Overcoming the Two Solitudes of Canadian Literary Regionalism

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A S GEOGRAPHERS and literary critics have been quick to note, the concept of space as a tool of critical and interpretive analysis is experiencing something of a "boom" of late.[1] Scholars cite various reasons for this turn toward the spatial. Francesco Loriggio interprets it as a logical consequence of living "in a period that has redrawn its atlases over and over again, that is constantly reconfiguring its surroundings" (3). Patricia Yaeger links the emergence of spatial analysis to the increasing problematization of time as an analytic category: "as time's reliable design fades from view and its linear pleasures ... become less certain," she notes, "suddenly space ... heaves into view as a potential site of physical continuity and analytic constancy" (12).

My observations as a critic of Canadian literature have led me to a supplemental explanation of why space is gaining momentum within my own discipline: the emergence of postcolonial theory has spawned a new fascination with the nation-space. Homi Bhabha's theorization of a relationship between "nation and narration" has helped to catapult the nation, an entity situated precariously between notions of cultural and spatial sovereignty, to a new prominence. Because this refocusing of critical energies on the nation has unquestionably energized Canadian literary studies, it seems an appropriate time to utilize this momentum to interrogate other terrains that, like the nation, call attention to the link between processes of narration and spatialization. The Canadian literary region is one such terrain that is ripe for reassessment. Though literary regions have had their champions, from Edward McCourt and Henry Kreisel in the 1950s and 1960s to David Jordan, W. H. New, and Herb Wyile in the 1990s, critics who interrogate the spatial bases upon which claims of regional sovereignty are founded have been few and far between.[2] In this paper I will begin to redress the imbalance.

One of the reasons why literary regionalists have lacked spatial critiques of their work is that English studies is without a conceptual vo-

cabulary that could enable such critical projects. Spatial theory is hardly required reading for critics of Canadian literature. Yet my reading in this field has convinced me that closer attention to the insights and conceptual vocabulary that spatial theorists offer would advance the study of Canadian literary regionalism considerably. In particular, my reading of marxist philosopher Henri Lefebvre's *The Production of Space* and spatial theorist Edward Soja's *Postmodern Geographies* has demonstrated to me that Canadian literary regionalists have been trapped, unnecessarily, between two opposing conceptions of regional space. I stress the need to overcome this false polarity because these two opposing conceptions of regionalized space have acted in tandem to stunt our ability to theorize literary regions as spaces that are capable of representing simultaneously the social differences that exist inevitably within regionalized spaces *and* the complex particularities that issue from a condition of geographic copresence.

It may be of some comfort to those who work with literary regions to know that we in English studies are not alone in having theorized the spaces we work with into a false binary — far from it. Lefebvre's work suggests that the two opposing tendencies I will be tracing in discourses of literary regionalism are but one emanation of a problematic that has stifled the theorization of space in the Western world since the introduction of a capitalist mode of production (31). Lefebvre figures what I am calling the "two solitudes" of Canadian literary regionalism as a more generic "double illusion" that has operated to "conceal" the fact that "(social) space is a (social) product" (27). Each of the two facets of this "double illusion," Lefebvre tells us, "refers back to the other, and hides behind the other. These two aspects are the illusion of transparency on the one hand and the illusion of opacity, or 'realistic' illusion, on the other" (27).

Those operating within the illusion of opacity tend to overemphasize the materiality of space, holding that space's "natural simplicity" speaks for itself (Lefebvre 29). Thus within the illusion of opacity society is thought to play no role in processes of spatialization — such as regionalization — because spatial divisions are not believed to be produced at all, but are rather thought to be "found" in "nature."

By contrast, those who subscribe to the illusion of transparency tend to view space as an invisible, unproblematic phenomenon "giving action free reign" (Lefebvre 27). Lefebvre looks to the "good old idealist school" to explain the origins of this illusion, positing its kinship to the belief that the subject, "his thought and his desires," has a greater reality than "'things'" (29). Within such an epistemology space is reduced to a sub-

jective condition, or, as Edward Soja characterizes it, "to a mental construct alone, a way of thinking, an ideational process in which the 'image' of reality takes epistemological precedence over the tangible substance and appearance of the real world" (125).

To summarize, while the illusion of opacity inflates space to a universal 'given,' the illusion of transparency reduces it to a subjective condition; while the former illusion tends to reify space, the latter tends to dematerialize it. And although these two illusions are to an extent distinct, they operate in tandem to obscure the fact that "(social) space is a (social) product" (Lefebvre 27).

