

THE REAL SOUTH

Southern Narrative in the Age of
Cultural Reproduction

SCOTT ROMINE

LSU

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INTRODUCTION

In his 1972 *The Americanization of Dixie: The Southernization of America*, John Egerton lamented an “amalgamation of regions that spreads and perpetuates the banal and the venal while it melts the great and valuable diversity of America into a homogenizing purée.” A decade later, Edwin M. Yoder offered an inverted jeremiad of Dixie’s “Dixiefication,” its willing participation in self-caricature and the commodifying logic of capitalist enterprise.¹ The two trends, of course, are not only reconcilable, but organically related under the standard account of globalization. In this account, the homogenizing pressures of a global economy initiate a recursive retreat to the local; whether this retreat is efficacious is a matter of some disagreement. Indeed, Egerton and Yoder were prescient in predicting two subgenres of globalization narrative: on the one hand, the story of McWorld popularized by Benjamin Barber wherein everyone eschewing jihadism will eventually eat the same Big Mac, and on the other, the story of Disney World, wherein local differences are relentlessly absorbed and reproduced by a commodifying regime of spectacle and simulacra. Both Egerton and Yoder place the Real Dixie in jeopardy, either as an absolute loss of culture under the homogenizing force of Americanization or as a simulation of culture—Dixiefication, not Dixie—that marks continuity itself as a fake. Both accounts are chronologically arranged as series of causes and effects—that is to say, they are narratives. And from the distance of two decades, both look increasingly like chapters in the much longer story of the South’s demise, reports of which we can now label, with some confidence, as greatly exaggerated. Surely no region, or culture, or nation, or place—whatever the South is—has been more often subjected to premature eschatology.

Although *The Real South: Southern Narrative in the Age of Cultural Reproduction* ranges well beyond the imagined geography of Dixie per se (a territory associated, in my mind at least, with a white quasi nation always, already consigned to an irretrievable past—a place where a certain *kind* of I wishes that it were), it explores the South’s persistence in what I call the age of cultural reproduction. My dissonant allusion to Walter Benjamin is not unintentional. In “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction,” Benjamin famously defined aura as that which withers in mechanical reproduction, a thesis consonant with a wide range of discourses defending southern traditions from the encroachments of modernity and its me-

chanical praxis. But however ugly it sounds to the contemporary ear, mechanical reproduction had, for Benjamin, a primarily "positive form"—specifically, in its "cathartic . . . liquidation of the traditional value of the cultural heritage." By detaching the reproduced object from the "domain of tradition," Benjamin argued, mechanical reproduction penetrated the smoke and mirrors of ritual to access "an aspect of reality free of all equipment."² One of the recurring questions of this study is whether a mechanically reproduced South is preferable to an authentic one. Another is whether Benjamin's liquidation of culture and detachment from tradition actually operate in an age of reproductions, counterfeits, and simulacra that hardly liberate reality in the way Benjamin predicted. The South is full of fakes—Civil War reenactments and plantation tourism, to name two—infinately preferable to their originals and arguably descended from them. Even so, faking it acquires, almost inevitably, the negative connotations associated with the work of Benjamin's longtime antagonist Theodor Adorno, in his pessimistic critique of the culture industry. Still, if mechanical reproduction tells a different story than does the industrialization of culture, the two stories are equally committed to a discontinuous narrative of historical rupture. *Cultural* reproduction, however, describes what cultures are supposed to do and are supposed always to have done. My subtitle, then, signals a double narrative of continuity and rupture, a doubling I wish less to adjudicate than to preserve, since it is in precisely this liminal space that, I argue, contemporary southern narrative has found something like a home ground. (If cultural reproduction describes an age in which organic culture is gone for good, it also reminds us that culture was never organic in the first place.) For similar reasons, I refer to the contemporary South as the "late South," a term that references simultaneously the condition of intensified continuity (as in "late modernity" and "late capitalism") and the condition of recent termination (as in "the late C. Vann Woodward"). The term also signals, I hope, a certain ironic distance from its own potential for eschatological grandeur, a potential I find almost inevitable in discussions of the South's fate.

Can culture reproduce itself via reproduction that is increasingly dominated by mass media, global corporations, and the logic of commodification? Can cultures and traditions flourish or even survive in liquidated form? It's not, after all, that Egerton and Yoder weren't on to something. Still, the real South whose decline they announce differs fundamentally from the real South around which this project is organized, which has little to do with a cultural or social actuality distributed evenly over a coherent space. By real South, I refer to something more like the "real"/"South": a set of anxious, transient, even artificial intersections, sutures, or common surfaces between two concepts that are themselves remark-

ably fluid: think of the ink that has been spilled describing what reality really is, or what the South really is. ("Reality," as Vladimir Nabokov reminds us, is "one of the few words which mean nothing much without quotes"; "South," I suggest, is another of these words.)³ My concern, rather, is with the ink (and other meaning-bearing media) that has been spilled over (or *on* or *in the fissures of*) precisely those intersections and surfaces in an effort to understand late southern cultures, as inflected by or colliding with other "kinds" of culture (mass, pop, late capitalist, American, global, and so forth), *as* cultures and to do so without reiterating some imaginary division between them and culture "proper." This will involve, among other things, being suspicious of a hermeneutics of suspicion that understands reality to lurk, categorically, beneath surfaces. Such suspicions are especially warranted where culture is concerned, given that stories about it characteristically deploy metaphors of depth and longevity to naturalize current arrangements and practices. Just as often, however, efforts to locate culture turn out to *dislocate* it from the here and now—that is, to defer its imagined "true" or "authentic" existence to some nostalgic past or utopian future. As Zygmunt Bauman observes, the ideas of culture and identity emerge simultaneously "because of that experience of underdetermination and free-floatingness which came to be articulated *ex post facto* as 'disembeddedment.'"⁴ Culture has a habit of not being where and when we are presently. In attempting to describe the work of narrative as it engages the cultures of the late South, I want, then, to avoid the potentially positivist implications of such description: like "work," "culture" is a noun that behaves like a verb. As an analytical matter, the difficulty lies in untangling how, as narratives go about performing cultural work—mobilizing desirable pasts and futures, reconciling the arrangements they describe with the arrangements that ought to be, weaving space into time with both subtlety and violence, all in an effort to provide an account of the relation between subjects and environments—they do so *now*.

For many reasons, the U.S. South provides an ideal site for such investigation: its tortured and complex relation to contemporary economic pressures and to flows of culture that are increasingly global and dispersed in nature; its acute absorption and production of declension and progress as culture—stories; and its fraught and anxious relation—in which most of the above are embedded—with authenticity. We might well expect an interesting collision between a culture that wears its history on its sleeve—didn't Faulkner say that history isn't even past?—and the cultural logic of late capitalism, where historicity is reduced to surfaces (if not a sleeve, then the front of a t-shirt), and where memory, as Andreas Huyssen observes, is consumed as spectacle and commodity.⁵ We might well expect dissonance to attend, under a regime of what David Harvey calls time-space compres-

sion, a culture historically (and often fetishistically) devoted to its insularity. Pick your postmodern poison: the South is adequately dosed—*fatally* dosed, some would say. I do not claim any special relationship between the South and the mechanics of post- or late modernity except one of intensification. As I shall argue, the South's relatively abrupt entrance into modernity and its aftermath has generated a kind of time-space compression compression, if you will, wherein the South's cultural and economic "backwardness" relative to the U.S. nation has, ironically enough, placed it in the avant-garde of contemporary cultural poetics. In short, the South was telling stories about the assault on its culture well before such stories—of the assault of something by something—operated as a kind of grand narrative in an age supposedly without them: the assault of the local by the global; of place by tourism; of history by the museum; of the real by the simulacrum; of authenticity by mechanical reproduction; of coherent space by time-space compression; of depth by surface; of value by consumerism.

