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Carly S. Woods

*University of Nebraska-Lincoln*, cwoods3@unl.edu

Joshua P. Ewalt

*University of Nebraska-Lincoln*, jewalt2@unl.edu

Sara J. Baker

*University of Nebraska-Lincoln*

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# A Matter of Regionalism: Remembering Brandon Teena and Willa Cather at the Nebraska History Museum

Carly S. Woods, Joshua P. Ewalt, and Sara J. Baker

## Abstract

In 2010–2011, the Nebraska History Museum featured two temporary exhibits: “We the People: the Nebraskan Viewpoint” and “Willa Cather: A Matter of Appearances.” We argue the public memories of Brandon Teena and Willa Cather contained in the exhibits are distanced from regional politics when articulated alongside the nostalgic regionalist rhetoric of the Nebraska History Museum. Specifically, both exhibits not only discipline the memory of trans\* performance within problematic material and symbolic contexts, but also place these memories within a rhetoric of regional optimism that has critical consequences for restricting counter-public formation. In performing this reading, the essay argues that critical regionalism has the potential to offer a nuanced perspective on the geopolitical dimensions of memory places by exploring understandings of the relationship between “local” and “national” commemoration at these sites.

**Keywords:** Rhetoric, Critical Regionalism, Public Memory, Brandon Teena, Willa Cather, Museum

From the fall of 2010 through the summer of 2011, the Nebraska History Museum featured two unique and seemingly unrelated temporary exhibits, which together highlight the rhetorical consequences of regional nostalgia at localized memory places. The first exhibit, entitled “We the People: The Nebraska View-

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**Carly S. Woods** (corresponding author) is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Communication Studies and the Women's and Gender Studies Program at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, 440 Oldfather Hall, Lincoln, NE 68588, USA; email [cwoods3@unl.edu](mailto:cwoods3@unl.edu)

**Joshua P. Ewalt** is a doctoral student in the Department of Communication Studies and Graduate Fellow in the Center for Great Plains Studies at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln.

**Sara J. Baker** is a doctoral candidate in the Department of Communication Studies at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln.

point," detailed the shifting meaning of these three words—"We the People"—throughout Nebraskan and United States history. Included in this exhibit, and hanging under the banner "The Shadow of Intolerance," was the story of Brandon Teena, a 21-year-old trans man killed in the town of Humboldt, Nebraska on New Year's Eve, 1993. Popularly recapped in the Academy Award winning film *Boys Don't Cry*, the documentary *The Brandon Teena Story*, local and national news coverage, and a plethora of scholarly and popular press articles, Brandon's story is a source for remembering and confronting gender-based violence.<sup>1</sup> Characterized by extreme tragedy, Brandon's memory serves as a reminder of the perils of transphobia in rural, conservative Nebraska.

Entitled "Willa Cather: A Matter of Appearances," the second exhibit commemorated the celebrated author using "clothing and textiles owned by Willa Cather, her friends, and family to tell the story of a woman who made her own rules in fashion, literature, and life."<sup>2</sup> Cather did not always embrace her Nebraskan identity with open arms, but one need only to visit the state to witness how it has embraced her. Red Cloud hosts swarms of literary tourists wishing to pay homage to Cather's childhood home. Faculty at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln can receive Willa Cather professorships and conduct research in the Willa Cather Archive. Omaha, Nebraska's largest city, has a public library branch and school named in her honor. She is, indeed, "one of ours."<sup>3</sup> By focusing on Cather's clothing and style, the exhibit contributed to praise of the "muse of the Midwest."<sup>4</sup> In doing so, it also tackled the complicated question of Cather's gender and sexual ambiguity. While Cather did not openly embrace "queer" or "lesbian" labels during her lifetime, nor did she explicitly discuss queer themes in her writings,<sup>5</sup> she also did not hide her long-term relationship with Edith Lewis, who was named literary trustee in her will. "A Matter of Appearances" moved the subject of Cather's queer performances to a place of regional public memory. Among dresses, jewelry, and other artifacts of bodily adornment, the exhibit extensively narrated Cather's life as a young woman who walked through Red Cloud and Lincoln dressed in masculine attire and went by traditionally masculine names such as "William."

Although the two exhibits were spatially separated and not meant to correspond in the museum, we choose to read them as part of the same critical operation.<sup>6</sup> Both provide insight into the appropriation of memory for Nebraska-centered, and ultimately, heteronormative ends. While public memory can act as a resource for constructing future-oriented queer counterpublics,<sup>7</sup> these exhibits articulate Nebraska's past in a way inconsistent with queer politics.<sup>8</sup> More specifically, they discipline the memory of trans\* performances within a problematic rhetoric of regional nostalgia that has critical consequences for restricting counter-public formation. A dual reading of the exhibits highlights how recent interdisciplinary work in *critical regionalism*—which urges the cultural study of regions, not as they are demarcated by city, state, or national boundaries, but as articulated within larger networks of spatial, temporal, and political relationships—can assist in critiquing and re-imagining the rhetoric of memory places.<sup>9</sup>

We begin by establishing the importance of analyzing state and regional history museums in light of critical regionalism. Doing so offers avenues of insight not yet fully traversed in memory place scholarship. We then analyze the two

exhibits, illustrating how regional nostalgia—particularly as it is manifested in rhetorical articulations between the state and nation—restricts the counter-public potential of the memories of Brandon Teena and Willa Cather. This regionalist boosterism is reflected in the aggregative collection of texts that characterize the exhibits as well as in the spatial politics of movement that define the site.<sup>10</sup> We conclude by highlighting the importance of incorporating critical regionalism into memory places.

## Regionalism and Places of Public Memory

### *Memory Places and the Intersection of Local and National Memory*

Over the past couple of decades, the literature on memory places has been steadily growing.<sup>11</sup> Broadly, this scholarship argues that material rhetorics such as museums, city skylines, or national parks are fundamental to the construction of a collective and public identity.<sup>12</sup> They position visitors as subjects capable of viewing rhetorical imagery and vocabularies in precise ways, which has ramifications on our identification with larger imagined communities.<sup>13</sup> Furthermore, such rhetorics create a space where certain visions of the past are legitimized as official and where visitors are invited to reflect in the context of the present.<sup>14</sup> Commemorative sites address “how to make an event of the past—what the memorial marks—relevant to the needs and desires of the memorial’s own present.”<sup>15</sup>

The material presentation of public memory occurs within a set of complicated rhetorical contexts, not the least of which involves the collision of “local” and “national” modes of commemoration. Constructed and located in a particular geographical context, memory places dance between a narration of local and national memory, investing rhetorical resources in the construction of publics at multiple geographical scales. As Carole Blair and Neil Michel argue, the “dialectic between local and national commemoration” was a characteristic feature of turn-of-the-century commemorative practices.<sup>16</sup> Over time these practices became more directly concerned with the centralization of public memory sites.<sup>17</sup> Nevertheless, the particularities of local contexts remain influential. For instance, in a reading of the North Carolina Museum of Art, Kenneth Zagacki and Victoria Gallagher contend that the collected artworks placed in the outdoor garden park responded to the locally oriented environmental concerns of Raleigh citizens but also indexed broader concerns about urban development.<sup>18</sup> Similarly, Greg Dickinson, Brian Ott, and Eric Aoki argue that the rhetorical construction of memory in Cody, Wyoming’s Buffalo Bill Museum functions by “inculcating a particular vision not only of ‘the West’ but also of what it means to be American.”<sup>19</sup> At this site, the locality functions as a synecdoche for the nation.

Not all places of public memory, however, have a commensurate relationship between the local and the national. Blair and Michel’s work on Mount Rushmore and the Crazy Horse Memorial highlights the “irony of constructing in the Black Hills what amounts to a memorial to US imperialism ... .”<sup>20</sup> Such an irony, particularly evident in the Crazy Horse Memorial, registers competing geographical identifications. It is not simply a synecdochic relationship

between the locality and the nation, but instead an account of a disjuncture between the memory of the locality and identification with the nationalist narrative. The mobility of some texts, exhibits, and artifacts further expand the way we can think about local and national places of public memory. The AIDS quilt, for example, was characterized by a "promiscuous mobility," moving throughout different localities in the United States, some of which LGBT communities viewed as problematic local contexts for the commemoration of a national tragedy.<sup>21</sup> While this work has been illuminative, recent interdisciplinary work in critical regionalism and regional rhetorics provides an avenue for complicating the local-national tension at memory sites beyond commensurate or incommensurate identifications.