Since I have now characterized the two illusions that prevent us from recognizing the role of the social in spatial production, it may well be asked: exactly what is social space? Social spaces are those we encounter most frequently in daily life. Even our knowledge of that most personal of all spaces — our 'material' bodies — is mediated to us though socially produced epistemes that imbue these intimate spaces with a highly social character. Given the omnipresence of social space, it is a great irony that the hegemony achieved by the illusions of opacity and transparency has rendered it a highly elusive concept. And its status as a relational rather than absolute epistemological category has undoubtedly contributed to our collective ignorance of this vitally relevant kind of space. For social space is not definitively knowable in and of itself; rather, it is knowable to the extent that it is differentiable from two other kinds of space — namely, "the physical space of material nature and the mental space of cognition and representation" (Soja 120).

It follows from the relational character of social space that both physical and mental space are "incorporated into the social construction of spatiality," and thus cannot be separated definitively from social space (Soja 120). Yet neither physical nor mental space is equatable with social space. Therefore it is as important to maintain some distinction between these three kinds of space as it is to acknowledge and work to understand the points of conjunction that render physical, social, and mental space highly articulated categories. Indeed, Soja contends that "defining these interconnections remains one of the most formidable challenges to contemporary social theory, especially since the historical debate has been monopolized by the physical-mental dualism almost to the exclusion of social space" (120). And I am arguing that the history of Canadian literary regionalism has been dominated by a similar "physical-mental dualism" that has prevented the field from recognizing that literary regions, like all geographic divisions, are social spaces *par excellence* (Soja 120).

I have chosen Hugh MacLennan's metaphor of "two solitudes" to capture within the context of Canadian literary regionalism the machinations of the two illusions Lefebvre uses to address a far wider circle of influence. Though my choice of MacLennan's metaphor has admittedly been influenced by my desire to 'domesticate' for Canadian literary critics two interrelated concepts that emanate from 'foreign' disciplinary turf, MacLennan's metaphor strikes me as an apt one for other reasons as well.

Though my interpretation is one among many, it seems to me that MacLennan invokes Rilke's poeticization of a condition of amorous intersubjectivity to articulate his vision of a kind of bicultural nationalism in which unity is enabled through the mutual recognition of difference. It is the mutuality of this gesture that establishes a kind of conceptual bridge across which "two solitudes" can "protect, / and touch, and greet each other." This kind of unity within difference also characterizes accurately Lefebvre's two illusions: for although the illusions of opacity and transparency generate different kinds of space, they are mutually interdependent in that "each illusion embodies and nourishes the other" (Lefebvre 30). And just as MacLennan's invocation of a bicultural, French/English context of Canadian nationalism obscures our recognition of an inevitably more complex, multicultural nation-space, so the two solitudes of Canadian literary regionalism have acted in tandem to obscure our recognition of a third, more multifaceted kind of regional space — namely, social space.

I will now demonstrate through example how it is that these "two solitudes" of thought in Canadian literary regionalism have operated to encourage our misrecognition of the social origin of regional spatial production. Although I will be presenting a rough historical progression in Canadian literary regionalism from first-solitude regionalists' investment in the illusion of opacity to second-solitude regionalists investment in the illusion of transparency, it is important to bear in mind that such a representation of the field is indeed an approximation. And although I feel that it is a useful one, it is an approximation that I will endeavour at times to interrupt by depicting some of the ways in which the illusion of opacity continues to cast its spell on contemporary literary regionalists, as emanations of the illusion of transparency can be gleaned in the work of first-solitude regionalists.

Having made this qualification, I can now identify two Western Canadian literary regionalists, Edward McCourt and Henry Kreisel, as the most influential 'forefathers' of first-solitude regionalism. Although regionalists in this first-solitude camp satisfactorily theorize literary re-

gions as spaces of shared geographic locality, they forge such theories of collective regional habitation at an analytic cost: the logical integrity of their theories is maintained only when society's role in regional production is denied. Not only does this denial of the role of the social reify the *processional* character of regional production by positing regional borders as "fixed," atemporal entities, it also, more disturbingly, presents an image of regional society as an artificially harmonious collective by mitigating the inevitability of intraregional group conflict within these 'naturally' bounded regional spaces. This utopian aspect of first-solitude regions can be linked directly to first-solitude regionalists' investment in the illusion of opacity because, as Edward Soja tells us, this illusion results typically in the "submergence of social conflict in depoliticized geometries" (124).