Fredric Jameson, who offers one of most powerful (and bleakest) versions of this narrative, suggests that regionalism is itself ineffectual against "a genuinely global late capitalism" that penetrates local populations by "adapting its various goods to suit . . . vernacular languages and practices." The penetration, Jameson says, of "corporations into the very heart of local and regional culture" makes it "difficult to decide whether it is authentic any longer (*and indeed whether that term still means anything*). It is the EPCOT syndrome raised to a global scale . . . since now the 'regional' as such becomes the business of global American Disneyland-related corporations, who will redo your own native architecture for you more exactly than you can do it for yourself [*emphasis added*]." For Jameson, the region gravitates toward the condition and logic of what he calls the module: prefabricated difference at the service of global standardization.⁶ But to begin to unpack this narrative, we might ask what authenticity did mean, when it did mean something. The double-bind of the word, which is at its core an advertising word, is that it cannot properly refer to anything: once something is called "authentic," it already isn't. More precisely, authenticity articulates a structure of desire and hence of absence; for Jameson, that means the absence of global corporations.

As it does for Jean Baudrillard; as it did for the Nashville Agrarians. One reason, I suggest, that southern studies has never quite been able to get over the Agrarians, despite their retrograde politics and numerous overt attempts at academic assassination, is that their localized culture war predicted the broader forms that cultural warfare would assume over the course of their century and into the next. In particular, the Agrarians mobilized an idea of culture against the forms of "disembedding" generated by the modern economy against which they

brought to bear their considerable rhetorical talents. *I'll Take My Stand* is, above all, an abortive intervention in desire that strives to counter desire's manipulation in the age of "modern advertising"—the "most significant development of our industrialism," Ransom writes in the volume's introduction, precisely because it enables producers to "coerce and wheedle the public into being loyal and steady consumers."⁷ Against advertising and the kindred ills of finance capitalism, Ransom and his cohort juxtapose a model of inheritance and tradition grounded in the economy of an agrarian society. But remarking "how much of their inheritance is artifice, how little merely 'passed on,'" Lewis Simpson concludes, in what has come to seem self-evident, that "no American writers ever worked harder at inheriting their inheritance than the Agrarians."⁸ Although for Simpson such labor is implicitly fraudulent, the work of inheriting inheritance has come to define a progressively larger share of the labor expended in the field of cultural production. One can easily imagine other writers—not to mention directors, musicians, and visual artists—wresting from the Agrarians the distinction Simpson bestows. But however effectively they performed the work of inheritance, the Agrarians were singularly unsuccessful in marketing that inheritance to their contemporaries. "It is strange, of course," they write, "that a majority of men anywhere could ever as with one mind become enamored of industrialism: a system that has so little regard for individual wants," but in the real South, enamored they were.⁹

Hence the tone of exasperation underlying the entirety of *I'll Take My Stand*: why doesn't the (actual) South want the (authentic) South? If, Michael Kreyling observes, the Agrarians, "like all dedicated elites, . . . more or less manipulated the image of the problem their time and place embodies so that their solution seemed unavoidable," we should further observe that their rigged solution competed with Madison Avenue as well. It lost. In the realm of production, where it focused most of its attention, the Agrarians' South competed just as badly against the South of tax breaks and cheap, nonunion labor that, as James Cobb shows in *The Selling of the South*, was being marketed contemporaneously.¹⁰ Still, I suggest that the Agrarians were not simply bad advertisers, but advertisers working in a market that had not yet evolved, precisely because the South, mired in a cash-poor agrarian economy, could not yet afford it. Read against the grain as a marketing strategy for the South of a consumption-based economy—the South of the museum, the reenactment, the themed space, and the tourist destination—the Agrarians' genius comes into sharp focus. In describing how a southern chair might be not just a chair but a container of a "whole way of life" are the Agrarians not describing why one might want to buy an antique southern chair—perhaps even a mechanically reproduced one? (As a character in Josephine Humphreys's *Rich in Love* puts it, why buy a regular

chair, when you can get one with history behind it? Why, indeed?) When Donald Davidson praises the South for keeping culture at home in the folk and decorative arts rather than segregating it in special places like museums and concert halls, is he not offering a logic for decorating one's house with southern folk art? My suggestion, in other words, is that the Agrarians were not too late for a South already corrupted by a capitalized and industrialized economy, but too early for a post-industrial economy wherein the flexible accumulation of capital would drive, and be driven by, the flexible accumulation of culture. Offering an aesthetics of labor as "one of the happy functions of human life," they unwittingly provided an aesthetics of late southern leisure and consumption. Over the pages of *I'll Take My Stand*, the South of the culture industry hovers ghostlike.

To recognize the paradox of the Agrarian project, then, is to recognize the potential for capitalist commodification already embedded in a project overtly hostile to capitalist commodification. In offering a version of the capitalist threat narrative—the story, as Slavoj Žižek puts it, that "capitalism is rootless, with no tradition of its own, and therefore parasitical upon previous traditions, a universal order which can thrive everywhere . . . uprooting and slowly corroding all particular lifeworlds based on specific traditions"—the Agrarians generated a problematic of culture that has only intensified under a regime of late capitalism wherein ideas of "culture" are often conjured as antidotes to the pressures of the homogenizing market.¹¹ But as Žižek observes, such accounts are narrative in fact as well as form, easily deployed as temporal, causal "solutions" to pressing synchronic tensions. Thus, tradition requires a narrative apparatus or sequence (tradition → modernity) that conceals modernity's actual status as tradition's constitutive underside. Žižek's scheme, in other words, requires that we view the Agrarians' putatively historical account of a tradition under assault (in real time, from the outside) as a way of manipulating (as Kreyling puts it) contemporaneous and competing orders of cultural power so that its solutions seem self-evident. It is, in short, a strategic account of southern culture and history. Real history, Žižek says, doesn't work this way, since "historical process does not follow the logic of narration: actual historical breaks are, if anything, more radical than mere narrative deployments, since what changes in them is the entire constellation of emergence and loss. In other words, a true historical break does not simply designate the 'regressive' loss (or 'progressive' gain) of something, but the shift in the very grid which enables us to measure losses and gains."¹² Žižek's differentiation of narration and historical process will resonate (uneasily) throughout this study, not least because his scheme generates radical ambiguity: one person's grid shift might well constitute another's

narrativized loss or gain. How, practically speaking, does one distinguish a true historical break from a mere story about one, real gains and losses from those of a purely narrative sort? Most concretely in the context of this project, Žižek's ambiguity informs whether the period under analysis—roughly 1970 to the present—comes in the aftermath of a historical rupture, or merely extends by intensifying historical trends already under way. Postmodern or late modern? Postsouthern or late southern? Or just southern?

The problem is acute because stories of progress and decline are never mere registers, but invariably lend themselves to particular social, cultural, and political usages. In *The Postsouthern Sense of Place in Contemporary Fiction*, Martyn Bone provocatively reworks the Agrarian account of how capitalist pressures erode place in his own scholarly effort to “recover the relation between postsouthern literature and the social reality of ‘place(lessness)’ in a late capitalist post-South.” With caveats of a sort I will repeat in reverse, Bone commits himself to the theory of a break, arguing that the “region we have known and narrated as ‘the South’ . . . may in fact have ceased to exist as a distinctive economic-geographic entity.” Still, Bone continues, the “social practice and production of place continues. Whether one likes it or not, capitalist land speculation and real-estate development play a major role in the reproduction—the creative destruction—of traditional ‘southern’ loci.”¹³ Whether “one” likes it or not, Bone clearly doesn't: hence his emphasis on reproduction, reworked immediately as creative destruction. (I like it a bit better: hence my emphasis on reproduction as a site of negotiating rupture and continuity.) According to Jon Smith, however, in a review of Bone's book, “There's only a ‘break’ if, like [Lewis] Simpson, you're a neoagrarian fantasist, or, like [Fredric] Jameson, you're overinvested in postmodern exceptionalism.” Instead, Smith argues that “absent essentialism—i.e. as space, as a portion, however arbitrarily bounded, of the surface of the earth—the South remains, by definition, the South, and the present South, with all its sprawling contradictions, must organically have grown out of earlier ones.” Although I want to return momentarily to the question of whether there is a South “by definition,” the point to be made here is that narratives of rupture and continuity support tactical (scholarly) projects of different sorts—for Bone, an account of southern cities as dystopian effects of postnational finance capitalism; for Smith, an account of cities as “the best thing yet to happen to the South”—and further, that they do so by suturing southern stories to southern spaces.¹⁴ In the pages that follow, sutures of this sort will recur frequently as an analytical concern; indeed, my own definition of the South, such as it is, would be precisely as a field of suture.

