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DARING TO DREAM:
RE-VISIONING CULTURE AND CITIZENSHIP

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A few years ago when the affluent Bay Area suburb of Los Altos passed an English Only ordinance, the Chicano artist and poet Jose Antonio Burciaga asked his neighbors to reflect on the irony of their choice

I feel that Los Altos should have gone all the way and changed its Spanish name to The Highs, Highlands, or more appropriately, The Tall Ones. All across the country defenders of ye olde English would do well to authenticate, in English, all of the "foreign" names of our cities and towns.

For example, here in California, we could begin by translating Los Baños to The Bathrooms and Sobrantes to Leftovers. San Francisco, of course, would be renamed Saint Francis of Assisi, Atascadero could become Mud

Puddle, Manteca, Lard, Panocha, Brown Sugar, and Aromas could become Smells, California.

Los Angeles? Anaheim already took away the city's baseball angels, so how about Lost Angels or Lost Anglos? <1>

Not inappropriately, Burciaga titled his piece "The Tall Ones are Ganging up on Me." There are plenty of people today who, at least from time to time, feel like "lost Anglos" in the contemporary reality of the United States. And since the political right launched its highly orchestrated and well financed campaign against educational reform in 1990, plenty of scholars and teachers have shared the feeling that "the tall ones" are ganging up on us.

In our good moments, those of us so beset know that the vehemence of the reaction to educational reform means something of potentially great significance is underway. It is very important not to lose sight of this fact. A few years ago I had the remarkable experience of seeing the planning documents of a first year culture course I co-teach published (in strategically edited form) in the Wall Street___Journal, along with a vehement ill-informed editorial attacking "The Stanford Mind". <2> After the initial shock and insult wore off I found myself astonished that such a thing as an undergraduate course syllabus could come to be of any interest to the national business daily – even assuming a slow day on the market! Unfortunately, like most academics, I lacked the media competence to take advantage of the occasion.

That was five years ago. Now it is clear that what some see as a battle for the national will is also a process by which U.S.

society is reimagining and redefining itself. At this point, it is essential that intellectuals pursuing the democratic renewal of society, institutions and culture make a concerted effort to insert some terms and ideas into the public debate, terms that suggest where it is we are trying to go, and why. Those of us arguing for democratic change face an opportunity and an imperative to articulate our visions clearly and forcefully. What sort of society are we looking for - in these United States, these Americas, this planet? What sort of culture, what sort of institutions do we wish to inhabit? What do we see as the relationships to be developed between language and nation, between culture, education and citizenship? If we abandon assimilationism and the idea of homogeneous cultural wholes, what will be the bases for our social bonds? In California, these questions have been posed with a new urgency since the Los Angeles uprising in the spring of 1992.

For many people the search is for ways to undo deeply held assumptions that tie difference to subordination, and social heterogeneity to social inequality. Difference, in other words, does not necessarily imply inequality -- where it does, it does so as the result of a historical process. For some it is a question of redefining social bonds so that homogeneity is not the only basis for solidarity or accountability. For many people it has become imperative to be able to live out particular identities and group histories as part of one's citizenship, rather than an obstacle to citizenship - imperative to feel not just that one is entitled or allowed to be here, but that one belongs here, that one is entitled

to proprietorship of the nation's institutions as fully as people of the traditionally dominant or normative group.

In the 1980's, following on the national and global upheavals of the 70s and late 60s, certain sets of monolithic linkages came unstuck in metropolitan culture, both in imagination and reality, -- notably linkages that lined up the idea of a nation with the idea of a territorial state, a language, a culture, sometimes a religion, and a (masculine-defined) citizen-subject who defends the territory, embodies the language and culture, and serves the state. In particular, the three-layered monolith of nation, language and culture, which defined the modern nation-state and the modern citizen-subject at the level of the imagined, came apart in what seems likely to be a permanent and global way. This is one lens for diagnosing the current upheavals both in actual social relations and in the ways nations represent themselves to themselves. Often these disarticulations register themselves most dramatically in the realm of language.

I. The polyglot citizen.

Every parent has moments when they confront the fact that their children are growing up in a different world from the one they did. I recall picking my daughter up a few years ago at preschool and hearing that she had a new friend she wanted to ask over to play. Great, I said, get her phone number and I'll call her parents. "I can't" said Olivia. "Why not?" "She doesn't speak English." "Well should we ask her in Spanish?" I said. "Momma," said Olivia impatiently, "We don't understand each other's

language." (The intonation meant: "we understand everything else, just not the language.") The two four year olds, I realized, lacked an expectation of a common language as essential to constructing a relationship, and indeed proved, in the times they spent together, that for four-year olds, it was not.

