Multiculturalism, Mourning, and the Americas: Towards a New Pragmatics of Cross- and Inter-cultural Criticism

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If the recent passage of the Columbus quincentennary has posed for us any new questions, one of them surely has to do with the relationships among the various cultures that Columbus's voyage, or rather our reconstruction of its consequences, has bequeathed to us. For if Columbus's voyage succeeded in producing anything other than a holocaust to native peoples, it resulted in an explosion of new cultures in the Americas that has now left us with an elaborate assemblage of societies and nations whose relations with one another, however carefully documented in other terms, are still comparatively unexplored in cultural terms. In other words, despite the fact that these new nations and societies arose out of a common experience of European settlement and colonization, an experience involving not only the conquest, displacement, and near extermination of almost the entire indigenous population, but also the domestication, often with the assistance of enslaved Africans, of immense tracks of undeveloped wilderness; and despite, further, the fact that the basis of virtually all of the imaginative, and many of the discursive, arts in all of the countries of the Americas would subsequently be furnished by the way these hybrid American societies, composed of three different races, would eventually undergo a revolutionary break with the colonizing power and then inevitably need to reconstitute themselves as something self-consciously different from their European parents -- despite these shared experiences and interpretations of experience, no one would describe the comparative study of American cultures as a thriving academic industry.

This is not to suggest that the cross-cultural relations among and between the many societies and political formations of the Americas, both North and South together with the Caribbean world, have in the past gone unexamined. From the period of earliest contact between native and non-native peoples to the present, these relations have been a source of the profoundest interest in texts ranging from the Mayan "Books of Chilam

Balam" and Bernal Díaz's The Conquest of a New Spain to Manuel Puig's Betrayed by Rita Hayworth and Jamaica Kincaid's Lucy. And these works of primary reflection have been supplemented in recent decades by a variety of distinguished studies of secondary reflection that include everything from Pablo Neruda's meditations on Walt Whitman, Octavio Paz's The Labyrinth of Solitude, Jorge Luis Borges's Introduction to American Literature, Roberto Fernandez Retamar's Caliban and Other Essays, Edmund Wilson's O Canada and Howard Mumford Jones's O Strange New World to Jose Martí's essays on "Our America," V. S. Naipaul's ruminations on "Our Universal Civilization, Juan Goytisolo's Realms of Strife, Tzetan Todorov's The Conquest of America, and Carlos Fuentes's The Buried Mirror.

Yet for all of its intelligence and insight, this enormous body of writing has not managed, at least in the United States, to do very much to diminish, for all but specialists, the general level of ignorance on these matters. Few U.S. students of American history, politics, or literature, for example, think that racial practices in the Carribean, or the appeal of dictatorships in South America, or environmental policies in the Canadian provinces, or modernist aesthetic experimentation in Central America have very much light to shed on their own subjects, and the development in the United States, during the postwar era, of an interdisciplinary field spanning the humanities and the social sciences and devoted to the examination of the history of American culture, "past and present and as a whole," to quote a famous formulation, known as "American Studies" has yet to de-provincialize the word "American" in that title so that it may encompass all of the New World societies that find some kind of interpretive shelter beneath its umbrella.

One could, I suppose, attempt to explain this by resorting to a reductionist argument which lays the responsibility for this ignorance at the ideological door of, say, U.S. imperialism, or Western capitalism, or institutional Eurocentrism, or even Spanish-American chauvinism, and no small amount of the scholarship that accompanied the quincentenary, at least on the left, has been tempted to take such a simplistic line. But the despite the genocidal horrors that the anniversary of Columbus's voyage has brought home to us in the United States and elsewhere -- horrors whose replication throughout the centuries and across so many of the emergent cultures of the Americas encourage one to reach for the kinds of explanation that link the structuration of socioeconomic as well as symbolic

formations to fixed ideas about race and ethnicity -- there are surely other reasons why the term "American," when employed as a hemispheric or continental designation, evokes for so many so minimum a sense of solidarity.

