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CULTURAL NATIONALISM, WESTWARD EXPANSION AND THE PRODUCTION OF IMPERIAL LANDSCAPE: GEORGE CATLIN'S NATIVE AMERICAN WEST

Gareth E. John

In this paper I approach artist George Catlin's landscape paintings and descriptions of 1830s Native America as a constituent component of an ambivalent imperialist iconography that depicted American westward expansion and Indian policy during the first half of the nineteenth century. Drawing upon iconological theory, I explore the multiple and often conflicting meanings encoded in Catlin's work to show how his descriptions and images of the northern plains asserted his vision of the western landscape as Indian country, projecting a naturalistic, 'scientific' and purportedly authentic view of what was perceived as a rapidly fading scene. Although he claimed for his art an authenticity and naturalism drawn directly from nature, Catlin was profoundly influenced by a set of artistic and literary conventions propounded by those arguing for a distinctive national culture. Indeed, the American landscape and the Indian were symbols linking textually and aesthetically the natural environment and its aboriginal people to romantic notions of morality, exceptionality, and a national racial heritage. But while celebrating and promoting the Indian subject, nationalists painted a spectral picture of the Indians' future complicit with Jacksonian policy designed to rid eastern lands of Native Americans. Catlin's landscape paintings and descriptions problematically reproduced this irreconcilable tension in early nineteenth-century cultural nationalism and ultimately contributed to an imperial discourse on the Native American West: one that in Catlin's works ambivalently contained its own critique, questioning the effects of westward expansion and Indian policy.

The West – the great and almost boundless garden-spot of earth! This is the theme at present. The 'antres vast and deserts idle,' where the tomahawk sleeps with the bones of the savage, as yet untouched by the trespassing ploughshare – the pictured land of silence, which, in its melancholy alternatively echoes backward and forward the plaintive yells of the vanished red men, and the busy chants of the approaching

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> pioneers. I speak of the boundless plains of beauty, and Nature's richest livery, ... Over whose green, enamelled fields, as boundless and free as the ocean's wave, Nature's proudest, noblest men have pranced on their wild horses, and extended, through a series of ages, their long arms in orisons of praise and gratitude to the Great Spirit in the sun, for the freedom and happiness of their existence.[1]

> Empires move outward in space as a way of moving forward in time; the 'prospect' that opens up is not just a spatial scene but a projected future of 'development' and exploitation.[2]

In 1824 George Catlin (1796–1872; see Figure 1) caught sight of a delegation of 'noble and dignified-looking' Indians visiting Philadelphia on a tour of the eastern cities from the 'Far West'. Awestruck by their 'classic beauty', the 28-year-old lawyer turned portraitist resolved to devote his life to the 'production of a literal and graphic delineation of the living manners, customs, and character' of the North American Indians.[3] Catlin visited 48 Indian tribes on the Great Plains on his expeditions throughout the 1830s,[4] and along the way made detailed ethnographical recordings and produced an impressive gallery of around 500 paintings – over half of which were Indian portraits and the remainder 'landscapes of the country they live in' and scenes of Indian life.[5]

Catlin stands out among his contemporaries as the most notable artist-explorer of the Indian West, though he was not the first in his genre nor necessarily the best.[6] Since 1821, Charles Bird King had painted portraits of Indian visitors to the nation's capital, but as a 'stay-at-home' artist King only really knew his subjects as 'picturesquely costumed, befuddled strangers in the complex civilization of the alien white man'.[7] Other artists, including Samuel Seymour, Prince Paul of Württemburg and Paul Rindisbacher, did venture out west, but their work had little if any influence on the American imagination.[8] Catlin pioneered western art. He blazed the trail for the likes of Karl Bodmer, Seth Eastman, John Mix Stanley and Charles Wimar, and inspired several important artists including Arthur Tait,[9] Rosa Bonheur and Paul Kane.[10] He also published extensively on his works and travels, and applied showmanship to his lectures and exhibitions held throughout the cities of the east and Europe – he was in many ways the true predecessor to Buffalo Bill and his 'Wild West' show.[11] In short, not only was Catlin very influential in scholarly and artistic fields but he captivated public audiences with his renditions of the Indian west.

In this paper I re-present George Catlin's painted and written portrayal of 1830s Native America, particularly his landscapes, as a constituent component of an ambivalent imperialist iconography depicting American westward expansion and Indian policy during the first half of the nineteenth century. In so doing I draw upon iconological theory as developed in cultural geography and art history to explore the multiple and often conflicting meanings encoded in Catlin's landscape paintings in conjunction with his writings, and in particular show how he mobilized his descriptions and images of the northern plains to assert his vision of the western landscape as Indian country, projecting a naturalistic, 'scientific' and purportedly authentic view of what was perceived as a rapidly fading scene. Although he claimed for his art an authenticity and naturalism plied directly from nature, Catlin was profoundly influenced by a set of

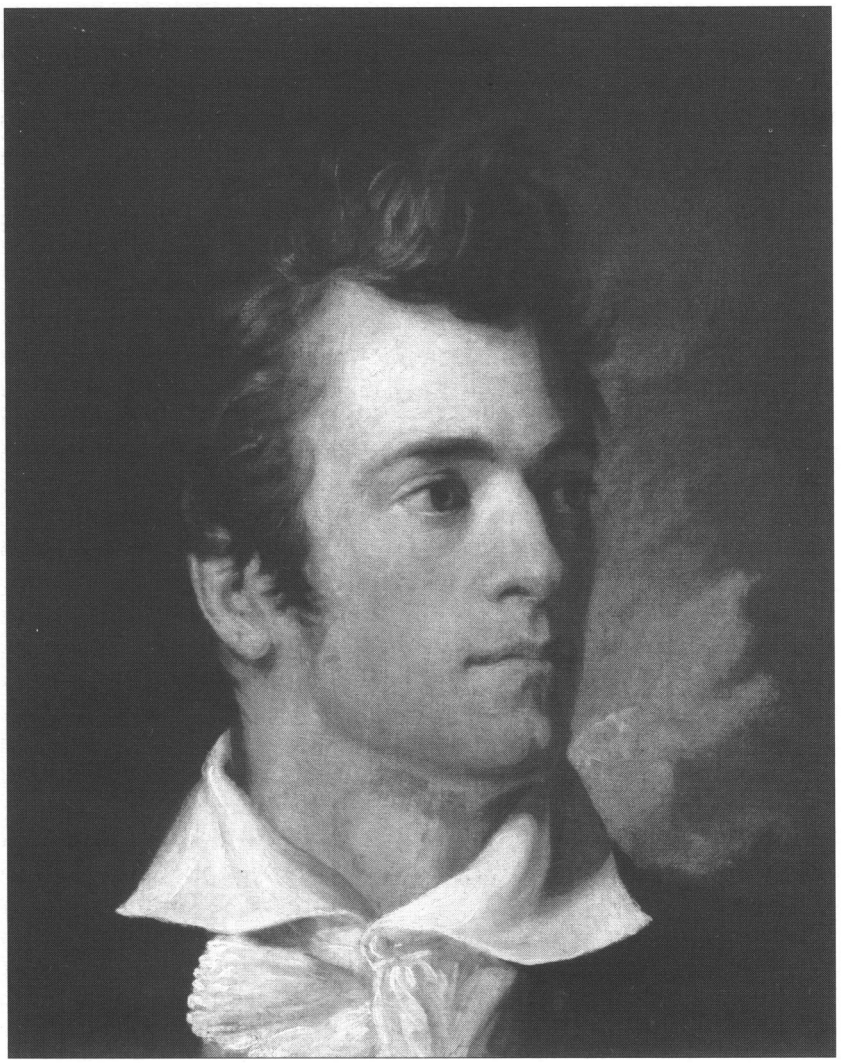

Figure 1 ~ George Catlin, *Self-portrait*, 1824, oil on canvas (Thomas Gilcrease Institute, Tulsa, Oklahoma)

artistic and literary conventions propounded by those arguing for a distinctive national culture. For during the first half of the nineteenth century, the American landscape and the Indian were employed by cultural nationalists – writers, artists, politicians, lawyers, bankers and merchants alike – as symbols linking textually and aesthetically the natural environment and its aboriginal people to romantic notions of morality, exceptionality and a national racial heritage. But while celebrating and promoting the Indian subject, nationalists painted a spectral picture of the Indians' future complicit with Jacksonian policy designed to rid eastern lands of Native Americans. In this vein, I explicate

not only how Catlin's landscape paintings and descriptions problematically reproduced this irreconcilable tension in early nineteenth-century cultural nationalism but also the ways in which his imagery – especially the naturalism and realism inherent to the landscape genre – contributed to an imperial discourse on the Native American West: one that in Catlin's works ambivalently contained its own critique, questioning the effects of westward expansion and Indian policy.

Iconology, geography and the 'West' as imperial landscape

In the 1930s, high humanist art historian Erwin Panofsky distinguished between various levels of meaning in visual imagery, making a distinction between iconography in the 'narrower sense' and iconography in the 'deeper sense'; the latter he termed 'iconology'. While iconography referred to the elucidation of conventional meaning that connected recognizable motifs to specific themes and concepts, iconology operated at the level of intrinsic meaning and drew out 'those underlying principles which reveal the basic attitude of a nation, a period, a class, a religious or philosophical persuasion–qualified by one person and condensed into one work'.[12] Iconology, as the science of imagery broadly conceived, is thus concerned with the symbolic, contextual meaning of the visual; that is, it probes 'meaning in a work of art by placing it in its historical context' and analysing the 'ideas implicated in its imagery'.[13] To W. J. T. Mitchell the iconological approach necessitates an understanding of the ideological functioning of imagery and of how images are related to texts. He treats 'textuality' as a 'foil to imagery', a 'significant other' or rival mode of 'representation', while recognizing that the visual and the verbal are deeply embedded in one another.[14]

Such an intertextual interpretive strategy has proved useful in conceptualizing the meanings associated with landscape imagery. Cultural geographers Stephen Daniels and Denis Cosgrove have applied iconology, which they refer to using the more general term 'iconography', to the analysis of landscape (reconstituted in painting, poetry, landscape parks and city plans) as an envisioned conceptual phenomenon embedded in the ideology of a particular class or social order.[15] Just as Panofskian iconology in art history 'concerns itself with subject matter or meaning of works of art, as opposed to form', iconographical analyses in the new cultural geography emphasize landscape's multilayered and contextualized meanings, as opposed to its absolute spatial configuration or morphological pattern.[16] Concerned with the historical production of landscape imagery and focusing on representative images of landscape,[17] iconological studies in geography tend often to engage the medium of landscape painting. The 'painterly approach'[18] continues to occupy an important position in the new cultural geography, alongside and integrated within 'textual'/discursive,[19] feminist,[20] (post-)Marxist[21] and 'theatrical' frameworks for understanding landscape.[22]

