

GLOBAL VILLAGES: MODERNISM AND THE REGIONAL FRAMEWORK FOR  
THE AMERICAN CENTURY

By

CHRISTINA VAN HOUTEN

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To Patrick

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

	<u>page</u>
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS .....	4
ABSTRACT .....	8
CHAPTER	
1 INTRODUCTION .....	10
A Regional Framework for Late Modernism.....	13
Global Villages: Regional Modernism in the American Century .....	22
2 RETURNING TO DOMESTIC CULTURE: WILLA CATHER, NELLA LARSEN, AND REGIONAL MODERNISM .....	31
Narrative Breaks and Peripheral Modernism .....	32
Domesticating Regional Modernism .....	39
Willa Cather: Regionalism Repairing Toward Modernism.....	46
Nella Larsen: Transatlantic Modernism in a Regional Context .....	69
3 THE MAPPING OF AMERICA: GERTRUDE STEIN, GEOGRAPHICAL HISTORIES, AND AESTHETIC GEOPOLITICS.....	83
Modernist Geography: The Critical Topography of Twentieth-Century America .....	89
The Late Modernist Turn, Or, Stein Fait Un Four.....	98
Pioneer Returns: Americanization, Middle-Class Domesticity, and Regional Habit .....	108
4 DAWN POWELL, REGIONAL MODERNISM, AND THE POSTWAR AIR WORLD .....	117
Regional Antinomies and the Postwar Air World .....	119
Regional Modernism and Uneven Modernity .....	123
Satire and the American Century .....	131
Late Modernism and the Marriage Plot.....	144
5 BESIDES RAISING SIX CHILDREN BY THREE MARRIAGES: KAY BOYLE AND THE POLITICS OF LATE MODERNISM.....	155
Domestic Politics: American Citizenship and the American Century .....	157
<i>The Youngest Camel</i> : Late Modernism and the American Family .....	168
Cold War Histories: Postwar Globalization and Regional Frameworks.....	177
6 DOMESTIC BATTLES & GLOBAL TRAVESL: MARION MAHONY GRIFFIN'S <i>THE MAGIC OF AMERICA</i> AND THE POLITICS OF REGIONAL MODERNISM	185

Modernism by Chicago Design .....	187
Toward a Politics of Regional Modernism.....	194
Coda: "The Last Word in Modernism" .....	207
LIST OF REFERENCES .....	215
BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH.....	226

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GLOBAL VILLAGES: MODERNISM AND THE REGIONAL FRAMEWORK FOR  
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By

Christina Van Houten

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In “Global Villages: Modernism and the Regional Framework of the American Century,” I study “regional modernism” as a critical movement in the American Century. My intervention centers on the place of gender in regional modernism. I argue that if this movement is not predominantly driven by women, it is certainly motivated by an explicitly gendered (if not feminist) politics.

My dissertation turns on two questions. How might a productive inclusion of gender into the culture debates between the 1920s and 1950s refigure the relationship between regionalism and modernism? How might gender reformulate vernacular culture or International Style such that the alternative model of regional modernism might challenge conventional readings of modernity? My response to these questions draws on the development of regional modernism in the writings of Willa Cather, Nella Larsen, Gertrude Stein, Dawn Powell, Kay Boyle, and Marion Mahony Griffin. Regional modernism politicizes domestic concerns, specifically relating to the family, the home, and representations of domesticity, as ideological alternatives to the increasingly global American Century.

My argument is two-part: I trace this development of regional modernism as a cultural concept in the work of Cather, Larsen, and Stein; and I consider the interventions of regional modernism by Powell, Boyle, and Mahony Griffin, paying particular attention to the way in which their work challenges American late modernist developments of aesthetic formalisms, political conservatism, and cultural hegemony. In this context, I offer an alternative genealogy to modernism because I focus on the work of modernist women who otherwise would have been excluded from literary studies because they were women or, more generously, because they were women who wrote texts that were peripheral to modernism. Moreover, this alternative genealogy, aligned with the project of feminist recovery, opens to a larger critical project. I read regional modernism as a crucial mediator between modernism proper and the late modernism of the American Century. Not only does this cultural movement challenge narratives of postwar American exceptionalism and conservative political developments in Cold War America; the collective project of these women challenges the contested space of modernism and the ideology of the domestic front.

## CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION

So here and there will force on your consciousness the phenomenon that I will permit myself to call Middle Westishness: the evolution of races, cities, or even civilizations brought about by the crowding out of Far, Wild or Pioneer Wests. This happens politically, as exemplified by the British occupation of India or the French eastern colonies; it happens financially when the great banks, British or North American, having nothing else to do with their plethora of money, exploit for their own purposes the Middle, the Near or the Far East; it happens when we Anglo-Saxons, finding the struggle for life too much for us at home, settle for cheapness, convenience and rational life, in France—to the East of our native lands. We are here as an exemplification of the fact. We are all Middle Westerners.

Ford Madox Ford, *Transatlantic Stories*

In his 1925 “Introduction” to *Transatlantic Stories*, Ford Madox Ford identified the emergence of a new movement in modern literary criticism: “Middle Westishness” (ix). Ford’s narrative that accompanies the announcement of this new term turns on two related events—a period of turmoil in which no new literary talent could be found in Paris or London and an increasing fascination with the imagined cultural exoticism of the American West. So the story goes, having announced to American writers a call for their fiction, Ford was overwhelmed by both manuscripts from midwestern writers and their author’s networking savvy, to the point that he found his periodical increasingly featuring almost exclusively midwestern contributors. Ford wryly notes that his editorial intervention in literary modernism—the promotion of American regionalism as the *new* cosmopolitan movement—was less a “bona fide discovery” of local color and regional difference than a “dun-colored” realization that “Middle Westishness” was always already a middling “world movement, the symptom of an enormous disillusionment... and an enormous awakening” (xx-xxi). What starts as an exclusively literary project of

searching for new talent becomes a totalized critique of the political, economic, social, and technological developments of massified modernity. According to Ford, “Middle Westishness” becomes a symptom of world developments: meaning, the cultural turn to the American Midwest is as much a result of European failure—“that France is *fichu*, England is *fichu*, etc”—as it is the value of midwestern realism—“telling the real thing in life from the pinchbeck [without] hypocritical idealism, moral gasconading, etc” (xxviii-xxix). More provocative, however, is the idea that this regionalism itself comes to characterize (if not dominate) modernism. With its elements of aesthetic revolutions, democratic possibilities, and American globalism, “Middle Westishness” becomes a regional framework for modernism.

This anecdote is important for three reasons, none of which have to do with Ford himself or with the particularities of his literary criticism. First, the anecdote is an example of the importance of geographic context in the changing political, spatial, and cultural relationships constitutive of modernism and global modernization. Significantly, Ford’s spatial metaphor of “Middle Westishness” becomes a strategic way of mapping what Jani Scanduri, invoking Michel Foucault, has described as “modern performances of social power” through which geography and geographical metaphors produce “the condition of possibility for critique of power and knowledge” (12). Second, the anecdote demonstrates in fairly obvious ways how prominently regionalism and midwestern culture figured in the ideology of Americanism for modernist theory and practice. Third, and less obviously, the anecdote alludes to the role that regionalism played in the cultural developments of Americanism and modernism, as well as the effects of

twentieth-century globalization, what Henry Luce notoriously coined as “the American Century” in 1941.

Broadly stated, Ford’s *Transatlantic Stories* introduction is important for the way in which he spatializes modernism, shifting the locus of political, economic, and cultural power to America and its regionalisms. Indeed, “Middle Westishness” is an intervening concept in the theorization of what will become in later decades “regional modernism.” But just as important as his story of the transatlantic, regional developments of modernism is the modernist ideology his story offers about the meaning of “Middle Westishness” and its historicity. One danger is a reification of “Middle Westishness” as concept and movement, accepting as a historical fact its development, its context, its import, and its effects.<sup>1</sup> Although Ford is critical of the potential effects of postwar modernity and American exceptionalism specifically because both reject history, either because “prewar knowledges led inevitably to the late war” or for a pacifist “desire to forget the standards of poms and parades that used to sway us,” he nevertheless reaffirms the clear style of regional stories that come “very definitely from the fact that the writers’ minds are definitely not lumbered up by all the bric-a-brac of monumental ideals that we used to have” (xxx). This cautious publicizing of “Middle Westishness” opens up to a second danger of the ideology of modernist theory and practice: the depoliticization of regionalism to an aesthetic style, or worse still, the deterritorialization of regionalism as a cultural movement to an international symptom.

“Middle Westishness” thus becomes a paradoxical concept, encompassing a variety of characterizations, some more problematic than others: a movement wherein

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<sup>1</sup> On this point see, Susan Hegeman’s *Patterns for America*, 20; and Raymond William’s *The Politics of Modernism*, 35.

local color and vernacular culture becomes a significant component of cultural nationalism; a movement wherein regional culture represents an Americanist, global modernity; an aesthetic style whose formal traits of simplicity, sincerity, clearness, and folksiness supposedly signal midwestern life; and a social and political orientation that on the one hand challenged centralizations, urbanism, and totalitarianism and on the other hand promoted a cultural conservatism that obscured significant racial, class, and gendered tensions. This dissertation will therefore consider the historical and cultural context of how Ford's concept of "Middle Westishness" serves as a theorization, characterization, and symptom of modernism. I will do this by investigating the development of regional modernism as a critical movement in the American Century, taking into consideration two things: the complicated history of regional modernism as concept and period, and the tensions this often contradictory movement evoked, with particular attention given to the gender politics of regional modernism.

### **A Regional Framework for Late Modernism**

In this dissertation, I am interested in both the periodization of regional modernism and its ideological critique. In the first place, because I trace the history of "regional modernism" to offer an account of its intermediary function in American cultural politics in the years between 1920 and 1960, my history locates modernism and regionalism as interrelated movements and challenges the polemics that position them in cultural opposition. A central premise of my dissertation is the continued importance of concepts like "the regional," "regionalism," and "regional modernism" in the periods extending from modernism through late modernism. I argue that the cultural framework of regional modernism complicates conventional narratives associated with regionalism, modernism, and late modernism. Not only does it refuse a neat sequencing of these

movements, it also reads regional modernism as a messy collection of intellectual, technological, political and aesthetic developments—a historical, periodizing category compeer to regionalism, modernism, and late modernism.

This premise opens up to a more complicated narrative about the gendering of regional modernism in the period leading to the Cold War. In the second place, in addition to theorizing the development of regional modernism and troubling its periodization in terms of the politics of modernism, my dissertation complicates the concept of regional modernism by reading its development specifically in relation to gender. There are several reasons for this move, including: the implicit gendering of regionalism as feminine and modernism as inherently masculine; the obfuscation of gender, vernacular culture, and the domestic in the theory and practice of *high* modernism; and a postwar return to regionalism that privileges previously gendered ideas like the local, the family, and domestic culture as ideologically important to the aesthetic and political culture of the Cold War. I argue that regional modernism not only puts in tension the related binaries of the local and the global, center and periphery, and past and present; it also calls attention to the particular gendering of these movements and the way in which tensions between femininity and masculinity, domesticity and empire, fashion and style, and sentimentalism and functionalism form a delicate dialectic. Thus, in this dissertation I am specifically interested in two questions: how might a productive inclusion of gender into the culture debates between the 1920s and 1960s refigure the relationship between regionalism and modernism? How might gender reformulate vernacular culture or International Style such that the alternative model of regional modernism might challenge conventional readings of modernity?

To get at these questions, I must make clear the advantages of reading regional modernism in relation to the ideologies of both modernism and the American Century—specifically with an eye toward late modernism and its gender politics. First and foremost, I must establish the critical parameters of my project. I take seriously Rita Felski’s point that “gender affects not just the factual content of historical knowledge—what is included and what gets left out—but also the philosophical assumptions underlying interpretations of the nature and meaning of social processes” (1). Centrally, my dissertation begins as a project of archival work and feminist recovery. I offer an alternative genealogy to modernism that focuses on the work of modernist women who otherwise would have been excluded from literary studies because they were women or, more generously, because they were women who wrote texts that were peripheral to modernism. Despite the value of my alternative genealogy, however, the work of historical recovery is not my primary concern; I am more interested in working toward a feminist historiography of regional modernism that takes seriously questions of gender, class, labor, and democracy for modernist theory and practice than in simply producing a countercanon for feminist reclamation. Thus, this alternative genealogy, aligned with the project of feminist recovery, opens to a larger critical project. Regional modernism serves historically as what Fredric Jameson has called a “vanishing mediator,” a transitional space between modernism proper and the late modernism of the American Century.<sup>2</sup> Not only does this cultural movement challenge narratives of postwar American exceptionalism and conservative political developments in Cold War America; the collective project of my set of figures—Willa Cather, Nella Larsen, Gertrude Stein,

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<sup>2</sup> “The Vanishing Mediator: Narrative Structure in Max Weber” in *New German Critique* (1973): 52.

Dawn Powell, Kay Boyle, Marion Mahony Griffin—challenges the contested space of modernism and the ideology of the domestic front. Their regional modernism repurposes modernism’s radical cultural and political project at the moment of modernism’s foreclosure, simultaneously working toward progressive social change and imagining a horizon of utopian possibility.

Taken together, my project of feminist recovery and historiography must therefore reckon with regional modernism’s failure. Indeed, we must consider both the failure of the individual projects of this set of modernist women *and* the larger failure of modernism’s radical energy being neutralized by the development of a depoliticized modernist aesthetic ideology.<sup>3</sup> Here, I follow Kathi Weeks, who argues that “the story of feminist history is not only a story of progress but also sometimes . . . of forgotten ideas and stifled aspirations” (116). One problem of “failure” in this mode of feminist history is not that regional modernism as a cultural vision has failed, but that the collective project of regional modernism is imagined as a part of history that has been superseded (115). Another problem is that modernism in general—in its aspirations to grasp and represent a social totality—may be described as a “failure,” albeit a politically useful “failure” insofar as it attempts to provide imaginary resolutions to concrete social problems (Jameson, *Postmodernism* 409).

Instead, we must think of regional modernism (and its failure) as a project of “cognitive mapping”—an attempt to construct “a situational representation on the part of the individual subject to the vaster and properly unrepresentable totality which is the ensemble of society’s structures as a whole” (Jameson, *Postmodernism* 51). In this

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<sup>3</sup> On the theorization of this ideological turn to late modernism, see Phillip Wegner, *Life Between Two Deaths, 1989-2001*, 5.

context, Cather, Larsen, Stein, Powell, Boyle, and Mahony Griffin collectively use the framework of regional modernism to map the relationship between gendered production and social reproduction in domestic culture, cultural nationalism, and global Americanism. The gendering of regional modernism, therefore, intervenes in the account of the social totality in which it is embedded: it reads gender as a systematic effect of a complex set of interconnected processes; it maps the connections among social systems like capitalism, patriarchy, colonialism, and Americanism that exclude, oppress, or exploit women; and it challenges contradictions in the material distribution of resources, the ideals of democratic representation, and the prevailing knowledges that constitute and constrain subjectivity. Significant to this project, for example, is the contestation of the typically modernist spatializing of gender and its binaries of masculine/feminine, public/private, modernism/regionalism, metropole/province, and center/periphery.<sup>4</sup>

The project of cognitive mapping—the framework of regional modernism—replicates each of my modernist figures’ attempt to map their own position as individual subjects within the social structure as a whole. As Carolyn Lesjak notes, “the project of cognitive mapping becomes as much about ‘placing’ the individual subject within a fully global system as it is about simply describing that system” (38). This is a significant point, especially given the context of regional modernism’s failure. That the framework of regional modernism fails or vanishes is less a product of each woman’s individualized critique of the American Century than it is a problem of reification in late modernism. I

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<sup>4</sup> My reading of the concept of “totality” is informed by the work on feminist standpoint theory, see: Kathi Weeks, *Constituting Feminist Subjects*, 70; and Rosemary Hennessy, *Materialist Feminism and the Politics of Discourse*, 67.

would argue that each of these women participate in a deeply political modernism: in *theory*, their narratives quite literally map a relationship between the individual and the global; and in *practice*, the range of their work, including novels, magazine editorials, short stories, children's books, and architectural manifesto impel a diverse audience to participate in this gender politics. The praxis of the framework of regional modernism ultimately fails because of the global political and aesthetic developments of late modernism. Regional modernism makes impossible political demands based on the political hegemony of Americanism spelled out in Marshall Plan and Cold War policies, and the ideology of modernism characterized by academicism, formalism, and the reification of autonomy, representation, and literature. And yet, despite this failure, the framework of regional modernism provides a crucial lesson about the politics of late modernism: as a mapping of the social totality, regional modernism contradictorily works to represent the unrepresentable, ultimately giving its female practitioner an opportunity to think through and challenge her individual social place in the global system. Put differently, the framework of regional modernism teaches us that the reification and totalizing knowledges constitutive of late modernism can be challenged and changed by the pressures of the local, the peripheral, the contingent, and the particular.<sup>5</sup>

A second consequence of this framework of regional modernism, then, is concerned with the theorization of late modernism. My project takes as its starting point the architectural theory of Charles Jencks and Kenneth Frampton, whose respective work on the concepts of "late modernism" and "critical regionalism," have provided me a theoretical scaffolding; they link the periodization of late modernism "as the last

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<sup>5</sup> See, Hegeman, *Patterns for America*, 211.

survivals of a properly modernist view of art and the world” with a critical practice that “tends towards the paradoxical creation of a regionally-based ‘world culture’” through its pairing of “vernacular” and “international” styles (Jameson, *Postmodernism* 305, Frampton 327). Although both Jencks and Frampton are specifically interested in *postmodern* architecture, their work is nevertheless relevant to me for its critique of the ideology of modernism, especially since it challenges the very emergence of postmodernism and its supposed radical break from modernist theory and practice. Moreover, as “marginal practices,” based on Frampton’s insistence that any movement critical of both modernization and postmodern style must be peripheral to normative architectural discourse, the combination of their theorizations of “late modernism” and “critical regionalism” put into practice the spatial logic of regional modernism (Frampton 327). The fact that these concepts are associated with architectural postmodernism perhaps speaks to the historical persistence of regional modernism into the period of postmodernism.

It is from this starting point in architectural theory that my work on late modernism turns to the cultural theory of Jameson and Raymond Williams. Although Jencks and Frampton provide me a framework that shows how local efforts can simultaneously work to resist global capitalism and create an alternative vernacular culture, their work does not exceed the confines of architectural discourse. In contrast, both Jameson and Williams provide me the tools to think through late modernism as both a periodization and a narrative category.<sup>6</sup> Jameson, for example, describes late modernism in these axiomatic terms: as both “the ideology of modernism and of the autonomy of art” and

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<sup>6</sup> “Periodization” and “Narrative” are two of the three methodological correctives to modernism that Jameson offers in Part 1 of *A Singular Modernity*. The third is “depersonalization” (138).

“the survival and transformations of more properly modernist creative impulses after World War II” (*Singular Modernity* 197). But more significant to my project than this definition is Jameson’s suggestion that late modernism serves as a kind of vanishing mediator in the emergence of postmodernism. As Phillip Wegner notes, there are a number of significant implications of this insight, one being “the dialectical bifocality of periods and breaks, and the tendency of the latter to proliferate” (5). In the context of this dissertation, this periodization points to a connection in Jencks’s late modernism and Frampton’s critical regionalism, especially if we read both projects intervening in postmodernism through their insistence that modernist theory and practice persists in this cultural moment. However, this reading strategy comes with a historical constraint. Jameson argues that critical regionalism must be a movement deeply invested in social *and* cultural politics: therefore, critical regionalism as a “geopolitical” proposal that “seeks to mobilize a pluralism of ‘regional’ styles...with a view toward resisting the standardizations of a henceforth global late capitalism and corporatism, whose ‘vernacular’ is as omnipresent as its power over local decisions” (*Seeds of Time* 202). Put this way, we can read “critical regionalism”—and regional modernism—as constitutive to the cultural logic of late modernism.

In a similar fashion, Williams describes the development of late modernism in terms of “the global village,” a proposition responding to postwar uneven modernization and the resultant tensions between popular tastes and avant-garde innovation, commercialism and democracy. The plan for building “the global village” started with modernist culture destabilizing the fixed forms of an earlier bourgeois period, and was followed by the new postwar metropolis providing the economic and political capital to

support this new social and cultural space. However, Williams makes clear that what started as a deeply critical aesthetic and political project quite quickly became normalized by the very systematic tensions it attempted to challenge: “What was being addressed was a real development of universal distribution and of unprecedented opportunities for genuine and diverse cultural exchange. What was ideologically inserted was a model of a homogenized humanity consciously served from two or three centers: the monopolizing corporations and the elite metropolitan intellectuals” (130). The effect of this late modernist ideology on the concept of space was to invoke the local and the peripheral for their populist and democratic connotations, only to negate their particular material needs and cultural differences for the sake of some centralizing and universalizing process. In this periodization and narrative of late modernism, we can find a historical critique of Marshall McLuhan’s work in new media and his theorization of “global village,” as well as of F. R. Leavis and his promotion of a return to “organic community” in literary studies. And we can find a historical critique of the ideology of modernism proffered in the complementary projects of the New York Intellectuals and New Critics, as well as in the work of the Southern Agrarians and their regional antimodernism.

The proposition of “the global village” not only marks the foreclosure of the possibility for modernist culture to transform “the widest areas of social, economic and political life”; it also anticipates the emergence of postmodern globalization belonging “to the dominant capitalist order in its paranational phase” (130). This framework also importantly helps us to locate a critical return to the frameworks of regional modernism and global villages. But like Jameson who pairs his critique of late modernism with a

proposal for its ideological alternative, so too Williams offers a caveat: the innovating energies of “the global village” can still be realized if they are connected to genuine communities. Moreover, he suggests that “there are two areas of ‘popular’ culture which can be seen as relatively distinct from the dominant capitalist sector,” and thus potential frameworks for “the global village” (133). The first area is “a deliberately rooted popular history and action” that is, to wit, a “regional” culture doubly invested in both aesthetic forms and political action (133). The second area is a popular culture of daily life, significant because it does not originate via the market and because “it is diametrically opposed to an ‘incorporated modernism’” (134). Both of these areas as potential contemporary spaces for “the global village” should bear a striking resemblance to the characteristics of the late modernist framework of regional modernism and its triangulation of regionalism, gender politics, and domestic culture. Likewise, the gendered mapping of regional modernism can also be read as a parallel project to Williams’s “global village” or Jameson’s region “as a culturally coherent zone in tension with the standardizing world system as a whole” (*Seeds of Time* 191-192). Indeed, the significance of “regional modernism” is the way it intervenes in the politics of late modernism by mapping an alternative spatial culture.

### **Global Villages: Regional Modernism in the American Century**

My dissertation is divided into two parts. Part 1 traces the development of regional modernism as a cultural concept. In the work of Willa Cather, Nella Larsen, and Gertrude Stein, regional modernism positions the domestic home, family, and domesticity as ideological alternatives to the increasingly global American Century. I argue that in their “return to the regional,” Cather, Larsen, and Stein put in tension American vernacular culture and international cosmopolitanism, ultimately articulating a

conceptual break from previous theorizations of modernism. However, the conceptual breaks and modernist history I narrate are less concerned with the “language of radical breaks, revolutions and epistemic shifts to describe conceptual usages” than with a new cultural project altogether—one that Susan Hegeman has argued will “grapple with the cacophony of ideas [this] ‘culture’ evokes, and the accretion of histories that have contributed to its rhetorical formation” (*Patterns* 212). It is in this new construction of regional modernism that the domestic, broadly conceived to include a range of invocations from feminized spaces to gendered divisions of labor to the domestication of culture, becomes a crucial concept for thinking through a spatialized history of American modernism and how we think through its relationship to the local and the global.

Chapter 1 consists of a comparative reading of Cather and Larsen, wherein I suggest that the 1920s mark not only their self-conscious rejection of a massified American modernity but also their troubling of the cultural logic of modernism. In the context of this chiasmic framework, I offer a reading of these women that challenges the conventional view of these women as modernists: that Cather is really a prairie novelist who must fight the stigmas of local color and political conservatism to prove her modernism, and that Larsen is an urban figure who is considered a modernist by dint of her associations with the Harlem Renaissance. However, read together, I argue that their interventions, doubly located in this personal and cultural politics, argue for a reconsideration of gender, domesticity, and local culture within American modernism. Specifically, I begin by narrating Cather’s and Larsen’s 1920s breaks with modernist convention to give pause to their larger considerations of gender, domesticity and geography in the theory and practice of modernism. What both women consider, and

what I argue they ultimately contribute to the development of literary modernism, include questions of feminism on peripheral frontiers, the politicization of domestic space, the function of race and ethnicity in marking the boundaries of uneven development, and the overlap of local and international concerns within modernism. To that extent, I see their respective 1922 and 1924 breaks as a respatialization of modernism toward an explicit regionalist politics.

In terms of a theorization of regional modernism, Stein's contribution moves in the inverse direction of Cather's and Larsen's but with similar political ends. Chapter 2 then focuses on the connections between Stein's autobiographical writing and her war texts. Beginning with her 1930s texts and extending through her 1940s publications, Stein maps two seemingly contradictory histories: the first, in which the American "Twentieth Century" becomes the culmination of the modernist project; and the second, in which the modernization propagated by Stein's Americanism proves incomplete and must be reorganized on a global level. Her work from this period functions as middling texts, narrating a shift between both high and late modernisms *and* nationalist and global Americanisms. But with regard to the problems of closure implicit in this second historical movement of Americanization, Stein seemingly attempts to resist the ends of modernism and history as cultural strategies by invoking a kind of critical regionalism in response to the institutionalization of late capitalism. Here, regionalism becomes important not only for its nationalist implications—for example, in periodizing the American Century as bound-up with the Great Depression, or in describing differences in regional identity as a mark of both American creativity and citizenship—but also for the way in which a regional lens can focalize a kind of critical topography of the

American landscape. Thus, I trace the development of a regional politics in Stein's literary modernism, where questions of regional autonomy, cultural nationalism, and foreign policy turn on questions of domesticity. Moving from the international to the local, Stein's regional modernism functions as a vanishing mediator, in which a return to regionalism becomes an attempt to resist the closure of modernism via the forces of fascist governments, world wars, and global capitalism.

Part 2 of my dissertation considers the explicit intervention of regional modernism in the late modernism of Dawn Powell, Kay Boyle, and Marion Mahony Griffin. If we take late modernism as being a cultural movement that accounts for the persistence of modernist theory and practice following the Second World War, one that specifically acknowledges the history of transnational developments within modernism, these women are significant because they collectively challenge what they perceive as a movement toward the commodification of modernism. Responding to the increasing cultural capital of American art, literature, and architecture in postwar modernism, Powell, Boyle, and Mahony Griffin combine to form an alternative response to the ideologies undercutting American modernism and cold war exceptionalism, those often contradictorily offered by American print media and New Critical academicism. To that end, their regional modernism becomes a kind of cultural corrective to the exceptionalist politics of the American Century.

In Chapter 3, I look at Powell's novels and their two-fold project of juxtaposing Midwestern and New York City settings and satirizing the effects of class constructs on domestic cultural nationalism. In the first place, Powell satirizes the spatial culture of the city and country and the domestication of their spatial differences, specifically that of

regional sentimentalism and modern pretensions and Midwestern conservatism and metropolitan progress. In her novels written between the 1930s and 1960s, Powell neither privileges the city nor the country. Instead, her regional modernism operates within a dialectic that ultimately points to the ways in which the city and the country are both mutually constitutive and ideologically co-dependent. In the second place, this complex dialectic of city and country and modernism and regionalism opens up to the second effect of Powell's regional modernism: that "regional culture" by way of a postwar focus on the family, the home, domesticity, and the suburb becomes alternatively a commodity for American print media and an anathema for American "high" modernists. Her fiction, therefore, offers a lesson in late modernist periodization: with the rise of American capital and the privileging urban metropolises over regional peripheries, geographical difference becomes homogenized and regional variation becomes impossible.

Chapter 4 considers the explicit intervention of regional modernism in late modernism in Boyle's fiction. Important to my reading of Boyle in the 1930s and 1940s is that when many of her modernist compatriots had returned to America for economic and political reasons she instead stayed in Europe, continuing to write middlebrow fiction for magazines like *The New Yorker*, *Harper's*, and *The Saturday Evening Post* and modernist novels that were remarkable for their combination of domestic narratives, family romance, and war polemics. Important to her project was a regional scaffolding that made a middling connection between cosmopolitan Europe and the American prairie. Boyle not only rejected *New Yorker* editor Harold Ross's quip that the magazine was not edited for "the old lady from Dubuque," she also actively wrote to invest a

middle-class, middlebrow population with news of the avant-garde and the developments of an increasingly fascist Europe. Moreover, Boyle is significant to my narrative as an example of the cultural estrangement that regional modernists experience in the postwar moment. Having written about romantic relationships, unconventional family politics, and criticisms of American war efforts, Boyle found herself both marginalized in literary circles and investigated in the House Un-American Activities Committee. Boyle's audacity was that she not only countered social, political, and cultural norms by writing about outré subjects, she also politicized them. Therefore, Boyle's work becomes significant because it is a kind of resistance to late modernism and its attendant Americanization: middlebrow journalism and domestic fiction become strategic regionalist examples of a relativist Americanism, where domestic politics and foreign policy intersect.

In my final chapter, I examine the cultural extensions of regional modernism for architecture. This turn to architectural theory and practice is crucial given the ways in which architecture offers a framework for the larger cultural connections between late modernism and regional modernism. Indeed, the conversations among modernists like Frank Lloyd Wright, Le Corbusier, Lewis Mumford, and Paul Rudolph—not to say Frampton's postmodern theorization of "critical regionalism"—provide important commentary on the significance of place, geographical context, vernacular culture, and international style for modernism beyond the disciplinary boundaries of architecture. I read Mahony Griffin as deeply invested in these conversations with her "domestic architecture" offering a particularly feminist intervention of regional modernism in the politics of late modernism. I argue that by periodizing Mahony Griffin's architectural

work we can see the way in which her modernist theories on “democratic architecture” shift in her postwar writing to a politics of regional modernism that has at its core a more materialist engagement with the social and political function of domestic housing. Specifically, in her 1949 expatriate narrative, *The Magic of America*, Mahony Griffin both comparatively reads American regional planning and Australian town planning and implicitly criticizes what will become Americanism’s complicity with imperialism. We can read Mahony Griffin as a case study that marks the limits of regional modernism in the transition between modernist and late modernist modalities: her focus on the domestic politics of regional modernism—particularly with regard to issues of class, gender, and environmentalism—differentiate her from the unpolitical stylizations of her more formalist contemporaries. More to the point, Mahony Griffin writes an architectural history that makes an explicit connection between vernacular and international modernisms and the competing pressures of top-down global capitalism and bottom-up regional planning. In this period of late modernism *The Magic of America* speaks not only to the influence of what Mumford in 1925 would describe as a “regional framework for civilization. The combination of Mahony Griffin’s democratic architecture and regional planning also provides a groundwork for city planners like Jane Jacobs who, especially in her 1961 *The Life and Death of Great American Cities*, combined a regional push toward decentralization—pairing, for example, the antimodern plan of Patrick Geddes’ Garden City and the modernist plan of Le Corbusier’s Radiant City. The result of this architectural practice, deeply indebted to Mahony Griffin’s work, is a plan for a kind of national architecture that might remodel American civilization by way of the interdependence of street, neighborhood, district, city, region, and nation.

Indeed, this final chapter will act as a coda to my dissertation project, specifically interrogating one question: what happens to cultural nationalism in the American Century if the country's historical "regional framework for civilization" is refused in favor of a streamlined, metropolitan modernity?

Putting Cather, Larsen, Stein, Powell, Boyle, and Mahony Griffin in dialogue with other regional modernists makes clear the sorts of issues that many male regional modernist writers, painters, and architects like Ernest Hemingway, William Faulkner, Grant Wood, Wright, and Mumford overlooked. These female figures complicate regional modernism via the gendered politics of their typically "feminine" commentary on themes like the family, the home, domesticity, and local color. But given the diversity within my list of six women writers—especially given the range of their sexual orientations, political alignment, and class affiliations—that there is a plurality of viewpoints on these themes becomes all the more significant given their attempt to expand the parameters of modernism as a direct counter to the developing ideology of late modernism. In this "regional framework for civilization," to borrow Mumford's phrasing, my female figures not only challenge the modernist ideologues of American New Criticism, Southern Agrarianism, and MoMA Architecture, to name but a few, but they also challenge the conservative political developments of Cold War America. Thus, the significance of their collective project is the contested space of regional modernism, specifically, and the domestic front, generally. Rather than proffering modernism—and indeed *high* modernism—as the exclusive domain of the highbrow and elite, these women incorporate elements of mass or popular culture to consider the ways in which modernism necessarily responds to middlebrow and middle-class

narratives. Rather than politicking a naïve concept of American democratic tradition as the new global order, these women trouble the theory and praxis of a blanket democracy at home and abroad. And rather than proclaiming the exceptionalism of America, these women ground their nationalism (their praises and their critiques) in what can be construed as a cross-regional-to-global cultural relativism.

## CHAPTER 2 RETURNING TO DOMESTIC CULTURE: WILLA CATHER, NELLA LARSEN, AND REGIONAL MODERNISM

This chapter begins by writing a set of parentheses around the 1920s in the careers of Willa Cather and Nella Larsen. For both women, despite radically different subject positions and literary alignments, the 1920s marks not only their self-conscious rejection of a massified American modernity but also their troubling of the cultural logic of modernism. Their interventions, doubly located in this personal and cultural politics, argue for a reconsideration of gender, domesticity, and local culture within American modernism. Specifically, I will begin by narrating Cather's and Larsen's 1920s breaks with modernist convention to highlight their larger considerations of gender, domesticity and geography in the theory and practice of modernism. What both women consider, and what I argue they contribute to modernist thinking, include questions of feminism on peripheral frontiers, the politicization of domestic space, the function of race and ethnicity in marking the boundaries of uneven development, and the overlap of local and international concerns within modernism. To that extent, I see their respective 1922 and 1924 breaks as a respatialization of modernism towards an explicit regionalist politics. Thus, while the pairing of Cather and Larsen is unexpected, particularly given the conventional view of these women as modernists—Cather as a prairie novelist who, throughout her career, fights the stigmas of local color and political conservatism in an attempt to prove her modernism, and Larsen as an urban figure who is considered a modernist by dint of her associations with the Harlem Renaissance—it is in the intersection of their literary politics that I see a conceptual break from previous theorizations of modernism. More provocative than the pairing of Cather and Larsen is

the parentheses around their spatializing of gender as a cultural terrain—and namely, their development of a “regional modernism.”

### **Narrative Breaks and Peripheral Modernism**

In her 1936 introduction to *Not Under Forty*, Cather reflected that “the world broke in two in 1922 or thereabouts,” and that within her collected essays, “the persons and prejudices recalled in these sketches slid back into yesterday’s seven thousand years” (v). On one level, Cather seems to be periodizing herself in terms of personal alignment, subject matter, and aesthetic theory. In the years prior to 1922, Cather had successfully established herself as a regionalist, whose “prairie trilogy”—*O Pioneers!* (1913), *The Song of the Lark* (1915), and *My Antonia* (1918)—had afforded her both popular success and critical acclaim. But in 1922, Cather’s narrative approach the levels of both form and content changed. Instead of continuing work on prairie novels she expanded her scope; she wrote a novel about World War I, *One of Ours* (1922), which was much criticized by veteran novelists like Ernest Hemingway and for which she controversially won the Pulitzer Prize in 1923; published “The Novel D meubl ” in *The New Republic*, which troubles the use of realism in modern writing; and began writing “Tom Outland’s Story,” the centerpiece of her 1925 novel, *The Professor’s House*, which meditates on the uses of regionalism as a movement.<sup>1</sup> “The world breaking in two in 1922 or thereabouts” becomes, on a personal level for Cather, a generational, gendered, and aesthetically polemic statement on twentieth-century literature—and Cather’s perceived place in it.

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<sup>1</sup> Merrill Maguire Skaggs’ *After the World Broke in Two: The Later Novels of Willa Cather* informed my chronology of Cather’s work in 1922.

More than charting her development as a novelist (or the sharp turn her career took at its midpoint) Cather also seems to be commenting on larger social, historical, and political trends in American culture. On this level, Cather seems to be locating a break: categories of writing in the years before 1922 (modes of narration, choice of content, and aesthetic style) seem incongruous in the years following 1922. Based on this break, and using Thomas Mann as a pivot for orienting writers on either side of the break, Cather classifies these categories as the “forward-goers,” who are concerned only with Mann’s forwardness and the “backward,” who appreciate Mann’s backwardness (v). Age—being at least forty years old—seems to be a marker of this generational split. But having been born by 1882 is more than an arbitrary distinction. In this year John D. Rockefeller unites his holdings into the Standard Oil Trust, Jesse James is assassinated and Billy the Kid is memorialized in biography, and Germany, Italy, and Austria-Hungary form the Triple Alliance. In this historical moment, we can see the beginnings of America’s economic development from an agrarian mode of production to industrial capitalism, and we can see the end of the frontier written into the social fabric of American history through the neutralization—in death or in writing—of its outlaws. And in the realm of international politics, we can see not only the political formations that would inevitably lead to world war, but also World War I as marking the end of one imperial order centered in the United Kingdom (and to a lesser extent Europe) and the emergence of a global imperial order centered in the United States. That is to say, in this triangulation of economic, social, and political events—to which she adds a literary break—I would argue that Cather is developing a theory of modernism.

