THE IDEOLOGY OF CRITICAL REGIONALISM AS A TEACHING AND DESIGN RESOURCE FOR THE NEXT 100 YEARS OF CELA

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1 ABSTRACT
Since its introduction as a term by Alexander Tzonis and Liane Lefaivre (Tzonis and Lefaivre, 1981), Critical Regionalism has emerged as a significant ideology in contemporary landscape architectural discourse worldwide that continues to merit closer attention as a framework for creative regional design. Kristine Woolsey wrote that the only constant in the process of Critical Regionalism is the quality of the ideological position of the architect that evolves over time through practice, experience, and the international debate of the profession (Woolsey, 1991). Looking towards the next 100 years of CELA, it is worth reflecting on where we are ideologically as a profession in relation to Critical Regionalism.

Critical Regionalism can be broadly summarized as an embrace of contemporary and historical world culture as an indispensable part of a creative and expressive regionalist design process, a desire to provoke both intellectual (critical thinking) and sensual reactions to a design by the end user, and a broadening of the experience intended by design to embrace the importance of non-visual experience. Personal ideological positions related to Critical Regionalism are informed and modified by influences of region, contemporary culture, and aesthetic components such as environmental psychology, cultural rules, personal growth and creativity, and the appropriation of regional ecology and environmental forces.

The author has used research into Critical Regionalism as a guiding ideology for both practice, research, and education for the past 25 years. This research is informed by continuing and extensive literature reviews, interviews with dozens of regionalist practitioners throughout The United States, criticism and documentation of regionalist built projects in 11 countries, and the use of Critical Regionalism as the overarching theme of a graduate landscape architecture design studio taught yearly since 2004.

This essay proposes a future viability of a Critical Regionalism that is resilient, continuously adaptive, open to continuing influences from throughout the world and made relevant by the creativity of individual designers that anchor it in the present.

1.1 Keywords
Critical Regionalism, landscape aesthetics, postmodernism, regionalism, creative landscape architecture
2  INTRODUCTION
Critical Regionalism is a term applied to regionalist trends that have been evolving since regionalism became an important feature of the design debate at the beginning of the modernist period. As with other productive areas of intellectual ferment, Critical Regionalism was a logical culmination of the best ideas by the most committed writers dedicated to the greatest good for the greatest number of people—the type of thinking that funnels design insights into a resonant relationship with each other at a particular point in time.

Critical Regionalism is a flexible and adaptable ideological framework and aesthetic construct that can be used to guide underlying design methodologies—an ideology that will productively produce future viable landscape architects and landscape designs. Landscape architects are always thinking ahead as we project our design ideas first mentally and then physically onto the landscape. We work to make our designs as durable and adaptable as we can to provide value for our clients and to integrate our visions with the end-users who lead their lives in our creations.

The design fashions and the barrage of technical innovations of the day force us to seek verities that will guide our work into a future that is only partially knowable at best. As educators, the problem is compounded. We are teaching future designers of future landscapes. When considering the long career of someone graduating in their early twenties and the projected longevity of the designs that they will participate in over the course of a career, it is not unreasonable to start thinking in terms of the next 100 years of CELA—even as we look back at the first 100.

A hallmark of the theory of Critical Regionalism is its constant reinvention. This is true for the theory and for the original principles as they are clarified and amplified to respond to the priorities of various design disciplines. It is also true for new priorities that layer onto the many design parameters that have created successful landscapes of the past. This paper will discuss some of the key original elements of Critical Regionalism considering current and speculative future priorities of landscape architects, a nuanced evolution, in some cases, diverging from the ideas of architects and historians who originally developed the term.

One of the most rewarding things concerning research into regionalism is the opportunity it affords to inform and to accelerate our evolution as designers and as educators. Many of the people who write about regionalism have a deep commitment to creating “habitat for humanity” that facilitates a future viable flourishing for both people and the bio regions in which we dwell. Tracing the evolution and persistence of the ideas of regionalists breeds confidence for projecting the evolution of their core principles forward to our students and to our clients as adaptable verities that are worthy of perpetual renewal.

Critical Regionalism can be broadly summarized into a few concepts that offer profound insights when their ramifications are applied to the planning, design and development of regions. These ideas include an embrace of contemporary and historical world culture as an indispensable part of a creative and expressive regionalist design process, a desire to provoke both intellectual (critical thinking) and sensual reactions to a design by the end user, and a broadening of the experience intended by design to embrace the importance of non-visual experience. These and many more elements of the theories of Critical Regionalism will be explained and expanded in this essay.

3  TRACING REGIONALISM THEORY SINCE THE ADVENT OF CELA IN 1920
The most influential modern regionalist thinking can be traced back to roughly the time of the founding of CELA in the 1920s. This was the time when the machine age was beginning to be absorbed as a design ethos and not just as a practical reality of industrial development. This paper is primarily intended to look forward, but it is important to trace a few of the important building blocks that led to Critical Regionalism. Just as historical building styles can be fodder for contemporary creative regional designs, the ideological building blocks inform a contemporary ideology of regionalism that embraces both the verities from the past, and potential future priorities of landscape architects and architects.

