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Rhetoricians have argued that place and culture are rhetorical, and that rhetoric is placed and cultural. This project identifies the rhetorics of place at work in popular writing, marketing and public relations efforts, and postsecondary teaching. I take as case studies publications *The Bitter Southerner* and *Scalawag*, festivals Merlefest and The Carolina Classic Fair, and my own first year writing classrooms. Through rhetorical analysis and rhetorical and institutional ethnography, I argue that sensory descriptions of place and conservative topoi shape region-making rhetorics for the (U.S.) Southern and Appalachian organizations studied. Further, the project demonstrates that a critical place-based pedagogy is a regionalizing approach to the teaching of writing, synthesizing variable methods for acknowledging place in the classroom. Ultimately, this dissertation argues that each of the cases studied are examples of regionalizing rhetorics — inventing and deploying region and regional identity for aesthetic, commercial, political, and pedagogical purpose.

# REGIONALIZING RHETORIC: MAKING, WRITING, AND TEACHING PLACE

by

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Approved by

_____

Dr. Risa Applegarth
Committee Chair

# DEDICATION

For Charlotte.

You can do difficult things. It is for you to decide if they are worth it.

APPROVAL PAGE

This dissertation written by Leah Justine Sink Haynes has been approved by the following committee of the Faculty of The Graduate School at The University of North Carolina at Greensboro

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To Nathan: In this and all things, we are a team. Thanks for being married to me.

To Charlotte: Thank you for being exactly who you are. It makes all the difference.

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# CHAPTER I: REGIONALIZING RHETORICS: WRITING, MAKING, AND TEACHING PLACE

## Same Story, Different Place

In late August 2022, a confluence of events resulted in national attention to the dire water situation in Jackson, Mississippi. Years of neglect of the city's water infrastructure had already caused the city to issue a boil notice a month prior, and then a series of heavy rainfalls pushed the Pearl River to crest, flooding areas of Jackson and incapacitating the water treatment system. News outlets in the United States and internationally covered the floods and the lines for rationed, bottled water. The story was presented as a symptom of a variety of larger ills: environmental racism, redlining, federal neglect, climate change, inefficient state bureaucracy. And while the central facts of the story remain consistent across outlets, *place* does not.

Depending on who is telling the story, Jackson is a different place. *The BBC* report uses quotations that situate the experiences of residents of Jackson within their broader citizenship to the United States: "Unfortunately, that [boil notices and low water pressure] is something we have gotten used to as American citizens - nobody should be adapting to that type of quality of life."[1] Jackson, here, *is* America and the American experience. *The Washington Post*[2] reports on Jackson as a city so poverty stricken and politically gridlocked that residents are desperate to leave. Quoting a woman named Roshanda Snell, a "Jackson native," as saying "I really want to leave Jackson so bad," and "I spend about $200 on bottled water every month. That's mainly what I use that money (her SNAP benefits) for, to buy five big cases of water for the month." Jackson, here, is a place to be left, but one where poverty makes leaving difficult (or impossible).

[1] Chi Chi Izundu, Mohamed Madi, and Chelsea Bailey, "Jackson Water Crisis: A Legacy of Environmental Racism?," *BBC News*, September 4, 2022, sec. US & Canada, https://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-62783900.

[2] Emmanuel Felton, "Living in a City with No Water: 'This Is Unbearable,'" *Washington Post*, September 3, 2022, sec. National, https://www.washingtonpost.com/nation/2022/09/03/jackson-mississippi-water-crisis/.

The borders around the problem-place of Jackson are drawn much tighter by *The Post* than *The BBC*. Rather than Jackson-as-America, *The Washington Post* defines Jackson as a poorly managed city. They quote Jackson resident Kwame Brown in their comparison of the city to other Mississippi locales. "It really is just government mismanagement and a lack of caring about what happens in the inner-city community," Braxton said. An "inner city community" in this quote, Jackson becomes an urban place, and by extension a predominantly Black place. The article goes on to specifically name Jackson as a "majority-Black, Democrat-led city." And further, Jackson is defined in comparison to the surrounding area; Braxton is quoted, continuing: "You go to these different communities outside of Jackson and you can see the difference; they will put funding towards fixing their infrastructure over there." Here, Jackson is an outlier, a place of particular problems situated among communities with different experiences, resources, residents, and leaders; places that are desirable in ways that Jackson is not. For the Southern Poverty Law Center, however, Jackson is neither synonymous with America nor a predominantly Black city distinct from the surrounding areas; it is a Black community that is part of the Deep South,[3] a subset of a region especially tied up in historical and contemporary racism. Intertwined in their reporting of the institutional and environmental racism, as well as the divisive political relationship between the state of Mississippi and the city of Jackson, that created this disaster, is the Southern Poverty Law Center's (SPLC) own place-making rhetoric. The SPLC frames their investigative and legal work as effort to "ensure that people living in poverty in the Deep South can get the help that they need from their local, state and federal government, and that they are not punished or exploited just because of the color of their skin or where their address happens to

[3] "'They Let Us down': Water Crisis in Jackson, Mississippi, Flows from Systemic Racism," Southern Poverty Law Center, accessed September 17, 2022, https://www.splcenter.org/news/2022/09/16/jackson-mississippi-water-crisis-systemic-racism.

be." Layered into that are well-worn ideas about the region: that the South is a distinct region of the United States, with a particular claim to racism and poverty. The Jackson water crisis, depending upon who is writing this story, is either in America, in a particularly inept city in Mississippi, or in a region that is saddled with - and known for - the legacy of this kind of neglect of Black communities.

This is not the only example of place-making rhetoric in public discourse. There are other pertinent, political conversations going on right now, where commentary seems to come back to arguments about place-based identities. Place features in discourse on public health, climate, and education. COVID-19 related policy decisions and changes are written and spoken about differently, framed as a national issue here, a state issue there; a big problem only for the cities, *no, wait,* it is the rural counties that are struggling with resources to combat the virus. Electric vehicles and other alternatives to petroleum-based fuel sources are discussed with respect to their feasibility beyond major metropolitan areas. Debates on the impact of climate change and the realities associated with natural disasters[4] and increasingly inhospitable climate in certain parts of the world have connections to not only national and international politics, but local, municipal, state politics - as recent news cycles' approaches to the flooding in Mississippi and in Pakistan demonstrate. In higher education, debates online about living and working in states with restricted or no access to abortion after the overturn of Roe v. Wade wrestled with ideas about movement, home, safety, and belonging. In all of these brief examples, place is far more than background to the story; expressions of where a story is shape what the story is.

Place is a key part of the context that shapes and imbues discourse with meaning: the flooding in Jackson comes to *mean* a (regional rather than national) history of redlining,

[4] Ongoing Hurricane Fiona in Puerto Rico, for example.

segregation, and environmental racism when the SPLC situates it in the "Deep South." This is not to negate the influence of those evils on the water crisis; it is to note that in the reporting of the issue as an issue of and in the South, the flooding, and the political problems, and the institutional racism come to *fit* within a larger pattern of ideas that make up that regional moniker: *The* South. Not only is place a part of the context that makes something rhetorically potent, appropriate, or fitting, but *place* is itself rhetorically negotiated and drawn, and drawn up and argued for, for a purpose. Its construction for a particular audience can be convincing, inviting, an opportunity to identify (or not) with whatever issue, cause, or story is being ascribed to a particular *place*. It is that claim -- that efforts to situate a story, an event, a question, or a person within a place is rhetoric -- that this dissertation will proceed from. That 1) place-making rhetoric is made up of plac*ing* and specifically regional*izing* strategies and 2) that regionalizing rhetoric can cultivate regional identification are the project's through-lines as I analyze cases of regionalizing rhetoric. Rather than journalistic examples of writing about place, the cases of regionalizing rhetoric I study in the following chapters are magazines, regional(ized) festivals, and place-based writing classrooms. Each, as I will argue, offers a different angle from which to see regionalizing strategies at work to cultivate identification.

Regional Identification.

Regionalization is a strategy for identification and for othering (disidentification). As the opening example outlines, issues, people, and their communities can be written about using language that draws borders of varying scopes. Border-drawing around people, places, and what does or should matter to them is one way that we might think about dis/identification in rhetoric. That is to say, when we articulate a place, people, or issue as belonging to a region, we set that place, or people, or issue apart from other places, peoples, and issues. Some belong together and some do not. Some are *of* that place, region and the others are not.

Literary and rhetorical scholars have noted that region is often presented as a kind of exception to nation.[5] There is political capital to be had from that kind of identification. Calls to identify with a region can situate discourse differently: depending on who's in power, who's writing, who's reading, the national identity or the regional identity (non-national, counter-national, alternate-national, should-be-national identity) may be the preferable one to call up in order to constitute voters or donors. And so, arguments that shape a discourse as a *regional* one can be used strategically to invite an audience to consider themselves as part of that group: identifying with the region rather than some other kind of place-based identity like nation or locale. These identities are often neither concentric to, nor fully separate from, local or national identities (this is one way Jenny Rice describes region as rhetoric[6]), but when specific steps are taken to ascribe certain qualities, or tropes, or traits to a region, then that region is brought to bear on the audience. There is undoubtedly also money to be had in the deployment of regional identification. Apparel and other decorative and household goods are examples of opportunities to buy into regional identity. Vineyard Vines, Old South Apparel Company, The Mast General Stores, and Patagonia are all brands that use regional tropes and aesthetics to design and market their goods. The sites I investigate in Chapters Two and Three of this dissertation each have commercial or charitable interests in cultivating regional identification. Chapter Four's case - the writing classroom and place-based pedagogy - approaches regionalizing rhetoric from a different perspective. Rather than analyzing the rhetorical materials used to cultivate regional(ized) audiences for magazines or events (commercial purposes), the chapter on the writing classroom

[5] Legih Anne Duck, *The Nation's Region: Southern Modernism, Segreagation, and U.S. Nationalism* (Athens and London: The University of Georgia Press, 2006); Jenny Rice, "From Architectonic to Tectonics: Introducing Regional Rhetorics," *Rhetoric Society Quarterly* 42, no. 3 (May 1, 2012): 201–13, https://doi.org/10.1080/02773945.2012.682831.
[6] Rice, "From Architectonic to Tectonics."

makes the case that approaches to place-based pedagogy are regionalizing rhetorics in that the course design, materials, and practice call the students and instructor into place-based identities. The project as a whole engages in academic conversations in cultural rhetorics, rhetorical theories of invention, and writing studies.

## Cultural Rhetorics and Regionalization

This dissertation is not doing a study of "regional rhetorics" - distinct about a region - but using a cultural rhetorics framework to investigate practices of regionalization. One way that regions are deployed rhetorically is through assertions regarding regional culture. Cultural rhetorics refers to "the study and practice of making meaning and knowledge with the belief that all cultures are rhetorical and all rhetorics are cultural."[7] Definitions of culture written by literary critics and cultural theorists demonstrate the rhetoricity - that is the arguability, the generativity - of that term culture. Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer write about culture as it relates to the reproduction of systems of power and hegemony.[8] Fredric Jameson argues that a culture is nothing more than "the ensemble of stigmata that one group bears in the eyes of the other,"[9] while Stuart Hall writes that culture is "experience lived, experience interpreted, experience defined."[10] What these articulations about culture have in common is that they each figure culture as the enactment of power through control of narrative. The field of cultural rhetoric - as well as what it owes to the field of cultural studies - offers that perspective to this study of place, region, and identity; the cases studied in the following chapters will highlight that region

[7] "Cultural Rhetorics Consortium," accessed June 27, 2022, http://cultrhetconsortium.org/.
[8] Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno, "The Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception," in *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, ed. Gunzelin Schmid Noerr, trans. Edmund Jephcott, 1st edition (Stanford, Calif: Stanford University Press, 2007), 94–136.
[9] Fredric Jameson, "On Cultural Studies," in *The Identity in Question*, ed. John Rajchman (New York: Routledge, 1995).
[10] Stuart Hall, *Cultural Studies 1983: A Theoretical History*, 2016, https://doi.org/10.1215/9780822373650.

specifically and place broadly are rhetorical strategies deployed to shape discussions, expressions, and performances of culture.

Significant cultural rhetorics work has been published by rhetoric and composition scholars like Alexandra Hidalgo, Raymie McKerrow, Malea Powell, Phil Bratta, Jennifer Sano-Franchini, who investigate questions of meaning-making and culture regards to feminism, corporeality and the body, Indigenous knowledge and methods, race, health, and medicine, class and labor, and digital rhetorics, among others. Journals like *Rhetoric Society Quarterly, Southern Communication Journal*, *Peitho,* and *enculturation* have published cultural rhetorics scholarship on myth-making, sonic rhetorics, ethos and identification, and regional rhetorics. Books, too, over the last two decades have investigated language, place, and culture via the understanding of the rhetorical nature of those ideas. Julie Lindquist's *A Place to Stand: Politics and Persuasion in a Working Class Bar*[11] uses a cultural rhetorics approach to map the rhetorical moves that generate and negotiate working class identity; Keith Gilyard's *Race, Rhetoric, and Composition*[12] analyzes the material, social, and discursive construction of race and identity; Iris D. Ruiz and Raúl Sanchez's *Decolonizing Rhetoric and Composition Studies: New Latinx Keywords for Theory and Pedagogy*[13] names the myths of monolingualism, Eurocentrism, and whiteness as normative in U.S. culture, with a specific look at educational policies and places. These texts are all examples of the critical engagement that cultural rhetorics can offer issues of identity, and how identity, the body, and place are parts of a constellation of factors that shape lived experiences. Further, this subfield claims many examples of interdisciplinary scholarship as

[11] Julie Lindquist, *A Place to Stand: Politics and Persuasion in a Working Class Bar* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002).
[12] Keith Gilyard, ed., *Race, Rhetoric, and Composition* (Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 1999).
[13] Iris D. Ruiz and Raúl Sánchez, eds., *Decolonizing Rhetoric and Composition Studies: New Latinx Keywords for Theory and Pedagogy*, 1st ed. 2016 edition (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016).

cultural rhetorics; Ahmed's *Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others*, Clifford's *The Predicament of Culture: Twentieth Century Ethnography, Literature, and Art,* and Lorde's "The Master's Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master's House." What these works have in common is the weight of the reciprocal relationship between language, meaning, and culture that comes to bear on their respective topics. Cultural rhetoricians see these as cultural rhetorics work because they each recognize the situated nature of knowledge.

What this project adds to conversations in cultural rhetorics is a focus on place as a rhetoric of identification and of regionalizing rhetorical strategies in the writing, making, and teaching of place. My work specifically addresses this by investigating the rhetorical materials[14] involved in calls to regionalized identifications in online magazines, by regional festivals, and through place-based writing pedagogy. Throughout this project, I take culture, particularly the assertion of a unique, place-based culture, as an argument rather than a fact. Furthermore, I argue that the cases in the following chapters demonstrate that place is an argument, especially when it is used as a modifier of "culture" and as a call for identification. Beyond naming place and culture as rhetorical, this project investigates the ways each case (magazines, festivals, and pedagogy) goes about generating those rhetorics. Cultural rhetorics makes claims about the role of rhetoric in culture and vice versa; this project specifically takes on rhetorical invention and investigates it in relation to regionalizing rhetorics.

## Invention and Identification

This project is an investigation of rhetorical invention. By looking into how rhetoric regionalizes, and how regions are deployed rhetorically, I am engaged in a project that aims to connect place, identity, and argument; and therein map how place-based identities are invented

[14] Peter Simonson, "Reinventing Invention, Again," *Rhetoric Society Quarterly* 44, no. 4 (August 8, 2014): 299–322, https://doi.org/10.1080/02773945.2014.938862.

for particular rhetorical purposes. In *A Rhetoric of Motives,* Kenneth Burke argues for a shift in focus away from persuasion and toward identification as the key term for rhetorical studies.[15] In this project, I take identification as the more exigent rhetorical goal, rather than persuasion. Furthermore, while the primary interest of this project is calls to identification, it is important to note that there exists scholarship that establishes the regularity with which rhetorical *performances* of identity crop up. Jeffrey T. Grabill and Stacey Pigg write, in their study on identity performance in online forums, that "identity performances are understood to be a central part of the discursive practice of everyday life."[16] They found that - in science forums - participants stake claims about who they are and what that lends them with regard to credibility in these public and ephemeral arguments about science. They go on to elaborate that people can take a variety of approaches to perform identity discursively, and that many of those approaches are rooted in the affective, the emotive, and not necessarily beholden to the logocentric, though no less rhetorical. The availability of and flexibility of identity, then, is a source of not only credibility but also of argument itself. This understanding of the recurrent, affective, and rhetorical nature of enacting identity is a thread that runs through my research in this project.

Wells of ideas about our identity and place are present for rhetors to easily call up, making place-based identities rich for the study of rhetorical invention. Think about what it means that *where are you from?* is such a common small talk or ice-breaker question: it is a quick heuristic for something about **who we are.** When we are asked or when we offer it up, what we say and how we frame our response is often contextual, intentional, and audience specific. For example, when I am asked, I can respond in a variety of ways: 1) to people in or

[15] Kenneth Burke, *A Rhetoric of Motives* (Berkley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1950).
[16] Jeffrey T. Grabill and Stacey Pigg, "Messy Rhetoric: Identity Performance as Rhetorical Agency in Online Public Forums," *Rhetoric Society Quarterly* 42, no. 2 (March 1, 2012): 99–119, https://doi.org/10.1080/02773945.2012.660369.

from Randolph County, NC, I am from Trinity; 2) to people from North Carolina more broadly, I'm from the High Point-Greensboro area; 3) to others, I have options of how specific or forthcoming I want to be about the small-town nature of where I am from -- I can be from North Carolina, or the Piedmont, or a small rural town in North Carolina, or about an hour and a half away from Raleigh. I can situate myself in relation to different places, and to what ideas those different places come towing. What we put out there for others about where we are from is an argument and an invitation, in order to see what kinds of connections or divergences we can uncover between ourselves and our audience or conversation partners. We are seeking identification/disidentification.

Those wells of ideas and patterns that come along can be called commonplaces, or *topoi*, and are strategies for identification. Identification and identity practices are a part of everyday discourse, so they're readily available for use in rhetorical context. Invention for the purposes of identification is going to rely on those existing patterns. Peter Simonson, in "Reinventing Invention, Again," argues that all invention is reinvention. Rather than approaching the creation of arguments through the lens of newness, or genesis, or discovery of the not-yet-known, Simonson's approach to invention focuses on generation. Generation, he argues, is a more accurate term for the stirring up, curating, collecting, and deploying that goes on in rhetoric; for the most part, we are not uncovering new ideas - we are putting together existing ideas, stringing together or splitting apart already established patterns of thinking, in order to make arguments, to make meaning. This dissertation will take up invention similarly; by tracking and analyzing the commonplaces about the South and Appalachia that are used to regionalize stories, events, and audiences.

What this dissertation will add to the study of invention is a focus on the relationship between the body and the commonplaces. Each case will look at ways the body is involved in invention and identification by analyzing the relationship between the body and the topoi used to invent region/regional identity. There is already research on the body and topoi: Christa Olson's *embodiable topoi* are examples of arguments about identity that are manifested through the body and the body's appearance.[17] There is also significant work on embodied knowledge in Indigenous, feminist, Black, disability, and queer studies: Sarah Klotz[18], Susan Kates[19], Christina V. Cedillo[20], A. Abby Knoblauch[21], J. Logan Smilges[22], Karma R. Chávez[23]. My work focuses on the use of the senses as sources of invention; the role of the body in identification, in making and heeding the call to a regionalized identity.

The focus on the senses in rhetoric continues a shift away (again) from the topics as logo-centric; Simonson's *reinvention* theory of invention works against those approaches and "(1) [their] continued focus on novelty, distinctiveness, and creativity more than repetition or reproduction; and (2) [their] still-dominant emphasis on arguments, words, and cognitions at the expense of affects, things, and bodily sensations."[24] This dissertation will continue on in this vein, taking the body, affect, and sensation as integral to the rhetorical process of invention-

[17] Christa J. Olson, "Performing Embodiable Topoi: Strategic Indigeneity and the Incorporation of Ecuadorian National Identity," *Journal of Quarterly Speech* 96, no. 3 (August 16, 2010): 300–323.
[18] Sarah Klotz, *Writing Their Bodies: Restoring Rhetorical Relations at the Carlisle Indian School* (Logan: Utah State University Press, 2021), https://muse.jhu.edu/book/81321.
[19] Susan Kates, "The Embodied Rhetoric of Hallie Quinn Brown," *College English* 59, no. 1 (1997): 59–71, https://doi.org/10.2307/378798.
[20] Christina V. Cedillo, "What Does It Mean to Move?: Race, Disability, and Critical Embodiment Pedagogy," *Composition Forum* 39 (2018), https://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ1188979.
[21] A. Abby Knoblauch, "Bodies of Knowledge: Definitions, Delineations, and Implications of Embodied Writing in the Academy," *Composition Studies* 40, no. 2 (2012): 50–65.
[22] J. Logan Smilges, "White Squares to Black Boxes: Grindr, Queerness, Rhetorical Silence," *Rhetoric Review* 38, no. 1 (January 2, 2019): 79–92, https://doi.org/10.1080/07350198.2018.1551661.
[23] Karma R. Chávez, "The Body: An Actual and Abstract Rhetorical Concept," *Rhetoric Society Quarterly* 48, no. 3 (2018): 242–50.
[24] Simonson, "Reinventing Invention, Again."

reinvention-reproduction, through the sensory, regional(izing) commonplaces identified and analyzed.

## Writing Pedagogy

This dissertation forwards arguments about the writing classroom alongside arguments about rhetorical theory. A study of rhetoric is important to pedagogical practices in the writing classroom because teaching is itself rhetorical. Every aspect of a teaching practice can be an argument, an invitation, a call to identify. The rhetorical canons are present in every class and every assignment. But furthermore, a study *regionalizing* rhetoric is important to the teaching of writing because there are a variety of place-based approaches to rhetoric and composition, and each has the potential to invite students and instructors to identify or disidentify with places.

Teaching place, is writing about place, is inventing place. Place-based pedagogy is regionalizing, and this dissertation will demonstrate that there are several ways this manifests: teaching about invention, teaching, learning, and writing about and with and in the body; critical-rhetorical genre study (with a focus on the place and regionalizing done by academic genres and the academy as "place"). What this dissertation adds to scholarship on writing pedagogy is an organizing theory for place-based pedagogy that illuminates its possibilities and limitations for rhetoric and composition teachers, specifically cultural rhetoricians.

## Regionalizing Rhetorics

In order to make visible the materials of regionalizing rhetoric, this dissertation analyzes specific cases of organizations that invite audiences to participate in and perform Southern or Appalachian identities. In order to demonstrate that place-based pedagogy is, too, an example of regionalizing rhetoric, this dissertation analyzes multiple approaches to place-based pedagogy, synthesizes them into categories of opportunities that place-based teaching offers. Then, it presents an example of a currently running first year writing course that aims to be a critical,

place-based pedagogy -- acknowledging the regionalizing effects of course design and leveraging those for critical engagement with place. Overall, this dissertation argues that sensory descriptions of place and conservative topoi shape region-making rhetorics for the (U.S.) Southern and Appalachian organizations studied, and that a critical place-based pedagogy is possible. Ultimately, this dissertation argues that each of the cases studied are examples of regionalizing rhetorics — inventing and deploying region and regional identity for aesthetic, commercial, political, and pedagogical purposes.

Regionalizing rhetorics as a frame helps clarify the non-given nature of region, the active rhetorical effort that goes into defining, delimiting, constituting, cultivating identifications with a region. This dissertation explores rhetorical regionalization by identifying three primary strategies through which it is done: definition, experience, and special topoi. These three are not distinct from each other; rather, as this dissertation will demonstrate, they are connected as overlapping aspects of regionalizing rhetoric. Below, key terms are sketched and will be elaborated on in the following chapters.

***Definition***

In each chapter, definitional work is a key part of the rhetorics studied. To define is to argue that something is or is not, and this kind of work will be done in obvious and surreptitious ways across the texts studied. In Chapter Two, definitions will look like revising, redefining, narrowing, comparing and contrasting, testifying. In Chapter Three, definition will look like broadening, blurring, expanding, obfuscating. In Chapter Four, definition will manifest through directing, prompting, moving within set boundaries, naming and exploring genres.

***Experience***

Experience in this dissertation will mean individual lived experience, invented experience, collaborative experience, and the experience of others. Even when - or especially

when - the experiences under analysis are *invented* (that is, they are being presented to a reader as an opportunity for identification), experience will be tied to the body through the sense and through affect. How something makes us *feel* will be intimately connected to arguments that claim to say something about who we *are* and what a place *is.* In Chapter Two, descriptive language and content that engages the senses to (re)create the experiences of the South that focus on food and drink and on the land/landscape. In Chapter Three, institutional rhetoric and promotional material for the festivals are rooted in the familiar, the expected, and thrown into sharp relief against the uncertainty and discomfort of the COVID-19 pandemic. Even in light of a major shift in public health discourses, the experiences promoted by the festivals only ever deviate a small amount, and the experience of consistency created by regionalized topoi will build to a satisfying sense of return and conservation. In Chapter Four, the senses as embodied and place-based research and writing are the focus of the experience of place-based pedagogy as regionalizing rhetoric.

***Special topoi***

The rhetorical concept of *topoi* lies at the center of this dissertation's investigation into rhetorical invention and identification. Topoi are the lens through which this dissertation simultaneously takes up definition and the senses. In Chapters Two and Three, special topoi are treated as potent and persistent sources of arguments about region. Region itself, is also treated like a special topos. In Chapter Four, place-based pedagogy is argued as particularly useful to teaching about and with topoi; as places to which a rhetor can go for arguments, or as planes where ideas that connect to a topic exist and interact, the *topoi* or commonplaces are presented as fitting way to teach invention with respect to place, and vice versa.

Chapter Outlines

This dissertation pursues the above arguments by investigating 1) topoi present in regionalizing rhetoric, 2) the role of the body and senses in those topoi, which create a *feeling* of place, and acknowledges the body, sensation, and affect as involved in rhetorical invention; and 3) the ways in which pedagogical approaches to place direct attention (of teachers and students), create the context for place based arguments, and are regionalizing rhetorics themselves - that curating materials and writing prompts that direct attention to place make visible and available the rhetorical materials of a place.

Chapters Two and Three investigate the topoi present in regionalizing rhetoric as it happens in publications and in support of regional festivals. Each chapter identifies the manner in which the regionalizing topoi operate: through definition, through the senses and sensory experiences, the creation of commonplaces, cultivation of identification. Chapter Two, "Cultivating Contemporary Southern Readerships by *The Bitter Southerner* and *Scalawag*," argues that both publications regularly employ arguments built on the sensory experiences of place related to land and to food. The magazines chosen are popular texts with growing readerships. They explicitly seek to cultivate a southern audience, per their mission statements. They each rely on a recurring use of a set of topoi that reinscribe established regional ideas while claiming to revise definitions of southern identity.

Chapter Three, "Homecoming: Regional Fairs Cultivating Return," investigates the process of regionalization deployed by two regional festivals: Merlefest and the Carolina Classic Fair. Festivals represent an opportunity to see people physically show up - be physically called to a place, in addition to spending money on tickets and merchandise. They are sensory, experiential, and site-specific (festivals don't happen digitally, it's their nature that they are on specific grounds). This chapter argues that topics like tradition, family, safety, and fun can be

used to regionalize events, creating a feeling of/drive toward homecoming as an answer to public uncertainty.

Approaches to teaching writing are so varied; what happens when we "root" writing in place? What does a rhetoric of writing pedagogy that place-makes do for writing studies? Chapter Four, "Place Based Pedagogy as Regionalizing Rhetoric," argues that place-based pedagogy *is* a regionalizing rhetoric, by investigating the ways it does place-making work, arguing for its benefits as a cultural rhetorics pedagogy, and demonstrating an approach to its application in the first-year writing classroom. In this chapter, processes of regionalization that are not ready-made are outlined. The chapter argues that place-based-pedagogy as a regionalizing rhetoric that does border work, emplacing people and drawing critical attention to the active dimension evoked by regionalizing.

My scholarly interest in region and identity began in earnest in 2017 during a master's level seminar titled Rhetoric of The South. In that class, we took both a topical and a chronological approach to the rhetorical nature of southerness: reading Alexander Stephens' Cornerstone Speech, watching Birth of a Nation, listening to Lynyrd Skynrd, discussing soul food restaurants and SEC football, and a variety of other things that are associated with "The South." I think it was the first time I heard someone explicitly articulate that The South, and therefore southerness, was not real, not a given, but rather an idea that has to be argued into existence. I have often struggled with calls to either identify as Southern or to eschew southerness. Time after time, the places I have called home have been called southern; I have been called southern. And time after time, southerness has been equated - veiled or not - with white supremacy. So, in starting from the premise that the South is not a stable, given, definitive place, but that the idea of southerness has real impacts on how people act and think of

themselves, region as rhetoric gave me the vocabulary for questions I had about place and identity. This dissertation demonstrates that regional identification is contextual and can be deployed by particular rhetors to invent places for audiences to identify with. It is an extension of questions that have been pestering me for a while now: how and when is place salient and meaningful to identity? How do we make regions when neither nature nor maps give them to us? How do other people language us in and out of identifications with place(s)? When do we do that ourselves?

# CHAPTER II: CULTIVATION OF CONTEMPORARY SOUTHERN READERSHIPS BY *THE BITTER SOUTHERNER* AND *SCALAWAG*

## Introduction

I came across *The Bitter Southerner* in 2016. A story by one of their guest columnists came up on my Twitter timeline: "The Lost Continent of Appalachia and the Beasts That Roamed It.[25]" Having grown up in North Carolina, I navigated over to the page, hoping to read about some dinosaurs that tramped around the Blue Ridge Parkway. What I remember from that essay is a sense of belonging, of affinity, of ownership over ancient places that don't exist in any recognizable way and haven't for hundreds of millions of years. Looking back at the essay, I notice that it opens with not-subtle language that evoked those feelings: "[t]his is our land, lost deep beneath the veil of history[26]." Our? I'm not even from Appalachia; I grew up squarely in the Piedmont area of North Carolina. But, before I knew it, I was devouring that essay and others, clicking around *The Bitter Southerner* with an air of birthright like - *ah*, my people.

I had resisted identification with *southerness* actively since at least my early teenage years. From my perspective, people who were loud about their southerness were the same ones watching CMT, driving trucks, and using racial slurs at the local high school basketball games. If you had asked me at sixteen, *Are you southern?* I would have interpreted that as being asked whether I pre-registered to vote as a Republican, or if I liked to go huntin'. The answer would've been a resounding *no*. Or, more likely, a resounding eye roll. So, given my years of dutiful resistance to being like those *country kids*, how did this digital magazine publishing about and for The South and "Southerners" get me on board? Well, first and foremost, they made a big deal about **not** being like *those* southerners. They were proud of not being those southerners. They

[25] Asher Elbein, "The Lost Continent of Appalachia and the Beasts That Roamed It," THE BITTER SOUTHERNER, accessed February 19, 2022, https://bittersoutherner.com/the-lost-continent-of-appalachia-and-the-beasts-that-roamed-it.
[26] Elbein.

wrote up a version of southerness that explicitly addressed the real reasons I did not want to be called (or call myself) southern: that it meant I would be claiming all the negative things about the South. From the stereotypes of the uneducated redneck (which would have mortified me then) to the shame of the legacy of white supremacy - southerness was not something that I could bear to claim, let alone be proud of. But these folks alleged to have a southern identity that they could wear on their t-shirts without feeling like a racist, or a homophobe, or a jerk. They promised stories about places and people I would recognize *and* a way to feel less out-of-place.

Reflecting on how *The Bitter Southerner*'s promises of a "Better South" and their knowing, head-shaking "Yeah, we know, us too," language about the desire to claim home made me rethink the possibility of making some room for "southern" on the list of identifiers, I realized there was some pretty crafty persuasion going on. Clearly, I was not the only person who had been attracted to the idea of being a southerner, just bitter about what all that *had* to mean; there were tons of stories and a couple dozen contributors, one of whom had even been a former college professor of mine! With such a strong association between the magazine's mission (more on this shortly) and the identity of the reader, I began to wonder what kind of strategies were at work here, in order to get people interested and invested in this relatively new digital magazine. How does a magazine about the South's people, politics, and aesthetics cultivate - to use Erin Branch's language on developing an audience[27] - this kind of readership? Magazines are businesses, so they need to draw and retain enough readers to sustain the business.

Here, I should note that there is a difference between cultivating an audience and cultivating a readership. Cultivating an audience for a particular piece is one thing. Cultivating a

[27] Erin L. Branch, "'Taste Analytically': Julia Child's Rhetoric of Cultivation," *Rhetoric Society Quarterly* 45, no. 2 (March 15, 2015): 164–84, https://doi.org/10.1080/02773945.2015.1007518.

readership describes the work to attract and connect with people who will then subscribe to your content or otherwise regularly read the stories a magazine or news outlet is publishing. You could end up a part of the audience for an individual piece as a one-off or somewhat serendipitously; much like I did when the Appalachian dinosaur story came across my Twitter feed (this is not to intentionally ignore the ways promoted stories or digital media algorithms work! I recognize that, in all reality, there is likely some digital marketing at play here that pushed the story to my account). But, becoming part of a readership requires an extra step: identifying with the publication's brand enough to believe you will continue to enjoy future work, or that it is otherwise worth it to you to keep that publication and its stories in your to-read list, in your inbox, pinned to your toolbar, or otherwise regularly available for reading. A readership is a group, then, that the publication can more confidently solicit for financial support, as they have indicated through newsletter subscriptions, social media follows, or frequent site visits that they have a sustained interest. The readership, then, is the likely target for memberships and merchandise, through which the publications generate revenue.

In this chapter, I provide background on two publications that depend on their readers and supporters identifying as southern - though not the kind of southern that my eye-rolling teen self would have so obviously rejected - and outline the definitions of southern identity that each crafts and offers. In other words, I offer an explanation for how these publications take explicit aim at the definition of southerness I held as an eye-rolling sixteen-year-old and argue that they employ topoi strategically to create southerness along lines that are amenable to, rather than antithetical to, progressive politics, though that politics is pursued in the name of liberal consumerism (in the case of The Bitter Southerner). Then, I will argue that constitutive rhetoric and regional rhetoric are made coherent through their reliance on *topoi*. I will next offer an

analysis of the topics that *The Bitter Southerner* and *Scalawag* use to cultivate their respective audiences. I will argue that each magazine must define the South and southerness (as a characteristic of identity) in such a way that constitutes an audience who will be motivated to contribute financially to the publications. The goal is for readers to identify with the publication so much that they *become* a bitter Southerner or a scalawag. In order to call these audiences forward - interpellate them into collective and specific versions of a southern subjectivity - I argue that the magazines invent shared memories of "southern" experiences through the use of two special, sensory topoi: the Southern landscape and the Southern table. Sensory topoi, then, are the commonplaces used by the magazines to create southerness, *regionalizing* the stories they tell by deploying the senses as they relate to food and to land.

About *The Bitter Southerner* and *Scalawag*

*The Bitter Southerner* is an Atlanta-based digital magazine that has published essays, photography projects, columns, and other stories under the slogan *"For the sake of the story. For the love of the South,"* since its launch in August 2013. A year after its launch, in 2014, *The Bitter Southerner* was called the *Vice* of the American South by *Forbes*, citing socially and politically relevant feature stories and tens of thousands of weekly site visitors,[28] and more recently been referred to as a "kitchen sink New Yorker,[29]" by the *New York Times*' Richard Fausset in his description of the magazine's broad coverage of regional politics, social justice and civil rights, culture, art, literature, food and drink, on a (then) "shoestring budget"

According to founder and former editor-in-chief Chuck Reece's founding essay "Why We Created *The Bitter Southerner* in the First Place" (which served as the About section for the

[28] J. Max Robins, "'The Bitter Southerner' Might Be The 'Vice' of the South," *Forbes*, accessed February 28, 2022, https://www.forbes.com/sites/maxrobins/2014/09/15/the-bitter-southerner-might-be-the-vice-of-the-south/?sh=4e76cc947062.

