PRIMITIVISM AND CONTEMPORARY POPULAR CINEMA

by

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DISSERTATION ABSTRACT

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This dissertation is a postcolonial analysis of four films: *The Gods Must Be Crazy* (1980), *Dances with Wolves* (1990), *The Last Samurai* (2003), and *Avatar* (2009). While previous scholarship has identified the Eurocentric worldview of early 20th-century ethnographic film, no book-length work has analyzed the time consciousness of turn-of-the-21st century films that feature portrayals of the colonial encounter. By harmonizing film theory with postcolonial theory, this dissertation explores how contemporary films reiterate colonial models of time in ways which validate colonial aggression. This dissertation concludes that the aesthetics of contemporary popular cinema collude with colonial models of time in such a way as to privilege whiteness vis-à-vis constructions of a primitive other. Contemporary primitivism works through the legacy of classical Hollywood style, nostalgia for the western film, the omnipotence of the white male gaze, and a reverence for technology.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

In terms of world box-office gross, *Avatar* (2009) was the most successful film ever made, outstripping its closest competitor, *Titanic* (1997), by a handy billion dollars.[1] In short, *Avatar* was a domestic and international sensation that captured the imagination of viewers everywhere. To a large extent, the film moved audiences with its spectacular rendering of a utopian, indigenous culture and this culture's martial and moral victory over a neo-colonial military-industrial complex. However, because the film was regarded as a technological *advance*, and because the film features the spiritual progress of a white male who literally possesses an indigenous body, we may observe that *Avatar*'s attitude toward the colonial encounter is thematically ambiguous. At the very least, *Avatar* is haunted by the very legacy of colonial desire it would disavow with its utopian resolution of colonial conflict.

Avatar is an indication of the contemporary, global preeminence of primitivism, a mode of cinema preoccupied with representations of the colonial encounter. More specifically, primitivism manages representations of the colonial encounter through the construction of a primitive : modern binary. This primitive : modern binary is not value-neutral: it privileges the modern while disparaging the primitive. In the analysis of four texts, *Avatar* (2009), *The Last Samurai* (2003), *Dances with Wolves* (1990), and *The Gods Must Be Crazy* (1980), I advance an understanding of how primitivism promotes a Eurocentric worldview through the construction of a primitive : modern binary. I list these films here in reverse chronological order to highlight the importance of *Avatar* as a

global cultural phenomenon, and to argue for the rereading of these other films in light of the current preeminence of cinematic fantasies of the Primitive Other.

The motivation for this project is simple. Through a close reading of the aesthetics and contexts of primitivist cinema over the last thirty-five years, I hope to perform a deconstruction of settler colonial ideology. This deconstruction is motivated by my concern that these films all reproduce a way of thinking that naturalizes and reaffirms the real-world history and ongoing practices of settler colonialism. As Edward Said writes in *Culture and Imperialism*, the process by which European powers came to dominate the globe, its peoples, and its natural resources, depended on the "the *idea* of *having an empire*" (11). As Said writes more expansively:

> There was a commitment to [imperialism and colonialism] over and above profit, a commitment in constant circulation and recirculation, which, on the one hand, allowed decent men and women to accept the notion that distant territories and their native peoples *should* be subjugated, and, on the other, replenish metropolitan energies so that these decent people could think of the *imperium* as a protracted, almost metaphysical obligation to rule subordinate, inferior, or less advantaged peoples. (10)

Said argues that the 19th-century novel manufactured consent to the imperial project through its persistent construction of empire as the self-evident infrastructure of domestic European space. Building on Said's thesis, I say that artifacts of cinematic primitivism encourage intellectual investment in colonialism.

While primitivism is current in contemporary popular culture, it has manufactured the imperative to colonial domination since the Enlightenment.[2] In brief, Enlightenment

philosophy conceived human history as a cumulative, linear effort of civilizational progress. This civilizational progress was conceived as the unfolding of rational, human social knowledge commensurate to the revelation of God's will.[3] Mark Moberg, a scholar of the history of anthropological theory, identifies the Scottish historian Adam Ferguson as the first purveyor of the Eurocentric historical model that I will refer to throughout this dissertation as *primitivism*:

> In his 1767 *Essay on the History of Civil Society* the Scottish historian Adam Ferguson … first attempted to place all known human societies on a three-stage scale of savagery, barbarism, and civilization. Ferguson's model was specifically developed with respect to the North American Indian cultures then being documented by French Jesuits in Canada. Ferguson assumed that all human societies passed through the same three states of development, and that all could be assigned a particular place on that sequence depending on their livelihoods, cultural practices, political systems and technology. Ferguson's was the first known use of the *comparative method*, the assumption that contemporary "primitive" societies represent the early stages of cultural evolution. In other words, members of a civilized society can understand their own distant past by studying existing primitive societies. (Moberg 60)

As Moberg observes, Ferguson's model privileged whiteness with a Eurocentric temporality:

> Ferguson suggested that rationality was the prime mover of history. In the process of cultural evolution people literally thought themselves out of a primitive state. Rational thought would lead to more and more reasonable institutions, customs,

> and subsistence practices. Hence the civilizations of Europe were believed to have left behind "superstitions" in favor of a worldview based on science. Although Ferguson believed, like Locke, that all people had the same intellectual *potential*, "savages" had not mastered the potential to the extent of Europeans. (60-61)

Because Enlightenment philosophy conceived of civilizational progress as a self-evident good, and because the colonial encounter provided a convenient map for temporal and civilizational difference, this thinking constructed colonial domination as the exertion of a benevolent force on a primitive object. As Roy Harvey Pearce writes in *Savagism and Civilization*, this logic of civilizational progress had a direct impact on the idea of empire and the manufacture of its imperative. Specifically, Enlightenment models of history allowed for the resolution of European settler colonists' moral quandaries over the destruction of native cultures because primitivism allowed American settlers to believe that "men in becoming civilized had gained much more than they had lost; and that civilization, the act of civilizing, for all of its destruction of primitive cultures, put something higher and greater in place" (85).[4]

In the 19th century, the discipline of anthropology would entrench Enlightenment primitivism in the scientific academic establishment through the misapplication of Darwin's theory of evolution. Building on the developmental model of Adam Ferguson, the anthropologists Lewis Henry Morgan and Edward Burnett Tylor infused evolution with the Enlightenment ideology of progressive time, an intellectual model known as "Victorian unilineal evolution" (Moore, 1997 4).[5] While the study of culture(s) had lacked a scientific rationale in the pre-Darwinian period, anthropology found itself legitimized as a scientific discipline in the post-Darwinian moment (Moore, 1997 16).

Even though Victorian evolutionists would erroneously lend Darwinian theory a progressive arrow, these anthropologists were able to scientifically produce indigenous people as primitive, backward, and atavistic.[6]

While theories of unilineal evolution were rejected by Franz Boaz in the first decades of the 20th century, the trend was "resurrected in the mid-twentieth century by contemporary anthropologists" (Moberg 60).[7] As Johannes Fabian argues in *Time and the Other: How Anthropology Makes its Object*, anthropology remains predicated on assumptions of temporal difference inherited from Enlightenment historiography. To wit, the subject/object relationship of anthropology is one in which a contemporary subject (the anthropologist) observes an anachronistic object (the ethnographic specimen). Fabian calls this structure the denial of coevalness. The resurrection of evolutionary thinking by mid-twentieth century anthropologists is so disturbing because the denial of coevalness stands to manufacture the imperative to empire after the fashion of Enlightenment historiography. In sum, the denial of coevalness reproduces the Enlightenment imperative to empire because it preserves progress, futurity, and subjectivity as the exclusive privileges of a European observer while simultaneously constructing the Primitive Other as a temporally contained object of the colonizer's gaze.

To a great extent, the evolutionary models of Enlightenment historiography and Victorian anthropology shaped European and American film culture in the early-20th century. Following Fabian, Fatimah Tobing Rony writes that early ethnographic films such as *Nanook of the North* (1922), *Tabu: A Story of the South Seas* (1931), and *King Kong* (1933), were instrumental in establishing the denial of coevalness in the popular cinematic consciousness of Europe and North America in the early-20th century. As an

"ethnographic time machine," this early-20th-century cinema produced images of anachronistic objects for a contemporary, colonizer's subject position. Specifically, the denial of coevalness came to structure the viewing position of classical ethnographic cinema in such a way as to locate the cinematic primitive in the long-ago-and-far-away of the colonial imaginary.

In Fabian's analysis of anthropological constructions of time, and in Rony's critique of the denial of coevalness in early 20th-century film, these authors perform the postcolonial critique of modern time consciousness. As Bliss Cua Lim writes in *Translating Time*, modern time consciousness is that way of thinking time as linear, mechanical, homogenous and progressive. This way of thinking time emerged in Europe and North America as a result of the industrial revolution, the preeminence of the railroads, and the advent of geological and Darwinian models of time. In its attainment of global hegemony at the turn of the 20th century, modern time consciousness subsumed or devoured local, indigenous, non-industrial ways of being and living in time. As such, modern time consciousness justifies colonial domination because it is predicated on scientific constructions of universality and progress. As a Eurocentric model of time which depends on colonial difference, modern time consciousness encourages the denial of coevalness and temporal elitism (Lim 69-88). Modern time consciousness is the broad conceptual framework within which colonizing subjects may deny coevalness to colonized objects, and temporal elitism is the ontological privilege attained through the denial of coevalness.

In the contemporary primitivist cinema here under review, the colonizer's gaze manages cinematic aesthetics in such a way as to produce the denial of coevalness. This

denial allows the colonial viewing position to assume the privilege of temporal elitism. Whereas Rony addresses the manner in which classical ethnographic film produced the denial of coevalness in the early-20th century, no book-length work examines how contemporary popular cinema constructs its particular form of temporal elitism. I hope to address a deficit in postcolonial cinema studies by advancing an understanding of how contemporary, popular cinema produces the denial of coevalness. In particular, this dissertation is concerned with how cinematic aesthetics work within cultural contexts to produce temporal elitism.

Chapter II is an aesthetic and historical analysis of the slapstick comedy *The Gods Must Be Crazy*. Directed by the South African apartheid regime's most trusted propagandist, Jamie Uys (pronounced "ace"), the film was the culminating effort of twenty years' work to legitimize, naturalize, or dream away the violence of white minority rule. The film tells the story of the collaboration between an Afrikaner biologist and his *!Kung* retainer in their quest to rescue a white damsel in distress from a band of black African revolutionaries. Academic criticism has condemned the film for its representations of black Africans who are either incapable of governing themselves or else hopelessly ill-equipped to navigate modernity, constructions which naturalize white paternalism and foreclose the possibility of indigenous futurity. In spite of the film's disturbing relationship to the apartheid regime, *The Gods* is historically significant as the highest grossing foreign film at the American box office. Also a hit in France and Japan, the film spawned two South African sequels, *The Gods Must Be Crazy II* (1989) and *The Jewel of the Gods* (1989), as well as three unlicensed, Hong Kong-produced sequels:

Crazy Safari (1991), *Crazy Hong Kong* (1993), and *The Gods Must Be Funny In China* (1994).

While scholarship has observed that *The Gods Must Be Crazy* served apartheid through the denial of coevalness, previous treatments have ignored how the film constructs temporal elitism through its affinity with the lingering forms of classical Hollywood aesthetics. To address this deficit, the methodology of *Chapter II* harmonizes the critical theory of temporal elitism with an aesthetic analysis of cinematic time. By juxtaposing *The Gods* with early American films such as *The Birth of a Nation* (1915) and *King Kong* (1933), I hope to demonstrate that *The Gods*'s temporal elitism takes shape in ways which are particular to tropes of classical Hollywood cinema. Like films of the classical Hollywood style, *The Gods* promotes temporal elitism through its use of linear storytelling, a romantic subplot, and an omnipotent spectator. Because it manages a primitive : modern binary with an aesthetic of spectatorial mastery, *The Gods* fuses the colonizer's gaze with the omnipotent gaze characteristic of the classical Hollywood style. This sense of spectatorial mastery, in turn, presides over a linear narrative trajectory which serves as a metaphor for the global trajectory of Enlightenment historiography.

While my analysis of *The Gods Must Be Crazy* is a departure from an otherwise uniform corpus of North American films, its inclusion here serves to expand and complicate my understanding of contemporary American primitivism. In my reading of *The Gods Must Be Crazy*, I invoke South African film culture to highlight how two different structural contexts, the industrial model of Hollywood cinema and the apartheid cinema of South Africa, demonstrate representational and aesthetic overlaps in the exhibition of primitivism. Specifically, *The Gods* constructs the denial of coevalness in

terms which echo constructions of race and time in *The Birth of a Nation* and *King Kong*. Therefore, *The Gods Must Be Crazy* is a text which allows for the easy legibility of the classical Hollywood style in the context of apartheid cinema. The easy transposition of the Hollywood style into an apartheid context is a strong indication of the racial unconscious of classical Hollywood style. In other terms, this transposition indicates how the legacy of Hollywood cinema is harmonious with the racial ideology of apartheid South Africa.

Like in *The Birth of a Nation*, the omniscient narrator and linear storytelling of *The Gods* manage a narrative of race told from a white point of view. Therefore, *The Gods* is an example of how a film culture outside of the United States has expressed its own ideology of race through a reiteration of the classical Hollywood style. The recognition of the legacy of classical Hollywood aesthetics in *The Gods* serves two critical purposes. First, it demonstrates that American ideologies of race and time have achieved global circulation through an aesthetic vector. Second, it suggests that contemporary American primitivism has great ideological affinities with the racial ideology of apartheid, especially considering that *Dances with Wolves*, *The Last Samurai*, and *Avatar* construct the denial of coevalness much after the fashion of *The Gods Must Be Crazy*. In *Chapter II*, I will explain how the aesthetic form of *The Gods* represents a confluence of classical Hollywood aesthetics and the ideological and industrial structures of South African apartheid. While a similar structural and historical analysis of the classical Hollywood studio era is beyond the scope of this project, my analysis builds on the work of scholars who have observed the racial politics of the Hollywood production system and the racial constitution of the classical Hollywood style.[8]

Beyond considerations for the influence of Hollywood aesthetics, accounting for the particular form of *The Gods Must Be Crazy* requires a consideration of South Africa's own, indigenous film culture. To a great extent, *The Gods Must Be Crazy* owes its form to South Africa's state subsidy scheme. This scheme dominated the funding and production of films in South Africa in the 1960s and 70s. As a tool of South African apartheid, the subsidy scheme supported only those films which propagated an Afrikaner worldview and the racism incumbent to that worldview. Released in 1980, *The Gods* catered to the expectations of a local film culture that had been absolutely dictated by the Afrikaner worldview for over 20 years.

If I have included a review of *The Gods*'s production context in a way that I have not in this dissertation's other chapters, it is for a few reasons. First, it is to acknowledge that *The Gods* was not simply a function of the lingering influence of classical Hollywood aesthetics. Quite to the contrary, South African film culture in the second half of the twentieth century was dominated by the politics of apartheid, and, in particular, the generic and narrative conventions that had been encouraged by the apartheid state's subsidy scheme. To not have accounted for these local factors in my assessment of *The Gods Must Be Crazy* would have been to give too much credit to the influence of Hollywood aesthetics. Second, I have included a brief history of South Africa and its film industry because these elements were a salient aspect of *The Gods*'s own scholarly literature. More often than not, treatments of the film dealt with the film's place in South African film history. Similarly, there was almost no discussion of the film that did not place it in the context of South African economic and social history. My treatment of *The Gods* in this dissertation is a reflection of this pattern.

Finally, my purpose here is to demonstrate the synergy between the aesthetic legacy of the classical Hollywood studio system and the industrial and structural norms of South African film culture in the era of apartheid. Any understanding of *The Gods Must Be Crazy* would be incomplete if it did not account for the fact that the primitivist ideology of South African cinema was the selfsame ideology that structured the racial logic of the classical Hollywood film. Indeed, the affinity shared by the temporal logic of South African apartheid and the racial logic of the classical Hollywood style accounts for the uncanny synergy of these forms in *The Gods Must Be Crazy*.

In *Chapter III*, I move from a discussion of *The Gods Must Be Crazy* to an analysis of *Dances with Wolves*. In this movement from an artifact of South African apartheid to the revisionist western of 1990s America, I argue that both *The Gods* and *Dances with Wolves* do similar ideological work. Whereas *The Gods* utterly disavows the colonial violence of the apartheid regime, *Dances with Wolves* disavows the ongoing structure of settler-colonial relations through its construction of Native American genocide as a historical event.[9] This construction of colonial genocide as a historical event is a settler move to innocence.[10] This move to innocence functions through the activation of that most American of film genres, the western. Whereas the classical western was an endorsement of manifest destiny, and whereas the revisionist western saw the deflation of the white male hero with whom manifest destiny was associated in the western's classical period, *Dances with Wolves* works for the redemption of the classical western and its hero by the means of a melodramatic adoption narrative.[11] In brief, *DWW* mobilizes melodramatic sympathy for its white hero by allowing him to appropriate the righteous suffering of indigenous Americans. This appropriation and its melodramatic

force depend on imperialist nostalgia for a lost, utopian, indigenous culture. Because it constructs the suffering of Native Americans as a historical event, *DWW* preserves futurity and progressive time as the exclusive privileges of the settler colonist.[12] At the same time, the appropriation of this historical suffering serves as a distraction from white complicity in indigenous genocide, allowing for the moral redemption of the classical western hero. By reading settler moves to innocence and imperialist nostalgia in terms of the melodramatic mode and the western genre, I hope to demonstrate that colonial ideology works through aesthetic forms which are distinctly characteristic of American popular cinema. Just as colonial time consciousness finds expression in the legacy of classical Hollywood aesthetics in *The Gods Must Be Crazy*, the settler move to innocence in *Dance with Wolves* has everything to do with the manner in which the film activates the western genre and the melodramatic mode.

In *Chapter IV*, I use the concept of imperialist nostalgia to explore how *The Last Samurai* interacted with the discourse of primitivism in *The War on Terror*. Taking *The Last Samurai* as a psychic screen for the colonial encounter in post-9/11 conflict, I argue that both the film and the discourse of *The War on Terror* bifurcate the signifier of the colonial other into the good and bad Oriental. In each case, the bifurcation of the colonial other is managed by the denial of coevalness. After 9/11, American and British discourses constructed "the terrorist" as the bad Oriental. As barbaric *and* techno-sophisticated, primitive *and* modern, "the terrorist" was a threat to the temporal exceptionalism claimed by the proponents of *The War on Terror*. In *The Last Samurai*, the bad Oriental is he who adopts western clothes and weaponry: the good Oriental is that samurai who remains unambiguously anachronistic. Like the "terrorist" of *The War on*

Terror, the bad Oriental of *The Last Samurai* threatens the temporal exceptionalism of the settler-colonial subject position: he is a contemporary rival. In contrast, the samurai restore the privilege of settler-colonial futurity because *The Last Samurai* constructs them as vanishing Indians.

In this analysis of *The Last Samurai*, I should make a methodological distinction regarding my use of the term "oriental." At first, one might think that *The Last Samurai* operates according to the terms of orientalism as defined by Edward Said, particularly regarding the film's lavish, pleasurable rendering of an Asian culture. While these dynamics are certainly at play, I find that the film's construction of Japanese masculinity has as much to do with the denial of coevalness and the construction of Enlightenment historiography as it has to do with constructions of despotism, sexuality, or religiosity, characteristics so important to Said's critique of orientalism. Thus, I am supplementing the orientalist reading of *The Last Samurai* with a primitivist one. While the binary of classical orientalism functions according to the logic of the European self and the Oriental other, the logic of primitivism depends on a self : other binary which is managed according to a temporal opposition of the "primitive" with the "modern."

Finally, by reading *The Last Samurai* as an analogical cipher for *The War on Terror*, I hope to highlight the manner in which popular cinema reflects a discourse of primitivism that extends beyond the boundaries of cinematic fiction. The structural affinity of *The Last Samurai* with *The War on Terror* suggests that the notions of colonial time which structure recent popular cinema also saturate popular understandings of United States' foreign policy. As such, the vanishing Indian and the bad Oriental are not just the hoary, cinematic hangovers of a defunct colonial project; rather, they are

signifiers which constitute and structure the United States in relation to its real-world others.

While *Chapters II, III,* and *IV* analyze the interaction of film aesthetics with cultural and historical contexts, *Chapter V* examines how *Avatar*'s temporal elitism was a function of the film's interaction with its own popular and scholarly reception discourse. In a stunning chorus of evolutionary rhetoric, popular and academic critics celebrated *Avatar*'s 3D exhibition technology as a dialectical leap into the future of film aesthetics. Because motion picture audiences were invited to celebrate this technology as a tool for exploring the film's diegetic world as a virtual colonial space, I argue that the film's exhibition technology moves into a dialectical opposition with the film's diegetic, indigenous people. As a result, the film's discourse and viewing position collude to preserve futurity as the exclusive privilege of the cinematic spectator: *Avatar*'s 3D exhibition technology was an ethnographic time machine.

While *The Gods*, *DWW,* and *TLS* all produce temporal elitism through the interplay of their aesthetics with particular historical contexts, the production of temporal elitism in *Avatar* is far more global. The motivation for the methodological shift of *Chapter V* is to demonstrate that *Avatar*'s colonial viewing position and its evolutionary reception discourse are part of a broader tradition of cinematic temporal elitism. This tradition originated in the earliest of ethnographic films, and finds expression in seminal writings of film theory. Throughout this tradition, cinema has been regarded as an emblem of technological progress in possession of its own aesthetic destiny. If celebrated as an expression of such, *Avatar* becomes emblematic of a broad exigency in popular cinema, the process by which civilizational difference and the colonial encounter are

always already managed by a discourse of cinema which is constructed according to paradigms of progressive time and the futurity of cinema itself.

With the cinematic management of the primitive in mind, it is worth taking a moment to explain how I will use the terms "primitive" and "primitivism" in each of the following chapters. In *Chapter II*, "primitivism" will refer to the way in which *The Gods Must Be Crazy* performs the denial of coevalness with its construction of South Africa's indigenous people. This same primitivism was active across the apartheid culture of South Africa throughout the 20th century. Indeed, the denial of coevalness was one of the preeminent means by which apartheid authorities of the South African state justified the segregation, discrimination, and disenfranchisement of South Africa's indigenous people.

In *Chapter III*, "primitivism" will designate the manner in which the Lakota Indians of the United States are denied coevalness in *Dances with Wolves*. As idealized, anachronistic people, the Lakota Indians are a spiritual and emotional resource for the film's white protagonist. It is important to note that primitivism in *Dances with Wolves* works in the same way as *The Gods*, while achieving slightly different ends. Whereas the denial of coevalness in *The Gods* justifies discrimination and disenfranchisement under the logic of South African apartheid, the denial of coevalness in *Dances with Wolves* has the effect of historically containing the ongoing violence of settler colonialism in the United States. Primitivism allows *Dances with Wolves* to imagine that violence against indigenous Americans is a thing of the past, rather than an ongoing political reality.

In *Chapter IV*, "primitivism" describes the manner in which the samurai of *The Last Samurai* conform to the myth of the vanishing Indian. The uncompromised anachronism of the samurai ensures that their disappearance is a matter of historical

inevitability, rather than colonial culpability. Moreover, their location in the past serves as a therapeutic counterpoint to the liminal temporality of the radical jihadi as constructed in *The War on Terror*. As such, primitivism in *The Last Samurai* is a therapeutic construction that liberates the colonizer from the guilt of colonial violence while simultaneously assuaging fears over a liminal other.

Finally, "primitivism" in *Chapter V* refers to the manner in which *Avatar* and its reception discourse installed the film's indigenous characters in a primitive : modern binary. This binary manages the relationship of the film's indigenous characters to the film's diegetic and extra-diegetic technologies. Primitivism in *Avatar* allows the cinematic spectator to enjoy temporal privilege over the film's indigenous people because the film harmonizes the colonizer's gaze with the technological sophistication of the film's own 3D exhibition technology.

I am particularly interested in the films of this dissertation because they demonstrate the endurance of a particular mode of primitivism which we may trace through the writings of Adam Ferguson, Lewis Henry Morgan, early ethnographic film, and contemporary anthropology. In spite of the fact that we live in an ostensibly "postcolonial" world, I hope to show that these films construct the Primitive Other as an atavistic remnant of primordial man, and, in doing so, that contemporary popular cinema continues to reproduce the imperative to empire with a trope which has endured since the late-18th century. In focusing on films which span the last thirty-five years, I hope to demonstrate two things. First, I want to show that popular cinema of the 21st century continues to reiterate the colonial temporality of the late-18th century. Second, in choosing a body of films which spans the last thirty-five years, I hope to demonstrate that

this Enlightenment temporality has enjoyed currency during the entire period of recent history. Rather than functioning as an isolated resurgence in the period of *Avatar*, Enlightenment primitivism has thrived in popular films from at least 1980.

The films here under review are far from a random selection from the cultural archive. First and foremost, I have defined my corpus backwards from *Avatar*. As one of the most widely screened films of all time, I take it as axiomatic that *Avatar* is an artifact worthy of scholarly analysis. Regardless of whether the film promotes colonial ideology, motivates anti-imperial resistance, or displaces the reparation of indigenous land and sovereignty with a utopian resolution of colonial conflict, the film is worth understanding because of its global readership. Because of its wide audience and great popularity, it stands to reason that the film's regard for time may have had broad influence on popular understandings of colonial conflict. It is as Richard Dyer writes in *White*: "how anything is represented is the means by which we think and feel about a thing, by which we apprehend it. The study of representation is more limited than the study of reality and yet it is also the study of one of the prime means by which we have knowledge of reality" (xiii). *Avatar* is all the more worthy of study if it can be shown to enlist global support for a colonizer's worldview while simultaneously posturing as a text of anti-colonial resistance, as it was often received. Specifically, I say the film encourages its spectator to think and feel in sympathy with white, settler futurity vis-à-vis indigenous people as objects of the colonizer's gaze. We cannot allow this structure to remain unconscious, unspoken, or uncontested.

Working backward from the present, *The Last Samurai* and *Dances with Wolves* present themselves as two very natural inter-texts for understanding *Avatar*. First and

foremost, these three films demonstrate great formal and aesthetic affinities: in all of the films, a disenchanted westerner plays Indian as a means of redeeming his masculinity, and, in the process, engages in imperialist nostalgia over an anachronistic, utopian culture in such a way as to mask his complicity in colonial violence. As such, I say that the nearly unstoppable success of *Avatar* more or less automatically calls out for a rereading of these previous films. *Avatar*'s popularity means that *Dances with Wolves* and *The Last Samurai* have been part of a recent history of the motion picture that is still unfolding. After *Avatar*, *Dances with Wolves* and *The Last Samurai* mean something that they could not have meant had *Avatar* never been released. At the very least, these films gain significance because they may now be observed as part of an enduring trend in American cinema culture which, now more than ever, has captured the imagination of a global audience. Finally, *Dances with Wolves*, perhaps more so than *The Last Samurai*, was a film celebrated as a work of art. The winner of seven Academy Awards, including Best Picture, the film is an example of an entry in the cultural archive that stands to invest aesthetic and emotional energy in the denial of coevalness.

Finally, these films are just as interesting for the qualities that differentiate them. Specifically, the uniformity of temporal elitism across the films' diversity of locations and historical periods suggests that primitivism is a profoundly flexible trope. When taken as a set, these films demand that the primitive is everywhere, and everywhen, even as the primitive is always long ago and far away. While *Avatar* projects primitivism into the future and onto a distant planet, *The Last Samurai* projects primitivism into Victorian Japan. While *DWW* projects primitivism into the American frontier (which is always a place *and* a time), *The Gods* imagines primitivism in present-day South Africa. That the

Primitive Other should populate Africa, America, Asia, and the colonial frontiers of an interstellar future, is a reassurance that the impulse to empire shall be valid in all places and in all times. As this body of films suggests the self-evidence and ubiquity of the Primitive Other across a diegetic, intertextual timespan of several hundred years, this corpus works as a cinematic metaphor for the actual historical endurance of primitivism and its temporal elitism from the late-18th century through to the 21st.

Notes

[1] *Avatar*'s global gross was $2,787,000,000; *Titanic*'s was $1,835,400,000. Adjusted for inflation, *Gone With the Wind* is the all-time American domestic box office champion, at over $3,000,000,000 (Quigley 16-18).

[2] While the temporal dimension of modern European racism dates to the Enlightenment, the European perception that non-Europeans are somehow less than fully human is an ancient attitude dating to the writings of Pliny the Elder, a Roman naturalist writing in the first century C.E. As Mark Moberg writes in *Engaging Anthropological Theory*, Plinian attitudes persisted in Europe into the 19th century, and would serve as justification of the colonial project:

> The result [of Pliny's racial speculation] was a conception of non-Europeans that has become known as the *Plinian races*…The Plinian races exhibited often grotesque, part-human, part-animal characteristics and were responsible for a lasting belief that non-Europeans were in some physical and behavioral sense less than fully human. These ideas persisted for centuries after Pliny devised them. The fact that they lasted into the period of European colonization of the Americas and Africa suggests that such beliefs may have served as convenient rationales for colonial endeavors that deprived native people of their labor and resources. After all, if the natives of the colonized world are not fully human, what inherent rights do they enjoy more than, say, livestock or any other useful species? (Moberg 47-48).

[3] As Roy Harvey Pearce writes of the Scottish Enlightenment thinkers:

> The Scots held that it might be conjectured back from empirical evidence how God was revealing His Word to modern man slowly but surely, how modern man was thus slowly but surely progressing to high civilization, how he had left behind him forever his savage, primitive state. This was the grand Christian civilized Idea of Progress. (82)

[4] For a review of the ideology of Enlightenment progress regarding representations of American Indians, see Berkhofer 40-48.

[5] As Mark Moberg observes, Morgan followed Ferguson but "is often erroneously credited with devising the savagery-barbarism-civilization evolutionary model" (Moberg 60).

[6] As Tylor writes:

> [Civilization] may be looked upon as the general improvement of mankind by higher organization of the individual and society, to the end of promoting at once man's goodness, power and happiness. This theoretical civilization does in no small measure correspond with actual civilization, as traced by comparing savagery with barbarism, and barbarism with modern educated life. So far as we take into account only material and intellectual culture, this is

> especially true. Acquaintance with the physical laws of the world, and the accompanying power of adapting nature to man's own ends, are, on the whole, lowest among savages, mean among barbarians, and highest among modern educated nations. (Quoted in Moore, 1997 24-25)

For his part, Lewis Henry Morgan writes:

> The latest investigations respecting the early condition of the human race are tending to the conclusion that mankind commenced their career at the bottom of the scale and worked their way up from savagery to civilization through the slow accumulation of experimental knowledge. As it is undeniable that portions of the human family have existed in a state of savagery, other portions in a state of barbarism, and still other portion in a state of civilization, it seems equally so that these three distinct conditions are connected with each other in a natural as well as necessary sequence of progress. (Quoted in Moore, 1977 35)

[7] Moberg writes that Boas's influential form of cultural relativism had "consigned to academic oblivion [the] ethnocentrism and speculative nature of unilinear evolution" (Moberg 234). An anthropologist intent on reviving the evolutionary model, and an anthropologist with an explicit intellectual affinity for Lewis Henry Morgan, was the Marxist Leslie White. White argued for a progressive model of cultural evolution in which the state of technological advancement was positively correlated to cultural complexity and achievement (Moberg 234-241). Whereas White was a proponent of unilineal evolution, his contemporary and adversary Julian Steward was a proponent of multilinear evolution, the "specific forms of adaptation that arose within particular environmental contexts and subsistence traditions" (Moberg 240). While these two anthropologists remained in somewhat heated antagonism, their dispute "signal[ed] evolution's rehabilitation in anthropology … From being virtually banned as a topic of academic discourse in the 1930s, social evolution moved to the center of anthropological theory in the US by the 1960s" (Moberg 240).

[8] For several analyses of the racial constitution of the classical Hollywood aesthetic, see Courtney 1-50, Doane 172-205, Lim 1-43, Shohat 19-68, and Rony 157-192.

[9] For an explanation of colonial genocide as an ongoing structure, see Wolfe 387-409.

[10] I take this terminology from Tuck and Yang 1-40.

[11] For an explanation of my use of the term melodrama, see Brooks 1-23, and Williams 42-88.

[12] For an explanation of imperialist nostalgia, see Rosaldo 107-122.

CHAPTER II

THE GODS MUST BE CRAZY AND THE IMPOSSIBILITY OF POSTCOLONIAL HOLLYWOOD

If, in the erotic regime of the colonizer's gaze, native is to metropole as woman is to man, then it should be no surprise that the ethnographic has always been the racialized theater of the pornographic. With the advent of *Avatar* (2009), modernity's erotic dreams of its primitive other have never been so popular or lucrative. While a google search for images of *Avatar* almost immediately assails the hapless viewer with pornographic fan-fiction, the film itself is explicitly erotic, and is structured according to the imperatives of a white, modern gaze on the primitive female other. While *Avatar* received nearly ecstatic popular and critical acclaim for its technological progress, the film's primitive : modern / female : male gazing relations are at least as old as the scopic regime that managed images of Sarah Saartjie Baartman (a.k.a. the Hottentot Venus), a Khoisan woman of colonial South Africa brought to England for exhibition as a primitive, sexual fetish object at the turn of the 19th century (Figure 1) (La Venus Hottentote). *Avatar*, an ostensibly anti-colonial text, perpetuates an asymmetrical, erotic viewing relationship endemic to the voyeurism of anthropology, what we may as well call *The National Geographic* effect. Indeed, this effect operates in that other great blockbuster of primitivist voyeurism, that ultimate triumph of South African apartheid propaganda, *The Gods Must Be Crazy* (1980) (hereafter *The Gods*). Like the voyeurism of Saartjie Baartman and *Avatar*, visual pleasure in *The Gods* depends on the interpellation of the cinematic spectator into a genre convention of visual anthropology, the nakedness of the

non-white body as revealed to the unrestricted voyeurism of a contemporary subject position, a relationship between the voyeur and his primitive object that Bill Nichols calls "Ethnotopia" (220).

Figure 1. *Avatar*, The Hottentot Venus, and *The Gods Must Be Crazy*.

While *Avatar* was guilty of its share of Hollywood stereotypes regarding indigenous people (read: dreadlocks and bows and arrows), no one would consider the film as an overt justification of colonial aggression. Rather, the film is heavy-handed in its postcolonial logic: the American military-industrial complex is an exploitative force of unqualified evil; the film's indigenous victors are an unqualified icon of ecological and social harmony. So goes the Manichean, civilizational dualism of many films of the last 25 years: *Dances with Wolves* (1990), *Ferngully* (1992), *Pocahontas* (1995), and *The Last Samurai* (2004). However, following *The Gods Must Be Crazy*, these films cannot be understood as simply postcolonial: rather, they constitute a culturally dominant yet politically ambivalent mode of American screen culture: cinematic primitivism.

In his recent essay on primitivist tourism in Papua New Guinea, Anthropologist Rupert Stasch defines primitivism as

> *any* ideological formation about human variety in which one kind of humanity is identified as embodying originalness in time, and correlative primordialness or archetypicality of being. … But a particularly important primitivist framework of the present era is the mainly European-originating one that envisions human variation in the crucible of a Manichaean contrast between two radically contrastive and incompatible types – the 'modern' or 'civilized' versus the 'tribal', 'indigenous' or 'primitive', with the further Romantic twist that civilized humanity is superior in technological and economic power but tribal humanity is superior in some aspects of spirit, social ethos, bodily aesthetics, or relation to nature. A small indicator of this primitivism's vast sway was the global commercial success of the 2009 movie *Avatar*, now known as the highest grossing film of the cinema era, a market success dependent on the allure of its highly recognizable primitivist plot repeated from earlier Hollywood blockbusters such as *Pocahontas* and *Dances with Wolves*. (Stasch 195)

Like *Avatar*, *Dances with Wolves*, and *The Last Samurai*, *The Gods* juxtaposes the utopia of indigenous life with the discontent of civilization. It is the construction of these poles as incompatible by which *The Gods* would justify apartheid segregation. In its construction of indigenous people as anachronistic, the film naturalizes apart-ness, the ideology that justified the establishment and maintenance of the apartheid homelands and the migrant labor which sustained the South African economy; "in order to legitimate the movement of black labor from the country to the city and back, the apartheid regime had

to remind everyone that, though African bodies could visit the city, the *mind* of the African … always stayed put in the bush" (Johns 223).

While the relevance of *The Gods* to American primitivist cinema has been left unexplored, the apprehension of these films as a discernible mode stands to satisfy a political and critical exigency, the fact that ostensibly postcolonial films of the present era, films which are in fact celebratory in their liberationist politics, are structured with Eurocentric temporal binaries that have worked to naturalize European colonial domination. The central problematic of contemporary primitivism is the anachronism of these films' non-white characters and the pleasure with which the colonizer's gaze regards this anachronism. My purpose in rereading *The Gods* in light of its affinities with American cinema is to note the ideological resonance of apartheid propaganda with contemporary American film. Primitivism is the formation by which these later American films unwittingly perpetuate the colonial ideology of *The Gods*.

Since its release in 1980, *The Gods* has been an extraordinary financial and popular success in its native South Africa and in France, China, and Japan, where it has been among the highest grossing films of all time (Tomaselli, *Cinema* 46; Gugler 71). Moreover, *The Gods* has maintained its status as the biggest foreign box-office success ever released in the United States (Gordon and Douglas 259; Gugler 76). In response to its popularity, film critics and academics have excoriated the film as Afrikaner propaganda. In fact, *The Gods* has been the most politically dissected film of the apartheid era (Tomaselli, *Cinema* 10). Critics have argued that *The Gods* functioned as a comic erasure of the systematic disenfranchisement of southern Africa's indigenous people that had been taking place for several hundred years, and by 1980 had reached the

level of a humanitarian crisis (Marshall; Gordon and Douglas 1-12, Gugler 73-78). The film presents a world in which the Bushmen live an idyllic, pre-contact existence of primitive affluence, in which whites exercise a benevolent, peaceful mastery, in which a utopian racial harmony is only threatened by communism and "the bad African." *The Gods* is an artifact of Afrikaner cinema that reflects the fantasies of the apartheid ideal while simultaneously dreaming away political oppression (M. Botha 12-13; Gugler 71-79; Gordon, 1-12, 259; Davis 81-94; Tomaselli, *Cinema* 1; Tomasselli, *Annoying* 75-80; Tomaselli, *Rereading* 174-181; Johns, 211-223).

In considering *The Gods* as a member of an otherwise American set, I note that previous scholarly treatments have ignored the film's aesthetics. These aesthetics are a combination of temporal elitism, the colonizer's gaze, and the aesthetic and narrative legacy of classical Hollywood style. *The Gods* constructs the denial of coevalness by means of its affinities with classical Hollywood style and the editing technique of convergent montage. Most globally, the film's primitive : modern binary is structured by Enlightenment progress narratives that had managed representations of the Bushmen in southern Africa since the late 18th century. A British government proclamation regarding the Bushmen in 1798 held that "the reclamation of these Boshiesmen from their present savage and deplorable state, is not only of the greatest importance in the colony, but highly interesting to humanity" (Quoted in Moran 4). As an expression of Enlightenment ideology, the primitive : modern binary is a Eurocentric racial fantasy that clings to the structure of a progressive temporal axis. This binary and its axis result in the denial of coevalness and temporal elitism, the processes by which European anthropologists and their fellow travelers relegate their racial others to previous stages in human evolution

(Fabian 31). This is *The Gods*'s global, abstract, colonial time structure. This global structure subtends the film's local structure of time, the white hero's quest and this quest's romantic subplot, which characterize the classical Hollywood paradigm. Because this local plot is teleological, it reinforces, and is reinforced by, the film's global sense of historical progress. But it is not that *The Gods* superimposes just *any* narrative trajectory over an abstract teleology of racial progress. Rather, the film's local progress narrative takes the form of the racial chase film, employing a trope standardized by D.W. Griffith in *The Birth of A Nation* (1915) wherein white men save white women from black men.

In her analysis of early-20th-century cinema, Fatimah Rony writes that film ethnography constructed human history as a spatial and temporal competition between different races of people; "*History was a race*: those who did not vanquish would vanish[.] … Film would inscribe race through the body (human difference) and would be evidence of history (which was also a race)" (28). Emerging from this context, the racial chase film is an explicit solicitation of the cinematic spectator to consider racial difference as a competition which can be managed by aesthetic conventions of space and time. Because the conventions of the racial chase film were managed by a white viewing position, they maintain the foregone conclusion of a white victor (Rony 10, 28). In *Birth of a Nation*, *King Kong* (1933, 2005), and *The Gods*, this race is managed by the technique of convergent montage, a variant of parallel editing.[1] With convergent montage, the intercutting of *Shot A* with *Shot B* signifies simultaneity of time across two locations. Convergent montage establishes a narrative vector through the anticipation of the confluence of threat and salvation. This is the editing technique and narrative structure of the last-minute rescue by the Ku Klux Klan in *Birth of a Nation*. Because *The*

Gods manages its racial rescue narrative with the same convergent montage as *The Birth of a Nation*, I argue that the film's racial and narrative tropes support global models of temporal elitism.

The primitivism and classical Hollywood aesthetic so central to *The Gods* are also crucial to American primitivist cinema from 1990 to the present: these films also infuse the classical Hollywood plot with an abstract, Eurocentric history. The result is the impossibility of a postcolonial Hollywood. With a new close reading of *The Gods*, I will outline the contours of American primitivist cinema with regard to this impossibility. First, I will situate *The Gods* as a paradigm of Afrikaner apartheid cinema. Then, I will survey one of the film's local historical contexts, the crisis of white masculinity in the Afrikaner regime of the late 1970s. Lastly, I will consider how the film is a management of the crisis of white masculinity, arguing that conventions of ethnographic gazing and the paradigms of the classical Hollywood style work for the redemption of the white, male ego.

Apartheid and Its Cinema

While *The Gods* was a stunning global success, it did not emerge *ex nihilo*: rather, it was the most popular artifact of an ideology that had influenced South African cinema throughout the 20th century.[2] Since the 1910s, South African authorities had regulated domestic film production in an effort to maintain class and racial hierarchies. In 1910, South Africa banned screenings of the *Johnson-Jeffries Fight* under the rationale that they would foment racial hatred and unrest among black viewers (Tomaselli, *Cinema* 13-14).[3] This colonial anxiety led to the Cinamatograph Film Ordinance of 1917, which prohibited the representation of "antagonistic relations between Capitol and Labor;

pugilistic encounters between Europeans and non-Europeans [and] scenes tending to disparage public characters or create public alarm" (Tomaselli, *Cinema* 14).

There is no understanding the repression of social conflict in South African film without an understanding of apartheid. Apartheid finds its legislative origin in the Natives' Land Act of 1913, which limited African landownership to seven percent of South Africa's land area. Of this small portion, white farmers and miners held legal claim to the most productive tracts of land (Beck 113). Because the law shunted them onto the least productive land, it transformed black South Africans into "wage or tenant laborers for white farmers, and ensured white dominance of the industrial cities[.] … [This type of law] played a crucial role in expanding the capitalist order under white control and reducing the black population to a proletariat status under that order" (Thompson 163). With the collapse of agriculture due to overcrowding, the reserves became "reservoirs of cheap, unskilled labor for white farmers and industrialists" (Thompson 164).

The idea of "apartness" was the ideological kernel that justified this economic structure. "Apartness" was a style of thinking which emphasized the incompatibility of different cultures within South Africa while also stressing the imperative of racial and ethnic purity: as Prime Minister Smuts declared, "everybody [meaning, every white person] (*sic*) in this country is agreed that European and African should live apart and preserve their respective cultures" (Quoted in Thompson 182). In the 1960s and 70s, the Afrikaner-dominated parliament partitioned the African reserves into ten territories, or "homelands," in which each "African 'nation' was to 'develop along its own lines'" (Thompson 191).

While the Afrikaner administration masked its economic motives with notions of ethnic incompatibility, an understanding of "apartness" is incomplete without a survey of its anthropological inflection: temporal elitism. The profitability of South African mines depended on itineracy, the prerogative of capital to opportunistically dismiss its reserve of exploited labor (Johns 223). Temporal elitism was the ideology that managed the mining industry's policies of labor itineracy. In its brutal crackdown on black protests over mining conditions in August of 1946, the Chamber of Mines released the following statement: "the Gold Mining Industry considers that trade-unionism as practiced by Europeans is still beyond the understanding of the tribal Native. … A trade union organization … would not only be useless, but detrimental to the ordinary mine Native in his present stage of development" (Quoted in Thompson 180). Thus, the mining industry used the denial of coevalness to justify its discriminatory policies.

In an effort to repress the organization of black labor in the 1940s, the government-commissioned Cilliers Committee advocated for a South African film culture that would "[discourage] modernist tendencies among black audiences" (Maingard 9). The cinematic effort to maintain an ideology of temporal difference served the various tactics of white minority rule. When justifying the reservation of skilled jobs for white laborers and the repressed wages of blacks, Prime Minister Hertzog claimed to be making a civilizational rather than a racial distinction. As Hertzog would have it, South African labor laws justly discriminated in favor of "persons whose standard of living conforms to the standard generally recognized as tolerable from the usual European standpoint," while giving short shrift to "persons whose aim is restricted to the

bare requirements of the necessities of life as understood by barbarous and undeveloped peoples" (Quoted in Thompson 168).