Reading Cather's "The Novel D meubl " in terms of narrative break, it is possible to read a movement from realism and naturalism towards a theorization of modernism. Although Cather labels herself as a "backward" writer, there are attempts on her part to align herself with literary modernism. According to Cather, writing must break with "mere verisimilitude, and, following the development of modern painting, to interpret imaginatively the material and social investiture of their characters; to present their scene by suggestion rather than by enumeration" (*Not Under Forty* 48). But Cather seems unwilling to subscribe completely to modernism proper. For example, Joan Acocella writes,

Cather could never be mistaken for a nineteenth-century writer. Her austere style is part of modernist classicism; her tragic vision, part of modernist pessimism. But the nobility of her characters, and the privacy she allows them, are an inheritance from the nineteenth century, one that did not go down well in the twenties, a decade determined to throw off the nineteenth century. Furthermore, Cather looked and acted her age. She read modernist literature and liked some of it. She admired Virginia Woolf and adored Proust, but she did not see herself as part of a movement. (23)

While Cather agrees that the form and content of the novel must reflect the modern conditions of the twentieth century, she refuses to move her novels in a direction that either ignores the provinces, the vernacular, or the regional or argues from a position of economic, political, or literary radicalism. However, when she writes that "the higher processes of art are all processes of simplification," Cather is absolutely arguing for a conservative type of modernism (*Not Under Forty* 48-49).

Similar to the way that Cather maps modernism as the coordination of local and international axes, Larsen considers the way in which literature and artistic practice might imagine new social and cultural possibilities as she relates the region to the globe—and vice versa. For example, Larsen considers the effects of a domesticated

regionalism, cultural nationalism, and European cosmopolitanism on black female identity. However, Larsen's regional modernism begins in the inverse direction of Cather's. Larsen first develops a theory of modernism—in dialogue with the larger movements of both the Harlem Renaissance and American modernism—and later crafts her concept of modernism to include more regional concerns. What this ambidextrous alignment demonstrates is the ways in which her political persuasions and narrative approach are necessarily informed by both the black middle class and the Harlem avant-garde. But it is precisely this conjunction of middle-class conservatism with literary avant-gardism that we can see the limits of Larsen's affiliation with each movement; although her identity is a parsing of conservative and leftist agendas toward material conditions and social relations, her literary politics turns on the exclusion of women (intentional or otherwise) from a larger racial politics. Larsen's break with both the black middle class and the black intelligentsia insists that a conservative politics might work for a radical poetics.

Two moments read together mark the development of an almost polemical feminist consciousness in her work. The first moment is the 1924 Civic Club dinner that was organized to celebrate the publication of Jessie Fauset's *There Is Confusion*, but that more successfully celebrated the height of popularity and political efficacy of the Harlem Renaissance movement—here coined the New Negro Movement—and to mark the transition of the leadership of W. E. B Du Bois, *Crisis*, and the older generation to Charles S. Johnson, *Opportunity*, and the new writers led by Alain Locke. For Larsen, still not a part of the Harlem literary world as she had not published any writing, it became clear with the dismissal of Fauset—making her honorary dinner a platform for

movement politics *and* ignoring her work in development of the literary movement—that women, not to say feminism, had little place in the New Negro Movement. The second moment is the publication of a letter in the September 1926 edition of *Opportunity*, in which Larsen writes a defense of Walter White’s *Flight*. On the one hand, this letter is important because she situates herself squarely in literary modernism. Her reading insists upon the modernity of White’s heroine Mimi Daquin—whom the novel’s first reviewer Frank Horne described as “never [becoming activated] by the warm breath of life”—by comparing White’s novel to the works of, among other writers, John Galsworthy, Sherwood Anderson, and Carl Van Vechten, as well as by arguing that modern character development must be read as contingent upon material conditions, social construction, and human psychology (Horne 227).

But beyond establishing her modernist credentials, Larsen differentiates her modernism from that being described in *Opportunity* by making explicit a connection between gender and sexuality and space and place for racialized modern subjects. For example, in “Correspondence,” Larsen takes Horne to task for failing to realize what makes Mimi Daquin a modern woman; fundamentally, it is that she “threw away material things for the fulfillment of [her] spiritual destinies” (295). Because Horne overlooks this bit of agency, Horne wrongly reads that “travail” of Mimi’s characterization—her lack of belonging in New Orleans, French Canada, Atlanta, or Harlem—as representing “the lonely vicissitudes of a lost race” (Horne 227). But whereas Horne hazards that the “lost race” must be black, Larsen reads White’s thesis as arguing that “it is the white race which is lost, doomed to destruction by its own mechanical gods” (295). The difference between both interpretations of the novel turns on what is being “lost”—or better

sacrificed—when Mimi returns to the black world after passing for white in New York City: for Horne, resuming a black identity means Mimi loses “all advantages of body and spirit, a position of eminence which she has developed out of the soul-sweat of her spirit” (227); for Larsen, resuming a black identity regardless of class position insists upon the distinction between material and spiritual needs (295). But more important than her argument for Mimi’s modernity, Larsen is using White’s *Flight* to underline the way in which American society operates as a racist system in which structural inequalities limit material success or spiritual fulfillment. In her analysis, because Mimi travels around the nation in hopes of living respectably, with life experiences including an unplanned pregnancy, condemnation by the black bourgeoisie, labor in the working class, and her decision to pass as white, White demonstrates not only that Mimi’s predilection toward white values systems denies black culture and removes her from a black community no matter her location, but also that her experience of racism, sexism, and classism are constructed differently in each place. I want to suggest that this regional patterning in *Flight* proves influential for Larsen’s development as a modernist, especially in her first novel *Quicksand* (1928).

I want to stress that Cather and Larsen are not alone in readapting the tenets of modernism for their own interests. Susan Hegeman has argued that it is possible to read modernism as addressing paradoxes of uneven development both as generational and geographical, to the extent that such work creates a “more historically embedded modernism in which its creators can be seen to have held the relationship between past and present, and center and periphery, in dialectical tension” (*Patterns* 24). Thus, as a part of modernism proper, we can read the development of a kind of “peripheral

modernism” in which modern producers pointed towards a nexus of intellectual, aesthetic, and technological developments “*within* the context of what might be described as the provincial, and the geographically and culturally marginal” (*Patterns* 23). Given this framework of peripheral modernism, it is not only possible to read American modernism and uneven development in the context of modernism’s global response to the historical experience of modernity and capitalist modernization; it is also possible to read adherents of a more conservative type of American modernism like Cather and Larsen as intersecting with the peripheral origins of many of international modernism’s central figures: James Joyce and W. B. Yeats from Ireland, Franz Kafka from Prague, Pablo Picasso from Spain, and Sergei Diaghilev from Russia all transpose a kind of historical specificity of their peripheral homelands to modernism’s European center, Paris. Or, likewise, we can link Cather and Larsen’s to the “peripheral” statuses like gender, sexuality, race, ethnicity, and religious orientation, laid out by Gertrude Stein, Virginia Woolf, and Marcel Proust.

But to this constellar definition of peripheral modernism, especially in the context of American culture, we should pause to consider what happens to the progress toward modernization and the representations of uneven modernity when conservative approaches to modernism hold in tension seemingly contradictory spatial elements like localism and internationalism and issues of identity politics like race, class, and gender. Specifically, I am interested in the ways in which seemingly conservative modernists might differently experience modernity in both American regions and international travel—and indeed comparatively write about the historical and self-perceived historical differences. More to the point, I am interested in the way that by simultaneously

insisting on vernacular, regional interests *and* cosmopolitan, global relations cultural conservatives like Cather and Larsen argue for a dialectic of regional modernism.

### **Domesticating Regional Modernism**

To consider Cather's and Larsen's intervention of regional modernism, we must first consider the larger uses of regionalism in forming American culture. In his reading of the regionalist movement in America, Robert Dorman has suggested that the American land shapes a national consciousness, creating a historical imperative in which national identity subsumes the regional *and* the idea of regionalism constitutes the idea of America. More specifically, Dorman offers a periodization of the comparative uses of regionalism in a modern American context: how regionalism moves from being a means of stabilizing the nation-state and consolidating national power in the eighteenth century to being a critique of hegemonic nationalism and an antidote to a catastrophist modernity in the twentieth century. Locating the seeds of the regionalist movement in the 1920s, in part because "the advent of mass culture set the context for the homogenized caricature of community life that artists and intellectuals . . . found so oppressive," Dorman argues that by the 1930s when "mass culture was to furnish for them one of the most visible emblems of the corporate domination of America," a "new regionalism" of the interwar period attempted to "salvage and preserve the culture of the folk from this perhaps most imperiling of all the forces of modernization" (19).

Reading Cather and Larsen in this regional context proves instructive. Indeed, they participate in Dorman's mapping of the regionalist movement in America from 1920 to 1945. Both women writers subscribe to the project of the "new regionalism," and its various attempts to "find a home for the older America of the folk in the fragmenting world of the twentieth century, a home not merely metaphorically but literally and

concretely” (24). But even as Cather and Larsen participate in the development of a regional modernism within America’s borders, their work also forces a consideration of the causes and effects of a global modernism on this distinctly American regionalism. That is to say, their work on “home”—be it, among other things, in the form of nationalism, locality, building, domesticity—forces a more relativist consideration of global influences beyond American borders or the limits of exceptionalism. Whereas Dorman pointedly argues that the 1920s and the 1930s were a period marked by a nativist impulse to define an American concept of culture distinct from what had been perceived as a dominant European “imported” cultural tradition, I want to complicate his land-locked reading of the regionalism movement (14). Instead, I want to suggest that regionalism—and its attendant questions of “culture” and “cultivation”—should necessarily be considered a dialectic other to modernism; meaning, a regional modernism must consider not only the past and present, center and periphery, and nation and region in dialectical tension, but also the relationship between the region and the world. As Hegeman has noted, in the twentieth century leading up to World War II, a peripheral modernism—a movement within Dorman’s larger periodization of the regionalist movement—had transnational extensions as eastern and southern Europe proved a “source of seemingly limitless supply of immigrant labor” (*Patterns* 22).

From a more “globalized” reading of regionalism comes two competing maps of modernist affiliation: one, where the two movements participate in similar projects for the domestication of culture; and the other, where ideology and politics preclude cultural alignment. On the one hand, because American modernism had to reconcile the social, economic, and political effects of American modernization, modernism as a cultural

movement necessarily had to position all patterns of development in relation to an emerging global economy. If regionalism can be read as a kind of peripheral modernism, and indeed regionalism and modernism similarly participate in what Warren Susman has described as “the domestication of culture,” we can similarly read the cultural concept of regionalism as working through larger international effects of incomplete modernization—like global economies during the Depression, the development of European fascism, or the spectre of Soviet communism for workers—on a subnational level (154). However, on the other hand, because nativist regionalists—Thomas Hart Benton, Grant Wood, and the Southern Agrarians, for example—arrayed themselves against the more cosmopolitan—“foreign,” “European,” or “Jewish,” etc.—modernism of New York, there are marked limitations to a liberal alignment of local interests and internationalism within a regionalist purview.

The regional modernism I am arguing for refuses blanket distinctions between the cultural and political agendas of the regionalists and the interwar modernist generation.<sup>2</sup> On a theoretical level, because both groups emphasize parallel concepts of *place*—regionalism’s focus on “lived environment as a unique historical, cultural, and physical entity . . . key to a fully human life”—and *space*—modernism’s embrace of culture simultaneously arranged as a constellation of converging “relatively equivalent, historically concurrent” and “spatially different” sites—I see their work toward an integrated culture as compatible (Dorman 23; Hegeman, *Patterns* 4-5). This means that

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<sup>2</sup> Specifically, Dorman argues that if regionalists were to join the interwar modernist generation in an attempt to create “a new integrated culture,” their participation would most likely be ambivalent. He suggests a degree of cultural alienation, on the part of the regionalists, for this shaky alliance: the urban privilege of the movements predominantly centered in New York City, favoring issues of immigration, ethnic boroughs, and factor work to the exclusion of rural America and its folk, community, and farming traditions (23).

in their attempt to theorize a distinctly American culture, regional modernists necessarily consider the form this culture takes as a comparative project of local, regional, national, and global interests. On a practical level, a handful of Americans writing in this moment—Cather and Larsen being my examples in this chapter—blur the distinctions between the new regionalist and peripheral modernist movements by writing about particularism and internationalism, the vernacular and the cosmopolitan, the rural and the urban, the subnational and the national, the regional and the global in the same text. For example, if Dorman argues that American history is simultaneously marked by the congruence of regionalist and modernist movements and the tension between federalism versus states rights, Cather and Larsen complicate this dialectic by forcing a consideration of the global (or put differently, the international, the transatlantic, or the transnational). In addition to writing about effects of place, class, gender, and race in different American regions (in the Midwest, in the South, in the Southwest, and in New York City) and in Europe, these women also consider the effects of this regional matrix on American individual identity and national consciousness abroad. What this means, then, is that regional modernism carries within a domesticated national—if not nationalist—culture, only to question the influence of the regional and the global on modern American life.

My reading of Cather and Larsen defines regional modernism by example. In this descriptive definition, in part because I am using two women writers as my exemplars of this modernist movement, it is necessary to acknowledge that there is a gendered inflection to my reading. But let me be clear: I am not suggesting that this is exclusively a movement of women writers, artists, intellectuals, or critics. Indeed, it is

possible to read some male moderns considering the relationships between regional and global issues in their modernism—among others, Frank Lloyd Wright whose architecture responds to the Beaux Arts and International Style; William Carlos Williams whose *In the American Grain* attempts to address American culture in terms of its origins in global capitalism; William Faulkner whose southern novels reference decolonization movements and Atlantic trade; and B. A. Botkin whose historical scholarship emphasizes the heterogeneous racial, ethnic, religious, and class influences on regional folk culture. Williams, for example, argues that a particularly American modernism must be read as a totality of place. For Williams, modernism necessarily has regional inflections as a poet must travel to both Virginia and China in an attempt to look for “pockets of local color” (122). Important to Williams’ project, however, is the implicit distinction that regionalisms will always be in the service of modernism: “Local color is not, as the parodists, the localists believe, an object of art. It is merely a variant serving to locate acme point of white penetration. The intensification of desire toward this purity is the modern variant” (122).<sup>3</sup> Modernism becomes the white space that envelops local color.

The Williams example instructively sets the parameters of what I am describing as a gendered regional modernism. The first distinction that limits the participation of Williams and certainly the majority of male moderns in the project of regional modernism is the association with the feminized (and often domestic or sentimental) genre of local color. As Williams makes clear, the local is modern insofar as it is a component “place” of modernism; localisms, read variously as local color or

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<sup>3</sup> Important to note regarding this reading of place in a modernist context, Williams is describing the work of Marianne Moore.

regionalism, cannot in and of themselves be modernist. Not only does Williams circumscribe the politics of local color as content, he also implicitly participates in a hierarchization of literary genre where local color, because it is not modern, is associated with being a “lesser” literary form. Indeed, this is in part what Cather’s 1922 anecdote is referencing: at the same time that she reminds her readers that she is transitioning out of the feminized genre of local color towards modern literature, she also is reminding that she will forever be associated with the older burdens of her career. Thus, the second larger distinction centers on a more sustained consideration of the domestic as content in their cultural formations. That is to say, if regional modernism deploys both the regionalist movement’s concept of place and the interwar modernist’s concept of space, women writing in the context of regional modernism recover the domestic, to paraphrase Williams, as an acme point of the intersection of both movements. For me, gender becomes a point of entry into the *place* of regional modernism in the discourse of modernity in the twentieth century. This allows for a consideration of regionalism and modernism that destabilizes the consensus of its predominantly male group of theorists—including among others, George Santayana, Van Wyck Brooks, Randolph Bourne, Waldo Frank, Harold Stearns, Carl Van Doren, Lewis Mumford, Ralph Borsodi, Carey McWilliams, Grant Wood, and Howard Odum—who often positioned gender within these movements as more often epithetic (the feminization of the nation, the domestication of daily living, the rise of consumer culture) than evaluative.<sup>4</sup> Reading women writing a regional modernism puts in tension

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<sup>4</sup> See, for example, George Santayana, “The Genteel Tradition in American Philosophy” (1911), Van Wyck Brooks, “America’s Coming of Age” (1915); Randolph Bourne, “A Mirror of the Middle West” (1918); Waldo Frank, *Our America* (1919); Harold Stearns, “Intellectual Life” in *Civilization in the United States: An Inquiry by Thirty Americans* (1921); Carl Van Doren, “Revolt from the Village” (1921); Lewis Mumford,

principles of interiority and exteriority, place and consciousness, femininity and masculinity, center and periphery. The critical question becomes, how might a *productive* inclusion of gender into the culture debates between the 1920s and 1950s refigure the relationship between regionalism and modernism?

Cather and Larsen certainly combine regionalism and modernism in conventional ways: they treat the intersection of both movements as ways to map the cultural exchanges between region, nation, and world; likewise, their emphasis on geography within both movements becomes a way for them to conceptualize history, particularly the ways in which shifts in modes of production and uneven development affect daily living. But the literal local-to-international travel they write into their novels narrates not only the transitions between different modes of capitalism existing simultaneously (and tenuously) within the American nation but also the differences between the modernization of American regions and a European modernity. What becomes important in this movement is that their regional modernism most explicitly deals with the causes and effects of incomplete modernization on the regional level as America becomes a global power—or at the very least asserts a larger influence on the international politics, economics, and art. Thus, their regionalism—which is to say, their modernism—necessarily considers the region in relation to the globe.

Cather and Larsen become important figures in the periodization of regional modernism because they put in tension the limitations of regionalism and modernism as period and as process; they underscore that there become gendered implications for

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“A Regional Framework for Civilization” (1925); Ralph Borsodi, *This Ugly Civilization* (1929) and *Flight from the City* (1933); Carey McWilliams, *The New Regionalism in American Literature* (1930); and Grant Wood, *Revolt Against the City* (1935).

regionalism and modernism as socio-historical movements *and* as cultural discourses. In their writings, they reorient the domestic within regional modernism so the local and the vernacular are expanded to include issues of home, domesticity, and a gendered division of labor; and so the expanded content of the developing middle class and its shifting daily living can be read relationally to world affairs. What is new about their approach to modernism is that they always force a return of modernism—be it national or international—to the home front. The “forward” progress of modernism paired with a “backward” glance to the domestic becomes a formula for Cather and Larsen to reflect their discomfort with the bourgeois ethos emergent in the middle class and to resist the standardization dominating American living. Their conservative approach to regional modernism underlines that if the project of building an integrated culture is possible, it must return to sites of domestic culture—as home, community, region, nation, and world.

### **Willa Cather: Regionalism Repairing Toward Modernism**

To begin my reading of Cather’s regional modernism, I want to return to the “Prefatory Note” of *Not Under Forty*. Besides offering a periodization of modern American literature—and offering a theory of what her modernism might look like—I want to elaborate that Cather also offers a praxis for reformulating modernist writing. Immediately before she offers 1922 as the breaking point toward modernism, she offers a disclaimer: “The title of this book is meant to be ‘arresting’ only in the literal sense, like the signs put up for motorists: ‘ROAD UNDER REPAIR,’ etc.” (v). In this sentence, Cather is offering two signposts simultaneously—a stop sign and a caution sign: first, she is arguing that realism and naturalism as the dominant modes of narration leading into the twentieth century no longer prove adequate for writing about American

modernity; and second, she is implying that modernism does not prove incompatible with certain narrative forms already in use to describe American culture. Given her personal ties to local color as a genre, her expansion of “Literature” to include the provincial and the modern simultaneously, and the cultural power of regionalism beginning in the 1920s, Cather seems to be pointing to the possible uses of regionalism in a modernist context. And by extension, it is possible to argue that what is under repair in Cather’s approach to modernist narrative is regionalism.

As early as 1920, in her essay “On the Art of Fiction,” Cather had indicated that because art must be viewed as a “process [that] was all the time one of simplifying” her writing likewise was amenable to change (103). What simplification would mean for literature, and what such an aesthetic move would require, centers on “finding what conventions of form and what detail one can do without and yet preserve the spirit of the whole—so that all that one has suppressed and cut away is there to the reader’s consciousness as much as if it were in type of the page” (102). She continues by suggesting that art might become “new and untried” when “the values are intrinsic and have nothing to do with standardized values” (103).

To her interrogation of modern literature in 1920—and her attempt to broach modernism as both a period of development and a set of formal and stylistic concerns—Cather, in her 1931 essay “My First Novels [There Were Two],” makes the choice of content equally as political. If in 1920 Cather is interested in writing a new modern literature that is opposed to the manufacture of stock stories according to market demand, a key move for dissociating herself from some of the pejorative connotations of local color, in 1931 she is even more critical about the way the choice of content can

affect the new forms of modern literature. Writing against “the conventional pattern” by writing the “novel of the soil,” Cather privileges form over “[following] manner, without qualifications” (93). What can be read as Cather’s move towards modernist forms also includes a regionalist content.

It is almost a truism to suggest that the form-content of Cather’s novels operates as a regionalized opposition to a massified modernity, beginning as early as 1917 with *O Pioneers!*. However, something dramatically alters in the mid-1920s when Cather dismisses realism and tries to reformulate her writing toward modernism. That is to say, rather than writing merely in opposition to the lost world of the pioneer or tracing the way in which the West standardizes as the frontier closes, Cather becomes concerned with the way in which her regional modernism might create new forms of narrative and new modes of life. She becomes aware of the way in which her writing might be implicated in processes beyond making art; she becomes more vocal about the critical capacity that her writing might have when life and art intersect beyond representation. But at the same time that she recognizes that choices of form and content are implicitly political, Cather opposes the idea of putting art in the service of politics.<sup>5</sup> By 1936, in a *Commonweal* article entitled “Escapism,” Cather rebukes the social realist call for the convergence of politics and art. She agrees that “one really important thing for every individual is his citizenship,” but refuses the idea that “loyalty to a cause” for a writer necessarily means “loyalty to a party” (20). She instead argues that the primary function of a writer is to “refresh and recharge the spirit of those who can read their

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<sup>5</sup> My reading of Cather’s politics is different than Marilee Lindemann’s, who argues that politics is something that Cather claimed to be trying to completely avoid, citing the “Escapism” editorial as prime example.

language” and, to that end, writing in the service of a cause can be political but not polemical.

We can read “Escapism” as establishing Cather’s literary politics in two ways. First, responding to critics who deem her work too conservative, Cather fires back that the conditions for a radical poetics is “not so much freedom from restriction, as freedom from adulteration and from the intrusion of foreign matter; considerations and purposes have nothing to do with spontaneous invention” (26-27). Cather refuses any identification with a movement that requires total acquiescence to a political party or artistic style.<sup>6</sup> Second, Cather opens up this political stance in terms of a more specific literary politics: we can contextualize “Escapism” as a response to Granville Hicks’s acerbic 1933 “The Case Against Willa Cather,” and we can read her as arguing for the modernity of her continued writing of pioneer novels. Instead of writing about “contemporary life as it is,” which for Hicks means “our industrial civilization,” Cather respatializes the scope of American writing and destabilizes the American literary establishment’s privilege of topics pertaining to eastern, urban, industrial capitalism (708, 710). By insisting on writing about the rural Midwest and small-town America, Cather defends both the idea that art might “escape” to the mesa and that the artist need not conform to the idea that writers must be socially responsible intellectuals.

Certainly this move in and of itself is reactionary. Partly because of the attacks leveled on her by 1930s intellectuals and partly because she subscribed to 1890s

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<sup>6</sup> To this end, Cather finishes “Escapism” with a flourish of critique: “So far, the effort to make a new kind of poetry, ‘pure poetry,’ which eschews (or renounces) the old themes as shop-worn, and confines itself to regarding the grey of a wet oyster shell against the sand of a wet beach through a drizzle of rain, has not produced anything very memorable: not even when the workmanship was good and when a beat in the measure was unexpectedly dropped here and there with what one of the poet’s admirers calls a ‘heart-breaking effect.’ Certainly the last thing such poetry should attempt is to do any heart-breaking” (28).

variation of midwestern progressivism, Cather maintained what Hermione Lee describes as a “deliberate detachment from the ‘progressive’ movements of the day—economic and social reform, psychoanalysis, and Marxism” (328). But contrary to Hicks’s charge that Cather’s novels are nostalgic projections of “supine romanticism,” Cather’s conservatism in fact has a deliberate politics (710). On the one hand, this politics intersects with larger progressive regionalist currents. Defiantly writing pioneer novels throughout the 1930s becomes a rejection of the closing of the American frontier, instead arguing for the continued relevance of regional uneven development for national culture and domestic policy. In this formulation, Cather refuses cultural and political distinctions between regionalism and modernism in the years between 1922 and 1940. Like leading regionalist figures Thomas Hart Benton, Lewis Mumford, and Charles Beard, Cather believed that regionalism could be a cultural salve to machine age values, industrial capitalism and economic depression. Her regionalism affirms “the essential importance of *linking* localized contemporary social, geographic, and economic cultures” (Doss 94). However, because Cather refused to read regionalism in either localist or leftist terms, her project quarrels with what Erika Doss reads as her fellow regionalists’ push for “the emergence of a collective national culture” that came from “the authentic ‘conditions of its locality,’ rather than from the manufactured conditions of an imposed ‘foreign’ political doctrine” (120). While neither accepting nor refusing the ways in which her fellow regionalists politicize culture as republican-populist or socialist-liberal, Cather’s regional framework instead focuses on the cross-cultural links between the local and the global, the community and the individual.

On the other hand, the intersection of global politics with regional cultures marks the fault lines between her modernist project and nativist regionalism. If “regionalism belongs to the future” for Benton and Mumford because it recognizes “the region as the permanent sphere of cultural influences and as a center of economic activities, as well as an implicit geographic fact,” Cather also requires that it have a historical embeddedness (94). For Cather, this means subscribing to the modernist project of making art reflective of the changing world—“a new kind of thought and a new kind of expression; in language, color, form, sound”—so long as alignment with this project does not necessitate “destroying the past” or writing with “contempt for the old” (25). In the context of her 1936 assertion that “the world breaking in two in 1922 or thereabouts” her regional modernism becomes a geographical alternative to the broad historical claims of Henry Luce’s “American Century.”<sup>7</sup> Against the popular narrative beginning in the twentieth century that “geography survives as nostalgia,” and despite Neil Smith’s efforts to define the period as a contradiction between a spaceless and spatially-constituted globalism, we can read Cather’s insistence on regional cultures, locational difference, and national boundaries as a challenge to the economic and cultural globalization complicit with the logics of capitalist expansion (2). Her pioneer novels, therefore, become a metonymy for her larger literary project: an argument for geographical history that reads geography and history in dialectic relationship; an argument against political conformism and polemical literature; an argument for the continued frontier’s relevancy in the shift to global capitalism; and an argument against the standardization of national culture at the expense of local color.

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<sup>7</sup> See Henry Luce’s essay in the February 17, 1941 *Life*, 61-65.

It is this hesitancy, her strain between conservatism and progressivism, regionalism and modernism that lead me to read Cather as a regional modernist—a classification that does not argue away the ambidexterity or contradiction in her association with regionalism and modernism as periods and processes. That is to say, the category of regional modernism allows for multiple emphases on the simultaneity of processes of modernization and the cultural logics of regionalism. In terms of this movement's literary politics, one of the tensions produced between modernism and regionalism is a focus on typicality within modernity—a renewed focus on the transformative power of daily living, or the quotidian, in modern life. In this framework, the transformation of the pioneers into the middling middle class, the shift from an individualist work ethic to machine-age standardization, the writing away from integrated regional life toward individualism as alienation and fragmentation, the privileging of a homogenizing American cultural history at the expense of folk traditions, become arguments for the regional modernist writing against the conformity of massification.

Cather's politics can be summed up as variously conservative and progressive: she is a conservative insofar as she is an individualist (which, in turn, is associated with her rejection of big government and the politicizing of criticism in the thirties); and she is a progressive insofar as she protests against a nascent massified culture (which, in turn, is associated with both the capitalist culture industry and fascism). In terms of political and cultural alignment, she falls somewhere between the conservative regionalism of the Southern Agrarians, for example, who modeled regionalism as a kind

of reactionary nostalgia, and the “liberal” regionalism of Howard Odum, for example, who saw regionalism as an antidote to fascism.<sup>8</sup>

Defending this challenge to American literary tradition and her tenuous alignment with both regionalists and the thirties Left, Cather offers a typically modernist explanation for breaking conventions to invent, however conservative, new forms of living: “The revolt against individualism naturally calls artists severely to account,” Cather writes, “because the artist is of all men the most individual” (“Escapism” 26-27). The writer-figure, therefore, is doubly characterized both as the creator of this new mode of narration *and* a typical representative of this new mode of living. In this approach to literature, the writer must make the universal and the typical her subject so that a certain amount of individuality and agency might emerge from an engagement with the contradictions of modern life. To write about typical characters is in part to write critically about modernity. Here Cather complicates her political alignment a final time by way of a dialectic approach to literature, foiling again her straight characterization as conservative: the individual, as character, is also representative of the group, and vice versa. Therefore, like Georg Lukács, who writes in his 1936 essay “The Intellectual Physiognomy in Characterization” (1936) that a character’s typicality “represents a profound personal experience and the most distinctive expression of his inner life [at the same time that] it provides a significant reflection of the general problems of his time,” Cather narrates the shift in the regional landscape—its settlement, its embourgeoisement, its commodification—as a means to intensify the

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<sup>8</sup> See Michael Denning’s “Ballads for Americans: Aesthetic Ideologies” in *The Cultural Front: The Laboring of American Culture in the Twentieth Century*” helped me to trace out this political continuum.

problems of contemporary society and, by extension, to imagine possible solutions (151).

In her novels, we can pattern the way in which her regional modernism reworks the typical in different geographic and social contexts: a middling character is dissatisfied with his lived environment and turns to the regional or the international as cultural alternatives to what he perceives to be stagnant local or national options. What regional modernism does is show a kind of cultural breakdown as experienced by a particular character; read the individual's problems as representative of a larger social, political, and economic conditions; offer historicity, folk aesthetics, and European traditions as comparative models for the reform of modern America; and tease out the ways that the typical character and his individual situation proves (and likewise does not prove) amenable to change. For example, *One of Ours*, the novel that provides the initial theorization for Cather's regional modernism, also provides the framework for a conventional plot in this narrative style: Claude Wheeler is a Nebraska farmer discontented with his farm work, his unhappy marriage, and his limited cultural pursuits. Representative of the disconnected prewar American youth, Claude is a typical modern American who must deal with the effects of modernization, ranging from mechanization of the family farm, to expanded gender roles, to middle class ennui, to the beginnings of modern American imperialism. Claude makes various attempts to escape his dissatisfying life—first to the state university where he takes an interest in European history and finally to the army where he volunteers to defend France in the First World War. Each attempt's failure—being pulled out of university by his utilitarian father to run the expanding family farm or being killed in action by German shells—underlines the

difficulty (if not impossibility) an individual faces in any attempt to challenge larger social or historical forces.

But the tragedy of Claude's characterization—failure at the moment he is about to transcend his typicality—must be gauged in relation to the hopefulness of the solutions that Cather offers: education and transnationalism. In this 1922 novel, both become ways to curb exceptionalist Americanism and even larger problems of an increasingly hegemonic Americanization. Cather makes clear in *One of Ours* that Claude's army enlistment and European enculturation would have an effect "so wide in its amplitude that the Wheelers,—all the Wheelers and the more rough-necks and the low-brows were caught up in it. Yes, it was the roughnecks' own miracle, all this; it was their golden chance" (269). Claude's purpose beyond individual development is to become a cultural corrective to "the legend of waste and prodigality" of Americans, "superfluous and disintegrating" at the start of the war and followed in the wake of Allied victory (282). Claude becomes a corrective because his false idealism in the global project of Americanism becomes an ideology of the postwar years and because his relativist approach to French culture is trumped in favor of an exceptionalist Americanism.

By writing Claude as a character who desperately wants to transcend his typicality but ultimately fails, Cather can write against the material and social conditions that shaped her middling protagonist, particularly the complicity of business and politics in promoting consumerism and isolationism as the keystones of the postwar life. World War I, which on first reading seems to be a heroic project toward individuation, on second reading becomes an example of the limitations of an American modernity.

Cather makes obvious the mobilization of individual idealism and naïve nationalism in the service of expansionist business and politics; from the perspective of a French shopkeeper, Cather underlines this distinction: “All this was not war,—any more than having money thrust at you by grown men who could not count, was business. It was an invasion, like the other. The first destroyed material possessions, and this threatened everybody’s integrity” (282). In this way, *One of Ours*, which was popularly castigated as a sentimentalized attempt by a woman to write about the war, becomes a critique of the war as an instrument of transnational American empire.

What becomes important for Cather’s war critique is its return to the home front—and corresponding return of the narrative of empire to the domestic realm. *One of Ours* closes with Mrs. Wheeler mourning her son and rationalizing his death: “He died believing his own country better than it is, and France better than any country can be. And those were beautiful beliefs to die with. Perhaps it was as well to see that vision, and then to see no more” (394). In this domestic scene, we can see the way in which the cultural logic of empire informs the private sphere in contradictory ways. On the one hand, we can see a mother internalizing her son as dying a hero for what was supposed to be a virtuous cause. But on the other, we can see her hesitation to read the effects of the war as anything but protecting the status quo. Significantly, it is the prairie home that becomes a site of critique for the standardization of American society and a site of resistance to a narrow concept of national culture. Smith has similarly written about American geographer Isaiah Bowman, who by his reading argues that a return to the frontier means a larger concern with the effects of modern pioneering on the lives of women. In this context, Cather likewise suggests that it is especially in the feminized

spaces of the frontier that the effects of twentieth-century uneven development will be writ large. But whereas Bowman suggests that women are responsible for the negative repercussions of “the flow of culture into the pioneering lands of the world” and the attendant “increased demands for services and civilization” that would require an increased degree of government dependence, Cather locates in these women pioneers a degree of resistance to the negative forces of modernization (Smith 224-225). For Cather, it is in these typically feminine spaces—the home, domestic scenes, family, local color etc.—existing on the fringe of modern industrial America becoming, to use Bowman’s words, “regions of experiment” (226). As *One of Ours* makes clear, the frontier is no longer peripheral given the scope of American cultural and economic expansion and intervention in world politics; thus the global reach of American foreign policy might be replicated not only in national domestic policy but also in the internal affairs of regions themselves.

What this return to the domestic means is that regional modernism becomes a diffuse political movement connecting the American provinces and the European continent in a direct line. Guy Reynolds notes that because by 1922 Cather “could no longer map her regionalist progressivism on to the midwestern heartland,” the content of her fiction had to “multiply outwards” to include the kinds of “idealized progressive places first depicted in the Nebraska novels” (22-23). However, at the same time that Cather expands the American frontier to include the whole of North America—Michigan, Canada, Arizona, Mexico, Virginia, Nebraska, etc.—her cultural pluralism always returns to the domestic as a privileged space. By implicating “every American gesture towards individual distinction as contributing to American empire,” as Richard Urgo

argues, Cather underlines that every American “endorsement, critique, or attack on the social order or its ideology is . . . an advance of the national culture as a whole towards an imperial position” (43). A return to the domestic is an attempt to complicate the cultural logics of the American Century, by forcing regionalism and modernism to consider the effects of the home, the family, and domesticity as foundational for an integrated culture. Put differently, the way to transcend typicality is to reorient identity and community in perhaps the most quotidian of spaces—the domestic.

In her 1923 *Nation* essay, “Nebraska: The End of the First Cycle,” Cather attempts precisely that. Education and transnationalism, in a decidedly regional context, become cultural strategies that redeploy the wartime “idealism, of noble seriousness” in the service of a “fluid and flexible . . . living, growing expanding society” (238). Beginning in the prairie and moving eastward, Cather seems hopeful that this regional spirit will prove a counter to the rampant materialism and jingoistic nationalism shaping her contemporary moment. Invoking the historical legacy of the pioneer, Cather spins her own frontier thesis that will “revolt against all the heaped-up, machine-made materialism”: “It is in that great cosmopolitan country known as the Middle West that we may hope to see the hard molds of American provincialism broken up; that we may hope to find the young talent which will challenge the pale properties, the insincere, conventional optimism of our art and thought” (238). The younger generation, returning to the moral systems and regional sensibilities that had characterized the Midwest for the better part of a century, would create links between the rural peripheries and the urban centers, between American provinces and European development, between old tradition and new progress, and between historicity and futurity. For example, *A Lost*

*Lady*, also published in 1923, might be read as bemoaning the loss of pioneers like the Forresters for modern America, but it also locates a degree of hopefulness in the younger generation as embodied by engineer Niel Herbert to recognize the loss of *and* to modernize (or better, to return to) pioneer sensibilities. Travel and education—not to say ethnic identification, cultural relativism, faith in the land, or local political engagement—are the ways Cather suggests that this cultural project might take root. But the utopic thrust of “Nebraska,” as Cather imagines it, ignores the force of the typical in shaping modern life.

By 1925, there are indications that this theory of regional modernism is impractical. Instead integrating an organic regional culture—say, Nebraska—with modernist progress—say, mechanization of the prairie and cultural relativism toward the frontier’s various immigrant groups—we can see a more sustained meditation on the ways in which regionalism and modernism intersect as Cather attempts to imagine an alternative cultural tradition. What becomes different for Cather in this moment is that she very explicitly considers the productive uses of both regionalism and modernism. Rather than abstractly pointing out the cultural spirit of the prairie (its cleanliness, vigor, work ethic, and pride in the land), and rather than superficially commenting on the region’s responsible approach to modernity (a fondness for novelty and change without showy extravagance), Cather engages in a sustained reading of the problems and benefits of both movements. Important to this comparative strategy is that domestic spaces become more rigorously considered as spaces that both promote modern complacency and allow for individuation; meaning, Cather pinpoints the problem of typicality as central to the cultural project of regional modernism.