The incident stuck in my mind because it occurred not long after I had attended a meeting of a professional organization at which two linguistic matters had come up for our consideration. One was whether and how to respond to the English Only initiatives that were being passed all over the country, with varying effects from undermining bilingual education programs to prohibiting workers the use of their native languages in their workplaces. At the same meeting, we received a briefing from some policymakers outlining the urgent need in the American business and government for more adult speakers of second languages. The proposal was to begin a massive national initiative to teach foreign languages to adults in advanced positions in the areas of business, diplomacy and national security.

So we had a situation where simultaneously initiatives were being taken (a) to eliminate bilingualism among school children (for whom multiple language learning is possible and perfectible) and (b) to try to create bilingualism among mature adults (for whom foreign language learning is extremely difficult and virtually never perfectible) ! My fantasy at the time was to get the two groups together in the same room (almost certainly revealing, of course, that they were in fact the same people!) . But that wouldn't do much good, really, because the crowd in such a room

would not have included a lot of people who needed to be there for a valid discussion of what was possible and desirable in the way of a national language policy. As anyone knows who has been working on educational democracy, everything depends on who is in the room where the decisions are being made, on whether those seeking change and those expected to benefit are part of the process. (One of the significant openings created by the upheaval in Los Angeles was the appearance on mainstream TV of inner city people analyzing their situation and the society as a whole. Their clarity, articulateness and wisdom often contrasted with the ignorant wafflings of an officialdom lacking all familiarity with of the dynamics at work.)

What a difference it would make, then, if a national language policy were formulated by a group that corresponded to the linguistic realities of the US --to the fact for instance that in California half the children entering kindergarten now speak first languages other than English. As a scholar, a parent, and a teacher, I dare to dream about a public education system that sees this extraordinary multilingualism not as an educational handicap or a social impediment but as an extraordinary endowment to be cultivated and preserved. Imagine a school system that made it a priority for children to become literate in all the languages they knew, and for every monolingual English speaker to learn a second language early and well. In a generation, without giving up a shared knowledge of English among its citizens, the national self-understanding would, I suspect, be profoundly altered.

What could emerge might be a new national subject -- a figure

Renato Rosaldo has called the polyglot citizen.<3> Let me use this term for a moment to reflect on this society's present and its past. On the one hand, as a purely linguistic entity, the polyglot citizen would be the result of changing realities in the U.S., notably the arrival of large new immigrant populations - 8 1/2 million in the 1980s alone -- and that's the official figure. On the other hand, as Burciaga tried to remind his neighbors in Los Altos, such a concept would simply incorporate into the national understanding realities that have constituted American life and history for a very long time. For of course multilingualism, intercultural contact, radical social heterogeneity and discontinuity have been part of human history in the Americas for a very long time, certainly since before contact with Europe, and of course more dramatically since the shock of 1492 and its aftermath. Despite ideologies of homogeneity and assimilation, the polyglot American has been everywhere but never named as a model for citizenship. (When you read Willa Cather's *O Pioneers!*, did you or your teacher notice that every single character is bilingual and there is not a single native speaker of English in the book? Did you know in the 1850s 60% of the newspapers published in the US were NOT in English?) In the Southwest people have constantly to be reminded that Spanish is not an immigrant language in the US, that Mexicans were here for three centuries before Anglos showed up, and that the dominant presence of English did not eliminate Spanish by the third generation, as the immigrant formula specifies.

In her courses on sociolinguistics at San Jose State

University, linguist Patricia Nichols does a simple and revealing exercise to orient her students to the history of multilingualism in the United States.<4> Nichols has students reconstruct their linguistic biography, to see how many generations back they go in their own family before encountering native languages other than English. This is a great exercise for something I call "unravelling th white synthesis" in the classroom. For most students, including Euroamericans, it is only 2 o 3 generations back to bilingualism. In fact, among Nichols's students, the group with the longest history as native speakers of English is the African Americans. (Of course! – when you think about it.)

The other things those linguistic biographies revealed, to Nichols surprise, was the violence of compulsory monolingualism. Many families had preserved horror stories about linguistic repression and forced language loss. In the United States the polyglot citizen of all races has traditionally been subjected to considerable psychosocial violence. This was one of the costs of producing what I referred to above as "the white synthesis". As Nichols' classroom experiment suggests, that synthesis begins to unravel as soon as you tug it by a thread. Unraveling it is crucial to the unraveling of white supremacy itself.

