

Narrating Social Space: *Ceremony*, Utopian Desire, and Cultural Difference

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要 旨

レスリー・マーモンシルコウは最も重要なネイティブアメリカンの小説家のひとりであり、彼女の小説「セレモニー」(1977)はアメリカ文化社会で、‘文化の違い’によって生じた問題を調べるために有用されています。

どんな文化に属しているかに関わらず、我々は人であるという考えを強調しているので、私たちはこの小説を“ユートピア”として理解することができます。しかしながら、同時に、多くの学者は文化の違いの重要性を強化しています。彼等は、読者がこの小説を正しく解釈するには、ネイティブアメリカンの文化（特にラグナブエプロ文化）について、深い知識を持つ必要があると議論します。

私はこの記事で“文化の違い”についてどのようなアンビバレンスがアメリカの文化社会に関連するのかを明らかにします。

I. Introduction

I would like to tell two “stories” about Leslie Marmon Silko’s *Ceremony* (1977). The first is how the narrative of *Ceremony* utilizes a traditional type of utopian gesture—the erasure of difference, as in utopian worlds without class, race, or gender—in order to imagine a resolution to the conflict arising out of an *ideology of racialized cultural difference*: “cultural difference” referring to different cultural practices, worldviews, traditions, histories, and so forth; “racialized” referring to the tendency to mark

different cultures, and the people associated with them, in an effort to delineate one from another. Historically, racialization has included the notion of discrete racial groups. To be sure, there is much conceptual slippage between the terms “culture” and “race.” And although I will mostly use the term “cultural difference” in this essay, I do want to retain this slippage, despite the conceptual murkiness it might introduce. In other words, I want the term “culture” to include the notion that cultural difference is often racialized and treated as if it refers to essentialized distinctions between races. I would propose that this slippage back and forth between “culture” and “race” is precisely the way we experience both concepts in U.S. American culture and social life. To some degree, it makes no sense to try to fully pin down either concept because the entities that they refer to are not stationary objects with fixed meanings. They are always moving and often expressing contradictions, ambivalences, and misunderstanding.

Ceremony is an exemplary text when considering our utopian desires and the ideology of cultural difference because the novel both imagines a resolution to cultural difference and is, itself, a fetishized cultural object. In *Ceremony*'s utopian narrative, the main character—the mixed-blood Tayo, who is the “half breed” child of a wayward Laguna woman and an anonymous “white” father (significantly left in this shroud of ambiguity)—embodies the cultural conflict in the Native American community, specifically in terms of the Laguna people in New Mexico. (Although “American Indian” may be the more current, preferred term, I have decided to use the term “Native American” in this essay because most of the scholarship I reference uses this latter. I also suspect that “Native American” might be more readily recognizable to Japanese audiences.) As readers, we reach an ultimate understanding of the cultural conflict through Tayo and his performance of the ceremony that heals him: that we are all part of one clan, one humanity, rather than different cultural groups within humanity. The Native Americans' own “witchery” has created the whites to do its evil bidding, but white people are in actuality a smokescreen hiding our common humanity. The mechanism for this utopian narrative is the erasure of cultural difference—that is, the erasure of the ideology that makes us believe there are, in fact, differently delineated cultural groups. *Ceremony*'s solution to the cultural conflict that is underwritten by the ideology of cultural difference calls for a paradigm shift from the idea that there are *different human races* to the idea that there is *only one humanity*. The differences we perceive between groups of people are a function of the witchery and are there to cloak the “truth”—that we are all part of one clan—from us. This is, of course, a very common approach to understanding cultural difference in U.S. American culture, which comes in many guises such as liberal democracy, the melting pot, and colorblindness.

At odds with this ideologically counter-ideological message in the novel is the

story of *Ceremony*'s life as a cultural object. In parallel to the narrative, the book also exists suspended in the medium of cultural difference. The desires and ideologies surrounding cultural difference are in play in what we might call "the space of reading," as well as within the text. Scholars consistently invoke the tropes of authenticity like "birthright" or "long study" as a prerequisite to accessing the text—an argument that is perhaps inevitable in discussions of any minority text. One must be *authorized* by cultural difference, whether through birthright or long study or something else, in order to *correctly* read this or any other Native American novel—indeed any novel by a member of a cultural group other than one's own. As I will discuss later, I am actually more sympathetic with the view that birthright somehow gives one special access to a cultural text than the view that one can *acquire* a perspective born on the other side of cultural difference, even if the former view treads dangerously into the territory of essentialism. The "long study" argument assumes that cultural knowledge is commodifiable and that possession of commodified cultural knowledge coincides with the knowledge and experience created by birthright.

Both of the stories I will tell about *Ceremony* feed off a paradigmatic erasure of difference that issues from liberal democracy. The problem with this paradigm is that the erasure of difference—for racial subjects, abstraction into simply an *individual*; for cultural knowledge, abstraction into universally accessible knowledge objects—produces a "remainder" that we need to account for. That is to say, erasing difference does not eliminate difference; it merely repositions it off to the sides where it goes unacknowledged or manifests itself in other ways. My argument about both *Ceremony*'s utopian narrative and the politics involved in reading it is that cultural difference can never be fully erased from either social subjects or cultural knowledge—that there is always a remainder that we must account for. (For a fuller discussion of the remainder in relation to utopia, see my "Utopia and the Problem of Race: Accounting for the Remainder in the Imagination of the 1970s Utopian Subject" [2006]).

In addition to this tension between *Ceremony*'s utopian narrative, which seeks to erase cultural difference, and the play of cultural difference within the space of reading, the utopian narrative also competes with other spatial narratives. It constructs the space of *home*, as Toni Flores (1989) suggests. According to Catherine Rainwater (1992), the text narrates *ideological complexes* and *double sociolects*, both of which work to produce a "semiotics of dwelling" and, thus, a particular type of relationship to space. These are *narrative spaces*—in other words, constructed by the narrative and in terms of desires the narrative calls into play for both the characters and the reader. I will suggest yet another type of space that operates within Silko's text: an unacknowledged, utopic space. This is why I read *Ceremony* as a utopian narrative. Highlighting the utopic

space can help to correlate the narrative spaces suggested by Flores and Rainwater, on the one hand, and the space of reading on the other. Furthermore, the concept of utopia—especially in the 1970s (Moynan 1986, Burwell 1997)—provides a way to think through the problem of cultural difference in spatial terms. Utopia becomes a way to manage social difference in an imagined space, somewhere other than the here and now.