Edward McCourt invokes just such a depoliticized national geometry in his preface to *The Canadian West in Fiction* when he claims that "the Prairie Provinces constitute the most homogeneous of the great natural geographic divisions within this country."[3] It is in arguing that the prairie region constitutes a "natural geographic division" that McCourt projects the *social* agency required to produce regional spatial divisions onto a seemingly asocial 'nature.' Although my critique of McCourt's work centres around his naturalization of regional borders, it is the ideological work such processes enable that raises concerns about the extent to which naturalized regions allow for the recognition of intraregional social disunity. For what McCourt's naturalization of the prairie region enables is his further contention that the prairie is imbued with a distinctive regional "spirit" that exerts itself uniformly upon all subjects who exist within its borders. According to McCourt, "there is a remarkable unity of spirit prevailing among prairie dwellers; and a way of life as distinctive as the region which fosters it." Because he stipulates that "the region" itself "fosters" both a "remarkable unity of spirit" and a "distinctive way of life" amongst prairie inhabitants, McCourt invests regional space with a social agency of sorts.

Now McCourt is not wrong to speak of regional space as a phenomenon that impacts subjects within it. Spatial divisions can and do (routinely) exert a kind of force upon human subjects, though they rarely exert such forces uniformly across a given society. 'Everyday' spatial divisions — such as those which differentiate between public and private space, which zone spaces as residential, commercial, or industrial, which 'theme' spaces such as Disneyworld or Expo, which gender spaces such as washroom facilities, and which racialize spaces such as Toronto's "Cabbagetown," Vancouver's "Chinatown" and Halifax's "Africville" — provide a practi-

cal means of demonstrating how spatializations exert uneven social forces on human subjects by *enforcing* different degrees of freedom on our access to, and mobility within, these diverse spaces.[4]

But what must be emphasized is that such uneven social forces do not derive from 'space' itself, but rather from the social agents who produce (through laws, by-laws, and the deployment of 'public' sentiment) and reproduce (through legal enforcement and/or hegemonization) these socio-spatial divisions. And it is because even our potential capacity to counter the inequities that often arise from spatial divisions requires that we recognize the social origin of spatial production that McCourt's naturalization of regional space sits at the heart of my critique. For it is his founding contention that "the Prairie Provinces constitute the most homogenous of the great natural geographic divisions" that removes from the realm of the political (if we consider 'the political' that which is socially contestable) not just the process of spatialization but also the uneven social effects such spatializations exercise on the disparate groups that compose regional societies.

And Henry Kreisel's argument in his influential article "The Prairie: A State of Mind" is open to a virtually identical critique. For Kreisel, like McCourt before him, argues that the prairie landscape itself exercises a uniform impact on its inhabitants. Because Kreisel believes that this impact is irresistible, he contends that "all discussion of the literature produced in the Canadian west must of necessity begin with the impact of the landscape upon the mind" (257). Thus Kreisel, like McCourt, imbues "the landscape," and not the human subjects who participate in the ongoing social construction of this landscape, with the capacity to consolidate "the prairie" into a spatio-aesthetic unity (257, 254). And as was the case with McCourt, it is Kreisel's projection of social agency onto his naturalized region that raises concerns about the extent to which his "Canadian west" recognizes intraregional social conflict, and thus social diversity (257). For Kreisel presses the agency he displaces from the realm of the social to that of the 'natural' into further service in arguing that there is a regional "state of mind produced by the sheer physical fact of the prairie" (256).

Though Kreisel and McCourt's parallel investment of the prairie with a land-locked regional essence that impacts all of its inhabitants uniformly might *seem* to exhibit a pleasingly democratic construction of regionalized subjects — for to exist within the region is to feel its essence, and thus to be part of a regional community — a closer examination reveals that such constructions of regional society derive from a desire for,

rather than a logical demonstration of, such regional social cohesion. For without ever addressing the potential influence of social differences (such as those of gender, class, ethnicity, or sexuality) on prairie inhabitants' experience of the prairie region, Kreisel assumes that "the land itself" produces a uniform "state of mind," as McCourt assumes that it produces a uniform "unity of spirit" and "way of life" amongst prairie dwellers. And to assume — without demonstrating — the presence of such a shared regional consciousness is a means of repressing social difference by refusing to recognize even its potential existence.

The socially repressive model of regional society that first-solitude regionalism produces is cast in particularly stark relief when McCourt and Kreisel's arguments are resituated within a context of regional literary criticism. As intuition might suggest, first-solitude literary regionalists construct regional writers as rather passive figures. They are not believed to participate in the ongoing construction of literary regions, but are rather thought to 'reflect' in their writing the regional essence that seemingly pre- (and post-) dates them. It is the task of regional writers to "understand and describe the influence of the region upon the people who live within its confines," McCourt tells us, and to convey through their work "the subtle modifications of character which inevitably result from the influence upon ordinary men and women of a highly distinctive environment" (56). Of course Henry Kreisel has already been shown to mirror this position in asserting that "all discussion of the writing produced in the Canadian west must of necessity begin with the impact of the landscape upon the mind" (257).

