

FROM PAINTING TO PIXELS: EXPANSIONIST TOPOI IN
AMERICAN VISUAL CULTURE

A Dissertation

by

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ABSTRACT

Digital representations of the mythic West abound, from Rockstar Games' popular open-world Western, *Red Dead Redemption*, to free iPad and iPhone apps (*Oregon Settler*, *Trade Nations Frontier*). These virtual re-enactments use twenty-first century technologies to reinforce broader dominant-cultural narratives celebrating the twinned colonization of indigenous land and bodies, yet their roots lie in far older aesthetic and discursive conventions: those found within nineteenth-century landscape and frontier paintings. This project traces the evolution of frontier imagery from the nineteenth century to the digital age and uses Aristotelian topics theory to evaluate recurring images' discursive impact over time in a Western context.

Nineteenth-century landscape artists generated a number of recurring visual topo which persist to this day. Among the most prominent are the "empty" prairie or rugged i Western landscape, waiting to be filled with white settlements, and the vanishing or dying "Indian," whose demise paves the way for the land's new inhabitants. My project articulates the rhetorical dimensions of these images and demonstrates the ongoing role of both visual and digital culture in shaping U.S. public opinion concerning Western land use and Native American tribal sovereignty. It also analyzes the additional rhetorical power and complexity such images hold when they make the leap from static media (paintings, illustrations, sculptures) to more interactive formats. Because participatory media such as video games allow for multisensory engagement – tapping users' aural and kinesthetic faculties alongside visual faculties – their multiple sensory

appeals enhance rhetoricity at the same time they blur the lines dividing *rhetor* and audience in traditional Western understandings of rhetoric.

DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to those who came before: my relatives and ancestors, both known and unknown. To my great-uncle Claude, who drowned in an Oklahoma lake at 26, before he finished living out his education and potential. To my father, Steve, who had to leave graduate school before completing *his* dissertation, in order to help support the family. To Isham and all the other lives marked by fragmentary traces in fading photographs, aged documents and painstakingly assembled family trees. And finally, to the nameless, the seemingly erased. You endure in my cells, my DNA, my breath. You are in my speech, my stories. And you are in this work.

May I someday leave a legacy that honors each of you.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION: “OH SAY, CAN YOU SEE?”

America’s self-concept has been long rooted in the image. From the ekphrastic amber waves of grain and purple mountain majesties of patriotic songs to personifications of the American spirit – Columbia, Lady Liberty, Captain America – visually oriented tropes have reinforced solidarity among those who consider themselves Americans, as well as the nation-state’s expansion of territory over its 200-plus-year existence. With this history in mind, this project draws upon Aristotelian topics theory in order to identify and rhetorically critique key visual *topoi*: powerful, recurring images which have circulated within American culture from the 19th century to the present, contributing to the epistemological framework undergirding the twinned colonization of Native peoples and Native lands.

During the era of Westward Expansion, Hudson River School artists such as Albert Bierstadt, Thomas Moran and Thomas Cole produced hundreds of landscape paintings, many of which were then copied and distributed by the thousands via large Midwestern home-decor manufacturers. This resulted in a broad standardization of content and message, leading to the establishment of frontier painting and, later, American Western art as genres. Furthermore, this early proliferation of seemingly rhetorical (yet heavily meaning-laden) frontier-themed images laid the groundwork for their later replication in a diverse array of media, settings, and art movements over the ensuing generations, particularly as the United States became more heavily industrialized and electrified. My analysis of the rhetorical dimensions of these images

demonstrates visual culture's ongoing role in shaping U.S. public opinion -- and, more importantly, policy -- concerning land use and Native American tribal sovereignty. A number of historians and art historians have already begun this work, noting the image's capacity to frame and record events, to reflect culturally situated attitudes and practices, to interpret and critique reality. In other words, a whole lot has been written about Hudson River School paintings as well as later nineteenth- and twentieth-century frontier art as an expressive response to political, cultural, economic, and geographic transformations. As William Cronon remarks, "[e]very stroke of the brush, like every chop of the ax and every turn of the plow, recorded a history of human struggles and dreams that mingled with the very soil" of the American Frontier (86).

Such studies are very informative in reconstructing the conditions surrounding a given work. However, they do not examine or reveal the entirety of frontier art's historical significance – nor that of its aesthetic successors. Determining the influences of outside factors on art is one thing; analyzing all the ways in which art reciprocally influences that world *in return* is a somewhat slipperier proposition. Martha A. Sandweiss acknowledges as much in her work on frontier art's public life. "It is hard to assess the overall public impact of these illustrations," she writes about the plethora of Western-themed prints that emerged in the mid-nineteenth century. She then turns to textual clues: a contemporaneous art critic's published review, a California congressman's written correspondence (128). Such snippets offer brief glimpses of frontier and Western images' role in shaping public discourse about the value of Western lands ("an uninhabited and dreary waste," in the unnamed nineteenth-century art critic's

words) and the desirability and ease of Westward Expansion -- at least in their immediate historical context. One revealing way to evaluate expansionist art's discursive impact can be found in Aristotelian topics theory. *Topoi*, or commonplaces, as they are also sometimes called, are a set of conventional starting points which serve as rhetorical springboards, “a constitutive body of sociolinguistic resources for argument ... [which] organize a *logos* or common logic” (Linquist 73). By returning to a commonly accepted *topos*, the rhetor can either generate or discover a successful argument lurking within the template. Furthermore, *topoi* have a reciprocal relationship with *endoxa* – communally shared beliefs – in that they simultaneously draw from them and continue their reinforcement in popular discourse. *Topoi* do not, however, reside solely in the linguistic realm. Rather, they can be found in a number of expressive safe havens throughout a given culture.

The recurring scenes in this study were initially generated by Hudson River School artists and other nineteenth-century frontier painters, many of whom utilized tropes such as metaphor, synecdoche or metonymy to undergird their visual arguments. Empty landscapes invited white settlement. Dying Indians erased any prior claims to sovereignty or continued inhabitation *within* the landscapes. By identifying the argumentative templates within the parameters of these scenes and then tracing their rhetorical deployment elsewhere -- both in visual and textual form -- scholars can assess Westward Expansion-themed art's lingering effects more meaningfully and fully. We can also evaluate them more evenhandedly: as a rhetorical force in and of themselves, rather than one which must be actualized in a Barthesian system of relay, in which text and

image necessarily reinforce one another, and their cumulative message is only "realized at [the] level of the story, the anecdote, the diegesis" (Barthes 41).

This is not to reject Barthes's insights outright -- their limitations notwithstanding -- or to naively insist that art can "speak" within a contextual vacuum. Certainly, words and pictures frequently share common discursive space; and as a result, texts influence images, and images in turn influence texts. However, it has been the habit of much rhetorical scholarship to treat imagic rhetoric as secondary in importance to verbal argumentation; in other words, to regard it as a medium which merely supports or reflects the verbal, without taking into account instances in which *visual representation itself* has served as the genesis for a particular strand of argument, or as the principal expressive "storage site" for a longstanding, collective belief in a given culture (or *endoxon*, in Aristotelian terms).

This project aims to serve as a corrective -- at least to some degree -- to this sort of theoretical oversight. It will do so in part by cataloguing recurrent topoi within frontier paintings themselves; it will also do so by analyzing moments of *ekphrasis*, the movement of a familiar image from visual art to textual form, via verbal description. This phenomenon reverses the traditionally assumed order of influence (i.e., asserts the power of the image over text) while suggesting a far more symbiotic relationship between the two in any given cultural matrix which combines verbal and visual forms of communication. The long-ranging historic movement of commonplaces across different modes of representation presents a complication to contemporary theories of media specificity, which may be another wrinkle worthy of examination.

In addition to seeking out visual applications for Aristotelian topics theory, my study also interrogates the *endoxa* located within frontier images themselves, contrasting them against indigenous paradigms and ways of seeing. Many present-day Americans, particularly those who retrospectively view Westward Expansion as a foregone conclusion, have a difficult time "unseeing" rhetorically constructed relationships and roles. Robert A. Williams, Jr., for example, points to what is now a common assumption: that Natives were an obstacle to white "progress," an idea which originated in the nineteenth century to bolster Indian removal efforts. During the early decades of contact, Williams argues, Natives were just as likely to aid white newcomers as impede them, due to the fact that pre-contact New England had *already* long been a multicultural space which required diplomacy and varying degrees of intertribal negotiation and coexistence. Moreover, modern viewers often wrongfully assume that paintings depicting the United States' Westward expansion merely *reflect* the inevitable historical processes of indigenous displacement and eradication, as opposed to *having helped justify and drive them*.

The ongoing, uncritical acceptance of endoxa stemming from visual representations of the American frontier often prevents dominant-culture audiences from imagining decolonial possibilities or experimenting with alternative forms of discourse when navigating present-day contact zones. By acknowledging and re-examining the appeals encoded within North American visual culture, scholars and laypeople alike can take a more participatory role in healing indigenous communities, while at the same time

challenging the pervasive visual conventions which discursively justify and perpetuate colonization – both historically and within the present day.

The discursive efficacy of many paintings and photographs is undoubtedly aided by a Western bias which has persisted for millennia: the assumption that "realistic" pictures objectively correspond to social and situational reality (Scott 252). Because nonverbal forms of persuasion often function subtly -- and, at times, even invisibly -- to Westerners, any serious examination of pictorial rhetoric must explicitly articulate why and how it *is* rhetoric, to begin with. As Charles Kostelnick and Michael Hassett observe in *Shaping Information*, perceptual psychology and epistemic assumptions about the nature of mimesis play a role in audiences' "unseeing" of visual conventions:

Concealed by their habitual use within discourse communities, conventions become so ingrained that users can take them for granted as direct conduits of information, rather than as social constructs that mediate it. Conventions so densely populate our perceptual landscape that it “naturalizes” them – that is, we believe that they mirror nature, rather than artificially represent it. (34)

In the case of the North American landscape paintings from which much of my dissertation springs, the conventions in question repeat many of the same metaphors and synecdoches as the imaginary landscapes of Anglo frontier poetry, all under the guise of “natural” representation. Furthermore, these conventions became increasingly familiar sights in North American homes after 1880, as Midwestern manufacturers discovered ways to cheaply reproduce landscape oils and market them to middle- and lower-class households across the country.

A number of recent art historians have interpreted these images as embedded within histories of empire, invasion, and slaughter. William H. Truettner begins *Painting Indians and Building Empires in North America* by examining 18th-century British representations of Native peoples alongside a later wave of 19th-century American paintings focusing on Upper Missouri tribes, charging that the images "enabled white patrons to gain a lasting advantage over their Indian subjects over the long run" (3). Nancy K. Anderson, Brian W. Dippie, and others point out the problems with past academic uses of art as historical "evidence." As Jules David Prown writes, "Just as history can never retrieve the affective wholeness of the past, neither can art be a totally accurate visual report. History and art history present us with partial truths, incomplete stories ..." (xiv). Furthermore, as numerous instances of Native erasure from Western landscape paintings illustrate, what is missing from art and its histories can be as destructive as what is represented.

Certainly, these moments of discursive contextualization have complicated art historians' approaches to Hudson River School, frontier, and American Western paintings over the past few decades. Meanwhile, rhetoric and communication scholars have been attempting to better theorize how paintings and other nontextual images function as discourse in the first place – resulting in a subfield of study which has taken on the (somewhat imprecise) name "visual rhetoric." Approaches to visual rhetoric vary. Some scholars focus on art's relationship to contemporaneous verbal or textual argumentation. Shawn J. Parry-Giles's analysis of television news practices and the verbal mediation of Hillary Rodham Clinton's image springs to mind, for example, as

does Joseph Kestner's *Mythology and Misogyny*, which examines Victorian paintings alongside editorials and other journalistic writings in the popular press. Other thinkers attempt to treat the discursive qualities of art as capable of functioning independently, without textual support. Michael O'Toole's semiotic study *The Language of Displayed Art*, currently in its second edition, argues strenuously – perhaps even overcorrectively – against reading visual scenes with any verbal or literary associations in mind: “This avoids starting with factors *outside* the picture itself [...] with mythology, or history, or techniques” (11). Art historian Stephen M. Caffey similarly cautions against reflexively deferring to written texts when analyzing a nonverbal image, a phenomenon he considers “one of the most consistent perils of writing about art: privileging the text, subordinating the image” (528). In contrast to O’Toole’s approach, however, Caffey’s philosophy leaves the door open for analyses which focus on the unique discursive qualities of nonverbal signifiers – in other words, analyses which *refuse* to subordinate the image – while simultaneously acknowledging the broader cultural, economic, political, and informatic matrices within which images are produced.

It is within this middle ground that I build upon analyses begun in art-historical studies that have demonstrated the role of specific paintings and movements in advancing the imperial project – an endeavor which locates manifestations of imperial discourse in specific temporal and historical spaces without exploring their ongoing use or development over time. The addition of rhetorical theory to this type of project adds a very helpful set of ideas and terms – machinery which allows for the identification of a given topos (also known as a commonplace), trope, argument, allusion, narrative

element, or other familiar pattern within visual culture that can then be analyzed in successive works and over longer periods of time. This approach extends the scope of potential analysis considerably: the familiar image of dying and/or mourning Indians, for example, can now be tracked from the expansionist era to the present day -- and across various modes of representation -- and similarities in representation (or departures from those conventions) addressed. Rhetorical theory also lends itself to discussions of ekphrasis, a phenomenon which reverses the traditionally assumed order of influence (i.e., asserts the power of the image over text, as the birthplace of an image or story). My project sharply disputes James Heffernan's 1993 assertion that "the [ekphrastic] word comes to master the painted or sculpted image it represents," and instead points out the rather shaky boundary between image and textual narrative within any given medium of persuasion, be it book, canvas, or film (10). W.J.T. Mitchell has polemically declared that "all media are mixed media, and all representations are heterogeneous; there are no 'purely' visual or verbal arts" (5). As the following chapters demonstrate, this is particularly true when a recurring set of topoi are involved.

In addition to this disciplinary intersection, my analysis also articulates Euro-American visual culture's role in perpetuating environmental injustice upon Native communities. An assault on lands is regarded within many indigenous epistemological systems as an assault on the lifeforms which the land sustains, as all are profoundly connected. In the words of Paula Gunn Allen (Laguna-Sioux-Lebanese), "[t]he circle of being ... is dynamic and alive. It is what lives and moves and knows, and all the life forms we recognize -- animals, plants, rocks, winds -- partake of this greater life" (247).

Numerous Native scholars (Winona Laduke, Jace Weaver, and Daniel Wildcat among them) have observed that, in many regions, activists and community members continue to battle toxic chemical and industrial trespasses that parallel larger historic patterns of imperial invasion, attack, and occupation. Stacy Alaimo writes that "this invisible form of invasion is the most recent mode of assault in a long history of colonialism" (83).

Hence, considering environmental degradation's longstanding link with imperial conquest and expansion, any project which seriously addresses colonization of indigenous lands must also address ecological colonization, as well as its damaging results upon traditional lifeways. Yet visual studies addressing imperialism in North American landscape painting have frequently neglected this dimension of the problem. One notable exception is John Hausdoerffer's 2009 study of George Catlin, which acknowledges the twinned colonization of Native peoples and Native spaces within Catlin's scenes. Like Hausdoerffer, I find myself drawn to address visual representations of "that delicate dance between social and ecological systems," as well as spaces in which sustainability -- both on a cultural and an environmental level -- is threatened (xi). However, the scope of my study is broader than his. Rather than examining a single artist's work in case-study fashion, my project reveals and analyzes a broader system of visual discourse in which Catlin (among many) participated.

My study also takes visual rhetorical scholarship as applied to environmental studies in new directions. It offers a stronger emphasis on ideological analysis to scholarship like the various chapters in Dobrin and Morey's *Ecosee: Image, Rhetoric, Nature*; adds a historical dimension to studies like DeLuca's work on the image-event;

and complicates studies like “Thomas Cole’s Vision of ‘Nature’ and the Conquest Theme” (Clark, Halloran, and Woodford) with additional perspectives on art history as well as historical sites of interaction between imperial visual culture and de-colonial/indigenous representational strategies.. If, as Sean Morey suggests, the discourses produced by writing and image-making can be likened to ecological systems, then these contact points between discursive systems can be potentially explored as moments of structural coupling (Morey 30).

The aforementioned systematic, large-scale production and distribution of inexpensive oil paintings – which critics and etiquette guides derisively called “daubs” – made art ownership, and hence constant household display of scenes reinforcing manifest manners, a reality for virtually all but the nation’s very poorest citizens during the nineteenth century. Certainly, Americans in far-flung regions used daubs in an attempt to emulate the decorative sensibilities of their more metropolitan countrymen. In doing so, they also took on a common interpretive lens, which broadly standardized content and message: “the uniformity of tastes shown by the relation between cheap and high art reveals a ‘national aesthetic’ that transcended the new socioeconomic, geographic, and ethnic divisions of the postbellum class system” (Zalesch 82). Later, as the United States became electrified and ensuing generations of Americans embraced broadcast and gaming technologies, the images originally found within "daubs" began to emerge and proliferate elsewhere: films, cartoons, video games. As a result, the embedded messages and appeals found new life -- and new audiences -- even as they

evolved in response to their new social and historical contexts. The following chapters track this progression.

Preview of Chapters

Chapter II Written in the Dust: American Landscapes and Appropriation

By promulgating among Europeans the idea of America as a vast wilderness, relatively empty of human occupants, nineteenth-century landscape painting took an active visual role that partnered with the verbal rhetoric of the period, rhetoric imbued with what Lawrence Buell calls “the aesthetic of the not-there” (69). Landscape came to dominate American art in the 1820s. The vistas reinforced a European need to see the wilderness at the edge of (their) civilization as empty; what’s more, they borrowed from the aesthetic style of European landscape painting itself, conflating the two territories in a visual sense (Byerly 52).

After examining a representative number of images which exemplify this topos and noting the rhetorical features of these landscapes, I turn to contemporary Cree artist Kent Monkman’s re-indigenized landscapes to analyze his decolonial reversals of the Euro-American tendency to scrub landscapes of their Native occupants.

Chapter III The Dying Gaul Dons Redface: Doomed Indians in the “Golden Era” of Sculpture and the Ethnographic Specimen

Despite continued Native presence in the lands depicted by white painters, natives themselves were seldom seen in these sweeping, empty vistas, whether they hung on the walls of humble Midwestern parlors or sophisticated galleries in New York and other Eastern cities. (For instance, in all the frontier landscapes that Albert Bierstadt produced over a 25-year period, only one, *The Rocky Mountains, Lander's Peak*, contained an elaborately detailed Native scene: a Shoshone village, draped in shadow.) When Native figures *were* portrayed by Euro-American visual artists, they were frequently portrayed in a way which constructed them as dying --either culturally or physically. Neoclassical sculpture was one particularly vivid medium which artists chose: its three-dimensionality and life-sized (or larger-than-life) proportions added an element of realism to the figures depicted, while the conflation of Native forms with those of ancient defeated Western foes – the Gauls, for example – served as prophecies concerning the “Indian’s” eventual fate.

Closely related to the Dying Indian is another common discursive treatment: the Museum Specimen. One early example of this dynamic is a series of Indian subject/North American landscape paintings by George Catlin, who traveled West in order to “rescue from oblivion [natives’] primitive looks and customs” (qtd. in Gluleck). But, like the dying Indian, the Indian specimen was not limited to two-dimensional canvases. As the nineteenth century drew to a close, numerous World’s Fairs were staged across the continent. These celebrations of American empire frequently employed

live Native actors to recreate indigenous village scenes, which were often accompanied by other nearby exhibits of artifacts and/or remains. While sculptures etched the fate of the Indian into grand displays of plaster and stone – taking on an air of ancient prophecy – specimenized Natives reinforced this message by casting Native lifeways as something both exoticized and nearing extinction, a set of past practices with no bearing on the scientific future.

Drawing from work by Malea Powell and others, John D. Miles has identified significant points of convergence between Vizenor's observation of *manifest manners* among non-Native rhetors (a set of beliefs and ideas which simulate "Indianness" in the absence of tribal reality) and Aristotelian theory. Like *topoi*, manifest manners "supply the subjects of discourse and the facts that are permissible in certain situations," creating a *nomos* of commonly accepted ideas which then serve as springboards for rhetorical invention (37). While Miles arguably oversteps both ethically and intellectually in attempting to flatten out distinctions between Native and Non-Native theorists, the Dying Indian and Museum Specimen are two egregious examples of colonial *topoi* which also exemplify these manifest manners, and have played a role in reifying this system of false representation.

Chapter IV Visual Topoi in Motion: The Rhetoric of the Digital Western

William Cronon writes that "[p]ainters have generally ceded the strict representation of wild nature to the camera" over the past 100 years or so, "turning instead toward impressionist, expressionist, formalist, and regionalist versions of

landscape art" (83). This doesn't mean, however, that traditional landscapes have gone away. Nor has the Tragic Indian, as moments like the 1970s "Crying Indian" public service announcement for Keep America Beautiful, Inc. demonstrate. Rather, the images have simply jumped to other media, a phenomenon enabled with the advent of filmic and digital representation.

This chapter builds upon the preceding analyses of nineteenth-century American landscape paintings, sculpture, and exposition displays to explore digital reconfigurations of frontier topoi and tropes, paying particular attention to the ways in which transfer from traditional formats to immersive and hypertextual media affect message and delivery. When images leap from static storage-and-retrieval media to the digital sensory commons, they provide contemporary audiences a more sensuously engaging means of interactively rehearsing (or, alternately, dismantling) common expansionist arguments. In digital spaces, longstanding visual topoi such as the empty landscape and tragic Native take on aural and kinesthetic dimensions which enhance their rhetoricity. Yet in virtual spaces populated by a potentially infinite number of practicing rhetors -- many of whom push against the limitations imposed by repetitions of colonial topoi -- there is no blanket critical assessment which can apply.

The Optical Frontier/The Frontier's Optics

By now, the nature/culture divide in Western arts and literature has been well documented and discussed by a number of scholars. However, this wealth of scholarship does not diminish the continued discursive impact of the divide -- particularly when

combined with the rhetoric of the American Frontier, Westward Expansion, and Manifest Destiny. These ideologies are based upon a number of presuppositions -- all of which can be traced to the historic imaginary line between Nature and Civilization in Western thought. To recap:

- Nature and Civilization are dichotomized opposites.
- There is a distinct, discernible boundary between these opposite states.
- Civilization is represented by European culture, dwellings, and systems of economic and social exchange.
- Anything else is non-civilization (i.e., savagery) and thus part of Nature.
- The boundary between Nature and Civilization in America is discernible as the American Frontier.
- This Frontier is destined to move westward.
- This predestined westward movement is both enabled by technological and cultural "progress," and *part* of technological and cultural "progress."

Due to the mapping of Native history onto "natural" history (read: non-human), this set of assumptions takes an additionally dangerous turn, especially when combined with repeated visual messages that reinforce the physical and cultural deaths of Natives and the ensuing emptiness of their former homelands.

Topoi and tropes drawn from the mythic Old West resonate in a number of professional and online settings. As their repeated use shows, they are certainly recognizable and effective in a number of contexts. In Figure 1, for example, the consultant is branding his competitors as reckless cowboys. Addressing a business

audience, these security experts play to the shopworn trope "the Digital Frontier," which is so common at present that far too few rhetors have even thought to interrogate its implications, or its potential Eurocentricity. Its use, however, is rampant. (Figures 2, 3).