The landscape architect and planner Patrick Geddes (1854-1932) is a seminal figure in the modern evolution of the idea of a region as the most logical repository for connecting all of the human activities that unite what he saw as the two opposite poles of rural and city life. He was one of the celebrated founding fathers of the modern town planning movement, the inventor of ‘conservative
surgery,' (careful editing and adaptive reuse of historical districts) and the creator of the term ‘conurbation’, (groups of cities now referred to as metropolitan areas). He used the tri-partite structure of place, work, and folk: the geographical, the historical, and the spiritual to understand the evolution of cities (Welter, 2002). This contemporary exigency was presciently articulated by Patrick Geddes in 1915 when he related the persistence of culture to the ability of plants to survive through adversity from one growing season to another (perennation).

“Our record of local history and achievement is...a perpetual renewal of certain recognizable elements... It is of the very essence of our growing sociological re-interpretation of the past to see its essential life as continuous to the present... and so to maintain the perennation of culture, the immortality of the social soul” (Geddes quoted in Welter, 2002, p.47).

His interest in typologies led him in 1909 to develop the idea of the “valley section” that follows a river course from its inception in the mountains to the sea. The section connected the various topographic regions and demonstrated the interconnected occupations that benefit from regional relationships, such as the miners and woodsmen in the mountains, the hunters and the shepherds in the grassy lower hillside, and the farmers and fishermen in the valleys closer to the sea. The occupations join together to form a cooperative society of people in the same way that communities of plants form mutually beneficial relationships (Welter, 2002, p. 60). Geddes’ regional ideas were originally inspired by regional plant associations which he studied during his academic tenure as a biologist. This conceptual connection of biological and cultural organization has found continuing resonance with regionalist thinking. It has elevated the influence of Geddes in contemporary discourse beyond his peers, and his historical influence with such regionalist luminaries as Lewis Mumford.

The American historian, sociologist, philosopher of technology, and literary critic Lewis Mumford (1895-1990) was a strong supporter of Geddes’ ideas and equally influential in the development of Critical Regionalism theory. He believed that we should never consider regional ideas without mentally “adding to it the idea of the universal”—a prime tenet of Critical Regionalism (Mumford, 1947, p. 101). The universal, both contemporary and historic, is seen as an indispensable tool for regionalist thinking in order to gain the perspective necessary to understand and develop the best ideas that will help a region celebrate itself.

Mumford criticized the pervasive functionalism prevalent during the modernist period for making engineering an end in itself rather than a foundation for a more humanized form by stating that “the brotherhood of the machine is not a substitute for the brotherhood of people”(Tzonis and Lefaivre, 2012, p. 20). Unlike many of the contemporary modernists of his day, Mumford always included the local in conjunction with the universal in his design theory and criticism. According to Mumford, by rejecting traditional architecture, modernists “… also rejected the human needs, interests, sentiments, and values that must be given full play in every complete structure” (Mumford, 1952, p. 86).

Aldo Leopold (1887-1948) is a seminal figure in the ongoing evolution of environmental and ecological thinking in the United States and more important to the regionalist thinking of landscape architects than to the early iterations of the theory of Critical Regionalism as espoused by architects. Leopold was very well known as a professor during his lifetime but is best known today for his work and writing on natural aesthetics, environmental ethics, wildlife management, wilderness preservation, conservation economics, ecology, the land ethic, and agriculture.

His career as a thoughtful professional gradually evolved from its beginnings in forestry as he looked more and more deeply into the root causes of the environmental and ecological dysfunction that he saw around the world in the early 20th century. His huge influential work, A Sand County Almanac (published posthumously in 1949), shows us that most of the issues, aesthetics, and ethics of land use that are still considered environmentally and ecologically forward thinking have been with us at least since the Great Depression era of the 20th century. It also makes clear that these imperatives are another area that requires constant nurturing and renewal by thoughtful design professionals and educators today.

As Aldo Leopold wrote, “We can be ethical only in relation to something we can see, feel, understand, love, or otherwise have faith in” (Leopold, 1986, p. 251). Leopold understood that the “death of nature”, which began with the enlightenment and continues to this day with the ethos and professional practice of many design professionals, can be addressed by increasing both ecological and aesthetic
appreciation of plants and other biota. Critical Regionalism in landscape architecture, particularly as applied to planting design, can be a very productive tool in that process as the human relationship to all biota and the resulting reconceptualized landscape designs and methodologies are added to a new definition of Critical Regionalism.

Another seminal figure, involved in the evolution of the experiential aesthetics that are an important component of Critical Regionalism, is John Dewey (1859-1952), a philosopher, educator, and founder of The New School for Social Research. Dewey described aesthetic experience as a combination of desire and thought, the sensuous and the intellectual. He was an early proponent of the tri-partite aesthetic construct of environmental psychology (which he referred to as human nature), cultural influences, and personal growth and creativity. These three key elements of landscape aesthetics were used very compellingly by Steven Bourassa in his book *The Aesthetics of Landscape* to shift the primary focus of Critical Regionalism away from its original concentration on form and to properly situate it within experiential landscape aesthetics (Bourassa, 1991).

Dewey summarizes experiential aesthetics as the *enhancement* and *intensification* (emphasis mine) of everyday experience. This broad and comprehensive definition is meant to encompass both sensory and intellectual components, key elements of Critical Regionalism. The intellectual engenders a prolonged contemplation of the object as the object triggers ideas that are beyond the landscape, or other design, that is readily perceptible. The sensuous aspects, however, facilitate an immediate and powerful emotional engagement and provide the psychological benefits of bringing people mentally into the present (Meyer, 2016, pp. 136-137).