Central to the painterly approach is the historical discursive development of the 'landscape idea' in various spatial, social and political contexts. Denis Cosgrove's now classic *Social formation and symbolic landscape* traced the emer-

gence of perspectival vision in Renaissance Italy and followed its development through seventeenth-century Dutch painting, eighteenth- and nineteenth-century English landscape painting and poetry, and the Jeffersonian land survey system in the United States. Whereas Cosgrove examined the ascendancy of the landscape idea within the framework of the transformation of societies from feudalism to capitalism and the emergence of modernity more generally, more recently W. J. T. Mitchell has suggested a connection between the rise of the genre of landscape and imperialism. In this way, landscape is approached as the 'dreamwork of imperialism', an imperial gaze employing the naturalizing techniques of realism to mediate between the self and the other, and more radically between the human and non-human.[23]

George Catlin's landscape imagery similarly requires contextualizing according to contemporaneous ideas of landscape in America. His landscape paintings and written descriptions lend themselves well to an iconological analysis which places them not merely within the institutional conventions of art and science which developed in Philadelphia in the Jeffersonian era – though this 'narrower' contextualization is important[24] – but also within the 'deeper' imperial national ideological milieux of US westward expansionism and Indian policy. Historian Brian W. Dippie writes that 'Catlin's art cannot be understood apart from the assumptions that informed it. More than any of his peers, he was certain that a great epic was being played out in America.'[25] The epic was the territorial expansion of the United States which effected changes not only in the land but in the status of the Indian tribes who occupied it. While Jeffersonians were plagued by the question of Indian policy, advocating a 'philanthropic' mixture of assimilation into the agrarian economy and voluntary removal,[26] successive Jeffersonian administrations extended the boundaries of the republic and promoted the settlement of newly acquired territories.

The presidencies of Thomas Jefferson and James Monroe, in particular with the Louisiana purchase of 1803 and later the Adams–Onís Treaty of 1819, committed the young nation to the task of settling a vast territory of virtually unseen and therefore unknown land.[27] Jefferson arranged for the famous 1804–6 Lewis and Clark expedition to the Pacific coast, but no artist was enlisted to record the scenery en route.[28] In 1820, however, an expedition by Major Stephen Long did produce – through artists Samuel Seymour and Titian Peale – a number of landscapes (including views of the leeward Rockies), paintings of Indian–white treaty councils and sketches of the flora and fauna of the country. But by 1832 – the year Catlin set out – few images of the land west of St Louis existed. Painting scenes beheld and documented nearly 30 years before by Lewis and Clark, Catlin's landscapes were essentially the 'first pictures of the Upper Missouri country, or any part of the Far West. In his pictures Americans could see for the first time portions of the country which by 1837 were exercising an exceedingly powerful influence on the national imagination.'[29] Those 'pictures' actively (re)produced the west as landscape, a 'prospect' or view framed by a particular set of nationalist, scientific and artistic discourses which by virtue of their shared – if at times ambivalent – imperialistic teleology necessarily constructed the Indian as the 'Vanishing American' and western land as the future

stage of national development. In the following section I outline Catlin's early artistic influences and the immediate context of cultural nationalism which formulated and naturalized an a priori interpretive framework through which the western landscape and the Indian – as national symbols – were to be understood.

Catlin in context: cultural nationalism, landscape and the Indian

George Catlin of Wilkes-Barre

George Catlin was born on 26 July 1796 in Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania, the fifth of 14 children of Putnam and Polly Sutton Catlin.[30] Early on, Putnam Catlin directed his son toward a career in law and in 1817 George enrolled in the law school of Reeve and Gould in Litchfield, Connecticut. His passions, however, lay elsewhere. In the early 1820s he moved to Philadelphia to 'commence the art of painting', and by February 1824 he was elected to the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts. He made a modest living, 'without teacher or adviser', as a portraitist painting members of eastern high society, including Governor DeWitt Clinton of New York.[31] Dissatisfied with the mediocrity which accompanied the pursuit of portraiture,[32] Catlin later recalled that 'my mind was continually reaching out for some branch or enterprise of the art, on which to devote a whole lifetime of enthusiasm'. When he caught sight of a delegation of Indians passing through Philadelphia on their way to 'Washington City', Catlin momentously decided to spend the rest of his life portraying these 'lords of the forest'.[33]

Financial constraints prevented Catlin from leaving at once for the West, but he visited Iroquois settlements in upstate New York where, among others, he painted the famous Seneca orator Red Jacket in 1826.[34] While his newfound passion led him to delineate portraits of the Seneca, Oneida and Tuscarora Indians, an emerging cultural nationalist taste for the exceptional – nurtured through an American variant of European romanticism in art[35] – largely dictated his choices for landscape representation during the 1820s. In 1827, Catlin painted several views of the Niagara Falls: a fashionable subject for landscape artists who sought to depict the sublimity and exceptionality of the American scene.[36] Though the results were rather mixed, they nevertheless illustrate his ability to articulate the romantic sensibility in his paintings. To be sure, George Catlin's later works on the West and the Indians were very much informed by artistic and literary conventions promoted through the movement of cultural nationalism.

Toward a national taste in landscape

Following the war of 1812 – itself an important stimulus to patriotic fervour[37] – cultural nationalists addressed the issue of developing a distinctive *American* culture through the cultivation of the arts and the promotion of a national taste. 'Fending off or deemphasizing systematic philosophizing, aristocratic predilec-

tions, and mindless trailing after Europe', American aesthetic nationalists stressed 'their preference for instrumental functionalism, morality, equalitarianism, and nationalism in aesthetic judgements'.[38] In so doing they employed a number of artistic and literary conventions, promoting their articulation through representations of the American landscape and the Indian to promote a national sense of morality and exceptionality and claim a national racial heritage.

In the first quarter of the nineteenth century romanticism emerged as the cornerstone of American aesthetic nationalism.[39] Particularly influential as a guiding text for American romantics was Archibald Alison's *Essays on the nature and principles of taste*, first published in 1790 and reissued in 1811. Alison's work developed the concept of *associationism*. Firmly grounded in the Scottish and English doctrines of Enlightenment thought,[40] associationism held that viewed objects set off a sequence of ideas or emotions in the imagination, so that 'trains of pleasing or solemn thought arise spontaneously within our minds':[41]

> There is not one [feature] of scenery which is not fitted to awaken us to moral emotion – to lead us, when once the key of our imagination is struck, to trains of fascinating and of endless imagery; and in the indulgence of them to make our bosoms either glow with conceptions of mental excellence, or melt in the dreams of moral good.[42]

While in their pragmatism American nationalists were reluctant to accept Alison's arguments for a direct relationship between psychology and aesthetics, they were certainly taken with associationism's moralistic implications.[43]

To 'overlook associationism is', according to Howard S. Merritt, 'to miss much of essential importance' in early nineteenth-century American thought.[44] Indeed, statements proliferated promoting the associationist significance of the arts. Boston lawyer, amateur painter and collector Franklin B. Dexter proclaimed that the arts 'act immediately on the character of a People, as well as of Individual Man; they are addressed to the whole mass of society'.[45] Similarly John Knapp, writing for the *North American review* in 1818, urged an appreciation of the American landscape as a source of national identity, stressing its potential to inspire virtue:

> If men's minds are influenced by the scenes in which they are conversant, Americans can scarcely be denied acclaim to be inspired with some peculiar moral graces by their grand and lovely landscapes. But, moreover, it is beneficial to connect our best intellectual associations with places in our own land.[46]

In America, persuasive and convincing argument was required to justify production in and patronage for the arts, for what Neil Harris calls 'national philistinism' pervaded.[47] Not only did landscape painting celebrate the exceptional qualities of the new nation's land, it appealed to a moral sensibility fostered by associationism. In arguing for a national culture, painters of landscapes, therefore, 'presented the most convincing case, for they tapped . . . the long American tradition of seeing moral significance in nature'.[48] Joseph Hopkinson's oration at the opening of the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts in 1810 asserted

the comparative value of America's vast and varied scenery in calling for the skills of the nation's landscapists:

> Do not our vast rivers, vast beyond the conception of the European, rolling over immeasurable Space, with hills and mountains, the bleak wastes and luxuriant meadows through which they force their way, afford the most sublime and beautiful objects for the pencil of Landscape?[49]

Similarly, DeWitt Clinton, addressing New York's American Academy of Fine Arts in 1816, asked:

> Can there be a country in the world better calculated than ours to exercise and to exalt the imagination – to call into activity the creative powers of the mind, and to afford just views of the beautiful, the wonderful, and the sublime?[50]

By the mid-nineteenth century a taste for the landscapes of the Old Masters had been cultivated. Sixteenth- and seventeenth-century artists such as Sanzio Raphael, Salvatore Rosa, Salomon van Ruysdael, Claude Lorrain and Nicolas Poussin were highly thought of by nineteenth-century American men and women of wealth and education.[51] According to J. Meredith Neil, American artists sought synthesis from the various Italian, French and Flemish schools providing a mixture of correctness, elegance, strength, sublimity, lively naturalness, and realism.[52] Given the grandeur of the American landscape, there was no reason why the landscape traditions of Europe could not be bettered by homegrown American artists. According to one cultural nationalist, 'The mind is now as susceptible as ever of the impressions of natural beauty and of poetical and moral associations. . . . We see no reason why men should not arise in our day to surpass all that was accomplished by Claude, Gaspar, or Salvatore.'[53] The work of the Old Masters inspired artists of the revered Hudson River School (which included the English-born Thomas Cole and his protégé Frederic Edwin Church, Asher B. Durand, Jasper F. Cropsey and John F. Kensett) by drawing attention to America's picturesque and rugged landscapes. What American artists lacked in artistic maturity would supposedly be compensated for by the grandeur of the scenes they depicted.[54] They painted scenes of rugged mountains, unruly wilderness, broad rivers, and immense and powerful cataracts,[55] while elsewhere portraying the order, quietness, and placidity of 'improved' pastoral land.

The Indian as fading national symbol

For some painters and writers the 'impressions of natural beauty and of poetical and moral associations' were not simply restricted to the inanimate. To those who viewed the West romantically, the Indian was equally a subject of national importance. In 1839 the New York *Evening star*, on hearing that George Catlin and his Indian Gallery and travelling exhibition were to cross the Atlantic and possibly be lost forever to European patronage, asserted: 'Nothing could redound more to the patriotism, national pride, and honor of our country, than the purchase by Congress of this collection of Aboriginal Curiosities, to enrich a National Museum at Washington.'[56] Arguing for the appropriation of Catlin's Indian gallery by Congress in 1849, the eminent Whig senator from New York,

Daniel Webster, passionately characterized Catlin's collection as 'an *American* subject, as belonging to us, to our history, to the history of a race whose lands we till, and over whose graves and bones we tread every day. I look upon it as a thing more appropriate for us than the ascertaining of the South Pole, or anything that can be discovered in the Dead Sea, or the River Jordan.'[57] To mid-century philanthropists such as Webster, Indians were historical remnants offering an ostensibly *American* sense of heritage, a clear and tangible link to the young nation's distant past.

