, Colony's reviewers in both the Canadian and the International Press endorse a Firstspatial interpretation of the Canadian landscape. Time after time, journalists empower the brutal topography of Newfoundland with a deterministic agency that shapes the thoughts and actions of Johnston's characters. Every major paper follows the same pattern: in The New York Times, Johnston's novel is described as a "tribute to a place more willful than even its toughest inhabitants" (Sante 6); in The New Statesman, "Johnston presents an awe-inspiringly barren and relentless landscape" (Hunter 3); in The Times, "Newfoundland is as much a character as Smallwood or Fielding" (Bradbury 41); in The Toronto Star, we are told that "[s]omething

about Newfoundland overpowers the imagination of its inhabitants [and] resists the mind's attempt to impose shape and perspective (Marchand, "Joey" K15); and that "[t]he pitiless and magnificent landscape of Newfoundland occupies a central part of the novel" (Marchand, "Newfoundland," A35). In The Calgary Herald, "[t]he setting is entrancing and the harsh beauty of Newfoundland and its magnetic power on its inhabitants are stamped onto every page (Fertile J8); in The Winnipeg Free Press, "Johnston's authentic sense of place, history and romance are woven into a magical tapestry encompassing the entire story of Newfoundland" (Penner D3). The list goes on, striking the same core argument again and again: though Colony is undoubtedly a postmodern historical novel, it also examines a powerfully deterministic social environment.

If Johnston himself is to be trusted as an expert on his own writing (and this is, admittedly, a dubious assertion) then his readers and reviewers are right to pay special attention to the role of geography in his novel. In numerous interviews, he has stressed the deterministic power the landscape of Newfoundland has had on his own vision of the province. In conversation with Elizabeth Renzetti, he explains that his "idea with the book was to create something commensurate with the greatness of the land itself" and that Newfoundland is "so overwhelmingly beautiful and substantial, the look of the place defies capturing" (D1). For her part, Renzetti argues that Johnston and his fictional Smallwood "share the same obsession with their home place;" she accurately locates Johnston within that tradition of Canadian regionalist writers who live in major urban centres while situating their fiction in different cultural locales (D1). Although Johnston has lived in metropolitan Toronto since 1989, his most celebrated work is set in

Newfoundland. Again, we see this gap - - or what Henighan calls a "denial" - - developing between the 'real' (sub)urban lives lived by most Canadians and the absence of these spaces in Canadian fiction. Unlike its American counterpart, which focussed so specifically on the imagined landscapes of the postwar suburb and shopping mall, Canadian postmodern novels such as Johnston's *begin* by rejecting this kind of social space and replacing it with a more rural, more realistically grounded regionalist alternative. Renzetti even goes so far as to suggest that such a strategic relocation is the key to Johnston's writing. She claims that he *needs* to write "from the uninspiring landscape of Toronto" in order to have the psychological distance required to write about Newfoundland (D1). It is simply assumed that contemporary Canadian cities are "uninspiring" and that good contemporary fiction must be situated somewhere else, preferably a social space that is structured very differently.

Philip Marchand's conversation with Johnston covers similar territory and makes a parallel assertion. When Marchand comments on the gap between Johnston's fictional and 'real life' settings, Johnston responds,

I don't think I could have written this book in the way that I did if I had lived in Newfoundland because I think the book is driven so much by a kind of benign homesickness. [. . .] It's not a debilitating homesickness, but it's there, a homesickness that inspires a vision of the landscape that I couldn't of managed if I were there. It would have been too close, too overwhelming. I wouldn't have been able to pick and choose the way I did being at a distance. (A35)

This disjunction between contemporary Canadian urban or suburban space and Canadian postmodernism is particularly striking in Johnston's case because his fiction has not always been exclusively set in Newfoundland. Johnston's 1994 novel, Human Amusements - - the book he wrote immediately before Colony - - is a Toronto-based narrative that defies most of the traditional regionalist and/or historiographic metafictional conventions we see in Canadian postmodernism. More in the mode of Coupland's Americanized fiction than anything in the traditional Canadian canon, Human Amusements is a comic, ultimately apocalyptic novel that follows the experiences of a child television star, Henry Pendergast. Working in the imagined TV universe of *Rumpus Room* (an obvious parody of the 'real life' hit program *Romper Room*), Henry is a postmodern star: his fictional TV persona eventually overwhelms his real life identity. "Miss Mary," Henry's teacher on the show, is played by his real-life mother, Audrey Pendergast, and as they become more and more famous, their real-life home on Toronto's St. Clair Avenue is eventually surrounded by tabloid journalists and paparazzi photographers who all want to catch a glimpse of the "real" Pendergasts. The postmodern influence of DeLillo's writing - - especially White Noise - - is impossible to miss in this novel. As Jeanette Lynes observes, Human Amusements is clearly a Baudrillardian text which "explores how T.V. and video culture trouble notions of perception, identity, and definitions of what is real"(87).

Despite its Toronto setting, Human Amusements is a novel that interprets its geography according to an American Secondspatial reading of postmodernism. Though it was written in central Canada and includes several pop-culture references familiar to

central Canadians, Human Amusements never received the audience, the critical attention, or the effusive praise that was heaped upon Johnston's other, more obviously regionalist, novels. The relative failure of Human Amusements compared to Colony reveals and reinforces the Firstspatial bias that lies at the heart of the Canadian postmodern. Simply put, Canadian audiences and critics do not celebrate fiction that comes from the "uninspiring" urban or suburban social landscape where they actually live. Rather, they prefer a historiographically flexible yet realistically regionalist postmodernism that is almost always set in a marginalised locale.

Johnston has learned this lesson well: The Colony of Unrequited Dreams succeeds in all the areas where Human Amusements seemed to be deficient. If, as Lynes argues, Human Amusements is a novel where a "sceptical postmodernism" combines with a "subliminal regionalism," then Colony embraces both discourses in a far less tentative way (82). Johnston's reconstruction of Smallwood's personal life not only plays fast and loose with the historical record to create a more satisfying postmodern narrative, but it fuses that storyline to a regionalist environmental determinism that is more powerful than any other force in the novel. In Colony, the landscape of Newfoundland provides far more than just the background setting for the love story between Smallwood and Fielding. Instead, as Wyile observes, "[t]hough Smallwood is the central figure of the novel, in many ways Newfoundland itself is the protagonist" (Speculative 127). For Wyile, Smallwood is an environmentally determined, anthropomorphic representation of the colony as a whole: he literally stands in as "the personification of Newfoundland's inferiority complex, the continuation of its colonial cringe, and the continuation of its

economic, cultural, political, and psychological dependence as part of the Canadian Confederation" (Speculative 130).

The deterministic ties that bind Smallwood to Newfoundland are clearly illustrated in the scenes that depict his first attempt to leave the colony. In Johnston's narrative, Smallwood's real-life journey to New York City in 1920 is interpreted as one of the major events of his life. Fielding describes the move as a transfer from a "New found land" to the "old New world" (130). Smallwood's trip - - moving from Newfoundland to Nova Scotia, to New England, and then on to New York - - is read as a retreat from the pure wilderness of Newfoundland into a series of regions which, although they all proclaim their 'newness,' become progressively more settled, more urban and more culturally cosmopolitan. Every stage of Smallwood's departure from home is recounted in precise detail and Johnston gives every major Newfoundland landmark its own respectful reflection. Before Smallwood leaves, he climbs to the top of Signal Hill and ponders the vast naturalistic power of the sea: "I never felt so forlorn, so desolate as I did looking out across the trackless, forever-changing surface of the sea, which, though it registered the passage of time, was suggestive of no beginning and no end, as purposeless, as pointless as eternity" (131). He then walks down to the Narrows of St. John's harbour and wonders if he, like his father who returned to St. John's after a disastrous attempt to live in Boston, will also fail in his efforts to find a place in the wider world:

I thought of my father's stint in Boston, where he had discovered the limits of a leash that up to that point he hadn't even known he was wearing. I wondered if like him, I would be so bewildered by the sheer unknowable, unencompassable

size of the world that I would have to come back home. How could you say for certain where you were, where home left off and away began, if the earth that you were standing on went on forever, as it must have seemed to him, in all directions? For an islander, there had to be natural limits, gaps, demarcations, not just artificial ones on a map. Between us and them and here and there, there had to be a gulf. (132)

This passage is a direct appeal to Firstspace epistemology and it illustrates Smallwood's desire for a secure environmental determinism. In the place of the 'artificial' borders drawn on a map, he demands 'natural limits,' a clearly established, and therefore non- negotiable natural 'gulf' to define his social space. The psychological leash that pulls his father (and eventually himself) back to St. John's is understood as another natural outcome, a causal connection between the landscape and its inhabitants. After Smallwood has made the long train ride from St. John's to Port- aux- Basques (Johnston devotes pages and pages of description to this journey through the interior landscape of Newfoundland), he boards the ferry that will carry him away from home for the first time. Because he feels it is "the appropriately romantic thing to do," he plans to stand at the railing of the ship until the island disappears from his vision (143). But to Smallwood's surprise, Newfoundland never seems to leave his sight. The environmentally determined leash, the Firstspatial connection that attaches him to this place will not be broken: "[t]hough I stood staring at it for what seemed like hours," Smallwood claims, "the island got no smaller [. . .] [it] was always there, as big as ever, as if we were towing it behind us" (143).

When he arrives in New York after temporary stops in Halifax and Boston, Smallwood interprets the American metropolis as the exact antithesis of his home. The comparison between these two social spaces and these two cultures - - one a naturalized, starkly physical Canadian landscape and the other "a dingy maze" of urban American streets - - is one of the novel's key juxtapositions (156). Like Quoyte, the protagonist of E. Annie Proulx's Pulitzer prize-winning novel, The Shipping News (the text to which Colony is most often compared), Johnston's Smallwood is transformed by his travels between these two worlds. In both novels, the geographical portraits of the two countries are unambiguous. American social space, especially New York city, is entirely 'made up,' imaginary, lacking in substance, and unavoidably uncertain. Canada, on the other hand, and especially Newfoundland, is authentic, real, substantial and metaphysically stable. Exactly as Proulx's Quoyte leaves the chaos of America behind to uncover his true identity in a pure Newfoundland geography, Smallwood's sojourn in America only reinforces his commitment to his home. These two characters and these two novelists, both fall back into the now familiar First and Secondspace epistemologies that have consistently been used to interpret Canadian and American cultural geography. In aesthetic terms, Canadian social space - - even when it is presented in a postmodern novel - - is almost always more securely realistic than American social space. After his painful five year hiatus in the city - - during which he has moved from flophouse to flophouse, gone through a fumbling proposal and break up with Fielding, and experienced both political and religious disappointment - - Smallwood eventually decides to return home because he is "afraid of being pulled further into that weird [American] world [. .

.]in which there was no telling what was and was not true" (204).

Immediately before and immediately after Smallwood's journey to New York, Johnston presents two remarkable scenes that both re-establish the deterministic Firstspatial relationship between the colony's landscape and his protagonist. Twice - - once as a young journalist and again as a hopeful union organizer - - Smallwood throws himself against the brutal contours of Newfoundland's geography and, both times, the landscape transforms him rather than the other way around. The first of these scenes takes place in 1916 aboard the doomed sealing ship, the *S.S. Newfoundland*. Though Smallwood himself never actually experienced this tragedy first hand, the plight of the *Newfoundland* is a real historic event. Caught in a freak storm in 1914, 77 members of the *Newfoundland's* crew froze to death on the exposed ice of North Atlantic. Johnston redramatizes this scene and relocates it time two year years after the actual event in order to place his version of Smallwood onboard the ship as a cub reporter who is supposed to file romantic biographical sketches about the adventurous lives of the sealers. In this version of the story - - a controversial historiographic adaptation of the official record - - Smallwood is actually there at sea with the men when the fateful storm hits. He then spends three brutal days locked in his cabin while the ship is surrounded and slowly crushed by the ice; and he is on deck when the lost crewman are finally re-discovered. He sees their frozen bodies stranded on an open pan of ice and memorably describes them as a "strange statuary of the dead" (107).

For Johnston, there are many reasons why it is important that Smallwood witness this scene first hand. In his fictional recreation, the events that come to pass onboard the

Newfoundland are interpreted as the catalysts that push Smallwood into politics and into his muddled engagement with socialist doctrine. Smallwood, the political animal, is literally *created* by the brutal confrontations - - both natural and social - - that he witnesses on the *Newfoundland*. For the young Smallwood, the sealers who died on the ice are the victims not only of a harsh Newfoundland climate but of an unjust Newfoundland society. He places the blame for their deaths squarely on the shoulders of the St. John's upper class: the unscrupulous merchants, ship captains and owners who send their employees out into terrible conditions without any concern for their welfare. While researching the journalistic pieces he writes in the aftermath of the tragedy, Smallwood discovers that when the storm began, the crew of the *Newfoundland* had been denied shelter on another ship, the *Stephano*, and had been sent back into the squall, and eventually to their deaths, because the captain of the *Stephano*, Abram Kean, had been "too miserly to offer those men the safety of his ship and sent them off [...] rather than have them [...] eating his provisions and using up his oil and coal" (114).

When he returns from this voyage, Smallwood's transformations come in rapid succession: he meets George Grimes, becomes a registered socialist, starts preaching on the docks against the upper class of St. John's, and attempts to organize his first union. Eventually he decides that if he really wants to help the world's working classes, he must leave St. John's entirely and go to New York to work for the great "New World socialist newspaper," *The Call* (124). All these changes can be traced directly back to his experience on the *Newfoundland* and though Johnston has absorbed considerable criticism for fictionally placing his Smallwood at such a dramatic (and sensitive) moment

in the province's history, it is easy to see why such a move makes narrative sense.

Johnston's Smallwood goes to New York because he courageously (and somewhat comically) believes that he - - a five-foot-six, ninety-five pound man from St. John's - - is well-prepared to take on the forces of global capitalism in the city where they are most dominant. As readers, we see this as a ironic misinterpretation of Smallwood's elevated sense of his own "destiny;" he feels that he has been practically pushed into his decision by a well-timed combination of natural and political forces.