This process is writ large in her 1925 novel, *The Professor's House*. In this text, the conventional Cather plot holds: Professor Godfrey St. Peter is a history professor at a small midwestern university, who is increasingly becoming dissatisfied: with his home life as his wife becomes tied up in the marital politics of their daughters, and as the impending move to a new house means leaving his beloved work space; with his school as his work in the humanities is being deprivileged in favor of more utilitarian courses of study; and with his scholarship as he wavers between writing an introduction to beloved student Tom Outland's diaries and finishing the ninth volume of his *Spanish Adventurers in North America*. Cather writes St. Peter as a typical man, experiencing the alienation, fragmentation, and boredom of the consolidating middle class—but with one exception. The novel becomes a kind of thought experiment on the possibility of cultural change if the comparative uses of regional modernism are pushed to the extreme. That is to say, Cather provides her protagonist with the tools to escape his middling life, but it becomes more important for her project to see, on the level of content, how a man from the older generation can use aspects of regionalism and modernism to reform his world, and on the level of form, how under the arc of regional modernism regional and modernist strategies might be used while avoiding reification.

This double movement hinges on Tom Outland. He is the character exemplar of regional modernism. A pioneer, a railroad man, a cattle-herder, an excavator, an anthropologist, a university student, and a scientist, Tom's various jobs make clear that the cultural work of regionalism is not incompatible with modernism; excavating the Blue Mesa and preserving its Indian artifacts in a museum exhibit are not incompatible with developing a patent for a new kind of aviation engine: both register the historical

specificity of the moment—one having the impulse towards preservation and one having the impulse toward progress—and both foster a sense of historical continuity in which the past and the future are important concerns for contemporary American life. At the same time that Tom represents the intersection of these two movements, it is necessary that he likewise embodies what is perceived to be contradictory positions in American modernity—the engineering power of the modernist and the organic notion of place of the regionalist. On the one hand, the intersection of these two movements in the characterization of Tom is ideal because he troubles the contradiction of these modern subject positions. On the other hand, he marks the limits of this self-division. His affiliation with regionalism and modernism uses him up, leaving only his idealized story and his engine. Cecelia Tichi has suggested that in Cather’s work on *Alexander’s Bridge*, “Alexander’s bridge is not a structure but an organic symbol. It is not an artifact of component parts but an evocation of the spiritual-psychological state of the man whose life it represents. Its significance does not lie in its statement on design, but only in what the symbol reveals about the spiritual state of the person it represents” (173). I would argue the same holds true for *The Professor’s House*. But whereas Alexander’s bridge represents a commitment to the waning values of the Romantic era and a discomfort with developing technology, Tom’s legend and his engine are bound up in a more relational idea of progress. That is to say, Cather seems to suggest that a new type of pioneering spirit embodied in Tom is being created on the frontier. It is not a sustainable type, given Tom’s young death in combat, but this is not because of the incompatibility of the projects per se so much as the use of both the man and his projects in larger American society.

Tom's function in the framework of the text, then, is to be the ideal representation of regional modernism. Indeed, Tom represents the idealism of the years prior to the world war—what Cather describes in "Nebraska" as the organic idealism that swept the prairie—and that must necessarily end before the social, political, and economic policies of the détente tarnish it. As St. Peter notes, in death Tom escaped the corrupting pressures of scientific renown, economic success, family life, and university politics, all the while preserving the ambitious spirit of his projects: "He had escaped all that. He had made something new in the world—and the rewards, the meaningless conventional gestures, he had left to others" (237). Tom becomes a model for what a fully integrated regional-modernist American culture might look like. And it becomes the task of the world he leaves behind—the family, the university, the college town, the nation, etc.—to continue his work. What becomes important for Tom in Cather's regional modernism, therefore, is the various ways that the legacy of Tom Outland is used—and to what ends. The question becomes not "what would have happened to him, once the trap of worldly success had been sprung on him," as St. Peter finds himself wondering, but what happens to Tom—as the model of regional modernism—once his work is profitable and commodifiable (236).

Considering this question, I am interested in the ways that Tom Outland (and his regional modernism) provide an architecture for St. Peter's house in its various forms. In a 1938 piece written for *News Letter*, Cather wrote that the formal approach for *The Professor's House* consisted of two experiments: the first, using a device of French and Spanish novelists which centers on "inserting the *Nouvelle* into the *Roman*"; and the second, following the model of Dutch paintings of putting a window to the outside world

in the middle of a domestic scene (30-1). What she hoped these two formal experiments would achieve is a framework for reading St. Peter's and Tom's various visions of America:

I tried to make Professor St. Peter's house rather overcrowded and stuffy with new things; American properties, clothes, furs, petty ambitions, quivering jealousies—until one got rather stifled. Then I wanted to open the square window and let in the fresh air that blew off the Blue Mesa, and the fine disregard of trivialities which was in Tom Outland's face and in his behavior. (31-32)

With these authorial intentions as a starting point, it is possible to explore both what these visions of America might look like and how each of these visions shape the other; more to the point, it is possible to see Tom—his life, his work, his America—as a scaffolding that helps to form St. Peter's larger approach to modern life. On the most basic level, in the novel this pattern forms in two ways: first, the book is broken into three sections—"The Family," "Tom Outland's Story," and "The Professor"—which narrate the after-effects of Tom's inheritance and how, during a summer devoted to work on Tom's diaries, St. Peter attempts to reclaim his domestic life from the control of his wife and the influence of his sons-in-law; and second, the book is composed of two modes of narration, the first and last being more modernist with their concerns of individuality, middle-class values, and scientific progress, and the middle section being more regionalist with its characters' impulse toward historicity and their anthropological approach to embedded cultures. What I want to suggest is that, rather than reading St. Peter's and Tom's lifestyles as radically different or reading their respective sections as incongruously narrated, the form of the novel allows us to see the way in which St. Peter is moving towards both patterns simultaneously. Likewise, if the formal logic of the novel intersects with Tom at its center, so too does the content. Therefore, *The*

*Professor's House* must be read as St. Peter's attempt to combine both regionalist and modernist modes of life into an integrated American culture following Tom's death.

These movements intersect in St. Peter's various homes. Because Tom is representative of the ideal regional modernism, in which center and periphery in all its manifestations are held in tension, his influence extends to both the public and private realm; therefore, at the same time that he is influencing public life in areas as diverse as the university, science, politics, and regional planning, Tom is also influencing domestic life in relation to family, probate, and architecture. Both Tom and St. Peter underline that regional modernism is a cultural framework that subsumes the domestic and global, the public and private to the extent that the home is the space in which St. Peter attempts to remake his world. In the novel there are five homes: the family home in which the St. Peters raised their daughters and in which St. Peter wrote *Spanish Adventurers in North America*; the new house built after the St. Peter daughters were married off and St. Peter had achieved a degree of economic and scholarly success as a historian; the "Outland" estate built by the Louie Marselluses as a monument to Tom's scientific success as engine inventor and their economic success as patent holders; Tom's mesa home with Roddy; and the domestic remains in Cliff City. The first two homes—the old and the new St. Peter residences—put in tension the conflicts of home life, centering predominantly on the division of gendered labor and classed expectations about domestic architecture.

On the one hand, we can see the private world of the family house, what is characteristically defined as woman's work in this historical moment, set in opposition to the public demeanor of the family household, dominated most often by the expectations

of a man's profession. On the other hand, we can see, in the case of the St. Peter family, these private and public worlds converging: the family home becomes both a space of domesticity and a place for university labor. Given the merging of domestic functions in the novel, we can see St. Peter responding in contradictory ways to his first home and the functions that it is supposed to provide him: the new home being the primary residence, the old house becomes only a workspace forcing him to "plunge in like a man, and get used to the feeling that under his work-room there was a dead, empty house" (7); but at the same time, even when the house functioned as the family home, "the sewing-room was the most convenient study a man could possibly have, but it was the one place in the house where he could get isolation, insulation from the engaging drama of domestic life" (16). Significantly, with the construction of and removal to the new house, the first house still remains a privileged space: it is a place that contains twenty-years of family memories, evokes nostalgia for Tom and his development into an exemplary modern man, and creates a comfortable and proficient space for a tenure of work for the tenure of a professorship. It is the domestic space that has both private and public functions that St. Peter continues to rent "to have room to think" (41).

The problems of domestic architecture come in two forms. The first problem has to do with the role of the family in modern American life, particularly with the role of the family within an integrated culture and the place of the family home in creating organic alternatives to an increasingly plastic modernity. Here we can see the problem of the St. Peters's two houses. But in addition to the problems of blending both the private and public spheres, we can see the attendant gender and class politics open up to a

larger critique of middle-class standardization. In the same way that Frank Lloyd Wright made a career arguing for an organic architecture that would both build the family house as a modern escape and as a unit in a larger democratic process of decentralization and social reintegration, Cather considers the ways in which the domestic might better engage with modern living.<sup>9</sup> This is especially evident when St. Peter complains, invoking Plato and the problem of women in the same breath, that “houses had become insupportable to him” (136). But what Cather, like Wright, is suggesting seems to be less a fixation on the ways in which identity politics have changed modern life than the ways differences can be deliberately rooted in a locality but simultaneously reflect a national spirit; and for both of these modernists, a level of historical consciousness that extends from the family to the region through the international is required for such a democratic architecture.

The second problem, represented in the “Outland” estate, has to do with the removal (if not perversion) of the project of architecture from forming culture, instead positioning the home as a marker of culture. For example, the Marselluses build a house that they presume to be site-appropriate for their wooded lot and midwestern locale. Describing their country estate to a visiting scholar, Louis Marsellus betrays that their “ambitious affair” revolves less around domestic planning than acquired taste, expensive modern amenities, and European styling: “We have a magnificent site; primeval forest behind us and the lake in front, with our own beach. . . . We’ve been singularly fortunate in our architect,—a young Norwegian, trained in Paris. He’s doing us a Norwegian manor house, very harmonious with its setting, just the right thing for a

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<sup>9</sup> For more context on Frank Lloyd Wright’s organic architecture, see *When Democracy Builds* (1945).

rugged pine woods and high headlands” (28). Indeed, the description of the house has less to do with a building style appropriate to geography than building a style of home reflective of their desired bourgeois lifestyle. A manor house, after all, has historical links to being the administrative center for landed gentry. Compounding their problem of architectural integrity, the Marselluses also plan to transfer Tom’s laboratory to their home, in fact naming the house “Outland,” thus converting the function of the home from a dwelling space to a monument of scientific progress and class status. This architecture is in direct opposition to Tom’s mesa, where form meets function. In contrast to this modern housing, the Cliff City was built with “patience and deliberation,” and the “orderly and secure life” of their built environment helped them “[develop] considerably the arts of peace” (190, 197). Importantly, middle-class businessmen Louis supplants engineer-anthropologist Tom, marking what Cather sees as the foreclosure of regional modernism. It becomes clear that in Cather’s regional modernism architecture becomes both a process of design and construction and a project of cultural formation.

The combination of shifting domestic spaces and competing scholarship creates a notable change in St. Peter. As he takes up the project of regional modernism that has become Tom’s legacy, the professor likewise becomes conscious of his own typicality; meaning, in true modernist fashion, St. Peter makes clear that there is a connection between interior consciousness and exterior world. Significantly, this consciousness is grounded in a regional sensibility. Recognizing that he cannot complete the unfinished project that Tom represents (a synthesis between historical excavations and scientific progress, a smoothening of the private and public realms of

life, a combination of the pioneer and the engineer) St. Peter instead attempts to ground the project in his own terms, making what had been work grounded primarily in nostalgia more future-oriented. He realizes that he had become concerned with “consciously or unconsciously conjugating the verb ‘to love’—in society and solitude, with people, with books, with the sky and open country, in the lonesomeness of crowded city streets” (240). His adult years—“and the design of his life”—had become “the work of this secondary social man, the lover” (240). As a corrective to this present state, St. Peter returns to his Kansas youth, becoming a “primitive” who is “only interested in earth and woods and water” (241). What St. Peter realizes is that he cannot be only a scholar, and he cannot return to his days of exploration with Tom. Rather, to reorient his world as regional modernism, he must do both things simultaneously. Thus, in his framework, the combination of the domestic and the public *and* the modern and the regional, he must be both a lover and an explorer.

There is a limit to the ways in which St. Peter might reorient his life to be “outward bound” (257). Although by the end of the novel he has figured out how he might overcome the alienation of his modern condition, St. Peter must still cohabit with a family more or less content with their typicality. While he doubts that his family “would ever realize that he was not the same man they had said good-bye to” because they would return from their European travels “too happily preoccupied with their own affairs,” St. Peter resolves to continue in his new direction, “[facing] with fortitude the *Berengaria* and the future” (258). Where we are left at the end of the novel is an understanding of what it takes for one person to come to regional modernism as a personal philosophy and a cultural logic; but we are also left with a with a question of

what the consequences of this new futurity might mean for modernity. Since Tom Outland and Godfrey St. Peter both offer examples of this process on an individual level, we can anticipate that for this process of individuation to become a cultural movement might be a monumental task. But there is also a certain degree of pessimism—if not failure—in Cather's end note. The effects of St. Peter's development remain ambiguous: there will be a new approach to domesticity, and there will be a return to the frontier with southwestern mesas and Spanish explorers. Perhaps this is the point: in the same way that St. Peter's unfinished project must return to history, so must Cather's. To think through the present conditions for a regional modernism, moving beyond the causes and effects of individuation, must look to the past to find alternative histories that offer different types of pioneers and different forms of domestic settlement. In this way, rather than being only a reactionary escape from her modern moment, *Death Comes for the Archbishop* (1927) and *Shadows on the Rock* (1931) prove a continuation of Cather's project of regional modernism.

### **Nella Larsen: Transatlantic Modernism in a Regional Context**

To begin my periodization of Larsen's regional modernism, I am going to return to her 1926 *Opportunity* letter so that I might elaborate the ways in which Larsen's modernism turns on the concept of place, first showing the ways in which American modernity necessarily constructs and maintains particular normative notions of gender, class, and race, and then offering the intersection of feminist politics with a politics of place as a challenge the expectations and enactments of identity. Larsen begins her novel by positioning *Quicksand's* Helga Crane similar to *Flight's* Mimi: both women are tenuously positioned between the black bourgeoisie and the white middle classes; both women find themselves torn between a need for respectability and a desire for

individual autonomy; both women figure themselves as simultaneously sexually independent and domestically bound; and both women travel the nation in hopes of improving their material, social, and psychological lives. However, there are two exceptions to this patterning. First, Larsen expands the travel to include Denmark. What this travel abroad does is expand the race question beyond the problems of black nationalism, instead working toward a black cultural consciousness that forces a consideration of the local *and* the cosmopolitan. Second, rather than ending her narrative at the moment her heroine makes the most difficult decision of her life, to paraphrase Horne, Larsen forces her reader both the events of Helga's life and her responses to them.

It is in this progress from "Correspondence" to *Quicksand* that Larsen differentiates her concept of modernism from the Harlem crowd by arguing for a more stringent feminist-materialist bent *and* by incorporating a regional consciousness. *Quicksand* simultaneously denies "the existence of a single spatial and chronological frame of reference," as Thadious Davis has described the larger arc of Larsen's writing, and constructs a spatial network that challenges both the real and imaginary problems of the color line (204). Her regional modernism, therefore, complicates the construction of a national cultural identity by considering race, class, and gender in relation to place. This forces American culture to be read more as "a set of singularities" contingent on difference within geographical terrains of region, nation, and world than a kind of citizenship arguing for sameness on the basis of a shared nationalism (Carby, "Becoming" 634). The question then becomes, how does this regional modernism work in the context of a black feminist politics? Or put differently, how does Larsen contribute

to the reading of a domestic politics by narrating the effects of different contexts of home—genealogy, family, community, among others—on the modern racialized, gendered subject?

With *Quicksand* this politics is writ large. Larsen writes a regional framework for America, mapping at least three ways in which a relation of the regional to the global attempts to decenter classed, gendered, and racial national ordering. First, Larsen's focus on spatial culture calls into question the construction of the individual in a local, national, and international context. What she does is highlight the cultural complexity that puts in tension material differences and social formations—on group and individual levels. In this way, Larsen pulls tight on a line connecting cultural formations and identity politics. Second, as a development of the first point, Larsen spatializes local and international differences, writing in opposition to a 1920s bourgeois ideology in which urbanization transformed the production of African-American culture and privileged the cultural representations of the black middle class often to the exclusion of the rural or working class. Finally, Larsen counters this national representation by making an explicit connection between vernacular and international modernisms: she links southern, midwestern, and Harlem regionalisms with European cosmopolitanism to create a transnationalism that reconsiders gender, class, and race identification both from top-down global capitalism and bottom-up regional planning. Therefore, her modernist regional framework not only elaborates on the structural and cultural consequences of a kind of limiting nationalism, but also imagines an alternative history in which regionalism and globalism intersect, forming an integrated culture in which

nationalism is forced to consider the multitude of communities within and outside its borders.

This process hinges on Helga Crane. Larsen characterizes her protagonist as a typical modern character, writing Helga as suffering from alienation produced by an internalization of her racial difference and fragmentation exacerbated by existing social relations that limited her level of belonging in gendered, raced, and classed contexts. In large part, this combined sense of alienation and fragmentation turns on Helga's identity as a mixed-race woman: as a mulatta, Helga not only perceives herself as having no "authentic" race community that she might belong to for lack of kinship with her black community and her white relatives, but she also materially suffers from American society's structural inability accommodate her biracialism. Thus, as Hazel Carby has argued, in the character of Helga, Larsen embodies the crisis of representation prevalent in the modernist moment of 1920s Harlem. Because Larsen was unable to romanticize "the folk or to accept the worldview of the new black middle class," Helga must necessarily embody the contradictions "of her racial, sexual, and class positions by being both inside and outside these perspectives" (*Reconstructing* 169). To that end, Carby argues that because Helga "represented the full complexity of the modern alienated individual," *Quicksand* becomes "the first text by a black woman to be a conscious narrative of a woman embedded within capitalist social relations" (*Reconstructing* 170). But to this reading of modern characterization, I want to emphasize the effect of place on problems of identity; to this crisis of representation, I want to emphasize that Larsen is also narrating crises of place. In addition to reading the dialectical relation between subject formation and geographic location, which is

certainly an important part of Larsen's regional modernism, Larsen is also creating a framework in which a network of regional cultures explodes the limits of political boundaries—particularly the limits of nationalism—to create a black cultural identity.

Helga's regional movement troubles a matrix of modern issues: the formation of a national culture, race affiliation, and class prescriptions. What Larsen makes clear is that Helga's experience of the issues in this matrix is largely contingent upon her location. Therefore, a part of Larsen's project is to show the way in which structural inequalities put in tension regions and their modes of production, and the way such oppositions shape subjects. To that end, we might read Helga's travel from the rural South to the industrial North—from Naxos to Chicago and finally to Harlem—as an allegorical representation of the Great Migration of southern blacks in the years between World War I and the Great Depression (Carby, *Reconstructing* 163). Carby points out that, especially in the postwar years, this migratory population of black workers challenged the cultural and political leadership of the (predominantly Northern) black intellectual elite: what would become the urban proletariat could no longer be socially grouped as “the people” or fictionally romanticized as “the folk” (*Reconstructing* 164). Indeed, this is a common project among Harlem Renaissance writers. Alain Locke, Jean Toomer, Richard Wright, Langston Hughes, Ralph Ellison, and Zora Neale Hurston, among others, narrate precisely the ways the movement from the South to the North respatializes the color line and its attendant identity, cultural, and political formations. What initially differentiates Larsen's project—from the works of the Harlem writers writing on the Great Migration and, more, from writers like James Weldon Johnson and Claude McKay who consider the effects of expatriation on black male

subjectivity and cultural autonomy—is the fact that she sets up a comparative framework for the social political and economic terrains of the places in which Helga travels, be they country or city, South or North, America or Europe. On the level of plot, at the same time that *Quicksand* reproduces these “tensions of migrations into a structure of oppositions between country and city,” Helga’s travels in America and Europe also provide an alternative to these narratives in that one fictional space is not favored over another (Carby, *Reconstructing* 172).

For Larsen, however, more important is the idea that geographical movement is bound up with the place of gender in the larger race politics. Her spatial project critiques the body of work by male Harlem writers that, as Barbara Johnson has described Wright’s writing, prove unable to acknowledge black women’s overdermined subject position (167). This means, of course, that Larsen’s regional modernism makes explicit feminist overtures by pointing to the marginality of black women both in the context of American daily living and representation in Harlem Renaissance writing. But in a broader feminist register, Larsen also underlines the less overtly gendered oppositions that inform the relationships between the production of space and place and the expectations and enactments of modern subjectivity. Because this list of modern oppositions prescribes both gendered and classed associations for southern and northern, rural and urban, folk and mass identifications, it is instructive to read Larsen and *Quicksand* in dialogue with Hurston and Wright’s respective projects as it points toward the interventions Larsen’s regional modernism makes. Like it does for Hurston and Wright, the movement South to North offers Larsen a certain kind of double-vision in which she might first deny southern culture and its superstructural

limitations and then return with a critical distance that allows her to find something usable in southern black culture. For both Hurston and Wright, as William J. Maxwell has argued, the combined process of migration and double-vision allow them to narrate the ways in which the “capitalist ethos” further accelerates uneven development at the expense of the rural black folk. Significantly, despite Wright’s famous diatribe against Hurston’s aesthetics and the feminization of black culture by decorative women’s writing, both writers situate womenfolk in imaginary places of resistance: “it is the home-working woman who is more firmly-rooted in the southern soil while more attracted . . . to the new regime of consumption,” so we might infer that the cultural battleground might be won or lost in these women’s spaces (Maxwell 69).<sup>10</sup> However, neither Hurston nor Wright grapple in sustained ways with the plight of these southern home-working women as they resist capitalism’s northern draw, as they labor for economic sustainability, or as they produce a vernacular (often gender-inflected) culture in opposition to national standardization.

This is Larsen’s intervention. Susan Willis has argued in relation to a larger tradition of black women’s writing that geography becomes “a means for conceptualizing history as either a specific mode . . . or as process, when it is experienced as the duration of a journey” (7-8). What becomes important in Larsen’s writing, then, is not only that each place represents a particular mode of local living or a national model for the shift toward industrial capitalism; what also becomes important is that each place is narrated as having its own regional culture and that the narration of

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<sup>10</sup> For a more detailed discussion of the feud between Richard Wright and Zora Neale Hurston, see Cheryl A. Wall’s “On Freedom and the Will to Adorn: Debating Aesthetics and/as Ideology in African American Literature” in *Aesthetics and Ideology*.

Helga's journey in these places sets up a regional framework in which America can be read as a totalized national whole and as a relation of regions. And Larsen, writing her novel from the perspective of a black woman in spaces that range from the family home, a New York-bound train, a southern black college, a European vacation, and a Baptist church revival, makes feminine (if not feminist) concerns in all of these places visible. In terms of the multiple terrains that Helga journeys, Larsen makes domestic spaces as politically relevant as regional, national, and foreign policy in the production of American culture.

In *Quicksand*, when Larsen plots Helga's travels, she offers a systematic critique of American life, mapping the way in which the coordination of these regions color economic, political, and social modes; and she offers another critical project in which a comparative framework of regions offers a different approach to transforming American culture. Not only does Larsen claim "the importance of time in space" in putting at odds the modern individual's "evolution towards alienation," but she also challenges the "nature of capitalist society" to inscribe time, space, and identity within a system of property relationships (Willis 36-7). Thus, in addition to narrating the shortcomings of the predominantly black middle-class project of racial uplift, Larsen narrates an alternative reform project that thinks about local needs in relation to a more global politics. In the South—Naxos and Alabama—race progress means questioning the ways in which religion becomes a kind of white capitalist ideology or stressing the ways in which an incomplete modernization of rural production compounds poverty; in industrial Chicago, race progress means interrogating employment rates as black labor moves north and identifying the ways in which the infrastructure can accommodate this

shifting population; and in Denmark, race progress means problematizing the ways in which American racism is tied to imperialist, colonial histories and underlining the ways in which global capitalism is complicit with a dominant Americanization.

There is, of course, a limit to this cultural project. Larsen pushes to the limits the political efficacy of this narrative strategy in her historical moment to imagine the possibility of a coordinated local, social, cultural, and political engagement for her protagonist's regional, national, and international worlds. If Helga Crane's representation in each of these places is tied to a project of regional modernism, problems of representation become a problem of enacting this reform work. In Helga's travels, then, at the same time as we can trace the beginnings of what might become a cross-cultural project, we can also map the foreclosure of Larsen's regional framework. What becomes clear is both that it is impossible for Helga to escape history to find a sense of individual or race identity not authorized by the nation and that the uneven development resulting from national institutions and ideologies makes impossible precisely the organic communities necessary for Larsen's regional context to subvert the status quo—or worse, even to form. After moving between Naxos, Chicago, Harlem, and Copenhagen, Helga realizes that her attempt to fuse a black cultural identity or to find a place that would accommodate her double-consciousness is impossible. Specifically, upon returning to Harlem, Helga becomes certain “of the division of her life into two parts in two lands, into the physical freedom in Europe and spiritual freedom in America” (98). More importantly, she becomes certain that there is no place for her: “She couldn't stay. Nor, she saw now, could she remain away. Leaving she would have to come back” (98). Helga told “herself and others” that she

couldn't live in America because the rampant materialism, consumerism, and class privilege made American living "something not to be endured for a lifetime if one could escape; something demanding a courage greater than was in her"; but Helga likewise could not leave because the need for racial kinship drew her back (97-98). Indeed, the draw of family, marriage, and domesticity proves a more dominant force upon Helga's return to the States. Not only does she feel *ressentiment* toward the marriage of Harlem friends Anne Grey and Robert Anderson, but she also projects a degree of hostility toward her Danish suitor Axel Olsen, rationalizing that it was his marriage proposal that ruined Copenhagen—and freedom—for her.

But although she may inwardly be considering marriage, Helga at least outwardly maintains a critical distance from domesticity—and most importantly, motherhood. For example, Helga engages in an argument with her ex-fiance James Vayle on the reproductive responsibility of African Americans. Helga argues from a material and spiritual standpoint that it is irresponsible to give "life to creatures doomed to endure such wounds to the flesh, such wounds to the spirit" as black children necessarily would have to endure. Vayle, however, counters with a class-cultural response: because "the race is sterile at the top," it is the duty of the black middle class to have children to ensure race progress (104). It is only after a misinterpreted kiss with Robert Anderson that Helga realizes escape from the middle-class pretension of the black bourgeoisie and its ideologies of consumerism, capitalism, and womanhood. Thus, Helga's identity crisis re-centers on the strictures of middle-class sexuality. We can see what Carby describes as "the long history of the exploitation of black sexuality [that] led to the repression of passion and the repression or denial of female sexuality and desire"

influencing both Helga's romantic desire for sexual fulfillment and her ascetic refusal of reproduction (*Reconstructing* 174). Ironically, Helga envisions her escape from Harlem—and its hypocritical articulations of race problems and morality—as residing in precisely the domestic life that she has been arguing against over the course of the novel. Marriage to Reverend Mr. Pleasant Green, moving to rural Alabama, and making a family becomes, for Helga, a “practical” resolution towards “stability [and] permanent happiness” (117-118).

It is not my intention to sentimentalize Helga's turn toward domesticity. However, I do want to emphasize that Helga imagines the building of her southern home as cultural work: not only will she improve her own physical, psychological, and spiritual well-being, but she will also be able to address the poverty of her new rural environs. Her regional turn seems, on first glance, to circle around a kind of organic architecture that pairs family life with a new kind of democratic possibility for daily living. On second glance, the problem is one of praxis. Helga's “young joy and zest for the uplifting of her fellow men” proves to be less work relative to the needs of the region than a project directed toward middle-class ends: on housekeep, “she meant to subdue the cleanly scrubbed ugliness of her own surroundings to soft inoffensive beauty, and to help the other women to do likewise”; on fashion, “she would help them with their clothes, tactfully point out that sunbonnets, no matter how gay, and aprons . . . were not proper things for church wear”; and on childrearing, “she visualized herself instructing the children, who seemed most of the time to run wild, in ways of gentler deportment” (119-120). So while Helga might be “charmed” by being “a mistress in one's own house, to have a garden, and chickens, and a pig; to have a husband—and to be ‘right with God,’”

Larsen underlines that Helga's work cannot be dissociated from her middle-class sensibilities (121). More broadly stated, however, Larsen marks the limits of uplift if, in theory or in practice, it sentimentalizes (and it often does) the region and "the folk."

It is not until Helga becomes a mother—until her children "use her up"—that she becomes aware of the reality of southern living (124). What had been so economically liberating and spiritually satisfying for Helga as a middle-class woman playing house becomes a real—and often oppressive—experience of domestic labor. With three children and a household to run, "there was not time for the pursuit of beauty, or for the uplifting of other harassed and teeming women, or for the instruction of their neglected children" (124). And by her fifth pregnancy, her focus becomes one of survival. In this final move South, Larsen makes clear the social and political limits on black female subjectivity in America. Helga represents the shift of black female sexuality from sexual desire to the biological capacity to reproduce: motherhood becomes less an autonomous choice than compulsory labor. To paraphrase Willis, Helga's typicality is her marginality: she not only makes visible the historical forces of social, political, and economic relations on black womanhood—which, of course, were already accomplished via speech acts—but she also literally comes to embody those same historical forces.

What Larsen underlines is that there are social, political, historical, material, *and* biological limitations for her project of regional modernism. By way of Helga's representativeness, Larsen demonstrates that the utopic potentialities of the domestic space to transform daily living can also conversely reinscribe women's bodies within the system of capitalist property relations. But although both Helga's journey for familial, racial, and national belonging *and* the regional framework for social reform that the

novel maps can be read as failed projects, we can also read *Quicksand* as imagining an alternative world in which domestic culture—as home, family, community, region—might upset hegemonic national and global systems.<sup>11</sup> Therefore, the failure of both Helga’s journey and Larsen’s fictional project opens up to an impossible regional framework as an ideal form of social reform and modernist culture.

Reading Larsen with Cather, we can see how, in the period between the world wars, these women mark the beginning of the project of regional modernism to make sense of the shift toward global Americanism to the exclusion of localisms. Problematizing the ways in which American history had predominantly become a narrative of modern progress, both Cather and Larsen spatialize history so that modernity’s speed and temporality must be read in tension with a regionalist attention to local color and organic cultures. Their regional modernism—backwards and forwards, real and imaginary, as theory and praxis—resituates the American vernacular in dialectical tension with an international cosmopolitanism, ultimately rewriting the domestic as regional and national and reprivilaging the place of women’s writing within modernism. And it is in this double movement that Cather’s and Larsen’s projects intersect with Gertrude Stein’s geographical history of the American Century. In addition to arguing for a connection between the dominant nativism that informs Cather’s and Larsen’s regional modernism and the expatriate cosmopolitanism of Stein’s modernism, the movement from Cather and Larsen to Stein underlines a complementary politics in the three women’s writing—indeed, a dialectic of regional

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<sup>11</sup> Both Susan Willis and Susan Hegeman have influenced my reading of the utopic possibilities of failure in modernist writing; see “Envisioning the Future” in Willis’s *Specifying: Black Women Writing the American Experience* and “Terrains of Culture: Ruth Benedict, Waldo Frank, and the Spatialization of the Culture Concept” in Hegeman’s *Patterns for America: Modernism and the Concept of Culture*.

modernism. In the next chapter, I will trace the development of a regional politics in Stein's late modernism, where questions of regional autonomy, cultural nationalism, and foreign policy turn on questions of domesticity. In terms of a theorization of regional modernism, then, Stein's contribution moves in the inverse direction of Cather's and Larsen's but with similar political ends: moving from the international to the local, Stein's regional modernism functions as a vanishing mediator, in which a return to regionalism is an attempt to resist the closure of modernism via the forces of fascist governments, world wars, and global capitalism.

CHAPTER 3  
THE MAPPING OF AMERICA: GERTRUDE STEIN, GEOGRAPHICAL HISTORIES,  
AND AESTHETIC GEOPOLITICS

The United States, instead of having the feeling of beginning at one end and ending at another, had the conception of assembling the whole thing out of its parts, the whole thing which made the Twentieth Century productive. The Twentieth Century conceived an automobile as a whole, so to speak, and then created it, built it out of parts.

Gertrude Stein, "How Writing is Written" (1928)

There was an end of the nineteenth century and realism was the last thing the nineteenth century did completely. Anybody can understand that there is no point in being realistic about here and now, no use at all not any, and so it is not the nineteenth but the twentieth century, there is no realism now, life is not real it is not earnest, it is strange which is an entirely different matter.

Gertrude Stein, *Wars I Have Seen* (1945)

The pairing of these two epigraphs offers us a glimpse of Gertrude Stein's obsession with historicizing an exceptionalist American modernity, particularly the way in which modernism turns on connections between narration and nationalism, periodization and progress, mechanics and grammar. But the pairing of these two epigraphs also offers us, especially given their contextual frame of world war, a degree of hesitancy (and indeed conservatism) in her arguments for modernist literature. In terms of her literary theory, between 1928 and 1945, the modernity of the twentieth century (its automobiles and assembly lines, its experimental writing and abstraction, its cosmopolitanism and Americanism) is increasingly compared to that of the nineteenth century (its daily living and inner cohesion, its nationalism and imperialism, and its realism and romanticism). Indeed, although Stein seemingly argues against realism for the twentieth century in the latter epigraph, *Wars I Have Seen* is very much concerned with everyday life during French Occupation. That is to say, Stein's attention to the "unreality" or wartime (food shortages, political prisoners, and cultural persecutions) is itself a modernist attention to the impossibility of comprehending the total effects of war

(51). In other words, her focus on daily living is not a symptom of realism but a modernist attempt to manage wartime disruptions of all categories of social life.

Describing her literary theory in the 1946 “Transatlantic Interview,” Stein acknowledges this development beginning in her “middle thirties” texts and continuing in her forties writing, and she describes it as being “interested in reality and interested in telling about it. I had the creation of reality, and then I became interested in how you could tell this thing in a way that anybody could understand and at the same time keep true to your values, and the thing bothered me a great deal at that time” (504-505). We might say, then, that the development of Stein’s literary modernism turns on a redefinition of realism: at the same time that she refuses the nineteenth-century mode of narration in which “realism of the characters” attempts most simply to “make people real,” Stein also suggests the importance of “the realism of the composition” as an important achievement of modern writing (502). This reconsideration of realism as narrative strategy links back to her 1926 essay “Composition as Explanation,” in which Stein simultaneously theorizes modernist temporality as a “continuous present,” in which a composition is made by “including everything and a beginning again and again,” and suggests that what marks difference in compositions and generations alike is habit—“the only thing that is different from one time to another is what is seen and what is seen depends upon how everybody is doing everything” (518-520). Of course, according to Stein, what makes a composition consciously contemporary and, likewise what makes its public contemporary, is war (521). In this context, habits can serve two functions: first, as a conservative defense against the trauma of war or the refusal of

political resistance; or second, as an invective to actively politicize daily living.<sup>1</sup> The question becomes, how does Stein's return to realism beginning in her "middle thirties" texts engage in an antithetical project: one that marks a definitive shift in her thinking about modernism while at the very same time grounding its origins in her older theorizations?

Stein's "middle thirties" texts mediate the development of twentieth-century global Americanism, which is to say, her literary modernism becomes an aesthetic intervention into the ideology of "The American Century." In *Four in America* (1933), *Lectures in America* (1935), *The Geographical History of America* (1936), and *Everybody's Autobiography* (1937), Stein begins to describe language in terms of what Fredric Jameson has described as "an aesthetic geopolitics" (*The Modernist Papers* 345). For Jameson, Stein's grammar lessons in *Lectures in America* mark the transition from nineteenth-century European imperialism to twentieth-century American exceptionalism, where in a fundamentally modernist gesture, revolutions in language and composition mirror global political and economic developments. According to Jameson, Stein's attempts to solve crises of time and space, form and content, interiority and exteriority "will be solved by the radically new space of America . . . in a situation in which the quite distinct possibilities of American language become for Stein the very epitome of modernism itself" (347). Americanism as a spatial theory necessarily relates narration and its attendant questions of temporality to geography and its nationalist implications.

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<sup>1</sup> Omri Moses presciently describes the recent critical attention paid to Stein's use of "habit," arguing against Liesl Olson's and Lisi Schoenbach's readings: "Both Olson and Schoenbach think habits threaten the deadening of feeling and mindless, servile reproduction of behavioral response geared to the ideological interests of the Vichy occupier and the social engineer" (472). See, Moses, "Gertrude Stein's Lively Habits"; Olson's "Gertrude Stein, William James, and Habit in the Shadow of War"; and Schoenbach's "'Peaceful and Exciting': Habit, Shock, and Gertrude Stein's Peaceful Modernism."

In the larger narrative of twentieth-century aesthetic geopolitics, Stein's Americanism is a timely map of the American Century in total: as prewar hopefulness, as postwar achievement, and as a late modernist revisionary project. But what distinguishes Stein's Americanism in particular is her simultaneous working through of local and global issues. In the continuous reworking of her theory of Americanism, Stein's totalized history reads geographical histories as contingent upon the local and the global, the particular and the general, the regional and the international. This is the context for her "middle thirties" realism, which is itself a metonymy for regional modernism. Building upon Jameson's spatial reading of Stein, I read her return to realism as intervening in narration, politics, and culture.

