Time Slips

Queer Temporalities, Contemporary Performance, and the Hole of History

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Chapter 1

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No Rock Straight Time Rain or Shine

Carlson/Strom Remember the Geyserlands

We mark time by events, not by the clock. We mark time by events, not by the clock. We mark time by events, not by the clock.

—Ann Carlson

Men wanted for track work cinder ballast no rock straight time rain or shine paid weekly accommodation very good. Board furnished $5 per week. It is a good job particularly for veteran gandy dancers. It's a few miles out and requires no weeks till to gets back to this borg [*sic*].

—*The Outlook*, May 1918

Actually, quite apart from anything written by Derrida, or anything reflected on by his critics, Archive Fever comes on at night, long after the archive has shut down for the day. Typically, the fever—more accurately, the precursor fever—starts in the early hours of the morning, in the bed of a cheap hotel, where the historian cannot get to sleep. You cannot get to sleep because you lie so narrowly, in an attempt to avoid contact with anything that isn't shielded by sheets and pillowcase. The first sign, then, is an excessive attention to the bed, an irresistible anxiety about the hundreds who have slept there before you, leaving their dust and debris in the fibres of the blankets, greasing the surface of the heavy, slippery counterpane. . . . This symptom—worrying about the bed—is a screen anxiety. What keeps you awake . . . is actually the archive, and its myriads of the dead, who all day long, have pressed their concerns upon you. You think: these people have left me the lot. . . . You think: I could get to hate these people;

> and then: I can never do these people justice; and finally: I shall never *get it done.*
>
> —Carolyn Steedman, *Dust: The Archive and Cultural History*

May 17, 2009. Four a.m. I am wide awake in my bed at the Boston Youth Hostel. I've spent the past three days driving from Providence, Rhode Island, to Amherst, Massachusetts, from Amherst to Lincoln, from Lincoln to Boston—to see an exhibit of Carlson/Strom's "New Performance Video" at the DeCordova Sculpture Park and Museum in rural Lincoln, Massachusetts. I have been in unfamiliar airports and archives, museums and diners, homes and highways. (One day I drove the same route twice—the GPS in my rental car sent me three hours down the Mass Pike and three hours back again to the Enterprise lot where I had started my journey—a six-hour-long technical, temporal glitch.) I lay in the bottom bunk, listening to the coughing, the sneezing, the wheezing, the communicable diseases taking flight from the body of the European traveler on the bunk above. I have anxiety—because I need to sleep, because I have to get up in two hours to catch my flight back to Austin, because I am too old to be sleeping in a youth hostel with paper sheets. I toss. I turn. I try to sleep. I can't. I worry. I wake. I won't read Carolyn Steedman for another year, so I don't know this is all a "screen anxiety"—no, not yet. I think it has to do with shared linens, and bathrooms, and noises. Not fears of archives, of dead things, of this burden of remembering, of doing people justice, of writing things down.

I am the feverish archivist that Steedman invokes, attempting to remember a performance that I did not see. As Steedman notes, the scholar is feverish because she is afraid of dead things—afraid, that is, of *not* doing people justice, *not* remembering properly, *not* getting it done. As I argued in the introduction to this book, the search for origins, evidence, and truth is an impossible task because histories have holes: much like the archives and memories that attempt to contain them, they are fragmented, nonlinear, and ever-changing.

A time slip, however, can function as an antidote to archive fever, acknowledging at once this pull of history, this imperative to "get back," this fear of dead things and this burden of remembering, while simultaneously disrupting the linearity and telos of time.[1] As I outlined in the introduction, time slips are moments in live performance in which normative conceptions of linear, progress-oriented time fail or fall away, and the spectator is transported into the future or past, while simultaneously remaining anchored to the present of performance. In slipping through the cracks of time, the spectator is returned to, or turned through, a moment, or hole, in history that is in need of attention and/or repair. In this chapter, I will look at the wound that is the American West, which, as I will detail, has been produced through strategic acts of U.S. American conquest and indigenous dispossession that are inextricably bound

up with the histories of modernity and technology in the United States, including electrification, photography, cinema, and train travel. I examine the ways in which the performance installation, *Geyser Land*, literally transported its audiences (by train) to the belly of the beast, using the conventions of site-specific dance and video to make the interconnected violence of technology and settler colonization visible and also imaginable "otherwise."

Geyser Land, the performance that forms the case study of this chapter, was conceived and directed by video/conceptual artist Mary Ellen Strom, in collaboration with choreographer/performance artist Ann Carlson, members of the Crow and Northern Cheyenne Nations, and the local community. The project is framed by Strom's lifelong research and scholarship on the histories of colonialism in the Rocky Mountain West; U.S. geological surveys; and modern technology, including photography, film, and train travel—that are the subjects of this performance as well as my analysis of it. The project is also informed by Carlson's career as a postmodern dancer and choreographer, in which she and her collaborators have been blurring the distinction between performance and "real life" for decades.[2]

Geyser Land was performed on a remote stretch of land in rural Montana in 2003, three months prior to my meeting the artists and learning of the work. The project's title refers to the geographic area in which the performance was staged, known as the "geyserlands," which are so called because they have the most geysers, or geologic explosions, in the world. *Geyser Land* audience members were carried by train-car along a twenty-five-mile stretch of land between Livingston and Bozeman, Montana. Out of the train's windows, audiences saw theatrical reenactments of late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century historic photographs staged *in situ* (on site), on or near the original site of the photograph in the style of tableau vivant, and video projections of cinema of that era and region. *Geyser Land* literally slipped historic photographs and cinema into the contemporary landscape and, in so doing, produced a time-space collision that asked spectators to rethink the dominant, benign, "progress" narrative of nineteenth-century U.S. "development" of this land. By restaging historic photographs and moving images in situ, but *ex tempus* (out of time), the *Geyser Land* project exposed the ways in which this land—two hundred years after the beginning of the U.S. colonial expansion project westward—is still haunted by multiple, ongoing, and ostensibly past traumas, including the disappeared disappearance of First Nations people, animals, and rights to self-governance. As the project makes clear, one defining characteristic of Native American genocide is not only the strategic appropriation of indigenous land and the rape, murder, and dispossession of Native people and ways of life, but also the equally strategic disappearance of *evidence* that such acts of violence took and are taking place. By restaging historic photographs and moving images of the colonial period in the contemporary Montana landscape, *Geyser Land* re-members

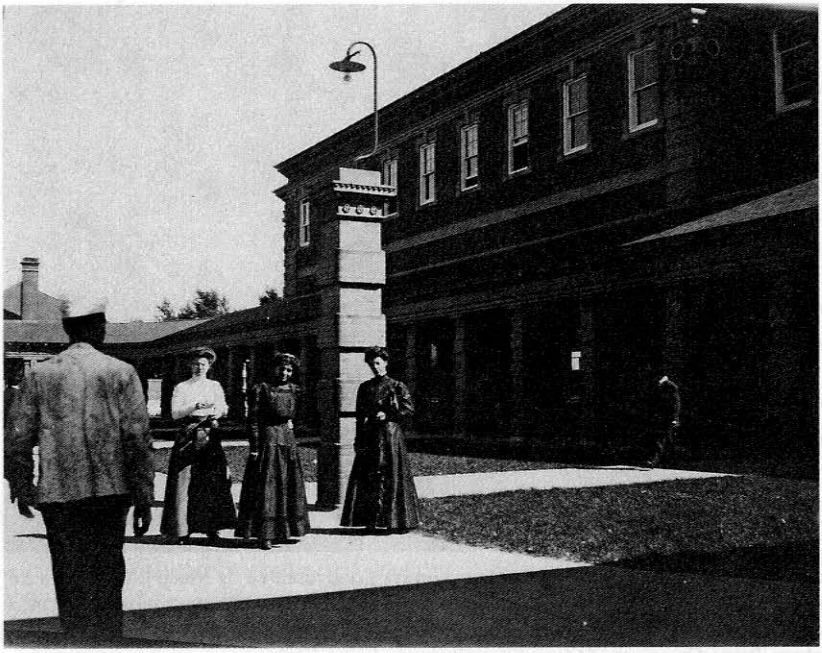
the geyserlands—and reminds spectators that time slips, haunts, and sticks to the very surfaces of things.