Much of the criticism written on *Ceremony* also identifies different types of readers who inhabit specific social spaces, which is to say that they are racialized subjects with particular relationships to cultural knowledge. Apart from the narrative, utopian desires and cultural difference are also at work in what I am calling “the space of reading” (yet another type of social space), especially in how the scholarship on Native American literature treats *Ceremony* as a cultural object. The space of reading denotes how a reader experiences a text or group of texts—including the ideological message a text embodies—in relation to the reader’s own location within social space, which is to say the reader’s racial/cultural identity. By using the term “space of reading,” I want to invoke institutional desires (canonization) as well as cultural desires directed at especially minority writers and their texts—that is, how an author or a text is enmeshed in a discourse of cultural politics.

II. A narrative of dislocation

Ceremony narrates a spiritual healing of the main character, Tayo, the illegitimate son of a Laguna Pueblo woman who turned her back on the community to live a reckless life of sex and alcoholism outside the reservation and consequently died. Laguna Pueblo is one of several pueblos located in the Arizona and New Mexico region. The different pueblos are categorized on the basis of language groups with slight cultural variations. Laguna is one of the most populated of all the pueblos and is part of the Western Keres group, which also includes the nearby Acoma. The Hopis are also part of the Pueblo grouping. (For a comprehensive picture of how Laguna fits culturally within the general Pueblo schema, see Elsie Clews Parsons’ anthropological study, *Laguna Genealogies* [1920], or Fred Eggan’s *Social Organization of the Western Pueblos* [1950].)

As a mixed-blood orphan, Tayo grows up in Laguna with his Aunt’s family, and part of his tortured and fractured psyche results from growing up in the shadow of his cousin Rocky, a “full-blood” Laguna who ironically strives to succeed in the white world away from the “backwardness” of the pueblo. Though the narrative carries this tension between full- and half-blood identities (without fully sliding into questions of authenticity), Laguna Pueblo has historically been a “multicultural” pueblo of sorts

(Lincoln, 1982, p. 233), including people from other pueblos and other tribes (including the sometimes adversarial Navajos) as well as whites. Silko, herself, descends from the Marmons, two non-Native brothers who joined the pueblo in 1872. (The Marmon story appears in many of the studies treating Silko—including Kenneth Lincoln’s *Native American Renaissance* [1983, p. 234] and Alan Velie’s *Four American Indian Masters* [1982, p. 106].) Auntie dotes on Rocky as her true son, in a way that implicitly criticizes Tayo as someone who cannot legitimately exist at home on the reservation (or outside it). He is unable to play the role of either the “traditional” or the assimilated Indian.

As the novel begins, Tayo has recently returned from the Philippines where he had fought against the Japanese and where Rocky died. Part of Tayo’s dislocation manifests itself during the war when he hears Japanese voices as Laguna voices, when he “realized that the [Japanese corporal’s] skin was not much different from his own,” and when he is unable to execute the Japanese soldiers because he cannot help seeing them as his Uncle Josiah (Silko, 1977, p. 6-8). In Los Angeles, on his way back to Laguna, he collapses at the train station while a group of Japanese-American women and children witness the event: “He lay on the concrete listening to the voices that surrounded him, voices that were either soft or distant. They spoke to him in English, and when he did not answer, there was a discussion and he heard the Japanese words vividly. He wasn’t sure where he was any more, maybe back in the jungles again . . .” (Silko, 1977, p. 17). In the midst of his dislocation, Tayo again conflates Laguna and Japanese bodies, transposing a Laguna face onto a Japanese-American boy: “He could still see the face of the little boy, looking back at him, smiling, and he tried to vomit that image from his head because it was Rocky’s smiling face from a long time before, when they were little kids together” (Silko, 1977, p. 18). The Navajo medicine man, Betonie, will later make an explicit ancestral connection by referring to the migration of people from Asia to North America over the Bering Land Bridge: “ ‘The Japanese,’ the medicine man went on, as though he were trying to remember something. ‘It isn’t surprising you saw [Uncle Josiah] with them. You saw who they were. Thirty thousand years ago they were not strangers. You saw what the evil had done: you saw the witchery ranging as wide as this world’ ” (Silko, 1977, p. 124).

What did “the evil” created by “the witchery” do? Since the narrative works toward healing Tayo’s identity, caught between seemingly discrete, cultural worlds—these are Japanese, these are Indians, these are whites—we might see the workings of evil as the assertion of cultural difference. Betonie gestures back to a primordial time when cultural difference did not underwrite the existence of “strangers.” Although read as insanity by Western medicine and sickness by the Laguna community, Tayo’s predicament revolves around two questions: *where* and *how* can he locate his identity?

The cultural difference encouraged by the witchery convolutes Tayo's attempts to ground himself within the cultural and geographical territory fought over by different "tribes."

Once back at Laguna, Tayo continues to be sick, living with Auntie, her husband Robert, and Old Grandma; Uncle Josiah has died. Struggling to resume some sort of life on the reservation—which, importantly, has everything to do with securing his identity—he is drawn into a group of young men also just returned from the war. With them, he is constantly reminded of how empty their lives are and how estranged he is from their attempts to consolidate their Indian identity against the whites, as they drink and relive how important they felt when in uniform. They problematically (and perhaps typically) assert both their "race" and masculinity through the sexual conquest of white women. Here, Silko's critique of the separation of cultures has everything to do with the operation of gender. However, as part of Tayo's identity crisis, he is unable to lose himself in their revelry: "They spent all their checks trying to get back the good times, and a skinny light-skinned bastard had ruined it. That's what Emo was thinking. Here they were, trying to bring back that old feeling, that feeling they belonged to America the way they felt during the war" (Silko, 1977, p. 42-3). The tension between Tayo and Emo grows so strong that Tayo tries to kill Emo with a broken beer bottle.

Along with Tayo's general malaise, this incident prompts his family to seek help. The "white doctors" of the Veterans Administration had already been unsuccessful in their treatment of Tayo, so the family turns to the Laguna medicine man, Ku'oosh, who is also unable to cure him. Thus, Ku'oosh sends Tayo to Betonie, a *Navajo* medicine man. That Betonie is a Navajo—historical enemies of the Laguna Pueblo—will become important later when considering Silko's utopian gesture. And as Dennis Cutchins (1999) notes, the turn toward Betonie is a movement away from traditionalism to a more dynamic revitalization of Native American culture in the form of nativism (p. 82).