[29] Richard Fausset, "For Southern Magazines, an Ambitious Mission: [News; Series]," *New York Times, Late Edition (East Coast)*, September 6, 2017, sec. A.

publication's website until the change in leadership in 2021), the southerners *The Bitter Southerner* claims to speak for and speak to are not ones interested in a "state's rights" argument, or racially segregated high school proms, or censored textbooks. No, this is *another* South and other southerners. "*The Bitter Southerner* is for the rest of us," Reece wrote. "It is about the South that the rest of us know: the one we live in today and the one we hope to create in the future." The essay linked out to a mission and vision statement, in which the publication added: "*The Bitter Southerner* exists to support anyone who yearns to claim their Southern identity proudly and without shame — regardless of their age, race, gender, ethnic background, place of origin, politics, sexual orientation, creed, religion, or lack of religion." Reece's articulation of *The Bitter Southerner*'s original project reads like a refutation or a rebuttal. His mission statement is a preemptive strike against those who would wish to lump him and other bitter southerners in with the Sons and Daughters of the Confederacy.

To answer the questions surrounding who the magazine is speaking to and how they write to cultivate an audience of the "right kind" of southerners, this project analyzes stories published online by *The Bitter Southerner*. With regards to scope, the chapter looks primarily at stories published by *The Bitter Southerner* during 2020 - a roiling year of political, social, and economic upheaval on scales local to global. The U.S. presidential election, recent uprisings of white nationalism like the Charlottesville Unite the Right rally, the ongoing Black Lives Matter movement, and the COVID-19 pandemic gave *The Bitter Southerner* plenty to account for and respond to in relation to their position as a "Southern" magazine. By extension, *The Bitter Southerner* had to demonstrate a cohesion between their southerness and their support for Black Lives Matter, their denunciation of the alt-right, and their consideration and concern for evidence-based community health initiatives like masking and vaccines — lest they be

associated with those *other southerners* that Reece was so determined to distance the magazine from.

While the publication has seen a shift in the breadth of their content - there are not as many essays on whiskey as there once were - the core argument and the belief in the efficacy of stories to make that argument stands. The editorial helm has been taken over by former creative director Dave Whitling, and the mission statement has since been revised:

> The Bitter Southerner has a single aim: to uncover the American South in all its truth and complexity — and in the process to break stereotypes about the region and its people by pushing out important, difficult, uncomfortable, irreverent, witty, addictive, and always enjoyable stories that turn myths about the South inside out. Every week[30].

The determination to revise the meaning of southerness remains the mission of the periodical, even across a more recent (2021) change in leadership. Common themes in the mission remain: an assertion that there is a place called The America South, that it is misunderstood, and that the stories published by *The Bitter Southerner* will do the work of revising our understanding of this place. The new mission posits that there is a true and complex definition of the South, if difficult to uncover due to "stereotypes about the region and its people," and that this definition will be uncovered through storytelling. Readers and followers of *The Bitter Southerner*, then, are "great Southern musicians, chefs, farmers, scientists, innovators, change-makers, writers, teachers, and more.[31]" As my analysis shows, these identities aren't (always) linked with southerness, and forging such connections is the explicit, rhetorical work

[30] "We Stand For A Better South," THE BITTER SOUTHERNER, accessed February 19, 2022, https://bittersoutherner.com/about.
[31] "We Stand For A Better South."

that the periodical pursues across issues and genres. To define southerness and the South, to draw borders around those definitions (this-not-that), is to rhetorically inscribe the region: to regionalize the magazine, its mission, and subsequently its stories, contributors, and audiences.

Since its launch, The Bitter Southerner has received enough donations (via memberships) to keep publishing into its ninth year. Evidently, asserting the existence of this other South is convincing an audience to keep paying attention and the goal of re-envisioning southern pride is compelling writers and readers to tell and retell about this other, bitter, South — becoming bitter southerners.

The Bitter Southerner is not the only digital publication aiming at revising southern identity. Founded through a Kickstarter campaign in the spring of 201532 Scalawag is based in Durham, North Carolina and aims to "spark critical conversations about the many Souths in which we live, love, and struggle." In a December 2015 interview with IndyWeek, co-founder Sarah Bufkin asserts that "[w]hat makes the South so great is that our political discourse has always been a bit different, and that storytelling has always been a way of other getting people on board with a political vision and telling how struggle and change happen. That's going to be a basis [sic] of what Scalawag will do." A key difference, here, between this magazine and the last is the explicitly political aim. A key commonality is the belief in the efficacy of storytelling for the purposes of persuasion.

Scalawag has since grown from a fully volunteer-operated organization to being well-funded enough through subscriptions, donations, and grants to pay their contributors and their entire staff. While Scalawag foregrounds nonprofit journalism as their primary mission, they – like *The Bitter Southerner* – are a platform for artists of many kinds, producing work that

[32] Chris Vitiello, "New Magazine Scalawag Aims to Tell the South's Untold Stories," INDY Week, December 2, 2015, https://indyweek.com/api/content/e0b87183-ab51-5b03-92ec-9a5c07bc3e19/.

responds to a vision of the American South as uniquely tense and shifting. Their most updated mission statement is: "Through journalism and storytelling, Scalawag works in solidarity with oppressed communities in the South to disrupt and shift the narratives that keep power and wealth in the hands of the few. Collectively, we pursue a more liberated South33." Scalawags, then, are members of "complex network of kinfolk—organizers, workers, poets, farmers, Grandpaps and Big Mamas who want justice and equity for us and every generation that comes after us.34" These identifications likewise aren't ready-to-hand but cultivated through the rhetorical practices I analyze below.

One noticeable and important difference between Scalawag and The Bitter Southerner that these magazines exemplify is the difference between southerness defined as a politic and southerness as aesthetic. Both magazines do engage with southern politics and southern aesthetics, yes. But based on mission and vision statements and story topics, southerness as a manner of political resistance is more prevalent and obvious in Scalawag; to enact their definition of southern, you should ultimately be voting for leftist politicians and policies. Southerness as a valuable approach to craft and beauty is more prevalent in The Bitter Southerner, both in content and their emphasis on merchandise.35 The Bitter Southerner is invested in persuading you to buy their "All Y'all" t-shirts and fried green tomato screen print kitchen towels. As I will aim to demonstrate, the primary focus of each magazine - politics or aesthetics - influences the topics chosen, the collective memories invoked, and subsequently the characteristics of the collective "southern" readership. However, both southern audiences -

[33] "About Scalawag: Reckoning with the South," Scalawag, accessed January 25, 2022, http://scalawagmagazine.org/about/.
[34] "Build a More Just South with Us: Become a Scalawag Member!," Scalawag, accessed February 28, 2022, http://scalawagmagazine.org/support/.
[35] "The Bitter Southerner General Store," accessed February 28, 2022, https://bsgeneralstore.com/.

political and aesthetic - are addressed and called into being by the rhetorical practice of storytelling.

## Constitutive Rhetoric

*"In telling the story of a people, the people come to be."*

I am using Charland's constitutive rhetoric[36] to theorize about how *The Bitter Southerner* and *Scalawag* invent their respective southern audiences and then call readers into those identities. Built in part on Louis Althusser's interpellation[37], constitutive rhetoric outlines the process by which rhetors invent collective identities and call individuals into them. The audiences are then made visible by their resulting political or material actions.

Charland makes it clear that these invented audiences are not the sole and novel construction of the rhetor. Instead, the rhetor taps into a context of existing ideas, patterns, and experiences and articulates those as a coherent identity to which their audience can belong. If subjects are constituted by the rhetor and by a lifetime of socialization and immersion in webs of patterns and ideas, and the individual's lifetime of socialization primes them for the rhetorical moves, then interpellation both taps into and invents the topics that call the individual into the collective identity. Put another way, telling (new) stories about a group of people or a culture - as *The Bitter Southerner* and *Scalawag* claim to do - is all about reusing and revising the images and ideas already out there about southerness.

Similarly to Charland's *peuple quebecois*, the bitter Southerner[38] and the scalawag, the politically progressive, contemporary and uniquely Southern subject exists only through the

[36] Maurice Charland, "Constitutive Rhetoric: The Case of the Peuple Québécois," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 73, no. 2 (May 1987): 133, https://doi.org/10.1080/00335638709383799.
[37] Louis Althusser, *On The Reproduction Of Capitalism: Ideology And Ideological State Apparatuses*, trans. G. M. Goshgarian, Later Printing edition (London ; New York: Verso, 2014).
[38] "The bitter southerner," here, and "scalawag" following referring to the collective identities of the publications' respective readerships - not the titles of the publications themselves.

discourse that constitutes them. That discourse - the one that invents and taps into the identifying topics of the collective identity - is present in their mission and vision statements and reinforced by the stories *The Bitter Southerner* and *Scalawag* publish.

Be constituted as a subject, there is both a call and response required; if the magazines are targeting a particular reader, then you need to recognize yourself as that reader. Althusser's interpellation[39]is rhetoric in action, where a "Hey, you there!" "recruits subjects among individuals." In our case, *The Bitter Southerner*'s "All Y'all" or *Scalawag*'s "Come on in y'all" work this way: the "y'all" is the specific, interpellating articulation, and a regionalized one. *Yes, if you are a **y'all**, then it really is **you** that we are talking to.* This approach uses slang (and an implied accent) to tie the audience to place and regionalize the reader.

Charland wrote, "[i]n telling the story of a people, the people come to be[40]." I would amend that statement slightly for the purposes of understanding the invention of southern collective identities these stories speak of: In telling the story of a people, of a place, the people *and the* place come to be. In order for a revised definition of southerness, there needs to be a South where these new southerners can be. Regional rhetoric - which I extend to regionalizing rhetoric - creates this.

[39] Althusser, *On The Reproduction Of Capitalism*.
[40] Charland, "Constitutive Rhetoric."

Regional Rhetoric

Both publications claim to tell stories about the South. And they both foreground the importance and efficacy of storytelling as a means of examining and advocating for the region. Region itself is a frame taken up by rhetorical theorists in order to understand the role of both place and space in invention. Jenny Rice, in "From Architectonic to Tectonics: Introducing Regional Rhetorics" outline her four premises of regional rhetoric[41], which I will use here to integrate regional rhetoric with constitutive rhetoric and to demonstrate that both are grounded in *topoi*.

Rice writes that (1) region is a rhetorical interface, that (2) regional identity and national identity are related, yet not concentrically, (3) that regions are folds, and (4) that regions are strategies.[42] Regional is a rhetorical interface - a place of contact and exchange - because it makes concrete the more abstract "local and global flows" of food, economic, and nature-based discourses. Rice focuses on public discourse on Appalachian photography in her home state of Kentucky to demonstrate that "regional" was a kind of jumping off point for public discussions on image, agency, race, class, education, and more - those concepts that flow through people's lives, impacting them materially, with both local and global driving forces. We see this play out similarly in *The Bitter Southerner* when they publish on beekeeping, the harvesting of tupelo honey, and the interconnectedness of foodways, economy, and environment,[43]and in *Scalawag* with "A queer and in-color geography: From Mumbai to West Virginia.[44]" Region(al) is the rhetorical meeting place that brings together these disparate topics, pushing bees and economic

[41] Rice, "From Architectonic to Tectonics."
[42] Rice.
[43] Jessica Bradley Wells, "Where the Tupelo Grows," *THE BITTER SOUTHERNER*, November 30, 2021, https://bittersoutherner.com/feature/2021/where-the-tupelo-grows.
[44] Anjali Enjeti, "Appalachia: Queer and in Color," *Scalawag*, March 3, 2022, http://scalawagmagazine.org/2022/03/another-appalachia/.

class into the same conversation. In “From Mumbai to West Virginia,” we can also see Rice’s second premise of regional rhetoric demonstrated: that regional and national identities are linked, though not concentrically[45]. In an interview conducted by *Scalawag* contributor Anjali Enjeti, writer Neema Avashia reflects on the intersecting, place-based identities - Hindu Indian American and member of a “hills and hollers” community of West Virginia - that were sometimes in tension, but always “queering” the lines between where she was from and where she was present(ly). In *The Bitter Southerner*, regional-southern identity is not subsumed into or submissive to a national-U.S. identity in articles like “Bizzaro Bavaria” - a look into a faux-Bavarian “tourist trap” town, 90 miles northeast of Atlanta[46]. With southerness shifted from being some strange subset of American to being an identity separate from, though definitely tethered to it, region(al) in these essays can open up to people without any prerequisite Americanness.

The next two premises of regional rhetoric - that regions are folds and strategies[47] - highlight the rhetorical work that regional discourse must do in order to hold region as a coherent place. By folds, Rice means that region(al) discourse bridges physical or conceptual space between places and ideas. For example, that barbecue is talked about as a regional food, then the sauce-covered ribs in Memphis and the vinegar doused pulled pork in North Carolina can be folded together along the regional food line, bringing together to fairly different dishes under the same topic: southern barbecue. And because regions are folds, Rice says, the bringing together of disparate ideas and places under the banner of regionalism is always strategic.

[45] Rice, “From Architectonic to Tectonics.”
[46] Anjali Enjeti, “Bizarro Bavaria,” *THE BITTER SOUTHERNER*, October 14, 2021, https://bittersoutherner.com/southern-perspectives/2021/bizarro-bavaria-helen-georgia.
[47] Rice, “From Architectonic to Tectonics.”

This intentional bringing together, this argumentation that occurs every time something or someone is called regional, is where *topoi* come in. Rice names Regionalism as a topos from which discourse on "regional meanings and forms of belonging"[48] can begin. All of the previous arguments, images, folds, and strategies that we have encountered that named one thing or another *southern*, are places to which a writer can return for available means, and bring a reader along with them, to make these new arguments about the South and southerness. Those already available ideas are options that can *regionalize* a particular topic, discourse, issue, or story. Therefore, I argue that *topos* is the theoretical mainspring that gives both constitutive rhetoric and regional rhetoric coherence, and as such I will focus on the topoi used by these two publications to create opportunities for identification, cultivating a readership, and ultimately regionalizing the stories they tell for specific, financial, and political purposes.

*Topoi* and Memory: constituting a readership

*The Bitter Southerner* and *Scalawag* constitute their respective versions of a southern reader through the stories they publish. With starting point definitions of a bitter southerner and a scalawag laid out in their mission statements, the publications rely on the stories to further strengthen those definitions as well as to serve as an access point into the argument for first time readers. They aim for identification by writing from a toolbox of topics that invents shared memories, upon which the collective identity (Readers) is built.

Aristotle's topos[49] has been a difficult term for rhetoricians to agree on, thanks to his lack of extensive defining of the term itself. However, the most usable definitions of the term come from its connections to place and memory. Carolyn Miller writes about the *topos* as a "source of

[48] Rice.
[49] Aristotle, *Rhetoric*, trans. W. Rhys Roberts, First (New York: The Modern Library, 1984).

novelty," calling it a "conceptual place to which an arguer can mentally go to find arguments,"[50] *and* as Rice cites in the previously mentioned "From Architectonic to Tectonics," Miller also conveniently calls it "a region that permits or invites the connection between the abstract and the concrete, between a pattern and the material." [51] The "permits or invites" portion of her definition is an opportunity to consider the ways topoi may be particularly effective in rhetorical projects that require reworkings, reimaginings, or redefinitions of ideas. *Permits* broadens the bounds of what is allowable, permissible within discourses on a topic; it expands what is up for discussion. *Invites* figures topoi as an abstract place that is ready and waiting for people to come, bring with them the "concrete and material" and forge new connections, new arguments. And so, building on these definitions, I argue that turning to *topoi* gets to the root of the inventive choices these publications make in order to bridge the space between their arguments about region and the reader that they need to adopt a regional subjectivity.

In order for the *topos* to be persuasive as intended, however, the arguer's audience would need to be able to visit that same abstract place - the reader needs to accept the invitation.[52] That is what the mission statements - and by extension the other landing pages on each website - do for these publications: they invite people in who feel (or could be persuaded to feel) that there is a disconnect between *southerness* and other important aspects of their identity and socialization -- their race, gender, sexuality, politics, tastes in art, religion, etc. The mission statements aim to create a place where it is permissible for their readers to hold what they thought or felt were contradictory identifications. That place, according to McKeon's work on commonplaces, would

[50] Carolyn R. Miller, "The Aristotelian Topos: Hunting for Novelty," in *Rereading Aristotle's Rhetoric*, ed. Alan G. Gross and Arthur E. Walzer (Southern Illinois University Press, 2000), http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/uncg/detail.action?docID=1354556.
[51] Rice, "From Architectonic to Tectonics"; Miller, "The Aristotelian Topos: Hunting for Novelty."
[52] Or, a similar enough mental place, so that the audience can follow along with the arguer's reasoning.

bring the familiar into contact with the unfamiliar,[53] as *The Bitter Southerner* and *Scalawag* bring old ways of thinking and writing about southerness into contact with **their** definitions, making the topoi a useful aspect of invention for studying any claims to a definition - or existence - of a coherent southerness.

***Topos and Identification***

Burke lays at the foundation of his theory of identification *joint interest* - particularly the belief in joint interest.[54] Since identification, for Burke, supplants persuasion as the key term of rhetorical study, the topoi are not (only) tools for arguing, for persuading, but they are tools that can generate belief in a shared way of life. "A way of life," Burke writes, "is acting-together… common sensations, concepts, ideas, attitudes that make them consubstantial."[55] Burke also points out that such identification is necessarily rhetorical, because were there such communion among people natural, real or consistent, there would be no need for politicians - or in our case, writers - to talk about it so much. Therefore, the commonness of the identity, its collectiveness, is constituted by the rhetoric that calls people into it. In his treatment of the topoi,[56] Burke points out that commonplaces are clearly opportunities for identification, because they do the work of translating one's own wishes into the audience's wishes. In writing with the commonplaces, *The Bitter Southerner* and *Scalawag* cultivate a readership whose wishes and opinions are brought close to their own. Put another way, the commonplaces make constitutive rhetoric work, because the shared identity is built around not a real place, but a place(s) in the mind; southerness and The South must be created even as they are being revised. These imagined places to which a rhetor can take their audience support the work of the formal topoi in (re)defining the south and

[53] Miller, "The Aristotelian Topos: Hunting for Novelty"; Richard McKeon, "Creativity and the Commonplace," *Philosophy & Rhetoric* 6, no. 4 (Fall 1973): 199–210.
[54] Burke, *A Rhetoric of Motives*.
[55] Burke.
[56] Burke, *A Rhetoric of Motives*., 56.

each magazine's southern subject. In their desire to define the South and southerness as something other than hoop skirts and racism, the two publications rely on commonplaces that evoke the senses and positive affect about southerness: the southern landscape and the southern table.

*Topoi* in the publications

As introduced above, in order to continue existing, these publications have to call up and call forth an audience for their work, keep them coming back, and convince some of them to shell out money for memberships and merchandise. First, I argue that there are three formal topoi which *The Bitter Southerner* and *Scalawag* use to offer new definitions of southerness. Second, I offer that there are two special topoi - which lean heavily on sensory language - that the publications use to create their respective southerness definitions.

***Formal Topoi***

Aristotle's formal *topoi* are places a rhetor can visit to generate argument, time and again; they are the general patterns and strategies that tend to work for persuading an audience[57]. These two regional publications come back to a few of these formal *topoi* with regularity, and those are definition, comparison, and testimony. Definition is the publication's primary strategy for persuading readers of their stories and webpages to ultimately become financially supportive *members*: they must successfully define their respective visions of southerness; and testimony and compare-contrast work to support definition.

***Definition***

*The Bitter Southerner* and *Scalawag* both must do the work of defining The South and Southerners in order to constitute audiences of the right *kind* of southerner. Both publications, by way of the framing work done by their tag lines, mission, and vision statements, have

[57] Aristotle, *Rhetoric*.

preemptively established that each story they present to these audiences is defined by its topic: The South, at the broadest level, and southerness as an experience. The publication titles do this work, previewing that *The Bitter Southerner* identifies with bitterness, sharpness, and resentment - of having an ax to grind; also, this is a reference to cocktail bitters - fitting, as Reece originally conceived this magazine as a cocktail blog after a stinging disappointment that his favorite bars (all in southern states) were left off a list of Top 50 bars in the U.S.[58] Bitters are intended to balance out the sugar in whiskey or bourbon based cocktails, and so they are a bitter balance to sugary sweetness - a metaphor for the resentment or criticism of the South that the publication argues is necessary for a "true and complex" understanding of the region. *Scalawag* associates the publication with mischief, trouble-making. Reconstruction white Southern Republicans were called *scalawag*, a derisive term for "traitors" to the Southern cause. The magazines attempt to address the definitional problem of the south off the top: in their titles, they point to images of the South with which they want their readers to associate.

The Bitter Southerner defines the South as a place of great makers, workers, and thinkers; it is a place full of goodness despite its history of slavery and white supremacy. Bitter Southerners are those - readers, writers, and editors - who believe in the power of story to highlight those "good folks" who inhabit the South, and in fact, make up the "true and complex" South that the mission statement asserts is there, beneath the stereotypes.

*Scalawag* defines the South as a place uniquely primed for social justice movements *due to* its history of codified and socially upheld white supremacy and a place of ignored cultural

[58] "Meet the 31 People Who Are Changing the South," Time, accessed September 12, 2022, https://time.com/5349036/people-changing-the-south/.

diversity. And it defines scalawags as "a community of folks working to shift the narrative about the South" who "reject objectivity" and "love our people through storytelling."[59]

A rich example of this (re)definition in *Scalawag,* beyond the quotations above, pulled from the membership page, is the "This Week in the South" newsletter. The newsletter, sent via email on Fridays, uses "we" to bring readers into community with writers in a shared mission:

> [W]e reckon with the South's politics and culture through reporting, storytelling, art, and community conversations. We question the dominant perception of the South and bring you interesting and informative pieces from voices you won't come across anywhere else.[60]

This definition of the south is dependent upon previously unheard or unnoticed voices; *Scalawag*, in their mission statement, then, is working against the "dominant perception of the South," with their definition of the South very clearly an argument, here. If the matter of fighting against unwanted perceptions of what the South *is* comes down to redirecting the reader's attention to stories they've not yet heard, then what the South is comes down to who is talking.

Two more technical commonplaces - comparison and testimony - support the work of defining the South for these magazines. To reiterate: I am arguing here that each magazine is offering a particular definition of The South and southerness as part of their overarching missions, and that comparison and testimony are formal topoi that writers use to support their respective definitions of the South and southerness.

***Compare and contrast***

[59] "Build a More Just South with Us."
[60] "This Week in the South—The Context You Need to Reckon with the South.," Scalawag, accessed March 14, 2022, http://scalawagmagazine.org/sign-up/twits/.

They say X, but it *is* Y. Another commonplace that both of these publications visit to establish their stories' southerness is the compare-contrast. The compare-contrast topos can be divided into two approaches: comparing and contrasting stories of the south with one another and comparing and contrasting visions (or versions) southerness. Comparing stories is a matter of what "they" say about the south versus what "we" say about the south.

In Scalawag, a system of story tagging allows the site to categorize stories and offer the reader a "Topics" menu to choose from - "grief & other loves," "The Press in Prison," "Blackness," "Breaking Through COVID," "Combating White Supremacy," "Environmental Justice," "Queerness," "Witness." The "Combating White Supremacy" tag is a good example of the compare-contrast topos in action. The tag's landing page populates with stories, organized by date, and is introduced by the following description:

> The history of white supremacy is deeply connected to the American South—but the South is also the home to some of the fiercest and most successful opponents of structural racism. Every other week we'll be bringing you stories that highlight everyday Southerners confronting white supremacy and anti-Blackness in their communities with creative strategies, dedicated coalition-building, and unwavering commitment[61].

In this, we can see that all the stories that fall under this tag are intended to do the work of expanding the definition of the South from a place of unique racism to include a place uniquely primed to combat white supremacy, due to southerners who are "fierce and successful opponents of structural racism." By telling the stories of Southerners who resist white supremacy - like the story of folks like Mab Segrest, "a white Southerner with at least three Confederate

[61] "Combating White Supremacy Archives," Scalawag, accessed March 16, 2022, http://scalawagmagazine.org/tag/combating-white-supremacy/.

great grandfathers,[62]" an activist with decades of anti-white-supremacy and anti-violence work - the magazine contrasts these people with traditional images of white southerners. Southerness, therefore, is not only the experience of white supremacy - either its benefits or its violence, depending on who you are - but through this use of compare-contrast, is also resistance to white supremacy. Again, here, we see that definitions of the South depend on who is in control of the narrative, and which stories are told in conjunction with each other.

In The Bitter Southerner, the column "From the Southern Perspective" publishes accounts of southern living, which populate weekly on a landing page, one by one, with full bleed photos. These accounts do not always respond to one another. Sometimes, they are simply set up for comparison and contrast through being housed on the same page, under the same title. However, sometimes they are in explicit conversation with one another, telling comparable or contrasting stories of southern experiences. For example, two essays "Why I Don't Hunt Anymore" and "Why I Hunt" offer cultural, moral, ethical, and political perspectives on the "southern outdoorsman"[63] and the ideas/ideology associated with it. "Why I Hunt" was published as a response to "Why I Don't Hunt Anymore," and the two authors and their respective versions of the southern outdoors, meat-eating, killing, and their relationships to nature expand and complicate the definition of southerness (stereotypically seamlessly pro-big gun and hunting season). Both of these men are acceptably southern, acceptably bitter, and the definition of the South "in all its truth and complexity" is supported by the rhetorical act of contrasting the two men and their stories. The column's title, *From the Southern Perspective*, is noticeably singular. Rather than setting up the stories to offer multiple perspectives, the column

[62] Mab Segrest, "The Old Devil and the New Details," *Scalawag*, March 29, 2021, http://scalawagmagazine.org/2021/03/capitol-insurrection-neo-nazi-nc/.
[63] Charles Dodd White, "Why I Don't Hunt Anymore," *THE BITTER SOUTHERNER*, accessed March 16, 2022, https://bittersoutherner.com/from-the-southern-perspective/why-i-dont-hunt-anymore-charles-dodd-white.

is attempting to co-host those competing perspectives in one perspective called *the* Southern perspective; the title attempts to make uniform that which the content tries to position as variable.

***Testimony***

This is a story *by a Southerner* and *about the South*. Testimony is as much, or more, about the one testifying as it is about the content of the testimony. When trying to build a case in a legal context, witnesses and expert testimony are used to establish credibility - to lend credence - to the rhetor's argument. If they say-we say is to work as a way to define and counter-define the south, then the "we" needs to include bonafide witnesses of the South.

The journalistic genre of *Scalawag* makes it a good first case for examining the use of the testimony topos and its potential for supporting a definition-based argument. In addition to having a tag titled "Witness[64]," *Scalawag* employs testimony frequently in its pursuit of a redefined South. In "Meet the Southern librarians fighting for racial justice and truth-telling," Jason Christian interviews North Carolina librarians kynita stringer-stanback and Carter Cue about abolitionist librarians and the Library Freedom Project.[65] The essay's thesis, that "libraries [in the South] can serve as critical institutions for historical truth-telling," is demonstrated primarily through a series of quotations from stringer-stanback and Cue. "It's very difficult for people to really have a very clear perspective on the future," Cue says, "if you have not really taken the time to understand your history." Cue's experience across decades of librarianship, paired with this quote, is used to situate both the South and the library profession as uniquely situated to interrogate and improve Southern politics.

[64] "Witness Archives – Scalawag," accessed March 16, 2022, https://scalawagmagazine.org/tag/witness/.
[65] Jason Christian, "Meet the Southern Librarians Fighting for Racial Justice and Truth-Telling," Scalawag, December 29, 2020, https://scalawagmagazine.org/2020/12/radical-southern-librarians/.

Stringer-stanback further emphasizes this. “I want us who are part of the educational structure in this nation to really start reading and interrogating the historicity of our nation, within context. And we need to really—especially and specifically in the south—really examine the racist terrorism that black people have been subjected to generation, after generation, after generation, after generation, after generation." Additionally, the article leverages testimony in a visually persuasive way: the use of pull-quotes. You see this frequently in magazines (print) and on web-based publication platforms. Copyeditors in-set a large font with the pulled quote, also included in the regular text of the article, as a way to use the quote to frame the surrounding text. Pulling quotes out and including them as visuals in this way functions like a lawyer in a courtroom reiterating the expert witness’ words during examination or in their closing argument: it is a visual way to achieve that kind of sticking point around which the case is being built.

An additional example of testimony at work from *Scalawag* comes from “North Carolina’s hog industry could turn a corner - for better or worse[66].” In this article, Ryke Longest writes about the detrimental impacts of the hog farming industry on health and environment and their disproportionate effects on Black, Latino, and Native American residents of North Carolina’s farming towns and neighboring communities. At the center of the article are more than two dozen lawsuits against Murphy-Brown, “a subsidiary of Smithfield Foods, the largest pork producer in the country.[67]” The more than 500 plaintiffs represented by the cases, while not interviewed directly by the journalist, are made present throughout the article. Their experiences and complaints are cited though not directly quoted, framed by demographic information and statistical likelihood of developing harmful or deadly health conditions. The article also links out

[66] Ryke Longest, “North Carolina’s Hog Industry Could Turn a Corner—for Better or Worse,” *Scalawag*, February 28, 2020, http://scalawagmagazine.org/2020/02/nc-hog-farm-legislature/.
[67] Longest.

to some additional representation of these plaintiffs - two nonprofits that advocate and organize alongside the plaintiffs (The Rural Empowerment Association for Community Help (REACH)[68] and the North Carolina Environmental Justice Network (NCEJN)[69]) and an additional article that contains quotes from impacted families[70]).

The article's citation of these racial and socioeconomic disparities with regards to the negative impacts of hog farming practices uses these cases - and the hundreds of recorded plaintiffs - as a kind of collective witness, testifying to two key aspects of *Scalawag'*s definition of the South and Southerners: 1) in their call to membership, the *Scalawag* team writes, "We're not here to peddle poverty-shaming agendas or pass along media narratives that whitewash the South.[71]" In making a specific effort to state the presence of Black, Latino, and Native American residents of North Carolina and those of "lower median household income" as a primary group among the aggrieved in this case, *Scalawag* uses their presences as plaintiffs to testify to this ignored cultural and racial diversity, arguing that the South and Southerners include more than white people; and 2) *Scalawag*'s mission includes the goal to "disrupt and shift the narratives that keep power and wealth in the hands of a few." The growing success of cases against hog farming corporations, including punitive damages awarded to those affected, argues in favor of this definition of a scalawag: one who supports this kind of anti-capitalist sentiment and pursuit of justice through the redistribution of wealth.

While testimony is a natural approach to journalistic argument, the form is still very much present in the essays and reflections of *The Bitter Southerner*. In "By Witness of the

[68] "Our Work," REACH, accessed March 16, 2022, https://www.ncruralempowerment.org/our-work.
[69] "NCEJN | EJ, Equity & Health for All," accessed March 16, 2022, https://ncejn.org/.
[70] Barry Yeoman, "Here Are the Rural Residents Who Sued the World's Largest Hog Producer over Waste and Odors – and Won.," *Food and Environment Reporting Network*, December 20, 2019, https://thefern.org/2019/12/rural-north-carolinians-won-multimillion-dollar-judgments-against-the-worlds-largest-hog-producer-will-those-cases-now-be-overturned/.
[71] "About Scalawag."

Martyrs," contributor Elizabeth Apple tells stories of martyrdom in Memphis, Tennessee.[72] She writes about four Episcopal nuns at St. Mary's School for Girls, who sacrificed themselves caring for the sick during Memphis' yellow fever epidemic in 1878. She relies on one woman, Sister Constance, for the primary testimony of their story by incorporating sections of her diaries from the time. The story of the martyr nuns brackets other stories of Memphis' struggles with community, wellness, and safety.

Apple parallels the story of the nuns with a slew of other women witnesses: her own experiences at St. Mary's, the testimony of Candy Walker and Donna Bradley - the first two Black girls to attend St. Mary's (integrated in the 60s), daughter of her former English teacher and present COVID-19 testing site volunteer Ramie Mansberk Glick.

The topos of testimony is central to the argument of the piece; Apple concludes the essay with "I belong to the South whether or not I claim it. Its folklore and fiction, its martyrs and miasma, I will belong to all of them, always." She figures herself as a witness to these women, to Memphis, and to the South as a whole, testifying that her experiences are southern.

Another *Bitter Southerner* essay where we see use of testimony is Sarah Enelow-Syder's "Austin Can't Be Stopped: The Search for a City's Golden Age."[73] Enelow-Snyder argues that she can see her hometown of Austin with the eyes of an "oldtimer" and a "newcomer" and that coming home with fresh eyes (fresh from living in Brooklyn) allows her to appreciate the more touristy places in Austin. By recounting for us, stop by stop, a trip home where she showed some New Yorker friends around, Enelow-Snyder's article questions authenticity as a badge of

[72] Elizabeth Apple, "By the Witness of the Martyrs — THE BITTER SOUTHERNER," THE BITTER SOUTHERNER, May 7, 2020, https://bittersoutherner.com/southern-perspective/2020/by-the-witness-of-the-martyrs-memphis-tennessee.
[73] Sarah Enelow-Snyder, "Austin Can't Be Stopped: The Search for a City's Golden Age," THE BITTER SOUTHERNER, July 22, 2020, https://bittersoutherner.com/southern-perspective/2020/austin-cant-be-stopped-golden-age.

cultural truth. Newbies, who get excited seeing Austin's taco trucks and funky music scene for the first time, "may be onto something," she writes. However, it is her particular placement as a homegrown Texan *turned* New Yorker that allows her to occupy this liminal space between oldtimer and newbie; and because she is able to offer a special expert testimony from that position, she can expand what's authentic and valuable about Austin's culture.

The thing about testimony - and I think these stories serve as good examples of this - is that you are putting a witness on the stand not only to give a believable account of what happened, but especially to lend credibility to your argument about what should happen next. If you're pulling their quotations from archival material or interviewing a live person and writing down and about what they say in response to direct questions, the goal of publishing these testimonies is the same: to provide an expert witness to the claims of your argument.

Each of these – testimony and comparison – are in the service of definition, since both publications' ultimate arguments are about establishing a particular definition of the South. Remember, the goal of both of these publications is to assert the viability of their definition of southerness such that readers spend money and take action in the ways advocated for by the editorial staff. In order to be successful in their attempts at persuasion-by-story, in order to produce convincing testimony and clear lines of contrast and comparison between images and definitions of the South, writers and editors of both of the publications must create resonance with their audience. To do this, when the work is to define a constantly debated thing, a consistently indefinable thing like "The South," the rhetor has to create the bond of identification with their audience – **especially** when the topic up for debate is identity itself. They do this by tapping into what I am calling sensory topoi: special topics that rely on descriptive language that recreates sensory experiences for the audience.

***Sensory topoi***

In addition to turning to the formal elements of argument present in the narratives presented by these publications, I am interested in some specific *topoi* that the writers use to do the work of defining southerness. Specifically, stories about the South published by these two outlets rely on arguments built upon the senses: sensory topoi. Identity is embodied – instead of "I think, therefore I am," identity as it relates to one's belonging to a group is more of an "I experience, I move and create motion, I interact, I sense, therefore I am." Or, put another way, "I feel southern. I experience southern things. I do, say, create southern things that are visible, audible, and tangible. Therefore, I am southern." This is the basic premise of the argument for a southern identity that is present in *The Bitter Southerner* and *Scalawag*. The secondary premise, though the one on which their editorial missions are built, is that southern *is-can be* liberal/leftist, Black, working class, Indigenous, communal, contemporary, positive, progressive, and valid within the context of 2020. Southern does not preclude these things, and in fact, in response to the socio-political-environmental context of 2020, acceptable southern identity *should* include these ideological and embodied identities. The tertiary argument is that you – yes you the target audience, you who finds yourself identifying with some story you have read on our website, you who are a "good person" or who have been excluded from prominent images of southerness – have the right to reclaim *southern* as an element of your identity, despite its associations with white supremacy and plantation slavery. Within the framework of the formal commonplaces that I have already outlined, stories produced by both of these outlets tell about a south that is rooted in what can be perceived by the senses, and then which feelings and experiences those senses engender. This ties place-based identity to the bodily and emotional experiences of the writers and what they can evoke for their audiences.