This same Firstspatial combination of the natural and the political dominates Johnston other great scene: Smallwood's heroic walk across the interior of Newfoundland. After arriving home from New York, Smallwood decides that he will walk the full distance from Port-aux- Basques to St. John's in an effort to unionize all the "sectionmen" who maintain the rail-line between the cities. The sectionmen live in run-down shacks spaced out at one mile intervals along the track. Because they can never meet as a group and are not literate enough to respond to a mailing campaign, Smallwood realizes the only way to organize them collectively is to sign them up individually. He sets out from Port-aux -Basques in mid-August and plans to walk twenty miles a day for more than three months. The pay cut his union is designed to protest comes into effect on November 1st so he must arrive in St. John's before that deadline. In total, the journey covers more than seven hundred miles and cuts through the heart of some of Newfoundland's least hospitable landscape.⁸ "The Walk," as Johnston calls it, has both a pragmatic and a symbolic function for Smallwood. By sacrificing himself to the marginalised, non- urban Newfoundlanders who will later make up the core of his

confederate constituency, Smallwood, literally, takes the first steps towards establishing himself as the political champion of the outports. At the same time, The Walk again reinforces his naturalistic Firstspatial connection to the environment. Like his experience on the *Newfoundland*, The Walk *makes* Smallwood into the politician he later becomes. His environmentally determined, Firstspatial union with the landscape is consummated by this journey, by walking every step of the way from one end of the colony to the next.

The deterministic power of the environment is unmistakable in the passages which describe Smallwood's journey. He interprets The Walk as the appropriate symbol for his return to Newfoundland, a metaphorical reacquainting between himself and his native territory acted out on a massive scale. "[T]he idea grew on me," Smallwood reflects,

-the idea of a grand momentous homecoming that would hint that my five years abroad had been full of just such adventures, walking in service of a noble cause from one side of the island to the other. I pictured the last few hundred feet of rail thronged by cheering crowds who, for weeks, had been tracking my progress in the papers and had come out to witness my long-heralded arrival at Riverhead station in St. John's. My family and friends would be there, all except my doom-prognosticating, now-chastened father, whose absence would confirm that I had proved him wrong; that, having shown that unlike him I could make it on the mainland, I had come back home, my demons of self-doubt laid to rest for good, not because I had to, but because I wanted to, wanted to selflessly put my talents, which elsewhere could have made me rich and famous, to use in helping

Newfoundland. (213)

Smallwood's walk across Newfoundland taps into the well-established Firstspatial Canadian themes of Survival and the Garrison Mentality. As he makes the journey, Smallwood is gradually worn down and reshaped by the environmental conditions that surround and overpower him. Unlike the American protagonists we studied before, Smallwood, despite his egomaniacal self-confidence, is unable to deny the influence of the Newfoundland landscape. Instead, the process is reversed and he sees himself as a victim of geography, an insignificant human presence standing against an unstoppable natural tide. While completing a particularly arduous section of his hike down the Bonavista branch line, Smallwood realizes that he is "inching ever closer to some sort of breakdown," and that he can not keep the landscape from intruding into his thoughts, transforming him and remaking him in a directly causal way (220). At one of his weakest moments, he observes that, no matter how strong he believes himself to be, he can no longer combat the power of the environment. Buffeted by one hundred and twenty mile-per-hour gusts, he admits that it is "impossible not to personify the wind" and that it is a "pathetic fallacy" to believe in one man's power to transform the landscape (220). Overwhelmed by the very place he is trying to embrace, Smallwood falls victim to his own Firstspatial misinterpretation of geography.

Predictably perhaps, Johnston's protagonist nearly dies during this attempt to cross the colony. While walking between two particularly distant section shacks, he is caught in yet another blinding snow storm -- the omnipresent symbol of Firstspatial environmental determinism in Canadian literature -- and he is rescued only by the

fortuitous presence of his love/nemesis, Fielding. Luckily for Smallwood, Fielding has become a section "man" and is responsible for the very stretch of track where he nearly meets his death. She nurses Smallwood back to health and, after teasing him about his deranged commitment to outport Newfoundlanders - - she imagines that his next project will involve "swim[ming] the coast to unionize lighthouse- keepers" - - she allows him to finish his journey successfully (238). Fielding is the only sectionman not to join Smallwood's union and in her later role as an influential St. John's journalist, she will never support his larger quest for Confederation.

As many commentators have noted, the relationship between Smallwood and Fielding mirrors the real Smallwood's relationship with Newfoundland.⁹ The quick-witted and unfailingly ironic Fielding is a representative of the St. John's upperclass. Her father is a doctor and she is a well-educated, financially privileged "townie." Though she can appreciate and even come to love Smallwood's dogged determination, she can not endorse his political goals. As the title of the novel suggests, their uncomfortable union, like Smallwood's ambivalent affiliation with Newfoundland, is "unrequited." In order to build his confederate coalition, Smallwood must turn away from Fielding and from the merchant class of St. John's and, instead, capture the votes of the 'real' Newfoundlanders who scrape together a desperately poor existence in the outports. Because the lives of Smallwood's constituents are undeniably shaped by the extremes of environmental determinism (most of them are subsistence fishermen), his decision to attach his political future to their needs demands that he accept their Firstspatial reading of geography.

In The Colony of Unrequited Dreams, even Newfoundland's entrance into

confederation is seen as an environmentally determined outcome. While the wealthier urbanites of St. John's voted against Smallwood in large numbers, the "Baymen" of the outports supported him with a staggering majority that eventually won the historic second referendum on July 22nd, 1948. By essentially bribing the outports with the promise of baby bonuses and other socialized benefits that a union with Canada offered, Smallwood tapped into a deep reservoir of anti-urban sentiment. For many of his supporters, a vote for confederation was a way of striking back against the corrupt monopolies of the St. John's merchant class, a way for the 'natural' environment to strike back at an imagined social space.

As Richard Gwynn points out in his excellent biography, Smallwood: The Unlikely Revolutionary, the real Smallwood fashioned himself into the only viable candidate for outport Newfoundlanders by becoming the only urban politician committed enough to maintain a real presence in these far flung communities. Though the vast majority of the colony was so sparsely populated that most politicians simply ignored "the regions," Smallwood - - working with his trademark tireless energy - - took on these vast expanses of empty space and created a constituency for himself by binding together a group of voters that no one before him had ever sought to unify. Using communications and transportation technologies, Smallwood's voice - - delivered through the articles in his newspaper, The Confederate, through the radio broadcasts of his alter-ego, "The Barrelman," and, in person, through the amplified stump speeches he gave in every remote corner of the colony - - became the voice of rural Newfoundland. As Gwynn describes it, Smallwood's early dedication to the outport communities bordered almost on

religious fanaticism. Like a deranged barnstorming preacher, he moved rapidly from community to community, announcing the "good news" of Confederation:

To spread his message in a country with almost no roads, Smallwood took to the air. He campaigned in an ancient seaplane that took the best part of a mile to taxi into the air [. . .] Bellowing down over twin loudspeakers, he flew above tiny, far-flung communities until the outharbourmen, many of whom had never seen a plane before and considered anyone connected with such machines faintly God-like, had taken to their boats and put out into the harbour. Smallwood would then land, one hand clutching a strut, the other a hand microphone. After the speech and the cheers and the shouts, he clambered back into the plane and took off - the people's champion who had cared enough to come. (99)

The Colony of Unrequited Dreams captures this fanatical aspect of Smallwood's character. At least during his campaigns, Smallwood becomes so attached to these communities that he eventually comes to see Confederation as the only means of protecting a non-urban, non mercantile way of life in Newfoundland. By taking up the confederate cause and the socialised benefits that accompany it, he sees himself as the political defender of a marginalised people, living in a marginalised place, clinging to a marginalised way of life. Smallwood imagines himself doing "what no politician in Newfoundland had ever done;" rather than depending on "the merchants or the hordes who voted as the merchants told them to," he would claim as his supporters "the poor who were greater than the others in number if in nothing else" (433). In a key passage that establishes the Firstspatial environmental determinism inherent in this political vision,

Smallwood reflects on Confederation as the pre-ordained destiny of Newfoundland's geography. "Here was the something commensurate with the greatness of the land itself, which I had so often felt was just beyond my understanding," he muses; only through Confederation can the landscape's "paradox of [. . .] permanent imminence" be solved (433).

Smallwood's belief that 'the land itself' holds a 'permanent imminence' over his decisions influences every aspect of Johnston's characterization. Throughout his narrative, Smallwood is perpetually confronted with and continually accepts the deterministic power of his geography. The fact that Johnston even creates fictional scene to complement to the many real-life historic examples of Smallwood's outpost consciousness only reinforces this interpretation of a political leader who was, for all intents and purposes, "produced" by the space he wished to govern. The experience on the *S.S. Newfoundland*, the retreat from America's imagined social space, the death-defying walk across the colony, the countless union or campaign visits, the battle against the entrenched urban power of the St. John's merchants: all of these clearly demonstrate the Firstspatial bias of Smallwood's understanding of cultural geography. In his mind, it is the environment - - more powerful even than the Newfoundlanders who live on (and in) it - - that demands Confederation. Unlike Jefferson, who was influenced by the American illusion of spatial transparency and felt that he could remake his national social space to correspond with an idealized democratic model, Smallwood, guided by a highly materialized Canadian illusion of spatial opacity, believes the landscape itself will ultimately decide the government of the province.

In this definitively postmodern Canadian novel, the deterministic power of geography is endorsed rather than deconstructed. Even Sheilagh Fielding, Smallwood's consistent critic, shares in his awe-struck appreciation for the colony's topography. In her final *Field Day* column, written after Smallwood's victory, she observes that although "[i]t doesn't matter to the mountains that we joined Confederation, nor to the bogs, the barrens, the rivers or the rocks," it is these brute physical contours of geography which define the essential character of the colony (560). "These things, finally, primarily are Newfoundland," she admits (562). Unlike a "soft" American place, Newfoundland is not an idea, or a cultural entity, or an image of community. Though the colony is free to politically transform itself into a province, it remains, resolutely, a Rock, a "hard" Canadian place where the Firstspatial forces of environmental determinism shape the subjectivities of its inhabitants. Even as Fielding laments the cultural transformations that Smallwood has brought to her home, she understands that Newfoundland's vital connection to its landscape remains consistent. In a line that could well be used to describe the Firstspace epistemology that dominates all of Canadian postmodernism, she claims that "[f]rom a mind divesting itself of images [. . .]those of the land [will] be the last to go" (562).

Chapter Nine

9.1 A Canadian Postmodernist in America:

Guy Vanderhaeghe's The Englishman's Boy

The Firstspatial epistemology that dominates Johnston's vision of Atlantic Canada finds its Western parallel in Guy Vanderhaeghe's The Englishman's Boy. Published two years earlier, Vanderhaeghe's novel was short-listed for the Giller Prize, and won the 1996 Governor General's Award.¹⁰ Another classic example of Canadian postmodern historiographic metafiction, Vanderhaeghe's text weaves together two interrelated plot lines. The first takes place in the late-nineteenth century and recreates the events surrounding the 1873 Cypress Hills Massacre: a bloody confrontation in which a group of American wolf hunters savagely murdered 36 Assiniboine aboriginals in what is now current-day Saskatchewan. The second story, situated in time fifty years after the massacre, is set in 1920's Los Angeles, during the early years of the Hollywood studio system. Like Colony, Vanderhaeghe's narrative alternates between different points of view and interprets the same historical events from various perspectives. In this case, readers view the action through the eyes of an Assiniboine warrior called Fine Man; from the perspective of an anonymous fourteen year old known only as "The Englishman's Boy;" and through the first-person reflections of a Saskatoon-based movie theatre manager who recounts the story of his brief tenure as a script-writer in Los Angeles.

Like much of Vanderhaeghe's fiction, The Englishman's Boy is fascinated by borders. The novel folds its analysis of the relationship between historical fact and fiction

into a parallel exploration into the relationship between the Canadian and American geographical imaginations. Vanderhaeghe's characters cross back and forth between the two countries and between these two different ways of appropriating the past. Like The Colony of Unrequited Dreams, The Englishman's Boy can be read as a spatial narrative that follows the experiences of a transplanted Canadian trying to adjust to America's imagined cultural geography. Like Johnston's Smallwood, who eventually abandons New York, Vanderhaeghe's protagonist abandons Los Angeles's social space. Like Smallwood, he retreats from the uncertainty of America's Secondspace epistemology and re-establishes himself in a Canadian landscape that at least seems more secure, more regionally realistic, more historically stable.

Although the nineteenth-century Cypress Hills narrative occupies almost half of Vanderhaeghe's text, my reading of The Englishman's Boy focuses on the novel's representation of American space in its Hollywood story line. The lead character in this plot is Harry Vincent, a young journalist who leaves Saskatoon in 1923 in order to find work as a screen writer in Los Angeles. By what seems like a stroke of good fortune, Vincent comes into the employ of Damon Ira Chance, a megalomaniacal American studio boss cast in the model of Cecil B. De Mille, Samuel Goldwyn or Louis B. Mayer. Chance gives Vincent a curious assignment: he must track down a reclusive old cowboy named Shorty McAdoo. Chance wishes to buy McAdoo's life-story and adapt it into the script for an epic American film. Vincent eventually finds McAdoo and, after a series of evasions, the elderly adventurer allows his story to be recorded. As the novel unfolds, we learn that McAdoo *is* "the Englishman's boy" - - the protagonist of the other half of the

novel - - and that, as an adolescent, he witnessed first-hand the terrible sequence of events that led up to and through the Cypress Hills Massacre.