### **Critical Regionalism and Rhetorical Studies**

In the broadest sense, regionalism is concerned with the rhetorical practices that constitute regional agendas and identities. Regional identity does not simply imply a particular locale (the Great Plains or Midwest, for instance), but is a set of attitudes, patterns, belongings, and beliefs that serve to distinguish spaces and places from other regions.<sup>22</sup> Douglas Reichert Powell highlights the rhetorical dimensions of regions: "When we talk about a region, we are talking not about a stable, bounded, autonomous place but about a cultural history, the cumulative, generative effect of the interplay among the various, competing definitions of that region."<sup>23</sup> Thus, the concept of "region" represents a particular vision of place emerging from the sum total of discursive contestations, material performances, and related rhetorics that seek to define the contours of the region and provide a particular perspective on its history and memory.

The construction of a region should not focus on the place as a bounded territory, but as a place in relation to a larger network of spaces, places, and political action.<sup>24</sup> While geographical units (such as the region, state, or nation) have traditionally been viewed as fixed entities, recent research in geography and political theory emphasizes a relational perspective on place, encouraging scholars "to imagine the geography of cities and regions through their plural spatial connections ... ." <sup>25</sup> As such, rhetoricians are encouraged to examine regions as equally relational, analyzing "ways of strategically describing relationships among places" evident in rhetorical praxis, "as well as the world those doing the descriptions wish to cultivate."<sup>26</sup>

Unfortunately, regional rhetorics often devolve into nostalgia; when limited to an uncritical defense of specific geographical sites, they can inscribe a sense of place rooted in the "good ole days" of the past. Not only does this approach build a "community identity around eccentricities and anomalies of legend [which] ties a place inevitably to its pasts, almost as if just one thing of note ever happened there,"<sup>27</sup> but it risks cordoning off the region from the larger global flows of information, people, and ideas. As Jenny Rice explains,

[C]ritical regionalism rejects the traps of nostalgia and pastiche by challenging territorializations of all kinds. What is critical in critical regionalism is exactly what prevents it from bleeding into a kitschy or nos-

talgic regionalism: a disruption of narrative. Such disruption is where critical regionalism meets rhetoric.<sup>28</sup>

Critical regionalism, as practice and method of inquiry, is not concerned with the production of nostalgia, but the interventionist practice of disrupting the narratives of a place through the production of alternative relational cartographies.

As a methodological framework for the study of museums, monuments, and memorials, critical regionalism directs attention to a number of issues and concerns. The central question of a rhetorical approach to critical regionalism, according to Rice, is "What do people actually do in region, as well as through rhetorical appeals to region?"<sup>29</sup> Additionally, the concept takes a critical turn when one considers Powell's statement that "Instead of asking whether a particular version of region is valid or invalid, authentic or not, this new regional scholarship asks whose interests are served by a given version of region."<sup>30</sup> We add a few more questions specifically directed at memory places: How do memory places articulate the relationship between multiple spaces (including the local and nation) in order to produce the discursive contours of a region? In what ways can this regionalism fall into a problematic sense of regional nostalgia instead of disrupting state, local, or national narratives? How can the particular rhetorics at the site function to enable or constrain certain memories in the region or the formation of counter-public resistance? Indeed, the state history museum merits a rhetorical and cultural critique, as it has the opportunity to articulate a disruptive critical regionalism and/or fall into a problematic rhetoric of state nostalgia. Critical regionalism provides a conceptual backdrop for our trip to the Nebraska History Museum, enabling us to examine the intersection of queer and Nebraskan discourses and prompting us to imagine new possibilities for social change.

### **Regional Optimism and the Public Memory of Queer Figures: Contexts for Interpretation**

In his analysis of the rhetorical landscape of Old Pasadena, Greg Dickinson argues that "[a]s rhetorical places or loci, landscapes draw together a wide range of cultural and historical resources," and as such "[a]n analysis of landscapes must begin by tracing the lines of these cultural resources."<sup>31</sup> The same holds true for other rhetorical places, including museums, monuments, and memorials. Like the landscape of the city, these sites draw together a number of cultural resources. Built from a number of texts, discourses, and artifacts that together constitute the rhetoricity of the site, past scholarship attends to the multiplicity of artifacts given presence at the site to form a particular memory-based rhetoric.<sup>32</sup> The tracing of cultural lines drawn together at the Nebraska History Museum allows us to identify two potential cultural resources, or contexts for understanding its rhetoricity: the traditional romanticized construction of the Plains region and the memory of queer figures as counter-public resources.



### ***The History of Regional Rhetoric in Nebraska***

A romantic portrayal of the Plains region is evident in the history of discourses aimed at Nebraskan self-presentation. Discourse surrounding the passage of the Homestead Act of 1862, celebrated at the Homestead National Monument of America, among other places, constructed the state as a place of personal liberties, providing the agricultural promise of the United States and, as such, buttressing the wealth of the nation.<sup>33</sup> Advertisements used to promote Nebraska to potential settlers in the 1930s further romanticized the state's role in creating the nation's wealth. Outsiders were invited to "thrive in the thriving thirties" in the "heart of the nation" with this prose:

Nebraska's development is a miracle of achievement. In seventy-five years it has advanced from an unsettled territory to sixteenth state in developed material wealth. Endowed with a healthful climate for man, beast and plant, and with a soil whose versatility is not exceeded on the earth, a race of sturdy homemakers has created a commonwealth that amazes the world for its agricultural and industrial development.<sup>34</sup>

Thus, the booster rhetoric of the era aimed at constructing a positive regional identity for a state that is otherwise seen as "fly-over" country, a place you travel through instead of taking up residence. Non-coastal regions like the Southwest and the Great Plains were characterized by an "internal regionalism of boosters who specifically and self-consciously felt marginalized or alienated from centers of power; and so they promoted their regions as distinctive or superior in order to advance interests that they believed were being ignored."<sup>35</sup>

Nebraska has not shed the influence of boosterish regional rhetoric. For instance, in the 1970s, "The Good Life" was developed as the official state slogan and has been in place ever since, adorning placards such as the one that welcomes travelers to the state on I-80. In 2011, the capital city of Lincoln took on the slogan "Life is Right" in order to entice young professionals to settle in the city.<sup>36</sup> Thus, the Nebraska History Museum is a site where rhetorics of space, place, and memory intermingle within a historically anchored nostalgic and utopian regional rhetoric. What is unique about studying state history museums in general, and especially a museum in a place known for being a "fly-over" state (Nebraska) in a "non-existent" region (Midwest)—is that its discourses are always engaged in a process of simultaneously identifying and creating a desirable regional identity.<sup>37</sup> Thus, it is perhaps not surprising that this utopian regional rhetoric manifests at the Nebraska History Museum. What is of note, however, are the *ways* in which it is manifested—through discursive and material rhetorical strategies—and the implications it has on the second cultural resource: the memory of queer figures.

### ***The Memory of Queer Figures***

Public memories of lesbian, gay, and trans\* figures have historically served as resources for generating counter-public resistance.<sup>38</sup> As Thomas Dunn illustrates, even memories of tragic and violent events such as the murder of Matthew Shepard can be mobilized as "strategic rhetorical resources for margin-

alized groups to engage publics and counterpublics.”<sup>39</sup> Although they are quite different, Brandon Teena and Willa Cather are both important public figures that have inspired the constitution and mobilization of queer counterpublics. Brandon Teena’s murder became a rallying point for hate crime activism, while films such as *The Brandon Teena Story* and *Boys Don’t Cry* raised widespread awareness about transphobic violence. Brandon Teena was remembered in a number of online memorials, including sites on Facebook, MySpace, personal websites, and YouTube videos, which can serve as decentralized sites of strength and coalition-building.<sup>40</sup> Furthermore, literary critics argue that Cather’s writings contain themes important to LGBT communities including issues of queer friendship, a refusal of the impulse for happy endings, and an interruption of the queer romance narrative.<sup>41</sup> As Marilee Lindemann argues, “Cather’s ‘queering’ of ‘America’ ... operates at times on the surfaces and at times on the deep structures of her fiction. It is ... an uneasy movement between ecstatic optimism and a sometimes deadly anxiety.”<sup>42</sup> Thus, through the public remembrance of their biographies and/or writings, the memories of both Brandon Teena and Willa Cather can be considered Nebraska-based cultural resources for queer politics.