By the 1940s, state and private economic interests conceived of cinema as a means for recruiting migrant labor, naturalizing the exploitation of the pass system, and justifying apartheid segregation. *Pondo Story* (1948) constructed the "homeland" as the migrant laborer's natural environment. Such films characterized labor in the mines as voluntary, productive, and temporary (Tomaselli, *Cinema* 55). As Timothy Johns argues, the fantasy of the childlike black worked in concert with the myth of the migrant laborer to buttress the ideology of the anachronistic primitive. These mid-century tropes came to structure the Bushmen of *The Gods*:

> By presenting a quixotic impression of the African naïf, a "country bumpkin" utterly dumbfounded by bright lights and the big city, [*The Gods*] creates a lasting impression that Africans are "essentially rural creatures," which is to say, too raw to feel at home on the metropolitan stage. … African migrants from the provinces needed to appear overly fragile in a metropolitan milieu, naturally requiring caretakers, overseers, mangers, bosses—in sum, a white hand to guide them through the daunting labyrinth before being returned to the provincial places where they felt truly at ease. After the African migrant was no longer demanded in the mines, it was necessary to send him back to his original, pre-colonial environment, in the bush, in the supposed "homelands and "locations." (Johns 215)

The Gods is a microcosm of the geographical, temporal, racial, and economic cosmology of South African apartheid. Released in 1980, the film demonstrates the tenacity of an

economic and ideological model that emerged in the 1910s. To better understand *The Gods*'s participation in the South African propaganda machine, let us examine its relationship to its historical cinematic context, South African screen culture from the 50s, 60s, and 70s.

South African Screen Culture: 1950-1980

As a means of talking back to apartheid and its cinema, two major films of the 1950s expressed the hardships of the black migrant laborer: *Cry, the Beloved Country* (1951) and *Come Back, Africa* (1959).

Cry, the Beloved Country is politically ambivalent. It tells the story of a rural black preacher who visits Johannesburg only to find that his son has murdered a white activist intent on advancing racial equality. Some critics argue that the film portrays the suffering of black South Africans as a function of their victimization under the conditions of migrant labor (Maingard 109). Others critics are politically ambiguous, writing only that "the film depicts the social and moral degradation of black South Africans in a way never done before" (M. Botha 37). Others regard the film as politically reactionary:

> [In *Cry, the Beloved* Country] no blame is put on the sociopolitical system of apartheid. The fiction is maintained that African migration did not stem from dire economic need but was voluntary and, consequently, that there was no need for Africans to remain in the city. This was in line with apartheid doctrine which maintained that Africans were temporary sojourners in the "white man's cities." (Bains 186)

The film's pathos depends on the Manichean rural : urban binary central to the ideology of apartness. Further, the film sources the suffering of the migrant worker to the depravity

of the city: "in the world of *Cry, the Beloved Country*, the organs of state are impartial, not malevolent" (Davis 40). The rural is represented as a pastoral ideal while the city is a "metaphor for the decay of modern society" (Bains 186). The danger of *Cry, the Beloved Country* is that it sources suffering to the incapacity of the rural native to cope with the challenges and hardships of modernity. In the film's final scenes, the black priest returns to the tranquility of the rural under the financial and moral protection of a white farmer, the very father of the murdered activist. In this politically amnesiac return to the pastoral ideal, *Cry* prefigures the 'back to the homelands' genre of the state subsidy scheme which I will discuss in more detail below, a problematic taken up in the film's successor, *Come Back, Africa*.

Like *Cry, the Beloved Country*, *Come Back, Africa* portrays the hardships experienced by millions of Africans as they migrated to the urban centers of colonial and postcolonial Africa (Davis 51). Unlike *Cry, Come Back, Africa* blames the suffering of the worker on the draconian injustices of the apartheid pass laws (M. Botha 39). Furthermore, the film challenges "the official definition of Africans as migrants who were out of place in the city" (Davis 52; Baines 187). *Come Back, Africa* "made it abundantly clear that blacks could find themselves very much at home in the city, both in mind and body" (Johns 224). The most progressive scene in *Come Back, Africa* features a cadre of black, urban intellectuals who openly critique the urban : rural binary of *Cry, the Beloved Country*. These characters decry the "urban incompetence" of the black characters in *Cry*, observing that whites in South Africa want nothing more than an "African from the country, from his natural environment, unspoilt," "pure," and "uncontaminated" (Quoted in Maingard 115). As on-screen representatives of the

intellectual activity associated with *Drum* magazine, these characters represented "new ideas of a modern, urbanized, African culture" which "explicitly reject[ed] the atavistic tribal fantasies of apartheid" (Quoted in Johns 224).

The Subsidy Scheme

The subsidy scheme of 1956 dominated South African cinema for 30 years, eliminated the possibility of a black national cinema, and openly promoted pro-apartheid films: "Any film that managed to be made which in any way reflected the South African society in turmoil was banned by the state, and thus did not qualify for any film subsidy" (M. Botha 116). Originally, the subsidy scheme was designed to protect the South African film industry from Hollywood, whose omnipotence was dramatized by 20th Century Fox's purchase of the Schlesinger Organization's entertainment interests in the 1950s (Tomaselli, *Cinema* 30). However, the subsidy scheme quickly molded South African cinema into an apartheid propaganda machine (Maingard 125).

The first successful appeal for state subsidy came from the South African Motion Picture Producers Association, chaired by Jamie Uys, in 1956 (Maingard 126; Tomaselli, *Cinema* 32). The scheme favored Afrikaner cinema, and was part of a backlash amongst Afrikaner legislators who anxiously perceived the erosion of Afrikaner privilege and influence. Awarded as a percentage of a film's box-office gross, the scheme subsidized English language films at a rate of 44%, and Afrikaans films at a rate of 55% (Tomaselli, *Cinema* 35). Afrikaner preponderance in the South African film industry was further consolidated when SANLAM, the Afrikaner insurance giant, acquired 20th Century Fox in South Africa (Tomaselli, *Cinema* 35). By the early 1970s, Afrikaner capital "controlled 60 percent of exhibition revenue. A system of vertical integration ensured the

exhibition of local Afrikaans product" (Maingard 126). These events privileged filmmakers like Jamie Uys, whose Afrikaans films reflected the Afrikaner worldview. Discussing the relationship of the subsidy to South African politics, Martin Botha writes:

> Afrikaners wanted their ideals visualized in these films. This idealistic conservatism was characterized by an attachment to the (pastoral) past, to ideals of linguistic and racial purity and to religious and moral norms. The films had to subscribe to these conservative expectations to be successful at the box office [and thus to earn a subsidy]. The films seldom attempted to explore a national psyche. As such, they were a closed form, made by Afrikaners for Afrikaners, with little or no attention to the potential to say something important about their society to an international audience. The type of realism that could have analyzed Afrikaner culture in a critical manner was avoided. Instead use was made of folk stereotypes that showed the Afrikaner as chatty, heartwarming and loveable in a comedy tradition or as beset by emotional problems that had little to do with society but much to do with the mainsprings of western melodrama about mismatched couples overcoming obstacles on the path to true love. (52)

Back to the Homelands

Subsidy films were more than ideological echo chambers for Afrikaner consciousness. Starting in the 1970s, subsidy films targeted black audiences. Like the industrial mining cinema of the 20s, 30s and 40s, this state-funded cinema was designed for the maintenance of white hegemony, and was explicitly designed to moralize the leisure time of black audiences (Maingard 127). This moralization had two salient components: apartheid political amnesia and the denial of coevalness. As Maingard

writes; “one of the key representational strategies was to create an enclosed black world, where whites were absent and where the film’s context was denuded of political realities thereby creating and naturalizing a mythical social space” (Maingard 128).

This enclosed black world, in concert with the economic imperative to justify migrant labor, spawned the “back to the homelands” genre. These films buttressed the myth of the independent homeland and the migrant laborer by juxtaposing the iniquity of the urban space with the unspoiled integrity of the native homeland (M. Botha 115; Tomaselli, *Cinema* 71). Moreover, the films emphasized the incompatibility of modernity with Afrikanerdom’s vision of the “unsophisticated and raw rural dweller” (Tomaselli, *Cinema* 71). Maingard writes; “in these films the city is a space of temporary sojourn, from which the black hero retreats ‘back to the homelands,’ discarding his western attire and readopting ‘tribal’ tradition” (129). A slew of these films preceded *The Gods*’s release in 1980: *Nogomopho* (1974), *Iziduphunga* (1977), *Wazenga* (1977), *Vuma* (1978), and *Maloyi* (*Witchdoctor*) (1978). Social scientist Ted Matsetela writes; “these films are subtle custodians of the back to the country move envisaged in homeland policy. Like the government, these pictures continually stress that city life is foreign to the black way of life: ‘the urban setting is not your home; you belong in the homelands’” (Quoted in Tomaselli, *Cinema* 72).

The Border War Film

Whereas the subsidy films targeted black audiences with “back to the homelands” mythology, they enlisted white support for apartheid rule with “the border war film.” These films were the cinematic expression of a paranoid Afrikaner nationalism, a worldview articulated by Prime Minister P.W. Botha as the “total

onslaught" against South Africa (Tomaselli, *Cinema* 20). In these films, "white conscripts fought to sustain apartheid, against what was presented as the insurgence of communist 'terrorists' intent on revolution in Southern Africa" (Maingard 134). These border films seamlessly blended nationalist anxiety regarding communist takeover with racial anxiety over black African liberation. In *Kaptein Caprivi* (1972), "black recruits parade with Mao Zedong's 'Little Red Book' in their hands" (Maingard 134). With this and similar imagery, the state subsidy scheme supported a film culture that pandered to Afrikaner fears of black insurrection. In turn, this film culture fed seamlessly into the "total onslaught" mentality of Prime Minister Botha and the paranoia of state propaganda (Maingard 134).

Prefiguring the narrative grammar of *The Gods,* border war cinema solicited white audiences with its portrayals of racial violence. Specifically, this genre depicted black Africans as threats to the white home, the white nuclear family, and white women. The melodramatic core of *Die Voortrekkers* (1973) is the assault on an Afrikaner family by a band of Zulu warriors. While father and child escape, the white woman is left to endure the full terror of the Zulu attack. As Maingard suggests, this scene takes the form of an allegorical rape reminiscent of *The Birth of a Nation* (135). Other films in the genre were even more explicit in their racial pedagogy. According to *Grensbasis 13* (1979), the sole duty of the white conscript is the protection of women and children from black terrorists (Maingard 135).

The border-war film, the back-to-the-homelands genre, and the broader ideology of apartheid are constitutive precedents for *The Gods Must Be Crazy.* In this film, an Afrikaner biologist temporarily employs a migrant native from the primordial past in his

quest to save a white female from a band of communist-led, black terrorists. Not only does the film blend elements of these two genres, but, in its representation of pre-contact Bushmen, it demonstrates the political amnesia of the Afrikaner worldview. As a function of its genre conventions and political amnesia, the film presents the confrontation of the primitive rural subject with the absurdity of modernity while simultaneously idealizing a pure, primordial rural space to which the native happily returns.

Jamie Uys's Oeuvre

The Afrikaner worldview depended on white supremacy, apartness, and the total disavowal of the violence and exploitation of white minority rule. In his production of films committed to this political amnesia, Jamie Uys was typical of the contemporary South African film industry. Uys's coevals "aim[ed] to provide escapist cinema on the assumption that audiences 'don't want to see things that depress you'" (Tomaselli, *Cinema* 68). Regarding black-targeted films, a spokesman for Igoli Films was politically explicit; "As with white films you shouldn't make the government look bad" (Quoted in Tomaselli, *Cinema* 69). Another filmmaker observed; "the trouble is that black awareness causes some people a lot of discomfort. It is easier to ignore it" (Tomaselli, *Cinema* 69).

After directing a series of propaganda pictures for the Department of Information, Uys would emerge in the 1970s as the consummate entertainer of apartheid cinema.[4] His transition to popular entertainment notwithstanding, his films still retained their propagandistic function. Indeed, *The Gods* is the perfect hybrid of the back-to-the-homelands and border-war genres of the 1960s and 1970s. Moreover, in its reiteration of the temporary sojourn in *The Fox Has Four Eyes* and the political erasure of *The Condemned Are Happy*, *The Gods* is very much an extension of these earlier projects.

Moreover, while Uys's propaganda films are didactic, they cloak their instruction in the aesthetics of continuity editing, character, and narrative. In turning to a review of Uys's entertainment cinema, I make no clear distinction between propaganda and entertainment because both bodies of work are equally adept at soliciting their viewers with the Afrikaner worldview.

While *Dirkie* (1969) prefigures *The Gods* in important ways, the two films which launched Uys to stardom were *Beautiful People* (1974) and *Funny People* (1976).[5] Both films earned the highest possible return under the terms of the state subsidy scheme. *Beautiful People* was the first South African film to gross one million Rand domestic, while *Funny People* was the highest domestic box-office earner in South Africa up to that time (Tomaselli, *Cinema* 36, 42, 174).

Beautiful People, for which Uys won the Hollywood Foreign Press Association's Golden Globe Award for best documentary, is an "impressionistic kaleidoscope of images of animals and landscapes." The film invokes the natural appeal of pastoral beauty "which has been a part of Afrikaans cinema since the 1930s" (M. Botha 46-47). And yet, the film relies as much on slapstick anthropomorphism as it does on the sublime landscapes of the Kalahari, and is narrated by the same Oxbridge-accented lecturer who narrates *The Gods*. In fact, *The Gods*'s opening sequence is a remake of a similar scene in *Beautiful People*. In both instances, Paddy O'Byrne lectures authoritatively over images of San or *!Kung* people in the Kalahari Desert in such a manner as to replicate the temporal elitism of the anthropologist's gaze. The Bushmen of these films live in a state of primitive affluence, removed from the violence of apartheid South Africa in such a way as to disavow this violence altogether.

Funny People (1976) is shot in the style of a hidden-camera reality show. *Funny People* is ethnographic in that it purports to capture real scenes of real people (Tomaselli, *Cinema* 42). The film has an infantile, slapstick premise: Uys and company play a series of practical jokes on unwitting victims and roll camera as hilarity ensues. While lacking any narrative or geo-political cohesion with Uys's other films, *Funny People* establishes Uys as a purveyor of the comic, and in particular, the sort of slapstick, physical comedy central to *The Gods*. Like *The Gods*, *Funny People* relies on the comedy of emasculation. The film features men who struggle with malfunctioning cars in the presence of women, a recurring slapstick set piece in *The Gods*.

To a large extent, the success of *The Gods* was a function of its similarity to these previous films. *The Gods*'s stock in trade was its slapstick comedy and a cinematography which capitalized on the natural beauty of southern Africa. The film's marketing campaign explicitly emphasizes *The Gods*'s similarity to Uys's previous films. One advertisement reads; "first the magical camera of Jamie Uys turned animals into the most beautiful people on earth [*Beautiful People*]. Then his people became the funniest animals around [*Funny People*]. And now, in his craziest movie ever, people are people and animals are animals, but there's no telling whose side the gods are on" (*Jamie Uys Delighted* 33) (Figures 2 and 3). Of course, by the time of *The Gods*'s release, Uys's popularity and financial success would have freed him from any aesthetic or generic fidelity to his previous work:

Jamie Uys has become something of a legend in his own lifetime with an unbroken run of 22 consecutive hits. After 20 years of local success he suddenly came to the fore with hits such as “Beautiful People”, “Funny People” and “The Gods Must Be Crazy”. His innate ability to provide audiences with what they enjoy is a rare talent. Today it is sufficient to sell a Jamie Uys film purely with his name above the title. (“Gods Smile” 41)

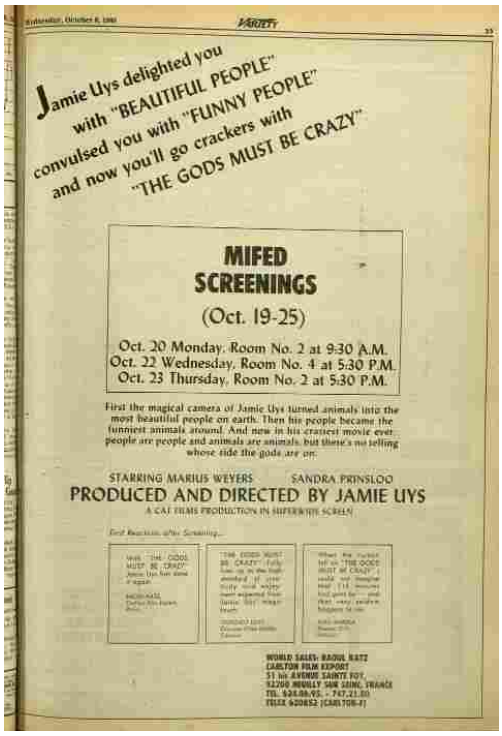

Figure 2. Advertisement for *The Gods #* 1.

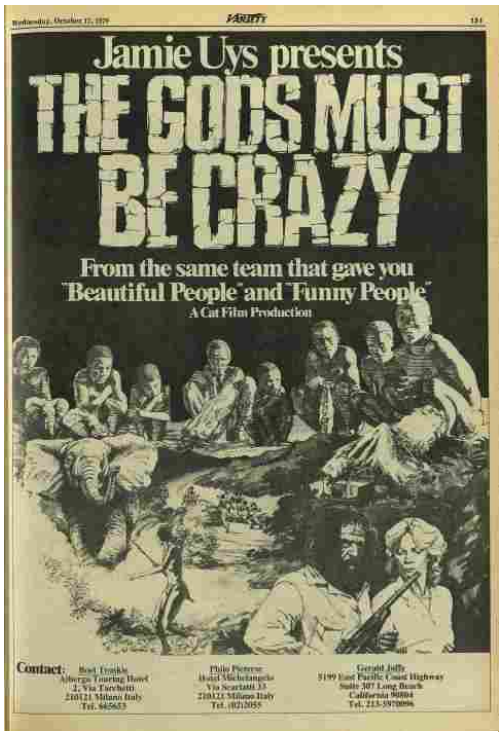

Figure 3. Advertisement for *The Gods* # 2.

But *The Gods* did not just happen to ride the coattails of Uys’s previous hits; rather, the film is a hybridization of successful elements from *Funny People* and *Beautiful People*, featuring slapstick antics on a stage of “striking widescreen visuals” (Lor 18). Moreover, the film incorporates elements of the back-to-the-homelands genre and the border-war films of the state subsidy scheme. It is no surprise that *The Gods* was a domestic smash in South Africa, as it played to every possible convention of

mainstream South African film culture while also synthesizing the popular elements of Uys's previous films.

The Gods in Its Cultural Context: The Masculine State in Crisis

It is ironic that apartheid's most successful filmmaker should have experienced his greatest success at the peak of apartheid's political crisis. In 1960, British Prime Minister Harold Macmillian proclaimed that Britain would not support South Africa if it tried to resist black African nationalism. Between 1960 and 1975, Tanzania, Uganda, Kenya, Malawi, Zambia, Lesotho, Botswana, Swaziland, Angola and Mozambique won independence. In 1973, the United Nations declared apartheid a crime against humanity (Thompson 213- 214). By the mid-1970s, South Africa was an isolated, white-minority ruled anomaly on the tip of an otherwise liberated continent. After global decolonization and the civil rights movement in the United States, "the ways had parted between South Africa and the rest of the world" (Thompson 223).

The nation's churches had organized against apartheid since 1948 (Thompson 204). The National Union of South African Students organized in 1959, publicly garnering Robert Kennedy's condemnation of the regime in 1966 (Thompson 205). By the late 1960s, English and Afrikaner industrial leaders had criticized discrimination in the workplace and the education system (Thompson 207). After the deaths of hundreds of black students in the Soweto uprising of 1976, a culture of protest would "pervade the black population of South Africa. Students and workers, children and adults, men and women, the educated and the uneducated became involved in efforts to liberate the country from apartheid" (Thompson 228).

In 1977, the Afrikaner regime responded to this international and domestic pressure with the imposition of mandatory military service. However, conscription into the armed forces flagged under the demographic reality of a declining white birthrate and white emigration. These pressures were so acute that in 1977, for the first time, South Africa experienced a net loss of white citizens (Beck 162-163). According to demographers at the time, this was the beginning of a larger historical trend in which the black population would vastly out-reproduce the white (Thompson 221).

The rhetoric and policies with which the Afrikaner regime responded to these exigencies were extraordinary: *The Gods* is an equally extraordinary cinematic rendering of Afrikaner ideology. My claim is that *The Gods* is the resolution of a crisis in white masculinity: the film was a projection of the crisis of the Afrikaner regime. The apartheid regime of the 1970s and 80s construed itself as heroic, hetero-reproductive, white and male. Each element of Afrikaner identity produced an evil twin as a function of Afrikaner paranoia: its whiteness was racist; its heterosexuality was homophobic. Taken together, these elements manifested in an anxiety of white death in the face of a reproductive racial other: "political and military leaders represented the South African polity in bodily terms. South Africa … could be killed and destroyed" (Conway 429).[6] As a reflection of the very real threats which challenged the regime, and as a function of white, reproductive paranoia, the Afrikaner state created a chimera of homosexuality, miscegenation, black reproduction, and international communism (Conway 422-429; Elder 56-62; Kaufman 105; Jones 398).

The sexual politics of apartheid paranoia were complicated by an internal threat to the Afrikaner regime: the conscientious objector. Due to the demographic pressures

already plaguing the South African Defense Force, the state considered conscientious objectors to be an existential threat. The state's response to this threat was a reflection of the reproductive anxieties which had motivated conscription in the first place: it alienated objectors from the political community through allegations of homosexuality, finding this to be its most effective strategy for combating the peace movement (Conway 423). In the McCarthy-style persecution of conscientious objectors after 1977, national party agents argued that objectors' deviant sexuality would lead to a debilitating deterioration of the nation's masculine character, especially in the face of a similar moral attack from black communism. Most fantastically, this heterosexist persecution allowed for the conflation of homosexuality with martial dissent. In turn, homosexuality, martial dissent, and communism would become indistinguishable in Afrikaner discourse during the high-noon of South African apartheid (Conway 422-439; Retief 100; Botha and Cameron 20-24).

The regime's political deployment of homophobia was a direct response to the reproductive paranoia of the Afrikaner regime. As David Conway writes, this discourse invoked images of bodily death:

> whites themselves were responsible for the survival of the body politic; therefore, they were capable of provoking its "suicide." The death of the body politic was something that men who refused to serve in the army could supposedly provoke and it served as a justification for the repressive and punitive response of the state. (Conway 429)

In sum, homosexuality and other non-reproductive sexual behaviors were policed by the psychiatric and disciplinary institutions of the state. The rationale for this persecution was

that such acts threatened the reproductive purity and moral courage necessary for the survival of minority white rule (Jones 401-405).

This cultural context is foundational for an understanding of *The Gods*, as the film is preoccupied with the vicissitudes of white reproduction. Specifically, the film's heterosexual romantic subplot presupposes a consummation which is deferred until the film's final scene. The two causes of this deferral are the male character's lack of romantic prowess, which I will argue is a function of latent homosexuality, and the abduction of his female counterpart by a band of black communist thugs, an extension of the threat to the white nuclear family which was so prominent in the border-war film of the previous 20 years. Thus, the film's deferrals of white heterosexual closure reflect exactly the confluence of anxieties which haunted the Afrikaner regime after 1977. Inasmuch as the film is about the reproduction of white people in South Africa, it is also about the threats to this reproduction which plagued the Afrikaner imagination during the same period.

The Gods personifies the national crisis of white masculinity in its protagonist, the sexually inept Andrew Steyn. The film is explicit, even redundant, in its articulation of Andrew's sexual incompetence: a majority of the film's gags involve Andrew's inability to impress his love object, Kate Thompson. In scene after scene, Andrew falls in the mud, loses his jeep up a tree, or stumbles on his underwear. The pleasure taken in these scenes is a mix of sympathy and contempt derived from the discrepancy between Andrew and a romantic ideal. However, Andrew's sexual failure involves more than a case of two left feet: rather, his condition is pathological. As Andrew speculates, his heterosexual blockage is "an interesting psychological phenomenon: perhaps it's some Freudian

syndrome." His syndrome's primary symptom is his motor incompetence, his problems with mobility.

Andrew's compromised physicality makes him an icon of Afrikaner anxiety, as Afrikaner masculinity defined itself as martial, heroic, and athletic. This conception of Afrikaner nationality had been central to constructions of British colonial masculinity since the late-19th century. John Beyon writes:

> Not every man in Britain at the time strictly conformed to the parameters of Imperial masculinity. Rather it provided, from a variety of sources, a powerful set of influences towards a hegemonic masculinity to which all 'proper' men should, as least, aspire for the future well-being of the empire and even the **British race**. (28 [emphasis in original])

Just as the discourse of Afrikaner masculinity held that all proper men should engage in the military defense of minority white rule, British imperial culture held out conquest as an exalted form of masculinity. This masculinity was defined as a muscular, Christian identity set against the weakness of females, homosexuals, and the effeminacy of native peoples (Beyon 28-34). In British boarding-school culture of the turn of the 20th century, "a direct link is made between all-male games and sport on the one hand and patriotism and Empire-building on the other" (Beyon 33). In sum, imperial masculinity is a function of mobility (Beyon 35). In a sense, male mobility is a metaphor for the entire imperial project, the history of European colonialism being the history of the mobility of the white male body, the power of the white male to penetrate colonial space.

Andrew Steyn is the antithesis of athletic, colonial man. Indeed, he is overly cerebral, a biologist collecting manure for his doctoral thesis. Further, his motor

inhibition signifies an existential, colonial, reproductive crisis because his immobility is triggered by the presence of a female love object. In the context of South African apartheid after 1977, when the very survival of white minority rule was threatened by a declining birth rate, Andrew's reproductive troubles are an expression of an anxiety about the death of the white body in South Africa. When Andrew refers to his sexual troubles as "some Freudian syndrome," he asks to be taken as a symptom of the reproductive paranoia of the Afrikaner regime. Paradoxically, Andrew's distance from the hetero-normative masculine ideal is a key strategy of *The Gods*'s hegemonic masculinity.

In *Masculinity*, R.W. Connell writes:

> At any given time, one form of masculinity rather than others is culturally exalted. Hegemonic masculinity can be defined as the configuration of gender practice which embodies the currently accepted answer to the problem of the legitimacy of patriarchy, which guarantees (or is taken to guarantee) the dominant position of men and the subordination of women. (77)

In *Gender and Power*, Connell extends this thesis: he argues that hegemonic masculinity is constituted by those practices and configurations which guarantee the dominant position of a culture's exalted form of masculinity over other masculinities (167-172). In South Africa of the 1980s, this would have meant the dominance of heterosexual white men over homosexual white men and non-white men of any sexual orientation. In this regard, hegemonic masculinity would have been almost indistinguishable from hegemonic whiteness, "that system of thinking, discourse and cultural production which answers the question of the legitimacy of white supremacy and manages a hierarchy within whiteness" (Hughey 1297). If, in the 70s and 80s, the exalted masculinity of

Afrikaner discourse was the muscular, virile hero, Andrew represents that non-reproductive man perceived as a threat to the white nation. He is a poster child of Afrikaner paranoia.[7]

And yet, Andrew's crisis in masculinity actually legitimizes white patriarchy. Moreover, his crisis in masculinity is a salient location of *The Gods*'s ideological and aesthetic resonance with contemporary American primitivism. In *Dances with Wolves* (1990), a wounded white male finds physical and spiritual redemption among the disappearing Indians of the American West. In *The Last Samurai* (2004), an emotionally-crippled veteran finds solace with the vanishing samurai of fin-de-siècle Japan. In *Avatar* (2009), a white, paraplegic soldier regains the use of his legs by going native. In all of these films, the white, male body is the primary location of suffering. As Sally Robinson argues in *Marked Men*, the white man as victim in popular culture is a manifestation of anxieties about the erosion of white patriarchy in the wake of the civil rights and liberationist movements of the 1960s. As Robinson argues, white male privilege has masked its continued dominance through an ironic misappropriation of victimhood. In the substitution of vulnerability for dominance, the misappropriation of victimhood dismisses challenges to white patriarchy (Robinson 6-11). Moreover, because crisis structures masculinity as something to be achieved through heroic struggle, these texts all privilege white masculinity by making its crisis central to narrative. *The Gods Must Be* Crazy and the other films of this dissertation take their narrative trajectories from the crisis and transcendence of white masculinity. This is the manner in which Andrew Steyn works for hegemonic whiteness and hegemonic masculinity. In sum, any text which recenters white

masculinity as its preeminent narrative concern will forfeit its capacity to do postcolonial work (Yekani 36-40).

In her discussion of masculinity in American culture after the 1960s, Robinson argues that the figure of the physically wounded or castrated male is an embodiment of "what is felt to be the *real* condition of white masculinity in post-liberationist culture" (6). Thus, in the United States and South Africa after the 1960s, the image of the white male victim became a powerful technique of hegemonic masculinity because it played to public beliefs about real social conditions. If Andrew doesn't live up to an exalted form of apartheid masculinity, he expresses the Afrikaner paranoia that whiteness is under assault. Andrew's kindness, benevolence, and timidity all put him in a relationship to the masculine ideal that dismisses challenges to white minority rule. In *The Gods*, concern over colonial violence towards indigenous people is displaced by anxiety over hetero-reproductive masculinity and the consummation of a white sexual relationship, exactly those concerns which plagued the Afrikaner regime in the 1970s and 1980s.

Aesthetics of the Omnipotent Male: Classical Hollywood Style and Ethnotopia

And yet, the utter emasculation of the white male is too much pressure for *The Gods* to bear. Indeed, the film recuperates symptoms of castration through a threefold aesthetic and narrative disavowal which depends on 1) the aesthetics of an omnipotent gaze, 2) classical Hollywood style, and 3) the logic of the racial chase film.

In the voiceover of its introductory sequence, *The Gods* immediately constructs an omnipotent, white, masculine viewing position as a British anthropologist lectures authoritatively over footage of the Kalahari Desert. The structuring of this panoptical, colonial viewer depends on the invisibility of the off-screen anthropologist vis-à-vis the

visible black bodies of the colonizer's gaze. The invisibility of the British narrator establishes white, masculine hegemony through the construction of white masculinity as an invisible norm. The invisibility of whiteness locates difference in non-white others because these others bear the mark of visible race. Finally, the invisibility of whiteness harmonizes the ideal of Enlightenment objectivity with the colonizer's gaze: the disembodiedness of whiteness allows its regard for embodied others to attain an otherwise impossible objectivity (Robinson 1-8; Dyer 1-3, 38-39).

And yet, disembodiedness haunts whiteness because it threatens corporeal disappearance. The aspiration of whiteness to masquerade as a lack of race is realized in the literal invisibility of the disembodied narrator throughout the film. In contradistinction to this disembodiment, the film tacitly affirms that blackness is the proper color of carnality. As such, the film affirms that the black body is the proper object of the cinematic gaze and ethnographic knowledge. Like the one-way mirror of an interrogation room, the invisibility of whiteness in *The Gods* is the symbol and facilitator of an asymmetrical power and gazing relationship: "invisibility [is] a privilege enjoyed by social groups who do not, thus, attract modes of surveillance and discipline" (Robinson 3).

It is from an omnipotent point of view that the film's first image, a map of Southern Africa as seen from outer space, reiterates the narrative and aesthetic tropes of colonialism and Eurocentrism (Figure 4). The image of the map foregrounds a Eurocentric perspective of global geography through the reiteration of a polar orientation that subordinates South to North. This type of map privileges England as a geographic center, while exaggerating the size of more northerly countries relative to their equatorial

counterparts. *The God*'s initial image establishes the primordial technology of colonial knowledge power, the map, while conflating the colonial technology of the map with the power of the cinematic gaze

In turn, *The Gods* constructs the cinematic viewing position as an omnipotent, masculine whiteness.[8] In *The Gods*, the cinema grants the final satisfaction of the colonial ambition for visual omnipresence. As Jean-Louis Baudry writes in regard to the moving camera; "if the eye which moves is no longer fettered by a body, by the laws of matter and time, if there are no more assignable limits to its displacement – conditions fulfilled by the possibilities of shooting and of film – the world will be constituted not only by this eye but for it" (350). In the regime of the colonizer's gaze, the world will be constituted for the white male eye, exactly the ideological effect of *The Gods'*s opening sequence.

The transcendental mobility of the colonizer's gaze is emphasized in the film's first shot. This telescopic reframing shot takes the

Figure 4. The Colonizer's Gaze in *The Gods*.

cinematic spectator from twenty five miles above the earth to a long shot of grazing ungulates in the Kalahari Desert. This reframing shot is the paradigmatic nucleus of the film's ideological and aesthetic mode.[9] First, the omnipotence of the camera's movement, in conjunction with its identification with the white male gaze, works as a preemptive redemption of Andrew's compromised masculinity, and, in particular, his compromised mobility. Second, the identification of the radically mobile camera with colonial masculinity means that the film's editing structure of convergent montage is continuously surveyed by a panoptical white masculinity. The colonizer's gaze redeems white masculinity through the management of a heteronormative, classical Hollywood aesthetic.

After descending from the heavens, the film's voice-of-god narrator lectures for a presumably Anglo-European audience. Throughout, the narrator genders this colonial encounter through the masculinization of the camera's gaze and the feminization of colonial space and people. The land is harsh, beautiful, empty, and virginal. The narration carries the implication that this land is available for the exertion of male effort. This is the standard gendering of the colonial encounter (Shohat 20-23; McClintlock 22-30; Dyer 153-165). As an extension of this gendering, the narrator uses a series of emasculating adjectives to characterize the Bushmen of the Kalahari. As the narrator intones the adjectives "pretty, dainty, small and graceful," two prepubescent boys wander into the field of the camera's gaze. The boys are nude except for the straps of their loincloths. In the next shot, the boys walk between two adult male Bushmen crouched in labor. As the boys pass between the men, the men's gaze tracks the boys' passage across the expanse of the frame, doubling the gaze of the camera and signifying the primitive male body's

to-be-looked-at-ness.[10] This on-screen doubling of the colonizer's gaze highlights the racial discrepancy of cinematic gazing. Whereas the black eye performs an embodied look located in time and space, the white eye is disembodied and omnipotent.[11]

The most astounding shot of the introductory sequence involves the intersection of overtly erotic cinematography with the rhapsodic primitivism of the lecturer. As he exclaims that these must be "the most contented people in the world: they have no crime, no punishment, no violence no laws, no police, judges, rulers, or bosses," the camera cuts to a medium shot of the band of Bushmen in single file, walking away from the camera (Figure 5).[12] Because this shot decapitates the non-white body, truncating the human form at the shoulder, it evacuates these characters of their personhood while objectifying the black body. Having deprived the ethnographic object of its organs of vision, the gaze of the camera lingers on the buttocks of the primitive as the Bushmen peacefully traverse the desiccated landscape.

Figure 5. Erotic Gazing in *The Gods*.

This combination of images and narration establishes the colonial, phallocentric viewing position which presides over the film's classical Hollywood style. If Andrew struggles to attain his sexual goals, his masculinity is buttressed by 1) the omnipotence of the colonizer's gaze and 2) the totality of information offered to the cinematic spectator through the techniques of classical Hollywood style, here harmonized with the mastery of the colonizer's gaze.

While it may seem far removed from *Bringing Up Baby* (1938) or *Casablanca* (1942), *The Gods*'s co-construction of race, sexuality, and masculinity depends on the film's affinities with classical Hollywood style. As typified in *The Gods*, this style presupposes an omnipotent viewer, capable of total knowledge, who presides over a world where mastery is guaranteed by the conventions of the style. David Bordwell's conception of the classical style is a natural model for *The Gods*: "most important is the tendency of the classical film to render narrational omniscience through spatial *omnipresence*" (24 [emphasis in original]). The classical Hollywood viewing position is structurally homologous with the colonizer's gaze because the ethnographic viewing position carries a similar guarantee of optical mastery, what Bill Nichols calls "ethnotopia" (220). Within the codes of classical Hollywood style, the audience identifies with an omnipotent subject, represses the lack of the editorial cut, and fantasizes totality by means of the sutures of continuity editing. This fantasy of mastery is made possible by the convention that the audience is always in the best position to see what happens next, and always sees the most significant part of a narrative's action. Similarly, in Bill Nichol's analysis of filmic ethnography, the colonial viewing position enjoys the pleasures of an uninhibited fantasia, the total satisfaction of its colonial scopophilia

(Nichols 201-229). This optical mastery is *The Gods*'s first strategy for the recuperation of the castrated male.

Its second strategy involves another of the norms of classical Hollywood style: the means by which a romantic subplot manages cinematic time.[13] *The Gods*'s narrative and aesthetic conceit is that !Xi's quest to dispose of a malevolent Coke bottle and Andrew's pursuit of Kate Thompson eventually coalesce when Kate is abducted by communist revolutionaries, Andrew rescues !Xi from the horrors of modernity, and Andrew and !Xi collaborate in Kate Thompson's rescue. In concert with the aesthetics of optical mastery, this narrative and cinematic structure has a striking ideological consequence: the film's transcendental white viewing position presides over a racially coded convergent montage. In turn, the logic of the racial chase film manages the narrative's diegetic time, and the heteronormative vector of this diegetic time serves as a local microcosm of a global, Eurocentric progress narrative. In short, white heterosexual resolution and the linear progress of the racial chase film work as a classical Hollywood variant of Johannes Fabian's denial of coevalness: the anthropologist's refusal to accept his racial other as anything but an anachronistic remnant of a previous era in human development (Fabian 31).

Heterosexism, Convergent Montage, and the Racial Chase

After the somewhat plotless establishment of Andrew's sexual inadequacy, the film supplements the abstract axis of its primitive : modern binary with the local, linear time of the racial chase film. This sequence begins with an utterly abhorrent distortion of the 1977 Soweto student uprising, in which hundreds of student protesters were mercilessly slaughtered by an unprovoked South African police force. In *The Gods* it is

not the apartheid regime which threatens schoolchildren, but, predictably, the specter of black international communism (Davis 85-87). The abduction of Kate Thompson and her schoolchildren transforms the film's parallel editing into the convergent montage of the racial chase film while simultaneously equating the consummation of the film's heteronormative romantic trajectory with the victory of whiteness over black communism, themes which preoccupied Afrikaner public discourse in the 1970s and 80s.

In managing the racial chase film with the heterosexual vector of the romantic quest, *The Gods* follows *The Birth of a Nation* (1915) and *King Kong* (1933). As Susan Courtney argues in *Hollywood Fantasies of Miscegenation*, continuity editing and the chase film emerged simultaneously as cinematic norms. More importantly, she writes that these aesthetic norms came to be managed almost immediately by a distinctly racial grammar. In her analysis, the racial chase film was at the very origin of narrative cinema and continuity editing; "Just as the chase is suited to the elaboration of narrative filmic forms – in particular here continuity editing, which joins a series of spaces to create the narrative unfolding of events – stories of interracial abduction and captivity are suited to the chase" (Courtney 28).

Taking *The Birth of a Nation* as a specific example of how miscegenation narratives were foundational to the emergence of classical Hollywood style, Courtney observes that the film mapped the time management of convergent montage onto the recently standardized grammar of the chase film: white men saving white women from black men. The great ideological work of this scheme is that it occludes the history of the sexual exploitation of black women under slavery while simultaneously using the myth of the black rapist to justify the violence and oppression of white supremacy (Courtney 63).

I extend Courtney's thesis to a reading of *King Kong* (1933). *King Kong's* diegetic time is managed with the same racially mapped convergent montage as *The Birth of a Nation* when the film's proper sexual relationship is threatened by the overwhelming masculinity of its great black antagonist. Moreover, the film reinforces the local narrative of the miscegenation rescue with the global time of the primitive : modern binary. In doing so, *Kong* superimposes two indirect images of time as theorized by Gilles Deleuze. In *Cinema 1: The Movement Image*, Deleuze juxtaposes the American montage of D.W. Griffith with the Soviet montage of Sergei Eisenstein, observing that American montage is essentially a montage of time management. He writes that what emerges from the American aesthetic is not a direct image of time, but instead "a necessarily indirect image. … Montage … is the indirect image of time, of duration" (29). Finding the origin of this aesthetic mode in Griffith, Deleuze writes that montage may create two indirect images of time: the global time of human progress, and the time of the last-minute rescue, that structure of diegetic time which defines the convergent montage of *The Birth of a Nation* (29-30). Like *King Kong*, *The Gods* uses the convergent montage of the racial chase film to superimpose both of these indirect images of time.

Of course, given the demands of hegemonic masculinity, hegemonic whiteness, and the denial of coevalness, this cinematic management of time is anything but value free. In *King Kong* (1933), Carl Denham inflects the primitive : modern binary with evaluative metaphors of space and height when he explains that the natives' protective wall was "built so long ago that the people who lived there have slipped back and forgotten the higher civilization that built it." Indeed, the victory of high modernity over low primitivism is dramatized in Kong's crucifixion on that catharsis of modern, phallic

emotion, the Empire State Building.[14] In Peter Jackson's remake of *King Kong* (2005), the racial chase film, its convergent montage, and the verbal discourse of temporal elitism reappear: as Denham and company discover the ruins of Skull Island, the ship's mate narrates these famous lines from *Heart of Darkness*; "We could not understand because we were too far and could not remember, because we were travelling in the night of first ages, of those ages that are gone, leaving hardly a sign – and no memories" (Quoted in *Kong*). Thus, *King Kong's* racial chase is managed by heteronormative vectors of white romance. Moreover, these vectors are superimposed on global narratives of the primitive: modern binary. Both in *King Kong* (1933) and its 2005 remake, Kong's defeat by modernity is co-terminal with the consummation of a heterosexual whiteness. This temporal confluence is crucial to the ideology of *The Gods*.

However, in turning to the heterosexual terminus of *The Gods*'s classical Hollywood trajectory, we must observe that Andrew Steyn and his primitive retainer engage in a scene of veiled homoeroticism in the service of heterosexual closure. First, Andrew contrives a plot to free Kate and her students by anesthetizing their captors with a tiny bow and tranquilizer-laden needles. Having attired his Bushman in the clothes of an escaped female student, Steyn proffers his buttocks as a test target for !Xi's dart. In this three-quarters medium shot, !Xi appears in drag on the left of the screen. Gazing intently at his target, he successfully launches his diminutive shaft. In the background, Andrew's Arabic mechanic looks on, doubling the gaze of the cinematic spectator while also reiterating the embodiment of a non-white gaze. To the far right of the screen we see only Andrew's bent back, his bent knee, and the curve of his buttocks in his tight grey trousers. The instant before the dart finds its target, the camera cuts to an extreme close-

up of Andrew's backside (Figure 6). This extreme close-up is maintained for a fraction of a second and immediately disavowed with a medium shot in which Steyn rubs his stuck flesh and stands erect.

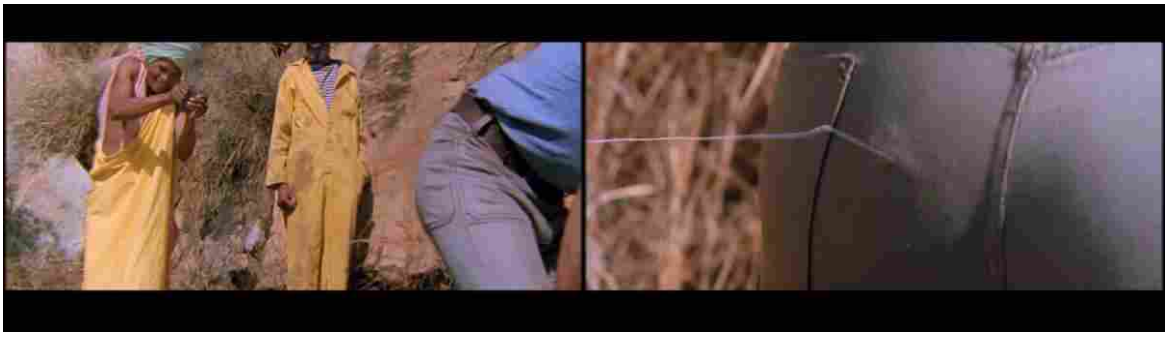

Figure 6. Repressed Homoeroticism in *The Gods*.

Given the use of women's clothing, phallic imagery, and the allusion to anal penetration, this scene manifests Freudian notions of sexuality vis-à-vis the primitive. David Eng writes that, in colonial discourse, masculinity, heterosexuality, and whiteness connote one another in a hierarchy of racial difference which denies non-white males full access to normative masculinity. For the ur-text of his cultural analysis, Eng draws on the armchair anthropology of *Totem and Taboo*. Here, Freud writes that primitive people represent a stage from the history of civilization's psychic past, and that this stage is characterized by a pathological, narcissistic homosexuality (Eng 6-10). As uncanny as it may seem, South African psychologists were explicit in their use of Freud's theories of sexual and racial evolution. Within the heterosexist and racist orthodoxies of South African psychology during the era of high-apartheid, psychiatrists explicitly invoked Freud's theory of pathological narcissism to argue for the arrested development of white homosexuals (Jones 406; Freed 1022-1023).

In contrast to the pathology of white homosexuality, same-sex relations among black Africans were considered a natural expression of Africans' regressive evolutionary character, and enjoyed a history of relatively lenient regulation by the South African authorities (Jones 407; Botha and Cameron 8). In fact, the Afrikaner regime encouraged sexual relations between black laborers as a method by which the threats of black sexuality, interracial sexual relations, and African fecundity could be conveniently assuaged (Elder 56-62).

In a striking example of *The Gods*'s ideological affinities with contemporary American primitivism, nearly identical models of evolutionary psychology manage the denial of coevalness in *Avatar* (2009). In *The Uncanny*, Freud writes that omnipotence of consciousness, a state in which the infant believes his thoughts to saturate his environment, characterizes the mental state of civilized children and adult primitives; "it appears that we have all, in the course of our individual development, been through a phase corresponding to the animistic phase in the development of primitive peoples, that this phase did not pass without leaving behind in us traces that can still make themselves felt." This phase of omnipotence of thought is characterized by "the old animistic view of the universe, by the omnipotence of thought and the technique of magic that relied on it" (Freud, *Uncanny* 147). According to *Avatar's* primitive : modern binary, the protagonist's journey from a civilized to a primitive state precipitates his experience of omnipotence of thought and cosmic consciousness (Norton 4-5).