No Rock Straight Time Rain or Shine

I opened this chapter with three disparate epigraphs, including an advertisement for "gandy dancers" that I found in the course of my research—an ad that ran in New York's *Outlook* newspaper in 1918. "Gandy Dancers," the title of a *Geyser Land* tableau vivant that I discuss later in this chapter, are also the common name for railroad section crews—composed mostly of African Americans, and also Chinese, Mexican, Irish, Italian, and Native Americans—who built and maintained the new intercontinental railroads beginning in the 1830s, under the supervision of white-owned and -operated businesses such as the National Pacific Railroad. The railroad expansion project in the United States displaced thousands of First Nations people from their land, forcibly removing them onto reservations established by the U.S. government to make way for capitalist "development," including the colonial project that would become Yellowstone National Park.

The primary task of section crews was "straightening sections of track that had been pounded out by the tremendous weight of passing trains."[3] In this 1918 ad, then, "straight time" refers to the fact that the job's hours and wage are predetermined and fixed; as such, the advertisement signals the ways in which a "good job" in the American social imaginary is framed as the straight time of wage labor—the signature invention of capitalism. Additionally, that this good job consists primarily of "straightening" railroads underscores my claim that straight time, like straight tracks, is produced through repetition and requires ongoing and often invisibilized labor to maintain its status as natural.[4] Here it is important to note, too, that the history of the railroad itself is bound up with the colonial history of time. The inception of train travel is what necessitated the creation in 1840 of what we now call "standard time," in order to standardize arrival and departure times between disparate cities. In other words, straight time is not only clock time and the time of capital but also train time, as the standardization and normativization of time is, from its inception, linked to trains, travel, and commerce.[5] In the analysis that follows, I examine how the *Geyser Land* project at once uses and subverts the technology and logic of trains and travel, while supplanting white and straight time with queer and indigenous temporalities.

The Livingston Depot, established in 1890 by the National Pacific Railroad to facilitate tourist traffic to the newly established Yellowstone National Park (1872), is the first site of this performance and a telling beginning. Here audience members buy forty-dollar tickets and board a sleek, dome-car passenger train to Bozeman, an hour-long trip that will take them through twenty-five miles of grassy plains, rolling hills, and mountainous rock, and in

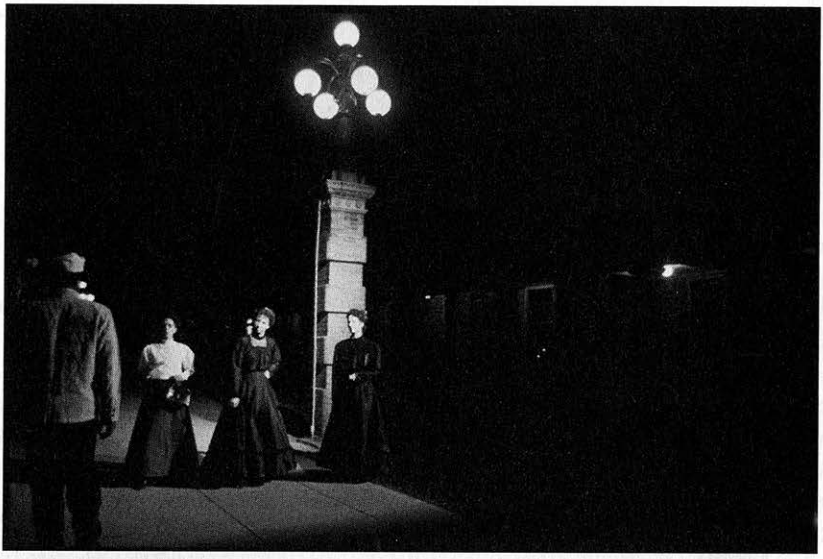


Three Women and a Porter at Livingston Depot (ca. 1902). Photographer unknown. Courtesy of Bob Ebinger and Livingston Depot Foundation.

proximity with various live vignettes and video projections embedded in the passing landscape. While they wait for the journey to begin, audiences are free to roam about, encountering several staged performances.[6]

In the first of many tableaux vivants, choreographed by Carlson, spectators encounter a live reenactment of a 1902 photograph taken at the Livingston Depot, *Three Women and a Porter*. In the original photo—which audiences can see in their playbill—a uniformed African American baggage porter approaches three bourgeois white women who prepare to travel by train. In "Porter," the *Geyser Land* reenactment of the 1902 photograph, actors Wayne Mansaw, Ann Johnson, Megan Schneeberger, and Krista Topham-Petty stand in likeness. "The performers must be still as statues," Carlson explains to the *New York Times*, which previewed the performance in their Art/Architecture section in August 2003.[7] In inimitable style, Carlson directs the performers to "pitch their still around the world until it comes back to them." In order to heighten the verisimilitude between the archival photograph and the tableau vivant, the performers are costumed in photographic-like grayscale. The performers hold their tableau until audiences board the train.

In order to fully understand the significance of this tableau, it is necessary to situate it alongside a series of historically related events, including the construction of the transatlantic railroad and the establishment of Yellowstone



"Porter" (2003). Mary Ellen Strom. From *Geyser Land*, created by Mary Ellen Strom in collaboration with Ann Carlson. Tableau vivant conceived and choreographed by Ann Carlson, performed by Wayne Mansaw, Ann Johnson, Megan Schneeberger, and Krista Topham-Petty. Courtesy of Mary Ellen Strom and Ann Carlson.

National Park. This photograph, estimated to be taken in 1902, comes only twelve years after the 1890 completion of Livingston Depot as the gateway to Yellowstone Park. Established by the U.S. Congress and signed into law by President Ulysses S. Grant on March 1, 1872, the creation of Yellowstone was part of a larger, rapidly accelerating movement of white male-dominated explorations and violent conquests of those parts of the western United States that were considered "virgin land." In *Narratives and Spaces: Technology and the Construction of American Culture*, historian David E. Nye explains how this colonial project was enabled by technological advancements that include the railroad as well as photography, electrification, and other machines and inventions. According to Nye,

> The American West was long perceived as "virgin land," an empty region waiting to be appropriated. This peculiar sense of space is legible in the boundaries of the western states. Mountainous Wyoming and Colorado are virtually square; their boundaries have nothing to do with local topography and everything to with geometry and the compass.[8]

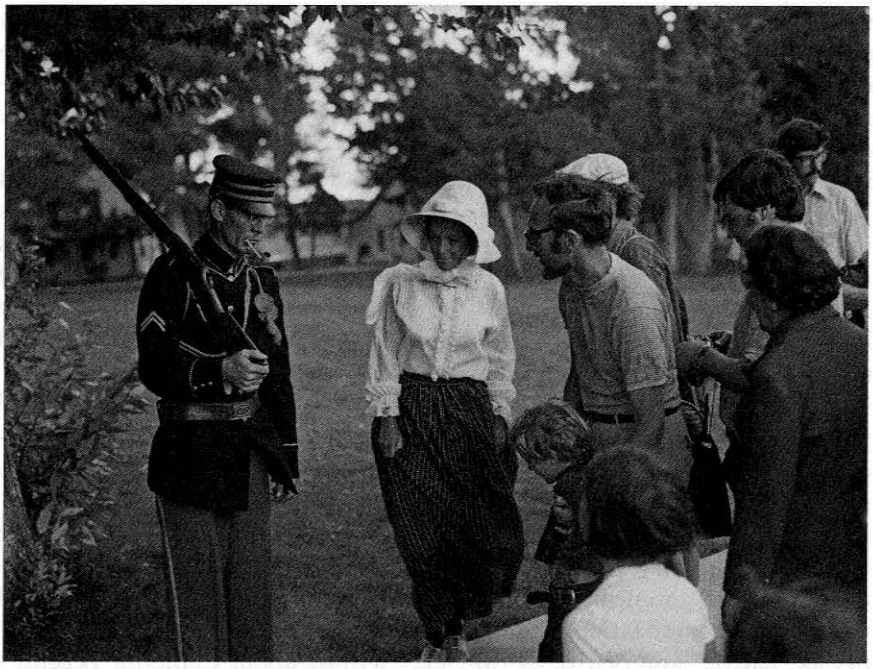
Here Nye cites geometry and the compass as the explanation for the illogical boundaries around "Wyoming" and "Colorado" in order to illustrate the

ways in which landscapes are more than places. Landscapes are actions with political consequences: "[T]he word 'landscape' is also a verb, referring to the active process of changing the appearance of the world."[9] One technology that changed the appearance of this part of the world was the advent of photography in 1839, and its proliferation in the century that followed, including countless missions funded by the United States government and private companies to document the "unspoiled" frontier of the western states in order to justify its appropriation and development for tourism.[10] This industry directly caused the extermination and displacement of thousands of First Nations people, including the Crow, who were banned from their land in order for the U.S. government to establish Yellowstone Park in 1878, and not allowed to return until the Civil Rights Act of 1964.