It is finally Betonie who correctly diagnoses Tayo's condition, and from the medicine man, Tayo learns of his role in a grand ceremony that has been going on for generations. More importantly, he learns that the ceremonies must change and evolve over time to incorporate contemporary cultural objects: "In the old days it was simple. A medicine person could get by without all these *things*. But nowadays ..." (Silko, 1977, p. 121, emphasis added). Thus, Betonie has fanatically collected "things" like old newspapers, phone books, and calendars—as he says, "[k]eeping track of things" (Silko, 1977, p. 121). The novel suggests a lineage of sorts between Tayo, Betonie, and Uncle Josiah's mistress, a Mexican flamenco dancer called the Night Swan. All three share the bond of being products of miscegenation (the marker of which becomes hazel, or "Mexican,"

eyes). The Night Swan is the first to recognize Tayo as a central player in the ceremony of change:

“They think that if their children have the same color of skin, the same color of eyes, that nothing is changing.... They are fools. They blame us, the ones who look different. That way they don’t have to think about what has happened inside themselves.”

...

“You don’t have to understand what is happening. But remember this day. You will recognize it later. You are part of it now.” (Silko, 1977, p. 100)

And true to her prediction, Tayo later learns what the “it” is from Betonie, a Navajo whose “grandmother was a remarkable Mexican with green eyes” (Silko, 1977, p. 119). This emphasis on cultural mixing signaled by eye color—the transgression of racialized cultural boundaries—foreshadows Tayo’s eventual realization that all cultures are part of one common humanity. The novel emphasizes borders—products of the evil and witchery—in order to highlight transgressions across them. Betonie instructs Tayo to retrieve Uncle Josiah’s lost Mexican cattle, which wander the land without regard for the artificial boundaries of private property. Indeed, the cattle are a metaphor for Tayo and all of humanity’s need to ignore the artificial boundaries between races and cultures. Finding the cattle becomes Tayo’s quest, a part of his healing ceremony. During his search for them, Tayo must cross over from the reservation onto a white rancher’s territory by cutting through the barbed-wire fence—a transgression of the spatial boundaries marked as private property.

In fact, space is very much a central concern in this novel and is intimately tied up with the imposition of cultural difference, separating the Indians on the reservation from the white cattle ranchers. Tayo must also trace the path of the ceremony through the land—crossing through the artificial divisions of land: “on the rez [reservation]” and “off the rez”—in order to work out the healing for both himself and his community. Thus, the novel is simultaneously a narrative of dislocation *and*, as Helen May Dennis also argues (2007), a narration of social space.

III. Crisis of meaning: ideological complexes and double sociolects

Catherine Rainwater’s particular emphasis on contested spaces in “The Semiotics of Dwelling in Leslie Marmon Silko’s *Ceremony*” (1992) is useful for considering Silko’s narration of social space because it points to the confrontation over meaning generated

by cultural difference. I imagine “meaning” here as that moment when—and that space where—power meets resistance, ideology meets subversion, and the physical meets the social—a moment in which definitions are in process and have yet to be reified. Tayo’s identity is only one of many things at stake, but special in the sense that, as a “half-breed,” he embodies the problems produced by cultural difference. As I will discuss below, finding a way to work through cultural difference is precisely the terrain of utopia.

Rainwater speaks of two different types of space within *Ceremony*: the type governed by “double sociolects” and the type governed by “ideological complexes.” Each type of space describes a similar action: the confrontation of two ways of thinking (sociolect or ideology). *Sociolects* refer to the mapping of cultural codes onto “reality” and *ideological complexes* refer to physical spaces contradictorily determined by different social groups. I will subsume the representations of these two types of space under the rubric “crisis of meaning,” a variation of Rainwater’s own move of subsuming them under the name “crisis of dwelling.” My desire to shift emphasis from how individual characters inhabit social space (“dwelling” or “*habitare*” for Rainwater) to the contestation of meaning within that social space motivates this change in diction. Shifting our attention to the collective struggle over meaning, we can then look at the way *Ceremony* narrates social space as a discourse (rather than an individual’s narrative) about how to define that space. This shift also retains the emphasis on the textuality of these spaces (their representation in narrative), as well as on what I believe to be the motor behind both ideological complexes and double sociolects: namely, cultural difference and the contestation of meaning it produces.

Rainwater, herself, explicitly avoids this move: “This juxtaposition [between Indian and Euro-American traits], however, is more than simply a means of signaling cultural difference. The two conflicting codifications of space highlight the instability at the heart of a country that people inhabit in radically different ways. Such difference is not merely descriptive, but potentially threatening” (1992, p. 224). However, the term “cultural difference” can indeed signify beyond the level of description. Homi Bhabha’s (1994) argument—that cultural *difference* involves a process of signification, whereas cultural *diversity* views cultures as discrete objects that can be evaluated independently—is useful for thinking about cultural difference in such a way that its embeddedness within signification leaves room for Rainwater’s insistence upon the semiotic nature of “reality.” For Bhabha, cultural difference is not a descriptive term, but instead actively participates in how we understand lived difference:

Cultural diversity is an epistemological object—culture as an object of empirical

knowledge—whereas cultural difference is the process of the *enunciation* of culture as “knowledgeable,” authoritative, adequate to the construction of systems of cultural identification.... [C]ultural difference is a process of signification through which statements *of* culture or *on* culture differentiate, discriminate and authorize the production of fields of force, reference, applicability and capacity. (p. 34, original emphases).

Understanding cultural *difference* in this way helps us acknowledge that culture is part of a meaning-making activity that invents discrete boundaries between groups of people as it organizes power relations around them: “the attempt to dominate in the *name* of a cultural supremacy which is itself produced only in the moment of differentiation” (Bhabha, 1994, p. 34, original emphasis). Double sociolects and ideological complexes occur within the ambiguity and ambivalence of Bhabha’s version of cultural difference. Furthermore, the tendency to romanticize the colonized figure of the “Indian” within U.S. American culture lends itself to a particularly ambivalent colonial discourse. Jana Sequoya-Magdaleno (1995) puts it this way: “Insofar as American Indians have been taken apart as peoples and reinvented as discourse, the referent of the category ‘Indian’ is a matter of much dispute,” such that, “[i]conically coded as a vanishing trace of the sacred at the horizon of the secular world, the Indian is (to paraphrase Jacques Lacan) a word in somebody else’s conversation” (p. 88). The Indian is no longer a subject, having been reduced to the imaginary object that others conjure in their imagination—or, in Bhabha’s terms, a reified object of cultural diversity.

In *Ceremony*, the Native American characters experience this ambivalence as outright contradiction: the Indian reservation is both a space “reserved” for Native American sovereignty and a space where the people can be kept “in reserve” (Rainwater, 1992, p. 228). Rainwater (1992) identifies the space of the Native American reservation as an example of what Robert Hodge and Gunther Kress call “ideological complexes.” For Hodge and Kress, an ideological complex describes “a functionally related set of contradictory versions of the world, coercively imposed by one social group on another on behalf of its own distinctive interests or subversively offered by another social group in attempts at resistance in its own interests” (as cited in Rainwater, 1992, p. 228). The reservation involves two competing sets of interests based on different worldviews. This situation sets up the conflict between the interests of the U.S. government versus Native American resistance to the imposition of those interests. By enforcing the reservation, mainstream U.S. culture attempts to contain, or at least delineate, Native American practices as well as people. This act of containment reflects the coercive imposition involved in the ideological. The novel represents the contestation through

the emphasis on borders (inside and outside the reservation). Betonie and Tayo's attempts to transform and rejuvenate Native American cultural practice by changing it—because those practices defy the official boundaries of the reservation (Tayo's search for the cattle on the ranch outside the reservation, Betonie's displacement on the city of Gallup's perimeter)—embody the resistance. As an ideological complex, the reservation represents one space where a contest of meaning takes place.

