Performing the Oregon Trail:
Belonging, Space, and Historical Representation in Settler Colonial Oregon

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Dedication

To Emily Jane,

whose endless support, patience, and encouragement made this possible.

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Introduction

This dissertation examines the role that performances of the history and mythology of the Oregon Trail have had in securing the power and futurity of a settler colonial Pacific Northwest at the expense of other social, political, and spatial possibilities. I primarily focus on how these practices naturalize particular modes of inhabiting and territorial belonging, as well as position settlers as the rightful people of Oregon.[1] To do so, I focus on a range of practices throughout the 20th and 21st centuries which celebrated, represented, and interpreted the Oregon Trail, the primary vehicle for settling the Pacific Northwest by the United States in the mid-19th century. These practices include trail marking, museums and interpretive centers, historical pageantry and parades, and nostalgic reenactments of a popular educational video game. My investigation teases out the role of both representation and performance within my objects of study, grounding both elements within the fundamental reality of settler colonialism: the expropriation and occupation of Indigenous lands by non-Indigenous settlers.

My project draws upon the work of scholars in several fields, including theatre and performance studies, settler colonial studies, Indigenous studies, geography, and heritage studies. Understanding how the events and practices analyzed in this dissertation function vis-à-vis settler colonialism requires

[1] I use the term settler to describe non-Native residents of the region, including those individuals who arrived during the initial periods of American settlement of the Pacific Northwest, their descendants, and more recently arrived non-Native residents.

understanding them as practices of historical representation, spatial production, bodily experience, and political power. They are site- and time-specific practices responsive to different conditions, utilizing different technologies, and productive of different experiences for participants. They operate via a range of different mechanisms like performative materialization, role-playing, display, and the generation of nostalgic feelings. As I lay out, however, each practice analyzed in this dissertation—regardless of time period, intent, or process—works to secure the stability, power, and futurity of the settler state within the Pacific Northwest.[2]

Historical Background

The first known European forays into what is now the American Pacific Northwest were sailing expeditions by the Spanish and British in the 1770s along the coast, followed by explorations of inland waterways by American Robert Gray and British Captain George Vancouver in 1792.[3] These early encounters with the Pacific Northwest were encounters with a remarkably diverse Indigenous world with trade and kinship networks reaching for hundreds of miles in each direction. It was this world that Lewis and Clark entered into during their overland Corps of

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[2] A note on geographical terms. I use the term Pacific Northwest to primarily describe the modern-day states of Oregon and Washington, though its typical usage often includes Idaho and British Columbia. I use this term to refer to the actual land encompassed by today's settler states, rather than as a cultural or political designation. At times I use the term Oregon Country, a historical term used to describe what is now Oregon, Washington, Idaho, British Columbia, and parts of Montana and Wyoming, or, post-1846, just the American portions of the region.
[3] Francis Drake claimed to have sailed as far north as the 48th parallel along the Pacific coast in 1579, though exactly how far north he reached is disputed. He named the lands he saw New Albion and claimed them for England.

Discovery expedition, soon followed by the fur trade. These ventures joined and modified the existing networks of an Indigenous world.[4] In the 1830s, early missionaries Jason Lee, Henry Spalding, and Marcus Whitman established missions among different Indigenous communities in what are now the states of Oregon, Washington, and Idaho. A trickle of settlers followed suit and established the Oregon Provisional Government in 1843, the region's first settler government. Over the next 40 years, an estimated 300,000-400,000 settlers moved west along the newly established Oregon Trail, ushering in a radical transformation of the Pacific Northwest.

Due to its significant role in the United States' colonization of the region and the establishment of Oregon as a state, the Trail and the figure of the pioneer became central to Oregon history, identity, and geography. Celebrations commemorating the Oregon Trail became more popular as the "pioneer generation" (those who came to Oregon on the Trail) began to age and pass away around the turn of the 20th century. Pioneer associations were formed, reunions were held, and by the 1920s, Trail preservation societies had popped up in communities across the region. The enshrinement of the Trail and its pioneers as central to settler identity and power in Oregon is perhaps best exemplified by the current Oregon state capitol, completed in 1938. Built to

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[4] The distinction between "joining" and "creating" trade networks is essential in describing the establishment of fur companies during this period. The former accurately reflects the dominance of Indigenous geographies and political power in the region, while narratives of creation and discovery assume the eventual dominance of Euro-American geographies and power.

replace an Italianate, neoclassical building built in 1876 with no significant references to the Trail or pioneers, the current state capitol is an unabashed tribute to early American settlers. It is adorned with sculptures and murals glorifying their exploits, inscribed with the names of 158 people significant to the establishment of Oregon, and topped with a 22-foot-tall golden pioneer.

Throughout the 20th and 21st centuries, celebrations of the Oregon Trail and its pioneers became ever-present in Oregon. Monuments celebrating pioneers began appearing in the state in the early 20th century and have continued; the most recent additions were installed in 1993 and 2016. Long distance wagon train reenactments have been staged to commemorate significant centennials in 1943, 1959, and 1993, and smaller versions of wagon treks have been organized throughout the state and beyond for decades. Historical pageants have been staged in cities across the state from the 1920s to the present day.[5] The route of the Oregon Trail was made a National Historic Trail in the 1970s and in the 1990s, four museums were built along the Oregon section of the route. Today, nostalgic iterations of the popular video game *Oregon Trail* abound and can be found on stage, at historical museums, in 5k runs, as card and board games, and in Oregon's tourism marketing. For over a century, Oregonians have represented the history of the Trail in myriad forms,

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[5] Performed annually to this day during the Pendleton Round-up, "The Happy Canyon Pageant is a show depicting the settling of the American West, beginning with a portrayal of the Native American way of life prior to the arrival of the white man, continuing with the arrival of Lewis and Clark, followed by the prairie schooners of the pioneers of the Oregon Trail and concluding with a reenactment of a frontier town's rollicking main street mishaps" ("Happy Canyon Night Show").

each providing new and different ways of valorizing the American colonization of Oregon and normalizing settler occupancy of (and power over) Indigenous homelands.

Conceptual Grounding & Literature Review

My inquiry into these practices was initially sparked by a question raised by historian Coll Thrush: "What does it mean to belong to a place that isn't yours?"[6] Though I had already begun research in this area, Thrush's question changed the tack of my investigation. I was struck by how his question succinctly captured the contradiction of the American settler state—that is, the desire or need to feel belonging in/to land acquired through the dispossession of others. Thrush's question generated several questions for me around issues of belonging and place. How are ideas and feelings of belonging constructed and fostered? What are the implications of claiming to belong in/to a settler state, especially as a settler? What enables non-Native settlers to claim a place as "theirs" and what enables the same people to recognize their home as "not theirs"? What kind of power does a claim of rightful belonging, or at least the *feeling* of rightful belonging, secure in the context of settler colonialism and what realities or possibilities does it foreclose?

Three major areas of consideration emerged as I brought these questions to bear on my objects of study. First, the matter of historical representation.

[6] From a personal interview, October 25, 2016.

Second, the matter of space and its relationship to land. Third, the matter of participants' experiences, specifically non-Native participants. In each chapter, attention is paid to how each mode of performance mobilizes representations of the past, conceptions of land and space, and embodied and affective participant experiences to naturalize settler claims of territorial belonging and (re)secure settler power.

Regarding the first, as a historiographical investigation into performed representations of Pacific Northwest history, this project necessarily requires a consideration of what it means to represent the past. Scholars from a range of disciplines have grappled with the implications of historical representation for many years. David Lowenthal argues that despite our desire for the past to be an exotic counterpoint to the familiar present, it is "forged with modern tools" (Lowenthal, *The Past Is a Foreign Country* xvii). Likewise, Michel de Certeau argues that any reading of the past, any history, always begins from current events and "a socioeconomic, political, and cultural place of production" in the present (de Certeau, *The Writing of History* 11, 58).

Similar arguments about the "presentness" of the past run through the literature on historical representation and heritage, a term generally used to describe a consumable version of the past, or what Graeme Davison calls the "veneer of pastness"—something which is not the past but appears as such (Fairclough et al. 32). This includes David Glassberg's work on historical pageantry (1990), Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett's work on heritage and

exhibitions (1998), Karen Till's work on places of memory (2005), Scott Magelssen's work on living history museums (2007), and Rebecca Schneider's work on reenactment (2011). Despite the breadth of work represented by these scholars, each argues that our representations of the past—whether histories, exhibitions, pageants, memorials, or reenactments—are not the past *per se*, but rather productions of the present moment, emerging from its concomitant power dynamics and social, political, cultural, and material conditions. To examine any representation of Oregon Trail history, therefore, requires a consideration of the site- and time-specific conditions of its emergence. This means both the dynamics of settler colonialism itself, and also the conditions of possibility for the ongoing existence of a settler colonial Pacific Northwest—the expropriation and occupation of Indigenous lands.

As Aimee Rowe and Eve Tuck note, the specific study of settler colonialism provides useful ways of "attending to life lived on stolen Indigenous land," bringing scrutiny to the norms, practices, and affects of settler colonialism (Rowe and Tuck 6). To do so, I draw upon scholars in both Indigenous studies and settler colonial studies. Settler colonial theory insists that settler colonialism is structural and enduring, continuously invested in the elimination or subjugation of Indigenous peoples, fundamentally about land rather than labor or resources, and produced and maintained through a variety of institutional and quotidian practices. Settler colonial theory "confronts settlers with an account of contemporary colonialism that is difficult to avoid," as Alissa Macoun and

Elizabeth Strakosch note, revealing connections across seemingly unrelated events, spaces, institutions, logics, and practices within settler colonial society (Macoun and Strakosch 427). It does not take settler society for granted, but investigates its production and naturalization, revealing as active and ongoing what is often presumed to be past and complete.

Scholars addressing settler colonialism have come from many backgrounds including history, geography, political science, and most notably, Indigenous studies. They have produced rigorous and nuanced analyses of the various discursive and material practices through which settler colonial societies are produced and legitimized. These have included land use and spatial production (Cronon 1983; Banivanua Mar & Edmonds 2010), labor (Jackson 2012), local histories (O'Brien 2010), law (Rifkin 2009), private property (Chang 2011; Moreton-Robinson 2015; Nichols 2017), "modes of inhabiting" (Barnd 2017), temporality (Rifkin 2017), tourism (Werry 2010), political protest (Barker 2012; Inwood & Bonds 2017), "playing Indian" (Deloria 1998; Huhndorf 2001), and the production of "quotidian affective formations" (Rifkin 2014).

Above all, a settler colonial society originates in and is dependent on the expropriation and occupation of Indigenous lands; as Patrick Wolfe notes, "territoriality is settler colonialism's specific, irreducible element (Wolfe, "Settler Colonialism and the Elimination of the Native" 388). Thus, my dissertation is ultimately an interrogation into land and its inhabitation. Unlike other forms of colonialism aimed at the exploitation of labor or resources, with settler

colonialism, “the colonizers come to stay—invasion is a structure not an event” (Wolfe, *Settler Colonialism and the Transformation of Anthropology* 2). As such, the colonization of Oregon is not a historic event, but an ongoing project—the production of Oregon itself. Settlers in Oregon did not emigrate to Indigenous *spaces* but produced their own spaces in/on Indigenous *lands*. Despite the common practice of calling those who settled the Oregon Country via the Oregon trail “emigrants,” settlers are not the same as migrants. As Lorenzo Veracini has argued, “migrants enter someone else's society, settlers recreate their own, moving not to another country, but, in effect, to their own” (Veracini, *The Settler Colonial Present* 42). Despite relocating thousands of miles to radically different landscapes from those they left, the overall effect of settler colonization is the recreation of settlers “own country” in new land.

Though the current state of Oregon is often framed as a transhistorical constant, simply the latest version of the land encompassed by the state borders, Oregon is the historical creation of American settlers. Historian Gray Whaley describes Oregon as “a cultural construction of the physical landscape” in contradistinction to *Illahee*, the Chinook word he uses for the interconnected Native spaces of the Pacific Northwest (Whaley 17). He argues the former drastically transformed the landscape of what is now called Oregon to the detriment of Oregon’s Indigenous people, yet it was not the complete transformation of *Illahee*. Oregon may have supplanted *Illahee* in the Pacific Northwest, but *Illahee* has survived and continues to persist within and alongside

settler Oregon in various ways, whether as a group of Siletz Indians defying myths of the disappearing Indian by marching in a pageant parade (see Chapter Three) or the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla reframing the Oregon Trail narrative through their Tamástslikt Cultural Institute (see Chapter Two).[7] Within this Oregon/*Illahee* binary, however, is a more complicated reality and multiplicity. Neither Oregon nor *Illahee* was, or is, homogenous. From French-Canadians to African-Americans to Asian immigrants, Oregon has always been constituted through the interactions of a multiplicity of people.[8]

This distinction between space and land, as well as the distinction between spaces within the same land, reveal a multiplicity which is often collapsed or conflated in order to secure the settler status quo, foreclosing alternative possibilities. By elucidating these distinctions, we can challenge the assertion that Oregon is a natural, coherent entity in which the settler space of Oregon and the land encompassed by its borders are one and the same. Instead, the processes by which Oregon has been produced and maintained in/on Indigenous lands are revealed, as well as coexistent spaces concealed or suppressed by the presumption of a totalizing settler state.

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[7] Perhaps the most obvious examples of the continual presence of *Illahee* are the 43 federally recognized Native nations that share the same geography as Oregon, Washington, and Idaho. In addition, there are non-recognized Native communities like the Duwamish Tribe and the Chinook Indian Nation.

[8] Indeed, Oregon's specific history of anti-Black, anti-Asian, and anti-Indigenous policies reveal it was never able to fulfill settlers' early desires of making Oregon a space exclusively for whites settlers. This includes anti-Black exclusion laws of 1844, 1849, and 1857.

Scholars from a variety of disciplines have provided a range of ways to think about space and challenge simple narratives about it, including theories of multiplicity and interaction (Lefebvre 1991; Massey 2005; Runia 2006); the reframing or reorienting of colonized space (Thrush 2007; Brooks 2008; Hau'ofa 2008; Chang 2016; Barnd 2017); the historicity of space (Cronon 1983, 1998; Rifkin 2009; Chakrabarty 2012); and space and performativity (Butler 1993; Glass & Rose-Redwood 2014). The interconnections between space and time also run through this literature, something I explore in more detail in Chapter Three. In this dissertation, I lean on this scholarship in order to elucidate how Oregon, as a settler colonial construct, has been imagined and produced through these performances of history. I also pay close attention to the tensions between settler and Indigenous spatialities and temporalities in order to dislodge settler Oregon from its oft-assumed position as inevitable, complete, totalizing, and natural.

Just as land is fundamental to settler colonialism, structures and practices which cultivate a sense of belonging are fundamental to the legitimization of settler occupancy and sovereignty. To inhabit land, as geographer Natchee Blu Barnd notes, includes both everyday ways of relating to your environment and "the related processes of legitimization for bodily presence in specific locations (whether individual or collective)" (Barnd 5–6). The legitimization of bodily presence is dependent on both *structures* of belonging (e.g. citizenship, property, and race) and *practices* of belonging (e.g. voting, fence-building, and racially

restrictive covenants). The structures of belonging in settler Oregon serve as conditions of possibility for a settler's identification with the land and assertion of rightful belonging. However, it is the practices of belonging which make those structures manifest and give them power and legitimacy. This project teases out the ways in which performances of history reify specific structures of belonging and make them tangible and accessible to participants through modes of performance and representation. The practices I focus on in this dissertation are therefore more than representations of a pre-existing entity (Oregon, the past, etc.), but also practices legitimizing the bodily presence of non-Natives—particularly white American settlers—in the land of the Pacific Northwest.

Although my analyses of these practices are heavily informed by the literature of settler colonial studies, Indigenous studies, and geography, my disciplinary home is theatre and performance studies. By framing my objects of study as *performances* of the Oregon Trail—whether its history, mythology, or geography—I emphasize these practices as more than the symptoms of the settler state, to borrow performance scholar Margaret Werry's phrasing, but one of its fundamental mechanisms (Werry xv). My working understanding of performance in this dissertation is indebted to Werry's lucid definition in her introduction to *The Tourist State*, situated within the context of Aotearoa New Zealand's tourist economies, liberal politics, and racial logics at the turn of the 20th century. She writes (citing Elin Diamond's pithy definition of performance):

> *The Tourist State* shifts focus from tourism's *representation* of nation or culture to anatomize its *performance* (by which I mean both materialization and expression) of the state…. This process is never only a matter of representation. In tourism, the state is revealed as a performance: 'a doing and a thing done,' taken up, and played out in flesh…. Because this process rests on its constant and necessary enactment, it is porous and fractal: the state thus conceived is neither monster nor monument but an ongoing and incessantly contested process, the cumulative effect of myriad performances. (Werry xv)

Following Werry's approach, I embrace the insights of performance scholars to position enactments of the Oregon Trail as enactments of the settler state itself, operating as mechanisms of an "ongoing and incessantly contested process" which continually labors to produce the effect of a coherent, stable, and totalizing settler state.