Because it simultaneously contained exhibits featuring Brandon Teena and Willa Cather, the Nebraska History Museum had the opportunity to construct the region as a space with a particular relationship to the queer memory and politics of the larger nation. It had the opportunity to both portray Nebraska as a space with a shameful past regarding the treatment of LGBT individuals and one whose spatiality has the potential to connect to the broader landscape of LGBT politics. However, when these cultural resources collide with a history of regional nostalgia and utopianism—the discourse of “the Good Life”—the optimism of the region is maintained against the counter-public forming potential of these queer figures. We explain the rhetoric of the museum by analyzing the two exhibits in turn.

## Nebraska Progressivism and the Memory of Brandon Teena

The initial section of the “We the People: The Nebraska Viewpoint” exhibit is located in a large, light filled foyer and focuses on constitutional rights and progressive Nebraskan politics. Behind the museum information desk, lockers, and donation box is the second portion of this exhibit, “The Shadow of Intolerance,” which features a panel on Brandon Teena. The spatial layout of this exhibit protects regional utopian rhetoric from the tragic memory of Brandon Teena through four rhetorical strategies in which the memory of Brandon Teena is (1) denied access to a progressive narrative of regional constitutional politics, (2) given context by the sensory experience of processing fragments of deviance,<sup>43</sup> (3) woven together with a problematic discourse of deception and psychologist-based accounts of the tragedy, in a space of attention<sup>44</sup> wherein (4) any sense of shame affiliated with the state of Nebraska is re-directed away from the regional space to the United States as a whole.



### ***“We the People”: Denying Access to a Regional Constitutional Politics***

Upon entering the foyer of the Nebraska History Museum, we encounter the “We the People” exhibit. The first display, entitled “Expanding the We,” presents a timeline made up of narrative markers for the federal constitution, such as “1865: No slavery shall exist,” “1920: All citizens, male and female may vote,” and “1974: All citizens 18 years old may vote.” We are told that the constitution was not designed to be changed often, but it has been amended and that “Several of these changes have helped expand the ‘we’ who may participate freely in our democracy.”<sup>45</sup> The “We the People” exhibit is designed to commemorate a history of progressive change at the state level in Nebraska and provides a number of interesting reflections on the state’s role in expanding equal rights. Our bodies are guided in and out of various displays that tell stories of slavery, American Indian rights, and women’s suffrage in Nebraska. The federal constitution has only been amended 27 times, we are told, while “Nebraska’s constitution, by contrast, has been amended over 200 times.” We are reminded that the state’s motto is “Equality before the Law” and that “this motto is unique among the 50 states. It reflects the post-Civil War years of the 1860s and relates to the granting of political and civil rights previously denied to black men.”

As we move through this exhibit, we are subjects constituted by celebratory praise of Nebraskan progressivism and Nebraska’s role in expanding constitutional rights, particularly to the degree that it has been more advanced than national politics.

After being directed through a chronological telling of expanding the Nebraskan “we,” the exhibit seems to come to an end. In the final display, visitors are invited to reflect on the exhibit by writing on post-it notes and recording oral accounts of their own fights for constitutional equality. Thus, the exhibit seems to conclude with no reflection on Brandon Teena or LGBT rights. A few individuals used this moment of reflection to disrupt the establishment of an LGBT-free memory, probing fellow museum-goers to consider questions like “Do gays and lesbians have the right to marry?” However, most individuals who left post-it notes either applauded “how far we’ve come as a nation and people,” or commented on issues already present in the exhibit.

A progress narrative characterizes the relationship between the local and the national in this portion of the exhibit. That is, on the issue of granting constitutional rights, the local space is positioned as ahead of, or temporally prior to, other spaces in the regional cartography.<sup>46</sup> While critical regionalism is dependent upon a “disruption of narrative,” this portion of the “We the People” exhibit constructs a type of regional nostalgia, supporting a boosterish rhetoric that has historically defined the state. Nevertheless, it is precisely because of the presence of this regional progressivism that the inclusion of Brandon Teena here could have rhetorical force. We are struck by the possibility of Brandon Teena’s memory to serve as a disruptive source for critical regionalism. If contained in this portion of the exhibit, Brandon Teena’s story could serve as an emotional register that contextualizes the exhibit’s statement that “the struggle for an expanded and better understanding of ‘We the People’ continues to this day.” An alternative

*critical* regionalism could have been presented here, one that emphasizes spaces of queer connection influenced by Brandon's death, and presents Nebraska as a state within a queer regional cartography. This, however, is not the case and represents, through absence, the first disciplinary rhetorical strategy in the exhibit: separating queer remembrance from a progressive regional constitutional politics and its construction of regional nostalgia.

### **"The Shadow of Intolerance": Deviance, Deception, and Re-Direction**

Instead of appearing within the narrative of progressive constitutional politics, Brandon Teena is remembered in a second portion, still a part of the "We the People" exhibit, but spatially isolated and given a different title: "The Shadow of Intolerance." In this space of attention, images and narratives pertaining to Brandon's story are woven together to construct the three remaining rhetorical strategies: contextualizing Brandon's memory with (1) a corporeal experience of excess, (2) verbal discourses of deception and psychological deviance, and (3) re-directing fragments accessing Brandon's story from Nebraska as a state to the United States as a nation. Together, these strategies discipline the possibilities of queer public memory and protect emotionality from direct association with the state of Nebraska.

To enter "The Shadow of Intolerance," we pass a museum technician who is sitting at a desk surrounded by cameras. We are asked to check our bags in lockers next to his desk. He informs us that recording video and taking photos is prohibited in this portion of the exhibit despite the fact that we are allowed to record video (but no flash photography) throughout the rest of the museum. As we pass the suggested donation box, we see a "Parental Discretion is Advised" statement next to the US flag. This portion of the exhibit presents Nebraska's shameful past. We are immediately confronted by three Ku Klux Klan (KKK) hoods to our right. Further to the right is an exhibit on Joseph McCarthy. Our ears are bombarded by a constantly streaming video about a Nazi party member living in Lincoln. Our eyes view frightening images of violent racism. We have entered a protected (suggested donation box, checking bags, security cameras, no video), yet dangerous (KKK hoods, parental discretion advised sign, McCarthy, loud Nazi documentary) space of attention organized by a collective "rhetoric of deviance."

Thus, circling the exhibit, we experience an onslaught of perverse sights and sounds. It is literally in the middle of this chaos where we are able to view Brandon's story. Given its placement in the exhibit, it is nearly impossible to read the display without seeing the KKK hoods or Joseph McCarthy in the peripheral, or to refrain from oscillating attention between Brandon and the audio sounds of the Nazi Grand Dragon. Perhaps it is this experience that makes it so striking that Brandon's story, rather than the story of his murderers, is articulated among these other audiovisual fragments of corporeal excess.<sup>47</sup>

It is not just corporeal sensation that articulates fragments of Brandon's story with deviance; the verbal discourse also helps to produce such rhetoric. The heading for Brandon's exhibit says "We: Those Defined by Sexual Orientation." This is the only display in the "Shadow of Intolerance" that has a heading similar to

those displays in the foyer. Thus, it is even more surprising that Brandon's story is not included in the first space of attention, but is spatially located amongst a discourse of deviance. Furthermore, this heading limits Brandon's "difference" to sexual orientation and does not take into account other intersections of identity that complicate Brandon's narrative. The sub-title for the display is simply "Brandon Teena." It states:

Brandon Teena (also known as Teena Brandon) was a twenty-one year old transgendered man who was raped and murdered on January 31, 1993 outside of Humboldt, Nebraska. Although genetically born female, Teena dressed and lived as a man, dated women and tried to fit in to the small town Nebraska life. When John Lotter and Marvin "Tom" Nissen discovered their new friend was biologically female, they beat and raped him. When the assault was reported to local police, Lotter and Nissen retaliated by going to the farmhouse where Teena was staying with Lisa Lambert and Phillip Devine and shot them all, execution style, leaving only Lambert's infant son alive. In 1999, Brandon Teena's story was made into a film "Boys Don't Cry" starring Hillary Swank (who was born in Lincoln). Teena's story raised awareness of hate crimes against gay, bi-sexual, and trans-gendered people.