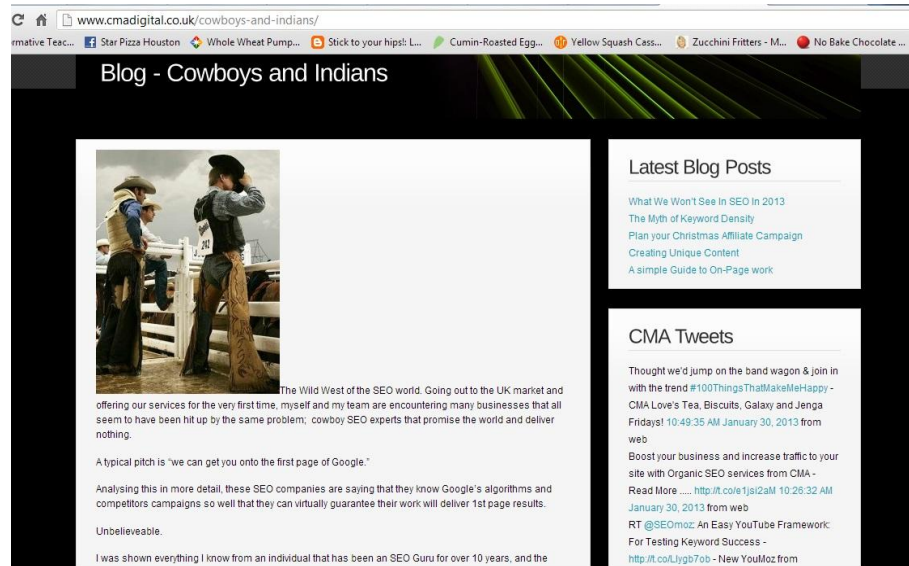


Figure 1. "Blog – Cowboys and Indians," web page screen shot.

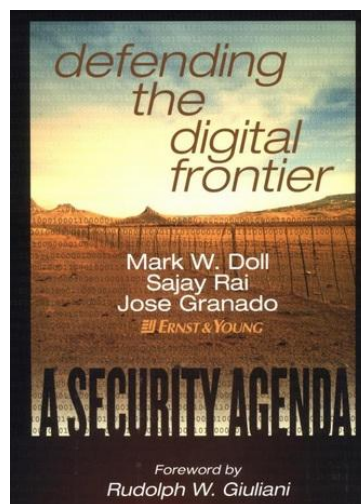


Figure 2. *Defending the Digital Frontier*, book cover.



Figure 3. Electronic Frontier Foundation, web page screen shot.



Figure 4. *The Atlantic*, web page screen shot.

What stands out in the Figure 4 screen shot, drawn from *the Atlantic*'s web site, is the elaborate extension of the metaphor. There is a narrative expectation on the part of this

business writer that the so called "digital frontier" will somehow follow the Frederick Jackson Turner hypothesis -- which certainly speaks to how ingrained this expectation is, for American audiences, but which also has its dangers. Is cyberspace the same physical or political entity as the emergent Western United States? No, of course not. So what are the logistic dangers in imposing this trope -- which seems to apply seamlessly -- over and over and over? What's more, given its imperial overtones, are digital-era rhetors being somewhat tone-deaf/culturally problematic when they employ it without careful consideration, given that parts of it include genocide?

These questions are important ones to consider in an age when digital and visual rhetoric so clearly hearken to enduring visions of the North American continent's past -- visions which were (and continue to be) shaped by histories of colonization, erasure, and violence. If nothing else, these images demonstrate that twenty-first century Western audiences, for all their supposed attempts at cultural pluralism, still apply colonial frameworks of vision -- in other words, the perspectives we (frequently unconsciously) adopt when we look upon or imagine land with what Mary Louise Pratt calls "Imperial Eyes" -- on a regular basis, even when searching for metaphors to describe something as mundane as network security or the rise of smartphone apps.

If the digital sensory commons is ruled by an imaginative continuance of the frontier's westward march, what then of real lands and real peoples? The continued rhetorical conflation of Native Americans and non-human nature, both of which have historically been consumed by the frontier's progression, holds ongoing ramifications for policy debates and intellectual/physical sovereignty. As of this writing, the United States

and Canada are still locked in a number of longstanding disputes between indigenous nations and museums over "ownership" of Native artifacts and bodies. And proponents of the Idle No More movement – Native and non-Native alike – have staged numerous protests in Canada and the United States against climate change, fracking and the placement of pipelines on Native lands, in some cases resulting in confrontations with oil company employees and Royal Canadian Mounted Police.

Questions of representation, of visual commonplacing, and the endoxa which drive them, then, are not merely idle ones. Rather, within the context of a culture and a nation-state which are both heavily reliant on the power of images, they bear important ramifications for the maintenance of indigenous sovereignty (in the face of wrongfully assumed extinction) and intra- and intercultural communication in the twenty-first century. The topoi of frontier art are alive and well, having made their leap from canvas to computer screen. That said, their greater degree of interactivity at present – due to shifts in medium and delivery – offers intriguing opportunities for revision and redirection.

CHAPTER II

WRITTEN IN THE DUST: AMERICAN LANDSCAPES AND APPROPRIATION *

*"I am monarch of all I survey,
My right there is none to dispute,
From the centre all round to the sea,
I am lord of the fowl and the brute.
Oh, Solitude! where are the charms
That sages have seen in thy face?
Better dwell in the midst of alarms
Than reign in this horrible place."*

- from "The Solitude Of Alexander Selkirk," William Cowper, 1782

The advance of empire is hardly a solitary act. When Christopher Columbus first set sail in August of 1492, he was accompanied by three ships and a crew numbering between 90 and 120 men.¹ His second voyage to the lands later appropriated and renamed the Americas was buttressed by 1,200-1,500 sailors and soldiers, by most contemporary accounts. With each wave of European colonizers, the raw numbers — and diverse occupations — of invaders in the so-called "New World" increased. Sailors.

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¹ Miles H. Davidson's *Columbus Then and Now: A Life Reexamined* discusses historians' various estimates, and the relative plausibility of their claims, in more detail on pp. 246-248.

Soldiers. Surgeons. Metalworkers. Coopers. Cabin-boys and servants. Men, in turn, required supplies: wood, meat, fresh water.² Supplies required networks, which required more sailors, soldiers, *ad nauseam*.

In short, colonization requires a certain degree of collective, systematized engagement — even as its records valorize the exploits of the few. In his own journals, Columbus frequently refers to "The Admiral" (himself in third person) as the primary actor, a metonymic stand-in for ship and crew, even if others were carrying out the actual work. ("The Admiral continued on his course, and during the day and night he made but 25 leagues because it was calm" [26].) Later narratives of exploration and conquest repeat this pattern. When I was in eighth-grade American history class, one of our first tasks was to memorize the names of European explorers. My teacher — a bubbly, enthusiastic woman with a fondness for mnemonic devices— encouraged us to use visualization to aid our memories: For Vasco Nunez de Balboa, she suggested, "think of the movie boxer Rocky Balboa, running across Panama and flexing his muscles at the Pacific." Her mnemonic worked; just as Mrs. Fleming promised, the image has never quite left me. It also illustrates the dual rhetorical action of traditional exploration narratives: the celebration of expedition leaders as larger-than-life champions in the "wholly male, heroic world" of exploration and discovery, alongside the simultaneous erasure of other actors from the scene (Pratt 152).

² These are the first supplies Columbus's journal mentions procuring, during his first voyage to the Americas, on a brief stop at the isle of La Gomera in the Canaries.

These insights are not extraordinary, yet they bear important implications for how we conceive of and understand colonial frameworks of vision as they pertain to landscapes — in other words, the perspective we (frequently unconsciously) adopt when we look upon (or imagine) land with what Pratt calls "Imperial Eyes." They are present when a painter conceptualizes and frames a landscape scene on canvas. They are present when audiences — whether composed of the colonized or of the colonizing — view the scene afterward.

But what do imperial eyes see? What do they purposefully overlook or ignore? And how does this view, whether replicated via text or visual art, assist in the colonial project? In the case of North American landscape painting, the imperial gazes imposed upon viewers via composition and framing have historically functioned through an elaborate system of *topoi* (argumentative patterns which hinge upon establishing definitions, divisions, or causes and effects), and tropes (the use of an image to signify a figurative meaning instead of, or in addition to, its typical literal one). Building upon the work of Edward Said and Mary Louise Pratt, David Spurr has identified a number of discursive patterns that have reverberated across centuries in a Western imperial context.³ These building blocks, which he collectively terms "the rhetoric of empire," represent facets of an ever-shifting, imperial discourse which is less concerned with consistency than it is with maintaining power (see table 1). Spurr acknowledges he

³ A brief note on terminology: in his work, Spurr calls these patterns "a series of basic tropes which emerge from the Western colonial experience" (3). In the interest of distinguishing argumentative springboards (*topoi*) and commonly accepted premises (*endoxa*) from figures of speech (tropes and schemes), as well as avoiding confusion on the part of some readers, I am breaking with Spurr's terminology — at least in part — and referring to these discursive patterns as "strategies" or simply "rhetorical modes" (his other favored term).

draws this insight from Michel Foucault, who wrote that "[t]here is not on the one side, a discourse of power, and opposite it, another discourse that runs counter to it. Discourses are tactical elements or blocks operating in the field of force relations; there can exist different and even contradictory discourses within the same strategy" (102).

Table 1
Strategies Common to the Rhetoric of Western Empire

Strategy	Description
Surveillance	Seeing is the first step to possessing. Visual observation is a means of mastery – and redirected more broadly from people to entire landscapes.
Appropriation	Territory and resources, once surveyed, implicitly belong to the colonizer.
Aestheticization	"Wild" or crumbling spaces typify the beauty (and desirability) of land unconquered by "civilization."
Classification	Scientific categorization and knowledge-making advance colonization.
Debasement	Indigenous peoples are savage, and disorderly without colonial intervention.
Negation	Uncolonized areas are places of darkness or emptiness, or proof of the indigene's failure to fulfill his responsibility to cultivate the land.
Affirmation	Seizing savage, dark, and/or empty places is the colonizer's moral imperative. (Ex: White Man's Burden.)
Idealization	The "Savage" is not so much a human – rhetorically speaking – as he is an ideal: a figure rich with symbolic value for those who wish to prop up European ideologies of "perfect" freedom and "natural" liberty.
Insubstantialization	Spaces outside Europe are dreamlike and should not be engaged on their own, concrete terms — a "disorienting Orient" rich with fantasy.
Naturalization	"Progress" is a natural phenomenon constructed along a linear timeline (as opposed to a cyclical one), which allows civilized man to wield the advancements of civilization in order to turn around subjugate nature itself (along with "lesser" civilizations).
Eroticization	Colonized spaces and peoples are feminine; masculinized Western administrators are fit to rule and derive gratification from them – both sensory and material.

Source: Spurr, David. *The Rhetoric of Empire: Colonial Discourse in Journalism, Travel Writing, and Imperial Administration*. Charlotte, N.C: Duke U P, 1993.

In other words, strategies such as classification, affirmation, and debasement are moving parts which have been deployed on an as-needed basis to justify and perpetuate colonization, from Columbus's time onward. For Spurr, they have been used in a variety of verbal contexts, from magazine journalism to travel writing and scientific treatises. Yet as this and subsequent chapters will argue, Western visual culture has also served as a staging ground for the establishment, justification, and maintenance of colonial thought. And American landscape painting – with its wide-open spaces and simultaneous invitation to and affirmation of colonial incursion *into* those spaces – is a prime historic staging ground, providing a ready set of commonplaces for colonial storytelling: The land is inviting; the land is empty; the land is ours.

Surveillance

As Spurr demonstrates, even in written communication, many instances of colonial discourse begin with the act of ekphrastically surveying the land itself. Surveillance is a form of visual argumentation which typically functions by manner of definition or redefinition (this land is a homestead; this land is New Eden). It also paves the way for the use of other lines of attack within the colonizing rhetor's arsenal, particularly negation, aestheticization, and appropriation.⁴ During the era of Westward Expansion, these three strategies — deployed in combination with the surveillance

⁴ While the burgeoning field of cultural rhetorics demonstrates that aggression and "attack" are not the only approaches to collective decision-making, much of Western rhetoric revolves around an agonistic model — and, as I argue, these strategies are no exception.

simulated by the sweeping vistas of Hudson River and frontier canvases — also figured heavily in the rhetorical thrust of American visual art.

When describing imperial rhetoric's functions in written composition, Spurr has isolated each of these strategic functions for discussion, even as he acknowledges at times that they bleed into one another ("Reporting begins with looking," which leads to an implicit colonial appropriation of landscapes as the reader of the report vicariously "surveys" through the reporter's words... etc. [13, 28]). In a visual field without a rigidly prescribed order of interpretation (unlike text, paintings and other forms of graphic art need not be decoded from left to right, top to bottom), however, these strategies overlap and intertwine even more profoundly, in a process which is far from linear. In many cases they operate simultaneously, since a painting by its very nature visually simulates surveillance on the part of the viewer.

Negation

On many American Expansion Era canvases, the first step in deploying these interlocking pieces — the grand argumentative springboard — was to first empty the scene. It is important to remember that the wide, sweeping vistas popularized in the American frontier paintings we now know, are not the historic reality encountered “[w]hen the English first landed in North America, where they found much of the coastal region heavily populated,” write Dinnerstein et al. Estimates of indigenous population in the territory now known as the United States vary, but many scholars now accept the figure of three to five million people prior to European colonization (5). (By way of

comparison, the population of Britain at the time is estimated at around 4 million.) If Europeans did not privilege native cultures, comparatively speaking, these numbers would have at least given some Europeans pause before attempting to displace a population as large as that of their own countries of origin – particularly given the fact that Native communities were not evenly spread over North America’s vast land mass, but instead dwelt, in many instances, in pockets of dense concentration, like the New England coast. Hence, a rhetoric which emphasized the emptiness of the North American landscape coupled with a sense of the Indian’s inevitable retreat into history – was often employed by those who romanticized the colonialist project in the Americas.

Landscape first came to dominate American art in the 1820s, just as white settlers began to emigrate to Texas amidst Mexican political instability, and the notion of Manifest Destiny – the idea that the United States were preordained to stretch across the entire continent, replacing existing governments and communities – was picking up steam among white Americans. By promulgating among Europeans the idea of America as a vast wilderness, relatively empty of human occupants, nineteenth-century landscape painting took an active visual role that partnered with the verbal rhetoric of the period, rhetoric imbued with what Lawrence Buell calls “the aesthetic of the not-there” (69). In his discussion of negation in colonial writing, Spurr suggests that explorers' collective habit of depicting uncolonized spaces as "wide enormous blanks," in voyager H.M. Stanley's words, "gives way immediately to [their] transformation into mythology." The resulting perception of nothingness — a space devoid of regional history, inhabitants, or destiny independent of the colonizing agenda — "acts as a kind of provisional erasure,

clearing a space for the expansion of the colonial imagination and the pursuit of desire" (92-93). To prove his point, Spurr offers examples from European dispatches describing Africa, South and Central America, and the Indian subcontinent. Yet the United States has produced numerous North American variations on this strategy as well, including works widely lauded as formative texts in the grand American nature writing tradition.

In one essay well-known to American nature enthusiasts, Henry David Thoreau's "Walking," Thoreau briefly re-imagines the territory between New England and Oregon as a vast, unpeopled wilderness, ripe for enjoyment by the hardy Euro-American recreationalist or adventurer with enough spirit: "It is hard for me to believe that I shall find fair landscapes or sufficient wildness and freedom behind the eastern horizon ... but I believe that the forest which I see in the western horizon stretches uninterruptedly toward the setting sun, and there are no towns nor cities in it of enough consequence to disturb me" (105-106). Despite his well-known interest in Natives and tribal artifacts, Thoreau still seemed to accept the Expansionist endoxon that whites had "replaced" the continent's Native inhabitants as successors; his remarks in the essay "Huckleberries" repeatedly refer to Natives in past tense ("Among the Indians, the earth and its productions generally *were* common and free to all the tribe" [252 emphasis mine]), while reaffirming that whites have "supplanted the Indians" and "taken possession of the territory of Indians and Mexicans" (252, 248). His journals echo these notions: "I forget that this which is now Concord was once Musketaquid," he wrote in 1842. "... Everywhere in the fields — in the corn and grain land — the earth is strewn with the relics of a race which has vanished as completely as if trodden in with the earth" (3).

With Natives rhetorically "trodden" into the ground — an unsettling metaphor which brings graves to mind — Thoreau was free to imagine contemporary wilderness as open, empty, and available to whites yearning for "unexhausted" earth ("Walking" 105).

William Cullen Bryant, "the first Anglo-American poet of the environment to produce a body of enduring work" in Buell's estimation (77), also provides numerous examples of negation. Take, for example, 1854's "The Prairies," which extols the virtues of "the gardens of the Desert, these /The unshorn fields, boundless and beautiful" (Bryant 147) – and most importantly, uninhabited. When the narrator stops to consider the land's native inhabitants, he speaks not of *living* beings, but of their graves as the only trace which presently remains in the (solitary white male) narrator's view:

As o'er the verdant waste I guide my steed
... I think of those
Upon whose rest he tramples. Are they here-
The dead of other days?- and did the dust
Of these fair solitudes once stir with life
And burn with passion? Let the mighty mounds
That overlook the rivers, or that rise
In the dim forest crowded with old oaks,
Answer. A race, that long has passed away,
Built them;- a disciplined and populous race
Heaped, with long toil, the earth, while yet the Greek
Was hewing the Pentelicus to forms

Of symmetry, and rearing on its rock

The glittering Parthenon.

(148)

One of the ironies of this passage is that the "disciplined and populous race" which built the earthen mounds which dot Illinois and other central U.S. states had not passed away, nor were they merely "the dead of other days," as Bryant's narrator supposed. Rather, the moundbuilders were likely the ancestors of the region's *contemporaneous* indigenous inhabitants, who were alive and well as of Bryant's writing, despite his proclamation that they had also vanished from the prairies ("The red man, too, / Has left the blooming wilds he ranged so long ... I am in the wilderness alone." [149, 151]).

While based more on wishful thinking than fact, this is fairly typical of the methods used to depict American wilderness spaces, both verbally and visually. The rhetorical erasure of Natives from the scene cleared the way for legitimized European encroachment onto their empty former homelands, the idea of which was similarly reinforced and depicted by nineteenth-century American painters. Despite continued Native presence in the lands depicted by white artists, natives themselves were frequently omitted from these sweeping, empty vistas, whether they hung on the walls of humble Midwestern parlors or sophisticated galleries in New York and other Eastern cities.⁵ Instead, landscape painters aspired to recreate the sublime landscapes of their European counterparts — idealized landscapes to which they, or at least their ancestors,

⁵ When natives *were* portrayed in these panoramas, they were often portrayed in a way which constructed them as dying. This recurring theme will be taken up in more detail in Chapter III.

were native, and from which others were absent. Nancy K. Anderson points to Thomas Moran's declaration that he placed "no value upon literal transcriptions from Nature," as well as other white artists' assertions "that their paintings be judged as works of art, not as historical, topographical, or ethnological documents" (16). Many viewers tend to assume that these scenes — whether constructed by respected artists or mass-market hacks — are naturalistic (read: arhetorical); they certainly represent themselves as such. Yet these assumptions, coupled with the original artists' denials, do not negate the paintings' rhetoricity. By their very compositions and perspectives, they project a European gaze onto the landscape as well as the accompanying dichotomies.

For example, in Thomas Cole's *View from Mount Holyoke, Northampton, Massachusetts, after a Thunderstorm—The Oxbow*, 1836, the diagonal skewing of the tree to the left is a common element in French landscapes, as is the distanced view of farmlands and the juxtaposition of civilization and wilderness as a sort of visual dichotomy (Fig. 5).

Does land look exactly the same in Massachusetts and the Loire Valley? Of course not. Yet by framing and configuring it similarly, these paintings insinuate a twinned mastery. It is aesthetically appealing. It is also most certainly rhetorical, in that it produces a twinned sense of homeland, comfort, and legitimate European occupation of both depicted spaces. Cole's landscape is so expansive in scope, it is easy to miss the image of the painter himself, seated upon the hillside along the bottom of the frame.



Figure 5. Cole, Thomas. *View from Mount Holyoke, Northampton, Massachusetts, after a Thunderstorm—The Oxbow*. 1836. Oil on canvas. Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.

The apostrophic insertion of a small human figure — both to emphasize scale and sublimity — is a feature borrowed from the European Romantics, and echoed on other North American canvases in the nineteenth century (Fig. 6). Yet the eye is directed to the verdant hills beyond the waterfall in Thomas Moran's watercolor *The Grand Canyon of the Yellowstone*, suggesting the availability of fertile, inviting territory just beyond the stunning scene. (In fact, in his painting of the same title, completed the same year, Moran inserts smokestacks and the faint lines of cultivation into the background, an act which consummates the promise of Expansion which is only hinted at in the watercolor.) Indeed, while the sublimity of earlier European landscapes suggested danger and human

insignificance in the face of Nature's awe, the effect in an American setting seems to be a sense of boundlessness — and of bounty (Fig. 7). The abundant game along the water's edge in Albert Bierstadt's *Among the Sierra Nevada Mountains* sends an inviting message to would-be Western settlers, while projecting their collective Edenic fantasies onto an idealized landscape.⁶ Even contemporary reviewers were struck with its hyperbole. One anonymous Boston critic suggested that the scene was "a perfect type of the American idea of what our country ought to be, if it is not so in reality" (qtd. in Anderson 15). Nevertheless, Bierstadt's scenery stirred popular interest in the American West and inspired scores of imitations.

As Euro-Americans made their uneven advance across indigenous lands, these images of boundless, idyllic landscapes accompanied them, a process which accelerated after 1880, when Midwestern manufacturers discovered ways to cheaply reproduce landscape oils and market them to middle- and lower-class households across the country. Saul E. Zalesch notes that the systematic, large-scale production and distribution of inexpensive oil paintings – which critics derisively called “daubs” – made art ownership a reality in homes across a broad socioeconomic spectrum. Additionally, because of working Americans’ enthusiastic desire to emulate their social “betters,” they tended to select pictures which echoed the composition and style of those hanging in expensive galleries: “[T]he uniformity of tastes shown by the relation between cheap and high art reveals a ‘national aesthetic’ that transcended the new socioeconomic,

⁶ Game animals were a recurring feature of Bierstadt's landscapes. See *Bridal Veil Falls, Yosemite* (1871-73), *Valley of the Yosemite* (1864), and *The Sierras near Lake Tahoe, California* (1865) for additional examples.

geographic, and ethnic divisions of the postbellum class system” (Zalesch 82). In keeping with this aesthetic uniformity, landscape painting quickly became “the bread-and-butter of painting manufacturers” in the United States, and the images marketed to Euro-Americans via print media, advertisements and catalogues reveal an almost exclusive focus on waterfalls, mountains, forests, and other outdoor scenes (Zalesch 86).



Figure 6. Moran, Thomas. *The Grand Canyon of the Yellowstone*. 1872. Watercolor and graphite on paper. Thomas Gilcrease Institute of American History and Art, Tulsa, Oklahoma.



Figure 7. Bierstadt, Albert. *Among the Sierra Nevada Mountains, California*. Oil on canvas. 1868. Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.

Malea Powell's work suggests that nineteenth-century America's so-called "Indian problem" was, in many ways, created by the increasingly obvious disconnect between experiential reality and the expectations created by these scenes, which were built upon "a vision of America as abundant and bountiful, ripe for the enactment of the desires of those who constituted the new nation" ("Rhetorics of Survivance" 401). The ongoing success of this illusion hinged on: 1.) settlers' seemingly unlimited access to land and 2.) their ability to discursively "unsee" the thousands of Indians who lived on those lands ("Rhetorics of Survivance" 401, "Down by the River" 44). Hence, many expansionist rhetors reframed *the continued presence of the land's indigenous occupants* — rather than whites' erroneous designation of their homelands as "empty" — as the problem.

Even those who recognized the fallacy of negation rhetoric (and the concomitant illusion of endless space and resources for whites) have sought to rectify the disconnect not by recognizing Native presence and sovereignty, but by pursuing the actualization of whites' negation fantasies. In December of 1881, three decades after the heyday of the Hudson River artists, President Chester A. Arthur told members of the U.S. Senate and House of Representatives that while the nation's lands had "*seemed* almost illimitable" to their predecessors, the conflict and death that had resulted from white incursions into Native lands begged for additional intervention. His solution was a refutation of sovereignty altogether: he proposed that Congress end the United States' historic policy of "dealing with the various Indian tribes as separate nationalities," a move which would have abolished the federal recognition of tribal existence, period (55). In other words, when negation fails — either through logic or experience — rather than abandon their rhetorical goals, imperial rhetors have often simply doubled-down.