Linguistic repression and enforced monolingualism are also old realities in the Americas. Walter Mignolo wrote recently about a literacy campaign conducted by the Spanish in the 1550s, led by Franciscan friars.<5> One of their tactics was to imprison children of the Aztec elite and prevent them from conversing with anyone in

their own language, "especially not their mothers". The authority of literate culture, the friars surmised, could only be established if the authority of oral culture was interrupted. (The Aztecs, it appears, were not entirely naive about what was afoot. Commentators revealed that some of them, suspecting the exercise, turned over not their own children but those of subordinates.) That history is still being lived out today. In the first-year culture course a group of us teach at Stanford (the one the Wall Street Journal wrote up) readings include a sacred mythic text of the Maya, called the Popol Vuh. This year, following the lecture on this text, a student came up to the professor with some comments, at the end of which he said "My grandparents are Maya, you know. It's the only language they know, but they insisted my parents speak only Spanish to get ahead, so I've never learned it, though I've heard it all my life." Ironically, as he probably knew, north of the border, Spanish is the language parents tell their children to suppress, for the same reasons his grandparents suppressed Maya. Of course it was the presence of the Popol Vuh on the curriculum, and a Chicano professor behind the podium, that brought this student's Maya experience into intersection with the powerful structures of knowledge that live in the university.

The idea of polyglot citizen is intended of course to refer to cultural and not just linguistic consciousness. It does not mean simply a polity whose citizens speak more than one language, but a polity that is, and sees itself as, multiply constituted, as consisting of heterogeneity at the level of the individual and the

collectivity. Citizens are constituted by the multiple and shifting parameters we all know by heart: region, gender, class, race, religion. People are bound by histories, but histories that they have lived out in very different ways. As anthropologist Renato Rosaldo has argued, fears that such multiplicity produces chaos are unfounded. Heterogeneous societies can hold together just fine, though what holds them together is not homogeneity. Rather they are held together by the dense degrees of overlap between and among their various identifications and formations. The other great fear is of fragmentation or, as it is often called, 'balkanization.' But this too cannot happen, because no one belongs to only one group. The polyglot citizen, metaphorically speaking, identifies herself or himself as a point of intersection of multiple threads that weave in and out to make the dense fabric of society. As the LA rap group Aztlan Nation put it, "I didn't cross the border, the border crossed me." Perhaps here there is a richer, and more inclusive model of citizenship than those which imagine social bonding as constituted by sameness and conformism.

III. Multiculturalism: Five Propositions.

There is at least one term that all participants in the culture debates have a stake in: multiculturalism. For reasons that will become apparent in a moment, I will make no attempt to define this concept. In fact I'll do the opposite. I propose to identify five of what I take to be key dimensions of the term, thinking in particular about widespread concern over coopted, bureaucratized, and watered down versions of multiculturalism. So acute are these

concerns that powerful voices committed to cultural democracy and educational reform now often back away from or even denounce multiculturalism, leaving colleagues who have taken great risks in its name dangling in a limbo of (il)legitimacy. Here are Five Propositions aimed at resolving some of the confusion generated by the multifarious evocations of the term:

Proposition 1. Multiculturalism has at least four narratives of origin:

(a) Civil rights. Multiculturalism has historical roots in US civil rights struggles, and continues the battles for gender and racial equality that have been an ongoing part of US social history since independence. With respect to people of color, women, gays, and other disenfranchised groups, one can characterize multiculturalism as a move from demanding the right to BE here, to demanding the right to BELONG here, from demanding representation to demanding co-possession of the nation's institutions.

(b) Immigration. Close to 1 in 25 Americans, by official statistics, arrived here in the last 15 years, from very disparate parts of the world. Actual numbers are probably greater. This extraordinary in-migration has produced a cultural and linguistic landscape much more diverse than has ever existed here. From this perspective, multiculturalism is not a movement, but simply a reality. It is already here. Debates over education and diversity represent simply the pangs of adjustment, and struggles over how to adjust our institutions to these new realities.

(c) Globalization. The communications revolution, worldwide

immigrant diasporas, the globalization of capital and markets mean that everyone's reality has diversified culturally and linguistically, and that nearly everyone is experiencing increasing demands to interact with other cultures and societies. This is where multiculturalism intersects with international relations; where domestic projects in cultural diversity meet up with the demand for greater global cultural competence, often in the name of economic competitiveness in the global market.