Some kinds of commonplaces that are sensorial, experiential in nature have been discussed by researchers like Christa J. Olson, in her work on "embodiable topoi" in Ecuadorian rhetoric surrounding indigeneity.[74] Olson's embodiable topoi are an "available physicality" taken up by "white-mestizo" Ecuadorians to legitimize national identity and bound Ecuadorian indigenous people within recognizable tropes, like savagery, barbarism, and rurality - many of which are images indigeneity. In addition to the visual, I am interested in the other sensory building blocks of southern identity. Here, I have argued that *The Bitter Southerner* and *Scalawag* seek to recreate boundaries for a contemporary southern identity, make them legitimate for their respective audiences. Their most persuasive arguments come from using available sensory topoi – referenced through the sensory experiences of their writers, and by extension, their readers. Put another way, writers for *The Bitter Southerner* and *Scalawag* tap into taste, smell, sight, hearing, and touch in order to create experiences for their audiences that legitimize their respective definitions of what it can and should mean to hold 'southern' as an identifying characteristic today. Place-based identity is rooted in the experiences of *bodies in context*. By putting into text these experiences – and therefore making them accessible, deliverable, and replicable – the writers can shape as they see fit their definitions of the South (as outlined in their vision and mission statements).

Like Olson's embodiable topoi, sensory topoi ground arguments about southern identity in the corporeal and the affective – in the lived experiences of the southern subjects of the stories. This is possible through the rhetorical practice of narrative – argument created through storytelling. Both publications establish their belief in the efficacy of storytelling for social and political change through their mission statements and in their calls for donations and

[74] Olson, "Performing Embodiable Topoi: Strategic Indigeneity and the Incorporation of Ecuadorian National Identity."

memberships. Like the physical referents of Olson's embodiable topoi, the commonplaces in these anecdotes offer a physical participation in southern identity – by reading about what the writer has sensed and experienced, I am offered the opportunity to sense and experience. Their senses and experiences - their memories - can become, even if temporarily, my own. Because the narratives explicitly focus on people and places either not a part of the expected southern landscape of tropes or part of the often ignored sections, these sensory experiences do the revision work that *The Bitter Southerner* and *Scalawag* aim for: they (re)define the south/southerness, compare and contrast it to "other" souths/southerners, and testify to its existence and value. The feeling and sensing of southerness – as created by storytellers tapping into sensory commonplaces like weather, food, music, spectacle – combined with the recognizable southern tropes of slowness, poverty, rurality, creates a rhetoric that revises – not eradicates – the idea of a real south.

The sensory topoi leveraged by these southern storytellers create what Olson refers to as a "corporeal common sense" in her work. That language is useful here, too. Common sense, or a system of logics shared by a group, is defined by both individual experiences and, perhaps most significantly, by experiences and adages passed on from other members of the group. The topoi textualize temporal experiences of culture (like those explored in "Festivals Chapter"). By textualizing particular cultural experiences, **both** *The Bitter Southerner* and *Scalawag* are building arguments about the legitimacy of southerness as a way to define a people, their respective audiences. These publications become repositories of responses and commonly agreed upon (at least by the editors and authors) premises about a particular place and time: the U.S. South in recent years. A *felt* common sense is strong and sticky. Each sense tapped into has the potential to stir up feelings about the particular south that is being described.

Inventing Memory

Through taking the reader to a mental place and providing them with approximations of sensory experiences via language, *The Bitter Southerner* and *Scalawag* invent memories of southerness upon which the audience's subjectivity[75] is built. In Cicero's *De Inventione,* "Invention is the conceiving of topics either true or probable, which may make one's cause appear probable; and Memory, is the lasting sense in the mind of the matters and words corresponding to the reception of these topics." In (re)inventing an identity, the writers for *The Bitter Southerner* and *Scalawag* make their definitions of southerness identifiable to their audiences through shareable, memorable experiences *of* southerness. That "lasting sense in the mind" is made lasting, in our case, through the use of sensory argument.

[75] The subjectivity of "bitter southerner" or "scalawag," respectively; of a true *member* of the publication's audience.

### *Arguing with the Senses*

Inventing memory is an argument with the senses. In order for stories to *feel* like something that we have experienced, the writer must use descriptive language that engages the body to recreate (if temporarily and proximally) the sights, sounds, tastes, smells, and touches of stories about southerness.

#### Sight

Authors and editors use sight to define what their South and their southerness looks like. On a broad scale, they use photographs, descriptions of landscapes, color – on skin, on clothes, on food, on plants, on political maps, images of maps and borders, to direct the reader's eye toward what they want them to notice about the region and its people. What do their faces look like? What do their homes look like? What does a Friday night at the local, small town drag show look like[76]? Once they have painted a picture, what do these images make them, or more importantly, their readers feel? The goal, I argue, is that they *feel* recognition, familiarity.

#### Taste and smell

The authors write about how they experience the South through taste and smell. There are the clear choices for taste and smell – food and drink – and all of the memories and family associations that go with them, but also the natural tastes and smells of the earth and of work: particular plant life, factory smells, farms. Adding to the visual recognition of southerness, taste and smell add feelings of pleasure, comfort, safety, satiety, sweat, work, and exertion.

#### Hearing and Touch

While present in writing on nature and food, sound and feel language feature prominently in essays that use music and other forms of entertainment to define the southern experience. Instruments and voices with a southern or country sound (regional instruments like the banjo or accented speech) are denoted with onomatopoeic language or phonetic spellings; textures and

[76] Sarah Prager, "Untold Stories of the Queer South," *Scalawag*, November 17, 2020, http://scalawagmagazine.org/2020/11/queer-southern-history-archive/.

temperatures give readers a feeling of the body in place (like sweating in the parking lot on a 97-degree day in West Virginia in order to watch a wrestling show[77]). In concert with sight, taste, and smell, hearing and touch language can bring to the mind of the reader the bodily experience of being in a particular place, behaving particularly. And, when the writer makes a point to say so, or the publication where the essay lives frame it as such, these in-place, sensory experiences are defined as southern ones. Sensory language is for the reader; if writing about what they experience(d), then the writer remembers what it was like to experience their southerness however it is that they did. But by describing the sights, smells, tastes, sounds, and touches of their essay topic, the writers invent a memory of the event that is accessible to the reader - one that exists in the discourse itself, rather than in the mind of the writer. The descriptive language, then, becomes the interface for shared memories of southerness.

While these lists of possibilities for arguing with the senses are far from exhaustive, and while there are sure to be additional special topics uncovered in regional - and particularly southern - rhetoric, all five senses can be found in descriptive language used regularly throughout the stories published by *The Bitter Southerner* and *Scalawag*, language used to detail experiences and invent shared memories of southerness; this language is regularly used in descriptions of food and of land.

[77] Mesha Maren, "A Night of All Star Catharsis — THE BITTER SOUTHERNER," December 3, 2020, https://bittersoutherner.com/southern-perspective/2020/a-night-of-all-star-catharsis-amateur-wrestling.https://bittersoutherner.com/southern-perspective/2020/a-night-of-all-star-catharsis-amateur-wrestling Maren.

Landscape and Table

Two special, sensory topoi that contributors to these publications return to frequently are the Southern landscape and the Southern table. The Southern Table is how I describe the reservoir of ideas beneath *southern* that deal with food. This includes, of course, foods themselves that are labeled as southern (fried chicken, grits, crawfish, gumbo, sweet tea, etc.) and it also contains ideas like hospitality, communion, cooking and preparing of food, eating and drinking, table manners, growing and harvesting food. The topos of the Southern Table is used to allow audiences access to *southern* as an experience of food and drink where eating and drink is participating in a kind of familial, common, congenial exercise. It serves as a place for connection and recognition among southern people.

The Southern Landscape is a topos which contains images of the southern landscape. This includes the natural as well as the commercial, industrial, and residential. It comes when listing off a series of southern states, when using the Mississippi River as a border and a throughline, and when referencing the bluish haze over the Appalachian Mountains in North Carolina or the briny air in the salt marshes in Georgia. The topos of the Southern Landscape is used to allow the audience to access sensory experiences of *southern* - primarily visual and spatial experiences, but when relevant - say, noting the toll of a Sunday morning church bell from the corner chapel in a small, southern town, or the smell of honeysuckle and the screeching of cicadas on a hot summer night - the Southern Landscape involves the other senses, too. The Southern Landscape as a rhetorical strategy is meant to connect *southern* with place(s) and to make those places - whether Memphis or New Orleans - recognizably southern through particular markers and bearings. It is also used to debate and (re)draw the boundaries of The South and to make arguments about where southerness can be experienced.

***Examples of The Southern Landscape***

Minnie Bruce Pratt writes in "The Queer South: Where the past is not past, and the future is now," that in 1925 her aunt, at age six, "walked by herself two miles on the dirt road into town to Mr. Hick's barbershop and asked him to "cut her hair like a boy's." Both these zoomed in, local depictions of the landscape and zoomed out, state- and region-wide lenses are used to map the Queer South and its related facts and fights for social justice. The article details a decidedly queer and socialist vision for the country, with the southern states at the center of the argument.

The article regularly describes the experiences of queer identifying people in the South n context with southern landscapes: the great aunt walking along a dirt road far too young in order to look the way she wanted to look. Students in the "Mississippi hills where Ku Klux Klan founder Nathan Bedford Forrest roamed" are waging a "queer southern resistance" against confederate statues. "Queerness" is mapped onto the South. Thirty-five percent of the United States' LGBTQ population is located by the article in Southern states - Alabama, Mississippi, Florida, Louisiana, and Texas named by Pratt specifically for their high percentage of LGBTQ people of color. The article's arrangement is organized around Pratt's "own Southern queer life" and her movements from Birmingham, to Durham, to Syracuse[78], to Atlanta. To demonstrate the role that lands, landscape, and mapping the south plays in the article, we can look at Pratt's early description of a time when her mental map of the South was redrawn. Describing her new understanding of the borders of southerness, she writes:

> We had to educate ourselves about the death-dealing massacres, occupations, seizures of land, and forced migrations that had persecuted Indigenous nations out of the South, sending them west to Oklahoma like the Cherokee of North Carolina, the Chickasaw and

[78] Note here that her southern queerness migrates with her, even as she spends time teaching in New York.

> Choctaw of Alabama and Mississippi, south to Florida like the Creeks and Seminoles—or north to New York state, like the Tuscarora of the Carolinas.

By referencing the forced relocations of "Indigenous nations out of the South,[79]" Pratt argues that authentically southern people live and write southern stories from "Oklahoma like the Cherokee of North Carolina," and from "Florida like the Creeks and Seminoles," and even from "New York state, like the Tuscarora of the Carolinas." The connections between people, migration/movement, and land either contested as authentically southern (in the cases of Oklahoma and Florida) or traditionally antithetical to southern (New York) demonstrate the use of the reader's mental map of the South as a tool for redefining southerness.

Published in *The Bitter Southerner*, "Another Sleepy Dusty Delta Day," [80] sees writer Mesha Maren reflect on the influence that Mississippi singer Bobbie Gentry's "Ode to Billie Joe" had on her writing. The novelist foregrounds the Southern Landscape in iterations of her own memories alongside the settings for country songs, weaving her analysis of her own southern experiences with the lyrics from singers like Gentry and Reba McEntire. Her southern landscape includes images of summertime, front porches - *It's the summer of 1991. I'm 7 years old. My sister, who is four years older, has a pink battery-operated radio. We sit on the front porch of the house my father built in the mountains of southern West Virginia, listening to that radio for hours* - and shacks and cities - from McEntire's "Fancy." Inseparable from the southern landscape in this essay is its connection to social class. McEntire's "Fancy" is "white-trash," and

[79] An interesting turn of phrase, I think, to connect indigeneity with the South as a region; possibly an example of what Rice means when she writes about the non-concentric relationship between regional and national identities.
[80] Mesha Maren, "Another Sleepy Dusty Delta Day — THE BITTER SOUTHERNER," *The Bitter Southerner*, September 24, 2020, https://bittersoutherner.com/southern-perspective/2020/another-sleepy-dusty-delta-day-bobbie-gentry-ode-to-billie-joe.

Gentry's farm-raised narrator in "Ode to Billie Joe" was "out choppin' cotton, while [her] brother was balin' hay."

In "Kin Detection," Marianne Leek links the Aspen tree of Colorado with the birches and firs of the Blue Ridge and Smoky Mountain sections of the Appalachian Mountains in North Carolina.[81] Working with an extended simile likening community care networks in rural Appalachia with the Aspen trees' one, interconnected root system or the firs and birches' consolidation and sharing of resources among like-trees (called kin detection or kin recognition by arborists), Leek tells a story about teachers addressing the needs of students and families during the first year of the COVID-19 pandemic.

***Examples of The Southern Table***

> *"Did you grow up drinking tea?"*
>
> *"No, I grew up in Pittsburgh."*
>
> *"Well, everybody in the South drinks iced tea. You go to a restaurant, it's like, 'What d'you like? Water or tea?"* - "Be Sweet: The Universal Hospitality of Texas' Rakkasan Tea Company"

The topos of the Southern Table is used to define southerness in relation to familial bonds, hospitable interactions, simplicity, and pleasure. In "Be Sweet: The Universal Hospitality of Texas' Rakkasan Tea Company," Shane Mitchell writes the story of two American veterans, Terrence "TK" Kamauf and Brandon Friedman, running a tea shop in East Dallas.

Their interest in tea began during a tour of duty in Afghanistan and has since branched out to include the tea drinking and growing practices of Iraq, Vietnam, and Mississippi. In this

[81] Marrianne Leek, "Kin Detection — THE BITTER SOUTHERNER," *The Bitter Southerner*, accessed March 13, 2022, https://bittersoutherner.com/southern-perspective/2020/kin-detection-rural-appalachian-schools-respond-to-covid-19.

essay, tea is a regional fold[82] in that the ideas that southerners like tea, and that iced tea is a symbol for southern hospitality bring together disparate places - and not only from across the southeastern United States; the essay uses tea to fold southern hospitality across oceans. Tea connects places within their story - from their recounted memories and from the origins of the teas in their shop - and redefines (southern) hospitality to include domestic and foreign tea cultures, pushing against the connections between hospitality and violence (tea trade violence and southern plantation violence). "The underlying mission for Rakkasan Tea," Mitchell writes, "is to make its customers think more deeply about peace in landscapes marred by violent conflict or oppressive regimes. The Republic of Georgia and Myanmar are next on their acquisition list."

The essay concludes with a statement that exemplifies the argument connecting the tea of a southern table, the tea in Afghanistan, and southerness as sweetness/hospitality: "Whether you come to the act of drinking tea by way of sterling spoons inherited from your Nana, or chipped glasses at your interpreter's house in Baghdad during a lull in an insurgency, the truth about hospitality proves to be a universal one. Stay sweet."

In *Scalawag*'s "The Triangle's first Black-owned vegan restaurant still doing business during COVID-19," Giulia Heyward's reporting supports the publication's expanded and redefined vision of southerness by interviewing Yah-I Ausar, owner of Vegan Flava Cafe in Chapel Hill, North Carolina. On its face, the article is part interest piece on a local restaurant owner's challenges during the COVID-19 pandemic and part advocacy for Black-owned businesses. But in its work as a story published for *Scalawag,* the article juxtaposes the contemporary, downtown vegan menu's focus on health, wellness, and ethics with images of traditional southern "soul" food prepared in grandma's kitchen. In doing so, the article continues

[82] Rice, "From Architectonic to Tectonics."

the work of expanding the definition of southern to include ideas like veganism, food ethics, and Black entrepreneurship. Three specific pieces of language from the article demonstrate this. Heyward's first paraphrase of her conversation with Ausar centers his belief in the spiritual importance of food; she writes that they discuss that "the food we eat nourishes not just our stomachs, but our souls."[83] After an explanation of Ausar's road to veganism and restaurant ownership, Heyward quotes Ausar's business partner Stephen Gardner El as saying, "Everything he does is based on flavor. This is the same kind of food grandma used to make. It's the same love and attention she put into her food." These two quotations, read under the umbrella of the article's title, "The Triangle's **first Black-owned vegan** restaurant still doing business during COVID-19[84]," seem designed to bring to the reader's mind images of Black southern "soul food," carefully and lovingly prepared in the home in generations past and to then contrast those mental sensory experiences with the newness and contemporaneity of "firsts" and the meat, butter, and milk-free meals of a vegan menu.

In a series called "The Remedy: comfort food for unrestful times," Scalawag publishes comfort food recipes framed by anecdotes about cooking and eating. In "Mrs. Betty's macaroni-and-cheese," Cynthia R. Greenlee describes an attempt to prepare a nice meal for a "masterful home cook," her mother. She writes,

> I thought I was really doing *something* when I prepared a roasted acorn squash dish with turmeric-spices chickpeas, dressed with a yogurt sauce, fragrant herbs, and pomegranate

[83] Giulia Heyward, "The Triangle's First Black-Owned Vegan Restaurant Still Doing Business during COVID-19," *Scalawag*, May 15, 2020, https://scalawagmagazine.org/2020/05/black-vegan-food-nc/.
[84] Emphasis my own.

> seeds…Watching my messy efforts in the kitchen and my imperfect knife skills, my mother promptly called her favorite barbecue join and ordered a rack of ribs. [85]

The failure of that attempt at cooking with ingredients like turmeric, yogurt, and pomegranate - deemed a failure by its replacement with ribs from the "barbecue joint," is implicated as being a home-cooking failure because it was complicated. That meal is contrasted with the titular recipe: macaroni and cheese. Mac-and-cheese, Greenlee argues, is the definition of comfort food.

> [I]t's hard to mess up. And that's part of my definition of comfort food: it's not just the pleasurable experience of consuming something rich and satisfying; it's also comfortable to make, a forgiving recipe that makes it easy to succeed.

Two more essays from *The Bitter Southerner* describe the "power of food memories"[86] and cravings for the southern experience when in non-southern places. "The Secrets of Deviled Eggs" and "Beans and Rice: More Than a "Poor Man's" Meal[87]," are written by two women with connections to southern states living in the Midwest. Explicating on a craving for southern food - deviled eggs and beans and rice, respectively - the essays take writing with the Southern Table to an even more intensely sensory place. In doing so, writers Strasser and Williams argue that southern foods bridge gaps - gaps between times and places and gaps between people.

In "The Secrets of Deviled Eggs," Strasser recounts a friend's craving for the dish on a Zoom call, writing, "As soon as he said it, the rest of us perked up. Had anything ever tasted

[85] Cynthia R. Greenlee, "The Remedy: Mrs. Betty's Macaroni-and-Cheese – Scalawag," *Scalawag*, July 10, 2020, https://scalawagmagazine.org/2020/07/remedy-southern-recipes-macaroni/.
[86] Emily Strasser, "The Secrets of Deviled Eggs," *THE BITTER SOUTHERNER*, November 12, 2020, https://bittersoutherner.com/southern-perspective/2020/the-secrets-of-deviled-eggs.
[87] Nikesha Elise Williams, "Beans and Rice: More Than A 'Poor Man's' Meal," *The Bitter Southerner*, accessed March 11, 2022, https://bittersoutherner.com/southern-perspective/2020/beans-and-rice-more-than-a-poor-mans-meal.

better than a deviled egg? In our Southern childhoods, deviled eggs were the staple of every potluck, family reunion, and funeral." With this quote, and the rest of the essay that follows, deviled eggs become a unifying food for those with connections to southern culture. In response to the author's Facebook poll, "deviled eggs were a clear favorite [among Southerners]." They are described as "benign and reliable" with "creamy, tangy taste" that spans physical, temporal, and cultural distances between eaters. Strasser quotes Jennifer Hill Booker, Atlanta chef, on the cheapness of hens and eggs that made deviled eggs a shared memory among/across socioeconomic groups: "So it wasn't like the division of the haves and have-nots, like some foods are." Strasser later quotes culinary historian Adrian Miller and Chef Samantha Fore, respectively, as saying that "eating deviled eggs is one way to highlight the commonality between Blacks and whites," and that "food is going to have to be a unifier right now."

Creating or tapping into food memories, then, are a way for writers to build a sense of shared identity, as Strasser is clearly making the case for deviled eggs as a southern unifier. Citing Susan Whitbourne, professor of psychology and brain sciences at University of Massachusetts Amherst, Strasser includes this explanation of the power of food memories:

> [E]arly food memories are located in this nexus in the brain between emotions and smell and taste and memory. They're powerful because they engage all five senses and are contextually linked to emotionally-rich memories of family, tradition, and ritual.

The five senses that are so intimately tied to food and memory make an essay like this one a rich demonstration of a sensory topos at work in arguing for a definition of southerness steeped in the experience of eating.

Similarly, in "Beans and Rice: More Than a Poor Man's Meal," Williams details the relationship among the sensory experience of a food, family, and place. "I distinctly remember

craving red beans and rice on fried chicken day in my dorm's cafeteria," she writes. "The first bite was home. I savored it on my tongue." Though she grew up in Chicago, Williams writes that her family's tradition of regularly eating red beans and rice came from her mother's roots in New Orleans. Again, the Southern Table is a fold, here, bringing together distant locations under the idea of regional food. However, rather than so seamlessly bridging the gaps between socioeconomic classes as deviled eggs did, beans and rice *highlighted* a gap for the writer when her husband called them "poor people food." Williams then makes a point of pulling up images of poor man's versions of red beans and rice only to elevate it through connections to food ethics and environmentalism, taste and wellness. The essay sets this southern food up as intentionally paradoxical: "complex simplicity [that] packs a protein punch, and create[s] a sumptuous feeling of fulfilling wholeness from their rich and creamy broth."

Beans are, like deviled eggs and tea, a fold that connect places; this time, however, the places are separated by more than thousands of miles. They are separated by socioeconomic class differences. "Whether you're in New Orleans' ninth ward or the French Quarter, red beans and rice can be found." The fold also, of course, connects this familial connection to Louisiana with the author's childhood in Southside Chicago, her college years in Jacksonville, Florida, and her present life in Amarillo, Texas. "More than anything, for me, they are a fond reminder of home, of family, and of love."

With these examples, we can see that defining southerness through food memories use the senses to connect the South with feelings of warmth, familiarity, comfort. These memories often bridge physical and temporal distance and can be used to make an argument for southerness as an identifier that is not beholden to race, class, or even nationality. While food memories are used, especially by *The Bitter Southerner,* to define southerness in primarily

positive terms, both publications also house stories that use the Southern Table and the Southern Landscape in conjunction, which can strategically highlight the contradictory images contained in these topoi.

### *Using Both Landscape and Table*

The examples above lean heavily on one of the two sensory topoi to define southerness. In both publications, there are stories that incorporate images from both topoi, creating a special argument about southerness that benefits from the intersections of landscape and table. Agriculture and slavery are topics with ties to both the Landscape and the Table – plantations, farms, resulting crops (some of which are food products, like sugar and rice), and hospitality are all linked to both Landscape and Table. Depending on the argument, rhetors of southern topics can draw out connections to the labor that produces food and shapes the landscape, or they can work to keep that labor hidden away.

In Scalawag's "Sweet (and sticky) redemption: Gullah/Geechee of Sapelo Island reclaim sugarcane to fight cultural erasure," University of Georgia Professor of Geography Nik Heyen and Director of the Sapelo Island Cultural Revitalization Society's Agriculture Committee Maurice Bailey argue for the reclamation and amplification of Black agricultural knowledge and practices - using a revision of the island's landscape alongside images of tending, preparing, and remaking with food crops.

The article links the disappearance of sugarcane crops from the island with the erasure of Geechee and Gullah culture from the island by white land developers and industrialists. The change over time of the physical landscape and the changing cultural landscape mirror each other, as the article maps the agricultural history of the island along the history of African enslavement along the southeast Atlantic coast. By focusing their language in the article largely on the plants - "the plantation grew rice, Sea Island cotton, sugarcane" Bailey and Heynen keep

the reader's eye close to the land itself; they even continue the nature conceit with phrasing like "Geechee descendants who *sprung* out of the first Muslim community in the U.S."[88]

U.S. agricultural history and its impact on Sapelo island culture and economics is, according to Heyen and Bailey, inextricable from "the expertise and labor of the African people who were enslaved across the South" and the "violence of slavery and white supremacy [that] is tied up with crops that grew the global economy" (sugar, cotton, rice, and other commercial crops).[89] Imagery of the industrial buildings, like the Dixie Crystal plant "up the coast in Savannah," mark white industrialism on the southern landscape.

Agriculture is the combination of landscape and table, as it is. In addition to the Geechee and Gullah people's southerness via connection and impact on the Southern landscape, highlighting their embodiment of cooperative preparing and sharing of food taps into the communal/togetherness of the Southern Table:

> The kids would sit around and help the adults put the sugarcane stalks into the mill for grinding and then women boiled the cane syrups down to a golden brown. Everybody pitched in and worked together, and once the syrup settled, all those who helped came back and got their share.

This image of the Southern Table is explicitly non-white, non-colonial. Further, Heyen and Bailey make clear that Black southerners' cultural history is more than enslaved physical labor, it is also intellectual power and innovation: "The story of Sapelo Island is inseparable from African agricultural knowledge and innovation." Rather than a sugary image of sweet tea, by

[88] Maurice Bailey and Nik Heynen, "Gullah/Geechee of Sapelo Island Reclaim Sugarcane, Fight Cultural Erasure," *Scalawag*, September 29, 2020, https://scalawagmagazine.org/2020/09/gullah-geechee-crops-agriculture/. Emphasis mine.
[89] Bailey and Heynen.

focusing in on the history of sugar as a crop whose cultivation is beholden to slave labor and stolen expertise, the combination of table and landscape in this essay throws the contradiction that is southern hospitality into relief.

Eventually, Bailey and Heyen detail the SICARS project of working to reintroduce sugarcane to Sapelo Island, putting into practice the African knowledge central to the crop's former success in Georgia. The island's specific landscape - its dependence on a delicate balance of salt and freshwater - is both backdrop and player to the struggle to do what the organization, and this article, set out to do: redefine Black agricultural labor in the South in such a way that exceeds the definitive violence of white supremacy and slavery.

> [M]onths after this planting, just as the baby cane started to emerge toward the sky, a punishing storm surge generated by Hurricane Irma flooded the Hog Hammock community in September of 2016. We feared that the saltwater that is so central to life on Sapelo had destroyed this second effort to grow cane… Once the floodwater receded, we flushed the saltwater out with the freshwater and the cane rebounded.

In a final articulation of their argument for Black lives, for Black agricultural knowledge, and for Black southerness that is apart from or more than the legacy of slavery, Bailey and Heyen write: "While it makes sense why some Black folks and white folks can only see the history of slavery in the face of sugarcane growing on land that was once a plantation, we see hope and possibility of redemption and survival of the Saltwater Geechee culture and Black folks' heritage more broadly."

In *The Bitter Southerner*'s "Southern Mutton," writer Gabe Bullard positions an unexpected southern food within a liminal-regional space in Kentucky's "narrow western

wedge."[90] In this essay, "a Kentucky-born writer looks for that 1 percent possibility that barbecued mutton might have kosher roots." As the far western border of Kentucky rarely takes center stage in discussions about southern locales, and mutton is not a commonly thought of barbecue meat in the south, its central role in the exploration of Kentucky Jewish culture makes the intersection between a southern-midwestern landscape and a southern-kosher food another useful example of both Table and Landscape at play in the redefinition of southerness. The exploration of whether barbecued mutton has any connection to Judaism in western Kentucky is the driving force of the essay, which concludes that "cultural communion is part of the South." However, whether or not the dish is kosher on purpose is less interesting in our case than the way interweaving depictions of southern eating and southern landscapes - particularly when either of those monikers for these foods and places is up for debate - stretches the boundaries of both topoi. Put another way, by even asking the questions - is this barbecue mutton *southern*? Is western, coal mining Kentucky *southern*? - the essay opens to the possibility. By bringing up images of southern food and southern land, the essay *speculates*. And, as Bullard puts it at the end, "if a little speculation about regional food helps remind people of [cultural communion], then maybe it's good to speculate sometimes."

Additional examples of arguing with both the Table and the Landscape can be found in two, previously analyzed essays. In *The Bitter Southerner*'s "By the Witness of the Martyrs91," the author uses both the natural landscape and food as folds, connecting Memphis to New Orleans through the Mississippi River and through the consumption of crawfish. In writing about the 1878 yellow fever epidemic, Apple uses the river to map a north-south thruway

[90] Gabe Bullard, "Southern Mutton," *THE BITTER SOUTHERNER*, April 8, 2020, https://bittersoutherner.com/southern-perspective/2020/southern-mutton.
[91] Apple, "By the Witness of the Martyrs — THE BITTER SOUTHERNER."

through the South, from city to city: “The epidemic of 1878 began in New Orleans and traveled like a fire up the river to Memphis. Infected mosquitoes swarmed the flat, washed land of the city.” She continues this linking of the two cities by using a food truck serving crawfish as a beacon of hope for the return of Memphis’ (southern) way of life after COVID, writing:

> But then, stopped at a light at the corner of Central and Cooper, I saw a sign that read “Hot Boiled Crawfish N Beer” in red letters. A crush of hungry people waited six feet apart in line outside a light blue food truck. I remembered being in New Orleans for carnival a few years back, watching children with small, glowing fists crack crawfish open on sidewalks in the middle of riotous crowds. Maybe Memphis will look so alive soon.

Similarly, in “Austin Can’t Be Stopped” the evolving landscape of Austin, Texas is exemplified through the new and different types of restaurants that have popped up since Enelow-Snyder’s last visit. The author uses food to describe herself as southern, and therein simple, predictable. (“The Donn’s Barbecue of my childhood had a pickle-and-onion station by the soda fountain, and I loved walking into that waft of tangy smoke. I was a predictable kid, always having chopped beef between two slices of white bread.”) She contrasts this nostalgia with an uncertainty about Austin’s shifting landscape, particularly the restaurant scene, writing that “no single thing unnerved me about the new Austin. I just couldn’t handle this much change.” She goes on to map out the changes to the city over recent years, citing everything from vegan restaurants to sky-high housing prices to the corporations and tech startups now abundant in Austin. She regularly compares the Austin scene to that of Brooklyn, where she currently lives, blurring the definition of a truly southern city.

Both the Landscape and the Table work because they create images and experiences in the mind of the reader that allow for a connection - and ideally for these publications, an identification - with the version of southerness each story puts forward. Writing with the Southern Table allows readers to experience food memories vicariously through text; sharing in those memories even temporarily is an opportunity for identification with the people in the story; eating and drinking *with* them, like fellows or family. Writing with the Southern Landscape allows readers to travel to different southern locations and to hold a shifting version of a map of the South in their minds. If the aimed-for identification happens, if the reader is persuaded by the writer's version of southerness, then it is the goal of both *The Bitter Southerner* and *Scalawag* to convert the reader into a regular member of their readership who will support the business.

Affirming the subject position

In Charland's constitutive rhetoric, subject positions are not simply constituted in the moment(s) of rhetorical engagement, but they are also affirmed by the subsequent actions of the audience. In the case of the peuple quebecois, *Québécois* were encouraged to affirm their belonging by voting *oui* in the referendum for Quebec sovereignty[92]. Both *The Bitter Southerner* and *Scalawag* make direct claims about how readers should affirm their subject position. Bitter southerners and scalawags should donate regularly to the publications (through membership), purchase merchandise, and participate in broader progressive politics (Scalawag makes this call more directly).

***Contributors as constituted subjects***

It is not only readers who are called into bitter southerner and scalawag subjectivity. Writers buy into these respective identities, too. From an operational standpoint, potential

[92] Charland, "Constitutive Rhetoric."

contributors to *The Bitter Southerner* must navigate to and through two pages online in order to pitch and submit work, both of which have clear statements from *The Bitter Southerner* on who they are and what they publish. Similar to the way they write for potential readers and members, *The Bitter Southerner* wants to hear from writers who identify with their defined southern subject.

From the submissions page on the main site: "Do you have a story about the South? Tell us a story about the South that the world needs to hear." and "The Bitter Southerner loves a good story, especially ones that expand the narrative of the South. We welcome pitches for narrative nonfiction, journalism, and personal essays, as well as submissions of photo essays, video, and audio."

From the submissions landing page:

> The Bitter Southerner covers the U.S. South from a modern perspective. Our goal is to tell surprising untold stories about people and places in the Southern United States. The Bitter Southerner is committed to amplifying a multitude of voices that make up the past, present, and future of the South.

In placing this language before prospective authors, *The Bitter Southerner* is both selecting their pool of authors *and* shaping – inviting – the authors to become the kind of bitter southern authors that they want to solicit pitches from.

## Conclusion

While only a slice of the years' worth of content produced by these two publications, the pieces I have examined here demonstrate the rhetorical strategies leveraged by contributors and the respective editorial teams to argue for specific definitions of a U.S. Southern region (present

and aspirational) and to articulate the right kind of southerners for this argument. Special topics grounded in the five senses - here called the Southern Landscape and the Southern Table - are commonly used to bridge the gap between known definitions of the South and the revisions presented by *Scalawag* and *The Bitter Southerner*. The mental place of the landscape or the table and the accompanying sensory experiences help this shift in definition - rather than an abandonment of the concept of the South all together - make "corporeal common sense" to the audience. Persuaded by stories that use tried-and-true strategies like testimony and compare-and-contrast and that make a kind of body-sense, successfully interpellated bitter Southerners or scalawags can heed the call to affirm their subject position by spending money on memberships or merchandise, supporting the continued existence of these publications.

Beyond the analysis of these instances of regional rhetoric, looking this closely at constitutive, place-based rhetoric points toward a few broader implications. (1) Collective identities are ideological[93] and successful interpellation into a subject identity leads to action. Charland and Althusser explain this well in their respective contexts, but analysis of contemporary, region-based writing demonstrates the usefulness of these frames for looking at configurations of identity/identification other than at the national level. (2) This chapter demonstrates the revisability of place-based collective identity for the purposes of material and potentially political action, even without explicit memories of real, in-place experiences. As the sensory, special topics show us - and as any lover of literature will intimately know - invented memories can hold as much or more space in our minds than real, personal experiences of place. Charland's constitutive rhetoric began with an example of political rhetoric, and we can see that examination of topoi at play should be acknowledged alongside narrative as sources of

[93] Charland.

arguments intended to move people to political or financial action. (3) Place-based identities have borders that are rhetorically generated, revised, and reinforced through the topics - sensory topics being potentially very effective in this type of invention. Like Rice writes in "Architectonics to Tectonics," regional identity is not physically beholden to places. Place itself is contextual and rhetorical, and calls into place-based subjectivity at varying levels may be worth examining through the use of sensory language and special topics.