The presence of the female tourists at the Livingston Depot in the original photograph as well as in its reenactment signals this larger story of conquest in the name of tourism and leisure, and specifically how white women played central roles in the conquest of Native land and people. As Americanist Amy Kaplan argues, nineteenth-century national discourses of "manifest destiny" are intricately connected to contemporaneous gendered discourses of "home" and "homemaker," and white women were seen to play a central role in the "domestication" of Native subjects as well as the rendering of settler as "native," and Native as "foreign." Writing about Catherine Beecher's *Treatise on Domestic Economy* (1841), Kaplan explains:

> Beecher's use of Tocqueville's ark metaphor suggests the rootlessness and the self-enclosed mobility necessary for the efficacy of middle-class domesticity to redefine the meaning of habitation, to make Euro-Americans feel at home in a place where *they* are initially the foreign ones. Domesticity inverts this relationship to create a home by rendering prior inhabitants alien and undomesticated and by implicitly nativizing newcomers. The empire of the mother thus embodies the anarchy at the heart of the American empire.[11]

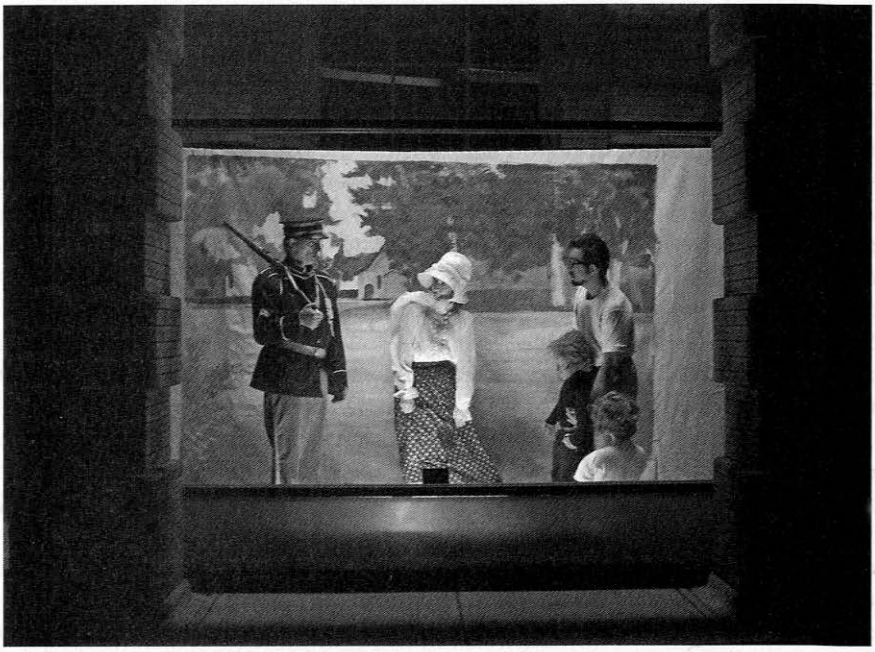
In other words, the figure of the female tourist—one with the economic mobility to travel by train—is far from a benign image. Rather, the white, middle-class female traveler is, as Kaplan notes, at the "heart" of the logic of empire because of the pivotal roles white women played in the alienation and "domestication" of Native land and people. Because the *Geyser Land* audience is free to move around while the performers in the tableau vivant are literally frozen in time and space, *Geyser Land* casts the contemporary spectator in the role of tourist, gazing not at some sublime natural wonder like a mountain or vista but at this ostensibly ordinary past moment. In fact, many of the *Geyser Land* audiences are literally tourists, art aficionados who traveled from New York or California to see the work, or vacationing families en route to Yellowstone who learned of this unusual art event that was taking



Park Visitors at Yellowstone National Park (ca. 1974). Photographer unknown. John Whitman in U.S. Army blue cavalry uniform, Winchester rifle on shoulder at left, Susan Sindt in period costume (early female tourist) at center, visitors at right. Courtesy of Yellowstone National Park.

place during their leisurely "time off" from work. The grayscale costumes not only link the tableau to its photographic referent, they further highlight the temporal gap between spectator and spectacle: still versus moving, grayscale versus color. In this sense, the 2003 spectator slips and dips into the "past" narrative of this troubling social history—recast alongside the 1902 tourists caught in complicity.

The role of tourists and travelers in the colonial project is made equally evident in the next tableau vivant, "Park Visitors," which audiences also encounter at Livingston Depot. "Park Visitors" mixes three different temporalities. In the original photograph taken at Yellowstone Park in 1974, two living history guides enact an imaginary nineteenth-century scene: a uniformed solider guards the park and a civilian female tourist observes the watchman—while a group of 1974 park visitors look on. In the *Geyser Land* reenactment (see "Park Visitors," p. 49), actor Rob Story plays the role of the 1970s living history performer pretending to be a nineteenth-century U.S. soldier guarding Yellowstone Park, Holly Seitz plays the role of the nineteenth-century tourist, and Bill Koch performs as the 1970s tourists watching the living history scene. While all of the performers in *Geyser*



"Park Visitors" (2003). Mary Ellen Strom. From *Geyser Land*, created by Mary Ellen Strom in collaboration with Ann Carlson. Tableau vivant conceived and choreographed by Ann Carlson, performed by Rob Story, Holly Seitz, and Bill Koch. Courtesy of Mary Ellen Strom and Ann Carlson.

Land's reenactment are costumed in grayscale, the specifics of their costumes signal the two distinct time periods that the tableau aims to represent: the soldier wears a nineteenth-century uniform replete with waist belt, rank badge, cap, and rifle; the nineteenth-century tourist wears a polka-dotted period skirt, billowing blouse, and bonnet; and the 1974 tourist wears a T-shirt and trousers, his haircut and glasses in recognizable 1970s style. If the original scene positions the 1974 tourists as contemporary and the nineteenth-century reenactment at which they gaze as past, historical time, the 2003 tableau vivant recasts the 1974 tourists as historical figures—themselves frozen in a moment of the park's history like the cavalry soldier one hundred years prior. The new present, then, is taken up by the contemporary 2003 *Geyser Land* "spect-tourist" who gazes upon them all.[12]

It is worth noting that while this tableau vivant reenacts the archival photograph, it also revises it by omitting four spectators seen in the original. While the artists' decision to revise the live image was practical, it exposes nonetheless the ways in which archives, and the histories they claim to represent, are always already partial, mediated, and malleable, serving the interests of the present as much as revealing some "truth" about past time.[13]