No doubt one of them has to do with the entirely different grammar of motives that fueled the original process of colonization in British as opposed to Spanish America and the different effects that these motives were to have on the way the societies they respectively generated dealt with everything from native peoples and African slavery to the desire for independence and the rise of nationalism. A second reason why the term "American" is so difficult to bring into focus in a hemispheric or continental context is that the cultures of the Americas, even where they border one another, display enormous variations among themselves and, like most cultures, are themselves anything but homogeneous or tightly integrated but rather highly unstable fields in which distinct and often divisive, or at least vigorously contested, processes -- social, economic, psychological, political, ceremonial, and aesthetic -- intersect, when they intersect at all, at strange angles. A third -- and for my purposes more interesting -- reason for the referential incoherence of the word "American" as a term of hemispheric designation -- and one of special significance to students of literature and ideas -- has to do with the extent to which all of its cultures were initially the products, and continue to remain the products, of a complicated process of rhetorical invention and reinvention.

As Edmundo O'Gorman was one of the first to teach us, America was not discovered so much as invented, or, rather discovered as a result of its invention, by Europeans less interested in determining the reality of New World conditions in all their empirical distinctiveness than in reimagining those conditions as forms of alterity in relation to which they as Europeans might redefine themselves. This is not, of course, to claim that there was nothing to be found on Friday, October 12, 1492, at around 2:00 A.M., when Christopher Columbus made landfall in the West Indies on the island of what is now called San Salvador; only that Columbus was mistaken about what he had come upon that fateful morning, and that he then compounded the problem by resisting the corrections of experience for the sake of using the opportunity for misinterpreting the otherness of the circumstances that

confronted him simply to reinforce and extend the image of himself and his mission that he had brought with him.[1]

Looking for a sea passage to India, Columbus supposed that he had actually managed to reach the Orient and then steadfastly refused to relinquish this conviction despite three later voyages that at most never carried him further west than the Paria peninsula of Venezuela. Convinced that he had landed on the shores of Asia because he viewed everything before his eyes with a mental picture composed in unequal parts of Ptolemaic geography, historical accounts of Marco Polo's journey, and the Christian Bible, Columbus was not only unaware that instead he had come upon on an altogether different landmass (consequently leaving credit for that discovery to be claimed by Amerigo Vespucci, another Italian navigator, whose report of the achievement of a landfall in the Southern hemisphere antedating Columbus's was itself most likely a fabrication) but persisted in believing that by undertaking this expedition he was merely fulfilling the injunctions of Holy Scripture: "In carrying out this Enterprise of the Indies, neither reason nor mathematics nor maps were any use to me: fully accomplished were the words of Isaiah."

One might demur by saying that what was really accomplished was the commencement of a history of astonishing and relentless misinterpretation that continued with the misalliance between Columbus's name and the idea of New World discovery as such, the title of America's first discoverers belonging rather to the remote nomadic ancestors of those singular and wondrous human specimens, as Columbus and Vespucci both attested, even if they could not credit them with any real humanity, that confronted them on the beaches of the Americas. All the more ironic, indeed tragic, that despite the sophistication and heterogeneity of the societies and cultures which Native Americans had created in the New World -- while some remained hunters and gatherers, others created written languages, became expert at engineering and astronomy, mastered the arts of mathematical calculation, and built such magnificent cities as Palenque, Tikal, Tula, Monte Alban, Uxmal, Chichen Itza, and Tenochititlan -- these infinitely various peoples were summarily to be lumped together and thus rendered indistinct by the name they received from Columbus himself when he mistook their homeland for Asia and thus called them "Indians."

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[1] Some of the material in the next several pages has been drawn from my "Introduction" to Early American Writing, ed. Giles Gunn (New York: Penguin USA, 1994), pp. xv-xxi.

Misinterpretations such as these, occurring at the very moment of the process of so-called "discovery," tell us something of what it means to say that America was invented as much as found. They tell us that from this moment on the world that was to realize itself within the compass of the word "America" was to be a world shaped as much by the energies of the imagination as by the substance of the empirical, as much by the ambiguities of desire as by the structures of the actual. The world called "America," both North and South, would ever after be a world determined controlled by meanings as much as by facts, a world where fantasy, fabrication, and fiction would dominate the question of the real and thus define the many of the processes of material as well as symbolic creation.