Chance purchases McAdoo's account of these events and ruthlessly reshapes the narrative to serve his own political purposes. In Chance's hands, the story of the Cypress Hills Massacre is transformed from a tale of white aggression against the Assiniboiné into a narrative of aboriginal sacrifice and American imperial domination. Vincent (and the reader) discover that Chance is a deranged American super-patriot and that he wants to portray the extermination of the Assiniboiné as the 'natural' outcome of America's frontier mythology, a symbolic surrendering of the continent to the forces of American expansion. Chance calls his movie *Besieged* and like D.W. Griffith's racist Civil War epic, *The Birth of a Nation*, he hopes his film will be "burned" into America's collective consciousness in one "instant of brilliant illumination" (107). Though Vincent and McAdoo both resist this reappropriation, the film is made despite their protests. On the night of its premier, McAdoo's friend, Wylie, kills Chance and his thuggish henchman, Fitzsimmons, ostensibly punishing them for their distortion of the "truth." Two weeks later, Vincent leaves Los Angeles and returns to Canada, while McAdoo disappears, fading off into the sunset like the stock Western hero he represents. Throughout the novel, Vincent's "LA story" is intercut with episodes from the nineteenth-century Cypress Hills narrative. In this way, the "real" events surrounding the massacre are continuously juxtaposed against the fictionalized Hollywood version created and promoted by Chance.

Like the Colony of Unrequited Dreams, The Englishman's Boy was greeted enthusiastically by the Canadian Press at the time of its release. Many reviewers singled

out Vanderhaeghe's depiction of the American film industry for special praise. Writing in the Financial Post, John Geddes called the novel "a subtle but pointed literary assault on Hollywood" (30), while Catherine Bush, a fellow novelist, argued that Vanderhaeghe's "[c]haracters and landscapes [were] inscribed on the mind's eye in language both startling and lustrous" and that the novel illustrated the "importance of telling stories that movies cannot or will not capture"(D18). Allan Hepburn characterized the narrative as "a shrewd expose of myths about the American West and American Cinema" and praised "the cinematic intensity" of Vanderhaeghe's writing (28). Val Ross identified the text as Vanderhaeghe's "breakthrough book" and his "most ambitious novel" (C1).

Similar glowing reviews came from other sources, but not every commentator interpreted The Englishman's Boy in an entirely positive light. Paralleling the response Johnston received with The Colony of Unrequited Dreams, Vanderhaeghe faced criticism for his supposed misrepresentation of a sensitive event in Canadian history. In this case, however, the charges against The Englishman's Boy carried an extra political resonance because Vanderhaeghe's text explores the potentially explosive subject of Canadian/ Native relations. Although the narrative is an unqualified indictment of the American Wolfers and though it represents the Assiniboine victims in a wholly sympathetic light, some critics felt that Vanderhaeghe's decision to dramatize such an important event in aboriginal history without providing equivalent narrative space to aboriginal perspectives was controversial. In Wylie's largely supportive reading of the novel, for example, he wonders if Vanderhaeghe's text might be inescapably "mired within the semiotic field of Eurocentric representations of natives and is ultimately a consolatory and compensatory

fiction expressive of white guilt" (Speculative 59). Such a critique reveals the dangers inherent in any fictional effort to appropriate a historical narrative. Like Rudy Wiebe or W.P. Kinsella before him, though Vanderhaeghe's portrayal of aboriginal Canadians appears sympathetic and sincere, his postmodern appropriation of "their" story poses unavoidable cultural challenges. As Wyile observes, "despite the novel's attempt to provide a less Eurocentric and even postcolonial Western, and despite its critique of white imperialism, Vanderhaeghe makes whites (Vincent and McAdoo) the heroes of the novel and relegates natives to the margins" (Speculative 60).

Wyile's argument here is valid: native perspectives *are* relegated to the margins of The Englishman's Boy, but in Vanderhaeghe's defense the focus of his text may not actually be White/Native relations, but rather Canadian/American relations. More specifically, the narrative examines the roles that history and geography play in the establishment of these national identities. Rather than simply condemning the actions of the Wolfers, Vanderhaeghe is interested in how the "true story" of the Cypress Hills Massacre is preserved or denied in Canadian or American culture. The novel suggests that because Canadians and Americans understand their geography in radically different ways, they appropriate historical narratives to correspond with these different visions of social space.

In The Englishman's Boy, America is, once again, clearly aligned with an imaginary Secondspace epistemology, while Canada remains resolutely realistic in its endorsement of a Firstspace epistemology. The place-to-place comparison which lies at the heart of the novel reinforces this theoretical divide. Throughout Vanderhaeghe's text,

readers are asked to interpret Hollywood through the eyes of a Canadian Prairie regionalist, and vice versa, to interpret the Prairie from a postmodern Los Angeles perspective. Vincent's readings of Los Angeles focus on the omnipresent fakery of Hollywood and the city's lack of any coherent sense of reality, while his depictions of the Prairie characterize that landscape as a permanently stable social space. The Californian narrative begins with a panoramic survey of "the jumbled vista of the studio lot," perhaps the iconic example of America's imagined geography (6). The lot is "twenty-five acres of offices, workshops, [and] streets of every kind - French, Spanish, Russian, Chinese, [and] Wild Western" (6). It is an entirely self-contained "world of make believe [. . .] held in quarantine" by a ten-foot fence (6). Within the confines of the lot, distantly separated real-world geographies are fictionally reproduced and brought into contact with each other: the Wild West streetscape collides with the Chinese backdrop, while the Spanish vistas nudge up against the Russian landscape.

In Vincent's portrait, an obvious envy mixes with his criticism of the scene. He is both astounded and disgusted by Hollywood's capacity to recreate and recombine so many different 'realities.' As he watches a parade of absurdly-clad extras heading home after the day's filming - - each cast dressed in a different set of period costumes - - Vincent sees them as representatives for America's historical ignorance. The extras are a confused jumble of non-sequential characters and historical epochs. Marching along in completely random order, he sees

Roman legionaries tramp the street accompanied by Joseph and Mary, while a hired nurse in cap and uniform totes the Baby Jesus. Ladies-in-waiting from the

court of the Virgin Queen trail the Holy Family, tits cinched flat under Elizabethan bodices sheer as the face of a cliff. A flock of parrot-plumed Aztecs are hard on their heels. Last of all, three frostbitten veterans of Valley Forge drag flintlocks on the asphalt roadway. (5)

Later, while driving through the Hollywood Hills on the way to his first meeting with Chance, Vincent again can not help but notice the huge gap between image and reality that defines Los Angeles's social space. He sees the city as "a very strange world" that is both "half-wild, half-artificial" (12). During the trip, he watches as an odd mix of fake European architecture competes with the real topography of the L.A. region, a "lunar landscape of parched hills" (12). In a memorable passage, he describes several outlandish Californian mansions that have gone up during the "recent boom in housing construction" (11). From the car, Vincent sees

a rash of thirty- room haciendas, Italian villas, and Tudor mansions thrown up helter-skelter by Hollywood's finest in the mad race to outdo their box-office rivals. Mary Pickford and Douglas Fairbanks have set the standard with their hunting-lodge home, "Pickfair," run with a modest staff of fifteen servants. Now everyone else is straining to gain ground on the reigning King and Queen of pictures. Harold Lloyd has bought a sixteen-acre estate, "Greenacres," with its own golf course and an artificial waterfall spotlit at night with coloured lights. And in the near future, John Barrymore will buy "Bella Vista," over the years expanding it into sixteen buildings, a skeet-shooting range, an aviary, a library of first editions, and a trophy room housing the only dinosaur egg in private hands.

His guests will also have two bars from which to imbibe - one an English tavern, the other a "Western" saloon dismantled and shipped down piece by piece from Alaska. (11-12)

In these opening sections, Vanderhaeghe highlights the fictional quality of the Los Angeles landscape. Each of these mansions is a different kind of personal theme park, a different Secondspace environment that has been made to order. Opposite to his realistic Canadian home, Vincent sees Hollywood as an imaginary world. Because it is a city dominated economically by show business, Los Angeles itself becomes part of a surreal fictional spectacle. It is a place where "lunacy" and "bad taste" combine to create a real-world geography Vincent finds vaguely disturbing (12).

As a stock Canadian character, Harry Vincent meets his American doppelganger in Damon Ira Chance. Where Vincent is a poor but hardworking Prairie boy who cares for his ailing mother and defends the accuracy of McAdoo's narrative, Chance is the free-spending inheritor of an American railway fortune who uses his millions to rewrite history and transform McAdoo's story into the great Western epic. It is, of course, ironic that Chance hires a Canadian to script his definitive 'American' film and that the events which he believes capture the 'essence' of the American West actually unfolded in Saskatchewan. For Chance these are mere details, trivial facts that can be recast to serve his greater purpose. He tells Vincent that "the facts in picture-making must be shaped by intuition," and that his particular brand of intuition is shaped by what he calls "spiritual Americanism" (19,107).

At first, Vincent is attracted by this epistemological strategy. "Spiritual

Americanism" demands a Secondspatial interpretation of cultural geography. This appeals to him because it is so different from the Canadian nationalism he has experienced at home. But as the novel unfolds, Vincent eventually uncovers the dangerous political forces that support Chance's vision. Chance, at first seen merely as an 'eccentric' millionaire, turns out to be a power-mad American fascist and a virulent anti-Semite. In one of his many rants against the inherent cultural "weakness" of the North American Aboriginal population, Chance describes their near-extinction as a necessary sacrifice to the greater good of America: "[T]he Indian tribes, like the Jewish tribes, would not face facts," he declares,

Think of the Sioux uprising at Wounded Knee. No different than the suicidal Jews at Masada. But let us not be sentimental about what they brought down upon themselves. The weak wish the strong to be sentimental because they know it undermines their strength. But in the world we face at this moment, we must keep strong. Only the strong will survive. (252)

Chance is a disciple of D.W. Griffith's 'real Americanism,' a supporter of Mussolini's propaganda, and a sworn enemy to Hollywood's Jewish elite - "the Laemmles, the Mayers, the Goldwyns, the Warners, [and] the Zukors" (253). In one of the most disturbing scenes in the novel, he explains that American culture is defined by its utopian capacity to reimagine its social space. He believes that such a culture can be represented only by an artistic medium that is equally dependent on such a rapid succession of images. In Chance's mind, "the American spirit" can only be expressed by the American motion picture. Fusing his Secondspatial reading of geography to a strange

corruption of the Turner Thesis, he argues that the American film maker and the

American frontiersman interpret landscape in similar ways. "You see," he tells Vincent,

The American spirit is a frontier spirit, restless, impatient of constraint, eager for a look over the next hill, the next peek around the bend in the river. The American destiny is *forward momentum*. What the old frontiersman called *westering*. What the American spirit required was an art form of forward momentum, an art form as bold and unbounded as the American spirit. A *westering* art form! It had to wait for motion pictures. The art form of *motion*! (no emphasis added, 108)

Throughout The Englishman's Boy, Chance functions as the great promoter of American postmodern aesthetics. In his opinion, the only way to represent a country that has been so profoundly shaped by an imagined conception of itself is to effectively surrender to that image and deny the deterministic power of the environment and the perceived stability of any social space. With a Baudrillard-like appreciation for the cultural dominance of the simulacra in America, Chance tries to convert Vincent to his Secondspatial epistemology. "[T]he new century [is] going to be governed by images," he declares,

Images take root in your mind, hot and bright, like an image on a photo-plate.

Once they etch themselves there, they can't be obliterated, can't be scratched out.

They burn themselves in the mind. Because there is no arguing with pictures. You simply accept or reject them. What's up there on the screen moves too fast to permit analysis or argument. You can't control the flow of images the way you can control a book - by rereading a chapter, rereading a paragraph, rereading a

sentence. A book invites argument, invites reconsideration, invites thought. A moving picture is beyond thought. Like feeling, it simply *is*. (107)

Because he is so obsessed by the power of the image, Chance is an early-century prototype for the postmodern characters who arrive later in contemporary American fiction. Like Pierce Inverarity in Pynchon's The Crying of Lot 49, Chance is a well-funded millionaire able to overcome any obstacle that might prevent him from creating the imagined environment he desires. Like Pierce, who will go to any length to construct San Narciso, Chance has no difficulty rewriting the historical "facts." For both men, 'reality' - - whether geographical or historical - - can be reshaped at any time. Both embrace an American Secondspace epistemology and both feel there are no metaphysical limitations on their capacities to reconstitute the world around on them. This complete lack of realistic restraint and the enthusiastic embrace of undecidability that American Secondspace postmodernism endorses are ultimately rejected by Vincent. When Chance asks him to rewrite McAdoo's story and to recast the Wolfers as American heroes and the Assiniboine as sacrificial victims, Vincent refuses. "[C]linging to the irrefutability of fact," he argues that Chance's "poetic truth" is nothing but a historical "lie," a blatant misappropriation of the facts (252).

Chance is the irredeemable villain of The Englishman's Boy. Worse even than the American Wolfers, his self-serving appropriation of the historical record is interpreted as a more severe crime than the Cypress Hills Massacre itself. Even at its core, the very structure of Vanderhaeghe's text lends support to McAdoo's retelling of events and implicitly indicts Chance for his manipulation of the truth. As Wyile observes, The

Englishman's Boy explores the "exploitative character of Hollywood's illusion-making" (Speculative 247). Vanderhaeghe's narration sides with the nineteenth-century realistic version of events and openly criticizes the postmodern Californian recreation. Wyile claims that

the novel inscribe[s] a metafictional scepticism about the filmic machinery behind the Hollywood Western and create[s] out of this era of cinematic modernism a familiar sense of postmodern vertigo, the infinite recession of the real behind a proliferation of signs. [. . .] The Hollywood in which Harry toils leaves the reader questioning what is real in a way that the sequences set in Whoop-up country do not, creating a sense of self-reflexivity that points to how Hollywood, as a maker of "unreal reality," has no equal. (Speculative 247)

Though Wyile's emphasis throughout Speculative Fictions focuses on the role of history in the contemporary Canadian novel, the regionalist interests of his earlier work remain present in passages, such as this one, in which the Firstspace / Secondspace comparison between Canadian and American geography repeat. Hollywood, the unequalled maker of "unreal reality," is seen as the regional centre of America's postmodern aesthetics, while "Whoop-up country" - - in rural Saskatchewan - - is portrayed as a site where realistic readings of landscape and history persist. Vincent, McAdoo and Vanderhaeghe all situate their readings within the cultural conventions of this latter space, while Chance positions himself within the Secondspace flexibility of the Californian model. Wyile sees a similar historical dichotomy developed in the text. He claims that

Vanderhaeghe ultimately approaches history much less as a free agent than Chance, and The Englishman's Boy, though it has certain postmodern inclinations, ultimately charts a course closer to the traditional ideal of the historical novel. [. . .] The Englishman's Boy ultimately inscribes a belief in the importance of historical consciousness, a resistance to a completely relativist recognition of history as fair game, as fodder for any narrative construction. (*Speculative* 251-252)

This resistance to relativism - - and to American-style Secondspace postmodern regionalism - - demands an enthusiastic acceptance of Canadian space and its more securely defined Firstspatial limitations on historical and territorial reality. In fact, it is McAdoo's quest for Canadian space - - his desire to *escape* the imaginary geography of L.A. - - which originally leads him to sell his story to Chance in the first place. When Vincent first meets McAdoo, the retired cowboy is living in an abandoned bunkhouse on a burned-out farm. McAdoo tells him that he has officially quit the movie business and that he intends to "get shut of this place entire" and "[h]ead north" (81). When Vincent pushes him for a more precise location, McAdoo admits that his goal is to make it back to "Canada" because, in his words, "[t]hey got some space there"(81).