At an address before the New Confederacy of the Iroquois in Aurora, New York in 1846, ethnological historian Henry Rowe Schoolcraft, former US Indian Agent for the Lake Superior Region, asserted the symbolic importance of the Indian as a subject for historical scholarship:[58]

> And where, when we survey the length and breadth of the land, can a more suitable element for the work be found, than is furnished by the history and antiquities and institutions of the free, bold, wild, independent native hunter race? They are relatively to us what the ancient Pict and Celt were to Britain or the Teuton, Goth and Magyar to continental Europe.[59]

In the same address, Schoolcraft also equated the great civilizations of antiquity with the Indians of North America and questioned the New World preoccupation with Old World classicism:

> Shall we neglect him, and his antiquarian vestiges, to run after foreign sources of intellectual study? Shall we toil amid the ruins of Thebes and Palmyra, while we have before us the monumental enigma of an unknown race? Shall philosophical ardor expend itself, in searching after the buried sites of Ninevah, and Babylon and Troy, while we have not attempted, with decent research, to collect, arrange and determine, the leading data of our aboriginal history and antiquities?[60]

Just as the civilizations of antiquity declined, so too would 'savagery' make way for a new American civilization as it moved westwards following the course of heavenly bodies.[61] In this sense, though a subject to be celebrated, the Indian was a ghost in the making: a notion informed by the political realities of the day.[62]

The election of Southern Democrat Andrew Jackson to the presidency in 1828 marked a fundamental shift in Indian policy away from the 'enlightened' Jeffersonian doctrine of gradual assimilation. In an 1829 address supporting the imminent Jacksonian policy of wholesale Indian removal, Thomas McKenney, head of the Office of Indian Affairs, prophesied that 'If the Indians do not emigrate, and fly by the causes, which are fixed in themselves, and which have proved so destructive in the past, they *must perish*!'[63] The following year, and by a close margin, Congress enacted the general removal bill which decreed that all Indians east of the Mississippi be removed to designated sites west of the river. Justifying the policy in his second annual message to Congress in December 1830, Jackson reasoned:

> What good man would prefer a country covered with forests and ranged by a few thousand savages to our extensive Republic, studded with cities, towns, and prosperous farms, embellished with all the improvements which art can devise or industry

> execute, occupied by more than 12,000,000 happy people, and filled with the blessings of liberty, civilization, and religion?[64]

Jacksonites appeased critics of the policy by appealing to their philanthropic sensibilities, arguing that 'America would save the Indians *for* civilization by rescuing them *from* civilization'.[65] For others, however, the Indians' fate was inescapable in spite of the removal effort. A Whig senator from Maine, Peleg Sprague, argued that they could not be preserved, that 'it is the doom of Providence that they must perish'.[66] While Jacksonian democracy represented southern plantation owners who desired to rid their lands of Indians altogether, the destiny of the Indian, as of the American nation, was discursively and pictorially constructed as manifest in providential design – the Indian would inevitably succumb to westward expansion.

Nineteenth-century American popular and high art genres of literature and painting, in reconstituting the emergent political rhetoric on removal, further compounded the belief that the Indian was fast fading from existence. Romantic poet William Cullen Bryant's 'An Indian at the burying-place of his fathers' (1824) likened the Indians to the melting spring snow and 'civilization' to the warmth of the noon-day sun:

> They waste us – aye – like April snow
> In the warm noon, we shrink away;
> And fast they follow, as we go
> Towards the setting day, –
> till they shall fill the land, and we
> Are driven into the western sea.[67]

Between 1824 and 1834 about 40 novels, epitomized by James Fenimore Cooper's *The last of the Mohicans* (1826), were published informing what G. Harrison Orians termed the 'cult of the Vanishing American'.[68] Painters similarly portrayed Indians as classical or romantic figures doomed to extinction by the forces of 'civilization'. Illustrative of what by the 1850s was a popular theme is Stanley's painting *Last of their race* (Figure 2).[69] In this, Indians of various tribal origin and different ages are silhouetted against the spectral background of the setting sun. Their extinction is foreordained; confronted by the western sea they have nowhere left to go.[70]

The painted and written works of George Catlin constitute an early articulation of this multi-faceted cultural nationalist and imperial political context. His Indian portraits and western landscapes, in conjunction with his writings and public lectures, celebrated the 'beauty and wildness of scenes that can be daily witnessed in this romantic country' while lamenting the inescapable demise of the Indians.[71] The task at hand was of one of pressing urgency and, as Henry Schoolcraft and Daniel Webster would echo over a decade later, of national cultural importance. To Catlin, 'the history and customs of such a people, preserved by pictorial illustrations, are themes worthy the lifetime of one man, and nothing short of the loss of my life, shall prevent me from visiting their country and of becoming their historian'.[72] Not merely illustrative of the immediate institutional literary and artistic context of cultural nationalism, however, his

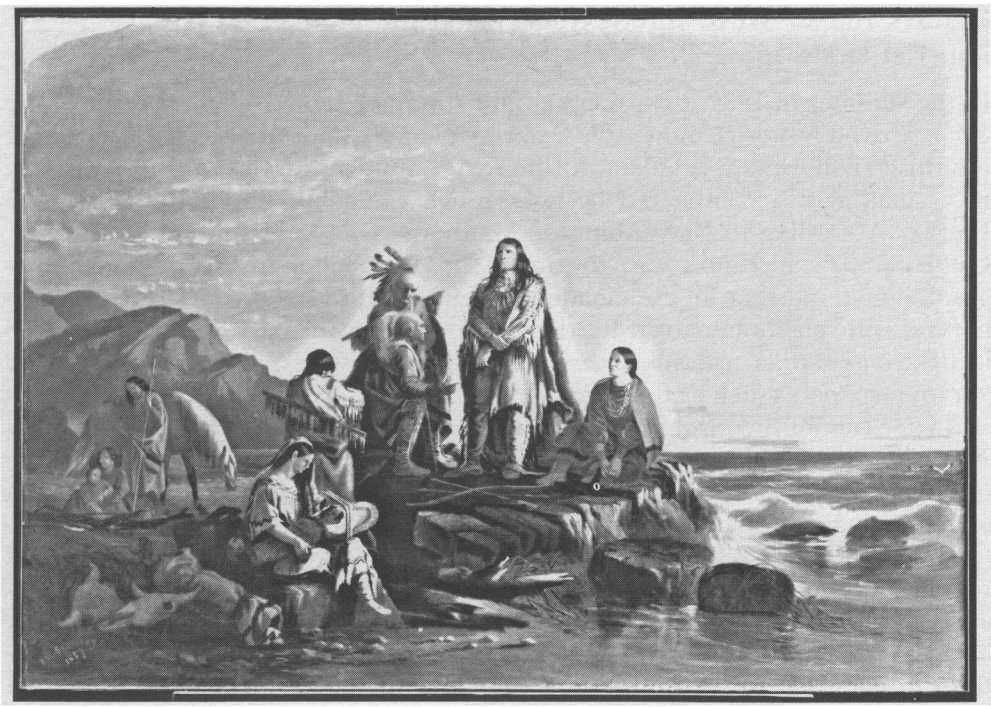

Figure 2 ~ John Mix Stanley, *Last of their race*, 1857, oil on canvas (Buffalo Bill Historical Center, Cody, Wyoming). Many painters of Indians were motivated by the belief that they were depicting a vanishing race of 'noble men'.

landscape images were informed by imperialist political ideology. In documenting the manners, customs and condition of the American Indian, and by illustrating the 'country from which he hails', Catlin constructed the west as Indian country – 'a vast country of green fields, where the *men* are all *red*', and which was soon to pass into oblivion under the plough.[73] Landscape as produced in Catlin's works constituted a series of 'natural' scenes or panoramas through which American empire would move as westward advancement, spaces to be transformed into Jackson's 'extensive Republic, studded with cities, towns, and prosperous farms'.[74] But Catlin's rendering of the West is ambivalent in that it contains anti-imperial sentiment directed at what he perceived as the very instruments of Indian declination: westward expansion, government policy and the fur trade. In short, Catlin's western landscapes acted as a 'medium of exchange between the human and the natural, the self and the other',[75] and were embedded in, but also critical of, the imperialism of US westward territorial expansion and its attendant Indian policy.

Catlin's Indian West: intertextuality and the production of imperial landscape

In the summer of 1832, the American Fur Company's new steamboat, the *Yellow Stone*, arrived at Fort Union after a voyage from St Louis that took nearly three months.[76] Following a brief stay at the fort, Catlin ventured down the Missouri in a small skiff accompanied by two French Canadian trappers, Ba'tiste and Bogard. According to Dr Washington Matthews, army surgeon and ethnologist, Catlin's 1832 expedition was 'the most fruitful journey in artistic and ethnographic material that he ever made'.[77] While painting landscapes directly from nature, with elaborate prose he described those scenes as well as encounters with various Indian tribes in a series of letters that were first published in New York newspapers (such as the *Spectator* and the *Daily commercial advertiser* in 1832) and later republished in his 1841 two-volume monograph *Letters and notes on the manners, customs and conditions of the North American Indians.* Combining the genre of travel writing with 'scientific' descriptions of the flora, fauna and geological formations and ethnographical accounts of the various Indian tribes encountered, *Letters and notes* is an impressive work replete with the associationist and romantic tropes of American cultural nationalism. Constructing the Indian West as a landscape of exceptional yet fleeting beauty, his writings necessarily informed the meaning of his painted imagery. But rather than mere illustrations to his extensive notes, his landscape images act back upon and reinscribe the meaning of his text, so that when interpreted intertextually, within a broader iconological framework, his paintings and writings embody a profoundly ambivalent imperialist way of seeing.