Queer/Indigenous Time

Like the tableaux vivants situated at the Livingston Depot, several animated scenes also presence the Crow and Northern Cheyenne who were displaced from the site—first at the depot, and later on the train itself. While audiences wait for the railcar to take them on their performance journey, members of the Crow Nation, wearing ceremonial regalia, perform a ritual dance on the depot green. Additionally, the music group Itta'Tbachiash (Fights Alone/Crow) sing and drum in the club car; Heywood Big Day (Crow) and Bently Spang (Northern Cheyenne)—the performance artist with whom Carlson/Strom would later create *Meadowlark*—tell autobiographical stories and interact with audience members aboard the train. In including these scenes at the start of the show, *Geyser Land* draws attention to the Crow and Northern Cheyenne as the original caretakers and inhabitants of the geyserlands. In contrast to capitalist notions of land ownership, the indigenous understanding of the relationship between humans and the land is one of stewardship. According to Native studies scholar Andrea Smith (Cherokee), "Our sovereignty is based on a connection to the Earth. It is a completely different understanding of land. Land is not ownable. [We have] a relationship with and responsibility for the land. Humans are dependent on the earth, not vice versa. [When First Nations people speak of land rights], we are fighting for the right to be *responsible* for the land."[14] In staging these scenes as animated and in color rather than still and in grayscale, *Geyser Land* also highlights not just historical but contemporary Crow and Northern Cheyenne sovereignty struggles and claims to place. This counteracts the dominant tendency to figure indigenous people as a thing of the past, a mythology that elides the fact that, despite repeated attempts by the U.S. government to annihilate them, thousands of First Nations people have survived the ongoing colonization of the United States and continue to live on their land. In other words, the presence of Crow and Northern Cheyenne performers in *Geyser Land* also subverts the temporal logic of genocide, which depends on the constant production of a narrative of Native absence. As Smith argues,

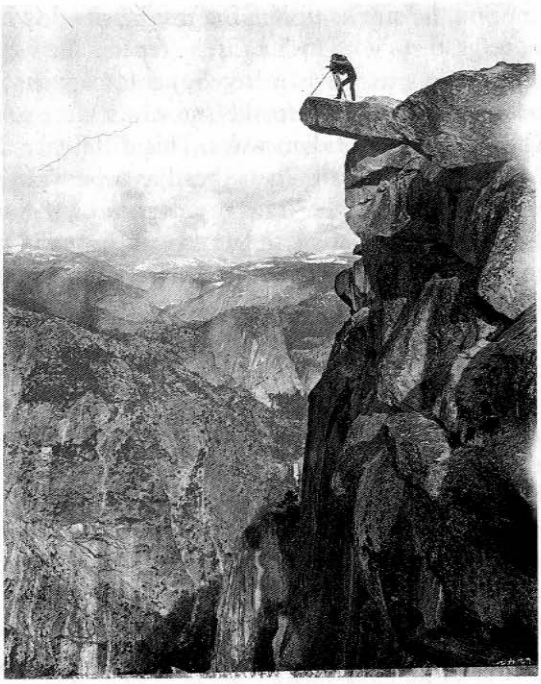
> This logic holds that indigenous peoples must disappear. In fact, they must *always* be disappearing, in order to allow non-indigenous peoples rightful claim over this land. Through this logic of genocide, non-Native peoples then become the rightful inheritors of all that was indigenous—land, resources, indigenous spirituality, or culture.[15]

This logic of genocide is also palpable in a movement sequence on the passenger train. When audiences board the train for Bozeman, it is not empty but already occupied by a teenage boy, actor Judah Goes Ahead (Crow). Once audiences board the train cars, Judah Goes Ahead begins moving in stylized

ways: in slow motion, he stands up; he freezes; he sits down; he freezes; he stands up again; he gestures with his hands; he repeats the sequence. His gaze is forward and direct; his tempo is metered; his movement is precise. This, of course, stands in juxtaposition to the (mostly white) passengers seated around him, who move in quotidian ways. This difference draws the audience members' attention to Judah Goes Ahead as a performer rather than a fellow spectator. In occupying the train in advance of the audience, Judah Goes Ahead also asserts his Native and sovereign status in time and space, and this framing device invites audience members to reimagine local land "development" as a story of Native displacement and to see themselves as white settler-tourists.

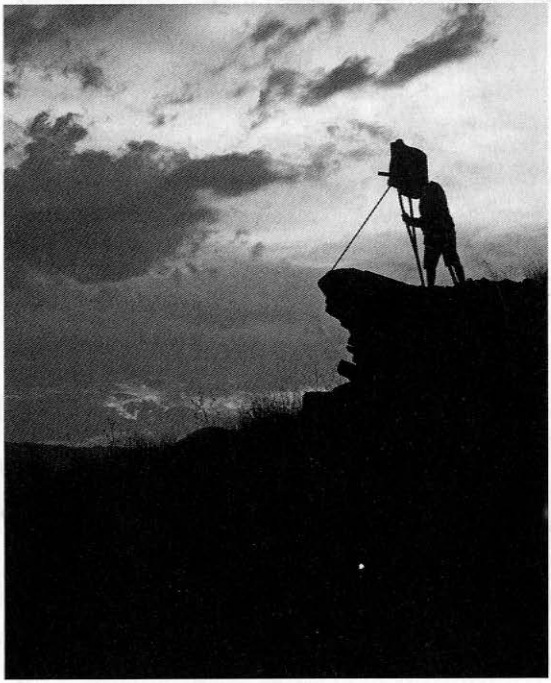
Carlson later explains that she felt that this movement sequence was confusing for audience members. In part, this is because they were not offered a clear framework for understanding this early scene as performance. With the other tableaux, audience members are able to see reproductions of the "original" archival photograph in their printed program against which they are able to compare the staged reenactment. In the sequence with Judah Goes Ahead, however, there is no photographic referent and, for many, arguably no referent at all. That is, the performance betrays the larger aesthetic conventions that frame dance with such recognizable features as concert stage; separation between dancer and spectator; continuous movement; music; and a clear beginning, middle, and ending. In the video documentation of the performance, for instance, we see a white teenage boy in a polo shirt—he is about the same age as Judah Goes Ahead and seated behind the actor. This boy turns around repeatedly and confusedly to watch Judah Goes Ahead: with neither historical referent nor postmodern dance literacy, he, like many other audience members, is confused by the performer's actions, unsure of how to "read" this moment.

While the artists might argue that this performance was less successful than the others because it was confusing, I would like to suggest that part of its efficacy lies in its ability to unsettle conventional understandings of performance as well as local history. At the start of the show, *Geyser Land* disrupts the aesthetic conventions of dance with the opening tableaux "Porter" and "Park Visitors" at Livingston Deport—suggesting that dance can be outdoors, ordinary, still, and durational. Then *Geyser Land* disrupts its own convention with this indoor, stylized, and animated movement sequence. In other words, *Geyser Land* is not only playing with audience members' cultural literacies of colonialism but also their various aesthetic literacies of the temporal and spatial conventions of dance. And because the multiple referents in Judah Goes Ahead's dance—political and aesthetic—are not self-evident, the scene challenges audience members to go searching for them ("Is this performance?" "What is this performance citing?") and become active collaborators in the production of cultural meaning.



Yosemite Valley, Rock at Glacier Point (ca. 1880). Photographer unknown. View of a photographer on Overhanging Rock on Glacier Point overlooking Yosemite Valley and Liberty Cap rock formation, Yosemite National Park, California. Courtesy of Colorado Historical Society.

Here it is important to note the disjuncture between white and indigenous understandings of time—a point of tension to which this performance on the train also gestures. As I outlined in the introduction, dominant Western understandings of time are intimately tied to the history of capitalism and the Western logics of accumulation and progress. The clock, the calendar, and the hourly wage are not natural but biopolitical systems of measurement and regulation that are used to keep individuals and populations in order and "on track." In a U.S. American context, straight time has worked as an instrument of settler colonization, literally displacing indigenous, somatic, and cyclical ways of being in time and on the land. In one of the greatest tautological moves of empire, colonial time not only replaces indigenous time as "standard," but then, not unlike Kaplan's logic of "manifest domesticity," situates itself as natural and native and casts indigenous time—and the people living in indigenous temporalities—as foreign and aberrant. Thus, when the actor Judah Goes Ahead performs his slow dance on the train as white spect-tourists look on, their confusion is also emblematic of this disjuncture between colonial and Crow, straight and queer, ways of moving in and through time.