Performance is not a single phenomenon but encompasses a range of practices. And, as Elin Diamond succinctly notes, performance is also used to describe the thing itself—a temporally-bound, completed event. This dual definition of performance—"a doing and a thing done"—allows a recognition of performances of the Oregon Trail as both productive of, and products of, the settler state and its operations (Diamond 1). Within this dissertation, I take up multiple facets of performance. This includes theories of performativity drawn from J.L. Austin and Judith Butler (Chapter One), how bodies are interpellated

and positioned within/through representational and geographic frameworks (Chapter Two & Three), the affective experiences produced through embodied enactment (Chapters Three & Four), the crafting of historical and geographical representations (all Chapters), and the capacity for embodied action to resist and disrupt settler assertions of sovereignty (Chapter Three).

Why Focus on Settlers, Settler Society, and the Oregon Trail?

This dissertation primarily focuses on settlers and settler society. Even though the settler is the traditional subject of American history, especially histories of Oregon and the American West, the settler (and settler society) is often taken for granted. As Veracini argues, it is "important that we focus on the settlers, on what they do, and how they think about what they do…in order to avoid the possibility that…we continue understanding the settler as normative" (Veracini, *Settler Colonialism a Theoretical Overview* 15). I am aware that centering the settler—especially white American settlers—risks repeating the epistemic violence of settler colonialism, as critics of settler colonial studies have cautioned (Macoun and Strakosch 2013; Snelgrove et al. 2014; Rowe and Tuck 2017). To avoid this, many working in Indigenous studies have instead shown that privileging Indigenous peoples, societies, spatialities, temporalities, and practices can be a powerful way to resist and subvert the power and normativity of settler society while de-centering the settler as subject (Thrush 2007; Brooks 2008; Hau'ofa 2008; Chang 2016). These scholars have demonstrated how a

shift in perspective and focus can profoundly alter our understanding of U.S. history, politics, and culture, including in theatre and performance practices (Imada 2012; McNenly 2015).

However, I believe a focus on settlers and their practices and experiences provides a necessary complement to those working in Indigenous studies. It is unreasonable to expect Indigenous peoples to carry the burden of decolonization alone, whether they labor as scholars or as subjects within scholarship. Those of us who are non-Indigenous must work alongside them to dismantle the very societies which have benefited us, and continue to benefit us, often at their expense. In order to most effectively do so, I include examples from the region's Indigenous nations that reveal their historic and contemporary resistance to, and subversion of, the settler colonial project. These counterexamples are essential to the work of destabilizing and denaturalizing settler society and its concomitant norms, logics, and practices, for they reveal robust possibilities for collective life and inhabitance beyond the limitations of settler colonialism, possibilities (and actualities) governed by different spatialities, temporalities, and embodied practices.

Why Oregon and the Pacific Northwest? Apart from my own personal history growing up in Washington state, I believe a project about Oregon speaks to a broader audience. Environmental historian William Cronon writes, "The stories Americans have wanted to tell about Oregon are the stories they have most wanted to believe about themselves, and about America itself" (quoted in

Robbins xii). They are stories of pioneers blazing trails, independent men and women carving out lives for themselves in new places, communities banding together to bring civilization to the wilderness—these stories are just as relevant now as they were 150 years ago. The mythology of Oregon has evolved to include hippies and hipsters, land-use planning, environmentalism, and political activism. Yet it has persistently remained rooted in the invasion and occupation of Native homelands. One does not have to look hard to notice the common thread of settler sovereignty underlying the Oregon Trail mythos, the back-to-the-land movements of the 1960s, the Timber Wars of the 1980s, Occupy Portland in 2011, and the occupation of the Malheur National Wildlife Refuge in 2016. Each depends upon settler spatialities and temporalities which privilege certain bodies, modes of inhabiting, and ways of thinking, and work to foreclose or delay indefinitely other social and spatial possibilities. To unsettle our thinking about Oregon, its history, and the land it encompasses opens up the possibility for unsettling the American settler colonial project more broadly.

A Note on Terminology

In this dissertation, I use the term settler to describe non-Native inhabitants of the Pacific Northwest. This term includes those individuals who arrived during the initial periods of American settlement in the 19th century, their direct descendants, and non-Native residents who have more recently arrived. Settler identities, cultures, and institutions are predominately defined by practices

and ideas largely developed elsewhere and imposed upon the lands and Indigenous peoples of the Pacific Northwest. Settlers are not a monolithic group and scholars such as Jodi Byrd have eschewed a settler-Indigenous binary by recognizing the differing statuses and histories of non-Indigenous participants in the settler state. Byrd uses a third term, arrivants, "to signify those people forced into the Americas through the violence of European and Anglo-American colonialism and imperialism around the globe," such as the descendants of enslaved Africans or various immigrant and refugee populations (Byrd xix).[9] The complexities of settler colonialism can make a simple settler-Indigenous binary inadequate for certain analyses. However, I agree with Patrick Wolfe that the fundamental premise of settler colonialism, the coming together of two previously discrete spaces (or "life-worlds" to use Wolfe's phrase), requires a maintenance of this binary. "Go back far enough, in other words," Wolfe argues, "and there can be no disputing the existence of an unqualified empirical binarism" (Wolfe, "Recuperating Binarism" 257).

Settler society in the Pacific Northwest has been largely defined by white, Euro-American culture since its inception. The categories of white and settler are heavily intertwined, for white supremacist racial hierarchies are a significant part of the American settler state and its operations to legitimize itself. Yet, as Mark Rifkin notes:

[9] Bryd notes she has borrowed the term from poet Kamau Brathwaite.

> [G]iven that all positions in that [racial] hierarchy are predicated on the continued existence of the settler state, settlement may be conceptualized less as a function of whiteness than whiteness may be understood as expressing a particular privileged position within the allocation of Native lands and resources among nonnatives. (Rifkin, *Settler Common Sense* 23)

Aileen Moreton-Robinson has even theorized (in an Australian context) that whiteness itself is inextricably linked to property and the possessive logics of settler colonialism.[10] Additionally, race and racialization has often been a tool for upholding the settler state, whether manifest through logics of racial superiority, blood quantum, or via the ideologies of the multicultural, multiracial state.

Like the term settler, the term Indigenous signals a specific relationship to land. I use it to refer to people, spaces, temporalities, and cultures that have been shaped through the intimate inhabitance of the land over a long period. The terms settler and Indigenous are both independent of one another (marking incommensurability) and interdependent (marking a dialectical relationship). Within American settler colonialism, both terms index a relationship with the other, signaling contested and overlapping land claims, sovereignties, and historic relations. As geographer Natchee Blu-Barnd has written, Indigeneity is:

[10] See *The White Possessive: Property, Power, and Indigenous Sovereignty*. University of Minnesota Press, 2015.

> [A] term and concept that codes as the supposed precondition of, as well as ongoing foil to, colonial completion. Indigeneity originates in and relies on colonial interventions and acts of racialized difference, yet also overlaps with self-definitions from those whose ancestors were present on the continent before European arrivals. (Barnd 3)

To define oneself (or be defined as) a settler or as Indigenous is, to some degree to define oneself in contradistinction to the other. However, despite this entanglement, Indigenous nations and communities are also defined by—and continue to develop—divergent ways of imagining and inhabiting the land of the Pacific Northwest originating from a time and space beyond the settler state.

When referring to peoples and their cultures, cosmologies, and histories, I capitalize Indigenous, but do not capitalize it in the few times I use the term in its generic sense. I also use designations of tribes and tribal nations when known. Occasionally, I use the term Indian, either to reflect the historic usage of the term, the self-designation of certain Indigenous communities, or the non-specific cultural construct created by settler society. Throughout I use Indigenous and Native interchangeably; Native should not be misread as native-born.

Methodological Choices

The source material for my analyses has primarily been gathered in two ways: archival research and my own first-person experience of the sites/objects in question. For historic events, I rely on archival material such as programs and

advertisements, event planners' documents and correspondence, newspaper articles, oral histories, journals, and photographs. I also utilize archival material not directly related to the events I'm studying in order to gain a more complex view of the conditions in which these events occurred. Along with archival material are analyses of extant exhibitionary sites such as museums, trail markers, and the participatory events I write about in Chapter Four. For these, I focus on how representation, narrative, land, and the scripting or choreographing of participant bodies are utilized to create experiences of history (time) and geography (space). The same set of analytic frames are also applied to the historic events, such as the *Oregon Trail Pageants* discussed in Chapter Three.

To navigate this material, I follow a particular practice of thought described by Michel de Certeau. Speaking about Michel Foucault, de Certeau describes a mode of thinking which scrutinizes the status quo from within and its emphasis on establishing fixed and known identities. He writes:

> Identity freezes the gesture of thinking. It pays homage to an order. To think, on the contrary, is to pass through; it is to question that order, to marvel that it exists, to wonder what made it possible, to seek, in passing over its landscape, traces of the movement that formed it, to discover in these histories supposedly laid to rest 'how and to what extent it would be possible to think otherwise.' (de Certeau, *Heterologies* 194)

By revealing the means through which the status quo secures power and position, this mode of thinking rejects accepting it as given or complete and

makes it possible to see and consider possibilities which had previously been marginalized or obscured. To interrogate how the settler status quo "repels or absorbs all alternatives" as it streamlines its particular violences and secures its own futurity, to borrow Herbert Marcuse's words, is the aim of this project (Marcuse vii). My goal is not to point out how we should reform settler colonial Oregon, make it more inclusive, or correct the flaws of its historical narrative. Rather, I aim to explicate how theatre and performance practices participate in the maintenance of a settler colonial status quo in the face of Indigenous resistance, internal contradiction, and other threats to its security and futurity.

I have chosen to focus on sites and events generally located along the historic route of the trail in the Pacific Northwest from the turn of the 20th century to the present. This scope allows me to focus on practices organized and performed primarily by settlers in the region who came after the "pioneer generation" (those who traveled the Trail themselves). This dissertation is not about the 19th century settlement of Oregon *per se,* but rather about the *performance* of that history and its influence in the ongoing normalization of Oregon as a settler space.

I have also chosen to focus on practices in different spaces and times because it allows me to pay attention to the relationship between the singularity of each event and the fundamental structures of settler colonialism which have remained unchanged across different times, places, and modes of performance. As Wolfe notes in his discussion on settler colonialism's eliminatory logic, tracing

the “historical development and complexification of settler society” requires one to chart “the continuities, discontinuities, adjustments, and departures whereby a logic that initially informed frontier killing transmutes into different modalities, discourses and institutional formations” (Wolfe, “Settler Colonialism and the Elimination of the Native” 402). Thus, in order to trace the persistent viability of the Oregon Trail in sustaining Oregon’s settler colonial society, I need research sites which will allow me to trace its mobilization across time and space. Importantly, I show that as the Trail is mobilized through performance, it supplies a malleable framework and orientation through which different generations of settlers can (re)produce settler space and settler belonging over time.

As noted earlier in this Introduction, Coll Thrush’s question about belonging was a significant moment in the development of this project. It also contains a compelling argument about the necessity of this work. The contradiction of “belonging to a place that isn’t yours” is a contradiction between multiple coexistent spaces; most notably in this context, Indigenous and settler.[11] Drawing attention to the multiplicity of space can foster a better understanding of how certain spatialities come to dominate at the expense of others and open up new possibilities for considering how to inhabit, manage, and coexist within spaces like the Pacific Northwest. As Thrush writes in his book *Native Seattle*, rethinking the spaces we live in and telling different stories about it hold the

[11] The multiplicity of space can articulated using many different categories, including ethnicity, gender, sexuality, religion, ecology, and generation, to name a few.

possibility of opening “dialogues about the transformations of landscape and power in the city and about strategies for living together humanely in this place” (Thrush 207).

I am not advocating for multiculturalism, inclusivity, or diversity as they are usually defined within contemporary American politics, i.e., a recuperative claiming of heretofore absent recognition or participation. I firmly believe such improvements cannot redeem the settler state as currently organized, given its inherent limitations and dependence on Indigenous subjugation (among other violences). However, I do believe that something new could be created, but it must begin with a recognition of the existing spatial realities of the Pacific Northwest—its multiplicity, contradictions, tensions, and incommensurabilities. Only then can we move toward meaningful change which does not fall back into the existing operations of the status quo.

Chapter Outlines

One: Creating a New Oregon Trail: Preservation and the Performance of Settler Sovereignty

In Chapter One, I explore the history of marking the physical route of the Oregon Trail. Building on the work of scholars in performance studies and heritage studies, I show how Trail marking is not a practice of preserving extant Trail remains or transparently representing historical realities, but a performative practice which materializes a specific settler colonial geography defined by, and

for, settlers. Like other settler colonial practices of asserting and maintaining claims to land and power, marking the Oregon Trail became another way for settlers to legitimize their occupation of the land, cultivate a sense of rightful belonging, and maintain the effect of a stable and totalizing settler state.

Throughout the chapter, I mark different periods in the history of Trail preservation to trace how the Oregon Trail became central to the history, geography, and identity of the Pacific Northwest. This includes the rise of a pioneer mythology in the late 19th century, early efforts to mark the trail beginning with Ezra Meeker in 1906, a shift toward experiencing the Trail landscape in the 1970s, and contemporary efforts to preserve the historic practices of preservation themselves. What is revealed by tracing this history is a continual practice of Trail memorialization and preservation which, despite changes in form, persistently labors to sustain and advance the settler colonial project in the Pacific Northwest.

Two: *"Playing Pioneer" and the Settler Spatial Regime: The Sesquicentennial Museums on the Oregon Trail*

In Chapter Two, I write about the contemporary tourist landscape along the route of the Oregon Trail, focusing my analysis on two museums in eastern Oregon built during the 1990s: the National Historic Oregon Trail Interpretive Center (NHOTIC) and Tamástslikt Cultural Institute. Despite both museums' engagement with history, I draw upon the work of scholars in museum studies, performance, geography, and Indigenous studies to show how they also provide

visitors with specific spatial orientations for understanding and experiencing the landscape of eastern Oregon. Each museum leverages technologies of display, narrative, and the choreographing of visitors' movement through exhibits to position visitors within either a settler spatial regime (in the case of NHOTIC) or the indigenous modes of inhabiting of the Cayuse, Umatilla, and Walla Walla peoples (in the case of Tamástslikt). By examining the visitor experience created by these museums—and the social, political, and economic conditions of their emergence—I show how they participate in the ongoing production of space in Oregon (both settler colonial and Indigenous).

Three: *The* Oregon Trail Pageants*, 1926-1950: Bodies, Temporality, and Settler/Siletz Futurities*

In Chapter Three, I examine the interaction between embodied performance and temporality vis-à-vis settler colonialism through an analysis of the *Oregon Trail Pageants,* a series of historical pageants staged in Eugene, Oregon from 1926-1950. I focus primarily on the inaugural pageant and its accompanying Pioneer Parade, elucidating how they created representational frameworks for imagining Oregon history and also time itself. Within these frameworks, I explore two different phenomena. First is the participation of a group from the Siletz Indian Reservation in the parade. For parade organizers, these Siletz Indians served as examples of the "primitives" who were superseded by the superior civilization of American settlers. When re-contextualized within a

differing set of Siletz temporal trajectories and orientations—revealed by a history of Siletz dance practices and public appearances—the participation of the Siletz Indians can be understood as a resistive act working to secure an Indigenous future in spite of the efforts of the settler state.

Second is the seemingly contradictory ways that the performing bodies of Eugene's settler community both substantiated the pageant's representational claims, and also collapsed the distinction between past and present in direct contradiction to the pageants' progressive, linear timelines. By noting the multiple temporalities utilized within the pageants over the years, I dispute simplistic characterizations of settler time and dichotomies of settler and Indigenous temporalities, revealing settler colonialism's tenacity and adaptability in preserving itself.

Four: *Playing the Trail, Performing Nostalgia: Reiterating* The Oregon Trail *Video Game*

Chapter Four examines the legacy of one of the most popular representations of the Oregon Trail, *The Oregon Trail* computer game. In this chapter, I trace this history of the game, showing how a classroom project created by student teachers became the most dominant way of imagining the history and geography of the Trail for an entire generation. I detail the recent recirculation of the game in popular culture via a host of nostalgic iterations, including participatory simulations of the game. Using my own participation in two

such events, *Oregon Trail Live!* and *The Oregon Trail Game 5k*, I argue that the game's limited and settler-oriented representations of the Trail combined with its capacity to generate positive feelings of nostalgia result in the simultaneous reproduction and obfuscation of settler colonialism. Despite this being a contemporary phenomenon, the effect of this performance of the Oregon Trail is the same as it has been for over 150 years—the naturalization of colonization and non-Native territorial occupation.

Creating a New Oregon Trail:

Preservation and the Performance of Settler Sovereignty

The Trail—Baker City, Oregon

In July 2019 I made a research trip to eastern Oregon. The primary purpose of my trip was to visit two museums built along the route of the Oregon Trail in the 1990s, discussed in chapter two, but the trip also gave me the opportunity to see extant remains of the original Oregon Trail. A seven-mile stretch of the trail is still visible east of Baker City, passing just below Flagstaff Hill and the National Historic Oregon Trail Interpretive Center. It was the first time I had visited any of the trail's remaining tracks or ruts. From a gravel turnout along the highway, I walked down a short trail to ruts marked with three separate trail markers. A grey, tapered, concrete post with "Oregon Trail" etched into the side—typical of markers installed by the Bureau of Land Management—stood along the trail with two brown, Carsonite markers emblazoned with the logos of the BLM and the Oregon National Historic Trail. A third set of brown interpretive signs directed attention to the ruts and asked visitors to "help us preserve the remnants of the wagon ruts" and "avoid activities that might cause further damage to this fragile site." Cutting through the markers and the sagebrush were two dusty traces running parallel toward the horizon, the dust of each trace marked with a collection of footprints from previous visitors (see figure 1).