Stories that *use* the South by purporting to *map* it are no new thing, as two nineteenth-century passages responding to the question of southern secession will illustrate:

It is true that science has achieved, over space and time, triumphs almost miraculous, but it has not annihilated them. . . . It is almost impossible to conquer nature. . . . In examining, then, the conflicting characters of two great sections, it is no unfavourable introduction to such an investigation, to discover that nature herself has drawn deeply the sectional lines.

In reality, if North and South formed two autonomous countries, like, for example, England and Hanover, their separation would be no more difficult than was the separation of England and Hanover. "*The South*," however, is neither a territory closely sealed off from the North geographically, nor a moral unity. It is not a country at all, but a battle slogan.¹⁵

The first passage, from William Henry Trescot's 1850 "The Position and Course of the South" (literally) naturalizes sectional differences in order to justify splitting the nations that have—organically, as it were—developed from them. Terrain precedes and predicts territoriality; as it would be later for Scarlett O'Hara, it's all about the land. But just as Scarlett's "land" constitutes an elaborate fiction, so Trescot's determines a particular—and particularly artificial—story about the South. "Not only has nature drawn these lines," he writes, "but history, in the action of its providential instinct, has followed their guidance."¹⁶ Once its position is established, the South's secession becomes a matter of course; intersectional rupture is necessary if sectional identity is to survive. But cause and effect are easily reversed when we recognize that Trescot's *course* necessitates that he *position* the South—his South, at any rate—as naturally separate from its northern counterpart. The second passage, from Karl Marx's 1861 article "The Civil War in the United States," tells a different story altogether. Here, the *absence* of geographical "separation" points up the *illegitimacy* of southern secession. (Frederick Law Olmsted employs an identical logic in *The Cotton Kingdom* of the same year, claiming that "an arbitrary political line may divide the north part from the south part, but there is no such line in nature: there can be none, socially.")¹⁷ Decoding Trescot's South as (mere) battle slogan, Marx silently generates a battle slogan of his own: his map of the South, too, terminates in a project of warfare, this one to suppress the South's revolutionary intentions. Today, the positions staked out by Trescot and Marx seem uncannily familiar. As Trescot says, nature still resists time-space compres-

sion, although it continues to be compressed at an accelerating rate; as Marx suggests, the South still operates as a battle slogan, often in projects of decompressing space and time against modernity's late encroachments. As deterritorialization proceeds apace, efforts to reterritorialize—to reproduce place and locality—are increasingly mobilized under the aegis of tradition, heritage, culture, and identity. Put another way, we are still reproducing and naturalizing the South *as place* in an age defined, according to one story (Jameson's postmodern one), by "nature" being "gone for good." (But it is almost impossible to conquer nature.) Mapping the South is always a situated venture and always implicitly narrative: a way of mobilizing space in efforts of immense variety and scope, ranging from (at the macro level) the red state mythology of contemporary American politics to more localized efforts to generate more intimate and compelling microSouths. To suggest that the South isn't going anywhere is not to say that it is impervious to motion. On the contrary, my premise is that the late South is mobilized in an increasingly diverse range of cultural projects.



The Real South is a study of the fake South, which I argue becomes the real South through the intervention of narrative. That the South is increasingly sustained as a virtual, commodified, built, themed, invented, or otherwise artificial territoriality—that is, as it becomes less imaginable as a "natural" or "organic" culture, if that antinomic construction ever existed—has hardly removed it from the domain of everyday use. Even if the South, as Michael Kreyling delightfully puts it, had become by the 1970s a "way of making and maintaining meaning [that] had ceased functioning, as it were, on involuntary muscles," voluntary muscles do important work, not least in the domain of culture.¹⁸ Indeed, while I am not persuaded that they were ever truly involuntary, it seems self-evident that the cultural muscles of the late South are more voluntary than ever and that they do more kinds of work. If a tradition that must "be automatically operative before it can be called tradition" (to borrow Allen Tate's classic formulation) doesn't operate automatically or even habitually, then its dysfunction may, as Stephen Connor observes, "actually intensify the desire for origin, even if that origin is increasingly sensed as an erotic lack rather than a tangible and satisfying presence."¹⁹ Noting the South's long history of cultural nostalgia, Edward Ayers writes that "from its very beginning, people have believed that the South, defined against an earlier South that was somehow more authentic, more real, more unified and distinct, was not only disappearing but declining."²⁰ What specifically, then, is new about the demon-

strably old news of a South in decline—a southern culture mobilized around the project of recovering an authentic, real southern culture—that would justify referring to the contemporary South as the late South? Although my answers here will be tentative, I begin with the salience of authenticity and reality themselves as they are attached to questions of culture and tradition. Is *Roots* authentic? Is Garth Brooks a real country singer? Does Mama Dip's Kitchen serve authentic soul food? Is Atlanta part of the real South, the New South, the No South, or (as Tony Horwitz maintains) the anti-South? Such questions make sense not because they are intrinsically sensible questions—a century ago, their equivalents would have been nonsensical—but because they reference a cultural competency: the ability to discriminate between the authentic and the fake. That competency, I suggest, is widely diffused in contemporary society. One of the premises of this study is that reality and authenticity have escaped the province of the cultural expert, the metaphysician, and the connoisseur to become matters of everyday practice, conceptual tools that individuals and groups use to probe and test their worlds, to orient scenarios, and to project themselves imaginatively into social spaces. For this reason, *The Real South: Southern Narrative in the Age of Cultural Reproduction* is less interested in defining terms such as "authentic" and "real" as metaphysical or psychoanalytic categories than in understanding how individuals and groups use these concepts in a region and an age compelled by them.

But precisely here, in the domain of reality's usage, we confront a self-evident and fundamental contradiction: on the one hand, the Real is associated with matters of habituation, normal practice, everyday use, and routine (a usage that aligns it with the actual), and on the other, it appears as a function of desire (a usage that aligns it with the ideal). Reality describes at once what we *have* (as in "the real world," with its bills and other unpleasantnesses from which college students are said to be protected) and what we *want* (as in The Real Thing™).²¹ So, too, I suggest, with culture. In his provocative consideration of the relation between essentialism and culture, Walter Benn Michaels argues that "without racial essentialism we have no way of imagining a discrepancy between our culture on the one hand and our actual beliefs and practices on the other. And it is only this discrepancy that makes possible exemplary culturalist projects of recovering our culture, defending our culture, stealing someone else's culture, etc."²² I would argue, by contrast, that culture itself entails this discrepancy—more precisely, that culture depends on a discrepancy between a group's actual practices and its ideal image of itself. Culture, in other words, is intrinsically aspirational and projective because it is a representational solution to the problem of social disembedding: as Bauman says, it is "*born as a problem* (that is, as something one needs to do something about—as a task)," since