If the aim of regional literature is to mirror or reflect a regional essence, the role of the regional literary critic follows in rather straightforward fashion: for a belief in a seemingly land-based regional essence supports conveniently a parallel belief that 'the land itself' produces an ostensibly 'objective' standard of literary value. And an investment in such an 'objective' canon-measure displaces concerns about a regional critic's particular interpretive bias, be it gender-, class-, sexuality- or ethnicity-based, right out of the interpretive paradigm. Canonical works of regional literature are those which 'reflect' with the greatest 'accuracy' the 'inevitable' effect that a land-based regional essence exercises 'uniformly' on its inhabitants.

That regional space does not exercise an even effect on regionalized subjects, and that first-solitude regional critics tend to exercise a far from objective critical authority over regional literature, perhaps goes without saying. To consider but one example, it takes no great act of imagination

to see a gender bias operating when Henry Kreisel names "man, the giant-conquerer, and man, the insignificant dwarf" as "the two polarities of the state of mind produced by the sheer physical fact of the prairie" (256). For where do we situate prairie women within this model, the women whose sphere of existence is delimited with a striking regularity within canonical works of prairie fiction to 'home and garden'? Her collective existence as 'prairie woman, house-bound help-mate' is given little recognition within Kreisel's model because, though it pretends universality, this model describes with greatest precision a 'state of mind' generated by a very particular set of social circumstances — those that govern the life of the overwhelmingly male, rural, agrarian prairie dweller. For it is the prairie farmer, who ekes out an existence between the extremities of earth and sky, economic self-actualization, and environmental devastation, whose "state of mind" is most likely to find expression in Kreisel's bipolar vision of "man, the giant-conquerer, and man, the insignificant dwarf always threatened by defeat" (256). And a gender-bias is not the only one operating in Kreisel's model of regional consciousness. For it represents no more accurately the 'state of mind' produced by the *urban* environment within which the majority of male *and* female 'prairie dwellers' now work and live than it does that of the 'house-bound help mates' who inhabit the novels of Robert Stead, F. P. Grove and Sinclair Ross.

One would perhaps expect that the vision of intraregional social harmony produced by the kind of land-based essentialism that characterizes first-solitude literary regionalism would have 'gone the way of the horse and buggy' by the theoretically informed 1990s. Yet this is not quite the case. First-solitude contentions of land-based intraregional social harmony continue to appear in contemporary writings on Canadian literary regionalism. In his introduction to the edited collection *Regionalism Reconsidered*, for example, David Jordan reinvokes such a utopian vision of regional society when he argues that "regionalism ... is born of a sense of identity and belonging that is shared by a region's inhabitants" (xv). And like McCourt and Kreisel before him, Jordan locates the origin of social cohesion in a seemingly asocial 'nature.' For he stipulates that "this sense of community springs from an intimate relation to the natural environment" (xv-xvi).

A somewhat more subtle means by which first-solitude thought continues to influence contemporary literary regionalism can be traced to the popular construction of regions as smaller spatial divisions of the Canadian nation-space. Although this mode of regional definition need not necessarily bespeak an indebtedness to first-solitude thought, an as-

sumption about regionalized space that often accrues from this definition does reveal such an indebtedness. Indeed, it seems that the very legitimacy of defining regional space in opposition to national space lends credence to the more contentious belief that the difference between regionalized and nationalized *subjects* is equally oppositional: while it is thought to be blatantly ideological to assume the existence of an overarching national identity or culture, positing the existence of such homogenizing entities on behalf of regions meets with far less suspicion. And the ideological work this mode of definitional contrast performs is not limited to the field of Canadian literary regionalism; it can be detected in Anthony Giddens's claim that "regionalization is an important notion in counter-balancing the assumption that societies are always homogeneous, unified systems" (376). Though Giddens does not explicitly state it, his contrast does suggest that regional societies are fit exemplars of such "homogenous, unified systems" (376).