Aestheticization

By definition, aestheticization is the act of visual conformation to a set of particular stylistic conventions. The aesthetics of classical sculpture differ from those of Saturday morning cartoons, for example, or Japanese *manga*. Each of these genres is individually recognizable by its characteristic system of representation and visual order.

As a site of invention, serially aestheticized images lend themselves particularly well to the deployment of what classically trained rhetoricians call tropes: figurative representations with multiple layers of meaning attached. The imposition of repetitive

elements, perspectives, treatments, and subjects in order to match stylistic conventions steer the image away from mimetic representation (denotative meaning) and allow space for figurative meaning and allusion (connotative meaning) to flourish. This is clearly visible in genres which we consider highly stylized, like graphic novels. Yet even images and objects which at first glance appear to be arhetorical shape information through framing, perspective, and implicit association. Painters and photographers have long known this, as have sculptors. Even utilitarian objects such as buildings are not exempt: Kostelnick and Hassett offer the example of the typical university campus, whose architecture — a mishmash of Greek Revival, Romanesque, Victorian and other styles — "invites interpretations of stability, truth and power" among users and passers-by. "[T]hese codes do important rhetorical work," they conclude, "regardless of whether all of those users can name or even distinguish the specific codes" (11).

The idealized waterfalls, mountain ranges, and forests of American landscape art are likewise imbued with rich symbolism, so much so that their symbolic arrangement is frequently an inherent and *necessary* dimension of their aesthetic order. Three of the so-called "master tropes" (metonymy, synecdoche, metaphor) offer one potential starting point — although certainly not the only potential starting point — from which the colonizing messages aesthetically embedded within these serialized frontier and wilderness scenes can be analyzed. Christian typology and neoclassical allusion — complex, culturally specific analogies in which objects and scenes are imbued with the narrative expectations of Judeo-Christian scripture or Greco-Roman mythology — offer another. Because these systems of figurative signification often intermingle in Western

verbal and visual expression, the aesthetic features of many paintings can (and do) perform multiple discursive functions simultaneously.

Synecdoche and Metonymy

Many of the conventions which serve to aestheticize the landscapes in Hudson River and American frontier paintings are actually synecdochal or metonymic in nature, as Nicholai Cikovsky Jr.'s work with cut stumps suggests. That is, they employ acts of scaled-down symbolic substitution in order to represent phenomena which were too broad to be captured in literal detail on a single canvas. It bears mentioning that there has been some historic disagreement among rhetoric scholars as to whether metonymy and synecdoche are distinct tropes, or whether synecdoche (the part represents the whole) is more properly understood as a subcategory of metonymy (in which an object represents a related idea or phenomenon).⁷ Furthermore, many visual signifiers can be read in multiple ways.

Cikovsky has observed that while the cut tree stump occurs sporadically in European art, the heavy proliferation of stumps in paintings of the North American wilderness suggests that white artists and their audiences attached an additional layer of meaning to representations of these objects. He concludes that the cut stump — along with related images such as the woodcutter or the felled tree — is "a special element of

⁷ In their book on style in written composition, Chris Holcomb and M. Jimmie Killingsworth argue that the two should be kept distinct, and that the fundamental division between metonymy and synecdoche lies in the difference between externality and internality: "While metonyms involve relationships with things external to, or not a necessary component of, the main subject ... synecdoche involves using some internal part or necessary component to stand for the subject" (92).

American artistic language" (611). Dawn Glanz catalogues a number of such recurring features in popular landscape images — "a rough log cabin, a pioneer family, a hunter with a deer, or treestumps and logs" — and glosses their meaning(s), but stops short of explicitly describing the rhetorical mechanisms by which they evoke these meanings in audience members' minds (73). Certainly, within the context of American Expansionism, these recurring visual representations of single items (or small clusters of items) — axes leaned against tree trunks, wagons headed west, railroad tracks penetrating virgin forests or grasslands — serve as stand-ins for more sweeping contemporary phenomena than each object would signify if it were presented as a literal-minded act of mimesis.

Take, for example, Cole's use of the tree stump alongside a shepherd and plowman in *The Arcadian or Pastoral State*, the second painting in his series chronicling *The Course of Empire* (Fig. 8). Cikovsky points to the cut tree stump at the far right of the scene as a symbol of "nascent civilization," one which "exists in complete parity among other symbols of civilization [in the painting] and must therefore have a similar meaning" (614). If understood synecdochally, the other figures he mentions, including "dancers and musicians, a woman with a spindle and distaff, a sage old man inscribing geometrical figures in the dust, a shepherd and plowman," can be each thought of as an individual representing the entire class of "civilized" people from which he or she comes: entertainers and artists, textile makers, mathematicians, sheepherders, and farmers (614).



Figure 8: Cole, Thomas. *The Arcadian or Pastoral State*. 1834. Oil on canvas. New York Historical Society, New York.

The tree stump, likewise, can be thought of as a synecdochal stand-in for the millions of cut tree stumps which have been cleared in the name of "progress." However, when viewed metonymically, the evocations of each figure become more ideologically complex: Dancers and musicians become representative not only of people, but of artistic expression and the creative process, as well as the arts' historic role in Western Civilization (note the performers' vaguely neoclassical garb). The woman with the spindle and distaff can be interpreted as a shorthand visual reference to the separate spheres doctrine which drove much of "civilized" nineteenth-century Anglophone gender relations, and her tools alone may metonymically refer to the idealized domestic hearth to which many male viewers hoped to retire at day's end. Similarly, viewers may

associate the elderly mathematician's calculations in the dust with the Western educational system (while their context reaffirms the colonial bias that ignores other historic "birthplaces" of mathematical knowledge and theory — India, the Middle East, Central America). It is at this level of rhetorical analysis and visual exegesis that the tree stump's appearance becomes infinitely more complicated. Rather than a representative "stump among stumps" is it instead meant to evoke a related concept, like progress, or perhaps the Westward Expansion movement as a whole? Even more importantly, was this association easily ascertained by contemporary audiences? Periodical clippings from the time suggest it was: an anonymous reviewer in the *New-York Mirror* describes, image by image, how Cole has narrated human "progress," then gushes that the painting's execution "shows a knowledge of nature, and of the philosophy of history, which places the artist on a much more exalted eminence than could be obtained by even *his* skill in mere landscape painting." The reviewer concludes that Cole has accomplished his goal: "to show what *has been* the history of empires and of man," optimistically predicting that despite this gloomy precedent, "the progress of the species" will nevertheless continue, and someday ruin will not be a successful empire's ultimate, inevitable fate ("Mr. Cole's Five Pictures" 135).

Clearly, then, Cole's viewers understood they were not merely looking at stumps, dirt scribbles, and textile-weaving equipment; rather, they were engaging with compressions of broader narratives celebrating histories of Western conquest and cultivation.

Metaphor

Certainly, in some cases metaphoric language was used by American landscape artists to construct an image's title, such as Frederic Edwin Church's *Heart of the Andes* (painted, curiously, in a New York City studio) (Anderson and Ferber 74). The image draws upon two figurative meanings of the word "heart": It depicts both a landscape in the center of the Andes Mountains and, just to the left of the eye-catching waterfall which showcases the idealized beauty in the land's "heart," a Christian explorer's grave, where his loved ones' grief and longing — sensations springing from their emotional cores, or "hearts" — are doubtlessly directed. Yet other examples of metaphor bypass textual signification entirely and occur solely within the images themselves.

Holcomb and Killingsworth introduce metaphor to a student audience by entreating them to “try thinking of it as an *identification*, a way of bringing together seemingly unlike things” (86). They suggest that metaphor is a relatively strong identification, while verbal constructions such as simile or analogy are “more cautious attempts to link unlike things” (86). This is a suitable working definition for verbal turns of phrase. However, when dealing with images – which contain no “like” or “as,” only pictorial signifiers -- it may be more helpful to turn further back to Kenneth Burke. In his landmark essay "The Four Master Tropes," Burke describes metaphor as "a device for seeing something *in terms of* something else. It brings out the thisness of a that, or the thatness of a this" (421-422).

In one well-known example, John Gast's 1872 oil painting *American Progress* uses visual metaphor to underscore and celebrate its triumphant depiction of Native

displacement and genocide alongside whites' efforts at westward expansion. (Fig. 9)



Figure 9. Gast, John. *American Progress*. 1872. Oil on canvas. N&R Enterprises, Inc.

Certainly, synecdoche has its place in this image, as representative trains and telegraph wire snake their way from the ships in the harbor across the plains, paralleling the paths of white miners, settlers, and stagecoaches. Ahead of them, clusters of Natives, bison, wolf, bear, and other game flee. Obviously, these figures are stand-ins for entire groups of people (and other living beings), and their juxtaposition tells the tale of nineteenth-century Euro-Americans' westward incursion and seizure of additional indigenous lands,

and Natives' simultaneous dislocation. However, other elements function in a different figurative sense. The sunrise to the east and the light with which it bathes the invaders and their cultural vestiges are a metaphor for the moral enlightenment and cultural progress which white colonization and annexation will supposedly bring. To the West their antithesis, clouds and darkness, hover over the land's fleeing inhabitants, signifying that they are, likewise, the Euro-Americans' antitheses: morally unenlightened and culturally regressive.

At the center of the scene, Gast employs personification (a specific type of metaphor in which a non-human object, event, or quality is compared to a human being) to celebrate the Spirit of Civilization. She is, notably, a Euro-American woman with fair hair and classical robes, which reinforce the superiority of ancient Greek and Roman traditions over other ancient ways of knowing and doing. Her flowing robes suggest forward motion (i.e., progress), and the book that she carries metonymically associates Western learning, knowledge, and systems of storage and retrieval with – again – the superior level of civilization she embodies. This supposed superiority was a culturally constructed myth; scholars such as Angela Haas, Tehanetorens, and Robert A. Williams have demonstrated that the indigenous peoples of North America devised their own material systems of information storage and retrieval, despite English speakers' frequent (incorrect) assumption that the continent's so-called "oral" cultures did not possess any other forms of pre-contact recordkeeping⁸

⁸. For more information about wampum's function among the nations of the Iroquois Confederacy, see Haas's "Wampum as Hypertext" or Tehanetorens' *Wampum Belts of the Iroquois*. Additionally, the

If sunrise functions on a metaphoric level to suggest the “dawn” of a new era of civilization in paintings like Gast’s, then sunset can be used to suggest the conclusion of another. Albert Bierstadt’s 1862 canvas *Toward the Setting Sun* depicts an unnamed tribal village, silhouetted against the fading sun and a panoramic Plains landscape. Its inhabitants – whose backs are turned toward the viewer – gaze into the receding light. Bierstadt’s metaphoric juxtaposition of Natives and sunset “carries a sentimental message of impending extinction,” one which has been clear to both critics and general audiences from the painting’s original exhibition (Kornhauser et al. 27). The painting’s title reinforces the metaphoric lens through which white audiences are expected to view the scene – as surveyors and, presumably, as successors to the dying peoples depicted.

Appropriation

In Western imperial rhetoric, once a land has been surveyed, it implicitly belongs to the colonizer, or, as Spurr puts it, “[c]olonial discourse takes over as it takes cover” (28). In the previous sections, I have demonstrated how landscapes have been emptied of indigenous presence and aestheticized in ways which project Eurocentric figurative meanings onto their features. As these figurative representations become more complex — as in the case of extended metaphors and typological reconfigurations — they also become more explicitly colonial. In these cases, the tropes deployed in the process of visually aestheticizing these scenes are inherently appropriative as well.

In Burke's view, the "purely" figurative qualities of tropes such as metaphor were of secondary importance; rather, the ways in which figurative language helped discover and describe "the truth" (which he placed in quotations as well) were what interested him (421). Certainly, many white contemporary viewers endorsed the "truth" behind images which implicitly conflated their conquest of the American wilderness with the Israelites' biblical journey through Canaan, the life of Christ, or the eschatological events of the book of Revelation. In Protestant settings, typology has traditionally functioned within sermons and writings as a type of analogy, drawing from a complex relationship to biblical language and the historically assumed sacramental relationship between textual expression and spiritual reality among Protestants – from whom the Puritan movement, and thus European colonizers' earliest conceptions of “America” came.

Sacvan Bercovitch has demonstrated the early use of typological rhetoric in early Puritan literature – particularly Cotton Mather's biography of Colonial Governor John Winthrop – as a means of convincing early colonists that they were the spiritual descendants of both the ancient Israelites and early Christians and thus entitled to God's favor while on their famed “Errand into the Wilderness.” This, as Bercovitch asserts in *The Puritan Origins of the American Self*, functioned as a defining force in American identity. As a result, typological relationships continued to be heavily utilized within nineteenth-century rhetoric — both verbal and visual — as a way of metaphorically affirming the predestination of white colonial presence and ownership in Native spaces. As Dawn Glanz remarks: "If we are to believe the popular images of western homesteads ... we must conclude that pioneers had indeed reentered the Garden of Eden

to lead peaceful, contented, prosperous, healthy, and virtuous lives amidst an idyllic wilderness environment" (72). The Edenic metaphor suggests far more than an area's pleasantness, comfort, or perfection. For Christians socialized to believe in the literal truth of the Bible, as historically interpreted by the Western European church — that the history of the world shall ultimately culminate in a return to the pre-Fall state of humankind — the Americas offered the potential realization of this theological promise. Hence, to suggest that the fledgling nation-state was New Jerusalem and its countryside Edenic was not merely a poetic or artistic device; rather, it was a pronouncement which carried the weight of prophecy for many devout settlers. Furthermore, even *after* white incursions into native lands had expanded U.S. territory from the Atlantic to the Pacific, the celebration of prophecy fulfilled was a powerful rhetorical device, one which promoted national unity (in the face of a civil war, no less!) via a sense of simultaneous spiritual and civic destiny.

One illustration of this phenomenon can be found in Emanuel Leutze's *Westward Ho, The Course Of Empire Takes Its Way*, which has decorated the U.S Capitol Building in Washington, D.C. from 1862 to the present (Fig. 10). Glanz notes that the mural's "religious overtones are undeniable — from the layout of the scheme, which is reminiscent of an altarpiece, to the allusions to the Israelites of the Exodus, to the reference to American missionary activity in the margin" (79). Yet other typological expectations are present as well. The reconfiguration of the Madonna and infant Jesus in the painting's center (note "Mary's" telltale virgin blue robes, which she donned after the

Annunciation, derived from centuries of European religious iconography), suggests yet another scriptural journey: the flight *to* Egypt found in the Gospel of Matthew 2:13-23.



Figure 10. Leutze, Emanuel. *Westward Ho, The Course Of Empire Takes Its Way*. 1862. Stereochrome mural. U.S. Capitol Building, Washington, D.C.

In the scriptural tale, which is one of the final events in the nativity, Joseph is warned of the impending Slaughter of the Innocents in a dream. As a result, he hastily relocates the Holy Family from Palestine to Egypt, thus sparing the infant Jesus from the carnage (ordered by a jealous King Herod — who has mistakenly read the star heralding Jesus' birth as a threat to his earthly throne). In Leutze's reconfiguration, Mary and Jesus are encircled not by Joseph, but by the strong, sturdy arms of an American frontiersman who points them toward their Western destination. The implication is clear, particularly when one pauses to consider the religious-persecution narrative that frequently accompanied earlier European emigration to the so-called New World: The United States' expansion

will continue to deliver "Christ," whose earthly body is now the (Euro-American) church, to a place of safety from those who intend him/it harm. To the right, the grave marker beneath which pioneers are burying another would-be settler appears to merge with the rocky hillside behind it, etching the sign of the cross upon the land itself — an act that is at once sanctifying and appropriative, suggesting that some must be martyred to the cause of divinely sanctioned westward expansion.

While neoclassicism draws from older source material than the Gospels, it also inspires typological expectations to a degree among Christianized Western audiences, who are conditioned to expect time-tested narratives to repeat themselves in contemporary settings. Angela Miller analyzes Cole's attempts at latter-day prophecy within his *Course of Empire* series at some length, including his use of classical icons to articulate these warnings in what she considers the series' pivotal canvas, *The Consummation of Empire*:

To an American aristocracy familiar with classical analogies, Caesar was a figure who symbolized the greatest danger to the Roman republic. ... In the image of the emperor sustained by a submissive and stupefied populace, Cole was evoking a common perception of Andrew Jackson that had found its way into contemporary political caricature.

(71-72)

To scholars who are familiar with Cole's political leanings, reading this painting as a colonizing gesture might seem counterintuitive at first glance. Cole's journals document his misgivings about the direction of the nation at the time he was executing *The Course*

of *Empire*, and the cycle of paintings clearly forecasts growth, hubris, and ruin (Miller 66). (Figs. 11, 12)



Figure 11. Cole, Thomas. *The Savage State*. 1834. Oil on canvas. New York Historical Society, New York.



Figure 12. Cole, Thomas. *The Consummation of Empire*. 1836. Oil on canvas. New York Historical Society, New York.

For the English-born Cole, who was raised in a Protestant setting and eventually joined the Episcopal Church in 1842, the course of imperial birth, growth, and death was cyclical and recurring, much like the typological patterns in Christian scripture. His visual comparison of Caesar to Andrew Jackson suggests that Jackson is perhaps predestined to follow the narrative events of Caesar's life, and lead the republic to ruin, without the electorate's intervention.

Yet the juxtaposition of this image — and the imperial tale it tells — with what began as an indigenous North American landscape in the series' initial painting (*The Savage State*) removes its narrative from the Italian peninsula and reinscribes it onto North American soil. While the land is viewed from slightly different perspectives in each frame, the boulder perched atop a peak in the distance confirms the entire narrative as playing out in the same geographic space, asserting the power of transplanted European stories over non-European settings, regardless of the indigenous storying traditions they might erase or supplant.

This approximates the rhetorical erasure of Native relationships to place discussed by scholars such as Malea Powell and Gerald Vizenor. It also suggests that the land itself is merely a blank canvas or empty stage, awaiting human inhabitation and narration; that it has nothing to say back to the people of European descent who enter and settle there. As Val Plumwood writes, “Western moderns mostly do not relate dialogically to the non-human sphere and have come to believe that the land is dumb, that culture and meaning” are exclusively determined by humans (67). Because earlier indigenous stories concerning the land are dialogic, and based upon histories of

interaction and kinship with non-human relations, they have been dismissed over centuries by colonizers as primitive and irrelevant, as well as contradictory to the Book of Genesis. What's more, such dismissal allows for the collective "othering" of indigenous people alongside nature; their stories and voices do not convey culture or meaning either. Only the colonizer's history – his Greco-Roman glories, his British fleets, his American revolution – exist ideologically, and representationally. The accompanying allusions and metaphors may illuminate the "thatness of this," to borrow Burke's phrasing. However, they obscure and eradicate the *thisness* of this: the pre-existing, centuries-old dialogic and relational partnerships between North America and its Native inhabitants.

Thus far, I have discussed negation, aestheticization, and appropriation separately. In order to fully appreciate their interdependence and the ways in which they can coexist and reinforce one another on a single landscape canvas, it is helpful to return to Cole. Many of Cole's paintings — long considered a foundation for the Hudson River School of painting, as well as American art in general — employ appropriative representational strategies, which partner with negation and aestheticization to create the endorsement and celebration of empire. The highly aestheticized forests of Cole's Catskills paintings hearken to the landscapes of earlier British Romanticism, creating a pleasurable, familiar viewing experience for their audience/surveyors, while the synecdochal insertion of colonizing figures assert a burgeoning Euro-American mastery over each New World scene. In 1826's *The Woodchopper, Lake Featherstonhaugh*, for instance, the skewed, gnarled trees which loom so threateningly in earlier European

paintings are being chopped and cleared by the eponymous American figure in the foreground (Fig. 13). Behind him, livestock graze placidly in a clearing near the lake. *Daniel Boone Sitting At the Door of His Cabin on the Great Osage Lake Kentucky*, completed the same year, casts its synecdochally colonizing figure even deeper into sublime wilderness, near a lake whose namesakes have been curiously absented from the scene (Fig. 14). While Boone has not cleared as much land as his eastern counterpart, Boone and his cabin are lit by the incipient sunrise, a metaphoric indication of the new era heralded by his presence and implicit claim upon the land.



Fig. 13. Cole, Thomas. *The Woodchopper, Lake Featherstonhaugh*. 1826. Oil on canvas. Fisher Museum of Art, Los Angeles, CA.



Figure 14. Cole, Thomas. *Daniel Boone Sitting At the Door of His Cabin on the Great Osage Lake Kentucky*. 1826. Oil on canvas. Mead Art Museum, Amherst College, Amherst, MA.

The Indians of Cole's imagination, by contrast, herald no such bright future. In 1847's *Indian Pass*, for example, an Indian hunter navigates wind-battered tree trunks amidst the harsh beauty of an autumn landscape (see Fig. 15). His presence within the audience/surveyors' frame of vision illustrates the savagery and primordial darkness of a less ordered, pre-colonial past. Commentary provided to online patrons by the Museum of Fine Arts in Houston, where the painting is currently held, demonstrates that even 165 years later, some art historians endorse a reading consistent with problematic portrayals of indigenaity: "In the foreground, blasted trees suggest the *inevitable passage of time* while the Native American figure, bow in hand, introduces a *nostalgic element*; by 1847,

when this work was painted, Native Americans *no longer inhabited* the scenic wilderness Cole depicts" (MFAH, emphasis mine). This assertion, while consistent with dominant culture narratives of Native disappearance in colonized spaces, is inaccurate.



Figure 15. Cole, Thomas. *Indian Pass*. 1847. Oil on canvas. Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, TX.

Neighboring Algonquian and Mohawk tribes had never inhabited the Adirondack Mountains in any sort of permanent sense, although they did use them for travel. Hence, a lack of Native settlements in the area depicted would hardly constitute the tragic disappearance that the Houston-based museum's interpretive remarks imply. Furthermore, if the passage is to be interpreted more broadly, geographically speaking, it is still inaccurate: With present-day Algonquian-speaking and Iroquoian people (who include the Mohawk Nation) numbering in the hundreds of thousands, the assumption that Natives had disappeared from scenic upstate New York by the mid-nineteenth century is similarly difficult to defend.

Monkman's Landscapes: A Twenty-First Century Reversal

Not everyone within the twenty-first century North American art world is content to reinforce the colonial storying of previous generations on canvas. In interviews, Toronto-based Cree artist Kent Monkman has expressed “a desire to look at history as it was written by Europeans, but to look at it through an Aboriginal lens” (“Contempo Abo” 22). He accomplishes this in a series of playful “scenic” paintings by reconfiguring images and forms from previous Euro-American art movements, paying particular attention to American landscape painting.

Of course, Monkman is not only toying with the conventions of genre by producing these canvases; he is also rhetorically challenging the visual narratives upon which Western expansion and “settlement” by Europeans is historically based. His work has garnered much recent critical attention for its provocative intrusions into dominant-

culture aesthetics in ways which subvert the colonizing power of the viewer's gaze and reinsert a Native presence into the very images which colluded in earlier artistic works to erase it. This is, most certainly, a survivance tactic – to use a term borrowed from Gerald Vizenor and other contemporary theorists – an example of the dynamic, ongoing practice of continued indigeneity within supposedly conquered landscapes.⁹

As Vizenor writes, “Native imagination, experience, and remembrance are the real landscapes of liberty in the literature of this continent” (7). Monkman's canvases suggest that similar landscapes of liberty exist within North American visual culture as well. If the typical rhetorical features of American landscape art have constructed Native lands as empty and “Indianness” as a state of disappearance or savagery, then Monkman's present-day disruptions of the embedded aesthetic and social codes signal a shift in this state: a shift from object-status to subject-status, from victimhood to action, from elegiac absence to living presence. These artistic disruptions both powerfully assert indigenous perseverance and playfully reject colonial sexuality. What's more, they also indicate Monkman's ability to creatively engage imperial systems of discourse while simultaneously challenging the stories they continue to convey about indigenous bodies, cultures and nations, enacting the sort of artful “imaginative liberation” that Powell points out in the work of earlier intellectuals like Sarah Winnemucca Hopkins and Charles Alexander Eastman (“Rhetorics of Survivance” 399).