In what follows, I analyse two of Catlin's landscape paintings from his 1832 upper Missouri expedition. While on the one hand they illustrate how in his quest for realism he inadvertently naturalized conventional, romantic, cultural nationalistic ways of seeing the Native American West as rapidly vanishing in the wake of 'progress', they also, by virtue of his celebration of the subject-matter inspired in part from years of close acquaintance with numerous Indians,[78] bring those ways of seeing into question. Indeed, the specific form of these two landscape paintings embodies the ambivalence of Catlin's imperial vision of the West as simultaneously the 'great and almost boundless garden-spot of earth' and as the site of the 'continued wilful [*sic*] destruction of these happy people' at the hands of the government and fur traders.[79]

Naturalizing conventions

At the grand détour on the Missouri River, Catlin landed his skiff and climbed atop a 'stately clay mound', his assistants carrying his easel and canvas, and from there he painted *Big bend on the Upper Missouri, 1900 miles above St Louis* (Figure 3). A strange blend of orange, greens and blues, the painting is divided horizontally by the Missouri River into two parts, the middle ground and background. The background depicts a series of conical clay bluffs before an elevated plateau that stretches into the hazy distance marked by a few mesas. The mid-

dle ground frames the distant view. To the right, a high, rugged grass-topped cliff provides a picturesque side-screen deflecting our view toward the centre, where a narrow ridge dominates the lower central space of the painting. A serpentine path, a common trope of the picturesque, leads out to the cliff's edge rising high above the tree-speckled floodplain immediately, we presume, below; perched on the end is the minute figure of a solitary Indian facing out on the magnificent scene before him. The composition is striking for its elevated vantage-point – our view transcends that of the lone figure – and for its contrasts of light and colour: the shade of the lower right-hand corner and the darkness of the woodland on the opposite bank of the river contrasts with the luminescence of both the river and the sky, while the natural greenery of the prairie and dense woodland on the floodplain contrasts with the almost supernatural hue of the denuded clay bluffs. One of 'the most imposing landscape[s] of the Upper Missouri series',[80] *Big bend* is exceptional within Catlin's 1832 portfolio.[81] Somewhat less imposing and less colourful, *River bluffs, 1320 miles above St Louis* (Figure 4) – more typical of his 1832 collection – is no less striking for its use of light and shade, the solitary Indian figure, and an elevated vantage-point.

In *River bluffs*, one of the most commonly reproduced of Catlin's landscapes, a low conical hill in the lower middle ground to the left holds our perspective on the Missouri meandering its way to the horizon. The solitary Indian again guides our vision, this time westwards along the serpentine course of the river

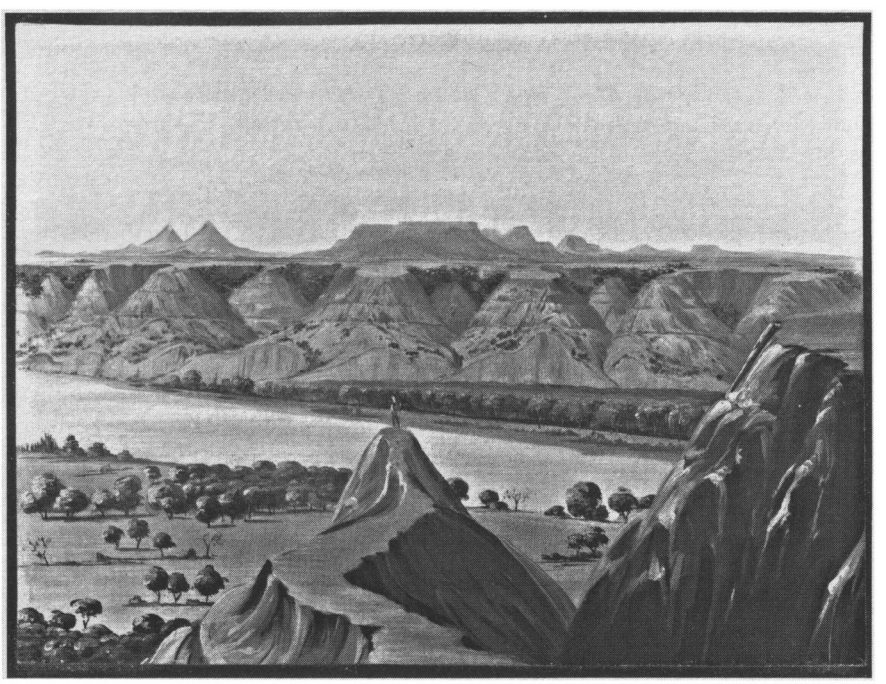

Figure 3 ~ George Catlin, *Big bend on the upper Missouri, 1900 miles above St Louis*, 1832, oil on canvas (National Museum of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, DC, gift of Mrs Joseph Harrison, Jr)

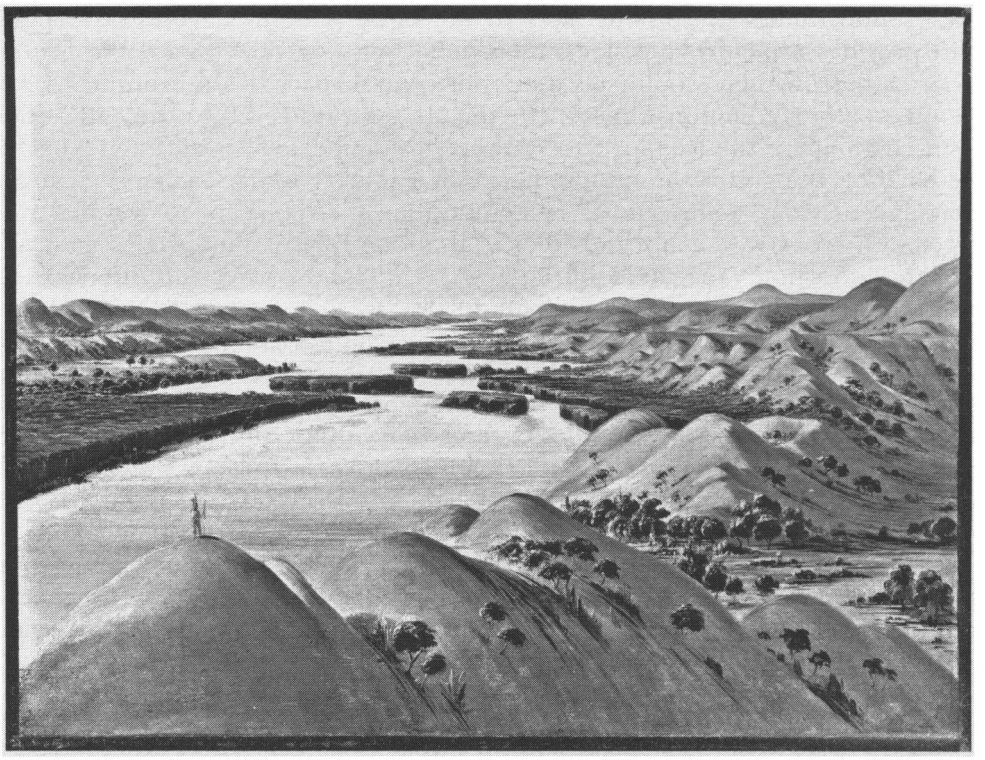

Figure 4 ~ George Catlin, *River bluffs, 1320 miles above St Louis*, 1832, oil on canvas (National Museum of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, DC, gift of Mrs Joseph Harrison, Jr)

framed by the gently rolling greenery which extends uninterrupted but for a scattering of trees. Light and shade, too, operate to structure our view. The brilliance of the river is enhanced by dense woodland along each river-bank, and the north-facing slopes of the bluffs are shaded, providing a natural side-screen on the right-hand side of the painting.

Both *Big bend* and *River bluffs* attest to the artist's concern for realism, displaying painstaking geological detail, clear light and careful shadowing – features entirely uncharacteristic of his later studio landscapes.[82] Indeed, in striving to 'pourtray [*sic*] with fidelity' the Native American West, Catlin embarked upon his western mission determined to paint Indians and their lands free from the 'foibles and fashions of Eastern life':[83]

> My enthusiastic admiration of man in the honest and elegant simplicity of nature, has always fed the warmest feelings of my bosom, and shut half the avenues to my heart against the specious refinements of the accomplished world. This feeling, together with the desire to study my art, independently of the embarrassments which the ridiculous fashions of civilised society have thrown in its way, has led me to the wilderness for a while, as the true school of the arts.[84]

While cultural nationalism's artistic and literary celebration of the Indian – particularly the 'cult of the Vanishing American' – provided the motivational rationale for Catlin's work, Philadelphia science provided an important framework for its production. Back during his days of self-apprenticeship in Philadelphia in the 1820s, Catlin was a regular visitor to Charles Willson Peale's spectacular art and science museum: a fantastic and exotic collection of natural history specimens, Indian curiosities and portraits that had earned national acclaim as a centre of the 'Enlightened' scientific community of Philadelphia.[85] According to Peter Hassrick, the museum's 'contents and conceptual philosophy [provided] a guidepost for bright and thirsty minds like that of George Catlin'.[86] Boasting the company of William Bartram, Baron Georges Cuvier, John Godman, Thomas Jefferson, Chevalier de Lamarck, Thomas Nuttall, Thomas Say and Benjamin Silliman, the Philadelphia scientific community stressed the importance of the principles of direct observation, detailed description and classification bequeathed by Francis Bacon and Isaac Newton.[87] Among members of Philadelphia's Academy of Natural Sciences and American Philosophical Society, science and art went hand in hand: indeed, the beauty of nature often inspired scientific endeavour while both were in search of 'truth'.[88] Because art provided the means for 'objectively' recording geological, botanical and zoological specimens, there could be no room for artistic fancy. To nationalists within the Philadelphia science community, then, '[f]ashion constantly tended toward capricious frivolity and vice. Good taste, virtue, patriotism, great art, the subjugation of fashionable variation – all these were reciprocally independent.'[89]

Catlin was very much influenced by this nationalist, scientific approach to art:[90] self-professedly, 'Nature' was his only adviser. 'I have learned more of the essential parts of the art in the three last years,' he wrote in 1834, 'than I could have learned in New-York in a lifetime.'[91] Convinced he was free from the distortional influences of artistic convention, Catlin posed an external independent 'nature' not only as his principal source of inspiration but as an undeniable handle on 'truth' – truth as it concerned the manners, customs and character of the North American Indians, and the land from which they hailed:

> If I am here losing the benefit of the fleeting fashions of the day, and neglecting that elegant polish, which the world say an artist should draw from a continual intercourse with the polite world, yet have I this consolation, that in this country, I am entirely divested of those dangerous steps and allurements which beset an artist in fashionable life; and have little to steal my thoughts away from the contemplation of the beautiful models that are about me. If, also, I have not here the benefit of that feeling of emulation, which is the life and spur to the arts, where artists are associates together; yet I am surrounded by living models of such elegance and beauty, that I feel an unceasing excitement of a much higher order – the certainty that I am drawing knowledge from the true source.[92]

His paintings would, according to Truettner, 'serve as illustrations for the extensive notes he was taking; the result would be a full account of all he had observed and learned.'[93]