# CHAPTER III: HOMECOMING: REGIONAL FESTIVALS CULTIVATING RETURN

## Introduction

I decided to study regional festivals because of Merlefest. I had never been, when I began this work, though I had driven through Wilkesboro dozens of times. The bluegrass music festival that took place there annually gave Appalachian culture in North Carolina purchase in my mind. Mountain folks lived that far up Highway 421, and Merlefest seemed to invite them to break out their banjos, mandolins, and clogging shoes. I had never been, but when I began to wonder where I could turn to learn something about how we write, and make, and act out identities in relation to place, Merlefest came to mind. It was shortly followed by an event I *had* been to - the Dixie Classic Fair. The Piedmont-Triad's major agricultural fair, the (then-titled) Dixie Classic was your best shot at consuming a fried Oreo and petting some farm animals without having to drive to Raleigh for the State Fair. The Dixie Classic is covered every year on the local news and those video packages have been, for me, an annual reminder of the interest in agriculture competitions across the state and that the fall season brings an opportunity to get out and do something that *felt* somewhat country, like fried Oreos and farm animals. The news coverage, the advertisements, and (once I started preliminary research) the event websites for both Merlefest and the Carolina Classic Festival (the new title) were selling an experience. They invited me to come to the festival, experience something *southern* or *Appalachian,* and assured me that I would enjoy myself and feel welcome there. The websites, news articles, and social media posts I perused did not say that outright, though. They wrote about the delicious and variable food options (including fried foods and barbeque), the roots-based music, the local craftspeople, and the kid-specific activities. They, in a nutshell, said to expect traditional, family fun in a safe environment that was aesthetically, sensorily southern (Carolina Classic) or Appalachian (Merlefest).

I realized that, whether they were offering fiddles or fair food, these events needed people to come and play, to buy into the value of the experience of celebrating those cultural markers of Appalachia or (rural) North Carolina. I chose to study these two festivals because they called people to places and were, themselves, about place. More than that, they created senses of place, cultivated people to gather, celebrate, and participate in activities that were representative of place. Like the publications in the chapter previous, both Merlefest and the Carolina Classic Fair, I argue, call people into place-based subjectivities. The festivals' cultivation strategy is based on a blurring of boundaries, lulling attendees into a feeling of safe and predictable sensory experiences: acoustic music, favorite foods, child-friendly activity. Rather than attempting to re-define southerness or Appalachianess as something counter to the white, racist stereotypes that *The Bitter Southerner* and *Scalawag* claimed to combat, the festivals intentionally open up those identities to as many people as possible, blurring boundary-drawing qualities like whiteness, Christianity, conservatism, in favor of purportedly neutral(izing) qualities like fun, family, and traditions. Blurring, but not countering. This is done, I argue in this chapter, through specific rhetorical moves. Both festivals employ commonplaces (fun, tradition, family) to funnel people into the affective experience of return to normal, of back to safety, of *homecoming*. Where the publications cultivated an audience through revision, re-definition, redirection, the festivals call people into regionalized identities by doing a type of anti-definitional work: blurring the boundaries of what regional identities can mean, relying on the soothing fulfillment of expected patterns to discourage critical engagement with cultural identity.

I had plans to attend and take detailed field notes at both festivals, but then the COVID-19 pandemic shifted the context of my research. The planned interviews were still viable options, though the pandemic context impacted these as well. During the interviews, there was no getting

around the topic of COVID-19 and its impact on how these events were planned and promoted. The pandemic was such an omnipresent force that the question of what these festivals would teach me about the rhetorics of place and cultural identity shifted to include *how would these organizations approach convincing people to come back?* How would the rhetorics of region and culture combine with the need to address a dangerous and uncertain public health landscape? What I discovered was that COVID-19, rather than derailing conversations, highlighted the way that return, safety, and homecoming featured in the constitutive rhetoric employed by both festivals. What became clear to me, and what I will argue in this chapter, is that the COVID-19 pandemic was just the current threat to which a rhetoric of homecoming responds. Through tradition, family, fun, and safety, regional festivals can become rhetorical safe havens in an uncertain national context; regionalizing rhetoric can be deployed to invent a safe place, an alternative.

Both MerleFest and the Carolina Classic are intimately connected with their host cities and have reach and recognition beyond North Carolina. The Carolina Classic Fair, formerly the Dixie Classic Fair, is a regional agricultural fair that takes place annually in Winston-Salem, North Carolina. 2021 marked the fair's 139th year and saw nearly 190,000 attendees.[94] Owned and operated by the City of Winston Salem since 1969,[95] The Carolina Classic offers carnival rides, live music, food and drink, and a variety of exhibitions and competitions featuring livestock, poultry, show crops, arts, and crafts from Forsyth County and beyond.

Merlefest designates itself as "America's Top Roots-Based Music Festival." Hosted in Wilkesboro, North Carolina, in the foothills of the Blue Ridge Mountains each year, Merlefest

[94] Rachael Lough, "CAROLINA CLASSIC FAIR WRAPS UP 10 DAYS OF FUN," Carolina Classic Fair, October 11, 2021, https://carolinaclassicfair.com/2021/10/11/carolina-classic-fair-wraps-up-10-days-of-fun/.
[95] Prior to that year, the fair was owned by the Winston Salem Foundation.

has been a fundraiser for Wilkesboro Community College since its founding in 1988. Celebrating "traditional music of the Appalachian region plus whatever style we [are] in the mood to play," as described by guitarist and founder Doc Watson, Merlefest has hosted enormous names in country and bluegrass music – Willie Nelson, Dolly Parton, The Carolina Chocolate Drops, and Allison Krauss, to name just a handful. Estimates of attendees in recent years surpass 75,000, with the festival bringing in around $10 million dollars in revenue to Wilkes County each year.

Despite their reach, each festival presents itself with a hometown feel. These two regional festivals pull in attendees far exceeding their respective towns and counties; the events are intimately connected with local businesses and tourism dollars, bringing out the locals and flooding the host cities with out-of-towners for their ten- and four-day runs, respectively. And yet, The Carolina Classic, as a regional agriculture fair, relies on tropes surrounding southern agrarianism to promote an image of wholesome, small town family fun - even with Winston Salem's population surpassing a quarter-million as the fifth largest city in the state[96]. Merlefest, with Blue Ridge foothills encasing the community college campus, promotes a familial and collegial jam session environment, despite the five figure attendance records.

Persuading people to come back to public events after two years of cancellations remains a salient exigence for organizations that depend on ticket sales for in-person events. In any year, an examination of their planning and promotion efforts would offer a look at successful strategies employed by organizations with financial investments in soliciting buy-in on regional-cultural practices and identifications. In the throes of a public health crisis, both organizations had to solicit participation amidst a virus that made visible and more potent the dangers of

[96] Wes Young, "Winston-Salem Population Tops 250,000 | Local News | Journalnow.Com," *Winston Salem Journal*, June 3, 2022, https://journalnow.com/news/local/winston-salem-population-tops-250-000/article_e155bcce-e0f0-11ec-a96c-73be524cc4c7.html.

gathering in public space to eat, play, and enjoy. These organizations, in these times,[97] offer the opportunity to investigate the viability of regional identity - southern and Appalachian - in the marketing of public, cultural events. Through interviews with festival employees and rhetorical analysis of news and promotional texts (including websites and social media content), this chapter takes regional fairs and festivals as invitations to participate in rhetorical performances of regional identity and examines the arguments made by promoters and promotional texts. Those arguments - as I will lay out - respond to the COVID-19 pandemic's impact on the opportunity and feasibility of people attending public events by emphasizing a return to fun, familiarity, safety (the topoi of family, tradition, fun). However, fun, family, tradition, and safety are not COVID-specific talking points, and when taken together, we can read them as components of a rhetoric of homecoming.

***Methods***

The primary research method for this chapter was scheduled, one on one interviews with some of the people responsible for arguing on behalf of the festivals. One on one interviews allow for privacy and time spent with each person, and the interviews were tailored to explore a few, initial research interests: how each festival approaches cultivating an audience, how the interviewees perceive and articulate the festivals' relationship to place and culture, what roles marketing and promotions play in audience cultivation (rather than word of mouth, past experiences, etc.), and what each interviewee's particular role contributes to public-facing messages about the festivals.

Because my research interests focused on message-making - with a particular focus on rhetoric created within these organization - I chose to interview employees of both festivals, particularly those with leadership roles. Interviewees were recruited based on their professional

[97] Interviews were conducted in late fall of 2021, and texts analyzed span 2021 and 2022.

affiliations with their respective organization. From Merlefest, I interviewed Ted Hagaman, then director of the festival, and Wes Whitson, operations manager and incoming director. From the Carolina Classic Fair, I spoke with DJ Hargrave, events and branding manager. Each of the interviewees was responsible, to varying degrees, for communicating on behalf of their respective organizations and promoting their fairs.

The interviews sought insights into each person's articulation of the goals, priorities, and ideas about regional culture that grounded their insider knowledge of the festivals. With each interviewee, I discussed their perceptions and experiences of the festival. We discussed the festival's overall mission, relationships with host towns and surrounding regions, interactions with attendees, and how these all influence the planning and promotions of these events. I conducted the interviews via Zoom and used its embedded recording and transcription services to produce the interview transcripts.

The interviews proved to be interesting and generative. Each interviewee was friendly and willing in their responses, while the context of their jobs was ever-present. Ted Hagaman came across as the seasoned public relations professional that his decades-long tenure as Merlefest director has made him. Wes Whitson's personal passion for the experience of Merlefest - an event he has attended since childhood - was evident in his responses; they were most descriptive when he was recounting the feel and experience of a festival attendee. Though a leader in the festival organization now, Wes' relationship to Merlefest gave his responses a kind of double expertise: both planner and participant, he had enjoyed the festival as a member of the audience and also seen behind the curtain of planning and promotion. DJ Hargrave's focus on the marketing, community engagement, and public communications work characterized our conversation; his relationship to the Carolina Classic Fair was grounded in the professional

sphere, even as he discussed the fair's importance to families and communities. The COVID-19 pandemic featured prominently in each conversation, as each representative of the festivals had to navigate planning and executing an event that necessitated large crowds while adhering to state health mandates, addressing attendee anxieties and perceived desires for (idyllic) normalcy, and managing institutional unease about the feasibility of safely putting on the festival (or of putting it on at all). Overall, the interview data creates an impression of the importance of audience cultivation and retention. All of the interviewees emphasized the need to make sure that guests come and have a good time, and the implication was that each attendee's annual fair experience was a major indicator of whether they would attend again in future years. As the more detailed analysis of interview responses will show, the particulars of the COVID-19 context complicated the topics of tradition, family, and fun, relied-upon commonplaces for defining festival culture and dependable for their marketability toward prospect festival audiences. However, despite the threat that COVID-19 posed - or, rather, *because* of it - those three wells of language continued to be used in planning and promotions talk and writing. The usefulness of homecoming as an implicit goal of festival messaging was that it turned the unsettled pandemic context into an opportunity for particularly potent arguments about place and region: that coming back was returning to safety, fun, tradition, and a focus on the family.

Marketing and promotions text translate institutional goals into content tailored for prospective festival attendees. To complement the interviews, and to explore the extent to which the interview responses aligned with the strategies present in marketing the events, I also conducted analyses of news article and press releases, website landing pages, social media content, and event-published blog content that circulated prior to and shortly after each festival.[98]

[98] The 2022 Carolina Classic Fair has not yet taken place, as of this writing. Promotions have begun, and those texts - especially social media content - are taken into consideration alongside content supporting the 2021 Fair.

The goal in looking at both interview responses about the festivals (and the planning and promotion involved) and texts produced by the festival managing organizations is to be able to answer questions about how these festivals encouraged attendance in 2021 and 2022 during the COVID-19 and what articulating those strategies can teach us about regional events as ephemeral but recurring opportunities for place-based rhetoric.

As the festivals communicate about who *they* (the staff/collective) and *you* (the attendee, guest, fan) are, they are not merely describing; they are inventing. In her work on working class identity, *A Place to Stand: Politics and Persuasion in a Working Class Bar,* Julie Lindquist conducted extensive interviews with patrons at a bar where she worked during graduate school. Her project, which she calls an "ethnography of rhetoric,"[99] argues that ethnographic methods are productive ways to approach the study of persuasion, particularly in contexts where the negotiation, and performance of group identities take place, negotiations and performances she saw her subjects enacting in their barstool debates. From her study, I am adopting her assertion that communications regarding social identities are also communications that participate in the invention of publicly held ideas about those identities. Rather than engaging in socio-political arguments in the barroom, the interviews of this study were designed to offer participants the opportunity to present personal and professional interpretations of the regional events in which they are involved. The *social* identities in question, though, have less salience in the lives of the people the interviewees talked about (fans, fairgoers) than something like class identity might. It may not be present, in a daily way, for the people that go to these festivals that they are southern, or Appalachian, or a fan of "traditional-plus"[100] music. However, a rhetorical ethnography

[99] Lindquist, *A Place to Stand: Politics and Persuasion in a Working Class Bar*.
[100] "Traditional-plus" is how Merlefest refers to the type of music played at the festival. It comes from Doc Watson, original Merlefest organizer, who said that the festival would play "traditional Appalachian music, plus whatever else [they] felt like playing."

approach to these interviews and promotional materials is designed to illuminate the relationships among persuasive messages (*come to the festival*), culture (*the festival offers a southern/Appalachian experience)*, and identification and cultivation (*you-the-target-audience are the kind of person who participates these cultural practices*).

While the interviews were not conducted on the sites of the festivals, they are fieldwork in that they sought insight through conversation into the places where rhetoric happens; in this case, those places were the working spheres of festival promoters. In the introduction to their collection, *Field Rhetoric: Ethnography, Ecology, and Engagement in the Places of Persuasion*, Candice Rai and Caroline Gottschalk Druschke make their case for ethnographic methods in rhetoric, writing that "fieldwork allows researchers to study both rhetoric's emplacement and fieldwork's complexity.[101]" The people interviewed in this study are producers of rhetoric *in place*, within the complex network of interactions between their jobs and personal associations with the festivals. Authors in Rai and Druschke's collection also usefully articulate the relationship between rhetorical ethnography and the investigation of topoi at work on cultural rhetoric, an interest of this chapter and of the larger project at hand. Rather than recording and reporting on the events, objects, and messages of their field sites as stable truths, rhetorical ethnography practitioners "us[e] them instead as lenses onto the topoi, or commonplaces, of field sites; as ways to understand the roles that rhetoric plays in constituting a shared life."[102] Building on this approach, I argue that the inventive strategies used by festival promoters to communicate about their events and to cultivate their audiences are a part of the overall rhetoricity of these festivals as opportunities to act out shared identities, thus (re)creating them.

[101] Candice Rai et al., *Field Rhetoric: Ethnography, Ecology, and Engagement in the Places of Persuasion* (Tuscaloosa, UNITED STATES: University of Alabama Press, 2018).
[102] Rai et al.

Festivals are examples of cultural celebration, creation, and negotiation in action, and they do not happen organically; rather, they are planned and curated cultural experiences. In "Critical-Rhetorical Ethnography: Rethinking the Place and Process of Rhetoric," Aaron Hess writes that a rhetorical approach to ethnography studies culture through "roles, rituals, and personhood [and] offers a close reading of cultural activities, which is necessary for gaining the participant or insider perspective for the examination of vernacular organizations or local publics.[103]" In this definition, we see the focus placed on vernacular communication and local publics. This focus on everyday life as both valuable for study in its own right and as indicative of larger rhetorical theories requires a research approach that is emplaced and engages with people where rhetoric happens. For example, Hess used interviewing and participant observation to examine successful anti-drug messaging within rave counterculture. Rather than interviewing, as Hess did, the recipients of messages (in my case, this would be festival attendees, or people who had seen festival advertisements but not chosen to attend), I chose to interview a few of the people involved in crafting messages on behalf of Merlefest and the Carolina Classic Fair. Those people, as employees of institutions (Wilkes Community College and The City of Winston Salem, respectively), are necessarily influenced by their jobs when responding to questions about their work. For this reason, this particular research project benefits from a methodology that takes a special interest in the influence of institutions on the language practices of individuals.

We've treated organizations like rhetors before; "The CDC says…," "Amazon responded to…," etc. As I've written, this project pays special attention to the fact that there are actual people doing this language work: copy writers, marketing directors, public relations professionals, administrators. They write or speak words about their organization under

[103] Aaron Hess, "Critical-Rhetorical Ethnography: Rethinking the Place and Process of Rhetoric," *Communication Studies* 62, no. 2 (April 18, 2011): 127–52, https://doi.org/10.1080/10510974.2011.529750.

institutional guidance, or pressure. Through strategic communication, they create promotional content, forge community partnerships, recruit talent and volunteers because without these efforts, the cornerstone events don't happen. There's no money, no fans, no vendors, no events. In addition to approaching these festivals from the perspective of rhetorical ethnography, I incorporate *institutional* ethnography. Institutional ethnography has been used by those in feminist sociology to examine everyday life and social relations under the structures of ruling within institutions;[104] and, in writing studies, it has been adopted to better explain how institutions like composition programs enforce and reinforce norms, behaviors, values, and ideas about writing[105]. This methodology, then, can also help to look at the ways other organizations perpetuate cultural and language practices: in the case of these two festivals, how to write and speak about agricultural fairs and Appalachian music.

While I interviewed each person, I specifically spoke with them within the context of their roles as employees for Merlefest and the Carolina Classic. Interviewing employees of the two festivals allowed me to ask questions about how and why planning and promotions decisions are made, and to listen to and analyze the kinds of language that the festivals and their employees use to describe, explain, and position their events. Institutional ethnography lends a critical eye toward the constraints on the interviewees *as* employees: their position within an organization both enables and constrains their speech. It also reminds us to read into interpretations of marketing and PR materials the economic forces and exigencies under which they are created and to which they respond. Ultimately, the directors, brand managers, and contract public

[104] Dorothy E. Smith, *Institutional Ethnography: A Sociology for People*, 50938th edition (Walnut Creek, CA: AltaMira Press, 2005).
[105] Michelle LaFrance, *Institutional Ethnography: A Theory of Practice for Writing Studies Researchers*, 1st edition (Logan: Utah State University Press, 2019).

relations professionals[106] are writing and speaking within the matrix of their specific professional roles, including obligations and institutional pressures to promote particular ideas about the events. Institutional ethnography's interest in texts that "run outside of the micro but permeate the local[107]" also makes it a useful methodology when researching the public-facing segments of the rhetorical ecology of these festivals: promotional professionals, the texts they create (or those they employ create), news pieces based on them. This is because these messages circulate through and beyond the institutions and host locations. Beyond direct employees of Wilkes Community College and the City of Winston Salem, there are contracted public relations firms, with their respective copywriters, who write on behalf of the organization as clients. Institutional ethnography, combined with my own professional experience in marketing and public communications in both an agency and in-house environment, provides a reminder that news articles, press releases, and other cross-functional and cross-promoted language[108] have been crafted for multiple audiences, a few of which (bosses, clients, brand guidelines) subjugate others (actual readers or social media followers) in order of importance.

The interviews were an opportunity for these people to speak about their work and their perceptions of the relationships between the events they plan and regional culture. Institutional ethnography was originally developed as an approach to sociology that centered the social relations and everyday lives of people, and the visible and invisible systems of power that

[106] Press releases and such are often written by marketing and public relations agencies. Merlefest, for example, is a client of IVPR.
[107] James Reid and Lisa Russell, *Perspectives on and from Institutional Ethnography* (Bingley, UNITED KINGDOM: Emerald Publishing Limited, 2017).
[108] Language written by copywriters, editors, or other public relations professionals that is designed to be reused across as many of the organization's publishing platforms as possible. Examples include boilerplate language, About pages, tag lines, calls-to-action and other content.

influence them.[109][110] Michelle LaFrance has written about the usefulness of institutional ethnography as a methodology for studying topics within writing studies, particularly studying the how work is done within institutional sites. She writes: "Using IE to study the 'work' that people carry out allows writing studies researchers to reveal the deep and often hidden investments and experiences of those people, making visible the values, practices, beliefs, and belongings that circulate below more visible or dominant discourses. The researcher might then uncover opportunities for recognition, conversation, or intervention" (LaFrance 5). Inevitable in responses to questions about their work are interactions between the personal and professional voices that festival spokespeople employ, particularly when (as the organizers of Merlefest do) employees have years of work and personal experiences invested in the ideas and ideals of their institution. Thus, the general goal of IE is to "uncover how things happen—bringing to light the experiences and practices that constitute the institution, how discourse compels and shapes what people do, and how norms of practice speak to, for, or over individuals." IE focuses on "the everyday work life of individuals, tracing work processes and textual mediations as these reveal the interplay among the individual, the material, and the ideological."[111] From institutional ethnography, then, this project takes not only an eye toward the labor-related constraints of the texts and ideas examined, but also the threading together of the language and ideas of individuals, institutions, and the texts they produce and considering them as influencing each other through systems of feedback, reiteration, and reuse.

[109] Smith, *Institutional Ethnography*.
[110] Dorothy E. Smith and Alison I. Griffith, *Simply Institutional Ethnography: Creating a Sociology for People* (University of Toronto Press, 2022).
[111] LaFrance, *Institutional Ethnography*..

***Regionalization, Cultural Identity, and Public Performance***

Beyond being public events that either raise money for a nonprofit or earn money for the city, Merlefest and the Carolina Classic Fair are regional events, in that they are promoted and publicly understood[112] as affiliated with Appalachian and southern cultural and business practices. Merlefest is a "celebration of (Appalachian) roots-plus music" and the Carolina Classic is the "second largest agricultural fair in North Carolina." In order to better understand the ideas about place, culture, and identity that these fairs engage with, I turn to scholarship on region and regionalization, and performance as they reveal ideas about cultural identity. These bodies of research will clarify that regional fairs are both generative and reiterative of regional topics (they are *regionalizing*); and that they are invitations to participate in performances of regional identity.

Regions are not naturally occurring. They are not merely landscapes, or biomes; they are concepts imbued with ideas about the people and environments around and across which rhetorically enforced borders are drawn. *Rhetoric Society Quarterly* published a special issue in 2012 on regional rhetoric that articulates a rhetorical theory of regionalism,[113] illustrating "how regionalization enables the selective deployment of cultural rhetorics,[114]" and that a sense of region "requires affective ties that bind together the materiality of topography with the much less

[112] I'll reference this again later, but the Carolina Classic Fair's new name generated news coverage, public discourse, and responses from groups like the Sons of the Confederacy, supporting this idea that the public perceives the fair as associated with "the South" and southern culture. See the quotes from the Sons of the Confederacy here: WFMY News 2 Digital Team. 2019. "Sons of Confederacy Responds to Dixie Classic Fair Name Change." Wfmynews2.Com. October 5, 2019. https://www.wfmynews2.com/article/news/local/sons-of-confederacy-responds-to-dixie-classic-fair-name-change-carolina-nc/83-ca7304ba-c2dd-49ca-985c-0c11d74db9ef.

[113] Rice, "From Architectonic to Tectonics."

[114] Christa J. Olson, "'Raíces Americanas': Indigenist Art, América, and Arguments for Ecuadorian Nationalism," *Rhetoric Society Quarterly* 42, no. 3 (May 1, 2012): 233–50, https://doi.org/10.1080/02773945.2012.682844; Andrew Wood, "Regionalization and the Construction of Ephemeral Co-Location," *Rhetoric Society Quarterly* 42, no. 3 (May 1, 2012): 289–96, https://doi.org/10.1080/02773945.2012.682847.

tangible realm of cultural politics."[115] Affect and sensory experience, as the first chapter of this dissertation argues, can be used to call people into regional subjectivities - subjectivities invented by the rhetorical act of regionalizing. As a group, the articles of the *RSQ* special issue make the case for taking up region as a permeable and dynamic concept that *acts on the places and cultures* to which it is ascribed. So, even more than a strategy for identification, region is itself a rhetoric that both shapes and is beholden to the ideas about place and culture that it engages.

Regions are rhetorical and argued for or negotiated using existing repositories of ideas, even and especially when revisions and drawings of regional borders and identities are the goal of a regionalizing rhetoric. Jenny Rice's "From Architectonic to Tectonics: Introducing Regional Rhetorics," introduces to the special issue the particular relationship between region and topoi, between place and invention. She writes that "appeals to and performances of regionalism are particular (re)makings of patterns within specific material sites." This chapter's analysis below demonstrates that the topoi of tradition, family, and fun resonate across the two southern sites of Merlefest and the Carolina Classic Fair. Rice also argues that "regional rhetorics are more specific and strategic instances of how topoi help to create space." Remembering this creative power of commonplaces enables me to draw connections between the patterns present in the interview data and promotional texts and the exigencies to which these respond.

Region-making is an opportunity for counter-identification, depending on the way that region(s) are positioned in relation to other configurations of place. In "Raíces Americanas: Indigenist Art, América, and Arguments for Ecuadorian Nationalism," Christa J. Olson argues that "regional appeals… demonstrate how place-based claims to identity can simultaneously ground and circulate arguments." Because regions are rhetorical interfaces, linking up disparate

[115] Dave Tell, "The Meanings of Kansas: Rhetoric, Regions, and Counter Regions," *Rhetoric Society Quarterly* 42, no. 3 (May 1, 2012): 214–32, https://doi.org/10.1080/02773945.2012.682843.

locations and ideas,[116] appeals to region then situate arguments in place(s) and also help to move them about and around to prospective audiences. Olson examines regional appeals that move through and across national borders (political and conceptual), arguing these appeals demonstrate "how the cultural politics of a particular landscape invoke and move within larger complexes of meaning and force." Writing about regional uptakes of artistic style across the Americas, Olson "urges attention not only to how even the most apparently place-bound rhetorics move across spaces" - her examples demonstrating the portability across nations of regional arguments - "but also to the ways that arguments built around notions of place provide fixture for tenuous claims and troubled identifications." Region, then, is a rhetorical strategy[117] to create places and identities neither wholly within nor wholly separate from national places and identities.[118] From this, this study takes the negotiable and non-concentric relationships between regions and nations, positing that these festivals are offered up as counter-places and counter-experiences, alternatives to the national context. Region-as-method, like ethnography, helps us to see these festivals as contextual instances of argumentation *and* as examples of how place-based rhetoric may operate on larger scales. Indicative, not definitive. "Rhetoric, after all," Olson also writes, "is first and foremost the study of movement, of flex, flux, and fixture."[119]

The fact of these festivals is that they require physical bodies to come in, take up space, move around and behave in prescriptive and institutionally sanctioned ways: eat the food, ride the rides, listen to the music, dress for the occasion, follow the fairgrounds' rules. But they are not so constrained that they do not contain in them space for performing outside the expected. The bodies in the space, through their participation in these cultural offerings, are enacting

[116] Rice, "From Architectonic to Tectonics."
[117] Rice.
[118] Rice; Duck, *The Nation's Region: Southern Modernism, Segreagation, and U.S. Nationalism*.
[119] Olson, "'Raíces Americanas.'"

performances of what it means to be a part of this particular group. The action and movement embedded in Olson's definition of rhetoric is mirrored in scholarship on ethnography and performance. Dwight Conquergood's *Cultural Struggles: Performance, Ethnography, Praxis* brings together questions of cultural identity, cultural practices, and the methods by which to best study them. A scholar of culture and performance, Conquergood's disciplinary home was Performance Studies. He argues for a definition of performance that is closely akin to Olson's definition of rhetoric: "as kinesis, as movement, motion, fluidity, and fluctuation.[120]" In the same text, he writes that "performance is an essentially contested concept." Contestation, negotiation, movement, and change: all of these are ways to think about the vitality of rhetoric, particularly when studying rhetoric's embeddedness, emplacedness.

Cultural and place-based identification, as interests of this chapter - and of the dissertation broadly - involve cultivating audiences along a matrix of opportunities to connect, textual and beyond. In earlier scholarship, published in the *Quarterly Journal of Speech*, Conquergood wrote that "performance—powerfully conceptualized—is the borderlands terrain between rhetoric and ethnography,"[121] The overlap between performance, ethnography, and rhetoric outlined by Conquergood is key to examining regional festivals as a cultural rhetorician because of the interaction between messages, ideas, spaces, materials, and bodies that are implicit in the music festival or agricultural fair. Fairs and festivals are performances of cultural identity on multiple fronts: institutional rhetors like planning organizations, sponsors, host city governments participate as well as audiences, vendors, and attendees. Olson argues, in "Performing Embodiable Topoi: Strategic Indigeneity and the Incorporation of Ecuadorian

[120] Dwight Conquergood, *Cultural Struggles: Performance, Ethnography, Praxis* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 2013).
[121] Dwight Conquergood, "Ethnography, Rhetoric, and Performance," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 78, no. 1 (February 1992): 80–97, https://doi.org/10.1080/00335639209383982.

National Identity," that there is a "nation-making force imbedded in bodily performance and reiterated behavior," (302). She demonstrates this through an examination of strategies by white-mestizo Ecuadorians to appropriate indigeneity rhetorically in order to argue for their place within the nation. Those rhetorical strategies of appropriation and place-based identity construction were built using commonplaces associated with physical characteristics of indigenous Ecuadorians. Thus, these "embodiable topoi" were bodily performances of place-based identity, even when they were textual. I argue that we can use the overlap between rhetoric and performance in order to see the strategic performances involved in the promotion of regional festivals. By reading the interviews themselves as performances[122] and the texts that are circulated to cultivate attendees for the festivals as performances, we can draw a through-line across these objects of study to group them together as acts that craft and cultivate regional identities. Performance, from these perspectives, does not merely present existing ideas but constitutes culture and identity. "Performance as making, not faking," as cultural anthropologist Victor Turner put it memorably,[123] reminds us that calls to participate in festivals are invitations to create and negotiate identities within a place. I argue that those performances are themselves regionalizing rhetoric as the promotion and cultivation of an audience for these festivals invents and reinvents the regional identity at stake.

***Marketing and Public Communication***

Spokespersons for public events like these are examples of place based institutional rhetors, in that the institutional identities that spokespeople take on are place-based and their rhetorical exigencies are place-based. The COVID-19 pandemic created a context where these organizations had to mitigate potential attendee uncertainty and encourage attendance -

[122] Conquergood, *Cultural Struggles: Performance, Ethnography, Praxis*.
[123] Victor Turner, *From Ritual to Theatre: The Human Seriousness of Play*, Later prt. edition (New York City: PAJ Publications, 2001).

complicating but not fundamentally reorienting the way they go about constituting their audiences and marketing their events. COVID changed how these organizations marketed their events--what they emphasized and addressed--but did not fundamentally alter the topoi they used to cultivate regional audiences through identification.

Merlefest and the Carolina Classic Fair advertise fun, sensory experiences of regional-cultural import. Beyond the field of rhetoric, place-based marketing has explored region and the senses, concluding that both are persuasive forces in purchasing decisions.

For instance, regional topoi have been shown to influence purchasing decisions, as when regional information on wine labels impacts consumer ideas about the wine, "increas[ing] consumer confidence in the quality of the product."[124] Wine is associated with particular regions, and consumers with investment (time, preferences, experience) in wine will associate certain regions with certain qualities in wines produced in those regions. The senses influence purchasing decisions as well. Studies from the disciplines of marketing and consumer insights investigate the relationships between place and affect. In one focused on marketing wine, "findings show that a positive winery experience – consisting of relaxing, educational, entertaining, aesthetical and well-served tasting of good products - in a winery, develops both emotional attachment and subsequent loyalty to the place in which the winery is located."[125] And so, positive sensory and affective experiences produce attachment to a place and its related products. In another, researchers found that eliciting feelings of groundedness increases consumer brand loyalty and willingness to pay for products. The group defines groundedness as

[124] Johan Bruwer and Ray Johnson, "Place-Based Marketing and Regional Branding Strategy Perspectives in the California Wine Industry," *Journal of Consumer Marketing* 27 (January 26, 2010): 5–16, https://doi.org/10.1108/07363761011012903.

[125] Sylvia Cardinale, Bang Nguyen, and TC Melewar, "Place-Based Brand Experience, Place Attachment and Loyalty," ed. Thomas Brashear Alejandro, *Marketing Intelligence & Planning* 34, no. 3 (January 1, 2016), https://doi.org/10.1108/MIP-04-2014-0071.

a "feeling of emotional rootedness" (3) connected to place, to people, and to the past (4-5). They argue that groundedness is particularly promising as a marketing strategy with respect to mitigating stress and uncertainty, citing the COVID-19 pandemic as a salient example.

As the interview data and textual analysis in this chapter will demonstrate, both Merlefest and the Carolina Classic Fair use messaging that regionalizes their events and positions the events as offering their respective versions of "relaxing, educational, entertaining, aesthetical and well-served tasting of good products."[126] Marketing for a public event combines the attempt to cultivate brand engagement or purchasing decisions (product-oriented marketing) with a more intensive kind of brand identification that comes with physical attendance, presence in a space and active participation in the events and acts associated with the festival. In other words, attendance at a fair or festival rises to a level of identification with the promoted experience beyond the level of identification required for a one-time purchase of a product or service. It is for this reason that I argue that a rhetorical and ethnographic approach to *attendee cultivation* is instructive on the role of regionalizing rhetoric in response to uncertainty.

This chapter studies the way that promotional professionals talk and write about regional festivals and the parallels between their rhetoric and the texts that circulate via news outlets websites and social media either directly or indirectly drafted by promotions professionals. Analyses of interviewee data and promotional materials demonstrate how such events are not simply regional but are *regionalized* through the rhetorical practices I uncover, namely: through repeated (annual) re-performances of cultural identity markers and soliciting attendees to embody these performances; and through strategic responses to novel exigencies that threaten to undermine those repeated identity performances. The need for COVID protocol and contingency

[126] Caringdale, Nguyen, and Melewar.

communications that the festival planners/promoters describe is responding to a rhetorical exigence: festivals need attendees, performers, and vendors to exist, but participation may risk attendees' health. As they attempt to cultivate attendees for the 2021 and 2022 events, marketing and public relations materials for Merlefest and the Carolina Classic Fair undertake regionalizing rhetorics that employ tradition, family, and fun as topoi. Interviews with promoters present institutional arguments in line with marketing messages. In addition to cultivating an audience, the festivals must also respond to perceived public uncertainty about participating in public events. Ultimately, they do so by combining the tradition/family/fun topoi with another set: safety and a sense of familiar place. This builds toward an argument that offers *homecoming* as a remedy for the public uncertainty that threatens continuity. The cultivating and responsive rhetoric of these festivals build toward the argument that *homecoming*, as experienced through participation in these regional events, is soothing, stabilizing, and reorienting; attending these events (as argued by the materials and responses this chapter analyzes) promises audiences that they will be rooted anew in a regional-cultural identity.

## Tradition, Family, and Fun

Cultivating the audience for events like these is calling people into a cultural subjectivity;[127] for the day(s) in which you are present at the festival or fairground, your ticket buys you entrance and participation in the cultural practices offered on site.[128] Much like the constitutive rhetoric theorized by Charland, the work of festival promoters calls would-be attendees into a cultural, and regionalized, subjectivity. When asked to describe the culture of the festival for which they worked, interviewees' responses relied on tradition, family, and fun as

[127] Charland, "Constitutive Rhetoric."

[128] The entrance that your ticket gets you is not the same as a sense of belonging, something that this study does not explore. Calls to and reflections on concepts related to belonging - like family and community - are provided by the festivals, but an argument on the experiences of those concepts by patrons would require a different set of interviews.

commonplaces with which they explained the event. Though related, these three patterns present in the responses represent distinct commonplaces that regionalize the festivals and contribute to the public ideas about Appalachia and the South that these organizations actively seek to emphasize in their communications.

***Tradition and Family***

The relative age of the festivals and their connections to North Carolina history are not the reason for the emphasis on tradition. Merlefest has taken place annually since 1988 and the Carolina Classic Fair (under varying names) since 1882. Organizers from Merlefest, however, more explicitly emphasized tradition in their interview responses. One possible reason for this is that Merlefest is approaching a milestone year (their 35th anniversary coincides with the 2023 festival), and as such, festival organizers are already in a frame of mind that reveres the past, and the conservation of particular practices across the passing of time. Another reason that Merlefest may be more inclined than the Carolina Classic to tap into the tradition topos is that the Carolina Classic Fair is indirectly responding to public discourse regarding the South's history of slavery and celebration of the Confederacy. In 2020, the City of Winston Salem decided to change the name from Dixie Classic to Carolina Classic–an action that demonstrated a willingness to break with "tradition" in light of contemporary reckoning.[129] For both festivals, however, tradition factored into their descriptions of the events as well as articulations of why people (should and do) show up. People, here, include both festival goers and the acts and vendors that supply the entertainment and culture.