(d) Academic business as usual. Questioning, challenging and revitalizing established traditions and structures of knowledge is business as usual in the university. In fact such processes of renewal are central to the university's mission in the society. Today's curriculum debates, for example, are strikingly similar to the heated struggles that occurred in the 1920s over whether American literature should be taught in American universities. Many of the arguments used then against American literature are the same ones used now to object to "substituting" European classics with "inferior" works by women, people of color, or non-Europeans. In any scholarly discipline, paradigm shifts are inevitable and desirable, for though they occasion discord, they are the way new knowledge is incorporated, the way history works on the institution. Without them universities would be attempting to live outside history – and would become instant anachronisms. There is of course a commercialized version of this: in the books and journals market multiculturalism is a growth industry, and most big corporations today have professional diversity managers.

Having suggested four narratives of origin, I would like to

privilege a particular orientation towards the future. The central core of the reformist projects referred to under the label multiculturalism, I would argue, is the struggle in the domain of culture against forms of subordination that distort this society, inhibit its thought and fail so many of its inhabitants: racism and white supremacy, sexism and heterosexism, ethnocentrism, intolerance and xenophobia, based as often on ignorance as on prejudice.

Proposition 2. ; Multiculturalism is not a goal or a stopping off place. Like affirmative action, it is a strategy not an end in itself. In the case of both strategies, it is crucial to keep in mind what they can and cannot do. They should not be attacked or blamed, as they often are, for what they cannot and never undertook to do. Affirmative action cannot eliminate racism and sexism, and those who designed it never thought it could. It was intended merely as an initial mechanism for intervening in situations understood to be distorted by racism and sexism. Yet affirmative action itself is often blamed for creating stigmas that should really be attributed to the persistence of racism and sexism themselves. Its "failure" to eliminate these prejudices has been effectively used by supporters of racial and gender inequality to divide and weaken groups committed to opposing inequality.

So it has been with multiculturalism, which is criticized, for instance, because it is compatible with a kind of uncritical pluralism, a smorgasbord approach to culture, and with forms of consumerism. Again, such limitations have been used to divide groups committed to promoting a democratic and heterogeneous

culture.

It is crucial to recognize these movements as strategies rather than goals, and to keep one's eye on the prizes of equality, liberation, and social and cultural renewal. In the case of both affirmative action and multiculturalism, it is the burden of their critics to propose something better.

Proposition 3. Multiculturalism doesn't have a referent. Precisely because it denotes a strategy, it is a highly contextual term. What it "means" in a given instance will depend entirely on the context, who the participants are, on what is at stake and what is possible. Such factors determine what constitutes a "multicultural" intervention in a given situation. If one recognizes the context-boundedness of multiculturalism, and its status as a strategy rather than an end goal, one worries less about compromised or coopted gestures that seem designed to appease rather than transform. The productive response to such gestures is not necessarily to condemn or reject them as undesirable per se, but to demonstrate their limitations and push in every instance for additional change. The fact of cooptation does not discredit the goals or trivialize the stakes, and should not be allowed to.

A related but somewhat different point concerns what one might call the horizontalness of political language in the electronic media age. Political terms tend not to retain specific empirical, ideological, or moral referents, but rather to spread horizontally across the political and ideological spectrum, altering their

meaning accordingly. Thus words like democracy, diversity, freedom, fairness, equality -- and multiculturalism -- are used across the entire ideological spectrum in public discourse. In part this horizontal spread is due to the right's habit of appropriating transformative or critical language as quickly as it enters public discourse. In part it is due to the fact that different sectors of the society are always responding simultaneously, but differently, to changes in social conditions. So in response to, say, an increased Mexican and Chicano clientele, a supermarket owner might hire more bilingual clerks, move the salsa out of the International Foods section, stock new items like tomatillos and plantains, add cumbias to the muzak. Now one can easily argue that such actions are not at all emancipatory, but simply designed to integrate the new clientele further into consumer society, and that would certainly be true. But what follows from such a conclusion? That the store owner should be expected to resist the impulse to respond to changes in the clientele, or be condemned for doing so? Would it not be absurd to deny the obvious fact that the changes do make the store a more hospitable place for the people who shop there? A more appropriate response, I submit, might be to open a dialogue with the supermarket owner and ask for funds to support multicultural initiatives in the education sphere on the grounds that there exists a shared understanding of changes taking place.

Proposition 4. Multiculturalism is not a substitute for, nor a guarantee of economic justice. Its goals will always be compromised by the absence of economic justice. Multiculturalism

is most immediately about consciousness and institutions. These are what is at stake in the struggle, and these are the sites of intervention and renewal. Multiculturalists ask what kinds of institutions are we going to inhabit in the future? How do we propose to represent ourselves to ourselves and to the world? How fully enfranchised will the populace be with respect to education, language, culture, and expression?