Both *Big bend* and *River bluffs* are illustrative of Catlin's desire to document the western landscape scientifically. In the former he sought to highlight the

exceptional geological qualities of the Upper Missouri,[94] in particular 'the wonderful manner in which the gorges of the river have cut out its deep channel through these walls of clay on either side, of two or three hundred feet in elevation; and the imposing features of high table-lands in the distance, standing as a perpetual anomaly in the country . . .'[95] Boasting mimetic precision, in reference to *River bluffs* Catlin adduced to have rendered 'even to a line' the scene that confronted him.[96] Indeed, some writers have argued that it is Catlin's conscious quest for realism which sets him apart from other artists of the west. According to Peter Matthiessen, formally trained artists such as Titian Peale and Karl Bodmer failed to capture the 'broad light of the plains and the dry grit and feel of Indian Country' by instead imposing a 'romantic and melancholy grandeur' characteristic of the Hudson River School.[97] In contrast, Catlin's realist brand of landscape painting sought to depict nature as it appeared. 'The clear light that crosses the river and casts delicate colors and shadows across the bluff', Truettner argues of Catlin's *Big bend*, 'one would also like to attribute to Catlin's direct method'; conversely, in their realism, landscapes like *River bluffs* 'seem little more than a pleasant record of the scenery – the endless variety of the conical mounds, the intense green of the prairie grass, and the pattern of shadows that softened the river vista'.[98] But while he purported to shy away from fashionable artistic convention in favour of direct observation, the scientific realism in his work merely served to mask and more importantly to naturalize and reinforce the very conventions and attendant imperialist, nationalist political ambitions that he consciously sought to evade. Moreover, the landscape genre of painting itself possessed a naturalizing function; nationalist ideology was portrayed as nature so that landscape was 'not only a natural scene, and not just a representation of a natural scene, but a *natural* representation of a natural scene, a trace or icon of nature *in* nature itself, as if nature were imprinting and encoding its essential structures on our perceptual apparatus'.[99]

Romanticism, informed by the moral philosophy of associationism and the American mode of the picturesque,[100] set the pre-iconographical parameters, the 'essential structures', by which landscape as nature would be understood and reproduced. Such is evinced in Catlin's writing. Purportedly, the Indian West furnished him with 'almost unlimited models, both in landscape and the human figure, exactly suited to my feelings. I am now in the full possession and enjoyments of those conditions on which alone I was induced to pursue the art as a profession.'[101] Unable to contain his excitement at having arrived at the fur trading outpost at Fort Union, he described the 'many novel scenes' on the voyage as 'of the picturesque and romantic', and expressed his joy at 'the singular feelings that are excited in the breast of the stranger travelling through this interesting country'.[102] Referring to the scene at *Big bend* he wrote: 'Scarcely anything in nature can be found, I am sure, more exceedingly picturesque than the view from this place.'[103] Similarly, he described the riverscape approaching the Mandan village near present-day Bismarck, North Dakota, as 'one of the most beautiful and pleasing that can be seen in the world, and even more beautiful than imagination could ever create'. He found himself 'surrounded by subjects and scenes worthy the pens of Irving or Cooper; or the pencils of Raphael or

Hogarth; rich in legends and romances, which would require no aid of the imagination for a book or a picture'.[104] Furthermore, the motivation for his philanthropic quest to capture for posterity the 'beautiful models' about him was informed by the romantic literary and artistic myth of the Vanishing American. Of central concern to the artist was capturing the Indians' modes and looks before their predicted impending and unavoidable demise at the hands of the agents of westward expansion. To the extent that they pictured the 'uncivilised regions of their uninvaded country',[105] Catlin's landscape paintings promoted a view of the West as prospect, as the site of future national expansion and settlement, as land to be colonized by the westward advance of 'civilization'. It naturally followed that as American progress marched westward, the Indian tribes would shrink from the land. At times openly critical of this perceived process, Catlin's work intertextually embodies a deep ambivalence concerning his country's imperialist design on western lands and, in particular, its treatment of the Indian tribes both east and west of the Mississippi. Ultimately, however, Catlin took for granted, if with some discomfort, the imperialist teleology inherent to national westward expansion and the myth of the Vanishing American: notions which did not merely provide the backdrop for his endeavours but structured his understanding of the Native American West from the outset.

Ambivalent imperialism

What Catlin's paintings lack in refinement they make up for in sheer magnitude of coverage. Catlin worked at a feverish pace on his 1832 expedition, in most cases merely producing sketches in the field to be completed upon his return to St Louis.[106] The result is a comprehensive series of landscape scenes along the Missouri from St Louis to its confluence with the Yellowstone River. As if to map the course of the river and the land through which it meandered, Catlin even designated the distance of many of his landscapes from St Louis as the last major outpost of the 'civilized' world. Truettner writes, 'One could follow its course and the changing appearance of the countryside in a remarkably consistent fashion, acquiring in the process a knowledge that might serve a variety of interests. It was, after all, the first comprehensive view of western landscape offered to the population back East, and it represented something vastly more tangible than the fanciful reports it replaced.'[107] In this way, Catlin's landscape paintings along the Missouri constituted a panorama, an all-encompassing vision making the previously unknown known.

This method was perhaps the extension of his quest for scientific precision, or else merely symptomatic of his zeal to picture all that he saw. But as Alan Wallach argues in a compelling analysis of Thomas Cole's 1836 painting *The oxbow*, the panoramic or 'panoptic' mode of representation evolved dynamically as the product of a 'complex set of interrelated, and mutually reinforcing, cultural practices'.[108] Describing what he calls the 'panoptic sublime', Wallach refers to the dizzying effect of suddenly coming 'into possession of a terrain stretching as far as the eye could see'. The panoramic view structured 'the way in which social meanings were projected onto landscape; were absorbed into the forms

of landscape; were quite literally naturalized'.[109] Catlin's extensive views deploying imaginary elevated vantage-points and distance-specific designations were similarly ideologically informed, not only manifesting the artist's ability to re-articulate the scenes before him but also embodying in naturalized form the assumptions of aesthetic cultural nationalism and the imperialist politics of US westward expansion.

From the hill from which he painted *River bluffs*, Catlin also produced a view looking east entitled *Beautiful grassy bluffs* (Figure 5).[110] Both views are from a bird's-eye perspective, facilitating a panorama across the upper Missouri to the distant horizons, east and west:

> I took my easel, and canvas and brushes, to the top of the bluff, and painted the two views from the same spot; the one looking up, and the other down the river. The reader, by imagining these hills to be five or six hundred feet high, and every foot of them, as far as they can be discovered in distance, covered with a vivid green turf, whilst the sun is gilding one side, and throwing a cool shadow on the other, will be enabled to form something like an adequate idea of the shores of the Missouri.[111]

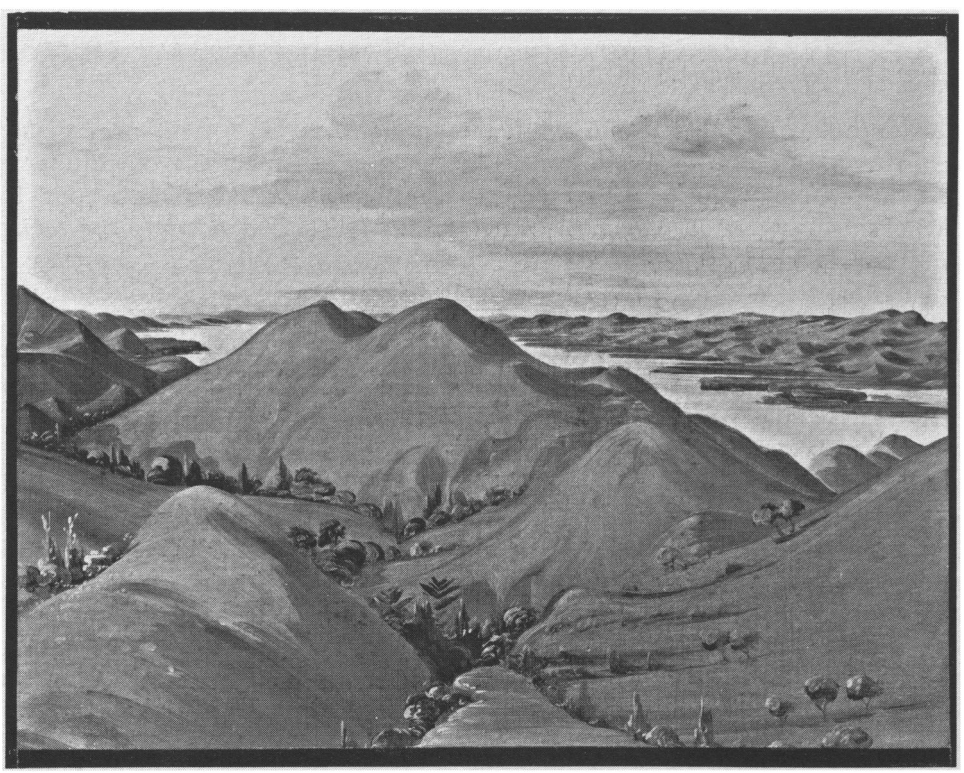

Figure 5 ~ George Catlin, *Beautiful grassy bluffs, 110 miles above St Louis*, 1832, oil on canvas (National Museum of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, DC, gift of Mrs Joseph Harrison, Jr)

In documenting the land as panorama, Catlin was at pains to stress not only its picturesque qualities but also its productive potential, while dispelling any ideas among his readers that this was the Great American Desert. Catlin continues:

> From this enchanting spot there was nothing to arrest the eye from ranging over its waters for the distance of twenty or thirty miles, where it quietly glides between its barriers, formed of thousands of green and gracefully sloping hills, with its rich and alluvial meadows, and woodlands – and its hundred islands, covered with stately cotton-wood.[112]

To Catlin the west, as a 'rich country . . . alluring the enterprising young men from the East . . . too tempting to be overlooked or neglected', presented a bountiful prospect.[113] 'Such is the great valley of the Mississippi and Missouri,' he declared, 'over almost every part of which I have extended my travels, and of which and of its future wealth and improvements, I have had sublime contemplations'.[114] But just as W. J. T. Mitchell conceives of landscape as 'the "dreamwork" of imperialism, unfolding its own movement in time and space from a central point of origin and folding back on itself to disclose both utopian fantasies of the perfected imperial prospect and fractured images of unresolved ambivalence and unsuppressed resistance',[115] so too do Catlin's panoramic landscape paintings and writings facilitate interstitial, anti-imperialist reinterpretations as they concern the supposed predetermined fate of the Indians and the destiny of the West.

In both *Big bend* and *River bluffs*, Catlin situates in the middle ground an Indian figure contemplatively viewing the 'natural', 'unspoiled' scene before him. Indeed, to understand Catlin's intent to paint in the Indian figure is to understand his reason for venturing out west in the first place: to professedly be the first and lamentably the last to document the quickly fading Indians in their natural setting. In this context the lone figure in *River bluffs* thus conveys a sense of solitude, perhaps a surrogate for Catlin himself, romantically pondering the dreadful fate that awaits the western Indian tribes who face the spectre of an ever-encroaching frontier. Recalling his thoughts while on the bluffs of the upper Missouri, Catlin wrote:

> I roamed from hill-top to hill-top . . . and looked into the valley below me, both up the river and down, and contemplated the thousand hills and dales that are now carpeted with green, streaked as they *will* be, with the plough, and yellow with the harvest sheaf; spotted with lowing kine – with houses and fences, and groups of hamlets and villas – and these lovely hill-tops ringing with the giddy din and maze, or secret earnest whispers of lovesick swains – of pristine simplicity and virtue – wholesome and well-earned contentment and abundance – and again, of wealth and refinements – of idleness and luxury – of vice and its deformities – of fire and sword, and the vengeance of offended heaven, wreaked in retributive destruction! – and peace, and quiet, and loveliness, and silence, dwelling again, over and through these scenes and blending them into futurity.[116]

The juxtaposition and intersection of these real-and-imagined worlds is instructive. Catlin was wholly mindful that the Native American West, a place of 'pristine simplicity and virtue', was quickly disappearing under the plough to make

way for civilization's 'vice and its deformities'. Indeed, immanent to the imperialism of westward expansion was the notion of the Vanishing American.

