

[in memory of Robert Bain]

Larry Brown's Joe and the Uses and Abuses of the "Region" Concept

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What we seek in history is difference—and, through difference, a sudden revelation of our elusive identity. We seek not our origins but a way of figuring out what we are from what we are no longer.

—Pierre Nora, "Between Memory and History"

The problem of "regionalism" goes to the heart of U.S. cultural politics today and has become a key "site" for theorizing the effects of global culture and postmodernity on contemporary subjectivities. Until recently a derogatory term in the mainstream academy, where it was reserved for "country cousins," "regionalism" has come to be considered by many as "a more appropriate frame within which to read literature than . . . nationalism."¹ At the same time, the tendency among cultural theorists to describe every ex-centric challenge to a posited centric mainstream as "regional" has transfigured the once-stable place-term into an un-

1. W. H. New, quoted by Roberto Maria Dainotto, "'All the Regions Do Smilingly Revolt': The Literature of Place and Region," *Critical Inquiry* 22 (Spring 1996): 487. For a more historicized version of the formation of American regionalism, see Robert L. Dorman, *Revolt of the Provinces: The Regionalist Movement in America, 1920–1945* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1993), and Robert Brinkmeyer Jr.'s essay-review of the book, which notes that the region concept largely failed during the war years because its "emphasis on particularism and indigenous culture appeared . . . chauvinist, regressive, and racist—for many observers regionalism was the seedbed of fascism," in "Modern American Regionalism," *Mississippi Quarterly* 46 (1994): 650.

bounded space "within" which to imagine or contest communities. *Mutatis mutandis*, what were "regional" texts seem to have lost their purchase in contemporary discussions of "regionalism," in part because of their perceived hostility to multiculturalism. To what (if not to where), one might ask today, might "regionalism" refer?

In this sense, Philip Fisher's account of American Studies tracks development of the term *region* as much as it does a shift within American Studies from (nationalist) myth to contending (regionalist) rhetoric. Applying the logic of a long line of regional sociologists—who have considered region as an ethnicity—Fisher argues that the first part of the twentieth century saw the rise of "regionalism that was not geographic but ethnic." The latter part of the century, Fisher continues, saw "a further episode of regionalism" centered around gender, race, queerness, and any other group that "sets out its claims against" the "central technological culture" and "the older forces of education and mass representation." In an elegant critique of this "metaphoric translation" of identity-politics into "regionalism," Roberto Mario Dainotto questions whether "regionalism's goal is different from . . . a centralized notion of nationalism" and finds that regionalism and nationalism "speak the same language" and "foster the same desires, menacing and childish, of purity and authenticity."² However, Dainotto's deconstruction of the region/nation binary seems to accept, as Fisher's account of the trajectory of American Studies does, the collapse point between metaphoric uses of region and uses of the term connected to specific narratives about land, many of

2. Philip Fisher, "American Literary and Cultural Studies Since the Civil War," in *Redefining the Boundaries: The Transformation of English and American Literary Studies*, ed. Stephen Greenblatt and Giles Gunn (New York: Modern Language Association, 1992), 241, 242; Dainotto, "'All the Regions,'" 505.

On interplays among region and ethnicity, see George Brown Tindall, *Natives and Newcomers: Ethnic Southerners and Southern Ethnicities* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1995), and, in a different key, the works of John Shelton Reed, especially *One South: An Ethnic Approach to Regional Culture* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1982) and *Southerners: The Social Psychology of Sectionalism* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1983). For Reed, with occasional qualifications, the southerner is white, and the South, as a distinct ethnic culture, has long been "multicultural" *avant la lettre*. For a symmetrically opposed viewpoint, see Thadious M. Davis, who argues convincingly in "Race and Region," in *The Columbia History of the American Novel*, ed. Emory Elliot (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991), that whereas "race and region" were "once considered inseparable, in the case of the South [they] are now two distinct and discrete areas of inquiry," in that black literature cannot now be treated responsibly through southernist frames such as Reed's (436).

which have always emphatically considered themselves sub-nationalisms: "not quite a nation within a nation, but the next thing to it," as W. J. Cash said of the South. Neither Fisher nor Dainotto suggests that there are meaningful distinctions to be made among understandings of regionalism, whether in terms of U.S. cultural politics or in terms of attempts to view historic regions as critical sites of social resistance, reactionary or progressive. Fisher can write of "the full spectrum of regionalized culture" as including "Native American, Chicano, gay, black, lesbian, female" regionalisms, as if "Native Americans" did not have over five hundred distinct and federally recognized "nations." Dainotto's cautionary *overview* of the region concept likewise loses sight of the histories of struggle of peoples committed to place in specific locations, and considers the identification of Americans with region as a recent phenomenon. In a similarly unhistorical manner, "postmodern geographers" often imply that the "turn" to "localism" is largely to be understood as a reflexive resistance to economic encroachment. Such readings charge (or credit) transnational corporatism (TNCs) with forcing the local to the surface of consciousness, as if place-bound identities had somehow previously been repressed.³

Scholars of what might be provisionally (re)considered as American "sectionalism" know, of course, that regional "dividing lines" have a history in America going back to the colonial period, and that these have repeatedly been discussed in terms of nationalism. For instance, in "The

3. Fisher, "American Literary and Cultural Studies," 242; Dainotto, "'All the Regions,'" 500. TNCs seemingly respond to post-Fordist critiques by presenting themselves as proactive brokers for global cultural preservation. IBM's "Solutions for a Small Planet" campaign, for instance, suggests that laptop computers protect "culture," linking disparate groups in ways that enable them to maintain traditional ways. The literature on global/local conjunctions is extensive and by no means homogenous in arguing that transnational and local formations have superseded statism. For exemplary post-Fordist accounts, see Edward W. Soja, *Postmodern Geographies: The Reassertion of Space in Critical Social Theory* (London: Verso, 1989); Robert Reich, *The Work of Nations: Preparing Ourselves for 21st-Century Capitalism* (New York: Knopf, 1991); Masao Miyoshi, "A Borderless World? From Colonialism to Transnationalism and the Decline of the Nation State," *Critical Inquiry* 19 (Summer 1993): 128–51; Arif Dirlik, *After the Revolution: Waking to Global Capitalism* (Hanover, N.H.: Wesleyan University Press, 1994); Rob Wilson and Wimal Disanayake, eds., *Global/Local: Cultural Production and the Transnational Imaginary* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1996); and Rob Wilson, *Reimagining the American Pacific: From "South Pacific" to "Bamboo Ridge" and Beyond* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2000). All are concerned with the cultural problem, as Miyoshi puts it, of how "to balance the transnationalization of economy and politics with the survival of local culture and history—without mummifying them with tourism and in museums" (147).