Meaning is also at stake in the space Rainwater calls "sociolects." For her, sociolects represent the "extra-textual frames of reference" associated with words or concepts (1992, p. 225). Double sociolects characterize the two orders of meaning that adhere to certain key words, whose cultural frameworks intersect, but may lead to different meanings that may even contradict each other. As an example, Rainwater discusses double sociolects in terms of the word "blue," and how it signifies differently beyond the text itself for mainstream (i.e., Euro-American) and Navajo (and presumably Laguna as well) sociolects:

The color blue—especially as associated with female presence and power—becomes a key term in Silko's revisionary semiosis: if woman and earth are equated (both sociolects), and if woman and blueness are equated (Navajo sociolect), then the equation of blueness and earth becomes axiomatic in an expanded, or "revised" reader frame of reference. (1992, p. 226)

In this instance, Rainwater describes an intersection between two sociolects that actually opens up the text to an expanded level of meaning. However, the process need not operate in such a positive way. There are in fact a number of different points within the text where the overdetermination of a word's meaning suggests the active presence of two *competing* sociolects and thus cultural conflict. The only other instance of double sociolects Rainwater discusses explicitly is Ku'oosh's statement, "the world is fragile" (Rainwater, 1992, p. 234; Silko, 1977, p. 35). As the narrator tells us, the English equivalent for Ku'oosh's word is "fragile." Yet, as the narrator also says, Ku'oosh's original, Laguna word signifies beyond tenuousness to include the antonymical meaning of strength that is simultaneously implied—and importantly, both are tied together in "the intricacies of a continuing process" (Silko, 1977, p. 35). Rainwater emphasizes the "role of thought and language in the construction and destruction of reality" (1992, p. 234). Instead, I will want to highlight how the crisis in meaning affects *narrative*, how it necessitates a utopian gesture in order to work through the cultural difference that it represents. (To jump ahead of myself for a moment, Tayo's healing process will invoke an erasure of difference through recourse to the proposition of humanity as "one clan,"

which will then be complicated, however, as we consider the space of reading.)

Another moment not discussed by Rainwater that invokes the double sociolects occurs when Betonie explains to Tayo why he stays in the hills of Gallup:

There was something about the way the old man said the word “comfortable.” It had a different meaning—not the comfort of big houses or rich food or even clean streets, but the comfort of belonging with the land, and the peace of being with these hills. But the special meaning the old man had given to the English word was burned away by the glare of the sun on tin cans and broken glass, blinding reflections off the mirrors and chrome of the wrecked cars in the dump below. (Silko, 1977, p. 117)

Not only does this passage indicate the competition for meaning between the two different sociolects, it also shows how the structure of meaning is always shifting for those at the intersection of Laguna Pueblo and mainstream cultures. Although, here, Tayo recognizes the extra-textual meaning of Betonie’s words, he is simultaneously aware of the rival sociolect’s presence as symbolized by the detritus (“tin cans and broken glass,” “wrecked cars”), which impinges upon the Navajo sociolect. Tayo’s struggle at this moment, as throughout the novel, is his inability to decide which sociolect he can use to interpret the world and his relationship to it.

Tayo’s struggle over which words to use in order to describe his sickness holds in tension the rival worldviews of the medicine man and the white doctors: “He wanted to yell at the medicine man, to yell the things the white doctors had yelled at him—that he had to think only of himself, and not about the others, that he would never get well as long as he used words like ‘we’ and ‘us’ “ (Silko, 1977, p. 125). As a “half-breed,” Tayo poignantly exemplifies the nature of that intersection between the two sociolects (as well as competing ideologies). These cultural nodal points represent the shifting ground Tayo finds himself on and the sense of homelessness (“the crisis in dwelling”) that Rainwater identifies.

The textual moments during which ideological complexes and double sociolects become apparent do two things: 1) they narrate spaces that have different and competing logics (mainstream Euro-American and Laguna/Navajo) in other words, they are part of *Ceremony*’s narration of cultural difference; and 2) they suggest that the text interpellates different types of readers in different ways, as we will see in the discussion of the space of reading.

IV. The space of home

Toni Flores describes *Ceremony* as Tayo's search for a cure by "going home" in her essay "Claiming and Making: Ethnicity, Gender, and the Common Sense in Leslie Marmon Silko's *Ceremony* and Zora Neale Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God*" (1989). "Home" for Flores is not so much a physical place where one goes (although it is that for her also), as it is a place in which one has a particular understanding of the world: "In this world there is a proper order to the universe, an order that includes humans, sentient and nonsentient material beings, and spirits; all evil, illness, misery, and natural disasters result from a disruption of this proper order" (1989, p. 53-54). For Flores, home is that place where you participate in the "common sense." Home represents much more than the "mundane," domestic sphere; it is a functioning logic. Home is more than a place in which one lives; it is a social practice that has been knitted together collectively from a common sense.

Catherine Rainwater (1992) also takes up this sense of going home to cure the self. And she defines home in metaphysical terms, in a way that matches what I want to emphasize about the space of home:

No mere "horizontal" or geographical dwelling space of an isolated ego, "home" for the Indian characters populating much contemporary fiction by Native American writers includes the "vertical" or metaphysical space which the landscape informs, and to which the self is inextricably connected. . . . The story of a self emerges from the land in which the story of one's people has arisen. Consequently, when home no longer exists, the self is incomplete. (p. 221)

Home, then, is more than just the geographic location that one inhabits; it also includes a way of understanding one's relationship to the land. In this sense, home functions as a social space, a vertical space that invokes specific cultural codes: sociolects and ideologies. And it is in those narrative moments representing a crisis of meaning (or dwelling) that we become aware of the contested nature of vertical space—i.e., the rivalry between sociolects or ideologies to define that space.