"it would not have congealed into a visible and graspable entity in any other but the 'disembedded' or 'unencumbered' form."²³ One of the broad shifts I trace in this project is from an understanding of culture as a field of regulation determined by filiation—the South in which "you'd have to be born" (perhaps, as the bumper sticker has it, "by the Grace of God")—to a field of desire defined by looser forms of affiliation. This is what makes "the South," to borrow Bauman's phrasing, a noun that behaves like a verb. Here, however, I am slightly distorting Bauman's argument in a way that illustrates, I think, a shift in the meaning of culture underlying the logic of cultural reproduction. In their immediate context, Bauman's claims are made specifically of identity, to which he links culture later on as a kind of afterthought; so culture, I suggest, can be "thought" only after its identitarian dimension emerges forcefully, that is to say, undeniably—an emergence I link to the pressures of a modern economy, the distinctive forms of social disembedding it carries, and the increased contact with other cultures that it brings through media and diffuse population flows. This is not to conjure an insular or precapitalist South, but to insist upon the democratization of global economic stresses and intensified cultural contacts as they are brought to bear as an everyday matter for contemporary southerners. In today's South, a global economy isn't just for planters anymore. Similarly, I suggest that culture itself is democratized as the stresses of a modern economy introduce a gap between the culture we have and the one we want, a gap that in turn permits culture's salience as a graspable entity. A way of life is only intelligible as such in comparison with something: either its disruption or another way of life. Modern economies and media enact the one and introduce the other as a matter of course, and they do so with increasing force.

Conceiving, then, of culture as an account of how "I" fits into "We" and how "I/We" fits into the world, I follow Arjun Appadurai's insistence that the imagination acquires a newly significant role in the postelectronic world, breaking out of "the special expressive space of art, myth, and ritual and . . . becom[ing] a part of the quotidian mental work of ordinary people in many societies." Appadurai's conception of imagination as implicitly projective and expressive orients my own understanding of culture as increasingly imaginative and improvisational—less a matter, that is, of *fitting* into social domains than of *sticking* oneself into them.²⁴ Put another way, the voluntary muscles of the late South make culture less a matter of accepting an existing account of how I fit than of improvising an account of how I stick (myself). The irony here is that capitalism gives with the one hand what it takes away with the other: if it is, on some level, responsible for the broadly diffused experience of dislocation and disembedding, it also offers solutions in prepackaged and commodified forms of culture. This is why advertising comes so natu-

rally to culture: both constitute attempts to replenish aura in an age of mechanical reproduction. As Jon Smith has suggested, it is also why the South is increasingly legible as a brand.²⁵

In the chapters that follow, my practice is to avoid thinking about the consumption of culture in terms that rehearse Adornian critiques of such consumption as passive and narcotic—an opiate of the masses in the precise sense of severing desire from reality. Probably my own thinking comes closest, in some respects, to the highly abstracted and dehistoricized account offered by Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari in their sharp critique of the “traditional logic of desire.” In their analysis of capitalist deterritorialization in *Anti-Oedipus*, Deleuze and Guattari argue that desire, improperly understood as “the lack of a real object,” leads theorists from Kant to Freud to posit erroneously a doubled reality in which “desire intrinsically produces an imaginary object that functions as a double of reality, as though there were a ‘dreamed-of object behind every real object,’ or a mental production behind all real productions,” an idea that terminates in “the world acquir[ing] as its double some other sort of world . . . that contains the key to desire (missing in this world).”²⁶ In contrast, they offer an essentialist account of desire as definitionally productive of the Real. For Deleuze and Guattari, capitalism’s radical innovation is that, unlike its predecessors, the territorial and despotic machines that encode and territorialize desire from the “outside,” capitalism “does not encode from the outside, but decodes and deterritorializes as a condition of its existence,” as “its primary determinant and its fundamental raw material, its form and function.” But after decoding and deterritorializing flows of desire, capitalism “institutes or restores all sorts of residual and artificial, imaginary, or symbolic territorialities, thereby attempting, as best it can, to recode, to rechannel persons who have been defined in terms of abstract quantities.” “Everything,” they write, “returns or recurs: States, nations, families.” So, too, I would add, regions, pasts, cultures, practices, and heritages. Under this regime, according to Deleuze and Guattari, “the real is not impossible, it is simply more artificial.”²⁷ While this may restate a paradox in the guise of resolving it, that paradox lies at the heart of this project and its analysis of artificial territorialities with real people in them. Where the South is concerned, this involves rescuing imagined geographies from the domain of mere fantasy.

Here I depart (taking a path well traveled in cultural studies) from Horkheimer and Adorno’s account of the culture industry, which strategically separates *consumption* from *use*. “Culture is a paradoxical commodity,” they argue. “So completely is it subject to the law of exchange that it is no longer exchanged; it is so blindly consumed in use that it can no longer be used.”²⁸ On the contrary, I view even the

most industrialized forms of culture as *useable*, just as I view even the most overtly simulated or virtual Souths as *inhabitable*. This is not necessarily to view them as useful or as nice places to live. Here my approach is broadly pragmatic and explicitly antifoundationalist in that I tend to avoid adjudicating a relation (as “real” or not) between southern (re)productions and what the philosopher Donald Davidson might call the–South–under–no–description. Using Davidson as a fellow–traveling pragmatist through which he advances an argument of his own, Richard Rorty suggests that adjectives such as “real” or “better” should have less to do with relations between descriptions and “things–as–they–are–under–no–description” than with “ways of describing the relation between a description and the rest of the human practices within which the use of that description occurred.”²⁹ In broadly adopting this logic and its attendant prioritizations—place over space, territoriality over terrain, memory over history, representation over referent—I mean neither to adopt a relativist position in which all southern reproductions are created equal nor to suppress entirely the relation between southern reproductions and the things–under–no–description to which they ostensibly refer. On the contrary, a sense of the latter is often essential to understanding the operations of the former. Still, my critical practice is to foreground the internal logics of reproductive modalities in an effort to situate them pragmatically within some context of “human practices” that renders them both legible and meaningful. In simplest terms, I ask of tradition, authenticity, heritage, and culture what Burke asked of liberty: for what purpose is it used? The corollary of this practice, to reiterate a point made earlier, is that I am less interested in whether cultures and traditions are “really” authentic than in what *counts* as authentic within stories of culture and tradition. My bias, in fact, is frankly presentist in that I view cultural reproduction as, first and foremost, a set of strategies adapted to a particular historical moment. Stories of the South then and now, for example, are likely to adjudicate differences between equally “contemporary” Souths. Consider, for example, the difference between the quaint southern hamlet advertised as allowing one “to go back in time” and the fictional terrain described in George Singleton’s *Novel*: “This was the year 1998, which meant about 1966 for Graywood County.”³⁰ We instantly recognize the difference between going back to a good past and a bad one; that we are traveling in space, not time, is equally evident. Even in such trivial instances, I suggest, lurk stories of culture concerned less with whether the past was really good or bad than with how one might stick oneself into present environments.