Dewey’s ideas are also important for an understanding of how the creativity encouraged by Critical Regionalism moves culture forward through the dissemination of innovation. The natural fit of a creative designer and a culture that is ‘ripe’ for appropriation of his ideas was described by Dewey and is a key issue in Critical Regionalism.

Dewey divides artistic innovation into three stages:

1. Experimentation that is generally condemned by the public. Ricoeur describes this initial stage as bringing forth “something which will be shocking and bewildering at first” (Ricoeur, 1965, p. 51);
2. The new style is used to modify previous styles and so is given a “classical” validity; and,
3. “Technique is borrowed without the urgent experience that at first evoked it. The academic and the eclectic result” (Dewey, 1980, p. 42).

The third stage above is the one that is most relevant to the constant reinvention that is a salient component of Critical Regionalism. This reinvention is as important to the original innovators as it is to the designers under their sphere of influence or to the culture that stays vital because it is in a constant process of renewal. The continued flood of new ideas created by a sensitized experience of region and the transformation of regional influences into creative design solutions helps prevent designers from repeating themselves and becoming creatively “switched off.”

By the first third of the 20th century, the trajectory was set for what would evolve into Critical Regionalism in the early 1980s. Many influential writers amplified and reinvented the ideas about region and districts, combining the local and the universals, bioregions and ecology and experiential aesthetics, and how all of these relate to environmental design in a rapidly developing and commodifying world. The early principles of Critical Regionalism are a snapshot in time created by people with specific professional biases and the trajectory of these ideas has continued and will continue far into the future. It is productive, therefore, to consider in greater detail the principles of Critical Regionalism and how adaptable they might be to future circumstances in the next 100 years of CELA.

“History is not ended with our historian’s “periods”; the world is ever beginning anew, each community with it, each town and quarter. ... How then shall we continue the past tradition into the opening future?” (Patrick Geddes quoted in Welter, 2002, p. 82).

4 **DEFINING CRITICAL REGIONALISM**

The contemporary use of the term “Critical Regionalism” with regard to architecture and planning was first introduced by Alexander Tzonis and Liane Lefaivre in “The Grid and the Pathway” in *Architecture in Greece* (Tzonis, 1981). Critical Regionalism grew out of the need to find a way for rooted, regional
cultures in developing countries to adapt to rapid economic progress and the resulting foreign, social, and technological influences, without dissipating “the cultural resources which have made the great civilizations of the past” (Frampton, 1983, p. 148).

More recent theory applies the ideology of Critical Regionalism to a wider variety of geographical areas, especially areas in advanced countries that have also become culturally dissipated. Rather than preserving a rooted culture, the problem in developed countries is to mitigate the sense of cultural estrangement engendered by the homogenous, “placeless,” endless megalopolitan developments built during and since the era of modernism and the international style, functionalism, and the excesses of consumer culture. Melvin M. Webber famously called this “community without propinquity” [kinship] or the non-place urban realm (Frampton, 1987 quoted in Canizaro, 2007, p. 382). The influential 20th century philosopher Paul Ricoeur summed up the problem succinctly: “There is the paradox: how to become modern and return to sources; how to revive an old dormant civilization and take part in universal civilization (Ricoeur, 1965. P. 47).”

Critics of Critical Regionalism sometimes wonder if Critical Regionalism is so dialectic, personal, and broadly applicable that it no longer has any meaning or can hold together as a theory of process. The contention here is that Critical Regionalism is not a theory of process, but rather it is an ideology—a philosophical posture and habit of mind—that sets the priorities for a variety of subsequent design methodologies. To hold Critical Regionalism together as an ideology, designers must uncover within themselves the elements that are most aesthetically resonant and practical, thereby establishing the continuing relevance of the theory to their professional practice.

This research focuses on the theory of Critical Regionalism most relevant to landscape architects and other designers and steers clear of most of the Marxist criticism that is such an important component of long-time architecture professor and writer Kenneth Frampton’s early ideas on the subject. If the theory is to be relevant in the United States and many other developed countries, it must be in concert with both our democratic and social institutions and our capitalist system of landscape development. A focus on aesthetic experience puts the rationale for Critical Regionalism into a proper context for working designers. The theory is not primarily subversive, political, or even economic, but rather a very practical way to encourage the creation of landscape designs that are creative, expressive, and that move culture forward in a positive direction.

Much of the early writing about Critical Regionalism was done by architects and historians so it is not surprising that the ideology of landscape architects was often minimized. Translating the tenets and methods of Critical Regionalism into the sensibilities of landscape architects provides a window into the flexibility of the concepts as we speculate on their future viability.

5 ELEMENTS OF CRITICAL REGIONALISM

The theories of Critical Regionalism have been emerging and transforming since their inception in a reconceptualization process that is a hallmark of the theory itself. Writings about Critical Regionalism have shown a great diversity of opinion as to what elements constitute a critical regionalist design. The elements listed below were uncovered in my first foray into Critical Regionalism research in the mid-1990s. The definitions of these elements have evolved in the intervening decades but their relevance as a framework for the ideology of design has stood the test of time.