⁹ For those interested in a more detailed theoretical discussion of survivance, Gerald Vizenor's book *Native Liberty: Natural Reason and Cultural Survivance* is an excellent starting point, as is his essay “Aesthetics of Survivance: Literary Theory and Practice,” from the 2008 collection *Survivance: Narratives of Native Presence*, which he also edited (1-24).

In order to fully appreciate the rhetorical sophistication of Monkman's work, it is useful to contemplate one of his larger, more detailed canvases. 2006's *Trappers of Men* is a monumental work, covering most of a large wall in gallery installation. Its sheer physical dimensions offer ample room for rhetorical play in the foregrounded details, and constitute a rhetorical gesture in and of themselves. During the heyday of British imperialism and American expansion, a number of Pre-Raphaelite-influenced artists on both sides of the Atlantic produced unconventionally large landscape paintings, which they filled with what Linda Ferber calls "obsessive detail" (878). The end effect – particularly in the case of a painter like John Everett Millais, who, in the early phase of his career, could spend an entire day filling in the detail on an area the size of a modern postage stamp – was a form of hyperrealism, one which at once overwhelmed and slowed the motion of the viewer's gaze, while simultaneously disrupting the social and visual hierarchies embedded within more traditionally sized, foreground-focused canvases. As a result, these larger landscapes automatically arrested the viewer's attention, prompting deeper reflection upon the myriad of details, and their accompanying embedded messages.

Hence, the size of Monkman's piece alone signals a desire, perhaps even an expectation that viewers will spend additional time with it. In order to further determine the rhetorical backdrop of *Trappers of Men*, one must turn again to specific images from North American art history. The setting is modeled almost exactly upon the paintings of Bierstadt, which helped shape Americans' conceptions of the West for generations.

Jordan Timm cites Bierstadt's *In the Mountains* (1867) as the specific painting Monkman reconfigures here (Timm 51); however, close visual inspection reveals a number of inconsistencies: The scenes are framed somewhat differently; the rock formations are slightly inconsistent – most likely due to a shift in angle and perspective; and the trees to the right of the mountains are slanted in an entirely opposite direction, in Monkman's work. A far more likely candidate is a canvas completed the following year, *Among the Sierra Nevada Mountains* (1868), and discussed earlier in this chapter, in which all the visual details of the background match up almost identically (Fig. 3). This is an important distinction because unlike *In the Mountains*, *Among the Sierra Nevada Mountains* contains animals, in the same locations where Monkman substitutes humans in his version. This is almost certainly a rhetorical gesture on Monkman's part, intended to combat the historic European conflation of indigenous peoples with romanticized "Nature" (capital N intended) instead of humanity. Another significant rhetorical facet of Monkman's scene is that despite its identical replication of almost everything else in the 1868 canvas, it is painted at midday. This is a deliberate rejection of Bierstadt's sunset, along with the countless other sunsets which have been metaphorically juxtaposed with images of Native bodies in Western art to suggest that indigenous peoples were one monolithic, "dying" nation in the twilight of their culture's era.

The details of the painting employ visual synecdoche as well as historical allusions in order to make additional rhetorical statements about European presence versus indigenous presence in such spaces. In the foreground, a perplexed-looking Lewis and Clark consult a Lakota recordkeeper for directions, suggesting Euro-Americans'

disorientation and lack of rootedness in the continent's geography. Intriguingly, the Lakota figure is working on a winter count copied from the year the Lakota defeated Custer. In an interview with Timm, Monkman explains the significance of this image, which displaces events deemed "important" by Europeans from their assumed centrality to broader human history:

There's a hundred years of history on that count [...] And what's interesting is that for the year that Custer was defeated by the Lakota people, it didn't factor into their tribal history as an important event. It was a huge event in terms of the Americans and their mythology of themselves, but from the point of view of the Lakota people, they chose instead for that year to talk about the theft of some ponies. (Timm 51)

Euro-American art history is similarly jostled – as artists Piet Mondrian and Jackson Pollock tussle nearby. "Actually, it's Monkman messing with what they represent," notes one Canadian newspaper art reviewer (Goddard), which is an art world bound and defined along European centrality, to the exclusion of other perspectives. The presence of "Indian photographer" Edward Curtis on the left side of the paintings reaffirms this. Curtis is so startled by a figure rising out of the water that he cannot concentrate on the stereotypical "Indians" he has come to this place to photograph. Rather, his attention – as well as Mondrian's and Pollock's – has been interrupted and seized by none other than Miss Chief Eagle Testickle, a brilliantly glammed-up, drag representation of Monkman himself on canvas.

Miss Chief's presence is a constant theme in many of Monkman's paintings and work in other media as well. By interjecting a prosopopoeiac stand-in – a queer, indigenous body in drag – into otherwise conventionally arranged European landscapes, Monkman disrupts the “vanishing Indian” myth which such scenes have historically supported and perpetuated, in tandem with imperialist texts; what's more, Miss Chief's obvious queerness disrupts the legacy of colonial heteronormativity, revaluing pre-contact sexualities and understandings of gender among the Americas' ethnically diverse nations, which in many cases originally included the concept of the Two-Spirit. As Kerry Swanson notes:

The concept of Two-Spiritness is not centred on the physical act of sex; it is the European worldview which essentializes sexuality in physiological terms. Historically, many tribes gave credence to the existence of what ethnographer Sue-Ellen Jacobs calls "the third gender," which is as much a spiritual as it is a physical state of being. [...]

Monkman refers to these traditions, and his alter-ego is likewise androgynous. (Swanson 3)

Intriguingly, in depicting Miss Chief this time around, Monkman borrows the very Greco-Roman imagery that was used earlier to rewrite Western stories onto indigenous spaces. The positioning/display of Miss Chief's scantily clad physique, and the waving gold curls of her hair are a clear reference to Boticelli's *Birth of Venus*, an iconic image revered by nineteenth-century Europeans as embodying the essence of classic female beauty. By reconfiguring himself in this form and allowing *her* to communicate with

viewers in his stead, Monkman is imbuing queer, indigenous bodies with the same erotic appeal and, even more importantly, power as the Europeans' traditional goddess of love. This a radical departure from the gender binaries inherent to Western thought, and marks another significant visual move toward decolonization – both of spaces and of bodies.¹⁰

In the recent essay “Two-Spirit Activism: Mending the Sacred Hoop,” Richard LaFortune lauds the “rekindling of pride and the exercise of ancestral domain, following centuries of imposed violence and poverty” due to European colonization, and points out that Two-Spirit activists have played a vibrant role in the process: “we are revitalizing sacred teachings, rebuilding communities and networks through our languages, through our ceremonies, and by working shoulder to shoulder within our communities” (46). By consciously toying with the visual commonplaces of American landscape paintings, Monkman has eked out his own participatory role in healing indigenous communities, while at the same time challenging the pervasive strategies of surveillance, aestheticization, negation, and appropriation which discursively justify and perpetuate colonization – both historically and within the present day. His bold, playful reversals of these representational strategies hold special power, particularly when compared with a sea of dominant-culture emulations which fail to question the ideological underpinnings of the aesthetic they aspire to reproduce and thus re-encode. By contrast, images such as *Trappers of Men* simultaneously break down the topoi historically encoded within

¹⁰ It also combats a more recent swell of ideological conflation of queer bodies with monstrosity and terrorism in post-9/11 discourse, a rhetorical development which conveniently obscures and erases the terrorizing force initially used by whites in order to establish and advance the hegemony of “settler sexuality” among Native peoples (Elston 58-59, Morgensen 105).

Hudson River and later landscape paintings (the land is empty; the land is ours, etc.), allowing Monkman to create a bold artistic space in which indigenous presence and survivance assert their own visual claims.

CHAPTER III
THE DYING GAUL DONS REDFACE:
DOOMED INDIANS IN THE “GOLDEN ERA” OF PUBLIC SCULPTURE
AND THE ETHNOGRAPHIC SPECIMEN

The qualities that make a ‘good’ tragic hero are precisely those required of the sacrificial victim. ... The spectator may shudder with ‘pity and fear,’ but he must also feel a deep sense of gratitude for his own orderly and relatively secure existence.

-- Rene Girard, *Violence and the Sacred* (291)

The persistent visions that Kent Monkman works to dismantle spring from early Americans’ tendency to conflate nationalist sentiments and the European Renaissance values that informed the rise of eighteenth-century neoclassicism. “Classical antiquity haunted the Federal imagination,” Wendell Garrett writes, noting that “leaders liked to ‘look back with reverence’ to classical antiquity as they sculpted their heroes in togas, named new communities Athens and Sparta, Ithaca and Troy ... and built Greek temples for their banks, schools, and homes” (10). In the previous chapter, I discussed how neoclassicism on landscape canvases likely functioned before white audiences as a sort of civic prophecy, imposing an additional layer of Eurocentric expectations upon indigenous homelands within the colonial imagination. These forecasts frequently took on even sturdier and grander material form; early American architecture, with its

columned public buildings hewn from stone, also served to express the collective white desire to emulate ancient Greece and Rome on North American soil. Depictions of the people who inhabited these lands were also frequently hewn in stone. American sculptors – many of whom trained in Italy or France, in an attempt to form themselves upon European predecessors – turned to the Native body as a contemporaneous stand-in for historically and mythologically based “Others.” As a result, indigenous subjects’ actual lived experiences were frequently subsumed by both classical and contemporary stereotypes.

If Native peoples were frequently depicted as monstrous, ill-fated, and dying, numerous artists imbued Greco-Roman images, by contrast, with an extra dose of staying power despite their clearly distant historicity, repeating images from antiquity over and over and over throughout centuries of art as if – unlike pictures of natives – they still bore heavy modern relevance. Scholars such as Malcolm Bull and Joseph Kestner have noted that Greco-Roman figures loomed large in European pictorial discourse as a way of historically legitimizing European superiority and traditions, while at the same time serving as commonplaces which could “accommodate their particular circumstances. Classical-subject painters modeled the myth to suit the contemporary situation” (Kestner 330). Similarly, scientific writers and journalists communicated in mythological allusion when writing to popular audiences. (In one example mentioned by Kestner, W. T. Stead compared the nineteenth-century flesh trade to a “minotaur” which devoured London’s young women as “maiden tributes.”) In his work on intertextuality, Frank J. D’Angelo discusses such rhetorical gestures as “appropriations” of the original

source material – here used in a different sense than Spurr’s appropriations of land, albeit a related one, as it involves seizure of material and unauthorized redirection toward new rhetorical purposes (36). Yet they also involve a degree of adaptation, or movement between genre and media, which bestows upon the resulting artifacts new potential dimensions affecting audiences’ experiences and understanding. Citing Linda Hutcheon, D’Angelo writes: “[S]ome media are better than others at ‘telling’ things. Some media can ‘show’ things better than others. And some media are better at ‘interacting’”(34). Indeed, a painting or sculpture adds new visual detail, as well as additional layers of audience participation to a previously written or spoken tale. Certainly, ideologies are represented within and reflected by such artifacts; however, they are also reframed – either subtly or broadly – by new sensory data peculiar to the medium itself, as well as the broader cultural context within which the artifact is encountered. As Marita Sturken and Lisa Cartwright suggest, “[l]ooking is rarely performed in total isolation from the activities of listening and feeling” (93). Rather, they contend, spectatorship is interactive, multimodal and relational – as well as imminently rhetorical.

In this chapter, I discuss how the inhabitants of North America’s “emptying” frontier landscapes were portrayed to white spectators. In the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, American visual culture doomed the Native – either by recasting him as the tragic hero of classical sculpture or the endangered species of a more modern genre: the scientific exhibition, with its myriad examples of primitive, exoticized, and in some cases disease-prone red bodies. The multiple proofs (*pisteis*) attached to this

combination in the white imaginary elevated the earlier general belief that Natives were fated to disappear to the status of reputable belief, or *endoxa*. Where the pathos of Greek tragedy might have moved modern audiences but failed to convince entirely on its own, the scientific specimen's logos – the simulation of logically deduced certainty within a widely accepted post-enlightenment epistemology – and ethos, fueled by a growing public trust in scientific expertise, reinforced a sense of the inevitable: Beset by a pathological, inborn tendency toward illness and vice, the Indian was vanishing from the picturesque Western landscapes which whites had idealized, imaginatively emptied, and appropriated.

Death and the Native

In her history of North American racism and white-Native relations, Bethany R. Berger writes that, contrary to their prevailing attitudes toward African slaves and their descendants, “European Americans were not primarily concerned with using Indian people as a source of labor, and so did not have to theorize Indians as inferior individuals to justify the unfair terms of that labor” (593). However, she notes that Native lands – idealized on canvas as the empty, inviting vistas described in the previous chapter – were a source of *resources* which whites aspired to seize (593). Hence, it became convenient to construct Native people as a population which was headed toward extinction, in order to justify white appropriation of land and erase whites’ active roles in both bodily and cultural acts of genocide. What’s more, the supposed barbarism of indigenous peoples – the reason for their impending demise – became a conveniently “flattering foil for

American society and culture,” which Euro-Americans imagined to be descended from the noble “races” of ancient Greece and Rome (Berger 593). Zia Sardar, Ashis Nandy, and Merryl Wyn Davies describe a longstanding Western "iconography of barbarism" out of which Europeans invented Indians and other non-Western peoples (44). Long before Columbus, medieval Christians had developed a taxonomy of monstrous races, one which Columbus and his successors readily appropriated in their descriptions of Indians. Sardar et al. write, "What they lacked were the characteristics of the society of Europe. What they *possessed* was never the concern of their European observers" (48, emphasis mine).

Religion continued to underscore attempts to link indigeneity with death. From the early years of European incursion into New England, Natives were regarded eschatologically as devils to be driven out of the new Promised Land. “To observant Puritans,” as Kristina Bross writes, “the death of an Indian was always a sign from God” (325). The eighteenth century saw a sharp spike in the popularity of Indian criminal and execution narratives, which were often defined by limited collaboration within the nexus of colonial power asymmetries. Many were execution sermons, in which the voices of the condemned were represented marginally, if at all. For example, Salem minister Joshua Spalding published copies of a sermon on repentance that he delivered before the execution of Isaac Coombs at what he called the “repeated request” of the condemned (5). Even those purporting to reflect the voices of executed criminals, Jodi Schorb notes, contained a plethora of omissions due to broken translation, “textual blank spaces [which] function like the dead letters of the contact zone” (153). In addition to the heavy

cultural filtering of such texts, their nostalgic emphasis on *dying* Natives both romanticized and reaffirmed colonial “progress,” including the eradication and erasure of indigenous populations in newly claimed spaces. Later, culturally approved forms of "Indian" narrative, such as conversion accounts, did not involve physical death outright, but frequently emphasized transformation according to Anglo-European values: a goal which found its utmost expression in the Carlisle boarding school philosophy of "kill the Indian, and save the man."¹¹

In the nineteenth century, with the advent of illustrated periodicals and a burgeoning North American art movement, the resulting widespread *endoxon* among whites— that Indians were a primitive race and therefore destined for extinction – took illustrative shape on canvas, sculptors’ block, and printed page, advancing colonial argumentations about land management and Indian relations. All betrayed a general sense among whites that the Indian's time was dwindling, which William Truettner attributes to ideological shifts away from Noble Savagery (which implied the capacity for assimilation or cultural "improvement") and toward a more static – and supposedly scientifically validated – ethnography of Native peoples as frozen in time and thus doomed (63). He calls the resulting ideological construct – driven by European and white American naturalists and zoologists – the "Republican Indian," a figure who cannot overcome his innately primitive physiognomy. Under this new understanding, Truettner writes,

¹¹ In a paper read in 1892 before a conference on charities in correction in Denver, Colorado, educator and boarding-school founder Richard C. Pratt invoked a widely known apocryphal quote (attributed to Gen. Philip Henry Sheridan) to argue that genocide was permissible in a cultural sense, if not a physical one: "A great general has said that the only good Indian is a dead one, and that high sanction of his destruction has been an enormous factor in promoting Indian massacres. In a sense, I agree with the sentiment, but only in this: that all the Indian there is in the race should be dead. Kill the Indian in him, and save the man" (260).

"[e]ducated, highly motivated individual Indians might still climb the [white social] ladder, but Indians as a race had fewer choices; their customs and rituals, according to many of these naturalists, were too deeply ingrained to allow them to change" (81).

Neo-Classical Natives and the Celebration of Suffering

Sculptor Hiram Powers was no stranger to his contemporaries' use of classical imagery to comment upon modern conditions – nor did he shy away from engaging in such tactics in his own medium. His 1844 sculpture *The Greek Slave*, for instance, harnesses the likenesses of Andromeda and the Medici Venus to depict a European girl's "dignity and moral fortitude" as she is sold by Ottoman slave auctioneers (Kilinski 197). The statue evoked such strong reactions on the part of its viewers that some reported "a practically religious experience" upon gazing at it (Gay, n.pag). Likewise, Powers' marble nude, *The Last of the Tribes*, conflates mythological and contemporary subjects. The life-sized sculpture depicts a young Native girl "run[ning] in alarm, looking back in terror . . . fleeing before civilization," in the artist's own words (Fig. 16) (MFAH). The statue exemplifies the false systems of representation -- what Vizenor calls *manifest manners* -- which whites frequently used to signify Native peoples and cultures. Upon closer examination, the fleeing girl is not an indigenous person, but a pan-Indian signifier with no contemporaneous or historical referent. Her body and features were modeled upon those of an Italian woman while Powers was in Florence. The "Indian" skirt she wears is not based upon any tribe's regalia or clothing, but rather was created as an amalgamation, a tasseled figment of Powers' colonial imagination. Only the shoes on

her feet are modeled from an actual tribally produced artifact, albeit one which had been decontextualized: a pair of moccasins Powers had acquired in Ohio and added to his studio collection (MFAH).



Figure 16. Powers, Hiram. *The Last of the Tribes*. 1876-1877. Marble. MFAH, Houston.

Critics and scholars point to *The Last of the Tribes'* neoclassicism; indeed, its aesthetic hearkens to the female nudes of Athens and Rome, as well as the gynophobia

of contemporary neoclassical images on canvas. John S. Haller and Robyn M. Haller note the parallel nineteenth-century construction of both women and "the more primitive races" as dependent [upon white men] and childish – a construction often underscored by subjects depicted a state of physical undress, coupled with vulnerability (73).

Such representational strategies appear in a number of nineteenth-century images of Andromeda ("the locus classicus of the enchained female," in Kestner's words) disrobed, chained to a rock and awaiting rescue by a male hero (Kestner 6). They are also echoed in the Orientalized images of non-Western women painted by Jean-Léon Gérôme and his numerous European and North American followers, during the same periods in which Powers was active. It should be noted that, like many nineteenth-century artists, many of Gérôme's depictions of ancient narratives frequently utilize the disrobed female form to underscore the psychological or erotic facets of the story (Weinberg 12). In addition, by emphasizing women's nudity at moments of male mastery (*The End of the Séance*, 1887; *The Artist and his Model*, 1895), oftentimes using Orientalized settings or dress, even within classicist images (*The Dance of Almeh*, 1863; *The Slave Market*, 1867; *A Roman Slave Market*, 1884), much of Gérôme's work reinforces contemporary discursive strategies which simultaneously exoticize both female and non-Western bodies and suppress their power – in effect, colonizing them on behalf of the (assumed) European male viewer. This model of visual colonization was easily then transferred to other Others; in fact, a number of Gérôme's North American students went on to apply the same aesthetic treatments to Native peoples, whom they viewed as analogous to his Oriental subjects:

[American artist George DeForest] Brush found his own ‘semi-barbaric’ subjects in American Indian tribes, with whom he lived in the early 1880s, and in Canadian tribes, whom he observed between 1886 and 1888. They offered him *raw material analogous to the North African types whom Gérôme had studied in their exoticism* and their potential for dramatic compositions.

(Weinberg 66, emphasis mine)

Drawing from Foucault, Spurr describes this type of fetishistic behavior as the collision of imperial and phallogocentric discourses, one which “represents the colonized world as the feminine and which assigns to subject nations those qualities conventionally assigned to the female body [by Westerners]” (170). And indeed, the fleeing adolescent girl in Powers’ sculpture functions as a synecdochal representative for colonized indigenous nations – or perhaps nations Americans still *hoped* to colonize, as the nineteenth century waned.

However, her terror in the face of apparent extinction also hearkens to another longstanding Western rhetorical tradition: apotheosizing the pain of a vanquished foe. The Laocoön sculptural grouping which fascinated Lessing and so many others, for example, was found in Rome in 1506 in the ruins of Titus’ palace. It depicts an event in Vergil’s *Aeneid* in which the Trojan priest Laocoön and sons are strangled by monstrous sea snakes which have been deployed by gods who favor the Greeks. Artists have continued to depict it throughout most of Western art history, regardless of whether death by sea snakes or punishment by wrathful gods remained a literal concern (Fig. 17).

The violence of the Laocoön grouping is equally striking and unsettling – yet it has long been praised by European academicians for its elegance and beauty of form, even as it apotheosizes human pain. In his famous eighteenth-century essay on the Laocoön,



Figure 17. *Laocoön and his Sons*. c. 25 b.c., marble, Vatican Museums, Vatican City.

Lessing praises the depiction of bodily agony in mythology, as well as its subsequent graphic celebration via the visual arts: “Though Homer, in other respects, raises his

heroes above human nature, they always remain faithful to it in matters connected with the feeling of pain and insult, or its expression through cries, tears, or reproaches. In their actions, they are beings of a higher order, in their feelings true men” (4). While art critics have only recently begun to trouble the notion of classical ideals – over the past century or so -- writing in 2011, Maria H. Loh remarks on the *Laocoön*’s enduring psychological affect before Western audiences, noting that the adjective *mirabile* was frequently used to describe the chisled grouping shortly after its discovery in the early sixteenth century: “There is no doubt that contemporary spectators came to see the *Laocoön* as a beautiful monument. [...] The corporeal and expressive hyperbole of the figures, however, was somewhat of a jolt,” she writes, concluding that “its beauty was borne of pain” (399). She declares the power to emotionally move spectators “the heart of horror,” and pleasurable for *rhetors* – be they artists, painters, filmmakers or poets – even if that pleasure comes at the cost of inflicting trauma upon one’s intended audience (414). Rhetorical sadism then, it would seem, is still celebrated by Western art critics, centuries after the spectre of the screaming, pain-wracked marble torsos was unearthed in Rome.

In another well-known example, *The Dying Niobid*, a Doric nude carved in roughly 440 B.C.E., freezes the body of one of Niobe's children in her last moments after being pierced by one of Artemis's arrows -- a fitting punishment in Greco-Roman mythology for mortals who attempted to position themselves above gods (Fig. 18). Like Powers' *Last of the Tribes*, her body is sexualized as she attempts to flee her inevitable fate. H.W. Janson observes that “[t]he violent movement of her arms has made her

garment slip off; her nudity is thus a dramatic device, rather than a necessary part of the story. The artist's primary motive in devising it [...] *was to display a beautiful female body* in the kind of strenuous action hither to reserved for the male nude."