While it hardly warrants saying that there are better and worse ways of realizing the South, I want to indicate at the outset my wariness of constituting these differences empirically. To return to Smith’s assertion that “absent essentialism . . .

the South is, by definition, the South," I doubt that we can meaningfully say that there is a South by definition or (to use Davidson's terminology) a South-under-no-description; else why are we defining or describing "the South" in the first place? Whence the potentially "arbitrary" boundaries to which Smith gestures? Post-essentialist accounts of the South (as something like a mere geographical container) characteristically reiterate, or at least depend upon, earlier essentialist accounts of what generated such boundaries in the first place: this or that sociocultural feature or set of features that made the South the South. (At any rate, the South under analysis in this project is a matter of definitions and descriptions—more precisely, investments in those definitions and descriptions.) In practice, the "real South" often turns out to be the one I desire, and the practice is not infrequently coercive: a matter of getting *you* to accept my South, my heritage, my culture, and so forth *as authentic*. In my South, I take my stand—either relationally (as a way of placing myself relative to you) or coercively (as a strategy of wielding authenticity as authority).³¹

If, as I have suggested, South is a noun that behaves like a verb, it often behaves as an imperative verb. As Marx observed, there is a territorial logic at work in "the South" as battle slogan, and in this sense the Agrarians paradigmatically stake out *their* southern territory as the authentic one threatened by capitalist depredations. Writing of Third World "westernization" in terms that recall the Agrarian project, Signe Howell claims that a "preoccupation with authenticity and posited contamination of traditions is found . . . among an elite group of western intellectual thinking about the Third World and amongst groups anywhere concerned with creating ethnic or national boundaries or fighting for cultural survival."³² At the same time, a concern for authenticity also informs less overtly nationalistic forms of cultural reproduction. In "Living Southern in *Southern Living*," Diane Roberts describes how, every Christmas, she "puncture[s] the skin on my fingers sticking lemons and kumquats onto a Styrofoam cone with toothpicks, making a citrus centerpiece. An old family tradition. Or is it? No one in my house can swear that the idea didn't really come from a picture in *Southern Living* of some Low Country plantation decorated for Twelfth Night."³³ Perhaps the most striking thing about this passage is that, insofar as we are competent late southerners, we immediately make sense of the difference between an authentic "old family tradition" and a fake one cribbed from *Southern Living*. At second and third glances, however, the difference begins to look curiously and curiously. How old, after all, could a family tradition be if it involves Styrofoam? Wouldn't even an "old" tradition be copied from somewhere? Tradition, Howell argues persuasively, works precisely this way: it is always and everywhere a matter of innovation, ingenuity, and assimilation of alien

elements—including the Coke bottles (genealogical origin: Atlanta, Georgia) incorporated into the traditional religious practice of the South Ryukyu islands.³⁴ I am less willing, however, to follow Howell to the conclusion that a concern for pristine, uncontaminated tradition is, categorically speaking, a “dubious preoccupation.”³⁵ As will become clear in the following chapters, I tend to view such preoccupations more as a neutral habit of late modernity, used for good *and* for ill to organize and mobilize social, cultural, and political projects of widely varying sorts. Although there is no reason to think that any culture is as pristine as it imagines it was, there is every reason to think that imagining this way helps to organize its present coherence and future prospects, and there is no reason to think that projects of cultural continuity, even the most overtly faked ones, are intrinsically pernicious. (In chapter 3, I briefly take up the *sine qua non* of cultural reproduction, Alex Haley’s *Roots*, in precisely these terms.) Neither is there any reason to assume the opposite. Even kumquatted Styrofoam, as Roberts acutely observes, obliquely serves *Southern Living*’s construction of an implicitly white, middle-class “refuge from the unlovely realities of the region it sets out to define and ameliorate.”³⁶ In its logic of disavowal and forgetting, this project, in turn, retains something of a quasi-nationalist residue in the terms offered originally by Renan, who famously insisted that, where nationalism is concerned, forgetting is as important as memory.

But if *Southern Living* conjures a kind of imagined community, it is an attenuated community that fails one of Benedict Anderson’s primary criteria for the nation: no one is willing to die for it.³⁷ There is some comfort, I think, to be taken in that fact. *Southern Living* symptomizes the distinctively post-nationalist properties of the late South by marketing a South to which one can literally subscribe. In practice, the ascendance of cultural commodification correlates to the rise of what Werner Sollers calls communities of *consent* relative to communities of *descent* that, historically speaking, have made more powerful claims on the individual. One of the primary logics of cultural reproduction, I argue, is to elide differences between the two, simulating consent *as descent* as it reconstructs imagined pasts, histories, and genealogies in order to ensure that identities are grounded in something real, not conjured willy-nilly. As the territorial logics of earlier Souths give way to the pressures of deterritorialization generated, as Appadurai suggests, by mobility and media, the consequent proliferation of microSouths reproduces culture with a difference. Because such microSouths rely on a plausible genealogy—even *Southern Living* didn’t whip up its South from scratch—they potentially (and in many cases, actually) reproduce forms of social organization with long and unhappy histories. But if, on the one hand, preserving old divisions with the new technologies

of the niche market may seem to point to the worst of all possible Souths, on the other, I am forced to conclude that the late South is the best of all actual Souths, not least because the thinning of culture has opened space itself to more flexible (if less coherent) usages. In my earlier book, *The Narrative Forms of Southern Community*, I examined various socio-formal practices, organized under the aegis of "community," that worked to affirm and naturalize inertial and coercive social forms. Juxtaposed against such coercive forms of reality-production, the advantages of a deregulated reality come into clear focus. If one doesn't subscribe to the South of *Southern Living*, then alternative subscriptions are available: the South of *The Oxford American*, the multicultural South often circulated in academic journals, the Dirty South playing on XM radio. In the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina, the Turner South cable channel, which broadcasts under the brand "Turner South. Your South," ran a series of public service announcements (or were they advertisements?) in which a series of celebrities explained that in "my South," neighbors helped neighbors. Their South is one to which I subscribe—through TimeWarner cable, as it happens. Needless to say, there are as well Souths I judge to be less desirable than *Southern Living*'s: the neo-secessionist South of the Southern League, for example. But no one is dying—or killing—for that South either.

Among the comforts of late southern cultures are discomforts, too. As the multiple forms of southern self-fashioning attenuate what Lyotard calls the "tyranny of we" in favor of localized language games that render consensus "an outmoded and suspect value," the loss of consensus is alternatively experienced as an actual deficit.³⁸ In *Watching Jim Crow*, Steven D. Classen aligns his analysis of civil rights media with Ellen Seiter's suggestion that media studies should "enlarge the possibility of intelligible discourse between people quite different from one another in interest, outlook, wealth, and power, and yet contained in a world where, tumbled as they are into endless connection, it is increasingly difficult to get out of each other's way." I would argue just the opposite of Seiter: that in today's world, it is increasingly easy to get out of each other's way, not least because of the proliferation of media that has subjected representation itself to an increasingly fragmented market logic. As Classen shows, the limited media outlets of Jackson, Mississippi, in during the civil rights era "provided virtually no opportunities for black voices to be heard or pro-movement arguments to be made." Recalling the era with what Classen characterizes as "an interesting mix of personal relief and loss," a white programming director suggested that the "crude racism" of one Jackson station, WLBT, "couldn't happen now," since the media giants are interested in "just making money. And, of course, the audience is so fragmented nowadays. I can take my clicker and go wherever I want."³⁹ That mixture of relief and loss over what

amounts to the balkanization of mediated space is, I suggest, pervasive in the late South. The capacity to “go” with a clicker wherever one wants—and how easily we understand *watching* as *going*, as traveling in (virtual) space—saliently juxtaposes the compensation of a represented world wherein we’re “at home” with the cost of our belief in a social domain “out there” (in real time, real space) that we might collectively inhabit. What J. Michael Dash calls a “temptation to grounded difference” operates even more temptingly among the virtualized and free-floating differences of an increasingly mediated world.⁴⁰



Central to my project, then, is an understanding of contemporary southern narrative as an archive of improvisations grounded in space and time, a register of imagined relations to artificial territorialities, themed spaces, virtual terrains, built environments, localities, and “the global”—imaginable precisely because of the breakdown of coded territorialities. Time and again in the stories in and about the late South, an opposition between the real and the fake emerges to perform crucial narrative work. My emphasis on improvisation foregrounds the *heterogeneity* of narrative paths occasioned—indeed, obliged—by deterritorialization, the proliferation of media, and the sampling of cultures possible in the late South. Central themes shrink in the presence of alternative thematics; unification gives way to the pressures of micronarratives and the microSouths they sustain. My choice of literary narrative as a primary analytical object was not inevitable, although it became more so with the publication of several works, including Tara McPherson’s *Reconstructing Dixie: Race, Gender, and Nostalgia in the Imagined South*, and Helen Taylor’s *Circling Dixie: Contemporary Southern Culture through a Transatlantic Lens*, and Jon Smith’s forthcoming *Alabama and the Future of American Studies*, which focus more heavily than this project on nonliterary cultural forms. My interest in narrative as a mode of negotiating the spaces of the late South, will, I hope, supplement what has emerged as a vital and sophisticated body of cultural criticism, although my view of—and in some respects, my basic orientation toward—the late South differs, as will become clear, from these critics. Still, in an era when literary analysis itself occasionally looks like a retro practice, I want to offer a defense of the particular modalities narrative bring to bear on its engagement with social and cultural domains. Let me begin with a television tour and two literary meals.