I relate the prevalence of the assumption of regional social cohesion to another popular assumption: that national diversity inheres in regional difference. Now there are, of course, many kinds of social difference at play across both regions and nations that do not relate explicitly to geographic difference. Yet the hegemonic tendency to equate national social diversity with regional difference has supported a systematic de-prioritization of these non-spatial social differences within regionalism because, when the critical focus is on regions *as opposed to nations*, critics (falsely) presume that 'difference' has always already been accounted for. And the connection between this belief and first-solitude thought is easily established. As my analysis of McCourt and Kreisel's work has demonstrated, first solitude regionalists invoke this very logic when they equate regional identity with spatial difference: according to McCourt and Kreisel, regional space *is* the origin of regional identity, and as a result, the "state of mind" or "unity of spirit" produced by the "the sheer physical fact of the prairie" is thought to be the only significant kind of difference that regionalists need consider.

And I find it a great irony that while the contemporary insurgence of postcolonial theory has enabled myriad critiques of the existence of an overarching national unity, these valuable critiques have served at times to actually reinforce the construction of regions as the nation's less ideological and more socially unified spatial subdivisions. Wyile exhibits this ironic reinforcement when he argues in "Writing, Regionalism and Globalism in a Post-Nationalist Canada" that "with the concept of the monolithic nation-state on the wane, and with artists and academics becoming

increasingly anti-centric and sensitive to the importance of difference and particularity, the way is being paved for a revival of sorts for regionalism" (10). The unstated assumption that Wyile perpetuates here is that national difference is articulated through regional particularity, and that regions somehow *embody* (and I invoke the term deliberately to suggest a kind of organic unity) such difference and particularity.

The corrective necessitated by the trends exhibited by Jordan, Giddens, and Wyile is, at least, refreshingly simple: for a region to be constructed as a socially inclusive space, claims of regional social cohesion must be held to the same critical standards as claims of national social cohesion are currently being held to. Though national space is admittedly produced through more formal, institutional means, we should not allow the relative informality of regional spatial production to encourage a belief in the 'organicism' of regional spatial divisions.[5] For both national and regional spatial divisions are socially produced, and thus both spatial divisions are equally capable of repressing the existence of social difference within their borders.

Although second-solitude regionalists tend to work with a greater awareness of social difference than do first solitude regionalists, they have not utilized this awareness as a means of integrating intraregional social diversity into their theories of regional production with much more success than the first-solitude camp. And although first- and second-solitude regionalists share common ground in this regard, their parallel assumptions of regional social cohesion arise from very different sets of premises about space.

Indeed, the premises governing the first- and second-solitude camps seem so different that it is tempting to configure them within a relation of direct opposition. For second solitude thought seems clearly to have taken its impetus from a vigorous rejection of the environmental determinism that drives first-solitude thought. But their very desire to 'liberate' regional space from a strictly material determinant has led second-solitude regionalists to reject rather too radically the materialism of the first-solitude camp. For while they have repudiated successfully the notion that literary regions originate in the "land itself," second-solitude regionalists have embraced an equally insufficient construction of these spaces as "region[s] of the human mind" (Kreisel 266; Mandel, "Images" 47). Thus second-solitude regionalists have replaced the first-solitude camp's reductive materialism with an equally reductive variety of idealism, and in so doing, have forsaken the illusion of opacity only to have embraced the illusion of transparency.

Yet Lefebvre emphasizes that our very capacity to overcome the double-illusion he names (and thus, by extension, the two solitudes I have named) inheres in our ability to recognize that what *seems* like a hard and fast opposition between the illusions of opacity and transparency is in fact a relation of symbiotic interdependence (30). This interdependence derives from the fact that, at their extreme limits, idealism and materialism are nourished by common philosophical roots. While radical materialism posits that reality inheres in objects that shape a subject's perceptions, radical idealism posits that reality inheres in the individuated *cogito*, a *cogito* which determines the objects of a subject's perceptions. It is because both positions negate the role society plays in shaping subjects' perceptions that it is surprisingly easy to shift from one illusion (or solitude) to the other — indeed, such a move constitutes the path of least resistance. Henry Kreisel's decision to entitle his article "The Prairie: A State of Mind" is a case in point: because society's role in producing regions is neglected whether Kreisel names "the vast land itself" or a unitary "state of mind" as the agent of regional production, he can juxtapose these positions with no apparent sense of internal contradiction (266, 254).

Two particularly influential practitioners of second-solitude regionalism are Eli Mandel and W.H. New. Though Mandel and New are most commonly associated with Western-Canadian literary regionalism, these second solitude regionalists' rejection of geographic locality as an exclusive basis for regional identity lends their literary regionalism a decidedly cross-regional relevance.