The juxtaposition of the homo- and hetero-erotic in the *The Gods*'s denouement activates the anxieties which beset white power in 1970s South Africa. In the defense of white heterosexuality against the clutches of black communism, our white hero finds

himself compromised by the threat of his latent, pathological homosexuality. As a response to these anxieties, the film activates an implicit global narrative by means of the vehicle of its classical Hollywood vector: the Freudian teleology of psycho-sexual development is advanced in the same moment as the satisfaction of the hetero-romantic quest and the miscegenation rescue. If healthy human development means the abandonment of a narcissistic love object for the assumption of a heterosexual one, *The Gods* reinforces the notion of primitive anachronism because its romantic narrative gives time a heteronormative vector. In *The Gods*, heterosexist diegetic time mirrors the heterosexual trajectories of Freud and the apartheid regime.

In the scenes preceding this homoerotic detour to heterosexual closure, !Xi spots the communists and their hostages on their cross-country trek. Having already set up a base of operations to telescopically observe the valley through which Kate and her captors walk, Andrew and company are free to scrutinize the rebels and their hostages through a large white telescope, a phallic signifier of white scopophilia *par excellence*. Andrew's observation of the communists and their hostages is framed as a point of view shot through Andrew's telescope. The shots of this sequence alternate clearly enough: *Shot A* is a long shot of the hostage scenario, *Shot B* is a medium shot of Andrew and his retainers at the telescope (Figure 7).

Theorizing the motivation and effect of parallel editing, Mary Ann Doane writes that such splits represent the desire to overcome physical separation:

> suspense is predicated on absence or separation and driven by an external threat to the home, the family, the woman. The gap between shots mimics the gap

Figure 7. Convergent Montage.

> constitutive of desire. … in parallel editing, when shot B is on the screen its legibility is saturated by the absent presence of shot A, and vice versa. (195)

When Andrew telescopically investigates his others, the shots of him at the telescope signify the absence of what is off screen, a white woman in the clutches of black men. It is in this context of the miscegenation plot that convergent montage transforms the film's mundane real time (the homogenous, empty time of the long shot) into the cinematically managed time of the rescue, exemplified in early examples of classical continuity editing such as *The Birth of a Nation* (Doane 192-194).

Thus, Andrew Steyn, like the voice-of-god narrator, engages in an omnipotent surveillance which harmonizes his look with the cross-cutting look of convergent montage. The gap between shots and the anticipation of its closure manage the time of the film through the aesthetic code of the convergent montage. Separation, the look

which bridges it, and the suspension of romantic closure, express and manage racial and sexual threats. For Andrew, it is the threat of a regressive homosexuality; for Kate Thompson, the threat of miscegenation. For the white couple, it is the threat of failing to reproduce their whiteness in a land of black fecundity, communism, and homosexuality. Writing that the temporality of cinema is figured by the teleology of death, and that this death is often metonymically represented by the figure of the imperiled female, Doane argues that "it is the mechanism of heterosexuality which ensures her salvation" (196). As we have seen from a review of the discourse of Afrikaner nationalism, it was exactly the mechanism of white heterosexuality which the apartheid regime constructed as a bulwark against the onslaught of communism, blackness, and homosexual degeneracy.

If considered in conjunction with the South African psychiatric orthodoxy of homosexuality, the romantic union in *The Gods* is a heterosexual salvation predicated on a temporal structure which manages race. Consider Doane:

> The compulsive replaying of the scenario of the heterosexual union exploits its mishaps and potential misses, energizing time and giving it direction. Anxieties about the rationalization of time in modernity, about the confrontation of racial otherness, about emerging instability of gender identity, can be allayed by the insistent repetition of an imperative, normative, and fully realizable heterosexuality that overcomes division itself. (196)

In *The Gods*, the union of parallel narratives does not simply overcome the gap between white lovers, it disavows the desires and anxieties of the white psyche vis-à-vis its racial other. The "mishaps and potential misses" of *The Gods* are threats of miscegenation and homosexuality which, because they are figured within the narrative structure of

convergent montage, doubly energize time and give it direction. Whereas Andrew transcends his latent homosexuality and achieves the progress assured by the norms of classical Hollywood style, his primitive counterpart achieves no such progress, returning instead to a state of primitive affluence, returning indeed to the static, eternal Eden of apartheid mythology. Andrew's great crisis, as an Afrikaner male, is that his desire to return to a previous state, what Afrikaner discourse defined as a regressive homosexuality, represents an existential threat in the political and demographic context of South Africa in the late 1970s. As a response to this threat, *The Gods* employs classical Hollywood style to bind the traumas of miscegenation anxiety and homosexuality with the vector of heterosexual progress. In doing so, *The Gods* secures the primitive in a Western past while allowing for the viability of a white reproductive future in South Africa.

Mobility, Whiteness, and the Temporal Axis of the Colonial Imaginary

Richard Dyer writes that Western representations take whiteness as a human universal through the construal of whiteness as a lack of racial specificity. In turn, this lack of racial specificity means that white bodies are less corporeal than their non-white others because the racial mark is a mark of the body. Rather than denoting a bodily quality, whiteness denotes a special quality of spirit, that which is beyond the body (Dyer 21). Because whiteness is essentially spiritual, rather than bodily, the quality of white enterprise is haunted by the anxiety that whiteness is a sign of death. While non-white people are more fully embodied, they are confined to the corporeal. Within such a schema, whites are conceived as less embodied than other races, less corporeal. This schema is dramatized in *The Gods* by both the immateriality of the omnipresent white

gaze and Andrew Steyn's motor inhibition. As Andrew's sexual problems suggest, schemes of whiteness that assume disembodiedness may figure white people as having less facility with sex than their non-white counterparts. As such, white people are threatened with white death:

> Inter-racial (non-white on white rape) is represented as bestiality storming the citadel of civilization – but this often implies that sexuality itself is bestial and antithetical to civilization, itself achieved and embodied by whites. What is disclosed by this is the conundrum of sexuality for whites, the difficulty they have over the very mechanism that ensures their racial survival and purity, heterosexual reproduction. To ensure the survival of the race, they have to have sex – but having sex, and sexual desire, are not very white: the means of reproducing whiteness are not themselves pure white. This is the logic behind the commonly found anxiety that the white race will fade away. (Dyer 26)

Dyer may as well be describing Afrikanerdom's reproductive paranoia and the expression of this paranoia in the miscegenation rescue in *The Gods*. Let me suggest that Dyer's analysis also has a lot to tell us about the temporal axis of the colonial imaginary (Figure 8).

This temporal axis is an elaboration of the analogical dictum with which I started this chapter: "man is to woman as white is to black." My schematic visualizes the superimposition of psychoanalysis on the temporal continuum of the colonial imaginary.

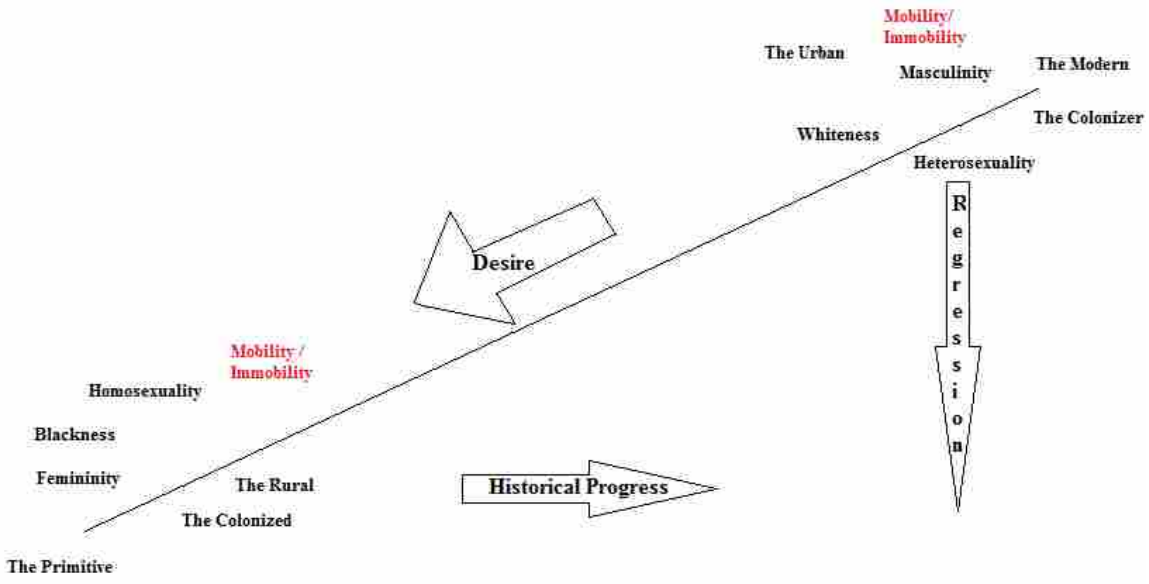

Figure 8. The Temporal Axis of the Colonial Imaginary.

Second, this graphic is meant to highlight the fact that the polar terms of these complimentary axes are interchangeable and co-significatory. As such, it represents the structure of race, sexuality, and time which manages the redemption of white masculinity in *The Gods*. Most importantly, I want to use the ambiguous location of mobility and immobility as a means for harmonizing psychoanalytic and colonial temporalities with Richard Dyer's understanding of race and embodiment.

As Dyer would predict, sex is not a spontaneous possibility for Andrew Steyn and Kate Thompson because sexuality belongs to the body and the body is black. Seeing as Andrew ascribes his motor incompetence to "some Freudian syndrome," and seeing as we can implicate him, by the text's logic, in a regressive homosexual relationship with his primitive other, I posit that Andrew's neurotic motor incompetence is an expression of a desire to return to a previous state of sexual and racial potency. It is also, paradoxically, a desire to regress to the infantile state of Lacan's mirror stage and the

physical incompetence of that earlier state.[15] In the case of *The Gods*, the alienating gestalt in the apartheid mirror is the racial other, the sublimely embodied Bushman of the Kalahari. Of course, Andrew's neurotic motor inhibition is expressed in moments of heterosexual threat, a neurotic timing which indicates the regressive character of his primitive homosexuality.

In considering Andrew's regressive crisis, it may help to consider the co-signifying terms of the colonial temporal axis in a more properly psychoanalytic way. In classical psychoanalysis, the association of objects in the unconscious allows for the free transferal of desire from one term to the next. When the desire for any object is forbidden or repressed, the psyche compensates with the substitution of an associated object. As Dyer observes, pre-occupation with non-white on white rape implies that "sexuality is bestial and antithetical to civilization" (26). As Sandra Gilman suggests, "projection of sexuality onto dark races was a means for whites to represent yet dissociate themselves from their own desires" (Quoted in Dyer 28). In *The Gods*, sex between white people is deferred and displaced by a sexual encounter with the primitive because sex is not the proper province of white people. Within a psychic regime of whiteness, desire for the white woman must be repressed and displaced onto the primitive male because white reproduction requires the satisfaction of a desire that is not properly white.

Alternatively, male colonial desire manifests in ways which actively associate the feminine with the land-to-be-conquered, a process demonstrated in the engraving of Theodore Galle after a drawing by Jan Van Der Straet (ca. 1575) (Figure 9) (Farber). This too is at play in *The Gods*. If white is to black as male is to female, we might predict that the primitive male would be the target of a homoerotic attraction, especially given

that black otherness is analogous to sexual otherness and blackness is the proper domain of the body and sexual pleasure. When Freud finds the primitive to be the proper domain of the homoerotic, it is not that he tells us something of the human condition; rather, he signals the co-signifying pole of the temporal axis of the colonial imaginary. *The Gods*'s great symptom of this co-signification is the absence of a primitive female body. Andrew's two 'others' are an explicitly feminized primitive male and a white female. It is telling that the 'other' with whom the colonizer's gaze does not interact, except in the briefest of clips, is the black female body. The absence of the feminine primitive in *The Gods* suggests that any erotic energy the white gaze may usually invest in this figure will instead be invested in the primitive masculine, here distinctly coded as a feminized object vis-à-vis a white male gaze.

Figure 9. Vespucci Awakens a Sleeping America.

While this homoeroticism seems a natural result of the co-signifying structure of colonial desire, the film explicitly encourages us to take a Freudian view of Andrew's blocked heterosexuality. Freud would have it that the film's homoerotic desire is pathological. And yet, this pathological desire is the device by which *The Gods* privileges a narrative of whiteness and white masculinity. Specifically, *The Gods* grants a white male the privilege of a dark, sexual pathology. As Richard Dyer writes, the archetypal structure of white masculinity involves a narrative of darkness and white transcendence:

> Dark desires are part of the story of whiteness, but as what the whiteness of whiteness has to struggle against. Thus it is that the whiteness of white men resides in the tragic quality of their giving way to darkness and the heroism of their channeling or resisting it. The really white man's destiny is that he has further to fall (into darkness) but can aspire higher (towards the light). There is a further twist. *Not* to be sexually driven is liable to cast a question mark over a man's masculinity – the darkness is a sign of his true masculinity, just as his ability to control it is a sign of his whiteness – but there can be occasions when either side discredits the other, the white man's masculinity 'tainting' his whiteness or his whiteness emasculating him. These contradictions constitute the fertile ground for the production of stories and images of a white masculinity seen as exemplary of the human condition. (28)

In running the risk of a dark, black, or primitive homosexuality, Andrew validates his manliness by borrowing the sexual potency and embodiment imparted to blacks by the colonial imaginary. Moreover, the threat of black homosexuality gives the white male a darkness to overcome, a bestial sexuality to transcend. In his affliction, Andrew walks through the valley of the shadow of a passionate darkness: this is his crisis of whiteness. Indeed, Andrew's surname, "Steyn," suggests that he must overcome a dark *stain* on his heterosexual whiteness.

This aspirational structure is *The Gods*'s greatest slight to its black characters, for it locates the true threat to white survival within the split condition of the white hero. As Dyer observes, and as *The Gods* makes clear, the greatest threat to white reproduction is never black people, for this would accord them "qualities of will and skill, of exercising

spirit, which would make them the equivalent of white people" (Dyer 35). It is for this reason that fixation on the crisis of white masculinity is such a great ideological coup. Like in *Avatar*, the struggle is not really a matter of indigenous people vs whites, but of white people against themselves and against one another. While white protagonists in cinematic primitivism struggle against their internal demons and transcend internal struggles, victory over the non-white, or the inevitability of the vanishing native, is a matter of course: it is merely the cruel but inevitable historical progress of manifest destiny. In like manner, *The Gods* is not really about a white man saving a white woman from black men. This is simply a generic narrative structure of colonial fiction, a familiar plot device we may as well take for granted, scaffolding for another story. The story is really about the transcendence of masculine whiteness and the crisis of white male sexuality.

The Gods compulsively repeats the centrality of the white male crisis with a seemingly nonsensical, repetitive phrase. In the moments of his grossest motor incompetence, Andrew utters the helpless refrain "eye-yie-yie-yie-eye-yie-yie." Andrew's refrain rhymes with the first person singular pronoun "I," practically insisting on white narcissism. Andrew first utters this phrase on his first trip to meet Kate Thompson when his vehicle bogs down in the muck. Andrew utters the phrase, matter-of-factly clambers behind his vehicle, and pushes the still-running jeep out of the mud. In the course of his effort, Andrew falls face first into the wet brown muck, launches his jeep out of the sinkhole, and is compelled to chase the autonomously traveling car. In this scene, we are treated to a mélange of images, narrative, and text which mark Andrew's regressive character. First, the scene is a paroxysm of motor incompetence motivated by

the first intimations of a romantic subplot. Indeed, when Andrew is asked by the reverend (played by Jamie Uys) to retrieve Kate, Andrew insists, "Ooohh reverend I'm very awkward around women. When I'm in the presence of a lady my brain switches off or something. I turn into a complete idiot." Second, this is the moment in *The Gods* when Andrew is at his least white: his whiteness is literally besmirched or obscured by mud (Figure 10). In his pursuit of a heterosexual effort, Andrew is regressive both in his motor ability, his capacity for articulate speech, and in his color: in his neurotic avoidance of heterosexual reproductive success, Andrew is at his most primitive. After regaining control of his truck, Andrew is shown in close-medium profile, reduced to a primitive, pre-lingual state, or what we might recognize as Lacan's infant: he is one without language. Once more reiterating his infantile refrain, positively shouting the phrase into the wilderness, Andrew can only affirm his helplessness, while simultaneously drawing attention to himself.

Figure 10. Andrew Steyn in Blackface.

In the following scene, Andrew's first rendezvous with Kate, his filthy, clumsy masculinity is met with the horror and skepticism of a notably white Kate Thompson.

Indeed, the male : female binary of their confrontation may as well be coded along the same axis as the colonial temporal imaginary. Her whiteness and the whiteness of her dress signify not only the matrimonial, but, in contrast with Andrew, the very absence of the carnal sexuality which the colonial imaginary locates in the bestial, the primitive, and the masculine. Kate, as immaculate woman, is that custodian of the properly white – whiteness free of the filth of the body (Figure 11). Regarding dirt, whiteness, and white sexuality, Richard Dyer builds on the work of Joel Kovel, who argues that white people's attitudes toward race and dirt were an extension of Martin Luther's emphasis on the split between God and those parts of humanity which are worthless for their embodiedness:

> 'the body is dirty; what comes out of the body is especially dirty; the material world corresponds to what comes out of the body, and hence is also especially dirty.' … It is in this context that Kovel makes his most vivid argument about race. Non-white people are associated in various ways with the dirt that comes out of the body, notably in the repeated racist perception that they smell. … To be white is to have expunged all dirt, faecal or otherwise, from oneself: to look white is to look clean. Whiteness … shows the dirt of the body. This is why it has such a privileged place in relation to things which are kept close to the body – bed sheets and clothes, especially underwear and shirts. … Bridal wear is a symbolically explicit case: it bespeaks the absence of sex, a dirt that is at once literal (sweat, semen, secretions and, in fantasies about virgins, blood) and moral; it also bespeaks the cleanliness of the wifely endeavor. … The importance of white

for men's underwear and shirts may have to do with a sense that men are less clean than women and thus must strive more to be clean (as they must strive to be white), to show that they are clean, not to be discovered (in the proverbial rode accident) to be unclean. (Dyer 76-77)

Figure 11. Andrew and Kate Meet.

The Gods makes explicit the relationship of white masculinity to feces; our first introduction to Andrew is a scene of him at work in the backcountry, collecting manure for his doctoral thesis on the wildlife of southern Africa. Indeed, Andrew's is a whiteness variously compromised, a whiteness tainted with a racial and a fecal darkness. Indeed, the first several scenes of Andrew and Kate's relationship revolve around an obsession with cleanliness which assumes a gendered axis of filth. At the moment of their first touch, a still-muddy Andrew thinks twice before transferring his earthy non-whiteness to Kate's immaculate hand. Andrew subsequently drops his hat, runs awkwardly back to maintain the flagging operations of his jeep, and returns to shake hands with Kate, a greeting which only succeeds after several excruciating fits and starts. This sexual dynamic will define Andrew and Kate's relationship throughout the film, and is typical of representations of whiteness and sexuality.

Whereas Andrew is preoccupied by heterosexual longing and suffers neurotically for his dark desires, Kate is stereotypically aloof, devoid of desire. In her lack of desire,

she is immaculately clean: she is the proper woman. As a version of the Virgin Mary, Kate Thompson is so purely white that she has no crisis of darkness to transcend, no narrative arc. Rather, her pristine virginity, her whiteness, is the preoccupation of both characters, as evinced in their journey from the rendezvous to Kate's station at the mission school. When their jeep stalls in the middle of a river, Andrew offers to carry Kate in an effort to preserve the very whiteness of her hair, face, and costume. This effort is a failure of erotic pleasure: Kate gets wet. In a slapstick sequence rife with sexual innuendo and dominated by images of Kate in her now-transparent gown, Kate exhorts Andrew to "Watch it, Buster!" It is as if Andrew's sexuality can only find expression in acts of motor incompetence, for, having successfully forded the river, it is only then that Andrew inadvertently pushes Kate and himself into the water. It is as if he were impelled by some unconscious impulse, not only to fail at whiteness, but to pursue his heterosexuality through a primitive baptismal, a ritual of dirt. For Kate to become an acceptable erotic object, she must do more than get wet, she must also be dirty, less perfectly white.

Finally, Andrew's pathological utterance takes its full meaning in the film's penultimate scene, Andrew and Kate's much-deferred kiss in close-up. However, Andrew's response to this kiss is the final indicator of his repressed homosexuality. Having resolved to explain his Freudian syndrome to Kate, Andrew stumbles helplessly over an array of baking supplies. In the course of this final neurotic spasm, Andrew is splashed across the face with pure white flower as if to insist on his whiteness, or his darkness, or his motor inhibition. After hearing Andrew's hypothesis that his clumsiness is an interesting psychological phenomenon, Kate modifies his assertion; "Yes, you are

an interesting psychological phenomenon, and I think you're very sweet." In her expansion of Andrew's hypothesis, Kate practically *begs* the viewer to read Andrew as a symptom of Afrikaner anxiety over white reproduction in South Africa. Particularly considering the imbrication of dirt and white powder as functions of the couple's sexual problems, the summary of my psychoanalytic reading follows the analysis of Dyer; "To relinquish dirt and stains, corporeality and thingness, is also to relinquish both the pleasures of the flesh and the reproduction upon which whiteness as racial power depends" (81).

But why, in this moment, should Kate find Andrew so very sweet? Perhaps she finds him so attractive in this moment because he wears a whiteface which is a result of his whiteness. The very immobility which caused his face to be powdered signifies his lack of embodiment, his failure to move and dance as only the black body can. This white immobility is a signal that Andrew is the proper object of Kate's affection. As such, immobility ceases to be a signifier of a regressive pathology, becoming instead a signifier of whiteness. Andrew's immobility signals an internal contradiction, it is a signifier of whiteness and primitive regression. This contradiction takes an inverse form in an image of John Travolta which haunts the film in a throwaway image on a t-shirt in a colorful bazaar (Figure 12). Dressed in his white leisure suit, Travolta is that supremely mobile sexual dynamo of the masculine sublime. But is he white? With his slick black hair and Italian heritage, he may be an affront to American puritanism, its

Figure 12. John Travolta.

whiteness, and its ideals of sexual and bodily restraint. All the while, his white leisure suit seems to either insist on, or point up the contrast to, his relationship with whiteness. For Travolta, mobility is a signifier of sexual mastery, and of a liminal racial status associated with the disco underworld. Like Travolta's character in *Saturday Night Fever*, Andrew Steyn has a relationship with mobility which allows him the privilege of participation in blackness and whiteness, which is really the broader privilege of mobility itself. As if to signal this privilege, Andrew's motor problems literally stain him black and white. In turn, these obvious color signs indicate a racial temporality which allows Andrew, at least unconsciously, the privilege of a mobile racial identity. Stiffness and awkwardness in the white body, the inability to move and dance, are the stuff of proverbial racial humor – see Elaine Benes of *Seinfeld*, whose awkward dancing is juxtaposed with the smooth, rhythmic melodies of a world music ensemble and the incredulous scrutiny of its black flutist (Figure 13) ("The Little Kicks"). Of course, this humor is never truly at whites' expense (Elaine is a corporate executive, her black watcher a street musician), because it always suggests that whiteness is not essentially *of* the body; rather, whiteness is a transcendental quality of spirit, ambition, intellect and enterprise. The crisis of whiteness, which is also its greatest privilege, is that it must transcend the body: white immobility is one signifier of that crisis and its transcendence. And yet, Andrew's immobility is also a signal of a primitive, infantile, regressive character, as visualized in the scene of Andrew's earthy blackface. Thus, Andrew's

Figure 13. "The Little Kicks."

immobility signifies that whiteness is a human universal: the white body's fits of immobility are atavistic remnants of the black body from which the white body is thought to evolve.

The scene of Andrew and Kate's kiss is a veritable tableau of white love and the dark desire it must transcend. Indeed, Andrew's *partial* whiteface evokes the internal struggle between bodily darkness and white transcendence which we may trace to Jesus Christ, a man both transcendent and embodied.[16] As an expression of this masculine archetype, Andrew's powdering dramatizes the conflicted nature of white masculinity much after the fashion of the half-lit face. Even in his whiteface, Andrew is several shades darker than his romantic partner. Unlike Andrew, Kate is shot in the fullness of the light. Her entire face enjoys the unbroken glow of white light. Moreover, while Marius Weyers and Sandra Prinsloo are attired for visual symmetry, Prinsloo's blouse is a lighter shade of blue. Finally, Prinsloo's whiteness is neurotically insisted upon by her ivory-white neckless and sky blue eyes, while Weyers's whiteness is undermined by grime on his upper lip, his cheek, and his jawline (Figure 14).[17]

Figure 14. White Love.

The dialogue following the kiss, the film's final line, is a breathy rendition of Andrew's regressive exclamation: "I-yie-yei-yei-yei!" It is strange that this phrase, having been previously associated with Andrew's blackface, motor incompetence, and linguistic regression, should now be his response to white heterosexuality. The repetition of this phrase suggests that sexuality and white masculinity endure a tenuous coexistence. Too much sexuality is a threat to whiteness, while too little is a threat to masculinity. Given the film's political and demographic context, Andrew's exclamation may simply indicate the horror with which Afrikaners regarded the link between white reproduction and white power. Let us accept that white reproduction, which depends on the confrontation of the masculine with the feminine, was a threat to the masculinist state. Andrew's homoerotic detour is this masculinity's disavowal of sexual difference for the fetish of the anachronistic primitive. Because *The God*'s so easily absorbs the racial other into the schema of colonial time, it displaces the threat of sexual difference with the domestication of a racial other.

In making this claim, I follow Homi K. Bhabha's psychoanalytic analysis of the white experience of racial difference. For the white ego, the apprehension of the racial other is a moment of profound anxiety. In the colonial encounter, the white ego must admit to an identity constituted by difference and lack (Bhabha 110). In *The Gods*, the difference of the white woman is too much for the white ego to bear. As a response to this threat, the white male ego activates the defense mechanism of the stereotype. According to Bhabha, the stereotype domesticates racial difference like the sexual fetish object denies sexual difference and the threat of castration (104-110). The foundational fetish of primitivism is the totalizing schema of colonial time. Within this schema, the

racial other is domesticated as an anachronistic same. It is this enlistment of history for the justification of colonialism which is the topic of Robert Young's *White Mythologies: Writing History and the West*:

> Hegel articulates a philosophical structure of the appropriation of the other as a form of knowledge which uncannily simulates the project of 19th-century imperialism; the construction of knowledges which all operate through forms of expropriation and incorporation of the other mimics at a conceptual level the geographical and economic absorption of the non-European world by the West. (3)

Like the fetish objects of unilineal evolution or Hegelian dialectics, *The Gods* functions to remediate white anxiety of the racial other through its construction of a panoptical regime and primitive anachronism. The immobility of the white man vis-à-vis the mobility of the primitive body is only the first term of a paranoiac, Hegelian structure. Within the discourse of cinematic primitivism, the final ideal-ego is no on-screen character. Rather, he is that white masculine viewing position which presides over the ethnotopic and classical Hollywood styles.

Finally, the colonizer's gaze resolves the seeming contradiction of Andrew's mobility. While Andrew's immobility figures him sometimes in blackface, sometimes in white, an omnipotent mobility is reserved for the white eye which presides over all things. Indeed, this eye presides over the fixity of the primitive. *The God*'s final shot, an example now of divergent montage, is the return of !Xi to his primordial paradise, his land before time. Having sojourned successfully in the land of the gods, !Xi returns to a place without time, and without movement (Figure 15).[18]

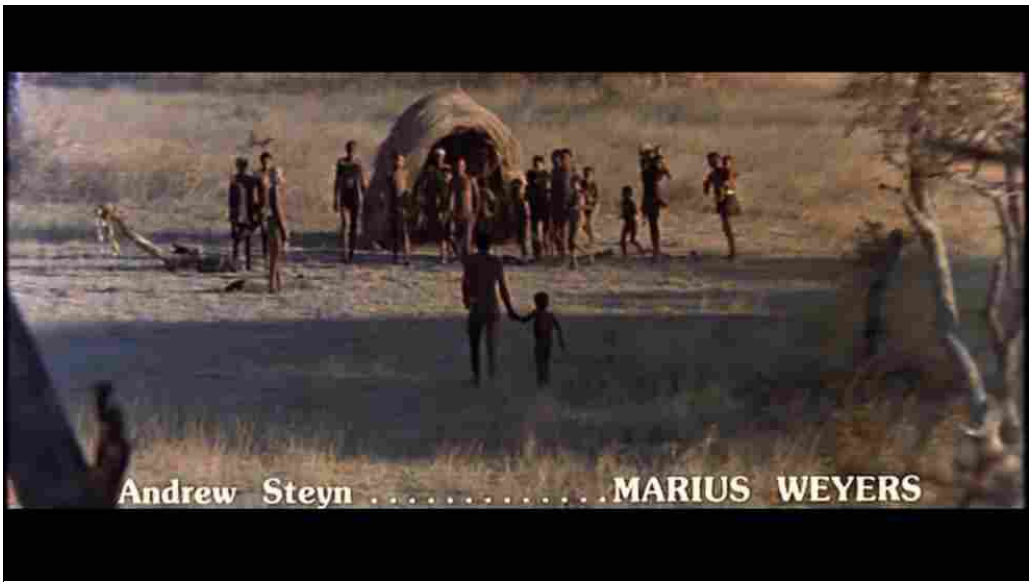

Figure 15. Divergent Montage.

Notes

[1] For the original appearance of the term "convergent montage," see Deleuze 29-32.

[2] As Keyan Tomaselli's writes:

> A second source of the debates [about South African film] was, ironically, the international financial success of Jamie Uys's *The Gods Must Be Crazy*. While the film itself drew attention to South African cinema, world interest was heightened by the campaign of anti-apartheid organizations to boycott the film. More column inches discussed the political character of this film than any other film ever made in South Africa: was it politics or entertainment? White South African audiences and critics, not surprisingly, saw the film as entertiainment, and few shared the overseas critique, from which they were, in any case, shielded. (*Cinema* 10)

[3] For a similar discussion of censorship of the *Johnson-Jeffries Fight* in the United States, see Courtney 50-61.

[4] Ignoring and distorting black consciousness is what Uys would do best. Before turning to his wildly popular entertainment films of the 1970s, Uys wrote and directed two propaganda films in the late 1950s: *The Condemned are Happy* (1958), and *The Fox Has Four Eyes* (1959). Produced by the Department of Information, these films demonstrate great narrative affinities with apartheid ideology and *The Gods. The Fox Has Four Eyes* reiterates the story of a tribal African's temporary sojourn to the city. In this case, a man travels to the city to avenge the death of his daughter, the victim of a blood sacrifice motivated by the advice of the tribal medicine man. Once jailed for the attempted murder of the man he believes killed his daughter, the film's protagonist comes under the benevolent tutelage of a white warden who teaches him the errors of tribal justice. In the film's closing sequence, the protagonist dreams of returning to his tribe as the bearer of modern wisdom:

> I am learning many things, and I know that I will be a good farmer when I go home … I will teach my son the things I am learning in this prison, and we will have fat cattle and good crops. … And I will tell the men of my tribe that witch doctors are liars and robbers and murderers, but they will not believe me.

Completely obscuring the political and economic realities of migrant labor, the film replaces economic necessity with African savagery. Moreover, white discipline and punishment are all to the good of the black sojourner, and eventually see him back to his tribe a better, more productive citizen.

The Condemned Are Happy reiterates similar themes. Its narrative follows an impoverished tribal family who is forced to abandon its homeland due to severe drought. By the simple presence of drought, the film obscures the reality that the homelands experienced environmental degradation as a result of overcrowding and overuse after the Natives' Land Act. The slummy township which accommodates these migrant workers when they do reach the city is treated as a spontaneous problem of overcrowding. Like *Cry, The Beloved Country*, the film addresses the slum dwellers' moral degradation, but ignores the fact that the slum is a product of the legal segregation of metropolitan space. The film's protagonist muses; "when people live so close together, the badness spreads from one man to all the men around him. Like a flame where the trees stand too close together." The source of this "badness" is unclear, but it is certainly not apartheid oppression. In fact, the film's white characters are a benevolent, liberating force, constructing proper homes on healthy plots of land. It is only when their slum plots are "condemned" by the white authorities that the black families of the film are moved to these more livable homes. Thus, the condemned are happy, and they have white rulers to thank.

[5] *Dirkie*'s premise is that a father sends his son to the wilderness as a remedy for his chronic respiratory ailment. Accompanied by his uncle, the young boy is left marooned in the Kalahari when his uncle's sudden death results in the crash landing of their single-engine plane. Over sweeping aerial shots of the metropolis from which the young man and uncle initially fly, the uncle exhorts the young boy to consider the toxicity of the air and the profound corruption of the urban landscape which are the genesis of the boy's malady. As they fly over the desert, these shots of the city give way to images of a sublime, primordial landscape: the proper arena for the actualization of masculine health. Thus, in its reiteration of a classic trope of the romantic colonial tradition, the unspoiled wilderness is that location of redemption for the white male adventurer. In establishing the rural : urban binary as an axis of masculine crisis and redemption, *Dirkie* prefigures *The Gods* in several important respects. First, the rural : urban binary is the spatialization of *The Gods*'s primitive : modern binary, as well as a crucial geographical axis in the broader ideology of apartheid's migrant labor scheme, in which rural is to urban as primitive is to modern. Second, the film eschews any political commentary on the nature of apartheid in its representation of Bushmen as anachronistic savages, who, while not the cartoonish, pre-contact primitives of *The Gods*, seem to have avoided the displacement and disenfranchisement which had plagued the Bushmen for hundreds of years. This political amnesia is crucial because, like a similar dynamic in *The Gods*, it allows the film to focus its narrative on the crises of white masculinity: the survival of a young boy and the torment of a father who is forced to acknowledge that he may have never loved his son.

[6] For an in-depth analysis of white death, see Dyer chapters 1 and 6.

[7] As Conway writes; "As much as [Afrikaner] identity was construed as virile and strong, it was co-dependent on a fear of being weak, compromising, and feminine" (428).

[8] For a similar analysis of the gendering of the colonizer's gaze, see Shohat 27-29.

[9] As an indicator of this technique's typicality, I point out that Uys uses the technique of the telescopic zoom several times in *Animals Are Beautiful People*. In many respects, the opening sequence of *The Gods* is a direct aesthetic and narrative extension of Uys's work in this previous film. To the extent that *The Gods* would have worked as an erasure of colonial violence and the disenfranchisement of the Bushmen, I think it crucial to note that *Animals Are Beautiful People* was received almost universally as a documentary.

American critics, while hostile to the politics of *The Gods*, often praised the film for its documentary value in its representation of the folkways of the Bushmen. As Lor writes:

> [*The Gods*'s] main virtues are its striking widescreen visuals of unusual locations, and the sheer educational value of its narration concerning the Bushmen and their folkways. In fact, the opening reel set deep in the Kalahari often resembles a low-budget, annotated version of "The Dawn of Man" opening segment of Stanley Kubrick's "2001: A Space Odyssey," but with the attractive Botswana people playing themselves rather than having men in ape suits enacting the roles of primitives encountering new technology (here the Coke bottle). (Lor 18)

[10] I transpose Laura Mulvey's analysis of the male gaze in classical Hollywood cinema to ethnographic film. See Mulvey 19-20.

[11] I follow the lead set by Courtney in her analysis of *The Birth of a Nation*, 67-75.

[12] A strikingly similar voiceover accompanies shots of the Bushmen in *Beautiful People*.

[13] See Bordwell 19.

[14] In *The Cruise* (1998), Tim Levitch soliloquizes; "If architecture is the history of all phallic emotion, the Empire State Building is utter catharsis."

[15] See Lacan 3-9.

[16] For an analysis of Christ as male archetype, see Dyer chapters 1 and 5.

[17] For an analysis of Christ and the Virgin Mary as archtypes for the lighting of the white face, see Dyer chapters 2 and 3.

[18] One should note the similarity between shots of the Bushman homeland in *The Gods* with representations of the Bushmen in the apartheid propaganda film *Remnants of the Stone Age People.* An excerpt from the voiceover narration which accompanies this propaganda is illustrative of temporal elitism, the ideology of apartness, and the discourse of the vanishing primitive:

> In South Africa, this vast country with its many and complex problems, most of the interest is centered in the cities, where South Africans and visitors alike feel the pulse of this land throbbing at an ever increasing tempo. The hustle and bustle of the young virile cities occupy so much of our time, that we seldom have the leisure to pause and consider the things going on around us, but when we do have the time, what better place is there than one of our modern museums, where we can see and consider relics of a bygone and more leisurely age. Only three centuries ago these little Bushmen who today exist in the minds of most people only as museum pieces, roamed the vast interior of southern Africa[.] … The reason for their virtual disappearance probably lies with the fact that they shied away from, and refused to cooperate with, other people. … Where today are found the remnants of their once numerous clans, and where after a hazardous and difficult journey through miles and miles of untrodden and uninhabited velt, we made this photographic record of their unbelievably primitive lives.

Like the voiceover narration in the opening sequence of *The Gods*, this lecture inscribes masculinity on the colonial watcher. Furthermore, it inscribes a reproductive masculinity on the city itself while associating that virility with modernity and a sense of time. The city is a place of virile, throbbing, heterosexual white modernity while the velt is the location of the incompatibly primitive and the slow.

CHAPTER III

PRIMITIVISM AND THE WESTERN: GENRE WORK AND *DANCES WITH WOLVES*

***The Gods* and *Dances with Wolves*: Settler Moves to Innocence**

The Gods Must Be Crazy and *Dances with Wolves* seem like films that interact with different contexts. Specifically, *The Gods Must Be Crazy* totally disavowed the existence of settler colonialism in South Africa. In contrast, *Dances with Wolves* is especially concerned with settler colonialism as a historical fact. While the erasures of *The Gods* should be read in the context of apartheid oppression, *Dances with Wolves* seems not to have emerged alongside any similar context of violence in the United States. However, *Dances with Wolves* constructs this apparent political truth. According to its own terms, *Dances with Wolves* does not need to disavow the contemporary violence of settler colonialism because the film imagines this violence to have been conclusively waged in America's colonial past. As a result of this construction, these films seem to do different work. *The Gods* justifies settler colonialism through its total disavowal. *DWW* is a ceremony of settler-indigenous reconciliation that distracts from the reparation of land and rights to indigenous people.[1]

The juxtaposition of these two films stands to increase our understanding of *Dances with Wolves* because it will demonstrate that the film performs the same ideological work as *The Gods*: the disavowal of the enduring structure of settler colonialism. To establish the methodological framework with which I will illustrate this common work, the remainder of this chapter's preamble will: 1) define settler

colonialism; 2) identify the tactics which legitimize settler colonialism; 3) describe how *The Gods* employs these tactics; and 4) describe how both films employ these tactics in similar ways.

As Tuck and Yang write, settler colonialism is a form of colonization which combines exploitative (or external) with internal colonization. Exploitative colonization denotes the extraction of wealth for the enrichment of colonizers (Tuck and Yang 4). Internal colonization is the "biopolitical and geopolitical management of people, land, flora and fauna within the 'domestic' borders of the imperial nation [that] ensure[s] the ascendancy of the white elite" (Tuck and Yang 4-5). Settler colonialism is a combination of these two modes:

> For example … many Indigenous peoples have been forcibly removed from their homelands onto reservations, indentured, and abducted into state custody, signaling the form of colonization as simultaneously internal (via boarding schools and other biopolitical modes of control) and external (via mining on Indigenous lands in the US Southwest and oil extraction on Indigenous land in Alaska)… the horizons of the settler colonial nation state are total and require a mode of total appropriation of Indigenous life and land, rather than a selective expropriation of profit-producing fragments. (Tuck and Yang 5)

In sum, settler colonialism is the establishment, by a non-indigenous population, of a permanent, sovereign homestead on the expropriated land of indigenous inhabitants (Tuck and Yang 5). The establishment of sovereignty is the difference between the settler and the immigrant: "Immigrants are beholden to the indigenous laws and epistemologies of the lands they migrate to. Settlers become the law, supplanting indigenous laws and

epistemologies" (Tuck and Yang 6-7). Finally, because settler colonialism requires the permanent disenfranchisement of indigenous people, it requires that "Indigenous peoples … must be made into ghosts" (Tuck and Yang 6). This erasure is what Patrick Wolfe calls the logic of elimination:

> The logic of elimination not only refers to the summary liquidation of Indigenous people, though it includes that. In common with genocide as Raphael Lemkin characterized it, settler colonialism has both negative and positive dimensions. Negatively, it strives for the dissolution of native societies. Positively, it erects a new colonial society on the expropriated land base—as I put it, settler colonizers come to stay: invasion is a structure not an event. In its positive aspect, elimination is an organizing principle of settler-colonial society rather than a one-off (and superseded) occurrence… Settler colonialism destroys to replace. (388 [I have elided a paragraph break])

While colonial violence frequently converges with genocidal violence, Wolfe writes that genocide and colonialism are distinct. Because he conceives of colonialism as a structure and not an event, Wolfe writes that "a major difference between [colonial genocide] and the generality of non-colonial genocides is its sustained duration" (400). Wolfe's most important point is this; "when invasion is recognized as a structure rather than an event, its history does not stop—or more to the point, become relatively trivial—when it moves on from the era of frontier genocide" (402). Recognizing settler colonialism as a structure rather than an event will lead to a proper understanding that settler colonialism is a "structural genocide" (Wolfe 403).

Primitivism has lent structural genocide its moral legitimacy. Emerging from Scottish Enlightenment thought at the end of the 18th century, primitivism regarded colonization as that fungible process by which savagery would be assimilated or destroyed.[2] In more specific terms, primitivism has mitigated the guilt of European settlers over the dispossession and slaughter of native peoples. Because primitivism casts colonial violence as a vehicle of progress, primitivism casts colonial violence as ultimately benevolent.[3] While primitivism is at play in *The Gods Must Be Crazy* and *Dances with Wolves*, both films also engage more specific tactics in support of settler colonialism. These tactics include reconciliation, metaphorical decolonization, settler moves to innocence, and the exclusivity of settler futurity.

Tuck and Yang argue that the appropriation of the language of decolonization has served academia as a settler move to innocence.[4] They argue that the rhetoric of decolonization is incommensurate with true colonization, which can only mean the reparation of indigenous lands and sovereignty. As a settler move to innocence, symbolic decolonization "kills the very possibility of decolonization; it recenters whiteness, it resettles theory, it extends innocence to the settler, it entertains a settler future" (3). As Tuck and Yang argue, the ceremonial rhetoric of decolonization serves "to reconcile settler guilt and complicity, and rescue settler futurity" (3). In her discussion of the global proliferation of truth and reconciliation movements, Gillian Whitlock posits a similar thesis:

> The material and lived experiences of First Nation and indigenous peoples in Canada and Australia continue to be shaped by extraordinarily high rates of poverty, death, unemployment, youth suicide, substance abuse and sexual abuse,

> domestic violence and family breakdown…there remains much for which to apologize. [However,] it must be asked whether a preoccupation with apology and symbolic acts of reconciliation has diverted attention from the need to radically reform the conditions in indigenous and First nation's communities and to address the situation of urban indigenous peoples. (25)

Following these scholars, I say that *The Gods* and *Dances with Wolves* are cinematic counterparts to the truth and reconciliation commission or the academic ceremony of "decolonizing the mind." In addition to the global tactic of primitivism, these films are ceremonies of settler-indigenous reconciliation which function as moves to innocence. *The Gods* is about the harmonious collaboration of a colonial agent with a primitive counterpart. This racial harmony disavows the exploitative labor relations of South African apartheid. Furthermore, the film is a settler move to innocence which functions through the recentering of white suffering. Finally, primitivism and the reproductive logic of classical Hollywood are an ideology and an aesthetic which express the endurance of white supremacy in the colonial space, what Tuck and Yang call settler futurity. In sum, *The Gods* imagines time and reproduction in such a way as to reassure its audience of the viability of settler futurity.

Working for the same ends, *Dances with Wolves* employs the settler-indigenous adoption narrative to manufacture settler innocence. Discussing *DWW* as a prime example of the Euro-American adoption fantasy, Tuck and Yang write that "these fantasies …refer to those narratives … in which the Native (understanding that he is becoming extinct) hands over his land, his claim to the land, his very Indian-ness to the settler for safe keeping. This is a fantasy that is invested in settler futurity and dependent

on the foreclosure of an Indigenous futurity" (14).[5] In a way which echoes the closing sequence of *The Gods*, *DWW* dramatizes futurity as the privilege of the white settler. While the Lakota almost literally disappear, John Dunbar and a presumably pregnant Stands With a Fist (Kevin Costner and Mary McDonnell) ride like Joseph and Mary into a white, reproductive future. Superimposed on this image of settler futurity, an intertitle posits the vanishing Indian as a historical fact of the late-19th century. The film reserves futurity for its white characters, denies futurity to indigenous people, and constructs colonial violence as a historical event. Like *The Gods*, *DWW* paradoxically insists on both the reproduction of white settlers while disavowing the ongoing violence which this reproduction entails.

As an aesthetic analysis, this chapter will demonstrate how *DWW* performs its settler move to innocence. In short, *DWW* works as a settler move to innocence through its particular interaction with its genre. Specifically, the film's adoption fantasy re-enchants the classical western film and its epic hero.

Primitivism, Identity Appropriation, and Genre in *Dances with Wolves*

Like *The Gods Must Be Crazy*, *Dances with Wolves* was a great financial and popular success. The film swept the Academy Awards in 1990, wining Best Picture, Best Director, Best Adapted Screenplay, Best Cinematography, Best Sound, Best Film Editing, and Best Original Score. Given this success, it is noteworthy that scholars and critics consider *DWW* to have been a revival of the western.[6] Films in the genre are typically apprehended by their geography, their iconography, and there placement in history. The timeframe of the classical Western is that period after the American Civil War and before the end of the 19th century. The space of the Western is that great tract of

land west of the Mississippi River, east of the Rocky Mountains, and north of the Rio Grande. The iconography is that of horse and rider, the rifle, the six-shooter, and of course, the Indian. While it satisfies the geographical, historical, and iconographic parameters which audiences identify as "western," *Dances with Wolves* is a revisionist western because its protagonist questions the legitimacy of manifest destiny. Of course, the film's adoption narrative immediately compromises this revisionism because it figures John J. Dunbar as a nostalgic revival of the classical western hero. As he adopts an indigenous identity, the film encourages the spectator's sincere identification with a white male and the erasure of his complicity in colonial violence. As such, *DWW* is a revival of the classical western, a genre whose protagonist was a heroic personification of manifest destiny.