This statement is accompanied by a variety of images: Lotter and Nissen being taken to jail, Brandon's mother holding two pictures, one of Brandon as a young man, and one of Brandon as a baby with long hair and in a dress, and two newspaper accounts of the murder, both of which rely on psychologists' statements as evidence of Brandon's "sexual identity crisis."

The display focuses on Brandon, his performance of masculinity, and the perpetuation of "the fact" that Brandon was biologically female. Following Butler, John M. Sloop argues that the discourse surrounding Brandon's death "should be read as a public iteration of sexual norms."<sup>48</sup> Brandon is consistently portrayed as an individual that maintained a life of deception. The discourse evidenced components of Brandon's biological sex to suggest it was deceptive appearances that caused others to feel betrayed when finding out his "true" biological sex. In this sense, newspaper and magazine accounts found ways to discipline the potentially disruptive power of Brandon in ways that reaffirmed heterosexist views of gendered stability.<sup>49</sup> In addition, the discourse surrounding Brandon's murder consistently looked for a "cause" for his queer behaviors, thereby reifying the notion that heterosexuality is normative and trans\* identity is a result of either a chemical imbalance or early psycho-sexual trauma.<sup>50</sup>

This discourse is woven into Brandon's display at the museum in multiple ways in order to discipline the political potency of public remembrance. First, the fact that the display is entitled "We: Those Defined by Sexual Orientation," and then focuses just on Brandon's deviance reifies the assumption that it is only non-heterosexual individuals that are defined by sexual orientation, thereby reinforcing heterosexuality as the norm. Second, the presence of two newspaper accounts, which provide psychological "evidence" to support this account of Brandon's story, reinforces the assumption that there has to be a cause for this behavior and that this behavior is a psychological illness.<sup>51</sup> Third,

the plaque introducing the display underlines the idea that Brandon's story is characterized by deception.

Thus, the memory of Brandon Teena is presented alongside audiovisual discursive fragments of deviance and serves to conjure up feelings of shame and fear as opposed to acceptance, to deviance and deception as opposed to agitation for constitutional rights (a theme present in the first portion of the exhibit). While the memory of Brandon Teena is affiliated with a discourse that has been productively used in different spaces and times for mobilizing counter-public politics, as it is woven into the museum, that memory is disciplined. The telling of Brandon's story at the exhibit, by primarily focusing the display on him instead of his murderers and reinforcing assumptions about "Brandon's deception," serves to direct the intolerance sensed in this space of attention not to a hate crime perpetrated in Nebraska, but to Brandon's performance of masculinity. While this story still maintains some potential for critically interrupting the regional narrative of Nebraskan progressivism as it forces the viewer to acknowledge trans\* issues, it simultaneously disciplines and protects the rhetorical potential of that acknowledgement.

However, it is not just this contextualization of Brandon's memory with a rhetoric (material, sensational, and discursive) of deception and deviance that disciplines the memory, it also encounters an unfortunate collision with the regional nostalgia of Nebraska. Specifically, through a particular regional rhetoric, the "Shadow of Intolerance" deflects accountability for these sinister events away from Nebraskan identity. This is accomplished in two ways: redirecting blame from state to nation and activating understandings of the rural regional imaginary. First, any significant narrative of constitutional rights has been removed, as has the narrative of Nebraska progressivism. We were initially confounded by the title of this section. Why, although it is still a part of the "We the People" exhibit, is it given a different name, in a different space? We then realized the significance of the title "The Shadow of Intolerance." Seventy-five percent of the displays in this space are located behind a large US flag. Nebraska does not set the tone; Nebraska is the shadow of the "real" body of intolerance, characterized by the US flag. The intolerance is never fully opened to critical reflection because it operates within the shadow of the nation. In other words, the regional rhetoric is characterized by a backgrounding of the state; when it comes to sinister events, Nebraska is merely a reflection of the dominant figure, the United States of America. The spatial relation has been reversed.

As Rice notes, "claims to regionalism may have complicated, multiple, and even conflicting relations to national identity" and thus "nation and region have an important relationship, although not a concentric one."<sup>52</sup> The relationship between region and nation is evident in both portions of the "We the People" exhibit. In the early, rights-based discourse of the first portion of the exhibit, it is a relationship wherein the state is defined through its more progressive relationship with national politics. Nebraska leads the nation. In "The Shadow of Intolerance," it is the opposite; Nebraska is a shadow of the body of intolerance characterizing the nation. In the first regional rhetoric, Brandon Teena's memory can serve as a disruptive resource. When contained in the second regional constellation, Brandon's memory is used to protect the regional optimism that has defined

Nebraska from Homesteading to boosterism; it is an isolated incident that does not disrupt the regional narrative of "the good life."

This relationship between the local and the national is supported by the incorporation of discursive fragments that present a particularly heteronormative image of rural Nebraska. The "Shadow of Intolerance" assumes that visitors to the museum will identify with the construction of rural spaces as white, heterosexual, normative, and uncomplicated. The discursive resources contained in the exhibit support this assumption. An article in the *Humboldt Standard* titled "Three Murdered near Humboldt Creates National Attention" states:

The topic [of Brandon Teena's death] even over-shadowed the Cornhuskers' two point loss in the Orange Bowl on New Year's night. If any consolation can be found in the murders of three young people, it is the fact that, for Humboldt's sake, none of the victims or accused were from Humboldt.<sup>53</sup>

An editor's note a few paragraphs down, in making a call for life to "return to normal in short order," further reinforces this conservative image of rural geography:

What will be the short-term and long-term effects of the three murders of Humboldt citizens? Hopefully not much. Life will return to normal in short order. The murders will not be forgotten and will act as a reminder to people of what can and does go wrong. Somehow, some good must come from such a tragedy. ... If nothing else, stopping anyone else from following in the footsteps of the two Falls City suspects.<sup>54</sup>

Together, these fragments provide an image of Nebraskan geography as a place where the prospect of life returning "to normal in short order" involves "none of the victims or accused" inhabiting the space, where discussion returns to the Cornhusker football game, and "hopefully not much" changes because of the tragedy. The evocation of this regional nostalgia re-directs any shame conjured up by Brandon's story to the nation as a whole. The rhetoric is constructed to implicitly ask the question: "How could this be Nebraska or Humboldt's problem?" This image of rural spatiality, combined with the other disciplinary strategies in this exhibit, seems to support a view of Nebraskan spatial identity as a countervailing force against queer politics and public memory, particularly as it is not consistent with the diachronic rhetoric that has defined the region. Thus, as a whole, the "We the People" exhibit maintains regional nostalgia against the resources of public memory that could otherwise potentially serve as a disruptive source for critical regionalism and LGBT politics.

## **Willa Cather, Queer Performance, and Regional Ambivalence**

Still processing "The Shadow of Intolerance," we make our way up two flights of stairs to "Willa Cather: A Matter of Appearances." We do not assume that other visitors will always make their way immediately to the third floor Cather exhibit; in fact, the museum is not designed to facilitate such a movement. However, we make this movement because it allows us to highlight an additional example in



which queer memory is disciplined in the face of regional rhetorics. As rhetoricians, we are not interested in an authentication of the writer's gender identity or sexuality. Rather, we are drawn to investigate how the exhibit navigates Cather's gender ambiguity within the contours of a traditionally defined regional culture at the Nebraska History Museum. By emphasizing her fashion choices, "A Matter of Appearances" re-appropriates Cather's queer struggles in rural and small town Nebraskan life as a necessary pretext for her later (national and international) literary career.