Figure 1, Oregon Trail ruts near Flagstaff Hill, Oregon (author photo)

As I stood among the sagebrush looking out at the trail running past my feet toward the Baker Valley, it became clear that the trail was being presented as a historic artifact, much like any object would be in a museum or as part of an interpretive site. The function of the markers appeared indicative, serving to identify the location of the trail. The scene was a rather straightforward and familiar example of historical preservation, the markers drawing visitors' attention to an already existing reality with historic significance. In this case, with the dusty ruts of the trail cutting clearly through the sagebrush, it was a seemingly obvious reality—the Oregon Trail was, and is still, here.

In this chapter, I build on the work of performance and heritage scholars to offer a different way of understanding this experience. Rather than seeing this visit to the trail as an encounter with an existing reality made legible through trail markers and interpretive signs, I frame this encounter as part of an ongoing performance of settler sovereignty and belonging. Marking the Oregon Trail, I

argue, is performance, not mere representation. What is being performed, however, is not the Oregon Trail itself, but a settler colonial Pacific Northwest. The practice of marking the Oregon Trail is part of the larger performance of settler colonialism in the region, a set of practices which materialize and sustain settler norms, modes of inhabiting, and power. As performances, practices of marking the trail materialize settler-oriented ways of imagining geography and history upon the landscapes of the Pacific Northwest. Also, as performances, they are made possible through the bodies and actions of preservationists and visitors. They are one of many ways the white, settler hegemony of the Pacific Northwest is enacted. Cumulatively, these enactments give settler colonialism—and its constitutive norms and modes of inhabiting—its effect of power and stability as well as provide the conditions of possibility for future enactments of settler sovereignty and belonging, thus contributing to the perpetuation of settler hegemony.

Performance, in this case, is occurring at both macro and micro levels. At the larger scale, the trail markers are one among many enactments of settler colonialism—and more specifically, settler colonial land practices—which performatively materialize and give the settler colonial state its effect of stability and power. At the level of the performance event itself, trail markers have created myriad opportunities for non-natives to affirm their own sense of rightful belonging in the Pacific Northwest. This includes the acts of installing and

dedicating the markers themselves, but also subsequent visitations to marked sites like the one outside Baker City.

When approached as a performance practice, marking the Oregon Trail is revealed to be part of the constitutive practices of settler colonialism in the Pacific Northwest. As performance, the relationship between settler colonialism and settler hegemony in the Pacific Northwest is not merely a matter of historical representation. Therefore, the remedy cannot only be one of correcting or broadening the scope of who or what is being represented through trail preservation. It must also change the fundamental terms of engagement between people and the land, as well as between settlers, minority non-natives, and indigenous peoples.

Despite being part of ongoing processes of colonization, scenes like the one outside Baker City seem quite static. Little suggests an active and ongoing enactment of settler power and hegemony. A much broader scope is necessary to reveal the performative operations of trail markers like these. To do so, I approach trail preservation from three angles, moving beyond its ostensible claims of historic preservation to position it as a new mode for perpetuating the foundational dynamics of settler colonialism. First, I use a second trail marker to open up the history of trail preservation in the Pacific Northwest, showing its origins in a pioneer mythology which imagined the Oregon Country as a land meant for white, American settlers. Second, I position trail preservation efforts within the long tradition of settler colonial land use. The heritage practices around

marking the Oregon Trail are fundamentally about land, not just history, and are an active part of the ongoing occupation, possession, and transformation of Indigenous homelands by American settlers. In the final section, I examine how the marked trail provides opportunities for settlers to enact their own belonging in the land through encounters with the trail.

I. Understanding Trail Markers and Heritage

My analysis of Trail markers draws heavily from the literature of heritage, for this is the framework often used to interpret them. In the year prior to my visit to Baker City, the 175th anniversary of the Oregon Trail was celebrated.[12] An article from *The Oregonian* newspaper noted the occasion, describing the trail as "immortalized in regional history" and "a huge part of our Pacific Northwest heritage" (Hale). The article proffers a list of ways for readers to "pay proper homage to our pioneer heritage." Number three on the list is to find some wagon ruts; the ruts outside Baker City are one suggested option (Hale). As the article suggests, the Oregon Trail and its physical remnants are accepted as a "huge part" of Pacific Northwest heritage today, but it has not always been so. The trail has been *made* heritage through an ongoing practice of selection, valuation, and materialization. Understanding how heritage operates provides a useful entry point into understanding the trail and its marking as performance.

[12] 1843 is considered the beginning of the Oregon Trail years. That year, about 1,000 people crossed the trail, the first major migration of Americans into the Oregon Country.

Despite being a rather slippery term, heritage, as David Lowenthal notes, is an enormously powerful force in the formation of identities and our relationship to the past. “Heritage,” he writes, “distills the past into icons of identity, bonding us with precursors and progenitors, with our own earlier selves, and with our promised successors” (Lowenthal, “Identity, Heritage, and History” 43). Decades of marking and preserving the Oregon Trail have transformed the route into an object of importance within the histories and identities of the Pacific Northwest’s settler societies. The trail and its pioneers have been especially powerful in shaping the identity of the state of Oregon and its citizens, from the NBA’s Portland Trailblazers to the 22-foot-tall *Oregon Pioneer* adorning the pinnacle of the State Capitol in Salem. Heritage, however, does not pre-exist its identification and so-called preservation—it is made, not found. The trail-as-travel-route existed in the 19th century, but the trail-as-heritage, mobilized in service of identity, is primarily a 20th century creation.

As Lowenthal and others have shown, though ostensibly about the past or oriented to it, heritage is not the same as the past. Despite language that “suggests that heritage is there prior to is identification, evaluation, conservation, and celebration,” writes performance scholar Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, “heritage produces something new in the present that has recourse to the past” (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, *Destination Culture* 149). Heritage utilizes the past (or often a “veneer of pastness,” to use historian Graeme Davison’s term) to respond to present-day concerns, whether to affirm what is of value, repudiate what is

troubling, or assuage anxieties about the future (Fairclough et al. 33). Stuart Hall describes this operation as a colonization of the past by those with the power to determined “whose versions of history matter” (Fairclough et al. 221). The past, in effect, becomes a resource to exploit in order to secure power in the present. Heritage, Hall continues, “inevitably reflects the governing assumptions of its time and context…[which are] inhabited as natural—given, timeless, true and inevitable” (Fairclough et al. 221). With heritage, the past—or more accurately the representations and distillations of the past—is always intelligible, relevant, and useful to the present. With the passage of time or the change in circumstances, however, these governing assumptions are thrown into relief, revealing them as site- and time-specific.

The operation of heritage is not, as Kirshenblatt-Gimblett has noted, something which identifies and selects objects of existing value. Rather, it is a “value-added” industry, adding value to things that are no longer or have never been viable (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, *Destination Culture* 150). In choosing which things of the past—people, narratives, epistemologies, objects, landscapes—are valuable to the present, heritage practices give heritage objects their value. Because of the way heritage is fundamentally a system of giving meaning, scholars like Hall and Laurajane Smith have argued heritage should be thought of as a discourse rather than a collection of things: “There is, really, no such *thing* as heritage,” Smith states plainly (L. Smith 11, emphasis mine). Imagining heritage as a collection of things—personal heirlooms passed down from one

generation to the next, spiritual or cultural values, or built environments requiring historic preservation—focuses attention on the objects themselves, often implying that they have inherent value. Since discourses, as Michel Foucault has shown, "systematically form the objects of which they speak," imaging heritage as discourse shifts attention to *how* heritage objects are formed and given value (Foucault 49).

As a discourse on the past, heritage is always a practice of selection and evaluation, akin to the historiographic operations described by Michel de Certeau in *The Writing of History*. To make the past legible to the present, de Certeau writes, a selection must necessarily be made "between what can be *understood* and what must be *forgotten* in order to obtain the representation of a present intelligibility" (de Certeau, *The Writing of History* 4). The representations produced by heritage practices (and the identities made possible, in part, by them) maintain their impression of stability and coherence only by forgetting or obscuring that which challenges or contradicts them.[13] These "remainders," while not totally eliminated, are effectively rendered "unthinkable" by the dominant ways of imagining the history and space of the Pacific Northwest (de Certeau, *The Writing of History* 4). Their presence must therefore be continually managed

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[13] In the case of the colonization of the Pacific Northwest, this includes the ongoing presence of Indigenous peoples and Indigenous temporalities, geographies, and epistemologies. It also includes challenges to white supremacy, recognition of the inherent contradictions of the settler state in the Pacific Northwest, and the presence of non-white settlers and "arrivants," the term Jodi Byrd uses to describe non-Native, non-majority, and—in the case of enslaved Africans and people of African descent—non-willing participants in the settler project.

or rationalized. Examples of this include the “disappearing Indian” narrative, racial hierarchies, Oregon’s early black exclusion laws, and Chinese exclusion acts.

Heritage is a historiographical operation, making determinations about what should be remembered according to the dominant narratives and values of the present and what must necessarily be rendered “unthinkable.” In order for the Trail and the mythologies and histories associated with it to be accepted as not only valuable but natural and legitimate, other ways of imagining the Pacific Northwest must necessarily be rendered illogical and illegitimate. Most notably, these alternative imaginaries include those of the Indigenous societies of the region that long predate colonization, but also the different ways non-white and non-Native peoples have inhabited the colonized land of the Northwest. This would include African Americans, Chinese and Japanese immigrants, and Kānaka Maoli from Hawai’i.

As noted earlier, the exercise of power is central to the operation of heritage. Heritage objects have often been about power, usually as a means to express, adorn, or increase personal and state power. The exercise of power is not only to be found in the use of heritage objects themselves, but also in the formation of the fields of knowledge within which the meaning and value of heritage objects are established. Establishing the terms according to which any object or tradition is judged as valuable or worthy of “preservation” is significant power. This field of knowledge includes the “given assumptions” Hall notes are

often perceived as natural or given. It could take the form of what he calls “the unfolding of a ‘national story’ whose terms we already know,” or what Smith calls the “authorized heritage discourse,” a combination of grand narratives and expert (and supposedly neutral) scientific and technical assessment (Fairclough et al. 219; L. Smith 11). To understand what heritage does necessarily requires understanding how it works within the established structures, systems, and stories which give heritage objects their value and meaning. In the case of Trail markers, that context is both historical and geographical; it is a question not only of inhabiting time, but of inhabiting space.

Considering heritage as a discourse or a value-added practice does not limit it to the realm of representation; discourse, as Judith Butler has shown, has material effects.[14] Heritage practices along the Oregon Trail are performative, materializing the very thing they claim to preserve. Given the fundamental territoriality of settler colonialism and the Oregon Trail’s role in the colonization of the Pacific Northwest, recognizing heritage as a material practice is important. Each iteration of “preserving” the trail operates within site- and time-specific conditions which make it intelligible, valuable, and useful in the present. Of course, this could include any number of material, social, political, or ecological conditions, but how Trail preservation efforts function vis-à-vis settler colonialism and the land of the Pacific Northwest is the primary line of inquiry for this chapter.

[14] See Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of “Sex.” Routledge, 1993.

What kinds of spaces do they produce? What spatial conceptions, modes of inhabiting, and relationships to land do they presume as given and operate within?

Being site- and time-specific, it would seem to follow that each instance of marking and memorializing the Oregon Trail is somewhat unique. Despite the differences across time and space, however, practices of Trail preservation have always operated within—and have been made meaningful through—a foundational conception of the Pacific Northwest as space created by and for settlers. Despite the differences between the meaning and function of the Trail use and memorialization from 1843 to 2019, the foundational settler colonial conditions have remained undisturbed. Yet, as Hall has argued about the assumptions governing heritage, "it takes only the passage of time, the shift of circumstances, or the reversals of history, to reveal those assumptions as time- and context-bound, historically specific, and thus open to contestation, re-negotiation, and revision" (Fairclough et al. 221). Hall may be correct, but throughout all the shifts in the history of Trail interpretation, the Oregon Trail itself has remained an unquestioned constant, its apparent historical facticity too much to argue with. Thus, what is contested or revised about Oregon Trail heritage is nearly always the question of historical representation or perspective. This can

lead to an insistence on inclusion, or, to paraphrase Laura Helton et al., a critique of settler colonialism's boundaries but not of its essence (Helton et al. 11).[15]

What is usually lost in these spaces of reconsideration is how iterations of marking and memorializing the Trail renew and revitalize the settler geography of the Northwest. The result is a continual affirmation of the Pacific Northwest as a space to which settlers belong (and a space which belongs to settlers). As the meaning and relevance of the Oregon Trail shifts over time and space, it remains a means to rationalize the ongoing colonization and occupation of Indigenous homelands. Representations may shift, but the trail still serves its original function—the colonization of the Oregon Country.

II. The Trail of the Pioneer

On February 22 of 1913, a granite boulder with a bronze plaque was installed in Olympia's Sylvester Park. The plaque on the boulder read: "Marking the End of the Oregon Trail, 1844/Erected by Sacajawea Chapter, Daughters of the American Revolution, Olympia, Wn. 1913." The boulder was donated by the Sacajawea Chapter of the Daughters of American Revolution, the recently-

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[15] It can also lead to a continual striving for the ever-receding horizon of accuracy and authenticity, a misled belief in the ability to "get it right." As Scott Magelssen has shown, "Accuracy and authenticity are socially constructed relationships. The degree to which a museum's historical environment is authentic has less to do with an ontological category of 'authenticity,' or how long and hard it has worked to get there, and much more to do with how the museum has managed its reputation as a rigorous, authoritative institution, and the degree to which visitors perceive and put stock in this reputation" (Magelssen, *Living History Museums* xiii–xiv). In other words, accuracy and authenticity are shaped by power, those who determine, police, and promote what qualifies as authentic.

formed Olympia chapter of the national women's organization. The boulder was one of many markers installed along the route of the Oregon Trail and other pioneer trails across the American West in the early 20th century. It was the first of several markers installed by the Sacajawea Chapter along the Cowlitz Trail, a spur of the Oregon Trail which diverged from the main route at Fort Vancouver and headed north into what is now Washington State. The dedication ceremony held that day included prayers, patriotic songs, and a sonnet written for the event by University of Washington professor and *Washington Historical Quarterly* editor Edward S. Meany, "End of the Oregon Trail." Speeches were given by members of the Sacajawea Chapter, Secretary William Gilstrap of the Washington Historical Society, Governor Ernest Lister, and famed trail pioneer and preservationist Ezra Meeker. After the ceremony, the boulder—draped in an American flag—was unveiled by Sacajawea Chapter Regent Janet Streets and eight-year-old Helen Lord, daughter of local banker and businessman C.J. Lord ("About Olympia").[16] Today, the boulder sits in the same northwest corner of Sylvester Park along busy Capitol Highway and across from Starbucks, quietly "Marking the End of the Oregon Trail" as it has done since 1913.

Unlike the markers along the trail outside Baker City, which draw attention away from themselves and toward the trail's ruts, the text on the Olympia marker is surprisingly self-referential. The plaque's inscription says little about the Trail

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[16] After his death, Lord's 1923 mansion was donated to the state to serve as a museum. It closed in 2014 and was subsequently given to the Evergreen State College to serve as an event space.

itself but focuses attention to its own act of marking and the organization responsible for installing it, the Sacajawea Chapter. No remnants of the physical Trail are visible near the park, nor were they when the boulder was installed in 1913. Olympia was not even the original "end" of the Trail in the area. That distinction goes to Tumwater, Olympia's neighbor to the south and the first permanent American settlement on Puget Sound, established in 1845 by the Michael T. Simmons party.[17] The boulder in Olympia claims to mark the end of the Oregon Trail, but in contrast to the markers outside Baker City, the Trail itself is nowhere to be seen. What then is being marked by the boulder?

In this section, I use the installation of this boulder to position the practice of trail marking within two trajectories. The first is a pioneer mythology that emerged in the late 19th century in the Pacific Northwest, firmly establishing the Oregon Trail pioneer as the founder of the settler societies in Washington and Oregon. This mythology was an outgrowth of the original ideologies shaping the colonization of Oregon such as white supremacy, Manifest Destiny, and a belief in the autonomous sovereignty of settlers. When the movement to mark the Trail emerged in the early 20th century, it was an extension of this already established pioneer mythology. Marking the Trail became a new way to assert and manifest

[17] Simmons and the rest of his party—including George Bush, a mulatto—had arrived at Fort Vancouver shortly after the Oregon Provisional Government in the Willamette Valley had passed their first racial exclusion laws, barring blacks from permanent settlement. Rather than split up, the party decided to head north and eventually settled in what is now Tumwater. The first permanent American settlement on Puget Sound was the result of Oregon's first racial exclusion policies.

this mythology and the logics, ideologies, and imaginaries undergirding it. The second trajectory is the long history of settler colonial practices of claiming, possessing, and using land. Like other practices of asserting sovereignty and possession, trail markers make a claim that is literally grounded in the land itself, materializing a spatial imagination of the Pacific Northwest organized around settlement and the Trail.