The earliest films to represent Native Americans mimic 19th-century anthropology in their constructions of anachronism (Griffiths 122). The denial of coevalness is more or less explicitly retained in westerns through the 1920s.[7] By the time of the resurgence of the "A" western with *Stagecoach* (1939), the temporal structure of the primitive : modern binary had become implicit. While John Ford would structure his westerns according to the clash between civilization and savagery, a review of the scholarly literature of the classical western shows little in the way of the explicit denial of coevalness.[8] *Union Pacific* (1939) and *Stagecoach* (1939) are two examples of this trend. While these films posit the nuclear family as a bastion of civilization beleaguered by savage Indians, the films do not necessarily present this assault in a way which characterizes the Indian as anachronistic. Rather, Indians in these films are one of the many obstacles of the frontier

which must be swept away or contained before civilization can activate its progressive machinery (Slotkin 267).[9]

The primitivism of *Dances with Wolves* interacts with the history of the western in a few important ways. First, the film's fantasy of an anachronistic Native American is a revisionist rejection of the Indian *qua* obstacle. Second, the film is a revival of the explicit temporal continuum of American moving pictures which preceded the classical western. The film reiterates the tropes of 19th-century anthropology in such a way as to justify or elide colonial violence. White guilt over manifest destiny and the redemption of this guilt through the appropriation of an anachronistic identity combine in such a way as to bifurcate the film's form: *Dances with Wolves* is aesthetically and thematically nostalgic in its celebration of a white hero, but it is historically and politically revisionist in its guilt over manifest destiny. Most importantly, the un-ironic self-actualization of a white male hero is distinctly out of step with the revisionist western. This recuperation of the revisionist western's fallen hero is the tactic of *DWW*'s settler move to innocence. The adoption narrative, in turn, is the method of this recuperation: "this narrative spins a fantasy than an individual settler can become innocent, indeed heroic and indigenized" (Tuck and Yang 14). In his appropriation of an anachronistic racial identity, Dunbar dramatizes the film's own generic regression from the anti-hero of the revisionist western to the epic hero of the genre's classical period.[10] While Dunbar's regression to a previous state allows the film to redeem the fallen angel of manifest destiny, it also functions as a metaphor for the process by which the film would return to the state of the classical western before the deconstruction of frontier mythology.[11] As Shari Huhndorf observes in *Going Native*, Dunbar plays Indian as a settler move to innocence:

> *Dances with Wolves*, the movie industry claimed with pride, was an original, Hollywood's first successful attempt to render justice to these Indians through Costner's sympathetic telling of their proud history. This claim attests to one of the primary impulses behind going native: European Americans' desire to distance themselves from the conquest of native America. (3)

Dances with Wolves uses primitivism to revive the myth that settler colonists may achieve greatness through struggles and suffering in the wilderness. This myth has a three part structure, involving separation from civilization, regression to a primitive state, and regeneration through violence (Slotkin 11-12). *DWW* harmonizes this myth with a trope of the classical western in which the suffering of white people is a function of their struggle to realize manifest destiny or achieve self-actualization in a harsh frontier (Simmon 118; Bandy and Soehr 1-4).[12] The agony of the white male body in *Dances with Wolves* is a revival of the melodramatic morality of the classic western. This morality figured the virtuously suffering white settler as a martyr for civilizational progress. Because the revisionist western problematized the idealization of righteous violence while simultaneously demythologizing the western hero, violence in the western can only be truly regenerative if the genre is deployed in its classical mode.[13] Dunbar's appropriation of indigenous suffering is a settler move to innocence because it allows the film to function as a classical western. As Tuck and Yang write on the appropriation of indigenous suffering; "The settler's personal suffering feeds his fantasy of mutuality… Because pain is the token for oppression, claims to pain then equate to claims of being an innocent non-oppressor" (16).

Dances with Wolves employs the western in its non-ironic mode through its primitivist plot. Specifically, primitivism informs the film's two narrative conceits. First, *DWW* superimposes the primitive : modern binary on a melodramatic axis of good and evil. In this constellation, the Lakota Indians represent a utopian culture vis-à-vis a reprobate modernity. Overlaid on this seemingly revisionist binary is the film's second conceit, the process by which a white protagonist is able to traverse the racial and temporal continuum of the colonial imaginary. By appropriating an indigenous identity, Dunbar claims the moral authority conferred on this identity by the film's melodrama. Ironically, Dunbar's traversal of the racial continuum undoes the film's revisionist work because it allows the un-ironic redeployment of a trope from the western's classical period: the suffering white hero-settler and his regeneration through righteous violence.

As the racial nostalgia of its protagonist is a dramatization of its own generic nostalgia, *Dances with Wolves* exhibits a compound nostalgia. To satisfy this nostalgia, the film deploys a network of narrative, aesthetic, and generic devices. Melodrama, if sincerely employed and received, is an essentially redemptive aesthetic mode based on nostalgia for moral clarity. Primitivism, by its very nature, involves nostalgia for a previous state and the promise of redemption that this state holds for the colonizer's gaze. In *Dances with Wolves*, these two modes work in tandem to redeem the classical western, a genre which was originally concerned with the redemption of the protagonist by means of his virtuous, melodramatic, civilizational struggle. In the wake of the revisionist western and its attack on white masculinity, *Dances with Wolves* sends the white male back to the frontier for a new scenario of regenerative violence. However, the redemption of this scenario is profoundly ironic because any sincere account of regenerative violence

is necessarily problematized by revisionist accounts of manifest destiny. The only way *Dances with Wolves* can elude its own irony is by the means of its two primary narrative conceits: the superimposition of primitivism with melodrama, and the protagonist's traversal of the spatial, racial, moral, and temporal axes of the colonial imaginary.

The first section of this chapter will situate *DWW* more specifically with regard to the classical and revisionist Western. The second section will address how *DWW* engaged with its cultural context: the New Age and Mythopoetic Men's movement of the late 1980s and early 1990s. Then, I will review the literature on the tradition of literary and cinematic melodrama and melodrama's relationship to contemporary primitivism. Considering these social and aesthetic contexts, I will analyze *Dances with Wolves*'s specific scenario of regenerative frontier violence, the captivity narrative. I will conclude the chapter with an analysis of the film's use of cinematography, mise-en-scène, and non-diegetic music, and explore how these elements of the film create meaning through their interaction with the western, the melodramatic and primitivist modes, and the crisis of white masculinity.

The Classical Western, the Revisionist Western, and *DWW*

An understanding of *DWW*'s handling of American history, the white hero, and manifest destiny is only possible in light of the evolution of the western genre. Let us assume that changes in the genre over the last hundred years have been homologous with changing attitudes toward manifest destiny, and that throughout its history, the western has been a reflection on American history (Bandy and Stoehr 5). As Janet Walker argues in her introduction to *Westerns: Films Through History*, westerns are utterances in a discourse. Just like history textbooks, westerns are always interpretive interventions in a discourse which constructs history (Walker 1-22).

As attitudes toward manifest destiny have transformed, the western has represented Euro-American colonialism in different ways. In the interim between the Spanish-American War and World War I, the western emerged as ideological support for American imperialism (Berg 213; Bandry and Stoehr 15-20).[14] Particularly after western film production moved from the forests of the east coast to the deserts and vistas of the American West, the emptiness of the landscape in western films played into myths of civilizational progress: "The newer Westerns emphasized battles between cowboys and 'Injuns' and, within white society, between heroes and villains. Such battles were typically waged over unclaimed land that was waiting to be conquered and controlled and cultivated" (Bandy and Stoehr 17).[15]

In these films, development and manifest destiny were closely linked to the portrayal of violence as melodramatic, virtuous, and chivalric. Specifically, the revenge plot of the classical western descends from codes of European chivalric honor.[16] In the classical western, there is no question as to the vengeance quest's moral clarity. As William Indick writes; "The theme of chivalric vengeance became the central theme, in one way or another, in almost every Western. … The hero's vengeance is always honorable. … The hero's justice is an honorable act, a just one, and not only fulfills the hero's personal need for 'satisfaction' but also performs a task of social value" (24-28). The task of social value in the classical western was that task which furthered manifest destiny.[17]

Manifest destiny and chivalric violence would be problematized by the revisionist westerns of the 1960s. In these films, the moral ambiguity of violence dramatizes the disintegration of faith in the chivalric code. Arguing that this trend has its roots in the

'psychological' western of the 1950s, Indick writes that, "the hero and the villain appear to suffer from the same conflicts. The hero, no longer a pure white knight is also afflicted, in varying degrees, by the killing sickness" (28). This moral reconsideration of the western hero was part of a larger trend in which a new generation of directors began to favor "more realistic, less myth-governed movies. Suddenly audiences as well as film critics became interested in 'ordinary' characters with everyday problems and flawed lives" (Bandy and Stoehr 227).

Whereas the classical western celebrated manifest destiny through its association with an idealized hero, the revisionist western abandoned myths of the heroic white male (Berg 213; Bandy and Stoehr 234). This unsettling of the white male hero was concomitant with the post-modern assault on narratives of manifest destiny (Berg 224). As Aleiss writes; "by the late 1960s, Indian activism combined with Vietnam War protests and racial uprisings set the stage for Hollywood's 'anti-Western' and their vicious attacks against frontier white aggression" (120). In *Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid* (1969), *Easy Rider* (1969), and *Midnight Cowboy* (1969), the classic western's "macho, upright lawmen of *Stagecoach* and *Union Pacific* had crumbled into society's doomed outcasts" (Aleiss 121-122).[18] With the release of *Little Big Man* (1970), Arthur Penn was determined to set the record straight regarding American genocide; "He believed that Hollywood's Indian images were based upon a 'pure, naked racism' and that Custer was really a 'pompous, self-aggrandizing man'"(Aleiss 124). In *Soldier Blue* (1970), director and World War II veteran Ralph Nelson was explicit in his anti-war sentiment, drawing parallels between the massacre of Native Americans and the American military misadventure in Vietnam:

> News photos of scarred and mutilated Vietnamese victims infuriated Nelson, so he channeled his anger into *Soldier Blue'*s bloody scenes. 'It was about war – all war,' he explained. 'It is war which is obscene.' Although Nelson denied that My Lai influenced *Soldier Blue,* he admitted that in the movie's massacre of Indian women and children, 'history was repeating itself.' (Aleiss 127)

Following *Little Big Man* and *Soldier Blue*, *Apocalypse Now* (1979) is a Vietnam-era anti-western that may serve as an instructive precursor to *Dances with Wolves*. *Apocalypse Now* was part of a cycle of films, including *The Deer Hunter* (1978), *Platoon* (1986), and *Full Metal Jacket* (1987) which, through their critical portrayals of the American military in Vietnam, challenged the cinematic glorification of armed struggle that had characterized American cinema after World War II (Rasmussen and Downey 176-177). This martial revisionism is in harmony with western revisionism of the same period, particularly considering the critical manner in which revisionist westerns responded to the Vietnam War.[19] While John Hellmann argues that *Apocalypse Now* is structured more along the lines of the hardboiled detective novel than the western, the film's construction of colonial time and its postmodern parody of the American cavalry officer warrant a reading of the film as a revisionist western that prefigures *Dances with Wolves*.[20]

Apocalypse Now delivers a stinging critique of American colonial violence, the cowboy, frontier mythology, and the American military effort in Vietnam. The location of this critique is the parodic, postmodern figure of Lieutenant Colonel Bill Kilgore (Robert Duvall), the leader of the film's mechanized cavalry. In the highly ironic, film-noir voiceover which introduces Kilgore and his troops, Captain Willard (Martin Sheen)

establishes both a historical continuity, and a structural homology, between the American cavalry's role in classical manifest destiny and the contemporary violence of Vietnam; "First of the 9th was an old cavalry division and had cashed in its horses for choppers and gone tear-assing around 'nam looking for the shit."

The verbal establishment of this structural homology serves as a critique of manifest destiny because Colonel Kilgore and his men pursue meaningless, wanton violence. Moreover, this representation of senseless destruction is made reflexive or self-referential by the appearance of a journalist and camera crew. The journalist shouts directly at Willard: "Don't look at the camera! Just go by like you're fighting… It's for television!" This self-reflexive historical awareness prepares the cinematic spectator for her first glimpse of Colonel Kilgore. His costume is an amalgam of historically appropriate, Vietnam-era military fatigues combined with the anachronistic flourishes of a yellow neckerchief and an Old West cavalryman's hat. While Colonel Kilgore's narrative purpose is to escort Captain Willard and his men up-river, deeper into the heart of darkness, his more impressive and memorable function is to serve as an ironic deconstruction of cowboy violence. When he learns that a member of Willard's crew is a famous surfer, Kilgore destroys a Viet Cong village and massacres its inhabitants so that the his men may secure a desirable point break (Figure 16). Kilgore's monstrosity is beyond review when he delivers his pithy, absurd rationale for the beachhead's violent capture: "Charlie don't surf!"

Figure 16. Charlie Don't Surf.

In its likening of this Vietnam-era helicopter commander to the cavalryman of the Old West, the film refuses either to retroactively endorse classical manifest destiny through a celebration of a modern-day cowboy, or to allow the celebration of the historical cowboy to justify America's more recent colonial violence. However, this revisionist sentiment is undermined by the film's construction of colonial time and space. Like Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, *Apocalypse Now* figures movement up river as a journey back in time and a descent into madness.[21] In both *Apocalypse Now* and the novella of its source material, the colonial encounter is structured by a temporal continuum whose primitive pole festers with the threat of savage contagion.

Dances with Wolves reiterates this colonial construction of time and space by allowing its protagonist to travel back in time through his journey into the wilderness.[22] However, the reiteration of this structure may not be immediately apparent because

Dances with Wolves replaces the contagion of the savage primitive with the therapeutic primitive of the New Age. Shari Huhndorf writes:

> New Agers claim that colonized peoples, including Natives, are in many respects fundamentally superior to their Western counterparts. Compelled by the conviction that modern Western societies confront terrible crises (including environmental destruction, spiritual bankruptcy, and rampant health problems), the movement goes native in its quest for solutions. (162)

While New Ageism seems to have replaced the image of the savage with a more politically correct Indian, the primitive *qua* therapy we see in *Dances with Wolves* has simply repackaged the contagion of *Heart of Darkness* as a therapeutic commodity. Lisa Aldred writes:

> In the so-called postmodern culture of late consumer capitalism, a significant number of white affluent suburban and urban middle-aged baby-boomers complain of feeling uprooted from cultural traditions, community belonging, and spiritual meaning. The New Age movement is one such response to these feelings. New Agers romanticize an "authentic" and "traditional" Native American culture whose spirituality can save them from their own sense of malaise. However, as products of the very consumer culture they seek to escape, these New Agers pursue spiritual meaning and cultural identification through acts of purchase. (328-329)

In *Dances with Wolves*, Keven Costner takes the consumption of indigeneity to its logical conclusion. For him, as for the New Agers he represents, this consumption becomes a

therapeutic lifestyle. As a result, the film transforms the Native American into a leisure identity that malaise-stricken whites are free to consume.[23]

The consumption of Native American identity by New Agers is a settler move to innocence. As Shari Huhndorf writes, white Americans have consumed Indian identity in the pursuit of self-discovery and self-healing (163). In going native, Dunbar pursues this self-actualization through a recuperation of indigenous suffering. Through his appropriation of Native identity, the white male assumes the innocence of victimhood. Huhndorf writes:

> New Agers' desire to go native reproduces, even as it extends, the history of colonization, shown in this case by the compulsion to own Native cultures and even Native identities. Moreover, this latest phase of colonization attempts to ensure that Native America no longer offers a fundamental critique of Western values and practices. (163)

In terms most relevant to the disavowal of ongoing settler-colonial relations and the redemption of the classical westerner, Huhndorf observes that "individual self-transformation rather than political action … provides the New Age's primary preoccupation" (165).

Mythopoetic Men and the Appropriation of Suffering

The mythopoetic men's movement of the 1980s and 1990s was a New Age subculture whose colonial imaginary demonstrates a striking affinity with *Dances with Wolves*. The men's movement was a loose confederation of emotionally dissatisfied males who came together seeking emotional and spiritual fulfillment. The movement was a reaction to the ascendency of feminism and the critique of white patriarchy in the wake of the civil rights movement. The movement was comprised mostly of white, middle- and

upper-class males between the ages of 35 and 60 (Schwalbe 19). The dissatisfaction and anomie addressed by the men's movement found their source in the same cultural trends that had unsettled the classical westerner of American cinema: instead of uncritically endorsing the hegemony of white male patriarchy, popular opinion had come to question the basic moral integrity of the white male. This cultural pressure drove men to the mythopoetic movement for its validation of the male character (Schwalbe 23). While actual participation in the movement's ceremonies and retreats was limited to around 100,000 men, the anxieties which had fostered the mythopoetic movement were active across American culture in the late-20th century (Schwalbe 4-5). In sum, men turned to the mythopoetic movement to rebuild their sense of masculine self-worth.[24]

DWW dramatizes the mythopoetic movement: the film would validate the white male character in an era when white patriarchy was under attack. Like *DWW*, participants of the men's movement worked to redeem their masculinity through the appropriation of Native American identity. In its own terms, the men's movement addressed a simple, overarching apprehension: that its members were suffering (Barton 3-4). In their adoption of the victim narratives of the civil rights movement, the mythopoetic men misappropriated the racial identity of one of America's most disenfranchised groups, Native Americans.

In sum, the mythopoetic men pursued the redemption of male virtue through the performance of indigeneity. Referred to as 'neo-primitivism' within the movement, these practices include drum circles, chanting, sweat lodges and guided visualizations (Barton 4). Like the white male protagonist of *Dances with Wolves*, and like the New Age movement more broadly, these men consumed Native American identity in an attempt to

bolster a masculinity which had been discredited by the post-colonial and feminist critiques of the 1960s.

Even more striking than the structural similarities between *DWW* and the mythopoetic movement are the affinities in diction between the men's Jungian therapy and the archetypal criticism of *DWW.* In its own terms, mythopoetic therapy sought to bring men into communion with unconscious masculine archetypes. By activating these archetypes, mythopoetic therapy was meant to encourage elevated consciousness and a revaluation of masculinity (Schwalbe 35-52). In her Jungian analysis, Amanda Smith identifies these same operations in *DWW.* She proposes that Dunbar's "mythical descent" into the archetypal unconscious was the heart of the film's popular appeal. Almost directly mirroring the language of Schwalbe, Smith writes; "A good deal of the power of *Dances with Wolves* lies not in its glorification of a specific culture … but in its ability to dramatize that culture in a manner so that it becomes the medium for freeing its protagonist from a vision that is too limited or circumscribed and awakening deeper sensibilities" (199).

Schwalbe describes the benefits of mythopoetic work in similar terms: the goal of the therapy was to "awaken in men the human sensibilities that had been dulled by … an exploitive economy … " (242). The technique of this awakening is a practitioner's inhabitation of the "Wildman" archetype: "To the mythopoetic men, the Wildman was not a rampaging rogue male, but an image of the unfettered, zestful, robust animal-like spirit found in everyone. This was the spirit … that the men saw as having been quashed by bureaucracy and industrialism" (Schwalbe 224).What Smith and Schwalbe both fail to criticize, however, is that the primitive masculine archetype on which this therapy relies

reduces the American Indian to the status of a therapeutic commodity. This is Indian *qua* lifestyle, as a spiritual resource for a journeying white male. In many ways, it is Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* all over again, but with the New Age twist that the savagery of the mythic descent has been replaced by the redemption of an authentic masculinity. As such, the mythopoetic men's movement reduced indigeneity to the Primitive Other *qua* fetish object and therapeutic technique.

Traversing the Axis: White Male Agony to Transcendental Mobility

Figure 17. Castration in *DWW*.

As a dramatization of the crisis of white masculinity, the opening sequence of *Dances with Wolves* insists on the preeminence of white male agony. In this sequence, Kevin Costner lies supine on a battlefield operating table as two surgeons prepare to amputate his right leg. This scene reinforces its amputation narrative with a series of claustrophobic images, a series of close-ups which allow only fractured images of Costner's body (Figure 17). This aesthetic visually mimics the amputation threatened in the narrative. As such, the sequence is typical of the fragmentation of the male body in action movies of the late-20th century, a trend that Mark Gallagher attributes to the

crisis of masculinity in contemporary capitalism: "a social and economic structure that severely limits and codifies the bourgeois male's ability to establish his identity through physical activity…" (199).[25] As the film's primal scene, this castration sequence serves as a thematic and aesthetic counterpoint to the film's later images, in which Costner will demonstrate his mastery of mobility in wide-angle shots on the open prairie. These later scenes serve one of the cultural functions of the action film in late-20th-century America, to "provide fantasies of heroic omnipotence and of escape from, and transcendence of, cultural pressures" (Gallagher 199). The film's opening sequence is so thematically significant because it serves as an unquestionable foregrounding of white male suffering while keying that suffering to a threat to white male mobility: Dunbar is threatened with the loss of his leg, another victim of gangrene on the slaughter fields of the Civil War. This foregrounding of suffering as a function of mobility is significant because if Dunbar is to successfully appropriate a Native American identity, he must literally and figuratively traverse the temporal axis of the colonial imaginary.

Thinking in terms of mobility, the Native American of *DWW* is the object of a colonizer's gaze much after the fashion in which Laura Mulvey describes the female object of male desire in *Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema*; "In contrast to woman as icon, the active male figure demands a three dimensional space[.] … He is a figure in the landscape[.] … The male protagonist is free to command the stage, a stage of spatial illusion in which he articulates the look and creates the action" (21). The privilege of movement through space and time is central to Dunbar's journey from emasculation to mastery. As the signifier of spiritual essence, the figure of the Native American, like woman as icon, is a stationary object set in a mythical western past, an object toward

which the White protagonist moves on a journey of personal redemption. The primitive never moves, never acts, never gains our identification. Much like *The Gods Must Be Crazy*, *Dances with Wolves* constructs the primitive other as essentially fixed, and I employ this term for its broad semantic field. As such, the primitive is an anachronistic object fixed in the western past, a fetish object which fixes white male castration, a domesticated other which can no longer threaten the white male, and a feminized object toward which the white male plots his journey through space and time in an effort to lay claim to the identity which will redeem his virtue.

However, this journey may only commence after Dunbar resolves his crisis of mobility. In the film's opening sequence, the equestrian jackboot figures prominently to dramatize this crisis, functioning as a signifier of the white male castration complex while keying castration to an anxiety of motor incompetence. The film's first shot is the removal of the boot from Dunbar's bloody leg. Shot from Dunbar's point of view, the boot is removed, dropped onto the surgeon's floor, kicked aside. When Dunbar's boot joins a pile of bloody boots in the periphery of the surgeon's quarters, it asks to be taken as a signifier of a larger trend of emasculation. Removed from Dunbar's injured extremity, his boot assumes a state of detumescence. It languishes as a flaccid signifier of castration. Here, the boot functions as a classic fetish object, a phallic surrogate which signals the impotence of the protagonist while displacing the castration it signals.

The image of the boot is so significant because the disavowal of castration in *DWW* relies on the reiteration of a classical trope of European colonialism, the notion that movement away from civilization is analogous to movement back in time (Fabian 8-12). *DWW* is a late- 20th-century reiteration of this intellectual tradition, and achieves the

disavowal of racial difference through the activation of this mythology. As so much of *DWW* relies on Dunbar's journey into the frontier, the boot becomes a significant symbol of masculine, colonial travel. Dismembered and flaccid, the boot cannot be a vehicle for westward expansion, temporal travel, or the traversal of the moral axis of the film's primitivist melodrama. The removal of the boot signals emasculation. Without it, Dunbar would be unable to perform the journey of transformation which disavows the historical guilt and social anxiety of late-20th-century, white, American masculinity. When integrated and erect, the boot becomes a tool and symbol of Dunbar's journey into the frontier and also the means by which the film's moral and temporal axes are traversed.

Dances with Wolves dramatizes the Eurocentric mythology of time-space in its cinematography, in the aesthetic juxtaposition of claustrophobic fragmentation with wide-angle shots of transcendental beauty. Dunbar's motion into the heart of the American frontier is showcased by a cinematography which forms an aesthetic and emotional counterpoint to the film's castration scene. This formalistic dyad reinforces the moral certainty and ethical utopianism of the film's melodrama, but it also underscores Dunbar's journey out of the fragmented space of Western culture and into the integrated space of the mythical West. Whereas the first scene encourages pathos and identification through extreme close-ups, quick editing, and tense music, inverse formal elements collude in the film's travel sequences to evoke a return to transcendental innocence.

In the series of shots in which Dunbar traverses the prairie, the film's motif of the Costner close-up works in tandem with several extreme long shots. These long shots work in concert with the film's award-winning score and slow-paced editing to produce a sense of calm, transcendence, and totality in contradistinction to the film's opening

sequence. This sequence observes a 180 degree logic which suggests a cartographical perspective of space and time. The cartographical perspective echoes a trope of 19th-century American art in which the left side of the frame represents the west and the primeval past.[26] The 180 degree logic, the extreme long shots, and the movement of Dunbar from right to left across the motion picture frame, suggest that the axis of action in these scenes achieves a longitudinal, epochal, and spiritual significance. The cinematic spectator is free to deduce that the camera takes a position from the south while observing the movement of the protagonist from east to west, evoking the movement of Euro-American settlers across North America in the 19th century.

Dunbar masterfully rides through space, back to the past, and into the frontier, achieving a level of spatial, locomotive mastery in firm juxtaposition to his impotence in the film's opening sequence. In one particularly long shot, Dunbar rides at full gallop from a hilltop at screen right across an extended stretch of South Dakota prairie (Figure 18). While Dunbar rides from the extreme right of the frame to a position in the center of the screen, the camera tracks left to emphasize and elongate Dunbar's movement through time and space. At the same time, the tracking camera moves the cinematic spectator from east to west due to the identification of the spectator's gaze with the gaze of the camera.[27] This tracking shot keeps Dunbar and his horse at center frame for several seconds. This shot emphasizes westward travel as a reconstitution of Costner's gestalt while harmonizing Dunbar's movement with the movement of the spectator and the landscape. This harmony is essential because it insists on the uncritical reception of Dunbar as the classical western hero. Rather than being in ironic tension with an anti-hero, the viewing position so constructed is one of intimacy and sincere identification.

Finally, the integration of the classic westerner into the landscape does more than redeem whiteness. It serves to redeem the myth of manifest destiny because the landscape of these shots is profoundly empty. According to *DWW*, this landscape is a nearly limitless space of natural and spiritual resources for the white men who traverse it. This is a cinematic rendering of late-20th century American attitudes, in which the frontier "continues to represent notions of conquest, progress, and individual achievement" (Carmichael 3).

Figure 18. Transcendental Wilderness Experience.

Melodrama, Primitivism, and the Captivity Narrative

This transcendental ride establishes the narrative which will preoccupy much of the remainder of the film, in which Costner journeys deeper into the redemptive bosom of the American frontier. For the most part, this process is dramatized by his love of, and integration into, the tribal culture of the film's Lakota Indians. As such, Costner's therapeutic appropriation of Native American identity, what is essentially an extended therapy session at *Spa Lakota*, is set in stark juxtaposition to the violence, emptiness, and castration of western modernity. The establishment of this melodramatic opposition

between good and evil, the primitive and the modern, serves as an ideological screen for the film's promotion of Native Americans as a therapeutic commodity for white settler-consumers.

Melodrama emerged at the turn of the 19th century as an aesthetic response to the disintegration of the unassailable truths of Christianity and its sacred narratives. Melodrama served to restore a measure of moral and ontological certainty to a world bereft of its sacred narratives through the proposition of an absolute and clearly legible moral universe. As Peter Brooks writes; "The melodramatists refuse to allow that the world has been completely drained of transcendence[.] … they locate that transcendence in the struggle of the children of light with the children of darkness, in the play of ethical mind" (22). Following Peter Brooks, Linda Williams argues that melodrama is *the* dominant mode of the classical Hollywood film (42-62). The melodramatic mode as it applies to the classical Hollywood film is key to understanding the primitivism and genre work of *Dances with Wolves*.

First, I would like to draw a structural and aesthetic parallel between the collapse of sacred narratives after the Enlightenment with the collapse of frontier mythology. If melodrama was an aesthetic response to the evacuation of sacred narrative, we might view the temporal, civilizational melodrama of manifest destiny as a particularly American aesthetic form which functioned as a replacement for a sacred Christian narrative. In this particularly American scenario, a millennial Christian narrative of salvation is replaced by a geographical and civilizational destiny of national exceptionalism. However, the postcolonial revision of this civilizational myth, the loss of faith in the classical western's melodramatic violence, is a replaying of the fall from

ontological certainty of the sacred Christian narrative which precipitated melodrama in the early-19th century.

In its employment of the melodramatic mode, *Dances with Wolves* works to redeem the western much in the way that Peter Brooks argues 19th-century melodrama to have redeemed the western psyche in a post-sacred age. *Dances with Wolves* works in this fashion because it is structured according to the following terms of American cinematic melodrama. First, *Dances with Wolves*, like American melodrama, is preoccupied with nostalgia for a lost innocence (Williams 65). Second, this mode focuses on "victim-heroes and the recognition of their virtue" (Williams 66). Lastly, "melodrama presents characters that embody primary psychic roles organized in Manichaean conflicts of good and evil" (Williams 77). In considering these characteristics of American cinematic melodrama, we may say that the makers of contemporary American primitivism are the pre-eminent melodramatists of the present era: they refuse to allow for a world drained of its transcendental splendor. More specifically, it is the interplay of nostalgia, the victim-hero, and the Manichaean conflict of good and evil which so completely harmonizes the melodramatic mode with the temporal axis of the colonial imaginary. In *DWW*, the primitive is coterminous with the transcendentally good, especially in the sense that it serves the primary psychic role of righteous victimhood, while Western civilization and manifest destiny are coterminous with an unambiguous evil which would victimize its other. The overlaying of melodrama's moral structure on the primitive : modern binary is particularly complex, for the temporal axis of primitivism does not simply oppose darkness with light; rather, it opposes the spiritual and ontological void of modernity with the spiritual and ontological self-evidence of an

anachronistic victim. Just as melodrama would have reenchanted the post-sacred Europe of the early-19th century, so too does primitivism serve as a tool for reenchantment in contemporary American melodrama. What is so interesting about contemporary American primitivism is that it presents a melodramatic moral binary which is meant to both dramatize and remediate the disenchantment of modernity. In other words, the primitive : modern moral binary of *DWW* dramatizes the spiritual emptiness of modernity which precipitated the melodramatic mode in the early 19th century.[28]

The western is a natural field of play for the superimposition of the primitivist with the melodramatic mode, as the genre has always been structured according to a developmental binary of wilderness and civilization (Neal 135). In classical westerns, this binary takes a melodramatic moral orientation, pitting the righteousness and suffering of pioneers or the white nuclear family against the hardships presented by bandits, bad guys, Indians, or the environment. In its generic nostalgia, *Dances with Wolves* revives the melodramatic figure of the virtuously suffering victim while inverting the classical western's racial morality. As a revisionist western which condemns manifest destiny, victimhood is the purview of the American Indian. As a melodrama, this victimhood serves to emphasize the utopian virtue of a culture under threat of extinction from the encroachment of Western civilization. However, because Dunbar is able to traverse the temporal axis of the colonial imaginary and appropriate an indigenous identity, he is able to recuperate the moral position of the classical westerner through his claims to righteous suffering.

The structural and spiritual parallels between early 19th-century melodrama and the melodrama of American primitivism at the turn of the 21st century are important

because of the nature of contemporary primitivism's ideological work. Whereas melodrama in its classical period would have reenchanted the world with its moral legibility, the work of contemporary American primitivism is to reenchant the classical westerner with the spiritual and moral integrity of the noble primitive. This spiritual and moral integrity are made possible by the moral clarity of the melodramatic colonial encounter. Because this process is superimposed on the fetish object of the temporal axis of the colonial imaginary, melodramatic primitivism disavows the castration of the classical westerner characteristic of the revisionist western. In *DWW*, this disavowal is achieved through the process by which Dunbar appropriates the suffering and victimhood of Native Americans, the process by which he disavows racial difference.

The process by which Dunbar appropriates Native American victimhood is most perfectly played out in the film's scenario of regenerative violence: the captivity of Dunbar by the American military. As the climax of the film's action, this captivity sequence is significant because of its emotional and narrative dominance over the film's other captivity narrative, the rather more classical abduction of a young Stands With a Fist by the psychopathically savage Pawnee.[29] Through its repression of the classical captivity narrative in an emotionally-removed flashback, and through the foregrounding of Dunbar's own captivity at the hands of American soldiers, *Dances with Wolves* allows its male protagonist to assume the position of a tragically suffering victim while displacing the suffering of a female character. Furthermore, because Kevin Costner is taken prisoner in the racial drag of Dances With Wolves, he misappropriates the victimization of Native Americans for white masculinity.

While this is the broad emotional strategy of the film's melodrama, the specific tactics of this sequence revolve around the emotional dynamics of violence. Specifically, the most salient and memorable aspect of Dunbar's captivity experience is the graphic, passionate violence visited on the white male body (Figure 19). As the film's most intense, intimate, and graphic portrayal of violence, this sequence is typical of a broader pattern in the film's portrayal of white male suffering: white men kill each other, white men kill themselves, and white men are savaged by, well, savages (Figure 20).[30] Except for one sequence in which Indian deaths result from inter-tribal warfare, very little violence is visited on the Indian body, and almost none of it is at the hands of whites. This is, perhaps, the film's most troubling erasure, the process by which it allows the white male body a monopoly on physical agony. This recentering of white male suffering encourages historical amnesia as to the true victims of the violence of manifest destiny: American Indians.

Figure 19. Channeling Andrew Steyn's Stain.

Figure 20. White Male Agony.

This is the heart of the film's ideological work. In its crucifixion of John Dunbar for the sins of manifest destiny, *DWW* appropriates the victimization of the American Indian for the redemption of the white male while deemphasizing past and ongoing colonial aggression against indigenous peoples. In terms of the film's genericity, we should recognize that this emphasis on white suffering is a redemption and reiteration of classical frontier mythology and the classical western film. As Richard Slotkin writes, the redemption of the American character in frontier mythology has everything to do with a separation from civilization, a regression to a primitive state, and a scenario of regenerative violence. In the early stages of Euro-American colonial mythmaking, the particular scenario of regenerative violence was the captivity narrative. In the earliest forms of this narrative, the Christian purity of a white settler would be threatened by the savagery of their primitive captors: "by resisting the physical threats and spiritual temptations of the Indians, the captive vindicates both her own moral character and the power of the values she symbolizes" (Slotkin 15). In *Dances with Wolves*, Dunbar's moral resolve is so great that he chooses to endure the most brutal treatment rather than betray his adopted culture. Rather than aid the American military in their persecution of the Lakota, Dances With Wolves defies his captors while staunchly

professing his new worldview. He speaks in Lakota: "I am Dances With Wolves. I have nothing to say to you. You are not worth talking to."

In the scenes which follow, the degeneracy of his former colleagues is melodramatically emphasized. Having already killed Dunbar's horse, the soldiers wipe their asses with his journal and shoot his pet wolf. Having done this work to establish Dunbar's captors as unambiguously contemptuous, the film fulfills the second aspect of the classical American captivity narrative, the regenerative violence of the rescue. In this scene, several members the Lakota tribe liberate Dunbar from the clutches of his foul captors. To a very great extent, the violence of this sequence is not the morally ambiguous violence of the revisionist western (featured, for instance, in *The Wild Bunch*).[31] On the contrary, it is the morally necessary violence of the classical western. This violence draws up the contrast between good and evil while demonstrating the power and mastery of Indians as benevolent victims.

In other terms, the violence of this sequence is a revival of the chivalric violence of the classical western, in which the hero's vengeance provides for the satisfaction of his honor and the performance of a task of social value. We may take the film's social task to be a historically and generically revisionist one: the film is an apology for the racist stereotypes endemic to Hollywood's Indian and an apology for the violence of manifest destiny (Newman 21; Matthews 42; Vera and Gordon 141). The film is a public ritual meant to exorcise white guilt over colonial genocide. It is in this sense that the film is a therapeutic commodification of Native Americans. This commodification works in harmony with the violence visited on the white body. While the violence visited on Dunbar's body is his crucifixion, the scapegoating of white America's sins on the site of

Christ's body, this recentering of the suffering white male recenters and recuperates this figure as the mythical hero of the American frontier (Figure 21).

Figure 21. Cowboy Christ *or* White Masculinity in the Colonies.

Music, Redemption, and Generic Nostalgia

In the scenes of Dunbar's physical and spiritual reconstitution on the prairie, the film's non-diegetic soundtrack delivers a triumphant, easily discernable melody. This melody emphasizes the grandiosity of the landscape and construes Dunbar's movement as a journey into a transcendental utopia. The non-diegetic music in this sequence is the first of several leitmotifs which literally underscore the narrative of masculine regeneration. This music is expressionistic, melodramatic, and Romantic.

It is expressionistic in the sense that it externalizes the protagonist's psychological and spiritual state. Furthermore, this music narrates Dunbar's psychological experience as a function of his integration into a utopian mise-en-scene. John Barry, the composer of the film's score, has said that his music was meant to express a transcendental experience of nature; "the music is the language of the spirit of the animals. … I like to score the inner feelings of a character – get into their shoes in an imaginative way and take the

audience there and enlighten them in a poetic rather than a realistic way" (Quoted in Matteo LI 15). Remarking that the score was meant to supplement narrative and mise-en- scène, Barry said in an interview that "[the protagonist] was a noble, simple and dedicated man who had a kind of purity in everything he did. … Because the look of the picture involved such a feeling of space, we envisioned a score that would be large and romantic. It uses a nice-size orchestra and a choir of 12 contraltos" (Quoted in Holden C20).

While the non-diegetic music of *DWW* is expressionistic, it is also melodramatic in a compound sense. First, *DWW* is literally melodramatic: it is a drama with melody after the fashion of the Wagnerian leitmotif. The narrative of redemption on the open prairie motivates a memorable and triumphant melody set in a bright and uncompromised major key. Second, the leitmotif of this sequence is melodramatic because it establishes the wilderness as the mise-en-scène of utopia. Music codes the spectator's understanding of place by drawing the mise-en-scène into the logic of the film's Manichean binary. In the keying of a transcendental musical theme to its melodramatic moral structure, *DWW* achieves aesthetic and thematic harmony.

Expressionism and melodrama are both aesthetic modes motivated by the anxiety of modernity, but they work in different ways. Whereas expressionism would foreground the anxiety of the protagonist, projecting his internal drama onto the mise-en-scène, melodrama would disavow modernity though the establishment of a moral utopia.[32] *DWW* blends these modes when it uses non-diegetic music as a non-naturalistic expression of modernity's emotional crisis. In deciding whether the music of *DWW* works expressionistically or melodramatically, we should consider that the non-diegetic

music of popular narrative cinema is not broadly apprehended as non-naturalistic. This is true even though it is the most obviously non-naturalistic part of the moveigoing experience. There are no leitmotifs in our waking life (Gorbman, *Music Criticism* 72-76).[33] Whereas non-diegetic music is classical cinema's most overt moment of narration, it is nonetheless not experienced as a narrative intrusion (Gorbman, *Unheard* 3). Quite the contrary: through the subordination of non-diegetic music to plots motivated by character, and through non-diegetic music's commitment to the narration of these plots, non-diegetic music becomes as transparent as the editing of classical Hollywood style. Film music is generally regarded as inaudible and invisible (Bordwell, Thompson, and Straiger 33-35; Gorbman, *Unheard* 73-79; Flinn 36-37; Brown 1).[34]

This transparency is crucial for *DWW*'s redemption of the classical western and its hero. Within the aesthetic mode of primitivist melodrama, the modern protagonist and his universe are redeemed by the harmonization of the protagonist's soul with the soul of his world. Because the film's travel sequence is about the transcendental integration of protagonist and landscape, it follows that music in this sequence would be an expression of both the protagonist's soul and the soul of the world. While non-diegetic music may not be naturalistic, it is nostalgically supernatural. In *DWW*, non-diegetic music is transparent and unheard because it is metaphysically indistinguishable from the mise-en-scène and Dunbar's soul. By extension, the transparency of the film's music is an indicator that the film would disavow its narrative address to the viewer. If this is the case, then it is also the case that the film would disavow its status as a western. This is crucial for the film's generic nostalgia because the revisionist western depends on the ironic deflation of the classical western protagonist.

Indeed, *DWW* must establish a viewer who is willing to traverse a temporal axis of her own: the temporal axis of the evolution of the western film. This requires that the cinematic spectator disavow the existence of the revisionist western because the revisionist western problematizes the moral clarity of white suffering on the frontier. In the age of the revisionist western, the violence of the white man is an ambiguous signifier. It is the management of the ambiguous signifier that is the function of film music: "[music] functions to lull the spectator into being an *untroublesome* (less critical, less wary) *viewing subject*" (Gorbman, *Unheard* 58). Gorbman writes more expansively:

> Music serves to ward off the displeasure of uncertain signification. … It *interprets* the image, pinpoints and channels the "correct" meaning of the narrative events depicted. It supplies information to complement the potentially ambiguous diegetic images and sounds. It cues the viewer to narrational positions. … It creates on one hand an ironic distance between viewer and characters, and, on the other, complicity with the film's narrative voice. (Gorbman 58)[35]

Music in *DWW* is formally nostalgic. Specifically, music in *DWW* works within the context of the revisionist western to disavow the fallen angel of manifest destiny. In an age of eclectic irony, in which the classical western and its revisionist counterpart are simultaneously available in the postmodern media array, the nostalgic formalism of *DWW* is an attempt to elude the irony precipitated by this field of contradictory texts. As Jim Collins writes, *DWW* is an example of what he has called "The New Sincerity":

> [Films in this mode fantasize] the move back in time away from the corrupt sophistication of media culture toward a lost authenticity defined simultaneously

> as a yet-to-be-contaminated folk culture of elemental purity, and as a site of successful narcissistic projection, the hero's magic mirror … in which an originary genre text takes on a quasi-sacred function as a guarantee of authenticity. (259)

In Collins's analysis, the authenticity of the film's Lakota Indians serves as a metaphor for the film's aesthetic goal: the denial of intertextuality and the ironic ambiguity of the revisionist western. This denial is essential because the intertextuality of the revisionist western must preclude the un-ironic appreciation of the white male's wilderness experience. Intertextuality demands the ironic skepticism of the cinematic spectator.

It is in the context of Collins's essay that we should consider *DWW*'s non-diegetic music. Specifically, we should recognize John Barry's lush, Romantic soundtrack as part of the revival of saturation scoring and the Wagnerian leitmotif. After the rise of the jazz score in the 1950s and the pop-music score of the 60s, the Romantic soundtrack was revived by John Williams in *Jaws* (1975), *Star Wars* (1977), and *The Raiders of the Lost Ark* (1981) (Cooke 463; Kalinak 184-202). Williams's music "not only imbued the films with a spirit of heroism in the face of threatened evil … they also tended towards the old manner of saturation scoring, a trend often noticeable in genres that require a high degree of suspension of disbelief" (Cooke 462). *DWW* shares an affinity with *Star Wars* in the sense that its music is a reinforcement of the film's moral melodrama. In the ironic context of the revisionist western, the establishment of the westerner as unequivocally heroic requires a great suspension of disbelief. In *DWW*, this suspension is accomplished by the saturation of the film's diegetic world with an unambiguously heroic score.

Finally, while the film's music is part of the revival of the Wagnerian score, it is important to note that the Romantic soundtrack of the classical studio period was always already a nostalgic rendering of musical forms from the late-19th century (Cooke 79; Flinn 20). Classical Hollywood cinema was interested in Wagnerian Romanticism because of this music's utopian disposition. In brief, this music pursued grandiosity, totality, and universality in reaction to 18th-century classicism's "emphasis on structure and rationality" (Flinn 24). The utopian inclination of Romanticism was already a distinctly nostalgic mode in the 19th-century. It was a utopian rejection of the urban and the rational, the industrial revolution and the Enlightenment (Ferber 15, 99). The Romantic notion of the sublime entails the harmonization of a modern individual with the grandiosity of the primitive, natural world (Flinn 25; Ferber 99-101).

It is fitting that *DWW* reinforces a Romantic narrative with a neo-Wagnerian score. In doing so, the film achieves a compound nostalgia: the nostalgia for moral clarity, the nostalgia for the mythic westerner, the nostalgia for a pre-industrial Eden. Moreover, the complex nostalgia of its soundtrack reinforces the film's narrative: Dunbar's journey back in time is itself reliant on the nostalgia inherent in the colonial axis of the temporal imaginary. Richard Wagner may as well have been lauding *DWW* when he wrote that "it is the expression of an honorable wish to reach back from an unlovely present to the past, and therefrom to reconstruct lost beauty" (Quoted in Flinn 13). In *DWW*, Dunbar seeks to traverse a Romantic axis. This axis perceives the alienation of the urban present in contradistinction to the plenitude of a rural past. Dunbar is the film's attempt to redeem the postmodern westerner with the figure of the Romantic genius, a figure doubled in the off-screen celebrity of Kevin Costner, who was celebrated,

Romantically, as an artistic genius.[36] The classical westerner is a natural avatar for the revival of this Romantic figure, as the westerner, like the artist after Romanticism, is perceived as that individual who seeks self-actualization in his sojourn away from the urban present.[37]

In the film's final sequence, when Costner and the Lakota Indians bid their emotional farewells, *Dances with Wolves* delivers its Romantic, melodramatic score for the final time. In this scene, the film's non-diegetic score reinforces the film's most troubling construction. As Kicking Bird and company wistfully gaze after the absconding white couple, Wind In His Hair hails Costner from a nearby canyon wall. In a rather unfortunate turn, the film insists on bestializing Wind In His Hair, echoing this shot with a similar shot of howling wolf (Figure 22). [38]

Figure 22. Indian as Animal Spirit.