1. a critique of the perceived excesses of modernism, functionalism, and enlightenment rationality;
2. a critique of the romantic, picturesque, and commercial approaches to regionalism;
3. an embrace of the postmodern emphasis on place, rather than primarily forms and space;
4. an embrace of regionally defining physical, tactile, environmental/ecological, social and cultural elements;
5. a desire to create designs that balance a celebration of regional character with the influences of world culture;
6. a striving to make the landscape an object for intellectual contemplation as well as sensual pleasure;
7. a distrust of grand design solutions and an embrace of incrementalism; and,
8. a desire to create an imageable bounded place where the excesses of endless megalopolitan development and a consumer driven culture are resisted (Hopman,1998, p.11).
The detailed descriptions of elements of Critical Regionalism that follows is taken from a wide variety of writers, primarily from short essays. These elements and others are greatly amplified and illustrated with many successful projects in Hopman, D (forthcoming).

5.1 The excesses of modernism, functionalism, and enlightenment rationality

Despite our being firmly rooted in the postmodern age, these issues continue to be paramount. Technology has with its rapid and increasingly facile ability to reproduce landscapes and buildings both visually and physically and its inevitable connection to efficiency and profit, continued to push development away from the psychological anchors and creative potential of regional modifiers. The resistance to global modernism and functionalism has moved in some very productive and unforeseen directions since the early 1980s. For example, the so called “Vancouver Style” has demonstrated that the sense of place can be defined by low buildings, other experiential streetscape elements, and carefully calibrated distant sight lines, even as the tall glass curtain wall buildings loom almost invisibly, blocked by lower pedestrian-scale facades. This focus on landscape as an increasingly important tenet of district and regional character shifts some of the focus of Critical Regionalism away from the stylistic debate in architecture that helped trigger the idea.

It is also imperative that designers resist the functionalism that is stripped of aesthetic experience in any future Critical Regionalism over the coming century. People that don’t understand or sufficiently value environmental experience will continue to find new ways to denigrate the poetics of design and elevate other functional priorities such as environmental performance, programing and human use, increasingly sophisticated algorithmic design, or pure economic factors. Critical Regionalism is an ideology that fights back and makes sure that this is never an either-or proposition. As Elizabeth Meyer has written:

“We are sustained by reducing, editing, and doing less harmful things. But we are also sustained through abundance, wonder and beauty. The performance of a landscape’s appearance and the experience of beauty should have as much currency in debates...as the performance of its ecological systems” (Meyer, 2016, p. 147).

5.2 The romantic, picturesque, and commercial approaches to regionalism

Romantic regionalism grew out of the picturesque art tradition of the late nineteenth century and is one of the most pervasive elements of worldwide capitalism. The term picturesque was first applied to landscape paintings, then romantic gardens, and finally to the architecture set in picturesque landscapes. The romantic regionalism tradition can be prominently seen today in the tourist industry where such interests as “unspoiled nature, ancient history, distant lands, and exotic peoples” have captured the public imagination and have been used as thematic lures for countless commercial projects (Wilson, 1997, p. 111).

Many influential writers have addressed romantic regionalism as a pervasive component of contemporary culture to be resisted. Tzonis and Lefaivre refer to this type of regionalism as commercial regionalism, which they criticize as “pornography of sorts,” due to the emphasis on emotion over rationality and the ease with which one can become totally possessed by it in a purely sensual way. It is “the professional architecture of the genius commercialis of tourism and entertainment which...offers to alleviate the pain of atopy and anomy of contemporary life in as-if settings, simulacra of places, facades, masks of environments offering the illusion of participation, ...of a feeling of ‘being there’ (Tzonis & Lefaivre, 2002, p. 18).” The writer, farmer and teacher Wendell Berry calls it a “regionalism based on condescension, which specializes in the quaint and the eccentric and the picturesque (Berry, 1972, p. 37).” Paul Ricoeur, professor and one of the most influential philosophers of the 20th century, calls the spread of pure consumer culture and its manifestation in design as “absolute nihilism in the triumph of comfort. The whole of mankind becomes a kind of imaginary museum: where shall we go this weekend—visit the Angkor ruins or take a stroll in the Tivoli of Copenhagen” (Ricoeur, 1965. p. 48)? The Finish architect and former professor Juhani Palasmaa echoes this sentiment by asking if the worldwide move to a consumerist culture is dooming our culture to “lose all its authenticity and turn into a planetary waxworks show...a naively shallow architectural souvenir” (Palasmaa, 1988, p. 133).
The ideology, rigor, and creativity of design consultants are often better predictors of a design team’s ability to transcend these problems, rather than just the fact that a project has a commercial imperative. Good design is possible in any type of landscape and architecture, including commercially driven design, and not just for the boutique clients with the loftiest aesthetic aspirations. The tenets of Critical Regionalism are an ideology that helps designers work through these contradictions and produce designs that will meet both the narrowly commercial and the broader socio-cultural imperatives of development well into the future with appropriate rigor and integrity.