There are a great number of tendencies that accrue from second-solitude regionalists' investment in the illusion of transparency. I will, however, be limiting my investigation of this second camp to a critique of the one tendency that I feel represents the greatest threat to the future of Canadian literary regionalism — the tendency to efface the distinction between geographic (social) space and mental space. Edward Soja substantiates the link between this second-solitude tendency and the illusion of transparency when he explains that, within the illusion of transparency, "social space folds into mental space, into diaphanous concepts of spatiality which all too often take us away from materialized social realities" (125). I will now demonstrate the manner in which this enfolding occurs using examples from Eli Mandel's work before discussing the threat this enfolding represents to literary regionalism by conducting a more in-depth analysis of New's work in this field.

Though Mandel's writings on literary regionalism are diverse, they do exhibit a consistent proclivity for either dematerializing literary regions

or for effacing the distinction between geographic and mental space. In "Images of Prairie Man" Mandel works with an utterly dematerialized conception of regions when he defines the prairie as "a sort of complex conceptual framework[,]... a mental construct, a region of the human mind" (47). In "The Regional Novel: Borderline Art," Mandel refines his earlier thought in contending that "a region is defined by its boundaries, regionalism consisting in the mapping of boundaries" (112). The kinds of regions Mandel envisions for future study are those which are defined by the boundaries that delimit "colony as opposed to republic, order as opposed to anarchy, energy as opposed to sloth" (115). Thus for Mandel, regions are those spaces that demarcate conceptual distinctions, regardless of whether these regions demarcate distinctions grounded in geographic space (such as the spaces of colony and republic) or mental space (such as those of energy and sloth, anarchy and order).

New's introduction to *Articulating West* exhibits this same disinclination to maintain a distinction between regions of the mind and regions of the Canadian nation-space. However, because New situates his understanding of regional space in *Articulating West* within a rather complex theory of Canadian cultural identity production, I must perform a bit more analytic work to substantiate this claim.

New begins his theory with the rather bold assertion that "Canada's regional identities have always fairly readily reduced to two: 'East' and 'West'" (xi). The regions that ground these identities are, however, "only loosely tied to geography and hence alter their meaning from place to place" (xi). Beyond signifying a plethora of geographic referents, 'East' and 'West' also signify something akin to cultural identity, for New explains that the meaning of the terms is "of a less palpable sort that underlies their simple directional geography and somehow enunciates the inchoate basic assumptions of a way of life" (xi). Despite the semantic breadth of 'East' and 'West,' New insists on retaining these terms because their wide usage "suggests that they do have meaning" (xi).

New sees the geographic and cultural levels of meaning imparted by the terms 'East' and 'West' as not only intimately related, but as roughly equivalent. This equivalency derives from New's premise that "Canadian writers have attempted to identify their culture by solving what Northrop Frye has called the problem of locating 'where *here* is'" (xi). Within this Frygian schema, the distinction that is maintained typically between cultural identity and geographic locality is eliminated altogether. Following this schema, New jettisons the geographic basis of regional identity from the fuller picture of cultural identity (which ideally includes both geo-

graphic and psychological dimensions) in the interests of locating within mental space a national cultural identity that cannot be located within geographic space. Locating this identity geographically is problematic not only because no one place can capture "the inchoate basic assumptions of a [national] way of life," but also because the geographic basis of cultural identity is seemingly too fluid to be fixed upon since "the physical realities represented by 'East' and 'West' shift as the *ideas* of 'East' and 'West' alter" (xi).

While Frye 'locates' the Canadian cultural identity within "the garrison mentality," New posits a different location for this identity, and a location that better incorporates Frye's further contention that "the question of Canadian identity ... is ... a regional question" (225; i-ii). New attempts to integrate the tension between regional and national affiliations into the Canadian cultural identity by locating this identity *in the between* of 'East' and 'West.'

Yet in order to render this location meaningful New must eliminate the semantic indeterminacy of his key terms, 'East' and 'West.' This he attempts to do by sublimating these terms into spatially free-floating signifiers, the burdensomely relative geographic content of which is replaced by a seemingly more stable conceptual content of New's own devising. "Implicit here," he tells us, "is an equation of 'East' with a settled order which may be imaginatively static" (xiv). 'West' takes its meaning in opposition to the eastern state of mind and represents within New's lexicon a mental "frontier" marked by the characteristics of chaos and imaginative activity (xiv).

'East' and 'West' do represent "regions" within New's theory of Canadian cultural identity, then, but according to his own "implicit" definition, they are *conceptual regions of the Canadian mind* (xiv). It is the tension between these two conceptual regions that demarcates the Canadian cultural identity, an identity that comes into view fleetingly when writers 'articulate west.' For "to speak the language of 'West' is not to be merely regional in bias," New explains, "but to articulate the tension between order and disorder, myth and reality, that underlies Canadian writing" (xi).