Tradition, especially when linked with family, is figured as a good and desirable quality of these festivals, one that drives attendance and that the feel will continue to bring people back

[129] Keri Brown, "Renaming The Dixie Classic Fair," *NPR*, October 12, 2019, sec. National, https://www.npr.org/2019/10/12/769688175/renaming-the-dixie-classic-fair.

to the fairgrounds despite the pandemic context. When asked to describe the culture of Merlefest, Ted Hagaman, outgoing director of the festival, responded:

> Ted: Very family oriented. Based on traditions. We do everything we can to preserve those pretty good traditions.

Family orientation and tradition, in Ted's response, are related but distinct concepts. In offering those ideas in succession, there is an implication that, at least in part, the traditions are what make Merlefest family-oriented. Here, again, tradition is presented as desirable ("pretty good traditions") and as something that should be preserved. The traditions that Ted references are summed up as embodying the spirit of the festival's founder, Doc Watson.

> Ted: The term traditional-plus came from Doc. We asked Doc one day, how do you describe the music of Merlefest? And he thought about it, and he said, I think I call it traditional-plus. We said, what does that mean? He said, well, it is the traditional music of the Appalachian region, plus anything else I want to play.

Very resistant to being "pigeon-holed into just one genre of music" Ted's interview responses mirror that original response from festival founder, Doc. Tradition, here, is tied to place ("the traditional music of the Appalachian region") **and** it is something more, something *plus*. It leaves room to add *anything else* to the combination music of banjos, ballads, African, Cherokee, Anglo-Celtic, old-time string, and bluegrass that make up what is thought of as traditional Appalachian - and specifically Western North Carolinian - music.[130] The reiteration of Doc Watson's original *anything goes* response works to obscure the boundaries around who can enjoy this festival. However, it is important to note that despite Ted's resistance to limiting the festival to one genre, traditional Appalachian music is foregrounded as the identifying feature of

[130] Whitney Smith, "Discovering the Roots of Appalachian Music," The North Carolina Arboretum, June 22, 2016, https://www.ncarboretum.org/2016/06/22/discovering-roots-appalachian-music/.

the festival. That *plus* does only enough to lower the barrier for entry somewhere beneath avid bluegrass fans.

Traditional-plus is an approach to discussing decisions about who gets to play at Merlefest, as much as it is a catch phrase for understanding the genres available. Wes Whitson, operations manager and incoming director, leaned on tradition in his explanation of recruitment and choice of acts for Merlefest.

> Wes: We have hundreds and hundreds of acts that come to us, looking to be a part of the festival. Merlefest has a long history, being that it's over 30 years old, where a lot of up-and-coming artists or even artists that have been around for a while - it's on their bucket list to come and play our festival.

He went on to reference popular bands, like The Avett Brothers, who have played Merlefest and gone on to great success afterwards, as well as Day-One acts, guys who played with Merle and Doc Watson and continue to play the festival annually. Wes' comments on the long history of the festival, its place on the must-play venue list of both rising and established artists, and the place of the founder's family and friends on the festival docket, point to two tradition-related ideas. One: it positions Merlefest as an event that multiple generations of musicians (and, implied, music fans) have participated in, some familially related to each other. The founding of Merlefest was all about celebration of family; Merle Watson's death was the impetus for planning the festival, and his friends and family continue to show up to play annually, even after his father's death. Herein, then, tradition and family are commingled.

Two: it reiterates Merlefest as a kind of rite of passage or pilgrimage location for bluegrass and adjacent musicians. Wes says that "hundreds and hundreds" of musical artists actively seek to be part of this Merlefest tradition and points out that The Avett Brothers played there and went on to success. While the act of seeking out admittance into the Merlefest family of past and present performers does not mimic blood relation, it does look like the practice of

trying to become an insider within an organization. The expression of the bucket list or springboard to success type motivation for playing Merlefest inspires thoughts of credentialing, or authenticating, these artists within the broader genre of country, bluegrass, or Appalachian-roots music. By presenting the practice of playing at Merlefest as desirable, authenticating, somewhat exclusive, and demonstrative of participation in a larger, recognized group, playing the festival becomes a traditional practice that engaging in makes you part of this musical subculture.

Family is not only a way to discuss connections, patterns, or repetitions of behavior across generations, but also a way to understand seasonal flows of behaviors throughout the year. DJ Hargrave, the Events and Branding Manager for the Carolina Classic Fair, similarly drew connections between family and traditions when describing the Carolina Classic.

> DJ: It's always for family. There are a handful of times during the year that people really make a conscious effort to make sure that they're with their family, like the holidays: Thanksgiving, Christmas, Fourth of July, birthdays. It seems like the fair's one of those times. Sometimes you'll see couples walking around or whatnot, but even then, they're always with a group of people and it's usually family.

There are a couple of notable turns of phrase, here, in DJ's response. The fair, he says, is *always* for family, *like the holidays.* The fair is not just family-friendly, it is **for** families. DJ's phrasing almost excludes other fairgoers - *sometimes you'll see couples.. But even then, they're always with a group of people and it's usually family.* DJ argues that the fair is like Thanksgiving, Christmas, Fourth of July, and birthdays. These are times he presents as particularly tuned toward time spent with family. Implied in this argument is the combination of family, religious or national traditions, and celebration (as well as a shared place, which I return to in a subsequent section). Each of the holidays he lists - even birthdays - imply / invoke commonplace practices surrounding food, activities, music and other entertainment, and even weather/seasonal

associations. While there are many consistent, cultural signifiers of participation in these holidays, the everyday experience of most of these are influenced by place: the difference between a local Christmas parade and the Macy's Thanksgiving Day Parade; the legality of Independence Day fireworks in a particular municipality; hemispheric differences between hot or cold Christmases. Through simile, DJ sets up the Fair as a type of holiday tradition for the region it serves - family is something that you return to seasonally. And, as he said, the expected practice here - the way you traditionally celebrate the Fair - is by coming together with your family.

Related to the family topos are care and community. Community does not imply the level of intimacy that family does but suggests a level of familiarity and concern for wellbeing. Festival promoters described their events as caring, community-oriented or community-building events by pointing to specific planning and execution decisions (logistics and operations) as well as marketing and public relations efforts.

> Ted: We keep hearing the word well-organized. It's a clean event. We put a lot of effort into making sure those bathrooms and those garbage cans are clean and that they [attendees] have a good experience in that they're treated with kindness. We just feel like we're a little unique there and we take that very seriously.

Ted describes the level of care and attention to detail that staff at Merlefest put into maintaining the environment on campus. He equates effort with kindness, and cleanliness with kindness. The kinds of tasks that he describes - cleaning bathrooms and removing garbage - are types of labor that are often hidden from view; there are not usually considered something that an event director would bring up in conversation about their event. His use of the pronoun *we* - "We put a lot of effort into making sure those bathrooms and those garbage cans are clean" - creates a sense that, for festival attendees, the festival staff are willing and able to do more intimate kinds

of cleaning and tending. Of course, sanitation work has to happen at any public event. But the interesting rhetorical move here is that Ted figures the staff at Merlefest - himself included - as caring for, cleaning up after, the attendees so that they feel like they are being treated with kindness. The staff of Merlefest, in this picture, becomes a community of care with the sole focus of making sure that attendees enjoy themselves.

Ted is also doing contrast work. *Clean* is also indicative of the type of expected behaviors at the festival. It's an alcohol-free site. The emphasis on sanitation work and cleanliness lends itself to contrasting Merlefest with images and reputations of other music festivals: Woodstock, Burning Man, Bonnaroo, Lollapalooza. Rather than mud, raucous young people, and recreational drug use and drinking, Merlefest makes a concerted effort to align itself with *cleanliness* - read both as a lack of garbage and clean bathrooms and cleanly behavior, cleanly people.

The desire for return is expressed in Ted's articulation of the anticipation of the 2022 festival.

> Ted: I do know this, our people, our fans are ready to come back. We hear that, over and over again. We have many that could not come this year, simply because their doctor told them they couldn't. They're ready to come back, so as soon as we can get over this, we feel very good about the future of where it's going.

Ted attributes the lack of attendance on the part of some fans - some of "our people" - to doctor's orders. Returning to the festival, then, is an indication of healing, of return to safety and wellness, of coming back to what used to be done. Here, we see the rhetoric of Merlefest becoming that of homecoming. Participation again in the beloved traditions, in a (now) safe place, as a representation of wholeness.

> Ted: So, you know we're trying to be smart, we want to get back to having the festival, just as close to being normal as possible.

Ted also framed the festival in terms of its positive, financial impact on the community.

> Ted: But one of the smart things the founders of this festival did was they really relied on getting people, locally, involved. And that kind of started something, whereas if they would have gone and started this and not involved the community, I don't think it would be looked at the same way.

That "same way," is a positive good in Wilkesboro. Despite the intense influx of traffic and out of towners, the local folks in Wilkesboro, according to Ted, are largely on board with the festival, because of how much money it brings into town. However, Ted makes a point to emphasize that the money is directed toward specific groups.

> Ted: "Our food vendors are nonprofits. Now, they may work with a for profit restaurant, to help them in preparing foods and things like that, but then the proceeds that are earned go to nonprofit organizations: so, it's touching church, school, civic organizations."

This adds to the framing of the festival as a wholesome, family-oriented or hometown type of event. Ted specifically mentions schools, churches, and civic organizations as the primary beneficiaries of the ancillary festival services, like food and parking. He cites that "almost half a million dollars" were earned from the 2019 festival from those types of volunteer work by local restaurants and groups.

Wes emphasized the importance of children to the festival.

> Wes: (On what's different this year, compared to 2020 and 2021) Wes Whitson: We have our kids' area in full swing. We have to be able to loosen up the reins a little bit, and of all the things that we've done in the past. For example, with the pandemic, we had to limit some of our kids' activities, and kids are a special part of our festival. Our Little Pickers all get in free, and we love seeing them here every year.

He also mentioned the school-day program, where local middle school students come to the festival during school hours, as an example of the children-oriented offerings that are part of their back-to-normal push for the 2022 festival. Children underscore the family topos, and the possessive way in which Wes describes their relationship to the festival - "*our* Little Pickers," "we *love* seeing them" - figures the festival in a parental role. Children are cherished and

welcomed, and their presence at the festival is an indication of the return to traditional values and family environment that the festival - past and upcoming - came to represent in the interview responses.

Another example of community comes from DJ, who described efforts to more closely connect the Carolina Classic Fair to the surrounding community, in hopes that it would become a more salient idea for people in Winston Salem and the surrounding area. Community outreach, then, is for the purposes of impacting publicly held ideas about the fair. He said:

> DJ: We also are focusing on really trying to get more community outreach with the fair because it seems like the fair is like something where people only think about it in late September and early October. We're trying to get like a year-round presence in the community.

This response creates an interesting tension between the definition of the fair as a family holiday and this ideal definition of the fair as regular, community presence (and practice). Rather than a late-summer, early-fall occasion, the Carolina Classic is aiming for a kind of regularity that is not limited to seasonality, or annual celebration. Still, in his next response, we see some remaining tension between fair-as-holiday-like-tradition and fair-as-community staple.

> DJ: So, you know, we sponsored a high school football game of the week with ABC 45 this year. We're starting to branch out and have a presence at Hanes mall. Year-round advertising there, selling tickets there, and just trying to be like that beacon for fun, you know, for people.

High school football retains a seasonal feel, though not as specific as a fall holiday like Thanksgiving. Sponsoring a local high school football game is a community-grounding, place focused marketing decision: the game sponsored was a local Forsyth County rivalry, Walkertown versus Reidsville.[131] The year-round presence at Hanes Mall (the mall in Winston-Salem, and one of the largest, still operating malls in the Triad area) does bring messages about

[131] "Winston-Salem Friday Night Rivals | News, Weather, Sports, Breaking News | WXLV," accessed August 8, 2022, https://abc45.com/sports/friday-night-rivals.

the fair to a more central location in the community. The Hanes Mall Fair Store - which sells merchandise and tickets to the fair - opens August 25 of this year (2022), about a month before opening day. While positioning the Fair in the community, as a family-oriented tradition, DJ also adds to this response the idea that these events are - he hopes - a "beacon of fun."

Not only is the Carolina Classic a family-oriented event at an attendee-facing level, but DJ made a point to describe the working environment during the fair as family-like. Among the regular, full-time staff and the vendors, DJ explained that the time spent together made them "like a family."

> DJ: You know, we only see these vendors once a year, I don't know most of them by first name, but for ten days it's like we're a family, because we're literally living here. We're here, usually from 8:30am to midnight for those ten days so, we pretty much live together for those ten days and we're all close here in general, anyway, like the staff, … It really all feels like we're a family, you know for those ten days."

The fair, then, erases the differences between them - any racial, political, hierarchical/labor differences within the organization, etc. The insistence that "we're like a family" obscures the labor relations, commercial interests, etc. present amongst a group of people brought together to do paid work.

Fun

It is not possible to have a depoliticized evocation of family, tradition, or fun - all are politically imbued and contested concepts; however, each interviewee is adopting a deliberately apolitical tactic with respect to the national political context. As in DJ's last response, fun can be seen as a bridging concept between the ideas of tradition and family working toward the goal of persuading audiences to return to fairgrounds, despite the uncertainty of the safety of being in public spaces. All three interviews explored the idea that these events are supposed to be fun, often modified with "family," and that that fun happens in a space outside of the tense and for some outright dangerous contemporary experience.

DJ emphasized the importance of fun heavily in his responses. His framing of the planning and execution of the festival intertwined fun, family, and place.

> DJ: It's a family-friendly environment where we provide entertainment to the public for 10 days, via music, live music, rides, fair foods, games, exhibits that are displayed from, you know, local citizens that want to display their work, whether it's in photography or culinary or clothing. Through our competitive entry displays, we give the public opportunity to do that, we also give some local businesses the opportunity to come out and set up booths and spaces and be able to interact with the public, So, it's really just meshing all Forsyth County - both the fun and some business - all into one space and just bring everyone together for a safe, family friendly event.

This is DJ's most descriptive response, in terms of what the fair offers to entertain attendees and support vendors. "The public" that DJ describes, we'll remember, is most commonly configured as family groups when he discusses the audience for the fair. There is focus here on the publicness of the fair, with references to "public," "local," "citizens," and "business," but that public is subordinated to safety, family-friendliness, and fun.

Topoi of safety and security support the broader topos of family by marking out desirable and undesirable behaviors. DJ's caution in describing the decision to have a beer garden area at the fair highlights the careful cultivation of a "family" environment and underscores the deliberate cultivation of such an environment through topoi of security. When asked to discuss how decisions are made with regards to the offerings at the fair, DJ named the fair's current director, Cheryle Hartley, as the top decision maker, as well as Robert Mulhearn, facilities manager.

> DJ: And then we have our facility manager; he's more so involved with events outside of the fair. But he is a facility manager, so he is also involved with the decision-making process for different things, from live entertainment booking to new exhibits that we bring, like the beer garden.

I draw attention to this line of response, in part to give a fuller picture of the institutional hierarchy of the fair, as well as to point out the weight that a new exhibit, the beer garden, had in

DJ's mind with regards to the recent fair and associated decision-making. In his discussion of the beer garden - a new addition to the offerings at the 2021 Carolina Classic Fair - DJ explored the tension between offering alcohol at the fair and the family-oriented environment that fair organizers craft and rely on for their promotions of the event.

> DJ: You know that was something that was a big topic of discussion, and it was the first year we did it this year, so we were all here talking about the pros and cons.
>
> Leah: Yes, you mentioned the beer garden; you said this was the first year that you all had that. How did that go and are there any considerations that you could share with me that went into the decision to ultimately have one?
>
> DJ: Yeah, so it went well. Some of the factors that went into it, are you, know what kind of protocols are we going to put in place to make sure that it doesn't turn into a nuisance itself? Like having security there making sure that, of course, everyone that gets a beer is carded you know, ideally. You know, really trying to set the environment, so that is pretty relaxing and kind of encourages people to just grab a beer or two and then leave.
>
> DJ: So, we didn't have any music bumping you know, like no live music in that area. Nothing to kind of keep people there for too long. We had some cornhole, but we really wanted to make it a casual environment, so that people you know wouldn't want to stay there and drink all day. Which, I don't think anyone will come to the fair for that anyway.

Notice the references to security, preventing nuisance, and the motivations for attendance that are assumed of the fairgoers. He mentioned that it was "a big topic of discussion" and that the staff were "all here talking about the pros and cons." Here, we see DJ and the rest of the promotions and planning folks dealing with a safety related issue that was not wholly associated with the COVID-19 pandemic. How safe, how family-oriented, how traditional could they make a new exhibit that featured alcohol? He employs a few strategies that aim to bridge those gaps: 1) the presence of security officers, 2) the lack of loud music, 3) cornhole, but no other games or activities associated with prolonged drinking or bar-like spaces. He continued on, saying:

> DJ: We did things like that, and then of course we had Appalachian Mountain Brewery, who is the presenting sponsor. We had them tie in an educational piece. So, every single ingredient that they use for the beer was sourced from local farmers, local to Forsyth County and surrounding areas. They do that specifically just for the Carolina Classic Fair.

> That’s not something they do for all their beers, everywhere, that they have in different places, or different retail locations. So, those were some of the things we did to set the environment.

By outlining the “educational piece” - the focus on ingredients and their particular ties to local agriculture - in his framing of the place of the beer garden at the fair, DJ further emphasizes the fair’s role as a familiarizing, securing force in the community. Yes, there will be alcohol offered, but even that is an opportunity to learn about and celebrate Forsyth County and its agricultural activity. This brings the exhibit back in line with the focus on local, agrarian, southern and Appalachian cultural offerings. This can also be read as a rationalization of commercial interest that may not on its face comport with a "family" festival. The fair has a brewery as a sponsor, and both the City of Winston Salem and Appalachian Mountain Brewer stand to benefit financially, so The Carolina Classic offered a beer garden. In order to maintain a coherent, family-friendly message and image of the fair, the planners tried to control the type of behavior in that space (how long people would spend drinking), so it wouldn't become a nuisance and cause bad publicity or conflict with attendee expectations. Framing this money-making venture as educational serves to further justify its presence and integrate beer into an otherwise "family" oriented space.

In addition to individual exigencies like constructing a family-friendly beer garden, the festivals had to respond - either directly or indirectly - to the tense socio-political climate of the last several years. COVID-19 is far from an apolitical topic in the United States (or globally, for that matter), with the varying responses and messages surrounding all things COVID, vaccine, and mask-related swirling in the public discourse. Add to that the insurrection on January 6, 2020, after the election of President Biden, widespread continued anti-police-brutality demonstrations, the invasion of Ukraine by Russia, and a rising tide of white nationalism in the

U.S., the national and global context is decidedly stressful, unstable, frightening. All of that adds to a backdrop of nervousness and uncertainty, which festival promoters addressed, though tentatively, and primarily by making rhetorical moves to disassociate their fairs with politics.

> Ted: The unrest that's going on, the politics, quite frankly, we tried very hard to stay out of that. And we do everything we can even in… you know its freedom of speech. We understand that. But we do everything we can in talking with an artist or stage managers or our emcees, things like that. We don't want to go there, we want people to come to Merlefest and basically have four days of good and just put that stuff to the side, we can get back to that later.

Here, Ted introduces the idea of the festival as escape. The "four days of good" are offered as a temporary reprieve from the "unrest" mentioned. As Ted says, the festival "tried very hard to stay out of that," meaning they made efforts to figure themselves as outside of the national conversations around health and human rights. Wes, similarly, expressed an uncertainty about how that othering would work, though he ultimately deemed it (staying out of it) a success. He said:

> Wes: We weren't really sure what the mindset was going to be like, with all the pressures of the world today, but everybody really stepped up, and it was a great thing.

These remarks aim to present Merlefest as out of both the present time and place - a place that exists outside of the tense and unhappy nation, in a scary and unhealthy time. As scholarship on region as pointed out, regions and regional rhetoric are often used to create places that can be presented as other, as exceptional, to national or global configurations of place. Having a good time, then, becomes a regionalizing rhetoric as the nation/national context is other to that; it is decidedly not-fun. This makes "fun," in this case, a regionalizing rhetoric, as the nation/national context is not-fun.

Wes, Ted, and DJ all make moves to position their respective fairs as fun and therefore apolitical - the "staying out of that" comment interacts with the ideas about fun, tradition, and

family that ground their depictions of a *fun* fair: it's a move to say, we are about fun, tradition, and family, not politics! But, how can fun be apolitical, when there are expectations around the kinds of activities fans are supposed to enjoy? How can family be apolitical, when implicit in family-oriented and family-fun are sanctioned types of family: nuclear family, child-producing families, heterosexual families? Whose traditions, then, are apolitical, when traditions reinscribe certain configurations of behavior, of fun, of family? And while it is clear that - in the course of their work as employees and representatives of these festivals - DJ, Ted, and Wes are all motivated to present the events as experiences that will be enjoyable, their distancing maneuvers aim to depoliticize that which is inherently political: return to "normal," status quo.

As each of the interview subjects are involved in the brand-level messaging for their events, you would expect to see parallels between their responses to questions about the festivals, cultures, and priorities, and the public-facing articulations of the festival and what patrons should expect. Those parallels are present in the texts whose origins are more in-house (like the webpages and social media content from the festivals themselves) *as well as* news outlets that cover the events. In these examples, you can see how tradition, fun, and family are leveraged for commercial gains, with the ultimate goal of ticket sales and attendance.

Promotional material from Merlefest foregrounds tradition, family, and fun. The Merlefest 2022 Wrap Up Video, titled with the tagline *Music. Moments. Memories.*, uses a combination of visual, sonic, and linguistic rhetoric to emphasize the festival's role as a celebration of regional culture, and is an exemplar of their promotions strategy. The video combines bluegrass music (banjos, mandolins, basses, fiddles) with video of attendees dancing, smiling, eating, and visibly enjoying the music. Overlaid are clips of interviews from participants that emphasize positive affect, tradition, family and ultimately a sense of return to a familiar

place. The festival is said to provide a feeling of "brother and sisterhood" as people are "having a great time…Doc's looking down on us and he'd be pleased." Additionally, quotes like "Feels really good to be back, post-pandemic." In addition to the feel-good comment, notice the post-pandemic assertion, despite 2022 still having COVID-19 infections. "After what we've been through, this is like a gold mine at the end of the rainbow," says another festival goer.

News coverage leans on tradition and family, too, to bolster the import of the festival's big return. An example text of regional news coverage of Merlefest is from the *Greensboro News & Record*'s *gotriad* weekly publication. The cover of the issue for the week prior to Merlefest 2022 featured an article promoting the first-time performance of country and gospel singer Josh Turner at Merlefest[132].

Tradition is a notable topos in the article. The journalist, Fran Daniel, and interviewee - Turner - rely on tradition in positioning Turner's performance at Merlefest within the history of the festival and within the trajectory of the artist's career. References to "tradition," "traditional country music," and "classic country music," position both the artist and the festival itself as part of country music genealogies and, therefore, as possessing an authentic, country music identity. Implied in the article is the relationship between country music and bluegrass music, between southerness and Appalachian-ness. The article references other, classic country music acts - like Johnny Cash, Randy Travis, Hank Williams - and country music acts that have performed or will perform at Merlefest: Emmylou Harris and Old Crow Medicine Show.

In addition to the use of Merlefest's boilerplate language, the article incorporates images of the Cabin Stage and fans watching performances on the bigger stages in plastic lawn chairs point to Appalachian class culture. The Cabin Stage at Merlefest is, as the name suggests, a small

[132] Fran Daniel, "A First For This Country Veteran: Josh Turner to Perform Opening Day at Merlefest 2022," *Go Triad, News & Record*, April 21, 2022, sec. Music.

log cabin with a front porch, on which musicians perform. It sits just to the right of the Watson Stage, the festival's largest and main stage. Press releases weave tradition, family, and fun throughout their announcements regarding the festivals. When Wes was announced as the new festival director,[133] the release focused on joy, tradition, beauty, region, and community. The release says: "I couldn't be more excited for the opportunity to serve WCC and our community through MerleFest," stated Whitson. "Having the opportunity to work with such an amazing organization over the past five years has been inspiring to say the least. I'm still taken back each and every day as I discover new ways in which MerleFest and Wilkes Community College make a difference in our region for those who need it the most. It's an honor to contribute to that effort and I look forward to building on the great tradition of giving back that MerleFest has established over the past 33 years." Public relations materials also emphasize Merlefest's back-to-normal and safety-first claims. In the COVID-related press releases regarding the 2021 event, Merlefest's PR agency released two press releases titled "MerleFest Makes A Grand Return For Rescheduled 2021 Event" and "MerleFest Details COVID-19 Safety Protocol for 2021 Festival." Public relations, news interest pieces, and in-house produced promotions materials reiterate the same talking points that Ted and Wes offered, creating the feel of a consistent narrative about Merlefest 2021 and 2022.

A look at texts from the Carolina Classic Fair sees this pattern replicated: the Carolina Classic Fair's in-house publications reflect many of the same arguments that DJ presented in his interview responses. The main site curates news about the fair under a News tab; this tab also includes the blog-style announcements and promotional articles written, as far as I can tell, by City of Winston Salem staff. Two such promotional articles are "Korean Dumplings, BBQ

[133] Patty Parsons, "Wes Whitson Named MerleFest Festival Director," MerleFest, accessed July 20, 2022, https://merlefest.org/wes-whitson-named-merlefest-festival-director/.

Sundaes and a Beer Garden Headline New Foods at the Carolina Classic Fair" and "Carolina Classic Wraps Up 10 Days of Fun." The wrap up article papers over any differences in the pre-COVID, COVID, and "post-"COVID fairs, including political landscape and the public discourse surrounding the name change. "The Carolina Classic Fair, Winston, Salem, NC, wrapped up 10 days of fair food, rides, entertainment and competitions yesterday, proving that this regional fair is second to none." The fair food, rides, entertainment, and competitions listed off the top not only define the fair for next year's prospective attendees (or remind those who did go of what they experienced), but they also serve as evidence to the sentence's claim that "this regional fair is second to none." Naming the Carolina Classic the best regional fair brings to the mind of the audience their own experiences with regional fairs; if they have ever been to a different regional fair, then they are told that whatever comes to mind for you, the Carolina classic is better, with more fun, better rides, better live entertainment, better competitions - second to none. If the regional fair that comes to mind for the reader is the Carolina Classic, then the superiority of their experience as compared to other regional fair options is established. And as is the case for all Carolina Classic Fairgoers, since the memories that are brought to mind are of the *Dixie* Classic Fair, the sentence also implicitly claims that neither COVID nor the City's decision to change the fair's name have negatively impacted the *experiences* available to people at the fair. The practice of attending the fair that, perhaps you and your family have participated in annually for years, is better than ever. The wrap up article also includes a weigh-in from the top of the fair's organizational chart: "We were just glad to put people back to work and to see families getting back together to enjoy the fair after a two-year hiatus."[134] Cheryle Hartley, festival director, is quoted in the article. Families and enjoyment - in addition to benefits to the

[134] Lough, "CAROLINA CLASSIC FAIR WRAPS UP 10 DAYS OF FUN."

local economy - are centered in her comment - and she refers to the pandemic cancellations of public events as a "hiatus." Again, the news coverage and the incorporated voice of the fair (its director) are forwarding a "back to normal" and "nothing to see here" message.

Publicity directly addressing the fair's name change relies on tradition as a source of argument as well as fun. An analysis of the competing strategies between fair officials and Winston Salem politicians points out the tension between a tradition of social and political unrest and the fair's commercial investment in the linking of tradition and fun. In local news coverage, Winston Salem Councilmember D.D. Adams explained that the decision "draws from the history of two fairs in Winston-Salem: The Dixie Classic Fair, and the Carolina Fair." By referencing this naming strategy, the journalist and Councilmember Adams are shifting the definition of renaming. It is not something new; instead, it is something created from existing traditions. "The bridging of the old fair, 'The Carolina Colored Fair' and 'The Dixie Classic Fair,'" Adams continues, "Taking a name from each of them and combining them. It reminds me of growing up here, and hearing the story of Winston and Salem, and joining them together."[135] Here, Adams also taps into the family topos, referencing both her actual childhood and a kind of marriage of the two sides of town that eventually become a single governance, a story she relies on to connect with other Winston-Salem residents. She brings into the narrative the "Carolina Colored Fair," the fair created in 1953 for Black residents in Winston Salem and the surrounding areas.[136] The "bringing together" narrative points out that Black people in North Carolina were not allowed to attend the Dixie Classic Fair until after integration. And while "coming together" with

[135] Carrie Hodgin, "What The New Name Of The Dixie Classic Fair Could Be | Wfmynews2.Com," WFMY News 2, October 15, 2019, https://www.wfmynews2.com/article/news/local/carolina-classic-dixie-classic-fair-name-change-winston-salem/83-bfbd5f5b-6fff-48ef-9e15-8257e7e9e1c6.
[136] "Timeline of The Dixie Classic Fair," Winston-Salem Journal, accessed September 2, 2022, https://journalnow.com/news/local/timeline-of-the-dixie-classic-fair/collection_40c5fa44-5e3a-11e9-b423-0f3e7e20fb2b.html.

this new "Carolina Classic" fair title inspires images of unity and progress, Adams' choice to remind readers with her quote that one of the traditions these fairs are built on is a tradition of anti-black racism in North Carolina.

In another effort to focus on fun over conflict, the fair redesigned their logo and rewrote the event's tagline, alongside the festival name change. *Ridin', Rockin', Livestockin'* tops their website landing page and social media profiles, paired with a brightly colored, carnival inspired logo. The City of Winston Salem contracted this work out to an agency called Elephant in the Room. In an article for *The Winston Salem Journal,* Elephant in the Room's president explains the logo's creative inspiration. He is quoted, saying that the goal was a logo that was "somewhat nostalgic but also modern and timeless…influenced by the lights of a Ferris wheel and the color bursts of fireworks…that invoked a sense of fun and warmth."[137]A map of the state of North Carolina sits in the middle of the logo, a reference to the fair's "regional reach."

Use of tradition, family, and fun as commonplaces defining the cultures of these festivals regionalizes them - making them separate, other to the changing, unfamiliar, and un-fun national context. This regionalizing rhetoric sets up promoters to then respond to perceived public uncertainty, situating the festivals within the region (not the nation) and offering them as safe and reparative experiences.

Safety, Normalcy, Sense of Familiar Place

Rhetorics of safety and a sense of familiar place are responsive, counter argumentative rhetorics, in that they are responding to a perceived threat and sense of the unfamiliar, the strange, and the dangerous. With the COVID-19 pandemic continuing, uncertainty - and mitigating that uncertainty - loomed large in the minds of festival planners. In fact, fun, care,

[137] Wes Young, "City Unveils Logo for Carolina Classic Fair," *Winston-Salem Journal*, January 17, 2020, https://journalnow.com/news/local/city-unveils-logo-for-carolina-classic-fair/article_117f8b50-e812-5076-acf8-817e717b4cf3.html.

community, family, and tradition all seemed to be scaffolding for the mitigation of risk and in search of creating a sense of safety. Remember, the fair is supposed to be a “beacon of fun,” and so not only is it supposed to be an enjoyable experience, but it is supposed to be a signal light, a guide to safe harbor. Promoters argue that the festivals both represented certainty, normalcy for their attendees. Planning the events was largely about mitigating whatever uncertainty they could, and what they could not mitigate. And in the minds of the interviewees, attending these events was a way for fans and families to assuage some of the uncertainty that the pandemic context has created. I would argue that this is likely a function of these kinds of festivals broadly; the pandemic threw into relief that these types of events need to navigate health and safety topics when those are especially salient, but it also demonstrates that regional festivals like these may be balming, soothing, or cathartic practices regularly. Theories of the carnivalesque come to mind; I do not mean to argue that these festivals are particularly interested in the grotesque; rather the opposite, actually. These festivals - as the previous sections have argued - rely on a traditional, family-oriented, and conservative rhetoric to present an option for fun that is a pressure release without being radical.

Addressing safety, for the festival organizers, is not limited to the COVID-19 context, however, and this is evident when the interviews came close to discussing political unrest and public discourse about renaming Dixie Classic to Carolina Class. Anything political ("stay away from all that") can seem like a risky stance for a festival to adopt. So, similarly to how those anti-politics distancing maneuvers were moves back toward status quo, they are really a political move that then connects the festivals with the feelings of safety. Safety that is not only biomedical but emotional, is an affective argument that the festival organizers try to provoke in order to encourage that "come back home" feeling of restoration. By pivoting from COVID

uncertainty and political uncertainty back toward a topos of care, safety, and ultimately homecoming, festival organizers lean on region to make these public events desirable places to come back to.

Amidst uncertainty related to planning, timing, and the unpredictability of COVID-19, the interviewees acknowledged unease, then mitigate that with rhetorics of safety and normalcy. I spoke with the Merlefest organizers during the planning stages for the 2022 festival. With a quicker turnaround than usual - the 2021 festival was postponed from its usual April to September, meaning they then had a seven month instead of twelve month planning and promotion schedule.

> Ted: Well, I mean we're still dealing with COVID issues and, quite frankly, right now we're no better off than we were last year**.** We are talking to the Health Officials every day we're trying to figure out what they're saying… Let me say, the state of North Carolina health officials have said that they feel like in the next six months, they will have this under control. Now, they said that if you go six months from that day. It is right at the end of April, which is when Merlefest occurs so again we're right on that edge.

The uncertainty of the feasibility of the next festival, at an institutional level, is evident in Ted's responses. He says, "we're no better off than we were last year," with regards to COVID-19 and the work to make decisions and communicate those with the public. "We're right on that edge," points to a feeling of teetering, of instability in whether the conditions for festival planning and hosting will turn one way or the other. He continues, citing the disappointment and stopping power they experienced from the uptick in infections and infectiousness brought by the delta variant.

> Ted: And that's kind of what we have been told last time and then the delta variant came into play, and the delta very really affected us, we were rolling right along and doing very well on our ticket sales and when it came out 45 days from the event. Things just stopped. So, you know we're trying to be smart, we want to get back to having the festival, just as close to being normal as possible.

That closer, "just as close to being normal as possible," represents Merlefest's response to a perceived desire for safety, calm, normalcy from their prospective patrons but it also represents, I argue, an institutional desire for a return to normal. Ted, as director, uses *we* to refer to the work that the festival planners are doing in part because it is, of course, a collective effort. But, also, that *we* is a representative one, as Ted does speak on behalf of Merlefest. At the helm of the ship, his position on these issues is influenced by the members of the organization and influences. He is also responsible for Merlefest's reputation, and like his earlier comments on cleanliness and care, the appearance of safety is an important part of the messaging surrounding the festival.

> Ted: The top goal was to do this safely. Safety, that you know, would keep us up at night. How do we do this, and this not become a… we couldn't afford to have this on the nightly news that you know, a surge occurred at Merlefest… that's not what our goal was. in that, that's not what our goal is at any time, safety is a number one concern.

Safety, and importantly the public perception of safety, is a priority, then. Ted says they "can't afford to end up on the nightly news." An outbreak at the festival would disrupt the reputation of Merlefest, one that even in a pandemic should resist association with dirtiness, infection, danger, and - related to those - crowds and strangers. In his work on the cultural practices of HIV testing, J. Blake Scott argues that even beyond addressing danger to public health, HIV/AIDS discourse and surrounding testing practices serve to demarcate between the safe and risky, the clean and the threatening, the deviant and the normal.[138] Not being able to "afford" an outbreak may then also be connected to arguments that the festival represents tradition, family, and fun. The safety rhetorics employed by Merlefest are responsive not only to the promoters' perceptions about

[138] J. Blake Scott, *Risky Rhetoric: AIDS and the Cultural Practices of HIV Testing* (Carbondale and Edwardsville: Southern Illnois University Press, 2003).

their prospective audiences, but also are responses to affect and discourse within the institution and to dominant, hegemonic forces about who counts as safe and family-friendly.