5.3 The postmodern emphasis on place, rather than primarily forms and space

Figure 1. Bloedel Reserve on Bainbridge Island near Seattle provokes critical thinking by juxtaposing intense and carefully maintained expressions of local nature with rigorously crafted geometry. The reflection garden (on right) was designed by Thomas Church. Photos by Author (2019)

Buildings, other cultural artifacts, un-designed areas, and people contribute to a “sense of place.” This is a term that is often applied by designers in many professions as an important criterion of beauty or aesthetics. Geographer John Agnew describes place as “the local structure of feeling” that pervades being in a particular place (Moore, 2005, p. 435). The structure of feeling is another way of describing experiential aesthetics. Other people would refer to it as the character of a place or even as the “vibe.” Professor of architecture (now emeritus) Steven Moore proposed a conception of place as “a dynamic process that links humans and nonhumans in space at a variety of scales (Ibid).” The scale that is most important to the ideology of Critical Regionalism is a small enough area that the human poetics of space are experienced directly. The scale of direct experience can reflect and trigger thinking about larger areas than those that are immediately perceptible. However, it is the direct experience that is the most important focus of Critical Regionalism.

As the ever-increasing billions of humans on earth exert greater and greater control of the environment, educated resistance to physical and cultural entropy should continue to rise as a priority of design. Using both natural and cultural history as key building blocks in the design process will both keep the design process fresh for designers in diverse locations, and also keep the landscape and structures emotionally accessible to inhabitants. This ethos is especially important with the advent of advanced manufacturing, artificial intelligence and the ever-accelerating waves of engineered design tools and components. Cognitive psychologist Daniel Levitin wrote that “in 2011, Americans took in five times as much information as they did in 1986”, a symptom of what has been called “the quickening” that is accelerating and outstripping our ability to adjust (quoted in Spirn, 2016, p. 66). The pace of change and the sense of place that facilitate appropriation by a local community will need to be very conscious
parameters for designers and decision makers when pursuing large-scale parametric interventions. The acceleration of change will require continuing psychological research for us to understand how we can keep designs both innovative and psychologically accessible. We will also need to increase the focus on celebrating particular geographical locations with their attendant population groups, biota, weather, topography etc.—a celebration that goes beyond creating a completely or primarily invented or transferred experience of place.

5.4 Regionally defining, tactile, environmental/ecological, social and cultural elements

Creative observation and understanding of both visual and non-visual regional signifiers are indispensable elements of a design process that leads to Critical Regionalism. A discussion of this complex topic is beyond the scope of this paper. A more in-depth understanding of regions, creative seeing, and non-visual design cues are explored in Hopman, D (forthcoming).

5.5 Embracing a celebration of regional character with influences of world culture

World culture is often referred to by writers on Critical Regionalism as *Universal Civilization*. Paul Ricoeur, professor and one of the most influential philosophers of the 20th century, describes universal civilization as both the scientific thinking that will lead people with similar intellectual backgrounds to the same conclusions and to technical expertise that diffuses continually throughout the world to all people and to all places.

"Mankind as a whole is on the brink of a single world civilization representing at once a gigantic progress for everyone and an overwhelming task of survival and adapting our cultural heritage to this new setting. To some extent, and in varying ways, everyone experiences the tension between the necessity for the free access to progress and, on the other hand, the exigency of safeguarding our heritage" (Ricoeur, 1965, p.43).

Places are moving towards a universal economy and common way of living involving such items as transportation, human relationships, comfort, leisure, and news programming. Designers have an opportunity to bring lessons learned from the excesses of consumer culture in developed economies to developing areas. One of these lessons is the imperative to celebrate the vastness and richness of cultural diversity that enhances human existence by pushing back hard against cultural homogenization.

"As with a human being, every culture must both be itself and transcend itself: it must make the most of its limitations and must pass beyond them: it must be open to fresh experience and yet it must maintain its integrity. In no other art is that process more sharply defined than in architecture" (Mumford, 1941, p. 101).

The quote above from Lewis Mumford shows his belief that it was impossible to produce a design that was in tune with the needs of its time by exaggerating “the local at the expense of the universal (quoted in Alofsin, 2005, p.371).” He stressed that it was much more important to study and learn the ideas and conditions that were the genesis for historical forms than merely to imitate those forms. This understanding will lead to new creative design solutions that address and contribute to continually evolving contemporary conditions.

In Critical Regionalism practice, universal civilization is not primarily seen as an alien force proceeding without our control or something that is being done to us. It is a continually transforming design parameter, based on the ethos of the day, which provides an important global experiential frame of reference for travelers and migrants, and unites all people on the planet. At the same time, however, the most important theorists of Critical Regionalism recognize that significant opportunities for regional expression are frequently lost when technology (universal civilization) replaces older regional responses to building technique, climate control, expressions of local ecology, etc.

One of the difficulties in defining modern technology in terms of landscape design is that the most advanced and forward thinking technical solutions can turn out to be a return to the natural systems that were in place before they were replaced by ‘modern’ mechanical systems. For example, a concrete culvert might be removed and replaced with “softer” vegetative erosion and flood control measures, or
bioremediation could replace a complex mechanical system of sewage treatment in the postmodern search for future viable design and infrastructure solutions. Another example is ethnobotanists who study historical agricultural practices that created productive farms without irrigation in areas, such as Spain, with very low rainfall. The forms and techniques of these vernacular technical solutions can then become ‘contemporary technology’ as sustainable responses to the imperative to reduce the carbon footprint of agriculture and address changing rainfall patterns caused by global warming and the climate crisis. An ideology that continually questions the ideal balance of local and universal influences is one of the strongest arguments for using Critical Regionalism as an overarching framework for future design philosophies.