In her opening speech from the dedication ceremony, Chapter Regent Streets makes it quite clear that the Trail itself is not the primary interest of the Sacajawea Chapter; marking it has an altogether different purpose than historical interpretation:

> We have gathered together to make with enduring granite and bronze a historic 'the end of the Oregon Trail.' …It is not my purpose to touch upon the history of the Trail itself but rather to indicate why we women are concerned in the dedication of this monument. The Society of the Daughters of the American Revolution is deeply interested in maintaining and fostering the spirit of love and devotion to country that so strongly dominated our ancestors and we believe that a powerful influence in that direction may be provided by the marking of places of historic interest and the restoration and preservation of objects of historical value…. We of the west cannot mark a Valley Forge or a Bunker Hill, but we can perpetuate the trails of an exodus greater than that of Israel, the pathways trod by those who traveled the Oregon Trail. The daughters of this America

> believe that it is possible to preserve for a generation more appreciative of our own the history and location of these famous trails now in danger of degeneration. (Thurston Community Media)

The Trail, as Streets notes at the end of this excerpt, is important to preserve, but insofar as it can be a "powerful influence" in fostering patriotism for years to come. Despite her language about restoration and preservation, Streets' speech redirects the audience away from the history of the Trail and toward the marker and its function in the present and future.

Other speeches given that day echoed the connection made between preservation and patriotism by Chapter Regent Streets. William Gilstrap, secretary of the Washington State Historical Society, gave a speech entitled "Patriotism." In it, he proclaimed, "[t]he marking of this and similar historic spots is preserving for coming generations cornerstones in history and teaching the public patriotism and reverence for the pioneers" (Thurston Community Media). Famed Trail preservationist Ezra Meeker gave a more urgent spin to the theme warning, "As the reverence for the past dies out in the breast of a generation, so likewise patriotism wanes. And if we wish to keep the flame of patriotism alive in America we must keep the memory of the past vividly in our minds" (Thurston Community Media).

For the Daughters of the American Revolution, the installation of the boulder was part of their mission to preserve important sites of American history, especially those associated with the American Revolution, the accepted origin of

the nation. For local chapters in the American West lacking sites directly related to the events of the American Revolution, the trails of American exploration and settlement became the object of their efforts. “Not all chapters could erect a marker for Bunker Hill or Yorktown,” write historians Carol Medlicott and Michael Heffernan, strangely echoing Streets, “but what DAR chapter anywhere in the United States could not claim a pioneer” (Medlicott and Heffernan 238)? For the Sacajawea Chapter, the Cowlitz Spur of the Oregon Trail was their local connection to America’s westward expansion. By 1916, 10 years after their founding, the chapter had placed 11 markers along the route between Olympia and the Columbia River.

For all three speakers, engendering national zeal answers the “why” of marking the Trail. Each insists that preserving the Trail by marking it with boulders and plaques has the capacity to accomplish this feat. In his memoir years later, Meeker describes “monumenting” the Oregon Trail (his phrase) as a practice which meant “more than the mere preservation in memory of that great highway; it means the building up of loyalty, of patriotism, as well as the teaching of our history in a form never to be forgotten” (Driggs and Meeker 225). History, according to Meeker, cannot be preserved in memory alone, but must be preserved in a durable form “never to be forgotten”: the trail marker.

The Rise of a Pioneer Mythology

When it was dedicated in 1913, the boulder in Sylvester Park was the product of existing ways of imagining the Oregon Trail, its history, and the Pacific Northwest. The marker was part of a national movement to preserve and memorialize the Trail which began in 1906 with Ezra Meeker. Though settlers traveling the trail in the 19th century "marked" the trail in a variety of ways—placing way finders, writing names on rocks, burying the dead, and casting aside excessive goods and broken gear—the practice of marking the Trail for commemorative purposes was a 20th century phenomenon. By the turn of the century, the Trail had begun to disappear from the landscape due to erosion, plowing, and land development. Somewhat ironically, the "civilization" which had allegedly been brought to the Pacific Northwest by the Oregon Trail became the very thing advancing its supposed demise, a refrain which still echoes today.[18]

At 75-years-old, Meeker departed from his home in Puyallup, Washington, with an ox-pulled wagon to retrace the route he crossed as a young man in 1852.[19] Along the way, he erected stone monuments along the route in partnership with local organizations and exhorted communities to take up the cause of preserving the Trail. Meeker continued his trek all the way to New York

[18] See Gilman, Sarah. "Protecting the Oregon Trail from the Development It Helped Create." *High Country News*, Mar. 2016.

[19] When he first set out to retrace the route of the Oregon Trail in 1906, Tumwater—the neighboring town to Olympia and the first permanent American settlement on Puget Sound—was the site of his first trail marker, a cedar post eventually replaced with a stone marker by the Sacajawea Chapter in 1916 (Driggs and Meeker 173; Corell 636; Redecker). The first stone monument associated with Meeker was dedicated a few days later in Tenino, approximately 15 miles south, where it still stands today.

City—driving his wagon down Broadway, Wall Street, and across the Brooklyn Bridge—and to Washington, DC where he was welcomed by President Theodore Roosevelt.[20] Meeker's efforts in 1906 quickly gained support nationwide, sparking state and national highway projects, local preservation efforts from Missouri to Washington, and the creation of the Oregon Trail Memorial Association, later succeeded by the American Pioneer Trails Association and the current Oregon-California Trails Association.

Meeker's retracing of the Oregon Trail in 1906 marked a shift in how the route of the Oregon Trail was understood and mobilized within the settler societies of the Pacific Northwest and the nation as a whole. As use of the Trail declined in the latter half of the 19th century, the importance of the route to the Pacific Northwest's settler societies also declined. The Trail had been a means to an end, useful as a route of emigration and a tool of empire, but unnecessary after the Oregon Country had been colonized/settled and the transcontinental railroad had been built. The figure of the pioneer, on the other hand, became increasingly important to the settler societies of the Northwest. In the latter decades of the 19th century, during a time of increasing pioneer death and economic depression, a pioneer mythology emerged within the Northwest.[21] A significant vehicle for this growing mythology was the pioneer organization.

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[20] According to Meeker's memoir, Roosevelt loved the idea of marking the Trail.

[21] See Boag, Peter. "Death and Oregon's Settler Generation: Connecting Parricide, Agricultural Decline, and Dying Pioneers at the Turn of the Twentieth Century." *Oregon Historical Quarterly*, vol. 115, no. 3, 2014, pp. 344–379.

These organizations formed primarily for two reasons: to create social opportunities for surviving pioneers (and eventually their descendants) and to perpetuate the legacy of the pioneers, including the institutions and industries built by them. These included the Oregon Pioneer Society (1867), Society of Washington Territory Pioneers (1871), the Oregon Pioneer Association (1873), the Pioneer Association of the State of Washington (1883), the Native Sons of Oregon (1899), the Sons and Daughters of Oregon Pioneers (1901), and the Linn County Pioneer Picnic in Brownsville, Oregon, the longest continuously running community event in the state. Some survive to this day and carry on the work of their predecessors.[22]

The American pioneer had already existed as a historical figure in the West and elsewhere, but the pioneer as a mythological figure central to Oregonian or Washingtonian identity—"state builders" with "no parallel…in all the history of mankind," as Oregon Historical Society curator George Hines declared in 1899—was a creation of the latter 19th century (Native Sons of Oregon et al. 8). The death of the pioneer generation raised concerns that their memories, stories, and first-hand knowledge of the early days of Oregon and Washington would vanish along with them. Vice-President E.N. Cooke of the Oregon Pioneer Association (OPA) warned of this possibility in his address at the organization's 1875 meeting:

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[22] The Sons and Daughters of Oregon Pioneers, the successor to the Oregon Pioneer Association, is still active; the tagline on their homepage reads "On the Trail of Our Ancestors," framing their work as carrying on the pioneer legacy.

> Scarcely a month passes, that does not consign to the tomb some member of the veteran band. Shall we make no effort to gather from their lips and garner into the store house of history, the facts and incidents that must perish with them? What is known by them must be recorded quickly…. It is our solemn duty to inscribe upon its walls the events of our day, whilst they remain unshrouded in the oblivion to which our neglect will consign them…. (Oregon Pioneer Association 42)

Since preserving the actual pioneers was an impossibility, the pioneer organizations became a way to ensure the founders of the Pacific Northwest's settler societies were not forgotten and the fruits of their labor would carry forth. The greatness of the pioneer seemingly knew no bounds, even taking on divine qualities—or rather, the divine took on the qualities of the pioneer. Oregon Secretary of State Stephen F. Chadwick described God as "The Great Pioneer of all, He who was, is and ever shall be" at the 1875 Oregon Pioneer Association meeting (Oregon Pioneer Association 15). Thanks to the work of these organizations, the pioneers transformed from historical people into larger-than-life, mythological figures.

As the mythology grew in the late 19th century, the rhetoric about pioneers explicitly lauded their role as conquerors who took possession of land and expanded the American empire. In his speech at the 1875 Oregon Pioneer Association meeting, Chadwick proclaimed, "The real Pioneer of America has been the landsman," and compared the pioneer to military conquerors. He

characterized the pioneer as a superior kind of empire builder who took possession of the land without the “furious rage” or violent subjugation of military campaigns—peaceful conquerors who used industriousness and self-discipline to build “a high order of society” (Oregon Pioneer Association 19). Repeatedly, Chadwick asserts that the pioneer had been responsible for settling the title of the Oregon Country, what he tells the pioneers is “your own land—your Oregon” (Oregon Pioneer Association 18).

Chadwick’s repeated emphasis on the pioneers’ role as “peaceful” conquerors was accompanied by remarks from Governor LaFayette Grover on the pioneers’ role in the “Oregon question.” Grover provided a geopolitical history of the Oregon Country and emphasized the role of the pioneer in gaining title to the land for the United States. He concludes, “the Pioneers of Oregon were really the fathers of American jurisdiction over all that magnificent domain of the United States, west of the Rocky Mountains—an Empire in itself” (Oregon Pioneer Association 39). Without their presence (primarily in the Willamette Valley), the United States would not have had such a strong bargaining position when negotiating the Oregon Treaty with Great Britain in 1846. The importance of land to the settler project of the Northwest—both its possession and utilization—was made very clear in this pioneer mythology. So too was the importance of the pioneer in extending American sovereignty over the region.

From Mythos to Markers

When Meeker began his journey to mark and raise awareness for the trail in the early 20th century, the mythology of the pioneer was firmly established within the Pacific Northwest's settler societies. So too was a sense that the heritage of the pioneer was in danger of disappearing and needed to be preserved. Meeker's campaign was an extension to the work of the pioneer organizations to secure the legacy of the pioneers via a new medium: the Trail marker. His efforts broadened the scope of pioneer heritage to include the physical Trail itself and marking it became a new way to honor the memory of the pioneers and secure their legacy. He was unabashed in explaining the purpose of his project. In his 1907 book *The Ox Team; or The Old Oregon Trail, 1852-1906*, Meeker stated clearly the purpose of his 1906 expedition across the old trail route: "To perpetuate the identity of the Trail made by the early sturdy pioneers, the battle-ground of peace, to honor the memories of these true heroes and to kindle in the breasts of the rising generation a flame of patriotic sentiment…" (Meeker 82). For Meeker, preserving and perpetuating the "identity of the Trail" had a specific purpose: remembrance and patriotism.

These were not neutral ideas for Meeker, but closely intertwined with ideas of white, Euro-American supremacy. In his 1927 book with Howard Driggs, successor to Meeker as president of the Oregon Trail Memorial Association, Meeker writes: "The civilized man builds upon the foundations of the past, with hope and ambition for the future. The savage has neither past nor aspiration for

the future. To keep the flame of patriotism alive, we must keep the memory of the past vividly before us" (Driggs and Meeker 165). By "savage," Meeker does not mean a generic contrast to civilization but makes clear he means the Indigenous people of the American west. He continues in the 1927 book to describe the Oregon Trail as a battlefield upon which men and women fought "a battle that wrested half a continent from the native race and from another mighty nation contending for mastery [Great Britain]" (Driggs and Meeker 166). By crossing the Trail and settling the Oregon Country, the pioneers proved victorious in battle against the Indigenous people of the region ("savages") and a great Imperial power (Great Britain). Like any great battlefield, Meeker felt the Oregon Trail must be monumentalized: "To mark the field of that battle for future generations was a duty waiting for some one [sic]; I determined to be the one to fulfill it" (Driggs and Meeker 166).

Meeker's campaign to preserve the Trail was ultimately a campaign for the preservation of white settler power in the Pacific Northwest and beyond. Civilization, he wrote, is characterized by an ability to build off of the past and aspire toward something in the future. The "savage," in contrast, is without a past and without aspirations for the future. When Meeker states that marking the Trail is about preserving the past and kindling patriotism in the current generation, he is ultimately arguing that historic preservation is necessary to the preservation of civilization and the nation itself. Marking the geographic "battlefield" of the Oregon Trail became a means to preserve man's civilized nature (read white,

American, and pioneer). The eventual subjugation of the West's Native peoples and the inclusion of the Oregon Country (or most of it) within the United States gave Meeker and others the historical evidence needed to prove the so-called racial, cultural, and political superiority of white Americans.

After Meeker's 1906 trek across the Trail, the movement quickly gained national prominence and was advanced in several different ways. New organizations dedicated to Trail preservation were formed, like the Old Oregon Trail Association (1922) founded in Baker City by Walter Meacham and Meeker's own Oregon Trail Memorial Association (1925). Legislation for memorial highways along the route was proposed at both the state and national levels.[23] One of the most well-known campaigns to raise awareness for Trail preservation was a commemorative Oregon Trail half dollar minted in 1926. Local communities, chambers of commerce, and existing organizations like the Daughters of the American Revolution also took interest in marking the Trail to advance their own purposes and missions. Meeker and those that followed shifted the heritage gaze from the pioneer toward the Trail itself. As markers dotted the historic route of the Oregon Trail, a new landscape was produced,

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[23] Just weeks before the installation of the trail marker in Sylvester Park, the Washington state legislature (meeting just across the street) passed Senate Joint Memorial 5 urging Congress to pass House bill 5966 "providing for the permanent location, marking, and monumenting the old Oregon trail, from the Missouri river to Puget Sound, as a memorial to the hardy pioneers, whose hardships, suffering, and brilliant achievements saved the Oregon country to the Union" (State Highway Board 229). The bill referenced in the joint memorial was known as the Humphrey Bill, first introduced in 1910 by Washington Congressman William Humphrey.

bringing the mythology of the pioneer together with the physical remains of the route.

III. The Trail Marker and the (Re)production of Settler Space

The Trail markers erected by Meeker and others are not merely symbolic; they are also performative. The power to continue the legacy of the pioneer and the power of the white, settler hegemony lies in more than the representational capacity of markers and monuments. It also lies in the performative capacity of markers to, in part, give settler colonialism the effect of stability and power. As a practice that produces something in the present and obtains its identity through the citation of existing norms and power structures, heritage is very much a performative practice.

Performativity, as theorized by Judith Butler and others, describes a citational and iterative process of materialization operating within the dynamic between performative acts and the discursive and material constraints guiding and conditioning such acts. Just as heritage practices appear to be about the past despite being of the present, the performative nature of heritage is concealed by the effect of stability they produce. Trail markers like those in Olympia and Baker City do not transparently represent an existing historical or geographical reality but effectively cite a precedent, renewing and operationalizing it for the present-day. After its usefulness as a trail of settlement

and colonization had waned, the Oregon Trail has had value and power only insofar as it has been enacted through marking and memorialization.

Butler expanded J.L. Austin's theory of linguistic performativity to include bodily and material acts, opening up the theory of performativity to a range of applications. Matter itself, she argued, should not be understood "as site or surface, but as a process of materialization that stabilizes over time to produce the effect of boundary, fixity, and surface we call matter" (Butler 9). Rather than action or discourse being limited to the expression or representation of matter—including categories of matter thought to be essential and unchanging—Butler flipped the order, arguing that such acts bring matter into being. The performative, according to Butler, is not an isolated event to be performed at will. Rather, the emphasis on reiteration and citationality is key to Butler's theorization of performativity, for it recognizes the ways that established norms, practices, and frameworks constrain and direct performative acts, thus perpetuating and reproducing those very norms. What she describes is an oscillation between performative acts and the effects they produce, situating embodied action within an ongoing process of materialization.

This central idea of processual and citational materialization that Butler developed has been taken up in theatre and performance studies, but also in geography and political theory, among other disciplines. In the same way gender is performative, space and territorial claims are also performative. The effect of stable, permanent, and (seemingly) totalizing settler spaces like Oregon and

Washington has always relied upon ongoing practices asserting possession, sovereignty, and belonging. In spite of the claim of autonomous sovereignty, such as those found in Oregon's foundational political documents and described by settler colonial scholars like Lorenzo Veracini, settlers' sovereign capacity is not innate, but dependent on the assertions of sovereignty through established and accepted means.[24] As Butler posits, "There is no power that acts but only a reiterated acting that is power in its persistence and instability" (Butler 9).