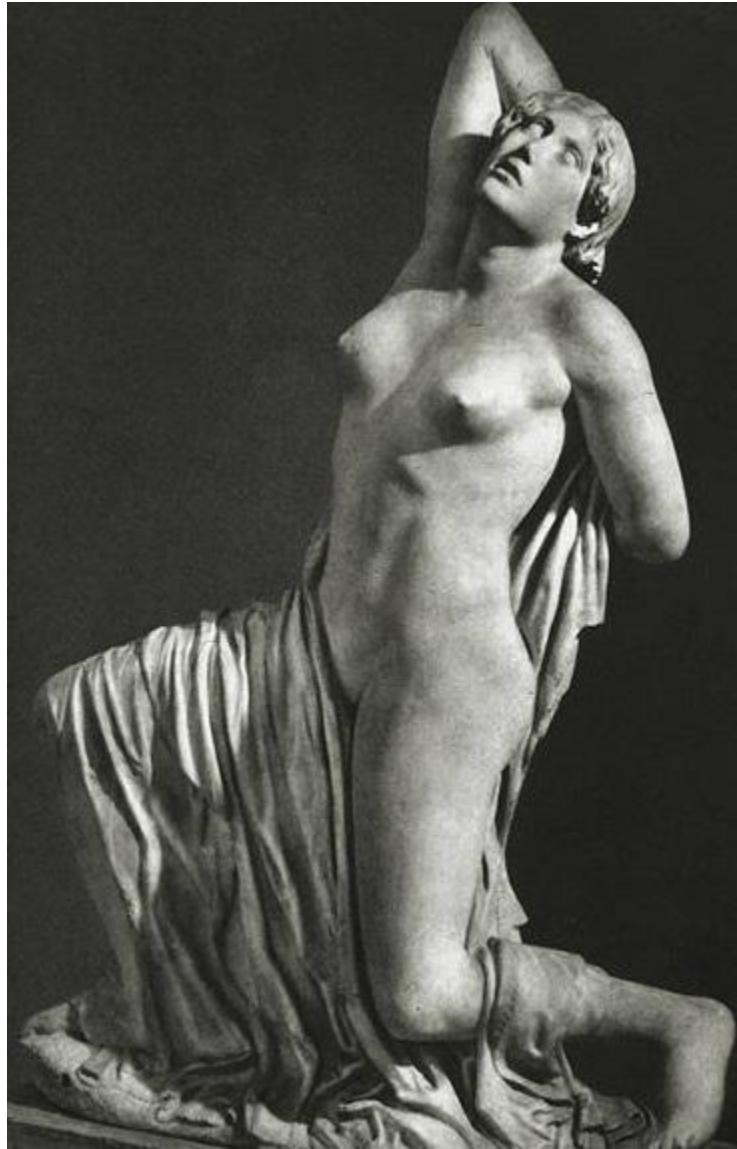


Figure 18. *Dying Niobid*. c. 450-440 b.c., Marble,. Museo delle Terme, Rome.

He then praises the sculptor's exquisite sense of *pathos* (and hence sidesteps discussion of sadism or the function of female nudity under the patriarchal gaze) (105).

The suffering of real-life adversaries was celebrated with equally painstaking voyeurism: "The Dying Gaul," a 230-220 B.C.E. copy of a Greek statue commemorating the defeat of invading Gauls (Celts) several centuries earlier, is one of the most renowned works from antiquity, and has been enthusiastically copied by generations of Western artists over the millennia (Fig. 19). Its title subject strains to lift his unclothed torso in the absence of any remaining lower-body strength, blood seeping from his fatal wounds.



Figure 19. *The Dying Gaul*. Roman copy after a bronze original, c. 230-220 b.c. from Pergamum. Marble. Museo delle Terme, Rome.

Writing centuries later, Janson interprets its message: "They knew how to die, barbarians though they were" – a statement which captures the imperialist nostalgia

frequently directed at populations deemed “subjugated” by the West, both in the past and present (118). Renato Rosaldo describes these sorts of popular sentiments as a “paradox” in which “[a] person kills somebody, and then mourns the victim” (69). Literal death does not have to occur, in Rosaldo’s model, in order for imperialist nostalgia to take hold. Cultural eradication also is capable of prompting superficial grief among members of the conquering nation: “In a more attenuated form, someone deliberately alters a form of life, and then regrets that things have not remained as they were prior to the intervention” (69-70). Gordon M. Sayre notes the nostalgia directed at America’s Native inhabitants by the 1800s after waves of invasion, colonization, and war had taken their toll on indigenous populations:

Colonizers recognized, at some semiconscious level, their responsibility for these deaths but summoned up complex responses to assuage or dismiss this responsibility. Perhaps the most pervasive was a sense of precious melancholy about the death of the Indians. In the first half of the nineteenth century, expressions of melancholic grief for the “vanishing Indian” became so commonplace, such a hackneyed trope of public discourse, that it is impossible to quote a single canonical statement of it. (4)

Because his primary area of focus is literature, Sayre’s work documents the spike in popularity that Indian-themed dramas saw in the nineteenth century. These productions treated Native characters as tragic heroes, and relied on both Aristotelian tragedy and contemporaneous melodrama for their emotional power (8). Yet sculpture – for all the

medium's static-seeming nature – was also used to construct colonial (hi)stories on grander stages, at times.

The Narrative Work of Monuments at World's Fairs

1905's Lewis and Clark Centennial and American Pacific Exposition and Oriental Fair in Portland, Oregon, was a celebration of empire. And nowhere was this in greater evidence than its statues and demonstrations featuring Natives – either carved in stone or paid as living re-enactors of a supposedly primitive set of lifeways. Alice Cooper's famed monument to Sacagawea debuted at this event, "connect[ing] the conquest of Indians and western lands in the nineteenth century with future U.S. commercial expansion" alongside a plethora of additional Indian-themed statuary (Blee 233). Lisa Blee writes that white observers were bombarded with "incongruous" messages about Natives via these exhibits, which portrayed indigenous peoples as "either doomed by their adherence to traditional lifeways or as a hopeless race in need of assimilation into white ways of life" (232). Yet upon further examination, such attitudes are not so much incongruous as they are dovetailing strands of a larger colonial discourse which at once blurred the distinctions between the Americas' indigenous nations while drawing *firm* distinctions between Natives and whites – distinctions which always found the Native side of the dichotomy to be lacking.

The U.S. Office of Indian Affairs (later the Bureau of Indian Affairs [BIA]), after all, had been in operation since 1824, beginning tellingly as part of the War Department before making the move to the Department of the Interior. Its mission was assimilation,

as numerous internal and external agency documents attest. Yet bureau accounts frequently characterized Native populations as irredeemably self-destructive, even as they emphasized the need for tribal “improvement” via adoption of settler-colonial familial, civic, and economic structures. In a report to Congress on December 1, 1859, for instance, U.S. Secretary of the Interior Jacob Thompson (later Inspector General for the Confederate States Army) noted that some nations – albeit few – were adopting the trappings of white civilization while simultaneously increasing in number. However:

It is equally well-known that many of the tribes, the great majority, in fact, despite the liberality and fatherly protection of the [U.S.] government, the energy and fidelity of their agents, and the disinterested efforts and personal sacrifices of devoted missionaries, are rapidly on the decline. In these the contact with civilization excites no new life, awakens no new energy, and seems but to pave the way for debauchery, demoralization, and ruin. ... [T]here is but little ground for the hope of averting their utter extinction. (4)

By the time of the 1905 World’s Fair, not much had changed – either in BIA literature or the public eye. A 1902 report penned by the Commissioner of Indian Affairs opened with the spectre of starving Sioux¹², saved from untimely death by federal rations. The food supply was given with the understanding that the Rosebud Sioux were to become, in turn, “civilized” at long last. Commissioner William A. Jones wrote that “[t]hey were to settle down permanently; their children were to be educated; they were to live like

¹² In keeping with current tribal naming practices, I will refer to the subjects of Jones’s missive hereafter as the Rosebud Sioux. They are also known as the Sicangu Lakota.

white men, and the rations issued to them ... were to be continued until ‘the Indians are able to support themselves’” [4]. In both the 1859 and 1902 documents, Native survival was explicitly tied to adoption of white cultural practices. Tribes who assimilated reportedly increased in number; tribes who refused or resisted – “Blanket Indians,” in Thompson’s parlance – were said to be dwindling (although Thompson claimed that an actual census to verify and quantify his observations was impossible to conduct) (4). In the case of Jones’s report, whites were not only the Rosebud Sioux’s sole source for the fruits of civilization and advancement, but also, for literal physical sustenance itself (in the form of beef, bacon, flour, corn, coffee, sugar, and beans) (3). Yet Jones aspired to reduce the rations to the Rosebud Sioux and other populations -- which he considered to be “degrading” handouts -- in the long run, substituting white lifeways as a means of continuance. Quoting an unnamed agent, Jones suggested that “the best lesson an able-bodied Indian can have is to convince him that he must work or starve” (10). This “work,” of course, was tied to practices which erased numerous traditional social structures and occupations: individually owned property in lieu of collective holdings, capitalistic labor practices (under white bosses, whenever possible) for wage earnings, and financial support of one’s discrete nuclear family – consisting of a heteronormative male-female pair and offspring – as opposed to extended family or kinship networks. Thus Jones’ argument concerning “work,” below the surface, was one of redefinition, even as he sought to redefine Natives’ sense of identity, both individually and corporately, in American nationalistic terms: “Hereafter, [the Rosebud Sioux] will no longer be a ward; to all intents and purposes he will become a citizen” (12).

Furthermore, while Jones's report rejected the "cold brutality" of the truism that the only good Indian was a dead Indian, Jones still saw tribes' *cultural* death as an inescapable fate. Hence, white "friends to the Indian," he wrote, "*recognizing his inevitable absorption by a stronger race*, are endeavoring in a practical way to fit him under new conditions for the struggle of life" (15, emphasis mine).

It was against the ideological backdrop of this ambitious program (as well as the recent memory of Indian wars that had concluded just decades earlier) that visitors flocked to the 1905 exhibition in Portland, where sculptures of Natives being absorbed by white culture – or, alternately, extinguished by it – abounded, visually reinforcing the assimilationist agenda. Notably, Solon Hannibal Borglum (whose brother Gutzon carved the Mount Rushmore National Memorial) displayed a series of sculpture groupings in prominent locations around the fairgrounds, intending them as illustrations of the march of white "progress" in Indian Country. *Sioux Indian Buffalo Dance* (also exhibited in other venues as *The Buffalo Dance*) depicts a traditional ceremony which Borglum had reportedly witnessed alongside his wife at a reservation in Crow Creek, South Dakota (McGarry 46). While at first glance, the grouping of figures (a medicine man, a drumming elder, and a young hunter) is a nostalgic ode to indigenous spiritual and hunting practices, the story that it tells hinges upon the decimation of the buffalo – a frequent metonymic stand-in for Natives themselves. According to Borglum, the ceremony was a prayer to the Creator to repopulate the prairie with buffalo in the wake of their loss. The men of the reservation had reportedly reenacted the hunt as the women had provided sound effects, such as the whinnies of horses (Davies 71).

If *Buffalo Dance* mourned for a disappearing Native past, the grouping of figures *First Steps to Civilization* attempted to map out a possible future for indigenous people who wished to survive displacement and disease, as well as the fate of those who did not adopt white lifeways (Fig. 20). Tropes abounded in this piece, from the metonymic association of the book with Western learning (shown clutched in a warrior's arm as he points the way "forward" for a younger boy) and machine-woven textiles with Euro-American industry and culture (shown draped over the warrior's torso) to the synecdochal defeat of the slumped, buffalo-skin-clad traditionalist who malingered with a staff at their backs – a clear representative stand-in for unassimilated Natives facing similar cultural and physical extinction.

At this point in history, the depiction of a dying Native simultaneously commemorated and mourned earlier acts of physical genocide, much in the tradition of *The Dying Gaul*. Yet at the same time, it also functioned as a metaphor for the broader process of colonization, which, if assimilationist policies were followed, resulted in a figurative death (i.e., the Carlislean "killing of the Indian") rather than a literal one. This dimension of meaning served an additional, complex purpose in the colonial imaginary, as it erased literal deaths by recasting their mimetic depiction as something less palpably violent. As time went on and memories of settlement faded, each successive Euro-American spectators could read such images as a mournful, yet somehow merely figurative representation of an overall cultural process, instead of as a visual reproduction of actual lived events – *horrific* events experienced over and over during frontier settlement by millions of indigenous people.



Figure 20. Borglum, Solon Hannibal. *First Steps to Civilization*. 1905. Plaster and straw, non-extant. (OHS neg., OrHi 28248, Oregon Historical Society Research Library.)

Ann Kaplan has done recent work which gestures toward the important role of institutional forces in managing and directing our reactions to trauma via visual rhetorics. Using a far more recent example – the terrorist attacks of 9/11 – she discusses how audiences can experience vicarious trauma, as well as pro-social responses, such as a desire to fight injustice, fueled by empathy (122). Yet when empathy with the victims of a traumatic event would threaten those institutional power structures, the representational management of events involving displacement, removal, rape, death, and other forms of loss is often starkly different. Borglum’s sculptures were not simply

works he initiated of his own volition; they were commissioned and the theme assigned to him by world's fair organizers for a previous expo in St. Louis. And a mere 10 years later, physical death still held plenty of rhetorical sway as a metaphor for colonization – hence, the artistic gesture was repeated at the 1915 World's Fair in San Francisco.

Visitors to the fair were greeted by a redisplay of some of Borglum's pieces from the St. Louis and Portland expos. Yet the entrance to the fair was overshadowed by something new: the towering form of a Native rider atop his horse, frozen in a permanent posture of defeat (and, ostensibly, on the verge of death).

Perhaps given the history of artistic display at world's fairs, it should come as no surprise that exposition organizers sought out an image which simultaneously elegized Natives while celebrating their defeat. As Rachel Plotnick observes, throughout the late 19th and early 20th centuries, world's fairs “served as powerful tools of persuasion through community engagement; these events often were designed to ‘win the hearts and minds’” of participants, advancing hegemonic and imperialistic policies through expressions of regional and national pride” (54). And this particular world's fair, officially called the Panama-Pacific International Exposition, purported to mark the 400th anniversary of the “discovery” of the continent's Pacific coast by white explorers, as well as the recent completion of the Panama Canal – a long-awaited imperial project. If other World's Fairs had feted the European settlement of the West, the Panama-Pacific expo framed it as the culmination of all imperial projects, past and present, both explicitly in promotional materials and implicitly in architectural choices for the pavilions and courts. Writing for the scholarly community, a contemporaneous academic

reviewer drew additional parallels between the American empire on proud display and those which had come before: “San Francisco, like Rome, has been built on seven hills, and it is these that form the natural background. . . . The architecture is a blending of the old and the new, an embodiment of the location and color of the best” (Parsons 312).

Despite its international billing, the San Francisco expo was intended as the fourth in a series of fairs commemorating “strategic” milestones in the continent’s history in glowing, nationalistic terms: Philadelphia, Pa., 1876, “the birth of Independence”; Chicago, Ill., 1893, “the discovery of America”; St. Louis, Mo., 1904, “the *peaceful conquest* of the West” (emphasis mine). A pamphlet distributed for purposes of “popular information” about the San Francisco fair, “this marriage festival of seas and peoples,” crowns with achievement: “Where others failed, thousands died, and nations retreated, America has fought against tides and torrents, pestilence and jungle, tropic river and rock-ribbed mountain, and won” (n. pag.).

If audiences had any doubt who the “loser” in this saga was, the juxtaposition of a dying Indian against the enduring architecture of ancient Greece and Rome provided clear – if wordless – commentary. In the Court of Palms at the expo’s entrance, the now-iconic sculpture which was ultimately viewed by almost 19 million people was an imposing, 17-foot plaster recreation of James Earle Fraser’s *The End of the Trail*, originally cast in bronze in the 1890s (Fig. 21). Today, its curators at the National Cowboy & Western Heritage Museum describe it as celebratory of Native peoples rather than funereal, marking the “transformation of proud, spiritual people into the next century,” interpretively justified by Fraser’s decisions to replace the original piece’s

buffalo shield with a medicine bag, and to display more muscled flesh, “representing the strength of the Native American” (n. pag.). Yet Fraser’s revisions only go so far: the figure remains in a defeated slump atop his mount for all his supposed strength. He is still metaphorically and synecdochally placed at the trail’s end – as the sculpture’s title indicates. His time is done. Other artifacts from the 1915 exposition reinforce this message (Figs. 22, 23).



Figure 21. Fraser, James Earle. *The End of the Trail*. Artist’s copy after a bronze original, plaster. National Cowboy & Western Heritage Museum, Oklahoma City.

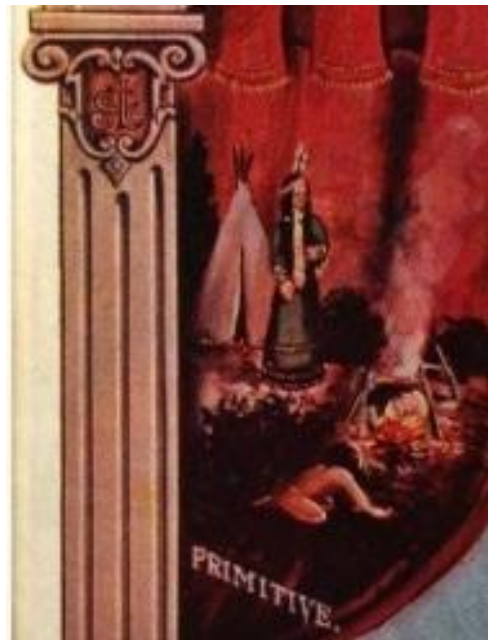


Figure 22. *World's Fair Menu and Recipe Book*, detail from left frontispiece.



Figure 23. *World's Fair Menu and Recipe Book*, detail from right frontispiece.

The frontispiece of a cookbook published to commemorate the exposition illustrates the enduring popularity of the “backward savage” notion. For expo organizers and audiences alike, Native bodies, cultures, and practices were relics of a dying past. The future, by contrast, was Euro-American, as images of white explorers, statesmen and inventors were paraded before fairgoers in multiple formats and venues.

At the close of the fair, Fraser tried several times to reclaim his plaster monument, and assumed it was lost or demolished along with most of the fair’s temporary structures. Unbeknownst to him, however, a citizen’s group from Tulare County, California, had obtained and moved the statue to a local public park, where it remained until the late 1960s. To this day, *The End of the Trail* endures as an iconic American sculpture – among the most recognizable in North American art – and one which simultaneously mourns and celebrates the image of the dying Native, to full nationalistic advantage.

“Indian Villages” and Other Live Displays

But what of the flesh-and-blood, *living* Native bodies on display at such gatherings? World’s Fairs were not merely sites of imperial celebration; they were also sites for scientific and educational demonstrations. From the dramatic recreation of “Indian Villages” at world’s fairs to Indian subject painting and photography – for which countless Native subjects posed – acts of salvage ethnography were based upon a widespread *endoxon* among whites: that Indians were a primitive race and therefore

destined for extinction.¹³ Propelled by the *pathos* of neoclassical sculptures of the “tragic” Indian, as well as the misguided *logos* of scientific determinism among evolutionists, this shared belief also simultaneously took illustrative shape on canvas, sketchbook paper, and printed page, advancing colonialist perspectives on land management and Indian relations. These images drew upon a general sense that the Indian's time was dwindling, which William Truettner attributes to ideological shifts away from Noble Savagery (which implied inner virtue, and hence the capacity for assimilation or cultural "improvement") and toward a more static ethnography of Native peoples as frozen in time and thus doomed (63).

The shift that Truettner describes is a nineteenth-century phenomenon, one which picked up steam after the American Civil War. Yet its roots lie in what Mary Louise Pratt has identified as Europeans' earlier "global classificatory project," which developed in the previous century alongside the imperial project as a means of exercising European mastery over the entire world. Starting in the second half of the eighteenth century, regardless of whether an expedition was primarily scientific, commercial, or political -- or the traveler even a scientist, "natural history played a part in it. Specimen gathering, the amassing of collections, the naming of new species, the recognition of known ones, became standard themes in travel and travel books" (Pratt 26). What's more, in establishing the boundaries of such categories, degrees of civilization could be plotted along a sliding scale, from savagery to civility -- the savage sharing the low end of the

¹³ The term “salvage ethnography” was coined in the 1960s by members of the anthropology community as a critique of ethnographic practices in the previous century, particularly those which had been based upon the belief that Natives were destined for extinction.

scale with various beasts and other non-human elements. David Spurr notes that "[w]ith the expansion of knowledge into those parts of the world which traditionally had served as places of savagery and wildness for the European imagination, [there was] a progressive despatialization of the concept of wildness" itself (77). In other words, by the nineteenth century, the savage was not as much the occupant of a specific geographic territory as he was a scientifically verified condition "of barbarism, wildness, and animality" in other human beings, one which was static and inborn. Spurr describes this notion as "species corruption" and points to animalistic descriptions of "lower-order" peoples in European and American texts from the age of exploration to the current day (76).

Hence, the use of Native bodies – and two- and three-dimensional depictions thereof – had a deeply entrenched history among white Americans' European predecessors long before the heyday of the world's fair. Furthermore, "scientific" drawings of Native bodies were popular in the aftermath of colonization and settlement, too. While George Catlin is generally thought of as an ethnographer whose work focused upon Native "manners and customs" (as the title of his most famous collection of writings indicates), he was also interested in gleaning medical knowledge from his time with Native subjects. His 1872 treatise, *The Breath of Life Or Mal-respiration: And Its Effects Upon the Enjoyments & Life of Man*, used sketches of Native bodies to illustrate for white readers a series of supposedly more "healthful" practices drawn from the author's travels. Catlin blames the bulk of early mortality amongst indigenous communities on conflict with Euro-Americans or the contraction of illnesses from

whites. He then enthuses: “Amongst two millions of these wild people whom I have visited, I never saw, or heard of a hunch-back (crooked spine) through my inquiries were made in every tribe; nor did I ever see an Idiot or Lunatic amongst them, though I heard of some three or four, during my travels, and perhaps of as many Deaf and Dumb” (12). The book was circulated among medical libraries and contained numerous illustrations (see Fig. 24). Notably, the white space around each figure visually decontextualizes it. Rather than existing within a network of communal relationships against the backdrop of a tribe or town, each Native body is sketched as an isolated visual specimen for the (assumed white) viewer to study alongside its European counterparts for comparison. I write this not to suggest a conscious insidiousness on the part of Catlin, but rather to illustrate some of the effects of this representational omission. The decontextualized use of a single figure as a synecdochal stand-in for “All Savage infants among the various Native Tribes of America” flattens differences among tribes and childrearing techniques across an array of peoples (44). Furthermore, both the text’s and illustrations’ focus on the cradleboard as medical equipment erases its complex cultural function, as well as the networked knowledges involved with the crafting of one.

Among Westernized peoples, Alan Gross has described the rhetoric of science itself as “a coherent network of utterances that has also achieved consensus among practitioners” (203). It is also created by a coherent network of images – some of which have been drawn, others of which were created with actual living human bodies.

All Savage infants amongst the various native Tribes of America, are reared in cribs (or cradles) with the back lashed



to a straight board; and by the aid of a circular, concave cushion placed under the head, the head is bowed a little forward when they sleep, which prevents the mouth from falling open; thus establishing the early habit of breathing through the nostrils. The results of this habit are, that Indian adults invariably walk erect and straight, have healthy spines, and sleep



Figure 24. Detail from a page of George Catlin's book *The Breath of Life Or Mal-Respiration: And Its Effects Upon the Enjoyments & Life of Man*, including illustrations.

At the World's Columbian Exposition in Chicago, an 1893 fair commemorating the quadricentennial anniversary of Columbus's arrival in the Western Hemisphere, Kwakiutl, Inuit, and Iroquois performers were among those employed to illustrate human progress from its more "primitive" stages to the modern era. Amidst the numerous technological and modern agricultural exhibits aplenty, fair organizers plotted a number of "village" encampments in which Natives were paid to live on display. Their bodies functioned, in Melissa Rinehart's words, as "trophies of scientific racism," particularly when "juxtaposed against the formidable white neoclassical architecture of the massive buildings on the fairgrounds" (405). One such display was dubbed the "Outdoors Living" exhibit (since the traditional structures of various tribes did not count as "indoor" spaces for white viewers) – yet was, in fact, the product of white anthropological fantasies about a static pre-contact past. Featuring representatives of at least 17 tribes, the exhibit was split into "villages," some of which had to be constructed at anthropologists' direction since the Native performers themselves had no memory of the architecture or culturally appropriate (read: unassimilated) clothing which their employers desired (409). The voyeurism and derision directed at Native lifeways reduced the technologies demonstrated for fairgoers, such as traditional weaving, to primitive spectacle (while elsewhere on the fairgrounds, Euro-American technologies designed to accomplish similar tasks were celebrated as "advancements"). Furthermore, participating in such displays took its toll on Natives' bodies themselves: conditions at the Eskimo Village were so intolerable that a number of Inuit families ended up leaving the exhibit after being underfed, kept in unsanitary conditions, and forced to wear

“authentic” fur and animal-skin clothing for nine hours at a time, regardless of heatstroke risk. Over the duration of the fair, a number of participants fell ill under these circumstances, including two infants who died (Rinehart 415-416).