V. The space of utopia

Scholars have consistently lauded *Ceremony* partly as a function of its narrative optimism, its vision of healing for conflicts between cultures. Kenneth Roemer (1999) notes only a handful of scholars who express some reservations about *Ceremony's*

status as an optimistic text of social healing: Paula Gunn Allen's "Special Problems in Teaching Leslie Marmon Silko's *Ceremony*" (2002, originally 1990), "some ambivalence in Elizabeth Cook-Lynn essays" (Roemer, 1999, p. 19), and Shamoon Zamir's "Literature in a 'National Sacrifice Area'" (1993). I would also add Jana Sequoya-Magdaleno's "Telling the *Différance*" (1995). Helen May Dennis (2007) has recently reiterated this optimism: "Thus the ceremony that is *Ceremony* can be read as a highly optimistic, indeed romantic, myth of individual and tribal salvation; in which the representative protagonist transforms his liminal status into a facilitating threshold experience" (p. 56). This tendency in the scholarship on the novel, however, has not led to a specifically utopian reading of the text. Nevertheless, thinking about this novel as a utopian narrative working toward the resolution of cultural difference can help us understand the problem of cultural difference not as something to be solved, but rather as something that is a fundamental contradiction within U.S. American culture. Even though the utopian genre has more often lent itself to an examination of gender and class difference, one of my interests in utopia as both a narrative form and a cultural desire is whether it can resolve or even fruitfully help us think through racial/cultural difference.

As a narrative of utopia, *Ceremony* anticipates a new social harmony made possible by the erasure of cultural difference and thus the conflict between cultures. Its utopian narrative participates in a kind of "traditional" utopian logic that aspires toward social order or harmony by erasing social difference within the utopian space. This erasure of difference can take different forms: the expulsion of terms marked by difference (e.g., gender, as in single-sex utopias, or socioeconomic status, as in the notion of a classless society), the invention of the abstract individual in liberal democracy (the gender-less, race-less, class-less citizen), a singular locus of power that erases individual difference within the social body, taking the form of either a single body (King Utopus in Thomas More's *Utopia* [1516]) or an abstract entity (the State in Edward Bellamy's *Looking Backward* [1888]). (For a fuller discussions of the erasure of difference in utopian narratives, see Burwell [1997] and Chan [2006].)

By erasing social difference and the chaotic conflict it produces, utopia promises social harmony and a restoration of order. That desire for order manifests itself in *Ceremony*'s narrative as the pattern of the healing ceremony that Tayo must complete:

He cried the relief he felt at finally seeing the pattern, the way all the stories fit together—the old stories, the war stories, their stories—to become the story that was still being told. He was not crazy; he had never been crazy. He had only seen and heard the world as it always was: no boundaries, only transitions through all

distances and time. (Silko, 1977, p. 246)

The proper order (“the world as it always was”), then, would be undifferentiated space and time. The form this takes in *Ceremony* is as different patterns that always converge into a larger meta-pattern. This image of patterns converging into a larger whole surfaces frequently throughout the narrative. In one example, Tayo learns that Betonie’s fanatical collecting of old calendars, newspapers, Coke bottles, etc., is part of a much larger pattern or process—one on the scale of the mathematical sublime:

“Take it easy,” [Betonie] said, “don’t try to see everything all at once.... We’ve been gathering these things for a long time—hundreds of years. She [Betonie’s grandmother] was doing it before I was born, and he [Betonie’s great-grandfather] was working before she came. And on and on back down in time.... Talking like this is just as bad, isn’t it? Too big to swallow all at once.” (Silko, 1977, p. 120)

Tayo’s difficulty in perceiving the never-ending pattern of Betonie’s ritual practices, in which Tayo is himself implicated, is parallel to the people not being able to see beyond cultural difference to the oneness of humanity. The structure of the healing ceremony becomes a process of following the seemingly isolated patterns to their point of convergence. Halfway through his quest to heal both himself and his community, Tayo recognizes this knowledge: “But he had known the answer all along, ... [h]is sickness was only part of something larger, and his cure would be found only in something great and inclusive of everything” (Silko, 1977, p. 125). In this regard, Tayo’s character becomes emblematic of the situation of the entire Laguna Pueblo community (if not Native Americans in general in their shared history of displacement and genocide by European invaders): the health of the community hinges upon Tayo’s completion of the ceremony.

Not surprisingly, it is not until the end of the novel that the ceremony becomes fully realized as a convergence of patterns. Hiding at an old mine from Emo, Pinkie, and Leroy—his fellow Laguna veterans who have allowed themselves to be guided by the witchery—Tayo finally makes the connection between his movements over the past four nights and the pattern of the stars that formed the constellation Betonie had pointed out to him earlier. And it is then and there—on the fourth night, in the fourth place—that Tayo realizes his role in the ceremony: “He had arrived at a convergence of patterns; he could see them clearly now. The stars had always been with them, existing beyond memory, and they were all held together there” (Silko, 1977, p. 254). Here again, there is the utopian gesture towards a collapsing of time and space into an undifferentiated

whole. And once more, the narrative leads us toward a point of homogeneity, where difference—in this case, of time and of space—falls away.

Rainwater (1992) might suggest that Tayo's mixed-blood body represents the perhaps inevitable point of contact between two different sociolects or ideologies. We might even say that the idea of "America" has always been about the impossibility of one cultural worldview fully inhabiting any given space or, to put it another way, the constant fear that cultural barriers will always break down in the form of miscegenation. Moreover, the novel does not call for a specifically Laguna sociolect or ideology to provide the proper order for *Ceremony's* universe—a return to that would be merely a nostalgic return to *home*. That Tayo must apply to Betonie, the old *Navajo* (as opposed to Laguna) medicine man, for help shows that the novel is not trying to erect barriers between Native American tribes, to create some type of order that draws only on a Laguna sociolect or ideology. That the central protagonist, Tayo, is bi-racial indicates that she is not even trying to erect a barrier between American Indian and Euro-American sociolects/ideologies, to some type of pure, pre-colonial state of existence.

If *Ceremony* can be said to espouse a utopic vision, it is one that works toward the convergence of all cultures into "one clan":

There was no end to it, it knew no boundaries; and [Tayo] had arrived at the point of convergence where the fate of all living things, and even the earth, had been laid. From the jungles of his dreaming he recognized why the Japanese voices had merged with Laguna voices, with Josiah's voice and Rocky's voice; the lines of cultures and worlds were drawn in flat dark lines on the fine light sand, converging in the middle of witchery's final ceremonial sand painting. From that time on, human beings were one clan again, united by the fate the destroyers planned for all of them, for all living things (Silko, 1977, p. 246)

As a statement about cultural difference, *Ceremony* seems to be calling for a utopian vision that reaches back to some golden age ("human beings were one clan *again*")—and, here, home and utopia merge in the mythic time of the text. The narrative calls for a *united purpose* that would erase the lines of cultural difference. That united purpose gives the "proper order" to the diegetic universe of the text.