Significance of the Section in American History" (1925), Frederick Jackson Turner argued (conventionally, even then) the persistence of distinct "sections" in America and expressed guarded optimism about sections "becoming more and more the American version of the European nation." At the same time, Turner saw "section" as working in a stabilizing dialectic with the national political party system, in which each party of necessity works to "conciliate sectional differences within itself." In their monumental *American Regionalism*, Harold Odum and Harry Moore likewise expressed fears about sectionalisms as inherently separatist and nationalistic, and counterposed the integrative powers of the "region" concept. Given the sedimented history of the "problem," then, members of venerable institutions like southern literature are understandably reluctant to redefine their projects in relation to a post-statist theory that posits the "local" as a discovery, or to proliferating "regional" claims upon a reopened American cultural frontier. For them, the post-statist tendency to act as if U.S. historic regions were suddenly obsolescent (a matter for antiquarians and tourist boards), while privileging abstract notions of the "local," might seem to work in the service of the globalization it critiques. At the same time, the widespread sense of "regionalism" as a now-legitimate frame for resisting what Frank Chin calls "death by assimilation" makes the concerns of regional institutions resonate against those of an increasingly pluralistic mainstream American Studies. This coincidence of interests affords opportunities on all sides and suggests the uses of bringing geopolitically regional outlooks into dialogue with culturally regional ones.⁴

4. Frederick Jackson Turner, *History, Frontier, and Section*, introduction by Martin Ridge (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1993), 112, 93. On American sectionalism, see Wallace Stegner, "Variations on a Theme by Crèvecoeur," in *The American West as Living Space* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1987), 63–86; and the essays in *All Over the Map: Rethinking American Regions*, ed. Edward L. Ayers et al. (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996), especially Peter S. Onuf, "Federalism, Republicanism, and the Origins of American Sectionalism," 63–82, and Stephen Nissenbaum, "New England as Region and Nation," 38–61.

See "From Sectionalism to Regionalism," in Harold W. Odum and Harry Estill Moore, *American Regionalism: A Cultural-Historical Approach to National Integration* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1938), 35–51. For the purposes of this chapter, and in the face of a critical scene in which *region* means many things, I posit *sectionalism* as involving a sublimation of both "local" and "global" into a concept of *region* that acts as a sub-nationalism and ultimately resists a more critical regionalism.

For an exemplary overview and critique of the complexities of a "politics of location," in which, following Adrienne Rich, the gendered body functions as "location" and subjectivity may have transnational "locations," see Cindy Franklin, *Writing Women's Identities:*

This conjunction might be empowered by an ongoing redefinition of the value of regionalism that differs in emphasis from Fisher's agonist notion of regionalism as "Civil War within representation." In "Place in Fiction," Eudora Welty wrote that the term "regional . . . has no meaning for the insider doing the writing, because as far as he knows he is simply writing about life." The danger in "as far as he knows," of course, was that this sort of regional writer did not know very far—was essentially provincial. James D. Houston distinguishes between such provincialism and a "new and upgraded regional feeling": "Provincialism implies a narrowness of perspective, a stubborn attachment to the only place one really knows. It springs, as often as not, from a fear of other places and possibilities. This new regionalism is characterized by conscious choice, together with a growing awareness of our options." Houston's "upgraded regionalism," in its emphasis on "conscious choice," suggests a regionalism that recognizes broad connections to diverse cultures, and acknowledges the need not just to assert one's own experience as central but to put it in relation to other cultures from which it might learn without being swallowed in the process. In making no distinction between economic refugees and back-to-nature yuppies, Houston's "choice" suggests that regionalism offers nomad and indigene alike a set of sedimented but nonexclusive alternative values that the long-time resident of a place will not necessarily choose.⁵

The architectural critic Kenneth Frampton builds the political dimension of form-place into a conception of "critical regionalism." For Frampton, critical regionalism is a consciously selected *arrière-garde* position capable of cultivating "a resistant, identity-giving culture while at the same time having discreet recourse to universal technique." In critical practice, this means "distancing oneself equally from the Enlightenment myth of progress and from a reactionary, unrealistic impulse to return to

Contemporary Multigenre Anthologizing Practices (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1997). This is an appropriate place to express my indebtedness to Franklin for incisive critiques of this paper.

5. Eudora Welty, "Place in Fiction," in *The Eye of the Story: Selected Essays and Reviews* (New York: Vintage Books, 1979), 132; James D. Houston, "One Can Think About Life After the Fish Is in the Canoe: Some Rambling Notes on the Regional Feeling," in *One Can Think About Life After the Fish Is in the Canoe and Other Coastal Sketches* (Santa Barbara: Capra Press, 1985), 60. For another vision of "New American Regionalism" that has the virtue of advocating a de-ruralizing of the concept of place, see Michael Kowalewski, "Writing in Place: The New American Regionalism," *American Literary History* 6, no. 1 (Spring 1994): 171–83.

. . . forms of the preindustrial past." Such a regionalism cannot gel as a "national" movement or as a theory proper, since it depends on decentralization and local/regional histories, but it can imagine mutually enriching dialogues and must recognize the need to work against the xenophobic aspects of place-bound "tradition." For Turner and Odum, the question of region is primarily part of an internal, nationalistic dialectic. For Frampton, on the other hand, critical regionalism responds to a pervasive crisis in (post)modernity. It registers momentous changes in the global system and seeks strategies to "mediate the impact of universal civilization," while avoiding romantic history, opportunistic invocations of place, or regressive conceptions of region.⁶

Among the most regressive of these conceptions is that which sees regions as dying "on and on," and regards this as symptomatic of historical decline, fall from grace, fracturing of value. This tenacious structure persists in ironic elegiac sayings like "even nostalgia's not what it used to be," which read as nostalgia for nostalgia. Like trick birthday candles, sectionalisms only seem to "go out." The South, for instance, has always been "postsouthern" but never "post," and has persistently sung gorgeous, doom-filled requiems for itself. As Jefferson Humphries acknowledges, "it is part of our pleasure . . . to assert that, as a literary culture, we are near the end in the South." Such discussions, fraught with the semiotics of a paralyzingly self-serving nostalgia, are less expressions of *fin-de-region* than demonstrations of reluctance to mobilize critically. Post-South discourse only discloses an anxiety-ridden awareness that, while the category southern is *not* imperiled by "post"-nesses, the rigor, politics, and popular significations of the term are increasingly visible. As much as ever, a mesh of southern "sublime objects"—signature clothes, music, architecture, eats, pulpit styles, and behaviors—"believe" southernness for the viewer within expanded American and global audiences. These "objects" may appear outdated, but if so they refuse to heed their expiration dates in uncanny ways, and even circulate back into regional consciousness from "without."⁷

6. Kenneth Frampton, "Towards a Critical Regionalism: Six Points for an Architecture of Resistance," in *The Anti-Aesthetic: Essays on Postmodern Culture*, ed. Hal Foster (Port Townsend, Wash.: Bay Press, 1983), 20, 21.