5.6 Designing landscapes for intellectual contemplation as well as sensual pleasure

John Dewey describes aesthetic experience as a combination of desire and thought, the sensuous and the intellectual. The intellectual engenders a prolonged contemplation of the object as the object triggers ideas that are beyond the landscape, or other design, that is readily perceptible. The sensuous aspects, however, facilitate an immediate and powerful emotional engagement and provide the benefits of bringing people into the present (Meyer, 2016, pp. 136-137). Regional elements that trigger emotional connections will fall into the sensuous, the intellectual, or even the subconscious categories of perception. Critical Regionalism is an ideology that moves design thinking towards having “the substantial cake of reason while also enjoying the sensuous pleasure of eating it” (Dewey, 1980, p. 258). The theory and design tools of Critical Regionalism such as defamiliarization and creative regional perception can be used to design what Anne Whiston Spirn refers to as the New Aesthetics “that encompasses both nature and culture, that embodies function, sensory perception, and symbolic meaning, and embraces both the making of things and places and sensing, using, and contemplating them” (Spirn, 1988, p. 108).

It is easy to see how new and currently underappreciated priorities may arise in the future. When Critical Regionalism was first articulated as a term in the 1980s, some of the most pressing emergent issues of our time were mostly absent from consideration by most landscape architects. The influence on the design methodology of global warming and the climate crisis, the increasing imperative to include the ideas and desires of shifting populations groups into the design process (De la Pena et al., eds., 2017), the general acknowledgement that we are now in the 6th mass extinction and that, like global warming, it is caused by global human land use practices, and the new challenges faced by designers as they address advanced manufacturing and artificial intelligence, are examples of more recent imperatives that can benefit from a design approach that uses the landscape to educate and to provoke critical thinking about region.

5.61 Defamiliarization

“Any product that is not of the very ‘easy’ sort exhibits dislocations and dissociations of what is usually connected…It brings to definite perception values that are concealed in ordinary experience because of habituation. Ordinary prepossession must be broken through if the degree of energy required for an esthetic experience is to be evoked” (Dewey, 1980, p. 173).

Critical thinking is triggered within a Critical Regionalism ideology by integrating an appropriate level of defamiliarization into designs that makes future cognitive goals accessible to users of buildings and landscapes. Defamiliarization is one of the prime tenets of Critical Regionalism and also one that needs a nuanced explanation when applied to landscape aesthetics. For a landscape to provoke critical thinking, it must first be noticed. Designers using Critical Regionalism principles strive to create thought provoking perceptions of and reflections about landscapes through a heightened or altered psychological sensibility in the process called defamiliarization. The term is borrowed from the study of structures of consciousness as experienced from the first-person point of view called phenomenology. In phenomenology, as in Critical Regionalism, attention is directed toward some object experienced by virtue of its content or meaning which represents the object (Smith, 2013). From a phenomenological perspective, defamiliarization is a way of breaking through what is referred to as “natural attitude”—the unnoticed and unquestioned acceptance of the things and experiences of daily living. The landscape becomes, through defamiliarization, a focus of attention and an object for reflective analysis (Seamon, 1991).
The American literary critic and Marxist theorist Fredric Jameson advocates using defamiliarization as “a way of restoring conscious experience, of breaking through deadening and mechanical habits of conduct, and allowing us to be reborn to the world in its existential freshness and horror (Jameson quoted in Castro, 1991, p.208).” Does this mean that a Critical Regionalism landscape design needs to be extreme enough to provoke the existential “horror” of human existence as Jameson suggests? I propose that the ethos of landscape architecture is more aligned with the creation of softer defamiliarized elements within regional contexts and established neighborhood patterns, and not primarily to make the project stand out for purely artistic, or philosophical reasons that are overly idiosyncratic to the designer.

If a landscape is a creative act—an original landscape—it will be noticed, experienced and understood on its own terms in the present, rather than evoking a past experience—an experience that has been mentally processed to the point that it is no longer a subject of attention or of interest for critical reflection. By consciously making the landscape perceptible through defamiliarization, Critical Regionalism allows the thinking and imagination unique to every person to be brought to bear on the design. The echoes of past personal experiences are thus blended with immediate sensual perception.

Figure 2. Purposefully defamiliarized abstract elements designed and created by subtraction, by landscape architect Bill Wenk, at a deconstructed former sewage treatment plant. Northside Park, Denver, Colorado (2006). Photo by author.

Designers must mitigate personal aesthetics with contemporary cultural modifiers, or they may grow too aesthetically distant from the users of landscapes and become marginalized in the ability to create expressive designs in the same way that many avant-garde artists are. The relative degree of defamiliarization required to make a landscape expressive and not overly eccentric, and hence alienating, or invisible to notice, will be entirely dependent on the local context and the conditions of a future time. As such, defamiliarization will continue to be a viable means of anchoring people into the experience of the
present and for triggering reflections about their region as the world adapts to changing circumstances in the future.

The philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche and other influential pre-modernist thinkers promoted a minimalism that evolved into modernism and the international style as an antidote to what they perceived as overly chaotic cities at the turn of the 20th century. They saw the need for an architecture that minimized distractions by the senses and encouraged people to turn inward for reflection and happiness (Welter, 2002, p. 221). The emphasis here on an intensification of experience through defamiliarization that brings people mentally into the present turns this idea on its head with more recent research findings based on environmental psychology and happiness studies (Widdicombe, 2015; Chaykowski, 2017).