Catlin was absolutely convinced that what lay in front of him was fast disappearing: the Indians were 'rapidly passing away from the face of the earth' and he thus saw himself as 'lending a hand to a dying nation'.[117] To the extent that he would capture their images and modes of life, he heroically characterized himself as the Indians' saviour:[118]

> I have, for many years past, contemplated the noble races of red men, who are now spread over these trackless forests and boundless prairies, melting away at the approach of civilisation. Their rights invaded, their morals corrupted, their lands wrested from them, their customs changed, and therefore lost to the world; and they at last sunk into the earth, and the plough-share turning the sod over their graves, and I have flown to their rescue – not of their lives or of their race (for they are '*doomed*' and must perish), but to the rescue of their looks and their modes, at which the acquisitive world may hurl their poison and every besom of destruction, and trample them down and crush them to death; yet phoenix-like, they may rise from the 'stain on a painter's palette,' and live again upon canvas, and stand for centuries yet to come, the living monuments of a noble race.[119]

But as Patricia Nelson Limerick points out, Catlin's quest to save the 'noble races of red men' did not extend beyond the aesthetic: the Indians were, after all, '"*doomed*" and must perish'.[120] This said, he by no means uncritically accepted the agency of government and the fur trade in effecting the debasement, dispossession and degeneration of the Indians. The causal chain was as insidious to Catlin as it was obvious: 'White men – whiskey – tomahawks – scalping knives – guns, powder and ball – small-pox – debauchery – extermination.'[121] While many Jacksonians for the most part accepted the Indian's fate as pre-ordained, the result of providential will or the natural order of the rise and fall of civilizations, Catlin – though doubtless accepting that such a lamentable outcome was inevitable – understood that it was incontestably at the powerful hands of westward expansion, government Indian policy and the fur trade that such a 'calamity' would occur. Specifically condemning the 'cruel policy of removing the different tribes to their new country', he was 'compelled to state, as my irresistible conviction, that I believe the system one well calculated to benefit the interests of the voracious land-speculators and Indian Traders'.[122] Toward the end of the second volume of his *Letters and notes*, he wrote:

> Justice to a nation who are dying, need never be expected from the hands of their destroyers; and where injustice and injury are visited upon the weak and defenceless, from ten thousand hands – from Governments – monopolies and individuals – the offence is lost in the inseverable iniquity in which all join, and for which nobody is answerable, unless it be for their respective amounts, at a final day of retribution.[123]

Catlin in contrast viewed himself as 'meting out justice' to the Indians with his pen and brush.[124] His entire gallery of Indian portraits and western landscapes was his monument to what he deemed a disappearing people. Ultimately, though specifically critical of the agents of westward expansion, Catlin remained ambivalent, caught between his learned appreciation for Indian land and life and a sense of awe at 'the grand and irresistible march of progress': 'I have seen this

splendid Juggernaut rolling on,' he exclaimed, 'and beheld its sweeping desolation.'[125]

Catlin's panoramic landscapes of the upper Missouri country embody this ambivalent imperialism, presenting the boundless 'green, enamelled fields' as the 'pictured land of silence, which, in its melancholy alternatively echoes backward and forward the plaintive yells of the vanished red men, and the busy chants of the approaching pioneers'.[126] For Catlin, such conflict in the meaning of the West could not be reconciled in his time and place. Concluding his *Letters and notes*, he sermonized: 'American citizens, who live, everywhere proud of their growing wealth and their luxuries ... must soon take their humble places with their red, but injured brethren ... and stand, at last, with guilt's shivering conviction, amidst the myriad ranks of accusing spirits.' A final day of '*national retribution*' would surely come.[127]

Coda

In this paper I have shown how the written and painted works of artist-explorer George Catlin were informed by and informing of both the immediate artistic and literary context of early nineteenth-century cultural nationalism and the broader imperial, political context of westward territorial expansion and US Indian policy. Following the practical approach to art advanced by the Philadelphia science community, Catlin adhered to the Baconian principles of direct observation and sought to reproduce the Indian West 'realistically', free of the distortions of artistic fancy. Nevertheless, by constructing the upper Missouri country as an exemplar of the picturesque and romantic, he necessarily remained bound to the self-same literary and artistic conventions he sought to evade; moreover, through his strict adherence to realism – inherent to the mode of landscape painting – he inadvertently naturalized and reinforced the assumptions those conventions embodied: in particular, the notion of the Vanishing American and the teleology of modern progress. In this way, Catlin's Indian West constituted an imperial way of seeing which produced the western landscape panoramically as 'prospect', the future stage for national development and the realization of American Empire. Ultimately, however, his imperialist bent was tempered by ambivalence. Though he took for granted the future progression of the western frontier, and with that the impending doom of the Indian tribes, he nevertheless critically addressed the role of Jacksonian Indian policy and the fur trade in perpetrating what he viewed as a deplorable process of debasement and dispossession. In the end, the landscape paintings and descriptions from his 1832 expedition along the Missouri constitute what W. J. T. Mitchell calls 'fractured images of unresolved ambivalence and unsuppressed resistance'.[128] And it is precisely for their fluid duplicity of meaning that Catlin's works raise some interesting and important questions not only for iconology in general but in particular for the 'painterly' approach to landscape in geography.

Stephen Daniels and Denis Cosgrove have stated that 'where the visual seems not to provide a transparent window to truth but shatters appearance into a set

of dazzling surfaces, many reflecting the vanity of the spectator, textuality is upheld as providing an instrument to probe into substance'.[129] But the meaning of landscape imagery cannot simply be located in the textual realm as if the latter were a stable guarantor of authenticity or handle on 'truth'. Rather, and as Stephen Daniels previously argued, the meaning of landscape remains duplicitous:

> Landscape may be seen, as Adorno sees culture generally, as a 'dialectical image', an ambiguous synthesis whose redemptive and manipulative aspects cannot finally be disentangled, which can neither be completely reified as an authentic object in the world nor thoroughly dissolved as an ideological mirage.[130]

By approaching landscape as an elusive, equivocal, dialectical image which negotiates between the visual and the verbal, the embodied and the disembodied, the material and the discursive, we move beyond a simple Panofskian dualistic image-text conception of iconology – which seeks meaning in the authority of texts – toward an intertextual approach that lends itself to the duplicitious, interstitial and unfixable nature of meaning.[131] Indeed, if images and texts are treated as mutually constitutive components of an ideological system, rival modes of representation, then we can begin to approach landscape not as a signifier of something substantial and essential but rather, as Mitchell contends,[132] as a medium of exchange or communication between the human and the natural, and between the self and the other.

Acknowledgements

Since I completed drafts of this paper, Peter Gould has sadly passed away; for his unerring support and challenging but gentle criticism of my ideas, it is to his memory that I dedicate this paper. I am particularly indebted to my former mentor at Penn State, Deryck Holdsworth, who advised my masters work on Catlin with enthusiasm and dedication. My special thanks also to Rich Schein who guided me through the writing of this paper, and to Jean Lavigne, Karl Raitz and two anonymous reviewers who read drafts and provided useful comments. The usual disclaimers apply.

Notes

1 G. Catlin, *Letters and notes on the North American Indians*, 2 vols (North Dighton, MA, JG Press, 1995 [1841]), II, p. 176.

2 W. J. T. Mitchell, 'Imperial landscape' in Mitchell, ed., *Landscape and power* (Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1994), p. 17.

3 Catlin, *Letters and notes* I, pp. 2–3.

4 Catlin arrived in St Louis in 1830 and, after a briefing from Superintendent of Indian Affairs of the western tribes William Clark, whom Catlin accompanied on several treaty-making trips up the Mississippi and Missouri rivers in the spring of 1831, later set out on four major expeditions: up the Missouri to Fort Union in 1832; across the southern plains into Comanche country with the Dragoons in 1834; north to Fall of St Anthony and south to New Orleans along the Mississippi in 1835; and throughout the north-eastern plains and the Great Lakes system in 1836.

5 Catlin, *Letters and notes* I, p. 4; J. C. Ewers, *George Catlin: painter of Indians of the West*

(Washington, DC, US Government Printing Office, 1955).

[6] Certainly Catlin had his share of critics. Perhaps the most defamatory was William Dunlap, who described his portrait of DeWitt Clinton as 'the worst full-length which the city of New York possesses'. See William Dunlap, *A history of the rise and progress of the arts of design in the United States*, 2 vols (New York, Dover, 1969 [1834]), I, p. 64.

[7] Ewers, *George Catlin*, p. 502.

[8] *Ibid.*

[9] Tait was an English artist whose first impressions of the West were given him by Catlin's paintings. Tait's portrayals of frontier life were popularized through their translation by Currier and Ives.

[10] H. McCracken, *George Catlin and the old frontier* (New York, Dial Press, 1959); P. H. Hassrick, *Drawings of the North American Indians* (Garden City, NY, Doubleday, 1984); B. W. Dippie, *Catlin and his contemporaries: the politics of patronage* (Lincoln, University of Nebraska Press, 1990).

[11] Between 1836 and 1839 – before taking his travelling show to London, Paris and Brussels – Catlin exhibited his accrued gallery in Albany, New York City, Washington, Baltimore, Philadelphia and Boston. He lectured daily on his travels, displayed buffalo robes and other Indian 'artefacts', including a fully assembled Crow tipi, and in London even arranged for English men and boys – joined by his nephew Theodore Burr Catlin – to dress up and act out ceremonial dances and scenes of Indian warfare for his audiences. By 1843, English audiences were treated to the real item when he arranged for a troupe of Ojibwas to perform for the public at Lord's Cricket Ground and for Queen Victoria at Windsor Castle – as Dippie notes, 44 years before she would emerge from seclusion to attend Buffalo Bill's 'Wild West'. Catlin's exhibitions were extremely popular. During its first year at Egyptian Hall in London, 3500 visitors were drawn to the spectacle that was according to Catlin a 'decided hit'. For a compelling discussion of Catlin's Indian exhibitions as a precursor to Buffalo Bill's phenomenally popular 'Wild West' show, see Dippie, *Catlin and his contemporaries*, pp. 99–105. See also Ewers, *George Catlin*; R. B. Hassrick, *The George Catlin book of American Indians* (New York, Watson-Guptill, 1977); McCracken, *George Catlin and the old frontier*; R. J. Moore, *Native Americans, a portrait: the art and travels of Charles Bird King, George Catlin, and Karl Bodmer* (New York, Stewart, Tabori & Chang, 1997); W. H. Truettner, *The natural man observed: a study of Catlin's Indian gallery* (Washington, DC, Smithsonian Press, 1979).