From his melodramatic perch, Wind In His Hair passionately shouts; "Dances With Wolves, I am Wind In His Hair. Do you see that I am your friend? Can you see that you will always be my friend?" In its management of this scene's narrative connotations, and in its efforts to placate political concern over the trope of the vanishing Indian, the film's score makes a final, Wagnerian argument: that this is a beautiful if melancholy vision of a fading dream, of a utopia that was and can never be again. As the white couple flees, the nostalgia effect of the film's soundtrack is verbally reinforced with the film's

sole intertitle: “Thirteen years later, their homes destroyed, their buffalo gone, the last band of free Sioux submitted to white authority at Fort Robinson, Nebraska. The great horse culture of the plains was gone and the American frontier was soon to pass into history.”

In this final sequence, the film domesticates the primitive other as vanishing Indian. Indeed, the perfect past tense of the film’s closing intertitle constructs their disappearance as a forgone conclusion. In contrast to the vanishing primitive, Kevin Costner may return to the present as a self-actualized denizen of the late-20th century. Unlike the Native American, Costner and McDonnell are free escape, with the cinematic spectator, back to the future.[39] Like *The Gods Must Be Crazy*, the final scene in *Dances with Wolves* is about the difference between white people and their primitive others: the core of this difference is the exclusive racial privilege that white people may claim on temporal travel. Just as in *The Gods Must Be Crazy*, the difference between moderns and primitives is the difference between mobility and fixity. It is this ideological constellation that motivates the film’s final narrative action. As Costner explains to Kicking Bird, the American military will pursue Costner as their sworn enemy. For the sake of the safety of the tribe, so his story goes, Costner must leave the Lakota, return to white civilization, and preach the gospel of inter-racial tolerance. While this seems philanthropic, this is a rationale which masks the domestication of the primitive. In *Heart of Darkness* and *Apocalypse Now*, contact with the savage primitive involves an irrevocable madness. In contrast, contact with the noble primitive in *Dances with Wolves* is as temporary for its protagonist as it is for the cinematic spectator. Both are free to reenter the stream of progressive time.

The Western, The Epic, and Ceremonies of Settler Innocence

In its disavowal of genre, *DWW* is an example of melodrama that we should properly refer to as epic. The film's formal affinity with the classical epic allows the film to function as a ceremony of settler innocence. In the context of the revisionist western, the viewer of *DWW* would have been right to expect some version of Don Quixote rather than Achilles. However, audiences received Dunbar in chivalric terms; "Lt Dunbar is simple, honorable, and gallant, as befitting the classic Western hero" (Matthews 89). Whereas Don Quixote is an apt prototype for the revisionist westerner, functioning himself as a parodic comment on the mythical deflation of the medieval knight, Dunbar's knighthood defies the irony of the revisionist westerner. Dunbar's traversal of the temporal axis of the colonial imaginary allows him to inhabit the metaphysical space of Lukács's integrated civilization, the dimension in which "the starry sky is the map of all possible paths – ages whose paths are illuminated by the light of the stars. … The world is wide and yet it is like a home, for the fire that burns in the soul is of the same essential nature as the stars" (Lukács 29). It is no coincidence that the publicity campaign for *DWW* eschewed the word "western" opting instead for "epic."[40] The sincerity of *DWW* is so formally nostalgic that we might rightfully call it an "epic" in the sense Lukács employs in *The Theory of the Novel*. It is as if Costner *qua* Quixote had reenchanted the frontier with the sheer force of his nostalgic delusion. It is as if *Don Quixote'*s readers gave themselves over to the beauty of our hero's Romantic vision.

From a postcolonial standpoint, this generic and metaphysical nostalgia is the film's greatest danger. Even though I know I'm being manipulated, even though I know *Dances with Wolves* is melodramatic catharsis that validates white privilege, I find

myself weeping as Wind in His Hair howls his ecstatic farewell. [41] In *Dances with Wolves*, melodrama serves as a metaphysical court of law which allows the acquittal of the classic westerner: this is what it means to cry in the film's final scene.[42] Just as the film's soundtrack tames the recalcitrance of the troublesome viewer, the broader effect of the film's melodrama is the displacement of critical thought with an emotional ceremony of settler innocence.[43] After thirty years of revisionist westerns, Adam as westerner was wandering in exile. One would think, in light of contemporary understandings of manifest destiny, that this exile would be irrevocable. And yet, the passion of the white Christ in *Dance with Wolves*, especially as it is narrated by a supernatural score, endorses a quixotic delusion of melodramatic primitivism, winning uncritical sympathy for its errant knight.[44]

Conclusion: Imperialist Nostalgia and Temporal Elitism

However, it is not primarily that the film's generic nostalgia redeems American Adam for the historical sins of manifest destiny. On the contrary, the film's generic nostalgia disavows the ongoing transgressions of settler-colonial relations. The film's nostalgic, Romantic, and epic qualities are moves to settler innocence because they operate along a primitivist axis of time. In turn, this axis of time and its denial of coevalness perform the historical containment of colonial violence and the suffering of indigenous people.

DWW disavows the ongoing transgressions of settler colonialism by means of imperialist nostalgia. Imperialist nostalgia is the colonizer's yearning for the very forms of life which he or she has destroyed. As such, imperialist nostalgia is a settler move to innocence; "In any of its versions, imperialist nostalgia uses a pose of 'innocent yearning'

both to capture people's imaginations and to conceal its complicity with often brutal domination" (Rosaldo 108). As Rosaldo writes more expansively:

> Imperial nostalgia occurs alongside a peculiar sense of mission, the white man's burden, where civilized nations stand duty bound to uplift so-called savage ones. In this ideologically constructed world of ongoing progressive change, putatively static savage societies become a stable reference point for defining (the felicitous progress of) civilized identity. "We" valorize innovation and then yearn for more stable worlds, whether these reside in our own past, in other cultures, or in the conflation of the two. Such forms of longing thus appear closely related to secular notions of progress. When the so-called civilizing process destabilizes forms of life, the agents of change experience transformations of other cultures as if they were personal losses. (108)

John Dunbar's redemption depends on his assumption of an indigenous identity. This appropriation entails a traversal of colonial time. The melodramatic morality of the primitive : modern binary is structured according to imperialist nostalgia. Dunbar's journey is therapeutic because the past is a location of moral and ontological purity.

DWW's iteration of imperialist nostalgia disavows the ongoing structure of settler colonialism through the local tactic of the adoption fantasy. In *DWW*, this fantasy figures the vanishing Indian as the historical hardship of a white protagonist. First, this means that the very trauma of indigenous people is appropriated by a white male. Second, the appropriation of trauma replicates the appropriation of land while functioning as a symbolic reconciliation between settler and Native. This is particularly significant given

the emerging experience of colonial violence as trauma and the inability of national reconciliation ceremonies to address this trauma in a meaningful way.[45]

In *DWW,* the appropriation of trauma via imperialist nostalgia is all the more effective as a settler move to innocence because of the historicity inherent in the very ideas of disappearance and loss. Dunbar experiences loss within the confines of a historical vignette. The moral purity of his loss is afforded by his appropriation of a utopian culture. Nostalgia over this vanishing culture disavows ongoing settler-colonial relations because it is a sadness over the foreclosure of indigenous futurity. Through the appropriation of a suffering which is anachronistic rather than contemporary, Kevin Costner displaces white guilt over the ongoing structure of settler-colonial violence with the performance of guilt over violence as a historical event.

By this technique, *DWW* denies that colonial violence "is reasserted each day of the occupation" (Tuck and Yang 5). Imperialist nostalgia is so well suited for this denial because it is predicated on the impossibility of a relationship between contemporary settler/subjects and anachronistic indigenous/objects. Nostalgia for a lost object necessitates the absence of that object. The disappearance of an object precludes the abuse of that object. As it allows this move to settler innocence, imperialist nostalgia is a nefarious form of temporal elitism. In *DWW,* this temporal elitism works through the satisfaction of the settler desire that "indigenous peoples must be erased, must be made into ghosts" (Tuck and Yang 6). In its transubstantiation of Wind in his Hair from human to wolf, *DWW* presents the American Indian as a Holy Ghost who may make Adam whole. As a congregant at the altar of the American Spirit, Costner consumes the Native

body as the redeeming body of Christ. Tuck and Yang write; "the settler is natural, whereas the indigenous inhabitant [is] unnatural, even supernatural" (6).[46]

Here, the primitive : modern binary is analogous to the sacred : temporal binary of western spirituality. This analogical structure condemns the primitive *qua* poltergeist. While the settler suffers and strives in the fallen world of the temporal dimension, the Indian is relegated to an ahistorical limbo. In *Dances with Wolves,* the settler may claim the Indian spirit as a (super)natural resource on the temporal (Great)plane(s). The Indian exists only in a world-onto-death, an existential netherspace forever barred from political futurity.

Notes

[1] Here, and throughout this dissertation, my language and concepts are informed by Tuck and Yang 1-40.

[2] For two very thoroughgoing analyses of the origins, precedents, and prevalence of this ideology, see Pearce 82-89, and Berkhofer 44-53.

[3] As Berkhofer reports, settler colonial attitudes toward America's indigenous people were informed by progressive models of time known as "conjectural history." These models explicitly privileged white society while endorsing settler-colonial violence:

> In conjectural or theoretical history, the ranking of societies that was part of the comparative method became a theory of progression. By analogy between the life cycle of a human being and the history of the species, philosophers in the eighteenth century, espescially in France and Scotland, produced a history of the sequence of stages of society that the race had passed through to reach the height of progress exemplified in Europe at the time. Just as the single person advanced from infancy through youth to reach adulthood, so all humankind had passed through savagery and barbarism before gaining civilization. (47)

[4] According to Tuck and Yang, settler moves to innocence are:

> those strategies or positionings that attempt to relieve the settler of feelings of guilt or responsibility without giving up land or power or privilege, without having to change much at all. In fact, settler scholars may gain professional kudos or a boost in their reputations for being so sensitive or self-aware. Yet settler moves to innocence are hollow, they only serve the settler. (10)

[5] Tuck and Yang identify the origins of the adoption fantasy in the writings of James Fennimore Cooper:

> Across all five books, Cooper's epic hero is Natty Bumpo, a white man 'gone native', at home in nature, praised for his wisdom and ways that are both Indian and white. In *Last of the Mohicans*, this hero becomes the adopted son of Chingachgook, fictional chief of the fictional tribe "Mohicans", who renames Natty, Nathaniel Hawkeye – thus legitimating and completing his Indigeneity. At the same time, Chingachgook conveniently fades into extinction. In a critical symbolic gesture, Chingachgook hands over his son to Uncas – the last of the Mohicans – the

> adopted, indigenous white man, Hawkeye. When Uncas dies, the ramification is obvious: Hawkeye becomes without becoming the last of the Mohicans. *You are now one of us you are not Native*. "The pale-faces are masters of the earth, and the time of the red-men has not yet come again" (15)

[6] The genre experienced a decade of abeyance following the commercial and critical catastrophe of *Heaven's Gate* (1980) (Russell 142).

[7] Referring to the explicitly Darwinian struggle of *The Vanishing American* (1925), Michael Riley writes; "in being cast as the last practitioners of a dying way of life the vanquished Indians are at best only the ghosts of the past" (62).

[8] See Nolley 73-90.

[9] Slotkin's commentary on the Indian in *Stagecoach* is particularly brief, and mentions nothing of temporal elitism; "the Indians are a menacing abstraction for most of the film, and their final eruption into the frame is so predictable, so conventionally treated, and so visually stimulating that is seems as much a release of tension as the arrival of a crisis" (306). Telotte writes that the American Indian in *Union Pacific* is more an incarnation of an obstructive chaos than he is an anachronistic, ethnographic specimen; "They are simply one of the more complex, curious, and dangerous obstacles standing in the way of what one character terms 'this mighty enterprise' of national building" (148).

[10] In his nostalgia for the West, Costner may be unaware of the generic history with which his film interacts:

> Costner never distinguishes between different western cycles, and his nostalgic view seems to erase of elide the more pessimistic, revisionist sentiments (which critique the expansion of whites into "Indian territory") as part of a "classic" western narrative, suggesting that Costner's highly nostalgic conception of the Hollywood western differs radically from critical accounts. (Russell 146)

[11] For other interpretations of the parallel between Dunbar's racial journey and the film's genericity, see Russell 142-158, and Collins 242-262.

[12] In *The Invention of the Western Film*, Scott Simmon cites this quote from *The Big Trail* (1930) as the central argument of the classical western:

> We can't turn back. We're blazing a trail that started in England! Not even the storms of the sea could turn back those first settlers. And they carried it on further. They blazed it on through the wilderness of Kentucky. Famine, hunger, not even massacres could stop them. And now we've picked up the trail again, and nothing can stop us. Not even the snows of winter, nor the peaks of the highest mountains. We're building a nation! But we've got to suffer. No great trail was ever blazed without hardship. And you've got to fight. That's life! And when you stop fighting, that's death. (Quoted in Simmon 118)

[13] *The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance* is a key example of a film that problematized the mythology of western violence. The film is about the protagonist's attempt to debunk the popular legend that his killing of the eponymous Liberty had been a melodramatically uncompromised victory of good over evil and the execution of chivalric violence. Instead, the film's extended flashback is the protagonist's confession that his violent engagement with Liberty actually represents the failure of his own moral resolve and his commitment to the ideals of law, order, and the democratic resolution of conflict. Moreover, the protagonist admits that it was not actually his bullet that killed Liberty Valance, but rather that of the protagonist's friendly rival, played by John Wayne.

[14] Bandy and Stoehr write:

> *The Vanishing American* depicts injustices suffered by Indians at the hands of a sadistic reservation agent. … The film also starts off with a broad-ranging historical prologue that traces

> the history of past injustices suffered by "weaker" races and peoples. But this prologue winds up espousing a principle of Darwinist determinism – and so "the weak" must accept that they will simply perish in the end, a principle that undercuts the otherwise sympathetic subject matter. (15-16)

[15] Howard Hawks's *Red River* (1948) is a fine example of developmental ideology. In an opening scene, John Wayne arrives triumphantly at a vast expanse of unused land and presides over this vacant earth with an imperial, developmental gaze. He declares that in ten years all of this "empty" land will be covered in "good beef."

[16] In *Stagecoach*, John Wayne's revenge plot is intertwined with civilizational and redemptive violence. Having broken out of jail to pursue his revenge against the men who killed his father and brother, Wayne's character gains redemption in two scenarios of violence: the first is the successful defense of the film's eponymous stagecoach from a band of faceless Indians, the second is his successful execution of the men responsible for his family's murder. In a surprise ending which signifies Ringo's redemption, the marshal responsible for Wayne's return to prison sets Wayne loose in the wilderness with his love interest.

[17] In Cecil B. Demille's *The Plainsman* (1936), the protagonist's imperative to tame the West (an imperative delivered by no less a man than Abraham Lincoln) is satisfied through the protagonist's just revenge against savage Indians and the traders who sell those Indians Winchester rifles. In the killing of these villains, the protagonist wreaks his just revenge for the torture he endured at the hands of savages while simultaneously making the frontier safe for future generations of white settlers.

Similarly, in *My Darling Clementine*, the revenge quest is explicitly tied to social and civilizational progress. In an early scene in which Henry Fonda's Wyatt Earp kneels over the grave of his slain brother, Earp vows to avenge his brother's death and, in the process, secure the frontier for the safety of future generations of young men and women.

[18] As Bapis writes:

> Paul Newman's pacifist Butch Cassidy did not know how to "shoot" a man, and Jon Voight could not figure out why potent markers – the buckskin jacket, cowboy boots, and a hat – did not draw New York City women to him like a magnet. Even Rooster Coogan had aged. He was "retired," patch-eyed, and addicted to booze. The remaking of the American man by reinventing the Western persona drew the attention of millions but signaled the passing of the standard, "professional" hero. (162)

[19] The revisionist western and the revisionist war film conjoined in *The Green Berets* (1968), a commercial and critical flop starring an aging John Wayne. As Rasmussen and Downey write:

> Prior to Vietnam the film industry generally justified, explained, and even encouraged American war efforts. That response, which had seemed suitable to the two world wars and the political climate surrounding the Korean conflict, was inappropriate given the socio-political controversy surrounding Vietnam. For example, Bayles observes that John Wayne's *The Green Berets*, "set in the confident days of 1963, fashioned in the style of 1949, nd lobbed like a grenade into 1968," was panned by critics and mocked by servicemen because of the incongruity of its juxtaposition against contemporary reactions to the war. (176)

[20] See Hellman 418-439.

[21] For an analysis of the narratological similarities of *Apocalypse Now* to *Heart of Darkness*, see Cahir 181-187.

[22] For an analysis of *Dances with Wolves* as an American *Heart of Darkness*, see Ostwalt 209-216.

[23] For an analysis of *Dances with Wolves* as therapy for white audiences, see Golub 23-45, Whitt 1-31.

[24] As Philip Deloria observes, playing Indian has a long history in the United States, going back most notably to the Boston Tea Party and taking significant incarnations in both Indian-themed fraternal organizations of the mid-19th century and the explosion of "scouting" in the early 20th. With regard to the Boston Tea Party, Deloria writes that the Indian was taken as a symbol of unfettered liberty and independence from the Old World, and was perceived by settler colonists as that icon of what was uniquely American. Dismissing the claim that Indian costume was used to mask identity during the Boston Tea Party, Deloria writes that "the performance of Indian Americanness afforded a powerful foundation for subsequent pursuits of national identity" (7). This identity, in turn, is based on the two-fold nature of the noble savage stereotype. Because it signifies freedom and a natural, indigenous Americanness, the noble Indian was taken as a signifier of American exceptionalism. In contrast, the savage Indian allowed the construction of colonial America as a civilizing force (Deloria 1-9). Since the Boston Tea Party, Americans have continued to play Indian as a means of coping with contemporary circumstances, and Deloria locates the mythopoetic men's movement within the tradition of white Americans playing Indian:

> In the antebellum United States, would-be national poets donned Indian garb and read lyrics to each other around midnight backwoods campfires. At the turn of the twentieth century, the thoroughly modern children of angst-ridden upper- and middle-class parents wore feathers and slept in tipis and wigwams at camps with multi-syllabic Indian names. Their equally nervous post-World War II descendants made Indian dress and powwow-going into a hobby, with formal newsletters and regular monthly meetings. Over the past thirty years, the counterculture, the New Age, the men's movement, and a host of other Indian performance options have given meaning to Americans lost in a (post)modern freefall. In each of these historical moments, Americans have returned to the Indian, reinterpreting the intuitive dilemmas surrounding Indianness to meet the circumstances of their times. (Deloria 7)

Similar to Deloria, Huhndorf writes that anxieties about modernity have motivated white Americans to play Indian throughout the 20th century. However, the Indian as therapeutic alter-ego tends to have distinct ideological consequence for renderings of colonial conflict. As Huhndorf writes; "Ironically, even as they articulate anxieties about modernity, these representations and events also reaffirm the racialized, progressivist ethos of industrial capitalism" (14). Further, Huhndorf writes that white people's indigenous masquerade "obscures the relations between the colonizers and the colonized … by inviting [settlers] to occupy Natives' places and histories" (202).

[25] Gallagher writes; "fragmented shots of the hero's body in action and multiple angle views of the same body signify the hero's threatened or fractured masculinity"(208).

[26] Natali notes that *DWW* inherits this pictorial spatialization of time from a tradition in 19th century American; "In many paintings of the 19th century, where the point of view of the artist implicitly prescribes that of the spectator, the left or 'west' side of the canvas is frequently occupied by the primeaval forest, with a few Indians, symbols of primitive America's past, its savagery and prehistory" (114).

[27] For an analysis of the spectator's identification with the camera, see Metz 42-56.

[28] I am working in parallel to observations made by Philip Deloria in *Playing Indian*. He writes that the Native American became a symbol of authenticity and wholesomeness in the 20th century for a white America beleaguered by the shocks of industrial capitalism after the Civil War. In this era, Americans began to "question progress when they saw their fellow citizens defined as cogs in industrial machines rather than as independent yeomen" (99). As a response to this anxiety over modernity, white America played Indian throughout the 20th century in a search for authenticity and wholesomeness. As Deloria writes, the search for authenticity in a post-lapsarian modernity often takes Indianness as its object and other:

> The authentic, as numerous scholars have pointed out, is a culturally constructed category created in opposition to a perceived state of inauthenticity. The authentic serves as a way to image and idealize the real, the traditional, and the organic in opposition to the less satisfying qualities of everyday life. The ways people construct authenticity depend upon both the traumas that define the maligned inauthentic and upon the received heritage that has defined the authentic in the past. Because those seeking authenticity have already defined their own state as inauthentic, they easily

> locate authenticity in the figure of an Other. This Other can be coded in terms of time (nostalgia or archaism), place (the small town), or culture (Indianness). The quest for such an authentic Other is a characteristically modern phenomenon, one that has often been played out in the contradictions surrounding America's long and ambivalent engagement with Indianness. (101)

[29] Indeed, Stands With a Fist's captivity narrative has been recognized by Gene McQuillan to have formal affinities with classical colonial settler narratives, while at the same time taking a modified form in such a way as to construct a good Indian / bad Indian dichotomy:

> [Stands With a Fist] gradually recalls a scene which could have been lifted directly from an eighteenth-century captivity narrative. On a sunny day, children are playing with chickens and puppies near a farm house, an outdoor table is set for a picnic, and the parents sit happily in the midst of this pastoral calm. The sudden arrival of several Indian warriors leads to a brief exchange of words. As the settlers turn to walk away, a warrior plants a tomahawk in the back of one of them, and a slaughter ensues. In the midst of all this confusion, a young girl named Christine (Stands With a Fist) is able to run away and hide. It is important to note that the marauding Indians are clearly identified as Pawnees, the "bad Indians" of this film. They do not discover Christine's hiding place, and she is eventually found by the Sioux tribe…The presence of Stands With a Fist in the Sioux camp, rather than proving the tribe's capacity for evil, suggests the tribe's capacity for mercy. (McQuillan 77-78)

[30] In my reference to "savages" I must clarify that *Dances with Wolves* represents Native Americans as such. Specifically, the film's Pawnee Indians are "savage" by the terms of the film's internal logic. While a sympathetic rendering of the Lakota, *Dances with Wolves* is equally unsympathetic with its portrayal of the Pawnee. This representation in the film is a cinematic rendering of a similar representation in the novel of the film's source material. Consider this particularly racist excerpt from Michael Blake's novel *Dances with Wolves*:

> [The Pawnee] saw with unsophisticated but ruthlessly efficient eyes, eyes that, once fixed on an object, decided in a twinkling where (*sic*) it should live or die. And if it was determined that the object could cease to live, the Pawnee saw to its death with psychotic precision. When it came to dealing death, the Pawnee were automatic, and all of the Plains Indians feared them as they did no one else. (Quoted in Riding In 94)

[31] The opening and closing shootouts of *The Wild Bunch* are extended, repulsive, almost pornographic sequences of meaningless, amoral violence. Significantly, this violence is perpetrated, not by evildoers who will eventually meet their demise at the hands of some chivalric hero, but, on the contrary, by the band of men with whom we are meant to identify. These are the anti-heroes of the revisionist western and this is its morally ambiguous violence.

[32] For a discussion of expressionism as a function of modernity, the anxiety of the subject, and the externalization of repressed anxiety in the modern subject, see Hayward 172 -176, Beaver 92-94.

[33] Gorbman argues that *Dances with Wolves* perpetuates the classic splitting of the American Indian into the noble and savage components of the noble savage stereotype, and that this splitting is keyed to the film's non-diegetic music. She writes; "John Barry's score hails from the grand, lush, neo-romantic 1930's tradition of Erich Korngold and Max Steiner, which continues into contemporary movies with John Williams… It is replete with beautiful themes that give narrative clarity and emotional force to the story." (*Drums* 191).

[34] Before the use of non-diegetic music in *King Kong*, producers worried that audiences would demand to know the source of off-screen music (Brown 62-63). Brown writes; "*King Kong* greatly helped the original, classical film score become what it was and what it largely remains today: an integral component of a given motion picture's overall profile that is so expected in people's minds that nonuse often becomes noteworthy" (62).

[35] As Kalinak writes, Hollywood has used non-diegetic music to "control narrative connotation" (xv).

[36] Ferber writes; "No characteristic of Romanticism is more prominent than the prestige, even glory, which it confers on the poet. He acquires the stature of prophet, priest, and preacher, hero, law giver, and creator; he grows almost into a god" (32).

[37] Flinn writes; "it was during the romantic era that the artist was first perceived in opposition to society" (28).

[38] The absconding white couple in *Dances with Wolves* not only echoes the racial, divergent montage of *The Gods Must Be Crazy*, it replicates the miscegenation anxiety of the classical, colonial captivity narrative. Gene McQuillan writes; "like Natty Bumpo, the children of Dances with Wolves and Stands With a Fist would be able to claim that they are 'without a cross,' that they have 'the full blood of whites'" (80-81).

[39] *Back to the Future Part III* (1990), like its predecessor *Back to the Future* (1985), literally dramatizes white access to the temporal continuum. In a much more literal way than *Dances with Wolves*, *Back to the Future III* dramatizes the ability of white people to both visit, and escape, the Old West.

[40] Greg Evans writes; "wary of having 'Wolves' perceived as a Hollywood Western, Orion will begin its marketing campaign by targeting an upscale and decidedly adult audience. Per the studio exec, 'Wolves' is being positioned as a serious 'epic,' with a docu-like depiction of Native American life" (97).

[41] I paraphrase Teju Cole, who writes via twitter; "The White Savior Industrial Complex is not about justice. It is about having a big emotional experience that validates privilege" 8 March 2012, Tweet.

[42] This metaphysical, melodramatic, and cinematic court of law exists in parallel to literal, legal courts which have routinely and uniformly sanctioned and justified settler colonial appropriation of indigenous land and sovereignty. As Mark Rifkin writes in *Manifesting America*, a juridical tradition in the United States dating to the ante-bellum period relies on the notion of legal acquiescence to justify a doctrine of the impossibility of reparation. Rifkin writes that, because the imperial legal establishment of settler America has discursively manufactured the consent of indigenous peoples, this perceived consent makes reparation "impossible." More broadly, Rifkin writes that this is the tactic by which the United States discursively transformed foreign land into domestic space. He writes:

> The imperial structure of U.S. jurisdiction prior to the Civil War … inheres to this double movement [of consent and impossibility]: recoding land formerly beyond the purview of U.S. governance as intimately embedded in national space; and producing subjectivities for involuntarily interiorized peoples that are designed to testify to their non-coerced acceptance of their place in national life. (6)

[43] Linda Williams writes; "Audiences of melodrama are positioned like juries of common law trials. Guilt or innocence is determined by orchestrated recognitions of truth that are inextricably tied to how audiences, who are essentially juries of peers, feel toward the accused" (81).

[44] With the release of James Cameron's *Avatar* (2009) came a resurgence in academic and popular interest with the "white savior film" and apprehensions of the white messiah complex in popular American culture as a function of globalization and international development.

Hernan Vera and Andrew Gordon write that these films feature the white protagonist as "the great white leader who saves blacks from slavery or oppression, rescues people of color from poverty and disease, or leads Indians into battle for their dignity and survival" (33). Following Vera and Gordon, Matthew Hughley writes that this genre has been motivated by the crisis of whiteness in the late-20th century. During a time of widespread assault on narratives of white supremacy, and during a time in which the white middle class has perceived threats to its economic and social status as a new norm, the narratives of mainstream media have compensated for white anxiety with representations of triumphant white redeemers. The ideological work of this genre has been to repair damaged myths of white normalcy and supremacy, and at its worst, redeems the narrative of the white man's burden (Hughley 1-17).

A basic formulation of the white savior complex holds that the disenfranchisement, underdevelopment, or backwardness of non-white people necessitates the benevolent intervention of the white First World in the affairs of the non-white Third, and as such, the white savior film is a revival of the colonial attitude of manifest destiny (Hughley 9). However, the white savior complex in not simply playing out on the silver screen. Katherine M. Bell argues that the on-screen white heroes who battle against dark and ominous forces often take real-world counterparts in celebrity philanthropists. These people are "constructed as redeemer[s] of distant Others. …This philanthropic role mingles with a celebrity's on-stage personas to create the White Saviour, a powerful brand of contemporary cultural authority" (Bell 1).

Considering that *DWW*, *The Last Samurai*, and *Avatar* are three salient iterations of the white savior film, and considering the near universal apprehension that *Avatar* was in many ways a remake of *DWW*, it stands to reason that the global popularity and commercial success of *Avatar* warrants a rereading of *DWW*. *Avatar*'s popularity and ubiquity demonstrate that the white savior film, especially in its expression within contemporary primitivism, is a still-emerging mode of popular American cinema. By reading *DWW* in the context of this still developing mode, we can better understand its ideological work. For instance, while *Avatar*'s white male is the literal savior of his adopted tribe, defending the natives from the dystopian forces of an environmentally exploitative, neo-colonial military industrial complex, in *DWW*, the disappearance and defeat of the Lakota Indians and the closing of the American Frontier is always already presented as a foregone conclusion. As such, these two films, while holding so much in common, exhibit two very different mythologies of the white male savior. In *Avatar*, the white protagonist is a very literal on-screen image of the liberal white savior, dashing in to save a Third World primitive which cannot be expected to save itself from the onslaught of a colonial force. In *DWW*, the eco-Peace Corps-tourist-philanthropist simply abandons the Indians to their inevitable demise. The film's emphasis on the passion of the white male body and its explicit invocation of the crucifixion suggest that *DWW* activates the passion of a white Christ. It does so in a way which caters to white guilt over the genocide of manifest destiny.

Thus, as Hughley argues, the film redeems whiteness in an age when white privilege is under attack. While the Indian is left to vanish into the American past, Christ is left to redeem the white celebrity philanthropist. Indeed, Bell observes that this outcome is a structural norm of the genre; "As publicity generated by famous people highlights the dire social and political inequalities of our time, celebrity philanthropy … generates a cultural authority that recenters whiteness, and in turn burnishes the celebrity brand" (Bell 2). Just as privileged volunteers in far-flung, poverty stricken locales are often criticized for their pursuit of emotional catharsis and personal development under the guise of altruism, a review of the trade press in the months following *DWW*'s release leaves little question that anyone was better served by the film than Keven Costner, who won several Academy Awards, earned millions of dollars, cemented his reputation as motion picture royalty, and burnished his reputation as a defender of the disenfranchised (Newman 21; Matthews 42; Salisbury 35).

[45] Dion Million writes in *Therapeutic Nations*; "indigenous people in the late-20th and 21st century came to understand the systematic, ongoing colonial violence which they endure as a trauma" (7). In her analysis of the inadequacies of symbolic acts of national "healing," Million writes:

> Human rights as a field of struggle … poses an international arena wherein Indigenous peoples have consistently engaged … in moral affective contestation with the nation-states whose "sovereignty" they challenge. This is an engagement that requires successful affective argument given the turn to the moral ethos of trauma. Canada looked to this field of human rights law in the establishment of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, where it asks for a reconciliation between a victim and a perpetrator in the same moment that any actual political power for Canadian Indigenous peoples is continuously deferred to a future self-healing from capitalism's present and ongoing violence. (12)

Finally, Million is clear that these acts of national reconciliation as therapy have not been effective in addressing the ongoing violence of settler-colonial relations; "the reconciliation that indigenes are called on to trust as acts of justice do not actually stop the removal of Indigenous women, or stop the social welfare interventions and criminalization that are endemic to Indigenous peoples and nations" (23).

[46] In *The Transit of Empire*, Jodi Byrd identifies a similar construction of the Indian in critical theory. She writes; "American Indians and other indigenous peoples have often been evoked in [critical theory] as past tense presences. Indians are typically spectral, implied and felt, but remain as lamentable casualties of

national progress who haunt the United States on the cusp of empire and are destined to disappear with the frontier itself" (xx).

CHAPTER IV

THE VANISHING INDIAN AND *THE LAST SAMURAI*: IMPERIALIST NOSTALGIA AND *THE WAR ON TERROR*

Like *Dances with Wolves*, *The Last Samurai* (2003) would redeem the myth of manifest destiny and its classical hero.[1] In both films, a white man abandons the project of manifest destiny and finds redemption in an anachronistic culture. By featuring morally exceptional protagonists, these films are ceremonies of racial reconciliation and setter moves to innocence.[2] While *Chapter III* explored the redemption of the western as a settler move to innocence, this chapter argues that imperialist nostalgia in *The Last Samurai* was a response to anxieties precipitated by *The War on Terror*. Specifically, the bad Oriental of *The War on Terror* threatens the settler colonist's exclusive claim to futurity because "the terrorist" is constructed as both medieval and techno-sophisticated. As a response to this anxiety, the good Oriental of *The Last Samurai* reaffirms the inevitable triumph of the colonial project and the temporal exceptionalism of the settler colonist because he is constructed as the vanishing Indian.

This thesis synthesizes two intellectual frameworks: Renato Rosaldo's imperialist nostalgia, and Jodi Byrd's observation that the reproduction of Indianness manufactures the imperative of empire. As we saw in *Dances with Wolves*, imperialist nostalgia is the longing of the colonist for the primordial state of the very culture which she has destroyed. This nostalgia masks the colonist's complicity in colonial violence (Rosaldo 108). *The Last Samurai* activates imperialist nostalgia, vis-à-vis *The War on Terror*, through the reproduction of Indianness in the Orient. As Jodi Byrd writes, the

reproduction of Indianness in Asia and the Middle East serves an imperative to Anglo-American mastery because this reproduction activates the logic of manifest destiny (xx).[3] Both *The Last Samurai* and *The War on Terror* project Indianness into The Orient. While *The War on Terror* constructed the techno-sophisticated terrorist as a terrifying Indian savage, *The Last Samurai* activates the therapy of imperialist nostalgia in the figure of a good Indian who is unambiguously anachronistic and inevitably vanishing. In its activation of the logic of manifest destiny and the trope of the vanishing Indian, *The Last Samurai* is a therapeutic response to *The War on Terror*.

In my analysis of the samurai and "the terrorist" as complimentary signifiers in the discourse of contemporary primitivism, I adapt Philip Deloria's observation that the noble savage is routinely split into its constituent parts. Deloria writes that the noble primitive and the savage primitive appear in settler-colonial discourse to critique modernity and justify the colonial mission, respectively (4). The noble samurai of *The Last Samurai* take savage counterparts in two locations, in the character of Minister Omura (Masato Harada) and the intertextual figure of "the terrorist" in *The War on Terror*.

Because the vanishing Indian and its frontier mythology structure representations of masculinity in both *The Last Samurai* and *The War on Terror*, nostalgic mourning in the former reinforces an ideology of racial vanishing in the latter. I argue that the vanishing Indian in *The Last Samurai* is a therapeutic reproduction of Indianness which responds to anxiety over the reproduction of the bad Indian in the Middle East. Therefore, the imperialist nostalgia of *The Last Samurai* is an indicator of imperialist contempt for the bad Oriental.

The War on Terror constructs "the terrorist" as a techno-sophisticated savage. Like Minister Omura of *TLS*, "the terrorist" is an object of imperialist contempt because of his difference from the object of imperialist nostalgia. The samurai satisfy imperialist nostalgia because they are temporally contained. In contrast, Omura and "the terrorist" activate imperial contempt as others that refuse the denial of coevalness. Like the Indian of *Dances with Wolves*, the samurai encourage the fantasy that colonial violence was a discrete campaign waged against an inevitably vanishing other. 9/11 problematized this fantasy with an Indian who threatened the denial of coevalness.

The first half of this chapter will establish the reproduction of Indianness in *The Last Samurai* and *The War on Terror*. *The Last Samurai* explicitly constructs the samurai as Indians. Moreover, the film construes Japan as a place for Nathan Algren to play out a metaphysical mulligan in his treatment of indigenous people. Similarly, *The War on Terror* figures the terrorist as a contemporary Indian on a new frontier. After establishing the presence of the vanishing Indian in these two texts, the first half of this chapter concludes with an analysis of this Indian's therapeutic effect on the film's white protagonist. The second half of this chapter explains the bifurcation of Japanese masculinity as an analogue for "the terrorist" in *The War on Terror*. I argue that the Katsumoto : Omura dyad is a melodramatic rendering of imperialist nostalgia for the wholly anachronistic other. I read this therapeutic nostalgia as a response to constructions of "the terrorist" in scholarly and popular texts.

Melodrama and the Vanishing Primitive in American Foreign Policy

Nathen Algren is hired to exterminate the samurai even though they are constructed as vanishing primitives. As such, sadness over their inevitable disappearance masks the colonizer's complicity in the destruction of their culture.[4] While admitting to

the presence of colonial violence, the samurai disappear as a function of modernization, or more generally, the progressive march of Eurocentric time. Within this ideology of time, Algren works as a salvage ethnographer for the cinematic spectator. He observes, records, and recounts the customs of a vanishing people through a series of voice-over journal entries. This combination of vanishing Indian and salvage ethnographer encourages the cinematic spectator to "turn a blind eye to how [indigenous cultures] were able to resist and survive European encroachment and dispossession … " (Rony 91). Indeed, the logic of the film's melodrama demands the absolute apocalypse of an anachronistic people. This melodramatic extinction is essential to the film's imperialist nostalgia, for extinction satisfies settler yearning for the denial of coevalness. As a melodrama of the vanishing Indian, the film is an example of that revisionist western in which "Indians are still cast as … the antithesis of modern civilization; and their cultures are still represented as doomed to extinction by the inexorable advance of a modernity which Indians could never have achieved by their own efforts and to which they were incapable of adjusting" (Slotkin 631-632).

The melodramatic conflict of the primitive with the modern has always been at play in the foreign policy of the United States. Just as melodrama is the preeminent mode of U.S. popular cinema, so too has melodrama been crucial to constructions of the country's foreign wars. Moreover, the melodrama of war in the United States has been nearly synonymous with primitivism. As Susan Brewer writes in *Why America Fights*, "the official narratives have presented conflict as a mighty clash between civilization and barbarism in the Philippines and World War I, democracy and dictatorship in World War II, freedom and communism in Korea and Vietnam, and, most recently, civilization and

terrorism in Iraq" (4). The Bush administration's casting of post-9/11 conflict as a battle between modern democracy and medieval darkness was only the latest iteration of a well-established understanding of U.S. military power (Ivie 55-65). Considering the affinity between cinematic melodrama and the melodramatic rendering of the United States' foreign wars, I propose that post-9/11 conflict became mediatized as a classic American war film and a typical American melodrama: *The War on Terror*.

In my discussion of *The War on Terror*, I do not analyze U.S.-led military operations in Afghanistan and Iraq. I do not analyze terrorism, terrorists, Muslims, Islam, or "The Muslim World." Rather, I discuss these terms as signifiers which circulate as a discursive field. "The War on Terror" is a rhetorical device which frames a vast array of visual and verbal signifiers. Representations of Muslims, terrorism, and the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq form a collection of images, signifiers, and utterances which are framed, as an aggregate, within a discursive field constructed as "The War on Terror." In a cinematic analysis of this rhetorical framing, I want to consider "The War on Terror" as a screen artifact, as a series of motion pictures, or as a film. "The War on Terror" frames the signifiers of post-9/11 discourse as the title of a film. I write under the assumed metaphor "terrorism is a motion picture." As such, I refer to *The War on Terror* in italics throughout this chapter.

The War on Terror is a vast, fractured, repetitive fiction which mediates the spectator's interaction with the post-9/11 world. In this understanding of *The War on Terror*, I follow Edward Said's work in *Orientalism*. *The War on Terror* is a localized discourse which functions as a subset of orientalism: purveyors of *The War on Terror* construct terrorism and terrorists. I follow Said's argument that the Orient was produced

by European academic discourse. As Alexander Spencer writes; "A discourse-centered terrorism studies has emerged. Here terrorism is not understood as a physical fact, but as a social construction … terrorism is constituted through discourse" (394).

My primary intervention in this reading of the construction of terrorism is to observe that the logic of temporal elitism manages orientalism in *The War on Terror*. Similarly, I say that the orientalist construction of the Japanese in *The Last Samurai* is primarily managed by the denial of coevalness. More specifically, the civilizational melodramas of both *The War on Terror* and *The Last Samurai* are managed by the temporal logic of manifest destiny, the vanishing Indian, and American frontier mythology. In very explicit terms, *The War on Terror* and *The Last Samurai* map the ideology and temporality of manifest destiny onto the Middle East and Japan, respectively. In sum, classical American myths of time and the other have been superimposed on orientalism in the post-9/11 era.

Also in the interest of methodological precision, I want to note that the production of Muslims, Islam, and terrorism is a contested discourse. Within this discourse, progressive utterances certainly work against negative stereotypes of Muslims and Islam. However, my analysis assumes that *The War on Terror* has been dominated by orientalist paradigms. These paradigms construct an adversarial binary between "Western Civilization" and "the Muslim World" while positioning Arabs, Islam, and terrorism as interchangeable co-signifiers. Describing misperceptions of Arabs, Muslims, and terrorism in post-9/11 discourse, Olivier Roy and Antoine Sfeir write:

> It was supposed that all Arabs are Muslims, forgetting that there are some fifteen million who are not. Again it was presumed that all Muslims are Islamists, though

> Islamists are only a minority of the Muslim world. Finally, all Islamists were taken to be terrorists, although terrorism has been practiced only by a handful of individuals dreaming of Islamic conquest. (vii)

As Morey and Yaqin have it, post-9/11 discourse routinely presents The Muslim Other *qua* problem:

> Whether the controversy is over veiling, cartoons of the Prophet Mohammed, conflicts in Afghanistan, Iraq, and Israel-Palestine, or protests about the knighthood given to Salmon Rushdie, Muslims appear always as a problematic presence, troubling those values of individualism and freedom said to define Western nations. (1)

On 14 September, 2001, Thomas Friedman engaged in a paradigmatic example of temporal, civilizational discourse. He argued that 9/11 was a result of a rift in the Muslim world between the "modernists and the medievalists" (Freidman). In *Neomedievalism, Neoconservatism, and the War on Terror*, Bruce Holsinger observes that Friedman's temporal chasm became a dominant paradigm in the rhetoric of the popular press and the White House. As Holsinger writes, this paradigm is dictated by the imperative of temporal elitism; "Imagining the September 11 attacks as acts of 'medievalism' divides the world along an axis simultaneously of history and geography, placing the West on the side of modernity and Islamism on the side of the primitive, the archaic, the premodern" (Holsinger 7). As such, *The War on Terror* is the cultural context through which we should understand the colonial imaginary of *The Last Samurai*. In both films, historical and geographical axes are infused with an ideologically motivated melodrama of time.

The Last Samurai (2003) debuted within a discourse of temporal elitism. The film is preoccupied with the juxtaposition of the traditional with the modern. Even more resonant with *The War on Terror*, the film foregrounds Japan's internal historical struggle. In an early scene, the British translator Mr. Graham informs Nathan Algren that

> the emperor [of Japan] is mad for all things western, and the samurai believe it's changing to fast. In fact, the ancient and the modern are at war for the soul of Japan. So your new employer Mr. Omura is bringing in every western expert he can get his hands on: lawyers from France, engineers from Germany, architects from Holland and now of course, warriors from America.

Repeating Friedman's construction, this dialogue also establishes modernity as the privilege of the European colonist. *TLS* superimposes this verbal construction on a series of eye-line matches which ally the gaze of the cinematic spectator with the gaze of the Anglo-American protagonist while visualizing the rift between the modern and the ancient (Figure 23). The camera having followed Algren from San Francisco to Japan, the colonizer's gaze manages the juxtaposition of steamship with rickshaw, Victorian clothing with traditional Japanese.[5] Working in tandem, this scene's dialogue, cinematography, and props construct the denial of coevalness and the temporal axis of the colonial imaginary.

This denial of coevalness in *The Last Samurai* runs parallel to the denial of coevalness in American foreign policy. President Truman instigated the modern version of this discourse in his opposition of the "first world" to the "third" along a developmental axis. Postcolonial scholars recognize that this axis is a denial of

Figure 23. Shot-Reverse-Shot and the Colonizer's Gaze.

coevalness; "To mark poverty as underdevelopment was intended to categorize the poor as anomalies of the present" **(**Tripathy and Mohapatra 109).

President Kennedy, for his part, explicitly mapped the American West onto this developmental model. He figured the "undeveloped" world as a new American frontier while proposing that this new frontier, like the Old West, could serve as a space for the self-actualization of the American spirit (Cobbs Hoffman 17-21; Slotkin 3, 493). *The War on Terror* is an amalgam of many discourses, taking elements from frontier mythology, Cold War melodrama, and developmental temporal elitism. In *The War on Terror*, the

"developing world" and the Middle East have been mapped as a contemporary frontier and populated by an anachronistic savage, the combatants of radical Islam.

In his essay "The 'Old West' in the Middle East: U.S. Military Metaphors in Real and Imagined Indian Country," Stephen W. Silliman reports that members at all levels of the U.S. military have used the term "Indian country" to refer to "hostile, unpacified territories in active war zones" (237). This metaphor has been ubiquitous in U.S. military discourse from Vietnam through the occupation of Iraq in 2003 (Silliman 237-240). Silliman argues that frontier mythology and manifest destiny have been "discursively and practically recapitulated in the Middle East" (237). For members of the U.S. military establishment, this recapitulation figures military operations as the march of civilization over savage peoples (Silliman 237-241).