VI. The space of reading

It is at this point that we need to take a look at the kind of reader *Ceremony*, as well as the criticism on it, attempts to construct. If the novel's utopian narrative is one that

erases cultural difference so that the common purpose of fighting “the witchery” can be achieved, then it would make sense that cultural difference would and could also be negated in the space of reading. In other words, the text would not call for or require a certain type of culturally (in effect, racially) delineated reader using one sociolect or ideology or logic, since we have always been “one clan,” though not always conscious of it. However, the scholars I will discuss here *do* in fact call for a certain kind of reader.

Toni Flores (1989) identifies *Ceremony* as “a most specifically Indian production. In this sense, the novel must be seen as a claiming of Native American and especially Laguna ways of being in the world” (p. 54). She argues “that it is difficult for *mainstream* readers to appreciate its richness, and perhaps even its point, without knowing something about that context” (1989, p. 53, emphasis added). The novel is difficult for non-Laguna readers because they do not have the “common sense” of Laguna cultural life (i.e., Rainwater’s sociolects and ideologies), which would come “through birthright or through long study” (Flores, 1989, p. 52). The space of reading does not, for Flores, work to erase cultural difference, but rather to affirm it—in what I think most would agree is a positive way—such that it becomes empowerment for Native American writers who write from the experience of that cultural difference. Flores makes an important point here that plays a particular role in a timely cultural/identity politics: the exclusive knowledge gained through the lived experience of difference. (Of course, this reliance on “experience” is precisely what Joan Scott calls into question in her influential essay “Experience” [1992].)

Writing from the different perspective of using English-as-a-Foreign-Language (EFL) methodology to teach the novel to German students, Peter Freese (1992) comes to a similar conclusion. His essay, “Marmon Silko’s *Ceremony*: Universality versus Ethnocentrism,” is an extreme case that highlights the difficulty of reaching that much sought-after entity, “inter-cultural understanding.” Part of his essay’s value for my discussion is that it attempts to show what might be involved in a reading process that specifically involves different forms of knowledge or, in Rainwater’s terms, different sociolects. Here are the details of “what readers would have to know” in order to fully understand *Ceremony*:

[This article] shows how the novel can be read in the traditional way as an ethnic variation of a “universal” predicament, and then demonstrates what its readers would have to know in order to arrive at an inter-cultural understanding of *Ceremony*, namely (1) a familiarity with the concept of story-telling as a performative act, (2) a sound knowledge of numerous Pueblo myths and the actual

landscape out of which they originated, (3) an acquaintance with a notion of time as circular and simultaneously fulfilled, and (4) an understanding of a cultural imagination that conceives of the single individual and the world as related by a fragile net of interconnections which, when disturbed, must be reconstellated through ethno-medical cures that re-align man and nature. (Freese, 1992, p. 613)

His conclusion is that German readers could only come to an approximation of intercultural understanding. In a similar way to Flores's insistence on a common sense derived from birthright or long study, Freese seems to be suggesting that, effectively, there are distinct differences between sociolectics. Not only are there different forms of sociolectical knowledge at play in the novel, creating different levels of textual meaning; the space of reading itself takes on different forms depending on what type of sociolectical knowledge is available.

However, for Rainwater (1992), this disjunction between sociolects—or rather, the availability of more than one—is precisely what *Ceremony*, as a text, calls for and what gets played out in the narrative in the form of Tayo's ceremony:

Through sociolectic doubling, Silko potentially expands the interpretive frame of reference of her readers in a way that affords a perspective on both cultures... Silko "invents" her reader, complete with a point of view unavailable within either one of the original (Native or Euro-American) "frames." Not coincidentally, this frame of reference resembles that of the half-blood Indian who, like Tayo, must constantly negotiate between cultural worlds (p. 227-8)

Rainwater goes so far as to identify Silko's "model reader" as someone who has access to "the experience of the bicultural individual" (1992, p. 231)—someone who can successfully negotiate more than one sociolect. Thus, while the experience of reading the novel can be expansive, Rainwater's ideal reader must actually be a "bi-cultural individual," as opposed to "simply" a reader who through birthright or long study has intimate knowledge of the cultural context of the novel. Yet, we must still ask, what does it mean to approximate the experience of this bicultural person, whose experience and worldview is also marked by cultural difference?

All three of these scholars encounter the same question: Do you have to "walk the walk," in order to "talk the talk"? All three want to entertain the possibility that any reader can approximate the "walk" in order to "talk the talk." I would suggest, however, that this situation is asymptotic. The assumption is that someone can *approximate* cultural knowledge without ever having to actually reach the point of difference—

which is really the point of lived cultural difference, something more in the realm of “everyday life” than “the philosophical.” I have in mind something like the distinction Henri Lefebvre makes between *everyday life* and *philosophy*. Philip Wander (1984) puts it in the following way: “‘Everyday life’ refers to dull routine, the ongoing go-to-work, pay-the-bills, homeward trudge of daily existence. It indicates *a sense of being in the world beyond philosophy*, virtually beyond the capacity of language to describe, that we know simply as the grey reality enveloping all we do” (p. vii-viii, emphasis added). But what is really at stake in this seemingly contradictory, or, at the very least, ambivalent, desire for authenticity and translatability?

Paula Gunn Allen (2002) poses the problem in a very interesting way, expressing her deep-seated ambivalence over teaching *Ceremony* to non-Indians. She demurs from exploring with her (presumably non-Indian) students the “exotic aspects of Indian ways,” even though she knows that this is exactly what they want to hear and talk about and, moreover, that this is what she needs to explain to them so that they can properly understand the text (Allen, 2002, p. 87). However, her refusal stems from her belief that this folklore is “sacred” and should not be shared with those who are outsiders to the culture. Like Silko, Allen is also Laguna and sharing the traditional stories and rituals would be a betrayal to her people. In this case, it is not a question of whether a cultural outsider *can* access the cultural knowledge needed to truly understand the novel, but rather *should* the outsider even try to gain access to that knowledge.

Also illuminating about the cultural politics surrounding Silko's novel is Kenneth Roemer's canonization study (1999). According to him, *Ceremony* had become one of the most frequently taught Native American novels by the 1980s and many American literature professors consider it one of the most important contemporary American novels, along with Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man* (1952), Thomas Pynchon's *Gravity's Rainbow* (1973), and Toni Morrison's *Beloved* (1987) (1999, p. 9). Other scholars also note *Ceremony*'s canonical status (Chavkin, 2002, p. 4). Of the causes leading up to *Ceremony*'s publication in 1977 (the *Journal of Ethnic Studies* published portions in 1975), foremost would be the generation of a market interested in Native American literature, an interest emerging out of the social movements of the late 1960s and early 1970s (Roemer, 1999, p. 12). Add to this Silko's fortunate contact with a schoolmate who would go on to publish an anthology of Native American literature for Viking Press in the early 1970s (Roemer, 1999, p. 14-5).