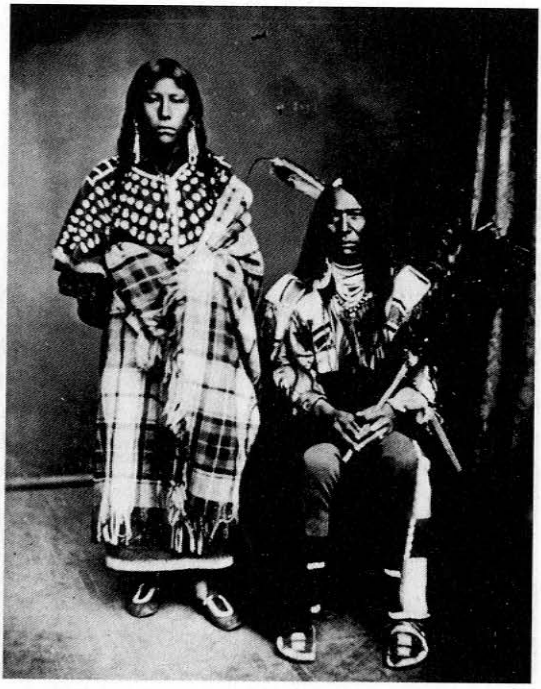


"William Henry Jackson" (2003). Mary Ellen Strom. From *Geyser Land*, created by Mary Ellen Strom in collaboration with Ann Carlson. Tableau vivant conceived and choreographed by Ann Carlson, performed by Keith Venema, Robert Kollzar, and Justin Lubke. Courtesy of Mary Ellen Strom and Ann Carlson.

Photography and Film and/as "Percepticide"

As the train travels to Bozeman, *Geyser Land* returns to the convention of the tableau vivant set up at the start of the performance. Here *Geyser Land* plays with the conventions of photography—stillness, grayscale, and so on—in staging the live reenactment "William Henry Jackson." This scene is unique in that it also overtly reveals the production of photographic knowledge by restaging photographer William Henry Jackson in the process of taking a photograph of the local landscape.

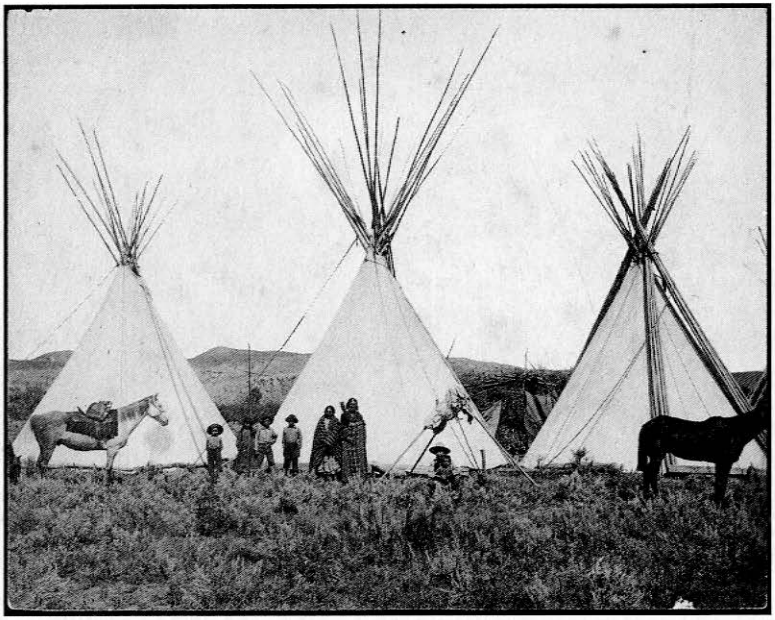
A close look at Jackson's career trajectory reveals the larger narrative of the role that photography played in the transformation of the landscape—and the hidden racial history of such a transformation. In 1866, at the age of twenty-three, Jackson left New England for the "West," traveling via the newly constructed Union Pacific Railroad to Omaha, Nebraska, which at the time was the end of the line. In Omaha, he started a photography business with his brother, during which time he took those portraits of First Nations people for which he would become renowned (see *Crow Northern Plains*



Crow Northern Plains Packs The Bear and Squaw (date unknown). William Henry Jackson. Subjects unknown. Courtesy of L. Tom Perry Special Collections, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah.

Packs The Bear and Squaw, p. 54). In this sense, Jackson's gaze, even before it turned to the landscape, was colonial—using the apparatus of photography to exhibit and sensationalize humans as "objects of ethnography."[16] Jackson's photographs were displayed at the storefront he co-owned with his brother in downtown Omaha, "Jackson Br.'s Photographers," as well as published for distribution. Today his work is celebrated in official national archives, including the Library of Congress, the Smithsonian, and various university collections that gather and display photographs and other relics of indigenous life for scholarly and tourist consumption.

Photographs such as *Crow Northern Plains Packs The Bear and Squaw* expose Jackson's ethnographic gaze—what Dwight Conquergood, writing about performance ethnography, labels a "curator's exhibitionism," which he defines as a "fascination with the exotic, primitive, culturally remote . . . suffused with sentimentality and romantic notions of the 'Noble Savage.' . . . Instead of bringing us into genuine contact (and risk) with the lives of strangers, performances in this mode bring back museum exhibits, mute and staring."[17] Jackson's photographs, like Conquergood's unethical ethnographer, render his subjects silent and staring, dehumanizing racialized others by appearing to bring them close, but only ever succeeding at placing them



Crow, Black Lodge Camp, Crow Agency, Montana (date unknown). William Henry Jackson. Subjects unknown. Courtesy of L. Tom Perry Special Collections, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah.

at a greater distance. When Jackson zooms out to include a fascination for the landscape as well as its people, he fails again, rendering his subjects not only voiceless but unrecognizable specs amid their horses, tepees, and horizon lines (see *Crow, Black Lodge Camp, Crow Agency, Montana*, p. 55)

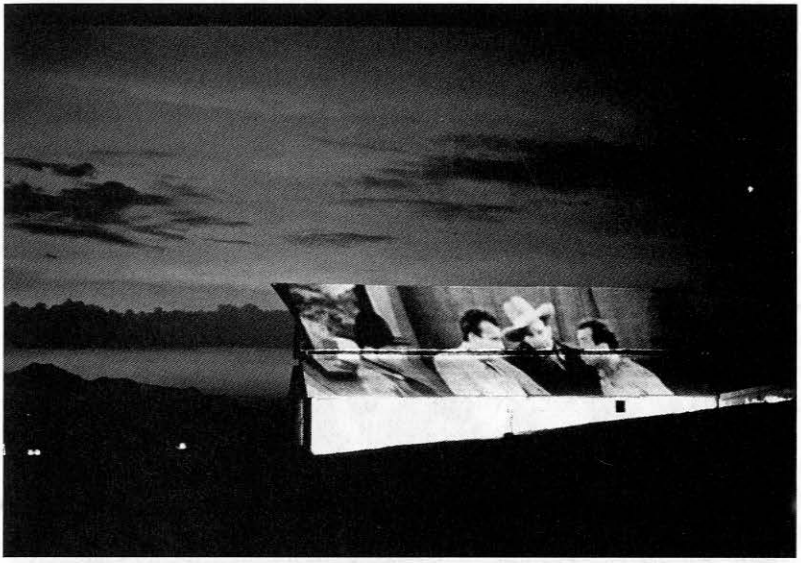
In 1869, Jackson was hired by the Union Pacific Railroad to photograph the scenery along its routes for publicity and promotional purposes, and he was also a member of the U.S.-funded Hayden Geological Survey Team, which exhaustively photographed the local landscape on a series of "expeditions" beginning in 1869. Here Jackson's new project asked him to capture the land itself: wild, untouched, absent of inhabitants. These photographs were presented by Jackson and Ferdinand Hayden alongside representatives from the National Pacific Railroad and used as evidence before Congress—for the establishment of Yellowstone Park as a tourist destination.

If Jackson's close-up photographs of the Crow and other indigenous people cast his subjects as exotic, and his photographs of them on the land make them unintelligible, these wide zoom shots render them invisible altogether (see *Lower Falls of Yellowstone from Artist's Point*, p. 56). As such, the act of Jackson constructing the landscape as "untouched wilderness" with his medium of photography both anticipates as well as facilitates the destruction of it as indigenous land and the reconstruction of it as "free" and "virgin" land for the growing tourist industry.