The initial result of these processes of rhetorical invention was the appearance of chronicles of discovery, conquest, and settlement that erased pretty much the whole inventory of what we might, within these indigenous cultures, call "local knowledge" for the sake of celebrating their own interpretive triumph over such wisdom. But this process of narrative triumphalism then left the descendants of these same chronicles with the task of reinventing themselves all over again if they were to develop any form of New World identity independent of the initial colonial stories. An definitional process made still more complex when several of these post-colonial Americas were to exhibit colonialist designs of their own, this process of cultural reinvention is now only being extended further as contemporary scholars and interpreters attempt to bring the counter-colonial texts produced in response to this process of cultural revisionism and reinvention into some form of critical contact and comparison with one another.

One can only hope, as Bell Gale Chevigny and Gari Laguardia have observed so intelligently about this process of cultural hermeneutics, that this last stage of cultural production can do something other than merely add yet another layer of fabrication to the process; that it can initiate, through comparative and other self-reflexive techniques, something like a "mutual interrogation" which, in addition to revealing the diverse strategies of representation differentiating this succession of colonial, post-colonial, and neocolonial texts, can also possibly throw into critical relief some of the inner assumptions of the divergent constitutive principles that are buried

within them.[2] What we need to learn is not simply how people sharing similar rituals of self-creation could have come to inhabit such utterly different social worlds but whether and in what sense, as Clifford Geertz has written, they can still have "a genuine, and reciprocal, impact on one another."[3]

One among the more understandable reasons why this impact is so difficult to achieve is because the symbolic sedimentation of such processes, and the cultural distinctions on which they depend, goes so deep. However integral and often indispensable such differentiations are to the organization of human life as we know it historically, they derive much of their power from what I hope it will offend no one to call their status as fictions. Cultural differentiations deserve to be called fictions at least in a limited sense not only because they often tend, whenabsolutized as some element of the cultural template, to presuppose a homogeneity or uniformity of experience that their historical development actually belies, but also in the sense that they derive much of their authority from assumptions that are, among other things, decidedly aesthetic. This is not to argue that such significations are any less real or legitimate -- or are experienced as being any less real or legitimate -- because they are imaginative as well as political or metaphoric as well as social and economic; it is merely to assert that whatever the experiential terrain on which such artifacts, and the deep attachments they afford, are expressed, these same artifacts, and the emotional appeals with which they are identified, are cultural before they are anything else. They are forms by which people make sense of the sense their experience makes to them, and make more valuable sense the more that sense can be expressed in figurative forms, the more it can be rendered, as it were, semiotic and tropological.

It is no accident, then, that Benedict Anderson chose to call his now classic study of nations and nationalism by the title Imagined Communities.[4] His intention was to show that nations can be viewed as imaginative in at least several different senses. In the first place, since no single individual can possibly be acquainted with all, or even with a majority, of the other individuals who belong to the national collectivity

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[2] Bell Gale Chevigny and Gari Laguardia, eds., Reinventing the Americas: Comparative Studies of Literature in the United States and Spanish America (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986, p. vii.

[3] Clifford Geertz, Local Knowledge (New York: Basic Books, 1983), p. 161.

[4] Benedict Anderson, Imagined Communities

they call their own, their sense of that collective formation thus lives in consciousness only as an image of what none of them singly has ever experienced. Second, no matter how large one's sense of that national collectivity, it is always, in the minds of its citizens, delimited by boundaries that are other than geographical but which can nowhere be fully or adequately represented, even through the machinery of the law. Third, because a sense of the limits of nationality is almost always accompanied by a coincident, though not wholly supportable, belief in the sovereignty or integrity of what those limits mark, that belief inevitably operates, in Wallace Stevens's language, as a kind of "Supreme Fiction." And fourth, if what, more than anything else, marks those limits is a sense of community or solidarity--Anderson calls it "a deep, horizontal comradeship" -- that sense of community or solidarity is felt to be self-validating.

If such fictive elements such as these lend the notion of nationality an enormous volatility and power, think of what they also do for such parallel conception as those of ethnicity, race, gender, class, religion, and even status. If, on the one side, they allow such notions to serve as instruments in and through which groups may express an understandable desire and need to honor and enact their own legacies of identity, on the other they so quickly tend to "naturalize" the boundaries between peoples of different nationalities, ethnicities, races, and so on as to make transit between or across them seem at times all but experientially impassible. But this only raises all over again the question about whether it is feasible, or even possible, to look for, or try to define, some common set of qualities or forms of experience which all the peoples of the Americas may be said to share and in relation to which some sort of public vocabulary might be constructed where they could provide, as it were, a plausible representation of themselves to one another. Even if those qualities or forms of life are not to be found, as the American poet William Carlos Williams once assumed, in his In the American Grain they might be found, through interpretive acts of archaeological excavation that lead one, as it were, beneath or behind history altogether, into a region of pure instinct and desire which, in its dark mystery and unpredictable violence, matches qualities that Williams associated with the primordial wilderness of the Americas itself, can they be located and identified anywhere else?[5]

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[5] William Carlos Williams, In the American Grain (New York: New Directions, 1925).