In January 2004, the Turner South cable channel aired an episode “Three-Day Weekend” in which a couple, Anna and Todd, tour Franklin, Tennessee, in order to “escape their frenetic life” in Orlando.⁴¹ Given the frenetic pace of their

leisure during their three-day weekend in Franklin, the escapist dimension is immediately put into question, as is the issue of whether they have moved to a more or less Disneyfied environment. Among their activities are the following: a stay at Namaste Bed and Breakfast, which offers rooms decorated in “western,” “Indian,” and “frontier cabin” styles; a tour of downtown Franklin, where a guide points out Confederate Civil War cannons manufactured in the North; antique shopping that turns up many reproductions and one authentic original, a “French table” produced locally in the early 1800s and listed at \$18,000; breakfast at the Lovelace Café in Nashville, “a li’l ole house,” according to the owner, that serves “everything that the grandmother used to make” and is decorated with (among many other such photos) a signed LeAnn Rymes publicity shot; a tour of the Cheekwood estate and museum, where, according to the guide, “If someone didn’t want to go to Chicago or New York, they could come here and see the same kind of art”; a “Nash Trash” bus tour of Nashville conducted by the “Jugg Sisters,” whose routine involves songs like this one: “The Juggs will give you the dish / On stars like Reba and Trish”; a “trip back in time” to the Carter house, full of “remnants of life from 140 years ago,” including bullet holes from Civil War (reenactors parade outside); a canoe trip that make you “think you’re miles and miles away” from downtown Franklin, only a mile away; a horseback ride in which “riders are transformed into cowboys and cowgirls” (successfully, in the couple’s opinion, since the ride “kind of gets you back to nature”—“like you’re back in the 1800s”); and, finally, a visit to “The Factory,” a former stove factory remodeled to include a church, loft apartments, retail stores, restaurants, and a convention center. Summarizing their visit, Todd and Anna conclude that the variety of activities available in Franklin—as Todd puts it, “We experienced everything along the entire spectrum of what you could do”—do not compromise but rather constitute the pleasures of what Anna labels a “wonderful quaint little town.” “So much charm and southern hospitality just exudes from Franklin,” she concludes. “It’s not just a place to visit, but a way of life.”

At first glance, this episode of “Three-Day Weekend” appears as a totally incoherent narrative. Movements in time and space, both real and virtual, are radically disconnected. To the Carter house for treasure or to Nashville for trash; canoeing in “your own little world” or horseback riding to get “back to nature”; taking a trip “back in time” to the Civil War or back to “the 1800s” on horseback; consuming, in overtly commodified forms, spaces themed as “Indian” (both kinds), down-home, “western,” and southern—Todd and Anna are somehow placed in contact with it all. The gap between the Cheekwood estate (which closes the distance between Tennessee and the art worlds of the northern metropolis) and the

Carter house (which instantiates a distinctively local form of authenticity—just try to find Civil War bullet holes in New York City) is passed over silently in a touristic world, in Elizabeth Bishop's words, "only connected by 'and' and 'and.'" ⁴² But a world so connected is an affront to narrative, and, as it turns out, an affront to Todd and Anna as well: however capriciously, the episode recuperates disarray as a form of order. Anna uses "southern hospitality" and "way of life" to perform narrative work: she organizes and connects the couple's disparate experiences by consolidating Franklin as an *authentic southern place*, not "just a place to visit." To be sure, the crudity of this narrative is exacerbated by Turner South advertising, which invites viewers back next week to its (virtual) locality to have another heaping helping of southern hospitality, this one located along the Natchez Trace, where, according to the voice-over announcing the next episode, "the Old South is alive and ready for a drink." (Onscreen, a woman offers a mint julep to the camera, affirming that "a mint julep is a sippin' drink.") Critically, we would judge Anna's conclusion of a southern way of life as having a tacked-on quality. But whatever its aesthetic shortcomings, Anna uses the South to tell a story about her weekend, just as she uses her weekend to fabricate a location of culture. In its broad contours, as I hope to show in the chapters that follow, this logic informs as well more substantive and compelling narratives of cultural reproduction.

Where everything in Franklin, however commodified, is retroactively subsumed as evidence of a "way of life," Fred Chappell's *Look Back All the Green Valley* performs a different, but no less common, form of narrative work: namely, in disavowing commodified forms of culture as fakes. During a trip to the mountains where he grew up, the novel's protagonist, Jess Kirkman, visits, out of a "perverse mild curiosity," a restaurant called Hillbilly Heaven where "toddies" are "gyarantee[d]" to be "untouched by Yankee hands."⁴³ Among the "the whistle-wetters you've been a cravin' fer, neighbor," the menu explains, are "Phoebe Redd's Love Spell, Tennessee Deelite, Rocky Top Rumbustious, Mountain Dooley," and so forth (94). For Jess, the commodification of the hillbilly stereotype constitutes an assault on identity: in a "darkened mood," his mind "buzzing with language," he wonders whether a soul-food restaurant might flourish in Minnesota by enjoining diners to "wrap yo' honky lips roun' dese yere collards these greasy greens, honky" (96). Dante, he concludes, would damn the proprietors of the restaurant to the eighth circle of hell, reserved for "those who perverted language" (96). But Dante's word is not necessarily the last word. For one thing, the sheer awfulness of Hillbilly Heaven is perversely *pleasurable* to Jess: he enjoys navigating its excessive fakery. The waitress, once she drops the "shiny prefab smile" and "commercial effrontery" required by management, turns out to be a charming girl from Canton,

Ohio, studying (what else?) anthropology and folklore at nearby Western Carolina University; moreover, she explains, the phony “hillbilly stuff give the customers something to chat with me about” (95). Locals, whom Jess assumes would be outraged by the restaurant’s stereotypes, “seem to like it,” according to the waitress, who adds that she can’t always tell the locals from the tourists (95).

Look Back All the Green Valley embeds the restaurant’s anxious juxtaposition of culture and commodity within a narrative acutely engaged with such juxtapositions. As “the son who went searching for his father, just like the characters do in all those important well-received literary novels” (271), Jess visits Hillbilly Heaven while searching for his father in a particular way. In a chapter entitled “Backward in Time!” Jess retraces a mysterious map his late father had made of Hardison County, which consists of three subregions—Downhill, Vestibule, and Upward—clearly modeled on Dante’s *Inferno*, *Purgatory*, and *Paradise*. Jess ends up in Upward, a more literary “Hillbilly Heaven” whose creator, like the waitress in the restaurant, was born in Canton (North Carolina).⁴⁴ For Jess’s father, Hardison County represents “the genuine old-time mountain ways and the true Appalachian temper that he thought were being crowded out and watered down by the exigencies of these later decades” (108). In this context, Joe Robert’s antipathy toward “Snuffy Smith” prefigures exactly his son’s antipathy toward Hillbilly Heaven. But neither father nor son is a true insider to this culture, and Jess worries that he has self-indulgently subjected his Virgil—Virgil Campbell, a central figure in the poetry of “Fred Chappell,” the pseudonym under which Jess publishes—to a kind of hillbilly stereotype not dissimilar from the “caricature of a mountaineer” in “lurid neon” outside the restaurant. “I was trying to see through the smoky focus of a literary lens,” Jess says, “fashioning [Virgil] into a symbol of mountaineer independence and rebellion against convention” (106). In what constitutes self-condemnation for his own perversion of language, Jess finds it difficult to untangle literary conventions (of the mountain rebel, as it happens) from those of the themed restaurant. For the critic, untangling Hillbilly Heaven from its knotty relation to Chappell’s narrative is no easier. Suffice it to say that consuming culture in the form of a Nowhars burger—“*You’ll smack yore lips and say thar hain’t nary a better burger nowhars,*” according to the menu (96)—organizes a moment, as “Wil Hickson” puts it in a simulated interview with Fred Chappell, “full of ironies about what we call nowadays the ‘inside-outside’ theme, that is, the difference between how Appalachian experience is seen by outsiders and how we folks who were born here experience it from the inside.”⁴⁵ As detached from Appalachia (about which this project will have nothing further to say), the “inside-outside” theme often defines the work