However, perhaps the most significant circumstances for canonization occur in the novel's reception. In the academic world, “just as Native American literature was beginning to gain acceptance in English departments, *Ceremony* became a key text for an important core group of scholars” (Roemer, 1999, p. 19). The book became important

enough to prompt *The American Indian Quarterly* to put out a special issue devoted to *Ceremony* in 1979 and eventually inspire several edited collections of scholarship. Outside academia, Silko's novel gained praise from the *New York Times Book Review* and important journals for librarians (Roemer, 1999, p. 17-18). As Roemer notes throughout his study, an important feature characterizing the range of *Ceremony*'s positive reception was the novel's ability to bridge the gap of cultural difference between Native Americans and non-Natives (particularly white), to offer a story of healing for a brutal colonial history. He finds Silko's publicity photo particularly symbolic of the book's reception. Her smile in that photo,

may also relieve some of the anxieties of non-Indians—including students, teachers, and critics—who would like to learn about Native literatures and cultures but are hesitant because of their ignorance or because of ambivalence arising from complicated mixtures of prejudice and guilt. Silko's relaxed smile can be reassuring to such readers, signifying a friendly invitation to begin *Ceremony*, even if the first word of the text, "Ts'its'tsi'nako" (1), is unfamiliar to them. (Roemer, 1999, p. 16)

In this account, *Ceremony* is not just a narrative expression of healing for the mixed-blood subject in Laguna Pueblo. It is also a cultural expression of healing offered to the non-Indian reader. It invites non-Indians to ignore their ignorance of Laguna culture and Native American literature in general so that they might work through the anxiety of cultural difference. And given Silko's own comments on the novel—as Roemer acknowledges, Silko "did not believe that readers should have abundant specialized knowledge to understand her works" (1999, p. 21)—it is not difficult to agree that this open-armed gesture contributed to *Ceremony*'s canonization.

Roemer, however, produces more than just an account of how and why Silko's novel achieved such extraordinary success; it also puts into play a lament from scholars who specialize in Native American literature, over the abuses and misreadings performed by "non-competent" readers. There would be few arguments against a "type of reductive essentialism" that generalizes Silko's representation of Laguna life as representative of either Laguna or Native American culture, subjectivity, and literature, or considers the fate of the mixed-blood subject as the primary concern of Native American literature or culture, or takes "contemporary novels as the most influential form of written expression by Indians" (Roemer, 1999, p. 25-27). Moreover, not many would question whether "long study" benefits our understanding of any novel.

As it happens, Roemer also happens to be a scholar of utopia and thus is well versed in

imagining ideals. Here is his ideal reading circumstances for a novel like *Ceremony*:

In an ideal world there would be an easy solution to the problems caused by canonizing *Ceremony* and, by implication, by the process of canonizing Indian literatures in general. Simply provide two-year sabbaticals to all teachers, critics, and scholars who would like to teach or write about *Ceremony*. Require them to read Ruoff's *American Indian Literatures*, my *Native American Writers of the United States*, and a recent *Dictionary of Literary Biography* volume; to browse through Daniel Littlefield and James Parins's bibliographies of eighteenth-, nineteenth-, and early twentieth-century Indian writers of many genres and to visit—via physical or electronic travel—their Native American Press Archives at the University of Arkansas, Little Rock; to read widely in the literatures; and to visit writers, reservations, and urban Indian centers. An ideal world would also provide all talented Native American writers with ample access to influential mentors and excellent publishers. (Roemer, 1999, p. 27)

In actuality, I don't think his ideal world is so far-fetched here. Even though he seems to exaggerate the expectation of sentiments, this preparation is within the realm of possibility (though not probability) and, furthermore, it meshes with an ideal of "scholarly rigor." Roemer's more sober, realistic, and modest pedagogical and scholarly proposal is that *Ceremony* be situated as a particular text that arose from "very particular geographical, cultural, familial, educational, literary, marketing, and reception circumstances" and that is not "a paradigm upon which to construct generic models of Indian texts and Indian experience" (1999, p. 28). This should certainly be something we strive for.

However, Roemer's ideal circumstances express a desire that goes beyond the pragmatism he settles for. Is a two-year sabbatical really enough to truly ensure expertise? Moreover, does expertise really provide a satisfactory level of cultural knowledge for someone who hasn't grown up within a culture marked by cultural difference, who doesn't carry and live with the "mark" of that cultural difference, and who doesn't have historical, if not ancestral, ties with that culture? In other words, do we need to be a racialized subject who has lived experience of a culture, in order to read a text that expresses something about that culture? To be sure, this latter position borders on a reductive essentialism. Yet, if we play out the concerns that some critics espouse, where do we draw the line?

In the introduction to her study of Native American Literature, Helen May Dennis (2007) struggles with the question of how a European reader might approach novels

like *Ceremony*. Because it poignantly expresses the dilemma of reading the novel as a cultural outsider, I will quote from it at length:

Thus the aim of this study is to consider a selection of novels by Native American writers, with specific reference to issues of understanding and interpretation, focusing on textual matters, and situating myself as a specific, individual European reader. I believe in the precept that a well-written novel will educate its reader as to how to respond to and comprehend its text and context. Therefore, I enact in my critical prose the effort of attention required to read *sympathetically* and thus to enter into the imaginative universe of the tribal or mixed-blood author. I cannot pretend to have insider authority on issues of indigenous American culture; however, I do believe in the urgent importance of cross-cultural reading. Positioned, by definition, as an outsider, my study offers a critical paradigm for *sympathetic*, foreign engagement with Native American literary texts....

My implicit argument is that non-Indian, especially European, readers need to approach these novels with a judicious combination of willingness to explore Native American culture and preparedness to learn from the narrative strategies of the texts. (p. 1-2, emphasis added)

I find Dennis's acknowledgement and foregrounding of her position as a reader on the other side of cultural difference more compelling than arguments that cultural difference can be overcome with "long study." Like Dennis, I need to acknowledge my own position as a reader who is an outsider to the specific cultural knowledge that informs the book. I approach the book as a non-Indian, but also however as someone who is non-white, as an Asian-American. If we are to heed Bhabha's (1994) warning to avoid reifying culture—and by extension, cultural knowledge—as an object, or a commodity that can be "purchased," we must acknowledge the operations of cultural difference not only in the literary text, but also in the space of reading. Cultural knowledge is not an object that can be acquired. It is something that is continuously produced by the relationship of one cultural group to another.