Do those forms, or at least the terms by which they might be made publically accessible, lie, for example, within history itself, say, in some mythic framework from which all the culturally specific stories of the Americas somehow narratively derive? Or might they instead be found, if not in some genetic link between general myths of origin and specific narratives of destiny, then in the connection between generic interpretive possibilities and diverse interpretive practices in cultural traditions that still remain differentiable? Or yet again, could they be found in the sorts of crosslights that can be produced when differing ideational, emotional, and ritual elements from distinctive historical traditions are brought into apposite but meaningful relations with one another? Or, finally, might they lie embedded within some text like, for instance, Machado de Asis's Epitaph of a Small Winner, or Isabelle Allende's The House of Spirits; or some figure, like José de San Martín, or the woman the Spanish called Dona Marina and the Indians knew as La Malinche; or some territory such as the Caribbean which may serve to bridge the differences between the Northern and Southern hemisphere?

As it happens, each of these possibilities has recently been explored with some care in the various essays that make up a book like Gustavo Perez Firmat's aptly titled, and very useful, Do the Americas Have a Common Literature"?[6] Just as many of the individual cultures of the Americas share, for example, a common myth of genesis that is clearly indebted to the Biblical depiction of Eden and the counter-image of humanity's expulsion to an outer wilderness of uncertainty and strangeness, so one can describe systematic relationships, let us say, between the Hispanic understanding of the family and the North American, or between the labyrinth of solitude in the Latin American literary soul and its echo in the soul of North American writers like Poe, Hawthorne, Melville, and Dickinson. Or, again, just as one can see affinities between the career of a Simon Bolívar and an Abraham Lincoln, or discern telltale similarities and differences between the history of miscegenation in Brazil and in the antebellum South, so one can isolate figures like Gabriel Garcia Márquez or, before him, Sor Juana who seem to absorb and express many of the contradictions that make up at least some of the Americas at any given moment; or, one can find a concept such as the mestizo that individuals as various as the African American intellectual Albert Murray, the Nicaraguan

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[6] Gustavo Pirez Firmat, Do the Americans Have a Common Literature?

poet Rubén Darío, and the Mexican graphic artist José Guadalupe Posada, all view as characterizing the cultures, like the peoples, of both hemispheres.

The question is whether such inquiries finally get us very far, or at least as far as we now need to go in conceptualizing how, without subordinating one of the cultures of the Americas to another, they may be related critically. While it is true that common essences can be detected beneath cultural differences, that sets of traits have been shared across cultural boundaries, that cultural homologies can be discovered in the origin and development as opposed to the appearance and function of otherwise disparate social practices, and that representative figures may be found who unify, or at least span, contiguous cultural traditions, these discoveries merely disclose materials of experience that, for the most part, have yet to be made visible to one another. In recent years our ability to bring such differences into view has presumably been secured and enhanced by the methods of the historian, the iconographer, the anthropologist, the literary critic, the philosopher of ideas, the political scientist, the sociologist, and the historian of religions and folklore. By the same token, our capacity to place such differences in critical relations with one another so that the many "Americas" they reflect or, better, refract can be dialectically engaged has only just begun. Thus the real issue is not so much how to bring these things into view as how to make them interpretively accessible and answerable to one another; how to formulate their similarities and differences in a way that might permit them to have a complementary, perhaps even a corrective, influence on one another.