To explain this point, I must offer another brief history of the "middle thirties" texts that, paired with my earlier periodization of nineteenth- and twentieth-century writing, will describe the geographical scope of Stein's revisionary project. In this history, the 1930s marks not only Stein's popular success—*The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas* was on best seller lists, *Four Saints in Three Acts* played Broadway for upwards of seven weeks, and Stein graced the cover *Time*—but also the mainstreaming of modernism. In part, as Karen Leick has pointed out, this thirties mainstreaming of modernism meant "that modernist writers became truly popular, rather than sensational as they were in the 1920s" (136). But in addition to ensuring the popularity of modernist writers—Virginia Woolf, James Joyce, and T. S. Eliot also enjoyed huge American sales—this mainstreaming marked the emergence of a new generation of cultural tastemakers, a constellation that Steven Watson has described as museum professionals, high-bohemian society, and commercial producers (7). Indeed, in the

1930s not only does modernism become mainstream but also the infrastructure is established that will make New York City the cultural center of modernism. Given this cultural turn, as Stein's reading public becomes more democratic, likewise do her form and content. Thus, Stein's narrative theory and geographical history converge to ask two questions, poignantly phrased by Thornton Wilder in his preface to Stein's *Four in America*: the first a global question of "how creativity works in any one," and the second a more local question of mapping, "what is an American and what makes him different from a citizen of any other country?" (xv).

The regional modernism articulated in these "middle thirties" texts can be read as strategically responding to the development of American late modernism. The globalization and Americanization of modernism maps a potential end to the project of modernism. Not only does the interwar period mark the beginning of America's role as eventual global power, but it also marks the economic transition from European colonialism to American imperialism and the cultural displacement of European modernism by its American-global counterpart. This proves interesting in Stein's larger project because she simultaneously argues for two contradictory historical narratives: the idealized beginning of a specifically twentieth-century American modernity *and* the simultaneous failure of modernism effected by the historical developments of global capitalism, modernization, and Americanism.

In this context, we can read the contradictory impulses of postwar celebration and disillusionment in *Wars I Have Seen*. Stein asserts that World War II has not only made her reconnect with her "native land," but also appreciate the ways in which its states have regional differences "just like the provinces in France" do:

After all every one is as their land is, as the climate is, as the mountains and the rivers or their oceans are as the wind and rain and snow and ice and heat and moisture is, they just are and that makes them have their way to eat their way to drink their way act their way to think and their way to be subtle, and even if the lines of demarcation are only made with a ruler after all what is inside those right angles is different from those on the outside of those right angles, any American knows that. (250)

In this literal meditation on mapping, we can see hints of the kinds of cultural nationalism that was popular in the thirties (isolationism, subnationalism, regionalism, exceptionalism, etc.) emerging as a cautionary note toward American postwar policy. While not refusing the emergence of the United States' global prominence—indeed, she celebrates both American war interventions and the cultural fluency of its G.I.s—Stein instead offers a cautionary note against the elimination of national difference. Thus, her “middle thirties” and forties texts can be read as attempting to resist the foreclosure of modernism by invoking a kind of critical regionalism in response to the institutionalization of late capitalism. Here, a literal rendering of space is key. Regionalism becomes important not only for its nationalist implications—for example, in periodizing the American Century as bound up with the Great Depression, or in describing differences in regional identity as a mark of both American creativity and citizenship. It is also important for the way in which a regional lens can focalize a kind of relief map of the American landscape. On the one hand, this strategy enables Stein to remap nationalism on a cultural front so the “the local” becomes a kind of romantic bulwark against “the global.”<sup>2</sup> But on the other hand, and perhaps more realistically, Stein’s regionalism offers a critical topography of the postwar moment such that the

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<sup>2</sup> Cindi Katz’s “On the Grounds of Globalization: A Topography for Feminist Political Engagement” has provided an invaluable model for feminist topography as a mode of spatial analysis.

local cultures, regional habit, and daily living that she is writing about might offer oppositional cultural politics to homogenous Americanization.

### **Modernist Geography: The Critical Topography of Twentieth-Century America**

Before mapping Stein's larger regional project, I will begin by giving shape to what was initially her explicitly modernist history of America, a project that for my purposes falls between the writing of *Four in America* and *Paris, France*, 1932 to 1940. This will articulate the connections between time and space in her "middle thirties" narrative theory, and it will also provide a groundwork for the ways in which modernist Americanism, set in crisis by late modernism's response to the effects of World War II, the rise of global capitalism, and the hegemony of Americanization, is mediated in her 1940s texts by a more explicit focus on geographical politics. That is to say, whereas in the thirties she considered narration as a process whereby language is structured in a dialectic of part to whole, with its ultimate end the development of the American twentieth century, in the forties this American grammar becomes a kind of global regionalism. Reconsidering the way in which Stein broaches identity and place in this period, especially with regard to what she might consider the global implications of an expanding modernized and industrialized cultural geography, allows us to see the way in which her work moves from geographical histories of American exceptionalism, as in the case of *Four in America*, to comparative frameworks of regionalized nations, as in the case of *Paris, France* (1940). The combination of both these strategies offers a critical topography of the American cultural landscape.

Stein's project in *Four in America* is simultaneously one of cultural nationalism and internationalism. If the majority of her writing in the thirties argues for America being "the mother of the twentieth century" and "the mother of modern civilization," *Four*

*in America* is the history that describes these modern origins (“Why I Do Not Live in America” 51). Specifically, Stein maps the development of both the American Twentieth Century and the transatlantic movement of global American culture. This mapping is important for several reasons. For one, in this geographical history of the twentieth century *and* American modernity, Stein marks a nuanced distinction between America as the place in which twentieth-century modern civilization begins and Americanism as the space in which this thinking circulates. For another, this spatial fluidity dismantles typically nineteenth-century notions of nationalisms to argue for a global Americanism in which other countries might be modeled on an American example. In this context, America becomes simultaneously a place and space of possibility.

To narrate this radical mapping, however, Stein turns to a quite conventional cultural model: the pioneer. That she should describe the protagonists of *Four in America*—Ulysses S. Grant, Wilbur Wright, Henry James, and George Washington—as pioneers is hardly surprising, especially since she begins her geographical history with the proclamation that “we, U.S. we, us, in the nineteenth century discovered the twentieth century” and it is in the 1890s that Frederick Jackson Turner’s frontier thesis fashions pioneers as cultural heroes. Stein is certainly participating in the cultural mythology in which, as Susan Hegeman has pointed out, pioneers began to represent “the spirit of adventure and entrepreneurship which had transformed the United States not only into a transcontinental power, but into a modern, industrialized nation” (*Patterns* 71). However, what is surprising is the way Stein rethinks the pioneer in the context of her modernist history so that she might link her American regionalism and global Americanism. First, Stein eliminates the category of “puritan,” the group that is typically

the cultural antagonist of the pioneers, instead folding a secularized American religion—a national spiritualism, if you will—into the pioneer archetype. Stein certainly seems to be drawing on the development of the evangelist movement at the turn of the century.<sup>3</sup> Not only does she define this new religion as a “camp-meeting”; Stein also proclaims that even though this camp-meeting is particular to “my country ‘tis of thee”—the United States of America—“a camp-meeting can be a meeting in the woods or anywhere” (10-11). The Americanism offered in Stein’s camp-meetings are profoundly democratic in thought and practice. Contrary to movements within twentieth-century evangelicalism that reject a liberal theology and argue for separation from the world, which has broad intersections with American isolationism in this historical moment, Stein’s pioneers testify to an American democratic ideal as a means for global conversion.

The second way that Stein rethinks the pioneer is directly related to the geographic flexibility of the pioneer’s modern American religion. Although she reads pioneers as distinctly American, she does not confine their cultural work within the nation’s borders. As early as 1928, in “Wherein the South Differs from the North,” Stein begins to think of pioneers as transnational explorers: the duty of an explorer is to “[indulge] in active plans and map drawing and also in constant observation and relative comparison” (252). But with *Four in America*, the work of pioneer moves beyond projects of cultural relativism; in the context of a spatial American Century, the work of the pioneer is to settle new regions and preach Americanism. The pioneer logic follows that because “America is always building a nation,” pioneers “have no home to which to

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<sup>3</sup> For a more detailed discussion of the evangelist movement and its intersection with American Puritan narratives, see Susan Hegeman’s *Patterns for America: Modernism and the Concept of Culture*; Walter D. Mignolo’s *Culture as History: The Transformation of American Society in the Twentieth Century*; and James Turner’s *Without God, Without Creed: The Origins of Unbelief in America*.

go,” therefore they “can stay anywhere” (10). Whereas critics like Van Wyck Brooks used the archetypes of pioneers and puritans to both differentiate American history from Europe’s and to articulate an American cultural tradition at the start of the twentieth century, Stein’s pioneer narrative establishes that America discovered the twentieth century, thus making moot a gesture of distinguishing among national culture, and that pioneers have themselves become cultural emissaries.<sup>4</sup> She instead uses the pioneer to destabilize concepts like culture, civilization, progress, and nationalism. In fashioning her protagonists as simultaneously pioneers and puritans, Stein not only reworks the narrative of national types but also clears a space for a distinctly modernist American intervention in global affairs. Pioneers, faithfully subscribing to American religion, rethink citizenship so that to a localized sense of civic or national duty is added a global consciousness.

The double function of the pioneer as expatriate explorer and religious leader is significant as it is a model for the double functions of each of the protagonists. Each of Stein’s pioneers also has an imagined second identity in the text, an identity that writes an alternative (and yet complementary) history of the United States: Ulysses S. Grant is a general *and* a religious leader or saint; Wilbur Wright is an inventor *and* a painter; Henry James is a novelist *and* a general; George Washington is a general *and* a novelist. On the most fundamental level, Stein makes these men simultaneously social and political pioneers whose work is specifically engaged in proffering an American cultural nationalism. In Stein’s history, this means that the historical figure of General Grant and his Civil War victory is re-imagined as leading an American religious

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<sup>4</sup> See, Van Wyck Brooks, “The Wine of the Puritans,” “America’s Coming of Age,” and “Towards a National Culture” in *Van Wyck Brooks: The Early Years*.

movement. In this translation, democracy is moved from explicitly martial and political realms to the cultural front. Because the historical Grant of the nineteenth century promoted democracy via war, the imagined Grant of the twentieth century can preach Americanism to maintain that hard fought peace. In this modernist history, then, Stein offers a higher priority to thinking, saying, or hearing—narration—than to action. For Stein, American religion turns on discursive education rather than active conversion.

The same modeling holds true for her other pioneers. Wright's invention of the airplane is re-imagined as a modern painter innovating perspective. His contribution to American religion, a complement to Grant's "hearing," is sight. Stein argues that while France appreciates the historical Wright because of the invention of the airplane, they fail to read him as part of a larger process of Americanism. However, by reimagining Wright as a painter whose compositions represent motion "like a bicycle and painting and an airplane," Stein highlights the valences of Wright's association with American modernity—literally, the invention of the plane; imaginatively, the perspective of American religion; and culturally, the American global turn. Expatriate novelist James is re-imagined as a conquering general. This diptych situates James in a "politics of location" in which his portraits negotiate American religion and European war, modern perspectivism and aesthetic tradition, ultimately reading him as a cultural link between nineteenth-century nationalism and a twentieth-century global Americanism. More to the point, in her characterization of James as general, in contradistinction to Washington whom Stein re-imagines as a novelist, Stein divorces the role of general from nationalism, militarism, or government. Instead, James is a general whose power is tied to his writing: having "begun a battle or war" for American literature, a global

Americanism “[commences] to cover ground” (157). And Stein ends her history with a portrait of Washington that not only re-imagines the “father of his country” as “great American novelist,” but also spatializes him as the country itself. She variously writes that “George Washington is meant to be peopled” and, more boldly, that Washington is “what is the United States” (165, 169). To say that Washington wrote “the great American novel”—that is, America and its citizens—and that “the United States is not where it is as other countries are” is by some modernist calculus to insist on the spacelessness of Americanism, if not America itself (169). In her modernist history, then, Washington becomes a cultural link—“think how George Washington can link. Link this with that” (212). The sum lesson of *Four in America* becomes: democratic politics is a cultural link (Washington), asserted by a victorious war in defense of these politics (Grant), that then has technological (Wright) and aesthetic (James) extensions; or, drafting democracy (Washington) becomes national religion (Grant) that changes world perspectives (Wright) and marshals global support (James). In re-identifying these men Stein likewise re-identifies America.

Following the composition of *Four in America* (the manuscript was not published until 1947) Stein returned to America in 1934 after twenty years to promote *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas*. On her lecture tour, Stein’s turn toward a spatial history of modernism becomes more pronounced: geography begins to explicitly signify both a physical location and a spatial arrangement of words.<sup>5</sup> In *Everybody’s Autobiography*, a memoir in part recounting her American travels, she broadly states the

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<sup>5</sup> Liesl Olson’s “‘An invincible force meets an immovable object’: Gertrude Stein Comes to Chicago” is instructive on the effect of Chicago’s geography on Stein’s writing during and after her *Autobiography* book tour.

significance of geography in terms of place and language. From the vantage of an airplane, Stein meditates on the model of regional difference for literary composition:

I have always wanted to write about how one state differs from another. It is so strange that the lines are ruled lines on paper, I never can stop having pleasure in the way the ruled lines separate one state from another. Ohio from Indiana Kansas from Nebraska Tennessee from Alabama, it always gives me a shock of pleasure the American map and its straight lines and compare it to any other with the way they go all over nothing neat and clean like the maps of America. (198)

She continues this line of thought by suggesting that this particularly American concept of place—beginning with a literal consideration of regionalism and extending to literary stylization—is itself constitutive of modernism. “Straight lines and quarter sections, and the mountain lines in Pennsylvania very straight lines,” Stein writes, “it made it right that I had always been with cubism and everything that followed after” (198). That Stein links regionalism to cubism is provocative. Specifically, she makes a direct connection between her participation in cubism’s avant-garde aesthetics and her increasingly regional literary politics. If in cubism objects are abstracted so that an artist might represent a subject from multiple viewpoints, the multitude of positions giving the object a larger contextual meaning, Stein is doing the same thing with her aerial mapping. The representation of difference implicit in regionalism—be it marking state lines on a map, appreciating a place’s local color, or historicizing a regionalist civic religion—moves toward an integrative nationalism. But we can go further: Stein’s reflection marks the parameters of what will become her regional modernism. To her modernist history in which geography is a starting point that differentiates the American Twentieth Century, Stein’s airplane trip argues for a relational concept of place in which a comparative framework of multiple locations speaks to more global cultural movements. Thus, circling back to “How Writing is Written,” Stein’s modernism considers geography—

physically and aesthetically—as parts-to-whole: Indiana to the Midwest to America *and* America to the world.

It is in this spatial register that *Paris, France* operates. To her geographical history of American culture, Stein compares French civilization. This regional modernism turns on a comparative reading of national identity, cultural habits, daily living, and artistic history. Nationalism becomes expressly linked to international politics. Stein begins the text where she left off in *Four in America*—America is the first country to have moved into the twentieth century and the only country to have completely modernized. At the beginning of the twentieth century, she writes that Americans naturally found the French “business of living” to be habitable for their expatriate adventures (8). But Stein concedes that especially in the context of World War II a reconsideration of French culture might be prescient:

french people really do not believe that anything is important except daily living and the ground that give it to them and defending themselves from the enemy. Government has no importance except insofar as it does that.  
(9)

In the context of France’s 1939 declaration of war, a return to habit—“life [as] tradition and human nature”—is certainly reactionary (8). If the twentieth century turns on rationality, scientific methods, social progress, and modern art, all of which constitute “the human mind” as Stein argues in *The Geographical History of America*, a reversion to habits and daily living, which constitute the opposing “human nature,” marks either a move away from the twentieth-century and the human mind because of its failure to secure peace or a resignation to an anachronistic way of life because war makes twentieth-century living insupportable.

However, there is a deeper logic to her cultural turn. In *The Geographical History of America*, Stein argues that human nature “has to do with identity, with government with propaganda with history with individualism and with communism but it has nothing to do with the human mind” (135). A return to habit—to the quotidian of daily living—is a condition of declaration of war. On the one hand, family life, fashion, cuisine, and pets become pragmatic responses to the shock of world war. As Liesl Olson has argued, although war, habit, and daily living proved important influences on the body of Stein’s work, habits in her World War II writings “seem both to mask the disruption war creates, dissolving the consequences of the world in the space of the home, and paradoxically to work as a way in which war itself can be represented, as the importance of habit is dramatically amplified” (329). On the other hand, though, a return to habit (a reconsideration of French culture, a starting over in the nineteenth century, a civilizing of modern culture) is a beginning again of the processes of modernization and Americanism. Stein makes clear the processional nature of this rhetorical shift. Because “events are connected with human nature but they are not connected with the human mind,” she argues, “all the writing that has to do with events has to be written over, but the writing that has to do with writing does not have to be written again, again is in this sense the same as over” (*Geographical History* 108). And *Paris, France* narrates this beginning again. If war marks the end of a series—and indeed, Stein makes this explicit point, suggesting that for the Americans Civil War and World War I made the nineteenth-century “definite and complete”—the French begin the twentieth century precisely because in 1939 they “have recreated and realised the twentieth

century war” (73). A return to habit—and likewise a return to the regional—is to create “a new Europe” (73).

### **The Late Modernist Turn, Or, Stein Fait Un Four**

Stein makes this regional modernism her personal politics. The sustainability and safety of the country—she describes her “mountain village” as having no poor, plenty of food, and liquid cash—becomes a haven for what was by 1940 a mobilized France (*Paris, France* 79). The Nazi invasion of France, the French armistice replacing the Third Republic with the Vichy Regime, and persistent American isolationism, not to mention a remnant of cultural autonomy located in the French countryside, influenced this move. For all of these reasons, but also because Stein and Alice B. Toklas were Jewish-American lesbians in an increasingly xenophobic France, the couple hunkered down at their country house in Bilignin. But despite trying to remain inconspicuous, largely because of her friendship with French academic Bernard Faÿ, Stein was enlisted to draft introductory remarks for a translated collection of speeches by Pétain.<sup>6</sup> Working at the behest of the “Hero of Verdun,” Stein was solicited to translate a collection of Pétain’s speeches, a publication that the Maréchal purportedly hoped would secure American aid for his Occupied France.<sup>7</sup> Stein found herself in a predicament. On the one hand, she recognized a space in which she might “sell” her global intervention to her American audience; but on the other, she recognized that through her collaboration

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<sup>6</sup> Although both Faÿ’s collaboration with the Vichy government and his anti-Semitism is well known, his Gestapo connections have recently come to light. See, Janet Malcom’s “Gertrude Stein’s War: The Years in Occupied France” and Barbara Will’s “Lost in Translation: Stein’s Vichy Translation.”

<sup>7</sup> This idea is implicit in one reading of the historical Pétain. According to Nicholas Atkin, the general had always supported—and even planned his military tactics and movements around—the hope of an American collaboration. Indeed, it might be plausible to suggest that, paired with his nineteenth-century warfare, his holding out for American troop support led to German Occupation (151-152).

she might be implicated in Pétain's—and the Vichy Regime's—collaborationist and increasingly authoritarian politics. By 1942, Stein had found some sort of resolution—rationalized or indoctrinated—sending a manuscript that included her “Introduction to the Speeches of Maréchal Pétain” and her literal renderings of the speech's translations to Bennett Cerf at Random House. Stein was right, however, to anticipate that her American audience would read her as subscribing to fascist ideology: even Cerf described the manuscript as a “disgusting piece” (Van Deusen 69).

Her audience was right to recoil at her act of collaboration. However, a literal reading of the text misses Stein's larger narrative point. What her audience failed to realize—indeed to “see”—was the way in which by writing about (or for) Pétain, Stein was really writing about (and for) America.<sup>8</sup> What Stein does with this project is less to subscribe to an ideology of fascism than to conceptualize the ways in which her social, political, and historical horizons manifest themselves on the level of form. To be clear, my reading of Stein's Pétain piece is less concerned with Stein's possible fascism than the way in which her reading of Pétain acts as a case study, testing the limits of her theorizing of American regionalism as American religion in the period between *Four in America* and *Paris, France*. Since the archival discovery of the Pétain project by Wanda Van Deusen in the 1990s, much scholarship has been written addressing Stein's potential collaboration. Van Deusen suggests that this work marks Stein as a willing collaborator with the Vichy government and as a foreigner who was ideologically

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<sup>8</sup> For a more detailed discussion of Stein's dealings with Fäy, Pétain, and Vichy fascism, see: Zofia Lesinska, “Gertrude Stein's War Autobiographies: Reception, History, and Dialogue”; Phoebe Stein Davis, “‘Even Cake Gets to Have Another Meaning’: History, Narrative and ‘Daily Living’ in Gertrude Stein's World War II Writings”; Wanda Van Deusen, “Portrait of a National Fetish”; John Whittier-Ferguson, “Stein in Time: History, Manuscripts, and Memory”; and Barbara Will, “Lost in Translation: Stein's Vichy Collaboration.”

committed to Pétain and his politics; John Whittier-Ferguson aligns the “Introduction” with the more critical politics of Stein’s wartime novel *Mrs. Reynolds*; and Barbara Will suggests that the “Introduction” and Stein’s literal rendering of the speeches that the text introduces lend this body of work a sense of both Stein’s coercion and self-preservation. My project is something different. It is not my intention to argue away Stein’s initial support of Pétain and the Vichy government or her complicit resignation to its domestic policies. Following Michael Moon’s argument that Stein posits a “visionary geography that exists alongside ordinary geography but that it is inseparable from—and even perhaps the same thing as—the visionary history she practices in . . . *Four in America*,” I am arguing that with Pétain Stein finds a way in which she might link local French politics with her more global Americanism (Moon 1a). However, that is not to say that this practice of regionalism is not naïve or perverse; it is certainly both. In an effort to push her global Americanism, Stein either ignores or proves unaware of the immediate political implications of her project. She implicitly promotes a regionalism that defaults to fascism, particularly with its rhetoric of organic communities, national religion, and paterfamilias. Thus, in her push toward a totalized American history, Stein walks a fine line in her privileging of the global reach of history—Americanism—over its potential local, nationalist interventions—fascism.

Reading the text in terms of its representation and in terms of its set of figures—George Washington and Pétain—is to see the way in which she performatively maps a global America. In this “Introduction,” Washington quite literally becomes the cultural “link” that Stein imagines him to be in *Four in America*. Her method, repeating Washington as a pioneer for France, and specifically Pétain, creates a line between

Twentieth-Century America and Nineteenth-Century Europe on the cusp of modernizing. In this translation project, Stein transcodes her idea of twentieth-century Americanization to her real experience of 1940s French nationalism. Bridging their temporal and spatial differences, especially relating to literature, culture, and politics, Stein's portrait of Pétain as Washington becomes less a representation of the French general as America's first president than a figuration—on the level of content and form—of the ascendancy of American culture in a global context. Following Warren Susman's reading of culture as history, in which history is "concerned with change, movement, the ongoing course of action and ideas," especially in the context of social life, I would argue that Stein's portrait of Pétain is more concerned with questions of ideology than fleshing out a utopian vision of Americanism (9). That is to say, the myth of Pétain is less important than the way in which history deploys this myth-content. As Susman writes, "Myths often propose fundamental goals; history often defines and illumines basic processes involved in achieving goals" (9). By problematizing the results of these content and form choices, it is my intention to extend Stein's mapping of French modernization to a larger consideration of her American modernism. My method is to read the "Introduction of Maréchal Pétain" as a case study of the spread of her geographical history, where Stein's narrative simultaneously attempts to embolden the problems implicit in American-style modernization and promote her theory of global Americanism.

To her "compatriots," Stein writes that she wants to introduce Pétain by way of narrative—a literal translation—so that she might "interest her fellow countrymen, in these words which tell so convincing and moving a story" (93). In her prefatory

remarks, she acknowledges that “until just now it would have been quite impossible” to interest her audience in such a project. What had previously “been quite impossible” for her fellow Americans was both the belief that they should be invested in European political or cultural affairs and the expectation that direct involvement would be mutually worthwhile or beneficial—hence America’s staunch isolationism. But with the United States’ entry into World War II in 1941, Stein could see the possibility of the twentieth-century American religion she had been theorizing in *Four in America* to be put into practice in France. With military action would come the end of geographic cultural isolation. Therefore, when she parallels Pétain and Washington, she points to the future of her Americanism, noting the historical void created by France’s occupation and filling it with what, in *The Geographical History of America*, she calls an American “space in time” (224).

To underscore America’s connection to France’s (and more generally, Europe’s) wartime situation, she rewrites American history so that its particular nationalist rhetoric might have a sense of global responsibility. For example, Stein provocatively suggests that the attack on Pearl Harbor was a direct correlation to America’s refusal to be active in international affairs:

We in the United States until just now have been [spoiled] children. Since the civil war until to-day, when the action of Japan has made us realize the misery the grief and the terror of war, all this time because we have tender hearts we have always felt for others and helped them all we [could] but we did not understand defeat enough to sympathize with the French people and with their Marechal Petain [sic]. (93)

Appealing to what is now a more global American citizenry, she suggest that there is potential for America to catalyze the events of Pearl Harbor as more manifest destiny than catastrophe. Extending the metaphor further, Stein impels her audience to

recognize the need for their important—but delayed—political and martial intervention, and she invites her audience to recognize the movement of America's particular cultural nationalism to world power.

This invocation circles back to Pétain's portrait. Making a parallel between the seeds of twentieth-century modernity taking root in eighteenth-century America, particularly under the leadership of Washington, Stein suggests that Pétain is similarly leading France into the twentieth century. The cultural memory of Washington becomes a model for the cultural redemption of Pétain. This perverse chronology—and peculiar modernity—is itself an example of her narrative shift from time-dominated to space-oriented history. Common to the majority of her work from the middle thirties forward is the idea that changes in periods are the result of social, political, technological and cultural revolutions and their attendant effects on the spaces of daily living. For Stein, periods are not bound to chronology or teleological process. What the line between Washington and Pétain marks is a geographical history in which the American Century very literally begins to have political and cultural capital. It is in this comparison that her theoretical Americanism becomes (or at the very least begins) a practice of global Americanization. And to a certain extent, her intention in large part becomes reminding her American public of their responsibility for this Americanism/ Americanization.

In this context, Stein does not picture Pétain as a general renowned for his republicanism like Washington was, nor does she argue away Pétain's fascism. Instead, she reads the ideological differences and national politics framed in these comparative portraits as multiply figured in the multiple horizons of her text. On the one hand, Stein invokes the myth of Washington to reintroduce Pétain as more a defender

of democracy than an authoritarian—or worse, fascist—dictator. In this formulation, each of the military leaders serves at once as defender and father of his national traditions. For example, Stein recounts Pétain’s rise to power in the military ranks based on his entirely surprising defense of Verdun during World War I, writing that “in the last war we waited day after day and day after day and Verdun did not fall, that was when we first knew about Pétain, and Verdun did not fall” (94). Like Washington, whose presidency was predicated by successful command of the Continental army, Pétain’s political ascent was a direct product of his prowess on the battlefield and the spirit of resistance that his memory evoked. And in the same way that Americans remember Washington’s militarism as stabilizing the new nation, Stein transcodes that cultural memory to Pétain in order to similarly write him as a war hero whose World War I patriotism could unite the fragmented Third Republic.

On the other hand, at the same time that she exalts Pétain’s heroism through his resemblance to Washington, she also uses the American general as a means to critique his authoritarian practices. Deploying the two American readings of Washington as the basis of her “defence” for Pétain—“Father of the Nation” and “Neo-Classical Cincinnatus”—Stein rewrites Pétain’s political symbolization as simultaneously benevolent father and reluctant dictator. That is to say, her bifocal history rewrites Pétain to show a larger connection between paternalism, nationalism, and fascism. Neither overtly subscribing to nor condemning any of these discourses, Stein rather repeats Pétain as simultaneously “father” and “dictator” to show not only the problems of reading and writing history but also what she reads as a more central problem of political leadership in the current historical moment. Indeed in *Everybody’s*

*Autobiography*, Stein had already leveled a critique on political leaders—democratic, fascist, and communist alike—for their inability to resolve political differences and, ultimately, stave off war: “There is too much fathering going on just now and there is no doubt about it fathers are depressing. Everybody nowadays is a father, there is father Mussolini and father Hitler and father Roosevelt and father Stalin and father Lewis and father Blum and father Franco is just commencing now and there are ever so many more ready to be one” (137). Thus, in terms of the “Introduction,” narrating history in the continuous present reduces the multiple figures of Pétain, simplifying his politics by complication to plot points, as parts-to-the-whole of Stein’s larger synchronic vision of history. Indeed, the Pétain portrait also implicates all varieties of big government (or nationalism, fathering, etc.) on their respective regions (or the local, their family units, etc.) To read Stein’s many stories about Pétain is to also read the effects of Americanism on narrative theory and aesthetic geopolitics.

What Stein drafts is an impossible vision of history. Her twentieth-century toolkit—her bifocality, her performativity, and her modernism—refuses to read or write Pétain in a single narrative. Thus, what seems like the point of the “Introduction” on first reading—redeeming Pétain as a national hero or casting him to the ashbin of fascism—becomes an impossible task and consequently a moot point. And yet, we must take seriously Stein’s plea “to have faith in [Pétain] and in the fact that France will live” (95). But if the text refuses a faith in her character, what is the function of its polemical American religion?

To answer this question requires that we break the frame of war and religion and move toward the “creative” potential of Stein’s portrait. In this reading strategy, Pétain

as Washington is a narrative frame enclosing Stein's more radical dialectical history. What her "Introduction to the Speeches of Maréchal Pétain" demonstrates, like *Four in America*, is that revolution toward Stein's Americanism is only possible if the picture is filled with all aspects of cultural life. Therefore, Stein's project is less concerned with redeeming Pétain than with announcing her Americanist history. But because Pétain is himself not a twentieth-century figure—he does not have a twentieth-century perspective—this Americanization complicit with Stein's project is impossible in this historical moment. That is to say, in the same way that Washington in *Four in America* is the pioneer who breaks with England and imagines and American modernity, Pétain pace Stein initiates a French progress towards the twentieth-century and thus his Americanism is only a space clearing gesture. For Americanism to take hold in France—not to say to have any power—requires not just pro-American sentiment on the part of French politicians but a full American undertaking of World War II. Where American religion should be oriented, then, is toward the real extension of a global American influence. To that end, Stein's portrait of both Pétain and his regime proves metonymic for the relationship between American and Europe in the Second World War more generally. Thus, the success and the failure that Pétain represents is the cultural opening of twentieth-century Americanism.

At this point, we should pause to consider the implications of failure on Stein's modernist mapping. By all accounts, this project is a failure. Pétain does not become a redeemable figure, not to say a cultural hero or American pioneer. In the most banal sense, "The Introduction to the Speeches of Maréchal Pétain" is a failure because it was shelved at Random House. But as a text that mediates between Stein's larger middle-

thirties and late-forties works, as well as negotiating the nuances of her work on narrative, this failure is rewritten as a space of potential. In *Lectures in America*, she famously remarks that “what makes American success is American failure” (172). And in *Four in America* she follows up this national prescription by qualifying what failure does and does not do; she writes, “A real failure does not need an excuse. It is an end in itself” (175). Her Americanism applied to the “Introduction,” therefore, is not a failure because the nature of the project—in theory and practice—marks the beginning of French Americanization.

Thus, while her “Introduction” does not prove a “convincing and moving story” to her fellow Americans, Stein at the very least forces her public to make cultural connections. That is to say, her portrait of Pétain as an American maps an imaginary geographical history that moves across the Atlantic, across history, and across political and ideological differences. Negotiating oppositions between nation and world, nationalism and globalization, tradition and innovation, culture and capital, Stein demonstrates that what makes her comparative portrait at once a success and a failure is its spatialization of possibility: the failure of the “Old World” order means needing to rethink these kinds of modern contradictions that arise in the form of national traditions and international responses; and it is an American intervention that might translate such European failures as fascism, communism, and world war into a particular kind of “New World” success. This kind of thinking—and later this thinking as policy—is most dramatically visible in American culture’s influence on daily European living and later in the American government’s implementation of the Marshall and Truman Plans. In that sense, the Pétain project is a performative restatement of this failure/success paradox:

the failure to provide a convincing “defense” of Pétain succeeds in gesturing toward national rewriting and global remapping. Indeed, the trouble with Stein’s “Introduction to the Speeches of Maréchal Pétain” is compounded by the delayed publication and the entirely different failure/success paradox of *Four in America*. Besides complicating a larger arc of Stein’s Pétain/Washington comparison, the 1947 publication of the middle-thirties *Four in America* puts into focus the developing politics of late modernism: an argument for the historical development of the American Century becomes an example of its institutionalization. To repeat Pétain as Washington is to insist on the expanse of American civilization. However, as the next section will demonstrate, to repeat Pétain as Washington also maps the foreclosure of Stein’s modernist history.

### **Pioneer Returns: Americanization, Middle-Class Domesticity, and Regional Habit**

By 1945, Stein’s faith in global Americanism was increasingly less optimistic. On the occasion of V-Day, she wrote “The New Hope in Our ‘Sad Young Men,’” a cautious essay that underlines that the war is only half over. In part, Stein might be referring to the still unsecured Allied victory in the Pacific Theater. It is more likely, however, that Stein is referring to the projects of recovery and normalization that necessarily follow war. Not only does American postwar foreign policy make the American Century a historical fact, but also this nascent globalization marks the beginning of the twentieth century for her “new Europe.” But Stein does not seem immediately confident in America’s capacity to create a pragmatic response to postwar reconstruction. The continuation of her project of cultural nationalism—an Americanism that, to paraphrase *The Making of Americans*, privileges ordinary middle class habits of daily living—is in fact jeopardized by the reversion of the United States to a “pre-Civil war state of mind” (142). With this new world order beginning in America and threatening to spread

globally, particularly in American Occupied Zones, gone is the belief that “you had to be old enough to really resist life in order to begin life,” replaced instead with a historical memory of “easy wars, easy victories, easy success, easy money, easy eating and easy drinking and easy madly running around and easy publicity, easy everything” (143). Besides offering an invective against the combined boom of what she considers the most invidious kinds of Americanization (Roosevelt’s big government, American big business, blind faith in mechanization, and the international policies that eliminate cultural difference) Stein offers in “The New Hope in Our ‘Sad Young Men,’” a return to a pioneering spirit so that daily life might again be cultivated in the twentieth century. If the postwar world has returned to a pre-Civil War state of mind, beginning again with pioneers as cultural heroes will teach Americans to have a “strenuousness to bulwark themselves with to protect their innocence and kind heart” (143). Stein ultimately argues for a pragmatic cultural transformation by way of a return to regionalism and to the pioneer. Pioneers very well might “be a sad and quiet people,” but they are folks who can listen and who can promise and who can perform” (143).

The question of what these postwar pioneers do becomes a prescient one. Although Stein scoffs at the vulgarity of “the boys [selling] America to the French” or these soldiers giving preferential treatment to enemy nations that flatter them rather than privileging wartime allies, she acknowledges the potential for these G.I.s to take up her postwar project.<sup>9</sup> On a practical level, this pioneering means helping to rebuild the

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<sup>9</sup> In “Off We All Went to See Germany” (1945), Stein recounts a conversation that she had with some G.I.s regarding their preference for Germans over all other Europeans. She dismisses their preference as solipsistic and naïve, arguing: “Of course you do, I said, they flatter you and they obey you, when the other countries don’t like and say so, and personally you have not been awfully ready to meet them halfway, well naturally if they don’t like you they show it, the Germans don’t like you but they flatter you, dog gone it” (140). But more importantly, she chastises the soldiers for the way in which their preferential treatment refuses a kind of international relativism, important to the project of post-War reconstruction:

poorer agrarian areas bombed during the war (“New Hope” 143). This postwar project maintains a degree of sentiment for the French countryside, whose citizens were “such good republicans” and the victims of “unfortunate accidents of war” (*Wars* 221-222). In linking “habits” with “home,” Stein makes the project of postwar pioneering both explicitly one of regional redevelopment (a literal rebuilding of homes based on local habit) and implicitly one of Americanist ideology (a belief in global modernity as tied to home, domesticity, and nationalism). In either formulation, the habits and homes become antidotes to postwar alienation or modernist rootlessness.

But while her defense of small town French life is a continuation of her wartime turn to regional habit, Stein’s postwar pioneering is a radical departure from her earlier modernist histories. And this difference turns, on a theoretical level, on her privileging of American G.I.s and twentieth-century pioneers. Stein’s move to a kind of critical regionalism—a turn to the local or regional in response to the spacelessness of the American Century—provides a late-modernist praxis to her original modernist theory. Recognizing that her original project of modernist mapping failed—a global modernism proved inseparable from complete global modernization thus pushing the project of modernism to its end—Stein attempts to reopen her project and to reorganize it in new terms. This new cultural strategy reads her modernist American history in a way that is more materialist and more middle-class. Whereas her earlier modernist histories made men of genius or fame her cultural heroes (read, for example, her four Americans) her late modernist histories make middling soldiers her new idealized pioneers. Given this

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“You don’t like the Latins, or the Arabs or the Wops, or the British, well don’t you forget a country can’t live without friends, I want you all to get to know other countries so that you can be friends, make a little effort, try to find out what it is all about” (140).

narrative shift, Stein certainly does not expect the same kind of modernist revolution that she theorized—and clearly idealized—in her middle thirties texts.

Indeed, Stein makes her pioneers expressly political. In *Wars I Have Seen*, the American army landing in France begins to talk about “the future organization of the world” (181). In this talk, Stein’s conservative politics are writ large: she argues for a return to the gold standard; military retribution for Axis persecution; and the arrival of goods to end wartime hunger. Currency reform, military occupation, and food rations become American interventions toward the reconstitution of European daily living. But they also mark the limits of what Stein might consider acceptable governmental action. For Stein, the “mystic” lack of utility of the gold standard might divorce daily life from the demands of industry, as she explicitly writes in *Wars I Have Seen*, but it is also a republican opposition both to governmental centralized banking and the New Deal (182). This itself is not new to Stein’s politics. Particular to her Americanism has always been the tenuous relationship between citizens and capital. In her 1935 “The Capital and Capitals of the United States of America,” Stein suggested that citizens “commence again to begin again forgetting that the government,” acting as a kind of shorthand for other centralized groups, like military and industry, “is something that any one of them can know is there all the time” (75). What is new about Stein’s politicking, however, is the relation of her political conservatism to her theory of Americanism. In this postwar moment, in the figuration of the pioneer, habit and republicanism intersect to underline the importance of individualism and personal need over centralized government and its collectivist ideology.