Lower Falls of Yellowstone from Artist's Point (ca. 1902). William Henry Jackson. Courtesy of L. Tom Perry Special Collections, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah.

By representing Jackson as a character in *Geyser Land*, the project points to the tautological nature of the argument that his and other photography made in support of the railroad expansion project and the establishment of Yellowstone National Park in the late nineteenth century. Like a subject in one of his photographs, the tableau freezes and silences Jackson in time and space, inviting audiences to return the gaze and asking them to imagine the ways in which his medium was used as a form of "percepticide"—which Diana Taylor defines as "social blinding [that] kill[s] or numb[s] through the senses."[18] Because Jackson is sited in the very landscape he photographs, audiences are asked to simultaneously look at the land itself and the act of constructing that land.

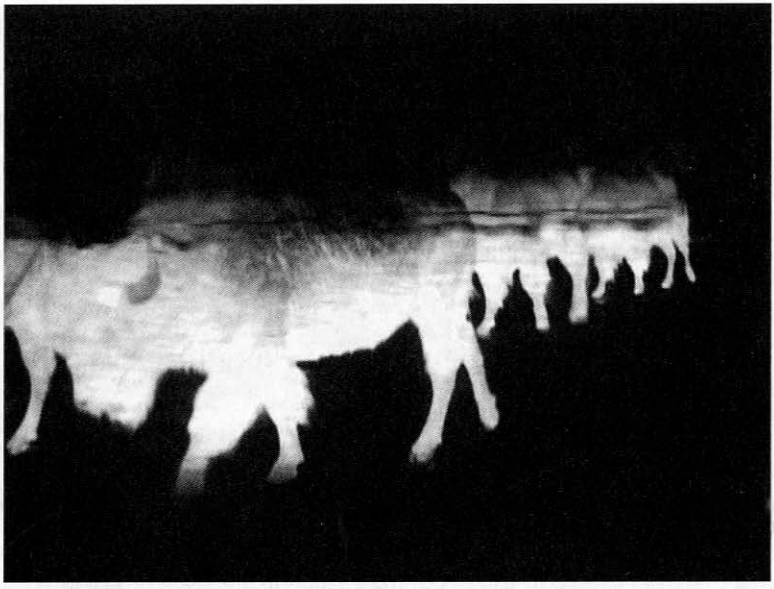
Geyser Land intermixes live tableaux with video projections sited in the passing landscape, created by Strom. These include "Buffalo Running," video footage of packs of running buffalo, and "Muybridge," adapted from Eadweard Muybridge's stop-motion photographic studies of galloping horses. Both are projected in bright white light from the passenger car onto the mountainside, visible to audience members out the train cars' windows (see "Buffalo Running" and "Muybridge," p. 58). Additionally, westerns of the era—such as Edwin Porter's *The Great Train Robbery* (1903), about Butch Cassidy, and George Sherman's *Frontier Horizon* (1939), starring John



"Jackson Creek Barn" (2003). Mary Ellen Strom. From *Geyser Land*, created by Mary Ellen Strom in collaboration with Ann Carlson. Video projection created by Mary Ellen Strom. Courtesy of Mary Ellen Strom and Ann Carlson.

Wayne—are projected onto the side of a barn and stationary refrigerator truck, respectively (see "Jackson Creek Barn," p. 57). Porter's *Great Train Robbery* is paired with the Lumière brothers' *Arrival of the Train* (1895), touted as the first documentary film, projected onto an adjacent truck. These projections draw spectators' attention to the uncanny parallel between the colonial project and the concomitant rise in technologies such as photography, film, and train travel; the ways such technology is and has been used to construct "truth" and inform and misinform people about local and national history; and the convenient mythologies embedded in the histories of those technologies themselves.

According to Strom, the projections are meant to function as a kind of site-specific "ghosting." In "Buffalo Running," for instance, *Geyser Land* "ghosts the buffalo" that the U.S. Army systematically slaughtered between 1872 and 1893.[19] In the late nineteenth century, the U.S. government encouraged the decimation of nearly 15 million buffalo as a way to diminish the Crow and Northern Cheyenne populations, which subsided on the buffalo for food, clothing, and other necessities. As a result, only a single herd grazes the Bozeman Pass. "Buffalo Running" marks this absence by making it a ghostly presence. "Muybridge" similarly ghosts the animal, but to very different ends. Here spectators see projected animations that Strom has adapted from Muybridge's iconic animal motion studies, for which the English photographer used a series of stop-motion photography techniques to settle a



"Buffalo Running" (2003). Mary Ellen Strom. From *Geyser Land*, created by Mary Ellen Strom in collaboration with Ann Carlson. Video projection created by Mary Ellen Strom. Courtesy of Mary Ellen Strom and Ann Carlson.

"Muybridge" (2003). Mary Ellen Strom. From *Geyser Land*, created by Mary Ellen Strom in collaboration with Ann Carlson. Video projection created by Mary Ellen Strom, adapted from Eadweard Muybridge's stop-motion photography study "The Horse in Motion" (1877). Courtesy of Mary Ellen Strom and Ann Carlson.

debate as to whether all four of a horse's legs are ever airborne at the same time during a gallop. Not only did Muybridge's study prove the debate in the affirmative, but in employing a new machine called a Zoopractiscope, which successfully captured a horse in fast motion, Muybridge invented the intermediate technology on the path to documentary cinematography.

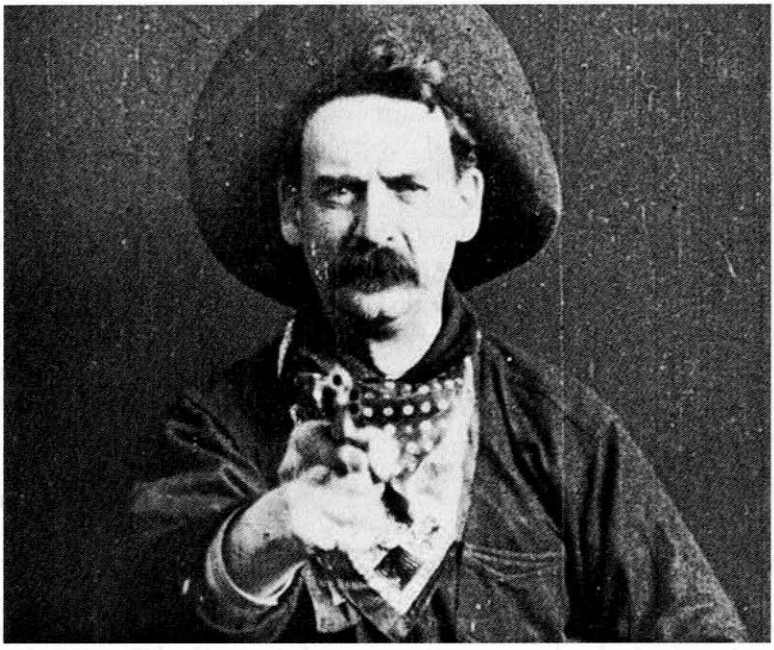
In the context of *Geyser Land*, calling forth this early history of cinematography sets the stage for audiences to begin to see the history of film—like that of photography—as a technology that is used by humans to construct arguments about the natural world (e.g., a horse "in fact" takes flight).[20] Put differently, film—particularly documentary film—easily masks its own construction and point of view, presenting the screen as truth itself, rather than constructed representations of reality from ideologically driven points of view. In citing the galloping debate that Muybridge's study sought to settle, "Muybridge" reminds spectators of film's polemic origins.

To further highlight the constructed nature of cinematography, as well as this performance itself, the *Geyser Land* project literally exposes the mechanics of production. In one car of the eight-car train that Carlson/Strom rent for the performance, the artists mount two four-hundred-pound digital projectors to custom-built turntables, which are visibly operated by *Geyser Land* crew members during the performance. Simultaneous to seeing the projected animations in the landscape, audience members see the human engineering that makes these animations possible.