7. Jefferson Humphries, "Introduction: On the Inevitability of Theory," in *Southern Literature and Literary Theory*, ed. Jefferson Humphries (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1992), xvii. Wallace Stegner makes the point succinctly: "We have been forever bidding farewell to the last of the Mohicans . . . or the vanishing wilderness. . . . We have made a tradition out of mourning the passing of things." *Where the Bluebird Sings to the Lemon-*

Faced by their images in the global media—or in a host of foreign discussions of “southernness” (as in the German academy)—“insiders” may appropriate or internalize behaviors attributed to them. It becomes hard to say which came first, the stereotype or the behavior—demand or product. In this, one might, following Raymond Williams, distinguish between emergent and residual place-bound literatures. With emergent literatures, communal self-imagining involves countermemory, or conscious renunciation of “prior” representations. But with sectionalism part of the project is precisely retaining contact with prior cultural production. The heritage that stereotypes attach to may not be attractive, but to do away with them might involve destroying vital grounds of identity. In Flannery O’Connor’s words, “The anguish that most of us have observed for some time now has been caused not by the fact that the South is alienated from the rest of the country, but by the fact that it is not alienated enough, that every day we are getting more and more like the rest of the country, that we are being forced out not only of our many sins, but of our few virtues.”⁸

In a world marked by the increasing intermingling of peoples, not disengaging the virtues from the sins threatens disastrous balkanization, and a perpetuation of ugly stereotypes into the foreseeable cyberspace future imagined by the likes of Neal Stephanson, whose southerner appears with confederate flag and “a baseball cap perched on the top of his head, tilted way back to expose the following words, tattooed in block letters across his forehead: MOOD SWINGS/RACIALLY INSENSITIVE.”⁹ Under-

ade Springs: *Living and Writing in the West* (New York: Penguin, 1992), 203–4. However, following Raymond Williams in *The Country and the City* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1973), one might consider such “mourning” a repetitive “structure of feeling” at the base of European modernity (12). Likewise, John Shelton Reed argued that “interaction with nonSoutherners can raise the regional consciousness of Southerners . . . by exposing them to regional differences and leading them to generalize about those differences: in other words, by generating regional stereotypes in Southerners.” *Southerners*, 38. On the devastating effects of regional stereotypes on Appalachian communities, see Stephen William Foster, *The Past Is Another Country: Representation, Historical Consciousness, and Resistance in the Blue Ridge* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988).

8. Flannery O’Connor, *Mystery and Manners: Occasional Prose*, ed. Sally and Robert Fitzgerald (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1962), 28–29.

9. Neal Stephanson, *Snow Crash* (New York: Bantam, 1992), 300–1. On the threat of balkanization today, see Tony Horwitz, who writes of “a cultural war flaring across the South . . . fuelled by a burgeoning and sophisticated cadre of Southern ‘nationalists’ who feed on modern fears of dwindling status and on nostalgic images of a South that is cohesive, distinct, and independent from the rest of America.” “A Death for Dixie,” *New Yorker*, 18 March 1996, 65. The article cites John Shelton Reed as saying that the “deepest

standing the historical contingency of regional identity on attitudes about race (and “race” as an effect that has meaning within time-place) would seem crucial for reenvisioning the future. As Arif Dirlik, who moves toward a syncretic mode of working through the trauma of postmodernity argues, “the local is valuable as a site for resistance to the global, but only to the extent that it also serves as the site of negotiation for abolishing inequality and oppression inherited from the past, which is a condition of any promise it may have for the future.” Dirlik does not say how consensus will be reached about the nature of justice and can seem to be reinstalling a center-periphery model of Reason. At the same time, Dirlik argues, like Frampton, that “it is neither possible nor desirable to dismiss the new awareness that is the product of modernity as just another trick of Eurocentrism.” Rather, it is now necessary to speak of “critical localisms” that subject “the present to critical evaluation from past perspectives” but retain “in the evaluation of the past the critical perspectives afforded by modernity.”¹⁰ What still needs to be heard, in the reading of regional texts, are the affirmative resonances of historic sections in this moment when present answers to past, and local resists global.

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If there be no constructive impulse behind the historical one, if the clearance of rubbish be not merely to leave the ground free for the hopeful living future to build its house, if justice alone be supreme, the creative instinct is sapped and discouraged.

—Friedrich Nietzsche, “On the Uses and Disadvantages of History for Life”

Larry Brown’s *Joe* (1991) immediately suggests ways in which, however much the South has changed (or at however different paces the Souths

grievances are cultural,” in that “they feel that they don’t get any respect, and that their ancestors are being disrespected” (72). However, a myriad of contemporary Hollywood films, such as *A Time to Kill* and *Dead Man Walking*, present the redneck as suffering less from cultural grievance than from a blind xenophobia emerging from faulty baptism.

10. Dirlik, *After the Revolution*, 108. See also Dirlik’s fine essay, “The Global in the Local,” in *Global/Local*, ed. Wilson and Dissanayake, 21–45. There is a sense, however, in which the term *local* as it is used in such analyses refers to what Benedict Anderson calls “imagined community.” For Anderson in *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (1983; rev. ed., London: Verso, 1991), “all communities larger than the primordial village . . . are imagined. Communities are to be distinguished not by their falseness/genuineness, but by the style in which they are imagined” (6). For this paper, it might be good as well to retrieve the quite different nineteenth-century American understanding of *local* as related to “local-color” movements. See, for instance, Josephine Donovan, “Breaking the Sentence: Local-Color Literature and Subjugated Knowledges,” in

are changing), it elicits books that *are experienced* as southern by readers, publishers, reviewers, critics, and that cannot simply be considered "retro," forms of nostalgia, aesthetic recycling, or literary tourism. If southernness is a market term, this need not contradict the pride that authors feel in asserting their affiliation, however fraught such affiliation might be in American culture.