Regularity and normalcy are paired with tradition and fun in Wes' descriptions of festival culture, motivations, and the particularities of the 2021 Merlefest.

> Wes: [in describing why people come to Merlefest] Well, I think it's the love for the music for sure, and the variety that we offer. But also again that expectation that they have. They know what they're getting when they come to Merlefest, and everybody seems to leave pretty happy.

Wes makes sure to differentiate between the variety of musical acts the festival offers - the festival has 12 stages running at any given time, so there are a dozen different options per hour for a festival goer - and the stability of the overall experience that Merlefest offers. He says, "they know what they're getting when they come" and as a result, attendees enjoy themselves and leave the festival happy. Happiness is linked to warmth through the practice of eating and engaging with others.

> Wes: I'd spoken with one of our food vendors, who has been at every festival since 1988 serving barbeque chicken. It's very popular. And they said that this year, in particular, they were met with the warmest reception they've ever gotten. From fan after fan thanking them for being there, glad that they were there, everybody was just so kind and happy to be here this past September.
>
> Leah: Where do you think that extra warmth or extra kindness that that particular vendor was feeling, where do you think that comes from this year?
>
> Wes: Well, I think our fans appreciate the thought and effort put into taking care of them at Merlefest, and they know that they can expect a quality show, and a quality experience when they come to our festival. And I think we were able to achieve that this September, despite the challenges. So, I think they appreciated that, and I think they were just happy just to see a piece of normalcy.

That normalcy that Wes references has to do with their sensory experiences of place. The not-normal was inside or masked, separated, six feet apart, alone or without access to public space - was fear and lack of a sense of personal safety AND a lack of connection with place

(think the inability to eat and drink safely outside the home, touch others, touch objects in public spaces, etc.) So, like the publications emphasized eating and drinking and being in natural spaces/landscapes associated with the south, Merlefest's quest for normalcy included attention to the way people eat, drink, listen, dance, touch, connect, and move in a particular place.

I spoke with DJ immediately after the 2021 Carolina Classic Fair wrapped up in October. The logistics of the last fair were fresh for him, as were the needs to communicate public health and safety information.

> DJ: The main thing that we were trying to communicate was that the Fair is open this year and it's going to be safe. We had COVID-19 protocols in place. So, really, it was about, number one, making sure that people knew that the fair was here, and that it was going to happen at 100% capacity. Number two, we did have a mask mandate. It was communicating the mask mandate, and then number three, just let people know that we will have COVID protocols in place, you know whether it was a ton of different hand washing stations or, that we had so much more staff, this year, cleaning everything and just really communicating those things to the public.

His priority message was that the fair was happening, and it was going to be safe, that there were safety requirements and additional cleaning. Like Merlefest, The Carolina Classic needed to position itself as a safe public space. The message is about assurance, but the sense I got from the promoters, especially those in the process of planning rather than on the back end of a festival, was that uncertainty was the feeling.

Ted said, "there's a plan B in place ready to plug in if all of a sudden things blow up again." This "plan B" if "things blow up again" is representative of Ted's uncertainty about the public health situation under which the next Merlefest would be operating. Having a contingency plan anticipates arguments about the uncertain public health landscape; there were and continue to be changes in the COVID-19 response, recommendations, and infections and an acknowledgement of the need for contingency mitigates that uncertainty.

In combination with communications regarding mask mandates, sanitation measures, vaccination requirements and opportunities, festivals included calls back to normalcy, to the expected, to the familiar. Like Wes says, patrons want a "piece of normalcy," and promoters see the festivals as opportunities to give that to them. DJ expressed similar ideas.

> DJ: So, I would say, you know we're definitely that one event that everyone kind of knows what to expect. I mean it's kind of like the Super Bowl every year. People know what to expect and people kind of understand what they're getting when they're deciding to be a part of it, as a local business and also the community knows what they'll be a part of, you know, whether they're entering a competitive entry or whether they're just coming as a patron. Everyone kind of knows what to expect.

A sense of patrons knowing what to expect from these festivals was a common theme among organizers, despite the very real inability to know what COVID-19 would continue to bring. Comparing the fair to the Super Bowl reveals the implicit argument that it, similarly, brings people together to celebrate a particular section of culture, regardless of whether that is something they participate in week in and week out. Like the millions of people who watch the Super Bowl every year who *don't* watch Sunday, Monday, and Thursday night regular season games, the Carolina Classic Fair offers a regular, ritualistic, predictable opportunity for performing the role of agrarian (adjacent) person.

> DJ: [on how the pandemic has affected his role] It's really affecting my role in an interesting way I'm always pretty much dealing directly with the public, so you know it seems like over the past like year, year and a half, you know communication is very important because people want to make sure that you know, whatever they're a part of is safe. As far as the COVID 19 protocols, people seem to be a little bit more on edge. But then, also a huge part of my role, you know before COVID it was pretty much, like, all about fun. It was all about, you know, come to the fairgrounds! This is fun! Now it's more so about communicating things like safety and logistics. It seems like the general public cares more about logistics and how things will work when they arrive as opposed to before. My communication with the public was a little more light. I get tons of messages on social media from people asking questions about events. I was answering questions on the Fair's page about events. I get phone calls directly to my desk.

Here, DJ specifically addresses his role as a communications point-person for the Carolina Classic. Citing the types of questions and concerns he spent the last year fielding, DJ notes the change in public interest or focus, with regards to the fair.

> DJ: People may be a little anxious, maybe experience a little bit of anxiety about going back and public again, for the first time or not, for the first time, but you know, getting used to it. We had the fair's name change recently. Maybe sometimes people, people have different opinions about you know the fair name change that happened recently that's a little bit more political. I can understand that.

His language is so tentative here: "people *may* be a little anxious," back in public "for the first time, *or not* for the first time," "*Maybe sometimes* people, people have different opinions," and "that's *a little bit* more political." Here, DJ is doing that rhetorical distancing work, blurring, to the best of his ability, the political lines around the Carolina Classic Fair, such that he does not explicitly exclude holders of alternate or opposite positions on COVID, or on nominal celebrations of the Confederacy. We **know** people have opinions; plenty of representatives of the political right and left have made their positions on these ideas clear in the public discourse. However, DJ resists associating with or condemning either side.

The recent name change for the fair that DJ cites here comes as part of a larger, national conversation on the place and purpose of Confederate memorials, namings, and other honorifics alluding to or celebrating the Confederacy, Civil War, or Antebellum South in the United States. The fair officially shifted its name from Dixie Classic to Carolina Classic in 2020. Like a variety of other renamings and statue removals across the country (though largely in the southern states), the move was met with a flare in public discourse about what such references and memorials can and do mean.[139] Similar to Ted's earlier *The unrest that's going on, the politics, quite frankly, we*

[139] WFMY News 2 Digital Team, "Sons of Confederacy Responds to Dixie Classic Fair Name Change," wfmynews2.com, October 5, 2019, https://www.wfmynews2.com/article/news/local/sons-of-confederacy-responds-to-dixie-classic-fair-name-change-carolina-nc/83-ca7304ba-c2dd-49ca-985c-0c11d74db9ef; Brown, "Renaming The Dixie Classic Fair."

*tried very hard to stay out of that,* DJ's position as a communications and marketing professional for the fair situates him where the strategic move is to neutralize the politics at work in the discourse around the fair's name. His response indicates an institutional desire to mitigate as much involvement in the uncertainty and contention surrounding the renaming as possible.

We see safety rhetorics paralleled in the public-facing content produced by both festivals. From the press releases, we see Ted quoted, foregrounding safety and reiterating the same, defining boilerplate language that infuses his interview responses. "Safety first," said festival director, Ted Hagaman. "After many conversations with public health officials, it's clear that the smartest and safest change we can make is to require vaccinations or proof of a negative test."[140] In the press release, Ted is cited: "Once again I want to thank all of our MerleFest family—artists, volunteers, staff, and fans—for their patience and support as we worked together to put on a safe and enjoyable festival that spotlighted the very best in roots-plus music," says Festival Director Ted Hagaman.[141] Note the incorporation of both family and tradition (through the continued use of Doc Watson's "roots-plus" definition) into a statement on safety.

While no one comes out and says that they hope the festivals will make attendees feel a returned sense of safety, they do contrast continued public uncertainty with festival preparedness, normalcy, and a fulfillment of expectations. Affect, then, is a submerged dimension of what the festival promoters are talking about when they address safety, return, warmth, restoration, security, avoidance of politics.

Sense of Familiar Place.

[140] Patty Parsons, "MerleFest Details COVID-19 Safety Protocol for 2021 Festival," MerleFest, accessed July 20, 2022, https://merlefest.org/1471-2/.
[141] Patty Parsons, "MerleFest Makes A Grand Return For Rescheduled 2021 Event," MerleFest, accessed July 20, 2022, https://merlefest.org/merlefest-makes-a-grand-return-for-rescheduled-2021-event/.

In addition to safety rhetorics (procedural), festivals responded to public uncertainty with familiar places as a strategy. This includes welcome backs, return tos (place and time), and ultimately builds on the tradition, family, fun set of arguments to develop a rhetoric of homecoming. It is connected to the perceived desire for normalcy that Wes, Ted, and DJ all point to in their responses; and the sense of *familiar place* specifically if achieved through the layering of those commonplaces I have explicated along with calls to place, region (southern or Appalachian), and cultural markers of each.

In describing their respective events, and in marketing them, festival organizers cite a sense of region while taking care to assert that attendees are desired from and do come from locations outside regional or county boundaries.

> Ted: You know it's interesting too, Japan is in the top three or five as far as countries that recognize bluegrass music. So you know the spread of this it's just amazing and every year we'll have anywhere from 10 to 15 different countries represented and we usually have three or four artists every year from overseas somewhere.
>
> Leah: That global presence is that something that has come up organically or was that something that you all have pursued.
>
> Ted: I think the Internet was a huge part of this festival growing, period. It exposed us to the world. So those people that didn't have an interest in any of this music, all of a sudden, they thought, huh, this sounds like something I'd like to explore. And now we even have volunteers that come every year and work at the festival from all over the world. I mean it's nothing to sit down at breakfast in the hotel early one morning and sit with people from South Africa. several different countries, it's just been interesting to see where they come from.

In this exchange, we see Ted describe globalization and broader participation in regional culture as a good thing. His framing of Japan as an unexpected place to find bluegrass popularity demonstrates his view of Merlefest as creating a common place among not only disparate cultures but also disparate locations. He specifically cites digital environments as responsible for expansion of opportunities to participate in regional culture, and points to examples where that

participation has moved beyond listening to bluegrass music online to volunteering or performing at the festival. An interest in bluegrass music, then, has invited people from as far as Japan and South Africa to travel to Wilkesboro, North Carolina in search of an in-person experience.

> DJ: [in describing the fair's relationship to the broader region) You know I would say that's where agriculture comes in because we have our livestock competitions, and the vast majority of those people aren't from Forsyth county. They come from all over and everywhere, most of the people that participate in the state fair come here and vice versa. So, people are coming from all over for the competitions.

Here, DJ points out that the majority of the competitors in the livestock competitions - that is, the people for whom their involvement in agriculture is professional, or professional enough that they livestock to enter - are not from Winston Salem's county (Forsyth). The reference to the State Fair, which takes place in Raleigh, brings up a parallel context where farmers from rural places around the state converge on urban places to show their wares, participating in paying competitions for themselves, advertising for their businesses, and putting on a show for non-competing attendees to come and enjoy. From this perspective, the agricultural fair is part professional event, part ritual cultural performance. The fairgrounds, through the agricultural focus of these events and the physical presence of the farmers, livestock, and people who come to see them, become a kind of rural, regionalized place during the fair that they are not (as they are otherwise mostly just empty lots or venues for other things) during the rest of the year. DJ elaborates on the influx of agrarianism during the fair:

> DJ: We're called the fair of Northwest North Carolina. Now the main reason for that is because of the agricultural piece. And we also kind of draw an audience from surrounding counties, specifically in Northwest North Carolina. But it's mainly about agriculture. That's kind of, like, the foundation of the fair and why it exists in the first place, so I would say that. A big reason for our drawing from counties far away, is the agricultural judging part of the fair. People submit, like, pumpkins and you know, of course, they bring cows and chickens and all these different things. That's probably the main thing.

The Carolina Classic Fair's tagline, *Ridin'. Rockin'. Livestockin',* combines a phonetic imitation of a rural or southern accent with that culminating focus on livestock. In that tagline, we can see the Fair's argument for itself as a place of fun and excitement that is, ultimately, grounded in its connection to southern farming. You see this reiterated across the social media posts and blog posts referenced earlier.

Fun, family, and tradition are both individual and collective responses to the political and public health context of 2021 - and really the previous and following years. A turn toward fun is a turn away from fear, toward permission and away from prohibition. A call for family is a call to move away from strangers - a purposeful turn to revise a public event full of one hundred thousand potentially dangerous, possibly infection or politically contentious *others* into a family affair. Emphasis on tradition reorients an audience amidst the disorienting effects of shifting public health messages and governing political parties. As public events, both fairs had to respond (even indirectly) to public mood, public unease. As regionalized events - in geography, in topic, and in rhetoric - the Carolina Classic and Merlefest can attempt a rhetoric that positions them as alternative, other, out of an uncomfortable national time and place. This other place (the region, rather than the nation) can then become a place that is familiar and safe, and a place that a return to offers reprieve, reset.

## Homecoming

When looked at as a group of regionalizing strategies that argue for a return to that which is other than the nation, fun, tradition, family, safety, and familiar places can be articulated as an argument for homecoming. One more time, I will bring up DJ's "beacon of fun," hope for the Carolina Classic. In addition to bringing up guiding light imagery, a beacon can also be understood as something that helps you navigate home - a homing beacon. The implied call to action, for both of these festivals, is to come, attend, come back to this place where you have

(probably) been before and take a break from the stresses and disturbances of your daily life, imposed upon you by the larger national context.

> Leah: Do you have a more general sense of why people come to the fair kind of a summative sense of that when they tell you.
>
> DJ: Yeah, like it's always for family almost always um you know, there are a handful of times during the year that that people really make a conscious effort to make sure that they're with their family, like the holidays thanksgiving Christmas fourth of July birthdays it seems like the fairs one of those times… Sometimes you'll see couples walking around or whatnot but even then, they're always with the group of people and it's usually family, so it seems to be one of those times, where people really take seriously that you know, this is a family event, and this is something that we need to make a memory with our family.

I bring this exchange back up to point out that, once we have considered the combination of commonplaces at work in DJ's definitions of the fair (fun, family, and tradition) and the positioning of the fair as other to the tense, dangerous national context, we can better read the stress on the need to return to these types of family and place-based rituals that attending this fair represents in his response. He says, *this is something that we need: to make a memory with our family.* DJ also referenced marketing efforts to align the Carolina Classic Fair with a local news high school football game of the week promotion. High school football, with its southern and seasonal accompanying ideas, is also connected by high schools and colleges to the practice of homecoming.

Another interview response that I will redraw attention to: Wes' description of his personal history with Merlefest. In the two segments of responses, you can see the pattern of family, regularity, and enjoyment paired with familiarity and return.

> Wes: Well, I started out my relationship with our office as an attendee. I've been coming to the festival since the mid 90s. I started coming with my family years ago and it's an incredible time that I look forward to every year. I would attend every year that I could after that point.

Wes' description of his relationship with Merlefest is described as a continuum. It is annual and recurring. He continues:

> I started working for the festival in 2017, so you don't get to see as much music working behind the scenes, as you would, as a fan, but you do still get to interact with fans and folks that come to the festival. A lot of times it's like a reunion where you get to see people, year after year, that you, you become more familiar with, as the years go on.

Here, Wes describes the festival as a "reunion" among "familiar" people. Like a homing beacon, this call to come back is not a frequency that can be picked up by just anyone, however. You must already have your radio tuned to the right frequency; you need to know where to look. And like homing beacons, these festivals are not calling just anyone home (though they certainly want as many attendees as they can reasonably get, for the money). Despite Ted's assertion that bluegrass music has global purchase, or the Carolina Classic's insistent on advertising their Korean barbeque selection, the southern and Appalachian coding present, even in topics that are not exclusive to those regions (family, tradition, fun), alongside the arguments presented by promoters and promotional materials mean that the audiences for these festivals are being cultivated, regionalized, through the use of a variety of regional topoi. Homecoming is oriented to time and space through return and repetition: it is a ritual return to places and behaviors that you have engaged in before. It is restorative, a return to tradition, stability, traditional roles. Homecoming itself is a topos, one of fulfilled expectations and the argument is supported by the satisfaction that comes with the fulfillment of a pattern.

Rather than the revision that region-making rhetoric aims at in publications like *The Bitter Southerner* and *Scalawag*, the cultivation of a regional audience for Merlefest and the Carolina Classic is dependent upon a kind of anti-definitional work, a blurring of the borders around southern and Appalachian. However, the reliance on conservative topoi of tradition, family, and fun to create a rhetoric of homecoming does ultimately call up places to come home

to. Place-based identities, particularly those at a regional scale, may offer rhetors a way to inspire groundedness and stability while figuring public, global contexts as destabilizing. Region-making, then, can be a conservative rhetoric when calls to identification are built on associating safety and the familiar with return to the past, the conservative formulations of family, and with lighthearted and uncritical sensory experiences with regional culture.

Place based identities and regionalizing rhetoric are not necessarily conservative and oriented toward whiteness, but the motivations and the types of identifications that these two organizations are working with are. These festivals took advantage of the uncertain public context to offer up their experiences as an opportunity for re-rooting oneself in regional identities through the practice of public performances and attendance at public events.

# CHAPTER IV: PLACE-BASED PEDAGOGY AS REGIONALIZING RHETORIC

## Introduction

Both of the institutions at which I have taught writing and literature have been in North Carolina. They are about 30 miles apart, situated in mid-sized, Piedmont cities that are home to multiple colleges and universities each. And yet, if I had assigned the same essay to writing students at both schools - say, the campus culture essay that I will detail later in this chapter[142] - I would undoubtedly have a repository of essays on UNCG/Greensboro that are quite different from the collection I have on Wake Forest/Winston Salem. [143] College writers are in specific contexts: classes that ask them to perform scholarly tasks; and they are people *with experiences* in, beyond, and before the classroom *who are experiencing* together spaces, situations, and events on a campus. I do not mean that they come to know campus in the same way as their classmates. The differences among bodies, pasts, and daily lives means that their college campus, an institution which presents a coherent identity or sense of place, will be a different place depending on which students you ask to write about it. I do mean, however, that place is a commonly held point of contact for a writing class: if you are teaching them, they have some kind of relationship with the *place*, be it UNC Greensboro, or Wake Forest, or the county community college. And for writing teachers, taking the college as not just a space to write, or an institution to write for, but also a place to write *about* is an approach that can open up an academic or professional writing course to the possibility of considering and critiquing what may at first glance seem like background facts about and agreed upon definitions of a place.

[142] In short, the campus culture essay asks students to conduct a variety of research on their campus - including field observations and rhetorical analysis - and to make an argument about the relationships among the language they see circulated and the aspects of campus life that they deem campus culture.

[143] Unfortunately, I don't have a good data set for this comparison; I have only practiced a concertedly place-based writing pedagogy since I began teaching at Wake Forest in the Fall of 2021.

A place-based writing pedagogy offers to my courses a frame that gives my students and me a core set of questions about writing and rhetoric - broad enough to sustain exploration and specific enough that we may arrive at arguable, if contingent, conclusions by the end of a semester. Students are pushed to notice, search, and question while developing research questions and pursuing theses; but they aren't so lost in the woods from the realization that they could investigate pretty much anything that they are interested in from a rhetorical or writerly position. When a writing teacher can make place a question, rather than a statement, then students are offered the opportunity to consider their college campus, and ultimately other places they have been or will go, an argument - and arguable.

My commitments and orientations to first year writing and professional writing inform my development of this particular approach to place-based writing pedagogy; and, my broader scholarly interests in the way that place shapes identity rhetoric and the rhetoricity of place itself inform the courses' questions, prompts, and learning objectives.[144] Writing is an embodied practice, shaped by the context in which it is done and the lived experiences of the writers doing the work. A writer's languages, literacies, and identification with the work of academic or professional composition are infused with the cultures they live in. Rhetoricians and writing teachers must be attuned to the inextricable influence of context - lived experiences (past and concurrent to the writing process), material aspects, and situational expectations of language and knowledge - on what and how we write. Rhetoric scholars approach this task of understanding rhetoric-in-context through theories of rhetorical ambience, ecologies, and cultures. A through line across these approaches in place. Place offers a way to apply rhetorical theory that touches on the non-human elements of knowledge and communication, the flow of people and messages

[144] Here, I mean the learning objectives and rationales that I bring to the course as an instructor, in congruence with and beyond the learning objectives set for me by the department.

that makes rhetoric vital, and the social and political powers that impress upon how we make sense of ourselves in the world. Places have nature, objects, networks, and cultures.

In order to teach writing in a way that acknowledges the complexity of forces involved in how we compose, writing teachers can adopt a place-based pedagogy. As a cultural rhetorician, I use place as a method to expose for students the way that culture and rhetoric are co-constitutive. Place-based writing pedagogy as cultural rhetorics is an approach to teaching writing that invites students and teachers to identify, critically engage, and use the rhetorics at work to define and describe a place in order to better understand how we come to think about ourselves and others in context. This chapter argues that analysis of place-based pedagogy can situate variable place-based approaches to teaching under the umbrella of cultural rhetorics. Ultimately, place-based pedagogy is a regionalizing rhetoric, with students and teachers inventing and contesting places as they write them.

## Cultural Rhetorics, Ambient Rhetorics, and Theoretical Approaches to Ecology and Place

One of the primary goals of this chapter is to demonstrate that place-based pedagogy in rhetoric and composition is a cultural rhetorics project. Implied in this goal is the assertion that place is cultural, and therefore rhetorical. The Cultural Rhetorics Consortium defines cultural rhetoric as "the study and practice of meaning-making and knowledge with the belief that all cultures are rhetorical and that all rhetorics are cultural."[145] In this definition, we can see the space for investigations into the matrices of relationships among language, identity, systems of power, environments, materiality, technology and media, and embodiment; *culture* being the capacious term that it is. Stuart Hall often wrote about culture as a site of negotiation and struggle; Gramsci defined culture with regards to the perpetuation of dominant ideologies. For

[145] "Cultural Rhetorics Consortium."

the cultural rhetorician, we can see both scholars'[146] perspectives addressed in the understanding that meaning and meaning-making are situated within cultural communities and that meaning and knowledge is (re)inforced through a constellation of social, political, economic, artistic, and performative forces.

In their article, "Interfacing Cultural Rhetorics: A History and a Call," Casie Cobos, Gabriela Raquel Ríos, Donnie Johnson Sackey, Jennifer Sano-Franchini, and Angela M. Haas claim a list of scholars as those who do cultural rhetorics work and have shaped the cultural rhetorics landscape: "Geneva Smitherman, Helen Fox, Victor Villanueva, Jacqueline Jones Royster, Shirley Wilson, Logan, LuMing Mao, Julie Lindquist, Terese Guinsatao Monberg, Ralph Cintron.[147] Cultural rhetorics theory and practice have been described and applied by rhetoricians and writing studies scholars interested in feminist rhetorics, Black rhetorics, Latinx rhetorics, rhetorics of class and labor, queer rhetorics, and Indigenous rhetorics. And while experts in these fields of inquiry use other frames and methods, place - as a factor in politics, economics, citizenship, nature and environmental issues, civil rights and social justice - can be a meaningful theoretical approach to issues of culture and identity. By outlining below scholarship on *place* from rhetoric and composition and drawing attention to the way that place can act as a crossroads for other cultural rhetorics key terms, this review of the literature will position place-based pedagogy as another kind of invitation for teachers and students to take a cultural rhetorics orientation to the writing classroom.

Rhetoric and composition's concern with place is persistent and has ancient origins: Plato's interest in the spatial and metaphorical difference between city-center and beyond;

[146] And of course others: Althusser, etc.
[147] Casie Cobos et al., "Interfacing Cultural Rhetorics: A History and a Call," *Rhetoric Review* 37, no. 2 (April 3, 2018): 139–54, https://doi.org/10.1080/07350198.2018.1424470.

Burke's *scene* in the dramatistic pentad; Cedillo and Bratta's positionality stories as student-centered pedagogy[148]. Where a person is -- where their body is in space and nature, the time/place/constraints that surround them at a given moment, where they are in relation to others and to institutions with/without/within which they write and speak -- has remained of interest to rhetoricians across theoretical and practical formulations of the discipline. Because context is so central to the concerns of rhetoric, how we draw attention to the place(s) where rhetoric and rhetorical study happens - including but not limited to the college town, college campus, the writing classroom - is strategic definitional work on behalf of writing teachers.

Related to the idea of place is space, and in spatial rhetoric scholarship we can see how place shapes our understanding of self and others in learning contexts. Jess Enoch's 2008 article, "A Woman's Place Is in the School: Rhetorics of Gendered Space in Nineteenth Century America," outlines the shift in descriptions and designs of the classroom space in New England from a masculine, authoritarian, public space to a site for women's work.[149] Enoch defines rhetorics of space as "those material and discursive practices that work to compose and enhance a space," offering to readers and occupiers of space "what a space should be, what it should do, and what should go inside it" (276). Enoch's use of the phrase, "to compose and enhance a space," is important. It points to the function of place and space rhetoric as inventive and revisional. Enoch details how nineteenth century classrooms - and the rhetorics of the classroom - changed as the definition of an appropriate schoolteacher and effective pedagogy changed. The classroom became cleaner, homey-er, and more concerned with beauty as the result of an effort

[148] Christina V. Cedillo and Phil Bratta, "Relating Our Experience: The Practice of Positionality Stories in Student-Centered Pedagogy," *College Composition and Communication* 71, no. 2 (December 2019): 215–40. Cedillo and Bratta offer stories of their lived experiences that serve as "academic counternarratives," which - among other possibilities - offer students examples of the interactions between (marginalized) identities and the places and cultures within which they work (academia).

[149] Jessica Enoch, "A Woman's Place Is in the School: Rhetorics of Gendered Space in Nineteenth-Century America," *College English* 70, no. 3 (January 2008): 275–95.

to transform New England's prison-like schools. Space design, thus, validated women's burgeoning authority in classrooms because the domestic space was women's space. As proponents of changes to New England's educational system -- like physical improvements to schools, shifts toward moral and affectionate teaching (rather than corporal punishment and strict authority), and widespread introduction of women to the teaching profession -- used a gendered rhetoric of space to garner support for tangible changes, they also changed the ideological landscape of education. The kind of person allowed in the classroom and the expected behavior, tenor, and emphasis of the classroom changed.[150] It became possible for the teacher (and her students) to be feminine/female, both in the minds of the greater American public **and** in the lived experiences of women who went to work and girls who went to school. Work in spatial rhetorics, then, demonstrates that the borders around spaces (like the classroom) are drawn and redrawn through language, that what belongs in a space can be rewritten, and, that individually held and ideological identities are changed/changeable through spatial rhetoric. *Place* rhetoric, similarly, can compose and revise the borders of *location* and the associated individual and ideological identities.

Beyond the role that place can play in norms, behavior, and identity, place is actively involved in the creation and circulation of messages. Ecology has been a generative and popular metaphor for discussing and complicating the relationships among audiences, messages, rhetors, constraints -- pushing the discipline past a view of the static situation as a backdrop and frame to concrete rhetorical acts, and toward the vital role of the ambience involved in knowledge-making. *Place* is necessarily related to this enterprise of figuring out the influence of everything non-subject-oriented. Rhetoric and composition scholars continue to have to deal with issues of

[150] Enoch.

place as they navigate the proliferation of digital media and technology, expanded and shifted perspectives on identity, embodiment, publics, and materiality.

Jenny Rice's frequently cited "Unframing Models of Public Distribution: From Rhetorical Situation to Rhetorical Ecologies,"[151] takes the Keep Austin Weird campaign as its object of analysis, taking care to emphasize the fluidity and dynamism present in the individual and collective rhetorical acts of the campaign. Notably, the collection of messages and rhetorical moments serves to argue for a city culture (weirdness), reminding us of the relationship between culture and place. Her book *Distant Publics: Development Rhetoric and the Subject of Crisis,*[152] seeks to demonstrate the rhetorical strategies at play with regards to place, publics, and urban development projects. Her stated goal is an intervention into the production of public subjects, interested and participatory in public crises. She also makes a special note in the introductory chapter to connect her place-based rhetorical project to pedagogy: situating herself as a "teacher of rhetoric and writing" who has the "unique advantage" of the opportunity to "encourage students to be different kinds of subjects… ones who relate differently to the world around them" (p.6). Both of Rice's projects, here, establish the centrality of place to available means of persuasion and people and collectives' sense of efficacy in public-civic participation.

Nathan Shepley, in "Rhetorical-Ecological Links in Composition History," writes that a significant contribution of ecological models of rhetoric is that they "frame texts not as a single moment of action from a writer-rhetor but as sites of a series of diachronic interactions between people and ideologies."[153]

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[151] Jenny Edbauer, "Unframing Models of Public Distribution: From Rhetorical Situation to Rhetorical Ecologies," *Rhetoric Society Quarterly* 35, no. 4 (Fall 2005): 5–24.
[152] Jenny Rice, *Distant Publics: Development Rhetoric and the Subject of Crisis* (University of Pittsburgh Press, 2012), http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/uncg/detail.action?docID=2039405.
[153] Nathan Shepley, "Rhetorical-Ecological Links in Composition History | Enculturation," *Enculturation*, February 28, 2013, https://www.enculturation.net/rhetorical-ecological-links.

Ecology as a metaphor for the relationship between meaning-making and place has also been criticized for its reliance on figurative language; Gabriela Ríos and Matthew Ortoleva have explained that indigenous relationalities between humans and their environments highlight the real, non metaphorical communicative and meaning-making relationships between land and people.[154][155] In her article, "Cultivating Land-Based Literacies and Rhetorics," Gabriela Ríos describes a theory of social change - demonstrated by the Coalition of Immokalee Workers - that, rather than relying on textual forms of communication, emphasizes and "recognizes the ways in which land can produce relations and recognizes the value of embodied ways of knowing." In "Let's Not Forget Ecological Literacy," Ortoleva points to a gap in the literacy studies scholarship, a lack of acknowledgement of what he calls ecological literacy: "the ways in which humans understand their interconnectedness to biotic and abiotic communities." Ortoleva's theory of place and language operates on both a local and global scale. He explains it further as "understanding material and discursive relationships, and how these relationships are created, maintained, modified, solidified, and radically changed by acts of language;" and goes on to emphasize his theory's investment in ecological and sustainability concerns, writing "[t]hat acts of language have direct impact on physical environments and can have significant consequences for life on the planet." This means that a place-based pedagogy must be as attuned to the ways that what we produce or compose moves and acts on places as much as those places shape what we can and do make.

[154] Gabriela Raquel Ríos, "Cultivating Land-Based Literacies and Rhetorics," *Literacy in Composition Studies* 3, no. 1 (March 2015): 60–70.
[155] Matthew Ortoleva, "Let's Not Forget Ecological Literacy," *Literacy in Composition Studies* 1, no. 2 (October 31, 2013): 66–73, https://doi.org/10.21623/1.1.2.5.

Another arm of the ecological model of rhetoric is the work done in rhetoric of networks and digital space. Jeff Rice, in *Digital Detroit: Rhetoric and Space in the Age of the Network*[156] demonstrates the role of place in invention and arrangement via mapping tools and their relationship to his invention of a Digital Detroit. He argues for the use of digital mapping tools (like Google Maps) as a rhetorical enterprise because of the way their use creates knowledge about a place - borders, features, paths, flows - that is mutable and negotiable. He also contrasts the "rhetoric of efficiency" that Google Maps uses when proposing the quickest routes around Detroit with the alternate routes he chose when working at Wayne State; those routes he associates with the "database" (his way of conceptualizing the memory bank of sights, sounds, people, places, and neighborhood features) that makes up *his* Detroit. He writes that to travel to Detroit is to "share a series of images and moments along the way, which are stored, processed, and eventually used to create a personalized database of space where each element engages another in a variety of ways. Through the sharing of data, these engagements cause me to form a meaning," (p. 54). Ultimately, Rice argues that his personalized knowledge database - his Detroit - demonstrates that when viewed as a network of memories, ideas, affects, perceptions, and experiences past and present, *place* has a shifting identity (52) and perpetual inventive potential, never fully encapsulated as data entries in the database are revised or replaced with new interactions with the place. Mapping, networks, and travel as rhetorical and place-making, thus, demonstrate for writing teachers that our movement through and around places is a site rich for opportunity to explore with students how our interactions with our environment constantly create and recreate meaning. Taking Rice's approach, by attending to place and movement in our classrooms, we are creating with students new maps and trajectories through places; we create

[156] Jeff Rice, *Digital Detroit: Rhetoric and Space in the Age of the Network* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2012).

new connections, new folds and interfaces [157] that invent place, rather than describe or document it.

Place encapsulates more than people, what they do, the tools they use, and the messages they create. Ambient rhetorical theories, while focused more on issues of materiality than culture, are not necessarily theoretically oppositional to the beliefs about meaning-making espoused by cultural rhetoric; instead, the attention to the intimate involvement of human embodiment, senses, perceptions, and contingent-contextual moments of rhetoric - within a vast and dynamic web of interaction - overlap with the understanding of rhetoric as cultural. Culture itself is a vast, dynamic web of interaction among human and nonhuman, language and environment and bodies. Thomas Rickert's *Ambient Rhetoric*[158] builds upon place-focused, ecological rhetorical frames and argues for the necessity of an emplaced understanding of rhetoric, saying that rhetorical theory and practice "must diffuse outward to include the material environment, things (including the technological), our own embodiment, and a complex understanding of ecological relationality as participating in rhetorical practices and their theorization" (p. 3). Rhetorical practice includes teaching: theoretical models of place and rhetoric encourage writing teachers to create opportunities for students to explore that network of meaning-making elements that Rickert and others describe, and to compose projects that might move out from the classroom into other rhetorical contexts.

## Pedagogical Uptakes of Place

As scholars of new media, technology, and composition have argued (Rice, Rivers, Clark), the writing classroom is a dynamic, moving, living place. As a teacher of rhetoric and writing, I recognize the potential of the classroom as a site for conversations on the rhetoricity of

[157] Rice, "Introducing Regional Rhetorics: From Architectonics to Tectonics."
[158] Thomas Rickert, *Ambient Rhetoric: The Attunements of Rhetorical Being* (Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2013).

place -- especially considering the many different configurations of place that hold or influence the higher education classroom (campus/system, city/urban, rural, regional).

Writing instructors approach course design in a host of ways, accounting for institutional and labor differences, departmental contexts and general education requirements, methodological commitments and instructor research interests. Place-based pedagogy is an approach to teaching that makes explicit and integral in a course the questions of *where*: where from? Where to? Whereabout? Where are we? In disciplines concerned with language and meaning, this can be further understood as an approach to teaching that uses *place* as a way to select readings (choosing only fiction set or written in Mississippi for a literature course), or design assignments (creating rhetorical projects whose outcomes aim at policy changes on the campus where you teach), or make assessment and grading decisions (co-creating a rubric with for a project that assesses the work based on how it addresses the goals and needs of a local nonprofit). Place based pedagogy also includes an awareness by the instructor - one that is ideally communicated to the students - of the particular issues, interests, public concerns, opportunities, events, expectations, or discourses of the place in which they are teaching and learning. Put simply, place-based pedagogy notices and addresses where we are teaching and learning as intimately connected to what we are teaching and learning. Below is a selection of approaches. The first few are more portable, less tied to a specific environment, adoptable and adaptable. The last - Donehower, Hogg, and Shell's *Rural Literacies* - is the most encompassing of the place-based pedagogy models I have included.