Most significantly for my analysis of *The Last Samurai*, Silliman writes that the recapitulation of manifest destiny has endowed contemporary military efforts with a sense of inevitable victory. Because the United States' military considers itself to be facing an inevitably vanishing Indian in the Middle East, the current conflict is perceived as just and legitimate. The conflict is justified because its victory is a forgone conclusion (Silliman 241-242). While the metaphor of "Indian country" has shaped attitudes towards the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, it is important to note that the metaphor also works retroactively: it reinforces triumphalist interpretations of manifest destiny as a means of understanding the 19th-century because it construes Native Americans as barbaric terrorists and enemies of the United States (Silliman 243). Because *The Last Samurai* features the vanishing samurai *qua* American Indian, it runs the great risk of picking up the connotations of "Indian country" as used by the United States' military.

The Vanishing Indian in *The Last Samurai*

The vanishing Indian in *The Last Samurai* is a forgone conclusion. As an American film featuring a white protagonist which was produced in the 21st century, *TLS* is a Romantic fantasy of a culture that disappeared more than a century ago. Furthermore, Tom Cruise is almost impossible to imagine as a 19th-century cavalryman. If we assume that Cruise is playing himself, a 21st-century movie star, and that the cinematic spectator identifies with Cruise's subject position, it becomes clear that *TLS* functions as an ethnographic time machine.[6] For both its protagonist and cinematic spectator, the film offers a glimpse back in time at a people of long ago and far away; "As Johannes Fabian has pointed out, the specificity of anthropology is that the subjects of its inquiry are represented as existing in an earlier age" (Rony 103). In *TLS* this is triply so. First, the samurai represent an earlier age of Japanese culture and an impediment to modernization for their others within the diegesis. Second, in his journey across the Pacific Ocean and his integration into traditional Japanese society, Algren moves through time as he moves through space. Compounded on this temporal travel is the extra-diegetic pastness of the samurai, the simple fact that a viewer of *TLS* presumes to observe a reconstruction of the late-19th century from the position of the 21st.

Taking this ethnographic structure of time, the film insists on the historical similarity of the samurai with the American Indian. It is bothersome that this similarity is a device by which Algren may cope with his colonial guilt. As he soliloquizes on his journey across the Pacific Ocean; "I have been hired to help suppress the rebellion of yet another tribal leader. Apparently this is the only job for which I am suited. I am beset by the ironies of my life." Algren's confrontation with the samurai is his opportunity to rewrite his own personal history, a chance to revisit the history of colonial genocide in

North America. The film emphasizes this historical return by pairing his soliloquy with flashbacks to his experience on the killing fields of the old frontier. Ironically, Algren's fame as an "Indian killer" leads to his employment in a structurally homologous colonial massacre. As the disenchanted henchman of modernity, Algren is a fine example of the revisionist westerner. His admiration for the samurai and his colonial guilt motivate a rejection of modernization in Japan. Algren is a none-too-subtle personification of white guilt over settler-colonial genocide in the Americas. Like the protagonist of *Dances with Wolves*, he is the projection of turn-of-the-20th-century guilt into a late-19th-century character. As such, *The Last Samurai* attempts to exorcise America's national trauma in an Oriental frontier. The technique of this therapy is imperialist nostalgia for the disappearing samurai.

TLS allows the fallen westerner back into the frontier to pursue a regenerative wilderness experience. This regenerative wilderness experience is achieved in the facile equation of samurai with American Indians. The film is about the return of the colonist to the scene of his moral failure.[7] By replicating the old frontier in the Far East, the film allows white masculinity a historical and metaphysical mulligan. This mulligan takes shape in a ceremony of racial reconciliation.

While I see this ceremony as a move to settler innocence and as a primitivist endorsement of *The War on Terror*, many popular critics argued that the film was a romantic and inaccurate rendering of an aristocratic, feudal culture. In an expression of the primitivist animus which characterized *The War on Terror*, Bob Mondello worried that the film presented "a noble tribal culture being crushed rather than a brutal

reactionary one being placed under the rule of law" (Quoted in Ravina 85). Tim Appelo saw the sympathetic portrayal of the film's samurai as an endorsement of radical Islam:

> Let's see: samurai were fundamentalist zealots furious about American military hegemony and their country's modernizers, so they hid out in remote hill country, trained a terrorist army, and glorified suicidal war against their ruler and his Yankee infidel allies, all in order to uphold their allegedly ancient holy traditions. Gee, who does that sound like nowadays? (Quoted in Ravina 89).

Observations of structural similarities between the film's samurai and stereotypes of the radical jihadi are not without merit. It is easy to imagine the Japan of the film as a distorted mirror image of the United States' military misadventure after 9/11. In *The Last Samurai* and *The War on Terror*, American forces traveled to the Orient and armed Orientals in the hopes of defeating a medieval enemy.

While these similarities are salient, the means by which the samurai vanish have more to do with the inevitability of progress than the celebration of anachronism as an ideal. One critic writes; "With its romantic view of samurai traditions, and its equating of the suffering of Native Americans and endangered Japanese warriors, *The Last Samurai* may be open to charges of a certain anti-Western bias" (Lally).[8] On the contrary, similar constructions of radical Islam, the samurai, and the American Indian endorse a colonial bias in every case. All of these signifiers are managed by the trope of the vanishing Indian and the denial of coevalness.

In the film's final battle sequence, the samurai execute a melodramatic suicide attack. In its foregrounding of the machine gun as the terminus of this attack, the film is clear about the superiority of colonial military technology. The slaughter of the samurai

by the Gatling gun is foreshadowed in the film's first scene. As a salesman of Winchester rifles, Algren exclaims, "this is the gun that's winning the West!" The sequence introduces Algren's alcoholic disenchantment with manifest destiny; however, Tom Cruise intones in his darkest mode, "you could kill yourself six braves without ever having to reload." Thus, the film reproduces the assumption that indigenous peoples are doomed to fall in the face of colonial military technology.

Like *Braveheart* (1996), *Gladiator* (2000), *The Patriot* (2000), *Glory* (1989), and other historical, martial epics of the turn of the 21st century, the last battle sequence of *The Last Samurai* is both deeply melodramatic and concerned with the redemption of its white male protagonist. Like *Braveheart* and *Glory* (another Edward Zwick feature), the film's climactic battle sequence pits the forces of good against the forces of evil. These three films frame this Manichean confrontation within a narrative arc of virtuous, melodramatic defeat. Finally, *Braveheart* and *Glory* explicitly invest the virtuous suffering of the white male with the passion of the Christ (*Braveheart* is particularly messianic), and we may understand *Glory* in particular as a white savior film which prefigures *The Last Samurai*.

While all of these films are historical, *The Last Samurai* is particularly concerned with the passage of history and epochal shift. As such, the film structures its melodramatic battle and this battle's virtuous suffering according to the primitive : modern binary. Therefore, a Christ-like defeat is an ultimately forgone conclusion for the film's anachronistic samurai. The disappearance of the primitive is managed by the juxtaposition of feudal with industrial warfare. The ideological work of this juxtaposition plays out in the disparate experiences of Algren and his companions. Whereas the

samurai perish at the fire of the machine gun, this battle is an arena of redemption for the film's white hero.

In the face of industrial weaponry, the samurai vanish. Their disappearance is a function of their interaction with the new. Having been ridiculed as hopelessly outmoded, the samurai are methodically cut down by a machine. As it is the difference between the musket and Gatling gun that is the difference between life and death, it is the mechanical rationalization of work which is such a threat to these anachronistic warriors. The difference between armor and machine guns is a local instance of the difference between the artisanal and the mass-produced: the artisanal is doomed to give way before the overwhelming efficiency of its modern rival. Medievalism and its artisanal modes of production are obsolete.

At its most figural, we may take the machine gun's rationalization of work as a metaphor for historical and technological progress. The victory of the machine gun over the sword is a metaphor for the hegemony and dominance of a new model of time, what Bliss Cua Lim has called modern time consciousness. Modern time consciousness is that linear, mechanical, scientific time which was born in the wake of geological and evolutionary thinking in the mid-19th century. As an industrial time consciousness which would achieve global dominance by the turn of the 20th century, it is also the time consciousness of colonialism. Modern time consciousness is so politically powerful because of its assumed universality. In short, modern time consciousness has subsumed and devoured local, indigenous, non-industrial ways of experiencing time (Lim 69-88).

Considering the release of *King Kong* in 2005, the machine gun in *The Last Samurai* suggests the samurai as a substitution for radical Islam. In her analysis of *King*

Kong (1933), Rony writes that Kong's death on the Empire State Building is an allegory for the inevitable victory of modernity over the primitive; "this was the necessary conclusion to *King Kong* … the native must be crucified, murdered, or at least captured and made a wax figure[.] ... For, above all, in order for the myth of modernity to be maintained, order must reign again, and everything must return to its place" (Rony 186-187). As a primordial force, Kong is conquered by the same technology as the samurai. In Peter Jackson's 2005 remake, Kong was once again a savage force who threatened the tallest building in New York. As such, Kong is structurally homologous with radical Islam as it was constructed in *The War on Terror*, as an entity having recently destroyed the World Trade Center as a function of its antagonism to modernity. In *Tracking Kong*, Cynthia Erb writes that Jackson's remake is very much infused with post-9/11 melancholy over the loss of the Twin Towers. As Erb observes, Kong gazes wistfully over a lower Manhattan distinctly bereft of the World Trade Center (240-248). Taken as a set, the samurai, King Kong, and radical Islam all function as terms opposed to modernity and its signifiers.

While the confrontation of the samurai with the machine gun is a striking tableau of the vanishing Indian, dialogue between Cruise and Watenabe invests this scene with a narrative of European superiority. Here, Algren regales Katsumoto with the Spartan defeat at Thermopylae. In doing so, Algren would lend their battle plan some of the honor that western history has conferred on the ancient Greeks. However, Algren's pep talk only reveals the logic of the film's colonial paternalism. To wit, the reiteration of this myth superimposes the prototypical victory of Europe over the Orient on a more recent one. The battle at Thermopylae is a story of the superiority of European ingenuity over a

vastly superior force of Asian others. The rehearsal of this story is unwittingly appropriate given the film's repetition of a Euro-American victory over an Oriental other. *The Last Samurai* simply trades in the Hot Gates for the Gatling gun. Algren's invocation of the Greeks and Katsumoto's eagerness to replicate their death is the construction of a paternalistic condescension. In this constellation, to die with honor against an overwhelming force is to echo a celebrated accomplishment of European culture against its classical rival. While the samurai may win a melodramatic moral victory, any lamentation over their suffering only serves as a distraction from the practical material victory of modernity. The best the samurai can hope for, by this scene's logic, is to face their extinction with a melodramatic bravado. Whereas by film's end the samurai are wiped out of existence, Tom Cruise stands, ever stalwart, as the samurai's last, greatest interpreter, archivist, and activist. In the film's final bit of dialogue, when the painfully effete emperor of Japan asks Cruise to explain how Katsumoto died, Cruise responds with a pedantic retort as the all-knowing salvage ethnographer, "I will tell you how he lived."

While the machine gun serves as the particular scenario of the vanishing Indian, Algren's use of a samurai sword is the technique of his regeneration. To this effect, *The Last Samurai* reproduces late-19th and early-20th century attitudes toward the machine gun as a tool of colonial violence. First, there is no doubt that the machine gun is a particularly American invention of the 19th century. As John Ellis explains, the machine gun emerged in the United States at this time because the U.S. lacked an established class of artisans and a stockpile of small arms, features which characterized firearms and their production in Europe in the same period (Ellis 22-23). In its embodiment of the industrial

mode of production, the machine gun was marketed as an icon of human progress. In the words of Richard Gatling:

> it occurred to me that if I could invent a machine – a gun – that would by its rapidity of fire enable one man to do as much battle duty as a hundred, that it would to a great extent, supersede the necessity of large armies, and consequently exposure to battle and disease would be greatly diminished. (Quoted in Ellis 27)

Like the sewing machine, the gun increased the productivity of the worker:

> The gun can be discharged at the rate of *two hundred shots per minute*, and it bears the same relation to other firearms that the McCormack's Reaper does to the sickle, or the sewing machine to the common needle. It will no doubt be the means of producing a great revolution in the art of warfare from the fact that a few men with it can perform the work of a regiment. (Quoted in Ellis 29)

As an icon of modernity, it is no surprise that the machine gun was used and conceived as a weapon of colonial violence. However, this use relegated the machine gun to a peripheral status among the aristocratic officer class of the European military establishment. While this establishment acknowledged the weapon's effectiveness in the colonies, colonial mythology maintained that European domination was a result of racial rather than technological superiority. Compounded on this colonial mythology was a centuries-old ethos that valorized the courage and élan of the individual soldier, the chivalric nobility of the bayonet push, and the glory of the cavalry charge. The machine gun was a profound threat to the values of this military ethos (Ellis 117-142).

In Japan of the Tokugawa period (the mid-1600s to the 1870s), the aristocratic military establishment resisted firearms for very similar reasons. Before the Battle of

Nagashino in 1575, feudal warfare in Japan consisted of highly ritualized encounters between individuals. As Noel Perrin writes in *Giving Up The Gun: Japan's Reversion to the Sword, 1543-1879*; "Such a battle could produce almost as many heroic stories as there were participants. It even had a kind of morality, since each man's fate depended principally on his own ability and state of training" (24).[9] The Battle of Nagashino prefigures the final battle of the Satsuma rebellion on which *The Last Samurai* is based. In a confrontation which would revolutionize Japanese attitudes toward the musket, 10,000 of Lord Oka's matchlockmen decisively rebuffed a great cavalry charge; "It all worked out brilliantly. Takeda's samurai did charge, and they were mowed down. In fact, the plan was so successful that a Japanese lieutenant general writing in 1913 could say that in his opinion very little improvement in infantry tactics has been made since" (Perrin 19). By the Battle of Komaki in 1584, the musket had become such a norm in Japanese warfare that the confrontation ended in an impasse. Neither general allowed their cavalry to charge the opposing side; "instead, both armies dug trenches, settled in, and waited. In some ways it was like a scene from WWI, three and a half centuries ahead of schedule" (Perrin 26). However, by the mid-1600s, Japan witnessed an almost total retreat from the use of firearms. Like late 19th- and early-20th-century Europeans, the Japanese warrior class feared that the gun would undermine the dash and skill of the men who used them.[10]

In its juxtaposition of an artisanal with an industrial mode of warfare, *The Last Samurai* engages in a melodrama that depends on a temporal axis. Edward Zwick has said that the agenda of *The Last Samurai* is "to talk about what is lost in principle and personal values in the name of progress and technological revolution" (Quoted in Lally).

The melodramatic portrayal of artisanal combat suggests what is lost: the redemption of chivalric combat. Through his appropriation of an indigenous identity, Algren may practice this redemptive violence. Indeed, Algren redeems his crimes of the American frontier by fighting alongside the Indians of the East.

When Katsumoto falls to the machine gun, Algren helps him end his life (Figure 24). With seppuku, Algren engages in a redeeming act of anachronistic violence. In a therapeutic reworking of Algren's personal colonial past, he redeems the honor of his primitive other: he saves Katsumoto's soul. This is the replaying of a scene in which protestant colonists sought to save the souls of Native Americans from eternal damnation.

Figure 24. The Samurai Vanish.

These early settlers "taught subsequent generations of Americans to feel a pleasing melancholy at the sight of Indian death … [derived from] a belief in the Christian paradox of eternal life through death" (Stevens 19). With this ritual suicide, Algren simply revises the particulars of the white savior in the colonial wilderness. Instead of saving Katsumoto's soul in a Christian sense, Algren saves Katsumoto from a dishonorable death. As we can tell by Algren's facial expression, Katsumoto's death fosters a pleasing melancholy. More importantly, Katsumoto's death is the moment of his beatific transcendence. Having said that a lifetime spent in search of the perfect blossom would not have been a wasted life, Katsumoto's final earthly vision is a cherry tree in full bloom. In a state of transcendental epiphany, Katsumoto gasps: "they are all perfect."

The Good Indian: Resolving Anxiety over Temporal Exceptionalism

In his righteous death at the hands of the sinister Omura, Katsumoto fulfills a settler-colonial fantasy of the good Indian. His quality is a function of his death. As a dead Indian and static object, Katsumoto is knowable, fixed, and stable. He is the good Indian who remains fixed in the past. In contrast, Omura is an unstable signifier. A Japanese man who has adopted western clothing, manners, and weapons, Omura survives the film's narrative and threatens the denial of coevalness.

When Mr. Graham states that "the ancient and the modern are at war for the soul of Japan," he reiterates a colonial stereotype prevalent since the 16th century, that Japan is a place of temporal paradox and internal contradiction, that it is an essentially duplicitous place. As Ian Littlewood writes in *The Idea of Japan*, European observers have been troubled by Japan because they perceive it as a foreign culture with a disturbing level of sophistication. In the case of Japan, "the usual European distinction between savage

natives and civilized westerners [is] difficult to apply" (Littlewood 1). Whereas Europeans have derived feelings of superiority from their sense that the colonial other was too different or uncivilized to adopt their technologies and cultural forms, Japan proved a notable exception to this rule; "[As such, Japan] seemed to be claiming a kinship with Europe which put at risk the sacred boundaries between east and west" (Littlewood 6).

Tacitly following the thinking of Mary Douglas's *Purity and Danger* or Julia Kristeva's *Powers of Horror*, Littlewood writes that Japan's perceived liminality has always been a threat to European observers:

> [Japanese paradox] is not something we suffer gladly. Whatever challenges the categories by which we understand the world is likely to make us uncomfortable[.] … Among the most fearful aliens are those that come in the form of some intermediate state – blobs, growths, slime[.] … Boundaries are a source of security; we need them in order to define the world. They are literally what the business of definition is about. Without east there is not west, without natives there are no sahibs, without 'them' there is no 'us'. To define what we are we depend on what is alien. To call Japan a paradox is really to say that it threatens the existing boundaries and therefore our definition of ourselves. It is for this reason that the language of paradox has always been counterbalanced by a language that reaffirms these boundaries as emphatically as possible. (8 [I have elided paragraph breaks])

With the Katsumoto : Omura binary, *The Last Samurai* is a melodramatic management of Japanese threats to temporal boundaries. Whereas the sinister Omura

represents the Japanese capacity for Euro-American attitudes, business practices, and modes of warfare, the noble Katsumoto remains loyal to ancient ways and Japanese customs. The manner in which *The Last Samurai* performs its ideological work is the process by which Omura and Katsumoto take up positions in a melodramatic binary. Katsumoto is virtuous and honorable for being anachronistic, while Omura is dastardly and sinister for his inhabitation of modernity's cultural forms. Taken together, Omura and Katsumoto represent signifiers in a fetishistic, colonial discourse. *The Last Samurai* asserts the threat of Japanese hybridity while simultaneously disavowing Japanese modernity. Whereas Omura is an Oriental monster who blurs the boundaries between the east and the west, Katsumoto is a signifier in a vocabulary of primitivism that reaffirms temporal boundaries as clearly as possible. In doing so, the good Indian *qua* dead Indian preserves the denial of coevalness and the settler colonist's temporal exceptionalism.

The ideological work of the Omura : Katsumoto binary has operations beyond the poles of its temporal vector. This axis is energized by another paradoxical trope: the Orient as aesthetic wonder and the Orient as utterly inscrutable. As the sumptuous production quality of *The Last Samurai* attests, the colonizer's gaze has regarded Japan as an "aesthetic wonderland, a place to be viewed" (Littlewood 61). In his discussion of contemporary promotional images for the Japanese tourism industry, Littlewood defines this specular regime in terms of time:

> [Promotional images of Japan] present us with a timeless world of rock gardens, mountain peaks and tranquil lakes. A spray of bamboo stands in front of the mountains, a lone rock with a single pine breaks the surface of the lake. This is the way it has always been. When people appear, they are part of the same eternal

> picture[.] … this is a Japan refined to its mythical elements, purged of modern Japanese and of all the other unwelcome realities of the present day – modern buildings, modern clothes, modern cars, modern technology. (62)

The Arcadian representation and consumption of Japan is a function of primitivism. The Orient as an aesthetic wonder is a mode of viewing which manages Katsumoto and his placement in a sumptuous mise-en-scène. As Littlewood's analysis makes clear, the good, peaceful, spectacular Japan is that Japan temporarily purged of its modernity: it is a vision of Japan whose temporal duality is momentarily disavowed.

In contrast to this utopian, primitivist, scopic regime runs another, antithetical discourse of the Far East. This discourse presents the Orient as profoundly unknowable and inscrutable, as a spectacular mélange of ambiguous signifiers which threaten visual mastery. Whereas the utter visibility of the East has a pleasurable effect in the utopian mode described above, the inscrutability of the Orient is a profound threat. In her book *Lost in Translation: Orientalism, Cinema, and the Enigmatic Signifier*, Homay King draws on Laplanche's theory of the enigmatic signifier to further a postcolonial analysis of the inscrutable oriental. For Laplanche, the enigmatic signifier is the primal, traumatic kernel which defines much of an individual's life. In this model, the infant subject is assailed by the address of adult others because he cannot decode the stream of signifiers with which he is addressed. While the infant knows that she is the object of direct address, she is powerless to decode a speaker's meaning or intentions. As such, these speakers will always represent a potential threat. For Laplanche, the infant's inability to decode these signifiers is a primal trauma which is reproduced throughout the subject's life whenever a signifier is not completely understood (King 1-23).

In her application of Laplanche's theory to cinematic constructions of the Far East, King writes that Hollywood habitually produces "East Asia as the site of an enigmatic decipherability. The Orient appears as a labyrinthine world teeming with inscrutable objects, concealing secrets that are irretrievably lost in translation" (2). In other words:

> The originary scenario of the enigmatic signifier is retriggered throughout the subject's life whenever he or she is sent a mixed message, hailed by ambiguous address, or confronted with a scenario that seems to invite and yet resist decoding. The entrenched dichotomy between East and West, often assumed to be monolithic and completely diametrically opposed, provides fertile ground for these paranoid sorts of encounters and thus a uniquely rich terrain for their analysis. (King 4)

Katsumoto's uncompromised anachronism is essential to his place in the film's melodrama. Specifically, Nathan Algren's imperialist nostalgia requires a vanishing Indian who is perfectly anachronistic. This rendering of Katsumoto is the film's most obvious effort. For the total satisfaction of imperialist nostalgia, Katsumoto's anachronism is keyed to ontological certainty and the pleasure of ethnotopia.

In the scene of Algren and Katsumoto's first formal meeting, Algren discovers Katsumoto chanting an untranslated and presumably ancient prayer in a picturesque temple. The clarity and emptiness of the mise-en-scène suggest that Katsumoto is a character of ontological legibility and clear boundaries. His gestalt is easily discerned as a function of the beauty and simplicity of his setting. This physical clarity works in concert

with the architecture and Katsumoto's prayer to construct an uncompromised anachronicity.

From his well-defined perch within this picturesque mise-en-scène, Katsumoto reinforces his signification of the antediluvian; "My family built this temple a thousand years ago." These words immediately co-signify the anachronistic with the beautiful. That which is clearly ancient is that which is available within the visual regime of ethnotopia. If Japan is a land of visual delights, part of this visual pleasure is the consumption of that which is clearly different (Figure 25).

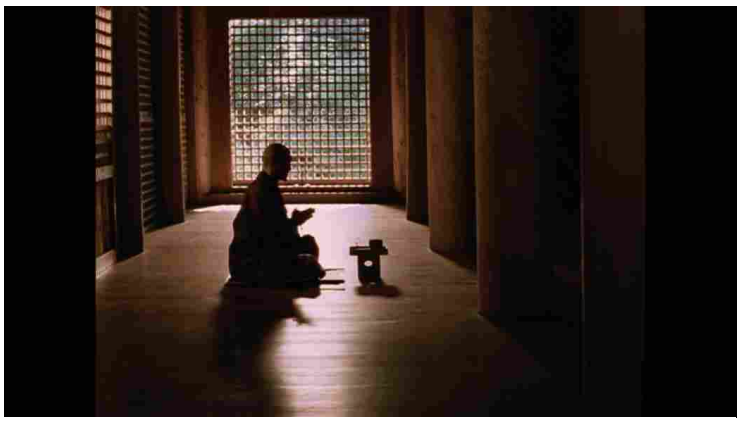

Figure 25. Ancient Place, Ancient Prayer.

The succeeding dialogue neurotically insists on the clarity of the boundaries by intellectually mimicking the visual definition of Katsumoto against the mise-en-scène. In his accented yet perfectly inflected English, Katsumoto engages Algren in a discourse of the self and other; "My name is Katsumoto. What is your name?" When Algren remains silent, Katsumoto worries that he might have presented as the inscrutable Oriental. Walking from the shadows and into the light, Katsumoto asks in a tender and inquisitive tone, "are my words not correct?" Katsumoto's passage from the darkness to the light, in conjunction with the clarity and tender honesty of his speech, establish Katsumoto as a scrutable Oriental concerned with the boundaries of self and other. Moreover, Katsumoto

is concerned with establishing the code by which his signifiers may be deciphered. In his concern over proper speech and decipherability, Katsumoto acts the part of the good Oriental (Figure 26).

When Nathan neglects to introduce himself, choosing instead to lambaste Katsumoto for beheading the general under which Nathan served, Katsumoto establishes the theme of Nathan's adoption narrative. Katsumoto shifts from the discourse of self-other ontology to the register of pedagogy; "General Hasagawa asked me to end his life. A samurai cannot stand the shame of defeat. I was honored to cut off his head." He continues in the pedagogical mode while emphasizing cultural difference; "Many of our customs seem strange to you, and the same is true of yours. For example, not to introduce yourself is considered extremely rude, even among enemies." After Nathan introduces himself, Katsumoto formally bows, and says, quite earnestly, that he is honored. When Nathan insists that he has questions regarding the terms of his captivity, Katsumoto responds with a neurotic retort; "I have introduced myself, you have introduced yourself. This is a very good conversation." This scene is symptomatic of colonial anxieties regarding confrontations with an Oriental other. It is not Katsumoto who is trapped in a cycle of pathological repetition; rather, he is himself a fetish object in a neurotic constellation of good and bad Orientals. When Katsumoto explains to Nathan that his lack of introduction is incredibly rude, the scene establishes their dynamic as both

Figure 26. The Legible Oriental.

pedagogical and ontological. It is pedagogical in the sense that Katsumoto teaches Algren to be Japanese. It is ontological in the sense that Katsumoto serves as a scrutable other.

In the ethnotopic montage which builds on these themes, *The Last Samurai* constructs Nathan as the Anglo-American consumer of an Oriental paradise. Within this ethnotopia, the anachronistic Japanese and the knowledge they possess are available for the scrutiny and consumption of a modern observer. Algren's ability to learn about the samurai, and their status as a profoundly knowable object, are a great comfort. Algren relates in voiceover; "it is here that I have known my first untroubled sleep in many years." As a key moment in the film's adoption narrative, this scene functions as a settler move to innocence after the fashion observed by Tuck and Yang in *The Last of the Mohicans*. Whereas the Indians pass into oblivion, they live long enough for the settler colonist to benevolently inherit their traditions and their lands (Tuck and Yang 14-15). In *The Last Samurai,* ethnotopia works in harmony with the adoption narrative to facilitate the utopian appropriation of indigenous lands and culture.

The scene of Algren and Omura's first meeting is the antithesis of Algren's meeting with Katsumoto. Whereas Katsumoto dresses in robes and prays in his ancestral temple, Omura dresses in Victorian clothes and haunts the back rooms of an opulent San Francisco restaurant. As such, Omura represents Japan and the Japanese as historically liminal. Indeed, this threat is reinforced when Algren's commanding officer, Colonel Bagley (Tony Goldwyn), introduces Omura by way of exposition; "Japan's got it in mind to become a civilized country, and Mr. Omura here is willing to spend what it takes to send white experts to train their army." Bagley's exposition introduces the theme of

Japan's historical motion while allowing Omura to remain silent: an unctuous, ambiguous presence (Figure 27).

Figure 27. The Inscrutible Oriental.

The dialogue in this scene frames Omura as a duplicitous, inscrutable Oriental. After Algren drunkenly demands $500 a month for his services, Omura's unnamed companion whispers to Omura in subtitled Japanese; "He's rude." Omura responds; "That's how it is here. A land of cheap traders." Spoken in a foreign and diegetically indecipherable whisper, this comment eludes the scrutiny of the table's Anglophone interlocutors while simultaneously alerting the cinematic spectator to Omura's duplicity. Of course, it is not merely that Omura insults his racial others with a signifier that they are helpless to discern, but that he actively masks his intentions with an obsequious grin (Figure 28).

Figure 28. The Duplicitous Oriental.

Omura's threatening inscrutability takes further expression in his cluttered mise-en-scène. First, Omura's haunting of an overstuffed restaurant signifies his freedom of movement in the modern world. The overabundant paraphernalia of this restaurant is an expressionistic reminder that Omura is an ontological threat. Whereas Katsumoto is clearly anachronistic, and as his ontological status is expressed in the clarity of his gestalt against an uncluttered mise-en-scène, Omura's ontological threat takes visual expression through his gestalt's immersion in a field of cluttered, modern signifiers.[11]

The Last Samurai constructs the difference between urban and pastoral space in ways which proliferate the Katsumoto : Omura binary. When Algren disembarks from Omura's steamship, he is welcomed to Japan by Mr. Graham. In an expositional rickshaw ride, Graham addresses historical change while imploring the activation of the colonial gaze; "twenty years ago this was a sleepy little town: Now look at it!" Though he compels his Anglo-American visitor to look, the cluttered mise-en-scène and quick editing of this sequence distinctly frustrate pleasurable gazing. This is in stark contrast to the leisurely viewing that Algren enjoys during his time with Katsumoto in the paradise of the Japanese pastoral. As such, the uncompromised anachronism of village life is constructed as a non-threatening other to the transitional culture of the Japanese metropolis. As opposed to the clear gestalts and revealed bodies that Algren enjoys throughout his conversion narrative, his observation of urban space is haunted by a faceless, elusive, and aimlessly milling Oriental horde. In this sequence, Japanese women, in particular, flit and dart in ways which allow only enigmatic, fleeting, and unsatisfying glimpses. As if to remove all doubt as to the scene's thematic implications, Mr. Graham engages in a reverie of classical orientalism; "I came over with a British

trade mission, oh, years ago. I had a rather unfortunate tendency to tell the truth in a country where no one ever says what they mean. So now, I very accurately translate other people's lies." Thus, *The Last Samurai* insists on the stereotype of the duplicitous, threatening Oriental in its superimposition of orientalist dialogue on a visual sequence which frustrates the colonizer's gaze (Figure 29).

Figure 29. The Enigmatic Signifier.

Oriental Masculinity in *The War on Terror*

The War on Terror presents a dualistic construction of Muslim identity which mimics the bifurcation of Japanese masculinity in *The Last Samurai*. In *The War on Terror*, the good Muslim is that Muslim who has so fully integrated into modernity and democracy as to no longer pose a threat. Like Katsumoto, this other is temporally unambiguous. In contrast, the terrorist is constructed as a medieval barbarian and temporal hybrid.[12]

In an academic journal article which positions itself as an exposé of terrorism and social media, Marie Wright expresses horror at the thought of the techno-sophisticated terrorist.[13] Writing that "jihadists have used the Internet to broadcast their atrocities and thereby promote an image of power," Wright declares that the video showing the beheading of Nicholas Berg by Abu Musab Zarqawi in 2004, "underscored the horrific partnership that had evolved between technology and terrorism" (Wright 4). To construct

this "partnership" as a "horror," Wright must assume that technology and terrorism are *essentially* incompatible. She must assume that the terrorist and the internet are essentially alien to one another and belong to opposing shores of an unbridgeable gulf. It is clear that a Darwinian worldview underwrites her horror when she claims that this unholy partnership has "evolved."

For Wright, only modern democracy is entitled to "technology," a term which here denotes the digital camera and digital information technology. The horror Wright expresses is the horror that the colonial other may challenge the ethnotopia of the colonizer's gaze. For Wright, the primitive appropriation of visual technology is a threat to the denial of coevalness. The partnership between technology and terrorism is "horrific" because it indicates that the primitive other has slipped into the flow of evolutionary time. Of course, it makes sense that the terrorist appropriation of digital media would be so disturbing to the colonizer's gaze. As Morey and Yaqin write in *Framing Muslims*; "In dealing with the Muslim "Other," Western nations have employed a complex and precise set of surveillance systems designed to profile, track, and when necessary exclude the problematic Muslim subject" (6). In other words, the West has established "cutting edge technologies and information networks … wherein Muslims can at a moment's notice be erected as objects of supervision and discipline" (Morey and Yaqin 6). In sum, the appropriation of the camera and the internet by the Muslim Other is a direct threat to the colonizer's scopic regime.

Moreover, the surveillance and production of Muslim otherness is tied to the process by which *The War on Terror* produces the fiction of the "unified nation and the sealed-off civilization" (Morey and Yaqin 5-6). As Morey and Yaqin argue, the reality of

the Muslim diaspora exposes these constructions for the fictions that they are. The 'West' and 'The Muslim World' are a "political strategist's daydream [in which] Muslims are positioned as an irretrievably Other presence" (5-6). The appropriation of media technology by the Muslim Other is an on-screen analogy for the blurring of boundaries threatened by the Muslim diaspora. The Muslim Other's appropriation of media technology is a challenge to the ethnotopia of the colonizer's gaze, and the production of a hybrid figure that threatens the boundaries between "then*"* and "now," "them" and "us." There is perhaps no better icon for the condensation of these threats than the images of Jihadi John with his victims in the moving images distributed by the so-called Islamic State since the summer of 2014.

In an image I include here from *The War on Terror*, "Jihadi John" appears with the aid worker Allen Henning, a British citizen abducted in the northeastern part of Syria in the winter of 2013-2014 (Figure 30) (Taher). The group known as ISIS disseminated the video of his execution on YouTube on Friday, October 3rd, 2014.[14] As an image produced by the so-called Islamic State and consumed by audiences in Great Britain and the United States, we may take this image as a condensation of colonial anxieties about the Muslim other, his appropriation of media technology, and his inscrutability. In a diegetic sense, this image represents white male impotence vis-à-vis a powerful Muslim other, and this impotence is a function of the inversion of the ethnotopic

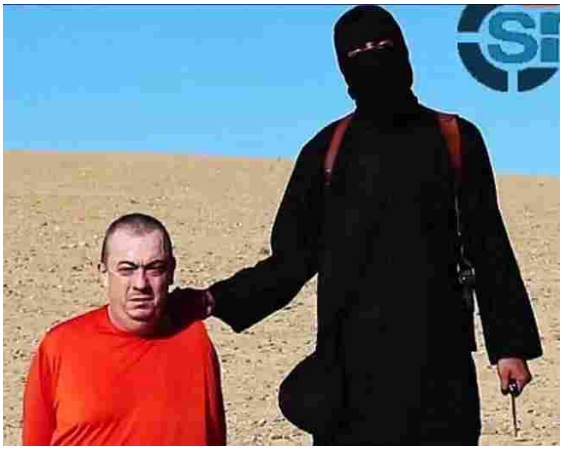

Figure 30. Jihadi John.

viewing relationship which we may observe in *The Last Samurai*. In an extra-diegetic sense, the videos themselves are a threat to the exclusive mastery of media technologies which the United States and Great Britain would mobilize for the surveillance and production of terrorism as a civilizational other.[15]

To translate the viewing relationship of *The Last Samurai* into the geo-political terms of *The War on Terror,* Algren's ethnotopia is a nostalgic rendering of the real-world process by which the United States surveils its Muslim other. Like the image of Jihadi John in *The War on Terror*, *TLS* figures Omura as a gazing, malevolent agent. In the scene of Katsumoto and Algren's arrival in the Japanese metropolis, Omura looks on from above, obscured and screened from view by a matrix of black wires (Figure 31).

The image of Jihadi John and his captives is the replication of the threat to white surveillance in *The Last Samurai*. Jihadi John is inscrutable and threatening, but he is also a liminal figure who threatens the boundaries between the West and the East. Nicknamed "Jihadi John" due to his English accent, the man thought to be Mohammed Emwazi is a threat because he is a British citizen who has joined the forces of radical Islam. His hybridity triggers the colonizer's anxiety about the temporal movement of the Oriental.

Figure 31. Inverting the Colonizer's Gaze.

In his description of ISIS's beheading videos, David Carr writes; "what they made are modern media artifacts being used to medieval ends. The videos serve as both

propaganda and time machine, attempting to wipe away centuries of civilization and suggest that the dreamed-of caliphate flourishes…" (ISIS Sends Medieval Message by Modern Method). Part of the problem, as Carr and others have it, is that these anachronistic barbarians have gained a great measure of success as a function of their techno-sophistication. However, it is not the simple acquisition of technology which is so threatening, but the fact that techno-sophistication is construed to represent the evolution of the Muslim other. In his description of changes in jihadist media practices, Carr betrays both the Darwinian paradigm which structures his colonial thinking, and the anxiety that the primitive other may have joined the stream of evolutionary time:

> In the evolution of modern jihadist propaganda, Bin Laden, addressing a single static camera with long-winded rhetoric in highly formal Arabic, represented the first generation[.] … The most prominent figure of the second generation was the YouTube star Anwar al-Awlaki … who … had a blog and a Facebook page. … ISIS is online Jihad 3.0. Dozens of Twitter accounts spread its message … Its videos borrow from Madison Avenue and Hollywood, from combat video games and cable television dramas, and its sensational dispatches are echoed and amplified on social media. (ISIS displaying Deft Command of Varied Media)

As such, anxiety over the techno-sophistication of terrorism in the 21st century is inseparable from anxiety that the Muslim other has attained mobility along the evolutionary continuum of an exceptionalist colonial imaginary.

The samurai *qua* vanished Indian is a reassuring balm when considered against the apprehension of radical Islam as a boundary-threatening contemporary. If we take Jihadi John as a substitution for Mr. Omura, we may observe that his transformation from

British citizen to inscrutable Oriental triggers colonial anxiety over the mobile, time-travelling other. As *The Last Samurai* would have it, the good Oriental is he who stays fixed in the past, reveals himself to the colonizer's gaze, and disavows temporal or technological hybridity. As a response to the Oriental as contemporary *rival*, *The Last Samurai* is an artifact of imperial nostalgia. This film is nostalgic for the Oriental as anachronistic *victim*.

It is not surprising that *The Last Samurai* emerged after 9/11. The attack on the World Trade Center was the perfect stage for the construction of the Muslim other as a monstrous hybrid. In interpretations of this event, a discourse emerged in which an icon of modernity had been destroyed by an enemy constructed as barbarically anachronistic. This figure was loaded with colonial anxiety over duplicity and inscrutability. As Morey and Yaqin write, the stereotype of "the bearded Muslim fanatic" emerged alongside images of "the duplicitous terrorist who lives among 'us' the better to bring about our destruction" (2).[16] The juxtaposition of King Kong with the airplane in his attack on the Empire State Building reinforces the boundary between the primitive and the modern. In contrast, constructions of 9/11 presented a scenario in which a primitive other challenged the denial of coevalness through the appropriation of American airplanes. Consider the civilizational paranoia in this excerpt from Samuel P. Huntington's *The Clash of Civilizations*: "somewhere in the Middle East a half dozen young men could well be dressed in jeans, drinking coke, listening to rap and between their bows to Mecca, putting together a bomb to blow up an American airliner" (58).

Huntington's ultra-conservative vignette depends on the assumption that, while the material signifiers of consumer culture may have been imported by individuals in the

Middle East, Enlightenment values such as liberty, democracy, and peaceful human interaction are essentially beyond the capacity of the "Arab mind" (Sheehi 70). Furthermore, Huntington's fable reinforces civilizational difference while simultaneously expressing anxiety over cultural hybridity and the danger of the duplicitous Oriental. The very function of Huntington's "Arab mind" argument, and the primitivist discourse which circulates in *The War on Terror,* is the justification of war through the moral clarity afforded by melodramatic civilizational categories. What is so startling about Huntington's vignette is its paradoxical capacity to function as a fetish object: it takes the sign of sameness in the other as evidence of difference.

In his analysis of metaphorical constructions of terrorism in a British tabloid, Alexander Spencer identifies the metaphor "Terrorism as Uncivilized Evil." He writes that such metaphors have distinct political consequences:

> The 'uncivilized' predication constructs the terrorist as someone who cannot be logically reasoned with, and consequently there is no real point in talking to them. At the same time, 'barbarians' are brutal, violent and primitive … and therefore only understand violence as an answer. So the predication of terrorism as 'barbaric' makes the use of violent counter-measures seem appropriate. (406-407)

Spencer notes that constructions of terrorism as "primitive" and "barbaric" are coterminous with terrorism as "evil."[17] The melodramatic effect of this co-termination is the justification of war through the dehumanization of the other:

> The predication of terrorism as 'evil' and 'barbarian' marginalizes the grievances and political goals of these groups and the reasons for the violence are avoided as 'evil,' 'barbarian' terrorists kill for the sake of killing rather than for some

> concrete motive. Evilness becomes the ultimate justification for their act and at the same time provides a justification for extreme counter measures. (Spencer 406)

In sum, this discourse constructs a melodramatic axis in which a righteous modernity confronts a villainous primitive. Such constructions have had disastrous consequences for U.S. foreign and domestic policy regarding the treatment of Muslims. As Stephen Sheehi observes; "Torture, … racial profiling, kidnapping, … extrajudicial assassinations, freezing *habeas corpus*, and total war against and occupation of sovereign countries are the effects of the deployment of Islamophobic foils, stereotypes, paradigms and analyses" (33).

The 9/11 attacks and the techno-sophistication of radical Islam haunt the discrete boundaries of civilizational conflict. As such, the construal of the terrorist as an anachronistic other is a project of neurotic disavowal and fetishistic repetition. *The Last Samurai* is a text of imperialist nostalgia. As such, it is as a cipher for the melodramatic work of primitivism in *The War on Terror*. As Renalto Rosaldo writes, imperialist nostalgia is the process by which colonizers "often display nostalgia for the colonized culture as it was 'traditionally' (that is, when they first encountered it). The peculiarity, of course, is that agents of colonialism long for the very forms of life they intentionally altered or destroyed" (107-108). In terms which are immediately applicable to both *The Last Samurai* and the discourse of "The War on Terror," Rosaldo writes:

> Imperialist nostalgia occurs alongside a peculiar sense of mission, the white man's burden, where civilized nations stand duty-bound to uplift so-called savage ones. In this ideologically constructed world of ongoing progressive change,

> putatively static savage societies become a stable reference point for defining (the felicitous progress of) civilized identity. "We" valorize innovation and then yearn for more stable worlds, whether these reside in our own past, in other cultures, or in the conflation of the two. Such forms of longing thus appear closely related to secular notions of progress. When the so-called civilizing process destabilizes forms of life, the agents of change experience transformations of other cultures as if they were personal losses. (108)

When we consider *The Last Samurai* vis-à-vis the construction of terrorism in *The War on Terror,* imperialist nostalgia is at work in two complimentary ways. First, *The Last Samurai* expresses nostalgia for the good Indian, and defines goodness in terms of ontological clarity and pure anachronism. *The Last Samurai* represents nostalgia for scrutable, anachronistic, techno-phobic others. It premiered in a moment when the United States found itself engaged with a temporally ambiguous enemy. In *The War on Terror*, primitivism functions as a "stable reference point" for defining America's melodramatically righteous violence. Paradoxically, the primitivism of *The War on Terror* insists on the anachronism of an enemy who is both techno-sophisticated *and* barbaric. Here, primitivism is a colonial fetish which disavows and constructs the monstrosity of a liminal other. As Morey and Yaqin put it in *Framing Muslims*:

> It is as if the attempt to solder together a watertight worldview based on supposedly civilizational difference – whether carried out by those hostile to Islam or those feeling the need to aggressively propagate it—can never really be successful; the vessel in which cultural purists set sail is always, in the end, a leaky one that requires constant bailing. (20)

"The Muslim World" is a strategic fiction which erases the many nations, creeds, sects, politics, and identities of the Muslim diaspora. The imperialist nostalgia of *The Last Samurai* and *The War on Terror* advances one of two strategies for justifying colonial aggression and neutralizing the threat of a boundary-defying other. In short, because the imperative to empire demands the temporal exceptionalism of the colonist, colonial mythology demands either the *total* assimilation of Islam into the folds of modernity, or insists on the absolute alterity of the Muslim other. This is a psychic defense for a colonial subject position because it unproblematically construes the other as an object of the white man's burden, as an anachronistic, inevitably vanishing Oriental. Moreover, it establishes the West as "inviolable because it is ineradicably different and superior in every way to the menacing irrationality projected onto the wild-eyed Muslim" (Morey and Yaqin 25). In either case, the liminal, hybrid, or ambiguous figure is forbidden, disavowed, and demonized. If we map *The War on Terror* onto *The Last Samurai*, we can see that imperialist nostalgia for the good Oriental is a nostalgic mask for imperial contempt for the bad Oriental. These signifiers collaborate in *The Last Samurai* to reflect and galvanize the melodrama of *The War on Terror*. Imperialist nostalgia motivates a fear and contempt for its opposite. This synergy exposes the colonial project of *The Last Samurai*: the celebration of a colonial other who affirms the denial of coevalness.

Notes

[1] Mina Shin argues that *The Last Samurai* is a western in samurai guise:

> the Wild West backdrop is replaced with a Japanese prairie, and the Native Americans are merely replaced by the Japanese. Nostalgia for the doomed samurai is, in fact, nostalgia for the Wild West before its dream was tainted by the Indian genocide and industrialization. Like other American

> Westerns, *The Last Samurai* symbolically rehabilitates the American shameful past (*sic*) of the Indian genocide as inevitable and honorable historical progress toward modern America (1069).

[2] For an analysis of *Dances with Woves* as historical therapy for white audiences, see Golub 30.