Beneath its taut, gritty narrative of rural life in a contemporary Mississippi more strewn with ramshackle structures than malls, *Joe* reads as, among other things, an enactment of tensions between a sectional preoccupation with a fantasmal "pre-" and an anxiety before an atavistic "post-." Nostalgia need not be for a simpler, purer, more integrated society. In *Joe*, it involves a hard-nosed, blue-collar attachment to individual freedom, without illusions about some less-violent, homier past, or fear of losing the "sense of home." The "post," in contrast, foresees loss through integration, destructive corporatism, over-regulation, a legal system stacked against the poor and psychically repressive. Because of its intonation of caught-in-betweenness, *Joe* functions as an exemplary text case for critiquing the usefulness of theories of global/local conjunctions and American cultural remapping for the residual regionalist. The book might be read as constituting one literary mode of "approaching" critical regionalism in that, in its very recalcitrance, it implicitly evokes tension between tenacious sectional modes and tropes (with their troublesome organicism) and a critical regionalism that might involve re-signifying these tropes of affiliation from within, and resituating southernness on its own shifting grounds. A book that leaves legible its own "betweenness" suggests the possibility of affirmative choices.

Whatever else reviewers comment on about *Joe*, they celebrate its southern "authenticity," though the review form precludes engaging the problem of what secures authenticity. One might, for brevity's sake, argue that if nothing guarantees it (and that, historically, "authenticity" is an outsider's term that self-servingly elides internal differences), this does not mean it cannot be useful to make tentative definitions, or distinctions between grounded and tourist invocations of place. Historians have never considered "region" or "section" as deterministically real concepts; although Turner spoke, in the Crèvecoeurian mode, of waves

The (Other) American Traditions: Nineteenth-Century Women Writers, ed. Joyce W. Warren (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1993), 232, on how local-colorist black and women writers resisted an internal colonization with which regionalism was at times complicit. For Donovan, *local-colorist* (female/black) is thus a more "insurrectionary" term than "the tamer, more acceptable, *regionalist*" (male/white).

of migration "pouring their plastic pioneer life into geographic moulds," he also invoked an eclectic amalgam of other factors: "a geography of political habit—a geography of opinion, of material interests, of racial stocks, of physical fitness, of social traits, of literature, of the distribution of men of ability, even of religious denominations." For reading regional texts, Paula Gunn Allen's definition, which foregrounds region as process while retaining the aboriginal context muted in Turner's analysis, is particularly useful: "A truly Southwestern work almost inevitably combines the ancient, the medieval, and the contemporary in ways that yield maximal meaning comprehensible within several contexts." For Gunn Allen, "cultural geography is more important than the geopolitical place" (seen as borders that have crossed people, as well as landscapes that various groups have placed borders around). To this might be added a concern with cultural maintenance, along with a rendering of regional "complicities of language, local references, and the unformulated rules of living know-how."¹¹

By all of the above criteria, *Joe* is certainly authentic. One *could*, perhaps, read *Joe* out of southernist frames, but much would be lost by doing so. The book "convinces" the reader through the specificity of its landscapes, ethnoscares, languages, and its participation in a strand (white masculinist)¹² of southern tradition. It has the aura of having grasped some substance of culture that percolates up into a convincing

11. Turner, *History, Frontier, and Section*, 106, 111; Paula Gunn Allen, "Preface," in *Writing the Southwest*, ed. David King Dunaway and Sara L. Spurgeon (New York: Plume, 1995), xxiii. For more detailed developments of this concept, see Leslie Marmon Silko's essays "Language and Literature from a Pueblo Indian Perspective," in *English Literature: Opening Up the Canon*, ed. Leslie A. Fiedler and Houston A. Baker Jr. (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1981) and "Landscape, History, and the Pueblo Imagination: From a High and Arid Plateau in New Mexico," *Antaeus* 57 (1986); and Richard Hama-saki, "Mountains in the Sea: Emerging Literatures of Hawai'i," in *Readings in Pacific Literature*, ed. Paul Sharrad (Wollongong, Australia: University of Wollongong Press, 1993). Marc Augé, *Non-Places: Introduction to an Anthropology of Supermodernity*, trans. John Howe (London: Verso, 1995), 101. Augé also invokes Vincent Descombes's notion of a character's "rhetorical country" that "ends where his interlocutors no longer understand the reasons he gives for his deeds and actions, the criticisms he makes or the enthusiasms he displays" (quoted, 108).

12. Since the Civil Rights movement and the rise of feminism in the sixties, "new" strands of southern fiction have contributed to the reconceptualizing of southern studies. Within some anthologies that claimed to speak for "the South" as a whole, white women fared much better than persons of color, in part perhaps because of a troublesome relation between regionalism (with its exclusionary, conservative tendencies) and a multiculturalism that is, in a disturbing sense, what provincial regionalisms defend against.

present, where cultural mores change slowly. This suggests that if the local is fully subject to the global, as postmodern geographers assume, *Joe* might be heard asking, "So what?" Postmodern geographers may see the local as fully global, while subjects whose affiliations are primarily regional may in complex, imperfectly conscious ways appropriate what suits them from the global without priorities in their lives being reordered by the encounter. For instance, in *Joe* TVs, VCRs, and radios are often on, but only highlight Joe's psychic distance from the consumer culture around him: "He twisted the dial around, and the radio snarled and whined while quick-speaking Spaniards exhorted their wares and somebody screamed CASH MONEY and the twangy garbled country music flared and diminished amidst the roading and fuzz and static until finally he snapped it off. The road twisted through strands of pine, hills of hardwood timber green as Eden."¹³ Joe Ransom's search through the no longer exclusively white/black voices of an increasingly consumer-oriented South ends in static.

If materialistic Spaniards (Hispanics?) are within his band-width, he need not listen to them. If the "outside" is "inside," it *can* be "snapped off," tuned out. The repetition of "twisted" in relation to the radio "dial" and then country "road" sets the two up as cognitive alternatives for Joe: the seductions of a "twisted" garish multicultural consumer society that "garble[s] country music," or the road back into the lyric and Edenic "hills of hardwood." Likewise, when Joe watches TV he sees "things happening on the television screen without seeing them and [hears] the words the actors [are] saying without hearing them . . . like dreams, real but not real" (30).¹⁴ It isn't clear what the book thinks of these TVs, which seem always half-ignored—"they had a movie going on the TV and VCR but the sound was low" (267). The TV seems neither something to resist nor something that makes individuals feel romantically or futilely anachronistic, demanding change.