Place-based pedagogy has been explicitly discussed in literature classrooms. In James Cahalan's "Teaching Hometown Literature: A Pedagogy of Place[159]," he details his approach to

[159] James M. Cahalan, "Teaching Hometown Literature: A Pedagogy of Place," *College English* 70, no. 3 (January 2008): 249–74.

teaching literature via "hometown authors." Informed by ecocriticism, regionalism, and place studies, Cahalan's hometown literature course(s) ask students to learn and think about the connections between writers, their hometowns, and the writing they produced about those places. Class conversations include the influence of social context, environments, and local histories on literature, as well as the relationships between place and (author) identity that are played out in the texts that they read. Cahalan's place-based approach to literature does a kind of positioning or highlighting of the importance of context in the creative, inventive process and in the reception and perception of a piece of writing -- similar to teacher-scholars of composition and literacy.

Nathaniel Rivers describes an ecological approach to rhetoric and composition education in "Geocomposition in Public Rhetoric and Writing Pedagogy," and similarly with Ryan P. Weber in "Ecological, Pedagogical, Public Rhetoric," argues for attention to omnipresent and mundane texts in the students' environments for rhetorical analysis projects for first year writers. Using a geocaching project and a rhetorical ecologies and institutional change project respectively, the two articles collaboratively demonstrate that a rhetoric and composition pedagogy focused on the particulars of space, place, and movement demonstrates potential for increased engagement in public discourse and an awareness of rhetoric's involvement in culture and power at a variety of levels.

Donehower, Hogg, and Shell in *Rural Literacies*[160] argue for a "critical, public pedagogy[161]" in response to perceptions of (il)literacy in rural communities. Specifically, they note that "from images of illiterate hillbillies to ignorant rednecks, the predominant

[160] Kim Donehower, Charlotte Hogg, and Eileen E. Schell, *Rural Literacies* (Southern Illinois University Press, 2007), http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/uncg/detail.action?docID=1979896.
[161] Using Henry Giroux's call to action

representation of rural literacy has been those of extreme deficiency," (37). This stereotype of deficiency is an example of a larger rhetoric of place related to rurality and extended to a number of places conceptually linked with rurality; though, the hillbilly and redneck examples point at Appalachia and the U.S. South, respectively. Linking literacy, rhetoric, place, and culture, the authors demonstrate the deficiency stereotype in rural literacies by presenting an exchange in which a North Dakota student in a college literature course is told, "You're from North Dakota. You have no culture. My job is to give you some."

Their pedagogical model, offered in the final chapter, is built on a metaphor of sustainability. It presents strategies from first year writing courses for incorporating rural literacies as core sites of inquiry into rhetoric and composition's disciplinary questions, rather than relegating them to niche interests or the field's periphery. Under the sustainability metaphor, the authors turn away from an understanding of rural literacies in relation to - and read as deficient in comparison to - urban and suburban models (159). Instead, their sustainability model understands "rural literacies as adaptive practices that change over time to respond to short- and long-term needs of the communities they service" (155). The three exemplar courses they provide - first year writing courses focused on "media representations, food politics, and place," - are examples of place-based composition pedagogy that moves *place* beyond a theme or frame toward a pedagogical method particularly potent for cultural rhetorics scholars and teachers. All three of the described courses ask students to do what Charlotte Hogg describes in her place and writing course as a "critical pedagogy of place:" "challenge dominant ideologies about their place [and] their investment in and identification with these ideologies" (181)[162].

[162] In her Media Representations of Rural Literacies writing course, Donehower's students critique representations of rural people and their literacies in media; in her sophomore research writing class on food politics, Schell's students address the food industrial complex - a network of place, rurality, and consumerism within which everyone

In centering *place* in their classrooms - particularly place(s) outside academia's urban orientation, places with cultures perceived to lack the literacy of urban and suburban places - the authors of *Rural Literacies* use place as a method through which to investigate, with their students, cultural rhetoric's concerns with "the myriad ways that culture and rhetoric emerge."[163] As *Rural Literacies* demonstrates, a pedagogy of place in the rhetoric and composition classroom allows teachers and students to address place-based and culture-based stereotypes about literacy. Also, this approach encourages students in writing classrooms to consider the way place shapes broader conversations with respect to culture and identity.

Similarly to Donehower, Hogg, and Shell, I argue for a critical, place-based pedagogy as an invitation for students to grapple with our discipline's big questions: *how are truths invented and configured? How can we account for the contextual, the contingent, the marginalized, the powerful, the quiet and loud, the human and nonhuman in our invention, contestation, and negotiation of knowledge? What is the role of rhetoric in our understanding of self(s)?* By framing writing pedagogy as an emplaced practice, the remainder of this chapter will present rationales and strategies for teaching academic and professional writing with an eye toward place, culture, and identity. Education researcher David A. Greenwood[164] argues that a critical place-based pedagogy "aims to contribute to the product of educational discourses and practices that explicitly examine the place-specific nexus between environment, culture, and education."[165] By approaching this from the cultural rhetorics assertion that all rhetoric is cultural and the

is somehow positioned; and in Hogg's "Messin' with Texas: Writing About Place," she creates a temporary sense of shared Texan-ness to shape the course around a discourse of place-based identity.

[163] Phil Bratta and Malea Powell, "Introduction to the Special Issue: Entering the Cultural Rhetorics Conversations," *Enculturation*, no. 21 (April 20, 2016), https://www.enculturation.net/entering-the-cultural-rhetorics-conversations.

[164] Formerly David A. Gruenewald

[165] David A. Gruenewald, "The Best of Both Worlds: A Critical Pedagogy of Place," *Educational Researcher* 32, no. 4 (2003): 3–12.

acceptance of place as culturally-rhetorically composed, place-based pedagogy can help college writers engage with their situatedness -- their *being in place* -- as a crucial part of writing.

Argument: Theory

Here, I argue that using place to teach writing can be useful to explain - for teachers and students - rhetorical invention, the role of the body in research and writing, and composing with attention to genre as rhetorical and cultural. By situating place-based pedagogy within cultural rhetorics conversation, I demonstrate that a) place-based pedagogy is rhetorics work and b) place is a key term for cultural rhetoricians to address - one that connects classrooms with other spaces in which we pay attention to rhetoric at work. As I laid out in this chapter's thesis, a place-based approach to teaching writing invites writers to *identify*, critically *engage* with, and *use* rhetorics of place and culture; the following section is arranged accordingly. Ultimately, that place based writing pedagogy invites writers recognize invention at work, note and foreground the role of the body in knowing and writing, and make writing choices depending on what context asks of them is due to the way that teaching with place at the center is to bring forth the borders and definitions of those places: contestable, invented, changing, and porous. Place based pedagogy is a region-making rhetoric because it asks students and teachers to think about themselves, what they read, and what they create *in place*.

***Identify: Places and Commonplaces***

Place-based pedagogy in the writing classroom first and foremost draws attention to place as a key term for analysis, use, discussion, or speculation for teachers and for students. As I wrote earlier: place becomes a question. More than a theme or an umbrella under which students can find essay topics or teachers can find readings, *place* in the writing classroom can help us understand where writers get their ideas and some approaches to understanding rhetoric's first canon: invention. "It is difficult," Sidney Dobrin writes in *Ecocomposition: Theoretical and*

*Pedagogical Approaches*, "if not impossible, to separate the writing from the place and the place from the writing,"[166] I read her sentence here in two ways: in the first, *writing* is a noun (product). A second option is to read *writing* as a progressive verb (process). That one - the progressive verb option - highlights the inherency of place to the creative and inventive process of writing.

Place-based pedagogy in the writing and rhetoric classroom might manifest as a grappling with some definitionally difficult rhetorical concepts with respect to invention, like the ancient Greek *topos* or *chōra*; both terms have been taken up in rhetorical theorizing about place, meaning, and our relationships to place and meaning as rhetoric using creatures[167]. While I find that the ancient Greek terminology our discipline throws around is often boring or alienating to students, I believe that a pedagogy concerned with place can find examples of rhetorical invention that represent topic and choric ways of thinking about writing without being beholden to the vocabulary. For example, to ask writing students in a pre-writing activity to consider what the word *home* inspires for them - what images, feelings, idioms, expressions, representations, memories - is to invite them to tap into a place that holds onto those many associations. By turning toward *home*, a group of writers could identify and verbalize a dynamic, moving, tense, bodily, personal, cultural, intellectual mess and confluence of ideas. Those ideas are a conglomerate of experiences, senses, perceptions, and thoughts that both came together at the time of assignment - "Think about *home."* - and already existed for them, as a group and as individuals. The place-based ancient Greek rhetorical concepts - like topos, or chōra get at that

[166] Sidney I. Dobrin, "Writing Takes Place," in *Ecocomposition : Theoretical and Pedagogical Approaches*, ed. Christian Weisser and Sidney I. Dobrin (State University of New York Press, 2001).
[167] To paraphrase Burke's classic definition of man

relationship between place (real and conceptual) and invention or creativity. Rhetorical theory that addresses place in these ways can shape a place-based writing pedagogy.

Choric and topical invention are different but overlapping. Chōra - literally intermediary the place beyond city-center but not yet the out-there of nature, is used in Plato's Timaeus[168] to describe a kind of third form, not Ideal or Being, but something closer to *Becoming*. Described as a receptacle, womb like, that contains and facilitates change, chōra is a way to think about the places where creativity dwells. Classic definitions of topoi include Aristotle's, where he describes the topics as lines of argument upon which persuasive arguments rely; patterns and places to which a rhetor can go for argument fodder.[169] Rickert[170] writes about chōra much like the way I think and write about the topoi: as dynamic wells of ideas - culturally imbued but not wholly manufactured by people[171] - by which our ideas are fed. Here, I mean to draw attention back to the environmental and the material. As I argued in Chapter 1, topoi are influenced by interactions with environments via the senses. When drawing together place and the topoi or chōra, we can begin to understand these somewhat shared repositories of ideas as functionally inextricable from the lived, sensory experiences of whomever is doing the inventing or arguing. When we manage to name and describe some parts of those concepts, we can use them differently, critique their employment is definitions that we seek to refute, and through our use and critique, complicate and revise them[172].

Theoretical uptakes of choric invention, especially, are integrated with the non-human parts of place. "[T]he chōra transforms our senses of beginning, creation, and invention by

[168] Plato, *Timaeus*.
[169] Aristotle, *Rhetoric*.
[170] Rickert, *Ambient Rhetoric: The Attunements of Rhetorical Being*.
[171] At least not without input/influence from interactions/experiences with environments.
[172] This is a lot of what I argue in chapter one that contemporary southern culture publications aim to do with sensory topoi, like the Southern landscape and Southern table.

placing those activities concretely within materials environments, informational spaces, and affective (or bodily) registers" (p. 45). According to Rickert, a main difference between choric invention and topic invention is the nonbiolgical v. human agency. In a first-year writing or professional writing course, I am not advocating for a deep dive into Rickert, or Kristeva, or Derrida in order to have students better grasp an ancient Greek understanding of invention. I am advocating for classroom activities and assignments that invite students to consider and actively engage in writing, pre-writing, and research practices that identify the contextual elements at work in a given essay or other composition. If we are asked to write about campus, what do we already know - from personal experiences, from cultural or common-sense knowledge, from the way the quad is designed or the classroom is set up - that works its way into what we write about our campus or what our campus administrators say about campus? Can we brainstorm that? Explore it in freewriting? If we sit and write down what we notice, sense, perceive with our minds and bodies about a place, what can we learn and how can that influence what and how we write? Engaging place and invention -- which, when we acknowledge the false dichotomy/border of inside-the-subject and outside, necessarily involves the body, the senses, and affect -- through a place-based pedagogy of rhetoric and writing that makes explicit that involvement of the world and senses in rhetorical invention, memory, arrangement. Place invites students to (re)consider their writing as participatory in contextual meaning-making.

As scholars like Jess Enoch and Jeff Rice demonstrate, place is rhetorical, in that any discussion of discrete characteristics or borders can be negotiated. "Ideas" Rickert writes, referencing Jenny Rice's work on rhetorical ecologies, "are permeated by affect, and place is less a stable notion than an affective, circulating, and evolving series of encounters.[173]" In addition to

[173] Rickert, *Ambient Rhetoric: The Attunements of Rhetorical Being*., p. 44.

paying attention to how place is involved in invention broadly - as in, the context in which we produce writing is enmeshed with the content that we produce - writing teachers can help students notice how *place itself* is invented. That "affective, circulating, and evolving series of encounters" that Rickert names is an ambient theory way to say that *place* - any place that we understand *as a place* - is rhetorical. To revisit the campus culture essay, we can then ask students to consider not only questions like, *how does Wake Forest or UNC Greensboro shape your understanding of the college experience?* But also, questions like, *who and what is involved in telling you what and where Wake Forest* ***is****? What do they stand to gain from this definition of UNC Greensboro, and not that one? Are your experiences or the experiences of others in line with that, or not?* With a place-based pedagogy, a writing teacher can think and teach about rhetorical invention in a way that deals with - even when we can never fully encapsulate - the context that shapes what we read and write.

***Engage: Place and the Body***

As I argue in chapter one, tapping into the senses is a way for a writer to inspire identification with audiences and situate them, engage their bodies, in the setting or topic (place) of a particular piece. Here, I will argue that teaching writers to acknowledge, write from, and with their bodies and their senses is a pedagogical strategy that encourages students to resist separating the mind from the body in writerly and scholarly work. Ultimately, this turn toward the relationships among bodies, place, and language in the writing classroom is a cultural rhetorics project.

Rhetoric and compositionists, as well as scholars from other disciplines, have written about the body in academic work. Sara Ahmed, in *Queer Phenomology: Orientations, Objects, Others*, writes that bodies are oriented differently to objects and to work depending upon that

body's experiences throughout time. "Bodies acquire orientations through repetitions,"[174] she writes, discussing not only her body's orientation to her writing desk but bodies' habitual and compounding gendering through a lifetime of repeated experiences with gender and sexualization. Knowledge - of how to approach and sit at a writing desk, of how to behave in space, or of what being in a particular place is like - is worn into the body through the body's experiences (with the desk, the space, or the place). Ahmed's orientations sound similar to the descriptions of embodiment in rhetoric by scholars of personal and embodied writing; the work of the mind is always, always the work of the body and that body is always in place and space with other people and objects.

Will Banks' "Written Through the Body: Disruptions and "Personal" Writing,"[175] argues that pedagogy without the bodies of students and teachers is an impoverished pedagogy (22). Lacking an explicit acknowledgement of the vitality of the body in writing, separatist approaches to mind and body, emotionality and rationality, can neither adequately address place nor culture, and for cultural rhetoricians to subscribe to the belief that all rhetoric is cultural - it follows that a classroom which does not address the body does a poor job of addressing either rhetoric or writing. In a place-based pedagogy, explicit acknowledgement of the body's role in sensation, perception, and relation to the practice and the product of writing can happen across the reading and writing process. Selections of texts for shared analysis - like Jamaica Kincaid's "Seeing England For The First Time," or Gloria Anzaldúa's "How to Tame a Wild Tongue," - can demonstrate how the body means and makes meaning; both Kincaid and Anzaldúa in those write about bodies, languages, cultures, and place, and each argues and illustrates with embodied

[174] Sara Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others*, First Edition (Durham: Duke University Press Books, 2006)., p. 58.
[175] William P. Banks, "Written through the Body: Disruptions and 'Personal' Writing," *College English* 66, no. 1 (2003): 21–40, https://doi.org/10.2307/3594232.

language. Sensory writing activities and field observations that are made central to the research process for academic essays on place emphasize the role of the body in research and argument.

Banks additionally points out that embodied writing is not only writing about the body specifically but writing about topics that are inherently embodied - topics like violence - and approaches to writing and maneuvers in writing that are representative of the ways that body act in response to scholarly work; hedging, tentatively arguing, half-steps are cited examples. "Embodied writing," he writes, "comes from embodied thinking." His article uses a number of vignettes to illustrate embodied/personal writing. Banks explains embodied thinking and knowing through his reflections on a graduate seminar in linguistics where his loud, abrasive professor reminded him so thoroughly of his older brother, that he could not relate to and know that class and that experience in a way removed from the bodily reactions and experiences held in his body from interactions with that brother. He writes, "Any 'theory' I now have for that class, that teacher, myself, is now 'personal.' I carry it in my body. I do not know where I end and it begins,"[176] Like Banks' understanding of that graduate course - any experiences and understandings, thinkings, knowings, writings about a place will be tied up with our bodily experiences in that place. Assigning Bank's article itself, or popular essays like David Sedaris' "Me Talk Pretty One Day," can link - for students - the depth of the relationship between places, bodies, and the contexts in which we learn and write.

Abby Knoblauch, in "Bodies of Knowledge: Definitions, Delineations, and Implications of Embodied Writing in the Academy"[177] clarifies embodiment terminology: embodied language, embodied knowledge, and embodied rhetoric. She writes that though they have some

[176] Banks.
[177] Knoblauch, "Bodies of Knowledge: Definitions, Delineations, and Implications of Embodied Writing in the Academy."

overlapping uses and applications, they are categories of embodiment talk in rhetoric and composition that benefit from distinct definitions. Embodied language "calls forth an image of the workings of the body" (52). She cites academic shop talk like "to grapple with ideas," and concepts that "bleed into one another" as examples of embodied language. Knoblauch argues that this kind of language can inspire identification or disidentification between readers and authors. Like Karma Chávez argues in "The Body: An Abstract and Actual Rhetorical Concept,"[178] whose body is represented by embodied language determines the potential for either identification or disidentification. In a place-based pedagogy of writing and rhetoric, reading and writing about place is framed by the teacher with mindfulness toward embodied language: *when writing or reading about **this** place, where is the body present? What kind of body, or whose body, is it and how is it connected to the place?*

For Knoblauch, as it is for Banks in his recounting of his experience with his graduate linguistics professor, embodied knowledge is clearly connected to the body, gut reactions, physical responses, emotions and feelings; it is making sense of the world through the body (55). Knoblauch makes a point to demonstrate that embodied responses are knowledge that can lead to creativity that led to scholarly projects (54-56). As I will outline in more detail in the practice section of this chapter, classroom activities and out-of-class assignments can be designed to encourage this process, response-to-scholarship. A writing class that invites students to pay attention to the ways that their body reacts in a particular place - that invites them to pay particular attention to their senses as part of the scholarly writing process - can potentially make clear for writers the inextricable role of the senses in their thoughts and arguments about place. When that bodily involvement in scholarly objectives is made clearer, students can then be

[178] Chávez, "The Body: An Actual and Abstract Rhetorical Concept."

invited to use the body in their writing consciously and strategically. This mirrors Knoblauch's definition of embodied rhetoric: a "purposeful effort by an author to represent aspects of embodiment within the text he or she is shaping" including when the author "attempts to decipher how these "material circumstances" affect how he or she understands the world."[179] Nathaniel Rivers, in "Geocomposition in Public Rhetoric and Writing Pedagogy," writes "our experience of place is generated at the intersection of bodies, media, and locations, which all influence each other" (p. 583). I read this as an extension of Knoblauch and Royster's attention to bodies and material circumstances, naming locations and media as specific forces alongside bodies in the experience of place. Bodies, though, experience and perceive, and are sites of mediation for understanding the world.

In order to reiterate the connection between embodiment, place, and cultural rhetorics, I turn to Raymie McKerrow's 1998 article for *Southern Journal of Communication,* "Corporeality and Cultural Rhetoric: A Site for Rhetoric's Future." McKerrow presents a theory of "embodied rhetoricity"[180] that aims to "write rhetoric into the history of women" by presenting the Body as a "site of mediation" between the self and that which is outside the self. That mediation, I propose here and aim to demonstrate for students in my classes through observation activities, can be explored through the senses. The senses - what we are able to gather and interpret via our bodies in-place, are both research and writing tools. They allow us to rhetorically engage with the places and spaces in which we recognize our bodies. As McKerow argues, this focus on the body's mediation of rhetorical spaces breaks down the nature-cultural dichotomy[181] that would

[179] Knoblauch, "Bodies of Knowledge: Definitions, Delineations, and Implications of Embodied Writing in the Academy."
[180] Raymie E. McKerrow, "Corporeality and Cultural Rhetoric: A Site for Rhetoric's Future," *Southern Communication Journal* 63, no. 4 (November 1998): 315–28, https://doi.org/10.1080/10417949809373105.
[181] McKerrow.

discourage us from critically engaging with rhetorics that seek to naturalize some aspects of place and culturalize other aspects. This is what cultural rhetoric aims to argue: rhetoric is cultural, and culture is rhetorical. It also demonstrates that our interpretation of nature or environment is folded up in our cultural knowledge and practice. This gives us - writers and rhetoricians - the opportunity to identify and interrogate those rhetorics at work in a particular *place,* bridging nature, environment, and culture.

In the first-year writing and professional writing classrooms, there are a number of opportunities to do the work of noticing rhetoric's force on bodies and writing; a place-based pedagogy can address the college campus and the workplace as places and help students note, analyze, and use the corresponding genres they will be likely to write in for each.

***Use: Place and Genre***

Until now, I have argued that place-based writing pedagogy can help students identify rhetoric at work in-place and engage the placed-ness of their bodies in the writing and research process. The next step in outlining the regionalizing effect of place-based writing and rhetoric pedagogy, and further demonstrating of the connectedness of this enterprise to the aims of cultural rhetorics, is to illustrate how this approach to teaching writing sets students up to read the genres they come across and those they are asked to create through the lens of the following questions: *what am I making? Where am I making it? Where will it go/be?* College writing is both generic and place-based -- it is called *college* writing; bounded conceptually by place, or academic writing, defined by the academy (a collection of places) or by the genre of the journal article, lab reports, or seminar paper. Professional writing, too, is genre-driven: emails, cover letters and resumes, marketing materials, presentations and slide decks, white papers, articles, web and social media copy, reports. Professional writing is also placed. Best practices, company culture, public relations, and internal and external communications all rely on a rhetoric of place

to shape how professional genres are written and circulated. Cultural Studies and Rhetorical Studies have both taken up genre, and the intersection of their approaches demonstrates the interest that place-based cultural rhetorics pedagogy should take in genre approaches to the writing classroom, as well as the importance of both place and culture to genre.

In their overview of genre studies definitions, Bawarshi and Reiff[182] outline cultural studies and rhetorical studies approaches to genre (in addition to literary and others) that are useful to establish this connection between genre, place, and cultural rhetoric. "Cultural Studies" they write, approaches genre with the goal to "examine the dynamic relationship between genres, literary texts, and socio-culture—In particular, the way genres organize, generate, normalize, and help reproduce literary as well as non-literary social actions in dynamic, ongoing, culturally defined and defining ways."[183] This means that a cultural studies approach to genre is concerned with "both examining how genres reflect and participate in legitimizing social practices and recognizing how generic distinctions maintain hierarchies of power, value, and culture"[184].

"Rhetorical Genre Studies," they write, "has tended to focus more on how genres enable their users to carry out situated symbolic actions rhetorically and linguistically, and in so doing, to perform social actions and relations, enact social roles, and frame social realities."[185] And so, a cultural rhetorics approach to teaching genres would make explicit for students social realities and symbolic actions that shape academic and professional genres. It would emphasize the role

[182] Anis S. Bawarshi and Mary Jo Reiff, "Genre in Literary Traditions," in *Genre: An Introduction to History, Theory, Research, and Pedagogy*, Reference Guides to Rhetoric and Composition (West Lafayette, Ind. : [Fort Collins, Colo.]: Parlor Press ; WAC Clearinghouse, 2010), 13–29.
[183] Bawarshi and Reiff.
[184] Bawarshi and Reiff.
[185] Bawarshi and Reiff.

of power in the (re)production of genres, and would offer students the opportunity to critique, use, and revise academic and professional genres within the course of the class.[186]

Bawarshi and Reiff go on to expand on genre in the classroom.[187] Genre studies researchers and Writing Across the Curriculum researchers are concerned with "writing transfer" or transfer of knowledge, especially from first year writing courses. A method by which they teach with transfer in mind is through genre analysis. Genre analysis approaches to teaching writing ask students to 1) collect samples of a genre, 2) identify the scene and situation in which a genre is used, including setting, participants, and purpose; 3) identify and describe patterns; and 4) analyze what those patterns say about the situation and scene.[188] Genre analysis described in this way uses place-based language, like, scene, situation. Teaching genre from a place-based pedagogical perspective can shift those from their more metaphorical operation in Bawarshi and Reiff's descriptions toward a literal (and rhetorical) analysis of how genres are shaped by place. This deepens with the kind of generic awareness that Bawarshi and Reiff outline, by leaning on the theories of embodiment and place that I have outlined earlier in this chapter. Bawarshi and Reiff write about (rhetorical) situations and scenes like Bitzer and Burke; their frame of RGS and the teaching of writing would benefit from a more ecological or ambient approach: place-based pedagogy brings this.

Student positionality - with regards to systems of power, like the college, and with regards to places and people about which they are writing - can be folded into discussion of genre. "[S]tudents can access and participate effectively in academic situations by identifying the

[186] And, where possible, we should consider opportunities for students to use and publish their work for purposes beyond the classroom.
[187] Anis S. Bawarshi and Mary Jo Reiff, "Rhetorical Genre Studies Approaches to Teaching Writing," in *Genre: An Introduction to History, Theory, Research, and Pedagogy*, Reference Guides to Rhetoric and Composition (West Lafayette, Ind. : [Fort Collins, Colo.]: Parlor Press ; WAC Clearinghouse, 2010), 189–209.
[188] Bawarshi and Reiff.

assumptions and expectations regarding subject matter, their role as writers, the role of readers, and purposes for writing embedded in the genres" (196). Taking this one step further: a rhetorical analysis of place with respect to the genres that students are reading and composing - such as writing by/about their college campus, or articles about their city or hometown, or region or nation, or company or industry - can increase critical awareness of the cultural expectations of whatever it is that they are writing or making.

Beyond understanding that genres are cultural and influenced by the places they are made and used, genre studies scholars have used place as a method for understanding how genres work. Charles Bazerman, in his 1997 chapter for *Genre and Writing: Issues, Arguments, Alternatives*, writes that genres "are locations within which meaning is constructed. Genres shape the thoughts we form and the communications by which we interact. Genres are the familiar places we go to create intelligible communicative action with each other and the guideposts we use to explore the unfamiliar."[189] Bazerman (in the quote Bawarashi and Reiff pull from "Where is the Classroom") continues to use place-based language and metaphors in his description of the genre of the classroom. For example, he writes,

> In our role as teachers we constantly welcome **strangers into the discursive landscapes** we value. But **places** that are **familiar** and important to us may not appear intelligible or **hospitable** to students we try to bring into our worlds. Students, bringing their own **road maps** of familiar communicative places and desires, would benefit from **signs posted** by those familiar with the **new academic landscape**.[190]

[189] Charles Bazerman, "The Life of the Genre, the Life in the Classroom," in *Genre and Writing: Issues, Arguments, Alternatives*, by Wendy Bishop and Hans Ostrom (Portsmouth, NH: Boynton/Cook Publishers, 1997).
[190] Emphasis mine.

And so, genres are common places that writers[191] can go to strategically use language; places that are bound by culturally configured expectations, mappable but not static. And as they are shaped by culture, by the writers/readers/users of them, genres are linked to place through the people creating, replicating, revising, and engaging them.

Genre and place together in the writing classroom helps students and teachers make and use rhetoric because they - in concert - invite them to think ambiently and ecologically in their analysis and their compositions of work. Place-based pedagogy responds to the de-contextualized use and study of genre - a critique of genre approaches to teaching writing. "RGS scholars have recommended … employing field research or ethnographic methods." in writing classrooms that use genre analysis[192]. Place-based pedagogical approaches to genre can "situate genre analysis"

Recent scholarship on place-based pedagogy in rhetoric and composition has detailed the approach's usefulness in constructing public and often multimodal composition genres[193]. I argue that place-based pedagogy also offers critical, cultural exigence[194] and rhetorical-ecological awareness of the scholarly or "college" essay and professional writing genres. The college essay, academic essay, scholarly essay, or research-based essay (however it is discussed), is a document produced almost exclusively in and for academia. Students write these for colleges, even if they are not always written on college campuses.[195] Professors teach them so that students can participate in the scholarly community, primarily of that campus though also the broader academic community. What genre analysis can do, particularly when informed by place-based

[191] Writers, at least, for my purposes. There are genres in other media, too, of course, which can be rhetorics.
[192] Bawarshi and Reiff, "Rhetorical Genre Studies Approaches to Teaching Writing."
[193] Phillip Goodwin, "Embodied Subjectivities and the City: Intervening in Local Public Debates through Multimodality," *College Composition and Communication* 72, no. 2 (December 2020): 224–50; Rice, *Digital Detroit*.
[194] Beyond the exigence of the assignment-for-a-grade
[195] Though plenty of them are written physically in the space/place of a campus.

methods in the writing classroom, is draw out the expectations and norms of the college essay and - when taught *critically* - help students see how the *placedness* of the institution of higher education: its people, borders, buildings, spaces, hierarchies, and movements: shapes what the college essay is and does. When viewed as a product of an academic culture, the college essay can be critiqued for the norms it reproduces and the literacies it privileges. It can also be mined for the types of arguments it enables and - when given the right framing - be remixed or subverted. I am thinking about, here, the kinds of revision projects I have seen from students in the last year or so; particularly memorable are the projects where arguments and evidence from an academic paper on issues pertinent to a meaningful place, like hometowns or college towns, have been revised into a genre (or genres) better suited to the people who inhabit that place.

Professional writing is often multimodal - email newsletters, marketing content, presentations, social media content - and cross-functional: internal and external, hybridized, revised, and repurposed. Place-based questions can provide writers/composers in these genres with ways to address purpose, reception, strategy, and ethics that better manage the vitality and circulation of all writing, and particularly these genres. Publication and use of professional writing genres are alive, changing, circulating, and temporary (or at least more obviously so than the way we think and talk about other genres). Place-based questions for prompting professional writing: *What am I making? Where will it go? From where am I getting the materials for its composition (including instructions and information) and how will that impact my writing?*

Take college marketing and communications content, for an example. A single story - say, a feature story on a student or member of faculty that marketing and communications find interesting - is often composed collaboratively and cross-posted widely; the story is repackaged for everything from social media content to donor solicitations, to admissions material, to

university news. Place features prominently in decisions about composition and use: *who are the targeted audiences? How can we drive traffic to X-place, either virtually or physically? How many places can this be published?* Rhetoric and composition scholars should be active in the work of professional writing instruction, as scholarship in cultural rhetoric, materiality, and embodiment make our field suited to a nuanced, theoretically supported, and socially conscious approach - if we make the effort.

Much of the work of writing teachers in colleges and universities happens in service of courses dedicated to first year writing and technical and professional writing. Developing pedagogies that effectively teach in those genres while also advancing critical approaches to rhetoric that make the shifts from prescribed hegemony toward cultural awareness, discourse communities, and multiple-contextual literacies is important work for the discipline.

Argument: Practice

For the remainder of the chapter, I demonstrate how a place-based, cultural rhetorics approach to teaching writing plays out in my first-year writing course. First, I will discuss course design and orientations, then describe my assessment choices and offer reflections on those as they relate to this chapter's central thesis. I outline assignment types and their corresponding learning goals, including the language used to prompt students for each assignment. Finally, I conclude with the relationship between this chapter's theoretical and practical arguments, critical pedagogy, and regionalizing rhetoric. Critical pedagogy is always a work in progress, and much of the work of critical pedagogy is also done on the fly, in teacher-to-student interactions, and in the flow of a given class session. My goal is to demonstrate the place-making and regionalizing rhetorical moves that go into crafting prompts and considering learning goals when taking up a place-based approach to teaching writing.

### *Place Based Pedagogy: Course Design and Materials*

The course materials included below support a first-year writing course at Wake Forest University. The course was titled Writing Seminar: The Rhetoric of Place and Identity. Students participate in place-based activities and assignments that take a cultural rhetorics approach to place and identity.

#### Syllabus and Assessment Policy

The syllabus and assessment policy is grounded in ungrading, flexibility, and trust. The course's framing questions begin a series of arguments that place is never fixed, and that the ways in which we move through, about, and around a place as we live, research, and write do much to draw and redraw the borders of a place. The assessment policy is centered on a grading contract that combines labor-based approaches and ungrading. The goal of the approach to assessment is to draw attention to the ways that grading schema are not-given tools to assess learning, and that other genres of assessment are possible and even better suited to the context of the writing classroom-as-place(s).

#### Learning Goals for the Course

- **Invention**: in the course, we will investigate the ways we argue and think about place, and how places are arguments, ready to be invented and deployed for a variety of purposes. Students will regularly read and write arguments about place and will hopefully come to understand the classroom as a place whose borders they, their teachers, and the institution of Wake Forest (and potentially others) define and revise.
- **Mindfulness and the Body:** In a class about place and identity, the body is key. We will take the body as an important part of the research and writing process - tapping into our senses as evidence, considering the way our senses are engaged in attempts to persuade or identify with us, and making note of the way that our senses help us engage, learn, and write in ways that are difficult to quantify and assess via traditional grading schema.

- **Critical Genre Awareness:** The argumentative essay, one of the primary genres of this course and of many seminar-style courses, will be examined not as an exemplar of writing style but as one genre, created within a specific context, *for a specific kind of place* (the academy). We will name its key features and interrogate when it serves us as an approach to writing and when it does not.
- **Reflexive Writing Practice:** Self-reflection and assessment will recur throughout class. As part of our reflective practice, we will take note of the material and embodied aspects of our writing as well as what we produce, and we will consider the ways in which our writing might move, might reach new places, might be tailored to and creating specific places.

**Syllabus Excerpt**

*Course Theme: The Rhetoric of Place and Identity.* In this seminar, we will focus on the rhetorics of place as a way to practice a variety of writing skills, as well as to think critically about the relationships among identity, place, and language. The course will ask you to think critically about the places with which you identify and interact. How does place influence your life - back home, here at Wake Forest, and in other places that are meaningful to you? What does it mean to say that you're from somewhere? What do we hear when someone else tells us they're from somewhere, or live somewhere, or going somewhere? Through our reading and writing assignments, we will explore the way we talk, and write, about places in this class, and take a critical look at how and when places come to be meaningful to us. You will practice your observation and interview skills, look closely at texts for the way language taps into place as ways to make meaning, and build arguments that help us better understand how writing is tied to where we are and where we've been. Projects will include mindful notetaking, interviewing,

annotations and reflections on written texts (instructor-assigned and student-chosen), short essays incorporating field research and secondary sources, and self- and peer-assessments.

Weekly Reading and Writing

***Assigned Readings***

I chose readings for this course along three lines of thinking: 1) readings that offer perspectives on writing that are situated rather than universal (and primarily situated within a higher education context) 2) readings that present arguments on language that demonstrate relationships among language, place, and identity, and 3) readings that are arguments about the specific places the class will write about.