[3] As Jodi Byrd writes:

> From the Pacific with the illegal overthrow of the kingdom of Hawai'i to the Caribbean with Guantanamo Bay as a torture center for "enemy combatants," I argue throughout this book that U.S. cultural and political preoccupations with indigeneity and the reproduction of Indianness serve to facilitate, justify, and maintain Anglo-American hegemonic mastery over the signification of justice, democracy, law, and terror. Through nineteenth- and early twentieth-century logics of territorial rights and conquests that have now morphed into late twentieth- and early twenty-first century logics of civil rights and late capitalism, the United States has used executive, legislative, and juridical means to make "Indian" those peoples and nations who stand in the way of U.S. military and economic desires. (xx)

[4] As Laura M. Stevens has it, the vanishing Indian is both palpable evidence of manifest destiny and a nostalgic, moral absolution for the violence of colonial aggression. The dying Indian is a figure of sadness and sorrow in the American imaginary; "standing for conquest, images of dying Indians have helped to rationalize aggression, absolving responsibility through sad depictions of inevitable demise" (18).

[5] I follow Shohat and Stamm in *Unthinking Eurocentrism*. They argue that the camera, having travelled to North America with Columbus, encourages a cinematic identification with Columbus, his struggles, and his narratives. They argue that such identification makes the signifier "Columbus" synonymous with the signifier "History" (58-62).

[6] Mitchell writes; "Although at times Mr. Cruise comes off as too contemporary for the 19th century – at one point, he seems to be waiting for a cellphone call to confirm his terms for a cover of *Details* magazine – this displacement fits better when he becomes a prisoner" (E13).

[7] In a prefiguring of the redemptive return to the wilderness in *The Last Samurai*, the first Gulf War is an instructive study. In this war, George H.W. Bush employed the rationale of the "savage war" to justify the large-scale use of the American military. Richard Slotkin argues that presidential rhetoric constructed Saddam Hussein as an evil dictator, a threat to American economic interests, and as a savage Indian; "Hussein himself was the perfect enemy for a modern Frontier-Myth scenario, combining the barbaric cruelty of a 'Geronimo' with the political power and ambition of a Hitler" (Slotkin 651). In concert with the presence of this anachronistic evil, President Bush asserted that "the violence of the Gulf War [had] regenerated the national spirit and moral character by expiating the defeat in Vietnam" (Slotkin 651). Here we see the collusion of many forces and ideologies: neo-liberal market capitalism and its global ambition, the inevitability of war with an essentially incompatible other, and the regeneration of the American character through the violence of a savage war. In essence, the first Iraq war combines and resuscitates two aspects of the New Frontier mythology. First, it establishes the undeveloped world as an arena for the redemption or restoration of the American spirit. The process of this redemption involves the invocation of frontier mythology's other trope, the barbarous, anachronistic enemy. Most troubling, "the president authorize[d] the shedding of blood … to erase the discomforting memory of our historical experience of error and defeat, and to substitute in its place the lie of 'symbolic victory'" (Slotkin 652).

[8] In response to these charges of anti-Western bias, Edward Zwick is explicit in his primitivist nostalgia *qua* white guilt:

> The movie acknowledged certainly that there was an American imperial impulse, that our relationship with Japan did not begin in 1941, and I think that's important as historical redress. But I don't think its agenda is political in that explicit regard. The agenda is to talk about what is lost in principles and personal values in the name of progress and technological revolution. (Quoted in Lally)

[9] Noel Perrin engages in his own share of nostalgic primitivism. Perrin concludes his book, written in 1979, by casting the long rhetorical shadow of nuclear holocaust. In a bit of romantic primitivism, he argues that the Japanese abandonment of the gun from 1600-1870 resulted in a period of peace and prosperity that has since been ruined by the industrial revolution in Japan. He argues that this period of retrogression, or primitivism, should shine as an example for westerners, that we might adopt a similar primitivism vis-à-vis the menace the nuclear bomb. Perrin replicates the very primitivism of late-19th century westerners in Japan. In 1858 the U.S. Consul General Townsend Harris observed; "the people all appeared clean, well fed … well clad and happy looking. It is more like the golden age of simplicity and honesty than I have ever seen in any country" (Quoted in Perrin 90). Tom Cruise's voice-over narration replicates this primitivist Arcadianism in *The Last Samurai*:

> Spring, 1877. This marks the longest I've stayed in one place since I left the farm at 17. There is so much here I will never understand. I've never been a church-going man, and what I've seen on the field of battle has led me to question God's purpose. But there is indeed something spiritual in this place. And though it may forever be obscure to me, I cannot but be aware of its power. I do know that it is here that I've known my first untroubled sleep in many years. … They are an intriguing people. From the moment they wake they devote themselves to the perfection of whatever they pursue. I have never seen such discipline. I am surprised to learn that the word "samurai" means "to serve", and that Katsumoto believes his rebellion to be in the service of the Emperor.

[10] Noel Perrin writes:

> [individual heroism] occurred very rarely in mass battles with matchlocks. A well-aimed volley of a thousand shots killed flurried soldiers and cool-headed ones without discrimination – and at a distance too far for conversation. Bravery was actually a disadvantage if you were charging against guns, while if you changed sides and became a matchlockman yourself, there was still not much chance for individual distinction. You were now simply one of the thousand men in your rank, waiting behind your breastworks to mow down the charging enemy. It didn't even take much skill to do this. Skill had been moved back from the soldier to the manufacturer of his weapon, and up from the solder to his commander. (Perrin 25)

[11] Here, I follow the analysis of mise-en-scène by Homay King 1-19.

[12] To quote Howard Dean, a prominent member of the Democratic leadership and a frontrunner for the Democratic Party's nomination for president in the 2004 primary:

> I think it is great to have Mosques in American cities; there is a growing number of American Muslims. I think most of those Muslims are moderate. I hope they will have an influence on Islam throughout the world because Islam is really back in the 12th century in some of these countries like Iran and Afghanistan where they're stoning people to death and that can be fixed and the way it is fixed is not by pushing Muslims away, it is by embracing them and have them become just like every other American, American's who happen to be Muslims. (Quoted in Sheehi 30)

Sheehi writes; "Dean's vision involves properly co-opting and assimilating Muslims into American culture whereby they not only do not pose a threat to US hegemony and white supremacist culture but, in fact, work within Muslim communities globally to bring them into the American fold" (30).

[13] Wright's horror is typical. Shane and Hubbard write in *The New York Times*; "[ISIS's] bigotry and beheadings seem to come from a distant century, [but] its use of media is up the present moment" (Displaying Deft Command of Varied Media).

[14] See also Rukmini and Freytas-Tamura.

[15] For a concrete example of paranoia over "the terrorist's" appropriation of media technology, one need only refer to the United States' reaction to Al-Jazeera's broadcasts of Osama Bin Laden after 9/11. After the broadcast, Condaleeza Rice denounced Al-Jazeera. Moreover, the United States bombed Al-Jazeera's Kabul and Baghdad bureaus, killing a correspondent in the Baghdad bureau in what was observed by

correspondents for the BBC as "clearly a direct strike on the Al-Jazeera office" (Terrorism: Essential Primary Sources 435).

[16] Morey and Yaqin note two trends in Muslim stereotyping. In the first, Muslims are represented as outsiders. The second is the Muslim as cultural hybrid:

> However, in recent years Muslim characters who pose a threat to the ethnonormalized community of the nation are more likely to be depicted as "Westernized" in outward appearance. As such, they are difficult to identify, thereby constituting an even more menacing "enemy within." They may be outwardly respectable, look something like "us," and hold down professions such as medicine or teaching. We would describe this particular mutation of the Muslim stereotype as a "post-Huntington stereotype," taking our cue from a passage in *The Clash of Civilizations* in which Huntington attempts to describe ostensibly culturally hybrid subjects who may nonetheless be drawn to terrorism: "somewhere in the Middle East a half dozen young men could well be dressed in jeans, drinking coke, listening to rap and between their bows to Mecca, putting together a bomb to blow up an American airliner" (115-116).

[17] According to Spencer, an understanding of the metaphorical, discursive construction of terrorism is important because, while the discourse and metaphors of terrorism do not cause policy, "metaphors are … likely to influence policy indirectly though their impact on a decision maker's general approach to an issue; they will be part of the conceptual foundation" (Spencer 399).

CHAPTER V

TECHNOLOGICAL PROGRESS AND THE SUPER-DIEGETIC: 3D EXHIBITION AND *AVATAR*

Like *The Last Samurai*, *Avatar* (2009) explicitly constructs the difference between an aggressive, technologically advanced, colonial force and its virtuous, primitive other. But while *The Last Samurai* is an oblique cipher for the construction of the Muslim other in *The War on Terror*, *Avatar* directly engages with post-9/11 conflict. With throwaway references to "shock and awe," a military commander who insists that "[he] will fight terror *with* terror," and the sci-fi displacement of Middle-Eastern oil with the fictional mineral "unobtainium," *Avatar* positions itself as both a pro-Indian revenge fantasy and a criticism of American imperialism. Because the film hangs its revenge fantasy and its anti-imperialist critique on a techno-phobic melodrama, it is tempting to read the film as a rejection of temporal elitism.

However, to understand *Avatar*'s engagement with temporal elitism, we must recognize that the film spawned two parallel discourses. The first of these discourses is ambiguous and contested. It questions whether *Avatar* is a neo-colonial fantasy of white male omnipotence or an allegory of eco-heroism and indigenous peoples' rights. Participants in this discourse evaluate the film's representation of technology and the colonial encounter. Many criticize the portrayal of a technology with which a white male appropriates an indigenous identity. Others read the film as technophobic and anti-imperialist, citing the film's heroic rendering of an indigenous triumph. As a contested field of interpretations, this discourse reflects *Avatar*'s own ambiguous narrative. Thomas

Elsaesser writes that this contest over meaning is a result of the film's own calculated ambiguity:

> The ideological message of [*Avatar*] seems to have been precisely calibrated, for instance, regarding … the degree of anti-Americanism, the manner in which ecological motifs are touched upon, and how – within the mythological matrix of "the White Messiah" that [David] Brooks calls "politically offensive" and [Slavoj] Žižek calls "brutally racist" – there is enough room for these indigenous peoples to claim or reclaim through the film their "rights." … Cameron … was well aware of the United States' deeply controversial role in the world, in the midst of two wars of aggression. … Avatar's anti-Americanism is thus just explicit enough to flatter Hollywood's vast international market, while not too offensive for Americans of the relevant demographic to feel repelled or insulted by it. (294)

Elsaesser argues that the film's narrative ambiguity is part of the postmodern marketing strategy of "multiple access points." *Avatar* was intended to flatter a global market that would account for 70% of its total revenue. It is fitting that the film's anti-American melodrama should so fully harmonize with a fantasy of white male dominance in a colonial utopia. This combination of narratives is a diegetic avatar for the film's own global market strategy; "Anti-Americanism is an instrument in Hollywood's arsenal for maintaining its dominance in a world market" (Elsaesser 294).[1]

While the interpretation of *Avatar*'s plot is a contested field of meaning, popular and academic critics have unambiguously reiterated a colonial temporality in their reception of *Avatar*'s 3D exhibition technology. This discourse constructs *Avatar* as an

unqualified advance in cinematic technology. Whether critics deride the film's visual sophistication as a distraction from narrative nuance, or celebrate the film's technological achievement as a new mode of cinematic storytelling, the critics have unanimously regarded the film as a step forward in 3D exhibition.[2] It is damning that this developmental model is so prominent in a film about the primitive : modern binary. Indeed, critics have noted the irony with which a technophobic melodrama of indigenous liberation assumed the form of a digitally-rendered 3D spectacle.[3]

I argue that *Avatar* is not as polysemous as Thomas Elsaesser suggests because popular and critical discourse unambiguously constructed the film as a technological advance. The futurity of *Avatar*'s cinematic technology manages the film's indigenous people with a super-diegetic binary. This super-diegetic binary recuperates the ambiguity of the film's narrative because it throws the film's indigenous people into horizontal and vertical relationships with futurity. The film's diegetic binary is reinforced by an extra-diegetic one. This extra-diegetic binary is decidedly uncontested. The relationship between the Na'vi and *Avatar's* own cinematic technology constructs the primitive as an anachronistic entity vis-à-vis a contemporary viewing position. The futurity of *Avatar*'s cinematic technology entails the denial of coevalness and temporal elitism.

3D Technology and *Avatar*: An Uncontested Model of Progressive Time

Poplar and scholarly reception constructed the 3D exhibition of *Avatar* as a highly evolved, sophisticated, and celebrated technology. As one scholar writes; "Cameron's *Avatar* achieved record-breaking box-office figures and gained widespread critical acclaim for bringing the 3-D format to aesthetic maturity" (Ross 382). Expressing the popular perspective, Adam Cohen of the *New York Times* writes that 3D cinematography was the "real star" of *Avatar*. Cohen uses spatial and temporal metaphors of progress;

"Three-D technology has come a long way from the old days of the Three Stooges' pie-throwing antics. Mr. Cameron created a single camera that can shoot live-action stereoscope 3-D, to take the technology to a new level, and it is an undeniable crowd pleaser (*sic*)" (22). In an article otherwise devoted to a celebration of *Avatar*'s anti-colonial message, it is curious that Cohen's rhetoric deploys the ideology of technological progress. In Cohen's diction, travel through space "[having come] a long way," is a spatial metaphor for temporal travel from "the old days." That this movement through time and space should be interpreted as progressive is reinforced with the unambiguous vertical metaphor of the "new level."[4]

To understand *Avatar*'s interaction with this context, I propose that we understand the film's primitive : modern binary according to two diagrams of my own design. In its diegesis, *Avatar* melodramatically constructs a primitive : modern binary. This is represented by the horizontal axis of the triangle in Figure 32.

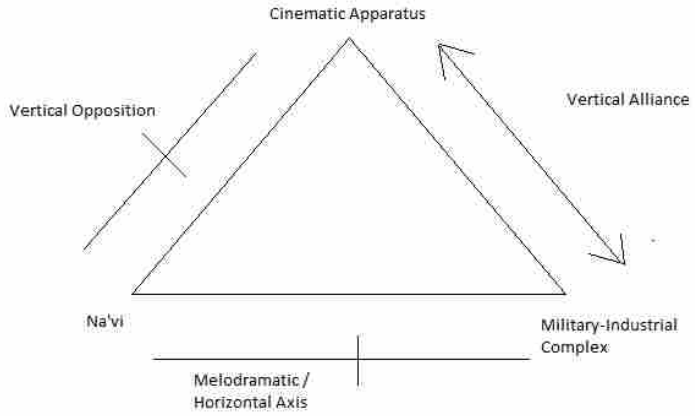

Figure 32. *Avatar*'s Super-Diegetic Constellation.

However, *Avatar*'s own futurity installs the film's indigenous people in a triangular constellation of difference. Within this constellation, the Na'vi are opposed to both diegetic and extra-diegetic icons of modernity. This becomes what I will call a super-diegetic constellation. In opposition to the Na'vi, the film's diegetic technologies enjoy a vertical harmony with the film's own extra-diegetic futurity. Throughout this chapter, I will use the language of "horizontal" and "vertical" relationships in reference to these diagrams. When I say that the film's "horizontal" diegetic relationship is managed by or subordinate to the film's "vertical" extra-diegetic relationship, I indicate the recuperation of the film's contested meaning by the unambiguous celebration of the film's own futurity. The horizontal relationship of the Na'vi to the film's diegetic technology is always subsumed by this vertical axis.

In the use of the terms "extra-diegetic" and "super-diegetic," I denote the ontological difference between non-diegetic music and extra-diegetic 3D technology. In the practice of everyday moviegoing, it is the rare spectator who marvels at the production of non-diegetic sound. In contrast, *Avatar*'s exhibition technology garnered constant attention as a non-diegetic spectacle of technological progress. As such, I say it was extra-diegetic, rather than non-diegetic. When I say that the Na'vi are thrown into both a diegetic and an extra-diegetic relationship to futurity, I indicate that the film's 3D exhibition technology draws attention to itself as a technique wholly independent from *Avatar*'s narrative world in a way that is impossible for the film's soundtrack. When I refer to a relationship as "super-diegetic," I indicate that one of the film's narrative elements enters into a relationship with both diegetic and extra-diegetic elements. The Na'vi endure a super-diegetic relationship with technological progress because their

opposition to diegetic technology runs in parallel with their relationship to the film's own exhibition technology. Finally, this triangular relationship is super-diegetic because the film's diegetic technology and the film's 3D exhibition technology share a structural affinity in their relationship to the Na'vi.

But it is not simply that *Avatar* positions the Na'vi against diegetic and extra-diegetic futurity, and it is not simply that *Avatar*'s diegetic binary is structured according to an evolutionary model. Rather, these local constructions of time run in parallel to a progressive temporal vector which structures the evolutionary discourse of cinema more broadly (Figure 33).

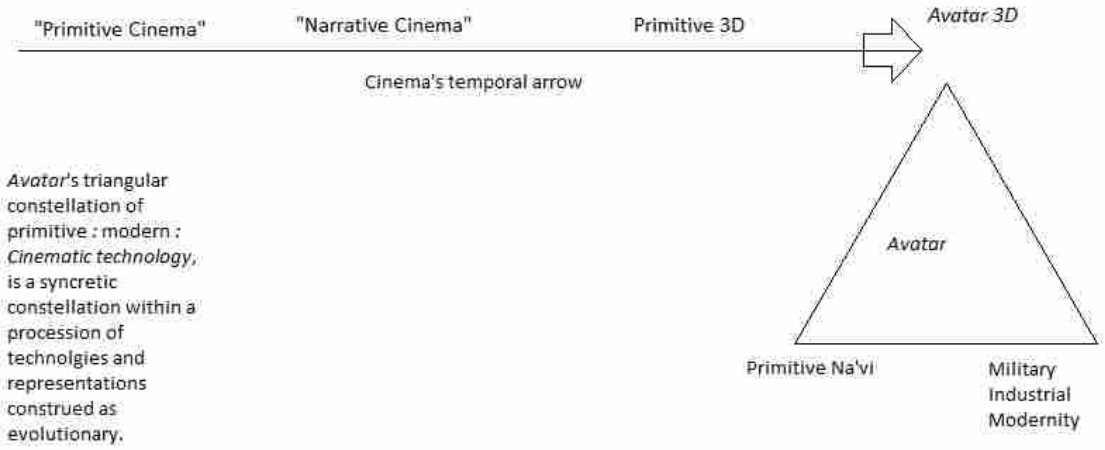

Figure 33. The Evolutionary Paradigm of Cinematic Technology.

To understand *Avatar*'s temporal elitism, it will be useful to summarize the broader history of cinematic primitivism. First, film theory has been infused with the notion that cinema is evolving toward a destination. Second, film theory has often construed cinema as the final realization of human, artistic, and Enlightenment ideals. These two notions are distinct in the sense that the first is about the internal evolution of

cinema itself, about cinema's own private destiny and self-actualization, while the second figures cinema and the photograph as the *teloi* of human and scientific desires. Two foundational documents in the history of film theory that address these themes are André Bazin's "The Evolution of the Language of Cinema" and "The Ontology of the Photographic Image."

In "The Evolution of the Language of Cinema," Bazin argues that the transition from silent to sound cinema was the progressive actualization of cinema's true nature. Specifically, synchronized sound was a crucial step in the actualization of film's final destiny, its realist aesthetic. In the essay's first line, Bazin writes that "by 1928 the silent film had reached its artistic peak" (43). He personifies "the silent film" as an explorer achieving dominance over the natural environment. Bazin links a vertical destiny to movement through time, as a *telos* which was achieved in 1928. As such, he harmonizes a colonial trope of man's dominance over the natural environment with an appropriation of Darwinism reminiscent of 19th-century anthropology. Bazin erroneously lends evolution a progressive arrow. As if to confirm this implication, the first sentence of Bazin's second paragraph unambiguously declares the teleology of cinema's aesthetic destiny; "In point of fact, now that sound has given proof that it came not to destroy but to fulfill the Old Testament of the cinema, we may most properly ask if the technical revolution created by the soundtrack was in any sense an aesthetic revolution" (43).

Indeed, his answer to this query is a resounding "no," for Bazin considers the introduction of sound, particularly sound's supplement to the realism of the long take and deep focus, to have resulted in the realization of cinema as a mature, classical form. Instead of defining the split in cinema as that between silent and sound film, Bazin makes

a distinction between those films dedicated to capturing the real, which he understands in terms of the unity of space and time achieved through the long take and deep focus, and those films dedicated to the image, or the plastic manipulation of the real through impressionistic effects or montage. Considering depth of field to be of a piece with synchronized sound in its ability to fulfill the Old Testament, to represent the real, Bazin writes that depth of field was "a capital gain in the field of direction—a dialectical step forward in the history of film language" (51). Deep focus was the actualization of cinema's destiny because cinema's true nature is to reproduce the real. Deep focus "brings the spectator into a relation with the image closer to that which he enjoys with reality" (54).

In "The Ontology of the Photographic Image," Bazin writes that photography is the realization of a human ideal. In doing so, Bazin places an ancient Orient in a dialectical relationship to the modern West. He blesses the Western and the modern by figuring them at the end of time's arrow. He does this by suggesting that the progressive history of the plastic arts, starting with the mummies of ancient Egypt and concluding with cinema, has been motivated by what he calls "the mummy complex." The mummy complex is the neurotic impulse for "the preservation of life by the representation of life" (195). Bazin argues that this practice took its original form with the Egyptian pharos, who believed that the replication or preservation of the body after death would preserve life (195).

Writing that renaissance perspective prompted an obsessive pursuit of realism, Bazin argues that photography and cinema satisfied this pursuit through the mechanical reproduction of the image. Photography is the final satisfaction of the mummy complex

because “we are forced to accept as real the existence of the object reproduced, actually *re*-presented, set before us … in time and space” (198). Because photography satisfies the mummy complex, Bazin claims that “photography is clearly the most important event in the history of the plastic arts” (199).

These two essays work as a foundation for the evolutionary discourse of cinema. “Ontology” figures photography and cinema as inventions of Western culture. This privileges the West as the location of global-historical destiny and the satisfaction of a primitive desire. “Evolution” describes changes in cinema technology and aesthetics in a way which reinscribes these developmental narratives while figuring Euro-American cinematic aesthetics as a privileged, classical norm.

Bazin’s teleology has been an enduring presence in film theory. In *The Classical Hollywood Style*, Kristin Thompson presents a historical trajectory of cinema which echoes Bazin while prefiguring the discourse of *Avatar*. She writes that the documentary mode of the single-shot actuality was characterized by a lack of training or sophistication. According to Thompson, this was a mode of cinema having to do with, or produced by, primitive peoples and cultures. Finally, she writes that this mode of cinema evolved into the more sophisticated style of the “classical” Hollywood period (Oksiloff 19-20). Thompson assumes a destiny for cinema, the so called “classical” period, while explicitly juxtaposing this destiny with a “primitive” cinema of and about “primitive” people. While Thompson attempts to maintain a value free comparison between these two modes, Assenka Oksiloff argues that “it is difficult to overlook, in the linking of the primitive with ‘untrained individuals’ and ‘simplicity,’ Thompson’s reassertion of an evolutionary narrative borrowed from traditional anthropological discourses” (20). Oksiloff argues that

Kristin Thompson is only a late instance of a broader pattern in which film theorists have mapped the history of cinema with anthropology's temporal elitism:

> Primitive cinema is not a product of recent historical criticism, but rather a myth that took shape almost simultaneously with the emergence of cinema. Similar in significant ways to the myth of the primitive ethnographic body, the myth of primitive cinema functioned as a point of origin and a basis for the self-identity of a new phenomenon in mass culture. It satisfied the desire to trace an evolution of the medium and to situate oneself upon a line of aesthetic and technological progression, simultaneously positing the primitive while distancing oneself from it. (Oksiloff 22)

While Oksiloff's work points to the origins of the evolutionary discourse of cinema, her study of German ethnography from the turn of the 20th century identifies a historical precedent for *Avatar*'s super-diegetic management of the primitive : modern binary. In her analysis of ethnographic cinema, Oksiloff writes that the German intelligentsia celebrated the motion picture as the realization of an Enlightenment ideal, as that technology that would allow objective, scientific observation.[5] It was in this context that Rudolf Pöch made *Bushman Speaking into the Phonograph* (1908). Oksiloff writes that the film's narrative action is a metaphor for the off-screen interaction between the ethnographic object and the camera that records him (Figure 34):

> Pöch's film stages a 'first contact,' … between 'primitive man' and 'advanced' technology … "Bushman Speaking into the Phonograph" is devoted exclusively to the event named in the title: an elderly subject, identified simply as Kubi, is shown speaking into the mouth of the phonograph in a static medium long shot.

> … In addition to foregrounding the technological procedure of gathering data – recording Kubi's gestures and words – the film contrasts the Bushman to the technology used in recording his tale. This film depicts a dramatic encounter between the two ends of the evolutionary line: the *most* primitive and the *most* advanced specimens of culture. (Oskiloff 46)

Figure 34. Bushman Speaking into a Phonograph.

The classical example of this primitivist tableau is a scene in Robert Flaherty's *Nanook of the North* (1922) in which Nanook interacts with a gramophone (Figure 35). In this scene, Nanook appears delighted with the gramophone and its production of sound. Apparently dumfounded as to the device's operations, Nanook examines the device with a series of exploratory bites. In reality, Allakariallak (the film's star) was well acquainted with media technology and worked closely with Flaherty to choreograph the film's scenes and evaluate the film's rushes.[6] A subsequent scene intercuts shots of barking dogs with Nanook and his family eating raw seal. An intertitle having asserted that the human characters share a "blood lust" with the wolf who is their "forebear," this scene "visually [associates] Nanook and his family more closely with dogs than to the trader

and his Western technology…" (Rony 114-115). Taken together, these scenes emphasize Nanook's primitive, oral corporeality.[7] If we take the gramophone as a surrogate for cinematic technology, *Nanook* and *Bushman Speaking* serve as twin prototypes for the super-diegetic management of the primitive : modern binary.

Figure 35. Nanook and the Phonograph.

There is no doubt that *Nanook* is an important example of early ethnographic film. However, because *King Kong* (1933) explicitly portrays a diegetic relationship between cinematic technology and King Kong as an object of the colonizer's gaze, *King Kong* is the more complex example of super-diegetic primitivism. Especially considering Peter Jackson's remake of *King Kong* in 2005, the structural similarities between both of these films with early ethnographic cinema, and the structural similarities of these films to *Avatar*'s super-diegetic primitivism, an analysis of *King Kong* will demonstrate how *Avatar* has inherited the legacy of early ethnographic film and how late-19th and early-20th century ideologies persist into the present moment.[8]

Cooper and Shoedsack's *King Kong* (1933) is a transition from non-fictional ethnography to fictional ethnographic film. *King Kong* dramatizes the ability of white filmmakers to penetrate colonial space and capture the primitive other. *King Kong* transports the tropes, ideologies, and temporal elitism of visual anthropology into the

arena of popular film.[9] As such, *King Kong* is a semi-autobiographical account of Cooper and Shoedsack's own work as the makers of early ethnographic films such as *Grass: A Nations Battle for Life* (1925) and *Chang: A Drama of the Wilderness* (1927).[10]

Like the films of Pöch and Flaherty, Cooper and Shoedsack's *King Kong* features the juxtaposition of a primitive other with modern technology. Because it features a film crew, their equipment, and the quest of this crew to capture Kong's image, *King Kong* explicitly manages its representation of the primitive within a super-diegetic constellation. Kong is juxtaposed with the technology of the diegetic motion picture camera, but he is also juxtaposed with the technological prowess of *King Kong* the motion picture. Just as Kong is diegetically managed by steel chains, airplanes and machine guns, he is cinematically managed by the puppetry, stop-motion animation, and other visual wizardry required for the presentation of his body.

Indeed, *King Kong* (1933) was as much about its own technological achievement as it was about a narrative of colonial mastery. One review for *The New York Times* stated:

> Three months were spent investigating scientific records before a single scene was photographed on the RKO-radio sets where "King Kong" has been in the making since 1931. Geographical data concerning the vegetation, location and population of an imaginary island … were checked with experts and university research departments. Paleontologists were consulted by Willis O'Brien, whose job it was to animate the dinosauria … [The sound effects coordinator] went for suggestions to Dr. O.A. Paterson, curator of mammalian paleontology at the

> Carnegie Museum, and Dr. J. W. Lytle, vertebrate paleontologist of the Los Angeles Museum. (A 50-Foot Ape X3)

As this excerpt demonstrates, the popular discourse of *King Kong* explicitly linked scientific knowledge of the antediluvian to the technique and triumph of *Kong'*s production. Moreover, this discourse construed *Kong* as an icon of technical cinematic progress in a manner which prefigures similar evaluations of *Avatar*. In comparing the film to *The Lost World* (1925), one critic wrote:

> [Kong] has the added advantage of sound, which 'Lost World' missed in 1925. It also has the additional technical knowledge and experienced gained by Willis O'Brien and other off-screen manipulators. O'Brien served as chief technician for both films. … So purely an exhibition of studio and camera technology—and it isn't much more than that –'Kong' surpasses anything of its type which has gone before it in commercial film-making. (Bige 14)[11]

Of course, *King Kong* actively references its own technological progress in ways which may have encouraged this popular discourse. By listing "King Kong" among the film's "players," the film uses direct narrative address to establish Kong as an extra-diegetic entity. By introducing Kong as the "8th Wonder of the World," the film congratulates its own technical prowess (Figure 36).[12] Thus, the film's regard for its own technical achievement is structurally equivalent to the diegetic regard of the film's modern characters for King Kong. Carl Denham's triumphant exhibition of Kong for a modern audience in New York City is a diegetic dramatization of the film's own spectacle. Indeed, in the shot-reverse-shot sequence in which Kong is displayed in his chains, the diegetic audience occupies the same space as the cinematic spectator, and the

film's diegetic auditorium becomes an on-screen surrogate for the space of the extra-diegetic cinema (Figure 37).

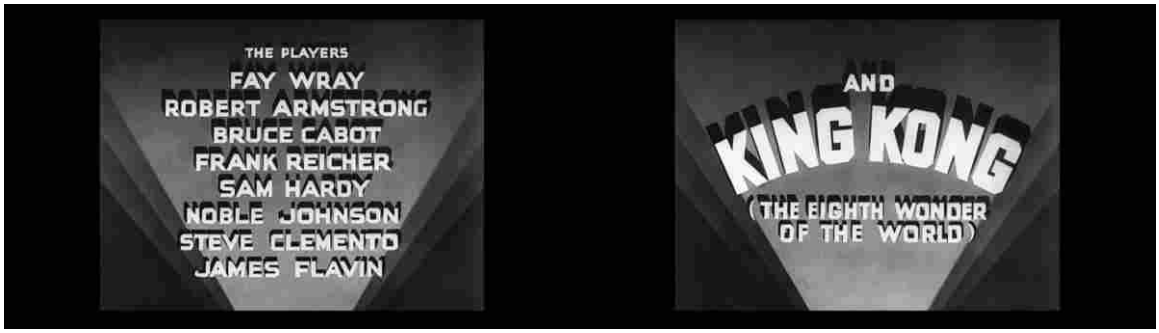

Figure 36. King Kong as Extra-Diegetic Spectacle.

Figure 37. King Kong as Super-Diegetic Spectacle.

This visual doubling is a metaphor for the double nature of the film's ideological work. On the one hand, the film is a spectacle as a function of its technological innovation. As if to reinforce a sense of technological progress, the spectacle made possible by *King Kong'*s visual technology is the spectacle of the primitive other. As such, the relationship between filmic technology and the primitive other is as much a relationship of power and domination as the narrative played out on screen. Just as Kong is slain by the airplane and its machine gun, so too is Kong managed, dominated, and upstaged by the very technology that represents him. As such, both the diegetic audience and their extra-diegetic counterparts are encouraged to move into a relationship of temporal elitism with King Kong. As Bliss Cua Lim writes:

> Though Kong and those who worship him are co-present with the filmmakers, they are spatially and temporally distanced: Skull Island is a remote, uncharted island off the coast of Sumatra, a place where time has literally come to a temporally confused stop: the enormous primate, Kong, battles a dinosaur. Kong and the primitives who worship him are therefore anachronistic contemporaries of the diegetic filmmakers (and, implicitly, of the extradiegetic spectator). (90)

Similar observations were part of the popular discourse at Kong's release. As one reviewer had it, the audiences of the Radio City movie houses in New York enjoyed "all the sensations of primitive terror and fascination within the scientifically air-cooled temple of baroque modernism that is Mr. Rockefeller's contribution to contemporary culture" (Quoted in Erb 21).

Peter Jackson's remake of *King Kong* (2005) indicates that the early-20th-century looking relations of ethnographic cinema, and, in particular, the triangular constellation of the original *Kong,* were an active cinematic paradigm in the years preceding *Avatar.* First, the 2005 film reproduces the process by which Kong is both a primitive, diegetic spectacle for a diegetic, modern other, and a primitive counterpart to the cinematic technology which produces him. The reproduction of the theater scene's shot-reverse-shot sequence emphasizes the endurance of the original film's super-diegetic gazing relations (Figure 38).

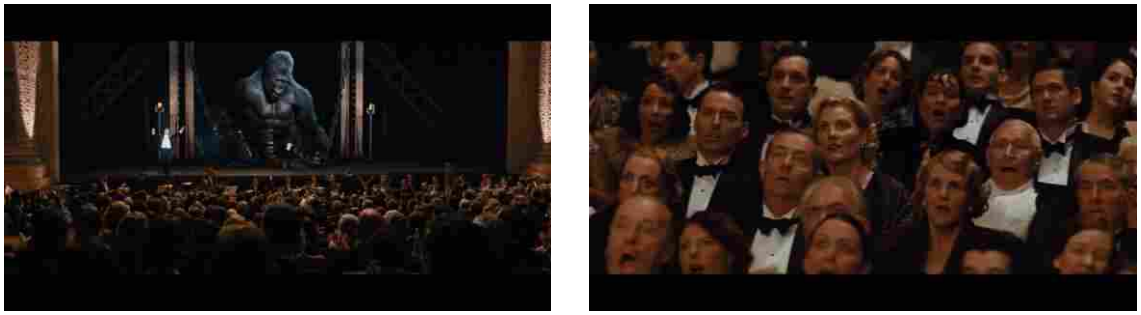

Figure 38. The Super-Diegetic Kong, Redux.

Moreover, this scene posits a temporal relationship between the diegetic audience of 1933 and their 21st-century counterparts. Significantly, *Kong* (2005) presents 1930s New York as a computer-generated spectacle (Figure 39).[13] The relationship between the diegetic spectator and her extra-diegetic counterpart generates another super-diegetic relationship: the juxtaposition of 1930s cinema technology with the film's own computer generated imagery (Figure 40). Just as Bazin emphasizes that the knowledge of the photograph's means of production is crucial to the psychological effect of the photograph and the motion picture

Figure 39. New York as Object.

image, so too is the knowledge of *King Kong*'s computer generated imagery an extra-diegetic factor in the construction of time for the cinematic spectator in 2005.[14] As the first remake of *King Kong* to render the film's drama with computer graphics, the 2005 remake explicitly complicates the triangular constellation of the 1933 film because it juxtaposes manual, hand-crank camera technology with computer generated imagery. Moreover, this juxtaposition is energized with the primitive : modern binary because the primitive other is the diegetic object of these temporally disparate visual technologies.

Figure 40. Primitive, Diegetic Visual Technology.

As both Kong and the diegetic camera are juxtaposed with the film's own visual technology, the film's computer generated images imply a parallel between Kong and the

antique cameras which capture him in the film's diegesis. Both Kong and the film's diegetic cameras are in an oppositional relationship to *Kong'*s own visual technology. While Cooper and Shoedsack's *King Kong* was set in present-day 1933, Peter Jackson's film is set in the 1933 of the cinematic past. As such, the film draws attention to the now-antiquated visual technology through its juxtaposition with the visual technology of 2005. As its new rendering of Kong may be said to depend on advances in CGI technology, *King Kong* (2005) constructs a temporal trajectory of film technology which is superimposed on its rendering of the primitive : modern binary. As Dan North writes, this is a result of the process by which Peter Jackson's film positioned itself against its predecessor "as a source of *comparative* wonder" (North 180-181). Following North, Lisa Purse writes; "Both films enthusiastically engage with the special effects technologies at their disposal, but the Jackson film's deployment of the state of the art digital technologies functions partly as an assertion of its technological distance from its 1933 forebear" (83). The final consequence of this technological upstaging is that Kong is all the more irrevocably doomed to a position in the past. *Kong* (2005) weaves its ape into a compounded matrix of overlapping temporal oppositions, all of which have to do with cinematic technology and the rendering of the primitive body for a modern audience.

Both versions of *King Kong* are precedents for *Avatar*. Like *Kong*, *Avatar* is a colonial adventure about the movement of Anglo-Americans in a colonial space and their observation of primitive people within that space. More importantly, *Avatar* features a super-diegetic management of the primitive : modern binary. The film's protagonist (Sam Worthington) engages in a diegetic discovery of Pandora and its native peoples. By virtue

of the film's cinematography, its 3D exhibition technology, and the process by which the film's protagonist functions as the cinematic spectator's own avatar, the protagonist's visual discovery of Pandora is doubled by the cinematic spectator's own immersion in a neo-colonial paradise. *Avatar* replicates the triangular constellation of early ethnographic cinema because its cinematic technology manifests a diegetic avatar, the protagonist's own avatar program, which serves as a technology of observation and mastery. Finally, just as *King Kong* (2005) placed itself in a dialectical relationship with both its diegetic ape and the antique cinematic technology of the 1933 original, *Avatar* was considered to have been a progressive advance in 3D exhibition technology.

The Colonizer's Gaze, Movement, and 3D Exhibition Technology

Avatar's 3D technology allowed for the immersion of the cinematic spectator into the three-dimensional space of the film's diegesis. The spectator's movement from the theater into the film's diegetic world is an extra-diegetic metaphor for Jake Sully's own movement into a colonial space. By virtue of this extra-diegetic metaphor, theater is to diegesis as metropolis is to colony. The terms of this analogy are infused with the trajectory of temporal elitism because *Avatar*'s 3D exhibition technology was received as the evolution of a film aesthetic. Because of this analogy and its temporal energy, *Avatar*'s 3D exhibition solicits the spectator with the colonizer's gaze and the denial of coevalness.

As the movement of the spectator into its diegetic world so spectacularly underscores, *Avatar* is a movie about movement. It is about the movement of a colonial force to a primordial world. It is about the rehabilitation of a paraplegic veteran and his personal recovery of bodily mobility. It is about the pleasure this man experiences as he

literally moves through a beautiful, exotic world. It is about the protagonist's spiritual journey from a state of transcendental homelessness to the heart of an integrated civilization. It is about his spectacular movement through space on the back of winged beasts. *Avatar* is also, primarily, a film about the movement of the audience. The cinematic spectator moves with Jake Sully in his flights over Pandora. The spectator is emotionally moved by the film's melodramatic rendering of ecological catastrophe and colonial violence. As a spectacular, visual-effects-laden blockbuster, and as a melodrama about a white-savior who gets his literal and metaphorical wings, *Avatar* is about many forms of movement. It is no surprise, then, that *Avatar*'s most spectacular visual innovation, an innovation which has everything to do with the immersion of the cinematic spectator in a neo-colonial paradise, has everything to do with movement.

Before *Avatar*, which is to say, in the "primitive" era of such technology, 3D exhibition was primarily characterized by negative parallax or "the pop-out effect." The sign of *Avatar*'s progress was its total revision of this aesthetic norm. In contradistinction to negative parallax, 3D exhibition in *Avatar* depended on the illusion of spatial depth and the sensation of movement into this depth of field; "*Avatar* set a standard in terms of depth-realism, paying much attention to extending depth planes away from the viewer" (Ross 382). These depth planes encouraged the cinematic spectator to feel that he or she was immersed in *Avatar*'s diegetic and colonial worlds. With Jake Sully as their avatar, audience members experienced movement into the pleasurably rendered space of *Avatar*'s fictional world.

This sense of spectatorial movement seems to have been the explicit goal of the film's creator, James Cameron. In a review of an early screening of the film at which

Cameron spoke, both the diction of the director and the commentary of the reviewer foreground the possibility of spectatorial transportation and the power of the cinematic apparatus:

> "Welcome to Avatar."
>
> The director James Cameron had materialized, as if by digital magic, before an early screening audience here of his latest blockbuster-in-waiting. But it's not quite clear what the director was inviting them into this day in early December. The little $230 million picture he had just finished? The "world" created by his production's advanced digital techniques? (Anderson 20)

First, an audience which is meant to identify with the viewing position of a white male protagonist is explicitly invited to move into colonial space. Second, this space is considered to have been constructed by and for the colonizer's gaze. Lastly, the primitive and its world are the acceptable and pleasurable arena of white mobility as a function of advanced technology. *Avatar* interpellates the cinematic spectator into the terms of the colonizer's gaze as a function of its 3D exhibition technology.

While the colonizer's gaze has structured the viewing relationships of previous films, *Avatar's* 3D exhibition technology is a new dimension in the interpellation of the spectator into the structure of the colonizer's gaze. As Richard C. Hawkins writes; "In the realm of true stereoscopic films, a control of depth relationships and of the position of the image in space may bring audiences into a new and intriguing relation with the picture" (333). In her discussion of the "new haptic effects" of the 3D exhibition technologies of *Avatar*, Mirriam Ross writes that this "new and intriguing relation with the picture"

involves a hyper-haptic, tactile viewing which collapses the distance between subject and object and produces an immersive effect:

> Stereoscopic images may at first seem to continue the dependence on optical vision … but once the moving images are brought to life, so to speak, the abundance of depth planes provokes an immersive effect through which the body is located within and in relation to, rather than at a fixed distance from, the content. (Ross 383)

Distinguishing between the traditional 2D screen, the haptic cinema screen, and the hyper-haptic 3D screen, Ross argues for a series of ontological and experiential consequences of 3D exhibition. For Ross, the traditional 2D screen is experienced by the terms of optical vision. Basically, "the viewer is offered a separate screen space, set apart from themselves, which has a structured intelligibility. In turn, this separation allows for a distance-based contemplation of the action, and there is a potential for mastery over and possession of the content" (Ross 385). Drawing on Laura Marks's definition of the haptic cinema screen, Ross writes that this cinema is distinct from the traditional visual space of 2D film because it challenges the visual mastery of the spectator; "[haptic cinema refuses] to position clear signs and relations between objects on its surface, which in turn draws attention to the images' textured and tactile quality. The screen speaks out to the audience and invites participation by showing and frustrating our understanding of its content" (Ross 385).

Ross argues that 3D cinema frustrates visual mastery even further: 3D cinema is "hyper-haptic." Noting that movement beyond the frame depends on a sense of the stable screen and its violation, Ross argues that "3-D is the only format to suggest the

impossibility of a stable surface for the moving images…by making the framing of the screen violable and open to play, the 3-D film allows the potential for a fundamental haptic effect the sense of 'touching not mastering'" (384). Finally, she argues that "3-D cinema asserts an uncontrollable, infinite depth in its image, producing a *hyperphatic* visuality" (384).

In sum, Ross considers 3D exhibition technology to dismantle the mastery of the cinematic spectator, going so far as to invoke Julia Kristeva's *Powers of Horror*; "the proximity of objects in the field screen threatens to engulf the audience" (386). I must disagree with Ross in the case of *Avatar*. *Avatar*'s 3D technology offers the cinematic spectator a "new and intriguing relation with the picture" which is one of colonial mastery and the privilege of movement. Indeed, Ross describes 3D technology in resolutely temporal and spatial terms which, when considered in the context of *Avatar*'s narrative, suggest that 3D technology is as much about the mastery of the colonial subject as it is about threats to the colonizer's gaze. For Ross, the hyperhaptic 3D field-screen is an "evolution of" the traditional haptic screen. Furthermore, the function of this "evolution" is the movement of the spectator through "infinite depth planes" (385-386). In sum, the stereoscopic advance in cinematic technology allows the spectator to literally move through a "habitable geographic space" (Bruno 250).

As such, *Avatar*'s technological advance is the crucial means by which Jake Sully's fantasy of colonial mastery is a vicarious pleasure for the film's viewer:

> When discussing *Avatar,* Cameron expressed his determination to move his film away from the supposedly gimmicky effects created by [the] use of repeated negative parallax. He made it clear in interviews that depth construction was his

> major aesthetic concern. This emphasis is evident in many of the landscape shots of … Pandora in which the viewer is taken "through the screen." In these shots, the visual world's endless and infinite quality becomes enhanced by the sensation that the landscapes could be indefinitely traversed through an extended journey into the background. (Ross 390)

For Ross, the film's own metaphorical "move away" from negative parallax is reinforced by the spectators' movement through the screen, Jake Sully's movement through *Avatar*'s diegetic space, and the spectator's own literal and vicarious traversal of both the diegetic dimension and Pandora's diegetic space. Moreover, this movement is always either a function of, or a metaphor for, the "evolution" of cinematic exhibition technology. In this way, movement through colonial space, and this movement's pleasure, are linked to a colonial discourse of evolutionary time.

It is not merely that the film produces the denial of coevalness as a function of its 3D exhibition. Rather, Jake Sully's journey into the wild reiterates a turn-of-the-20th-century psychoanalytic trope. In *The Interpretation of Dreams, Totem and Taboo,* and *The Uncanny,* Freud reiterates the recapitulation hypothesis common to anthropological thought of the 19th-century. This hypothesis maintained that the racial evolution of the human species could be observed in the maturation of a civilized individual. As an extension of this hypothesis, Freud argued that the psychology of civilized children was analogous to the psychology of primitive adults because children are recapitulating the primitive stage in human psychic development.[15] In both *Totem and Taboo* and "The Uncanny," Freud complicates this thesis with his theory of the "omnipotence of thought." His theory holds that civilized children, adult neurotics, and primitive peoples are

incapable of distinguishing their desires from external reality. When a neurotic, civilized adult imagines the satisfaction of his desire through the process of a hallucination, this represents a regression to a previous state of human evolution. Freud describes this stage of human development as a state of primitive, infantile narcissism. As he writes in *The Uncanny*:

> The analysis of cases of the uncanny has led us back to the old *animistic* view of the universe, a view characterized by the idea that the world was peopled with human spirits, by the narcissistic overrating of one's own mental processes, by the omnipotence of thoughts and the technique of magic that relied on it, by the attribution of carefully graded magical powers (*mana*) to alien persons and things, and by all the inventions with which the unbounded narcissism of that period of development sought to defend itself against the unmistakable sanctions of reality. It appears that we have all, in the course of our individual development, been through a phase corresponding to the animistic phase in the development of primitive peoples, that this phase did not pass without leaving behind in us residual traces that can still make themselves felt, and that everything we find 'uncanny' meets the criterion that it is linked with these remnants of animistic mental activity and prompts them to express themselves. (Freud 147)

In preparation for the film's final battle, Jake prays to the all-hearing "All Mother" of the Na'vi religion. Miraculously, his prayers are answered when the fauna of Pandora come to his aid in the film's melodramatic conclusion; "When Jake projects his desires and thoughts onto the external world, and the external world responds by mirroring the desire

of the protagonist, Jake enjoys a regression to an infantile state characterized by omnipotence of thought" (Norton 4-5).