Furthermore, I would argue that we cannot treat all novels alike, just as we cannot treat all readers alike. There are different relations of power and different life experiences that attend to cultural knowledge. The experience of a Native American reader confronting a text by Herman Melville is different than a white European reader like Dennis or even a white Euro-American reader confronting a text like *Ceremony*. I, myself, as an Asian-American reader whose parents were Chinese-Mauritian and Japanese, also experience a work by Silko or Melville differently than a Laguna or

non-Laguna Native American or a Latina/o or Euro-American reader (and here I am, of course, bracketing class, gender, sexuality, and other forms of difference). Certainly, we can be “sympathetic,” as Dennis suggests, but we will forever be strangers to that cultural knowledge. I think most, if not all, readers of *Ceremony* want to be respectful of it as a novel and of Native American culture more generally—to sympathize or better yet *empathize* with Native Americans. However, there is still the danger of over-identification (as I will discuss below).

Although positing that cultural difference is unbridgeable and that not everyone necessarily has the same access to the same knowledge butts heads against deeply rooted notions of equality in U.S. American culture, it does not mean that we cannot or should not engage with texts from other cultures. At the same time, we must be vigilant about the power that cultural difference still holds over our lives, as well as over literary texts. Dennis (2007) claims that “[d]espite the occasional misunderstandings that might occur, this process is an important aspect of cultural exchange and sharing that should shape future human transactions” (p. 5). I would argue, however, with the notion that there are only “occasional misunderstandings” that attend to these transactions. Instead, misunderstanding is perhaps the rule rather than the exception in cross-cultural exchange. It is inevitable that there is a certain amount of “violence” done to any text when we read it. But there is a specific violence when we are reading across cultural difference, and especially when we are reading from a position that has somehow been privileged over another cultural position.

But here again, the story of cultural difference told in the space of reading is at odds with the space of utopia constructed in the narrative that imagines an erasure of cultural difference. Joanne Lipson Freed (2011) makes an interesting argument about narratives of trauma by comparing *Ceremony* with *The God of Small Things* (1998) by Indian writer Arundhati Roy. Freed’s reading of *Ceremony* as a narrative of “trauma and recovery” is parallel to my own reading of it as utopian:

Indeed, *Ceremony* not only invites the engagement of its white readers; it also allows them to occupy a comfortable place in relation to the story of trauma and recovery it narrates. By allowing its readers to align themselves with Tayo as fellow victims of the pernicious effects of witchery, *Ceremony* shatters the perceived distance of its white readers and effectively interpellates them into the Native epistemology it espouses. (p. 228)

Her account also identifies the erasure of cultural difference I have been discussing. Importantly, however, Freed argues that *Ceremony*’s optimism is counterposed by *The*

God of Small Things, in which Roy “challenges our own desire as readers to identify with the suffering of her characters” (p. 233). Furthermore, Freed follows Dominic LaCapra’s theories on the representation of trauma: “If we who have not been severely traumatized by experiences involving massive losses go to the extreme of identifying (however spectrally or theoretically) with the victim and survivor, our horizon may unjustifiably become that of the survivor, if not the victim, at least as we imagine her or him to be.” (quoted in Freed, 2011, p. 237). I would argue that the experience of trauma is not unlike the experience of some forms of cultural difference that position us in social space in very specific ways. While I do not want to imply that cultural difference is always or necessarily a traumatic event, I would say that it marks a category of experience that is beyond “long study.”

The positions taken by some scholars in the space of reading sit uncomfortably with *Ceremony*’s own utopian erasure of cultural difference indicated by the ceremony (human beings as one clan) or at least how Tayo’s bi-racial status calls into question the boundaries of that cultural difference. This is not to say that we need to correlate our readings of a text with some notion of authorial intention. Rather, the different attitudes toward the requisite cultural knowledge needed to understand *Ceremony* point to a paradigmatic contradiction played out in cultural politics, especially at the academic level. Lying beneath Flores’s (1989) position that cultural knowledge is authorized by either “birthright” or “long study”—a position in which Freese (1992), Roemer (1999), and others are also implicated—is a contradiction about cultural difference, itself, at play in mainstream U.S. American culture. On the one hand, we want to deny that cultural difference exists, that we are all really part of one common humanity. And, on the other hand, we want cultural difference to be something that is desired and attainable by those who do not already possess it; that is, we want it to be an intellectual commodity. So even when trying to maintain cultural difference, we still want to think it can be erased so that knowledge of difference can be transacted in the form of cultural capital—that is, so cultural difference can be “bought” with “long study.”

VII. Conclusion

Ceremony offers itself as a “healing” of wounds caused by cultural difference. My own reading of it as a utopian narrative is only one way to characterize the novel’s resolution of conflicts that emerge from this cultural difference. Yet, as we see in the scholarship, cultural difference reasserts itself in the space of reading as the abstraction “knowledge.” Even cultural knowledge of a particular social group can be abstract because it holds itself open to all people who ultimately come to it as abstract

individuals: you don't have to be of a given culture to be a "competent" reader; you just have to possess the knowledge, whether it is gained "through birthright or through long study." The text becomes a commodity whose value is presided over by academics, some of whom are Native Americans themselves. While the text marks out a utopian space—timeless, undifferentiated—the space of reading it invokes is one in which cultural difference is very much in play. Indeed, it would be hard to imagine a utopic space of reading—one in which no form of social difference operates at all—since it is very much a space of, in Rainwater's terms, conflicting sociolects and ideological complexes.

I certainly do *not* want to suggest that much of the criticism on *Ceremony* simply exhibits a jealous possessiveness over the objects of its expertise. In fact, "long study" will of course make us better readers and thus make us better understand the novel. Rather, the desires surrounding *Ceremony* are one and the same as the desires surrounding cultural difference in the U.S. American culture generally. The erasure of cultural difference that we see in ideologies such as colorblindness or the melting pot has always conflicted with the persistence of cultural difference in the experience of everyday life.

What is really at stake in this cultural situation—of which *Ceremony* provides a very useful example—is how we imagine ourselves as subjects. If we *are* social subjects who can interact with each other as abstract individuals, then we must ask what happens to social difference, whose visibility is only one of its manifestations; social difference also has a life as a reified concept within an equally reified system of signification that tells us both who "we" are and who "they" are. The tension between wanting to erase cultural difference so that we can become abstract subjects and wanting to commodify cultural difference points to one of the fundamental contradictions in U.S. American culture. The importance of utopia as a conceptual framework, as Fredric Jameson (1982) has taught us, is *not* for imagining an ideal future, but rather for understanding the "systemic, cultural, and ideological closure of which we are all in one way or another prisoners" in the here-and-now (p. 153). If we read *Ceremony* as a utopian narrative, the closure it points to is the intractability of cultural difference.

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