The implications of this definition of power for political entities like Oregon and Washington are spelled out by geographers Reuben Rose-Redwood and Michael R. Glass: "The sovereign state is not a pre-existing political actor that performs the sovereignty that it already possesses," they write, "it is through the *assertions* of sovereign power that the structural effect of 'the state' is performed" (Glass and Rose-Redwood 22). For settler colonial states, this has been evident from the earliest days on colonization. From 1492 on, Europeans claimed sovereignty over Indigenous lands with a variety of performances legitimizing their conquest (at least in their eyes), from the proclamation of scripted declarations (Spain) to more everyday practices signifying possession like fence-building and planting (England) (Seed 179). During the 19th century colonization

[24] The claim of autonomous settler sovereignty is front and center in the formational years of Oregon's settler governments. The earliest laws adopted by the Oregon Provisional Government in 1843 claim the authority of "the free citizens of Oregon Territory" to enact such laws. Meeting minutes from those early meetings of the Provisional Government interchange the term citizen with "inhabitant," making clear the link between political authority and inhabitance. Article one of the Oregon Constitution adopted in 1857, makes the claim of autonomous sovereignty even more explicit, declaring, "all power is inherent in the people, and all free governments are founded on their authority." (Grover 28; *Oregon Constitution*)

and settlement of the Pacific Northwest, many similar practices were performed in order to assert settler sovereignty—from Lewis and Clark's *Requerimiento*-like declaration to the Indigenous communities they encountered, to the requirements to cultivate land claims received under the Donation Land Act of 1850.

Throughout the United States' westward expansion, performances of sovereignty and possession became a means to secure new territory, consistently preceding formal declarations or affirmations of territorial rights, whether by treaties, legislation, or legal decisions.[25] It was only retroactively that these performances were framed (or rationalized) as expressions of an inherent and autonomous right to the land. To be clear, that is not to say that the sovereignty of the United States or non-Native belonging in the Pacific Northwest is a settled matter; it is only through the sustained enactment of territorial sovereignty and belonging that claims of legitimate occupancy are maintained.

What I wish to draw attention to is the process by which performances of sovereignty or possession precede their formal legitimization, thus bringing into being the effect they claim to express. This is evident from the earliest American forays in the Oregon Country. Acts of exploration like Robert Gray's sailing into the Columbia River, John Jacob Astor's establishment of Astoria, and Lewis and Clark's overland expedition were retroactively understood as examples of the legitimacy of the United States' claims to the region in treaty negotiations with

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[25] See Mark Rifkin's discussion of *City of Sherrill v. Oneida Indian Nation* (2005) in the opening to *Manifesting America*.

Great Britain. The arrival of American settlers preceded legislation like the Distribution-Preemption Act of 1841 and the Donation Land Claim Act of 1850 authorizing Americans to take land in the Oregon Country. The large number of American settlers in the Oregon Country gave the United States the upper hand in their negotiations with Great Britain in the 1840s. Most notably, the treaties between the United States and Britain, the land claim legislation, and significant American settlement all occurred before any treaty between the United States and the region's Indigenous peoples had been signed. It wasn't until the 1850s that treaties were signed with the Native tribes, bands, and nations of the Pacific Northwest to "legitimately" extinguish their legal title to the land.[26] The story of the United States' colonization of the Pacific Northwest is "act first," where performative assertions of sovereignty produce the effect of territorial possession and legitimate occupation.

The performance of sovereignty and belonging occurs not only at the level of treaties and policy but include much more intimate practices of inhabiting and using the land specific to settler colonialism. The colonization of the Oregon Country also happened at a granular level of the everyday. Many of these settler colonial practices, as settler colonial theorist Lorenzo Veracini notes, presume a lasting, multi-generational occupation such as:

[26] Of course, this can only be understood as legitimate or legal through settler frameworks of law. It does not follow that these should be universally accepted designations for the current status quo of settler and Indigenous claims to land, sovereignty, and nation-to-nation relationships.

> The production of surveying plats and other deeds conveying real estate (an essential instrument allowing the transfer of real estate across generations), and especially by ploughing (which can, in Lockean terms, sustain a claim), by the collective performance of familial rites sanctioned by a locally constituted church and congregation (especially births, weddings, and burials: the establishment of normative familial relations is a crucial marker of a successful settler project), and by a capacity to transform the landscape (clear fields and pastures, erect fences, buildings, and other improvements). (Veracini, *Settler Colonialism a Theoretical Overview* 76)

Like assertions of political sovereignty, the practices described by Veracini do not succeed established and settled claims to territorial possession or belonging, but rather produce them. It is through the practicing of private property, land improvement, familial rites, etc. that settler claims are made manifest and sustained. These practices validate, and are validated by, the larger political machinations and social ideologies of settler colonialism (like Manifest Destiny, white supremacy, and European cultural supremacy). Most importantly, it is these practices that materialize settler *possession and occupation of land*.

Through these practices, settlers have created landscapes recognizable to themselves as "theirs." As historian Richard White explains, when American settlers arrived in the Pacific Northwest, they "almost automatically sought familiar landscapes" and "sought not so much to create as to recreate" (White

111). Rather than adapt to the landscape of the Pacific Northwest, the new settlers transformed it to look like the places they came from (primarily the Midwest and South). Despite impressions that the Oregon Country was a wild frontier on the edge of the United States, the replication of familiar and already established modes of inhabitance made the frontier "the most conservative region of the country," White argues: "The new land became merely a foundation upon which to reestablish existing ways" (White 112).

As sovereignty, possession, and belonging has been performed, the settler colonial landscape of the Pacific Northwest has taken shape. By the early 20th century, the states of Washington and Oregon were firmly established as part of the United States. The lands they encompassed had been claimed, settled, and their transformation into familiar landscapes was well underway. When the movement to mark and memorialize the Oregon Trail emerged, it was not about *establishing* a claim to the land of the Pacific Northwest but *sustaining* it by giving it new meaning and value. As Patrick Wolfe has argued, the organizing structures and logics of settler colonialism do not disappear or dissipate over time. Rather, these logics continually transmute into different modalities in order to sustain and preserve settler society (Wolfe, "Settler Colonialism and the Elimination of the Native" 402). Marking the Trail was a new way to assert settler claims to the land, continuing to sustain the logics enacted through prior performances of possession and sovereignty and ensuring the colonizing labor of the Oregon Trail continued on.

Like prior practices which turned alien landscapes into something familiar, marking the Trail continued to transform the land of the Pacific Northwest into something which affirms the presence of non-natives. Landscape, as geographer Neil Smith has shown, is “a very powerful naturalization of the social assumptions that sculpted such landscapes in the first place” (N. Smith). As the land of the Pacific Northwest was repeatedly marked as the land of settlers through various monuments and memorials, it has made it increasingly difficult to imagine it as anything else, reinforcing a spatial imagination of the Pacific Northwest as “always already” settler space.

At the same time, however, there have existed alternative possibilities for imagining the history and geography of the Pacific Northwest. For example, just blocks from where the Sacajawea Chapter dedicated the boulder in Olympia was the town’s small Chinatown, no more than a couple of blocks long. For Olympia’s Chinese immigrants, the prize to be won for the arduous journey to the Pacific Northwest was not likely land, as they were prohibited from making land claims, but opportunity, nonetheless. The route there was not west over land, but east over sea. The reorientation is not an insignificant difference, for it starts to chip away at the dominant ways of imagining the history and geography of the region. For the Chinese who lived in Olympia and throughout Oregon and Washington, the Pacific was not the end of American expansion, but the origin point of a Chinese diaspora that spread throughout the American West. The pioneers may have been celebrated as empire builders, but the railroads, lumber camps,

canneries, and farms were built and run with the labor of tens of thousands of Chinese.

Despite their labor helping make the settler state succeed, the Chinese posed a (perceived) threat to the power of white Americans in the Pacific Northwest. As more Chinese arrived in the Northwest, anti-Chinese sentiment increased, most famously leading to the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882. Across the Northwest, the Chinese faced violence for decades: forced expulsions in Tacoma and Seattle, arson in Portland, and the massacre of 34 Chinese miners at the hand of whites in 1887 at Hells Canyon. In order to sustain white settler power in the region, those presenting different possibilities beyond the existing American settler state needed to be marginalized, subjugated, or even eliminated.[27]

IV. The Trail as Stage

As the Trail was repeatedly marked throughout the early 20th century, a new landscape of Oregon Trail heritage emerged. The growing accumulation of markers, monuments, memorial highways, interpretive kiosks, historic sites, museums, and highway guides provided new opportunities for enactments of

[27] The problem with the marked and memorialized Oregon Trail, as noted earlier in this chapter, is not merely a matter of historical representation or perspective. The remedy for the hegemony of the settler state cannot only be an apology for past wrongs and a belated inclusion of Chinese people within the foundational narratives of the Pacific Northwest. It must necessarily be a question of geographical and historical imagination, one that requires a critical and reflexive interrogation into how we inhabit and relate to the lands we occupy, and the implications of those modes of inhabitation and relationality.

settler sovereignty and belonging, beyond those of simply marking the Trail. In 1923, Walter Meacham staged the “Top o’ the Blue Mountains” pageant along the Trail route in Meacham, Oregon. It was an enormous spectacle drawing thousands, including President Warren Harding, and featured a frontier streetscape, square dancing, and a horseshoe competition in addition to the performance.[28] As soon as 1910, efforts to build memorial highways along the route were introduced and continued with varying success for decades. As highways were built, automobile clubs, chambers of commerce, and other interest groups like Meacham’s Old Oregon Trail Association distributed road guides encouraging Americans to travel “the world’s most historic highway,” where “[e]very mile of the old Trail is filled with history, sentiment and tragedy” (Ryder Bros.). Automobiles became a new means for Americans to quickly and easily retrace the Trail and enjoy what Meacham described as the “wealth of scenery, resources, health and contentment” lavishly poured out to the pioneers by “a generous Creator” (Meacham, *Story of the Old Oregon Trail: The World’s Most Historic Highway and the Road to America’s Scenic Wonderland.* 21). Long-distance wagon train reenactments also traveled along the Trail, most famously in 1959 for the Oregon State Centennial and in 1993 for the Oregon Trail Sesquicentennial.

[28] For more, see Vaughn, Chelsea K. “‘The Road That Won an Empire’: Commemoration, Commercialization, and the Promise of Auto Tourism at the ‘Top o’’ Blue Mountains’.’” *Oregon Historical Quarterly*, vol. 115, no. 1, 2014, pp. 6–37.

In the next chapter, I examine more closely some of the performances made possible by the heritage landscape of the Oregon Trail. Before doing so, however, I will mark two shifts in the practice of Trail preservation which began in the latter half of the 20th century. The first was a shift in historic preservation that emphasized visitors' experience the Trail. The second is how the preservation efforts of the early 20th century have transformed into historical objects themselves to preserve and memorialize. Each of these shifts has worked to further obscure how Trail marking operates to secure and normalize settler colonialism.

Experiencing the Trail

When first marked by Meeker and others, the Trail was closely associated with the pioneer mythology which flourished in the post-trail years. As Trail preservation continued through the decades, the function of marking the Trail became less and less about honoring and preserving the legacy of the pioneers and more and more about preserving the physical Trail itself. In 1978, the Oregon Trail was designated a National Historic Trail, the culmination of decades of work to make the Oregon Trail part of the national heritage. The Oregon Trail was evaluated for inclusion into the newly created National Trails System in a 1975 report prepared by the Bureau of Outdoor Recreation (an agency of the Department of the Interior later absorbed into the National Park Service). The report affirms the value of the Oregon Trail to the nation, stating, "As part of the

great national epic of western expansion, the story of the Oregon Trail has gained well-deserved prominence in a diverse national heritage" (Northwest Regional Office, Bureau of Outdoor Recreation 8). What Meeker and others had once warned was in danger of disappearing had now been officially enshrined as important to the nation.

The report also reveals a shift in the purpose of marking the Trail, more explicitly emphasizing the importance of the Trail's landscape and visitors' experience of it. The report was, after all, published by the Bureau of Outdoor Recreation. When the Oregon Trail was included the National Trails System Act of 1978, this new directive for Trail preservation became official. The recreational emphasis of the act is laid out in the opening sections of the law:

> In order to provide for the ever-increasing outdoor recreation needs of an expanding population and in order to promote the preservation of, public access to, travel within, and enjoyment and appreciation of the open-air, outdoor areas and historic resources of the Nation, trails should be established…. ("The National Trails System Act," sec.2)

National trails—both scenic and historic—were to be created as vehicles for the public to use and enjoy public lands and the nation's historic resources.

Within this new framework, inhabiting the *landscape* of the Trail was seen as a means to know and be inspired by the *history* of the Trail. Visitors' sensory experiences of the extant Trail and its surrounding landscape were seen as

powerful means to achieving this end. This is made clear in the 1975 report's characterization of why the Oregon Trail should be preserved:

> Much of the Oregon Trail's potential for public enjoyment lies in these visible remnants, and in the historic sites associated with the trail. What remains of the Oregon Trail lies gently on the land, as easily erased as a pencil line on paper. If protected, these remnants can provide future generations the opportunity to catch glimpses of our land as it appeared to the emigrants, to relive vicariously their great adventure, and to sense the enormity of its consequence.... (Northwest Regional Office, Bureau of Outdoor Recreation i)

The stated purpose for marking and preserving the trail was no longer about fostering love of country or securing a pioneer legacy, but about giving future generations opportunities to see, sense, and relive the history and meaning of the Oregon Trail. It would be through the visitor's physical presence on the trail that the past could be glimpsed, or the hardship of the pioneer felt. That purpose is strongly evident today in the ways the trail is framed as a tourist site. "Oregon maintains a number of sites," states the Travel Oregon website, "where you can step into the captivating history and understand the rigors of trail life" (Grosvenor, "The True Story of the Oregon Trail").

The shift toward experience went hand in hand with a growing emphasis on how the history of the Trail was framed. Celebration of the pioneers as empire builders, peaceful conquerors, or civilizers of "a country uninhabited except by

wild beasts and wilder savages" had diminished (Native Sons of Oregon et al. 8). In its place was a stronger emphasis on the struggles, perseverance, and resourcefulness of trail "emigrants," simple men and women who rose to the challenge of an over 2,000 mile overland journey. The "pioneer spirit," once explicitly linked with conquest and territorial possession, was now aligned more closely with suffering and the pursuit of a dream. Instead of preserving the battlefield described by Meeker, designating the Oregon Trail as a National Historic Trail allowed current and future generations the opportunities to vicariously experience the pioneers' enormous undertaking.

Of course, like any heritage practice, designating the Oregon Trail a National Historic Trail affirmed the already mythological status of the Trail and its pioneers within American history and culture. However, unlike earlier preservationist's faith in the power of markers themselves, the language around the National Historic Trail designation more strongly emphasizes the role of the visitor. Meeker saw monuments as a means to preserve the legacy and memory of the pioneers in a "form never to be forgotten." The Sacajawea Chapter in Olympia saw erecting markers as a way to foster patriotism. These earlier efforts saw the markers and monuments as the primary means of achieving their goals. The markers were, in a way, perceived as the active agents of preservation: they made the Trail visible, reminded the public of the pioneer past, and asserted settler claims to the land. By the 1970s, greater emphasis on experience made visitors' use of the Trail the primary goal of preservation, but also the primary

driver for greater public interest. “Public interest is expected to broaden,” the 1975 report states, “if action is taken to make the Oregon Trail's potential for outdoor recreation better known and more available” (Northwest Regional Office, Bureau of Outdoor Recreation 46). The visitor was now positioned as the most important agent in preserving the Oregon Trail’s history and its relevance within American society.

The Trail Visitor as Trail Producer

Let me return to the trail outside Baker City. When I visited it, I noticed footprints in the dust of the wagon ruts. They were traces of the bodily presence of previous visitors to that space, of visitors “experiencing” the trail. Whether or not those visitors felt any connection to the 19th century pioneers or their hardship, ambition, or adventure, remains a speculation. There is little the footprints can tell me about their experiences. What visitors personally experience while walking the wagon ruts, however, is not all that matters. Just as the repetition of footfalls wear away stone steps, might the cumulative effect of visitors’ footsteps wear away the land to keep the Oregon Trail visible? Perhaps literally in the case of the footprints in the wagon ruts, but also more generally through ongoing visitation created by the Trail’s heritage infrastructure. The designation of the trail as a National Historic Trail encouraged the development of more facilities along the Trail, more protections for Trail remnants, and a more prominent position within the nation’s heritage—all working to increase interest in

the trail. As preservation efforts for Oregon Trail increasingly became about recreation and experience, the visitor and their physical presence along the Trail became an important way of securing its relevance and power in the Pacific Northwest and beyond.