Of course, *Avatar* reiterates Freud's recapitulation hypothesis with a distinctly post-modern twist. While omnipotence of thought continues to characterize the primitive stage of human evolution, this state is by no means considered a neurotic or pathological one. Rather, this is a utopian state set in contradistinction to a post-apocalyptic techno-nightmare. This is *Avatar's* temporal paradox. On a cinematic level, the film is technologically advanced and was celebrated as such. On a diegetic level, the primitive is celebrated for its integration with the divine. In the broadest sense, this paradox in *Avatar* is representative of the trend observed by Morris Ginsberg in *The Idea of Progress*. Writing that the belief in progress was strongest at the turn of the 20th-century, Ginsberg writes:

> In more recent times the belief in progress has been further weakened by the growing recognition that advances in technical knowledge are by no means sufficient to ensure social and moral progress, and the fear that the use of scientific knowledge for destructive purposes may outpace and arrest the growth of its powers for good[.] … However, [the idea of progress] is so deeply rooted in the modern mind that its critics never entirely reject it and consciously or unconsciously leave a loophole for escape. (10-12)

Indeed, the capacity for technology to wreak material and moral havoc is showcased in one of *Avatar*'s most spectacular set pieces, the destruction of the Na'vi Home Tree by the sinister Colonel Quaritch.

The destruction of this tree by technologically advanced forces is only one instance of the film's construction of a civilization past its prime. In her analysis of sentimentalism and the appropriation of the indigenous body, Kyla Schuller writes that the stillness of Jake Sully's paralyzed legs is a metaphor for a culture in an epoch of dystopian stasis. Schuller argues that *Avatar*'s construction of a static culture is the cinematic expression of real-world fears. Schuller writes that fears of environmental catastrophe have "dampened the teleological fantasy that moving forward through time and accelerating technological mastery necessarily will bring about progress" (183). This disenchantment has carried the fear that "modernity [has become] toxic to the bodies of its seemingly rightful inheritors" (183).

Avatar relieves the pressure of techno-dystopia with its super-diegetic management of indigenous identity. As Jake's experience demonstrates, the bodies of the Na'vi are "an important resource for colonists fleeing [the] destructive march of time" (Schuller 179). In an ironic resolution of techno-dystopia, *Avatar* makes the primitive body available to modern subjects through diegetic and extra-diegetic technological achievement. Whereas the terms of the recapitulation hypothesis lock the Na'vi in a primitive past, the film's protagonist achieves therapeutic progress when high technology allows him to appropriate an indigenous body. Moreover, the appropriation of the primitive body is a privilege extended to the cinematic spectator through the device of the film's 3D exhibition technology:

> Particularly in its 3D versions … *Avatar* enacts the sentimental dynamic in which the audience experiences sensory movements that are similar to those of the protagonists. The viewer not only watches Sully don the perceptual apparatus of

> [the avatar program]; through the 3-D lenses, the viewer too is offered an avatar [and, by extension, an indigenous] body. (Schuller 184 [I have added comments in brackets])

Of course, the political consequences of this appropriation are contradictory. On the one hand, this appropriation encourages a shift in the protagonist's point of view so that he "switches allegiance to what the film constructs as sanctified indigenous life in utter harmony with the forces of life itself" (Schuller 186). On the other hand, the film reiterates the 19th-century logic of temporal elitism when it allows for the progressive movement of a white male vis-à-vis the stasis of a primitive other (Schuller 186). *Avatar* attempts to negotiate this ambiguity in a politically acceptable manner by presenting Sully's inhabitation of a primitive body "as redemption rather than colonization on account of the emotional sympathy and political allegiance he has demonstrated for Pandora's residents" (Schuller 187).

This shift in point of view is crucial for an understanding of *Avatar*'s deployment of the sentimental mode. In his discussion of the sentimental mode, James Chandler writes that "the sentimental spectator [who functions both as part of the plot and as a witness to the plot] proves to be a figure in motion. Able to assume multiple locations in narrative space, this figure is defined in no small part by his capacity to pass virtually into other points of view" (Quoted in Schuller 179). In *Avatar*, the construction of a sentimental viewing position is synonymous with the colonizer's gaze and the technological advance of 3D technology. Here, access to different points of view is synonymous with white access to a continuum of racial identity. Moreover, access to

different points of view is metaphorized as the literal capacity of the colonizer's gaze to move into the film's diegetic, colonial space.

Indeed, there is a structural parallel between the sentimental spectator's ability to move between points of view and the cinematic spectator's ability to move between the theater and the diegesis. Just as Jake Sully's colonial and sentimental point of view is backwardly mobile, able to sympathize with the primitive through the appropriation of emotional, ethical, and racial perspectives, the cinematic spectator is vertically mobile in his or her point of view, able to transcend the diegetic world of the film to appreciate the cinematic technology which allows this sympathetic rendering of the Na'vi. This movement of the cinematic spectator is a product of the film's spectacular technology. Specifically, the film's 3D exhibition encourages emersion into the film's diegetic world and an appreciation of the apparatus which renders that world. As Stephen Prince writes in *Digital Visual Effects in Cinema*; "visual effects at times can be disruptive; they can extend themselves as a spectacular dialectic. Viewers may see them simultaneously as a technological achievement and as an authentic part of the imaginary narrative world" (Price 189).

In his analysis of "post-*Avatar*-depression," Jonathan Mulrooney writes that, as a function of its 3-D exhibition technology, "*Avatar* at once courts audience desire for immersion in an alternative universe and leaves that desire conspicuously unfulfilled" (201). Ambiguously alluding to visual, spiritual, and emotional perspectives, James Cameron has said that Jake Sully's journey into the wilderness was a "journey of perceptual change" (Quoted in Mulrooney 201). Mulrooney writes; "For Cameron, the success of *Avatar* is measured in the way the film approximates that perceptual journey

for viewers" (201). This perceptual journey of the cinematic spectator is figural and literal. It is figural because it involves the shift in emotional allegiance and sentimental identification with the Na'vi. It is literal because *Avatar* is a spectacular visual journey from the mundane to the sublime for both protagonist and cinematic spectator. This perspectival shift and spectatorial movement are facilitated by the nature of *Avatar*'s 3D exhibition technology, its construction of the illusion of depth of field.

However, immersion in the diegetic dimension is always coupled with an alienation from the diegetic as a function of the spectacle of the cinematic apparatus. According to Cameron, 3D technology offers an immersive experience of a "supercharged" reality, and yet, he suggests a level of alienation from this immersive world when he says that "watching a stero[scopic] movie is looking into an alternate reality though a window" (Quoted in Mulrooney 202). Mulrooney observes:

> Mediation in cinema is ever present: the viewer looks into an "alternate" reality "through a window." What makes the reality "alternate" is the viewer's awareness of that reality as a framed thing, an awareness of the medium that makes cinematic seeing possible. By this means the spectator's gaze is at once within and without the scene the movie depicts (Mulrooney 202).

Mulrooney argues that "post-*Avatar*-depression" results from the impossibility of total filmic immersion and that *Avatar* demands a viewing subject divided from herself; "the three-dimensional virtuosity of *Avatar* is always … on display; the irresistible attractions of cinematic immersion disrupt rather than empower viewers' sensation of specular mastery" (202).

While it is clear that spectacular visual effects, and particularly 3D exhibition technology, can produce the sense of being in two places at once, it is not altogether clear that such an experience is a threat to the mastery of the cinematic spectator. Post-*Avatar*-depression was only one of many emotional responses to the film. While some viewers experienced the *Avatar* blues, the film moved many viewers to states of political, environmental or philosophical ecstasy. Biologist and science writer Carol Yoon writes:

> When watching a Hollywood movie that has robed itself in the themes and paraphernalia of science, a scientist expects to feel anything from annoyance to infuriation at facts misconstrued or processes misrepresented. What a scientist does not expect is to enter into a state of ecstatic wonderment, to have the urge to leap up and shout: "Yes! That's exactly what it's like!" So it is time for all the biologists who have not yet done so to shut their laptops and run from their laboratories directly to the movie theaters, put on 3-D glasses and watch the film "Avatar." … James Cameron's otherworldly tale of romance and battle, aliens and armadas, has somehow managed to do what no other film has done. It has recreated what is the heart of biology: the naked, heart-stopping wonder of really seeing the living world. (Quoted in Elsaesser 219)

As this biologist's ecstasy is a function of her immersion into a 3D environment, we must conclude that the film's exhibition technology is not essentially a threat to mastery or a source of depression. In fact, this excerpt highlights the potential for liberation, professional rejuvenation, and spiritual rebirth made possible by the difference between 2D visual technology (the laptop) and the immersion of 3D. As such, the film's 3D

exhibition is as much an emotional resource for the cinematic spectator as the primitivist narrative is for the film's white protagonist.

The Colonizer's Gaze: In the Theater and on the Screen

First, the simultaneous immersion and alienation of the 3D spectator is diegetically reproduced by a narrative of colonial mastery. To wit, the diegetic apparatus of the film's avatar program allows a colonial agent to exist in two places at once. For *Avatar*'s protagonist, mastery of this technology is tantamount to dominance over the primitive other and its landscape. Second, *Avatar*'s reception constructed the film's 3D technology as a scientific achievement. This context indirectly engages the film's diegetic primitive in a vertical dialectic. Third, when we consider that the particular nature of 3D's maturation was the process by which the spectator is afforded movement into a colonial space, it becomes impossible to separate an evaluation of *Avatar*'s diegetic technology from its exhibition technology, and an evaluation of its protagonist's diegetic mobility from the mobility of the cinematic spectator. Just as Jake moves through colonial space by virtue of his diegetic technology, so too does the cinematic spectator move into the colonial world as a function of the film's 3D exhibition technology.

But the structural parallel between extra-diegetic immersion and the film's diegetic colonial mobility is not the only factor which implicates 3D exhibition technology in a colonial dialectic. In a diegetic representation of this very parallel, the film explicitly and consistently renders diegetic 3D imaging technology as a tool of colonial surveillance. In almost all of the scenes which take place from the point of view of colonial scientists, military agents, and corporate executives, futuristic visual technologies allow mastery of Pandora. In no ambiguous terms, *Avatar* represents an

avatar of its own 3D exhibition technology in the diegetic devises which human characters use as instruments of colonial control. At Thomas Elsaesser writes, this diegetic use of 3D technology is nothing less than a virtual endorsement of 3D technology in real-life medical, industrial, and military operations (299).

In a sequence of images which diegetically reproduce the film's own exhibition technology, Jake Sully, his military commander, and a corporate executive command a 3D hologram (Figure 41). In this scene, diegetic surveillance technology serves as a surrogate for two other locations of the colonizer's movement. The first is Jake Sully's movement in Pandora's wilderness space. Through the immersive technology of the avatar program, Jake enjoys movement in a diegetically literal, yet digitally constructed, 3D environment. The rendering of the diegetic hologram in this expositional sequence mimics Jakes interaction with this 3D space while replicating the experience of the cinematic spectator: as Jake sits casually on the perimeter of the hologram, his arms overlap with the image. This image diegetically renders the experience of the cinematic spectator who is free to reach into the field-screen of the 3D image, passing her hands through the phantom of the image in the motion picture theater.

Figure 41. Jake and a Super-Diegetic Hologram.

Next, the cinematic spectator watches with the film's protagonist as a technician scrolls effortlessly over some fifty or sixty kilometers of geographic space which have been rendered in the 3D hologram. Because it is a spectacle for both diegetic viewers and the cinematic spectator, this 3D hologram is a super-diegetic icon of colonial mastery. As it is super-diegetic, this hologram stands to endorse the film's own 3D exhibition as a technology of colonial surveillance and mastery. As a result, this super-diegetic hologram must always remind the audience that "actual" space in the film's diegesis is always a space which is a product of digital, 3D rendering. As this hologram is an image which confers mastery to diegetic users, it suggests that the 3D spaces which comprise the film's many flight sequences are diegetic 3D spaces which may be mastered by the film's protagonist and by the cinematic spectator.

Significantly, it is not merely the malevolent agents who enjoy access to diegetic 3D technology. In a botanical mission conducted by the film's benevolent scientist (Sigourney Weaver), colonial agents in indigenous bodies use hand-held 3D devices in their observation of the colonial space and its organisms. In this scene, the spectacle of the primitive body and the spectacle of Pandora's computer generated landscape are thrown into juxtaposition with a diegetic icon of the very technology which renders these images (Figure 42). The primitive body finds itself in both vertical and horizontal dialectics with the hyper modern in a scene whose narrative dramatizes a colonial looking relationship.

Figure 42. Diegetic Visual Technology in *Avatar*.

These super-diegetic relationships are structured according to the super-diegetic colonizer's gaze in *King Kong*. However, *Avatar* introduces a significant twist to the super-diegetic gaze, and this twist has to do with the nature (or is it the artifice?) of the primitive object so doubly perceived. In *King Kong* (2005), Kong's body is set in juxtaposition to 1930s cinematic technology, his diegetic spectators, the 21st-century spectator, and 21st-century film technology. This juxtaposition is deepened by the fact that, unlike in *The Bushman Speaking into the Phonograph* and *Nanook of the North*, the primitive body becomes an icon of modernity's capacity to produce visual wonder. *Avatar* replicates many of these relationships, but it is a further departure from the super-diegetic gaze in early ethnographic cinema. Whereas the primitive body in *King Kong* is a product of extra-diegetic technology, in *Avatar*, the primitive body is diegetically constructed by the achievements of high technology.

Avatar is part of a cycle of films, starting with *Jurassic Park* (1990), which surpass *King Kong*'s super-diegetic complexity. *Jurassic Park* is about the gaze of the modern human on the anachronistic dinosaur, but it is also about the construction of this relationship as a super-diegetic gazing relationship. Just as the film's human characters

gaze in awe at the creatures of the diegesis, the cinematic spectator gazes in awe at the film's own cinematic spectacle (Figure 43). Geoff King writes:

> The first sight of the dinosaurs leaves the principals [played by Sam Neill and Laura Dern], in the characteristic blockbuster-movie state of open-mouthed amazement. The sequence is worth closer analysis. It plays an important part in the establishment of audience identification with the characters, at this point specifically as viewers of the on-screen spectacle, but also highlights our own experience of the spectacle of the movie itself. (42-43)

Figure 43. The Super-Diegetic and *Jurassic Park.*

In *Jurassic Park*, the technological achievement of the film's diegesis, the ability of scientists to produce the primitive body for the viewing pleasure of a diegetic audience, is a dramatization of the process by which the film's own technical wizards produced a spectacle for the cinematic spectator. As such, the film compounds the temporal looking relations of *King Kong* by infusing the diegetic body of the primitive other with the energy of scientific progress. Whereas Kong's body is always about the difference between the primitive object and the technology of the colonizer's gaze, *Jurassic Park* complicates this relationship because both the cinematic spectator and the diegetic spectator gaze on the primitive body as a spectacle of technological wonder.

This super-diegetic viewing dynamic is crucial to James Cameron's own oeuvre. *Terminator 2: Judgment Day* is famous for the 3D morphing technology so crucial for its plot and the characterization of its antagonist. Like the dinosaurs of *Jurassic Park*, the T-1000 is a threatening monster whose danger is a function of scientific progress. Like the dinosaurs of *JP*, the T-1000 is a diegetic spectacle for the film's other characters and a cinematic spectacle for the audience (Figure 44). Again, the technological sophistication of the T-1000 is a reproduction of the film's own technological sophistication. In a film with such distinctly techno-phobic themes, it is highly ironic that the film should have been enjoyed, and critically lauded, for its technological progress.

Figure 44. The Super-Diegetic and *Terminator 2*.

Avatar synthesizes the looking relationships of *King Kong* with the looking relationships of *Jurassic Park* and *Terminator 2*. In *Avatar*, the super-diegetic gaze falls on primitive bodies which are diegetically natural and diegetically manufactured by high technology. Like *JP* and *T2, Avatar* features super-diegetic gazing in one of the film's expositional scenes. When the film's scientists introduce Jake to his avatar, a shot-reverse-shot sequence explicitly coordinates the gaze of the cinematic spectator with the gaze of the protagonist on a super-diegetic spectacle of scientific progress (Figure 45).

Figure 45. The Super-Diegetic and *Avatar*.

The super-diegetic engagement of protagonist, spectator, and diegetic object is more like the viewing relationship of *Jurassic Park* than *King Kong* because this body, like the bodies of the dinosaurs in *JP*, is both a primitive body and a product of diegetic technology. This body is an emblem of progressive time: it represents the fusion of the the primitive and the modern. Moreover, this icon of time is a vehicle for the super-diegetic gaze and super-diegetic mobility. This body serves as a visual technology for a white protagonist in a primordial landscape. Therefore, it replicates the relationship of the motion picture camera to spectacular primitive objects in *King Kong*.

In Jake Sully's first expedition in his avatar, a spectacular sequence which is also the cinematic spectator's first introduction to Pandora, a shot-reverse-shot between Jake and a flying creature emphasizes the primitive : modern binary, super-diegetic gazing, and an artifact of high-technology as a tool of colonial mobility (Figure 46). On a narrative and emotional level, this is a scene which dramatizes the ability of the white

colonist (*qua* humanity) to enjoy movement in a primeval wilderness space. The high-technology of the helicopter is set in juxtaposition to the primeval quality of winged flight, while foreshadowing Jake Sully's mastery of this primitive mode of locomotion. This diegetic juxtaposition is compounded by two factors: 1) the diegetic presence of visual technology in the form of Jake's avatar, and 2) the super-diegetic presence of techno-sophisticated and primordial signifiers. As a helicopter ride, the scene emphasizes movement through three-dimensional space and serves as a reminder of the 3D exhibition technology enjoyed by the cinematic spectator. Of course, this parallel does more than simply reinforce the super-diegetic.

Figure 46. Diegetic Technology and Primitive Space.

Sully's introduction to his avatar is punctuated with his smile. His smile explicitly indexes super-diegetic gazing to pleasure. The film's first flight sequence reinforces this index. In this sequence, a long action shot renders a vertiginous aerial maneuver of the helicopter over a waterfall. This shot foreshadows vertical movement in the film's many flight sequences, while capitalizing on the film's 3D exhibition technology. Indeed, the terrain's vertical drop is as precipitous as its rendering is picturesque, emphasizing the consanguinity of visual beauty and the sensation of motion for both spectator and protagonist. In a diegetic expression of the spectator's pleasure, Sully emits a shout of boyish glee. As if to endorse enjoyment of this colonial paradise, Jake's own expression is echoed by the hearty chortling and infectious grin of the helicopter's pilot, the sexy, feisty, and ultimately benevolent Trudy (Michelle Rodriguez) (Figure 47).

Figure 47. Technology and Joy.

While technology allows Sully to move in and out of an indigenous body, part of the film's drama is generated by Jake's inability to control this movement. This is a diegetic acknowledgement of the alienation effect of *Avatar*'s 3D exhibition. Just as Jake is vulnerable to unforeseen extractions from his avatar, the spectator may find himself spontaneously alienated from his immersion experience by his admiration of some particular visual effect or the discomfort of 3D glasses. While Sully's spontaneous extraction from his avatar is a threat to his mastery, the celebration of the film's 3D technology is bound to constitute analogous movement by the cinematic spectator as part of the film's pleasure.

Because the alienation effect of 3D technology is the final indicator of the colonizer's mobility, the cinematic spectator enjoys a position over and above any character in the diegesis. The spectator may enjoy the wonders of Pandora while simultaneously enjoying the knowledge of the production of this spectacle.[16] As Miriam Ross writes in her essay on hyperphatic visuality; "Certain pleasures result from the sensation that occurs in all cinematic experience whereby 'we are doubly situated. We have a distinct feeling of being in two places at once, even if we never literally leave our seats'" (395). In her discussion of the spectator's enjoyment of depth of field, Ross figures this pleasure in terms which highlight the movement of the spectator, her dual location, and her alienation. Writing that the 3D field screen forces the spectator to choose where to focus her attention, Ross writes that "this interaction with the field screen is complicated by the awareness that the stereoscopic perspective process is not the same as the practice of looking in our everyday visual world. Instead it recalls the

potential offered by deep focus to explore the space created in the mise-en-scène" (395). Further, Ross describes the 3D field as a natural extension of depth of field photography, in the sense that it allows audiences to "actively … scan and explore the film's diegesis" (395).

Just as Jake and company explore Pandora, so too is the cinematic spectator invited to explore the film's diegetic dimension. This diegetic dimension is always also an erotically rendered colonial paradise. Access to this paradise is afforded by Cameron's 3D technology, itself a triumphant *telos* of technology and aesthetics. I reject the notion that 3D technology challenges mastery of the visual field. Because the spectator may move from a position within the diegesis to an extra-diegetic position, the primitive object of the diegetic gaze and the movement of the film's protagonist in and out of the primitive body become metaphors for the cinematic apparatus as an object of the spectator's gaze. As a function of the compound mobility afforded by the film's sentimentalism and its 3D exhibition technology, the cinematic spectator is free to identify with the Na'vi, the white protagonist, and also with the technology which renders them. If the cinematic spectator is free to inhabit a primitive body and, in the next instance, celebrate the technology that renders this body, the spectator enjoys a mobility which benefits from a privileged relationship to futurity. In a manner which preserves futurity as the exclusive privilege of the colonizer, the spectator is free to move out of the past, out of the diegesis, and out of the theater in a way unimaginable for the film's primitive characters.

The spectator is free to move among the points of *Avatar*'s super-diegetic constellation, identify with these various points, or, as my own analysis demonstrates,

take up a position outside this triangulation. As a function of the sentimental viewing position, the cinematic spectator is free to sympathize with both the Na'vi and with the white protagonist. This is surely a position of mastery and security, for, from this flexible vantage point, the spectator may experience "the relief of an emotional catharsis, the munificence of an affective rescue, and the gratification of a newfound position of status vis-à-vis the abject position of the object of viewer sympathy" (Schuller 178). The position of the sentimental spectator vis-à-vis the abject, primitive object is compounded by the very flexibility enforced by the film's 3D exhibition technology. Just as this technology knocks the spectator out of the film's diegesis, it is a reminder to the audience that they are free to leave the theater. This freedom is a function of the spectator's mobility every bit as significant as the spectator's prerogative to move into sympathy with the fixed, abject primitive.

Notes

[1] Noting that *Avatar* has been lambasted by intellectuals as disparate as David Brooks and Slavoj Žižek for being a white savior film, that the film was celebrated by indigenous president Evo Morales of Bolivia as an anti-imperialist melodrama, and that the film was appropriated by Palestinian protesters as a means of generating sympathy for their cause in their struggle against Israel, Thomas Elsaesser argues that one of *Avatar*'s defining features is that it offers a plurality of readings based on a profound narrative hybridity and thematic ambiguity. The benefit of this plurality of meanings is that the film increases its marketability through the exploitation of "multiple access points" to a wide variety of viewers (293). Instead of labeling this plurality of readings and access points as a bundle of ideological contradictions, Elsaesser prefers to read *Avatar* as a "textually coherent ambiguity" (293). He writes:

> while not predicating or privileging any one in particular … the *Na'vi blue* became the *new red* (of left-wing politics, in the case of the Palestinians) *and the new green* (of environmental causes in India and China). The point, therefore, is not that the film proved controversial, and that professional critics as well as web users had many different views (which, of course, happens all the time). Rather the claim is that these divergences and seeming contradictions were programmed into the film from the beginning, as part of the Cameron concept. "Access for all" in the internet era has become a complex, multi-level, multi-cultural process of mediation and appropriation, which presupposes in the fabric of the film's political and emotional texture not only a planned degree of pluralism of signs, regarding its story, ideology and effective registers, but a new way of encoding them. (293)

[2] For an example of a critic who understood *Avatar*'s 3-D exhibition as the crux of its narrative mode, see Cohen 22. For an example of a critic who felt the film's dialogue and narrative groaned under the weight of its special effects, see Zacharek. For a book-length discussion of the tension between spectacle and narrative in the recent Hollywood blockbuster, see Geoff King. King's broadest thesis is that the spectacular elements of blockbuster cinema have not detracted from structurally classical plots in contemporary Hollywood cinema (1-2).

[3] In a review of *Avatar* for *The New Yorker*, David Benby writes:

> Science is good, but technology is bad. Community is great, but corporations are evil. "Avatar" gives off more than a whiff of nineteen-sixties counterculture, by way of environmentalism and current antiwar sentiment. "What have we got to offer them—lite beer and bluejeans?" Jake asks. Well, actually, life among the Na'vi, for all its physical glories, looks a little dull. True, there's no reality TV or fast food, but there's no tennis or Raymond Chandler or Ella Fitzgerald, either. But let's not dwell on the sentimentality of Cameron's notion of aboriginal life—the movie is striking enough to make it irrelevant. Nor is there much point in lingering over the irony that this anti-technology message is delivered by an example of advanced technology that cost nearly two hundred and fifty million dollars to produce; or that this anti-imperialist spectacle will invade every available theatre in the world. Relish, instead, the pterodactyls, or the flying velociraptors, or whatever they are—large beaky beasts, green with yellow reptile patches—and the bright-red flying monster with jaws that could snap an oak. Jake, like a Western hero breaking a wild horse, has to tame one of these creatures in order to prove his manhood, and the scene has a barbaric splendor. The movie's story may be a little trite, and the big battle at the end between ugly mechanical force and the gorgeous natural world goes on forever, but what a show Cameron puts on! The continuity of dynamized space that he has achieved with 3-D gloriously supports his trippy belief that all living things are one. *Zahelu!* (Benby)

[4] For another instance of the popular press celebrating *Avatar'*s technological progress, see Ebert.

[5] As Toril Jensen writes in *Behind The Eye*:

> The empirical trend of the Enlightenment later to be known as positivism had already introduced the criterion of the visible. We know only what we see. Reality is of a material nature to which we have access through the sight. Right from the beginning, photography was regarded as a medium capable of rendering precise, mechanical and impersonal representation of an object. The culmination of modernity was marked by the invention of a tool to represent, dominate, research and change the world through the technology of vision. (27)

[6] Allakariallak's contribution to Flaherty's film is well known, and Flaherty's collaboration with the Inuit greatly enhanced Flaherty's credibility. As Fatimah Tobing Rony writes:

> Because Flaherty showed rushes to his Inuit crew, and because Inuit contributed to all aspects of the filmmaking (from acting, to the repair of his cameras, to the printing and developing of the film, to the suggestion of scenes to film), critics from the art world as well as anthropology have claimed that *Nanook* represents true collaboration, the native acting out his or her own self-conception. (118)

[7] As Rony writes:

> Nanook touches the gramaphone; intertitles explain that he does not understand where or how the sound is made. He then is shown biting the record three times while laughing at the camera. This conceit of the indigenous person who does not understand Western technology allows for voyeuristic pleasure and reassures the viewer of the contrast between the Primitive and the Modern: it ingrains the notion that the people are not really acting. ... This conceit, of course, obscured the Inuit's own appropriation of the new technology, their participation in the production of the film. (112-113)

[8] Citing Peter Jackson's remake of *King Kong* in 2005, Bliss Cua Lim argues that contemporary films "powerfully insist on the contemporaneity of the savage and highlight the durability of the nineteenth-century ethnographic imagination, which lives on in twenty-first-century popular culture" (95).

[9] As Rony writes:

> The lineage of *King Kong* should be obvious: the filming, capture, exhibition, photographing, and finally murder of Kong takes its cue from the historic exploitation of native peoples as freakish "ethnographic" specimens by science, cinema, and popular culture. Critics have consistently passed lightly over the fact that, in the 1920s, Cooper and Schoedsack were well-known ethnographic filmmakers, producing and directing both *Grass* (1925) and *Chang* (1927). *King Kong*, moreover, begins with an expedition, fully equipped with film camera, to a remote tropical island: *King Kong* is literally a film about the making of ethnographic film. (Rony 159)

[10] The auto-biographical element of *King Kong* is documented by Rony and many others. For an account of Merian C. Cooper and Ernest B. Shoedsack's pre-*Kong* exploits, see Morton 5-9, Haver 14-23.

[11] Morduant Hall praised the film for its "camera wizardry" (C12).

[12] *King Kong* (1933) employs an impressive array of special effects. Kong's body was a composite of an eighteen inch, stop-motion figure and full-scale versions of his head, hands, and legs. In addition, the film used split-screen matting, soft-edged matting, rear-screen projection, glass painting, foregrounded miniatures and rotoscoping (Morton 33-44). Writing of the significance of technological advances in the production of *King Kong*, Morton writes:

> Just as work began on the log scene, a technological breakthrough was announced that would turn out to be of enormous benefit to the production. Dispensing with glass, Sidney Saunders, the head of RKO's paint department, had constructed a new kind of rear-projection screen by stretching a sheet of acetate across a large wooden frame and then painting it with a layer of cellulose. At 16 x 20 ft., Saunder's screen was bigger than previous rear screens had been and generated a much better image, reproducing a full range of tones from the deepest black to the brightest white. Because the acetate was flexible, it could also be adjusted to minimize both hot spots and fall off. Suddenly, rear-screen projection had become a viable option after all. Impressed with Saunder's tests, Cooper and O'Brien immediately began using it on *Kong*. (43)

[13] Robert Cashill discusses the film's representation of New York *qua* spectacle:

> The decision to keep the film a period piece, after the humiliating attempt to update the story in 1976, was sensible… the design of New York is awesome, so good you wish Kong would get out of the way (even if I have a few qualms about the expenditure of so much capital to recreate poverty, as in *Gangs of New York*) (39).

[14] While not only highlighting the difference between *Kong* (1933) and *Kong* (2005), the computer graphics of the 2005 film were regarded as a technical advance in special effects technology. Cashill writes; "The fluidity of effects technology today allows [Naomi Watts and Andy Serkis] to interact believably, unlike thirty years ago, where Jessica Lange can clearly be seen positioning herself in Kong's stiffly mechanical arm, and Jeff Bridges, in pursuit of her and Kong, actually says that the search team isn't looking for "some guy in an ape suit" (40). Later, when he argues that the realism of *Kong*'s (2005) computer generated imagery detracts from the mythical quality of the film, Cashill refers to Jackson as a "master of the digital world" (43). In doing so, Cashill draws a parallel between *Kong*'s diegetic technology of mastery and the film's own cinematic mastery of the primitive body.

[15] *The Interpretation of Dreams* handily exemplifies Freud's application of the recapitulation hypothesis to psychoanalysis:

> … dreaming is on the whole an example of regression to the dreamer's earliest condition, a revival of his childhood, of the instinctual impulses which dominated it and of the methods of expression which were then available to him. Behind this childhood of the individual we are promised a picture of a phylogenetic childhood – a picture of the development of the human race, of which the individual's development is in fact an abbreviated recapitulation influenced by the chance circumstances of life. … and we may expect that the analysis of dreams will lead us to a

knowledge of man's archaic heritage, of what is psychically innate in him. Dreams and neurosis seem to have preserved more mental antiquities than we could have imagined possible; so that psycho-analysis may claim a high place among the sciences which are concerned with the reconstruction of the earliest and most obscure periods of the beginning of the human race. (587-588).

CHAPTER VI

EPILOGUE

In conclusion, I say that the classical Hollywood style is an enduring trend in American and world cinemas and that this style continues to be structured according to the racial and temporal logics which constituted this aesthetic in its classical period. While contemporary popular cinema demonstrates a racial and temporal constitution, I should clarify the relationship between the classical Hollywood studio era and the lingering legacy of classical Hollywood style. The classical Hollywood studio system, which enjoyed preeminence from approximately 1930-1960, was characterized by an industrial mode of production, a standardized product, and an aesthetic regularity that we have come to know as the classical Hollywood style.[1] While the vertical integration, industrial hegemony, and industrial regularity of the classical studio period ended with the Paramount Decrees of the late 1940s, the narrative linearity, romantic subplots, and omnipotent spectator of this period survived to become the aesthetic foundations of the New Hollywood. The New Hollywood was an industrial, aesthetic, and commercial model that emerged in the 1970s with films such as *Jaws, Star Wars,* and *Raiders of the Lost Ark*.[2] This form of cinema was characterized by its large form and its spectacle. Throughout the 1950s, 60s, and 70s, the American film industry suffered reduced revenues due to the popularity of television and the suburbanization of the movie-going public. With an increased emphasis on spectacle, color, and the widescreen format, the film industry hoped to cope with the changing landscape of motion picture viewership.[3] As film scholars have argued, contemporary popular cinema can be understood as the infusion of the classical Hollywood aesthetic with epic spectacle.[4] As such, the

spectacular films of the New Hollywood are the most proximate aesthetic and industrial models for contemporary blockbusters such as *Avatar* and *King Kong*. These later blockbusters, in particular, have synthesized the racial constitution of the classical Hollywood style with the aesthetic and industrial norms of the New Hollywood. As contemporary primitivist blockbusters, *Avatar* and *King Kong* synthesize their spectacular visual styles with the racial logic of the classical Hollywood style in such a way as to emphasize the visual logic of the colonizer's gaze. In other words, the visual exceptionalism of these recent films glamourizes the colonizer's gaze as never before while investing that gaze with the enduring temporal logic of the classical Hollywood style.

My goal has been to understand how recent popular cinema expresses primitivism. In *The Gods Must Be* Crazy, I found temporal elitism to be tied to the legacy of classical Hollywood style. In *Dances with Wolves,* settler futurity is reinforced through a complex structure of imperialist and generic nostalgia. In *The Last Samurai*, we saw colonial anxiety over the techno-sophisticated terrorist to be ameliorated by constructions of the Oriental as ethnotopic object. In *Avatar*, I demonstrated that the denial of coevalness is achieved through the futurity of the film's 3D exhibition technology. In each film, the specific technique of temporal elitism is distinctly cinematic. Primitivism in contemporary popular film works through cinematic style, genre, ethnotopia, and technology. However, it is not simply that cinematic style, genre, ethnotopia and technology work exclusively for the films which I have analyzed as local expressions of these aesthetic forms. If I were to revise this dissertation with the intent to publish as an

academic monograph, I would deepen my analysis in any given chapter by infusing it with the methodology of the dissertation's other chapters.

For instance, the super-diegetic construction of temporal privilege that I identify in *Avatar* is also active in *The Last Samurai*. In a montage before the film's final battle sequence, the British translator Mr. Graham takes a photograph of a group of stone-faced samurai. He is motivated by concerns for posterity or, more specifically, the imperatives of salvage ethnography. This shot-reverse-shot sequence of cameraman and samurai dramatizes the colonizer's gaze while simultaneously constructing a super-diegetic gazing paradigm. Moreover, the shooting of the samurai by Mr. Graham's camera replicates the shooting of the samurai with the machine gun. Just as the machine gun excludes the samurai from settler-colonial futurity, the super-diegetic constellation of samurai, diegetic camera, and the cinematic apparatus allows the cinematic spectator to assume a temporally privileged subject position vis-à-vis the samurai as an object of the colonizer's gaze (Figure 48).

Figure 48. The Super-Diegetic and *The Last Samurai*.

While this methodological cross-pollination might serve as a global revision strategy, an academic monograph would also allow for a deeper analysis of this dissertation's individual films and those films' problematics. Taking *The Gods* as a theoretical model, I would examine the extent to which other colonial cinemas have adopted and recirculated the lingering influence of the classical Hollywood style. For instance, an aesthetic analysis of *The Gods Must Be Funny in China* would determine the extent to which classical Hollywood aesthetics and ethnotopic gazing have circulated in popular Hong Kong cinema. Thinking in inverse terms, it would be interesting to compare *The Gods Must Be Crazy* with those postcolonial cinemas that reject the legacy of the classical Hollywood aesthetic. For instance, *Touki Bouki* (1973) lampoons the colonizer's gaze while simultaneously refusing both an omnipotent viewing position and the linear narrative of the classical Hollywood style. Indeed, *Touki Bouki* seems to reject the colonizer's gaze by means of a decentered viewing position and a non-linear narrative structure.

While *Touki Bouki* is an important example of the ways in which an indigenous art cinema has rejected the temporal paradigms of the classical Hollywood aesthetic, it does not stand to exert the same influence on popular cinema culture as other, more widely-viewed films. With that in mind, it may be particularly important to investigate the work of popular indigenous filmmakers who have achieved a wider audience. If I were to expand this project into an academic monograph, I might ask how Chris Eyre's *Smoke Signals* (1998) works as indigenous popular cinema to appropriate or subvert the Enlightenment historiography of the classical Hollywood aesthetic. To what extent does

such a film reject the legacy of the classical Hollywood style in its presentation of indigenous protagonists? As a movie about a road trip that is also preoccupied with death, memory, and identity, how does *Smoke Signals* rework the linearity of the Hollywood movie? With the characters' movements both backwards and forwards, how and where do the film's aesthetics locate mastery, time, and racial identity?

Expansion of the corpus aside, there are other intellectual and aesthetic questions particular to *The Gods* which previous scholarship has left unexplored. For instance, how does *The Gods* interact with filmic ethnography, and, in particular, renderings of the indigenous peoples of southern Africa? Does *The Gods* construct the signifier "Bushman" in the same way as non-fiction films? If so, does the film reinforce temporal elitism and a colonizer's worldview because the film functioned as a documentary? Do the aesthetics of film ethnography before and after *The Gods* reflect the legacy of classical Hollywood aesthetics? If so, how do these aesthetics contribute to the construction of time and viewing position in documentary film?

In revising my treatment of *Dances with Wolves*, I might inform my reading of imperialist nostalgia with an analysis of the idea of authenticity. In its portrayal of the Lakota as psychologically complex individuals, *DWW* garnered acclaim for its rejection of the Hollywood Indian and its efforts to portray Native Americans authentically. This perception of authenticity would have infused the film's adoption narrative with the inertia of an American tradition, as European settlers have always appropriated indigeneity as a means of establishing authentically American identities. Indeed, the film would have been a timely activation of this tradition, paralleling the process by which the mythopoetic men played Indian in an effort to restore what they understood to be

authentic masculinity. Because feelings of authenticity are so central to *Dances with Wolves*, it is worth asking whether the film functioned as a documentary. Like *The Gods Must Be Crazy*, there is a chance that audiences read the film's representation of Indianness according to the codes of visual ethnography. While this may seem ridiculous, it is important to remember that *Nanook of the North* is a significant precedent for this reception practice. Even though audiences and critics knew that Robert Flaherty had staged many of the film's scenes, they still regarded the film as a vehicle for poetic or metaphysical truths about the human condition.

In revising my analysis of *The Last Samurai*, I would make both descriptive and theoretical distinctions between the temporal elitism of this film and that of the other films in this corpus. While *The Last Samurai* represents the Japanese as feudal, medieval, or a people in epochal transition, *The Gods* and *Avatar* seem to locate the primitive other in an antediluvian stage of human development. In theoretical terms, this difference could be accounted for in the distinction between shades of temporal elitism in which primitivism proper is reserved for those peoples perceived to totally antedate Western civilization. While the samurai of *The Last Samurai* are certainly denied coevalness, it may not be entirely accurate to say that the film characterizes these people as "primitive." I hypothesize that the denial of coevalness which manages representations of cultures that are not totally antediluvian may be prevalent when the represented culture is apprehended as a cultural rival. In the case of *The Last Samurai*, the medievalism of the samurai manages American and British anxieties about perceived medievalism in the Muslim world. In considering revisions of this project for an academic monograph, it would be interesting to see whether other films conform to the dynamic of *The Last Samurai*.

Inversely, it would be worth investigating whether primitivism as it appears in *The Gods Must Be Crazy* is always more or less associated with representations of colonial otherness that are not perceived to threaten European or American supremacy.

In considering an expansion of *Chapter V* and, in turn, the dissertation as a whole, I would include an analysis of films which challenge the utopian identification of the cinematic spectator with the techno-sophistication of the cinematic apparatus. In *Avatar*, the techno-sophistication of the cinematic apparatus is a vehicle for the pleasure of the cinematic spectator. In turn, this cinematic pleasure manages the spectacle of colonial space in such a way as to endorse a fantasy of colonial omnipotence. However, it is important to note that a pleasurable identification with cinematic futurity, and, in turn, a pleasurable identification with the colonizer's gaze, only characterize one particular mode of contemporary moviegoing. Whereas primitivism is defined by these pleasurable identifications, there certainly exist other modes of popular cinema which operate according to a rejection of this pleasure. *2001: A Space Odyssey* (1968) and *Gravity* (2013) are films which foreground the impotence of white explorer-protagonists while simultaneously confounding the pleasure of the cinematic spectator.

Like *Avatar*, *2001: A Space Odyssey* addresses extra-planetary colonization, technological progress, and the relationship of white explorers to technology. Indeed, the film self-consciously foregrounds the idea of human technological achievement with the legendary juxtaposition of bone and spacecraft. However, *2001* denies the commensurability of technology with human progress through the character of HAL 9000, an insane, homicidal computer. In the face of this technological menace, the film's human protagonists experience terrifying incompetence. In stark contrast to the

omnipotent mobility of *Avatar*, one of *2001*'s most horrifying scenes portrays a human figure falling frantically into the abyss of deep space.

This diegetic portrayal of human helplessness is reinforced through the aesthetics of the film's conclusion. A confounding rejection of the classical Hollywood denouement, the final sequence of *2001* is a disorienting, surrealist montage. First, an abstract rendering of hyperspace travel assaults the spectator: color and light fill the motion picture screen for several minutes. Next, the film dramatizes the decentering of the explorer protagonist: his ego is split to such an extent that he catches himself viewing himself in the third person. In the conclusion's final image, human agency and progressive time are displaced by the transubstantiation of the dying protagonist into an inter-stellar fetus. Whereas the classical Hollywood paradigm guarantees its spectator the pleasure of total knowledge, the conclusion to *2001* is beyond the capacity of rational thought. Rather than delivering a narrative resolution, the sequence openly confounds spectatorial mastery, defying teleological imaginings of human life. In sum, *2001* discourages the pleasurable identification of the cinematic spectator with the technologies of exploration and cinema because the diegetic disorientation of the film's protagonist is reproduced in the spectator's relationship to the film's surrealist montage.

Like *2001*, *Gravity* is a rendering of extra-planetary exploration that emphasizes the impotence of a white explorer-protagonist. Like both *Avatar* and *2001*, the spatial and visual conditions of *Gravity*'s protagonist are replicated in the relationship of the cinematic spectator to the film's diegetic space. While this is a pleasurable experience in *Avatar*, *Gravity*'s protagonist experiences a constant state of terror and motor incompetence. Through a series of extremely disorienting long takes and vertiginous,

360-degree camera movements, the cinematic spectator is encouraged to identify with the spatial and visual impotence of the explorer-protagonist. This protagonist experiences a horrific lack of mastery in relation to diegetic icons of mobility and technological progress, the spaceships which eventually carry her to Earth. In a manner similar to *Avatar*, these diegetic icons are replicated in the visual wonder of *Gravity*'s own impossible cinematography. Unlike *Avatar*, this super-diegetic relationship produces feelings of anxiety and disorientation for the cinematic spectator. Whereas Jake Sully enjoys mastery over colonial space, Sandra Bullock sums up an entirely different perspective in the film's only line of comic relief: "I hate space."

I include this cursory analysis to demonstrate that *Avatar*'s constructions of cinematic futurity are far from hegemonic. Primitivism, as it exists in *Avatar* and films of its ilk, is only one expression of the human experience of technology and time. While some films warrant postcolonial deconstruction, other films may promote models of time which reject temporal elitism. I call for the funding, promotion and analysis of films and cinema cultures which actively reject the aesthetic legacy of classical Hollywood style and its omnipotent spectator. While it has not been within the purview of this dissertation to analyze these cinemas, productive work remains to be done in which the lingering influence of the classical Hollywood style is analyzed with regard to cinemas that explore different models of time and different aesthetic forms.

In addition to this comparative analysis, more work remains to be done concerning the racial politics of films that sustain the legacy of the classical Hollywood style. Because films from *The Birth of a Nation* to *Avatar* so readily confess to a racial constitution, and because this racial constitution assumes an omnipotent, progressive,

white-supremacist viewing position, I argue that even a film not ostensibly concerned with colonialism or race will reaffirm the futurity of whiteness if it employs either the temporal aesthetic of progressive time or the spatial aesthetic of visual and motor omnipotence. In films which feature actors or characters of different colors or cultures, these structures of the classical Hollywood aesthetic promote the idea of empire by structuring difference as primitivism. The presence of these aesthetic structures in films which do not directly address ideas of race or colonization will still propagate the ideas of empire, white omnipotence, and white futurity. I argue for the postcolonial analysis of any film that engages in the omnipotent gazing of the classical Hollywood style because this style assumes the temporal privilege of the colonizer's gaze.

Notes

[1] For an analysis of classical Hollywood style and its mode of production, see Bordwell, Thompson, and Straiger, chapters 1, 2, and 7.

[2] For a description of the New Hollywood, see Schatz 15-44.

[3] For a description of the historical context of the rise of the blockbuster, see Neale 47-60.

[4] For an analysis of the relationship of classical Hollywood style to film spectacle in contemporary cinema, see King 1-40.

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