Similar dress-code and behavioral restrictions were placed on Native performers at other fairs as well (Fowler and Parezo 100). At the 1904 Louisiana Purchase Exposition, organizers constructed a “Reservation” comprised of “anthropology” and “tribal” villages (the latter of which had been ranked and arranged along an expert’s hypothesized evolutionary timeline). While the exhibits had been conceived as discrete units, Fowler and Parezo note that visitors “experienced them as one,” a seamless visual experience which flattened the distinctions between individual tribes, as well as the distinction between the scientific field and its purported specimens (103). At the 1905 fair in Portland, a number of Northwestern tribes were also represented – and somewhat conflated – in a section of the fairgrounds also dubbed the “Indian Village.” There, spectators could observe Nez Perce dancing, regional artisans selling wares, and Umatilla Indians who were placed within the crowd to mingle and converse with tourists.

The anthropological messages conveyed by such displays dovetailed with the civic messages of other exhibits elsewhere at the fair, where Native bodies also served as props for more explicit colonial storying. In the U.S. Government building in Portland, for example, various North American indigenes were displayed alongside Filipinos as examples of peoples who could not rule themselves effectively and needed the benevolent paternalism of colonial intervention. Superintendent Edwin L. Chalcraft of

the residential Chemawa Indian School was put in charge of organizing the fair's Indian Exhibit. While the exhibit did not feature live demonstrations such as those which had thrilled Chicago fairgoers, it nevertheless juxtaposed pre-contact objects with industrialized ones – material evidence of “progress” toward white assimilation (Blee 240-241). Over and over, these displays reinforced the message of statues like *First Steps Toward Civilization*. While the Euro-American scientific advancements on display elsewhere trumpeted the successes of Western civilization, Native cultural practices, such as dancing and weaving, were cast as the foil for these achievements. In this mode of seeing, indigenous lifeways and objects became primitive relics; metonymically speaking, by virtue of their association with these objects, so were unassimilated Natives themselves.¹⁴

Rinehart notes that after the Chicago World's Fair, Native performers, agents, and merchants began to leverage their popularity in order to secure contracts and conduct other economic transactions, as well as exert a measure of control over their self-representation in the popular *nomos* – a universe of shared meaning which they shared with whites (426). Her view is that “Indian performers were not hapless victims of exploitative working conditions but, instead, creative resisters of the status quo” at the Chicago exposition (Rinehart 405). Indeed, as Rinehart demonstrates quite convincingly, World's Fairs did serve as sites of resistance for indigenous performers who refused to

¹⁴ This observation carries with it a certain sense of irony, as fair organizers carefully choreographed Indian exhibits in order to visually emulate a *lack* of assimilation among performers (and hence, in their white audiences' minds, “authenticity”). For a more nuanced discussion of the problematic nature of cultural authenticity, which he calls a “contingent fiction,” please see James Clifford's *The Predicament of Culture*, referenced in the final bibliography.

simulate “Indianness” for crowds by dressing as whites expected/directed them to, or who circumvented prescribed dances and performances in order to resurrect prohibited rituals. Nevertheless, attempts at exploitation – at converting diverse indigenous bodies to performative props, animated signifiers of colonial order in an embodied discourse which *still* hinged upon surveillance – persisted in such settings. Furthermore, audiences of such exhibits do not come to them as “blank slates,” as Joanna S. Ploeger has shown (144). Rather, they are sites of negotiation, upon which viewers construct their own meanings.

Within the broader context of colonial ideology, even powerful acts of resistance in fair settings were often misinterpreted or resisted themselves by white audience members. Among the inhabitants of the Indian Village at the St. Louis fair, Lakota performers who sang unauthorized songs as acts of subversion were still frequently stereotyped by the American press (Fowler and Parezo 132-133). Earlier in Portland, a group of white passersby had fled in terror from the sight of a disgusted Native exhibit assistant throwing out a set of “Indian” wigs, mistakenly thinking them to be scalps (Rinehart 403).

Native Illness and Death as Embodied Spectacle

Living subjects were, arguably, not the only means of visual persuasion at anthropologists’ disposal. After several centuries of colonial incursion and appropriation, the Euro-American scientific community had amassed a number of Native “artifacts,” including body parts and corpses. Christina Normore has demonstrated the rhetorical

power of inventories as they relate to objects and collections; however, the persuasive power of objects themselves, particularly within discourse communities where “hard” evidence of a hypothesis or position is prized (such as Western scientific circles), is hard to overstate. While the seizure and retention of Native bodies, even after death, stands as an ongoing desecration and affront to many indigenous communities, to evolutionists and ethnographers, human remains could be wielded as the visual and material evidence of extinction, a physical signifier with considerably more epistemic thrust. Furthermore, the sheer physical presence of an object – as opposed to two-dimensional Barthesian reflection (the photographic “certificate of presence”) or an indexical linguistic sign – aids the rhetor in filling his or her audience’s “field of consciousness” more completely (Hill and Helmer 29).

Put more simply, it was one thing to “know” Indians were fated to die out via acceptance of a common colonial endoxon; it was another to experience the emotional pull of a tragic sculpture like *Last of the Tribes*, to feel a pang of sympathy for the dying savages synecdochally represented by the single frightened girl. And yet, it was still *quite* another to see desiccated bodies, such as the remains displayed at the Cliff Dwellers Exhibit and other buildings in Chicago, to stand and gawk in the presence of the physical artifact of death itself.

Even recent illnesses and deaths were considered exhibition opportunities. When tragedy befell the Inuit inhabitants of 1893’s Eskimo Village, exhibit manager P.M. Daniels, the president of the Arctic World’s Columbian Exposition Company, did what he could to maintain – and even increase – the display’s profitability. In the wake of a

15-year-old boy's drowning death in the village lagoon, he cobbled together a funeral service that combined Inuit customs with Christian burial rites, claiming it was "traditional," and charged white fairgoers an admission fee to attend. Sick and weakened Native bodies were also of interest to spectators: Earlier, when the Inuit families featured at the village were suffering a measles outbreak, a white reporter had asked if they would be amenable to displaying their ill kin to the crowd for an additional charge as a sideshow novelty, so that fairgoers could observe what an Indian with measles looked like (Rinehart 415-417).

The Rhetorical Legacy of the Native Specimen

Aristotelian categorizations of proofs (*pisteis*) have traditionally divided them into inartistic (atechnic) and artistic (entechnic). Yet in the case of the Native on contrived display – whether living or otherwise – these categories break down. The specimenized Indian is at once an external, concrete object and an artistically crafted fiction. He is at once applied and invented. Gerald Vizenor teases at this paradox when he writes of the "ontic image":

The *indian*, of course, has no real referent, no actual native ancestors. The simulation of that name is a colonial enactment. The *indian* is the absence of natives. ... Native identities likewise bear the traces of renunciation and absence of connections to traditions, the racialist *indian* suits, documents of mediation, and the tricky cues of dominance in the occidental theaters of tragic victimry.

(164)

Vizenor writes of the Baudrillardian inversion that occurs when modern-day observers view an ethnographic image – such as the photographs of Edward Curtis, which were carefully costumed and positioned to simulate “Indianness” – and then redefine that image as the *real* (193). Yet Native bodies which have been anthropologically specimenized, whether in a choreographed rehearsal of “Indian life” at a world’s fair, or within a decontextualized museum display of remains, produce a similar ontological inversion for spectators. The result, over time, has been a scientifically validated substitution, a *topos* which relies just as heavily upon (re)definition as it does upon commonly shared notions of the past, present, and future among dominant-culture audiences.

By the early decades of the twentieth century, American visual and popular culture had successfully reimag(in)ed the West’s lands as empty and the West’s indigenous inhabitants as dead or dying – resurrected only through quasi-scientific conjuration at the hands of ethnographers and sideshow barkers. The tragic Others of Greco-Roman myth – the objects, the victims, in Johannes Fabian’s terms – had been replaced by likenesses of tragic chiefs, Indian princesses, and ill-fated braves, all physically hewn in the same materials as their ideological predecessors, and displayed in and among similar, stately columned buildings (107). White audiences mistook these static, homogenized images for Natives themselves. And thus, a new Western myth, the Old West, was born in the colonial imaginary.

CHAPTER IV

VISUAL *TOPOI* IN MOTION: THE RHETORIC OF THE DIGITAL WESTERN *

There's certain things in this country a woman could do much better, if you ask me.

- Bonnie McFarlane, *Red Dead Redemption*

The previous two chapters have demonstrated how repeated visual depictions of indigenous lands as empty and indigenous peoples as dying helped rhetorically pave the way for Westward Expansion during the nineteenth century, using a variety of artistic and commemorative media. They have also analyzed some artists' more recent efforts to seize upon visual colonial topoi in order to refute and redirect enduring dominant-culture messages of disappearance and erasure. But how does transfer from traditional to digital media affect an image's message, composition, and delivery? When images leap from static storage-and-retrieval media (such as technical manuals, anthropologists' journals, or artists' canvases) to the digital sensory commons, they provide contemporary audiences a more sensuously engaging means of interactively rehearsing (or, alternately, dismantling) common expansionist arguments. In the case of popular iPad apps such as *Oregon Settler* or gaming-console titles like *Red Dead Redemption*, players repeatedly

* Part of this chapter is reprinted/adapted with permission from “Allegorical Confrontation Meets Gaming System: Rhetoric and Trauma within *Red Dead Redemption/Undead Nightmare*.” by M. Melissa Elston, 2013. *Undead in the West II: They Just Keep Coming*. Eds. Cynthia Miller and Bow Van Riper, Scarecrow Press, Lanham, Md., 142-58. Copyright 2013 by Scarecrow Press.

return to prod the dimensions of the American West's visual *topoi*, to test the directions in which they can be manipulated, altered, reversed, or exploded. In the chapter which follows, I argue that these immersive gaming environments expand the rhetorical function of traditional visual predecessors and serve as a site of perpetual invention -- both for colonial/decolonial storytelling and explicit argumentation. Furthermore, I contend that the stories which emerge from this site are far from a unified narrative, and say far less about the eras visually depicted than they do about diverse twenty-first century responses to linguistic difference, ethnic tension, and complex asymmetries of power in the wake of American expansion.

Empty Fields and the Epideictic Digital “Frontier”

In an Aristotelian framework, deliberative rhetoric deals with issues and questions yet to be resolved and is employed as *rhetors* urge their audiences to take future action. For the Hudson River School and other artists examined thus far, the imagery attached to the North American frontier offered a powerful set of *deliberative* tools. Wielding frontier imagery, painters could make a case for the desirability -- nay, the inevitability -- of American expansion onto the-unannexed lands. As Cole's *The Course of Empire* demonstrates, these tools could also enable artists to lodge political complaints and broadcast warnings.

Epideictic rhetoric, on the other hand, reinforces the status quo. It celebrates continuity and adherence to communal norms through praise and its antithesis, blame. Indeed, as time has passed, the mythic Old West of folklore and legend has remained,

over generations, a site of rhetorical invention -- albeit a place where nationalistic ideologies and *endoxa* are reinforced, rather than forged anew. The visual signifiers which once served as deliberative tools have now shifted chiefly to epideictic use via nostalgic celebration of the past. Elly Mons suggests that this has had to do, in part, with industrialization: "The burgeoning industrial era of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries plunged Americans into the roiling rapids of modernization. The frontier myth erected an island of stability in a tumultuous sea of change" (120). What's more, the frontier and its related *topoi* and figures have continued to shape dominant-culture thinking about a plethora of topics, from space exploration to financial markets. Angela M. Haas's work has demonstrated that many of the narratives and tropes which shape twenty-first century thinking about cyberspace and digital media spring from this collectively imagined national past: "[T]he 'history' of hypertext is a Western frontier story," she writes, "a narrative that most often begins with the exploration of the land of Xanadu and the Memex and eventually leads to the trailblazing of the World Wide Web" (82).

It only stands to reason, then, that in a spatial imaginary already constructed vis-à-vis a colonial mindset, colonial stories and themes would emerge. And, indeed, video-game history is rife with virtual Westerns, from the silly (2011's cartoonish shooter *The Gunstringer* on xBox 360) to the supernatural (2005's *Darkwatch* on Playstation 2 and xBox, in which vampires roam the frontier). It is important to note that a number of these games were originally conceived as having educational value: *The Oregon Trail*, for example, was developed and distributed through the Minnesota Educational

Computing Consortium (as were its successors, *Oregon Trail II* and *The Yukon Trail*) as a way to teach schoolchildren the officially sanctioned history of white Americans' westward migration. In navigating their wagons across the virtual terrain, encountering dysentery and other hardships, students no longer simply read about doctrines of Manifest Destiny in history books; they actively rehearsed the Westward Expansion narrative by participating in river crossings, shooting game, even conducting funerals for virtual party members who died along the journey. The game (which began as text-only, although later versions incorporated graphics) was widely popular in North American classrooms throughout the 1980s and 1990s, and continues to serve as a nostalgic touchstone for many adults who came of age during those decades. It also continues to spawn new titles: one of its 2012 iterations, *The Oregon Trail: American Settler*, is an app for iPhone, iPad, and Android devices, and invites players to further participate in and thus reify popular notions of historic frontier settlement with additional layers of multisensory experience, including music and sound, as well as social-networking features. (In an appeal that is perhaps most squarely directed to thirty- and forty-somethings who grew up playing the original classroom game, *American Settler's* description in the Apple iTunes store reads, in part: "You've conquered the trail, now it's time to tame the frontier! In this continuation of The Oregon Trail story, you and your family can finally settle down and build a new home.")

Because *American Settler* is a story about settlement, it relies heavily upon the topos of empty landscape. Upon beginning the game, players arrive in Oregon by ox-driven cart with a spouse. (In an affirmation of settler colonialism's heteronormativity,

the spouse's presence is automatic. There is no option to settle the frontier as a singleton.) In order to progress in the game, the player must chop down trees, remove wild plants and boulders, and erect buildings upon the newly cleared land, all while being peppered by both verbal and visual affirmations of nineteenth-century American expansion: among the amenities players can erect to enhance the landscape are American flags, presidential monuments, military veterans' graves, flag-draped speakers' podiums, and bald eagles' nests. While whites may also incorporate decontextualized Great Plains tipis and Pacific Northwestern totem carvings into their townships, Native bodies are largely absent from town spaces and gameplay -- although a cartoonishly caricatured Indian does appear from time to time with a spontaneous challenge or mission. In one example, he announces that "[s]ome of your people have claimed land and built fences that keep us from our hunting grounds. Will you help us?" Upon advancing to the next screen, the player is informed that "[t]he man's tribe is being driven off their traditional lands by squatters," and given three options: side with the tribe ("Round up the sheriff and move the squatters off the tribe's lands"), side with the settlers ("Squatters got rights same as the tribe; make sure the man's people don't retaliate against the homesteaders"), or practice noninterference ("This here's a squabble outside the town's boundaries"). It should be noted that siding with the tribe is the game's preferred option and carries the least risk of property loss for the player. However, the entire range of options obscures the player's own role in Native displacement. By heaping blame in referring to the miscreants as "squatters," the game reinforces the legitimacy of historic mainstream white acts of settlement -- which are taking place on

the vast, "empty" landscapes of gameplay. While colonial settlement and informal squatting both have their roots in the Roman doctrine of *terra nullius*, a squatter is generally understood in a twenty-first century context as someone who has made their home on someone else's land without formal title or rights, and the term is still used colloquially to describe unauthorized occupation of a building or tract of land. By contrast, a settler is simply "one who settles in a new country; a colonist," according to the Oxford English Dictionary, and a settler's right to occupy is assumed. (The OED's definition should, more accurately, read "new to them.") The air of neutrality surrounding the term "settler" is reinforced by the Western assumption that any land unoccupied by a permanent dwelling structure or village is empty.¹⁵ Indeed, upon selecting the first "Round up the sheriff" option, the player is greeted by the smiling, caricatured brave, who praises the player's efforts to police relations between indigenous communities and less principled whites: "Despite some grumbling, the squatters find plenty of land *unused by the tribe*, and yer [sic] able to keep the peace" (emphasis mine).

The Learning Company's updated *Oregon Trail* game for the Wii system adds yet another layer of kinesthetic experience to previously digitally scripted performances, allowing players to go through the physical motions of "hunting," "fishing," and "driving" an animal-powered covered wagon. Drawing upon theorists such as Oliver Grau, Mark Hansen, and Anna Munster, Anne Frances Wysocki points to the inherently

¹⁵ Scholars have noted some slippage in Western understandings of *terra nullius* over the years. During the age of European exploration and colonization *nullius* could be interpreted to mean land which was not literally unoccupied, but simply unoccupied by people who Europeans deemed "civilized." Camilla Boisen discusses the evolution of *terra nullius* during European colonization and imperial administration, as the doctrine shifted from a right to settle "empty" land to one which carried an implicit moral imperative to "civilize" the inhabitants of these spaces.

rhetorical nature of such repeated sensory engagement via gaming: "[W]hat we know about the world through our senses," she writes, "... becomes the ground for opening up the potentials of how we live together, socially, ethically" (102-103). What's more, she argues, the senses are trained through repeated experiences--sensory experiences like those found in video games (104). This level of persuasion occurs not at the level of dialectic or *logos*, but rather, at the level of repetitive sensory conditioning, conditioning which shapes epistemology empirically over time, without the need for explicit verbal argumentation. Hence, it stands to reason that apps and video games in which players recreate portions of the Westward Expansion myth over and over, without deviation, subtly shape contemporary audiences' acceptance of--and participatory investment in--that narrative.

The *Oregon Trail* titles are far from the only video games which rely upon the topos of empty New World landscapes awaiting inhabitants (see Figs 25-27). Over the past decade, a rash of farming- and settlement-themed games, from the *Harvest Moon* series for Nintendo and Sony Playstation systems to social-networking apps such as *Farmville*, *TradeNations Frontier*, and *Tap Paradise Cove*, have been touted in North America as wholesome alternatives to ostensibly more "violent" first-person shooters and fighting games. Yet the games' fundamental objective, fill "empty" land with buildings and crops, erases an entire history of violence, enslavement and indigenous displacement which has accompanied the settlement process -- both in America and much of the world. (It also erases the link between indigenous displacement and the



Figure. 25. *Oregon Trail: American Settler*, in-game screen shot.



Figure 26. *Paradise Cove*, in-game screen shot



Figure 27. *Trade Nations Frontier*, in-game screen shot.

accompanying histories of environmental displacement by deforestation and the introduction of invasive species by settlers observed by Murray Bookchin, Val Plumwood, and others.) *Paradise Cove*, for example, allows players to set up a township on an uninhabited set of islands peppered by all the material elements of earlier European exploratory fantasies ("ancient ruins, exotic animals, hidden treasures and more!" the app's description on Google Play exclaims). It as if the game's developers wish to induce a sense of amnesia around phenomena such as Arawak genocide or the trans-Atlantic slave route. Despite the fact that the fleet contains a ship called the Santa Maria and the new town's "improvements" include a plantation and sugar mill, settlement occurs by way of an exclusively European cast of cartoonishly endearing avatars, upon a benignly unpopulated -- as opposed to violently *depopulated* -- field, a virtually imagined *terra nullius* in the most literal sense.

Dying Natives and the First-Person Shooter

This is not to say that the *topos* of the dying Native has vanished in digital culture. *Red Dead Redemption* is an open-world first-person shooter, what gaming enthusiasts call a "sandbox"-style game, because its players are granted freedom of movement and action within a large, three-dimensional imaginary space (the "sandbox"). While gameplay is driven by a main storyline, players can wander away from the scripted scenes and locations at will, in order to pursue side quests and other activities anywhere within the game map. A player who becomes enamored of hunting big game, for example, can opt to take an extended "camping" trip to the hills at the north side of Hennigan's Stead, popular spawning point for cougars and wild boar, and bag animals indefinitely. A player who enjoys shootouts could become a part-time bounty hunter, riding from town to town in search of "Wanted" posters and sniffing out bandits' wilderness hideouts for pay. The multiplicity and open-endedness of available choices and outcomes--coupled with a cynical storyline that, when followed, questions the basis of American exceptionalism, settler colonialism, and the heteropatriarchal discourses of white supremacy which historically have accompanied these ideologies--transforms *Red Dead Redemption* into a site of *inventio*, or active rhetorical invention. New frontier stories are perpetually generated via gameplay and player modifications to that gameplay. And the traumas attendant to white incursion, seizure, and appropriation of Native lands are confronted, albeit problematically at times. *Red Dead Redemption*, as well as its companion game, *Undead Nightmare*, neither completely affirm or totally subvert the endoxa which undergird historic settler colonialism. Yet both gaming

environments illustrate that alongside the repetitive filling of empty landscapes, the dead or dying native also remains a powerful visual *topos* for users of digital media.

Red Dead Redemption opens in *media res*, as the player's character, John Marston, is being transported to Armadillo, a fictitious outpost in the area of the American Southwest along the Rio Grande, a.k.a. "New Austin." The year is 1911, situating the story in the direct aftermath of the nation's nineteenth-century expansion. Marston is accompanied by two stiff-demeanored lawmen, and we soon learn as the narrative cutscenes unfold that he is a retired outlaw being coerced to track down his former gang members and bring them into custody. As they disembark the train, Marston appears resentful and reluctant to help. Yet we soon discover that something more than mere personal freedom hangs in the balance: as collateral, the feds are holding Marston's wife and son hostage -- and under threat of bodily harm -- until the job is completed. Ultimately, Marston succeeds in his mission and reunites with his family, and they spend the remainder of his life on their homestead at Beecher's Hope.

Because the game's genre is dependent upon the master cultural narrative of Westward Expansion, it seems almost doomed to repeat some of that narrative's hegemonic characteristics in order to remain recognizable as a Western, even as it simultaneously challenges other aspects of hegemony, such the European scientific community's assumed monopoly on logic and expertise concerning non-Anglo subjects. Take, for example, the irony embedded within the following scene, in which Marston's quest leads him to the front door of a white academic, Harold MacDougal. As Marston enters, MacDougal is staring into his microscope and muttering "Incredible, simply

incredible." He then turns to Marston and begins discussing eugenics, as a turn-of-the-century Western scientist might:

MacDougal: Tell me, sir, are you from Norse stock?

Marston: Not as far as I know. I was raised in an orphanage. My father was Scottish.

MacDougal: Unfortunate. You'd make an interesting case for my theory of natural population characteristics.

Marston: Really?

MacDougal: Why yes, a white man obviously, but with a savage spirit. Trust me, sir, I mean 'savage' in the best possible sense. Natural nobility, but also simple. Pure. I've been looking at some blood samples through my microscope and you know what?

Marston: No.

MacDougal: Ah, well of course you don't. It's a remarkable breakthrough. I've been looking at the blood of both natives and white men of corresponding height, weight, and age and you know what?

Marston: Again, no.

MacDougal: They're exactly the same! It's remarkable. It completely refutes my last book, but I'll tell you what, sir, this sabbatical in the field may have been somewhat forced upon me by circumstance, but my scholarship has benefitted enormously! Would you like to partake of a syringe of cocaine? I've quite enough for two.

Marston: Not right this minute, no.

Marston's dry delivery and obvious disdain for MacDougal, telegraphed to players via facial expressions, body language and tone of voice, aligns his attitude with that of most twenty-first century gamers': A figure like Harold MacDougal is clearly not to be taken seriously, nor are the antiquated scientific attitudes which he synecdochally represents. On its surface, the scene, lampoons the eugenics movement as well as the historic relationship between Western science and imperialism, a goal which becomes patently obvious after Dr. MacDougal whips out his syringe of cocaine tincture.¹⁶ MacDougal's credibility is further undermined when a Native guide (who, not incidentally, is one of the only "friendly Indians" in the game) enters the room, and he attempts to speak to him, using slow enunciation and grandiose gestures: Nastas, the guide, replies in fluent English, making MacDougal appear even more foolish.