Yet New's deployment of the terms 'East' and 'West' does not comply consistently with the dematerialized understanding of regional space he utilizes to explain the articulation of national identity. For at times New uses the terms 'East' and 'West' to signify regions grounded in geographic space. It is hard to imagine, for example, that New does not intend 'West' to signify (socially produced) geographic spaces when he

implores 'Westerners' to resist the imaginative stasis of the 'East' because "by pandering to such stasis ... the 'West' denies both its real distinctiveness and its mythic potential" (xiv). It is logically impossible for 'West' to signify a frontier of the Canadian mind here — no mental space can "pander to" or "deny" anything, these actions being meaningfully attributable only to social agents. Yet the 'West' New invokes here need not refer exclusively to 'the Canadian West' as defined by McCourt, Kreisel, or the metropolitan-hinterland thesis, either. For New claims at another turn that "in many ways the Arctic is now seen as a new Canadian 'West'" (xxiv).

It is not until New explains how it is that the circumstances of some Canadians imbue them with a heightened capacity to understand the distinction between his regions of 'East' and 'West' that the degree of semantic elasticity he intends for his regional signifiers comes into clearer focus. For according to New, "no one knows these distinctions better than the inhabitants of a new frontier, for their realities and the imaginative designs of outsiders are constantly at variance" (xiv). With this explanation in place, the meaning New intends for us to invest his regions of 'East' and 'West' with becomes more precise, though no less problematic. For in order to invest these terms with a hermeneutic coherence that addresses their diverse usage, we must formulate an understanding of 'West' as a metaphoric signifier of all those 'sites' whose "inhabitants" have had their identities dictated by "outsiders' preconceptions" (xiv). By contrast, rules of coherence dictate that New's 'East' be understood as a metaphor which signifies all of those 'sites' whose inhabitants have the power of self-definition. In short, New deploys 'East' and 'West' as generic spatial signifiers that demarcate psychological limits whose interrelation governs — simultaneously — the articulation of 'regional' identities grounded in either geographic or mental space. And it is in this manner that New disregards the distinction between geographic (social) space and mental space in *Articulating West*.

New's tendency to collapse the distinction between 'region' as a marker of geographic locality and 'region' as a metaphoric expression of social marginality finds much clearer expression in his recent work on regionalism in *Land Sliding*. Here New collapses the distinction between geographic and mental regions when he explains that he is trying with the concept of region "to differentiate between the metaphors *insider* and *outsider,* or between two kinds of relationship with centralized authority" (116). According to New, "'region' is a shorthand way of conceptualizing this distinction" (116).

It follows from this metaphoric and spatially free-floating under-standing of region that "the truly regional voice is one that declares an internal political alternative" (152). Since New contends that

> it is perhaps not surprising that it should be Coast-dwellers, Western-ers, Quebeckers, Maritimers, Northerners, Newfoundlanders, Women, Native writers, and Ethnic Minorities — writers on the political margins of so-called 'Central' Canada (the industrialized St. Law-rence basin) — who should be among the most forceful challengers to the normative presumptions of anglophone Ontario male history,

it is the writing produced by members of these identity groups that should constitute the canon of regional literature (152). Thus once again in *Land Sliding* New eliminates the distinction between region as a socially me-diated marker of material locality and of region as a marker of political marginality. Though such an analytical move highlights interesting par-allels between these two kinds of identity, it also effaces important par-ticularities about the "materialized social realities" that issue from conditions of shared geographic locatedness (Soja 125).

Indeed, I see the tendency exhibited by second-solitude regionalists such as New and Mandel to locate regions in mental space, or alternately to posit literary regions simultaneously as 'regions of the mind' and of the nation-space, as a genuine threat to the future of literary regionalism in Canada. For such a generic deployment of the term region removes the crucially important — though admittedly blurry — line that distin-guishes literary regionalism from other fields of identity-based inquiry that already find expression in literary studies, enquiries such as feminist studies, cultural studies, gay and lesbian studies, and ethnic studies. In short, the tendency for second-solitude regionalists to efface the distinc-tion between geographic and mental space removes the only impetus for a long and productive tradition of regional studies in Canada. This im-petus is that literary regionalism endeavours to articulate aspects of col-lective being that are neither more nor less important than those of groups whose identities do not require an explicit geographic dimension, but that are decidedly *different*. By collapsing the distinction between regions of the mind and regions of the Canadian nation-space, this difference, which bespeaks the specificity, complexity, and very legitimacy of regional stud-ies, is lost.