For this to be accomplished, we need an interpretive method that is not only adept, as Clifford Geertz once put it, at translating the performances and practices of one culture into the idioms of another but that is also capable, as Renato Rosaldo has insisted, of rhetorically submitting the cultural positioning of its own idioms and perspectives to the critique of the performances and practices it would translate into them.[7] This not only requires replacing the notion of culture as a system of shared and stable meanings with a view of cultures as often composed of, and held together by, a more fluid, irregular, and often contradictory, as Lionel Trilling called it, "hum and buzz of implication"; it also entails an acknowledgment that

[7] Clifford Geertz, The Interpretation of Cultures (New York: Basic Books, 1973); Renato Rosaldo, Culture and Truth: The Remaking of Social Analysis (Boston: Beacon Press, 1989).

the social analyst is not a tabula rasa but a positioned subject who must realize, as Rosaldo puts it, "that the objects of social analysis are also analyzing subjects whose perceptions must be taken nearly as seriously as 'we' take our own."[8] Stated positively, this means that the student of culture must follow the lead of theorists like Gloria Anzaldua who encourage the exploration of cultural borderlands that surface not only at the boundaries of officially recognized cultural units but also at less formal intersections, such as those of gender, age, status, and distinctive life experiences, the site of what within cultural studies is currently called the "multicultural imaginary."[9] In more negative terms, this means that the intersections of the multicultural imaginary are neither self-evident nor self-interpreting, and that, indeed, they can neither be read, nor for that matter even found, so long as critics fail to submit their own methods to the potential critique of the subject positions they intend to expose by their means.

Among several methods of critical inquiry capable of putting their own epistemic authority at risk while at the same time attempting to turn putative cultural differences into forms that can effectively address one another, I know of none possibly more useful than the method known as pragmatism. The pragmatism to which I refer is something rather different from the philosophical theory originally created by Charles Sanders Peirce and then developed in his own rather special manner by William James's first essays on the subject, the pragmatism which defined itself as, on the one hand, a method of philosophical inquiry that associated the meaning of ideas with the effects they are calculated to produce in experience and, on the other, as a theory of truth which asserted that all beliefs, including ultimate ones, are confirmed or disconfirmed by whether or not they put us in better touch with the rest of what we take our experience to be. In its more contemporary and, I would now want to say, trans-national form, elements of which can be found in Jurgen Habermas's theory of communicative action, Michael Oakeshott's philosophy of discourse, and Pierre Bourdieu's reflexive sociology as well as in Richard Rorty's conception of edifying philosophy or Clifford Geertz's social and cultural anthropology, pragmatism now presents itself more generally as a method for making discriminations in a world without absolutes, or, to state it more accurately, in a world where the "quest for certainty," as John Dewey put it

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[8] Lionel Trilling, The Liberal Imagination: Essays on Literature and Society (New York: Doubleday Anchor Book, 1957), p. 200; Rosaldo, p. 207.

[9] Gloria Anzaldua

in the title of his Gifford lectures, has become too treacherous and too futile to pursue.[10] Specializing in determining the social and moral practices generated by theories, this kind of pragmatism is less interested in reducing all theories to a set of themes and then applying them in a variety of different contexts -- all psychoanalysis is collapsed into the Lacanian postulate that the unconscious is structured like a language and then critics set abot looking for linguistic structures in every unconscious trace; all of Foucault is condensed into a theory of power and then critics set about proving that there are no symbolic or epistemic structures that do not attempt to subordinate one form of consciousness to another -- than in trying to place their referents in the circumstances of their social and moral significance.[11]

Pragmatism thus offers itself, in Dewey's famous formulation in Experience and Nature, a critique of prejudices.[12] The prejudices in question are those ideas and values we cherish and idealize precisely because they tend to stabilize and ground us in the face of life's precariousness and uncertainty. The gods, after all, were born in fear, as Dewey likes to point out, which is why we are always seeking to reify and essentialize them. To criticize the gods or, in other terms, to examine prejudices is thus to de-essentialize them, which we accomplish through hermeneutic acts of "intellectual disrobing," as Dewey termed them, designed to determine, on the one hand, what the garments of cultural sense-making that we call prejudices or values do to those of us who put them on and, on the other, to assess what the wearing of those garments of cultural sense-making does to the values or prejudices themselves.[13] Without pretending that we can shed such garments entire and hence recover in experience the fundamental innocence or primitive naivete of living without them, Dewey formulated his own version of immanent critique when he insisted that by an imaginative reconstruction and intelligent analysis of the situations from which values arise and the

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[10] John Dewey, The Quest for Certainty (New York: G. P. Putnam Sons, 1960).