After a few grumbling exchanges, Vincent convinces McAdoo that if he sells his story, he will earn enough money to buy his "ticket up north" (81). This is the first step in their awkward relationship. For both men Canada represents a realistic oasis, a place where a dominant geography guarantees a stable social space, free from the metaphysical uncertainty that dominates California. Throughout the remainder of the narrative, Canada

is repeatedly referenced in this way Vincent, McAdoo, and by McAdoo's side-kick, Wylie. For Wylie, Canada becomes a kind of nirvana, a longed-for peaceable kingdom where he and his friend will be able to retire in safety and stability. Wylie's dedication to this vision of a realistic Canada is so strong that he eventually kills Chance and Fitzsimmons because he feels their misappropriation of McAdoo's story has denied him the opportunity to enter the country. Standing over their bodies outside the theatre after the premier of the film, he cries, "You-you-you ought to [have] talked to him [. . .]if you'd only just talked to him. We would be in Canada now. We would be in Canada...happy" (322).

This comparison between an overly- determined Firstspatial interpretation of Canadian geography and an uncertain Secondspatial interpretation of its American counterpart continues throughout the novel. During one of their interviews, Vincent discovers that McAdoo - - exactly like Smallwood in The Colony of Unrequited Dreams - - has had his own life-changing encounter with the Canadian landscape. Just as Johnston's protagonist discovered his 'true' connection with Newfoundland during his walk down the Bonavista branch line, McAdoo tells Vincent that he uncovered his true essence, "his creature spirit," when left exposed to the elements, "[s]tanding out in the bare prairie in the middle of the most godawful storm you ever seen" (152). Nearly dead after wandering the Prairie for a month without food, McAdoo's sanity and his control over his own subjectivity are fractured by the Firstspatial power of the Canadian landscape. With the storm raging all around him - - "the [t]hunder booming and the sky cracking like a bad plaster wall" - - he surrenders to the elements and ends up naked and

"bawling like a baby" (153).

The description in these passages, and the powerful Canadian Firstspace epistemology represented, are unmistakably clear. The image of McAdoo beaten down and broken by the landscape is such a familiar scene in Canadian literature that it could function almost as the cover illustration for a reprinted edition of Laurie Ricou's thematic study of Prairie writing, Vertical Man/ Horizontal World. Though it was published in 1973, Ricou's description of the "single human figure amidst the vast flatness of the landscape" could easily be applied to McAdoo (ix). Like so many other Canadian characters before him, Vanderhaeghe's hero is transformed by a tough-but-merciful Canadian geography that pushes him to his physical and psychological limit before relenting and allowing him to "survive."

In her excellent critique of the "cliche[s]" that have dominated Prairie writing for decades, Alison Calder takes direct aim at the kind of imagery Vanderhaeghe uses to describe McAdoo's Firstspatial interaction with the landscape (51). She argues that for more than fifty years, Canadian writers and scholars have been representing the Prairie in almost exactly the same way. This long tradition of recurrent and over-used metaphors has done nothing but reinforce the notion that Prairie aesthetics have remained stagnant and that Prairie culture as a whole has barely progressed during the postwar period. According to Calder, most central Canadians who encounter the region only through its fictional representations believe the "prairie is only a wasted earth and burning sun" with "no imaginative possibility" (59). Because every academic discussion of Prairie writing returns to the same realistic texts written by the same realistic authors - - Calder lists

Sinclair Ross's As for Me and My House, Frederick Phillip Grove's Settlers on the Marsh, Martha Ostenso's Wild Geese and Robert Stead's Grain as the best known works in the canon - - it is simply taken for granted that realism is "the 'natural' mode of representing the prairie," and that all Prairie texts should share the same "belief in the primacy of the land" (59, 56). Summarizing just a few of the 'required elements' which seem to be found in every single Prairie novel, Calder claims that

[i]t is fairly easy to enumerate the qualities of the prairies as they appear in prairie regional fiction. The land and climate are everything. The prairies exist in a permanent, drought-produced dust storm, the tedium of which is broken only by the occasional blizzard. It is always circa 1935. There are no colours and no animals, unless you count domestic livestock that freeze or smother. Human beings die natural deaths only in that their deaths are caused by nature: they freeze, suffocate, drown, burn, or are driven to suicide. There are no urban centres; the ones that do exist are immeasurably far away from the isolated farm houses where the works are set. Even when there is a town, no one speaks to another; no one has any friends. There are vicious rivalries but no politics. Sex, when it occurs, is frequently adulterous, and usually followed by death. (55).

Although this listing of typical prairie settings, plots and themes is meant to be a comic oversimplification, most of the elements Calder describes can be found in Vanderhaeghe's novel. Though The Englishman's Boy can be read as a complex historiographic metafiction and as a classic work of Canadian postmodernism, it nevertheless clings to this stubbornly realistic engagement with Canadian social space.

Vincent understands his relationship with the Prairie landscape in exactly the way Calder describes. After his brush with the uncertainty of California's cultural geography, Vanderhaeghe's protagonist realizes that he belongs back home, back in the kind of Prairie that Calder's article critiques, back in the kind of place 'where land and climate are everything.'

The novel's most detailed exploration of Canada's Firstspace epistemology occurs while Vincent is describing the South Saskatchewan River. Like the Newfoundland landscape which dominates the final paragraphs of The Colony of Unrequited Dreams, the river emerges at the close of The Englishman's Boy as Vanderhaeghe's recurrent geographic symbol. When Vincent tries to define a "typically Canadian" experience for his American friend, Rachel Gold, he returns to a scene from his childhood which takes place on the banks of this river. He tells her that in Saskatoon the whole town used to come out to watch the first thawing of the ice in early spring. The scene is recalled as grand natural spectacle:

We'd be woken up in our beds in the middle of the night by a noise like an artillery barrage, you could hear it all over the city, a great crashing and roaring as the ice broke apart and began to move downriver. At first light, everybody would rush out to watch. Hundreds of people gathered on the riverbanks on a cold spring morning, the whole river fracturing, the water smoking up through the cracks, great plates of ice grinding and rubbing against the piles of the bridge with a desperate moan. It always excited me as a kid. I shook with excitement, shook with the ecstasy of the moment. We all cheered. What we were cheering nobody

knew. (182)

Vincent's memory reinscribes the environmental determinism that has always influenced traditional interpretations of the Canadian identity. The people on the riverbank are mesmerised by their natural environment. Vincent tells Gold that "Canada isn't a country at all, it's simply geography" (181). In his initial assessment, he thinks his community's childish fascination with the thawing river illustrates the immaturity of Canadian nationalism. "[M]y memory is the truest picture of my country," he tells her; Canadians are "bystanders huddled on a riverbank, cheering as the world sweeps by" (182). At the end of the novel, however, Vincent reverses his interpretation of the scene. Even as Gold begs him to stay in California and promises to find him another job as a script writer at Metro studios, Vincent knows that he can never adapt to the Secondspace epistemology of American cultural geography. He tells her that he doesn't "belong here;" that he is "done with Hollywood" (524). Gold eventually comes to the same conclusion. "Maybe this isn't the place for you," she admits (524).

Harry Vincent's return to Saskatoon completes Vanderhaeghe's comparison between Canada and the United States. Back home, Vincent becomes the manager of his local movie theatre and buys a little house that overlooks the Saskatchewan River. He admits that "[l]iving beside the river has taught [him] something about change" (325). In a choice that mirrors the difference between a Canadian Firstspace epistemology and an American Secondspace epistemology, Vincent reminds himself that a "map of the river is not the river itself" and that, in his life, he has chosen to abandon an engagement with the image in favour of a more direct engagement with nature itself (326). In the final lines of

Vanderhaeghe's Hollywood narrative, Vincent stands there, firmly rooted in Canadian social space, pondering the force of the river as it rushes by, "pulling for the horizon" (326). Like Johnston's The Colony of Unrequited Dreams, another postmodern Canadian novel concludes in this way, with another moment of Firstspatial reflection: Vincent contemplates the deterministic power of the natural landscape rather than deconstructing it .

Chapter Ten

10.1 An American Postmodernist in Canada:

Douglas Coupland's Girlfriend in a Coma

The third novel I want to consider in this section shares almost nothing in common with the two texts we have just studied. When it was released in 1998, Douglas Coupland's Girlfriend in a Coma did not win any of the major Canadian literary prizes. It was not short-listed for the Giller, nor for the Governor General's Award, and it received very few favourable reviews in the Canadian Press. In The Globe and Mail, John Doyle memorably described the novel as "a dull and sanctimonious book" ("Generation Vexed" A7). He criticized Coupland for abandoning his trademark ironic sense of humour and replacing it with a newfound earnestness - - "a soaring sense of a new utopia within reach of Generation Xers" ("Asleep" D16). In Doyle's embittered opinion, Coupland's optimism is nothing but "twaddle;" he compares the book to a 1980s "concept album" and calls it "a long and overwrought response to some mid-level Stephen King novel" ("Asleep" D16). Doyle is not alone in his opinion. In The Toronto Star, Marchand called Girlfriend in a Coma a "vacuous" sermon and a "literary failure" ("Humbleness" M15). South of the border, in what has become Coupland's most receptive literary audience, the novel fared no better: it was critically savaged in the New York Times, The Los Angeles Times and The Chicago Tribune.¹¹ Perhaps the most note-worthy recognition Girlfriend in a Coma received came from the CBC. On its end-of-the-season awards show for 1998, a jury of

critics assembled for the network's literary program, *Hot Type*, chose Coupland's novel as a dubious double winner: Girlfriend in a Coma walked away with the prize for "Most Overrated Book of the Year" and also claimed the title "Book that Will be Most Quickly Forgotten" (Smith D10).

Beyond the reams of negative press his work has attracted, the most significant commentary on the perceived value of Coupland's work may be the fact that it has been virtually ignored by Canadian scholars. Though he is recognized as a major literary figure around the world and repetitively anthologized in different international collections that attempt to define postmodern writing, Canadian critical interest in Coupland's work has been practically non-existent. Running opposite to the traditional trend - - whereby a Canadian writer gains a major following at home after he or she has attracted international attention - - Coupland has received far less academic scrutiny in his own country than he has abroad. How do we explain this apparent lack of interest? Why is it that a writer many consider to be a major American figure - - the namer and literary conscience of Generation X - - continues to be seen as a minor figure in Canadian criticism?

One possible explanation for Coupland's relatively weak critical following in this country can be linked to the Firstspatial bias we have been tracing through the Canadian postmodern tradition. Simply put, Coupland does not write Canadian postmodernism; or, more accurately, he does not write the kind of Canadian postmodernism established by Hutcheon and Kroetsch and practised by writers like Johnston, Vanderhaeghe, Wiebe, and Van Herk. Coupland's work does not fit within the standard restrictions of the

Canadian geographical imagination and his marginalised position in the Canadian canon can be at least partly attributed to the fact that his plots, themes, settings, symbols and characterizations do not endorse the same materialized spatial epistemology that has dominated the country's literature for more than a century. Rather than situate his work in artificially naturalized settings or producing the kind of historiographic metafiction we have already considered, Coupland has carved out a unique position for himself: he is both the most suburban and the most contemporary writer at work in Canada today.

Although the characters in Girlfriend in a Coma live in Canada, they do not inhabit the rugged landscape of Newfoundland, nor the wide expanses of the Prairie. Instead Coupland's Canadians come from the suburbs. Like the majority of Canada's "real" citizens, their experience of social space is inescapably indexed within a man-made environment. These characters actually live in the split-level bungalows and sprawling housing developments that dominate Canadian social space. They shop at the same big box retailers and strip malls where most real Canadians get their groceries and, like most Canadians, they spend the majority of their leisure time consuming American culture. Revealingly, these people never encounter the natural environment as a powerful unmediated force. Instead they inhabit a cultural geography entirely incompatible with Firstspace epistemology. Rather than interpreting their landscape as a naturally pre-determined Canadian reality, they endorse an American-style Secondspatial reading. To them, "place" must be understood as an imaginary projection, an idea of community.

If, as we saw earlier, Kroetsch's definition for Canadian postmodernism is rooted in a strong sense of anti-Americanism, then Coupland's definition of the same discourse

has been shaped by an opposite but equivalent pro-American sentiment. In fact, the "Americanised" quality of Coupland's fiction is often considered its defining feature (Bradbury 7). Other than Girlfriend in a Coma, almost every one of his novels is set entirely in the United States. Coupland's obvious affection for America and his intimate knowledge of its popular culture have done little to help his reputation as a Canadian author. For example, though he is almost never discussed in Canadian literary quarterlies and has yet to be included in a single major anthology of Canadian writing, Coupland's work does occupy one of the coveted spots in the Norton Anthology of Postmodern American Fiction. For a writer whose has, outside of the current discussion, *never* been compared with other Canadian postmodern writers, it is interesting that the editors of this anthology posit such a clear connection between Coupland's novels and the work of American authors such as Pynchon, DeLillo and Morrison: all four writers are included on the same canon-defining list of American postmodernists. In the introduction that preface Coupland's selection, the Norton editors explore this relationship between his Canadian citizenship and his Americanised imagination. In a brief interview, they ask Coupland to describe his "place" in North American culture. The response they receive is fascinating: rejecting the basic principles of environmental determinism, Coupland admits that although he is "a Canadian by birth," he identifies himself "more as a citizen of the West Coast than as anything else - the intellectual 'Chile' that spans from Anchorage right down to San Diego; Juneau, Vancouver, Victoria, Seattle, Portland, San Francisco, and Los Angeles" (568).