Part of the book's "southern" mode is its refusal to establish "theoriz-

13. Larry Brown, *Joe* (Chapel Hill: Algonquin Books, 1991), 75 (hereafter cited parenthetically in the text).

14. This quality of minimizing the importance of references to popular culture seems a deliberate characteristic of a certain kind of regional literature. In *Bastard Out of Carolina* (New York: Penguin, 1993), which might be seen as a woman-centered perspective on a community whose male characters share many predilections with those in *Joe*, Dorothy Allison typically refers to characters watching TV without mentioning what they are watching: "Daddy Glen was sitting in the living room in front of the television set with the sound turned down low" (77).

ing" vantage points outside the literary matrix. The book's "literariness" is thoroughly traditional, an implicit argument for regional reproduction: its stakes are, as allegorically as ever, a concern for the eradication of the ancestral landscape, and the theme still feels like an epochal metaphor, redolent of Faulkner. In *The Bear*, for instance, Faulkner emblemizes the "final" moment of a mode through the interlocked figures of Boon, Lion, and that metaphor on hind legs, Old Ben: "It fell all of a piece, as a tree falls, so that all three of them, man dog and bear, seemed to bounce once." The connection between bear and forest is literalized when the reader learns that hunting has stopped because "the lumber company moved in and began to cut the timber."¹⁵

The "hero" in *Joe* no longer hunts in the forest for sport; rather, he hunts the forest itself in the least sportsmanlike manner, for profit, without any sustaining connection to the land or traditional coming-of-age rituals. Brown suggests an inversion of old hunter myths in an episode where Joe carves up a deer found snagged in barbed wire. In part through his complicity in such inversions, Joe becomes representative of a generation that participates uneasily in cutting itself off from crucial aspects of an identity that imagines itself nonetheless connected to a "first settler," rebel mentality. Joe, with his "scarred knuckles, outsized, knotty with gristle" (256), and Gary, the young illiterate worker he befriends (a "kindred soul" whose imitation of Joe suggests a perpetuation of ways), are pulled toward an unregulated "settler" past where the region's guiding philosophy was established. As Joe puts it, "Ain't nobody gonna run my life for me" (123). In the present, this involves a largely class-based distrust of the legal process, so that vigilante justice will ultimately be heroicized. The linkage of past-present emerges in connection with the collapsing cabin that Gary restores.

Gary seems designed to represent a consciousness cut off from contemporary consumer culture: "The boy was fascinated by the logs. He touched their axed surfaces, felt the dried mud chinked in the cracks. He thought he would have liked living in times when men built houses like this one" (32). Likewise, Joe mentally associates the house with a pioneer

15. Elsewhere, in the hilarious and uncharacteristically metafictional story "Discipline," Brown satirizes the literary establishment's obsession with Faulkner (and a hyperventilating southernness) through the figure of a writer on trial for "secretly copying Faulkner . . . using heavy, frightening imagery. . . . Ignoring punctuation . . . making your characters talk like Beeder Mackey on LSD." See Larry Brown, *Big Bad Love* (Chapel Hill: Algonquin Books, 1990), 131-32. William Faulkner, *Go Down, Moses* (New York: Vintage Books, 1990), 237, 301.

ethos: "From where he lay Joe could see under the house and see the sandstone foundation, the logs resting on strategic rocks maybe chipped flat by some pioneer with high boots and a muslin shirt. The logs had long cracks and they were huge and they bore on their sides many axe marks" (313). Joe's connection to this frontier mentality is underscored throughout the narrative: "He backed out into the road and headed west, toward where there were dirt roads and big deer green-eyed in the light and no lawmen patrolling the old blacktopped roads. He got a beer from the cooler and opened it and rolled down the window and stuck his arm out. There was good music on the radio. The dark trees enveloped the road in a canopy of lush growth" (293). The passage shows the persistence of the impulse to "head west" along dusty roads into a wilderness without "lawmen"; "old" impulse and new "products" don't seem in contradiction. With a writer like Brown, who has the rowdy, heavily inflected southern stuff, the ability to turn sorry squalor comic-side out while remaining tuned in to and honest about social realities (including the pleasures and costs of alcoholism), the southern tradition cooperates powerfully to absorb product references.

Joe's opening places the reader familiar with southern literature in a domain of familiar images:

They trudged on beneath the burning sun, but anyone watching could have seen that they were almost beaten. They passed over a bridge spanning a creek that held no water as their feet sounded weak drumbeats, erratic and small in the silence that surrounded them. No cars passed these potential hitchhikers. The few rotting houses perched on the hillsides of snarled vegetation were broken-backed and listing, discarded dwellings where dwelled only field mice and owls. It was as if no one lived in this land or ever would again, but they could see a red tractor toiling in a field far off, silently, a small dust cloud following. (1)

The seemingly beaten, anthropomorphized setting, the oppressive sun that makes the language seem dusty and monotonous like a documentary spool, the abandoned, collapsing houses and rapacious vegetation are tropes long associated with southern fiction. This is the vanquished, evacuated setting of aftermath, emptied of all sound but that feebly brought into it, the site of a disastrous heat that dehydrates the spirit and the soil and makes characters, tractors, and prose toil to move. No one watches the unnamed "they"; the creek holds no water; disembodied feet drum out a defeated marching beat; no cars pass so the hitchhikers are not hitchhikers; no one dwells in the "discarded" houses; the dust of the landscape shrouds the tractors and the perspective minimalizes their importance, re-

turning the reader to a structure of the long run—of the old interplay between laborer and land.

* * *

The starting point of critical elaboration is the consciousness of what one really is, and is "knowing thyself" as a product of the historical process to date which has deposited in you an infinity of traces, without leaving an inventory. . . . Therefore it is imperative at the outset to compile such an inventory.

—Antonio Gramsci, *Prison Notebooks*

In entering Brown's monumentalized landscape, the Joneses (and Joe's readers) enter a realm of quirky (a)temporality, a sort of "prepost"-erous southern time in which a forgotten past (as opposed to the modernist southern over-remembered past) so saturates the land and the present and its language as to become unconsciously *of* it. Allen Tate's idea of southern literature as a "consciousness of the past in the present" seems irrelevant. If anything, Brown's characters have regressed from this vision rather than "advanced" into some rupturing postmodern beyond. While the elemental tableau—with its Steinbeckian outsize quality and Depression-era graininess—gestures toward (and potentially empties) the platitude that the essential pilgrimage of life remains the same, human identity in this scene constitutes itself within place figured as a form of temporality because place has absorbed time/history. Repeatedly, Brown's blistering landscapes overgrow or reclaim historical reading itself: thus, Joe stops to "run his hand over the old knife scars of names and dates healed almost unreadable in the bark of a giant beech" (111), or the landscape bears traces of erasures—"Fire had swept over it a long time ago, yet some of the trunks were still blackened" (110).