But my critique of second solitude regionalism is intended as more than just a defense of this field's 'rightful turf,' if you will. It is also in-tended to demonstrate that Lefebvre's concept of social space provides a

uniquely efficient means of facilitating a recognition of the sociocultural plurality of regional space. For the premises informing both the first- and second-solitude schools of literary regionalism have disabled this recognition by different means. Just as first-solitude regionalists look to the "land itself" to justify their contention that regions are geographic spaces within which individuals are conjoined by a common "state of mind" or "unity of spirit," second solitude regionalists look to shared identity positions to delimit the borders of regions grounded in mental or geographic space. Thus the work of both first- and second-solitude regionalists is informed by the same *assumption* of intra-regional social coherence. It is only the source of social unity these two groups utilize to legitimate this shared assumption that varies.

Now this assumption of intraregional social cohesion has not pervaded the field of Canadian literary regionalism for nothing. It seems clear enough that the very meaningfulness of the term 'region' derives from its capacity to represent some kind of collectivity or identity. Yet perhaps the most fundamental point my analyses have been intended to underscore is that literary regionalists must interrupt the tradition of utilizing the *assumption* of regional social cohesion as an uninterrogated premise for theorizing regional space and begin to utilize it as an open-ended and self-conscious hypothesis for future theorizations.

A literary regionalism that takes its impetus from the *hypothesis* that regions are socially produced spatializations offers as one of its most exciting features the opportunity to explore the contestatory character of both regional space and of the processes of border-production which delimit regional spaces. Such a socialization of the space of the literary region would also enable a shift away from an exclusive focus on 'nature' or 'regional environments' and towards a broader focus on the myriad social practices that characterize any process of geographic cohabitation.

I feel not only that a literary regionalism informed by Lefebvre's contention that "(social) space is a (social) product" is the only means of facilitating a simultaneous recognition of the social diversity of regionalized subjects *and* of the particularities of geographic cohabitation, I am also convinced that it would inject an exciting new set of questions into this field. Perhaps first among these should be the question of whether regional cultures actually exist within the Canadian nation-space: are there social practices and beliefs that conjoin individuals who occupy a variety of identity positions together within a given — but not necessarily continuous — geographic space? Does Canadian literature offer any ground for positing a shared urban culture, a shared prairie culture, a

shared Northern culture, a shared suburban culture, or a shared rural culture, for instance? Because such a literary regionalism would acknowledge the inevitability of intraregional diversity, it follows that a shared regional culture would not constitute an exhaustive identity for regionalized subjects. Rather, I envision such a regional identity as a nexus of shared beliefs and practices that conjoins subjects — who themselves occupy individually and collectively a variety of identity positions — together within an *additional* regional identity.

Since I recommend that social cohesion be adopted as a hypothesis, rather than an assumption, about regional society, the approach to literary regionalism that I am arguing for must confront literary regionalism's potential irrelevance. For once both geographic locality and social difference are recognized, a nexus of shared beliefs and practices may not be easy to locate across time and space. Though I find this possibility to be unlikely, I believe that acknowledging the potential 'death' of literary regionalism is the only means of ensuring its rebirth as a non-repressive mode of analysis. For in order to theorize literary regions as socially inclusive spaces, Canadian literary regionalism must be put to this hard test. Or perhaps more accurately, Canadian literary regionalism should become the practice of conducting this hard test.

NOTES

[1] In "Politics and Space/Time" Doreen Massey compiles an impressive list of examples to defend her claim that "'Space' is very much on the agenda these days" (249).

[2] Francesco Loriggio's "Regionalism and Theory" stands out as a thought-provoking exception to this rule of critical neglect. While we share common ground in our desire to re-theorize regions as socially diverse spaces, Loriggio looks to narratology and "possible worlds semantics" for the vocabulary to encourage the recognition, while I look to spatial theory and cultural geography (Loriggio 11).

[3] The preface to McCourt's *The Canadian West in Fiction* is not paginated.

[4] Patricia Yaeger provides an interesting discussion of themed spaces in her introduction to *The Geography of Identity*. And for those interested, Kay Anderson's *Vancouver's Chinatown: Racial Discourse in Canada, 1875-1990* provides a insightful explanation of the way in which municipal by-laws and 'public sentiment' were manipulated to create Vancouver's "Chinatown" — a spatial division that did not so much 'reflect' racial difference as *produce* it.

[5] George Woodcock distinguishes between provinces as "merely political" spatial divisions and regions as "more organic and less formalized" ones in "The Meeting of Time and Space" (24).

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