Coupland's desire to identify himself with an "intellectual" nation rather than a

real one, and his effort to portray himself as a citizen of the "West Coast" rather than as a Canadian, demonstrate that his postmodern identity is dominated by a Secondspace epistemology. Coupland crafts his own readings of cultural geography and believes that his personal intellectual community can be defined by imaginary borders rather than materialized ones. By suggesting a direct link between his postmodern aesthetics and the social space of the West Coast, he also reveals the regionalist index of his work. Like the Californian postmodernism we studied in Pynchon and DeLillo, Coupland's West Coast consciousness is similarly influenced by Lefebvre's illusion of spatial transparency. In the same way that most Canadian postmodern regionalism has been dominated by an overly-materialized conception of cultural geography, Coupland's Americanised postmodern regionalism is dominated by an overly idealized reading of social space. If Joey Smallwood and Shorty McAdoo, in The Colony of Unrequited Dreams and The Englishman's Boy, inhabited Canadian landscapes that were overpoweringly natural, the characters in Girlfriend in a Coma exist in a Canadian social space that lacks any realistic core.

A quick summary of Coupland's novel reveals just how unlike the typical Canadian regionalist text Girlfriend in a Coma is. Though this is the only Coupland narrative set almost entirely in Canada, the country described in these pages would be unrecognizable if compared to the naturalistic depictions of the nation we studied earlier. Girlfriend in a Coma takes place in an affluent suburb of Vancouver and follows the lives of six teenaged friends as they grow up during the 1980s and 90s. Though Coupland's characters are Canadian, they lead typically American lives. They watch American films

and television programming, consume American products, travel on American interstate highways and visit American tourist destinations. Their conversations are laced with American pop-culture references and they consistently compare themselves to American celebrities.

More like caricatures than fully developed individuals, each person in Coupland's circle of friends corresponds to a type-cast American role. Jared Hansen, the ghost who narrates the first and last sections of the novel, is a highschool football star: he is tragically diagnosed with leukemia at the age of eighteen and dies three months later. Pam Sinclair is the typical "beautiful girl" in their high-school class: she eventually becomes an international runway model and after spending the affluent 1980s in a globe-trotting, self-destructive haze, she returns home to Vancouver in the bitter 1990s as a disillusioned version of her former self. Albert Linus is the cynical, overly intelligent student: frustrated with society, he becomes a type of Kerouac figure and spends years "on the road," hitch-hiking across North America in a futile search to discover some kind of meaning in his life. Hamilton Reese is the angry, self-destructive young man: he grows up to become a demolitions expert and heroin addict. Wendy Chernin is a shy, sincere book-worm in high school: she studies hard, goes to med-school and becomes an emergency room specialist. The two main characters of the novel, Karen MacNeil and Richard Doorland, are highschool lovers who have sex for the first time on December 15th, 1979. That night, Karen overdoses on a mixture of Vodka and diet pills and falls into coma. She does not wake-up until seventeen years later on October 31st, 1997. While unconscious, she gives birth to a daughter, Meghan, who also grows up to be a disaffected

teenager.

Standing in as "a modern Rip Van Winkle," Karen's prolonged period of suspended animation makes her uniquely qualified to comment on the changes that have occurred in North American society during her illness (167). When she first emerges from the coma, she is happy to see her friends and to re-engage with contemporary culture, but after a brief period, she becomes depressed. She thinks the demands of a consumer-driven society have instilled a "*hardness*" in the people she meets and that "[t]he whole *world* seems to be working too hard" (154; 143). Soon after she awakens, Karen has an ominous vision of the future and predicts that the world will come to an apocalyptic end. On the day she predicts, December 28th, 1997, a mass sleeping-sickness sweeps across the planet. The earth's entire population - - except for Karen's group of highschool friends - - is destroyed. In the aftermath of the disaster, the group spends a year wandering through the dystopian landscape of a ruined Vancouver. Eventually, Jared, their ghostly classmate, reappears and offers them a miraculous opportunity to reinvent North American civilization. In order to save the world, the friends must abandon their postmodern cynicism and rediscover a new purposeful agency in their lives. They must actively challenge the established power structures that led the planet to such a disastrous end. In the much criticized closing paragraphs of the novel, Coupland commands his legions of Generation Xers to snap out of their consumption induced comas, and to "smash the tired, exhausted system" (284). Reviewers were less-than-impressed with this dispensing of "comic wisdom" (Marchand M15). In the Los Angeles Times, Cara Mia di Massa attacked the "preachy tone" of the conclusion and accused Coupland of using his

"characters as bully pulpits to purge his own frustrations with the modern age"(10).

Obviously this is not your standard Canadian novel. Coupland's shallow characters inhabit a cultural geography that is equally unsubstantial. Unlike Johnston's Smallwood, Vanderhaeghe's Vincent, Van Herk's Arachne Manteia, or most of the characters Kroetsch presents in a sympathetic light, the completely urbanized young adults in Girlfriend in a Coma are not overwhelmed by a reverential respect for their physical landscapes and they do not display the fragile psychologies associated with the garrison mentality. Even after the apocalypse, "The Big Sleep" that destroys the entire planet, Coupland's characters never show the slightest symptom of Atwood's "Survival" psychosis. Instead, they continue to live fairly comfortably in their suburban homes: they eat canned food and watch endless American films on video cassette to pass the time. They are overwhelmed, not by nature, but by their own boredom. When Jared describes "the real estate that remains one year after the world ended," his portrait of Vancouver's wasted suburban landscape sets the tone for the rest of the novel:

It is above all a silent place with no engines or voices or music. Theatre screens fray and unravel like overworn shirts. Endless cars and trucks and minivans sit on road shoulders harboring cargoes of rotted skeletons. Homes across the world collapse and fall inward on themselves; pianos, couches, and microwaves tumble through floors, exposing money and love notes hidden within the floorboards. Most foods and medicines have time-expired. The outer world is eroded by rain, and confused by lightning. Fires still burn, of course, and the weather now tends to extremes. Suburban streets such as those where I grew up are dissolving inside

rangy and shaggy overgrown plants; vines unfurl across roads now undriven by Camaros. Tennis rackets silently unstring inside dark dry closets. Ten million pictures fall from ten million walls; road signs blister and rust. Hungry dogs roam in packs. (4-5)

Coupland's images of suburbia dominate Girlfriend in a Coma, but not in the way that Newfoundland or the Prairie dominate Johnston and Vanderhaeghe's texts. The Firstspatial power of those landscapes is absent here. When Coupland's characters survey their surroundings, they see the suburbs as fictional substitutes for real geography. Although their city is surrounded, and effectively hemmed in by the mountains and the Pacific ocean, they never feel as though their lives have been shaped by the brute force of environmental determinism. While riding a gondola up one of the surrounding ski hills on the last night before Karen falls into her coma, Richard describes Vancouver as "a shimmering city below, a city so new that it dreamed only of what the embryo knows, a shimmering light of civil peace and hope for the future" (7). Similar images recur throughout the novel. Vancouver is always characterized as a "new" city, an invented social space that appears more as an imagined projection than a substantial reality. At different times it is seen as "an innocent, vulnerable, spun-glass kingdom [. . .of] sober, sterile mountain suburb[s];" or as a city "bath[ed] in freighter loads of off-shore money;" or a place dominated architecturally by "[b]lue glass towers through which Canada geese fly in V-formation" (15; 153). Vancouver is a town composed of "sterile suburban tracts" that are "cool and dry and quiet as a vault" (107; 24). In a chapter clearly titled "It's All Fake," Richard explains that he grew up in "the middlest of middle classes" and that his

suburban community was a cultural void:

People across the city believed our hillside neighbourhood to be the cradle of never-ending martini-clogged soirees and bawdy wife-swaps. The truth would have bored them silly, as it was middle-class dull to the point of scientific measurability. My mother, while barbecuing one fine summer evening in 1976, said prophetically that this neighbourhood was "like the land that God forgot."
(41)

In the single Canadian critical essay ever written on this novel, Robert McGill argues that Coupland's depiction of suburbia merits consideration as literary regionalism. He claims that Girlfriend in a Coma is a meditation on the "Geography of Apocalypse" and that it "demands to be situated [. . .] within the topographical and historical context of the late-twentieth-century North American West Coast" (253). McGill's efforts parallel the mapping of postmodern-regionalism I have attempted here. He sees a similar interdependence between North America's postmodern geography and the fiction that represents this kind of social space. For McGill, "the Vancouver of Girlfriend in a Coma is synonymous with Los Angeles;" its marginalized suburban community becomes the "apocalyptic and (oxymoronic) poststructuralist centre" of the novel (262). By portraying Vancouver as the Canadian version of Los Angeles, Coupland presents his readers with an ontologically uncertain postmodern geography rarely seen in Canadian literature. For all its similarities, Vancouver essentially *is* an American postmodern city: an entirely new, entirely man-made urban space that denies the basic tenets of Canadian environmental determinism. As McGill observes,

Coupland engages with America at its own level and undertakes the quest of its constituents. He follows an ontology of pop. One should read Coupland as a postmodern architect who erects Girlfriend in a Coma on the property of the 1990's West Coast and as a bricoleur with a disdain for foundation or unity who synthesizes the materials at hand. (272)

This is why Coupland's fiction seems so Americanised and so out of place in the Canadian canon: it *does* engage "with America at its own level" and it *is* a detailed exploration into the kind of postmodern geography that dominates "the property of the 1990's West Coast." Instead of falling under the influence of the Firstspatial object-centred environmental determinism which dominates the Canadian geographical imagination, Coupland's characters endorse an American, subject-centred Secondspace epistemology. Consistent with the illusion of transparency, they conceptualize Vancouver as an idea, an image inscribed onto the landscape. This postmodern interpretation of space triggers the same postmodern fears we saw in Pynchon and DeLillo's depictions of Los Angeles or in Morrison's descriptions of New York. Like those American cities, Vancouver is also only "half there" in a materialist sense. Coupland's characters perpetually worry about the metaphysical questions that accompany this lack of reality. The same apocalyptic themes that run through American postmodern fiction are also repeated here: the same juxtaposing of imagined utopias and real dystopias; the same fearful over-dependence on pop culture; the same worries about the shifting border that now separates truth from fiction. Revealingly, the deathly "Big Sleep" that hangs over the second half of the novel seems to be initiated by Richard's trip to Los Angeles. Though

Karen begs her boyfriend "not to go to California," he makes the journey anyway, and it is only while he is "flying home from Los Angeles" that the disease begins to creep across the continent (200).

Though both the protagonists in Girlfriend in a Coma and The Englishman's Boy make similar journeys from Los Angeles back to the Canadian West, Coupland and Vanderhaeghe interpret the significance of this voyage in different ways. In Vanderhaeghe's standard Canadian postmodern text, Harry Vincent flees from Los Angeles's postmodern social space to re-establish himself in Canada's more ontologically stable social space. In Girlfriend in a Coma, the results are reversed. Coupland's characters are already living in contemporary Canada when they first encounter the metaphysical insecurity of postmodern space and, for them, Vancouver can not function as a stable realistic retreat. In Coupland's vision, Canadian space is fully implicated in the postmodern condition; like the most hyperreal American cultural geography, Canadian space has also been created by the same postmodern social forces. It too has been re-shaped by a flexible-accumulation economy, a mass-market culture industry and an increasingly mobile population. For Richard, crossing the border between the US and Canada provides no protection from the postmodern instabilities that exist in any imagined social space.

There are many more common points of connection between Coupland's novel and the canonical works of American postmodern fiction. Like Oedipa in The Crying of Lot 49 or Nick Shay in Underworld or Violet Trace in Jazz, each of the friends in Girlfriend in a Coma contemplates his or her unreal social space in a similar way. "I feel

like everybody in the world is fake now," Linus complains, "as though people had true cores once, but hucked them away and replaced them with something more attractive but hollow" (83). Hamilton feels an identical absence in his life: he tells his friends that "[t]here's nothing at the centre of what we do? No center. It doesn't exist. All of us - look at our lives: We have an acceptable level of affluence. We have entertainment. We have a relative freedom from fear. But there's nothing else" (95). Even Pam identifies a "blankness at the core of the world;" and at his weakest moment, Richard returns to the central image of the novel - the coma (263). He imagines all of postwar North America unconsciously sleep-walking towards its apocalyptic end: he asks, "[w]hat if instead of unity there was atomization and amnesia and comas?" (61). Using a pop-culture reference to Rod Serling's classic cult television hit, Hamilton summarizes his feelings of postmodern paralysis in the following way:

If you look at the world as a whole, we have to admit life's good here where we live. But in an evil *Twilight Zone* kind of way there's nothing else to choose. In the old days there was always a bohemia or a creative underworld to join if the mainstream life wasn't your bag - or a life of crime, or even religion. And now there's only the *system*. All other options have evaporated. For most people it's the system or what . . . *death*? There's nothing. There's no way out now. (155)

The Secondspatial bias of Coupland's geographical imagination is best illustrated through his depiction of Vancouver as the Canadian capital of the American film and television industry. During Karen's coma, her friends take jobs with a production company that is filming an American science fiction television series. Like the *Twilight Zone* in the

1960's, Pamela, Hamilton, Linus and Richard work on a program that is a fictional parody of *The X-Files*, the supernatural hit-series of the 1990's which actually was filmed in Vancouver. Coupland's choice here seems purposefully postmodern. His characters are employed by an imaginary version of a real program that really did shoot its rainy "noir" episodes in Vancouver's consistently wet climate. The fact that the "real" *X-Files* became a postmodern hit and that its ironic slogan - "The Truth is Out There" - became a mantra for conspiracy theorists everywhere only augments Coupland's tongue-in-cheek depiction of the show. His "literary" characters work for a fictional program that is standing in as a parody of a real program; but that "real" program was itself already a parody of the established "detective show" genre. Though *The X-Files'* agents Scully and Mulder spent hundreds of hours searching for clues, the postmodern focus of the series never allowed them to arrive at any certain conclusions.