As noted in the introduction, Cather is a significant figure in both queer cultural and regional memory, although she had a complicated relationship with both as personal affiliations. Some see Cather's life and work as a source of inspiration in queer history, a figure who "'queered' 'America'" by weaving together matters of difference in ways that reconstituted the national imaginary; others contest this move.<sup>55</sup> As Lisa Marcus explains, "[t]his tug of war over Willa Cather—prairie spinster or queer diva—has proven quite invigorating for Cather scholarship, as if the culture wars themselves could be fought in the terrain of her fiction and biography."<sup>56</sup> Yet while her gender and sexual status remains a subject of scholarly debate, her childhood and college years in Nebraska were nonetheless characterized by a series of masculine performances. This becomes a feature of Cather's memory that runs counter to the state's conservative regional identity.

Furthermore, Cather's ambivalence for Nebraska is made clear in her 1923 *Nation* article, "Nebraska: the End of the First Cycle." Here, readers can see firsthand her love for and belief in the state as a place of promise, a "great cosmopolitan country known as the Middle West" where it was possible to see the "hard molds of American provincialism broken up ... ." Cather tells the tale of a cosmopolitan and pluralistic state that thrives because so many of its residents were foreign-born.<sup>57</sup> Yet in the same article, Cather lists her grievances at length. She accuses her contemporaries in Nebraska of being too removed from the land, too focused on economic prosperity to the detriment of broader sources of culture and wisdom. She worries aloud that her alma mater, the University of Nebraska, is at risk of leaving the classics and humanities behind in favor of becoming "a gigantic trade school."<sup>58</sup> Later in life, Cather reportedly told her friend Elizabeth Sergeant that her visits back to the state were short "for fear of dying in a cornfield."<sup>59</sup>

Cather's performance of female masculinity and ambivalence toward Nebraska create a rhetorical complication for "A Matter of Appearances." Whereas "We The People" spatially isolates Brandon Teena's memory from the progress narrative of the state, Cather's fame as a literary luminary remains vital to the state's identity. Thus, remembrance of her gender and place-based struggles must be incorporated as a resource for constructing regional identity.

### **"A Matter of Appearances": Protecting the Region from Cather's Queer Performances**

The first regional rhetoric in the exhibit works to mollify Cather's queer performances for a regional audience. Since "A Matter of Appearances" tells the story of Cather's life through her sartorial choices, the exhibit permits—perhaps even necessitates—a discussion of Cather's preference for masculine garb while growing up in Nebraska. However, throughout the exhibit, a particular effort is



made to emphasize that Cather was also fond of donning traditional feminine attire. Articles about fashion during the time period accompany images of Cather in dresses and white linens. As we move through the exhibit, we note an early display that states "one of the most recognizable garments worn by Willa Cather was a simple white cotton middy style blouse."<sup>60</sup> A photograph of Cather wearing the blouse is juxtaposed with other women wearing the same article of clothing in an advertisement from the 1922 Montgomery Ward Catalog. Furthermore, discussion of Cather's adult years in Pittsburgh, New York, and Europe are accompanied by images of her fancy dresses, fur coats, and exquisite jewelry. The exhibit assures its visitors that Cather loved lavish feminine fashion: "People who met Willa during the 1930s and 1940s recalled a dignified older woman who dressed in tasteful tweed clothing and loved to wear furs."<sup>61</sup>

Despite this effort to emphasize the feminine, Cather's "nontraditional" (read: masculine) style during her Nebraska years is given a regional justification. One salient example appears in the discussion of Willa Cather's reputation in the small town of Red Cloud, Nebraska. Her high school attire, which included "tailored suits, starched shirts, and straw hats," is contrasted with traditional feminine clothing at the time: "In the 1880s, women were expected to wear metal bustles, corsets, heavy petticoats, towering hats, complicated hairstyles, and skirts with long trains." After noting how Cather's attire deviates from typical female dress of the era, the exhibit offers an explanation steeped in a regional rhetoric: "traditional female clothing was not practical for active girls like Willa, who liked to ride horses, fish, and canoe with her brothers on the Republican River." Cather's "independent spirit" toward fashion (which often included a blurring of traditional gender norms) is regularly discussed in the exhibit with a regional inflection. One display explains that "she was intrigued by the work that took place on the farm: butter-making, preserving, and especially the textile arts," and "grew up watching women work with fabric and use it as a vocabulary for creative expression." Thus, the culture of the farm and its outdoor activities become a justification for Cather's "unorthodox" style. The search for "causes," again, as Sloop argues, would not accompany heteronormative behaviors.<sup>62</sup> And in this case, the causes are embedded in a regionalist rhetoric of rural space.

Other displays in the exhibit offer alternative explanations for Cather's queer bodily performances. The most notable strategy involves the contextualization of Cather's masculine performance as a by-product of her penchant for theatre as she came of age in Red Cloud. The exhibit notes that a youthful Cather used to sign her name as "William Cather, M.D.," quoting Cather's explanation that, "the fact that [she] was a girl never damaged [her] ambitions to be a pope or an emperor." The discussion of "William Cather, M.D.," is accompanied by a photo of Willa wearing a tiger's head, an act that can be read as the type of playful performance that comes along with wearing a costume for a play. The exhibit continues on to cite Cather's love of the theatre, showing her dressed as a man for a performance of *The Fatal Pin* and explaining that "Willa discovered that she enjoyed becoming another person on the stage." An anecdote detailing the Cather family's move to Red Cloud is telling:

Willia made new friends and learned about life in a small prairie town ... . She rebelled against conventions of the time, cutting her hair short and wearing outrageous color combinations and boy's clothing. Her new look certainly would have been appropriate for her role as the merchant in a production of *Beauty and the Beast* that she and her friends put on at the Red Cloud Opera House to raise money for the poor.<sup>63</sup>

By positioning them within the context of the relatively safe space of theatre (where gender bending is permitted), the exhibit insulates auditors from the possibility that Cather might have engaged more "deviant" gender performances in her everyday life in Nebraska.

### ***"A Matter of Appearances": Protecting the Region from Cather's Struggles in the State***

The second regional rhetoric invoked in the exhibit re-contextualizes Cather's struggles in the state within the context of Nebraskan boosterish rhetoric. Although the exhibit takes us through her early years in Virginia, later years living in Pittsburgh and New York, and notes her love of Europe, Nebraska is consistently portrayed as the formative landscape that molded Cather into the national treasure she would become.<sup>64</sup> Any hardship she experienced in Nebraska is recast as a source of literary inspiration that would later serve the larger nation. In fact, even the opening panel of the exhibit sets the tone in this regard: "Willia Cather grew up on the plains of Nebraska to become a Pulitzer Prize-winning author who introduced the Nebraska prairie and its diverse people to the world."

We also see the region promoted and protected when Cather's reputation in her hometown of Red Cloud is discussed. The display mentions that there were many "gossips" in Red Cloud that disapproved of Cather's attire and behavior. However, Cather is not presented as a lonely outcast in a place intolerant of difference. Instead of critiquing Red Cloud for its intolerance, the display reminds us that her talent is located in her "eccentricities" and that "Willia's fearlessness in fashion and her independent ways would help shape her future career as a writer." Thus, Cather's struggles are refashioned so that it seems that being subject to gossip in the local town of Red Cloud served to develop her "eccentricities" and, consequently, her later genius as an international writer.

Another portion of the exhibit emphasizes the struggles Cather faced during her college years at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. One display notes that for a university prom, Cather was at the height of fashion when she "wore a formal gown made of ivory net over satin and trimmed with gold sequins." However, this performance of "successful" femininity was ruined by the failure of a heterosexual romantic relationship. In a rather painful moment, Cather realized her date, Tom Wing, had asked her out on a dare. This tale of suffering is re-characterized and transformed into a future-oriented pay off in the exhibit's narration: "hurt by the cruel joke, Willia swore her passion for writing would always be her true love." In that sense, the only love story in "A Matter of Appearances" is one between Cather, her writing, and the Cornhusker state.