***Reading List***

- *Bad Ideas About Writing*, selected chapters
- Silvia's "Specious Barriers"
- Lamott's "Shitty First Drafts"
- *Wake Forest Magazine*
- Enelow-Snyder, "Austin Can't Be Stopped"
- Downtown Winston Salem Partnership, website
- Old Salem Museum and Gardens, website
- Carolina Classic Fair, website
- Rice, "Networks, Place, and Rhetoric"
- Anzaldúa, "How to Tame a Wild Tongue"
- Bailey and Heynen, "Sticky (and sweet) redemption"
- *Black in Appalachia*, selected episodes
- *Dolly Parton's America*, "Dolly Parton's America"

- One week of select your own reading, where students come equipped to their individual conferences with a reading they have selected that explores place (or discuss with me in conference)

***Readings Learning Goals***

1. Offer students perspectives on writing that are situated rather than universal. As discussed in the Genre and place section above, I aim to explore with students the idea that the writing they are asked to participate in for their college courses is part of a genre-driven approach to composition and learning. Considering writing a craft, with expectations and approaches, tools and techniques, that can be adopted **and** resisted whenever a writer is in a particular place, with a particular task. This is a useful learning goal for place-based professional writing as well.
2. Present arguments on language that demonstrate relationships among language, place, and identity. A selection of the readings and podcasts explore perspectives on language, culture, and identity. Discussion and analysis of these aims to offer examples of this type of argumentation as well as possible sources for engagement within student essays.
3. Explore arguments about the specific places the class will write about. Readings about Wake Forest and Winston Salem, as well as the choose your own reading assignment that corresponds with the final essay (Place and Identity), aim to provide students with examples of place-based rhetoric and place based identity cultivation in action.

***Weekly Writings.***

Students will keep up with a weekly writing practice that combines a critical eye on their course progress with an analysis of weekly readings. Weekly readings about place, identity, culture, and language will be discussed in class, but these weekly writings offer students the opportunity to synthesize discussions with their own experiences of reading.

***Weekly Writing General Instructions***

In your portfolios (Google Drive or similar), you will maintain a Weekly Writing practice. Each Monday throughout the semester, you should submit your weekly writing. There will be week-specific questions and adjustments added in each Weekly Writing Assignment on Canvas, but the general layout for each week is as follows:

In a paragraph or two of around 300 words, please respond to the following:

1. What were your key takeaways from last week's assignments, readings, **and** class discussions (address all - assignments, readings, and discussions)?
2. What were your "writing wins?" (Things you were successful in)
3. What are your writing goals for this week? Include goals that address your growth and learning and also the tasks you need to accomplish for the class. Be as specific as you can.

***Weekly Writing Learning Goals***

1. Regular attention to the practice of writing
2. Integration and wrestling with the readings.
3. An attention to the way place and place-making rhetoric appears in their lives outside of the classroom.

***Selected Prompts***

*Weekly Writing 1:* In a paragraph or two (around 300 total words), please respond to the following:

What are your goals for learning in this class? Think deeply about what you'd like to walk away in December having accomplished, as a result of 16 week's worth of work on writing.

1. What are your strengths as a writer and a thinker?
2. What would you like me to know about you, as a student?

3. What is one piece of writing, art, or other media that you think is about *place*? What do you think that piece is saying/arguing/teaching about place?

*Weekly Writing 6*. In a paragraph of 300 or so words, respond to the following questions:

1. What makes a place a city?
2. Are there cities that, in your mind or experiences, have an identity? Have a particular character, or personality, or set of qualities? Which cities, and how do you know whatever it is that you know (or think) about them?
3. Is there a piece of writing, literature, art, film, or other media that you strongly associate with a particular city? What is it and how does that city relate to the piece?

*Weekly Writing 7*: In a paragraph or two (around 300 total words), please respond to the following:

1. What is your relationship to the classroom? For this response, think about the classroom as a place, and think about the different classroom spaces you've worked and learned in.
2. What are some ways that your identity as a student or learner is shaped by the classroom?
3. What are some ways that we can push against, or revise, or redefine those identifications? Who can, does, and should determine what classrooms are like?

Essays

The course is designed to support students as they plan, draft, and revise essays. The prompts for each essay are designed to encourage critical inquiry into place and place-making rhetoric. The first essay centers on Wake Forest, the second on Winston Salem, and the third on a student-chosen topic that addresses the relationships among place and identity that they wish to explore. Each essay is scaffolded such that students submit research assignments, then drafts,

then participate in a peer review workshop, receive feedback from me, then ultimately choose to conduct an extensive revision of one of the essays as part of their final work.

***Essay Learning Goals***

1. Place-based research skills. Students will participate in field observations, conduct interviews, learn to navigate their particular campus library, and conduct rhetorical analyses of place-focused writing. In this, students will be urged to consider the ways their writing is a part of a larger rhetorical process of place-making
2. Prewriting and drafting with focus on multiple options and genre awareness.
3. Peer review and feedback.
4. Revision. The revision project will require students to rework and expand their essay draft toward a specific community/audience and a specific publication plan. The final revision must either be published in a public facing way or presented in a mock-public manner (designed to fit with a particular publication, even if the student cannot feasibly gain entry into that publication within the course timeframe).

***Essay Prompts***

Essay 1: Wake Forest

College campuses are places that are full of meaning. From the time you applied to Wake Forest, you've been receiving messages about what this place means: what campus is like, what it means to be accepted into this community, what it means to be a Demon Deacon, *Pro Humanitate*, etc. Pick from one of these (and many other) messages about what Wake Forest means and write an essay about it. As part of your research for the essay, you should:

- Do your Wake Forest Observation assignment

- Read Wake Forest Magazine **and** at least two other examples of writing about Wake that are written for some part of the Wake Forest community (prospective students, current students, alumni, faculty, staff, students' parents and family, etc.)

Your goal is to present an argument about **what is said/written** about Wake Forest as a place (campus, community, school), **for whom and by who** it is written and said, and **for what purposes** it seems to be written/said. For example, as a faculty member, I might read emails that are sent to us from the Office of the Provost and build an essay that **explains** how Wake Forest is defined in terms of faculty teaching, research, and service, and **argues** for why the Provost's Office writes in that way, rather than another way.

Essay requirements:

- 4 page minimum, 6 page maximum
- Double-spaced, 12-point font
- Title and Works Cited
- In-text citations

We will hold a peer review/feedback session for these essays on Wednesday, September 21.

Essay 2: Winston Salem

Cities have borders drawn and acknowledged by city and state governments, but also exist in ways much larger, much messier, and much more obviously contestable than zip codes or city lines. Take New York City, or Los Angeles, Atlanta, or Houston: these cities exist for people well beyond those who live and work there. They *mean* things, and mean things differently, depending on whether we've lived there, visited, or have only ever read about them, seen them in movies, or heard references to them in songs. Cities, like the other places we've

discussed this semester, can come to hold a lot of meanings, different depending on the who, what, when, where, and why. For this essay, we will all write about the city in which we are working and learning: Winston Salem. Choose a direction:

1) Who writes and speaks about Winston Salem? In what contexts? For what purposes? Write an essay that explores the rhetorics of place used in some texts or series of texts (can include non-alphabetic compositions like art) about Winston Salem. Consider public or political messages, art installations, business of economic institutions, institutions of education, cultural or social scenes.
2) How does Wake Forest write and speak about Winston Salem? What are the implications (the So Whats) about the relationship between the university and the city in which it's located? Consider writing (print and web) about Winston Salem that is authored by Wake Forest faculty, staff, administration, students, as well as any other non-alphabetic compositions, like art.

In either case, you should conduct research for this essay by:

- Conducting at least two observations
- Reading and analyzing the assigned texts on Downtown Winston Salem, Old Salem Museum and Gardens, and the Carolina Classic Fair (on Canvas)
- Finding and analyzing other texts or messages as needed (depending on which essay direction you choose)

Essay requirements:

- 4 page minimum, 6 page maximum
- Double-spaced, 12-point font
- Title and Works Cited

- In-text citations

We will hold a peer review/feedback session for these essays on Wednesday, October 19.

Essay 3: Place and Identity

What relationships are there among place and identity? How do we write about those? Choose a place and write an essay about what it means - *according to whom, for whom, and in what contexts* - to be in or be from that place. Remember to pay attention to how arguments about place and identity are formed, how they are supported, and to whom they are directed.

For your research you **can:**

- Conduct observations
- Conduct interviews
- Read/engage with and analyze any of the following, and more:
    - Songs, poetry, creative writing
    - Restaurants, food blogs, recipes
    - Advertisements, marketing materials, tourism websites, social media
    - Government websites
    - Advocacy organizations and supporting materials, fundraising efforts
    - Visual art of any kind, including film and multimedia art

For your research you **should:**

- Use a combination of field research and rhetorical analysis
- Use secondary sources, they may be scholarly or popular, but you must account for their value and credibility

Essay requirements:

- 6 page minimum

- Double spaced, 12-point font
- Title and Works Cited
- In-text citations

**Research Assignments**

***Field Observations and Note-Taking***

As referenced earlier in the theory section of this chapter, Nathaniel Rivers, in "Geocomposition in Public Rhetoric and Writing Pedagogy," demonstrates that a) writing is movement and b) "our experience of place is generated at the intersection of bodies, media, and locations, which all influence each other." The Field Observation and Notetaking sequences assigned at the beginning of each essay arc ask students to think similarly, in both respects, about place and writing. Like Rivers' public rhetoric pedagogy assignments, the rhetorical analysis assignments for my first-year writing classes as students to pay attention to the mundane texts circulating in the place(s) about which the students will draft essays.

*Learning Goals:*

1. Mindful, sensory focused note taking that foregrounds the presence of the body-in-place within the research process.
2. Ethnographic approach to rhetoric
3. Focus on material influences on place and place-based rhetoric

Campus Observations Prompt

Pick two or three different places on campus. Spend at least 15 minutes in each place and take careful notes on what you can observe. Try not to multitask while doing this activity. Simply sit, observe, and take careful notes.

**You will need to pay attention to and take notes on:**

People: what do they do? What do they say? What do they wear? How else are they behaving or interacting with others and the space? How does your presence impact what's going on?

The place itself: what is there? Objects? Furniture? Colors? Lighting? What is your experience of the environment and what does it encourage or discourage people in it to do?

What you experience with your five senses: what do you see, hear, taste, smell, or touch?

Type up your notes (they may be bulleted or otherwise, but they must be detailed). You will use these notes later! Make it easier on your future self and give yourself a lot to work with. Submit them on Canvas and save them in your portfolio.

City Observations Prompt

In support of your Winston Salem essay, you'll again conduct field research and take careful notes. Conduct no fewer than two observations, paying close attention to people, places, spaces, and your own senses in the places that you choose to go. You may choose places in Winston Salem that you can easily travel to (depending on your transportation situation) and/or you may choose to take the campus shuttle to Wake Forest's downtown campus, study spaces, and classrooms. Please let me know if this poses an issue for you and I will collaborate with you to uncover solutions and alternatives.

Information on Wake Downtown here: https://wakedowntown.wfu.edu/

Type up your notes - with thorough descriptions of the places you sit for your observations and as much detail on what happens while you're there as you can - and submit them on Canvas. Save them to your WRI 111 folder.

*Where can I go in WS?*

- Parks (Bailey Park)
- Wake Downtown

- Innovation Quarter
- Restaurants
- Shopping Centers
- Museums (Reynolda House Art Museum, SECCA)
- Old Salem Museum and Gardens
- The Carolina Classic Fair
- Greenways
- Salem Lake
- Salem College
- Winston Salem State University
- Other places, too, ask if you have questions!

If you want to go somewhere for this assignment, but there is an admission fee, please let me know and I will work on getting tickets/funding for that.

***Interviews***

Students will be asked to conduct interviews as another foray into field research. Interviews are assigned for the City and Place: Identity essays, and must be recorded and transcribed for use in the coursework.

*Learning Goals:*

1. Field research: inviting perspectives on your topic other than your own as qualitative data.
2. Question preparation: considering the types and approaches to questioning that will be ethical, generative, and interesting for a particular project
3. Rhetorical analysis: engaging with the interview transcripts as informative **and** argumentative, and analyzing the responses given as such

Interviews Prompt

For this essay, conduct one or two interviews with someone that has expertise or extensive experience with the places/spaces in Winston Salem that you are studying. To prepare for these interviews, research a few possible people. Gather information about their connection to the city, contact information, and brainstorm a few topics you think they would be able to talk with you about.

Then, reach out to them via phone or email to invite them to assist you in this assignment. We will discuss ways to do this in class, and I will share with you examples of what these kinds of requests can look like. Write your interview questions ahead of time (we will do this in class, too) and offer to provide your interviewees with the questions before you conduct the interview. Record the interview for review and transcription. In your crafting of the interview questions, and later on in your analysis of the responses, 1) reread the essay prompt; 2) consider the interviewees relationship to the city: is it personal? Professional? Longstanding or new? How might this impact the responses they give you? 3) What kinds of answers are you expecting to get, and how might you account for and invite responses that go beyond that? 4) What is your relationship to Winston Salem, and how is it influencing this research project?

***Annotated Bibliography***

The annotated bibliography will ask students to create another genre that is place-specific, and to consider whether the genre expectations are useful to them as writers, useful to an audience (their instructor), and in what ways it connects with the work they are conducting on place.

*Learning Goals*

- Critical engagement with sources beyond quote-pulling
- Critical analysis of the relationship between place and research

- Brainstorming and experimentation with ways to use a source, beyond background information on a topic

Winston Salem Essay: Annotated Bibliography Prompt

Submit an annotated bibliography of the sources you plan to use in your essay. Entries (sources) should be listed in full MLA or Chicago style citation, in alphabetical order, and include a one paragraph annotation that answers the following questions:

- What kind of source is it - is it a research article, book chapter, newspaper article, video, etc.? Where did you find it? What is the relationship between **what** it is and **where** it is located (physically, digitally)?
- What is the source about? (SHORT summary) Where in this source do you see important examples of place-making rhetoric.
- What's the source *like?* (Think review - what are the characteristics a potential reader or user of the source should know about it going in?)
- How are you planning to use the source? (As background research? As evidence for your argument? As an example of something?)

***Research Plan: Place and Identity Essay***

For the last essay sequence, students will be asked to submit a research plan in which they detail the decisions they are making with regards to their Place and Identity essay.

*Learning Goals*

1. Making writing decisions in context
2. Defending research methods

Research Plan: Place and Identity Essay Prompt

Submit your topic, plan, and rationale for research. You may choose any type of research that you think best supports the projects and will allow you to find the answers to your research questions. Be as specific as you can and include any questions and concerns you have about completing the work. Your rationale should outline the initial research questions driving your project and how whatever types of research you plan to engage in (field observations and notes, interviews, rhetorical analysis of texts or other materials, secondary research via library resources) may help you uncover answers to those questions. Consider the possibilities and limitations of each type of research, especially those related to being in place with others, traveling, speaking with others, or observing a particular place and time.

Supporting In-Class Activities

***In-Class Rhetorical Analyses of Texts Found in Place***

Learning Goals:

- Rhetorical analysis and close reading
- Rhetorical awareness of place-based rhetoric

Rhetorical Analysis Prompt

For this assignment, you will conduct a rhetorical analysis of some text that offers an argument(s) about Wake Forest/Winston Salem/your chosen intersection of place and identity[196]. Example texts can be flyers, social media posts, videos, syllabi, policy documents, announcements, archival material, or any other use of language that you think demonstrates the place you've chosen to study. You should write as much as you can during the class period, where you answer the following questions:

- What is the language style like?
- What are the apparent rules (grammar, etc.)?
- What types of evidence and sources are used?
- What kinds of citation practices are present?
- What arguments are put forth or debated? Are they implied or explicitly laid out?
- How are those arguments supported?
- Who are the intended audiences?
- What strategies are used to connect with the audience(s)?

**A note on the above rhetorical analysis activity:** the first time we conduct this analysis in a given semester, it will be together as a class. The chosen text will come from *Wake Forest Magazine,*[197] and will be timely, recently published. For the Fall 2022 semester, the article I chose was "Entrusted to Lead," an article on the recent inauguration of Wake Forest's 14th president, Susan Wente.[198]

[196] This shifts depending on which essay this activity is supporting.
[197] Or, if taught on another campus, a comparable, institutional publication.
[198] Maria Henson, "Entrusted to Lead," Wake Forest Magazine, June 16, 2022, https://magazine.wfu.edu/2022/06/16/entrusted-to-lead/.

**Essay Self Assessments**

Self-assessments are in-class, low-stakes, and one-to-one assignments (in that they are written from the student to the instructor and not shared otherwise). We spend a lot of time in class on self-assessments, specifically addressing the usefulness of the practice.

*Learning Goals*

- Reflexive assessment/metacognition
- Personal genres

***Essay Self-Assessment Prompt***

Compose a self-assessment that answers the questions listed below. You should think of you and me as your primary audiences for this assessment. The assessment can be in whatever format or genre you would like to do, though we will spend class time working on it (if you are present in class).

*Questions to address in the assessment:*

1. What was your process like for completing this project? This includes the Deep Observation, Rhetorical Analysis, and Essay. Describe how you did the work (when did you write? Where? Handwritten notes or typed? All-at-once or in small chunks? Multiple drafts of just the one? Did you work alone or with others?). What worked well for you about this writing process? What didn't work so well?
2. Assess your final product, the essay. What are the strengths of the essay? Weaknesses? What strategies for argument and identification did you use?
3. Make some plans for possible revision. If you choose this essay to revise at the end of the semester, what will you - as the author of the piece - want to revise? A note on revision: revision is more in depth than editing. Editing cleans up and tweaks surface level concerns, like grammar, spelling, word choice, sentence structure. Revision addresses

higher order concerns like argument, evidence, overall arrangement, and issues of purpose and audience.

4. Name some specific changes or adjustments to your writing process for next time. You know that you will work through a similar process for this next project: fieldwork, data gathering, drafting, etc. Decide on some specific adjustments you'd like to make to your process that you think will positively impact your writing experience and the final product.

*Why are we doing self-assessments?* The purpose of this and future assessments is to think critically about both the process of writing and the product that you ultimately submitted. You will do a formal revision of one of your three essays at the end of the semester, and so this self-assessment will provide you with direction and next steps (alongside your instructor feedback), should you choose to revisit and revise essay #1.

*Wait, I haven't received any feedback on my essay yet! How do I know what I'm supposed to change/revise for next time?* Yes, you should do this self-assessment before you receive feedback on your essay from me. I want to provide you with the opportunity to hone your critical eye and take ownership of your writing. I hope my feedback will help you, and I have expertise to offer, but ultimately you must make decisions about your writing. So, it is important that you practice analyzing your writing practices and the work they help you produce.

**Formal Assessments**

*Learning Goals*

- Reflexivity: self-examination with regards to practices, emotions, orientations, physical experiences, changes, and growth as a writer
- Argumentation: opportunity to define, articulate, and support their experiences of learning

***Midterm Self-Assessment Prompt***

Write a reflection on your learning that cites specific examples from the work so far in this course. Offer concrete next steps for growth as a writer and reflect specifically on how your understanding of the relationship between language, place, and identity is shifting or expanding. Also offer, as part of this self-assessment, a suggestion for your midterm grade.

***Final Self-Assessment Prompt***

Your final self-assessment is your final word on Writing 111. It should convey what you've learned about writing, how you understand yourself as an academic writer, and how you assess your work as a student in this course. You should recommend and support a final grade for yourself. It can also explore your thoughts on writing and rhetoric more broadly, and your perspectives on the relationships among language, place, and identity.

Consider the following questions in preparing your final self-assessment:

- What did you learn about writing processes this semester? Cite specific readings, activities, assignments, and anything that supports your statements.
- What did you learn about rhetoric this semester? Cite specific readings, activities, assignments, and anything that supports your statements.
- What did you learn about yourself as a writer? Cite specific readings, activities, assignments, and anything that supports your statements.
- How do you assess your participation as a student in this course, including both engagement in your work and engagement with peers and your instructor? How do you assess your growth as a writer?
- What did you do well? What would you do differently, if you had the semester to do over again?

- What are the interesting or important relationships that you uncovered among language, place, and identity?
- Which place(s) that you studied this semester taught you the most? What did they have to teach you?

Your assessment must include a written component, but this written component can come in a variety of forms. Please consult with me if you have questions regarding your preferred method of self-assessment. Also, please refer to the grading contract as you prepare; I will be using it in consultation with these assessments to submit final grades.

**Place-Based Revision Project**

*Learning Goals:*

- Revision, critically engaging and incorporating feedback
- Tailoring to publication options and plausible audiences
- Critically engaging ideas about place in rhetorical choices

***Place-Based Revision Project Prompt***

Choose one of your three essay projects to revise. You will conference with me one on one regarding the plan for this revision. Come to the conference with answers to the following:

- Which essay are you most interested in revising and why?
- What are your goals for the piece?
- What is the most important thing that this essay has to teach us about the rhetoric of place and identity?
- What are your genre options? Who needs to know what you have to teach, and what kinds of genres would they be likely to learn from?

## Critical Place-Based Pedagogy, Regionalizing Rhetoric

In "The Best of Both Worlds: A Critical Pedagogy of Place,"[199] David Greenwood writes, "developing a critical pedagogy of place means challenging each other to read the texts of our own lives and to ask constantly what needs to be transformed and what needs to be conserved." I argue that this is especially true in the classroom. By designing a course around the rhetorics of place and identity, I have been pushed to notice and engage the place-making and regionalizing rhetoric in my own teaching practices, in ways that I want to transform and conserve. First, by drawing attention to place the way that I do, I have in the past reinscribed for students notions of stable definitions of place and have unintentionally encouraged students to take what is said or written about place at face value. This is something that my research into regionalizing rhetorics has led me to transform. Rather than encouraging critical, rhetorical engagement with place as an argument, my past place-based approaches have stopped short at sending students on scavenger hunts for information and quotes about place. Because of this dissertation project, I have begun incorporating more explicit questioning of place rhetorics during class. Second, I have designed essay prompts and their supporting assignments to explicitly argue about/for the borders of where the classroom is, where learning takes place. In doing so, I have come to understand my work in designing a course about place as its own regionalizing rhetoric. Like the rhetors of my first two chapters, I am relying on sets of ideas about a place (the writing classroom) to define and revise, to blur and redirect, to invite students to perform particular identities in relationship to that place. Like a region, the classroom -- where is can be, who belongs, what goes in it and who can move in and out -- is an argument, and the teacher's work in that argument is one connected to calling out to students to identify.

[199] Gruenewald, "The Best of Both Worlds."

A place-based pedagogy is also a regionalizing rhetoric; relying on the making visible and deploying the rhetorics of place. There is an opportunity for that to be a critically engaged pedagogy and there is a possibility that asking students to write about place will be a practice of reinscribing what is rhetorical about place as, instead, just topical or factual. Place based pedagogy is not inherently critical, but it offers a grounded opportunity for critical pedagogy, when the instructor works toward that goal explicitly. When you write and teach - and invite students to write and teach - about place, you make clearer the border work that you do with the classroom. Because place becomes a persistent question in the writing course, because you ask students to visit and engage place(s) as part of their work, you open up - and blur - and revise the borders of the writing classroom. Rather than a room, your class becomes a region, one that you widen and narrow depending on the choices you make with regards to readings, assignments, policies, and opportunities. Your students, too, will draw and redraw the borders of the class. How they write about places, people, culture, and language will contribute to how the class works, what kinds of arguments and practices are expected, and how individual and collective identities are crafted and called upon. A critical, place-based pedagogy then, would make clear to them the non-given nature of the classroom and the academy as places.

A cultural rhetorics approach to place-based pedagogy opens opportunities for teachers and students to consider the mutability of their identities and the connections between place and identity. Place-based pedagogy is a way to encourage what Freire called conscientização - critical consciousness.[200] Structuring a class so that it has students read and write about place is not inherently good or critical pedagogy - as a mere theme, place is as good or as bad of a place to start as any. Yet, making explicit the emplacedness of the work of the course - inviting

[200] Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed: 30th Anniversary Edition* (Bloomsbury Publishing USA, 2014).

students to think with their bodies in time and space, asking them to notice and acknowledge and respect that others move in and out of place(s), too - bringing in and making language and knowledge as they do so - is the kind of goal that transforms the work that a writing teacher is trying to do. It transforms it from the work of picking a theme for the course and running with it to the kind of praxis - the radical reflection plus action - that Freire writes about. It not only invites the students to identify, engage, and use place-based rhetoric, it demands that the teacher does so, too.

# CHAPTER V: CONCLUSION

I told everyone who asked – outside of my academic circle and my spouse – that I was writing my dissertation about "southern culture, basically." But the more I worked on this project, the less true that became. This dissertation doesn't do much to answer questions about contemporary southern culture, per se. What this project does answer is a series of questions about how specific institutions can cultivate Southern and Appalachian identities, draw borders where borders are resisted, and argue (with and against) long standing and contemporary ideas about the connection between who people are and where they are from. This dissertation explores the rhetorical building blocks of calls to regional identification, names them *regionalizing rhetoric*, and explores what regionalizing and cultural rhetorics has to offer to place-based approaches to writing pedagogy.

## In the Classroom

I did not start out this project with plans to include a pedagogy chapter. I was excited by the suggestion to make that shift; I am really invigorated by conversations about teaching! It was not immediately clear to me, however, how the chapter would fit in with the two other cases that I had planned. But Chapters Two and Three show up in my classrooms all the time. When I go to find examples of writing about place, culture, and identity, the publications and the festivals make rich texts for readings and activities. I assign readings from both *The Bitter Southerner* and *Scalawag* so students can practice rhetorical analysis; I ask students to analyze the Carolina Classic Fair's website, social media, and – if they can – the fair's atmosphere itself (it is right down the road from Wake Forest University, where I currently teach first-year writing). The work of this dissertation folds in on and circles back to itself; maybe that is because the work of the dissertation has made me a bit myopic. But, I would also argue that it is because the practice of teaching about "place and identity" and the practice of reading and writing about regionalizing

rhetoric are really the same. What I am doing amounts to the same argument: *Look! See how these people write about place! See how they draw borders with their words, their images, their implications. See how they make you want to belong and make the place they describe real and worth belonging to.*

I have not always so explicitly designed my courses with the rhetoric of place and identity at the center, but nevertheless, place comes to bear on my conversations with college students. Since the campuses on which I've taught have been in different cities, with different constellations of students, they have offered different starting points on discussions of place, of campus, and city, and region. The students I taught at UNC Greensboro were predominantly from North Carolina (though not exclusively) and discussions of place were commonly more localized. I had not started this work in earnest, then, but students continued to bring into the classroom and to their assignments ideas, experiences, and arguments about place. When you asked them to reflect, to connect, to extend any reading beyond the bounds of the classroom, a common strategy was to bring in place: campus, home, the nation – each and all offered a way to ground a class discussion on rhetoric, or literature. I, too, brought in a more localized relationship to place in my UNC Greensboro classes. I don't have the kind of detailed notes on anything like a place-based approach for these semesters, but I do distinctly remember teaching a student from my cross-town rival high school. Where she went to high school meant something to me, and I imagined that she felt the same (whether she really did or not, I don't know). The short cuts, the references, the assumptions and ideas about place and identity and the hyperlocal that must have been passed between us during that classic, *where are you from?* icebreaker. How differently must each of us have thought about the other side of that small town, now brought into a classroom a half hour away, in the nearest city.

At Wake Forest, students come to the campus from all over the country. Several students in each class are consistently international students. My starting points on place with these students are rarely high school sporting rivalries. Instead, we start from campus, the guaranteed shared space, then explore and discuss, ultimately arriving at the indeterminable nature of a solid definition on such a seemingly concrete, tangible place as the college campus. Campus for me is not campus for them; campus for them is not campus for others.

Any time we begin a new unit with a new place as our central question, we must begin with some definitional work. Students struggle to learn and to write without some definitional work. I struggle to teach without some sense of shared understanding. So, what I have taken to doing since I began to track, in earnest, the commonplaces that make up our available means of place-based identification, is a simple whiteboard activity. In the middle of the board, I write whatever place it is that we are trying to define. To one side, I write something like "Wake Forest is…" and on the other side I write, "…according to…" From there, I offer the board up as a question, and document whatever the class can generate. What they come up with is always nebulous, blurry at the edges, but with a handful of core ideas that the class feels strongly about. The peripheral ideas, though, about whatever place, are never erased. They are defensible, arguable even if not obvious, and they extend the conceptual area that Wake Forest, or Winston Salem, or The South, or New England, or America covers. We can never quite get consensus on what counts and what doesn't. There are never clean boundaries, only a region. The key to this activity is trying to stay in the realm of **critical regionalization**: always aware of the rhetorical nature of the places we are trying to work with. Resisting pinning them down. Resisting settling on a definition. Letting it stay a question, rhetorical.

## In the Field of Rhetorical Study

Regionalizing rhetorics have more to offer than pedagogical praxis. Beyond the specifics of mapping the rhetorical materials of regionalizing rhetorics for these three cases, what is left is to extend the link between the rhetorical analysis of the publications and the festivals. That link, I am coming to understand, is the persistence of whiteness in regionalizing rhetoric. In Chapters Two and Three, I uncovered similar effects of regionalizing rhetoric in southern and Appalachian examples. Despite the different missions espoused and pursued by *The Bitter Southerner*, *Scalawag*, Merlefest, and The Carolina Classic Fair, each of these cases ultimately anchored their calls to southerness or Appalachianess to conservative topics, topics connected to whiteness, to hegemony, to a maintenance of the status quo. Whether redefining or anti-defining, revising or returning, the fact remains that these sites draw on similar topoi to build their arguments. Looking at these cases demonstrates that - when the starting point conceptualization of a region is rooted in whiteness, in normativity, in conservatism, even an anti-definitional strategy is anchored to these ideologies.

I am not, at this point, arguing that the political, advocacy, or activist work of the publications is rendered bad, pointless, or ineffective by the realization that their source material for arguments is not progressive, not radical, not divorced from the southern plantation or ideals of whiteness the way that they hope to be. That can be true, and they can still encourage voting, donations, conversations, and other actions that incrementally progressive, critical, even transgressive goals. My point here is that any revisions of the South are also reinscriptions. It is something like the whole, *don't think of an elephant* thing, which inevitably makes you think of the elephant.

What place-based pedagogy can bring to this is an approach to both teaching and writing that makes visible the invented nature of places, their ties to old ideas, and that approaching

place as an argument and a question rather than a fixed location can do critical, cultural rhetorics work for both the teacher and the students. The exploration of a critical, place-based pedagogy and the work I have done to design a (ever growing and shifting) model of that has led me to consider the ways in which non-white, non-Western methods and knowledges are sure to be better suited for making, writing, and teaching places that are not so beholden to the arguments about place and culture that colonizing ideas of regions (the South) are. Extensions of this project, for me, will be listening to and learning from anti/decolonial and Indigenous methods; methods that may be doing a kind of regionalizing that **is not** anchored to whiteness, to conservatism, to capitalism.

I started out trying to understand how and why people remained so interested, so invested in ideas about southern identity. Were there, as *The Bitter Southerner* and *Scalawag* assert, redeemable aspects about identifying with The South? If you made enough noise - enough room - with alternate stories about the south and southerners, could tying up your identity with *southerness* mean something apart from the antebellum plantation, the Confederacy, white supremacy? This project finds anchors to the plantation south even in the writings of publications purporting to be antithetical to that vision of southerness. The ways in which southerness is evoked are tied to antebellum topoi. However, it is when region is taken up in non-white contexts that we see methods of regionalization that take a different approach. Of the texts that I studied, I will return to one to reread it and consider again how this article might do regionalizing rhetorics that are not stuck in The Old South. That essay is from *Scalawag*, titled "Sweet (and sticky) redemption: Gullah/Geechee of Sapelo Island reclaim sugarcane to fight cultural erasure."[201] The article details the liberation farming efforts to return healthy sugarcane crops to the Sapelo island

[201] Bailey and Heynen, "Gullah/Geechee of Sapelo Island Reclaim Sugarcane, Fight Cultural Erasure."

and to rely on non-white, non-Western agricultural innovations. While much of the historical framing of the article emphasizes the damage that Southern plantation farming and the subsequent farming and commercial practices did to both the land and the Gullah and Geechee communities in Georgia, the article's emphasis on African agricultural expertise and the citation and research practices of the article demonstrate anti-colonial approaches to writing about place. Maurice Bailey is listed as the first author, and his expertise as "an author, a griot of the West African tradition of storytelling, and a Saltwater Geechee activist" is foregrounded, while Nik Heynen's position as an academic and professor at the University of Georgia is sublimated to that. That title, griot, is not explained in the article. It is left to stand in equal clarity with "Geography professor," and of greater import.

Throughout the article, rather than colonialism being presented as the driving force of progress and innovation, the article argues - persuasively - that colonialism and chattel slavery were regressive. In addition to the evils they presented for human rights and life, these practices *made worse, made less successful and advanced* the farming practices on Sapelo Island. Though exploiting enslaved people's knowledge, plantation farming and later large commercial sugar farming and residential development destroyed ecosystems, divorced sustainable practices from the land, and ultimately produced poorer agricultural results. As *Scalawag* is rhetorically committed to combating (but also reinforcing) a specific set of stereotypes about a white supremacist South, the story is hitched to the image and idea of the plantation South, no doubt. However, there are moments in the article when the authors rely on and argue with perspectives that begin before America and extend beyond America, people and knowledge and places that exists somewhere outside of the nation-region relationship, where I see rhetorical possibilities for regionalizing that are not beholden to the white, conservative core of southerness.

Beyond my claim that my next step in understanding regionalizing rhetorics is to further investigate its ties to whiteness and what Indigenous methods of place-making do differently, there are a few other places where I see the study of regionalizing rhetorics as potentially useful and generative. The first is in the flows between local, state, and national politics. Regionalizing rhetoric can offer an analytical approach to political rhetoric and strategies taken on by whichever political party temporarily lacks the executive, judicial, or legislative upper hand. Arguments for the regional, or local, against the national always work better for the party who does not currently hold the White House or Congress. "Washington," as metonym for the nation, becomes a point of attack whenever a party or candidate can situate themselves as counter to the national; therein, the candidate is likely deploying regionalizing strategies and anchoring their candidacy to any number of the regionalizing topoi that this dissertation mapped. Regionalizing rhetoric can offer, then, a way to link place and culture rhetorics with political discourse that is about place but not specific to any one place. Secondly, I foresee uses of regionalizing rhetoric alongside the work already being done in rhetorics of other regional configurations of places within the United States (The Midwest, New England, etc.), about and by scholars in the Global South, other regionalized places globally (The Middle East).

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# APPENDIX A: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS FOR CHAPTER III

## Merlefest Interview Questions

- I understand the mission of Merlefest to be a celebration of "traditional-plus' ' music - a genre rooted in Appalachian culture - and a fundraiser for Wilkes Community College, based on the website. How would you describe Merlefest and its priorities?
- I understand that the Artist Relations Team handles recruitment for acts - are there ever instances where a judgment call must be made about who to include? What considerations are taken into account?
- How would you characterize the relationship between Merlefest and Wilkesboro?
    - North Carolina?
    - The region (Appalachia?) (the South)?
- What interaction do you have with folks who come to Merlefest? What sense do you have about why they come to Merlefest?
- What can you share with me about the promotions and marketing process for Merlefest 2021?
- What can you share with me about the goals for the 2021 festival? 2022?
- What are the current issues Merlefest is struggling with or working on?
- 2020, and now 2021, have been particularly eventful years in the United States. How has the broader national context impacted Merlefest?
- Is there anything else you'd like to share?

## Carolina Classic Interview Questions

- I understand the mission of the Carolina Classic Fair to be family fun through music, food, rides, and competitions, based on the website. How would you describe the Fair and its priorities?
- There are a variety of entertainment acts, vendors, competitions, and other attractions at each year's fair. Are there any instances where a judgment call must be made about whether something is included or excluded on the Fair schedule?
- Who is involved in decisions like these?
- What considerations are taken into account?
- How would you characterize the relationship between the Fair and Winston-Salem?
    - North Carolina?
    - The region (the South)?
- What interaction do you have with folks who come to the Fair? Can you share any specific examples?
- What can you share with me about the promotions and marketing process for the 2021 Fair?

- What can you share with me about the goals for the 2021 Fair? Next year?
- What are the current issues the Fair is struggling with or working on?
- 2020, and now 2021, have been particularly eventful years in the United States. How has the broader national context impacted The Carolina Classic Fair?
- Is there anything else you'd like to share?