The advantage of making her pioneers middle class soldiers is that it intersects with the broadening of the middle class and the significant rise in the American standard of living, effects hastened largely as a result of the global wartime economy. In a sense, Stein's G.I. pioneers would have a level of social, economic, and political power to facilitate her regional modernism. Not only would the pioneers not necessarily have direct ties to the national governments, social policymakers, or financial interests that, in Stein's mind, made war, but the success of the hard-working, responsible middle class would in fact legitimate both her representation of postwar pioneering. The relationship between the G.I. victory and the potential success of her middle-class pioneering is hardly unintentional. But more important still is that the recent emergence of the middle class as world cultural power would allow for a more malleable audience. Although the middle-class soldiers might be guilty of too much individual bravado and a symptomatic culture ignorance—Stein complains, for example, that G.I.s often “did not know what country they were in”—“the mother of modernism” at least finds them teachable (*Brewsie* 13). Thus, in addition being folks “who can listen and who can promise and who can perform,” the G.I.s are also the only Americans abroad whose mobility preaches her American “religion” while at the same time having a connection to their home. In *Brewsie and Willie* (1946), her middle-class pioneers not only talk incessantly about their American homes—questioning or describing “where is home” (23)—but also relate their home life to their regional deployments—wondering “whether home was ever like this” (43).

Contrasting the kinds of American conversation taking place in Europe will flesh out this distinction. On the one hand, the official radio broadcasts make “national life so

complete and determined” (*Wars* 156). Although her description of the radio broadcasts are benign enough—“The Americans say with poetry and fire, This is the Voice of America, and then with modesty and good neighborliness, one of the United Nations, it is the voice of America speaking to you across the Atlantic”—the official talking voices are disembodied and merely transmitting (*Wars* 155). There is no “hearing.” With the G.I. Joes, though, Stein is struck by the way the American boys were “conversational”: “They talked and they listened and they had a sureness, they were quite certain of themselves, they had no doubts or uncertainties and they had not to make any explanations” (*Wars* 251). Whereas the doughboys demonstrated a kind of provincialism, more asking questions than chatting, this new army does not ask questions, but rather “[considers] that people have their habits and their ways of living, some you can get along with and others you can’t, but they are all perfectly reasonable for the people who use them” (*Wars* 252). Important to Stein is the way these American boys map the postwar America in the twentieth century: they only have a national consciousness and develop an international relativism. The G.I.s also can talk about the relationship of domestic life in both of these contexts. Pioneering in the late 1940s becomes a new kind of religion insofar as the concept of “home” becomes geographically specific. Although the soldiers are technically right that “there is no wilderness” to pioneer, they still acknowledge that pioneering is still an important job. Willie, Brewsie, and the other deployed Americans decide that with “that pioneer thing, you got to break down what has been built up” (83). For them, pioneering becomes about very literally returning home, about challenging systems that provoke war, about reconstructing Europe, about promoting democracy, and about avoiding the atomic

bomb. Put bluntly, pioneering becomes about “living”—happily, seriously, habitually, and democratically—wherever you might be (85). Thus, to paraphrase Stein’s reading of the camp-meeting from *Four in America*—in this postwar moment, the woods *do* have something to do with it.

By the time she drafts her World War II texts, Stein invokes the notion of regionalism as a mediator between individual and nation, be it by naming the G.I.s by the state they were born in, critiquing United States foreign policy for its problematic race and class domestic policies, or periodizing the Great Depression as the moment that modernized American consciousness. But I would argue that Stein does even more with her regionalism: namely, mapping regionalism as global. If regionalism also aims to create, as Richard Pells argues, “a communal form of living that existed apart from the formal institutions and the pressures of industrial capitalism,” I would argue that this kind of regionalism pervades Stein’s work, beginning especially with *Wars I Have Seen* and continuing to *Brewsie and Willie* and *Mrs. Reynolds* (1952) (105). Her focus on habit, both as it relates to the time of war and to domestic spaces, paired with her privileging of pioneering as the ideal postwar policy underlines the importance of place in the late-modernist moment. This revised project not only challenges the primacy of the United States in late modernism by offering alternative spaces as important as the nation (like rebuilding countries, the region, the town, and the home), but it also marks a decisive shift in the periodization of narration. If in Stein’s “middle-thirties” narrative theory, the problem of the twentieth century was time in relation to the spatial developments of the American Century, in the late forties it becomes explicitly one of space. This transition can be read in what Bernard Fay reads as Stein’s American

project in his introduction to the 1933 French edition of *The Making of Americans*: “Gertrude Stein’s present is America” (16). Space and time, moving into the 1940s, intersect in Stein’s larger transatlantic regionalism.

Because of this regional impulse, Stein can make explicit the connections between geography and identity that she begins in *The Geographical History of America*. At the end of *Wars I Have Seen*, she punctuates her geographical politics, writing, “After all anybody is as their land and air is. Anybody is as the sky is low or high. . . . That is what makes a people, makes their kind of looks, their kind of thinking, their subtlety and their stupidity, and their eating and their drinking and their language” (258). In vernacular language using quotidian examples of daily life, Stein can underline the problems of a massified American modernity and its effects on individual and communal living. And it is this localized, largely middle class narrative that gives her the space to challenge the United States’ global nationalism, and what she reads as its homogenizing (if not hegemonic) distortion of America’s historical legacy and democratic tradition.

It is with this distortion in mind that, in a postscript addressed “To Americans” in *Brewsie and Willie*, she argues for a return to the American “religion” exemplified in the pioneer. “We are there where we have to fight a spiritual pioneer fight,” Stein warns those Americans resistant to her largely regional narrative, “or we will go poor as England and other industrial countries have gone poor” (113). But Stein’s “spiritual pioneer fight” is invested in more than democracy in name alone. In her postwar writing, her conservative politics become polemical: it is the American middle class who, in becoming war heroes and pioneers, will stand up to big business and big government

and stand against communism and socialism. Indeed, Stein's regional modernism becomes both a late modernist praxis and a Cold War politics, the very framework the remaining chapters of this dissertation responds to.

The individualism of the 1940s pioneers—as workers, as citizens, and as consumers—will be a bulwark against 1930s “fathering”—as depression, the New Deal, or fascism—or any possible deviation from American progress. It becomes the cultural work of her middle-class pioneers to see “that a government by the people for the people shall not perish from the face of the earth, it wont, somebody else will do it if we lie down on the job, but of all things don't stop” (114). Stein's conclusion in *Brewsie and Willie* becomes simultaneously an ethic of justification and patriotism: “We are Americans” (114). Bound up in Stein's regional modernism is the hope that her modernist American religion might remake the world *and* the confidence that the G.I.s will do this cultural work. Stein's late forties return to the pioneer is an insistence on domestic life in the cultural logic of modernity. This return to the trope of the pioneer at the official beginning of the twentieth century is appropriate. For as Stein writes in *Everybody's Autobiography*, “After all revolutions are a matter of habit” (54).

CHAPTER 4  
DAWN POWELL, REGIONAL MODERNISM, AND THE POSTWAR AIR WORLD

In her February 13, 1943 diary entry, Dawn Powell proves uncharacteristically political: “After Clare [Boothe] Luce made such evil use of her new Congressional power, I was glad I had slashed her in my last book and realized that my immediate weapons are most necessary and can help. The lashing of such evil can only be done by satire and I am the only person who is doing contemporary social satire” (213). The last book she is referring to is *A Time To Be Born* (1942), a novel that scrutinized, among other topics, the cultural reach of a New York publishing power couple fashioned after Luce and her husband *Time* magnate Henry Luce; and “the evil use of power” Powell attributes to Luce refers to the newly-elected Congresswoman’s attack on Vice President Henry Wallace’s internationalist’s views—which she infamously decried as “globaloney” (“America in the Postwar Air World” 761). This bit of journaling is significant not only because it ends the speculation (and self-contradiction) that Luce was in fact the model for Powell’s conniving heroine, Amanda Keeler.<sup>1</sup> It more importantly links Powell’s novels and their scathing cultural commentary to explicit political commentary.

This is perhaps a banal statement to make about most novelists living in New York City from the 1920s onward. But Powell’s case merits special consideration if only for its catalog of contradictions. Living in Greenwich Village from 1918 until her death in 1965, the Ohio native had acquaintances from circles as diverse as leftist modernists to

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<sup>1</sup> More proof from her *Diaries* is offered on March 11, 1956: “I have been denying for years any basis in *A Time To Be Born* for the general idea that it is Clare Luce. I swear it is based on five or six girls, some known personally and some by talk, and often I changed the facts to avoid libel with resulting character a real person evidently and libelously Luce-ian. I insist it was a composite (or compost) but then I find a memo from 1939—‘Why not do novel on Clare Luce?’ Who can I believe—me or myself?” (356).

more conservative literary critics; a short list of her closest friends would certainly include John Dos Passos, Max Perkins, Edmund Wilson, Malcolm Cowley, and Gore Vidal. And her politics, like her taste in friends, was equally scattershot; she was famously a lifelong Republican, but her political affiliations were in reality more nuanced: “libertarian conservative, anti-McCarthyite, Stevensonian Democrat, anti-Vietnam War, [and] antifeminist who thought there should be a housewives’ *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*” (Lingeman 38). It is precisely this complexity and contradiction that places her squarely in the politics of modernism: the ceaseless pursuit of stable subjectivity, the rebellion against established forms and traditionalism, the tensions between high culture and the vernacular, the promise of pluralism paired with the problem of difference, and the social experiences relating to the conflict between the city and the country. I will argue that more than merely being at the center of these debates, Powell serves a mediating role for modernist literary history. As a midwestern woman writer who satirizes the contemporaneous development of the ideologies of modernism and the American Century, Powell’s contradictory politics force us to think beyond local and particular circumstances, or global and systemic forces, instead holding them in dialectical tension. In the context of her diary entry, she mediates the beginnings of modern identity politics and the wartime development of the antipolitical subtext of modernist aesthetic formalism, which specifically forces us to confront the place of gender, class, and regional identities in the theory and practice of modernism. Here this different narrative of modernism, what I will call Powell’s “regional modernism,” functions as a vanishing mediator for the transitional space between modernism proper and the late modernism of the American Century, providing us “a way of registering the antinomies

of a globalizing world before we were fully historically able to develop a new discourse for it” (Hegeman, *The Cultural Return* 60).<sup>2</sup> To get at the stakes of Powell’s specific historical intervention, however, requires a brief narrative of the political disagreement between Luce and Williams.

### **Regional Antinomies and the Postwar Air World**

Despite being elected predominantly on the basis of her internationalist credentials, in her first floor speech as Connecticut Representative and Committee Member on Military Affairs, Luce criticized the wartime policies of the Roosevelt administration and positioned herself squarely in the GOP isolationist camp. In “America in the Postwar Air World” (1943), Luce had two deeply related agendas. The first was her call for “freedom of the air,” which was essentially a call for postwar domestic policy to regulate and invest in American commercial and military aviation as a means of national security. The second, more explicitly partisan agenda, was her specific challenge to Wallace’s plan for postwar internationalism, whose “freedom of the air” became a metaphor for postwar globalization. Because “airplanes and air power have eliminated the old significance of national boundaries,” Wallace argued, “international airports and extensive international air travel will cause the American businessmen to think in international terms as never before” (“Business Measures” 214). Building upon his 1942 speech “Century of the Common Man” that argued for the internationalization of Roosevelt’s Four Freedoms, Wallace now linked political economy and market capitalism as foundational to foreign policy and ultimately postwar

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<sup>2</sup> Scott Herring’s work on “regional modernism” has been an invaluable resource for me. I am interested here in expanding his work to flesh out the gendered politics of this cultural movement in the period of late modernism: “Regional Modernism: A Reintroduction,” 1-10.

liberalism: “Modern technology, the wings of the air, and the waves of the air, mean that the common man will demand and get a better education and a higher standard of living. In serving the common man, the business leader will have opportunities for initiative such as he never dreamed before” (“Business Measures” 214).

The congresswoman declared that Wallace’s economic globalism would reduce American living standards (761). However, her problem with Wallace’s propositions for “freedom of the air” was less its “internationalization of American airports and air space” than the New Deal economic policies that would regulate both foreign and domestic trade *and* the lucrative aviation markets. With this rhetorical move, Luce positioned herself as a centrist to the “New Deal Utopians” whose postwar cooperation would make “for a bigger and redder and more royal New Deal for the whole world” and the “Isolationists” whose “realistic solution” consisted of America refusing any postwar international involvements in order to become as domestically strong as possible (760). For Luce, the key to preserving American living standards, and promoting American sovereignty of the skies, was to dismantle the New Deal political infrastructure: domestically, she challenged New Deal ties to labor unions and government-backed trade subsidies; and globally, she linked the Roosevelt administration’s “freedom of the air” plan to its “freedom of the seas” policies, which destroyed America’s merchant marine through its internationalization of the ports and promotion of foreign trade to the detriment of American national security and employment (762). Thus, Luce accepted globalization insofar as it was synonymous with American capitalism, free markets, and domestic stimulus. As Luce later clarified, “every nation has sovereignty of its skies,” but American international cooperation should only exist “as a basis for liberalizing the

air through bilateral treaties” such that U.S. aid to Allied nations would reinvigorate the aviation industry and spur competition (“Mrs. Luce Defines Freedom of the Air” 3).

Though the rhetoric and the policy of Republican Luce and New Deal Democrat Wallace are different, their partisan programs, which focus on American trade as a central postwar concern, bear strong resemblances. In the first place, both politicians spoke to the importance of Americanization for postwar liberalism, specifically through which nationalist political and economic schemas could influence postwar geopolitical development. There are certainly crucial ideological differences: Luce promoted Americanization as a means to strengthen the American economy abroad, which would in turn consolidate American interests in the global free market *and* solve the Cold War problem of communism, whereas Wallace promoted Americanization for its emphasis on democratic theory and practice, in which the United States would secure a significant amount of postwar power through its cooperationist efforts to rebuild Europe via the model of the American New Deal. Nevertheless, these disagreements provide different valences of a similar political alignment: both Luce and Wallace were centrally concerned with the place of both the United States and American hegemony in the postwar global world.

This support for postwar liberalism, framed as it were by isolationism and internationalism, opens to another similarity: the function of global Americanism as a cultural concept within a larger discussion of postwar Americanization. However, if their respective political and economic agendas opened up to the universal rights and freedoms afforded by postwar liberalism (while still, of course, privileging the U.S.), Luce and Wallace’s cultural programs turned toward particularism and American

regionalism. Thus, at the same time that they were offering Americanization as a model for postwar liberalism and moral universalism—“the proposition that there are fundamental common moral issues upon which all of humanity agrees”—Luce and Wallace were also using regional culture as a justification for their respective causes (Hegeman, *The Cultural Return* 62).

But here I must make a qualification: in the case of Luce and Wallace, regionalism—and more specifically, regional culture—functions as a mediator between nationalism and internationalization, explaining the connection between local examples of domestic programs and their future application for foreign policy. To paraphrase Hegeman, regional culture must serve two purposes: it must explain the relationship between the smaller and larger parts of the political, economic, social, and cultural thinking of the World War II period, and it must also denote difference, in our case among the various spatial registers of Americanization (*The Cultural Return* 113). While in theory Luce and Wallace invoked regionalism as a strategy to explain the local, regional, national, and global benefits of their respective postwar foreign policies, in practice both politicians neutralized regionalism’s particular social contexts by folding it into narratives of American nationalism and postwar internationalism, which is to say Americanization.

For Wallace, regional planning projects like the Tennessee Valley Authority served as a model for the way in which New Deal political, economic, and social programs might provide a similar infrastructure for building postwar democracy. But thirties regionalism was also significant to the Vice President for the ways in which progressive cultural politics worked to sustain regional development. “Education,

manual dexterity, and economic literacy,” for example, become a pedagogical base for working “in cooperation with United Nations investment corporation to develop flood-control works, irrigation projects, soil reclamation, rural electrification and the like” (“Business Matters” 211). In contrast, Luce’s turn to regionalism meant an opportunity to critique New Deal programs and to show how her postwar plans could benefit the periphery. According to Luce, her “America in the Postwar Air World” would facilitate midwestern development, not to say cultural modernization, in ways that Iowan Wallace proved unable to do. Indeed, Luce could kill two birds with one stone: not only did she slight her political opposition with the idea that *even* grammar school boys from the “isolationist Middle West” could recognize the importance of an American “freedom of the air,” she also pointed to the important irony that Middle America had become “the geographical air hub of America’s international postwar air traffic” such that “any important city in the whole world” could be reached by air “within 48 hours” (760-761). Taken together, both politicians choose regional culture for its use value. In the process, Luce and Wallace make negligible cultural differences by forcing a comparative contact between regionalism and internationalization. And in theorizing this global Americanism, they establish new parameters for late modernism: “We want to fly everywhere. Period” (Luce 761).

### **Regional Modernism and Uneven Modernity**

It is at this point that Powell returns to my story of the American Century, specifically intervening in the particular uses of regionalism in narratives of modernism and globalization. Whereas regionalism becomes a tautology of Americanization for Luce and Wallace, Powell still finds in regional culture a kind of oppositional politics, especially at the moment of modernism’s institutionalization. To that end, Powell

challenges certain caricatures of regionalism in this wartime, postwar, and Cold War periodization of modernism: on the one hand, regionalism's conflation with an oversimplified "Revolt from the Village" narrative, the antiquarian and effeminized style of the local color tradition, or a particular kind of gendered nationalism in thirties regionalism; and on the other, a conservative desire to affiliate local and regional culture with national imperatives, or the celebration of singular case studies, isolated from larger geopolitical forces, as somehow representing a national folk tradition and the successes of American modernity (Herring 3). Indeed, Powell's regional modernism would even reject her friend Cowley's nostalgic treatment of regionalism in *Exile's Return*: "Looking backward, I feel that our whole training was involuntarily directed towards destroying whatever roots we had in the soil, toward eradicating our local and regional particularities, toward making us homeless citizens of the world" (27). The reasons for this would include that this perverse reading of regionalism situates regional culture as exclusively facilitating the cosmopolitan developments of modernism, but also more tragically that the romantic project of modernism is over since the Lost Generation had returned to the United States. Ironic, and yet highly instructive, is the fact that Cowley included Powell in his 1963 "Last of the Lost Generation" essay for *Esquire*, writing that she was "the only one who didn't live in Paris at some time during the Twenties" and instead was the wit "the repatriates" looked for while they read their French newspapers in New York cafes or bars (77). For Cowley, it seems that Dawn Powell and regionalism served similar metonymic purposes.

By way of contrast, Powell's regional modernism takes seriously the effects of "development" on the mutually constitutive politics of late modernism and the American

Century. Powell counters Luce's and Wallace's polemics, wherein regionalism is acknowledged for its rhetorical utility but not its own political significance, with an expressly cultural response to the effects of Americanism, both domestically and overseas. Instead, Powell's regional modernism anticipates Cindi Katz's point that "development—always uneven—is less a process imposed by one place on another than the uneven notion of capital finding, producing, and reproducing places and people in particular and differentiated relation to peculiar strategies of accumulation" (ix). Thus, while Powell herself does not engage directly in polemical debates, her fiction is deeply invested in the relationship between the political, the social, and the aesthetic; and her regional modernism, because it is fundamentally a mode of cultural criticism, becomes what Fredric Jameson has described as "space of mediation between society or everyday life and art as such" (177). The question becomes, what is the function of development in Powell's cultural criticism?

For Powell, development refers primarily to two related concepts: representation (identity, subjectivity, style, and aesthetic form) and the geographical-spatial considerations of a specific location (human, physical, cultural, and feminist geographies). Moreover, the conceptual tension between representation and geography produces a kind of map for regional modernism, in which this spatial culture concept is a particular form of a larger social totality. In terms of the first concept, Powell complicates representation, specifically the prescription of a homogenous collective identity, the stereotypes associated with particular groups, or prejudices attached to various individual subjectivities. For example, Powell would reject outright that because she was "a woman," "a Midwesterner," or "a Republican" that these

subjectivities would uniformly determine who she was as an individual and indeed as a writer. Here, Powell's quarrel with feminism is especially instructive: she does not reject the project of feminism so much as its typical practice. In 1952, she bemoaned the gender division of labor in which a woman must always primarily be "a housekeeper, mama, cookie-cutter, hostess, confidante, family sofa" even if she has a professional job, as well as the inability of the predominantly middle-class feminist movement to address the "fictions about how they handle their sick-life, how politely silent they are about their work" (*Diaries* 309). This provokes her off-color quip that this situation should result in "a novel like *Uncle Tom's Cabin*."

But Powell's larger dissatisfaction with feminism stemmed from the fact that it was already problematically tied to a characterization of modern women writers to which she did not conform. In 1934, having read fiction from Nancy Hale, Louise Bogan, and Kay Boyle, she reflected:

I was impressed with how women now made their art serve their female purpose whereas once it warred with their femininity. Each page is squirming with sensitivity, every line—no matter how well disguised the heroine is—coily reveals her exquisite taste, her delicate charm, her never-at-a-disadvantage body (which of course she cares nothing about and is always faintly amused at men's frenzies over her perfect legs, breasts, etc.) What gallantry, what equalness to any situation in the home, the camp, the yacht, the trenches, the dives—what *aristocrats* these women writers are, whose pen advertises the superiority of their organs. Fit companions and opposites to the he-man writers—Hemingway, Burnett, Cain—imitation he-manners whose words tersely proclaim their masculinity, every tight-lipped phrase shows the author's guts, his decency, his ability to handle any situation. (*Diaries* 92-93)

The public status of modern women writers, read in conjunction with the superficial gender politics popular in bourgeois feminism, turned on the idea that women must fashion themselves as "beautiful objects of the mass media gaze" (Keyser 3). In the case of Hale, Bogan, or Boyle, whether this overt femininity or dripping sexuality was an

intrinsic part of their identity or a strategic maneuver to promote themselves was unimportant to Powell. In either case, these women writers failed to address social issues that inhibit gender equality with their fiction exclusively focusing on feminine ideals of taste, charm, and sexual attractiveness. Powell's larger point is the irony of this decision: having positioned themselves as exceptional women, they remain nevertheless peripheral to their male colleagues.

This problem of individual representation opens up to a second problem of aesthetic representation—a certain ideology of modernism in which formalism trumps historical or cultural contexts. It should also go without saying that this problem is further exacerbated when individuals, groups, or subjects are deprivileged as aesthetically marginal by the cultural elites who dominate modernist publishing and literary criticism. In the period between 1934 and 1952 when Powell lodged her critiques of feminism, the capital of the art world had moved from Paris to New York. There were several consequences of this move, one being the already described gender politics of the literary marketplace. This cultural shift contributes to what Andreas Huyssen has called the “great divide” between modernism and mass culture, which succeeded in gendering modernist literary production as inherently masculine (highbrow, avant-garde, elite) and massified popular culture as implicitly feminine (middlebrow, representational, domestic). A second consequence, directly related to the tensions between the literary marketplace and the institutionalization of modernism, is the spatial politics of this cultural shift. With New York modernism's new cultural capital, groups having strong bases within the metropole—intellectuals associated with *The Partisan Review*, *The Nation*, or New Criticism, but also publishing houses,

middlebrow magazines, and print media empires—proved increasingly dismissive of individuals, groups, subjects, and places from somewhere outside the city’s limits. Therefore, because Powell classified her novels as either “Ohio” or “New York” based on their respective settings, editors like John Farrar tended to compare her to Willa Cather whose representations of midwestern vernacular culture by the 1930s were viewed as antique by the modernist elites. Alternatively, critics like Diana Trilling dismissed her as an embittered modern woman who both “frittered away [her] powers on the small-time” provincial characters and proved “guilty of the sentimental gestures that so markedly diminished the value of her keen social perceptions” (*Diaries* 46; “Fiction in Review” 612).

And yet, even for her so-called Catheresque novels, Powell refused entirely the idea that she was a regional writer (*Diaries* 57). By 1932, she was writing “regional novels” insofar as their settings were still in Ohio, but they were also entirely “modernist” because she was consciously interested in the modernization and development of the Midwest.<sup>3</sup> “The *new* Ohio must be the keynote—the dizziness of speed through broad auto highways, hot dog stations, not the tranquil hayfields of my recollection,” Powell argued, pointing toward uneven modernity as a theme that would continue in the rest of her novels (*Diaries* 54). But for Powell, this development was not one-way. Unlike Luce and Wallace, who argued that American modernity was passively received by the rural periphery, Powell argued that modernization and development in the Midwest had a likewise transformative effect on cosmopolitan America.

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<sup>3</sup> See Susan Hegeman’s “Modernism, Anthropology, Culture” in *Patterns for America: Modernism and the Concept of Culture*, 14-27.

To explain this point, I will offer two examples of this dialectical development, both coming from 1940s publication memos. In the first example, in her Scribner's publicity release for *A Time to Be Born*, Powell seemingly marks the foreclosure of regionalism: not only has the Midwest become popularly imagined as a site of consumerism and mass culture, regional culture itself has become commodified by the publishing industry. So the story goes, protagonist Amanda Keeler would do anything to maintain her literary reputation, public position, and magazine career. When "she permits herself human weaknesses" (an affair with a struggling writer, a love triangle with that man and her Ohio friend and rival, a romantic rebuff from a Hemingway-like modernist, and a separation from her publisher husband), Amanda's "public structure is weakened, and the latter part of the book deals with her frantic efforts to indulge private emotions without surrendering her public position" (*Letters* 112). Amanda ultimately decides to recreate herself as common folk in her essay, "I Came from Across the Tracks," to exploit the growing popularity and profitability of the midwestern periphery, all the while increasing her readership (and her purchase power) (*Letters* 112).

In the second example, a Guggenheim Fellowship proposal, Powell makes an explicit connection between regionalism and cultural nationalism, questioning the effects of modernization for both infrastructural development and American hegemony. She specifically wonders if a new conversation must be started between the provincial and the cosmopolitan (and by extension, arguably regionalism and modernism) would be an appropriate cultural strategy as Americans prepare for world war:

As a member of a family rooted in Ohio for nearly 150 years my observations have been concentrated on such people's struggle against or in defense of their inherent provincialism. My novels have followed this trail—the provincial in the city eager to trade his naiveté for a sort of

Hollywood culture, the other provincial American determined to keep his roots in a rootless environment, then the provincial returning to his roots with cosmopolitan messages. This pattern seems to me to follow the mass of life of America as well as the individual life. The late insistence of Europe and Asia in impressing another life on this native pattern gives an opportunity to study the pattern in protest. It is better to record the lives of these people now than to wait till the glacier has destroyed them and left only a statistical clue. (*Letters* 112)

Drafted while she was writing *A Time To Be Born*, this would become her last Ohio novel, *My Home is Far Away* (1944). Whereas her satire critiques the Midwest for its mass cultural turn, in this fictionalized memoir of her childhood, Ohio becomes a site of resistance to Americanization and globalism. And by 1943, this cultural politics becomes overt: Powell decides that the novel is “propaganda,” fulfilling a “duty to show there was another America, not just the present one of war and woe” (*Diaries* 217). But although this cultural turn of the novel is an intervention in global politics, it is importantly not reactionary because it does not propose isolationism as its regionalist strategy. Instead, the Midwest becomes a heterogeneous space of cooperation. *My Home is Far Away* shows “the things possible to learn—that in a small radius of 100 square miles in Northern Ohio there are a half-dozen different types of civilization—a Finnish town, a Dutch town, a rubber town, steel town, and great grain farms, fruit farms, German towns, etc.” (*Diaries* 217).

On the most basic level, this comparison points to “development” as a theoretical basis for Powell’s “regional modernism,” showing the degree to which both terms are constituted by the dialectic tensions between center and periphery, the regional and the modern, aesthetics and spatial culture. But this comparison also points to the changing political, social, and spatial contexts of the region as place and regionalism as cultural relations for the American landscape. If in the first example, the Midwest is a space

intrinsic to processes of Americanization, and in the second example it is a site of resistance to the negative effects of American modernity, these spatial contradictions could very well point to the failure of regionalism's political, social, and cultural viability. Read another way, with her 1940 publication memos, Powell begins to work through how locality (the provinces, the periphery, the region) is produced, both as a space that reinforces the nationalist agendas of the American Century and as a place whose particular history, culture, and social context provides an alternative model for development. Thus, these contradictions speak to the persistence of regional modernism as a cultural logic in the historical moment of late modernism. I must emphasize, however, that this turn to regional modernism in the moment of late modernism is not exclusively a rhetorical strategy.

### **Satire and the American Century**

In *Late Modernism: Politics, Fiction, and Arts between World Wars*, Tyrus Miller defines late modernism as a response to “shifting hierarchies within the arts, intensive development of the mass media, and traumatic events of social and political history—historical trends that were incipient for high modernist writers, yet no so ineluctably part of the ‘weather’ as they would become during the 1930s” (24). Drawing on the respective work of Fredric Jameson and Charles Jencks that insists upon late modernism as a historicizing concept, Miller's commentary argues for a set of comprehensive formal, thematic, and stylistic elements that comprises late modernism.<sup>4</sup> A crucial concept to which all of his elements refer is satire, a term expansive and ambidextrous enough to include late modernist irony, “self-reflexive laughter”, or “riant

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<sup>4</sup> See Jameson's *A Singular Modernity: Essays on the Ontology of Present* and Jencks' *Late-Modern Architecture*.

spaciousness” (63-64). Because late modernism was, in part, a reaction to the ideology of modernism in the moment of its cultural institutionalization, a turn to “a variety of satiric and parodic strategies” weakened the formal cohesion of a text and “sought to deflate its symbolic resources, reducing literary figures at points to a bald literalness or assimilating them to the degraded forms of extraliterary discourse” (19). Put differently, if the ideology of modernism prevalent in the historical period of the American Century advocated an antipolitical subtext and an elitist rejection of mass culture, late modernist satire attempted to subvert this logic through more politicized and historical referents.<sup>5</sup> As an oppositional strategy, then, late modernist satire not only refuses a formalist separation between literature, history, and politics, it also points to the importance of mass culture and popular forms for these narratives of modernism and Americanization.

In this sense, Miller’s work is an important contribution to how we think about late modernism. However, I must point out that his theorization of late modernism, as well as his historical and political commentary, is predominantly interested in questions of aesthetics. For Miller, “aesthetics” seems to function as a totalizing concept: because modernist texts engaged with social and political realities, to talk about aesthetics, and indeed form and style, is to gesture toward connections between literary modernism and the historical world. And yet, for all of his talk about late modernism’s increasing self-reflexivity, the institutionalization of high modernism, and the rise of the literary marketplace, Miller’s narrow set of aesthetic preoccupations insufficiently addresses the ways in which late modernism opens up to larger conversations about cultural politics and “social totalities.”

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<sup>5</sup> See Hegeman, “Haunted by Mass Culture” in *The Cultural Return*, 41-44.

For example, having first pointed out that “late modernist writing was not particularly successful in either critical or commercial terms, [as] each work tended toward formal singularity,” Miller then points to the way in which both Walter Benjamin and Charles Baudelaire theorize the potential “undoing of a whole literary movement or aesthetic” via a “critical gaze that shatters the unity of the object at hand into fragments” (13-14). Somehow this “allegorical optic” opens toward late modernism which functions rather romantically for Miller as the “splinter products of a shattered ‘classic’ modernism”:

Late modernist writers were divested, by political and economic forces, of the cultural “cosmos”—the modernist “myth,” in the most encompassing sense—in which the singular works of high modernism seemed components of an aesthetically transfigured world. In the empty spaces left by high modernism’s dissolution, late modernists reassembled fragments into disfigured likenesses of modernist masterpieces: the unlovely allegories of a world’s end. (14)

Miller’s repetition of formalist criticism—particularly his focus on optics, beauty, and singularity—seems to belie a significant *political* aspect of late modernism. If late modernism is the persistence of modernist theory and practice in the interwar and Cold War years, late modernism must also represent the persistence of modernism’s aesthetic, social, and political concerns. Miller’s theorization of late modernism as singularity, then, refuses the persistence of modernist forms of collectivity, totality, or utopia.

Moving forward from this critique, I think it is important to account for the connection between spatiality and late modernism. In the context of American literary history, the turn toward a spatial culture concept in the modernist moment was an attempt to work through various forms of individual and critical estrangement: for example, the estranged perception of collective identity and the way in which uneven

modernity exacerbates alienation and cultural difference across geographic locations (Hegeman, *Patterns for America* 4). Although the spatial context of late modernism might have changed, most obviously in the geopolitical and cultural shifts registered in the very naming of the America Century, these tensions persisted albeit with an important difference: the ideology of modernism espoused by the New York Intellectuals and the New Critics, which separated modernism from questions of history, politics, and daily living, also simultaneously moved away from the spatial logic of modernism (cultural relativism, regional development, geographical difference).<sup>6</sup> Hence, my suggestion that work like Miller's needs also to interrogate the shifting terrains of spatial culture and geographical context in relation late modernism's aesthetic politics.

Satire remains interesting to me because it seems to bridge both of these concerns. On the one hand, it is a formal innovation that ambivalently or contentiously reacts to the literary marketplace; and on the other hand, it is a stylistic choice that betrays historical and geographical specificity. This ambidexterity—satire's "self-reflexiveness" or its "critical self-consciousness"—opens toward a larger cultural politics in which aesthetic production and social reality, form and content, theory and practice, center and periphery are held in dialectic tension. And I think it is in the convergence of these formal styles and spatial considerations that we can locate late modernism's larger cultural intervention: new sites for the production and representation of publics,

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<sup>6</sup> See Hegeman, "'Beyond Relativity': James Agee and Others, Toward the Cold War" in *Patterns for America*, 158-192.

counterpublics, and mass culture via the development of new mediating frameworks of satire and, of course, regional modernism.<sup>7</sup>

To explain the convergence of these terms, I am going to return to Powell's satirical novel, *A Time To Be Born*. It should be clear from my analysis that I am not interested in satire as a late modernist aesthetic style seeking to mediate a divide between a progressive avant-garde and a conservative high modernism; nor am I interested in the way late modernist satire might "register the impact of powerful social and psychological forces on that elusive dimension of human life—how we feel" (Greenberg 43, 46). Instead I am interested in satire's function in late modernism's highly politicized cultural landscape, and how specifically Powell's juxtaposition of Ohio regionalism (local color, provincialism, middlebrow taste, regional culture) and New York modernism (urbanism, elitism, highbrow taste, cosmopolitanism) complicates popular narratives of the geographic-cultural divide inherent to the American Century.

Susan Hegeman has pointed out that a number of the Midwest's literary sons "tended to emphasize the dynamics of modernization, placing the Midwest in a relational drama of rural and urban, East and Midwest," and in the process mythologized midwestern provincialism as a regional trait (*Patterns for America* 135). While Powell certainly addressed the convergence of class taste and geographical region, she tended to satirize regional differences and uneven modernity a bit differently, especially because her representation of midwestern culture and development were significantly shaped by the region's prevailing gender politics. To

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<sup>7</sup> I follow Michael Warner's definition of "counterpublics" as kind of public that "maintains at some level, conscious or not, an awareness of its subordinate status" (56). He further suggests that a counterpublic "exchanges and remains distinct from authority and can have a critical relation to power; its extent is in principle indefinite, because it is not based on a precise demography but mediated by print, theater, diffuse networks of talk, commerce, and the like" (56).

that end, Catherine Keyser has suggested that women writers like Powell used literary humor, satire, and “smartness” as performative strategies, adopting the sense of triviality associated with middlebrow culture in order “to expose the anxieties riddling modern hierarchies of class identity, gender norms, and even literary reputation” (7). In creating friction between middlebrow culture’s “smooth presentations of modernity and their own disruptive articulations of disbelief,” Keyser argues that these humorists called “into being a counterpublic that [reimagined] humor as critique rather than capitulation” (7). Here, holding in tension the cultural politics of geographical divides and gender difference, I situate Powell’s regional modernism. Her satire, simultaneously engaging the public sphere and daily life, both exchanges and remains distant from the literary marketplace, public intellectuals, and cultural industry. And yet, because of her caricature as a middlebrow woman writer, Powell contradictorily proves reliant on the very networks of politics, social relations, and culture that she seeks to critique.

In *A Time To Be Born*, one of the plot lines involves the rise and fall of Amanda Keeler, an ambitious novelist and journalist who seduces newspaper publisher Julian Evans. Amanda’s downfall comes when she becomes too complacent with her new life: the success of her debut (and ghost-written) historical romance novel, *Such Is the Legend*, paired with her social-climbing marriage to magnate Julian, has allowed Amanda to become something of a mouthpiece for corporate and political powers. “At thirty Amanda had all the beauty, fame, and wit that money could buy, and she had another advantage over her rivals, that whereas they were sometimes in doubt of their aims, she knew exactly what she wanted from life, which was, in a word everything” (23). But despite the social and material advantages of her two-year marriage to Julian,

Amanda becomes bored with fidelity, although she is unprepared to divorce and thereby forfeit all of her hard-won comforts. Enter Ken Saunders, a hack novelist with whom she wants to restart a long-simmering affair, and Vicky Haven, a childhood friend from Lakeville who moves to New York to escape her Ohio family and begin her career. To the world, and most importantly to Julian, Amanda making Vicky her protégé seems a “normal, if not sentimental” attempt to start-up her friend socially and professionally (58). What Amanda actually intends, however, is to use Vicky as a “springboard to freedom” from her restricted life as a “public figure and public wife” (57). To Amanda, Vicky’s relocation becomes an advantageous opportunity to sneak around with Ken since Vicky would serve as “a perpetual alibi [and] a private cause that Julian could not touch” (57).