While multiculturalism will not directly bring about economic justice, it brings awareness of the workings and histories of inequalities, and fosters more representative institutions through which to correct them. Multiculturalists call for scholarship that clarifies the links between economic injustice and cultural disenfranchisement, brings the histories behind both to national consciousness, and explores alternatives.

Proposition 5. Multiculturalism does not "balkanize." Segregation does. Multiculturalism seeks to multiply the number of socially defined groups that have access to the society's dialogues about itself, and to place those groups in dialogue with each other. Inevitably the dialogue is initially anchored in the groups' differences from each other -- but this does not constitute balkanization. IN fact it constitutes the opposite, for the groups are in the same room and talking and listening to each other. The real balkanization is what we had before -- the legal and de facto segregations around which this country's institutions were built. Nothing could be more balkanized than American higher education in the 1920s or the 1950s. The momentum of multiculturalism is to counter fragmentation produced by social disenfranchisement and

segregation.

IV. The colonized imagination.

I suggested that the breakup of cultural monoliths in the US involves two processes. First, a response to new realities: the communications revolution, the so-called immigrant implosion of the third world onto the first, the globalization of markets, successful demands by women and people of color that their differences be decoupled from legacies of subordination and recognized as the basis for their belonging. Second, people in the US (and many other countries) are coming to grips with old realities that have been elided from official history.

It is on this latter process that I want to focus for the moment, and give it a name that may surprise some readers: decolonization. When the debates over Western Culture broke out in the US six years ago, I found myself reminded over and over of my years growing up in English Canada in the 1950s, when pictures of the Queen of England governed every home, courtroom, hockey arena and curling rink, and received our morning pledges of allegiance in the classroom; where culture, history, art, reality itself lived somewhere else. Not where we were, but on the other side of the ocean, which Britain ruled. These, I later realized, were the workings of the colonized imagination. Now the United States is a world imperial power and it is admittedly difficult to think of it as having a colonized imagination. But I am convinced that in the domain of culture and national understanding, it does.

When it comes to culture, Europe has continued to possess the

American, especially the Euroamerican imagination, to be its point of reference, regardless of the realities that surround us here. So it was in the 1920s that American universities debated intensely whether American literature should be taught there. So it was in the 1980s at many American colleges, that the book lists adopted as representing the cultural heritage of American students included no Americans! These are symptoms, I would argue, of a much more general state of mind. Even when they know almost nothing about European high culture, as cultural subjects, I suggest, Americans remain to a significant degree colonial subjects for whom reality and value live somewhere else. They are so constituted by the national institutions of knowledge and culture, official and otherwise. Euroamericans tend to experience this phenomenon, as ever in neocolonial contexts, as alienation, passivity, and a sense of disenfranchisement. Asked to define or describe their culture, for example, white American students often react with pain and anger. For they tend to know themselves as people without culture. They tend to envy and resent "ethnic" students who know themselves deeply as cultural beings, because in the absence of political and economic power, culture and community have been the sustenance of life. In US ethnic communities culture often plays the role it plays in anticolonial struggles -- as a site and source of resistance to domination. This is very different from the sense of self-alienation and disenfranchisement that characterizes the cultural self-consciousness of many Euroamericans, and which readily leads people to use white privilege to ridicule culture and those who "have" it. Much of this, I suggest, is the legacy of

European colonialism from which this country has still to emancipate itself. In a recent article exploring the term "post-colonial", cultural critic Ann McClintock similarly argues that the US belongs to the group of what she calls "breakaway settler colonies" which "have not undergone decolonization". Is it the colonized imagination that makes the soil here so fertile for the growth of a passive culture of consumption, spectatorship and simulation? In the public polemics about canons and book lists, it is the colonized imagination that speaks when writer after writer, even distinguished intellectuals like C. Vann Woodward, denounces books they have never read, writers whose names they have never seen, simply because they are not European. It is, at least in part, the colonized imagination that sends intellectuals of the Americas to Europe for theories of society -- even theories about America, like those of Eco, Baudrillard, Todorov -- or for terms like "balkanization" in which to mirror ourselves.

European culture critics have created a tradition of talking about the sense of unreality they encounter in the United States, about the mania here for creating simulations, replicas and artificial worlds like Disneyland or Heritage USA. (Eco wrote up his pilgrimage documenting all the replicas of the Last Supper between San Francisco and Los Angeles.<6>) What is this mania for simulation, which the Europeans do not seem to understand (they tend to conclude Americans cannot distinguish between fiction and reality because they have no history)? Perhaps it's what you get when you combine a technological superpower with a colonized imagination that experiences "real" cultural agency as being

"somewhere else". Though this view runs counter to perceptions of the US as the ultimate global cultural imperialist, the two facts are not at all incompatible.