The physical presence of visitors along the Oregon Trail is not secondary to other modes of Trail preservation like physical markers and heritage policy. In other words, visitors are not just the product of Trail preservation, but producers of it. Live, embodied performances, as Rebecca Schneider has shown, are essential to historical preservation. Schneider proposes that performance can be understood as a remnant of the past in a similar way as archival documents or archeological fragments might be. Performance does not elude the archive or stand in opposition to it; instead, performance is necessary to accessing the past and bringing it into the present.[29] The performance of history, she contends, is not merely the expression or reenactment of a historical event, but the means of ensuring the past remains *present* in the present. As such, history might be understood as an "act of securing any [historical] incident backward—the repeated act of securing memory," rather than the cumulative accretion of sedimented events (Schneider 104). The *matter* of history, then, is not the accumulation of historical remains, but the repeated performances in the present.

[29] Unlike Diana Taylor, who theorized the repertoire as a counter to the archive's emphasis on discourse and writing, Schneider works to "to resituate the site of any knowing of history as body-to-body transmission," including encounters in the archive (Schneider 104). Taylor, she writes, "works to situate the repertoire *as another kind of archive*, rather than emphasizing the twin effort of situating the archive as *another kind of performance*" (Schneider 108).

The footprints outside Baker City are evidence of some of the performances which have labored to secure the historical event of the Oregon Trail in the present. So too are the physical markers and monuments, each of which are traces of dedication ceremonies, fund raising events, and association meetings. These are the live, embodied actions which have, and continue to, materialize the Oregon Trail in the present. What is secured through these performances of historical preservation, however, are not only historical events and pioneer legacies, but the logics and geographies of settler colonialism as well. Collectively, these performances of installing markers, giving speeches, traveling along the route, and walking the ruts secure a historical and geographical imagination in the present, an imagination that positions the settler as the rightful inhabitant of the land. Importantly, as Trail preservation efforts have shifted toward recreation and experience, presence and experience have been reframed as epistemological tools for understanding the land and its history. In effect, the settler or non-Native experience of the land becomes the legitimate means to know, understand, and inhabit the land.

This effect of centering settler experiences of the land is compounded by the fact that the Trail experienced by visitors today is not the trail of the 19th century. No matter how historic a Trail remnant may appear, to experience it is always to experience it through the lens of the present moment. The colonized land of the present-day is mingled with the history of the Trail, unavoidably shaping any knowledge of the past supposedly attained by experiencing it. The

result is inevitably a conflation of the past with the established myths, historical narratives, and landscapes of the present-day. It is also a conflation of the past with the visitor's immediate experience of the trail. Understanding the past becomes deeply linked with each visitor's existing relationship to the land and their understanding of it.[30]

Preservation as Historical Object

Over time, as the Oregon Trail has continued to be performed through marking—whether via granite boulders or dusty footprints—it has seemingly become as natural as the sagebrush of eastern Oregon. A continual practice of preserving, interpreting, and visiting the Trail has sustained its position as essential to the history and geography of the Pacific Northwest. Though critiques of how the pioneer past is remembered in Washington and Oregon have increased over time, the Trail remains an unquestioned part of the region's heritage. Criticisms usually focus on how the Trail is framed and interpreted, not whether or not it should be remembered at all. At the very least, it remains durably marked upon the landscape, and will as long as it is sustained through performances of marking and visitation. As each new iteration gives the Trail new life and relevance, it also reaffirms the legitimacy of the Trail as significant to the

[30] In Chapter Two, I interrogate Tamástlikt Cultural Institute, a museum on the trail owned and operated by the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation. Here, non-native relationships to the land are called into question by positioning visitors within the tribes' ways of imagining and inhabiting the land of Eastern Oregon.

historical and geographical imagination of the Pacific Northwest. Just as an emphasis on experience has presumed the legitimacy of the already marked Trail, a similar operation is taking place now. What had originally been the means for securing a pioneer legacy and settler claims to the land have now become the objects of historical preservation.

One example of this can be found just up the hill from the wagon ruts outside Baker City in the National Historic Oregon Trail Interpretive Center. The final exhibit of the museum is comprised of a few panels about Meeker and early Trail preservation efforts. Included is one of the markers erected during Meeker's 1906 trek, this one from Union County near Ladd Canyon, about 40 miles from the museum. It had been missing from its original location for about a century, but was found in 2017 by Ronnie Allen, a Union County resident. Allen promptly donated it to the Interpretive Center. What had originally been intended to mark the route of the Trail, preserve the memory of the pioneers, and inspire patriotism is now an artifact used to tell the history of Meeker and his 1906 journey across the country. Today, thousands of visitors get to see the stone pillar in the museum, not in its original location near Ladd Canyon. This relocation prompts the questions of what happens when the medium of preservation becomes the thing preserved?

A second example of this phenomenon could be found on a sunny July day in Olympia's Sylvester Park in 2013. On this day, the still active Sacajawea Chapter reenacted the original 1913 dedication ceremony for the Trail marker.

The reenactment included period attire, a band, local descendants of pioneer families, and a professional Ezra Meeker portrayer. The Ezra Meeker society even brought down the wagon used in his 1906 crossing from the Meeker estate in Puyallup. The speeches and prayers given that day were repeated verbatim in the order of the original ceremony, with additional messages given by the mayors of Olympia and neighboring Tumwater, Governor Jay Inslee (in absentia), and local radio host Dick Pust, who served as the emcee for the day. When the speeches ended, the newly refurbished 1913 marker was (re)unveiled to the crowd and the ceremony was closed with the singing of "My Country, 'Tis of Thee."[31] Like the lost Trail marker, the dedication ceremony itself had become the object of historical interest, brought into the present through the Sacajawea Chapter's reenactment.

When Meeker and the Sacajawea Chapter were marking the Trail in the early 20th century, the Trail and its relevance to a rapidly changing society were uncertain. As the pioneer generation declined, the physical Trail became a means to secure for future generations what had been gained in the conquest of the Oregon Country. A century later, the Trail and its significance are seen as settled matters. In describing his own experience of territorial inhabitance, however, Mark Rifkin reminds us that the constant tensions of settler colonialism are often difficult to ascertain: "The fact that there is not, or I do not perceive

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[31] The Sacajawea Chapter also refurbished all of the remaining markers originally installed along the Cowlitz Trail, though I believe the Olympia reenactment was unique.

there to be, an active political struggle over the place I inhabit does not mean it and my apprehension of it somehow exist outside or beyond ongoing histories of settler-Indigenous negotiation, antagonism, and conflict" (Rifkin, *Settler Common Sense* xvi). The successes of Trail preservation throughout the 20th and 21st centuries do not mean that settler claims to the land are settled. If anything, the ongoing practice of preserving settler histories and geographies indicates a continual need to rationalize non-Native presence in Indigenous homelands.

V. Conclusion

In *The Past is a Foreign Country*, David Lowenthal writes: "The surviving past's most essential and pervasive benefit is to render the present familiar. Its traces on the ground and in our minds let us make sense of the present" (Lowenthal, *The Past Is a Foreign Country* 39). In the case of the Oregon Trail, Lowenthal's statement rings true. The surviving past of the Trail (in this case, quite literally "traces on the ground") has provided non-Natives a means for making sense of the present for over a century. Making sense of the present in a settler colonial space like the American Pacific Northwest necessarily requires making sense of *presence*, that is, the physical presence of non-natives in Indigenous homelands. This is what the 20th century Trail has helped do for settlers over generations: make sense of presence using the remnants of the past. From its origins as an extension of the Northwest's pioneer mythology valorizing pioneers as empire builders and peaceful conquerors, marking the

Trail has continually provided non-Natives a way to assert belonging to the land of the Pacific Northwest.

Like other heritage practices, marking the Trail is a performative act, bringing into being the very thing it claims to represent. The significance of the Oregon Trail within the settler societies of the Pacific Northwest—especially the physical Trail itself—was never assured. It has only been through continual practices of marking it and deeming it valuable that it has maintained its position within the historical and geographical imagination of the Pacific Northwest. As the Trail-as-heritage has materialized, it has affirmed the settler colonial present as the natural and inevitable result of history; the Trail performs the Pacific Northwest as "always already" settler space. It is not only the markers themselves that have secured the power and position of the Oregon Trail within the Pacific Northwest, but the many performances made possible through them. From patriotic dedication ceremonies and legislative acts to automobile tourism and hikes along trail ruts, the relevance and vitality of the trail to the settler status quo is repeatedly secured through the live, embodied enactments of many. These collective performances not only normalize the history and geography of the Trail, but the underlying logics and norms of settler occupation, continuing in settler colonialism's long tradition of performing sovereignty and possession.

When examples of Trail preservation like the ruts outside Baker City or the boulder in Olympia are understood as performances, rather than merely representations, it reveals the true stakes of Trail marking. If it was *only* about the

representation of the past, then a more accurate and inclusive telling of history could be an adequate correction. If it was *only* an extension of the white supremacist pioneer mythology celebrating the "peaceful" conquest of the Oregon Country by the United States, it could be discounted as outdated and no longer representative of the Pacific Northwest today. If it was *only* a mapping of a historical route of emigration, its interpretation could be shaped in ways that work to undo the violence and hegemony of settler colonialism. As performance, however, undoing the Trail's work vis-a-vis settler colonialism requires us to pay attention to how the Trail shapes and fosters our engagement with the land itself—everyday embodied practices of commemoration, tourism, and historical preservation. The labor of the Trail exceeds representation and includes many performances—both expressive and constitutive—which affirm, naturalize, and encourage settler occupation.

In *Settler Common Sense*, Mark Rifkin theorizes the titular concept of his book, examining how the structures, logics, and norms of settler colonialism come to be understood as given, generic, and certain. More specifically, Rifkin connects the sensation of belonging with the geographies crafted within settler colonialism. He writes: "[T]he sensation of belonging…arises out of an 'impress' that also *orients,* directing attention to some things and not others while providing a working map of extant relations and potentials in the space of inhabitance…" (Rifkin, *Settler Common Sense* 13) The geographies of settler colonialism—produced through property law, treaties, and, as I have shown, trail marking—

provide such an impress, orienting non-Natives toward the land they inhabit and informing them of how they can and should engage with the land. "[T]he sense of relative stability such geographies generate," Rifkin continues, "facilitates the normalization and becoming-given of the ways they contour place, association, and belonging as well as the particular kinds of actions, connections, and dispositions they incite and incentivize" (Rifkin, *Settler Common Sense* 13).[32]

What the history of Trail marking has brought about in the Pacific Northwest is a seemingly stable geography that orients settlers within the land they inhabit, facilitates normalization and sensations of belonging, and incites and incentivizes future actions. In the following chapters, I examine in detail three different ways the Oregon Trail has become the fertile ground for the articulation and materialization of settler belonging in the Pacific Northwest.

[32] It should be noted that the "sense of relative stability" described by Rifkin is the effect of cumulative and ongoing enactments of settler geographies.

“Playing Pioneer” and the Settler Spatial Regime:

The Sesquicentennial Museums on the Oregon Trail

Introduction

When Ezra Meeker kicked off his movement to mark and memorialize the Oregon Trail in 1906, he sparked a transformation of the Trail from a 19th century route of colonization into a 21st century tourist destination. Each year, thousands of visitors follow the iconic covered wagon highway signs marking the Oregon National Historic Trail, stopping along the way to see wagon ruts and visit a wide range of interpretive sites, from roadside kiosks to reconstructed military forts. In the 1990s, four museums were built along the route in Oregon giving visitors new ways to learn about and experience the trail. The galvanizing catalyst for these museums was a 1988 report submitted to Oregon Governor Neil Goldschmidt entitled *Our Oregon Trail* by the Oregon Trail Advisory Council.[33] In it, the council recommend that four “full scale, manned” interpretive sites be constructed along

[33] The Oregon Trail Advisory Council was the result of Executive Order 84-10 signed by Oregon Governor Vic Atiyeh in 1984. It was formed to fill in a vacuum left by the dissolution of the National Trail Council, an advisory group originally organized after the creation of the National Oregon Historic Trail in 1978. During the second annual convention of the Oregon-California Trails Association, interest was generated in a state level council to provide oversight of the Trail in Oregon. The Council’s charge was to promote public awareness of the Trail, encourage preservation, advise and inform state agencies, serve as a liaison to other state and national groups, and provide an assessment of current and potential interpretive sites along the route of the trail by January 1, 1988.

the route of the trail in Oregon in or near four cities: Baker City, Pendleton, The Dalles, and Oregon City.[34]

The goal was to have the new interpretive centers completed for the state's Oregon Trail sesquicentennial celebration in 1993. Only the National Historic Oregon Trail Interpretive Center outside Baker City was open by 1993, having opened the year prior. The End of the Oregon Trail Interpretive Center in Oregon City followed in 1995, the Columbia Gorge Discovery Center in The Dalles opened in 1997, and the Tamástslikt Cultural Institute on the Umatilla Indian Reservation opened in 1998. These four museums were a significant addition to the existing landscape of Oregon Trail heritage tourism in the state and still draw tens of thousands of visitors each year.[35] In this chapter, I examine three of these sesquicentennial museums in order to interrogate how they have created new modes for experiencing the history and geography of the Oregon Trail, thus expanding the emphasis on experience that emerged in trail preservation efforts in the 1970s as discussed in Chapter 1.[36]

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[34] Although promoted and supported at the state level, the planning, funding, and construction of each museum was spearheaded by local communities and organizations.
[35] The National Historic Oregon Trail Interpretive Center alone draws 40,000 visitors annually (Bureau of Land Management and Vale District Office).
[36] I do not discuss the Columbia Gorge Discovery Center in The Dalles, Oregon. It focuses on the natural and human history of the Columbia River gorge and Wasco County.

The landscape of heritage tourism along the Oregon Trail encourages visitors to imagine themselves as pioneers, both implicitly and explicitly.[37] Collectively, the series of museums and interpretive sites along the route create a kind of pilgrimage, encouraging visitors to retrace the steps of the settlers who colonized the West. Recounting her own experience visiting the sesquicentennial museums, anthropologist Deborah Bird Rose describes the cumulative effect of these sites, writing, "You travel the trail and visit the centres; you see the ruts…. Over and over you are told that you *are* this history; this history *is* you" (Rose 235). From being present in the same landscapes that Oregon Trail settlers traveled through, to more specific role-playing activities, these facilities encourage visitors to "play pioneer" and identify (or be identified) with white, American settlers.

I agree with Rose that these museums produce an alignment between the visitor and specific historical narratives about the Oregon Trail, yet I contend that performing the role of the pioneer within these museums also produces an alignment between the visitor and the land of the Pacific Northwest. By visiting these museums and traveling the contemporary trail—by "put[ting] one's body into motion," to use Rose's phrase—you, the visitor, are repeatedly assured that you belong in this land *and* that this land belongs to you (Rose 235). Embracing

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[37] The front page of the National Park Service's website for the Oregon National Historic Trail reads: "Imagine yourself an emigrant headed for Oregon: would promises of lush farmlands and a new beginning lure you to leave home and walk for weeks? More than 2,000 miles of trail ruts and traces can still be seen along the Oregon National Historic Trail in six states and serve as reminders of the sacrifices, struggles, and triumphs of early American settlers."

a late 20th century shift toward experience in museum design, these museums utilize representation, performance, and their locations along the route of the Oregon Trail to shape how visitors imagine and relate to the land of the Pacific Northwest. By creating experiences of the past, these museums work to rationalize and reproduce the social and spatial conditions from which they have emerged, securing the power of a given spatial order in the present. Understanding this process—how it is facilitated and what it produces—is the focus of this chapter.

Two of the museums I analyze—the National Historic Oregon Trail Interpretive Center (NHOTIC) and the End of the Oregon Trail Interpretive Center (EOTIC)—focus on the settlers who traveled the Oregon Trail and largely work to affirm and secure the legitimacy and security of a settler colonial status quo. The third—Tamástslikt Cultural Institute—is owned and operated by the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation. It provides a different experience of the history and geography of the Oregon Trail for visitors, grounded in the Indigenous spatialities and modes of inhabiting of the Cayuse, Walla Walla, and Umatilla peoples. This experience works to advance the tribes' ongoing efforts to secure their sovereignty, self-determination, and own future, but it also offers non-Native visitors the opportunity to reimagine their relationship to the land of the Pacific Northwest.

I: The Museum Experience

I begin this chapter with a description of my visit to the National Historic Oregon Trail Interpretive Center (NHOTIC) outside Baker City on July 14, 2019. When the NHOTIC and the other sesquicentennial museums were designed and constructed in the 1990s, museum design was moving away from an earlier emphasis on the display of objects and were increasingly defined by their relationship to the visitor. This relationship, as Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett writes, is often marked by the term "experience," a term which "indexes an engagement of the senses, emotions, and imagination" (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, *Destination Culture* 138). Embracing this turn, each of the sesquicentennial museums was designed to give visitors an experience of the history of the Oregon Trail and the lands it crossed.[38] At the NHOTIC, this experience is created through the use of dioramas, soundscapes, interactive displays, living history demonstrations, and a linear layout organized to mimic the Oregon Trail itself. The use of these various technologies, a NHOTIC brochure promises visitors, "brings to life the Oregon Trail experience" (Bureau of Land Management and Vale District Office). The emphasis on experience also makes the performance of the visitor within this environment central to the work of the museum.

[38] For the NHOTIC, emphasizing experience was essentially a necessity given the paucity of extant artifacts from the Oregon Trail years.