The importance of this de-sexualized promise is reinforced in the final display. The exhibit ends with a discussion of Cather's death in 1947, and her lasting legacy. Here, a forward-thinking, celebratory rhetoric commemorates her enduring memory:

When she died, she left a legacy of novels, articles, and stories that continue to inspire and enchant readers today. Her themes of family, community, and mortality are timeless. The beautiful craft clothing and textiles Willa chose to surround herself with offer another dimension of an unconventional woman whose lifelong celebration of art, beauty, and storytelling continues to inspire.

By the end of the exhibit, any struggle Cather experienced in her life is resolved upon her death; instead, we have a repertoire of works and creative fashion from Nebraska's cultural icon.

It is important to emphasize that there are moments in the exhibit that seem to support rather than obscure queer politics. For instance, in a portion of the exhibit entitled "The Education of Billy Cather," comments from University of Nebraska-Lincoln school friends are woven into the display. One particularly striking quotation is that of classmate Morgan Riley: "Willa was just plain Billy to us. She wore mannish clothes, high stiff collars with string tie or four in hand, and white cuffs peeping out the plain suit coat she always affected."<sup>65</sup> This is a moment of emphasis wherein, despite the fact that deviation from heterosexual gender norms contained sadness, auditors get a glimpse into the fact that Cather found acceptance amongst her friends at the university. Furthermore, we are told that upon her death in 1972, Edith Lewis, Cather's "best friend and companion" was laid to rest beside her. This narrative finale offers museum auditors a happy ending to a biography peppered with moments of gender discipline: in death, Edith and Willa are together.

In all, however, "A Matter of Appearances" aims to cultivate feelings of regional pride for "Nebraska's first lady of letters," while explaining away her queer performance and regional ambivalence for a Nebraska audience.<sup>66</sup> While we applaud the exhibit for including commentary on Cather's queer gender performance and long-term relationship with Edith Lewis, it employs numerous rhetorical strategies to maintain a sense of traditionally defined regional nostalgia. Essentialist notions of region "can be easily co-opted into the service of racist or otherwise discriminatory politics," using traditional notions of local place to define the authentic and inauthentic behaviors of the region.<sup>67</sup> The regional rhetoric in this exhibit functions as a way to maintain an awareness of Cather's queer performances, yet still upholds her as an iconic symbol of rural, conservative Nebraska and the Great Plains, despite any suffering she may have faced in the state.

It can be argued that the exhibit's placement within the Nebraska History Museum justifies a focus on Cather's state identity rather than a focus on opening up spaces for LGBT activism. However, outside of this context, Cather's ties to Nebraska have served simultaneously as a source of queer remembrance *and* inspiration for a better future, as seen in Adrienne Rich's poem, "For Julia in Nebraska":

*On this beautiful, ever-changing land*  
—the historical marker says—  
*man fought to establish a home*  
(fought whom? The marker is mute.)

They named this Catherland, for Willa Cather,  
lesbian—the marker is mute,  
the marker white men set on a soil  
of broken treaties, Indian blood,  
women wiped out in childbirths, massacres—  
for Willa Cather, lesbian,  
whose letters were burnt in shame.

Rich goes on to ask the simple but provocative question, “how are we going to do better?”<sup>68</sup> Whether or not Cather’s letters were actually ever burnt in shame, we believe critical regionalism prompts us to ask the same question about LGBT rights in Nebraska.

## Conclusion

In the past, scholarship on memory places has attended to the interplay between memory designed for “local” and “national” spaces. Much of this work has commented on the relationships between identification with a regional geography and that of the nation.<sup>69</sup> In this essay, we extend this literature by utilizing a critical regionalist framework to analyze two exhibits at the Nebraska History Museum. Rhetorically oriented studies in critical regionalism emphasize the nature of the discursive construction of the region as one of relationality; constructing the relationship between the particular space and other spaces (other regions, the nation, the globe) as well as in relation to political (class, gendered, racial, heteronormative) discourses. Additionally, such work emphasizes the point of disrupting taken-for-granted assumptions about the region as opposed to a discourse of regional nostalgia. This study demonstrates how the state/nation relationship devolves into a particularly problematic regional nostalgia, hindering the counter-public forming potential of the memories of Willa Cather and Brandon Teena.

In examining the two exhibits in tandem, we were able to trace the multiple ways that regional boosterism shaped the rhetorics of display at a state history museum.<sup>70</sup> In the case of Brandon Teena, local and state-based memories (Brandon’s death, hate crimes) were positioned as reflections of a larger trend in national memories (the “real” body of intolerance characterizing the nation at large). The memories of Willa Cather’s queer performances are rather easily incorporated into a progressive relationship between the state (queer struggles) and the memories of a nation (literary treasure). Her queer performances can be explained away through focus on heteronormative fashion, regional requirements for masculinity, or penchant for performance. Together, through multiple material and discursive rhetorics, and articulations of the relationship between the

state and the nation, the museum disciplines the memory of queer figures with a rhetoric that maintains rather than disrupts regional nostalgia.

In reading state history museums in light of critical regionalism, we offer a future-oriented criticism aimed at a more progressive politics of the region. As Powell stresses, critical regionalism should include progressive criticism anchored in rhetorical production:

To understand the full effects of the impact of injustice, of uneven development, of racism, classism, sexism, and heterosexism, progressive intellectuals and educators must reclaim the supposedly tranquil or quiescent (depending on one's political perspective) spaces of regional culture as vital spaces of cultural strife. And to do this means developing critical strategies capable of recognizing conflict and struggle in forms unique to specific landscapes, and implementing tactics for intervention and action specific to those landscapes ... crucial struggles, matters literally of life and death, are playing out in places occluded by enduring images of city and country, center and margin, metropole and region.<sup>71</sup>

Places of public memory, and criticisms of their rhetoric, can participate in this progressive criticism, imagining regions as spaces of conflict, and developing regional interventions. Of course, when making these "progressive" suggestions for re-imagining the regional politics of museums it is important to recognize, as Amy K. Levin does, that:

When contemporary museums attempt to focus on marginalized populations, their exhibitions gain inflection from three inextricable and commanding forces: the institution's past and present relationship to dominant groups; the politics of control inherent in spectatorship and display; and the evolving economics of marketing culture, and especially sex, as a commodity.<sup>72</sup>

Thus, we must recognize the presence of institutional forces in museology that inflect the politics of rhetorical invention. As such, we applaud the curators' inclusion of Brandon's story and Cather's queer performances in the state history museum at this moment in time. Yet, we also believe that these cases prompt consideration of how critical regionalism might be infused into practices of rhetorical invention in contemporary museology.

Incorporating critical regionalism into memory places involves multiple possibilities. On a narrower level, memory places can invert the regional rhetoric evident at this museum. Our criticism of the Nebraska History Museum, and the collision of the memory of queer figures and historically anchored regional utopianism, is largely dependent upon the rhetorical positioning of the relationship between the state and the nation. In certain instances, the state is articulated as ahead of the nation; in others, the state is merely a reflection of the larger politics of the nation. We underline the need for acknowledging bidirectionality in the state museum. That is, not only should we be asking "how does Nebraska lead the nation?" in terms of constitutional equality and the creation of literary treasures, but also we should be asking "how is Nebraska trailing the nation?" in these contexts. The same is true for tragic queer memory: Nebraska may indeed

be a reflection of national politics, but it also is a region with a shameful past, and one connected to larger spaces—indeed, an alternative region—of LGBT politics. Without this more complicated, bidirectional regional cartography, state history museums are simply spaces of boosterism, points to smooth over vulnerabilities. On a macro-level, then, consideration of critical regionalism emphasizes the need for state history museums to rhetorically construct the state as a place connected to and embedded in a larger relationship with other spaces of politics, activism, and inequality.