What current educational reform movements are engaged in can be understood, in part, as a process of decolonization of culture and the national imagination. It involves recognizing the unique historical and cultural experience of the United States and the Americas, and claiming of that experience in all its specificity and complexity. It involves not erasing the European legacy (though that is the thing multiculturalists are most often accused of), but situating that legacy within the history of life and society on this side of the Atlantic, being accountable to that history from within.

What is to be gained from such a decolonization? The prospect of society here knowing its reality more fully, judging itself more wisely. It points to the possibility of a society more fully grounded in its own reality and history. This is the part I bring up most often when people ask me what is in all this for the white middle class. An extraordinary cultural renewal, I say, an enrichment and an emancipation. Emancipation, for instance, from the sense of being at the mercy of consumption and spectatorship; the possibility of a cultural subject that is more than a consumer. An emancipated imagination is a rich and powerful thing. Colonizers know this well, which is why colonialism tries to deprive the colonized of independent access to cultural institutions, particularly to the means of representing themselves to themselves.

V. The (U.S. in the) Americas.

Earlier on I spoke about the fact that bilingualism, intercultural relations, radical social heterogeneity and discontinuity are old realities in the Americas, though not always part of official histories and national mythologies. This final point is about The Americas, in the hemispheric sense. Of all the possibilities for cultural renewal offered by the current movements toward cultural enfranchisement, one that strikes me as most promising is the possibility that the United States will reimagine and resituate itself in the Americas; that it will rewrite its history and rework its self-understanding so as to recover the specificity and uniqueness of the experience of this hemisphere. (Uniqueness and specificity are not simple celebratory terms here: the experience to be recovered has horrendous dimensions multiculturalists are always being attacked for bringing up.) The unique, specific experience of this hemisphere includes the history of the huge range of indigenous societies, both before and since contact with Europe; the European invasion and conquest and the establishment of white settler colonialism; the elaboration of African-based cultures out of massive forced emigration and slavery. European intellectual history, often accepted as the source of American social understanding, has an extraordinarily limited capacity to characterize the realities of the Americas, for its anchor points are in the history of European society. European theory is not going to tell us about colonialism, neocolonialism, dependency and decolonization from the receiving end. (For that we must look to Latin American and Caribbean thought.) European social theory only peripherally knows

or even cares about such questions as the structure of settler societies, interactions between Christianity and indigenous religions, the plantation as a social order, the structure of intercultural relations on the frontier, institutional racism or the ways imperialism interacted with religion and patriarchy, about the role land plays in the frontier imagination, and in that of longterm subsist societies. Yet these are matters of central concern to social understanding in the Americas.

As the examples suggest, the re-identification with the Americas I am describing is part of what I referred to earlier as the decolonization of consciousness. As most Americanists (in the hemispheric sense) are aware, it is not a question of setting such a process in motion: it is in motion, and has been for some time, accelerated by the social movements of the 1960s, and foregrounded by the recent 1992 quincentennial. Within the United States, significant and often brilliant scholarship has sought to decenter the euro-centered narrative of western expansion as the backbone of national history and view things from a intellectual center of gravity here. As U.S. multiculturalists know, the body of Canadian thought on these issues is much larger and more sophisticated than what has emerged in the U.S., partly because Canada has been dealing openly with these issues for longer and partly because Canada has staked its very constitutional viability on the possibility of a diverse and discontinuous conception of the nation-state. But I propose to end by looking southward, and offering, in list fashion, a few examples of terms and concepts from Latin American and Caribbean intellectual dialogues on the

social and cultural peculiarities of the Americas. See if you don't think there are interamerican conversations to be held on the subject of culture and American self-understanding.

i) Criollo is the term in Spanish for a Euro-American. While this category has never functioned in U.S. social thought, it has been a basic term in Latin American vocabulary since colonial times, when it was used to distinguish people of European descent born in the Americas from those born in Europe who under Spanish colonialism were given the positions of greatest power and privilege. The category has always functioned to distinguish the Euroamericans from Europeans, especially as regards their relationship to Europe. Equally importantly, it has functioned to distinguish Euroamericans, who following independence formed the elites of most countries, from indigenous, mestizo and African-descended populations.