“Imagine Yourself an Emigrant”

As I enter the National Historic Oregon Trail Interpretive Center (NHOTIC), a long, high-ceilinged hall stretches out before me filled with a life-size diorama of a wagon train. The entrance hall is bordered by a gift shop, an information desk, and a theater playing a specially made film titled *West to Oregon*, but it is the diorama that captures my attention, its sheer size and immersive design make me want to explore. I follow the gently curving path through the large-scale diorama and am immersed into the sights and sounds of a wagon train. Models of people, wagons, and livestock fill a recreated sagebrush landscape. The ambient sounds of the wagon train—shouting, wood creaking, mules braying—fill the hall. Firsthand accounts of the trail play through speakers embedded in the diorama: a man speaks about wagons and oxen, a woman mourns the death of her child, a husband worries about his wife in the hot weather and doubts his choice to go to Oregon.

A series of placards along the path provide context for the world I have entered, inviting me to imagine the past in detail:

> 150 years ago, the Flagstaff Hill area (nameless then) had the same dry, brown terrain, the same sparse vegetation, the same rugged basalt outcrops you see today. Imagine yourself an emigrant: After months of travel, you reach this rocky expanse of ankle-turning, wagon-eating ground. Hot, dusty winds smother your few remaining supplies. This

unforgiving terrain proves that rough times never end on the long Oregon Trail.

Halfway through the diorama, a sculptural recreation of muddy wagon tracks and footprints crosses the visitor path, raised up from the carpeted walkway. It spans a gap in the train, wagons on each side of sculptural trail. As I cross it, I am put in the middle of the wagon train, positioned within (not just alongside) the sights and sounds of the 1840s Oregon Country. My footsteps fall into the muddy footprints sculpted into the floor below and I am interpellated as yet another settler moving west with the train.[39]

As I exit the diorama and its recreation of the past, I reach a large, three-story panoramic window revealing a spectacular view of the eastern Oregon landscape—the real landscape of the Oregon Trail. Looking west from the window, I see the rolling sagebrush hills of eastern Oregon flatten out into the orderly green agricultural fields of Baker Valley. The dark, forested wall of the Blue Mountains provide a dramatic backdrop to the scene, a few lingering patches of July snow still dotting the peaks. Below me, running northwest toward the valley, a faint trace is just visible in the sagebrush—the extant ruts of the Trail. A placard titled “Traces of the Past” indicates the location of the ruts and informs me: “The light traces running through the sagebrush bear silent witness

[39] On the other side of the muddy track, with the wagon train behind me, the final placard in the diorama tells me, “You’re on your own,” reminding me that “self-sufficiency is the way of the Trail.” It is a clear assertion of the ideology of individualism common to settler colonialism, an ideology that masks its systemic and structural nature.

to tens of thousands of immigrants who passed this way." After enjoying the spectacular view from the windows, I turn to my right and continue moving through the museum.

Museums, Ordering, and Rehearsive Experiences

Though the technology is nearly 30 years old, the NHOTIC's entry hall still creates an exciting and engaging introduction for the museum. Just as the brochure claims, moving through the diorama feels like stepping into the past. The simple ability to walk through a life-size replica of a wagon train is surprisingly thrilling, even if the mannequins are not terribly lifelike and none of the wagons, people, or animals move. The stunning views from the windows at the end of the hall reveal a rugged sagebrush and mountain landscape, evocative of countless film and television Westerns. But more than provide an exciting entrance to the museum's exhibits, the diorama and windows also orient the visitor in relation to the Trail, its history, and the land of eastern Oregon.

The entry hall demonstrates the power of museums to produce a disciplinary order and position the visitor within it, as Tony Bennett has described in his extensive work on the topic. Unlike other disciplinary institutions, power in museums is "made manifest not in its ability to inflict pain," Bennett argues, "but by its ability to organize and co-ordinate an order of things and to produce a place for the people in relation to that order" (Bennett, "The Exhibitionary Complex" 80). For the modernist projects of the long 19th century, that order was

defined by nationalism, imperialism, and an abiding faith in Western civilization's position as the pinnacle of human progress. The sesquicentennial museums in this chapter, however, all emerged from the specific conditions of settler colonialism in Oregon during the late 20th century.[40] Given that settler colonialism is fundamentally an order predicated upon the possession and occupation of land by non-Native settlers, understanding how these museums reproduce the conditions from which they emerged requires a focus on space and its production. If the sesquicentennial museums work to reproduce a given order, it is invariably a spatial order.[41]

As visitors move through the diorama and gaze out at the Baker Valley from the panoramic windows, they enter into specific ways of imagining—and relating to—the land of eastern Oregon. At one level, this occurs at the level of vision. Historically, museums and a wider "exhibitionary complex" worked to establish order by making the "whole world, past and present metonymically available in the assemblages of objects and peoples" (Bennett, "The Exhibitionary Complex" 79). A similar operation occurs in the entry hall of the NHOTIC. The diorama creates a kind of lens through which museum visitors are invited to view the landscape outside the museum walls. As visitors emerge from the trail replica, they have been primed to see the landscape spread out in front

[40] This includes Tamástslikt. Even though it focuses on the history, culture, and lands of the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation, it still responds to and operates within a settler colonial order.
[41] I expand on the distinctions between land and space later on in the chapter.

of them as the land of the Oregon Trail. The placard below the window further encourages this way of seeing, informing visitors that the landscape before them is significant because of the Trail, its history, and its legacy. This is a landscape of journeying, the visitor is told, a landscape made significant by and through the Oregon Trail. As visitors gaze out at the Baker Valley, the extant ruts of the trail cutting across the sagebrush seem to affirm this conception of space as true—this is the land of the Trail pioneers.

The diorama and panoramic window are part of how the museum perpetuates what Bennett calls the dream "that the rational ordering of things [in exhibition] might mirror the real order of things" (Bennett, *The Birth of the Museum* 126). Despite this dream being just that, a *dream*, the presumption of a correspondence between the world of the museum and the land outside persists. This perceived correspondence enables visitors to understand the museum experience as true to life. It is an illusion maintained through a variety of means, as scholars have shown: the use of replicas, the leveraging of institutional authority and reputation, and the museum's own performative production of objectivity (Magelssen, *Living History Museums*; Mitchell). In addition to these, the position of the windows further blurs the distinction between the world created by the diorama and the landscape outside.

This perceived correspondence is important in the sesquicentennial museums for two reasons. First, each of these museums is positioned along the historic route of the Trail. The sesquicentennial museums are not, for example,

heterotopic spaces functioning as counter-sites to the real world, in spite of their occasional use of living history, theatricality, and technologies of illusion.[42] Instead, they are explicitly intended to be interpretive centers, designed to educate visitors about the history of the Oregon Trail and the specific places where the museums are located. Each operates under an assumption that what is seen and experienced within the museums enables visitors to better understand the land they are physically present in at that moment.

Second, as the diorama at the NHOTIC demonstrates, the museum's ordering of the world is not only produced through a spectatorial relationship. Although the entry hall employs visual spectacle and encourages a specific way of seeing the landscape of eastern Oregon, it is as dependent upon *moving* through the diorama as *seeing* it or the landscape beyond. Visitors are explicitly asked to identify with the emigrants depicted in the diorama as they move through its recreated landscape. The diorama positions the visitor *within* the NHOTIC's ordering of the world, casting them as key players within a spatial imagination governed by the Trail, its settlers, and by journeying. It is a corporeal experience, an important part of the museum experience, as Kirshenblatt-Gimblett notes: "The key sense [in the museum]—so key that it is invariably overlooked—is propriocepsis or how the body knows its own boundaries and orientation in space" (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, "Performance Studies" 50). Instead

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[42] See Foucault, Michel. "Of Other Spaces." *Diacritics*, translated by Jay Miskowiec, vol. 16, no. 1, 1986, pp. 22–27.

of installing the visitor as a knowing subject visually apprehending an ordering of the world, the NHOTIC installs the visitor as a performer within the museum's staged drama.[43] Museum-goers are immersed in the sights and sounds of the wagon train and invited to perform the role of the trail pioneer, joining the train bound for Oregon.

This combination of embodied performance and perceived correspondence between the museum and the land enables the museum experience to function as a *rehearsive* experience. "Like the picturesque, in which painting set the standard for experience," Kirshenblatt-Gimblett argues, "museum exhibitions transform how people look at their own immediate environs…. [T]he museum experience itself becomes a model for experiencing life outside its walls" (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, *Destination Culture* 51). As visitors physically move through the diorama's recreation of the arid, sagebrush landscape of eastern Oregon, they rehearse specific ways of imagining and relating to the land. Importantly, these rehearsive experiences emerge from the specific conditions that shape and govern the museum itself and therefore work to rationalize and reproduce those conditions.

The experiences facilitated by the museum operate akin to an idea I mentioned at the end of Chapter One, Mark Rifkin's concept of "settler common sense": "the unmarked, generic conditions of possibility for occupancy,

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[43] Museums have always been theatrical, Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett argues, they are an inverse of the traditional theatre dynamic. In museums, unlike theatres, the spectacle is stationary and the spectator moves.

association, history, and personhood" (Rifkin, *Settler Common Sense* xv). Rifkin theorizes that the embodied and affective sensations of settler occupancy—a felt sense of rightful belonging—emerge from the "macrological dynamics and institutionalized frameworks of settlement" such as property law and whiteness (Rifkin, *Settler Common Sense* xv). The experience and sensation of territorial belonging, he argues, are made possible through a process of "phenomenological translation" in which the settler state's constitutive frameworks provide the raw material and contours for constructing settler selfhood and inhabitance (Rifkin, *Settler Common Sense* xvi).

The translation effect described by Rifkin is a two-way street. In one direction, the structures and processes of settlement give rise to and shape feelings of belonging. In turn, these embodied, irrefutable, and seemingly natural feelings of belonging work to conceal the very processes and structures which made them possible in the first place. In the same way, what museumgoers perform within the NHOTIC can be understood as both operating within specific norms of settler occupancy and productive of their normalcy at the same time. Therefore, the performance of the visitor is central to the museum's capacity to naturalize and reproduce the settler colonial conditions from which the museum (and its content) emerged.

Land and Space

As noted, the NHOTIC is designed to explain and interpret the location in which it stands. The museum experience is an experience of what it means to be physically present in what is now the eastern part of the state of Oregon. Given that, it is important to better clarify the distinction between space and land. The orderings produced through the NHOTIC and the other sesquicentennial museums, though specific to the land surrounding the institutions, are not equivalent to the land itself. Land and space are not the same thing, nor are they mutually exclusive, but terms which index different aspects of what geographer Natchee Blu Barnd calls "modes of inhabiting": our relationships to land and the processes by which we legitimize our presence in specific locations (Barnd 5–6).

Land broadly includes the topographical and material aspects of a landscape, what is often labeled the "natural" world. Space, on the other hand, is a *social* product.[44] Space, as Henri Lefebvre theorizes, emanates from our ways of imagining and acting, provides our world with a sense of coherence and meaning, and governs our use and transformation of the material world. Our relationships to the land are always governed by specific spatial formations or regimes. These are comprised of our conceptions of space, the social and material practices which produce and reproduce space, and the meanings attached to both. These spatial regimes are not universal, but historically and

[44] As geographers have established, the interaction between the "natural" and "social" realms does not operate in only one direction, nor are the two realms distinctly separate, but are mutually constitutive and interconnected.

culturally specific, formed and sustained by ongoing interactions and dynamics among their constituent conceptions, practices, and meaning. These spatial regimes are not static or closed systems, but change and adapt to shifting conditions, new forces, and interactions with other spaces and spatial regimes.[45]

The relationship between land and space is at the heart of the Oregon Trail museums. When the Pacific Northwest was colonized, entire new modes of inhabiting were introduced to a land already governed by multiple Indigenous spatialities. The introduction of settler spatial regimes created a broad distinction between Indigenous space—ways of producing and practicing space developed through the long-term occupation of the land—and exogenous space—spatial regimes originating elsewhere and imposed upon the land of the Pacific Northwest. This distinction is usually missing in narratives of American settlement, as environmental historian Richard White notes: “Settlers might think that they were putting the mark of human use on the land as they displaced the Indians and plowed and fenced and planted, but they were only reordering the land and imposing a different vision, one developed far from the place they settled” (White 111).[46] Settlers’ inability (or refusal) to recognize and understand

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[45] In addition to Lefebvre, this definition of space draws heavily from the work of Doreen Massey in *For Space* (2005).

[46] White is careful not to assign either Indigenous or settler spaces inherent moral superiority. Despite the violent and destructive effects of colonization for the Indigenous Pacific Northwest—both in terms of human and non-human life—the dominance of the settler colonial spatial regimes is not what ultimately matters: “The question is not domination *per se*…,” White contends, “but rather how an environment is dominated and with what results” (White 111). The relationship between a given spatial regime and the land, White reminds, must be evaluated according to what it does, not by preconceived notions of inherent correctness or superiority.

Indigenous spatialities has proved useful to the settler colonial project, enabling a host of legal and ideological rationalizations for the colonization of lands already occupied, the concept of *terra nullius* (land belonging to no one) for example.

As the simultaneous operation of both Indigenous and settler spatialities in the Pacific Northwest was unrecognized, ignored, and/or suppressed, settler space came to dominate.[47] Lefebvre, discussing the role of power in the production of space, notes how the more space appears as "natural" or "given," concealing its own production, the more power it secures for itself. As Indigenous spaces have been ignored and suppressed, settler norms and practices related to space and land have become unquestioned and accepted as given. The settler states of Oregon and Washington, for example, have become synonymous with the land they occupy, equating the land with settler space and making it difficult to imagine the former (land) outside of the governing practices, conceptions, and structures of the latter (space).

Despite the centrality of land to the history of the Oregon Trail and the content of all the sesquicentennial museums, the NHOTIC is typically described as a historical museum. However, I argue these museums are first and foremost about space—its rationalization and its (re)production. If the museum produces

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[47] A process greatly aided by the power imbalances which existed between the United States and the Indigenous nations, tribes, and bands of the Pacific Northwest. This included several severe disease epidemics that swept through the region in the 18th and 19th centuries and greatly weakened many Native communities just prior to the arrival of thousands of settlers. For more, see Boyd, Robert T. *The Coming of the Spirit of Pestilence: Introduced Infectious Diseases and Population Decline Among Northwest Coast Indians, 1774-1874*. Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1999.

an order and a public in relation to it, that order within settler colonialism is always spatial (governing our relation to land), not merely historical (in relation to the past) or cultural (settler vs. Indigenous, for example). This raises several questions. What modes of relating to and inhabiting space are (re)produced by the NHOTIC? How are the tools leveraged by the museum—display, proprioception, narrative—used to secure settler space and affirm the presence of non-Natives in the Pacific Northwest? How are threats to settler space and its coherence or stability concealed or mitigated? What are the implications of failing to recognize the existence of multiple spaces? These questions are not peripheral to my analyses of the NHOTIC and the other sesquicentennial museums, but central to understanding their role in shaping non-Natives relationships to the land.

II: Performing the Settler, Performing Settler Space

In addition to establishing a framework for seeing the land of eastern Oregon as described earlier, the NHOTIC works to rationalize and naturalize settler space and non-Native presence by aligning visitors with the white settlers who crossed the Trail. Just as the entry hall diorama does, the rest of the museum interpellates museumgoers as settlers through both discursive content and the choreographed movement of visitors through the exhibits. This interpellation presumes that all visitors can or should identify with white, American settlers regardless of visitors' race, ethnicity, nationality, or tribal

affiliation. In doing so, it asserts a claim about the universality of the settler experience, whiteness, and Euro-American culture, and establishes these as the norm for the Oregon Trail experience. To perform the role of the settler is to perform the "everyman" role of the Oregon Trail.

The entire facility is designed to facilitate this alignment between visitor and 19th century settler, providing a stage for visitors to play pioneer. The exhibits are organized as a linear journey for the visitor, beginning with the jumping-off towns of the Midwest and ending with settlers' arrival in the Oregon Country. As visitors move through the museum, they simulate the journey along the Oregon Trail. It begins with the diorama and panoramic windows and continues to lead visitors through galleries about each stage of the Oregon Trail journey: preparing for the trip in jumping-off towns, fording rivers, crossing the Rockies via South Pass, encountering Native peoples, and eventually, arriving in Oregon.

It is a trajectory "advancing" chronologically through time and westward across the land. As visitors "travel" to Oregon through the exhibits, mile markers featuring maps of the Trail show the visitor's "location" on the journey, indicating both the distance and travel time to Oregon City and Independence, Missouri. Placards and dioramas along the way guide visitors through each stage of the journey, providing information, images, and firsthand accounts to flesh out what the pioneers experienced on the Trail. When visitors arrive in the last gallery, they are greeted by a diorama of a pioneer family—man, woman, and boy—

looking down at a sculpted relief map of a land claim, complete with surveying lines, a homestead, and furrowed farm fields.