[11] See, for example, John McDermott, Streams of Experience: Reflections on the History and Philosophy of American Culture (Amherst, Ma.: University of Massachusetts Press, 1986), Cornel West, The American Evasion of Philosophy: A Genealogy of Pragmatism (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1989), Richard J. Bernstein, The New Constellation: The Ethical-Political Horizons of Modernity/Postmodernity (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1992), and Giles Gunn, Thinking Across the American Grain: Ideology, Intellect, and the New Pragmatism (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992).

[12] John Dewey, Experience and Nature (LaSalle, Ill.: Open Court, 1929), p. 35.

[13] Ibid.

consequences in which they issue, we can recover what he termed a secondary naivete or cultivated innocence. Otherwise known as the "discipline of severe thought," Dewey believed thast this method of critical inquiry holds the key not only to the criticism of cultural forms but to the furtherance of culture as a whole. Only by emancipating and expanding the meanings of which experience is capable, Dewey maintained, can culture advance; and only by critically assessing the valuatons of which cultural experience is composed can the meanings potential to it, but not yet effectively realized within it, be successfully liberated.

Problems arise for this theory, as they do for so many others, not simply because people seem to prefer their own values to the values of others but because they seem to be able to maintain their own values only at the expense of disparaging and often demonizing the values of others. To put this somewhat differently, questions of cultural identity seem so often locked in such destructive embrace with issues of cultural difference. The political theorist William E. Connolly has recently explained this by arguing that identity, whether personal or cultural, can only establish itself paradoxically in relation to a set of differences that it is constantly tempted view not simply as other and but also often as inimical. This moral reflex, by which we create and defend our own identity only at the expense of deprecating the identity of others, no doubt reaches its apogee in the virtually universal practice of scapegoating in which, as Kenneth Burke long ago reminded us, we continuously transform others into sacrificial objects for the ritual unburdening of our own unwanted vices and phobias. Connolly maintains that such practices, and the contribution they make to what he calls "the dogmatization of identity," can only be resisted, even if never entirely reversed, through the development of modes of reflection that investigate what he calls a new "ethicality" that expresses itself in the "care for difference."[14]

Pragmatism's ethical interest in the nurturing of difference can be seen in the way it serves as an antidote to its dogmatization. As with all good therapies, pragmatism seeks to combat the effects of the disease by ministering to its cause. Assuming that the cause of this process of dogmatization lies in the threat of the loss of identity, or, rather, threat of the loss of those portions of the past that permit identity to be constructed in

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[14] William E. Connolly, Identity/Difference: Democratic Negotiations of Political Paradox (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991), p. 212ff.

relation to a self-serving dialectic of sameness and difference, pragmatism is to be associated with those interpretive strategies which, like psychoanalysis, cultivate what the cultural psychologist Peter Homans calls "the ability to mourn."[15]

To link psychoanalytic therapy and pragmatist inquiry to the work of mourning is not only to side with Freud in his eventual refusal to restrict the process of mourning to the self's recurrent experience of the loss of loved persons and objects and extend the process of mourning to include as well the disappearance or disintegration of valued meanings and ideals; it is also to assume that the process of cultural as opposed to personal mourning is blocked when the self responds to such losses, or to their anticipation, by, as it typically does, attempting to recreate itself in the image of some aspect of the past that it fears may be lost to it but which the self believes can remain effectively present and thus available to it when that element of the past is imaginatively reified as some form of cultural alterity which reinforces identity by diabolizing, or at least deprecating, difference. Mourning is thus associated both by pragmatism and by psychoanalysis with the process, largely interpretive, whereby the self learns how to shed itself of these self-protective, often narcissistic attachments, not by abandoning the meaningful historical past altogether, but by relinquishing the attempt to compensate for the continual need to revise outworn structurations of the relation between subjectivity and the social surround -- be they ethnic, social, racial, religious, sexual, or nationalistic -- by absolutizing some essentially oppositional version of them as an adequate model for negotiating the relations between self and other.[16]

The relations between mourning and the formation of cultural identity might be thought of another way as a crisis of representation and its possible resolution. This crisis of representation is precipitated, one might say, by the initial movement of mourning itself, a movement which records, in addition to the abjection of a self that has suffered the loss of an object in some sense determinative of its own sense of presence and empowerment, the consequent negation of the self's ability to compensate for such loss except by creating and then valorizing a representation of its own experience of it. The crisis is in turn resolved only when the work of

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[15] Peter Homans, The Ability to Mourn: Disillusionment and the Social Origins of Psychoanalysis (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989).