This arrangement at the start of the novel foreshadows Amanda’s downfall: on the romantic front, a love triangle develops among the three friends, culminating with Vicky and Ken falling in love and eloping; on the domestic front, which is exacerbated by the initial failure of her tryst with Ken and her subsequent (and ultimately unsuccessful) effort to start a relationship with Hemingway-like Andrew Callingham, Julian decides to divorce Amanda because she is a hazard to his publishing business and political connections; and on the professional front, Amanda’s public reputation suffers, of course, from her impending divorce, but also because her romances have distracted her from the shifting class-based, wartime propaganda themes popular in print media. With this plot line Powell exercises a common theme among the “smart” women satirists: the way in which sexuality simultaneously functions as a source of

women's pleasure and autonomy, but also of their eventual moral collapse or professional undoing.<sup>8</sup>

But there is a second plot line in *A Time To Be Born* that, while alluded to above as a component of Amanda's career troubles, is an important development in and of itself: the rise of the Midwest as a significant political, social, and cultural terrain. For Powell, Ohio functions as a metonym for regional culture crucial both for the way it affects the gender politics of women in the public sphere *and* the way in which regionalist culture begin to inflect (and indeed become profitable for) cosmopolitan social relations. At the same time that *A Time To Be Born* is concerned with Amanda's downfall (because of her cosmopolitan cunning and moral depravity) and Vicky's simultaneous success (because of her independent work ethic and sexual restraint), the novel also plots a cultural turn to the Midwest, the middle class, and the middlebrow in New York publishing and, most importantly, the Evans media conglomerate. This turn starts as a companion critique of the domestic, feminized sphere. To negotiate the criticisms leveled by women's organizations about "the gravity of the feminine mind" and the continued "soaring sails in furs, nail polish, lipsticks, perfumes, wrinkle creams, and other peace time consolations," *Peabody's* magazine solved this editorial issue with a "Home in America" section (174). Their rationale for their "new homespun policy of the magazine" was to balance taste with economy, match fashion with democracy, and substitute regional culture for international style:

*Peabody's* would instruct its readers how to make their little homes into inexpensive castles of great beauty; if it was unpatriotic to praise Capri skies or to photograph Mediterranean resort activities, then *Peabody's*

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<sup>8</sup> See Catherine Keyser's "Introduction" to *Playing Smart: New York Women Writers and Magazine Culture*, 1-19.

would loyally devote themselves to the hidden charms of Route 21, the bouquet of western vintages, the decorative possibilities of gilding horse chestnuts. (174)

In other words, *Peabody's* corners the middle-class market by making the American periphery fashionable: real estate, family homes, and interior design become an affordable and profitable alternative to metropolitan luxury or wartime decadence. And while this editorial change was not isolationist per se, this policy of “building the American morale in time of fear and waiting” was certainly a turn toward a conservative nationalism in which the typical American family took on a particular ideological importance and away from the magazine’s former internationalist luxury propaganda (175).

Julian soon turns his eyes homeward to the rising middle-class market, having noticed that “exploiting American problems for circulation purposes” was a profitable venture (192). About the same time that *Peabody's* profits were rising with their “Home in America” expansion, Julian’s “Little Man” paper began to outperform its “Big Man” counterpart. Contrary to *Peabody's* purely rhetorical editorial changes—catering in practice to the various needs of its large American audience without in theory subscribing to their published positions—Julian has both a financial and ideological investment. Not only does he begin to earmark more money for his *Little American* (for example, paying higher wages to Little Man reporters) and charge its subscribers more (“because there were so many of him”). Julian also sets out on a spiritual quest to “lead the Little Man out of darkness and to pamper him with platitudes, vague fight talk, and somewhat defeatist exhortations to be proud of being a Little Man or a Little Man’s wife or a Little Man’s family” (193). But there is a subtle distinction to be made regarding Evans’ Little Man ideology: while he might have a patronizing pity for the

“underprivileged, underhoused, underdog,” Evans never concedes that the common man’s aptitude would match his “Big Man” status (193). Here, the parallels between Powell’s fictional Julian Evans and the historical Henry Luce should be striking. Although the Big Man and Little Man newspapers divide messily into Luce’s three periodicals—*Fortune*, *Time*, and *Life*—the ideological sentiments transfer nicely. Indeed, it is particularly impressive that Powell might anticipate the apex of Luce’s middlebrow turn, his 1941 *Life* editorial on “The American Century.” This should also remind us of Wallace’s 1942 rebuttal to Luce and his Republican cohort, “Century of the Common Man.”

These historical referents are more than speculative associations on my part. After describing the mass cultural effects of Evans’ Little Man ideology, Powell describes the way in which the perverse class consciousness of the *Little American* translates into political and highbrow intellectual connections for Evans: the President lauded the magazine “for its fair play and foursquare talk,” and many of the “intellectual weeklies began referring to Julian as an intellectual equal because of his pity interviews with the Little People” (194). But these new associations establish a range for the way in which the Little People function in the prevailing cultural discourses: hardworking folks, common men, nontechnical workers, the uneducated masses, middle class consumers, and the bourgeoisie. For his part, Julian’s views are closer to the cultural elitism of the highbrow intellectuals than the progressivism or populism of the New Dealers or Popular Front. To him, the Little People were not “the folks that poured down the mountain in pointed shoes at the stroke of midnight,” but his conception was nevertheless extravagant: he fell in love with the superstition that the masses were

“automatically endowed with a rare and incontrovertible well of wisdom” (194).

However, this wisdom was innate to the Little Man and importantly not a product of education. Of course, this editorial bias had unfortunate consequences, namely the standardization of American culture *and* the deskilling and unculturing of the American population:

Julian did not like at all if it developed that the simple sage had been corrupted by an average education, or if he betrayed a normal interest in reading. The subjects of his research must be one-syllable little men, not articulate literates, as if lying, confusion, bigotry and corruption never came in one syllables, and in book learning alone was there sin and woe. This reverence for ignorance was apparently so deep-seated in the public, as vouched for by *Little American* circulation, that it seems astonishing citizens continued to support colleges and schools. It would have been logical to assume that the serious parents would raise their children to be oracles of ignorance, uncorrupted by the nuances of language, able to couch their primitive impressions in as simple a form as “Ug.” (194)

Put differently, in romanticizing the Little Man, Evans and the *Little American* (and Luce and *Life*) established a framework for the ways in which the masses and the middle class would become associated with the most pernicious effects of American culture: fascism and consumerism. This cultural turn was part of a process which obfuscated regional culture inherent to midwestern locales to create a “culture of the middle.” In this framework, class, taste, and region began to work in the service of a subnationalism that was, more or less, interchangeable with cultural nationalism and its various ideologies.<sup>9</sup>

This middling of regionalism proves to be a significant cleavage between Julian’s interests and Amanda’s career, and marks the swift demise of their marriage. Because his *Little American* newspaper made him more favorable with the progressive-leaning

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<sup>9</sup> See Hegeman, “The Culture of the Middle: Class, Taste, and Region in the 1930s Politics of Art” in *Patterns for America*, 126-157.

President, Evans became a “leading public-opinion molder” in Washington political circles, “rumored to be wanted by the President’s closest chiefs for a post of unparalleled importance” (272, 273). Moreover, with the United States moving increasingly closer to war, “Washington was America, the rest of the country was spoken of as ‘the field,’ as if its acres and population were the testing laboratory for the myriad experiments being discussed in the Capitol” (272-273). A series of unfortunate circumstances thus befell Amanda: Washington became the center of American public life and policy; she did not have the appropriate domestic credentials to become a female patriot because she had been crafting an internationalist persona; and she had missed her opportunity to capitalize on the mass cultural turn because she dismissively focused on the cultural elites and literary highbrows. In short, with cultural nationalism now wed to political nationalism, Amanda is only relevant insofar as she is married to Big Man Julian.

Amanda decides on two courses of action: in the first place, she decides to finally leave her husband so long as there is another powerful romantic interest in queue to help promote her literary career; and in the second place, she decides not only to capitalize on the mass cultural politics popular in this moment, but also to personally steal some of Julian’s attention. Both of these decisions are deeply related. The first course of action having already been described in relation to the gender politics of *A Time To Be Born*, I will begin with Amanda’s turn to regionalism—her publication “I Came From Across Tracks” in *Peabody’s*. In this personal essay, Amanda confesses her humble origins: she was born and raised in Lakeville, Ohio; her father ran a haberdashery; their family lived in an apartment above the store; sometimes she didn’t have enough food to eat. Although her success among *Peabody’s* middlebrow

subscribers skyrocketed with the publication of her essay, among the smart set and the publishing elite her work proves a bit more contentious. Mr. Castor, *Little American* editor, immediately recognizes Amanda's savvy. To critics who might point out the contradictory logic of this new confession, namely that she had before gloated about "her royal blood and being lonely in the big house on the hill," Castor makes a prescient connection between middle-class culture and mass politics: "The public is revolution-minded these days. They are massing against the few, the rich, the titled, the aristocrats. Nothing could have been more politic than building up herself as a woman of the people, at this stage of the game" (307). For him, it is perfectly fine for Amanda to publish this essay "unless of course she *is* a woman of the people" (307). The only way this publication will make sense—especially since the picture accompanying the essay showed its author fashionably wearing silver brocade, emeralds, and a "proud proletarian smile—is for Amanda to have grown up "land-poor only" (308). Apparently, to still maintain literary status, a writer could only be regionalist insofar as they have good taste; it was gauche to be both from the periphery and common folk.

Julian, however, recognizes the *Peabody's* essay as the personal affront it is meant to be. Initially upset that he will be judged for having married a low-class woman, the newspaperman becomes livid when he recognizes that the essay reads like something Callingham would have written. This is a problem for Julian not only because one of modernism's lotharios is now his romantic rival. Callingham, whether he is ghost-writer or editor, now becomes a potential highbrow competitor for Little Man cultural capital. Indeed, Callingham is neither interested in maintaining a relationship with Amanda nor in harming his career: he leaves for Libya soon after "I Came From

Across the Tracks” is published. Thus, the two plot lines of *A Time To Be Born* intersect: the rise and fall of Amanda Keeler correlates with the institutionalization of peripheral (regionalist, middle class, middlebrow) culture. What Powell implicitly points to is the fact that narratives on the feminization of culture and the use value of uneven modernity make the very ideology of the American Century possible.

### **Late Modernism and the Marriage Plot**

To a certain degree, *A Time to Be Born* works as a national romance. On the one hand, the economically and politically lucrative rise of Little Man themes and middlebrow cultural productions, the professional success of Vicky independent of conventional working-girl sexuality, and the novel-concluding marriage of provincial Vicky and cosmopolitan Ken can be read as reconciling diverse subnational and national interests in the historical moment of World War II and the development of American internationalism. On the other hand, however, Powell takes up this national romance, this love story between the Midwest and New York City broadly stated, for its satirical critique. Rather than harnessing the affective force of the love story to champion marriage as a domestic response to world conflict, to justify the ends of thirties regionalism, or to mediate the political, social, economic, and cultural inequalities inherent in the American Century, Powell instead uses romance to critique all of these developments.<sup>10</sup>

Much criticism has come from reviewers failing to distinguish between Powell’s motives. Trilling again becomes representative of the way in which serious critical attention has misread her work or misrepresented her satire. On two separate

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<sup>10</sup> See Emily S. Davis’s “Romance as Political Aesthetic in Ahdaf Soueif’s *The Map of Love*.”

occasions, she levels *A Time To Be Born* as a stereotypical, sentimental disappointment. Both of her critiques originate with what she views as the contrived marriage of Vicky and Ken. In the first example, her 1942 *Nation* review of the novel, she supposes that American literary traditions must be deficient to account for Powell's problems of maintaining satirical form: "Perhaps it is because there is no proper satiric tradition nowadays for Powell to work in; so that she loses heart and dubs in, as a backdrop to satire, the kind of love story—nice, little small town girl wins away the great big tough newspaperman from the glamorous big time beauty—that she would be the first to ridicule" ("Four Recent Novels" 244). Trilling continues this critique of Powell's satirical fiction in her 1949 *Nation* review of *The Locusts Have No King*. Returning to *A Time To Be Born*, she suggests that the failure of satire in all of Powell's books are representative less of an American tradition than a particular female inflection of American satire, namely "a principle of correction" that was no more than "an act of sentimentality" ("Fiction in Review" 612). "In the degree that we were invited to pillory the tycoonness of [the novel]," Trilling argues, "we were also invited to give our affection to a pair of utterly inconsequential young lovers—an unnecessary, indeed an impossible, choice for anyone as intelligent as Miss Powell to force on her readers" (612). Even if Powell contextualizes the marriage of Vicky and Ken with a degree of cynicism in the "her love idyl," as Trilling concedes is the case, it is not enough to redeem the novel nor Powell's feminist literary politics (244). Indeed, Trilling offers a strong punch to Powell's credentials as a smart woman writer who, in an attempt to "prove her 'womanliness' by disproving her seriousness [and] disarm male hostility by asserting a basic frivolity," frittered away her powers (612). For Trilling it seems that if a

woman writer ends her satirical novel with a marriage it necessarily reinscribes a normative gender politics, conforms to the sentimental gestures of romance genres, and negates a writer's literary aptitude and keen social perceptions.

Needless to say, Trilling does not take seriously the point of the marriage scene, not to say its novel-ending significance. The last pages of the text conclude in the bedroom of the recently married couple, Vicky sitting on the bed surrounded by a mound of Sunday papers and Ken pecking at the typewriter by the window. Vicky exclaims, "How strange!" and Ken sarcastically replies that their marriage would not make news, especially since the headline would read "SAUNDERS TAKES HILLBILLY BRIDE TO SHADY HOTEL" (325). Vicky corrects Ken, noting that she is actually looking for information on Amanda, especially since news has broken that Callingham will soon marry his dancer fiancée in Egypt. The remainder of the scene in the honeymoon suite is marked by silence, which to Vicky foreshadows that she will "have to do a lot of talking in their married life to cover up the silences when Ken might be remembering another love" (326). We learn that Ken has quit his job at *Peabody's* to enlist in the army; and we learn that Vicky plans to be an army wife, following him to training camp in the South. But we also learn about the dynamic of the newlyweds' relationship: they are a war couple, each spouse reacting to Amanda's rejection; they speak haltingly and hesitatingly to one another; and when they do converse, they are incapable of talking to each other about the futurity of their relationship. To that end, both seem to doubt the longevity of their marriage. Following his declaration to Vicky that "you're the one for me, darling. There couldn't be any Amanda in my life, now that I know about you. Never, never, again," Powell ends the novel not with a romantic

interlude, as Trilling suggests, but with anxiety: Vicky “was not at all sure whether he was speaking the truth or what he hoped was the truth. For that matter, neither was Ken” (327).

This kind of ambivalent final twist is similar to a number of national romances, especially those that are realist. One example is Henry James’s *The Bostonians*, which concludes with the couple (allegorically North and South) uniting, and a final sentence that inverts a conventional prediction of matrimony’s happy future: “It is to be feared that with the union, so far from brilliant, into which [Northern feminist Verena Tarrant] was about to enter, that these were not the last [tears] she was destined to shed” (464). In addition to its ambivalence about postbellum American culture, this particular national romance is also uneasy about feminism and the general role of women in society. Nevertheless, James makes clear that these movements (Reconstruction and feminism) are somehow useful for national culture more broadly. According to Jennifer Rae Greeson, the function of these kinds of realist national romances is to imagine marriage as “a bridge to a new national future—as a vehicle for limning the conversion of the nation from soi-disant republic into a self-confessed empire” (269).

In this context, the strained relationships among the characters, paired with the narrator’s ambivalence about their allegorical union, call several things into question: including, James’s skepticism about the function of sentimental fiction and the romance plot in relation to national reconciliation, and correspondingly what must be subjugated to make this new “state of the union” work. Very quickly we can say that narratives critical of race relations or gender equality are put in tension with American masculinity and the Southern man’s “muscular force,” with the “reconstructed man” prefiguring

American exceptionalism in his attempt to organize and control his social world (James 463).<sup>11</sup> I must also point out the spatial politics at work in this realist national romance, which of course have direct bearing on subsequent romance plots like *A Time To Be Born*. Taking into consideration America's geographical difference, the national romance joins together the sectional nation and its diverse regional cultures in order to survive the trauma of war (the Civil War and Reconstruction) and cope with new socio-political developments (postbellum nationalism, the rise industrial capitalism, the emergence of American globalism, the abolition of slavery, the strengthened feminist movement, etc.). The ambivalence that realist writers like James exhibit toward the national romance, then, could very likely be a product of revealing new ideological contradictions or problematic social relations at the same time they are imaginatively "contributing to the construction of a cohesive public sphere" (Kaplan 9).

This question of ambivalence about the marriage plot must now be reframed in relation to *A Time To Be Born*, specifically considering the relationship between regional modernism, gender relations, and middlebrow culture. Returning to its function as a roman à clef of Clare Boothe Luce becomes important. This novel satirizes both the women's magazine formula for its feminized content (how to cure a broken heart, how to gird yourself for war, how to achieve high style) and the way in which smart women must conform to problematic gender stereotypes despite their purported independence, power, and wealth. In this context, Powell is satirizing the specific circumstances that necessitate Clare/Amanda be married to Henry/Julian to legitimate and maintain her own cultural capital. In a similar fashion, although they do not marry for increased

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<sup>11</sup> See Ann Brigham's "Touring Memorial Hall: The State of the Union in *The Bostonians*" for an extended reading of the relationship between gender and sub-nationalism.

money or social station, Vicky and Ken do marry for security: their union is less a sentimental belief in marriage than a desire for companionship and the potential for romantic fulfillment.

From the particular contexts of these two examples, *A Time To Be Born* can also be read as opening up to a larger critique of the social constructs of the institution of marriage, as well as the paradox of marriage within modernism. A central premise that Powell forces us to reckon with is that marriage has a complex and contradictory history that does not easily reflect conservative, radical, normative, or progressive cultural affiliations or ideological camps. For example, standing in for Powell, Vicky's childhood friend Ethel reflects that she cannot be optimistic about any marriage, let alone her pal's: "Marriages aren't awfully important nowadays anyway. War makes love and all that sort of thing seem sort of silly doesn't it?" (324). This ambivalence reveals certain attitudes prevalent in twentieth-century society and politics toward marriage conventions and marital norms, but it also enables a critique of the marriage plot in literary modernism. If modernity characteristically reinforces a social imperative to marry, then modernism should at the very least disrupt cultural assumptions, dogmatic complacencies, or bourgeois conventions about marriage.<sup>12</sup> And yet, as many critics have pointed out, especially on the issue of marriage, modernism seems ambivalent (if not reactionary) to radical cultural change, especially as it relates to marriage.<sup>13</sup> Moreover, if we take seriously Marianne DeKoven's argument that modernism arose in reaction to the emergence of feminism and the figure of the New Woman, then we can

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<sup>12</sup> See Rita Felski's *The Gender of Modernity*, 14; and Michael Levenson's *A Genealogy of Modernism*, 59.

<sup>13</sup> See Marianne DeKoven's "Modernism and Gender," 175; and Davida Pines's *The Marriage Paradox: Modernist Novels and the Cultural Imperative to Marry*, 1-18.

read this ambivalence to marriage as a “contradictory attitude” toward “empowered femininity” (175). On the one hand, then, this ambivalence might critique the institution of marriage while simultaneously reinforcing the marital norm. As Davida Pines points out, historiography suggests that literary modernism broadly reaffirms marriage conventions even as particular novels appear to subvert it (3). On the other hand, modern texts that fail to directly critique marital norms might actually actively critique the institution of marriage as part of a larger ideological critique: say, of capitalism, class relations, modernity, globalization, etc.

A final comparison of Clare Boothe Luce and Dawn Powell will be instructive to flesh out the nuances of this paradox of marriage in relation to the politics of late modernism. There are several reasons for this move on my part: the women’s ideological disagreement over the postwar air world; their difference of opinions about the function of the middle class and mass culture in the political, social, and cultural developments of the American Century; their different responses to feminism and identity politics; and, of course, the fictionalization of Luce as Amanda Keeler. Constructively, both women write literary texts that incorporate a marriage plot as central to their critiques of modern American women and the political context of their daily lives: Luce’s play *The Women* (1936) and Powell’s already-mentioned novel, *A Time To Be Born*. Broadly stated, *The Women* is a satirical commentary on wealthy Manhattan socialites and the means through which these women must maintain their power: including, ruthless gossip, invasive beauty regimens, conspicuous consumerism, and manipulative sexuality. In this Depression-era marriage plot, which also functions as a comedy of manners, Mrs. Mary Haines decides to travel to Reno to

divorce her husband, Stephen, after the news of his affair with shop-girl Crystal is circulated in the gossip columns. While in Reno, waiting for her divorce to be granted, Mary learns that her husband has married his mistress, foiling her plans for reconciliation. However, two years later and still pining for Stephen, Mary learns that Crystal has been unfaithful and, with the help of her catty friends, schemes to expose this infidelity. At the close of the play, we learn that the *old* Mrs. Haines wins: in the Powder Room at the Casino Roof, a message is delivered to the quarrelling women: “There’s a gentleman called Mr. Haines. He says he’s been waiting a long time for his wife” (88). Mary—the first wife, the mother of his children, and the faithful woman who fights for him—is Stephen’s choice.

Like Powell’s novel, *The Women* has contradictory readings regarding its feminist politics: some critics have condemned the play as negatively representing women as exclusively vapid and shallow, thereby marginalizing them within literary discourse; and other critics have championed the play as a feminist text that challenges the social construction and status of women in American culture. However, I am less interested in the political stakes of these interpretations than I am more generally interested in the way in which Luce’s play speaks to the reification (and potential commodification) of marriage and motherhood. I think that it is productive to read *The Women* in relation to what Stanley Cavell describes as “a comedy of remarriage,” a film genre specifically referring to a selection of 1930s American comedies made to evade the restrictions of sexuality and morality mandated by the Hays Code. There are two caveats that I must offer about this reading strategy. In the first place, the genre is different and thus the mass cultural effect of the play will have subtle differences compared to a filmic comedy

of remarriage. But because this play is adapted to film in 1939, I think these loose literary associations are more than plausible. In the second place, Cavell's theorization of the comedy of remarriage requires the active efforts of both parties to reunite. In the case of *The Women*, Stephen's role in the Haines remarriage is absent—and indeed his actions are irrelevant to the all-women play. In this case, we can read *The Women* as satirizing, if not the comedy of remarriage genre, the way in which it represents “the fate of the marriage bond [as epitomizing] the fate of the democratic social bond” (193). Put another way, in her representation of thirties gender politics and related ideologies of marriage, we can read Luce as pessimistically challenging the correlation between American cultural progress (feminism, social reform movements, the expansion of the middle class, etc.) and American national birthrights (freedom, equality, the pursuit of happiness, etc.) for women.

Broadly stated, Cavell argues that the development of the comedy of remarriage genre coincides with, indeed is dialectically related to, the “creation of a new woman” and a new “phase in the history of the consciousness of women” (16). He argues that this genre, despite its slapstick comedy or sexual innuendo, is an ideological attempt to create marriage based on mutual love:

Our films may be understood as parables of a phase of the development of consciousness at which the struggle for love is for the reciprocation or equality of consciousness between a woman and a man, a study of the conditions under which this fight for recognition (as Hegel put it) or demand for acknowledgement (as I have put it) is a struggle for mutual freedom, especially of the views each holds of the other. This gives the films of our genre a Utopian cast. They harbor a vision which they know cannot fully be domesticated, inhabited, in the world we know. . . . Showing us our fantasies, they express the inner agenda of a nation that conceives Utopian longings and commitments itself. (17-18)

In this context, in this moment of economic depression and New Deal modernism, romance replaces religious or economic necessity as the exemplar of domestic partnership and marital bliss. But we could also say that this cultural turn toward romance exemplified in the comedy of remarriage also reflects a shift toward patriotic virtue and an attempt to normalize, depending on one's perspective, the difference or deviance inherent to modernity.<sup>14</sup> As Antonio Gramsci pointed out, "the new capitalism wants monogamy" (304). This should remind us of two key points: that the ideological developments of Americanism and Fordism are coextensive with the developments of feminist political movements and gendered divisions of labor; and that whatever radical possibility the comedy of remarriage genre might subversively articulate in spite of cultural censorship very likely might fail due to conservative misprision or mass cultural ignorance.

This point circles us back to the start of the section and the proposal that Powell's novel is a national romance. To say that comedies of remarriage function as political allegories for their particular historical moment means that we can draw some significant conclusions about their interventions into narratives of thirties American modernity: the demands of daily life having direct bearing on both domestic and foreign policy; the rise of the middle class and the fear of mass culture prompting both conciliatory pandering and ideological manipulation from politicians, businessmen, and the developing culture industry; and the stalling possibility of political, social, or cultural movements making history and enacting progressive change. It is in this moment that I read Powell as most damning: whereas Luce and *The Women* are squarely situated in

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<sup>14</sup> See Jani Scanduri's "Reno: The Divorce Factory" in *Down in the Dumps: Place, Modernity, American Depression*, 32-67.

Cavell's thirties periodization, Powell and *A Time To Be Born* marks the foreclosure of the genre of remarriage's possibilities. If we read Luce's play as critiquing middle-class divorce culture and the general silliness of women, and we quite generously grant that she is pointing toward a national fidelity outside of consumer capitalism, unchecked progress, or bad identity politics, we can perhaps catch a glimpse of thirties utopia. Through Powell's forties regional modernism, we can see both the limitations of Luce's play and the failure of the remarriage genre: in both cases, its subjects of critique (the middle class, sexuality, gender, the periphery) and its cultural idealism become institutionalized. Thus, *A Time To Be Born* represents the marriage plot of late modernism: Powell's ambivalence for Vicky and Ken's marriage is not so much a critique of the institution of marriage as it is a question of the place of the middle class in the American Century.

CHAPTER 5  
BESIDES RAISING SIX CHILDREN BY THREE MARRIAGES: KAY BOYLE AND THE  
POLITICS OF LATE MODERNISM

Kay Boyle sits next to [Marcel Duchamp], looking now more Latin than Irish: one might take her for an admired diva who has passed in a moment from a fit of scorn to an outburst of hilarity. Kay is the baby of the group, having been born in 1903. When she was a girl in Cincinnati, she met a French engineer who married her and took her to Paris in 1922. She was then a rather elfin creature, and one looks back with amazement at the work she has accomplished. Besides raising six children by three marriages, she has written twenty volumes of fiction and three volumes of poetry.

Malcolm Cowley, "The Last of the Lost Generation" (1963)

In his *Esquire* essay, "The Last of the Lost Generation" (1963), Malcolm Cowley situates Kay Boyle as peripheral to modernism. Boyle's prolific career as a modernist writer is first contextualized in terms of her beauty, her provincial origins, and her domestic life. Despite her forty-year career as a modernist writer—having worked for little magazines, signed the "Revolution of the Word" manifesto, won two Guggenheim Fellowships and two O. Henry awards, and accumulated innumerable friends in New York and Paris—Boyle is instead marginalized as a *woman* modernist. More specifically, she is characterized as peripheral to modernism and formally and politically conservative because literary critics like Cowley read work that in theory and practice engage questions of gender, sexuality, domesticity, kinship, romance, etc., as marginal to the larger aesthetic concerns of modernism. Because "she raised six children by three marriages," her provocative love life and her motherhood overshadow her modernist theory, aesthetics, and practice (77). And yet, Boyle is significant for a historical narrative of modernism especially for the cultural estrangement that female modernists experience in the postwar moment. Having written about romantic relationships and unconventional family politics, and having criticized American war efforts, Boyle found herself both marginalized in literary circles and investigated in the

House of Un-American Activities Committee. Boyle's audacity was that she not only countered social, political, and cultural norms by writing about outré subjects, she also politicized them.

Boyle becomes important because she shows how the family became a crucial concept in the ideology of the American Century. Not only does the concept of "the family" come to represent an idealized version of America's exceptionalist democratic culture, it also represents an intimate and domestic space in which global modernity has expressed itself most fully. In the moment of modernism's formalization and institutionalization, Boyle's explicit representation of the family as a radical space is a challenge to the reification of the family within late modernism. By contrast, her leftist children's books—which talk about American labor and class relations, allegorize American postcolonial investments in the Middle East, and teach American children about war crimes and genocide—paired with her 1960s feminist, anti-racist, and labor activism connect modernist aesthetics and political praxis. Thus, Boyle's work resists late modernism and its attendant Americanization: middlebrow culture, domestic fiction, and children's literature become strategic examples of a relativist Americanism, where domestic politics and foreign policy intersect.

In this chapter, I am specifically interested in how Boyle's thinking turns to a politics of critical regionalism, tracing a line that connects a legacy of American leftist politics, a comparative project of modernist culture, and a critique of postwar reconstruction and globalization. I will begin by reading the development of a late modernist critical regionalism in her 1944 long poem, *American Citizen: Naturalized in Leadville, Colorado*. In this poem, Boyle constructs a comparative geographical

relationship between Colorado Army training camps and European theaters of war that puts in tension not only the politics of cultural nationalism and the increasing globalization of American culture but also the gendered politics of home front and battlefield. From this initial consideration of World War II as necessarily regional and domestic, Boyle continues this move toward critical regionalism with a study of family in late modernism. In her children's literature, beginning with *The Youngest Camel* (1939), and continuing with *The Youngest Camel: Reconsidered and Rewritten* (1959), and *Pinky in Persia* (1968), Boyle not only writes a materialist history that relates developments in global social relations with family life; she also importantly relates global modes of production to the division of labor on the domestic front. This particular generic turn to the family proves significant as she offers two distinct, but of course politically-aligned, critiques of the history of global capitalism in the American Century.

### **Domestic Politics: American Citizenship and the American Century**

Boyle began *American Citizen: Naturalized in Leadville, Colorado* in April 1943, when her third husband, Austrian Joseph Franckenstein became an American citizen. Franckenstein's naturalization was part of a larger complicated narrative, marked by both personal and political concerns. In August 1942, Franckenstein had been drafted into the United States Army as a foreign national with the assigned job of training American soldiers for winter warfare. In February 1943, after receiving her divorce from Laurence Vail, Boyle and Franckenstein married. What should have been the start of their marital bliss actually marked the beginning of the political investigations of the couple. The two-month delay for approval of Franckenstein's citizenship was the start of the FBI's long-term investigation of Boyle, in which she was falsely accused of having an affair with protofascist Ezra Pound. It also marked the beginning of federal

investigations of Franckenstein, which would continue until he died of cancer in 1963. To start his long-term interrogations, federal agents asked Franckenstein to read a German document aloud to test his competency in German; he became increasingly angry when in the middle of his spontaneous reading he discovered that he was reading an oath of allegiance to Hitler, not to mention following his confrontation he had to justify that his language skills were a product of being an Austrian native and his PhD credentials, and not an insidious devotion to Nazism (Mellen 27).

This context provides a crucial framework for reading the poem. There are two quite obvious ways to read *American Citizen*. In the first place, it is Boyle's vindication of her husband. As the back cover of the Simon and Schuster published poem makes clear, Franckenstein not only had been "fighting fascism as a member of our armed forces for the past two years. Before that, he fought fascism as a private citizen of Austria and, in Europe, suffered internment in a concentration camp for his anti-fascist convictions." Following this very personal defense, in which her husband represents not only a benevolent immigrant but also an ideal American, *American Citizen* positions Franckenstein as symbolic of all American soldiers fighting in World War II. More specifically, Boyle makes clear that the significance of his citizenship like his military service is rooted in both domestic politics and home life *and* foreign policy and nationalist ideology. The poem's publishing précis further explains that "he is seen, not simply as a beloved man who is away on a dangerous mission of great importance; he is seen as a symbol of what all good men must be in times like these, of what they mean to the world, of what they mean to their wives." In the second place, then, it

seems that marital love and love of country work together to produce a new meaning of American citizenship and national sacrifice.

There is a third context that influences the way in which *American Citizen* must be read: the poem's articulation of a particular spatial culture in the historical moment of world war. To sum up the précis, the publishers suggest the importance of geography to the poem: "It is a tragic poem, but undespairing; and in it are the love of country itself, and the hard, stern aspects of the State of Colorado. Its diction is as American as its setting, and its rhythms are the rhythms of dances." The setting of Colorado is a specific referent to Franckenstein's stationing at Camp Hale in the Eagle Park Valley with Leadville being one of the nearby towns. Boyle's juxtaposition of the militarized zones in the Colorado wilderness and the domestic spaces of the neighboring camp towns articulate tensions important to the American World War II effort, including for example: domestic politics and foreign policy; home front and battle front; women's sacrifice and men's bravery; regional encampments and world war; American citizenship and internationalism. Especially in the last two examples, Boyle points toward a crucial development: the productive relationship between the regional, the national, and the global; or put differently, the comparative relationship between regionalism, nationalism, and globalization. To that end, the biographical context of the Boyle-Franckenstein relationship becomes the instigating circumstance through which Boyle can comment on larger world politics. In this framework of regional modernism, we can read simultaneously the dialectical relationships between the personal and the political, the general and the particular, and the local and the global. Thus, *American*

*Citizen* consists of a metonymic relationship between a married couple, regional terrains, American citizenship, and wartime internationalism.

*American Citizen* is divided into five parts, which shift between male and female perspectives of war. The first section, "Colorado 1943," describes the difficulty of military life for Franckenstein, and the "hard state" of Colorado in which "no quarter is given" describes the physical roughness of the mountain training, the emotional hardship of being separated from family, and the psychological anxiety of being an Austrian who must doubly prove his American military allegiance and citizenship because of his foreign birth (5). Moreover, Boyle describes Franckenstein's military service at Camp Hale, training American soldiers in mountain climbing, Alpine skiing, and cold-weather survival, in relation to his war service already completed both as an anti-fascist activist and war prisoner. Franckenstein, whose austerity and solemnity is heightened by the Colorado winter, works against the memory of Nazi occupation at the same time as he labors toward American citizenship. In the third section, "The Waltz Tune in It," Boyle expands this problem of citizenship, marking specifically the tensions of nationalism in the context of global war. She imagines a soliloquy that Franckenstein will deliver as he hikes from camp to town. He will remember his conscription, internment, escape, and voluntary military service, not as an Austrian or an American, but as "one of an army of lost men who follow a point of the compass in common" (9). And just as he is a kind of global citizen, refused nationality by wartime annexation or citizenship by bureaucracy, Colorado becomes for him a microcosm of the world. "This is not Colorado, this is not the West, this not January even," Franckenstein will say. "I have left not an army camp tonight, but my own soil. Let Pando be Austria then, and I

still Austrian. Here the mountains stand similarly high, but they are rugged” (9).

Fighting in the American army, and later as an American citizen, is a way to fight the Nazis and to redeem his personal history: “I leave them, monuments erected to my country, not leaving Redcliff to slog on to Minturn, but crossing from Austria by the Brenner, taking the high frontier” (9).

In the intervening sections on women’s perspectives of war, Boyle invites her friend, the novelist Carson McCullers, to dance the “mazurka of women” in wartime: waiting for leave visitation, waiting for letters, and waiting for their soldiers to return (6). McCullers becomes an interesting character in *American Citizen*, especially because the published poem is dedicated to her: “Her husband, like mine, is serving overseas” (4). This dedication is curious for two reasons: not only did her husband not serve overseas, but Carson had been divorced from Reeves McCullers for three years by the book’s publication. Joan Mellen hazards that Boyle’s career was marked by an attempt “to draw others into her mythology,” so this might be easily explained as an attempt to draw in “her closest friend, who was something of a legend herself” (275). According to Mellen, involving McCullers in this mythology is an attempt to demonstrate the ways in which “for the women left behind, life demanded bravery” (275). In the fourth section, “They Are Overseas,” to Carson she writes: “The days are long this year. Our dreams are interchangeable, your dreams with mine and mine with yours, mingling as gracefully as do all women’s dreams in war” (11).

The question becomes, what are the dreams that all women, but especially Boyle and McCullers, share during wartime? Given both women’s involvement in the modernist movement, as well as the fact that their respective forties regionalist fiction

has anti-fascist themes, the answer should point towards the place of the woman writer in the war effort. Therefore, in addition to proving herself a worthy partner to Franckenstein, Boyle must also prove herself a worthy citizen. And by extension *American Citizen* becomes a statement on women's wartime production, one that works toward a theorization of women's anti-fascist regional modernism.

In the concluding section of *American Citizen*, "The Interruption," Boyle establishes a comparison between American soldiers and their cosmopolitan compatriots. She begins by wondering if "men who bear love for their own soil" have a particular look, and continues by comparing Franckenstein to a list of anti-fascists that includes Édouard Herriot, Giacomo Matteoti, Léon Blum, Henry Wallace, and Juan Negrín (13). In terms of the poem's trope of dance, Boyle concludes that these men, regardless of individual background (nationality, age, profession) or dancing ability (form, style, or training), have one unifying characteristic: they "are born certain of the rhythm and steps, born certain of the tune, knowing exactly if the notes are false or true" (14). Meaning, they are men of action who continue their fight regardless of imprisonment, occupation, or exile.

Although she does not diminish women's conventional wartime labor, at the end of *American Citizen* Boyle wants her work to be more comparable to the fearless men she honors. She decides that the wait and worry, the housekeeping or the fortune telling, is not appropriate for either herself or McCullers. Instead, they must actively participate in the war effort by writing:

In days like these when peoples in migration stage the  
allegory of racial flight,

We have become articulate. When generations play the  
individual's tragedy

And triumph out, then we are marvelously and faithfully  
portrayed. Shall we

Despair that men we love move from the wings and take  
their part in history?

Let us say only  
That their names are there. (15)

Her solidarity with the soldiers, and indeed her wartime labor, demanded that she remind Americans on the home front of their connection to the war and their relationship to the war effort. Her task, as the closing stanza suggests, is to link the struggle for freedom fought by Franckenstein and his anti-fascist compatriots to the American public. To a degree, Boyle determined her work must be Allied propaganda.