5.7 A distrust of grand design solutions and an embrace of incrementalism

The larger the development, the greater the risk that a new landscape design will be dysfunctional aesthetically, socially, economically, environmentally, and/or ecologically. Distrust is the key word—not an outright rejection but a healthy skepticism that the many stakeholders in a massive new development will have the foresight and expertise to avoid some of the many mistakes that have contributed to our “placeless” urban realms. Designers often believed that they were doing the right thing. However, a look back at both the designed projects and at the design education literature from historical periods that steered landscape architects in many unproductive directions shows that good intentions are sometimes not enough. This is particularly true when designers are confronted with vast new spaces or large buildings where there is only so much creativity, rigor, and care that can be lavished on any particular space. Our contemporary multidisciplinary design teams have much more evidence-based information than we had in past decades, but we are still likely to look back in future years and bemoan what we missed in the many large construction projects currently underway throughout the world.

A focus on the value of incrementalism is highly relevant to the practice of landscape architecture as an alternative posture as we make small but impactful day-to-day decisions on landscape developments that are either part of the problems or part of the solutions. There can be incremental regional changes or “punctuated equilibrium” that produces what is at first perceived as a radical departure, but may be seen in time as a more logical series of regional transformations that are triggered, redirected, or aided by the designer. Chris Reed, an educator, researcher, landscape architect and the director of the firm Stoss Landscape Urbanism, applies these concepts to adaptability by writing that “…the designer becomes a producer or curator of effects, dynamics, and of a whole range of socio-environmental and urban conditions” (Reed, 2016, p. 341). This post-modern focus on incrementalism and process over fixed and immutable solutions will contribute to the future viability of landscapes over longer periods of time.

5.8 Creating imageable bounded places to resist the excesses of megalopolitan development and consumer driven culture

Critics of Critical Regionalism sometimes ask, “does regionalism have to apply to broad geographical parts of a nation or state, or can we have micro-regions within cities” (Judith Butler quoted in Allen, 2005, p.423)? The idea of the enclave (the micro-region) is one of the prime tenets of both Critical Regionalism and postmodernism. Critical Regionalism’s most prominent cultural precept is creative ‘place’ creation that acknowledges local culture, social institutions, political issues, ecology, construction techniques, climate, topography, and many other elements of the regional context (Bourassa, 1991). Albert Mayer defines the “place” or enclave as a “tapestry of many figures, each distinct with its own color and character but [interpenetrated] into a total interrelated excellence” (Mayer, 1971, p. 257).

The boundary of the region is not where something stops, but rather where an enclave begins—what the German philosopher Martin Heidegger calls its “presencing.” This more indefinite boundary encourages designers to consider not only the enclave that is the object of a design, but also its relationship to other areas within a reasonable sphere of influence by car or mass transit. The boundary is where the collision of styles and forms is most likely to create innovative ideas that can be developed later in the centers of the established enclaves. This regionalist trend appears to be accelerating as people gravitate towards places that are both authentic expressions of the regional context and imageable as distinct places within the region. Designing these enclaves will help the individual designer by keeping the design process interesting and engaging with continually renewing district character to
play off and to combine with both the regional and the universal. The creation of imageable enclaves may, in turn, exhibit an expressive and compelling enough character to become attractants within the fabric of a region and thereby contribute to the development of the overall regional character or to world culture.

5.81 Resistance

The idea of resistance is very useful and appealing to landscape architects and architects who must deal with a wide variety of influences that come between the first flash of design inspiration and the final completion of construction that realizes that inspiration. Resistance is an important element of a rigorous Critical Regionalism design process that will help prevent a design from devolving into something trivial, overly sentimental, or merely functional. The resistance that is a characteristic of Critical Regionalism is in concert with a growing movement that seeks to mitigate the excesses of technologically enabled cultural globalism. The resistance advocated here is not necessarily radical or heroic with "bellicose visual rhetoric (Cassidy 2000, p.418)." Rather, it is a resistance that is appropriate to a region, at a certain point in time and against specific problematic influences.

Frampton provides a very comprehensive description of resistance that encapsulates both Critical Regionalism and the ethos of post-modernism.

"Resistance against the domination of positivistic technology and its involvement in the maximization of production and consumption, wherein the dominant attitude towards nature is always violent and exploitive..., the resistance of locally grounded cultural form as opposed to the phenomenon of universal technology, ...the way in which bounded form can be brought to resist the space endlessness of megalopolitan development, ...a resistance to an emphasis on the visual experience of place over the senses of hearing, touch and smell ...and the establishment of bounded domains and tactile presences with which to resist the dissolution of the late-modern world" (Frampton, 1987).

The path to direct experience afforded by all the senses (tactile presence = experiential aesthetics) and not just vision will also help resist the focus on information over experience, the cognitive over the affective, that is a feature of formalist designs.

The cultural geographer and educator Chris Wilson writes of a resistance to "the tendency to turn culture and the environment into exploitable commodities," a corollary to preconceived or overly sentimental thinking such as is found in romantic regionalism (Wilson, 1997). This resistance encourages the designer to rethink past regional experiences, without dismissing them, in order to imagine the landscape in new ways. The result can be a new creative design that will not be purely personal, academic, or derivative, but rather an honest creative expression of the sensibilities of the designer linked to a creative expression of the regional context and the zeitgeist.