Fittingly, Pamela, Hamilton, Linus and Richard work behind the scenes on this show. As make-up artists, special effects technicians and director's assistants, it is their job to give the series its illusion of reality. Hamilton, Linus and Richard eventually become location scouts. For weeks, they drive around Vancouver searching for Canadian settings that can be made to look like American cities. Vancouver becomes the postmodern facade of "Hollywood North." Like the 'jumbled vista of the studio lot' in The Englishman's Boy, the entire city is seen as a fictional backdrop, an image rather than a reality. One of the show's L.A. producers tells the friends that American studios love to work in this city because "Vancouver's unique: You can morph it into any North American city or green space with little effort and even less expense" (88). Once again,

Coupland's depiction of this Canadian region shares nothing with our traditionally conceived definitions of Canadian nationalism or regionalist literature. Vancouver is "unique" only because it is so similar to the rest of the North American built environment. Its social space is uniquely conformist or ideally unrealistic. The city's social space is so temporary, so flexible, that it can not be contained within the restrictions of any particular image or definition. That special, unnameable, metaphysical presence which endures in Johnston and Vanderhaeghe's understandings of the Maritimes or the Prairie is absent here. In Vancouver, postmodern indeterminacy becomes the city's defining feature. Rather than lamenting the fact that their city has no central "essence," Coupland's characters embrace the numerous hidden possibilities of their landscape: "We enjoyed our location scouting as much as we could," Richard observes; "we located, dense, evergreen versions of Florida, California, Wisconsin and Pennsylvania. 'It's a good thing not too many botanists watch this show,' Linus said with grating frequency. 'Or weathermen, for that matter.'"(89)

The fictional and the real easily co-mingle throughout Girlfriend in a Coma, and Coupland makes no effort to defend an "authentic" description of Vancouver. McGill claims that its "elusive, malleable identity marks Vancouver as postmodern, perhaps even more so than Los Angeles, which for all its pop and apocalypticism, at least has an identifiable and definable ethos of superficiality and artifice" (263). Better even than the Californian capital which has formally established itself as a city of make believe, Vancouver's postmodern character is attained without ever making such an assertive claim. It is passively postmodern, a contemporary urban space which arrived at its state of

ontological indeterminacy without any effort. Though the city is confronted every day with potentially overwhelming natural forces, it ignores these Firstspatial influences and instead fictionalizes itself, continually reconstituting its social space in an ongoing process of postmodern pastiche. McGill argues that Vancouver is positioned "at that border between simulacrum and sublime" and that its urban and its "super" natural settings eventually blend together (263).

The same tension between Vancouver's suburban reality and its near-mythical natural surroundings is explored in Coupland's 1999 travel guide, City of Glass: Douglas Coupland's Vancouver. Though he, somewhat astoundingly, makes no reference to Paul Auster's classic American postmodern novella of the same name, the parallels between Coupland's City of Glass and Auster's are unmistakable. Like Auster's New York - - an equally unstable ontological site where the barriers between fiction and reality are continuously challenged - - Coupland's Vancouver (even when it is being described as a "real" travel destination), is never thought of as a permanently fixed social space. To make this point absolutely clear, Coupland's book even includes a centre-spread illustration which compares a map of the "'Real Vancouver" to a map of the "Parallel Universe Vancouver" (96-97).¹³ The map of Real Vancouver accurately includes the names of the city's neighbourhoods and parks, while the map of the Parallel Universe replaces those real names with their American (and most often Californian) equivalents. Vancouver's real space "doubles" for an American geography. In Coupland's estimation, "Kitsilano" is the fictional replication of "Berkeley"; the "UBC campus" stands in for "Monterey, CA"; and the "West End" of downtown becomes Canada's "San Francisco"

(96-97). The Californian index of his postmodern-regionalism now seems almost impossible to deny. As Leah McLaren observes, Coupland's Vancouver "turns out to be a weird and wonderful post-modern paradise;" she calls it "an unhistoried Mecca contained by salt water and mountains," a place dominated by a "West Coast cultural amnesia" (T1).

Interestingly, the fictional qualities of Vancouver that Coupland seems to celebrate in his non-fiction are exactly the features of its social space that eventually come under critique in Girlfriend in a Coma. In City of Glass, Coupland praises Vancouver as "The Everycity [. . .] the model of how American cities and neighbourhoods were *supposed* to have functioned," yet, in Girlfriend in a Coma, Coupland's characters lament the homogenizing forces that have transformed every major North American urban centre into one undifferentiated Edge City (34). As the "Big Sleep" sweeps across the continent, Karen's friends watch the CNN coverage of the story. Though they see many different shots of "smoking downtown cores," "hopelessly snarled" bridges and tunnels, and "accident-clogged roads," they can not match these images to any specific "real-world" locations (192). The jump cuts from image to image and the place-to-place juxtapositions come so quickly that every North American city blurs into one. Coupland's characters can not be certain if they are viewing Vancouver, Atlanta, Los Angeles or New York because "[a]ll cities have gone random" (192).

Though this distinctly American reading of postmodern-regionalism dominates Girlfriend in a Coma and most of Coupland's other fiction, it is eventually challenged at the conclusion of the novel. Here, again in the awkwardly presented closing scenes, Coupland appears to at least partially abandon the geographical imagination he has

always endorsed and to, instead, resuscitate the more stable Firstspatial vision of Canadian nature we have identified in other texts. Though he does not deny the obvious power of the illusion of spatial transparency, Coupland suggests that the human capacity to remake the natural landscape has finally extended beyond its limitations. In one of his final overwrought soliloquies, Jared tries to make his friends understand that they have underestimated the consequences of living in a completely denaturalized social space. In a series of aphoristic platitudes that come far too quickly to be taken seriously, he tells them that the myth of "the America's" is "over" and that "[t]he New World isn't new anymore" (269).

Coupland implicates his Canadian characters in the same pan-continental assault on nature normally associated only with American Manifest Destiny. Richard and his friends can not take refuge in a stable Canadian environment that exists safely beyond the influence of a postmodern American world because no such place exists. Exactly like Americans with their frontier mythology, Canadians have participated in the same restructuring of the natural landscape. Jared tells his friends that "[p]eople don't have dominion over Nature. It's gone beyond that. Human beings and the world are now the same thing" (269). The poststructuralist overtones are obvious here. Because they have blurred the Cartesian division between the thinking subject and the external world, Coupland's characters are fully postmodern. Unable to separate their identities from the world they live in, or to view themselves as the external creators of that world, they are both the architects and the victims of the social spaces they inhabit. Again, Jared explains the social consequences of living in a world where these metaphysical divisions have

broken down: "We crossed the line", he tells them,

A thousand years ago this wouldn't have been the case. If human beings had suddenly vanished a thousand years ago, the planet would have healed overnight with no damage. Maybe a few lumps where the pyramids stand. One hundred years ago - or even fifty years ago- the world would have healed itself just fine in the absence of people. But not now. [. . .] That's why the world has seemed so large in the past few years, and time so screwy. It's because the Earth is now totally ours. (269)

Although the final pages of Girlfriend in a Coma contain some of the worst writing in the novel, they also contain the passages in which Coupland directly confronts his own assumptions about cultural geography. Karen's coma and the whole apocalyptic sleeping sickness are reinterpreted here as elaborate warnings. Coupland, the great chronicler of North America's mass-culture, offers a cautionary fable to his readers. On the second last page of the book, the world is magically restored to its pre-disaster condition and Richard and his friends are transformed from cynical postmodern slackers into altruistic do-gooders. They commit themselves to new levels of maturity, new, more serious lives of service: "We'll be adults who smash the tired, exhausted system. We'll crawl and chew and dig our way into a radical new world" (284).

If it is possible to get past Coupland's jarring about-face or what di Massa calls "the ludicrous and discombobulated" plot twists that dominate the novel's conclusion, the confused 'moral' of Girlfriend in a Coma emerges. It seems the only way Richard and his friends can combat the degenerative social effects of a postmodern Secondspace

epistemology is to commit to that epistemology even more completely. Ironically, it is only by willfully creating a different "radical new world" that Coupland's characters will be able to correct the changes that this same geographical imagination inflicted on the "old" New World. Because his suburbanites can never retreat into the pure natural environments that are still present in so many other Canadian postmodern novels, and because they can not defend a stable Vancouver reality, they must continue searching for yet another alternative utopia. As we've seen, the origins of such a quest are well-established: though it is set in Canada, the spatial epistemology that dominates Girlfriend in a Coma makes it an unmistakably American postmodern novel.

Conclusion:

More of the Same in 2002?

In the fall of 2002, each of the three writers discussed in this section released a new book. Wayne Johnston and Guy Vanderhaeghe published new novels -- The Navigator of New York and The Last Crossing, respectively -- while Douglas Coupland delivered a non-fiction collection of essays and photographs entitled Souvenir of Canada. All three texts were well-received. Johnston's novel garnered the same enthusiastic reviews that had accompanied The Colony of Unrequited Dreams four years earlier. Writing in late-August in The Globe and Mail, T.F. Rigelhof predicted that The Navigator of New York would sweep all of Canada's major literary prizes and establish itself as the "must-read" book of the year; he called Johnston "the most prodigiously talented and morally complex novelist this country has produced since Mordecai Richler"

(D2). Not to be outdone, Vanderhaeghe's text was swamped with equally effusive praise. In The National Post, Noah Richler argued that The Last Crossing was "so poised, so expert, and so utterly engaging" that *it* had to "the year's best book" (AL1). Throughout the autumn book-buying season, Johnston and Vanderhaeghe competed at the top of the Canadian bestseller list, exchanging the number one and number two positions.

Coupland's kitsch-filled examination of Canadian culture also fared well. In The Globe and Mail, Carla Lucchetta proclaimed that "[e]very Canadian should own" Coupland's nostalgic scrap-book of national images and reflections (D6). In The Hamilton Spectator Magazine, Naomi Brun characterized Souvenir of Canada as a "144-page inside joke that only Canadians would understand;" she argued that "Coupland has somehow accomplished what hundreds of government policies have failed to do; he has created a definition of Canada that few would disagree with"(1). Like Johnston and Vanderhaeghe's novels, Coupland's book also went to the top of the non-fiction best seller list. 2002 was a very good year for these writers.

The recent success these authors have all enjoyed illustrates the remarkable consistency of the Canadian geographical imagination in its literature. In each of these three texts, each of these writers returns to the site of a previous triumph. Johnston and Vanderhaeghe have both returned to the nineteenth century to find the settings and plots for their new novels. Like so many of the narratives Hutcheon described fifteen years ago in The Canadian Postmodern, The Navigator of New York and The Last Crossing are two more text book examples of historiographic metafiction. Both can be seamlessly integrated into the Canadian postmodern tradition. From a spatial point-of-view, each

novel re-presents the same cultural geography that dominated its predecessor. Like The Colony of Unrequited Dreams and The Englishman's Boy, The Navigator of New York and The Last Crossing reinscribe the same Firstspace epistemology that has dominated Canadian literature for a century. All four plots contain those now-familiar scenes in which a Canadian character is transformed by the deterministic power of the landscape. Like Colony, Johnston's new novel also begins in Newfoundland before heading to New York and then recreating the great race for the North Pole between Robert Peary and his rival, Dr. Frederick Cook. And like The Englishman's Boy, Vanderhaeghe's new offering is another Western epic that once again explores the borders between nineteenth-century Canada and the United States. Though both novels are excellently written and fully deserve the praise they have received, they replay the same geographic themes and images we have explored throughout this discussion. Even in 2002, not much has changed for Canadian Postmodern regionalism: it remains a rural genre, and a Firstspace epistemology still directs its engagement with Canadian social space.

In fact, if anything, Firstspace epistemology has extended its influence over Canadian postmodernism. In Souvenir of Canada, even Coupland's vision of the country takes a decisive swerve toward environmental determinism. Though he maintains his Americanized perspective on the country and continues to defend Canada's suburbs as "the most luscious real-estate on earth," Coupland's collection of essays and photographs definitely reinforces the mythic status of the Canadian landscape (110). Its alphabetically organized exploration of the Canadian identity begins at "B" for "Baffin Island" and concludes with a emotional tribute to the Canadian wilderness that one would never

expect from such an obviously urbanized postmodern author. In the final lines of Souvenir of Canada, Coupland declares that "we [Canadians] *are* the land, and the land *is* us - [. . .] the land makes us who we are, and continues to do so - [. . .] this knowledge binds us together in a covenant that is as sacred and precious as any written under the eyes of God or otherwise, since the creation of the world" (142).

If one ever needed conclusive proof that Canadian postmodernism differs from its American counterpart and that the two literatures understand their relationship to geography in different ways, this is it. Even Douglas Coupland - - the most suburbanized writer in North America today - - feels he is bound to the Canadian landscape by a "sacred covenant." Even he eventually comes to embrace the illusion of Canada's spatial opacity and to endorse its Firstspace epistemology.

Notes For Section III

1. This citation comes from Kroetsch's famous introduction to the special "Canadian Issue" of boundary 2 (Fall 1974). In the same brief essay, Kroetsch makes his celebrated observation that "Canadian literature evolved directly from Victorian to Postmodern" (1).