To that end, while Boyle's career is marked by her biographical writing style, and indeed her politicization of domestic subjects, her writing shifts considerably with her 1941 American repatriation. Thomas Austenfeld describes this development in terms of what he calls the "deep expatriatism" of American women writers like Boyle, Katherine Anne Porter, Jean Stafford, and Louise Hellman (but which also could be expanded to include Gertrude Stein): an eighteen-year stay in Europe confirmed Boyle's "native consciousness of individuality, an American predilection" and "brought with it a fresh awareness of the real-life implications of national identity" (58-59). According to Austenfeld, this "deep expatriatism" sharpened her style to reflect a "painful knowledge about the political limitations placed on emotional fulfillment in wartime Europe" (59). For him, the effects of this development include a shift in both form and content: "from domestic to public life, from family to politics, from perceived conflict with her mother-in-law to war with Germany" (45). This periodization is a compelling argument for Boyle's wartime modernism, but with certain accommodations. In the first place, for her pre-

1941 writing, we should be wary of generalizations that suggest domestic life, family narratives, or other typically feminine issues are necessarily not political. Although the majority of her fiction written during her close to twenty-year life in Europe fictionalizes aspects of her own life, to say that her Lost Generation *kunstlerromans* like *Process* (1925) and *Year Before Last* (1932) or novels about domestic disputes and cosmopolitan kinship like *Plagued by the Nightingale* (1931) are not conventionally political loses sight of Boyle's sharp gender analysis or the always present negotiation between domestic space and national identity.

In the second place, in her post-1941 writing, we should read Boyle's politicization as an expansion, and not a rejection, of her earlier work. As *American Citizen* demonstrates, Boyle makes domestic life and the family political subjects through which she explore larger questions of national identity, national allegiance, government policy, or combat ethics. Moreover, I would argue that Boyle in fact re-politicizes regionalism (and all its attendant themes and subjects) in the moment it is being foreclosed by the historical developments of political and economic globalization and aesthetic late modernism. Describing a poet that she had known in Paris, Boyle remarked in 1942: "I am convinced that the only thing wrong with him...is that he is not a realist. He is mumbling and bungling about in a vague state somewhere and to a person of action it is most unsatisfactory. He is—perhaps completely—a poet, and had not place in this world of taking decisions and doing acts" (qtd. in Spanier 152). This literary development therefore was strategic. To paraphrase Sandra Whipple Spanier, Boyle's turn to realism generally, and regional modernism specifically, was what she thought necessary to communicate her urgent wartime message (152).

These are crucial distinctions. My insistence that the family, the home, or the domestic are political spaces anticipates their reification in the postwar American Century. Indeed, reading the family in relation to the region, the nation-state, and the globe creates a comparative context refusing privilege to one political space and its respective ideologies over another. And yet, while Boyle might refuse American political, social, and cultural hegemony, her project nevertheless conspires to a certain degree with the development of global Americanism.

For example, for the 1942 publication of *Primer for Combat*, Boyle replaces the back matter with a patriotic statement about war bonds: “it is now a matter of the survival of ourselves as individuals, and of the survival of that freedom, honor, and human dignity which can be lost if we refuse to recognize our country’s needs” (Mellen 270). What initially reads as nationalist propaganda—war bonds address American wartime needs—the back matter takes on a different color when read with the novel. The primary plot of *Primer for Combat* consists of an American woman’s effort to free her Austrian lover from his military internment and to secure papers and passage so he might immigrate to America with her. But the novel, an “armistice diary” which begins on the third day of the armistice between France and Germany, is also centrally invested in narrating the slow imposition of fascism, as well as the quicker effects of rationing and deprivation, on daily life. Regarding the development of Boyle’s regional modernism in this moment of late modernism, two themes become important: the role of the periphery in relation to the political, social, and cultural developments of fascism; and the role of the women in relation to fascism’s effects on daily life.

Boyle counters a particular narrative that reads the countryside as a space conducive to fascism, specifically through its attachment rhetoric of family, blood, and soil and practices of cultural nationalism and isolationism. Gauging the town of Pontcharra's response to the armistice, her American protagonist Phyl reflects:

The keynote is "reconstruction" toward a newer and more beautiful day, but the tone of the people's talk is something quite different, for they know it can never be the same. It is difficult to say whether any lasting judgments can be based on the reactions of this small and frontier community, but I am here and I see no chance of going further for the moment, so all this must serve as a substratum for what is to come. (22)

More important than the town's participation in these political and social debates is Pontcharra's collective refusal to subscribe to the popular rhetoric of immediate demobilization, militarized zoning, and the institutionalization of the provisional government. Indeed, this oppositional stance is despite the official propaganda being offered by the Vichy regime. Instead of reading the newspapers, all of which conservatively support the provisional government, the majority of Pontcharra listens to the Free French radio addresses. According to Phyl, the effect of this alternative propagandizing, "just one week after the country's collapse, this part of the population at least is outraged by the treachery of a specific coalition, the names of which form it having become as familiar as one's own" (22). Although this is an exaggerated account of the town's political alignments, Phyl's anecdote nevertheless provides an important lesson: the cultural tensions produced in this center/periphery dynamic can function as an oppositional politics. Pontcharra becomes not only a literal site of resistance to Nazi military advances in the Alps. The rural commune also functions as a different cultural space than rebel center Paris or provisional center Vichy. As a site of uneven development that negotiates the cultural politics and material realities of Paris and

Vichy, Pontcharra also mediates their narratives of theory and practice: the region functions as a space to work through the contradictory totalities of world war and national autonomy, ultimately remapping a third space for modernity different from twentieth-century globalization or nationalism.

Toward the end of *Primer for Combat*, Boyle reveals that the success of this oppositional politics is a result of women's wartime work. This revelation is revealed in a conversation between Phyl and Paul, a French soldier who had escaped his prison camp and was aided primarily by women he encountered on his travels away from the German zones. Thinking about French women, Paul decides that women see "the eternal boundaries of war and peace and right and wrong in a queer, imperishable way" (190). They sustain the French army and the liberation movement. Not only do they provide for the material needs of daily life, both for noncombatants and soldiers alike, women also provide different perspectives that challenge wartime ideologies. According to Paul, the women he met on his escape gave him food and shelter, and they provided him with a "peculiar, uneven piece of truth that can be maneuvered into the authentic picture if you have the patience to try it one way and then another until you find the way it's meant to go" (190). This picture is in fact a historical narrative of women's production offered by a woman in whose house he was billeted two weeks before he marched to the front. To Paul she remarked that "women had their part in everything" in France: some women had helped to run their husbands' businesses, and others had been "good lawyers and doctors and artists and musicians" (190). However, the only thing that women were legally prohibited from having their part in was the French government—"and look at the French government!" (190).

### ***The Youngest Camel: Late Modernism and the American Family***

Given this account of Boyle's modernist theory and practice—and specifically how she responds to deeply political questions about citizenship, gender, and labor—we can make three generalizations about her work:

- Boyle writes “domestically” while being an expatriate and critiques domesticated nationalisms after repatriating.
- She maintains a belief in democracy in theory and practice. Boyle holds onto the idea that America is the expression of its people, a notion that directly challenges an ideological tenet of the American Century, in which the exceptionalist United States defines American citizenship.
- Her cultural turn to regional modernism corresponds to developments in which the nation-state's needs no longer correlate with those of its citizens. This incongruence is at least one aspect of the politics involved in the late modernist tensions between center and periphery.

Following the Second World War, these generalizations take on a new political significance because of postwar American policies: on the one hand, foreign policies for European reconstruction like the Marshall Plan; and on the other hand, domestic policies centering on anti-communist investigations like McCarthyism and Cold War politics. These policies have personal effects for Boyle as well. As a *New Yorker* foreign correspondent, a large component of her assignment was to report on postwar daily life in Occupied Germany. Following his decorated military service while deployed in Europe, Franckenstein also found work specifically related to European recovery and reconstruction. Immediately following the war's end, he took a job as a civilian employee of the Army, working on projects dealing with “the reconstruction of Democratic Germany,” specifically coordinating a training program in censorship operations (Mellen 301, 303). In this capacity, he also worked for the military government of Hesse in Wiesbaden, “reporting on the progress that the Germans were

making toward democratization” and reorganized the Marburg newspaper on an American model with news and editorials separated to ensure that Nazis could not dominate the presses and return to positions of authority (Mellen 309). But despite their respective work, and in spite of their mutual democratic beliefs in thought and action, both Boyle and Franckenstein were again subjected to more political scrutiny and investigations by conservative American politicians. The couple was investigated by Senator Joseph McCarthy’s House Un-American Activities Committee because Boyle had undersigned political causes ranging from American pro-labor movements to the German democratic trade union movement, in addition to critiquing U.S. policies on civil rights and Cold War containment strategies; and because Franckenstein as a German-speaking intellectual was suspected of pro-Soviet sentiments.

Following the couple’s respective investigations and her rejection by (and isolation from) her modernist cohort, Boyle made a conscious decision to become expressly political. Following the completion of her Loyalty Hearing in 1952, Boyle remarked: “For the first time in my life I feel like joining something. I feel I must have something to protect me so that this kind of thing cannot happen again. For the first time in my life I feel that being an American is not enough” (qtd. in Mellen 358).

Because she was effectively blacklisted from the majority of national magazines and New York publishing houses, she followed through with this promise by breaking with her conventional habits of politicking exclusively through her biographical fiction. Two of these developments were synchronous: in 1963, she started a position as a member of the creative faculty at San Francisco State University; and in the early 1960s she became a political activist for anti-racist, anti-war, feminist, and labor movements. The

third development—the writing of children’s books—is a mediation of her writing and activists personas. Indeed, Boyle’s turn to children’s literature is a direct response to the personal and political effects of Cold War policies in her daily life. Having written her first children’s book in 1939 at the peak of her modernist celebrity, following her federal investigations she returns to children’s literature—and indeed to her first children’s book, *The Youngest Camel*—with revisionary political perspectives. Taken together, we can say her personal and political development is toward a radical pedagogy, what Julia Mickenberg has described as a juvenile “red network” that points toward “the possibility of reshaping American society and institutions to embody the nation’s democratic practice” and that shows “individuals and communities actively working injustice and toward enlightenment” (*Learning* 17). In this moment of late modernism, Boyle underlines her commitment to the American values of democracy and free expression while remaining critical of their unjust applications.

In *The Youngest Camel* series, we can see Boyle’s effort to continue writing in a leftist intellectual tradition: she tells the story of a mother-and-son pair of working camels that must overcome several ordeals to both receive a reward for their labor and achieve consciousness and enlightenment. In this series, the 1939 text is playfully modernist, quipping about the religion as a kind of “opiate of the masses,” bemoaning the need for camel’s insurance, and arguing for individual agency. In the 1959 edition, *The Youngest Camel* is “reconsidered and rewritten,” instead offering an earnest pedagogy for negotiating authority, autonomy, and family responsibility in adolescent development. With this series, we can see a shift towards a cultural politics of critical regionalism, starting from the premise that modernity has its roots in older, dormant

cultures and universal civilization, all the while suggesting that this project begins at a local level. Indeed, in the context of Boyle's biography—her brood of six children, her fictional critiques of the Marshall Plan, and her interrogation by the House Un-American Activities Committee—we can read the political unconscious of the later text as implicitly commenting on the effects of the Cold War and McCarthyism. While the youngest camel's ordeals connect education, family, nationalism, and universal values, it is only through the labor and value associated with the first two that democratic culture can persist.

The critical history of *The Youngest Camel* series is interesting for several reasons, the most obvious being children's books' financial expediency. With the rise of juvenile fiction as a separate and significant field in the American publishing industry, Boyle published her first children's book both for the money and the cultural capital that this new genre offered. In the 1930s, she became one of several modernists who attempted to capitalize on the expanding children's book market *and* on the way in which this genre might introduce authors to a middlebrow audience not familiar with their work, thereby increasing the sales of their modernist writing. By the 1950s, when Boyle revised *The Youngest Camel*, there was a different cultural context for children's books. As Mickenberg has importantly noted, at the onset of McCarthyism children's literature became a key outlet for leftist writers. Because children's literature allowed these writers to maintain "the democratic spirit of the 1930s through the Cold War," the genre "became a kind of bridge between the Old Left and the New Left generations" (*Learning* 5). For Boyle, the genre not only allowed her to remain in the public eye and craft her new political persona. Children's literature also provided her with a beginning

opportunity to critique American politics and to continue her conversation about the interrelatedness of citizenship, domesticity, and foreign policy. This is the beginning of her radical pedagogy: using children's book to teach children to question the authority of those in power.

The difference between the two *Youngest Camel* books is largely an issue of tone. For both books, the primary theme centers on the love between an aging mother camel and her youngest son, with the plot lines including: the tensions between a single mother who works hard to support her creative son who has never worked in his life; the lessons that the supportive mother tries to give her son as he moves toward adulthood and working life; and the youngest camel's navigation of the "ordeal of loneliness," a ritual in which camels are abandoned in the desert and can only return home through successful completion of a series of events. In both books, the youngest camel, overcome with despair and self-pity, is saved by Mohammed's son, who teaches him an invaluable lesson about hope, an acronym for "Help, O, Power eternal!" (*Youngest Camel* 36). This provides an instructive example of the ways the texts diverge. In the 1939 text, Mohammed's son is playful and irreverent. After giving the youngest camel lessons about independence and self-sufficiency, as well as physical directions so that he might reconnect with his mother's caravan, Mohammed's son asks for the camel's help in returning to the godhead. He needs the camel to chant: "Power eternal reign near our dreams," or "P-E-R-N-O-D!" for short (*Youngest Camel* 38-39). By contrast, in the 1959 version Mohammed's son, disappointed by the youngest camel's solipsistic concern about "the story about what he is" and not reuniting with his mother, vanishes without needing the youngest camel's help (*Reconsidered* 44).

This change in tone between the two editions also correlates to the subtle differences in their respective conclusions. In both editions, the youngest camel chooses a necklace of magic beads over a delicious bag of ashes as his final test in the ordeal of loneliness. Although the conclusions are the same, the rationale and the effects of this decision are quite different. In the 1939 text, the youngest camel chooses the necklace despite the fact that the old leader of the white caravan of camels chastises him that “everyone’s *always* chosen the bag of ashes because it was the politest and nicest thing to do” (*Youngest* 96). He does this for three reasons: the magic beads are an invaluable treasure; the red opal will transport him directly to his mother; and the necklace will transform “all the lies he had ever told her to truth” (*Youngest* 96).

In the 1959 text, the youngest camel chooses the necklace, but rationalizes away the magic associated with it. Part of his ordeal turns on his “coming to consciousness” as an artist. In this version, the final test is not that he chooses the magic beads so that he might return to his mother or gift her the necklace, although these are important consequences of his decision. The lesson of his final test is realizing that he invented the necklace and its magical significance during his youthful extravagance and that as an adult he must want “things exactly as they were” (*Reconsidered* 93). And he successfully completes his ordeal of loneliness when he realizes he must write his poetry and songs accordingly: “The night is not a dark blue cloak” and “the stars are certainly not grains of sand. They are stars!” (*Reconsidered* 93-94). This turn to a kind of literalism makes the youngest camel understand what is most important: not a lush green vale to live in or eternal youth as he proclaimed at the start of *The Youngest Camel*, but being content with his mother in their quotidian lives. Put differently, in this

moment of late modernism, *The Youngest Camel* puts in tension magic (religion, fantasy, modernism) and daily life (the domestic, material needs, social realism) without privileging one concept or division over another. Instead, the writer-figure—in this case, the youngest camel—must negotiate this new cultural framework.

Of course, the shift in tone from playfulness to earnestness represent more than Boyle's changing personal and political mood. More to the point, the shift in tone, paired with subtle changes in the plot's conclusion, represents more than Boyle's response to domestic and family life. Without venturing too close to a biographical analysis of this children's book, the conventional reading of both versions turns on a fictionalization of Boyle's domestic life. According to Mellen, Boyle wrote *The Youngest Camel* to narrate her frustration with second husband Laurence Vail's "fecklessness, his having never worked a day in his life, his leaving her with all the burdens" (223). In addition to critiquing her husband, Boyle supposedly also wrote the book to her daughters as a plea for their "understanding and tolerance" of all the work that she must do to support the family, hoping that they might "forgive her for the scanty attention she gave to them" in comparison (223). While this personal family context certainly informs the narrative of *The Youngest Camel*, there is also a larger social context that we must historicize, especially in the "reconsidered and rewritten" second edition.

In 1956, Boyle began to plan her follow-up to the 1939 *Youngest Camel*. At the start of this project, she was not interested in revising the original children's book, but rather writing a sequel that told the story of the youngest camel and his mother moving to Pisa, Italy. According to Boyle, her narrative was motivated by two postwar

developments. One event was the re-assembling of a herd of camels on royal estates near Pisa:

Up until World War II, dromedaries of the finest strain were bred on the San Rossore estate as a royal hobby. But when hard times came, the herd was dispersed (and it is quite likely that many of the camels ended up as steaks on the tables of hungry Italians). But now Italian ministers and ambassadors, according to the "New York Times," have become erstwhile camel dealers in the Arab countries, and, sponsored by the Italian government, some of the finest dromedaries in the world have been shipped to Pisa for breeding purposes on the San Rossore estate. ("Outline" 1)

The second event described in her book précis is that "the Leaning Tower may have to be dismantled, stone by stone, and rebuilt with a corrected posture" ("Outline" 1). On first reading, these historical developments do not seem to fit with the narrative of Boyle's postwar politicization. Neither does Boyle's abbreviated employment of these events in her sequel: the youngest camel's mother is selected as one of the finest camels in Arabia, so their family travels to Italy; the youngest camel discovers that the Leaning Tower of Pisa is in danger, so he enacts ways to save it from collapse, acquiring much wisdom in the process; and he leads a caravan of camels from San Rossore to Pisa to successfully engineer his plan.

However, two comments in particular elaborate Boyle's potential motivation in writing this sequel. In the first place, Boyle remarks that the camels, led by the youngest camel, will "achieve what engineers of international repute have so far not been able to, and the youngest camel brings untold honor upon himself, his mother, and the entire herd" ("Outline" 2). In the second place, she provides a rationale for why the fantastical elements of her story are in fact realistic: why the "old and moth-eaten" mother would be selected as one of the finest Arabian camels, and why the youngest camel's plan might work ("Outline" 1). According to Boyle,

seven government ministers must be capable at times of seeing beyond the outer aspect to the inner truth of things. And I believe that the youngest camel's solution for the Leaning Tower may prove to be prophecy instead of fantasy. It seems to me almost inevitable that the dromedaries, with their timeless endurance and their sense of balance, will accomplish in their hours of leisure in Pisa exactly what my story describes" ("Outline" 2-3).

In sum, the youngest camel succeeds when engineers and government ministers do not. But this simple premise requires further consideration, especially in the context of Boyle's remark that the youngest camel's successful solution is a "prophecy."

Rather than offer hypothetical answers about a text that was never written—and indeed only discussed in a ten-page archival file—I am going to offer an answer that frames the intensions of this 1956 précis in terms of Boyle's work that comes immediately before and after. In both of these periods, Boyle underscores the political function of the artist. In this moment of late modernism, the youngest camel, representing the artist-figure, offers a more successful postwar reconstruction plan than either engineers or politicians. By extension, the political function of art is to provide different historical narratives and alternative models of postwar development. Whereas the engineers represent scientific specialization and the politicians represent a reactionary return to monarchical tradition, the youngest camel, the dromedary caravan, and their plan symbolize the relationship between art and democracy.

Although she does not complete this particular book, she takes up this specific theme in *The Youngest Camel: Reconsidered and Rewritten*. In this sequel, we find the youngest camel both questioning authority and using critical thinking skills. To this end, Boyle is participating in leftist children's literature radical pedagogy: she promotes the idea that independent thinking is political. As Julia Mickenberg and Phillip Nel have pointed out, twentieth-century leftists "taught children to take collective action to effect

change, to trust their own instincts, to explore alternative social arrangements and to use history to understand how and why [the] world developed as it has” (*Tales* 1). This is why the different conclusion is significant for the 1959 text. The youngest camel (youth, art, democracy) challenges the old leader of the white caravan of camels (political and cultural hegemony), asks him why he refuses the magical necklace’s potential for youth, newness, or change. The old leader responds: “Do you really think I’d like to start way back at the beginning again and do all the silly thing I did over, and not have people in every country in the world paying me homage and not be the leader of the caravan of white camels anymore?” (*Reconsidered* 90). The youngest camel follows this question with another that pointedly asks the point of keeping the necklace if the old leader never wants to use its powers and dissuades all of the young camels in their ordeals of loneliness from choosing it. The elder responds, “so many people wanting it makes it valuable indeed” (*Reconsidered* 91). Broadly stated, the youngest camel democratically chooses the necklace and he likewise chooses to share with his mother all that it contains (shelter, food, material comforts, youth, and love). Thus, to paraphrase Mickenberg and Nel, in celebrating the youngest camel’s decision to question authority, Boyle encourages American children to speculate about what *might* be while also inviting them to question what *is* (*Tales* 4).

### **Cold War Histories: Postwar Globalization and Regional Frameworks**

In reimagining postwar Americanism in the 1950s as necessarily bound to the cultural logic of the family and the domestic sphere, Boyle is to a certain degree participating in Cold War rhetoric that positions the nuclear family as a metonymy for American exceptionalism. But this invocation of the family and the domestic sphere is also strategic. By invoking the family as representative of the nation in twentieth-

century Americanism, Boyle shows crucial *exceptions* about how the nuclear family is constituted as a national family. In this context, her 1950s revisionary history opens toward her political activism in the 1960s, specifically her involvement with pacifist and civil rights movements. A specific contradiction that Boyle exposes in her critique of America's Cold War "culture of containment" is the fact that the rights and privileges of American democracy refused to its black citizens. Beginning with her 1950s foreign press work, Boyle begins to question the relationship between the democracy of domestic American culture and the democratization of European postwar recovery.

For example, in *The Smoking Mountain: Stories of Postwar Europe* (1951), Boyle writes about the effects of reconstruction and denazification on Germany's daily life. But in responding to Harold Ross's call for "fiction out of Germany," in this collection of foreign dispatches and short stories, Boyle also writes back to her audience about domestic concerns, most often using the concept of the family to scaffold her comparisons. In "Home," the plot centers on a black G.I. discovering a German boy, who is starving and without adequate clothing, begging at the American Shopping Center. The soldier ends up buying the boy an entire new outfit, despite learning that the boy has been receiving handouts from all of the other sentimental soldiers. His rationale is simple: in this moment, "the boy was his, the authority of family, of country, of Occupation even, having discarded him, and the soldier, who had known only leaning Negro shacks, become the provider, the protector at last, the dispenser of white-skinned charity" (163). The story concludes with the soldier's justification of this democracy: "At home, I never had much occasion to do for other people, so I was glad to have had this opportunity offered me" (167). In this short story, Boyle immediately sets up a

framework in which a kind of global kinship might be imagined: American consumer excess and German wartime scarcity, paired with American benevolence and German cooperation. However, with “Lost” Boyle makes clear that the global construct of “family” or “American benevolence” is a bit more fraught. In this short story, black G.I. Charlie Madden wants to adopt Polish orphan Johnny who has been the “company mascot” during the war. Charlie’s application is refused, and the director of the children’s home Johnny is living at must explain segregation policies to him: “There’s the color question. There’s the question about being colored or people being white. In some parts of the country at home, they don’t live in the same part of town that white people live in” (203). Taken together, these short stories put in tension concepts like “democracy” and “family” as foundational to local/global ideologies of Cold War Americanism. In the comparative context of regional modernism, these stories reveal a kind of uneven development in the distribution of these terms.

Returning to children’s literature, we can see Boyle continuing her political critique of global American hegemony in her late 1960s children’s books. In *Pinky in Persia*, the plot lines center on an American family relocating to Iran for what is seemingly a diplomatic stationing. Like most of Boyle’s fiction, *Pinky in Persia* starts from a biographical context and opens toward a political horizon. In 1961, Franckenstein was rehired by the State Department and posted to Iran with the assignment of running the American center. In this capacity, he taught adult education classes in addition to overseeing the daily operations of the center. However, he was also required to participate in the United States Information Agency policy of attempting to convince local intellectuals about the problems of communism and the failures of the

Soviet Union (Mellen 422). Uncomfortable with this Cold War foreign policy, Franckenstein violated USIA policy “by discussing taboo topics from Russia to the Shah” (Mellen 422). Although Boyle didn’t join Franckenstein in Iran until 1963, just as his failing health required that he leave his post, by all indications she shared his political sentiments. In the 1970s, Boyle worked on behalf of political prisoners as a member of the Committee for Intellectual and Artistic Freedom in Iran (Spanier 200). In 1977, for example, she wrote an open letter to the Shah of Iran demanding the restoration of human rights and academic freedom (“Words for the Shah” 1). Thus, while the Franckenstein-Boyle household did in fact have a pet cat named Pinky during their Tehran posting, there is likely a political significance to *Pinky in Persia* that is different than it being a story that “revealed Kay Boyle’s affection for cats, as well as a capacity to imagine how animals think” (425). Meaning: it seems more than coincidental that a woman who was accused of communist sympathies and investigated by HUAC would write a children’s book about a somewhat suspiciously-named cat in Iran following American support of the 1953 Iranian coup and during a period in which the U.S. provided emergency aid to the Shah’s regime.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Melani McAlister offers a much more comprehensive history of the 1953 Iranian coup and U.S. economic investments in the region: “American-based oil companies would, as much as possible, obtain access to oil and other strategic raw materials through concessions negotiated in conjunction with the main colonial power in the region, Britain. . . . In the immediate postwar period, for example, the US intervened numerous times in the Middle East to support pro-Western governments, prevent the rise of ‘radical’ nationalist regimes, or ‘guarantee the oil supply.’ In 1953, the newly formed Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) secured the northern border of the new ‘American frontier’ by helping to overthrow Mohammed Mosaddegh, the elected but nationalist-minded leader of Iran, when he tried to nationalize Iranian oil. As with other globalizing industries, including film, US-based oil corporations presented themselves as operating in the national interest, and US state power seemed to agree” (34).

To a certain degree, the narrative is a continuation of Pinky the cat's predilection for napping in inopportune places.<sup>2</sup> Falling asleep underneath one of the mother's souvenir parasols, Pinky is snatched up by two giant birds who think that the cat would be a nice meal for their hatchlings. The remainder of this children's book consists of Pinky trying to navigate his Persian environs and return to his American family. From the start, on a very basic level, Pinky's adventure introduces children to cultural difference as this book demystifies Iran for her American audience. The children learn about the different landscape and vegetation because of Pinky. Their mother must give them a brief geography lesson when the children are disappointed to find that catnip trees are nowhere to be found in their lush garden, only native fruit trees and melon vines. She follows this conversation with what is presumably the start of a history lesson: "Once upon a time this country was called Persia. But now it is called Iran" (3). Although the mother does not make this distinction explicit in her lessons, it is interesting that Boyle acknowledges a distinction between a historical and cultural Persia and the political and national context of Iran. Moreover, it is notable that with the exception of the mother's brief mention of Iran, for the remainder of the story Boyle exclusively chooses "Persia" as its spatial and cultural context.

While on the surface the book is an anthropomorphic adventure tale, *Pinky in Persia* can also be read as a political allegory in which Boyle deconstructs nationalism

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<sup>2</sup> *Pinky in Persia* is in fact the second of a two book series. In the first, *Pinky the Cat Who Liked to Sleep* (1966), Pinky is accidentally carried away from his middle-class home when he falls asleep on a bed of rags in the window cleaner's car. During Pinky's haphazard adventure, he stays with the window cleaner, a shopkeeper, a single-parent family, a boatyard operator, an old woman, and a zookeeper, sleeping indiscriminately at homes quite different than his own. While trying to find their pet, Pinky's family interacts with people in their community they otherwise would have paid no attention to: the family not only visits their neighbors, the family learns about their neighbors' work, their homes, and their lives. Pinky, therefore, becomes more-or-less an agent of class consciousness and community solidarity.

and globalization by challenging questions of democracy and foreign policy as it relates to America's Cold War allies. In particular, Boyle problematizes particular usages of American exceptionalism which disproportionately privilege American culture and U.S. interests. In this case, we can read *Pinky in Persia* as challenging what Melani McAlister has described as "the imperialist rhetoric [that] came directly from the assumption that all people were capable of civilization and should thus have the cultural opportunity of 'benevolent' Americanization" (30).

We learn that Pinky is a linguist: he understands his human family, and he can speak the languages of all the other animals. But more than being able to simply communicate with animals, Pinky is also a crafty wordsmith. To escape both the nest of birds and the giant lizard, Pinky "did not stamp like a wild horse. He did not roar like a lion. He did not claw like a tiger" (13). Instead he sings songs to the birds and the lizard, which both distracts his captors from potentially eating him *and* makes Pinky something of an amusing acquaintance. In fact, Pinky only chooses to fight in a moment of self-defense when his language skills fail him. This is the case with the giant bat. Not only does that animal lie to Pinky, originally telling the cat that he will fly him to the American family; the bat also threatens physical harm to Pinky, truthfully saying that he is going to exchange his blind eyes for the cat's perfect green ones. It is in this context that Pinky begins "to stamp like a wild horse and roar like a lion and claw like a tiger" (25). But even here, the cat's actions are not excessive force. Pinky remains rational and reactive: he only begins to fight back when it becomes clear that the bat is going to violate his initial offer. Although Boyle seems to be blind to specific issues of economic imperialism, which is one of the key factors for Pinky's family's Iranian

stationing, she importantly critiques what Emily Rosenberg has described as “the ideology of liberal-developmentalism,” or “the belief that other nations could and should replicate America’s own developmental experience” (7). Somewhat idealistically, *Pinky in Persia* instead privileges culture, broadly stated, over economic interests, political alliances, or military force.

To end, I want to return to Cowley’s remarks that start this chapter and I’m going to suggest that we should refuse the false binary he establishes about Boyle’s modernism: the idea that “besides raising six children by three marriages” she was a modernist. As if she could separate these identities, it should be clear that her modernist theory and practice was formed in relation to her personal experiences of marriage, family, domesticity, and gendered divisions of labor. By way of conclusion, then, I will suggest that Cowley’s remarks reveal less about Boyle or her modernism than his. In 1963, he is historicizing a cultural movement that he has already declared finished. In contrast to Cowley’s retrospective, Boyle is resisting modernism’s foreclosure in this cultural turn toward the politics of late modernism: the continued obfuscation of gender, vernacular culture, and the domestic in the theory and practice of *high* modernism; and the more quotidian celebration of previously gendered ideas like the local, the family, and domestic culture as ideologically important to the aesthetic and political culture of the Cold War.

Put differently, Boyle counteracts the cultural logic of this historical moment by making the home front, domesticity, and the family not spaces of ideological containment but rather spaces of radical democratic possibility. She not only contextualizes the Cold War in ways relatable to her middlebrow American audience,

she crafts her deeply political narratives in such a way as to emotionally and intellectually invest her readers in conversations they otherwise might not have considered (Klein 7). As a figure who intervenes in the politics of late modernism, her *political* turn to education, children's literature, and activist movements champions modernism's commitments to social collectivities. As a colleague remarked in 1962, "Kay Boyle has fused her knowledge as a historian, her talents as a writer and her insights as a mother" with the intention of inspiring in children "a sense of kinship with all mankind" (Slawson 4). In this sense, we can read her career as an attempt to bridge a utopian desire for democracy (American citizenship, internationalism, modernism) with the cultural work (domestic fiction, women's labor, political activism) that makes this regional modernism possible.

CHAPTER 6  
DOMESTIC BATTLES & GLOBAL TRAVEL: MARION MAHONY GRIFFIN'S *THE  
MAGIC OF AMERICA* AND THE POLITICS OF REGIONAL MODERNISM

This chapter reads Marion Mahony Griffin's domestic architecture as a feminist intervention of regional modernism in the politics of late modernism. By periodizing the cultural work of Mahony Griffin, we can see the way in which her belief in democracy and the way in which architecture might extend democratic living to the masses shifts to an exercise in regional modernism with her 1949 text *The Magic of America*, in which she both comparatively reads American regional planning and Australian town planning and implicitly criticizes what will become Americanism's complicity with imperialism. If we take late modernism as being a cultural movement that accounts for the persistence of modernist theory and practice following the Second World War, one that specifically acknowledges the history of transnational developments within modernism, we can read Mahony Griffin's *The Magic of America* as being an artifact of late modernism at the same time that it is a historical intervention into the modernist potential for democratic architecture and domestic housing.

On the one hand, in this movement we can see Mahony Griffin's modernism at the start of the twentieth century—the belief that domestic housing is an intermediary in democratic processes—develop into a postwar manifesto for the ways in which local interests must be reprioritized in a global context and the ways in which the interests of democratic nations must be approached relationally. As a corrective to the politics of late modernism, *The Magic of America* simultaneously argues for national political decentralization *and* the construction of globalized economic policy, repurposing her prewar modernism as a counter-politics to the hegemonic global policies of the American Century. In this framework of regional modernism, Mahony Griffin writes an

architectural history that makes an explicit connection between vernacular and international modernisms and the competing pressures of top-down capitalism and bottom-up regional planning. On the other hand, we can read Mahony Griffin as a case study that marks the limits of regional modernism as a vanishing mediator in the transition between modernist and late modernist modalities: her focus on the politics of regional modernism—particularly with regard to issues of class, gender, and environmentalism—differentiate her from the unpolitical stylizations of her more formalist contemporaries. But to read *The Magic of America* as a vanishing mediator means that we can also read Mahony Griffin's regional modernism—her radical hopefulness for an American-modeled globalism—as naively complicit in the politics of global Americanization.

My argument, therefore, is two-fold. What I first want to establish is the feminist work that this text does: in this period of late modernism, *The Magic of America* underlines the importance not only of recognizing women in the production of architecture but also in acknowledging the way in which the modernist rhetoric of democratic architecture in this postwar moment is being eclipsed by the growing connection between modernist style and consumer culture. This is particularly noteworthy in the case of Mahony Griffin not only because she was the second woman to graduate from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology architecture program and the first woman to be officially licensed as an architect in America. In a professional context, despite the fact that women in architecture were viewed with suspicion (if not contempt), Mahony Griffin collaborated with Frank Lloyd Wright and Walter Burley Griffin, and maintained a good working reputation with the majority of Chicago School

architects. Importantly, she also introduced her colleagues to labor reformers, suffragists, civic activists, and socially prominent liberal clubwomen. This activist network became a consistent source of clients for Wright and Burley Griffin, and in turn influenced their architectural theory and practice through progressive politics and social reform initiatives.<sup>1</sup> My second claim, then, is that in this historical context, Mahony Griffin's regional modernism neither resists the culture of consumption nor argues against the "social life of things."<sup>2</sup> Instead, by way of *The Magic of America*, she confronts the shifting global market in the practices and ideologies that fuel architecture and housing. Thus, Mahony Griffin's domestic architecture becomes metonymic for democratic policies, regional modernism, and the American Century.

### **Modernism by Chicago Design**

Because Mahony Griffin's architectural career began in the Chicago studios of Dwight Perkins and Frank Lloyd Wright, her design of buildings, furniture, and decorative panels—not to say the illustration of more than half of Wright's influential 1910 Wasmuth Portfolio (the manuscript that made Wright's architectural fortune and fame in Europe)—squarely positioned her as a major contributor to "Chicago School" architecture and "Prairie School" design. Not only did Mahony Griffin include herself in a lineage that extended from her mentors Louis Sullivan and Wright to her husband and partner Walter Burley Griffin, she made this group's architectural ideas, specifically "democratic architecture," "organic architecture," and Sullivan's famous motto of "form

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<sup>1</sup> See Alice Friedman's, "Girl Talk: Feminism and Domestic Architecture at Frank Lloyd Wright's Oak Park Studio," 23-50.

<sup>2</sup> My description of "regional modernism" as an intervention into the politics of postwar modernism draws on Allison Carruth's working definition of "late modernism" in "War Rations and the Food Politics of Late Modernism," *Modernism/Modernity* 16.4 (2009): 767-795.

equals function,” central concerns of her own practice. And because the Chicago School was a pocket of nativist American modernism, pairing an attention to midwestern vernacular culture and the region’s populism with beliefs in the progressive potential of American modernity and the transformative function of built form, we can likewise read the regional impulses in Mahony Griffin’s modernism: she worked toward a modernist architecture that argued against a prescriptive international style in favor of local and national differences; and she worked toward a modernist architecture that argued against an industrial modernity and its mass produced architecture in favor of craftsmanship and buildings designed in relation to their landscape.

However, Mahony Griffin’s architectural practice also moved beyond her cohort’s typically more conservative politics. While the idea of “democracy” pervaded the Chicago Group’s work—from its building of middle-class housing, to its design of “republican” commercial buildings, to its challenge to continental architectural authority—“democracy” for Sullivan, Wright, and to a lesser degree Burley Griffin chiefly meant independence from prescribed architectural style or the promotion of individual talent in opposition to established aesthetic schools. Burley Griffin’s comments in his 1913 article “Architecture and Democracy” typify the Chicago Group’s definition of “democracy” as “independence of thought” (63). By extension, democratic architecture becomes independence of thought in the face of, among other constraints, stylistic conventions, architectural authorities, and classical orders. We can picture “democratic architecture,” then, for these men as revolting against the 1893 White City of the Chicago World’s Fair or the popular stylizations of Beaux Arts training. Put another way, “democracy” becomes synonymous with modernism.