Critical Regionalism provides a valuable framework for a future resistance that facilitates "learning how to change in order not to be changed" (Brian Walker quoted in Lister, 2016, p. 314). Each designer and design team must continually and consciously assess both the categories and the intensity of resistance that will be most productive to moving their design vision forward as conditions and priorities evolve over time.

6 CRITICAL REGIONALISM, PLANTS AND NATURAL SYSTEMS

Plants and natural systems are important landscape design elements where ideas developed by architects for Critical Regionalism need significant translation and expansion to apply to landscape design. The reconceptualization that is a hallmark of a Critical Regionalism ideology has led to many interesting and instructive approaches to the creative possibilities inherent in plants and natural systems. Some approaches are historic and well resolved, and some are very new, experimental and creative, redefining the way nature is expressed and the role of plants within an increasingly complex cultural context. Both hardscape materials, such as concrete and stone, and plants address environmental effects including the carbon footprint of the material. However, plants have a much more direct impact on the often neglected but increasingly critical area of ecology.
Reconceptualizing nature as part of a Critical Regionalism methodology is no trivial matter. It is one thing to address the visual aesthetic forms of nature in a naturalistic planting design as part of a Critical Regionalism ideology, and quite another to bring ecological functioning into the design process, particularly in urban or urbanizing areas. The level of understanding required to accomplish the latter calls into question the way landscape architecture practice is presently constituted, and the skill sets that will be required in the profession moving forward. Patrick Geddes famously promoted the use of biological principles to observe humans in their ‘natural environment’. This imperative has now flipped, and design professionals must once again become as adept at observing and appropriating the local natural environment as they have now become at observing human behavior.

There are myriad planting design styles from every region of the planet and thousands of years of history that can be used as elements of universal civilization for a Critical Regionalism design approach. French, Italian, New American, Japanese, Chinese, English, Minimalist, and many other garden traditions from across the United States and around the world have been successfully adapted for new regions and used as part of Critical Regionalism ideology and methodology. Similarly, any personal style can be used if it is adapted to local expressive cultural referents and/or the local environment and ecology. The horticultural adaptation is especially important in non-temperate areas such as the Southwestern United States.

Plant materials have a unique place in any consideration of landscape architecture and Critical Regionalism. They are the most complex and the most interesting materials that landscape architects can take advantage of to create expressive, creative, and future viable designs. With over 24,000 plant species documented growing without human intervention in North America alone, the possibilities for unique expressions are almost limitless (Maina and Villa-Lobos, n.d.). A focus on planting design also elevates the case for landscape architects as the lead designers for landscapes far into the future over the increasing encroachment of architects and planners who are only peripherally knowledgeable about this important arena of design.

7 CONCLUSIONS

Looking back at regional trends around the time of the founding of CELA and at the original ideology and subsequent theories of Critical Regionalism as set forth almost 40 years ago in the early 1980s, demonstrates the durability and the evolutionary potential of the concepts. The ideology of Critical Regionalism will continue to be a very productive means to shape new emergent design ideas for practice, criticism, research, and education.

The guiding principles of Critical Regionalism have deep and broad implications for the many polarities that will be a part of current and future design debate by members of CELA and their students. Many of these polarities are already part of the literature surrounding Critical Regionalism such as local/universal, affective/cognitive, creative/expressive, inner form/outer form, creative regional seeing/non-visual regional cues, etc. Many more unforeseen propositions that are also not either/or will emerge within the flexible ideological framework that is Critical Regionalism.

As a landscape architect and a professor in the United States, I have personally found Critical Regionalism to be a very helpful framework for understanding and guiding our purpose as designers and educators in society at large. This useful and flexible “ism”, that helps designers resolve the myriad claims on the design process beyond the primarily utilitarian, has been embraced by many luminaries of the practitioner realm of landscape architecture as well as the writers who study and critique their work. In the next 100 years of CELA, Critical Regionalism will require ongoing advocates who can research the concepts and apply them to contemporary conditions in both practice and academia. The new evolving ideology and theory derived from this ongoing research and philosophical reflection will provide enduring benefits to world-wide regionalist designs on the land.


9 ENDNOTES

1 For a critical review of Geddes contributions to the evolution of regional thinking and to city and regional planning, see Welter, V. M. (2002)

2 For an image of the valley section, see Welter, V. M. (2002).

3 This expands on the idea that beauty is only arrived at through an intellectual process, a critical analysis, as promoted by art critic and philosopher Arthur Danto and others. Environmental psychology shows us that we can experience beauty in a subconscious or pre-conscious way, before critical analysis or moral judgement. See Meyer (2016).

Media Statement:

This essay addresses the future viability of Critical Regionalism as an ongoing ideology and aesthetic construct. Regionalist trends in the early 20\textsuperscript{th} century, around the time that CELA was founded, and the theory of Critical Regionalism as originally proposed in early 1980s are explained and proposed as flexible ongoing frameworks for teaching and design. Tracing the evolution and persistence of the ideas of regionalists breeds confidence for projecting the evolution of their principles forward to students of landscape architecture and to clients as adaptable verities worthy of perpetual renewal.