Rather than being ancestors of the Joads or Compsons, Brown's "Joneses" appear like fallout from time and tradition. They are the poorest white trash, unredeemed by positive qualities except Gary's pre-ethical loyalty to kin and those who help him. Similarly, the ruined cabin that the Joneses reclaim seems to predate the southern ancestral houses that have been collapsing prognostically since Poe's "Usher" and G. W. Cable's "Belles Demoiselles Plantation." The Joneses' cabin has been built by some unnamed "pilgrim," but the Joneses stagger onto the scene like historyless pseudo-pilgrims. They are not settlers but the unsettled, who seem to confirm Dainotto's notion of region as "an indestructible entity that transcends and survives history to remain everlastingly the same."¹⁶ As the narrative proceeds, though, the reader learns that the

16. Dainotto, "All the Regions," 492.

cabin only seems historyless; Wade (Gary's monstrous father) lived in it before being driven from the region because of his involvement in a ghastly hanging: "It was Clinton Baker they hung. He was down there three days before they found him. Hangin' in a tree and buzzards eating on him" (207). Wade lives out the consequences of this action, and its effects are visited upon his family. In a world where misdeeds follow misdeeds, there is no easy way to break the cycle. Barker's hanging recalls ritual lynching and implies the psychic legacy that such events exert, which implicitly contribute to the (white male) southerner's reputed mood-swing problems. The lynching, associated with a debased frontier ethos as well as with slavery and Reconstruction, lingers over the land: when Joe enters a yard, he stops beside a "single tree, where a rope hung" (67).

Writing of various traditions, authors like Leslie Marmon Silko (Laguna Pueblo), Bruce Chatwin (on the songlines of aboriginal Australia), Denis Kawaharada (Hawai'i), William Butler Yeats (Ireland), Epeli Hau'ofa (Tonga), and Eudora Welty (Mississippi) have argued that knowledge of landscape is literally historical knowledge. In these traditions, however, relation to land differs; some have had land taken, others have been takers. In this sense, Welty's comment that "place is forever illustrative: it is a picture of what man has done and imagined, it is his visible past, result" emphasizes that connection to land may be a complex predicament.¹⁷ In *Joe*, the disconnection of people from land suggests a perverse stake in a segment of the contemporary South living out the effects of violence. Their "forgetting" even expresses a latent desire to repeat history. Although Faulkner's Gavin Stevens may have been right in suggesting that at one time every southern boy carried around an image of Pickett's Charge, Brown portrays a generation of dirt-poor southerners whose "culture" is that of not knowing. His characters—with the exception of World War II veteran John Coleman, who sits around drinking and reading Civil War books, functioning as an archive of local lore—ignore history's monuments that, rigid and bespattered as they are, continue to signify: in the square of one town, "the stained marble soldier raised in tribute to a long dead and vanquished army went on with his charge, the tip of his bayonet broken off by tree pruners, his epaulets covered with pigeon droppings" (138–39). Lacking cultural memory, this South cannot feel nostalgia or feel that there is any former dignity to be upheld. Lacking a sense of place-history, these characters lack a sense of future direction.

17. Welty, "Place in Fiction," 129.

Thus, despite all the changes in the "outer" world that smuggle their ways into this text and the characters' homes and filling stations in the form of brand names, TV shows, and sporting events, more remains the same than otherwise. Whether or not Brown's characters fantasize about products ("I'd buy me one of them SS Chevelles with a automatic transmission and tinted windows" [83]), characteristically customizing them according to local taste, Brown's is still a world where one can speak of workers as virtually prehuman forms in a land that has forgotten time, "toiling shapes remorseless and wasted and indentured to the heat that rose from the earth and descended from the sky in a vapor" (248). It is their very unconsciousness of the forces that limit their consciousnesses that allows characters in *Joe* to retain the sense of being in control of their reckless destinies. They do not worry about being contained within a larger culture that is not like them, and they have no framework for identifying themselves as subjects within history, class struggle, or homogenizing mass culture. They retain a sense of freedom *from* that gives them a freedom *to* preserve their own order of things.

Balances shift slowly. If there is little meditation of how social movements like feminism are relayed from the national media back into specific sites, the book does imply a measure of changing consciousness. The few women characters in the book are sympathetically drawn and shown as increasingly independent, though they are still to some degree defined in relation to their need (or lack of it) for men or by their vulnerability before male violence. Blacks and whites seem locked together in a dysfunctional intimacy; the Civil Rights Movement may have changed things legally, but it seems to have had little effect on social organization. For the most part, blacks work for whites who work for someone else. Most of the time, Joe keeps up a light banter with workers he's known all his life and whom he is concerned about as people, so long as they pull their weight. At other times, Brown shows a deeply ingrained racial fear getting the better of Joe. He dreams of "stealthy blacks with knives" (11). Likewise, in a passage that shows racism mixing with the pop-culture of Oz, Joe jokes, "My niggers can't work in the rain. Afraid they gonna melt" (68).¹⁸ Fixating on the present as if it had no context, racism here

18. These "phobias" or attitudes are of course Joe's. Brown makes the relation between a black and white southerner central and complex in his deeply affecting novel *Dirty Work* (Chapel Hill: Algonquin Books, 1989). A lengthy conversation between two badly maimed Vietnam veterans, with the war as an important backdrop, the book suggests a disfiguring legacy of racial division in the South as well as a moment of transcending those divisions.

centers on labor, on the fear that "others" may steal one's job and/or are too lazy to work. So Gary says that his own nomadic family moved because "wetbacks" (116) took their jobs, or Joe tells his workers, "You've laid on your goddamned ass all your life and drawed welfare and people like me's paid for it" (197). Such moments show history, race, and region knotted within the consciousness of a man presented as hard but decent within the shifting standards of his time-place—a man who differs essentially from Wade in the understanding and application of the values he has inherited.