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## Notes

1. *The Brandon Teena Story*, directed by Susan Muska, and Gréta Olafsdóttir (United States: Zeitgeist Films, 1998), DVD; *Boys Don't Cry*, directed by Kimberly Peirce (United States: Fox Searchlight Pictures, 1999), DVD. See also John M. Sloop, "Disciplining the Transgendered: Brandon Teena, Public Representation, and Normativity," *Western Journal of Communication* 64 (2000): 165–89; Judith Halberstam, "The Brandon Teena Archive," in *Queer Studies: An Interdisciplinary Reader*, eds. Robert J. Corber and Stephen Valocchi (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2003), 159–69.
2. Nebraska History Museum, "Willa Cather: A Matter of Appearances," (museum exhibit, Lincoln, NE, October 9, 2010). All subsequent direct quotes in our analysis of the Cather exhibit (see "Willa Cather, Queer Performance, and Regional Ambivalence") share this citation.
3. Willa Cather, *One of Ours* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1922).
4. Deborah Carlin, "Willa Cather, 1873–1947," in *Modern American Women Writers: Profiles of their Lives and Works—from the 1870s to the Present*, eds. Elaine Showalter, Lea Baechler, and A. Walton Litz (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1993), 35.
5. As we will detail later the essay, although Cather was not outspoken on LGBTQ issues during her lifetime, many literary critics have found queer themes in her writings.
6. We are not seeking to contribute to the "Brandon industry" surrounding the Brandon Teena case (Halberstam, *In a Queer Time and Place: Transgender Bodies, Subcultural Lives* (New York: New York University Press, 2005), 16), nor are we attempting to engage long-standing scholarly debates about Willa Cather's literary legacy. Instead, we ask: can these figures—linked by their Nebraskan identity but spatially differentiated in the museum—be meaningfully read together in the museum space? For information about the two exhibits, see The Nebraska State Historical Society Foundation, *Projects and Events*, <http://www.nshsf.org/projects-and-events>
7. See Michael Warner, "Publics and Counterpublics," *Public Culture* 14 (2002): 49–90 and Thomas R. Dunn, "Remembering Matthew Shepard: Violence, Identity, and Queer Counterpublic Memories," *Rhetoric & Public Affairs* 13 (2010): 615.
8. Our aim is to study "nonnormative behaviors that have clear but not essential relations to gay and lesbian subjects," as articulated by Judith Halberstam, *In a Queer Time and Place*, 6. This is important because Brandon Teena and Willa Cather did not embrace—in fact, at times, they actively disavowed—labels connoting same sex desire. We take inspiration from John M. Sloop's argument that "mainstream discourses illustrate the rhetorically material ways in which those who do challenge dominant ideology are ideologically disciplined, the ways in which gender normativity is upheld and judged." John M. Sloop, *Disciplining Gender: Rhetorics of Sex Identity in Contemporary*



*US Culture* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2004), 55. Rather than focus on "lesbian and gay" as fixed identity categories, we examine the mobilization of normative notions of gender, sexuality, and state-based citizenship as systems of discipline in museum representations.

9. Although it stems from a strong interdisciplinary tradition, the study of critical regionalism has just recently experienced uptake in rhetorical studies. Douglas Reichert Powell laid the groundwork for this move in his *Critical Regionalism: Connecting Politics and Culture in the American Landscape* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007) and a recent special issue of *Rhetoric Society Quarterly* (42.3) continues the charge. See especially Jenny Rice's introductory piece, "From Architectonics to Tectonics: Introducing Regional Rhetorics," *Rhetoric Society Quarterly* 42 (2012): 201–13. We use the term "articulation" to discuss the production of regions as it seems the most fitting rhetorical term for the production of relationality—the joining or fusing of multiple fragments to produce a rhetorical collage. As Nathan Stormer argues, articulation "is about historicizing different configurations of materiality and meaning (collapsed, segregated, overlapping) as conditions for the coming into being of a given form of rhetoric ... to articulate is to spatialize culture and nature by arranging diverse material-semiotic elements into recognizable bodies and languages." Nathan Stormer, "Articulation: A Working Paper on Rhetoric and *Taxis*," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 90 (2004): 261. Dave Tell argues that the production of regions is best seen as a process of articulating relationships between spaces, histories, and political formations in his, "The Meanings of Kansas: Rhetoric, Regions, and Counter-Regions," *Rhetoric Society Quarterly* 42 (2012): 214–32.
10. Rhetorical analysis of museums has traditionally focused on the rhetoricity of the spatial layout, which works by way of directing the movements of the body throughout the museum display. See Victoria J. Gallagher "Memory and Reconciliation in the Birmingham Civil Rights Institute," *Rhetoric and Public Affairs* 2 (1999): 303–20. For an overview of museum rhetoric as a process of "collecting, exhibiting, and representing," see Greg Dickinson, Brian L. Ott, and Eric Aoki, "Memory and Myth at the Buffalo Bill Museum," *Western Journal of Communication* 69 (2005): 89.
11. Carole Blair, Greg Dickinson, and Brian Ott, "Introduction: Rhetoric/Memory/Place," in *Places of Public Memory: The Rhetoric of Museums and Memorials*, ed. Greg Dickinson, Carole Blair, and Brian L. Ott (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2010), 2.
12. See Kenneth S. Zagacki and Victoria J. Gallagher, "Rhetoric and Materiality in the Museum Park at the North Carolina Museum of Art," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 95 (2009): 171–91; Gregory Clark, *Rhetorical Landscapes in America: Variations on a Theme from Kenneth Burke* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2004).
13. To elaborate on the position of visitors within particular ways of seeing, see Greg Dickinson, Brian L. Ott, and Eric Aoki, "Spaces of Remembering and Forgetting: The Reverent Eye/I at the Plains Indian Museum," *Communication and Critical/Cultural Studies* 3 (2006): 27–47. For an elaboration on the idea of imagined community, see Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1983). See also Clark, *Rhetorical Landscapes*.
14. For more on official public memories, see Tamar Katriel, "Our Future is where our Past is: Studying Heritage Museums as Ideological and Performative Arenas," *Communication Monographs* 60 (1993): 69–75; Carole Blair and Neil Michel, "Reproducing Civil Rights Tactics: The Rhetorical Performances of the Civil Rights Memorial," *Rhetoric Society Quarterly* 30 (2000): 31–55.
15. Blair and Michel, "Reproducing Civil Rights Tactics," 33.
16. Carole Blair and Neil Michel, "The Rushmore Effect: Ethos and National Collective Identity," in *The Ethos of Rhetoric*, ed. Michael J. Hyde (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2004), 163.

17. Blair and Michel, "The Rushmore Effect," 163–64.
18. Zagacki and Gallagher, "Rhetoric and Materiality," 172.
19. Dickinson, Ott, and Aoki, "Memory and Myth," 88.
20. Blair and Michel, "The Rushmore Effect," 175.
21. Daniel C. Brouwer, "From San Francisco to Atlanta and Back Again: Ideologies of Mobility in the AIDS Quilt's Search for a Homeland," *Rhetoric and Public Affairs* 10 (2007): 701–22.
22. Wendy J. Katz and Timothy R. Mahoney, "Introduction: Regionalism and the Humanities: Decline or Revival?" in *Regionalism and the Humanities*, eds. Timothy R. Mahoney and Wendy J. Katz (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2008), xi.
23. Powell, *Critical Regionalism*, 5.
24. See Rice, "From Architectonics to Tectonics" and Powell, *Critical Regionalism*.
25. Ash Amin, "Regions Unbound: Towards a New Politics of Place," *Geografiska Annaler* 86B (2004): 34. See also Doreen Massey, Ash Amin, and Nigel Thrift, *Decentering the Nation: A Radical Approach to Regional Inequality* (London: Catalyst, 2003).
26. Rice, "From Architectonics to Tectonics," 206.
27. Powell, *Critical Regionalism*, 13.
28. Rice, "From Architectonic to Tectonics," 203.
29. Rice, "From Architectonic to Tectonics," 203.
30. Powell, *Critical Regionalism*, 7.
31. Greg Dickinson, "Memories for Sale: Nostalgia and the Construction of Identity in Old Pasadena," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 83 (1997): 4. For us, the tracing of cultural lines is taken broadly to imply tracing the particular contexts that are most important for understanding the rhetorical operations at the museum. As we will illustrate, while the "cultural resource" of regional utopian rhetoric is manifested at the site, the counter-public potential of the memory of queer figures remains an unfulfilled context at the museum.
32. Dickinson, Ott, and Aoki argue that this is a threefold rhetorical process of collecting (selecting which artifacts are to be presented), exhibiting (deciding in which spatial context they will be exhibited), and representing (using whatever sensory and/or multimediated form of presentation that will best achieve rhetorical ends). Greg Dickinson, Brian Ott, and Eric Aoki, "Memory and Myth," 89. Often this methodology considers how visitors articulate their own unique memories in light of the different fragments available to them. See, for example, Roger C. Aden, Min Wha Han, Stephanie Norander, Michael E. Pfahl, Timothy P. Pollack, Jr., and Stephanie L. Young, "Recollection: A Proposal for Refining the Study of Collective Memory and its Places," *Communication Theory* 19 (2009): 311–36. For elaboration on visitor behaviors as resistance to sites of memory, see Thomas R. Dunn, "Remembering 'A Great Fag': Visualizing Public Memory and the Construction of Queer Space," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 97 (November 2011): 435–60.
33. Joshua P. Ewalt, "A Colonialist Celebration of National <Heritage>: Verbal, Visual, and Landscape Ideographs at Homestead National Monument of America," *Western Journal of Communication* 75 (2011): 367–85.
34. David Bristow, "Oh, the Irony," *Nebraska State Historical Society* (blog), August 7, 2012, <http://blog.nebraskahistory.org/?p=7850>
35. Katz and Mahoney, "Introduction," xxii.
36. "Life is Right," *Lincoln Chamber of Commerce* (2013): <http://www.lifeisright.com>. More than one Lincolnite has wondered whether the "right" in the slogan may refer to the political inclinations of the region.
37. Katz and Mahoney, "Introduction," xxii.