2. In The Production of Space, Lefebvre describes the "The Illusion of Spatial Opacity" or "The Realistic Illusion" in the following way:

This is the illusion of natural simplicity- the product of a naive attitude long ago rejected by philosophers and theorists of language, on various grounds and under various names, but chiefly because of its appeal to naturalness, to substantiality. According to the philosophers of the good old idealist school, the credulity peculiar to common sense leads to the mistaken belief that 'things' have more of an existence than the 'subject,' his thoughts and his desires. To reject this illusion thus implies an adherence to 'pure' thought, to Mind or Desire. Which amounts to abandoning the realistic illusion only to fall back into the embrace of the illusion of transparency. (29)

In Thirdspace, Soja constructs his Firstspace epistemology around the realistic illusion. He claims that

Firstspace epistemologies tend to privilege objectivity and materiality, and to aim toward a formal science of space. The human occupancy of the surface of the earth, the relations between society and nature, the architectonics and resultant geographies of the human 'built environment,' provide the almost naively given sources for the accumulation of (First)spatial knowledge. Spatiality thus takes on the qualities of a substantial text to be carefully read, digested, and understood in all its details. As an empirical text, Firstspace is conventionally read at two different levels, one which concentrates on the accurate description of surface appearances (an indigenous mode of spatial analysis), and the other which searches for spatial explanation in primarily exogenous social, psychological, and bio-physical processes. (75)

3. Obviously, Canadian urban and suburban space has not been completely ignored by its writers. As is often the case, when one looks beyond the canon, beyond the major presses, and past the most established figures who normally define Canadian postmodernism, there are, in fact, a fairly substantial number of writers who challenge the rural-regional index of the genre. Perhaps the key text in this effort to re-contextualize contemporary Canadian fiction is Hal Niedzviecki's recent 1998 anthology Concrete Forest : The New Fiction of Urban Canada. Gathering together writers like Michael Turner, Mark Anthony Jarman, Crad Kilodney, Stewart Ross, and Elise Levine, Concrete Forest provides a

rarely-seen glimpse of Canada's urban environment. In his introduction, Niedzwiecki suggests that "the new Canada" is "a place where the challenge is no longer to explore the discovered wild, but to examine the fallacies and dangers of exploration turned inward to the cloistered confines of consciousness" (xx). We are told that the stories in Concrete Forest provide us with "as distinctive and compelling a reflection of post-industrial reality as any in the confining sprawl that defines the developed world," and that "[i]t is in our ability to explore our own imagined spaces that we find that we can understand ourselves" (xx). The echoes of Soja's Secondspace epistemology are obvious: Niedzwiecki's formulation equates "post-industrial reality" with "imagined space." For more on urban and suburban Canadian writing, see Niedzwiecki's The Original Canadian City Dweller's Almanac: Rants, Anecdotes, and Unsupported Assertions for Urban Residents (2002). Some city-specific studies include Callaghan's This Ain't No Healing Town: Toronto Stories, Gerson's Vancouver Short Stories and Demchinsky and Naves' Storied Streets: Montreal in the Literary Imagination. Colin Hill's unpublished dissertation The Modern-Realist Movement in English-Canadian Fiction 1919-1950 traces the hidden history of urban writing during this period. See especially his chapter 5, "The Proliferation of Modern Realism in Canada, Part II: Urban and Social Realism Reclaimed." David McGimpsey's Hamburger Valley, California, (2001) is a recent collection of unapologetically "Americanized" Canadian poetry that actively explores the kind of Secondspace environments found in DeLillo and Pynchon's depictions of mass-culture.

4. The results of the 2001 census surprised many experts. It was discovered that 15.3 million Canadians (51 percent of the population) live in or around the 'Big Four' cities: Toronto, Montreal, Vancouver and the Calgary-Edmonton corridor. The growth of these urban and suburban centres continued a trend that has dominated Canadian demographics throughout the twentieth century. In 1901, 67 percent of the Canadian population lived in rural communities. In 1931, that number had dropped to 46 percent; in 2001, it rested at 20 percent. For more reaction on the 2001 census, see Abbate, Lewington and Janigan

5. Cole Harris's "The Myth of the Land in Canadian Nationalism" and Carl Berger's "The True North Strong and Free" provide two excellent examinations of the geographical index of Canadian nationalism.

6. In her conclusion to The Canadian Postmodern, Hutcheon calls Kroetsch "the paradoxical centre of the decentred phenomenon called postmodernism" (162). Emphasizing the inter-relationship between Kroetsch's creative and academic work, she argues that

Kroetsch has been important to Canadian letters both as a writer and as a critic. In his novels and poetry he has radically problematized the notions of creativity and commentary: his creative characters are always as ambiguously creative (think of Hazard Lepage, Jeremy Sadness, William Dawe, Dorf) as are his ordering interpreters (Demeter Proudfoot, Mark Madham, Anna Dawe, Karen Strike). In his critical essays Kroetsch deliberately subverts academic convention: they are

wilfully fragmentary, discontinuous, asystematic, incomplete - and powerful because of this. (160)

7. In his introduction to the Canadian Issue of boundary 2, Kroetsch suggests that in order for the Canadian postmodern writer to "uninvent" the word, and discover his place in the world, "[h]e must destroy the homonymous American and English languages that keep him from hearing his own tongue." (1)

8. For more detailed discussion of the ambiguous use of archaeological metaphor in Seed Catalogue, see Wanda Campbell's "Strange Plantings: Robert Kroetsch's Seed Catalogue." Campbell argues the poem might be better discussed in accordance with "a horticultural model" (17). "The patterns that grow out of the poem are not merely accidental unearthings on the part of the reader" Campbell writes, "[b]ut the result of intentional plantings on the part of the writer" (16).

9. In his Maclean's review of recent works by Mary Lawson, Lynn Coady, and Lisa Moore, Brian Bethune argues that, although "[e]very year, Canada becomes more multicultural, more concentrated in its largest cities, [and] further from its rural past [. . .] you'd be hard pressed to know it from Canadian literature" (84). He observes that Canadians prefer their fiction to be "small-scale, but mythic" and "set in hard times or hard places" (84).

10. Smallwood's walk across the colony follows the route of "the Newfie Bullet," the famously slow, narrow gauge railway that ran across the interior of the island, connecting St. John's to Port-aux-Basques (See Figure 8.1). The Bullet operated from 1898-1969 and ran on smaller-than-regulation tracks that were only three feet, six inches wide. In Colony, Johnston describes the construction of this chronically inefficient line as a proud engineering achievement in Newfoundland's history:

The building of the railway had been one of the few great ventures in Newfoundland not connected with the fishery. Its primary purpose was not to link the scattered settlements around the coast, but to convey passengers and freight back and forth between the eastern and western seaports, St. John's and Port aux Basques, to give Newfoundlanders access to both the ships that crossed the ocean to England and those that crossed the gulf to the mainland. Its route was not determined by the sea, nor was the sea visible at more than a few points along the way. (137)

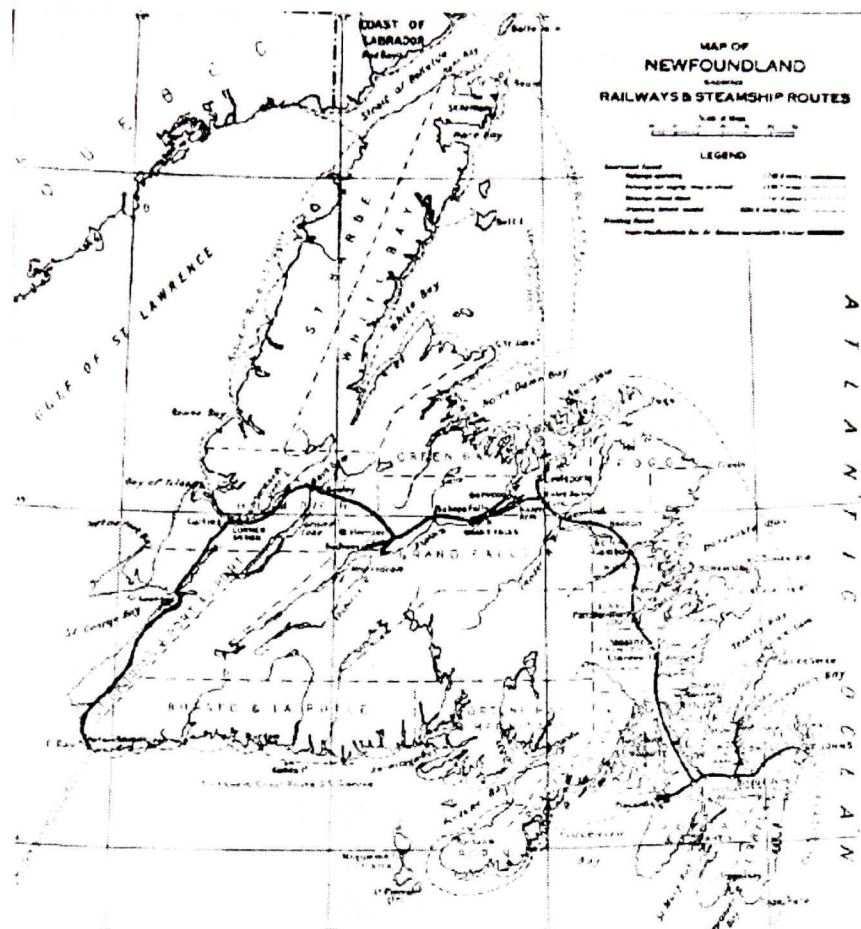


Fig. 8.1 Route of the "Newfie Bullet" and Smallwood's legendary walk. Note the Bonavista Branch Line. Source : *Newfoundland Royal Commission 1933 Report* (London: His Majesty's Stationary Office, 1934)

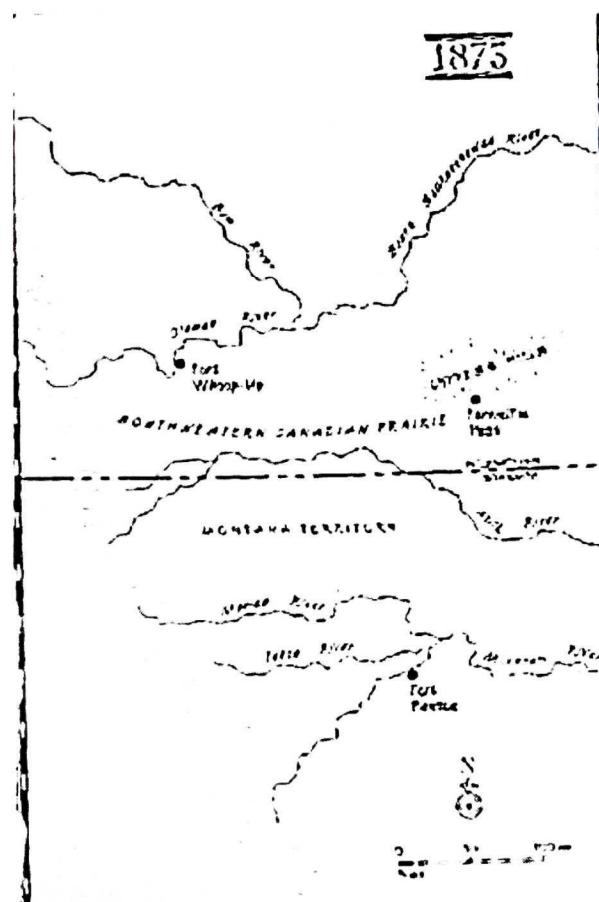
11. In his reading of the novel in *Speculative Fictions*, Wyile suggests that Smallwood's relationship with Fielding

provides a mirror image of his political failures. Throughout the novel, Smallwood and Fielding are fated to cross paths again and again in an elaborate dance of attraction and enmity, oscillating between intimate near misses and acrimonious splits. Though unrequited and therefore potentially pathetic, their romance provides the novel with a comic heart [. . .]. By virtue of a series of misunderstandings, grounded in mistaken assumptions and withheld information, Smallwood misreads Fielding throughout the novel and fails to consolidate their mutual attraction. Through their ambivalent relationship, Johnston dramatizes the personal costs of the class and colonial hegemony that shapes the politically obsessive Smallwood's devotion to making it above all else. (131-132)

12. In the citation for his Governor General's Award, the jury recognized Vanderhaeghe's *The Englishman's Boy* as a "Powerful novel by a master that weaves the Old West with

the young Hollywood and in the process roots the present century in the frontier myth of the past."

13. This map comes from the frontispiece of The Englishman's Boy. It clearly identifies the border between the American "Montana Territory," and the "Southwestern Canadian Prairie," as well as the precise locations of "Fort Whoop Up," "Farwell's Post," and the "Cypress Hills." Although Vanderhaeghe's historiographic metafiction challenges the objectivity of the historical record and actively re-interprets the events surrounding the massacre, this map follows the standard conventions of a nineteenth-century representation of social space. In Huggan's Territorial Disputes, he observes that regionalist writers often reproduce these types of illustrations to provide an objective spatial referent for their fiction. Huggan argues that the fictional map, in these kinds of cases, functions as "a metaphor of structure whose own lines of connection and authority are contained within a definite, and apparently coherent framework" (17).