Evident here is the artists' commitment to exposing artifice, to revealing the theatrical illusion and the related illusion of historical truth. Because the cinematographic illusion, the production crew, and the spectators are placed side by side, and because, as critic Catherine Lord observes, "everything and everyone [is] piled on that train: historical photographs incarnated in *tableau vivant*, projections of buffalo stampeding off a cliff, a butoh hiker inching down the aisles, Crow drummers, leathery ranchers playing poker, Ann's cranky mother, various curators, local bed and breakfast owners, stray philanthropists and uniformed ticket inspectors,"[21] alongside hundreds of audience members and dozens of crew, all without barriers between them—*Geyser Land* creates a situation in which dialogue about performance slips inside the theatrical frame, unfolding concomitantly with the performance event itself.

In the final moments of the performance journey, *Geyser Land* connects the founding myths of nation to the founding myths of film. As the train pulls into Bozeman Depot, audience members see the following triptych: the tableau vivant "Pax the Hat," framed by two films—the Lumière brothers' *Arrival of the Train* and Edwin Porter's *The Great Train Robbery*—projected onto adjacent refrigerator trucks.

Both films belong to the canon of turn-of-the-century train-inspired cinema. Like the "Porter" tableau at the start of the performance, the "Lumière Brothers" video installation asks audiences to become conscious of their mode of travel and draw connections between the black-and-white representations



Final shot, *The Great Train Robbery* (1903). Directed by Edwin S. Porter, performed by Justus D. Barnes.

of trains and their current experiences as passengers aboard the sleek Montana Rockies Rail Tour train that had carried them to this point. The films, however, do more than merely denaturalize train travel: they point to the founding myths of cinematography, which conflate film and reality and situate its early spectators as cultural dupes.

In *Arrival*, a fifty-second film depicting a train pulling into a station, the train travels from the top right hand of the frame to the bottom left, growing larger and larger as it seemingly draws closer to the audience. In *The Great Train Robbery*, actor George Barnes points his pistol directly at the camera (see Final shot, *The Great Train Robbery,* p. 60). In both *Arrival of the Train* and *The Great Train Robbery*, the diegetic action is addressed so directly to the camera that, as legend goes, early audiences who watched the films feared for their lives.

While *Arrival* is heralded as the first documentary and *The Great Train Robbery* as the first narrative film, the reception history of both films suggest that early audiences—not yet habituated to the basic convention of either genre as prerecorded—feared for their lives. The train and bullet seemed to literally head their way. In this sense, film historiography situates early audiences as spatially and temporally confused subjects, mistaking distant, prerecorded events as local and live.

In his essay "Lumiere's 'Arrival of the Train': Cinema's Founding Myth," media scholar Martin Loiperdinger evidences the falsity of this founding myth. He shows how the popular legend of the *Arrival* audience's terror over the encroaching train is little more than a convenient story that reifies the power of the medium. He also illustrates the ways in which the film was likely staged rather than documentary footage. Whether or not Loiperdinger's argument is "more true" than popular legend is beside the point. What's important here is Loiperdinger's observation that the dominant narrative of film historiography successfully frames the audience as passive victims. As such, these founding myths of film cast spectators as cultural dupes, deny them their ability to distinguish reality from representation, and absolve them of their shared responsibility in the construction of cultural meaning. That is, *Arrival* and *The Great Train Robbery* do little more than elevate the filmic genre while disempowering its spectators as discerning critics. By contrast, *Geyser Land* empowers its audiences with filmic literacy—creating moments that reveal their own theatrical construction, expose the construction of those cultural scenarios that have explicitly and tacitly shaped spectators' narratives of self and other, and illuminate the entitlement with which the settler subject experiences a false sense of belonging in place.[22]

The Right to Live(ness)

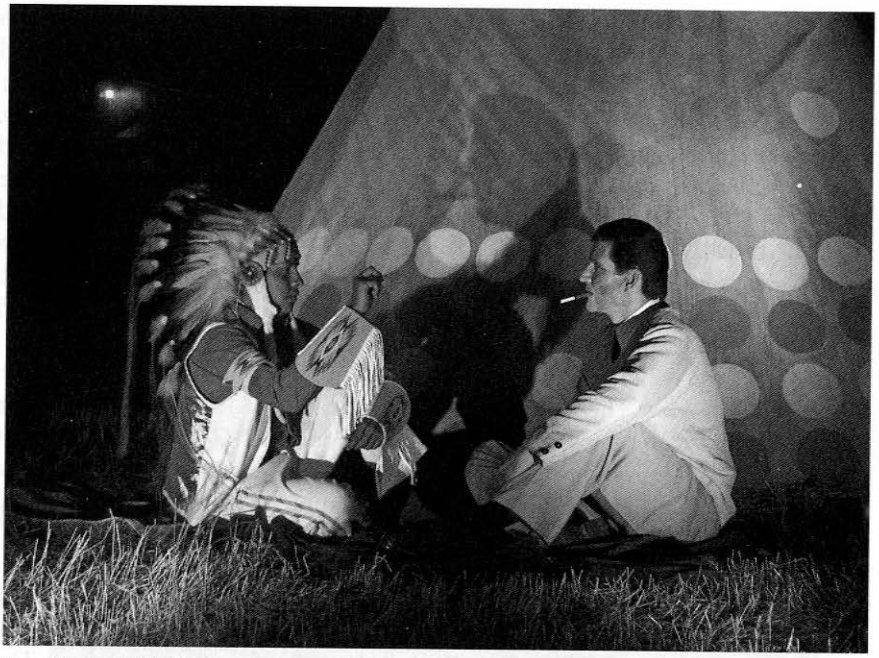
Sited between these two video installations is the tableau vivant, "Pax the Hat," which links the founding myths of photography-as-truth to those of film—and both to those of nation. In the original photograph, "Chief Pax the Hat" (1920), Pax the Hat is seated beside a white Yellowstone tourist at the entrance to the park. Pax the Hat wears a headdress and ceremonial regalia; the tourist wears a suit and smokes a cigar. A tepee serves as their backdrop. In the reenactment, actors Randolph Big Day (Crow) and Mike Dirkers play the roles of Chief and tourist, respectively.

Read together, the archival photograph and its ghostly double make visible those strategies of cultural appropriation, denigration, and ambivalence at the core of Yellowstone's colonial history. As noted earlier in the chapter, six years after the U.S. government established Yellowstone as a national park, they legally banned all Crow from the land, forcibly removing them to nearby reservations. At the same time, white investors recognized the ways in which part of the "lure of the local" landscape was its reputation as "wild" and "untamed," personified by the figure of the Indian in late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century photography, cinematography, landscape drawings, literature, and folklore.[23] Capitalizing on this social imaginary, Yellowstone National Park employed local, indigenous people to welcome the almost exclusively non-Native tourists as they entered the park. This colonial strategy at once eclipsed the violent disappearance of thousands of indigenous

Chief Pax the Hat. Yakima Kammit and Crow (ca. 1920). Courtesy of Yellowstone National Park.

people while representing them as willing cultural ambassadors. In *Playing Indian*, historian Philip Deloria argues that performances of racial impersonation are animated by white ambivalence, which he summarizes as a "dialectic of simultaneous desire and repulsion" toward the Native subject, as well as white American desires to be at once both "wild" and "free," tropes that the Native represented in the dominant social imaginary. In his discussion of British novelist and essayist D. H. Lawrence's *Studies in Classic American Literature*, Deloria explains,

> Throughout the essays, Lawrence frequently turned to "the Indian," intuitively locating native people at the very heart of American ambivalence. Whereas Euro-Americans had imprisoned themselves in the logical mind and the social order, Indians represented instinct and freedom. They spoke for the "spirit of the continent." Whites desperately desired that spirit, yet they invariably failed to become aboriginal and thus "finished." Savage Indians served Americans as oppositional figures against whom one might imagine a civilized national self. Coded as freedom, however, wild Indianness proved equally attractive, setting up a "have-the-cake-and-eat-it-too" dialectic of simultaneous desire and repulsion.[24]



"Pax the Hat" (2003). Mary Ellen Strom. From *Geyser Land*, created by Mary Ellen Strom in collaboration with Ann Carlson. Tableau vivant conceived and choreographed by Ann Carlson, performed by Randolph Big Day (Crow) and Mike Dirkers. Courtesy of Mary Ellen Strom and Ann Carlson.