This satirical challenge to Western scientific authority -- a story told to gameplayers by the game's Scottish designers -- works on a certain superficial level, reminiscent of Cherokee scholar Daniel Heath Justice's blogged and much-circulated critique of the film *Avatar*. In the case of the film, Justice noted that its predictable, white-focused narrative (which addresses historical wrongs with the "subtlety of a sledgehammer") allows colonial audiences to feel comfortable criticizing past iterations

¹⁶ MacDougal's remarks are presented as somewhat comical in the context of the game. However, they are fairly close to turn-of-the-century scientific "breakthroughs" among anthropologists and others. In 1913, the year of his death, researcher Alfred Russel Wallace strived to persuade colleagues that "[t]he very lowest of existing races are found to possess languages which are often of extreme complexity in grammatical structure and in no way suggestive of the primitive man-animal of which they are supposed to be surviving relics." He concludes from this "discovery" that non-whites "possess human qualities of the same kind as our own" (40).

of imperialism without stepping away from a Eurocentric perspective or examining their own present-day complicity in perpetuating asymmetries of power: “[T]he audience is left with a self-congratulatory feeling of having grappled with major issues without having actually dealt with any of the *real* complexities of colonialism, militarism, reverence for the living world, or environmental destruction” (n. pag.). Similarly, in *Red Dead Redemption's* script, it is as if gamemakers are just conscious enough to intuit that the narratives attached to Westward Expansionism and colonialism as a whole are flawed -- but they aren't willing or consciously able to make a connection between the clueless anthropologist of yesteryear and, say, our supposedly more "enlightened" scientists who continue to advocate eugenicist aims via the human genome project.¹⁷ MacDougal isn't merely high on cocaine; he's high on *colonialism*. And so are we, if we truly take a step back.

The way the game script treats Nastas himself is additionally problematic. On the one hand, he ostensibly gives voice to indigenous experiences under colonization. Yet within dominant culture's narrative framework, there are limits to the type of story Nastas is allowed to tell. Nastas is a digital manifestation of what Gerald Vizenor would call manifest manners. He is a postmodern simulation, a representation embedded in the audience's mind and operating as the real, while erasing and standing in for actual tribal reality (vii). Despite Nastas's Navajo name, his tribal affiliation is undeclared and

¹⁷ Commentators and scholars across disciplines have brought attention to the uneasy parallels between the aims of current human genome mapping research and the eugenics movement of a century ago. For a nuanced discussion of these issues, see Gerald V. O'Brien's "Eugenics, Genetics, and the Minority Group Model of Disabilities: Implications for Social Work Advocacy."

nonspecific. He gives just enough details to recall various histories of Plains and Southwestern peoples (he hunted buffalo, then was forced onto a reservation). In the hands of Native rhetors, such simulations can be appropriated and manipulated in ways which paradoxically facilitate rhetorical production before a colonial audience, and speak presence back into absence. In the hands of European game designers, however, Nastas suffers injuries in every mission in which he is featured -- the only non-player character this happens to -- and is ultimately murdered by members of his own tribe. He has no family, no successor. In short, he is the animated embodiment of the previously static "dying" Indians which filled nineteenth-century canvases and art galleries (see Figs. 28-30).



Figure 28. Nastas, *Red Dead Redemption*, in-game screen shot.



Figure 29. Bierstadt, Albert. *Toward the Setting Sun*. 1862. Oil on canvas. Wadsworth Atheneum Museum of Art, Hartford, Conn.



Figure 30. Beard, William Holbrook. *Lo, the Poor Indian*. 1879. Oil on canvas. Utah Museum of Fine Arts, Salt Lake City.

Despite the topos's leap to a more dynamic visual medium, Nastas remains, to borrow a phrase from Reid Gómez: "trapped within the narrative frameworks that declare ... subjugation and eventual and inevitable extinction" (147).

***Undead Nightmare's* Zombie Disruptions**

To date, much work has been done with trauma theory and film. Scholars such as Adam Lowenstein and Linnie Blake have explored the ways in which genres such as horror cinema reveal deep-seated cultural anxieties about war, terrorism, and genocide, as well as challenges to heteronormative patriarchy (i.e., Iris Marion Young's masculinist security state) that such events catalyze. Lowenstein, in particular, points to what he terms "allegorical moments" in horror films, which he sees as sites of artistic confrontation with historical trauma (8). By displacing audiences' feelings of corporate vulnerability onto corporeal representations--the abductee, the murder victim, the violated teen virgin--filmmakers can metaphorically articulate collectively experienced histories of shock, imbalance, and stress, Lowenstein argues. What's more, they can challenge official narratives which only superficially address the anguish these histories cause while reaffirming national identity and conventional social roles, troubling the waters of epideixis.

It is within this discursive mode that the video game *Undead Nightmare* deploys images of death and decay in order to engage in an ultimately more satisfying, if still imperfect, critique of the frontier myth. Where *Red Dead Redemption* fails to engage or confront twenty-first century continuations of colonialism and its attendant legacies of

racial hierarchy and oppression, *Undead Nightmare* pushes a bit harder, revealing the illogic and moral ambiguity of nationalistic modern-day political stances emanating from nineteenth-century notions of Manifest Destiny. What's more, it extends its depictions of death and dying to include other, non-Native figures, suggesting that extinction rhetoric can be applied to them and the ideologies they represent.

It is during Marston's last years on the ranch with Abigail and Jack that the events of *Undead Nightmare*, a downloadable expansion pack which *also* allows for unlimited, open-ended gameplay, take place. In *Undead Nightmare*, the West has become overrun with zombies due to a plague that is rumored to have originated in Mexico. John's wife and son are bitten and infected, and, after hogtying them near a plate of food, he thus sets out in search of a cure. Once he reaches the nearby settlement of Blackwater, he once again encounters the synecdochal Western scientist Harold MacDougal, whose prestigious affiliation with Yale and research mission (document the zombie infestation) fail to keep him from being eaten by an undead Natas, in a classic moment of horror-movie retribution. Before his demise, however, MacDougal's lines of dialogue express the limits of the Western academic establishment in remedying the allegorized social disorder around him. When Marston asks him what is going on, he replies, breathlessly: "Well sir, I am a man of science, a man of great learning, a thinker, a wise man, and I'll be honest with you, sir." Here, his voice wavers and drops: "I haven't got a fucking clue."

MacDougal's caricaturization of academia surely resonates with contemporary strains of the populist American anti-intellectualism noted by Richard Hofstadter as

early as the 1960s.¹⁸ At Marston's suggestion that they search for survivors and work together to discover a cure, MacDougal balks, declaring "I'm not sure I'm cut out for such shenanigans," and suggests he instead write a paper from the relative safety of his study, as the camera pans back to reveal burning buildings and scrawled graffiti ("America is doomed") on the side of a nearby business. As he is quickly attacked and succumbs to a zombified Nastas, the scene's angle shifts, displaying another grim graffiti pronouncement: "Our time has passed." This is quickly followed by yet another, viewed as Marston flees the scene: "It's your fault." Rather than place sole blame for the traumas inflicted by frontier settlement on one institutional culprit (i.e., MacDougal/science), the statement's shift to the second person implicates Marston for his shared role in creating dystopia--and by extension, the player/viewer.

James Berger's work suggests that America's obsession with representations of the post-apocalypse serves a number of cultural functions. In the case of *Undead Nightmare*, it is a way of imaginatively expressing the eventual failure of settler colonialism, as well as the social structures which have perpetuated and propelled it: the plague disrupts the process of white incursion onto Native lands and repopulation via replicating heteronormative family units.¹⁹ Not only are members of Marston's family felled by the plague, but other settling families as well. One sobbing Blackwater teen cowers in an abandoned building, blurting that she saw "my mama rip my daddy's face

¹⁸ For a more recent look at American anti-intellectualism, see Susan Jacoby's *The Age of American Unreason*.

¹⁹ See Mark Rifkin's *When Did Indians Become Straight?: Kinship, the History of Sexuality, and Native Sovereignty* and Scott Lauria Morgensen's *Spaces between Us: Queer Settler Colonialism and Indigenous Decolonization* for an extended discussion of both precontact family structures and settler colonialism.

off and drink his blood. And they were happily married twenty years!" Elsewhere, parents mourn for children lost to zombie infection or death. Even the reunification of Marston's family toward the expansion-pack game's end is tempered with the knowledge that it will soon be dissolved once more in the original game's narrative arc: Marston himself is doomed to die in a shootout with crooked lawmen mere months into homesteading, an ending which is underscored by *Undead Nightmare's* final image: Marston's own zombie emergence from the grave.

This graphic disruption of the settler narrative, in which clusters of white families displace indigenous communities, challenges colonial thinking in a manner the original game's script fails to embrace. For example, after running off a band of outlaws in *Red Dead Redemption* at the MacFarlane ranch, Marston engages in the following exchange in a video cut-scene with Bonnie, the patriarch's sole daughter:

Marston: Well, I did all I could, Miss MacFarlane. Sorry about all the damage. That gang seems to really want you out of here.

Bonnie: Yeah well, my father fought Indians. I scarcely think we're going to be frightened by some white trash.

Marston: White trash can be pretty frightening.

The implication that Natives are somehow more savage or threatening than the problematically denoted "white trash" terrorizing the MacFarlanes is hackneyed and plays to a shopworn colonial trope. But perhaps even more insidious is the fact that the dialogue "unsees" Marston and Bonnie's roles in the expansionist appropriation and occupation of native lands, and absolves them of any complicity. The only injustice or

displacement the two are concerned with is the potential relocation of Bonnie's ranch, should the gang's lawless tactics prevail. But how did Bonnie's family obtain the land, and from whom? The lives and homes of the land's indigenous occupants are effectively erased via this discourse.

By contrast, *Undead Nightmare* repeatedly critiques white settlement of the American West. The extension pack's juxtaposition of frontier imagery with invocations of twenty-first century dilemmas, such as the contemporary immigration-reform debate, compress history and imply a link between America's past land seizures and present political woes. Perhaps the hyperbolized, anti-Semitic paranoia of Armadillo's general-store-proprietor-turned-conspiracy-theorist Herbert Moon is easy to dismiss: before his demise, he angrily blames the zombie outbreak on "the Jewish-British-Catholic-Homosexual Elite and their ideas," much to John Marston's bafflement. (He also includes American Indians in his invectives against non-white newcomers who have ruined America, before ironically declaring that "this was a good country once.") Yet other manifestations of nationalism gone awry invite uneasy comparisons to discourses playing out in contemporary popular and political culture at the time of *Undead Nightmare's* October 2010 release, six months after the passage of Arizona's contentious Support Our Law Enforcement and Safe Neighborhoods Act (SB 1070), which required police and other law-enforcement officials to determine individuals' citizenship during traffic stops and other routine detentions and arrests.

Indeed, some of the handlettered warnings on the streets of zombie-plagued towns like Blackwater emulate reactionary jingoism: "Close the borders." Furthermore, a

number of white survivors blame "the Mexicans" for the rash of lawlessness and homicide, as well as the U.S. government for allowing in "too many foreigners," echoing many contemporary conservative commentators' allegations that undocumented immigrants commit higher rates of crime, as well as complaints about the ineffectiveness of federal border enforcement.²⁰ One band of Blackwater refugees repeatedly demands to know (at gunpoint) whether John Marston is "one of them" as he approaches them on a desolate street. Marston's exasperated attempts to prove his status during a random encounter on a dusty street in the American Southwest acknowledge the role of racial profiling in tense border-checkpoint and post-SB 1070 traffic-stop conversations. They also suggest the depth of right-wing anxieties about national identity, as he implores the survivors to examine how he, a white man, *looks and speaks* as evidence of his belonging. In the meantime, their bickering lampoons the frequent rhetorical pairing of militarism and white patriarchal privilege in contemporary political discourse: "How we gonna rebuild America like this?" cries a pacing white man with a double-barreled shotgun. The man, whose protective role marks him as the personification of the masculinist security state, continues to lecture the three women and one unarmed man before him: "I thought we had it all decided. We was gonna be kind, and gentle, and pay homage to our leader--who happens to be me."

²⁰ A number of political and public figures made headlines in 2010 with criticisms of U.S. federal immigration enforcement, from Arizona sheriff Paul Babeau, who declared that "[a]t a time when we need help, our federal government has become our enemy [...]" to Gov. Jan Brewer's statement upon signing SB 1070, framing the bill as a response to "a crisis we did not create and the federal government has refused to fix" (Cooper, Brewer 1)

Perhaps the immediate historical and political context of *Undead Nightmare's* release has much to do with this preoccupation with the discourses and ideologies surrounding border security. Yet the game references additional contemporary dilemmas springing from America's expansionist past, and employs other familiar visual topoi pertaining to colonization. One mission in particular, "Birth of the Conservation Movement," initially seems to address colonial disruption of ecosystems and the extinction of frontier species through overhunting. Upon reaching Tanner's Reach, Marston encounters a grizzled trapper who claims that the hills contain Sasquatches, "dumb hairy bastards" posing a threat to human and animal life that rivals that of the zombie plague. ("Down in Manzanita Post," he reports breathlessly, "they ate a little girl!") Marston is then given the dubious task of tracking and bagging six Sasquatches in the Tall Trees region of the game map. If the player goes through with the mission, Marston encounters the sixth Sasquatch weeping despondently beneath a tree in human fashion. Upon approach, the creature implores Marston to shoot him. Marston replies, boldly:

Marston: Oh I will, you foul creature of the night!

Sasquatch: You'd be granting me peace.

Marston: Why is that? Keep you from eating more babies?

Sasquatch: (Standing) What in the name ... of all that's right... are you talking about, human?

Marston: You eat babies. You have to, to survive. Everyone knows that. Ain't your fault.

Sasquatch: (Shouting) We eat mushrooms and berries, you fool! Or we did. Now none of us are left. Some maniac's been murdering us! I'm the last of my kind. We've lived in these hills a thousand years.

After a few more brief words of exchange, Sasquatch breaks down again and sinks to the ground, begging Marston to put him out of his misery. "I can't take it any more," he sobs. "Make it stop."

At this point, players have the choice to end the (now heavily anthropomorphized) being's life or leave without inflicting any more violence. The wind whispers through tree leaves. Somewhere, a piano tinkles. The moment's quiet, cinematic pathos underscores its moral ambivalence. It is also yet another moment of thinly veiled allegory. Certainly, the Sasquatch can be viewed as another tragic, dying Native. However, he also bears a disturbingly direct likeness to the illustrations accompanying naturalist Carl Linneaus's 1763 typology of anthropomorpha (see Figs. 31, 32). These visually suggested a continuum of characteristics among humanoid forms, from the smooth body and upright form of *homo sapiens* to the base tendencies and monstrosity of satyrs, pygmies, and tailed men. Theories of the "lower" races' supposed genetic closeness to apes and other primitive or grotesque beings persisted among European and American scientists, even into the twentieth century. In addition, European explorers' reports of cannibalism among indigenous peoples of the Americas, as well as Africans and others, have a long and storied history which parallels that of exploration and colonization themselves. David Spurr points to Ralph Waldo Emerson's description of nonwhites as simultaneously apelike and cannibalistic in the 1862 essay

"American Civilization," noting that within Western European ideological frameworks, "[c]ivilization is then marked by degrees of progress from this abject condition," in which inferior races are so atavistic and morally bereft that they consume other humans as food (117).

Undead Nightmare's Sasquatch, then, can be seen as a proprosopoeic appropriation of this figure, pulled from centuries of white-supremacist thought and the Western scientific establishment's longstanding affirmation of--and complicity with--imperialist goals. His appearance is a tricky and somewhat problematic rhetorical gesture, because it repeats a long history of visuals linking Native peoples to monstrosity, cannibalism, and animalism, which is deeply ingrained in both European and American culture. Nevertheless, the expansion pack's scriptwriters use this shopworn representation in a way which complicates its past associations.



Figure 31. Linné, Carl. *Amoenitates academicæ seu dissertationes variæ physic, medicæ botanicæ antehac seorsim editæ*, illustration.



Figure 32. Sasquatch, *Undead Nightmare*, in-game screen shot

Marston's uncharacteristically melodramatic accusations ("[F]oul creature of the night!" "You eat babies") evoke both the misguidedness and the righteous fervor with which Euro-Americans have historically attempted to "kill the savage and save the man." Additionally, the ambivalently pliable nature of gameplay leaves Sasquatch's fate open-ended. If players walk away without finishing him, there is the unspoken possibility he will find others and begin anew in the wake of Marston's genocide. Yet the scene does not abandon previous colonial narratives of indigenous erasure and inevitable extinction, nor have the gamemakers imbued Sasquatch with any power to enact physical or cultural survivance in the face of such narratives.²¹ Rather, within the mechanisms the game makes available, Marston retains the sole narrative prerogative to determine Sasquatch's

²¹ For a fuller discussion of the rhetorics of colonial erasure and Native survivance, see Malea Powell's "Rhetorics of Survivance" or Gerald Vizenor's *Manifest Manners: Narratives on Postindian Survivance*.

future. Clearly then, this moment of allegorical confrontation attempts to address historical traumas without completely dismantling the systems of visual representation or the ideologies of paternalism and privilege which created them. These shortcomings undermine its ability to meaningfully subvert colonial discourses of racism, even as it gives limited articulation to the suffering they have generated.

More successfully decolonial, by contrast, is the expansion pack's final scenes in Mexico, where despite American survivors' xenophobic accusations, Marston finds an even greater zombie problem. The issue, as he discovers, is that ambitious white treasure-hunters have stripped an Aztec sacred space of its holy things. Marston's rectification of the issue is short-lived; in the game's epilogue, a mask is re-stolen within months, and the plague begins anew. This presents a stark difference for players than the ending of *Red Dead Redemption*, in which they take on the persona of Marston's son, Jack, a gesture which suggests continuance and new beginnings. By the end of *Undead Nightmare*'s story-driven portion, rather than walk away satisfied that the narrative arc has reached its denouement, players are reminded that colonization is an ongoing material, cultural, and ideological trauma. If they choose to continue playing the game in open-world mode, they must play John Marston as a corpse who has risen to join the zombie ranks (albeit with the remnants of a human soul). Marston is a visual manifestation of the persistence of colonial violence and its lingering systemic machinery. Furthermore, inhabitation of his perspective invites further and deeper reflection upon players' own complicity in perpetuating neocolonial systems which

simultaneously justify and reproduce historical patterns of inequity, abuse, dispossession, and genocide.

The frontier spaces which he roams have *not* been emptied of previous inhabitants, nor are they fated to die. Rather, in *Undead Nightmare's* denouement, Marston -- the iconographically rugged white cowboy -- is the synecdochal figure trapped in a perpetual state of death.

Player Mods, Recomposition, and *Inventio* on the Virtual Frontier

In *Red Dead Redemption* and *Undead Nightmare*, Marston has a close relationship with Bonnie's family because, as he puts it, "I prefer doing business with people I know." As players, we can only "do business" through Marston's eyes. One readily apparent critique of both games is that while players are capable of unlocking other characters in community-play mode (a series of games and challenges that can be completed online with other players across the globe, as opposed to in single player within the game's narrative framework), in order to complete the main storyline, they must assume the white heterosexist perspective which informs expansionist hegemony itself. The player's point of view tells us, plainly: This is Marston's story—not Nastas's, not Bonnie's, not the Mexican rebels' or the Mexican soldiers' who Marston alternately helps during the portion of the game when he crosses into Mexico, and insistently not *yours* (the player's).

Certainly under the traditional gameplay, players can make a limited range of choices using Marston's persona, but they cannot escape his viewpoint, nor can they

avoid participating in the gaze projected by his “imperial eyes,” over sweeping vistas and non-white bodies (which again affirms European surveillance). If rhetoric can be said to have identificatory properties, such as those observed by Burke, then the interactive, immersive nature of digital environments hold enhanced potential for sensory rehearsal and conditioning from a given figure's perspective. This is significant in a gaming world in which studies demonstrate the majority of protagonists continue to be white -- and those who are not are frequently thrust into a limited span of roles: criminals, sports figures, wrestling or martial-arts fighters, and villains. Perhaps one of Red Dead Redemption's most egregious missteps concerning race is its overwhelming concentration of black characters in one category: criminals -- a rhetorical move which limits gamers' interactions with these figures largely to shooting (see Figs. 33a-d). Dr. Lane Davies, Jason M. Bright, and Stuart B. Wilson, III (top left, top right, and bottom left in the figures) are all multiplayer-mode personae from a menu entitled "Misc. Criminals." (Note the knife, cigarette, and liquor bottle in their hands, respectively.) Hestor Frith (bottom right) is a bounty target in the main game who is wanted for murder.

Drawing upon earlier work by James Paul Gee, Soraya Murray argues that in gameplay, the conventional rules of the assumed social contract are suspended, an act which results in "rule-based, problem-solving environments that require creative solutions within a defined set of parameters" (97). These solutions can often include acts otherwise deemed unethical, immoral, or unlawful.

Yet I share many of Anne Wysocki's questions when she takes up Walter Benjamin's argument that the unlinking of aesthetic experience, epistemology and ethics carries a certain degree of risk, that sensuous engagement under such circumstances leads to the position that, "any experience is worth intensifying and exploring aesthetically, even violence -- with no grounding to connect it to any ethical placement or ramifications" (106). Her broader point seems to be that sensory engagement via virtual environments is potentially rhetorical, because our senses are persuadable. And, while Wysocki refrains from making any specific contemporary political connections in her piece, critics should raise the question: how are gamers allowing their senses to be persuaded when they follow a narrative which requires that they engage in repetitive, dramatized rehearsals of frontier violence, much of it directed toward nonwhite bodies—particularly when many do not receive formal training or outside encouragement to ponder the ethical dimensions of these experiences? In a country where violence is still directed at non-white bodies due in no small part to the lingering ideological machinery of Eurocentrism, the ramifications are potentially disturbing -- particularly in light of a 2011 study which demonstrated short-term increases in proviolence attitudes among Grand Theft Auto players in Singapore after just three weeks of gaming in a laboratory setting (Teng et al.).

Of course, a critique that focuses exclusively on a game's preprogrammed storyline ignores the nature of video games themselves as a medium. The stories games tell are not one-way utterances, from programmers to players. Rather, they serve as invention spaces in which players can manipulate virtual bodies and environments in

order to compose their own ongoing, immersive narratives. This quality is particularly pronounced in a "Sandbox" video game like *Red Dead Redemption*, where the player has



a.



b.



c.



d.

Figures 33a. Dr. Lane Davies, b. Jason M. Bright, c. Stuart B. Wilson, III, and d. Hestor Frith, *Red Dead Redemption*, "Black Characters" menu screen shots.

the option of eschewing the gamemakers' storyline altogether -- opting instead to go off on his or her own into the game's spatial imaginary and interact in a freeform, nonscripted manner with nonplayer characters. Any rhetorical critique of video games which focuses on the game's script as the primary source of meaning or persuasion ignores the rhetoricity of how users actually play, given these tools. It neglects the multinodal web of stories generated through individualized gameplay -- a teeming universe of immersive, decentered rhetorical activity. For evidence of this, one only needs to go to YouTube and take note of how many gamers upload videos of their interactions with a given title, including glitches and user-created scenarios which run counter to the game's intended design and narrative purpose.

This is one level of recomposition initiated on the players' end. Yet another level of digital recomposition is evidenced by unauthorized game modifications, or mods. (Another word for modifying is "hacking" -- tinkering with the game's infrastructure and coding itself in order to alter characters, rules, events, and environments.) As avid gamers know, mods are typically circulated informally and surreptitiously -- if a gaming network like Xbox Live detects a player's character has been modified on the local level, that gamer is typically locked out of online gameplay.