[12] E. Panofsky, *Meaning in the visual arts: papers in and on art history* (Garden City, NJ, Doubleday Anchor, 1955 [1939]), pp. 28–31; see also D. C. Miller, 'Introduction' in Miller, ed., *American iconology: new approaches to nineteenth-century art and literature* (New Haven, CT, Yale University Press, 1993); W. J. T. Mitchell, *Iconology: image, text, ideology* (Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1986); S. Daniels and D. E. Cosgrove, 'Introduction: iconography and landscape' in Cosgrove and Daniels, eds, *The iconography of landscape: essays on the symbolic representation, design and use of past environments* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1988), pp. 1–10.

[13] *Ibid.*, p. 2.

[14] Mitchell, *Iconology*, p. 3.

[15] See Cosgrove and Daniels, *Iconography of landscape*; S. Daniels, *Fields of vision: landscape imagery and national identity in England and the United States* (Oxford, Polity Press, 1993); D. E. Cosgrove, *Social formation and symbolic landscape* (London, Croom Helm, 1984); D. E. Cosgrove, *The Palladian landscape: geographical change and its cultural representations in sixteenth-century Italy* (University Park, Pennsylvania University Press, 1993). Although it is Erwin Panofsky who is primarily associated with iconographi-

cal/ iconological theory, geographers have drawn on the concepts of other scholars in developing their ideas. The Marxist art critic John Berger has influenced a number of geographers, having argued that '[e]very image embodies a way of seeing' informed by the class position and view of the artist or patron. Another influential Marxian thinker is Raymond Williams, whose polemical treatise on the meaning of landscape in English literature argued: 'It is possible and useful to trace the internal histories of landscape painting, and landscape writing, landscape gardening and landscape architecture, but in any final analysis we must relate these histories to the common history of a land and its society.' See J. Berger, *Ways of seeing* (London, Penguin, 1972), p. 9; R. Williams, *The country and the city* (London, Chatto & Windus, 1973), p. 120; Daniels and Cosgrove, 'Introduction'; P. Jackson, 'Constructions of culture, representations of race: Edward Curtis's "way of seeing" ', in K. J. Anderson and F. Gale, eds, *Inventing places: studies in cultural geography* (Melbourne, Longman Cheshire 1992), pp. 190–209.

[16] Panofsky, *Meaning in the visual arts*, p. 26.

[17] See Cosgrove and Daniels, *Iconography of landscape*; Daniels, *Fields of vision*; Jackson, 'Constructions of culture'.

[18] J. S. Duncan, 'Landscape geography, 1993–94', *Progress in human geography* **19** (1995), pp. 414–22.

[19] See J. S. Duncan and N. Duncan, '(Re) reading the landscape', *Environment and planning D: society and space* **6** (1988), pp. 117–26; J. S. Duncan, *The city as text: the politics of landscape interpretation in the Kandyan Kingdom* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1990); D. Ley, 'Between Europe and Asia: the case of the missing sequoias', *Ecumene* **2** (1995), pp. 185–210; R. H. Schein, 'The place of landscape: a conceptual framework for interpreting an American scene', *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* **87** (1997), pp. 660–80.

[20] See G. Rose, *Feminism and geography: the limits of geographical knowledge* (Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1993); C. Nash, 'Reclaiming vision: looking at landscape and the body', *Gender, place and culture* **3** (1996), pp. 149–69. In reclaiming landscape for feminist geography, Nash critiques Gillian Rose by arguing that the landscape is not necessarily solely interpreted by the objectivizing male 'gaze' but can be actively produced by feminine subjects. She illustrates her point with reference to two sets of landscape images in which the male body stands in for landscape, revealing a view of the land that is structured by the complex intersubjectivities of gender, race, class and geography.

[21] See D. Mitchell, *The lie of the land: migrant workers and the California landscape* (Minneapolis, University of Minnesota, 1996).

[22] Denis Cosgrove has recently argued for a metaphorical understanding of landscape as theatre, an approach that ontologically combines image and text within a spectacular, performative spatial framework. See D. E. Cosgrove, 'Spectacle and society: landscape as theater in premodern and postmodern cities', in P. Groth and T. Bressi, eds, *Understanding ordinary landscapes* (New Haven, CT, Yale University Press, 1997), pp. 99–110; S. Daniels and D. E. Cosgrove, 'Spectacle and text', in J. S. Duncan and D. Ley, eds, *Place/culture/representation* (New York, Routledge, 1993), pp. 57–77; S. Kirsch, 'Watching the bombs go off: photography, nuclear landscapes, and spectator democracy', *Antipode* **29** (1997), pp. 227–55.

[23] Mitchell, 'Imperial landscape'. For a critique of this idea see D. E. Cosgrove, 'Introductory essay for the paperback edition' in *Social formation and symbolic landscape* (Madison, University of Wisconsin Press, 1998). Cosgrove suggests that it is an exaggeration to claim that landscape functioned as the 'dreamwork' of imperialism,

though he concedes that this notion has currency in the context of Jeffersonian America.

[24] Truettner, *Natural man observed.*

[25] Dippie, *Catlin and his contemporaries*, p. 434.

[26] B. W. Dippie, *The vanishing American: white attitudes and U.S. Indian policy* (Middletown, CT, Wesleyan University Press, 1982); B. W. Sheehan, *Seeds of extinction: Jeffersonian philanthropy and the American Indian* (New York, Norton, 1973).

[27] H. R. Lamar, 'An overview of westward expansion', in W. H. Truettner, ed., *The West as America: reinterpreting images of the frontier, 1820–1920* (Washington, DC, Smithsonian Institution Press, 1991), pp. 1–26.

[28] Lewis and Clark navigated the Missouri, Snake and Colombia rivers to the Pacific coast in order to explore the newly acquired Louisiana territory, search for a north-west passage, and facilitate trade with Native Americans. See B. DeVoto, ed., *The journals of Lewis and Clark* (New York, Houghton Mifflin, 1953).

[29] B. DeVoto, *Across the wide Missouri* (Boston, Houghton Mifflin, 1947), p. 393.

[30] According to Haberly, even towards the end of his life, despite not having lived in Wilkes-Barre since he was two years old, he still signed himself 'George Catlin of Wilkes-Barre'. See L. Haberly, *Pursuit of the horizon: a life of George Catlin, painter and recorder of the American Indian* (New York, Macmillan, 1948).

[31] Catlin, *Letters and notes*, I p. 2.

[32] Truettner, *Natural man observed.*

[33] Catlin, *Letters and notes* I, p. 2.

[34] Ewers, *George Catlin*; M. Halpin, *Catlin's Indian gallery: the George Catlin paintings in the United States national museum* (Washington, DC, Smithsonian Institution, 1965); Truettner, *Natural man observed.*

[35] According to Minks, Romanticism was a way of seeing exceptionality in nature via the mysterious, fantastic, supernatural and sublime. In America these ideas took on a peculiar nationalist connotation, often subsuming the language of the picturesque. See L. Minks, *The Hudson River School* (Leicester, Magna, 1989); E. McKinsey, *Niagara Falls: icon of the American sublime* (New York, Cambridge University Press, 1985).

[36] *Ibid.* See also P. McGreevy, *Imagining Niagara: the meaning and making of Niagara Falls* (Amherst, University of Massachusetts Press, 1994).

[37] R. B. Gruver, *American nationalism, 1783–1830: a self-portrait* (New York, G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1970).

[38] J. M. Neil, *Toward a national taste: America's quest for aesthetic independence* (Honolulu, University Press of Hawaii, 1975), p. 22.

[39] *Ibid.*

[40] L. B. Miller, *Patrons and patriotism: the encouragement of the fine arts in the United States, 1790–1860* (Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1966).

[41] Alison, quoted in McKinsey, *Niagara Falls*, p. 48.

[42] Alison, quoted in H. S. Merritt, *Thomas Cole* (Rochester, NY, University of Rochester, 1969), p. 14.

[43] Neil, *Toward a national taste.*

[44] *Ibid.*

[45] *North American Review* (July 1827), p. 227.

[46] *Ibid.* (Dec. 1818), pp. 173–4.

[47] N. Harris, *The artist in American society: the formative years, 1790–1860* (New York, George Braziller, 1966).

[48] McKinsey, *Niagara Falls*, pp. 86–7.

[49] J. Hopkinson, 'Annual discourse delivered before the Pennsylvania Academy of the

Fine Arts' (Philadelphia, 1810), quoted in McKinsey, *Niagara Falls*, p. 56.

[50] DeWitt Clinton, 'Address before the American Academy of Fine Arts' (23 Oct. 1816); quoted in McKinsey, *Niagara Falls*.

[51] Miller, *Patrons and patriotism*.

[52] Neil, *Toward a national taste*.

[53] F. B. Dexter, *North American Review* (Jan. 1848), pp. 143–4.

[54] Neil, *Toward a national taste*.

[55] Miller, *Patrons and patriotism*. Native Americans were sometimes pictured in these scenes, associating notions of antiquity, nature, and a national heritage to the 'grand and lovely landscapes' they occupied. Thomas Cole's landscape *Kaaterskill Falls* (1826) is a prime example of such a strategy.

[56] Quoted in Hassrick, *Drawings*, p. xiv.

[57] Quoted in G. Catlin, *O-kee-pa: a religious ceremony; and other customs of the Mandans* (London, Trübner, 1867), p. 52.

[58] Dippie, *Vanishing American*.

[59] H. R. Schoolcraft, *An address, delivered before the Was-ah Ho-de-no-son-ne, or new confederacy of the Iroquois* (Rochester, NY, 14 Aug. 1846), pp. 5–6.

[60] *Ibid.*, p. 7, quoted in Dippie, *Catlin and his contemporaries*, p. 171.

[61] R. Horsman, *Race and manifest destiny: the origins of American racial Anglo-Saxonism* (Cambridge, MA, Harvard University Press, 1981); see also Y.-F. Tuan, *Cosmos and hearth: a cosmopolite's viewpoint* (Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1996).

[62] One might also point to contemporaneous 'scientific' discourses formulated as part of an early American ethnology which acted to legitimize the Jacksonian policy of Indian removal and foster a popular disdain for the character of the Indian. Through the work of physicians Charles Caldwell, George Coombe, John Bell, R. B. Coates, J. C. Nott and the Fowler family, phrenology and physiognomy – by measuring the size and shape of human skulls and classifying them according to various preconceived racial categories – sought to prove the cranial inferiority of Indians. Indeed, Catlin partially viewed his own task as one of 'drawing fair conclusions in the interesting sciences of physiognomy and phrenology': see *Letters and notes*, I, p. 17. For discussion on the genealogy of phrenology or craniology in early nineteenth-century America, see R. F. Berkhofer, Jr, *The white man's Indian: images of the American Indian from Columbus to the present* (New York, Vintage, 1978); R. Horsman, *Race and manifest destiny: the origins of American racial Anglo-Saxonism* (Cambridge, MA., Harvard University Press, 1981).