[16] This process is discussed at greater length and linked to the genealogy pragmatism and psychoanalysis share in Gunn, Thinking Across the American Grain, pp. 12-16.

mourning succeeds in dissociating the self from its fixation on a representation that merely memorializes its own experience of its loss so that the self can commence to reconstruct in its place a representation or narrative that memorializes instead the object that occasioned its sense of loss, and in a form that can eventually be contemplated and enjoyed rather simply suffered and endured.

Gathering up hints from Freud, Lacan, and Melanie Klein, the American literary historian Mitchell Breitwiesser has deftly shifted the description of this arduous process into a more psychoanalytic register by depicting it as one where the initial image, or, better, sense, of what has been lost to the self, and thus of what has been lost of the self, is subsequently challenged by a resurgence of memories that mark the passage of the deceased's life through the mourner's world. Threatening what Lacan calls a "second death," this surge of memory begs to be blocked by the nearest mechanism at hand, a mechanism which turns out, as previously noted, to be a defense of that initial image which the mourner had constructed of his or her own felt sense of loss.[17] Promising to immunize both the mourner and the mourned against further encroachments of the experience of death -- and thus to help reverse the mourner's sense of impotence in the face of the loss of his or her object of attachment -- this defensive strategy nonetheless carries with it an additional risk. This is the risk of creating within the self what Nicholas Abraham and Maria Torok have termed a "crypt," or inert area, which then obstructs the return of further memories and permanently blocks the continued work of mourning.

To remove these impediments, and the fantasies of spurious empowerment that accompany them, requires the recovery of those resurgent memories so that the self can eventually reconstruct a different representation of the deceased that is this time based not on the self's experience of its own loss but on what Lacan calls "the unique value/valor of the dead's being."[18] In other words, without a return of the repressed (in this case, the memories of the diseased), the self cannot construct out of, and for, the imagination a representation of the passage that the diseased has made through its own world, much less one that is distinguishable from the self's image of its own grief. Hence the work of mourning is thwarted if the

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[17] Mitchell Breitwiesser, American Puritanism and the Defense of Mourning: Religion, Grief, and Ethnology in Mary Rowlandson's Captivity Narrative (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1990), p. 302.

[18] Quoted, Breitwiesser, p. 325.

dead is not allowed, as Breitwiesser aptly observes, to die "honorably, that is, adequately assigned to being something symbolized" as opposed to remaining "a crippling defect in a survivor who would otherwise be whole."[19]

If honoring the dead, in psychoanalytic terms, is dependent on the technique of transference, the technique of transference, as post-Lacanian psychoanalysis has emphasized, is none other than a method of interpretation. Bearing a striking resemblance to what might otherwise be described as a pragmatist theory of criticism, transference creates what Freud viewed as a region situated somewhere between illness and real life where the patient's blockage, now manifested in a symbolic reification centered on the patient's grief rather than on the meaning of his or her loss, can become accessible to the interpretive interventions and reinterpretations of the analyst. Transference thus turns the therapeutic relationship into an interpretive exchange where the story to be reconstructed is a product of the transactions between analyst and analysand as each contributes -- because of, and in anticipation of, the interventions of the other -- to the production of a new, or at any rate an altered, narrative.

This is a narrative whose veracity, as in William James's theory of truth, has less to do with its correspondence with buried fact, with a reality that is reflected or copied, and more to do with its plausibility as the model for an alternative future. As in literary interpretation generally, the meaning produced by this narrative is neither alone a result of the author's intentions nor of the reader's responses but rather a consequence of their collaborative and critical interaction. The aim of the therapeutic exercise is thus to create an interpretive environment where, in clinical terms, both patient and therapist and, in aesthetic terms, both artist and critic, may work on a "text" that simultaneously "works" on them in the belief that the fullest measure of so-called truth, to utilize Peter Brook's helpful formulation, will be found through the deepest possible penetration of the semiotic, the imaginative, and the hermeneutic into the domain of the psychological.[20]

But if the process of transference is central to the psychodynamic process of individual therapy, where it exhibits its analogies with the work of reading, may it not also possess a similar, if somewhat less readily distinguishable, function in the psychosocial process of cultural therapy,

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[19] Breitwiesser, p. 41.