38. Rhetoricians, cultural theorists, and literary critics alike have developed this insight, that queer history and memory can be generative for contemporary politics and scholarship. See especially *Queering Public Address: Sexualities in American Historical Discourse*, ed. Charles E. Morris, III. (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2007) and Heather Love, *Feeling Backward: Loss and the Politics of Queer History* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007).
39. Dunn, "Remembering Matthew Shepard," 613.
40. One can look to a number of Facebook pages ("Remember Brandon Teena," Facebook, 2011), YouTube videos, ("Remembering Brandon Teena—Chasing Cars" YouTube, LLC, 2011), and Myspace pages ("Brandon Teena Memorial, MySpace, 2003–2011) to illustrate the coalition-building potential of Brandon Teena's memory.
41. Love, *Feeling Backward*, 72–99.
42. Marilee Lindemann, *Willa Cather: Queering America* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), 4.
43. Michael Calvin McGee, "Text, Context, and the Fragmentation of Contemporary Culture," *Western Journal of Communication* 54 (1990): 274–89.
44. The concept of space of attention is developed more fully in Kenneth Zagacki and Victoria Gallagher's work on the North Carolina Museum of Art. Spaces of attention are rhetorical insofar as they direct perception and sensation to experience certain objects in certain ways, while avoiding or silencing other aspects. See Zagacki and Gallagher, "Rhetoric and Materiality." They can also function by constructing a particular interplay of presences and absences. For instance, see Brian Ott, Eric Aoki, and Greg Dickinson, "Ways of (Not) Seeing Guns: Presence and Absence at the Cody Firearms Museum," *Communication and Critical Cultural Studies* 8 (2011): 215–39.
45. Nebraska History Museum, "We the People: The Nebraska Viewpoint," (museum exhibit, Lincoln, NE, October 2010–September 2011). All subsequent direct quotes in this section are from the exhibit and share this citation.
46. For an elaboration on the concept of rhetorical cartographies as a method of discursive analysis, see Ronald Walter Greene, "Another Materialist Rhetoric," *Critical Studies in Mass Communication* 15 (1998): 21–41; Ronald Walter Greene and Kevin Douglas Kuswa, "From the Arab Spring to Athens, From Occupy Wall Street to Moscow: Regional Accents and the Rhetorical Cartography of Power," *Rhetoric Society Quarterly* 42 (2012): 271–88. We are using a variation on the term here to refer to the particular articulations of spatial relations that constructs a regional rhetoric, suggesting this as a type of cartography, or mapping of connections and disconnections between a number of diverse places. See also Tell, "The Meanings of Kansas."
47. On the rhetoric of excessive corporeal sensation, see Carole Blair, "Reflections on Criticism and Bodies: Parables from Public Places," *Western Journal of Communication* 65 (2001): 271–94.
48. Sloop, "Disciplining the Transgendered," 168.
49. Sloop, "Disciplining the Transgendered," 168.
50. Sloop, "Disciplining the Transgendered," 168.
51. Joe Duggan, "Brandon Fit Profile of Transsexual," *Lincoln Journal Star* (Lincoln, Nebraska), Jan. 4, 1994. Article included in the exhibit.
52. Rice, "From Architectonics to Tectonics," 206
53. "Three Murdered Near Humboldt Create National Attention," *Humboldt Standard* (Humboldt, Nebraska), January 6, 1994. Article included in the exhibit.
54. "Three Murdered."
55. Lindemann, *Willa Cather, Queering America*, 4. For criticism of feminist and queer interpretations of Cather, see chapters 5 and 6 of Joan Acocella's *Willa Cather and the Politics*

- of *Criticism* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2000).
56. Lisa Marcus, "Review of *Willa Cather and Others*, and: *Willa Cather, Queering America*," *American Literature* 74 (September 2002): 656.
  57. Willa Sibert Cather, "Nebraska: The End of the First Cycle," *Nation* 117 (September 5, 1923): 238.
  58. Cather, "Nebraska," 238.
  59. Carlin, "Willa Cather, 1873–1947," 36.
  60. Nebraska History Museum, "Willa Cather: A Matter of Appearances" (museum exhibit, Lincoln, NE, October 9, 2010). Unless otherwise noted, all subsequent direct quotes in our analysis of the Cather exhibit share this citation.
  61. Nebraska State Historical Society, "Willa Cather: A Matter of Appearances" (exhibit pamphlet, Lincoln, NE, 2010): 18.
  62. Sloop, "Disciplining the Transgendered."
  63. Nebraska State Historical Society, "Willa Cather: A Matter of Appearances" (exhibit pamphlet, Lincoln, NE, 2010): 6.
  64. Indeed, Cather's biography and writings themselves have a complicated regional map: while she is known as the quintessential voice of a particular *bounded* region (whether demarcated as Nebraska, the Great Plains, or the Midwest), she was born in Virginia and later lived in Pennsylvania and New York. Her literature certainly brought a sense of the Great Plains to a number of outside readers, although it also explored a variety of other regions. According to Guy Reynolds, to characterize Cather as *only* a regional writer functions as a form of reductionism, "helping to narrow and constrain the sheer imaginative diversity of her oeuvre" and reducing the spatial pluralism of her life and writings to one bounded territory. See his "Willa Cather's Case: Region and Reputation," *Regionalism and the Humanities*, ed. Timothy R. Mahoney and Wendy J. Katz (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2008), 86.
  65. Quoted in the exhibit from James R. Shively, ed., *Writing from Willa Cather's Campus Years* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1950), 122.
  66. Lindemann, *Willa Cather, Queering America*, 2.
  67. Powell, *Critical Regionalism*, 43.
  68. Adrienne Rich, "For Julia in Nebraska," *Women's Studies* 11 (1984): 324–25.
  69. Communication scholarship on media discourses has also noted this relationship. For instance, in Squires and Brouwer's analysis of media framing surrounding the death of Susie Guillory Phipps, the authors argue that national media deflected accountability of the issue by "localizing race," containing the significance and implications of "the Phipps case to the state of Louisiana or the region of the South" (288–89). See Catherine R. Squires and Daniel C. Brouwer, "In/Discernible Bodies: The Politics of Passing in Dominant and Marginal Media," *Critical Studies in Media Communication* 19 (2002): 283–310.
  70. Lawrence J. Prelli, ed., *Rhetorics of Display* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2006).
  71. Powell, *Critical Regionalism*, 21.
  72. Amy K. Levin, "Introduction," in *Gender, Sexuality, and Museums: A Routledge Reader*, ed. Amy K. Levin (London: Routledge, 2010), 3–4.