The redface spectacle of "Chief Pax the Hat" playing the role of happy ambassador to the park takes place around the same historical moment as its blackface counterpart. In his foundational account of blackface minstrelsy in U.S. culture, historian Eric Lott uses the terms "love and theft" to similarly describe this phenomena of concomitant white desire and repulsion, identification and objectification, attraction and ambivalence, at the heart of the logics of racial impersonation. Lott writes, "'Black' figures were there *to be looked at*, shaped to the demands of desire; they were screens on which audience fantasies could rest, securing white spectators' position as superior, controlling, not to say owning, figures."[25] By representing the encounter between "tourist" and "Chief" as history rather than fantasy, the photograph reproduces the nation's foundational myth of thanksgiving while eliding the economic and racial motivations—the "dollars and desire," as Lott puts it—behind such an act. What's more, in figuring the relationship between colonizer and colonized as one of peaceful cultural exchange, the former is using his power over the latter to stage and document a performance that will later slip into the history record as evidence for the official story of early contact as one of equanimity. The Chief is made into a colonized subject—in Homi Bhabha's sense of the term—one who must, as a survival strategy, masquerade under duress as

friendly ambassador. The violence of colonial contact is replaced by an illusion of racial harmony, concealing the larger story of white expropriation of and control over the local landscape and its people. By their very ontology, master narratives necessitate the destruction of subaltern experiences of lived history. History, Walter Benjamin reminds us, is written by the victor.[26] History, Roland Barthes adds, is hysterical. "It is constituted only if we consider it, only if we look at it—and in order to look at it, we must be excluded from it."[27] Excluded from the process of representation, the Chief is only ever allowed to live as a dead photographic remnant, a relic, a thing of the past. A dead subject, the Chief's right to self-expression and self-determination is both destroyed and contained by the enforced reservation that is the photographic frame.[28]

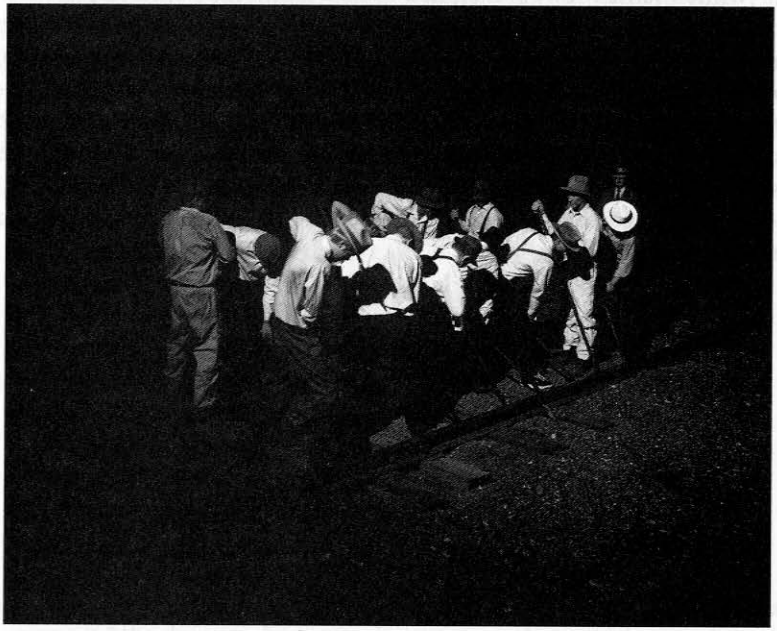
In the staged reenactment, actor Randolph Big Day (Crow) performs the role of Pax the Hat. The bold red, white, and blues of Pax the Hat's regalia are not whitewashed by the photographic apparatus. *Geyser Land*'s Chief wears bright colors, while the tourist remains in black-and-white. Nowhere else in *Geyser Land* is this illusion of photographic verisimilitude disrupted. Costumed in color rather than grayscale, Big Day, like Judah Goes Ahead, recharges himself with the right to live(ness) that the colonial history and its photographic record deaden and deny. In wearing differing color palettes, Big Day and Dirkers are also placed in different temporalities, flipping the social script: the tourist exists in past time; the Chief lives in the present. The Chief sits still, but his stillness reads like a performative act, as if he could break free of this theatrical convention at any moment, animate, get up, and go, leaving the tourist and tepee and all that they signify in this counterfeit scenario of brotherly peace.

A close comparison of the archival photograph and its reenactment also reveals that unlike Yellowstone, Carlson/Strom cast a young, light-skinned actor to play the role of Pax the Hat (compare *Chief Pax the Hat*, p. 62, and "Pax the Hat," p. 63). It comes as little surprise that, in 1920, Yellowstone National Park would want to hire a "Chief" who is older and dark-skinned: by definition, a racial stereotype transmits knowledge through a performance of excess. Staging the stereotype of the Native lent Yellowstone's original scenario its authenticity. *Geyser Land*, however, interrupts this stereotype when Big Day slips himself into the archive, recasting and revising historical memory. The casting of this young Crow man to impersonate an older Crow man who himself impersonates an imaginary Chief-as-willing-ambassador exposes this Chief as a "fictive ethnicity"—a sham, a performance of identity with no original referent, only racial simulacra and simulation.[30]

The Gandy Dance

Before disembarking from the train, *Geyser Land* spect-tourists encounter "Gandy Dancers," referenced in the opening of this chapter. In the 1946

Gandy Dancers (1945). Warren McGee. Bozeman Tunnel Operation, July 1945. Subjects unknown. Courtesy of Gallatin History Museum, Bozeman, Montana.



"Gandy Dancers" (2003). Mary Ellen Strom. From *Geyser Land*, created by Mary Ellen Strom in collaboration with Ann Carlson. Tableau vivant conceived and choreographed by Ann Carlson, performed by Graver Johnson, Emily Brodsky, Daniel Johnson, Jack Dyer, Alex Scaff, Bruce Johnson, John Hedges, Gary Fish, Rob Raney, Dave Gehrke, Anthony Eisenstein, Sten Hertseus, and Jake Whittenberg. Courtesy of Mary Ellen Strom and Ann Carlson.

archival photograph, we see a large section crew at work on the tracks as well as the rolling hills, trees, and brush that comprise the surrounding landscape. Surrounded by darkness, the section crew works to straighten the tracks—knees bent, backs arched, tools engaged: their repetitive movement sequence is synchronized to an inaudible beat. To their left, a man also wearing work clothes—a foreman perhaps—looks on. To their right, a large man in a suit and tie stands at rest.

Perhaps more than any other scene in the performance, "Gandy Dancers" enacts a queer slip of time as the 2003 audience witnesses a 1946 section crew working on the very same tracks that have carried them to their present-time destination. To witness a 1946 section crew straightening a 2003 track connects what Strom calls the "conceptual tourist attraction" known as *Geyser Land* to the ongoing one known as Yellowstone.[31] And it is not, of course, the tremendous weight of the *Geyser Land* train that has forced the tracks out of joint but 113 years of tourist trains ripping through the Bozeman Pass. Because they are captured in the midst of extreme physical exertion; because they are black and brown; because their white supervisor hovers menacingly nearby; because they labor in what appears to be the middle of the night (while the next day's imagined tourist slumbers peacefully somewhere nearby), this gandy dance is exposed to *Geyser Land* audiences as the performance of empire itself. And the seemingly seamless flow of bodies and capital across this haunted landscape is also exposed as a "performative act"—with their synchronized, quite literal "stylized repetition of acts" keeping things intact.[32] The sublime wilderness, the harmless tourist, the happy Native, the invisible ghosts: *Geyser Land* reveals the myths behind these myths, and shines its floodlight on the many gandy dances that keep the trains, and the time, running straight.