[63] T. L. McKenney, 'Address', in *Memoirs, official and personal* (New York, 1846), pp. 240–1, quoted in Dippie, *Vanishing American*, p. 65.

[64] Andrew Jackson, quoted in J. D. Richardson, *A compilation of the messages and papers of the presidents* III (New York, Bureau of National Literature, 1909), p. 1084.

[65] J. W. Ward, *Andrew Jackson: symbol for an age* (New York, Oxford University Press, 1962), p. 41, (emphasis original).

[66] Quoted in Dippie, *Vanishing American*, p. 67.

[67] W. C. Bryant, 'An Indian at the burying-place of his fathers', in *Miscellaneous poems selected from the United States Literary Gazette* (Boston, 1826), p. 17.

[68] G. H. Orians, *The cult of the vanishing American: a century view, 1834–1934* (Toledo, OH, 1934); Dippie, *Vanishing American*. In many ways, films such as *Dances with wolves* (1995) and *The last of the Mohicans* (1992) continue to perpetuate the romantic myth that 'authentic' Indians vanished, thus placing 'true' Native Americans squarely in the past. Given such powerful media depiction, it is difficult to bear in mind that, as the poet Chrystos reminds us in her polemical collection *Not vanishing!*, the Indians

did not disappear, and the material conditions of urban and reservation Indians should not be obscured by myth and misconception. See Chrystos, *Not vanishing!* (Vancouver, Press Gang Publishers, 1988). Others, too numerous to list here, have dealt with issues concerning the media representation of the Native Americans whom Vine Deloria, Jr characterized as the 'mythical Indians of stereotype-land who were always THERE'. See V. Deloria, Jr, *Custer died for your sins: an Indian manifesto* (New York, Macmillan, 1969), p. 2; W. Churchill, *Fantasies of the master race: literature, cinema, and the colonization of American Indians* (Monroe, ME, Common Courage Press, 1992).

[69] According to Julie Schimmel, images of this kind first emerged in the 1840s and continued to be produced until the early 1860s, after which the increasing intensity of the Plains Wars temporarily dispelled the romantic appeal of the Indian subject. Actually, one of the first paintings of Indians to employ the Pacific Ocean as the backdrop is Tompkins H. Matteson's *The last of the race*, painted in 1847. Indeed, the chronology of the emergence of this particular form of landscape in representing Indians is important, for during the years 1846–8 the United States was at war with Mexico over the south-western territory including California. For the first time, the nation's political boundaries could be conceived in terms of continental extent, and thus the natural geographical limits of the Indians' westward retreat lay with seeming certitude at the Pacific shoreline. In this way, the western sea is symbolic of an 'abyss': the 'end of the line' for Indian existence. See J. Schimmel, 'Inventing the Indian', in Truettner, *The West as America*, pp. 149–89.

[70] Dippie, *Catlin and his contemporaries.*

[71] Catlin, *Letters and notes* I, p. 16.

[72] *Ibid.*, p. 13.

[73] *Ibid.*, p. 67 (emphasis original).

[74] Andrew Jackson, quoted in Richardson, *Compilation*, p. 1084.

[75] Mitchell, 'Imperial landscape', p. 5.

[76] Fort Union, a fur trading-post, was located at the confluence of the Yellowstone and Missouri rivers on the present-day border between Montana and North Dakota. While at Fort Union, Catlin painted many portraits of the Blackfoot, Assiniboine and Crow Indians before setting off down-river back to St Louis with his two companions.

[77] W. Matthews, 'The Catlin collection of Indian paintings', in *Report of the National Museum* (Washington, DC, Govt Printing Office, 1891), p. 597.

[78] Catlin wrote: 'I have roamed from time to time during seven or eight years, visiting and associating with some three or four hundred thousand of these people, under an almost infinite variety of circumstances; and from the very many and decided voluntary acts of their hospitality and kindness, I feel bound to pronounce them, by nature, a kind and hospitable people': *Letters and notes* I, pp. 10–11.

[79] *Ibid.*, II, p. 176; I, p. 69.

[80] Truettner, *Natural man observed*, p. 253.

[81] A scene depicting a similar land formation to *Big bend* is '*Brick kilns*', *clay bluffs 1900 miles above St Louis*, 1832. Note that the distance from St Louis stipulated in the title of these two paintings is the same.

[82] Truettner, *Natural man observed.*

[83] Catlin, *Letters and notes* I, p. 3; *ibid.* II, pp. 180–8.

[84] *Ibid.* I, p. 16.

[85] Truettner, *Natural man observed.*

[86] Hassrick, *Drawings*, p. ix. Charles Willson Peale, an army captain under the revolutionary leadership of General Washington, painted several historic scenes and heroes

from the War of Independence. His sons, Raphael, Rembrandt and Titian, became noted artists in their own right. In fact Titian Peale preceded Catlin by painting portraits of various Indian delegates from the West as they passed through Philadelphia. See Haberly, *Pursuit of the horizon.*

[87] Truettner, *Natural man observed.*

[88] *Ibid.*; see also B. Novak, *Nature and culture: American landscape and painting 1825–1875* (New York, Oxford University Press, 1980).

[89] Neil, *Toward a national taste*, p. 44.

[90] John Heckewelder's *Account and history, manners, and customs of the Indian nations who once inhabited Pennsylvania and the neighboring states* (1818) no doubt made an impression on the young Catlin.

[91] Arkansas *Gazette*, (12 Sept. 1834), quoted in Hassrick, *Drawings*, p. xiii.

[92] Catlin, *Letters and notes* I, p. 16.

[93] Truettner, *Natural man observed*, p. 67.

[94] Further illustrating Catlin's interests in geology, in 1870, two years before his death, he published a detailed appraisal of North America's physiography entitled *The lifted and subsided rocks of America.* This was a curious book that paid little heed to then current-day scientific findings and proposed that under North America there existed a great subterranean river system that emptied into the Gulf of Mexico to become the Gulf Stream. See J. J. Lloyd, 'George Catlin's geology', *Earth sciences history* **10** (1991), pp. 56–9.

[95] Catlin, *Letters and notes* I, p. 85.

[96] *Ibid.* II, p. 9.

[97] Matthiessen, *North American Indians*, p. ix. A case can be made, however, for scientific realism in Karl Bodmer's meticulous watercolour sketches of the Upper Missouri: see Truettner, *Natural man observed.*

[98] *Iboid.*, p. 106.

[99] Mitchell, 'Imperial landscape', p. 15.

[100] According to McKinsey, in the US the picturesque convention was a pure appreciation for aesthetics and was employed to explore the significance of landscape in terms of its romantic qualities. In this sense it was a means to an end, not an end in itself. See McKinsey, *Niagara Falls.*

[101] Catlin, *Letters and notes* I, p. 16

[102] *Ibid.*, p. 15.

[103] *Ibid.*, p. 85.

[104] *Ibid.*, p. 91.

[105] *Ibid.*, p. 6.

[106] Truettner, *Natural man observed*; Dippie, *Catlin and his contemporaries.*

[107] Truettner, *Natural man observed*, pp. 107–10.

[108] A. Wallach, 'Making a picture of the view from Mount Holyoke', in Miller, *American iconology*, pp. 80–91.

[109] *Ibid.*, pp. 81–4.

[110] As Truettner notes, there appears some discrepancy in his designation of mileage between these two paintings. The title of the painting places the scene at 110 miles from St Louis, while his 1837 catalogue locates it at a distance of 1100 miles. (*River bluffs* is labelled 1320 miles above St Louis.) His *Letters and notes*, however, clearly states that both scenes were delineated from the same location. This is not something that can be resolved here, suffice it to say that Catlin was prone to the more than the occasional lapse when it came to numerical accuracy – be it dates or distances.

[111] Catlin, *Letters and notes* II, pp. 9–10.
[112] *Ibid.*, p. 10.
[113] *Ibid.*, p. 179.
[114] *Ibid.*, p. 177.
[115] Mitchell, 'Imperial landscape', p. 10.
[116] Catlin, *Letters and notes* II, p. 5.
[117] *Ibid.* I, p. 3.
[118] K. S. Hight, '"Doomed to perish": George Catlin's depictions of the Mandan', *Art Journal* **49** (1990), pp. 119–24; P. Limerick, *Legacy of conquest: the unbroken past of the American West* (New York, Norton, 1987).
[119] Catlin, *Letters and notes* I, p. 17.
[120] Limerick, *Legacy of conquest.* Instructive of the Indians' fate were the Mandan with whom Catlin stayed on his 1832 down-river trip. So taken with the Mandan was Catlin that in his *Letters and notes* he devoted an impressive 14 epistles to describing their customs, their dress, and their religion, including the fantastical O-kee-pa ceremony. His 1832 stay among the Mandan took on special significance when, in 1837, they were stricken by smallpox and the tribe decimated. On hearing this, he added a new painting to his Mandan repertoire, *A bird's-eye view of the Mandan village.* Again deploying an elevated panoramic perspective, the lower half of the painting is densely packed with tribal lodges; in the foreground, to the right, sits the Medicine Lodge overlooking the ceremonial circle at the centre of which is the barrel-shaped 'canoe'. The village is bustling with activity. One Mandan is astride his horse, another is playing with a dog, many more recline atop the roofs of their homes; puffs of smoke indicate activity from within the more distant lodges. Teeming with life, the village's healthy inhabitants are actively, though complacently, going about their daily recreation 'without the sober reflections on the past or apprehensions of the future'. In the distance, just beyond the village, biers signify the burial ground, serving to remind the viewer of the tribe's impending fate. See *Letters and notes* I, p. 97; Dippie, *Catlin and his contemporaries.*
[121] Catlin, *Letters and notes* I, p. 112.
[122] *Ibid.* II, pp. 282–3.
[123] *Ibid.*, p. 254.
[124] *Ibid.*
[125] *Ibid.*, p. 177.
[126] *Ibid.*, p. 176.
[127] *Ibid.*, p. 290 (emphasis original).
[128] Mitchell, 'Imperial landscape', p. 10.
[129] Daniels and Cosgrove, 'Spectacle and text', p. 73.
[130] S. Daniels, 'Marxism, culture, and the duplicity of landscape', in R. Peet and N. Thrift, eds, *New models in geography: the political economy perspective* (London, Unwin Hyman, 1989), p. 206; Daniels cites M. Jay, *Adorno* (London, Fontana, 1984), pp. 111–60.
[131] For a detailed and competent discussion of iconology that draws on the ideological relationship between the visual and the verbal, see D. C. Miller, 'Afterword', in Miller, *American iconology*, pp. 276–96.
[132] Mitchell, 'Imperial landscape'.