In presenting Joe's consciousness, Brown favors a hyper-remniscent *being in the scene*, less a displayed knowledge of psychologies than a conveyed sense of motivational inner tides. We can almost predict how Joe will act, but though we are led to the edges of Joe's consciousness, Brown refuses to open out his thoughts. This stresses consciousness as deeply ingrained, not a matter of forebrain or analytical internal debate but of something residual within subjectivity that is constituted by a perpetual, imperceptible dialogue between received ideas and lived relations. The method is at its best in one of Joe's introspective moments as he reflects on his livelihood. By day, Joe heads a team involved in "deadnin timber." They spend their days shooting trees with poison guns. The forest will die slowly and be on the ground in six to eight years so Weyerhaeuser can plant pines. Although some might argue that Weyerhaeuser, having done impact studies, acts with an ecological conscience and creates valuable jobs, Brown's text presents what is happening to the anthropomorphized forest as a murder: the workers "kill" it; it looks like "the red ground [is] bleeding" (25). Brown lets us know that Joe reflects on what he is doing, though not specifically *what* or *how* he reflects about it:

The whole party moved off into the deep shade with their poison guns over their shoulders, the merciless sun beating down. . . . The heat stood in a vapor over the land, shimmering waves of it rising up from the valleys . . . Joe stood in the bladed road with his hands on his hips and watched them go. He surveyed his domain and the dominion he held over them not lightly, his eyes half-lidded and sleepy under the dying forest. He didn't feel good about being the one to kill it. He guessed it never occurred to any of them what they were doing. But it had occurred to him. (202–3)

Brown emphasizes Joe's connection to the land by applying the same verb (*stood*) to him and the heat, and by suggesting that he dies out of consciousness as the forest dies. At the same time, his proprietary relation to the land is underscored and undermined by the attribution of similar

feelings to Wade, who has been described as "drinking a beer and looking off into the trees as if this magnitude of land were his and he was wondering what it was worth" (92). Joe argues a relation between such attitudes toward land and right living. Throughout, Brown contrasts images of hard-working farmers with inversions of that life, where characters like Wade "harvest" dumpsters for cans (51), think of ditches "rich with cans" (155). In contrast, almost as a rebuke to characters like Wade and Russell, who are presented as "burning" with "meanness ingrained" (88), Brown presents idyllic pastorals: "They coasted to a stop beside the growing cotton, where the honeysuckle blossoms hung threaded through the hogwire in bouquets of yellow and white, the hummingbirds and bees constant among them . . . riding the Summer air" (209). This is argument by tone and juxtaposition. For authors like Wendell Berry and Gary Snyder, canny pastoralism inclines toward local activism and common cause enables coalitions that might redistribute power within communities.¹⁹ Joe does not take the reader to this point. There are glimmers of eco-consciousness in John Coleman, who is something of a critical regionalist in taking what he likes from pop culture while retaining a sense of what is primary to him: "Coleman would hear a song he recognized and, once in a while, turn the radio up, then turn it back down when the song was over." Watching a redtail, Coleman says, "I'm glad they protected them hawks," to which Joe answers: "I sure like to watch them" (285–86). The moment illustrates the difference between a conscious endorsement of protective measures and an implicit recognition of their desirability.

For the most part, though, Brown rarely provides narrative distance from the perspectives of his principals, and even in these moments it pulls up suggestively short: "The owner sighed. Dealing with these people over and over. With the depths of their ignorance. The white ones like this were worse than the black ones like this. Where they came from he didn't know. How they existed was a complete mystery to him. How they lived with themselves. He tossed his list onto the counter without ever thinking he might have helped to make them that way" (178). How, the passage asks without answering (and not independently of its exposure of pseudo-liberal racism), is every person in a community responsible for and related to the development of every other person? Likewise, as sug-

19. See Wendell Berry, "Writer and Region," *Hudson Review* 40, no. 1 (1987): 15–30; and Gary Snyder, "Poetry, Community, and Climax," in *Interchange: A Symposium on Regionalism, Internationalism, and Ethnicity in Literature*, ed. Linda Spaulding and Frank Stewart (Honolulu: InterArts Hawaii, 1980), 47–59.

gested, Joe is placed in a position of "dominion" over the landscape, and thus over the community. If Joe doesn't feel good about being "the one to kill" the forest, it's partly because, in ways pressing at the edges of his sensibility ("half-lidded" implies that he half-sees and connects him again to Wade, who sees through "sloe-lidded eyes" [233]), he's performing a self-slaughter, poisoning his own "domain." The text suggests that the death he is spreading is catching up to him: "Joe raised his head and looked far down the tract to the dying trees they'd injected three days before. It was as if a blight had grown across the emerald tops of the forest and was trying to catch up to where they stood" (22). Metaphorically, to "stab" and "poison" the forest resembles allowing southern letters to become commodified in relation to outside consumption habits, to disengage it from its roots and sell transplanted versions of southern "tract." If this is one of *Joe's* warnings, it is implicitly a call for critical regionalism, whether or not Brown, or Joe, or *Joe*, cares to be specific about what is at stake in bringing "blight" to the "emerald" trees.

Joe is finally neither redneck text nor simply backroads verisimilitude. What can at first seem reactionary in the book moves toward a cannily ambivalent sense of the degree to which the regional culture it represents must move beyond a self-defeating bigotry and exploitative relation to land. The book balances lyricism and humor with violence, avoiding at all costs a jaded Kmart realism; it at once endorses masculinist viewpoints and foregrounds their inadequacies. Although critical of some local attitudes, it maintains a strong sense of identification with its "time-place." *Joe* does not end, as Lee Smith's *Oral History* does, with a culture faced with its theme-park double; rather, it closes with birds headed toward "their ancient primeval nesting lands" being "swallowed . . . up into the sky and the earth that met it and the pine trees always green and constant against the great blue wilderness that lay forever beyond" (345).

In this, *Joe* finally warns against a reading that would make the regional text overly determined by the latest encroachments of economic forces; as Mike Featherstone argues, "not everyone is affected by, or conscious of . . . globalization processes to the same extent." Residually regional literatures have demonstrably flourished in America at moments when major changes in the modes of production threatened traditional patterns of life, but it is reductive to speak of sectional consciousness at any given juncture as primarily the product of changes in the structure

of capital.²⁰ Economic or horizontal explanations must be balanced with more vertical cultural, historical, and ideological ones, including those reproduced through the institutions of literature. This is not to say that such institutions and the traditions they perpetuate or critique exist without translocal economic and cultural linkages, but to suggest that received cultural patterns exert imaginative pressures that operate in idiosyncratic ways through individual writers in particular locations.

* * *

The bulldozing of an irregular topography into a flat site is clearly a technocratic gesture which aspires to a condition of absolute *placelessness*.