of authenticity under a regime of cultural reproduction.⁴⁶ Even phoniness, as the waitress suggests, gives social groups something to talk about, while authenticity allows you and me to relate to one another as insiders. By contrast, that guy over there is just faking it; he wouldn't understand; it's our thing. As my final two chapters especially will show, the navigation of fake worlds, tourist traps, themed spaces, and built environments has evolved as a central theme of late southern identity.

However hyper Jess Kirkman's meal at Hillbilly Heaven, it pales in comparison with the sine qua non of the late southern hypermeal served at Turpmtine, Charlie Croker's quail plantation in Tom Wolfe's *A Man in Full* (1998). Hardly more subtle than Hillbilly Heaven, the Gun Room at Turpmtine is elaborately themed—to the tune of 3.6 million dollars—with ranks of priceless shotguns, a vast hearth fashioned by Ronald Vine out of Georgia limestone, and a "Frieze of Unfriendly Beasts" replete with alternating rattlesnakes and boars.⁴⁷ The "magic of Turpmtine," as Charlie understands it, "depended on thrusting his guests back into a manly world where people still lived close to the earth, a luxurious bygone world in which there were masters and servants and everybody knew his place" (294). Unfortunately, Charlie deploys these effects in a farcically unsuccessful effort to attract the capital of Herb Richman. A Jewish fitness center tycoon and push-button liberal whom Charlie later introduces as "Hebe," Richman, Charlie realizes, will be "a hard one to mesmerize with the magic of Turpmtine" (295). And so Charlie intensifies his mesmerism, demanding larger logs for a more visually stunning fire in an already-hot room, badly staging a virtual minstrel show from a faithful retainer whose children he has sent to Georgia Tech, and then encouraging the homophobic "humor" of the millionaire good old boys whom he's invited as local color. Where the good old boys draw comic energy from plugging into the meal, the Richmans are merely shocked. Pulled aside by his second wife, who warns him that his efforts with Herb are going awry, Charlie partially recovers, only to err again by informing Herb that the quail "Oughta be!" delicious because "Each bird cost FO' THOUSAND, SEVEN HUNNERT'N EIGHTY-FO' DOLLARS!" (306). Crudely foregrounding the quail as an object of conspicuously conspicuous consumption, Charlie concludes, for the moment, his stunning ineptitude at his late southern potlatch. But the comedy of errors continues as Herb's wife, Marsha, lavishly praises the black cook's down home cooking and asks for her "secret." The answer—"Welcome to . . . Grease"—is funny to everyone but Marsha, who "looked as if she had just been shot through the heart" (310). She looks this way because her effort at *egalitarian* appreciation—she wants to make a good liberal compliment, not reiterate the effusive, patronizing praise dictated by "southern" manners—is

thwarted by the cook, who either shares the cultural style of her employer or simply recognizes the side on which her bread is buttered. Either way, the greasy greens stick in Marsha's throat.

Taken cumulatively, the scene is dominated by inept performances, dissonant environments, irreconcilable subcultures, unstable economies, and broken communicative circuits. Increasingly unable to command built environments, Croker progressively morphs into the late southern incarnation of Lucy Ricardo on the assembly line. Turpentine, with its faux atavism organized around a "breathtaking" Big House that uncoils to the "true antebellum Old South," unlike the "Greek revival palace[s]" of the "plantation parvenus" (86), cannot be updated or redesigned *enough* for its present purposes. The Ronald Vine Gun House will never attract capital flows from the likes of Herb Richman, who doesn't like guns in the first place. Charlie commands emergent spaces no better than he does residual, redecorated ones: the Croker Concourse, envisioned as capitalizing on the new paradigm of the "edge city," becomes Croker's folly, a money pit that precipitates his economic decline.⁴⁸ Repeatedly, Charlie mistakes *his* South for the real South, but in the end, he doesn't know his places or his place. In the epilogue to *A Man in Full*, it is the black Atlantans who are able to maneuver among the heterogeneous micro-communities of late Atlanta, while Croker is exiled to Fox television—not even the local station, CNN—where he broadcasts stoicism, once an artificial but vital prop of plantation culture, to the virtual masses.

Both *Look Back All the Green Valley* and *A Man in Full*, then, traverse what Patricia Yaeger calls themed spaces as part of their broader interrogations of how space itself is historicized, acculturated, traveled, commanded, penetrated, valued, and exchanged. Cultural terrains, which sound down-to-earth, begin to float vertiginously; the work of Hillbilly Heaven and Turpentine is to keep culture in proximity to the ground. As Yaeger explains in *The Geography of Identity*, the theming of space as "extrinsically storied or narrated," "precolonized and prefabricated around an idea or point of view," "gratifies much more than a whimsical desire for homogenized, coherent space; it suggests a longing for incorporation, a longing to inhabit credible space. What does it take for space to be credible? In the absence of the support systems provided by communal life, costumes, props and crowded stage settings help, and thus a whirl of costume dramas and artificial backdrops have invaded our lives." Linking the proliferation of themed spaces to deterritorialization and the severance of what "was once an unproblematic link between identity and place"—more specifically, to the "loss of 'persuasive' space that can guarantee solidarity and solidarity or produce comforting 'reality effects'"—Yaeger describes the broad logic of Disney World as embodying "the narrative problem at the heart of

the postmodern commodity world: the prevalence—and the preposterousness—of inhabiting ‘themed’ space.” But in pondering why space has “become such an indispensable category of social and cultural analysis,” Yaeger solidifies time in order to interrogate space.⁴⁹ As Johannes Fabian explains, what counts as “here and now” is based in the way “shared time and space are fused into identities we call community, society, civilization and history.” It is precisely what Fabian calls “received time-space fusions” that permit Yaeger to think about the once unproblematic link between identity and place and to conceive of themed space as a distinctively postmodern category of time-space fusion.⁵⁰ I make this point for two reasons: first, because I share Yaeger’s premises almost exactly, and second, because her understanding of a particular kind of space as a narrative problem points to, even as it is embedded in a narrative of her own, the distinctive capacities of narrative vis-à-vis space. If, as an epigraph to Chappell’s chapter “Backward in Time!” maintains, “Time is Space,” then it becomes so only through the intervention of narrative, just as narrative structure underwrites Charlie’s fantasy of using Turpentine to “thrus[t] his guests back into a manly world where . . . everybody knew his place.” What Yaeger alerts us to is the proliferation and commodification of time-space fusions as they are received, repackaged, and reproduced in the contemporary world. And yet literary narrative has, in ways I want to consider momentarily, been doing similar things for a long time.