It can be enlightening to think of the United States as a multiethnic country ruled by a criollo elite, with significant indigenous, mestizo (especially in the West and Southwest) and African-descended populations. The term criollo is especially helpful in characterizing the dependent relations the Euroamerican elites have maintained with Europe. In the multiethnic, heterogeneous social orders of the Americas, the European referent, however alienated it may be from the lived American reality, becomes the chief guarantor of criollo identity and the chief means of legitimating their privilege above all to themselves. The term thus names the alienated basis for white supremacy in the societies of the Americas.

ii) Creole, the English translation of criollo, is a broader term that denotes anything born in the Americas out of its intersecting cultural heritages. Creole refers specifically to the uniqueness of American-generated phenomena, be it language, music, race, culture, or dress, to their difference from European or African or Asian or Amerindian "originals." Creole in a way denotes the upstart, the inauthentic, mixed around thing – that generates its own authenticity, often by being rooted in a particular very local place: Jamaica, Trinidad, Antigua, and so on. In linguistics, créole is the name given to languages that began as pidgins – hybrid, simplified languages invented to enable communication between historically discontinuous groups (like European slave traders in West Africa, or U.S. soldiers in Vietnam). When such languages develop into the full-fledged native language of a group, they are called créoles. The term thus embodies the improvised, transcultural character that many see as a central fact of culture and society in the Americas since contact with Europe and Africa.

American vernacular culture is often fruitfully analyzed as créole or creolized in this way. The term has the potential to go beyond the narrowness and alienation of hyphenated ethnic terminologies, towards self-conceptions rooted in American reality.

iii) Transculturation is a term originally coined in the 1940s by the Cuban sociologist Fernando Ortiz, as he studied the workings of Afro-Cuban society and its development in the tobacco

and sugar economies of the Caribbean. Anthropology had used the concept of acculturation to describe the ways subordinated groups absorbed materials from dominant cultures, but Ortiz found this term inadequate to depict the dynamics of Afro-Cuban culture that he observed. The traditional assumption was that in situations of contact between dominant and subordinate or metropolitan and peripheral cultures, the subordinate or peripheral culture necessarily acculturates to the dominant or metropolitan culture, gradually abandoning its own practices and traditions. The assumption was that (a) culture tends to be a finite space in which new things must necessarily displace old things and (b) subordinate and marginal peoples absorb metropolitan or dominant cultures by something akin to osmosis, exercising no choice or agency in the matter. Ortiz's argument, later developed by the Uruguayan literary scholar Angel Rama, was that in fact subordinate groups are anything but inert when it comes to determinant relations with dominant and metropolitan cultures. Even in situations of extraordinarily unequal power, they argue, subordinate groups are highly selective and inventive in absorbing materials from the metropolis, and develop many ways of maintaining cultural integrity. When processes of selection and invention are factored into the picture, what once appeared as a simplistic dynamic of acculturation is better characterized as a dynamic of transculturation. (The absorption of Christian elements into pre-conquest religions, traditionally called syncretism, is perhaps the best known example of such selection and invention. The selective tendency of Latin American intellectuals to absorb

resistant and critical currents of European thought, such as Marxism and radical Christianity, is another.)

Transculturation is a vital concept for characterizing the dynamics of culture in the Americas from a vantage point anchored in the Americas, rather than in Europe. It forces into motion static pluralist paradigms that multiculturalists often find so confining.

iv) Heterogeneity is a term introduced by the Peruvian scholar Antonio Cornejo Polar to describe society and culture in the Andean countries, where Euroamerican (criollo) minorities cohabit national territory with large indigenous populations whose language and traditions are Andean, and large mestizo populations whose lifeways draw on both. In contrast with the terms "difference" and "diversity" used in European and North American discussions, Cornejo Polar uses the concept of "heterogeneity" and *culturas heterogéneas* ('heterogeneous cultures') to name the conditions of drastic discontinuity and incommensurability that characterize societies where colonial invasion has brought together peoples with entirely separate histories, such as the Spanish and the Andeans. When one side does not eliminate the other, such societies articulate themselves in states of intractable conflict and profound incomprehension. The idea of a social synthesis or community is not an option, nor is the idea of a single national form of expression or representation that will speak to/for all. There is no shared discourse or concept of membership, no shared symbols, not even any stable meanings, for

the signifiers constructed by one side will be transculturated and redefined by the other. More than a case of the proverbial slipperiness of signifiers, it is a case of profound semantic disjuncture. Such situations appear extreme from the perspective of a normative model of social homogeneity, but, as Cornejo Polar argues, they are normal conditions of existence and social structure in the Americas, and we can't intervene in them wisely until we have adequate theories of them.