—Kenneth Frampton, "Towards a Critical Regionalism"

In a discussion of "supermodernity," Marc Augé distinguishes between "places" and "non-places" as follows: "If a place can be defined as relational, historical and concerned with identity, then a space which cannot be defined as relational, or historical, or concerned with identity will be a non-place. . . . Supermodernity produces non-places, meaning spaces which are not themselves anthropological places and which . . . do not integrate with earlier places."²¹ Critical regionalism opposes the de-differentiation of supermodernity, finding "in" place an important relational ground conductor to identity that implies with it a whole nexus of residual attitudes; it sees region as an appropriate frame both for renegotiating these attitudes and for positioning local cultures in relation to both contiguous locales that share family resemblances and political concerns, and to translocal systems. Supermodernity may suggest a utopian quality of "non-places" within which categories like race/gender/queerness no longer carry predetermining significances, but if standardized spaces accomplish egalitarian neutrality, it may be through reducing all relations to the casual and economic. In an age of increased nomadism, the critical regionalist thus envisions region as inevitably more polyphonic, inflected by newcomers, but one that keeps as a "bass line," to

20. Mike Featherstone, "Localism, Globalism, and Cultural Identity," in *Global/Local*, ed. Wilson and Dissanayake, 46. For a traditional analysis of this sort, see Richard H. Brodhead on how "regionalism became the dominant genre in America at the moment when local-cultural economies felt strong pressures from new social forces, from a growingly powerful social model that overrode previously autonomous systems and incorporated them into translocal agglomerations," in *Cultures of Reading: Scenes of Reading and Writing in Nineteenth-Century America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), 119.

21. Augé, *Non-Places*, 77–78.

use Jean Starobinski's analogy, the ancient places and rhythms that undergird a "place." As Augé notes, these rhythms (intertwined with the clichés that go into every sectional hopper) are not obliterated by modernity but pushed "into the background," where they function as "gauges indicating the passage and continuation of time." As Walter Benjamin has it, to change the metaphor, the past illuminates present identities in "lightning flashes."²²

Despite the prevalence in every historic U.S. section of centers for regional studies and sizable regional apparatuses, global/local theorists confronted with the superabundance of the present, the excess of information, and the collapse of space have had little use for "region" except as a micro-marketing term. They tend to dismiss "region" as the kind of nostalgic nationalism that sectional theorizing produces by sublimating both "global" and "local." But although the "local" may be the site of particular, crucial resistances to development and supermodernity, its relation to the sectional "regions" ingrained in individual and national American psyches cannot be overlooked by careful analysts, whatever the critical desire to do so. As "local" text, *Joe* refers to particular road junctions and a rhetorical country in which "the word travel[s] fast" (239) within a circumscribed location and reputation affects the practice of everyday life, whatever products one consumes. At the same time, *Joe* clearly perpetuates—in its modes of telling, its tropes, its landscapes and codes, its relation to history—a larger understanding of "region" as crucial to the formation of individual consciousness.

The "region concept" thus remains a more appropriate frame for books like *Joe* than local, national, or transnational frames, as it implicitly does for discussing relations among the peoples occupying its "postage stamp" of Mississippi. The book even suggests that global/local interactions figure in inverse proportion to the extent to which regional identity matters. Many of the diasporic notions of "location of culture" characteristic of major urban centers do not obtain in this rural cultural-landscape. At the same time, *Joe* demonstrates how contemporary regional fiction about the rural poor, which can be sloppily made to stand in for the (im)pure, authentic heart of the entire traditional section, cannot avoid involvement with postmodern problematics. The text builds toward recognition within its eponymous hero of the necessity for becoming more conscious about powers that molest the local from within and without. However, in its caught-betweenness, *Joe* remains a text that

dramatizes the resistance to overcoming a certain chauvinistic consciousness. If *Joe* presents people often choked by hate, their latent aggressions released by alcohol, it also presents a world in which perpetrators generally get something like what they deserve. The book both marks and gestures beyond its own limitations, suggesting abuses of the region concept as well as potential uses, not just for understanding contemporary subjectivities but for challenging them to inaugurate change.

Traditionally, sectionalists have heroicized the struggle of individual will (shaped by regional ethos) against incursion and poverty rather than analyzing the relays between global and national forces and regional self-understanding. In the South, this is in part because literary critics have tended to conceive of their vocation as a form of humanist praxis—as active upholding of values and forms of community—rather than as an intervention in the messy world of cultural politics. *Joe* certainly invites (and reflects) such humanist criticism, with its presentation of a "hero" who gives his life as "ransom" to repay conduct he abhors, implying an extralegal system of retributive justice. But, as Michael Kreyling puts it, such readings, like the formalism with which they are historically associated, "satisfy the desire . . . to avoid dealing with narrative on its own shifting, complex ground." Today, this shifting ground includes a sense of the connectedness of race and gender to notions of regions, and of the existence of counter-hegemonic claims on regional space. In no way does the continued significance of residual regionalisms preclude the great variety of alter/native narratives increasingly seen to cut across sectional lines, such as those discussed in Ramon Saldivar's exemplary *Chicano Narratives*, or those produced by diasporic movements. A look at regional anthologies from the Southwest and the West in particular suggests that a place-centered multiculturalism, in its simultaneous decentralizing and recentering, might avoid many of the problems with a nationalized multiculturalism. In *New Writers of the Purple Sage*, for instance, editor Russell Martin argues that the stories he selects are all identifiably "Western," but that, in selecting them, "diversity seemed the only consideration of much editorial merit. I wanted the collection to reflect the geographic, ethnic, and stylistic diversity of the region's writers." The region concept, that is, might embrace the contributions of newcomers while reaffirming the value of geographically and historically inflected cultural patterns and priorities. At the same time, although there are inevitable limitations to what metropolitan global theories contribute to discussions of residual regionalisms, it is also clear that "any version of the

22. Quoted *ibid.*, 77.

local or *regional* . . . will have to be spread upon the cognitive map of global postmodernity." A critical regionalism acknowledges these conditions and possibilities and cannot ignore the concept of historic "regions" in the U.S. as value-full, rich, sedimented cultural ground for working through the predicaments or possibilities of contemporary culture.²³

23. Michael Kreyling, "The Fathers: A Postsouthern Narrative Reading," in *Southern Literature*, ed. Humphries, 186-87; Ramon Saldivar, *Chicano Narratives: The Dialectics of Difference* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1990); Russell Martin, ed., *New Writers of the Purple Sage: An Anthology of Contemporary Western Writing* (New York: Penguin, 1992), xx; Rob Wilson, "Blue Hawaii: Bamboo Ridge as 'Critical Regionalism,'" in *What Is in a Rim? Critical Perspectives on the Pacific Region Idea*, ed. Arif Dirlik (Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 1993), 286. Wilson's reading exemplifies the "striated" strategies of the critical regionalist in describing the emerging literatures of Hawai'i as sharing "a sustained commitment to articulating a shared ground," which involves a complex relation to the indigenous peoples of Hawai'i. For a further illustration of the complexities attending competing claims to cultural geography in Hawai'i, see Candace Fujikane, "Between Nationalisms: Hawaii's Local Nation and Its Troubled Paradise," in *Critical Mass: A Journal of Asian American Cultural Criticism* 2 (1994): 23-57.