[20] Peter Brooks, "The Proffered Word," Times Literary Supplement, Nov. 9, 1991, pp. 11-12.

where it exhibits albeit looser analogies with the work of criticism. The point to be noted is that recovery of the self's ability to create and enjoy new meanings, which is synonymous with the work of mourning itself, is made possible only by a liberation of the self's capacities for imaginative as well as interpretive reflection. Thus the work of mourning thus eventuates both for pragmatism and for psychoanalysis in the development of a new emotional and intellectual space that exists, as it were, between the self and the social order. An intermediate space that enables the self through symbols to fashion its relations with structures of meaning that it inherits and at the same time, in the process of appropriating them, recreates, this is the cultural space that until the end of his life, as Homans points out, Freud had trouble conceiving, and then could imagine only at the risk of mythically essentializing it, but that pragmatism necessarily presupposes and critically seeks to colonize without conceptually defining.

More specifically, this cultural space for the recreation of the self is the region that James brought into view by his pragmatic association of the meaning of ideas with outcomes merely anticipated and consequences only projected and that Dewey delineated by reinscribing critical inquiry at the imaginative intersection of causes that ultimately can only be inferred and results that finally can merely be divined. An at least partially fictive space created in no small measure by fantasy, conjecture, inference, hypothesis, surmise, and prediction, this domain is not only where, as James and Dewey maintained, though not always with consistency, that our most fateful (and fanciful) reasoning occurs but also the realm where societies like selves must, with the help of the intepreters of their own and others' traditions, continuously learn how, in relation to one another, to redescribe and thus reconceive themselves. If this interpretive process, often conducted simultaneously but assymetrically on multiple levels of cultural understanding and experience, is endlessly complex, fragmentary, provisional, and haphazard, it is no less indispensible to the possibility of cultural change.

This is as much as to say that if selves, as Jamesian and, more emphatically, Deweyan pragmatism has always insisted, develop only in relation to other selves, the same holds true for cultures. But if cultures constitute themselves, as Christopher Miller has again pointed out, "by reference to each other," this intercultural referentiality can, and does, cut in

more than one direction.[21] If cultures can, as we are now prepared to acknowledge, only find out how they might become other than they are by imaginatively placing in the narratives and fables of others, so it is also, as Carlos Fuentes has recently noted, only by discovering ourselves already in some sense situated in those narratives, often as their demonized other, that we can even begin to learn who we presently are. The stories, narratives, histories, and representations of the other Americas thus not only permit us to begin reimagining and refashioning ourselves; they also enable us to recognize aspects, dimensions, and potentialities of ourselves that we did not even know were present in us, or at least possibilities for us, all along.[22]

We thus return to where we began but this time found in translation rather than lost in it. To find oneself in the processes of cross- and inter-cultural translation is to realize that our relations with others, and particularly with socially and culturally significant others, are rarely direct or transparent. Occurring most often in that intermediary space between selves and the social suround, those exchanges occur through the mediation of symbols and narratives that have become consequential for us both in oddly similar ways: not because they possess the same significance in our different cultural-historical contexts, but because they have served -- and can be comprehended as having served -- the same, or at any rate similar, functions in our respective moral development. Thus what we usually identify with through these mediations are the psycho-cultural processes by which other people, often so different from us in many other respects, have become more interesting, and sometimes more admirable, but in any case more instructive, for us through their ability to redraw the relations between identity and difference in a way that does not define one at the expense of the other; by, to state it another way, converting the temptation to lament the loss of previous forms of cultural identity into an opportunity to create new alternatives for personal and collective experience out of the imaginative and interpretive energies brought into play through the dissolution or wearing out of former ones. What, on the other hand, we sometimes rather miraculously achieve through such symbolic interventions is that fuller enlargement of ourselves that comes from recognizing, in terms and forms often so alien and even unsettling to us, traces of that

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[21] Christopher Miller quoted, John Guillory, Cultural Capital: The Problem of Literary Canon Formation (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), p. 53.

[22] Carlos Fuentes, Myself With Others: Selected Essays (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1988).

common and unending imaginative struggle for meaning that not only still marks us all as human but still marks our humanity as necessarily a corporate rather than an individual accomplishment. The possibility of creating a mutually interrogative and genuinely dialogical cultural criticism of the Americas depends on recognition of this double truth.