When skimming popular mods to *Red Dead Redemption*, certainly, one encounters a number of cheats which involved gaining access to unlimited firepower or buying power. However, scholars of digital rhetoric should be intrigued by the proliferation of mods which allow users to manipulate their onscreen personae. Dissatisfied that they can only access different bodies in community mode, a significant

number of users have hacked the game in order to play *all of it* -- save the cinematic cut scenes -- from the perspective of one of the game's female, black, indigenous, or other similarly marginalized characters, rather than experience the colonial imaginary as a white cowboy (see Fig. 34). It's easy to intuit all types of motives for this sort of hack: Are players doing it because they long for virtual bodies and positionalities which more closely resemble theirs? Are they doing it because they're sick to death of John Marston and his stoic one-liners? Are they doing it because they've "beat" the game and are bored and want to see much they can alter from a technical aspect, without getting caught?



Figure 34. Playing as Christy Weller, *Red Dead Redemption*, in-game screen shot.

Yes. No. Perhaps all of the above. But regardless of intentions, at their very base, these hacks suggest a conscious or unconscious dissatisfaction with the limitations of the game's figurative "sandbox" -- its narrative boundaries, which are derived from the myths of racial classification and hierarchy, American Exceptionalism and Manifest Destiny.

What's more, the ongoing multiplicity of user-driven narratives that emerge from this environment destabilize the historic notion of a single, Eurocentric objectivity which propels the white man forward and erases (or minimizes) all other voices, bodies, and communities.

Theory and Beyond

In an analysis with obvious ideological commitments, there is an impulse to assign a verdict or sweeping assessment of the rhetorical act under scrutiny. In a tightly scripted app with limited options, such as *Paradise Cove*, this task is somewhat manageable. Yet given the disparate directions in which narrative events can flow from *Red Dead Redemption's* virtual imaginary, sweeping verdicts cannot apply. Is the game bad? Good? Colonizing? Subversive? In a virtual space populated by a potentially infinite number of practicing rhetors -- many of whom push against the limitations imposed by the game's repetition of colonial topoi -- there is no blanket critical assessment which can apply. When images leap from static storage-and-retrieval media (such as printed page or artist's canvas) to the digital sensory commons, they provide contemporary audiences a more sensuously engaging means of rehearsing (or,

alternately, dismantling) arguments. Longstanding visual topoi such as the empty landscape and tragic Native take on aural and kinesthetic dimensions -- which enhance their rhetoricity. Such an environment begets stories upon stories. And a technologically enhanced, persuasive sensory engagement with these tales invites further and deeper reflection.

The implications of this observation for rhetorical theory, on the other hand, are intriguing. When we explore twenty-first century visual reconfigurations of frontier topoi and tropes, it is instructive to pay particular attention to the ways in which transfer from traditional to digital media affect invention, arrangement, and delivery. Drawing upon Lawrence Lessig's theories of remixing, Jim Ridolfo and Dànienne Nicole DeVoss have already begun to explore the dynamics of composition and recomposition within digital environments in their work on rhetorical velocity, which they define as "the strategic theorizing for how a text might be recomposed (and why it might be recomposed) by third parties, and how this recomposing may be useful or not to the short- or long-term rhetorical objectives of the rhetorician" (n.pag.). In short, rhetors with a savvy sense of velocity anticipate the appropriation of their words and other materials, and enable it in ways which aid -- rather than hinder -- their message. Ridolfo and DeVoss point to the press release, with its stock quotes for easy reuse by news reporters and other media professionals as a classic textual artifact which reflects this sort of authorial anticipation. They posit that the advent of digital media has further altered rhetorical practice by divorcing composition from the single-author model: "Freedom from romantic authorship is crucial to rhetorical velocity, and the speed with

which artifacts can move and be remixed across networks, audiences, and contexts. In fact, the romantic author figure stands in opposition to rhetorical velocity" (np). This congrues with Stuart Selber's assertion that scholars who view technology as an "add-on" which can be tacked onto existing theoretical models, such as the single-author rhetor "underestimate the extent to which dialectic tensions occupy the literate spaces and activities of a digital age" (5).

Yet Ridolfo and DeVoss's observations have even broader implications. Digital composition practices challenge not only the romantic author figure; they challenge longstanding Western concepts of language and persuasion. Most Western tongues are speaker-responsible; in other words, ensuring clarity of meaning is generally considered the *speaker's* job, not that of his or her audience. Accordingly, Western rhetoric has developed under the assumption that persuasion is the rhetor's task. He or she is responsible for moving an audience toward his or her goals. This notion has a long history: Aristotle devotes a large portion of the second book of *On Rhetoric* to the identification of different "character" types, and strategies of appeal which sway each one. As Chinwe Christiana Okechukwu succinctly states, "[r]hetoric has always embraced the social responsibility of guiding audiences towards making right decisions" (567).

Despite the heavy Western emphasis on persuasion and rhetor-responsibility, however, digital gaming environments shift the balance of discursive and representational power away from its assumed *locus*: the original rhetor/composer. Player modifications to games such as *Red Dead Redemption* suggest that within the

environment of an open-world video game, practices such as hacking and recombination convert visual topoi into staging grounds not only for the original *rhetor* (in this case, the gamemakers) to present his or her ideas, but for perpetual *inventio* on the part of the audience as well: play invites endless "writing upon" each topos. Furthermore, social networking sites, such as YouTube, allow for rapid, widespread dissemination of these new stories and messages. (see Fig. 35). In the case of *Red Dead Redemption's* dead and dying Indians, characters such as Nastas which spring from colonial topoi can be seized, reinhabited and revisioned. What's more, via first-person perspective, they can become the focal point of new stories, rather than a tragic sidebar.

Selber writes: "[T]echnology does not function as a separate category or subcategory of consequence. It tends to infuse each and every area of the discipline. ... In fact, it is difficult to imagine a rhetorical activity untouched by ongoing developments in writing and communication technology" (2). For his part, Geoffrey Sirc points out the nevertheless-static nature of traditional writing instruction, much of which he suggests still revolves around insular, nineteenth-century models: "College Writing might not care that both the production and reception sites for text are changing so rapidly," he pointedly observes, "but the rest of the world does" (69).

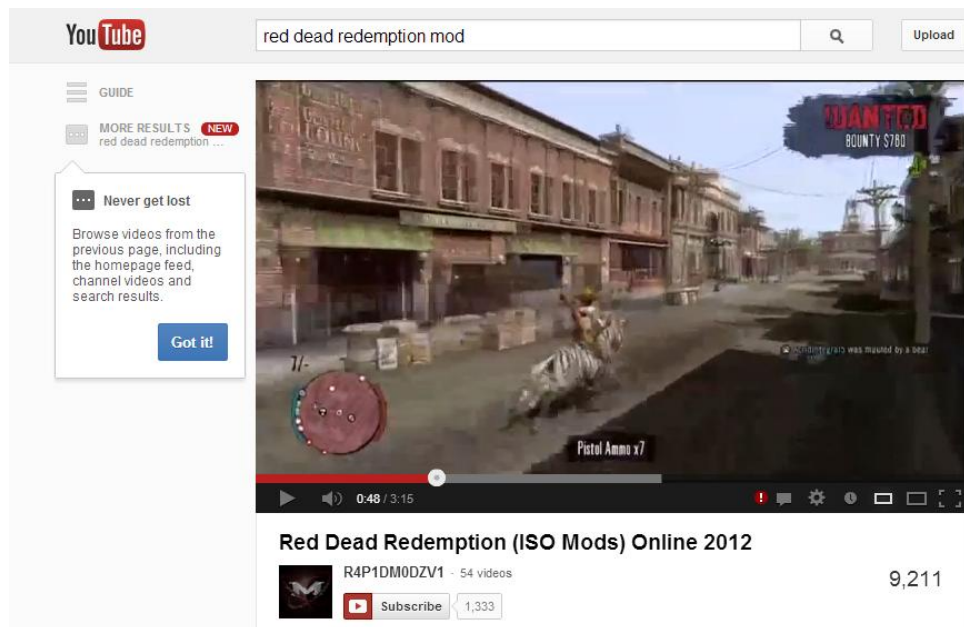


Figure 35. Modded Mexican bandit riding zebra in single-player mode, *Red Dead Redemption*, YouTube screen shot.

With these insights in mind, the conclusion which follows proposes updated understandings of the five traditional canons of rhetoric in a world where visual topoi also speak, move, and invite direct inhabitation by audience members -- who are then free to use them in order to invent their *own* arguments and narratives. It also evaluates and projects the future of frontier art's most enduring visual topoi, the empty landscape and dying Indian, in such an environment.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION: THOUGHTS ON DELIVERY AND DECOLONIZATION

In the preceding chapters, I have pointed out two recurrent topoi within Euro-American visual culture: the empty Western landscape and the tragic, vanishing Indian. I have demonstrated how they function in traditional static media, and then explored how their transference to digital environments can affect their rhetoricity and range of messages. These findings have a number of ramifications for scholars interested in revisiting the canon of Delivery, which has received renewed interest among rhetoricians in recent decades (among them, Danielle Nicole DeVoss and Jim Ridolfo). They also hold important ramifications for rhetors wishing to engage in decolonial work – that is, work which dismantles the rhetorical apparatus which have perpetuated both colonial attitudes and actions over centuries of European presence in traditionally non-European lands. In closing, I would like to address both sets of concerns.

Delivery: Should It Be Retrofitted or Rejected?

The five canons of rhetoric, drawn from classical Greek and Roman thinkers, are traditionally understood by Western scholars as invention, arrangement, style, memory, and delivery. As Paul Prior et al point out, what makes the canons unique (when contrasted against other Greco-Roman categorizations such as forensic, deliberative, and epideictic rhetoric; or pathos, ethos, and logos) is that they attempt to map *rhetorical activity itself*, rather than categorize the resulting speech acts' content, purpose, or

strategies (1-2). In other words, the canons have served European rhetors and their descendents over the millennia as a mechanism enabling explicit attention to each step of the composition and delivery process. Viewed against this longer history, the turn to process-oriented pedagogy among compositionists in the latter twentieth century seems far less like a contemporary trend. Rather, it appears to be a collective reapproach of a theoretical task begun centuries earlier by classical thinkers, albeit under different cultural, linguistic, and media constraints. (The Roman orator Cicero, it could be said, was a huge fan of process; *De Inventione* may start with invention, but it certainly pays attention to other steps in the crafting, refinement and delivery of a speech. Likewise, Quintilian's return to the canons while authoring a multi-volume textbook suggests he saw the value in adopting a process-oriented approach with students as well.)

What the process-oriented compositionists of the late twentieth century *did* do was attempt to remap the rhetorical process in light of shifts in media. The act of writing for an audience of readers, rather than listeners, has inherently different dimensions – and thus, stages – from the speeches of classical Greece and Rome (Table 2). When examining the canons and modern “process” steps side-by-side, one can argue that an array of steps in the writing process as currently imagined, such as Drafting, Revision, and Proofreading, all fall under the umbrella of Arrangement and can thus be viewed as latter-day, composition-oriented elaborations upon that canon. Additionally, one can infer that important writerly decisions pertaining to Style are made during these stages as well. Nevertheless, compositionists' attempts in the 1960s, '70s and '80s to theorize process-based writing instruction de-emphasize the other two canons (Memory and

Delivery), even as they potentially expand and/or remap the first three. Hence, some compositionists have mistaken process theory for a near-abandonment of *all* the canons, save invention.

Table 2
Classical Rhetorical Canons and Some 20th/ 21st Century Successors

Classical Model <i>Canons of Rhetoric</i> (Cicero, Quintilian)	20th Century Models <i>Three-Step Process</i> (Rohman and Wlecke, 1964) <i>The Writing Process</i> (MIT Writing and Humanistic Studies, TAMU Writing Center, present day)	
Invention	Pre-Writing	Invention/Pre-writing
Arrangement	Writing	Drafting
Style	Revising	Revision
Memory		Proofreading
Delivery		

Sources: Rohman, D. Gordon, and Alfred O. Wlecke. "Pre-Writing: The Construction and Application of Models for Concept Formation in Writing." U.S. Department of Health, Education, and Welfare Cooperative Research Project No. 2174. East Lansing: Michigan State U, 1964. MIT Writing and Humanistic Studies Web site < <http://writing.mit.edu/wcc/resources/writers/writingprocess>>. Texas A&M University Writing Center Web site < <http://writingcenter.tamu.edu/for-faculty/teaching-writing/instruction/the-composing-process/>>

(Framing the matter more positively – but still perhaps a bit misconceptually – James L. Kinneavy writes that “the process approach allows those with a background in classical rhetoric to reassert the importance of invention over organization and style” [7].) As a result, rather than exploring all the rich potential connections and continuities between Western process theory and the earlier classical canons, a number of scholars have

instead sought out connections with other contemporary theories of cognition and learning. Drawing upon psychological models, for example, Linda Flower and John R. Hayes's well-known 1980 chart attempts to better illustrate the complexity of the relationships among various writing activities, as well as their recursivity and non-linearity, a gesture which harkens to the concurrent multifunctionality of the elements within Kenneth Burke's dramatic pentad (Fig. 36).

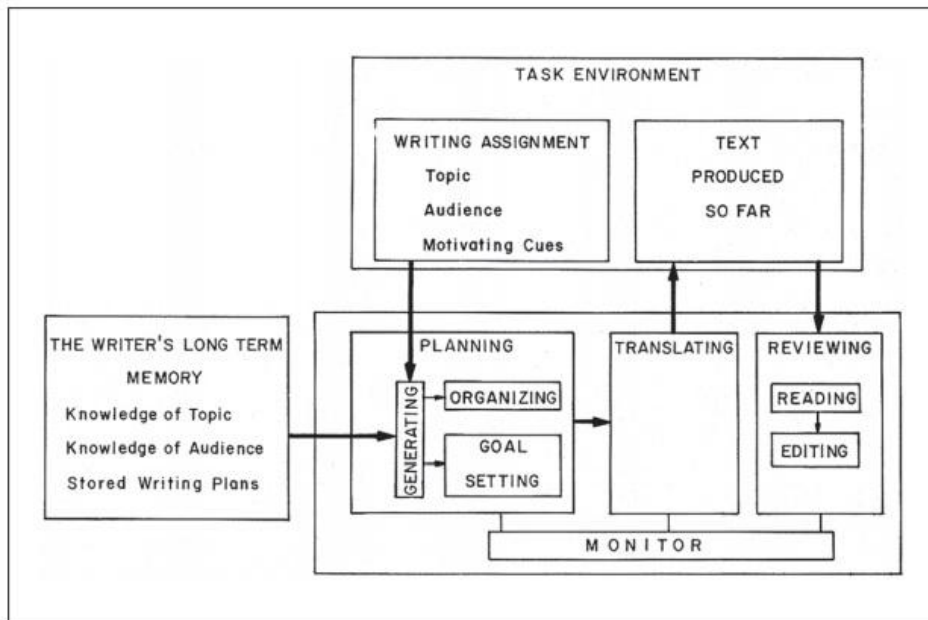


Figure 36. The Hayes-Flowers Model of the Writing Process, 1980.

In addition to underscoring the argument against narrow prescriptivist interpretations of process theory, Hayes-Flower chart also reintroduces Memory as an integral component of written communication – albeit one which informs Invention and Arrangement (which can be mapped over activities such as Planning, Translating, and Reviewing), rather than capping off the process at the end (for example, memorizing an oral speech before its

public delivery). Style is, notably, not mentioned. Another intriguing aspect of Hayes and Flower's map is that it illustrates the role of external forces (or "task environment," to use their terminology, an umbrella term which includes audience) in shaping decisions pertaining to invention and arrangement. At least, this is how it can be viewed conservatively. Viewed more radically, the chart redefines rhetoric and writing as collaborative acts, rather than rhetor-responsible ones, paving the way for a more complex understanding of agency and authorship in textual production.

My point in providing this brief history is not to argue for the rightness or wrongness of a given map for the writing (or persuasive-speech-making) process. Nor is it to argue for a return to the original Western rhetorical canons as a primary means of understanding rhetorical endeavors – although as a system, they still can be helpful.²² Rather, my purpose is to demonstrate how dependent our understandings of rhetorical activity are upon medium. The media-specificity of each of these models – does Memory belong at the beginning or the end? – points to necessary shifts in the ways we conceptualize and categorize the rhetor's tasks when dealing with a new method of communication. This is an important phenomenon to observe as the cultural locus of communication shifts from orality to literacy to on-screen visualization.

How, then, might we map rhetorical production in visual or digital environments? Can the classical canons be said to apply? Ridolfo and DeVoss

²² Prior et al discuss the limitations of the Classical canons as theoretical imperfections which have not been brought on by our current digital age, but which existed in ancient times as well. "Rhetoric was already multimodal for the Greeks. They didn't need the printing press or the web" (5). Paul Zanker's *The Power of Images in the Age of Augustus* suggests similar multimodality on the part of the ancient Romans.

demonstrate how the relative immediacy of digital transmission necessitates a renewed, explicit concern for matters of delivery: “What document format should a file be sent in for certain types of future remixing? What resolution should images be released in if they are to be reprinted in a print publication? What level of quality and format should video be released in if it were to be cut up into additional tapes?” (n. pag). While Ridolfo foregrounds a related discussion of the long-neglected canon by remarking that the discipline has actually renewed its interest in the notion of Delivery over a span of the past twenty years – shifting from print documents to digital ones, and then on to the (electronic) movement of texts – it stands to reason when one observes that this renewed interest coincides with widespread personal use of broadcast and digital devices in the so-called “developed” world. In other words, this contemporary redrawing of Delivery back onto the map of rhetorical activity was likely prompted by shifts in media, even if a number of digital scholars initially chose to analyze examples which had been produced and transmitted in older, more familiar ways.

However, other theorists suggest that the increasingly complex factors involved in the electronic transmission and redistribution of texts only underscore the fact that “Delivery,” as conceived by Western classical thinkers, was conceptually limited to speech-related activities. Paul Prior et al. argue for a remapping of the rhetorical canons altogether, given the unforeseen dimensions and abilities of digital communication:

[T]he canon of delivery does not focus attention on the possible rhetorical configurations of distribution, mode, and other mediations. It does not alert us to take a broader view of the rhetorical landscape, to the

possibility of rhetorical campaigns. Nor does it feed back easily into a recognition of the arrays and chains of distribution, mode, and mediation in rhetorical processes. On the classical map, delivery is traced on a scene of individual production rather than on fields of cultural-historical practice. ... [I]t makes more sense to begin remapping rhetorical activity, to trace distribution and mediation, than to attempt to retrofit this ancient tool to do varieties of work it was never designed to address.

(Prior et al 8)

Prior's point is well-taken, and my own analysis similarly points out the importance of media-specificity to any given rhetorical framework. However, the challenge in attempting to retrofit the canon of Delivery is not merely one of reconciling differences between traditional and emerging media. Nor is it simply an issue of reconciling historical differences; the classical canons have *not* become disconnected from many present-day rhetorical systems merely by the passage of time – although both media and temporal changes have played a part. The canons, like any human-produced epistemological framework, are as culturally situated as they are historically and technologically situated. Hence, they are embedded within a nexus of culturally based assumptions about communication (i.e., an effective rhetor is one who directly persuades his or her audience, the roles of rhetor [active] and audience [passive] are distinct) that simply cannot be assumed to apply in an ever-enlarging, often digitally-mediated *nomos* shared by communicators from a divergence of ethnic backgrounds, geographic locations, and national/linguistic affiliations.

When dealing with rhetors who come from regions and backgrounds dominated by Western discursive traditions, the canons may still provide a helpful roadmap or model (with some media-specific modifications). Nevertheless, as a universal tool, a concept like “Delivery” has notable limitations – the foremost of which is its assumption of a speaker-dependent language and discourse. This is not to say it should be abandoned altogether; however, it should be recognized as a culturally bound model which cannot successfully map or describe the entire array of rhetorical phenomena that help shape the process(es) and experience(s) of exchange with multiple audiences via the *World Wide Web* (emphasis mine).

Visual Decolonization: Which Tools are Best?

My work in Chapter II on Kent Monkman’s paintings demonstrates how traditional artforms can be used to make a case in the 21st Century that earlier stereotypes have wrongly characterized Native lands, peoples, and bodies. Furthermore, an embrace of multimedia over painting as a more “advanced” method of visual communication implicitly endorses the culturally situated notion that human “progress” is linear and that new materials and methods are always, by definition, “advancements” along that linear track. However, Daniel R. Wildcat has pointed out the anthropocentrism – and hence, the fallacy – at the heart of the Western progress myth, which he criticizes as unrealistically “romantic.” “Progress is a powerful idea when associated with societies and history, for it is imbued with positive connotations. ... No one wants to be told they are against progress,” Wildcat writes. “At the most

fundamental level, it denotes improvement, something we do not expect plants, other animals, or other features of nature to do” (68-69).

Certainly, electronic media are different, and draw some of their rhetorical power from their unique dimensions and qualities, such as interactivity and ease of remote transmission via email and download technologies. Nevertheless, in the case of Monkman, the thing that gives his work its unmistakable power is that it returns to the site of original dissemination, the painted canvas, in order to playfully dispute centuries-old mischaracterizations. His paintings engage directly with the visual medium which popularized and serialized images such as the empty frontier and dying Indian. Modern audiences may falsely believe that older paintings are mimetic representations of a lost American past – rather than artistic interpretations of that past, interpretations whose disconnection from reality was, at times, unambiguously noted by critics. While some artists were indeed seen as documentarians in the service of science and the public, others were roundly criticized for the ways in which their creations stretched the truth. Contemporaneous art critics noted that a number of Albert Bierstadt’s canvases combined terrestrial features that are not naturally seen in close juxtaposition. And, writing in *Scribner’s Monthly*, acclaimed painter Thomas Moran opined that “[t]opography in art is valueless. The motive or incentive of my ‘Grand Canyon of the Yellowstone’ was the gorgeous display of color that impressed itself upon me. Probably no scenery in the world presents such a combination.” Citing this essay, present-day art historian Nancy Armstrong concludes, “Clearly, Moran saw himself as an artist, not a recorder of facts” (16). Even with these critiques and disavowals on record, the

persistent, unqualified use of images by Bierstadt and Moran as illustrations in secondary literature and history textbooks nevertheless treats their paintings as a supplementary form of historical record, rather than imaginative renderings. With these (mis)uses in mind, Monkman's appropriations of this medium – and rejection of its traditional messages – vividly remind audiences of paintings' subjective nature. Monkman's work spotlights paintings' dependence upon an artist's cultural as well as physical perspective, and thus aids 21st century viewers in interpreting the paintings' predecessors as similar rhetorical gestures. This is a task that could not have been accomplished as effectively, using any other medium.

What electronic media *can* do is allow audiences an opportunity to interact with, even inhabit, the visual topoi which spring from older media. In the case of a simple static image like a meme, the ease of wide dissemination via social media sites makes recomposition and mass “viral” publication easy for even relatively inexperienced rhetors. In the case of video games, players can use them as tools to write upon existing topoi and challenge widely accepted histories of colonization and Native erasure. In addition to offering a multisensory engagement with the visual topoi of previous static media, while using this medium results in a marked decentralization of rhetorical activity. As players, each audience member not only co-collaborates with the scriptwriter to draw meaning – but co-collaborates in producing the narrative itself, which springs from players' inhabitation of the characters onscreen, and their interactions with other visual elements within the game. This allows for the creation of multiple stories which break with histories of colonization; however, it also makes adherence to a single,

decolonially attuned storyline more difficult for game designers to ensure, as individual players are also free to resist and subvert such alternative narratives (to the extent that open gameplay allows).

It would appear, therefore, that the more interactive they become, the more limited digital media are in their ability to thrust forward a single rhetorical vision, such as the explicit reversals of colonial *topoi* found in Monkman's paintings. Nevertheless, the decenteredness of rhetorical activity within such an interactive space does a type of decolonial work in that it challenges Western assumptions about rhetoric and discourse at their root. Rather than a rhetor- (or speaker- or author- or game designer-) responsible exchange that hearkens to Ciceronean discussions of *movere* or *docere* (in which the audience is acted upon or targeted), exchanges created in a genre such as the open-world Western contribute to a dynamic, multinodal universe of invention and recomposition, in which everyone is increasingly a rhetor who writes upon the American West's visual *topoi*, as well as an audience member who recognizes and interprets them.

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