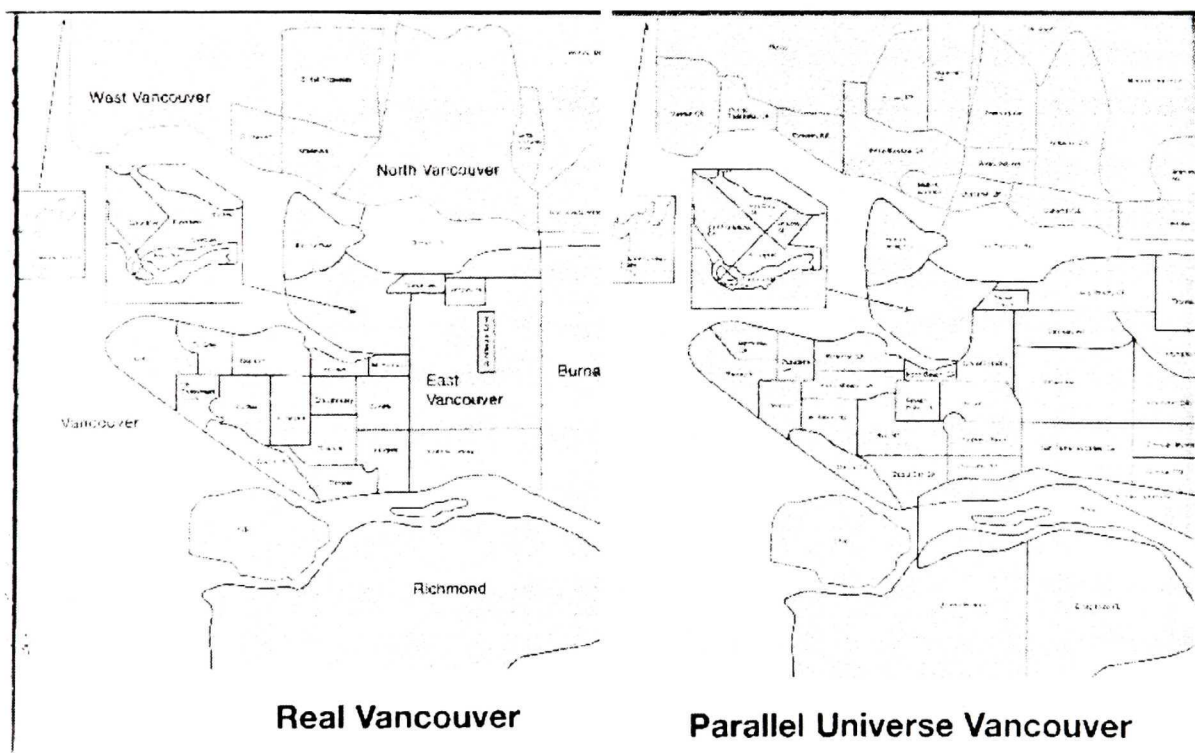


"Whoop Up Country" from The Englishman's Boy, 1996.

14. In The Los Angeles Times, di Massa suggests that Girlfriend is populated "[w]ith characters that are flat, undeveloped and powerless to rouse the reader's sympathy" (10). In The New York Times, Miller argues that, as a novelist, Coupland is "underpowered and oddly truncated," more like a sputtering "Gremlin," than a high performance

"Porsche;" she thinks that reading his fiction is like "watching someone use a butter knife to remove a screw" (9). In The Chicago Tribune, Made echoes these sentiments. She observes that Coupland "writes with a certain glibness that works against the seriousness he means to convey" (E3).

15. The fictional maps that Coupland produces in City of Glass share nothing in common with Vanderhaeghe's image from The Englishman's Boy. Whereas Vanderhaeghe's illustration posits a stable geographical referent and shows us exactly where his narrative takes place, Coupland's construction of "Parallel Universe Vancouver," provides us with an ironically "objective" reproduction of a place that only exists in his imagination. By substituting American (and predominantly Californian) place names for the Vancouver's "real" geography, Coupland acts very much like his location-scouting characters in Girlfriend in a Coma. He effectively "morphs" his flexible, Secondspace environment into another form. For more on Vancouver as a postmodern paradise, see Paul Delaney's Vancouver : Representing the Postmodern City



From City of Glass: Douglas Coupland's
Vancouver, 2000.

Conclusion

Indeed, despite these attempt to reformulate regionalism within the context of poststructuralist theories of representation and marginality, regionalism's position within both poststructuralist theory and postmodern culture is a tenuous one.

- Herb Wylie ("Ransom Revisited" 107)

To conclude this discussion, perhaps we should return to the beginning and evaluate the distance we have covered. As I stated at the earliest stages of this project, Between a Rock and Soft Place has tried to achieve two major goals: the re-theorization and explicit spatialization of contemporary regionalist discourse, and the demonstrated applicability of such an updated regionalist theory to the study of selected canonical texts from the Canadian and American postmodern traditions. In Section I, I suggested that regionalism could be separated from its long and exclusive association with nineteenth-century realist aesthetics, and that a new relationship could be forged between regionalist theory and postmodern cultural geography. The result of such a combination - - a hybrid postmodern regionalism - - would, I argued, address some of the most oft-criticized weaknesses in both contributing discourses. A postmodern regionalism would possess a more subtle theoretical vocabulary than traditional realistic regionalism and, due to its contemporary index, it would be better placed to examine the kind of generic landscape that now dominates North American social space. By the same token, postmodern regionalism would also improve on traditional postmodern theory by "grounding" the discourse in a specific real-world cultural geography. I argued that many of the canonical texts of American postmodernism centred on the social space of Los Angeles and

Southern California, and that the genre maintained at least some kind of partially mimetic connection to this unique parcel of the postindustrial landscape. Rather than realistically replicating, or scientifically reproducing, the physical attributes of this geography - - in a nineteenth-century Howellsian fashion- - postmodern regionalism focussed on the active cultural processes which, in Henri Lefebvre's terminology, *produced* such a social space.

In the second and third sections of the dissertation, I demonstrated how such a postmodern-regionalist criticism could provide a new index for the study of contemporary North American fiction. By concentrating on the different "spatial epistemologies" that dominate the Canadian and American postmodern traditions, I argued that profound differences in the ways these two countries understand geography produce traceable differences in their two definitions of postmodernist fiction. Using both Lefebvre's concept of the "double illusion" of "transparent" and "opaque" spatiality, and Edward Soja's recasting of that argument in his use of "First" and "Secondspace" epistemologies, I suggested that American postmodernism was dominated by an overly-idealized (imagined) conception of space, while Canadian postmodernism was dominated by an opposing, overly-materialized (real) conception of space. The historical origins of both spatial epistemologies were briefly outlined before being applied to the study of three canonical texts from each tradition. In the American section, I illustrated the dominance of an imagined Secondspace epistemology in Thomas Pynchon's The Crying of Lot 49, Toni Morrison's Jazz, and Don DeLillo's Underworld. And in the Canadian section, I outlined the presence of a deterministic Firstspace epistemology in Wayne Johnston's The Colony of Unrequited Dreams and Guy Vanderhaeghe's The Englishman's Boy.

At the close of the Canadian section, I included a special case-study of Douglas Coupland's Girlfriend in a Coma. I argued that because Coupland's fiction borders the two countries and their distinct spatial epistemologies, his work clearly illustrates the geographical conventions of American and Canadian postmodernism. By abandoning the realistic Firstspace epistemology which normally dominates Canadian postmodernism and replacing it with the Secondspace epistemology that normally influences American postmodernism, Coupland produced a strangely *Americanized* work of Canadian postmodernism. Girlfriend in a Coma, I argued, occupies a special place in Canadian literature because it is one of the few Canadian novels that has ever investigated the imagined postwar landscape of Canadian suburbia. Rather than setting his work in an artificially naturalized region - - like Vanderhaeghe's *Prairie* or Johnston's *Newfoundland* - - Coupland's work examined that portion of Canada's geography that dominates the country's real life, but is almost never seen in its fiction.

Although I believe that a spatialized postmodern-regionalist criticism can make an important contribution to contemporary literary debate, I do not see it as a panacea that will magically repair every deficiency that plagued regionalism and postmodernism when they were considered as separate discourses. Obviously, one cannot combine two complex aesthetics and expect there to be no conflict between them. As Wyile suggests, despite the best efforts of many theorists associated with the current renaissance, regionalism's position in contemporary culture is still quite "tenuous." His advice, warning scholars to use "a great deal of caution and self-consciousness about critical practice" in their dealings with regionalist discourse, is sound counsel ("Regionalism,

Postcolonialism" 139). Ultimately, Wyile admits it may be "unduly optimistic" to see "postmodernism and poststructuralism as heralding the liberation of regionalism from a humanist hegemony" ("Ransom Revisited" 104).

As we might expect, the same difficulties and deficiencies we found in traditional models of postmodern or regionalist theory continue to persist, in some form or another, in postmodern regionalism. Though such arguments often produce more heat than light, the familiar criticisms of the realist vs. postmodernist debate can easily be reapplied to this new discourse. Though postmodern regionalism is specifically designed to reduce such polarized disagreements and to encourage a kind of rapprochement between the two sides, "pure" postmodernists will continue to attack any form of regionalist theory that depends on a representational aesthetic, and "pure" regionalists will always resist any effort that even partially demystifies the sacred "sense of place" their work often tries to defend. Obstinate opinions on both sides are well-entrenched and difficult to overcome.

For example, on one extreme, it does not seem likely that Frank Davey or Roberto Maria Dainotto will ever be easily "converted" to an appreciation for the cultural complexity of regionalist discourse. As two of regionalism's most vocal critics, they are already too deeply invested in their over-simplified characterizations of a brutally naturalized version of the aesthetic. Throughout his career, Davey has portrayed regionalism as the equivalent of environmental determinism. As we have seen, he argues that regionalism gives a cultural "priority" to the natural landscape and that it transforms "geography into a sign that can conceal the presence of ideology" ("Toward" 2-3). Davey suggests that all regionalisms have a "politically oppressive" function and that they are

incapable of the kind of self-reflexivity that has become postmodernism's trademark ("Toward" 16). His version of regionalism can never see itself as a textual product.

According to this definition,

Regionalisms develop the appearance of having "natural" boundaries - an inside and outside- as if these boundaries were beyond culture. Appeals are constructed to the landscape and climate to explain cultural forms and customs. What is often obscured in these various constructions are the politically oppositional aspects of regionalism: that regionalism is cultural rather than geographic, and represents not geography itself but a strategically resistant mapping of geography in which historic and economic factors play large but largely unacknowledged parts (4).

Obviously, the regionalism described here shares very little in common with the spatialized model of the discourse we have explored throughout this discussion. As part of his rhetorical strategy, Davey seems to artificially "prop-up" an over-determined version of regionalism so that he can later tear it down.

Similarly, Dainotto's polemic critique of regionalism is far too forceful to be derailed by the insights of cultural geography. His suggestion that regionalism re-evaluates "notions of authenticity, of natural and organic community," and that it "attemp[s] to revive some peculiarly nationalist ideals by passing them off as 'new' regionalist ones" tries to invalidate contemporary regionalism by re-enforcing its supposedly unbreakable ties with nineteenth-century realism ("All the Regions" 488). Once again, this type of criticism is based on a strategically chosen, but comically oversimplified, reading of the discourse. For both Davey and Dainotto, regionalism's fate

is sealed. In their minds, any effort at a contemporary reconstruction will be too rustic, too naive, and too theoretically unsophisticated.

On the other extreme, scholars like Chalykoff and Loriggio, who are much more appreciative of regionalist discourse, share a suspicion of the overly "theoretical" portrayals of postmodernism and poststructuralism. Chalykoff's excellent re-evaluation of Canadian regionalist criticism takes many important scholars to task for falling under the influence of a purely mental construction of regionalism. At different times, she targets David Jordan, Eli Mandel, W.H. New and even Wyile himself. She argues that these critics have been too focussed on the discursive construction of regionalism and that their work has moved regionalism away from its traditional materialistic definition. Chalykoff observes that this "tendency [. . .] to locate regions in mental space" poses "a genuine threat to the future of literary regionalism in Canada" (174). She believes that such a "generic deployment of the term 'region' removes the crucially important - though admittedly blurry - line that distinguishes literary regionalism from other fields of identity-based inquiry that already find expression in literary studies and ethnic studies." (174.) The introduction of too much post-structuralist theory may sever regionalism's vital connection to its real-world geography, thereby destroying the "long and productive tradition of regional studies in Canada" (174).

Loriggio's work displays a similar concern over postmodernism's relationship with regionalism. Though he is intensely interested in "Regionalism and Theory," Loriggio resists any poststructural reading of social space. Instead, his work separates regionalism from both realism and postmodernism, and attempts to establish new connections

between regionalism and "possible world" theory, or the narratological arguments of Jurij Lotman. Like many other scholars, Loriggio appreciates the close connection regionalism seems to share with postcolonialism. He credits Edward Said for "saving" regionalism from the pure relativity of postmodernism, and consciously re-entrenching it in a secular "worldly" context. Loriggio argues that postcolonial theorists have

rescued literature and geography (and, ergo, regionalism) from the web of literary and cultural movements we have labelled postmodernism. They have disjoined them [geography, literature and regionalism] from philosophies which, having proclaimed the advent of the local, have seemed unable to do anything with it, other than to re-ontologize it, to reintegrate it in those signifying processes that celebrate the very universalist priority of language and the linguistic over history.

(5)

Clearly, Loriggio wants no part of a regionalist theory that transforms the relationship between subjectivity and space into a purely linguistic or textual construction. In his argument, the combination of regionalism and postmodernism only distracts regionalism from its true purpose. The linguistic turn in critical theory must be avoided because it pulls regionalism away from its vital connection with the real "ambivalences" of geographical space (4).

Critiques such as these - - from both sides of the regional/ postmodern debate - - are inevitable, predictable, and, in the end, valid. A postmodern-regionalist criticism must be prepared to face such charges and aware of the fact that many scholars will work actively *against* the reconciliation of these two aesthetics. Anti-regionalists (like Davey

and Dainotto) and anti-postmodernists (like Loriggio) will never endorse the kind of give-and-take that such a combination requires. For some, postmodernism will always be too abstract, non-representational, and relativistic, while, for others, regionalism will always be too grounded and theoretically naive. That being said, I think the potential for postmodern regionalism far outweighs the negative risk of this critique. As Soja argues throughout Thirdspace, scholars must be able to move beyond such "reductionist stances" and to reject such "ritual purification" (4). No new critical theory can surface without some form of resistance. Especially when we question the production of social space, and literary regionalism's representation of that active process, we must think beyond the typical categorical restrictions that often limit our explorations. Again, Soja provides some sage advice: traditionally minded postmodern and regionalist critics must "set aside the demands to make an either/or choice and contemplate instead the possibility of a both/and also logic, one that not only permits but encourages a creative combination" (5). As we have seen, postmodernism, despite its claims to be a pure non-representational aesthetic, actually does have a close connection to a particular, real-world geography, and regionalist criticism, despite its much-maligned reputation for naive realism and local colorism, actually possesses a very sophisticated literary theory. Between a Rock and a Soft Place has simply tried to illustrate these tendencies in both aesthetics, and, in the process, to re-invent them for a new kind of real-and-imagined cultural geography.

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