In a way, Cornejo Polar's use of the term heterogeneity can be thought of as radicalizing (though not in the political sense) the more descriptive European-based vocabulary of difference, *différance*, heteroglossia, and polyphony so that it can express the physical and epistemological violence that follows on the shock of contact and invasion. There are many areas of the United States where the model of the *cultura heterogénea* would help us recover the specific ways the history of colonial contact continues to determine reality.

I introduce these four concepts, *criollo*, *créole*, transculturation and heterogeneity, along with the term decolonization, to encourage consideration of what it might mean for U.S. Americans to work out theories of society and culture that take American historical experience as the norm. Such theorizing would be grounded in an open encounter with American realities, and anchored in the shared experience of this hemisphere, an experience that both divides us irrevocably from

Europe and binds us historically to Europe (as well as to the rest of the world).

A few years ago my son's fourth grade class was given a copy of a letter Chief Seattle wrote to the president of the United States toward the end of the last century, protesting the violation of land agreements by white settlers. The settlers argued back that they needed the land to survive. The fourth graders were asked, of all things, to think about it and write up what they thought would be a fair solution. My son, a skeptic when it came to schoolwork, closed his door and, astonishingly, began to write. Pages flew, covering the floor. He emerged with a two sentence paragraph that said something like, "There is no fair way to solve this problem. The Europeans must return to Europe and the Native Americas must agree to stay in America." I told him I thought he had probably reconstructed Chief Seattle's own conclusion. But what was to be Manuel's solution, as a Chicano-Jewish-Anglo-Canadian California kid? How was he to situate himself with respect to that manichean history? There was no language for it in his classroom, no language better than that which Chief Seattle was able to lay his hands on over a century ago as he sought to negotiate with the conqueror in the conqueror's language. We can do better than this, I thought -- and for Manuel's sake, we have to.

While the wholesale re-envisioning of society remains incomplete, few of us have any trouble envisioning the work that awaits us as scholars and educators. The picture is daunting and

exciting. It is not necessary to dream to encounter scholars and teachers excited by new possibilities for understanding, driven by curiosity, eager to read the lost texts and the new ones, eager to branch out of their specializations and to devise forms of collaborative work that are accountable to heterogeneity and multiplicity. One need not dream to find teachers exploring new pedagogies for multiethnic classrooms, pedagogies where the teacher's role cannot be to unify the world or create homogeneously shared understandings. Everywhere teachers are working to develop forms of classroom leadership that will shape but not control the development of understanding, and foster in students a sense of excitement over the responsibility of creating a new vision of one's society. One still does have to dream, however, to encounter two elements still largely lacking at present. The first of these is translators, needed by the dozens to make the knowledge and insights from each part of the world available to others. Respect for the work of translation has not yet caught up in the US with the vital need for it, and one can only hope it will. The second element that still has to be dreamed could be called science of cultural mediation, by which I mean a disciplined inquiry into the means by which intercultural understanding and communication are constructed and sustained. I believe it will not be long before such an inquiry consolidates itself. There is work to be done, lots of it. We know something about what it is and how to do it. The thing now is to get on with it.

NOTES

*This essay began in remarks presented at a forum on American Literary Pluralisms, at the Modern Language Association Convention, San Francisco December 1991, sponsored by the Commission on Literatures and Languages of the Americas. My sincere thanks to Rina Benmayor, David Palumbo-Liu, José Saldívar, Renato Rosaldo, James Clifford and Herman Gallegos for their comments.)

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José Antonio Burciaga, "The Tall Ones are Ganging up on Me," *Estos Tiempos*, Stanford University, 1989.

2

"The Stanford Mind," *Wall Street Journal*, December 22, 1988.

3

Renato Rosaldo, personal communication. To be discussed his forthcoming book, *Cultural citizenship and Educational Democracy*, Beacon Press.

4

Patricia Nichols, "Language in the Attic: Claiming our Linguistics Heritage," in D.E. Murray, ed., *Diversity as Resource*, TESOL Publications, 1990.

5

Walter Mignolo, "Literacy and Colonization: The New World Experience," in R. Jara and N. Spadaccini eds, *1492-1992: Re/discovering Colonial Writing*, Minneapolis: U. of Minnesota Press, 1989.

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Umberto Eco, *Travels in Hyperreality*, San Diego: Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich, 1986.

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May 16, 1993

Prof. Art Young
English
Clemson University
Clemson SC 29634

Dear Art:

Here at last is my manuscript. Hope it's OK. I'm really sorry if

I held things up. You'll be geared up already for the next institute. Hope it goes well and that everybody shows up!

Hope to see you again soon, it was good getting to know you.

Yours truly,

Mary Louise Pratt