My understanding of the basic work of narrative in the age of cultural reproduction—that is, the story of narrative that I tell in this project—is not as a means to weld a discontinuous reality into a coherent whole, either spatially (as in Joseph Frank’s classic account of modernism) or temporally (as a sequence tending toward the condition of a grand narrative), but as a more contingent register of negotiating and reproducing reality’s seams as they are confronted in time and space—more specifically, in the received time-space fusion called “the South.” This is not to imply that narrative ever renounces its desire for utopian configurations of time and space—indeed, I accept without qualification Jameson’s insistence that narrative as a socially symbolic act invariably reproduces utopian drives—but that such configurations have trended toward miniaturization and, consequently, heterogeneity. What Fred Hobson has characterized as the loss of the “big novel” I view as the effect of a broad sociocultural trend that discriminates with increasing precision between big spaces that resist desire and smaller, more intimate ones wherein desire might operate as agency—wherein it might, indeed, find itself at home.⁵¹ (The grassroots utopianism of “Think Globally, Act Locally” reproduces this distinction while pretending to heal it, since it identifies the global as a sphere in which one cannot directly obtain agency. As an imagined geography, “the global”

consistently recurs to a terrain controlled by the Other, whoever that is.) As Peter Brooks maintains, "narratives both tell of desire—typically present some story of desire—and arouse and make use of desire as dynamic of signification"; they "portray the motors of desire that drive and consume their plots, and they also lay bare the nature of narration as a form of human desire."⁵² Narratives *tell of, present, and portray* desire even as they *use and embody* it, and in this doubling lies, I argue, narrative's distinctive capacity to account, in the broadest sense, for desire's operations as it is decoded, cut loose from more regulated forms of territoriality, and then reattached more tenuously and flexibly to themed spaces, localities, and artificial territorialities. If utopianism is understood, at its core, as desire's relation to space, then how does desire *locate* itself in a world where space itself is experienced unevenly and unsettlingly? Speaking of the South today, I am inclined to heed David Harvey's broader insistence that "it is hard to tell exactly what space we are in when it comes to assessing causes and effects, meanings or values."⁵³ This is not to say that such things aren't spatially mapped—manifestly they are—but that re-mapping proceeds under the aegis of an imaginary irreducible to "common practice." (More precisely, I should say "practices held in common," since it is the collective, not the quotidian, properties of such practices that are attenuated.) Rather, the multiplicity of everyday worlds constitutes a kind of highly localized or micro-utopianism operating in smaller and smaller spaces, themselves perceived as more susceptible to *design* taken in its broadest sense. Harvey's recognition that the home has evolved "into a private museum to guard against the ravages of time-space compression" has, for example, been thoroughly mined by so-called "reality TV," which would doubtlessly offer the fourteenth way of looking at Thomas Sutpen as a happy one ending with the French architect and the well-appointed Big House.⁵⁴ A similar dynamic is at work, I suggest, in the designer Souths whose narrative configurations we will explore in the following chapters, beginning with Tara, which strives to consolidate and refine a vanished way of life within a single estate.

If, in 1941, W. J. Cash could plausibly offer his famous one South thesis; if, in 1937, Donald Davidson could plausibly refer to a "Southerntowner" who inhabited a local community seamlessly integrated within a broader imagined community, then the late South represents the deterioration of such coherently received time-space fusions.⁵⁵ But the South continues to be offered, referenced, located, used. Narrative permits such pseudocontinuity even as time-space fusions are multiply received, improvised, and adapted to the contingencies of the present. In this context, I share Edward Said's understanding of the conservatism of narrative form, which, he argues, "is on the side of institution's preserving, transmitting, confirming not only the process of filiative repetition," but also the "joining of people

in a nongenealogical, nonprocreative but social unity.”⁵⁶ As I’ve suggested above, I see the work of narrative in the age of cultural reproduction in precisely these terms—namely, as producing nongeological unities through the simulation of what Said calls filiative repetition. But here again, questions of desire collide with questions of desirability. If we understand what Hermann Lübbe calls “musealization” to encompass all efforts to prevent the atrophy of culture and memory, have such strategies remained segregated from everyday use or, as Lübbe suggests, have they “infiltrated all areas of everyday life”? In either case, is musealization experienced as an index of cultural pathology or of cultural health? For Adorno, commodification meant forgetting; can memory, then, operate through commodities and the forms of consumption they entail? (An expanded choice of cuisines is generally regarded as a good; why not an expanded choice of pasts, memories, and cultures?) And if musealization is itself, as Andreas Huyssen argues, “sucked into that vortex of an ever faster circulation of images, spectacles, events, and thus is always in danger of losing its ability to guarantee cultural stability over time,” are such guarantees desirable in the first place? Lastly, how does nostalgia—utopianism with a backward glance—function as both a discrete industry and a diffuse cultural practice in a South whose past is almost uniformly undesirable? Huyssen again: “Our discontents rather flow from informational and perceptual overload combined with a cultural acceleration neither our psyches nor our senses are that well equipped to handle. The faster we are pushed into a global future that does not inspire confidence, the stronger we feel the desire to slow down, the more we turn to memory for comfort. But what comfort from memories of the twentieth century?!”⁵⁷ What comfort, indeed, from memories of slavery, Reconstruction, racial violence, Jim Crow, rickets, and widespread poverty? And yet nostalgia continues unabated as everyday practice and as industry, seeking out not only the detoxified Souths of which Andy Griffith’s Mayberry is representative but also, as we shall see, trauma itself in the multiple guises of the “good old bad old days” Tony Horwitz identifies in *Confederates in the Attic*.

Embedded in all of these questions is the problem of the real: its recession and its recovery. I want to argue that distinctive capacities of narrative to engage such questions turn on a kind of Geertzian thickness, not only as regards thick description (as in Chappell and Wolfe, where themed space and their pure micro-narratives are situated within impure and complex macronarratives), but also in relation to what I want to call thick utopianism, by which I mean the dense register of how desire flows into space, organizes it, is thwarted or gratified by it—ultimately, how desire imagines, seeks out, and connects with social domains. I should be clear that utopianism, in these terms, isn’t always pretty—that flows of

desire through, in, and around discrete spaces are as likely to encounter resistance as gratification. Wish fulfillment in the novel, as Jameson says, is not available for the taking of a thought, while for Georg Lukács, the novel formally registers a world of blocked access, of man-made structures that no longer offer a pure return on the investment of desire. For Lukács, this generates the novel's "special dissonance": the "refusal of immanence of being to enter into empirical life." The novel, according to Lukács, is simply "the art-form of virile maturity, in contrast to the normative childlikeness of the epic," a break marked by *Don Quixote* and its acute register of the faulty seam between desire and reality, its formal recognition that the one can never fully penetrate the other.⁵⁸ To the criticism that the novel's highly artificial form clogs its access to the real world and the cultures and histories contained therein, I suggest that this artificiality provides special insight into a world where, as Appadurai maintains, imagination has infiltrated the quotidian. Lukács's special dissonance, in other words, may not be so special anymore. Don Quixote is anomalous in his own time: for one thing, he can read about Amadis of Gaul; for another, he can afford to project fantasy onto reality. Today, these capacities are widely available. By a peculiar logic, it becomes possible to see the novel's formal problems as permeating an increasingly wider range of social practices—vacations, restaurants, housing, entertainment, role-playing games—through which individuals build and negotiate quasi-social environments. It's not only novelists and painters who generate what Roland Barthes called the reality effect, but interior designers, software programmers, restaurateurs, and Disney. Willingly or not, we suspend disbelief as a matter of everyday practice. What is a novel, after all, if not a low-tech prototype of virtual reality itself? Surely we are not far away from video games that allow a player to enact the classic Faulknerian scenario of Pickett's charge; to tear violently, under the aegis of Sim Plantation, our own Hundred from virgin forest; or to manage, as a virtual Nat Turner, our own slave insurrection. But in even such fantastic narrative forms, I suggest, lies the capacity to record and transmit social values and meanings, to improvise and secure the boundaries of group identity, to fashion and mobilize what Appadurai calls the "diacritics of difference"—to perform, in sum, the work of cultural reproduction.⁵⁹ Before turning to an analysis of how that work proceeds in a range of late southern fictions, I want to begin at the South's most famous narrative fake: Margaret Mitchell's Tara.