In contrast, Mahony Griffin offers a corrective to “democratic architecture” in the first two decades of the twentieth century to the extent that she not only actively thinks of democracy in terms of the political principle of majority rule but also makes her praxis one of middle-class representation beyond the inclusive interests of bourgeois men (Dustin Griffin 382). For while the development of the “prairie house” was concurrent with the height of Chicago progressivism, the fact that the prairie house-buyers were typically upper-middle class lays bare the social contradictions implicit in the Prairie School’s domestic architecture—if not neutralizes the project’s self-described radical cause. As Richard Twombly points out, in this period of progressive reform, “the prairie house appealed to an apprehensive upper middle class by emphasizing in literal and symbolic ways the security, shelter, privacy, family mutuality and other values it found increasingly important in a period of urban dislocation and conflict” (“Saving the Family” 59). Without pandering to middle-class wives with architectural advertisements in *Ladies’ Home Journal*—as Wright did with titles like, “A Home in a Prairie Town” (1901), “A Small House with ‘Lots of Room in It’” (1901), and “A Fireproof House for \$5000”—Mahony Griffin recontextualizes “democratic architecture” in terms of progressive issues relevant to women: among others, gendered political reform, economic equity, and education policy. Put simply, Mahony Griffin radicalizes the Chicago Group concept of “democratic architecture” with two feminist concerns: on a professional level, that women’s architectural work is disregarded, unattributed, or—worse—stolen by their male colleagues; and on a social level, that the boom in domestic architecture takes for granted gendered concerns in housing. That is to say, Mahony Griffin differentiates herself by linking the idea of “democratic architecture” popular in the formalism of the

Chicago Group with both a political agenda of democratic reform and literal plans for domestic architecture.

In her 1914 article series, “Democratic Architecture—I and II,” for Australia’s *Building* magazine, Mahony Griffin makes the gender politics of the architectural studio and the problems of family housing two sides of the same coin. In the first article of this series, Mahony Griffin describes her design process, emphasizing her collaborative process with the owners of the designed house, encouraging them to express their needs, wants, and tastes, and with her studio colleagues, encouraging mutuality in the sharing of designs and architectural solutions. However, she implies that being a woman architect limits her participation in this so-called democratic exchange of ideas. Indeed, Mahony Griffin offers a veiled indictment of Wright’s not uncommon practice of taking credit for all of the designs produced in his studio—and most frequently hers.

Moving from the personal slights she feels in her work (although she once more categorizes architects with practices like Wright as “parasites” and “drags”), Mahony Griffin transitions from the gendered limitations of her profession to the possibilities for practicing “democratic architecture.” The first sentence of “Democratic Architecture—II” reads: “We are so fortunate as to be living in a time when the ranks of the democratic forces are rapidly being filled in the political field, and even along ethical, domestic and social lines, and in a time when in the economic field also these forces must soon form for the achievement of pressing needs” (88). Mahony Griffin subsequently links the building practices of a democratic architecture with democratic social movements—class-conscious economic policies, environmentalism, and gender reforms put various stresses on her modern architecture. Put boldly, she makes the middle-class domestic

architecture of the Chicago School more radically democratic. Meaning, instead of building suburban houses as a “cause conservative” for the “city man going to the country,” as Wright famously remarked in his 1908 “In the Cause of Architecture,” Mahony Griffin argues for a democratic architecture that puts in dialectical tension social relations and built environments and that transforms daily living beyond bourgeois conventions of the “model home” and its ideologies of patriarchy, family values, submissiveness of women, and suburban retreat (Wright 155; Twombly, “New Forms” 86). She specifically challenges the idea that domestic architecture, as practiced in Wright’s Chicago office, should offer “the possibility of refuge from the social conflict and contradictions of the time for a certain segment of middle-class society” (Weirick “Spirituality” 70). Instead, she argues that modern architecture must necessarily reconsider the relationship of interiority and exteriority—thus broadening the discipline to include conscientious considerations of landscape architecture (lot orientation, conservationism, and the social metabolism of nature and building) and the architectonics of private life (the physical setting of the home, the social network of family relations, the routines of the household, and the habits of the body).

As an important bit of contextualization, Wright does not begin to “radicalize” his concept of “democratic architecture” until the 1930s when faced with the rise of Le Corbusier and International Style. Beginning with his 1931 Kahn Lecture at Princeton University and extending through *The Disappearing City* (1932), *When Democracy Builds* (1945), and *The Living City* (1958), Wright becomes concerned with ruralism, decentralization, and organic architecture in the service of a distinctly American democratic style of architecture—the prime example of “this new American concept of

architecture” being his design of Broadacre City (*The Living City* 92). It is in this period of late modernism, two decades after Mahony Griffin makes her argument for the democratic importance of domestic architecture, that Wright even acknowledges that the modernization of the family home effects “radical change in the *basic structure*” of “the American citizen as *an individual*” and American democratic government (*The Living City* 78). It is worth pointing out, however, that beyond pointing to the family home as the basic unit of democracy his restatement of “democratic architecture” does not speak to the necessary social functions that would in fact build democracy.

To further illustrate this difference between Mahony Griffin and her Chicago cohort—and particularly her prime target Wright—in summarizing the importance of the theoretical work of “Democratic Architecture—I and II,” Mahony Griffin ends by narrating a conversation that she has with a friend who has encountered the limitations of such housing for middle-class women, the supposed benefactors of this modern architecture. Her friend alludes to the fact that, rather than improving standards of living, these houses inhibit domestic functions. She quips, “you could not keep a cat nor raise a child” (91). In these articles she makes “democratic architecture” contingent upon the political spaces of the architectural studio and the household. But unlike Wright who never substantiated his broad claims for the democracy of his domestic architecture in writing or built form, Mahony Griffin offers at least two subsequent examples of ways in which family housing—and architecture itself—might be modernized with respect to the spatial *and* social necessities of “democratic architecture.” First, in a 1915 lecture to the Australian National Council of Women on “Women as Architects,” Mahony Griffin calls

for the broadening of architecture to allow for the direct participation of women.<sup>3</sup> In this speech, “democratic architecture” turns on the relationship of access to architectural training, the expansion of labor irrespective of gender, and a reprioritization of equity in community planning. If these three elements are addressed—indeed, modernized—Mahony Griffin argues that a democratization of both daily living and social relationships will happen. And in this move toward “democratic architecture,” there will be a correlation between the individualism popular with the Chicago Group and her prioritization of democratic practice. Put differently, Mahony Griffin summarizes her position by reminding her audience that “to solve an architectural problem satisfactorily you must consider it as an element in a community to be considered in connection with its neighbors”—a labor, Sydney’s *Daily Telegraph* in covering the lecture suggests, that brings rewards “quite sufficient to make it worth woman’s while to take up her obligations and shoulder her responsibilities” (9).

Second, in her 1916 interview with Henrietta Walker for Australia’s *Lone Hand*, she further elaborates on her working definition of “democratic architecture,” more boldly making the case for a feminist intervention in architectural modernism. This time, she calls for the acknowledgment of gender equity in architecture, especially as it relates to domestic functions and home economics:

Only women who know how much work is increased by a badly-planned kitchen are likely to believe how necessary it is for an architect to make allowances for the admission of labor-saving appliances all through a house. A woman who did not know much about housework would make no better, and probably no worse, a planner of houses than a man, but a woman who knows what women have to put up with and who has the technical knowledge to alter certain things, should be capable of designing comfortable homes. (43)

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<sup>3</sup> This speech—“Woman as Architects”—was reported in Sydney’s *Daily Telegraph* (12 October 1915): 9.

Important to this interview is her further broadening of “democratic architecture” on gendered lines: she not only restates her position from the Australian National Council of Women lecture that women need to be educated as architects; she also insists that *all* women be recognized as more successful managers (if not more capable designers) of modern homes. Opening up the conversation of “democratic architecture” to the politics of domestic architecture, Mahony Griffin quite literally begins thinking through the relationships of gender, class, and architecture—and in so doing, she begins to develop an ecology of architectural form, environmental concerns, and gendered divisions of labor.

### **Toward a Politics of Regional Modernism**

By the 1940s, Mahony Griffin’s theorization of modernist architecture as “democratic architecture” developed into an expressly polemical regional modernism. Between 1938 and 1949, she compiled and wrote *The Magic of America*, a text that is simultaneously an architectural history, an aesthetic politics, a domestic narrative, and a memoir. This text is divided into four sections—indeed, four battles. The first section, entitled “The Empirical Battle,” centers on Burley Griffin’s architectural practice and his unexpected death in India, where he designed the United Provinces Industrial and Agricultural Exposition, the Lucknow University Library, and the Pioneer Press Office and Works. The second and third sections, entitled “The Federal Battle” and “The Municipal Battle,” center on the Griffins’ Australian planning projects, respectively a nationally-funded design for the new federal capital at Canberra and a regionalist plan for the Castlecrag residential community. And the fourth section, entitled “The Individual Battle,” narrates the romantic and professional partnership of the Griffins—their biographies, their courtship, their architectural theories, and their political stances.

What distinguishes the Griffins' work abroad is the specific pairing of principles of architectural modernism with critical issues of regionalism. In this framework, we can read Mahony Griffin as making their partnership and their architectural practice—or their regional modernism—expressly political: rejecting nationalist imperialism (constructing Burley Griffin's 1935-1937 work in India as participating in anti-imperialist democratic movements), rejecting governmentality (the Australian Parliament's bureaucratic obstruction to the implementation of the Canberra plan and the sexism that Mahony Griffin experienced while trying to organize a women's caucus on Town Planning), and opposing international capitalism (Mahony Griffin's architectural plans were concerned with the progressive cultural life of the Castlecrag community and the way in which its design benefits local communities, family, and women). In turn, this regional modernism forms the basic structure of *The Magic of America*. The movement of the sections—"Empirical," "Federal," "Municipal," and "Individual"—writes an architectural history that makes an explicit connection between vernacular and international modernisms and argues for a mediation between global capitalism and town planning. For Mahony Griffin, the project of modern architecture becomes less one of "awakening a national spirit of democracy"—as the editors of *Building* had described her 1914 articles—than cultivating democratic practices that, following the framework of *The Magic of America*, extend from international to individual levels (88). As Mahony Griffin remarks on the topic of modern architecture, creative thinking in revolutionary architectural practice "goes direct to totalities and works from wholes to particulars" (IV.38).

This relation of parts-to-whole becomes crucial to thinking through the continuation of Mahony Griffin's project of regional modernism in this period of late modernism. If her modernism, which develops by way of her association with the Chicago Group, turns on the belief that "democratic architecture" literally builds democracy, her postwar regional modernism likewise thinks through "democratic architecture" as a totality of wholes to particulars, but this time with the distinction that architecture is part of a plan to build global democracies on an American model. Thus, "democratic architecture" in 1949 moves between the global and local—moving between decolonization efforts, postwar reconstruction, and economic reform; federal contracting, town planning, and environmental conservation; domestic housing, education policies, and gendered divisions of labor.

Particularly important to this development of regional modernism is Mahony Griffin's involvement with the Chicago Group, and in each of the four volumes of *The Magic of America*, she makes reference to the nascent modernism of this midwestern architectural school. And in the last three volumes of her manuscript—"The Federal Battle," "The Municipal Battle," and "The Individual Battle"—Mahony Griffin specifically situates Prairie School architecture as a point of reference for the Griffins' expatriate architectural work. More to the point, she constructs a comparative framework in which regional schools and international modernisms might be read as mutually constitutive. It is at this juncture that my reading of Mahony Griffin's regional modernism diverges in significant ways from contemporary Griffin scholarship. If scholars concede that Mahony Griffin's work is modernist, it is always insofar as it is singularly derivative of the Chicago School, and the specific lineage of Louis Sullivan, Frank Lloyd Wright, and

Walter Burley Griffin. If scholars argue that Mahony Griffin's work is not modernist, it is because her lens of Chicago progressivism was too exclusionary in its regionalization of international modernism; her spiritualism and its influence on her architectural ornamentation make her in some way anti-modern; or that her alignment was more bohemian than radical, avant-garde because the political project for the Canberra Federal Plan failed to be built.<sup>4</sup>

For example, in "The Empirical Battle," Mahony Griffin narrates the centrality of Chicago in the Griffins' efforts to design "democratic architecture" for India. Not only does the 1893 Chicago World's Fair become a model for the Griffins on how *not* to design their United Provinces Exposition in Lucknow; but the emphasis on regionalism within Chicago modernism becomes a model for resisting modernism as a centralized movement. For Mahony Griffin, the development of a regional modernism for India—a cultural movement that resists the standardization of a European modernism at the same time that it actively promotes local color in architectural design—is possible because there is "no tendency to limit enterprise to the material to the elimination of soul and spiritual qualities and output" (i. 137). Indeed, she suggests that the comparative model of Chicago to India has in fact allowed India to accomplish "in fifty years what it has taken America a hundred and fifty years to accomplish" (i. 137).

Because Chicago modernism primarily turned on revolutions in domestic architecture, Mahony Griffin's comparative framework for a global regional modernism explicitly returned to their midwestern suburbs as a model for democratic development.

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<sup>4</sup> In the case of the former, see for example: David T. Van Zanten, "The Early Work of Marion Mahony Griffin"; Paul Kruty, "Chicago 1900: The Griffins Come of Age"; and Paul Sprague, "Marion Mahony as Originator of Griffins' Mature Style: Fact or Myth?". In the case of the latter, see for example: James Weirick, "The Griffins and Modernism"; and Karen Burns, "Prophets and the Wilderness."

Specifically, Mason City, Iowa's Rock Crest-Rock Glen subdivision becomes the epitome of the Griffins' architectural modernism: this development transformed domestic architecture by thinking through the problems of family housing in relation to landscape architecture, communal property, environmental conservation, technological advancements, and local color. There are several characteristics that distinguish the Griffins' modernism and their particular Prairie Style in Rock Creek-Rock Glen from, say, Wright's Prairie School homes. The first distinction is the Griffins' focus on landscape architecture, both in terms of the orientation of individual houses on their respective lots and the arrangement of the houses within a larger subdivision organization. Rock Crest-Rock Glen was planned to conserve the natural area of Willow Creek. For the 18-acre subdivision, built on a former quarry site, Burley Griffin retained trees already in addition to adding many native plants; and he created internal reserves by covenants on title to prohibit buildings at the rear of each lot (Harrison 23). As Peter Harrison points out, specifically beginning with Rock Crest-Rock Glen development, the combination of architecture and landscape as complementary disciplines directed towards the creation of a coherent scheme for community living became significant organizing principles for the Griffins' landscape architecture (23).

The next distinctions turn on the way in which the individual houses of the subdivision relate to the stylistic conventions of Prairie School architecture. The exteriors promoted an idea of "organic architecture," in which houses of the subdivision looked as if they naturally grew from the site. All houses were designed to face the glen, with each house incorporating the natural backdrop as its primary view. In addition to their explicit conservationism, the Griffins' concept of "organic architecture"

emphasized that the land along the creek would be “commons area” to be shared by all of the homeowners. Whereas Wright’s “prairie house buttressed the newer suburban notions that home life was not to be intruded upon, that it was separate form though not totally withdrawn from the rest of the community, and that contact with the outside world should be at the residents’ discretion,” the Griffin plan always designed the family home in relation to its larger community (Twombly, “Saving the Family” 67). In the 1910s, the houses’ horizontal lines and spatial orientations provided a middle-class suburban counter to urban environments and mass corporate culture and their vertical skyscrapers (Weirick, “Spirituality” 70). Similarly, the interiors both highlighted an open floor plan, which emphasized “the integration of significant living areas without obstruction,” and complemented the exteriorized design, which emphasized “the horizontal, [blunting] the distinction between the inside and outside” (River City Society for Historic Preservation 1). Using variations of Mahony Griffin’s “T shaped” residential plans throughout the subdivision, the Griffins’ design placed public rooms across the front of the house, with an upstairs “stem” holding the bedrooms (Pregliasco 167). This design gave the middle class family homes a sense of spaciousness and a feeling that their economical home was a much grander residence. It also made the common areas within the house—the living quarters—the privileged spaces of the house.

Finally, the new domesticity of the Griffins’ Prairie Houses, which had ideological and intellectual affinities with Wright’s, importantly envisioned the domestic home as an environment for education and activism within the family and the larger community. In this way, “organic architecture” overlapped with “democratic architecture.” Thus, the Rock Crest-Rock Glen subdivision in theory and in practice reconceptualize domestic

architecture, domesticity, and the family unit to include larger social and political issues like the arts, education, women's rights, childhood, American democracy, individualism, the landscape of the Midwest, spirituality, domesticity (Friedman "Girl Talk" 42).

From this midwestern model, Mahony Griffin elaborates not only that domestic architecture is the basis of democratic architecture, but also that the Rock Crest-Rock Glen subdivision likewise becomes a model for postwar democracy: in India, this Iowan design becomes a framework for the ways in which family homes can improve social conditions and promote decolonization; and in Australia, this Iowan design becomes the starting point for progressive town planning. For example, in "The Federal Battle," Mahony Griffin contextualizes the failure of the federal planning project in terms of their American successes. Following her account about the parliamentary obstruction that leads to Burley Griffin's resignation from the Canberra project, she shifts the narrative of *The Magic of America* from a complaint against the conservative cultural nationalism of the Australian government—not to say the cultural injunction against their "democratic architecture"—to a strategy for building democracy that circumnavigates government involvement. There is a deliberate pattern to "The Federal Battle" that simultaneously acknowledges the political problem of an Australian paradigm shift from the model of the British Commonwealth to American Democracy; the cultural problem of translating the project of a nativist American modernism to a country increasingly turning to more conservative European aesthetics; and the social problem of being expatriate modernists isolated from a large enough network of like-minded friends to actually effect their political and cultural agendas.

One such thread consists of Burley Griffin's 1917 editorial on "Planning for Economy"; descriptions of American regional planning for a Grinnell, Iowa subdivision; Burley Griffin's 1924 editorial on "The Menace of Governments"; a literal rendering of the Griffins' plan for their Canberra community; descriptions of American regional planning for Mason City's Rock Crest-Rock Glen subdivision; and Mahony Griffin's editorial on "Equity the Watchword." She concludes this particular thread by arguing for a new political world model to promote "the functions of a human community—Liberty, Equity, and Mutuality"—based on an American model of democracy (ii.119). Mahony Griffin suggests that if America might establish a "World Economic Model" that provides Equity across all divisions of labor without governmental interference modern troubles like bureaucracy, plutocracy, totalitarianism, and war could be averted. This "World Economic Model" would begin in the United States and first expand hemispherically to include the Americas and then globally to include other national democracies. In practice, this "World Economic Model" would consist of an economic federation of distinct world democracies just as in theory America is modeled on a federation of regions. Indeed, Mahony Griffin quite literally concludes "Equity the Watchword" by surmising the possibility of the American Century in global regional terms. "With our T.V.A. supplemented by a M.V.A. and an A.V.A. and a St.L.V.A, we could easily and profitably absorb the whole population of Europe" (ii.122).<sup>5</sup> In this patterning, what started as a problem of political, economic, and cultural conservatism in which Australia resisted the Griffins' application of progressive modernism is reframed as a polemic for

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<sup>5</sup> In the Art Institute of Chicago's digital copy of *The Magic of America*, there are textual notes that suppose the abbreviations for the Valley Authorities refer to the Tennessee Valley Authority and the hypothetical creation of a Missouri/Mississippi Valley Authority, Arkansas Valley Authority, and St. Louis Valley Authority.

regional modernism on a global level. And this pattern of pairing regional modernism with domestic architecture and global democracy repeats in the “Municipal and Individual Battles” that follow.

To the extent that Mahony Griffin ends her text with a personal biography is significant because she makes a direct connection between democratic architecture and domestic politics on an individualized level. Given this personal turn, we could read “The Individual Battle” as describing the origins of the Griffin partnership—detailing their familial influences, their architectural educations, Burley Griffin’s early American work, Mahony Griffin’s theories of architecture and social organization, and the way in which their professional relationship was shaped by their cooperative marriage. This is typically how must scholars read *The Magic of America*: feminist scholars in one corner argue for scholarly recognition of Mahony Griffin’s work, and more traditional historians refuse her aesthetic claims.<sup>6</sup> However, it is more consistent with the history of her modernist writings to return to the Chicago Group’s originary concept of “democratic architecture” and revise it such that the individual—in this case the architect—becomes the starting point for both democratic design *and* social practice. A conscious practice of democratic architecture on the part of modern architect would have a direct intervention in more global politics—as the connections among Mahony Griffin’s “Empirical,” “Federal,” and “Municipal” Battles and the repetition of content in each of these sections suggest.

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<sup>6</sup> My project therefore engages contemporary scholarly debates that situate Mahony Griffin’s architectural practice in terms of a feminist project of reclamation conservative art historians refusing her claims of attribution. See, for example: Jane Pregliasco, “The Life and Work of Marion Mahony Griffin”; Anna Rubbo, “Marion Mahony Griffin: A Portrait”; Elizabeth Birmingham, “Lies, Damn Lies, and Autobiography: How and Why We Read Architect’s Lives”; David T. Van Zanten, Paul Kruty, and Paul Sprague.

This return to the architect as the engineer of democracy gives a degree of authority to her social plan for a “Threefold Commonwealth.” In contrast to the typically modernist valorization of the architect as the exemplar of American modernity, Mahony Griffin makes her architect an engineer of both material realities and esoteric spiritualism. As Cecelia Tichi has argued, the engineer was always culturally bound to a project of spiritual nationalism: “The engineer renewed the spiritual mission embedded for over two and a half centuries in the national experience. He promised so it seemed, to lead industrialized America into the new millennium” (105). If the engineer embodies the modern values of “efficiency, organization, production, functional and elegant design,” Mahony Griffin’s architect as engineer adds a literal spiritualism to this list. This development is influenced by the 1929 start of her involvement with Rudolf Steiner’s Anthroposophy, a spiritual movement of ethical individualism that in broad terms argued for personal discipline and meditative training as a means for transcending the material world. On the role of Anthroposophy on the Griffins’s architectural practice, Mahony Griffin remarked that the spiritual movement made “it possible for us to understand these differences in architectural requirements through a knowledge of the phylogenetic sequence of the creative ethers and so the underlying spiritual influences in the sequence of the civilizations” (i. 83). The effect of Steiner’s Anthroposophy on both Mahony Griffin’s architectural theory and practice and the structure and content of *The Magic of America* is its mediation of science and technology with spirituality and humanism. According to Mahony Griffin, the tensions produced through the comparative relationships of these categories—including evolutionary sciences, cultural anthropology, and theosophy—expand her knowledge of

daily life and the spiritual world while simultaneously facilitating her intellectual capabilities and architectural imagination.<sup>7</sup>

There is a direct correlation between Anthroposophy and the progression of Mahony Griffin's concept of "democratic architecture." Having lost her faith in the potential for democracy in Australia, a result of the conservative nationalism that developed at the start of the First World War and effectively canceled Burley Griffin's contract to build his Canberra Capitol Plan, Anthroposophy provided Mahony Griffin a way of reopening the project of democracy on social terms—specifically avoiding problems of government and economy. In his 1917 *Threefold Social Order*, Steiner called for a spiritual modernization that addresses the problems of modernity by reorienting "the body social" along three questions:

The first is the question of a healthy form of spiritual life within the body social. The second is the consideration of labor, and the right way to incorporate it into the life of the community. Third is the correct deduction as to the proper place and function of economic life in today's society. (14)

His answer to these questions evolves into his "threefold social order," in which daily living subdivides three distinct (but mutually invested) realms—the spiritual, the political, and the economic. In both theory and practice, in the composition of *The Magic of America* and in the community planning of the Castelcrag suburb, Steiner's influence becomes evident in Mahony Griffin's regional modernism.

Using Steiner's "social threefolding" as a framework for *The Magic of America*, Mahony Griffin's democratic plan would consist of three organizations: a political organization that promotes democracy by creating EQUITY among citizens; an

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<sup>7</sup> For an extended reading of the influence of Anthroposophy on *The Magic of America*, see: James Weirick's "Motifs and Motives in the Lifework of Marion Mahony."

economic organization that promotes FRATERNITY or MUTUALITY in divisions of labor; and a social organization, financed by land taxation, to promote LIBERTY among individuals. Following America's successful "social threefolding," she suggests that this should become a global model for twentieth century democracy—to create "the concept of a united States of Europe or of the World" (iii. 175-180). Consistent with her regional modernism that calls for both decentralization and globalism, Mahony Griffin suggests that while each nation will consist of its own political unit, each nation will participate in a federation of economies—organized first on a national level, then in regional units, and ultimately as a "world economic organization." This separation of national politics from global economies is necessary so that social projects and the "the management of communities [can become] so flexible as to be able to place large areas of land or large sums of money . . . in the hands of individuals of ability to give them control for designing and bringing about planned areas to meet the expanding needs of growing communities" (iii. 205). This plan is simultaneously socially progressive and economically conservative: at the same time that she argues for federal subsidies of social programs for education, environmentalism, or housing, she also argues for the work of these projects to have autonomy from political control, i.e. she wants public money for socialized projects that will be enacted by private interests.

While conceding Mahony Griffin's contradictory late modernist politics—she argues for radical global democracy based in large part on the strength of American capitalism—I must underline that I am more interested in the thinking-through of *The Magic of America* as a blueprint than the possibility that this "social threefolding" could actually take place. And for me, this turns on her narrowing of democracy to the

domestic. By ending *The Magic of America* with “The Individual Battle,” Mahony Griffin insists on the importance of “private life”—broadly and flexibly—for modern architecture.<sup>8</sup> She makes domestic architecture consider not only the politics of “domestic spaces,” a subject that is ostensibly bound up in architectural discourse, but also the ideological concept of “domesticity.” The domestic house becomes a space rooted the private life of the family, but it also becomes a localized space in the larger social life of a community. In this spatial register, moving back and forth between the particular and the general, concepts like education, family, kinship, culture, privacy, household labor, etc., are radically revised. Mahony Griffin’s domestic narrative thus implicitly intersects with a larger feminist critique of modern architecture.

While we can concede that in America and Europe modernist architects “were dedicated to a total restatement of the problem of the house,” Alice Friedman has importantly noted that it was commissions by female clients that made male modernists more innovatively approach domestic space based on *their* more liberal gender politics (Rosner 7). To the modern architects’ preoccupations with questions of “household efficiency, health, standardization, new materials, and technology,” Friedman argues that the women commissioning these modern homes demanded a “complete alteration of the home—its construction, materials, and interior spaces” that not only promoted a modernist vision of new life but also a feminist “redefinition of domesticity” (*Women* 16). It is in this context that we should read Mahony Griffin’s domestic narrative as destabilizing a masculinist, if not sexist, architectural tradition. This historical critique

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<sup>8</sup> Victoria Rosner’s *Modernism and the Architecture of Private Life*, although written with a British context, has been invaluable in its description of the relationship between domesticity and modernist space—and their mutual influence on twentieth-century architecture.

has reach, beginning with Alberti's fifteenth-century assertion that "the house is a mechanism for the domestication of women" (Wigley 332). It also extends to Mahony Griffin's contemporaries, especially the developing trends in modernist architecture toward a return to formalist principles in the service of "style."

### **Coda: "The Last Word in Modernism"**

Beginning in 1920s and 1930s, "International Style" architecture categorized the structural and aesthetic characteristics of architectural modernism globally and codified these formal principles as defining a specific style that would encapsulate modern architecture as practiced by specific architects. According to Henry-Russell Hitchcock and Philip Johnson who coined the term in their 1932 treatise, *The International Style*, three principles defined this modern architecture: a new conception of architecture as volume rather than mass; regularity rather than axial symmetry as the chief means of ordering design; and the proscription of arbitrary applied decoration (36). For this "single new style," these principles are based on the "experimentation of the individualists," an exclusive list of architects which include Le Corbusier, J.J.P. Oud, Walter Gropius, Mies van der Rohe, Richard Neutra, and Frank Lloyd Wright (35). According to its proponents, the formalist aesthetics of "this contemporary style," purportedly existed "throughout the world" and was "unified and inclusive, not fragmentary and contradictory like so much of the production of the first generation of modernist architects" (35).

Based on these qualifying characteristics, Mahony Griffin was peripheral to the International Style movement. In this interwar period, her work was specifically interested in the intersections of domestic architecture, community planning, landscape architecture, environmentalism and conservationism, anthroposophy, and democratic

theory. And whereas International Style architecture valorized the experimentation of individualists, Mahony Griffin remained committed to resolving the problem of individualism communally. To that end, Mahony Griffin seems more allied with architectural theorists and community planners like Lewis Mumford, Catherine Bauer, and Jane Jacobs. Like these contemporaries, she was interested in the way in which architecture intervened in daily life. More specifically, Mahony Griffin was interested in the dialectical relationship between domestic architecture (family houses, community planning, common spaces) and social movements (labor activism, women's rights, public education reform, progressive politics). Moreover, she was interested in the way in which housing's spatial relationships, specifically the ways in which specific kinds of housing in particular places respond to larger community and social needs. To this degree, all of these figures participate in the development of regional modernisms. But even with these like-minded folks, there are crucial distinctions. The most obvious is that Mahony Griffin is the only trained architect. Beyond this professional distinction, however, she is expressly different in that her interest in community planning and regional development begins at the local level of the family house and extends outward. Thus, she is less inclined to read domestic architecture, community planning, or regional modernism only in terms of urbanism—for example, Mumford's garden city movement as a challenge to machine culture, Bauer's modern housing reform to address urban uneven development, or Jacobs' advocacy of regional-cities to counter modernist urban renewal projects.

In this context, given the 1949 end date of *The Magic of America*, we can read Mahony Griffin as offering a possible rejoinder to The Museum of Modern Art's

symposium on the question of “What is Happening to Modern Architecture?” This 1948 symposium was imagined as an assessment of modern architecture and International Style aesthetics. It follows Mumford’s 1947 “The Skyline: Status Quo” article for *The New Yorker*, which critiques International Style functionalism, individualism, and global singularity and instead argues for the importance of humanism, vernacular modernism, and critical regionalisms. Thus this symposium is important because it problematizes the dogmatism of the International Style movement. Moreover, the symposium is significant because it never comes to a consensus about what “what is happening to modern architecture.” Not only is there disagreement between architects and architectural theorists in favor of international modernism and regional modernism, there is also disagreement within these respective camps about what precisely constitutes “modern architecture.”

The argument can be broadly framed in terms of a disagreement between Lewis Mumford and the MoMA Directors of Architecture and Design—specifically Alfred H. Barr, Jr., Hitchcock, and Johnson—on the state of modern architecture in relation to the needs of postwar society. But as *The Bulletin of the Museum of Modern Art* suggests, the controversial debate “was soon reduced to something much more basic: those who spoke in terms of style and standards, and those who denounced all labels and ‘isms’ as secondary to the problems of production” (Barr et al 4). For example, Barr argues for the continued relevance of an International Style on the grounds of architectural aestheticism as opposed to functionalism: “We are on the side of architecture as an art rather than on the side of mere building, however structurally efficient, commercially successful, sentimentally effective, humanistically plausible, or domestically agreeable

that building may be” (Barr et al 5). In contrast, Mumford restates his position from his “The Skyline: Status Quo” article that both questions the hegemony of the International Style and calls for a new style of architecture that reconsiders architectural functionalism, and the postwar development that “the modern accent is on living, not on the machine” (Mumford 2). In his comments, Mumford insists that the Bay Region Style might be a better model for postwar life as it is “an example of a form of modern architecture which came into existence with our growth and which is so native that people, when they ask for a building, do not ask for it any style” (Barr et al 18). For Mumford, modern architecture that designs in accordance with local needs is a sample of a more relevant internationalism.

To both Mumford and the MoMA Directors of Architecture and Design, Mahony Griffin’s regional modernism offers a challenge. Broadly stated, she interjects a feminist approach to architecture. Not only are there no women included in this symposium discussion, but questions of the domestic function of houses or division of labor in homes are eclipsed by debates over Bay School Regionalism versus International Style, and cottage homes versus machine art. Although she would be arguably more sympathetic to Mumford’s Bay Region Style and his defense of vernacular modernisms, Mahony Griffin makes clear in *The Magic of America* the political function of modern architecture: to design built environments that both meet the material, social, and spiritual needs of its communities *and* actively promote global democracy. Meaning this: Mumford’s challenge to MoMA and International Style does not go far enough. While he critiques the political conservatism and aesthetic formalisms of his MoMA counterparts, he nevertheless replaces one style (International Style) with another (Bay

School Regionalism). For Mahony Griffin, it is not enough to say that in this postwar moment localisms become internationalisms.

This is the point at which we must differentiate Mahony Griffin from Mumford, in terms of both historical alignment *and* architectural theory and practice. What Mahony Griffin's regional modernism requires is a comparative framework in which these local efforts might be read as participating in something more prescient than, say, formalisms, aesthetics, or middle-class domesticity—not to mention the implicit sexism in both poles of this debate. She also requires that domestic architecture and family housing be dealt with more critically than acknowledging that “the modern accent is on living” or that “a house should be as personal as one's clothes and should fit the family life just as well” (2). Indeed, Mumford's architectural regionalism, and more specifically his qualification that vernacular modernism primarily differentiates American national culture, leaves him as a significant prewar figure. That is to say, he remains a prewar fellow of Van Wyck Brooks and Randolph Bourne, who stressed that the distance between urban centers and their regional peripheries produced a distinctive modern cultural nationalism, rather than a postwar figure who deals more critically with the way in which regional or vernacular culture might critically intervene in the ideologies of modernism or the politics of globalization. For these reasons—and for her insistence on “democratic architecture”—Mahony Griffin argues that the Griffins' architectural modernism “is the last word in modernism” (i.9).

In the “Municipal Battle,” the section that props the Griffins' 1920s-1930s Castlecrag suburb as a model for a new civilization, Mahony Griffin appropriately levels a three-part attack on modern architecture. She begins by positioning the International

Style in opposition to “democratic architecture.” Arguing that regional planning is the starting point for democratic architecture and by extension world democracy, she quips: “The new aristocracy in architecture are much taken up just now with what is called the international style. They have failed to learn that when anything can be identified as ‘style’ it is already dead” (iii.4). Moving from wholes to particulars, Mahony Griffin moves from the “new world of regional planning” to domestic architecture. In the family dwelling exists the microcosm of this new social democratic order. She writes that

a dwelling is the most important unit in a human community. It is the most complicated problem, the one most difficult to solve in the profession of architecture. The range of its possibilities is endless. Other buildings are but incidents in the mass of dwellings...It is like a life cell in a living body. In a way the health of the community rests on the perfection of the single cell as it does in the body. (iii.11)

In her third and final step in this relation of “democratic architecture” to the question of domestic housing, she returns to Burley Griffins’ 1927 article, “Architecture in another Fifty Years.” Besides recontextualizing her late modernist *Magic* in the context of the Griffins’ earlier modernist practices, by returning to the earlier text Mahony Griffin also recontextualizes her project for a sustainable democratic domestic architecture. For her, there becomes a direct correlation between economic security (or rivalry) and environmental conservation (or the extermination of nature). The world must acknowledge that architecture is quotidian—to the extent that it is built by the average man for the daily social welfare of the masses and that the concrete reality of architecture has huge political and social consequences. For example, architecture must necessarily respond to problems of ecology, materialism, and feminism. According to Mahony Griffin, the planning for democracy “must include a totality, from a continent to the tiniest unit, a single home in relation to its neighbors” (iii.67).

Looking at the history of Mahony Griffin's architectural writings—beginning with her 1914 article series “Democratic Architecture—I and II” and ending with her 1949 archival submission of *The Magic of America* to the Art Institute of Chicago and the New York Historical Society—in addition to her numerous architectural designs and drawing, we can see a radically different plan for postwar life. It is important to my narrative, however, that I stress that Mahony Griffin's project of regional modernism was only a theoretical alternative. Not only was *The Magic of America* never published, her attempts to put into practice the tenets of her regional modernism for planning projects like New Hampshire's World Fellowship Center (1942), Texas's Hill Crystal-Rosary Crystal (1945), and the Chicagoland Prize Home Competition (1945) were never completed. *The Magic of America*, then, is important for us because it shows how regionalism generally and the American Midwest specifically could have functioned differently in a global American context—at the very best in terms of the political viability of regional culture at the very least in terms of domestic relationships. Put differently, in the American Century, however fraught the concept of domesticity becomes, the home front becomes the space of democratic potential.

This is a crucial point, especially in this postwar moment of American Cold War politics and cultural late modernism. In this historical moment, for Mahony Griffin, like all of the figures of my dissertation, regional modernism becomes “the last word in modernism.” The postwar moment of late modernism saw the conceptual disconnection of art, architecture, and culture from the political and the social. In contrast, regional modernism functions as a kind of oppositional cultural politics to late modernism, and especially to the kind of conservative aesthetic formalism offered by the proponents of

International Style architecture. Regional modernism locates a critical conjuncture between regionalism and globalization in the American Century. While Mahony Griffin theorizes the potential of regional modernism, in her own time we can see the beginning of political, economic, social, and cultural developments in which the region, regionalism, or regionalization are put in the service of American exceptionalism, postwar globalization, and neoliberalism. No longer tied to a *political* modernism, regional modernism instead opens toward *the politics* of late modernism. Gone is the idea that regional modernism might re-start modernism, its comparative culture concept, or its collectivist politics. Instead, whatever potential might have existed with regional modernism, specifically a regional framework for the American Century, is instead repurposed as what Marshall McLuhan has called a “global village,” in which America’s world role is to “maintain equilibrium in the commercial economies of the world” (37).

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## BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Christina Van Houten earned a Bachelor of Arts from Stetson University in 2005. She earned a Masters of Arts in English from the University of Florida in 2007 and a Doctor of Philosophy in English from the University of Florida in 2012. While a PhD student at the University of Florida, she was the recipient of the prestigious Alumni Fellowship and was a finalist for the Madelyn Lockhart Dissertation Fellowship. She has articles forthcoming in *Politics and Culture* and *Women's Studies*. She has accepted a position as a Marion L. Brittain Postdoctoral Fellow in the Georgia Institute of Technology's School of Literature, Communication, and Culture to begin in August 2012.