The museum's re-creation of the journey provides visitors with a specific orientation within the land of the Pacific Northwest. It is an orientation founded upon moving west toward Oregon and the promise of "free land." It also establishes settlers as the active heroes of the story being told. When visitors enter the diorama hall, a placard to the right introduces the museum and its content. Titled "The Oregon Trail," it shows a map of the Trail stretching across the American West circa 1850.[48] The text accompanying the map establishes the main characters of the museum's (and history's) story. It tells visitors that the men, women, and children who crossed the trail "sensed they were making history." They were heroic, albeit imperfect, people who "wrested" a new territory out of the land. "The story of the Oregon Trail," it concludes, "reminds us of those who came as empire builders." From the very beginning, visitors are told that the settlers—by moving west—were the active makers of history, builders of a new territory, and the (imperfect) heroes of the story told through the exhibits.

Settlers remain the subjects in nearly all of the informational placards throughout the museum, even at the level of sentence structure. It makes it

[48] Bordering the bottom of the map is a triptych-like image illustrating the journey. It is a classic representation of the Oregon Trail story, from civilization to Edenic wilderness across a daunting and dangerous wasteland. On the right is a wagon departing the developed and civilized world of Missouri. The center depicts the arid, desert-like plains complete with a foreboding bison skull in the foreground and a pair of Indians hunting in the background. On the left is a wagon train snaking through the green, scenic mountains of the west.

difficult *not* to imagine settlers as the main characters of Oregon's history. The text also frequently uses second person, direct address language, making it clear visitors are meant to identify as settlers themselves. Placards scattered throughout the galleries remind museumgoers of the roles they are supposed to play through various commands and questions, beginning with the diorama's command to "Imagine yourself an emigrant." Some examples:

- You are a blacksmith headed west….
- Should you take your family's heirloom dinnerware…?
- You've heard...of drownings, cold winds, and other terrible times….
- After months of travel, you've learned the odds: nearly one out of every ten dead….

These callouts repeatedly interpellate museumgoers as settlers within the museum's staging of the Trail, affirming that they are the central characters of the Trail's historical narrative.

As the museumgoer is aligned with the character of the settler through the museum's discursive content and design, they are also aligned with specific conceptions of space which undergird settler colonial claims of possession and belonging. The most dominant way of imagining space in the NHOTIC is as a surface to be crossed. This is common to narratives of discovery and exploration, explains geographer Doreen Massey. It is a spatial imagination conceiving of space as a single, continuous, and homogenous surface to be crossed or conquered. Space is reduced to the plane upon which action occurs, reiterating

the idea of an absolute space distinct from its contents. This conception of space differentiates between the active makers of history—those who journey or discover—and those who are merely “found” upon its surface. “It is not an innocent manoeuvre,” Massey writes, “for by this means they [the ‘found’] are deprived of histories…. Such a space makes it more difficult to see in our mind’s eye the histories [they] too have been living and producing” (Massey 4). At the NHOTIC, the distinction between those who make history and those who are “found” is (unsurprisingly) a distinction between the settlers on the Oregon Trail and the Indigenous people they encountered along the way.

This distinction is made discursively through the museum’s content, but also through the museum’s layout. About halfway through the wagon train diorama stand a pair of Native figures watching the wagon train pass by.[49] The wide visitor pathway separates the Native figures from the wagon train, drawing a clear distinction between the active makers of history journeying across the land (the settlers) and those “found,” unmoving, in the land (the Native figures). As visitors move through the diorama, they move along with the wagon train, passing the Native figures. The informational card below the figures (labeled “The First Ones”) acknowledges that these people—the Cayuse, Walla Walla, and Nez Perce—have lived in this land for centuries, but in the diorama, they

[49] A howling coyote stands close by the Native figures on their side of the diorama, not so subtly reinforcing the characterization of Native peoples as “wild.” This is repeated in the next gallery with a prominently displayed quote from famed Oregon pioneer John Minto: “My blood ran hot to…see where the country was full of wild game and wild Indians.”

seem to have no existence apart from their relationship to the trail. They are merely spectators watching the settlers move across the land. They are deprived of their agency, their unique histories, and their complex modes of inhabiting.[50]

Visitors are similarly deprived of knowing about them. The figures ("The First Ones") simply exist within the landscape to be "discovered" by the settlers as they move west. As such, they are subsumed into the world of the settler. While the phrase "first ones" implies an a priori existence apart from the arrival of the settlers, there is nothing in the exhibit to tell visitors what that existence might be or mean. In addition, the term "first ones" implies the existence of "second ones," reducing the Cayuse, Walla Walla, and Nez Perce—and their tenure of the land—to little more than a prelude to the arrival of American settlers.[51] The differences between Indigenous and settler spaces and their associated modes of inhabiting are elided through a discursive, and visitor enacted, sleight of hand. What was historically an encounter between wholly different worlds has been reduced in the museum to a single, unidirectional narrative about the settler's quest.

A second diorama in the museum repeats this maneuver of depriving Indigenous people of any existence prior to, or apart from, settlers. In an exhibit

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[50] The diorama also fails to acknowledge any Indigenous right to the land. In the history of American settler colonialism, Indigenous sovereignty has always been simultaneously ignored and necessary. Ignored as legitimate or worth respecting, but necessary in order to extinguish their title through treaties and thus legally transfer it to the United States. The "First Ones" placard recognizes the Cayuse, Walla Walla, and Nez Perce's tenure of the land, but does not equate that with any kind of legal or political claim.
[51] In Chapter Three, I write more about the reduction of Indigenous people to "opening acts" for the arrival of Europeans and Americans in my analysis of the *Oregon Trail Pageants*.

titled “Trading Post,” a pioneer couple is seen trading with a Native couple at their teepee. A recorded voiceover reveals the contents of their conversation. The white couple is discussing what to trade with the Indians, who are identified only as “some Sioux Indians.”[52] Out of 21 lines of dialogue, the Native man has 3 lines, each comprised of “swap” or “no swap.” The rest consists of the settler couple deliberating (somewhat apprehensively) about the trade. We do not know what conversations the Native couple may be having with one another, nor do we know if this couple is part of a larger community encountered by the settlers. Like the first diorama, they seem to have no existence other than as trading partners for the settlers.

The layout of the diorama positions the museum visitor behind the settler couple looking toward the Native couple, aligning the visitor with the settlers and the trail (represented by the path through the exhibits). Behind the Native couple and their teepees, a glass wall makes the wagon train from the entry hall diorama visible in the background. Though likely not intended, the glass wall gives the effect of arriving colonizers completely surrounding the Native couple, an apt visual and proprioceptive metaphor for the conception of space being constructed by the museum.

The spatial imagination of discovery created by the museum delimits visitors’ ability to consider the land encompassing the Trail beyond the realm of a

[52] The voiceover also refers to “squaws” making and selling moccasins. Though its use by settlers is historically accurate, there is nothing in the diorama to contextualize the term or explain that it is a racist and sexist slur.

settler colonial spatial regime. This is true in spite of the cursory acknowledgement of the region's Indigenous peoples. If space is imagined as a continuous, homogenous surface to cross, it is implied that all who exist upon that surface coexist consensually within a single space.

The NHOTIC operates under the assumption that it is telling the history of the present-day state of Oregon. The land encompassed by Oregon is presented as a single space created by the colonization of the Pacific Northwest's natural landscapes by white, American settlers. But Oregon, as a settler colony, was not an already existing space discovered in the 19th century by explorers and settlers, it was produced through that exploration and settlement. What was encountered in the 18th and 19th centuries by Europeans and Americans were the existing spaces of the Cayuse, Walla Walla, Nez Perce, and countless other Indigenous communities. As museumgoers move through the NHOTIC's staging of colonization, they encounter the Indigenous Other in the same way they might encounter any other landmark along the trail: consequential insofar as they relate to the settler, the Trail, and the eventual creation of the state of Oregon.[53]

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[53] The staging of discovery played out in the NHOTIC is repeated over and over again throughout the landscape of tourism created by the sesquicentennial museums and other interpretive sites. At the End of the Oregon Trail Interpretive Center in Oregon City, impressed upon the risers of the main staircase to the center, are the names of notable landmarks along the route of the Oregon Trail. Examples include Chimney Rock, South Pass, Farewell Bend, Fort Laramie, and Fort Vancouver. To climb the stairs is to "make your way" from Missouri to Oregon like settlers moving west. Among the "landmarks" impressed in the concrete are two Indigenous groups, identified as "Sioux Nations" and the "Nez Perce Tribe." These two groups with long histories and specific ways of imagining and inhabiting the land are reduced to milestones (or perhaps obstacles?) on the journey to Oregon. Like the NHOTIC dioramas, the Oceti Šakowiŋ (Sioux) and the Nimiipuu (Nez Perce) are reduced to static objects found along the route. The use of the names Sioux and Nez Perce, names given by settlers and trappers, is yet another example of how Indigenous people are subsumed into a colonial imagination.

Though I use the term settler to describe the people who traveled along the Oregon Trail, the NHOTIC nearly always calls them emigrants. By emphasizing travel rather than settlement, the term evades the fundamental territoriality of settler colonialism and the role of the Oregon Trail in the expropriation of Native lands. It also avoids acknowledging the Oregon Country as Native space. The term migrant may imply moving from one country to another, usually understood in terms of the nation state, but Oregon is and always has been a settler construct.[54] Migrants, political theorist Lorenzo Veracini argues, "face a political order that is already constituted," while settlers imagine they "carry their sovereignty with them" (Veracini, *The Settler Colonial Present* 40). In other words, in the settler colonial imagination, "migrants move to *another* country, settlers move to *their* country" (Veracini, *Settler Colonialism a Theoretical Overview* 15). Early settlers coming to Oregon in the 1840s may have described it as a foreign place beyond the bounds of the United States, but it was always imagined as a land rightfully belonging to American settlers.[55]

In contrast, Indigenous peoples are not shown as existing within already constituted political orders upon the arrival of settlers; there is nothing to indicate

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[54] The origin of the name Oregon is uncertain and there have been many theories about its etymology. It could be derived from a Native word, but its usage as the name for the Pacific Northwest is colonial. For a summary of different theories around the origin of the name Oregon, see: Battistella, Edwin. "Oregon, the Name." *The Oregon Encyclopedia*, https://oregonencyclopedia.org/articles/oregon_the_name, accessed 8 Mar. 2019.
[55] The presumption of belonging reaches back to the Doctrine of Discovery, effectively made United States' policy in Chief Justice John Marshall's decision in *Johnson v. M'Intosh* (1823). For more, see Miller, Robert J. "American Indians, the Doctrine of Discovery, and Manifest Destiny." *Wyoming Law Review*, vol. 11, no. 2, 2011, pp. 329–49.

they are political beings at all.[56] Though called emigrants in the museum, emigrating to Oregon is not imagined as entering into and taking up residence in the already existing worlds of the Pacific Northwest's Indigenous peoples. Instead, *it is moving to a land already imagined as settler space*. This is compounded by the NHOTIC's historical perspective, interpreting the Oregon Trail from the present-day in which Oregon has been part of the United States for 160 years. This temporal perspective along with the spatial imagination fostered by the museum makes it very difficult to imagine settlers as anything other than what Veracini calls "the inhabitants of a polity *to come*: proto-Americans" (Veracini, *Settler Colonialism a Theoretical Overview* 14).

The Museum as a Settler Move to Innocence

The use of the term emigrant is one of many ways the NHOTIC works to make the identification between the visitor and the Oregon Trail settler a positive one. To avoid any discomfort around identifying with colonizers who ushered in the near-destruction of the Indigenous Northwest, the NHOTIC deploys what Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang describe as settler "moves to innocence."[57] Tuck and Yang define these moves as "strategies or positionings that attempt to relieve the

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[56] They are "occupants" of the land, the same language used to describe them in Chief Justice Marshall's decision in the case Johnson v. McIntosh (1823), a case that posited that Indians had no right to own land, only to occupy it.

[57] Tuck and Yang borrow the idea of "moves to innocence" from Janet Mawhinney's theorization of storytelling and white power and privilege, see: Mawhinney, Janet. *Giving up the Ghost: Disrupting the (Re)Production of White Privilege in Anti-Racist Pedagogy and Organizational Change*. National Library of Canada/Bibliothèque Nationale du Canada, 1998.

settler of feelings of guilt or responsibility without giving up land or power or privilege, without having to change much at all" (Tuck and Yang 10). Against challenges to its legitimacy and power, these moves work to preserve and secure settler futurity. For the NHOTIC, recounting the history of colonization without making non-Native visitors (the target customer) uneasy or alienated is necessary. Without visitors, these facilities cannot survive. Unlike some museums or historical societies, they do not have secondary purposes like archiving historical documents and artifacts—they operate almost entirely as touristic and educational experiences. Ensuring an engaging experience that does not make visitors feel complicit in harm is essential, especially when visitors are asked to perform as settlers.

In her analysis of the sesquicentennial museums, Deborah Bird Rose characterizes the act of journeying as a practice of assuaging "moral anguish," emphasizing how the contemporary visitor perceives and relates to the history of colonization. Remaining in a state of threshold, of perpetual becoming, she argues, allows Americans to avoid reckoning with the violence of colonization. It is one of the stories, she argues, used to "inscribe a moral presence in places we have come to through violence" (Rose 228). The discomfort avoided through perpetual journeying, however, also pertains to matters of space, not just history. For non-Native visitors following the trail and navigating the museums, the stability and coherence of settler space is paramount—it is the dominant spatial regime governing American society. To cast doubt about its legitimacy or

goodness would be to undermine the foundations of American life itself. At the same time, as Bird notes, the very presence of non-Natives in this landscape unavoidably testifies to the violent processes of invasion, possession, and occupation that make possible that American life. The means by which the settler Northwest was produced must be concealed or rationalized in order to preserve its stability, power, and goodness.

While the NHOTIC conceals the existence and legitimacy of Native space—imagining Indigenous peoples as always already existing within settler narratives and spaces—it does not completely ignore the destructive impacts of colonization. As it acknowledges the violence of colonialism, however, the NHOTIC employs a range of tactics to ensure the alignment between the museumgoer and the settler is not an unsettling one. The use of the term emigrant is one example. Avoiding the full reality of settler colonialism is a phenomenon integral to settler colonialism, Veracini argues. He identifies a variety of rationales that conceal the actual operations of settler colonialism and the complicity of settlers in carrying out those operations. The settler hides, he argues, behind distant metropolitan colonizers, behind notions of persecution and refuge, behind labor and hardship, and behind notions of *terra nullius* and the "vanishing Indian" (Veracini, *Settler Colonialism a Theoretical Overview* 14). Through these disavowals, "Settler colonialism obscures the conditions of its own production" (Veracini, *Settler Colonialism a Theoretical Overview* 14). The

obscuring of the means of production gives the impression that the colonization of the Pacific Northwest "just happened" or, even more powerfully, "just is."

In the NHOTIC, this disavowal begins at the entrance and continues throughout the museum. The discursive content of the museum continually rationalizes the visitor's own act of "playing pioneer" acceptable. The museum's introductory placard describes the Oregon Trail story as one with "tragic consequences" and the settlers themselves as "intolerant, prone to violence, exploitive, and sometimes ill-tempered."[58] The acknowledgement of their imperfections appears to be a recognition of the settlers' role in colonization's violence and destruction, but it actually operates as a useful disavowal in two ways. First, it historicizes colonization, a common strategy of disavowal. In the NHOTIC, the Oregon Trail is a historical event and therefore, so are the tragic consequences of colonization. Even though museumgoers are aligned with the settlers throughout the museum, the 19th century pioneers are usually objectified as historic Others—similar and connected, but also distant and different. To imagine oneself as an emigrant—acknowledged as imperfect—is to safely imagine oneself as a relic of a more primitive time.

At the same time, the museum frames the Oregon Trail settlers as the founders of the present-day state of Oregon and the greater American Pacific Northwest. They are patriotic Americans who pursued a dream and built Oregon,

[58] The use of the phrase "prone to violence" rather than just saying violent seems to relieve the settlers of agency in the matter, as if acts of violence were outside of their control.

the people in whose steps the museum-goer treads. This both/and of historic Other and lineal antecedent provides enough wiggle room for museumgoers to choose which aspects of the 19th century settlers to relate to and identify with. The tragic consequences of colonization can remain safely in the past, a relic of less enlightened times, while the heroic determination of the settlers can be celebrated, something to be proud of and claim kinship with.

Second, the placard implies that the “tragic consequences” of colonization are largely due to the racist, violent, and greedy tendencies of the 19th century individuals, not larger political designs, social structures, or ideologies. It “attributes to people,” to borrow from Theodor Adorno, “everything that in fact is due to the external conditions, so that in turn the conditions remain undisturbed” (Adorno 93). This is an operation that conceals the structures and processes of colonization behind individual acts, redirecting focus away from the former and onto the latter. It is, in effect, a claim that the violence of settler colonialism is due to a “few bad apples”—imperfections in an otherwise good system. By refusing to examine how such intolerance, violence, and exploitation emerge from persistent and systemic ways of imagining oneself in relation to the Indigenous Other and the land they inhabit, the violence of settler colonialism can be easily disavowed. Chalking up the “tragic consequences” of colonization to the personal shortcomings of the pioneers allows the conditions which make such attitudes and actions possible to remain uninterrogated and undisturbed.

At the same time, the NHOTIC acknowledges that the attitudes and actions of the 19th century settlers were shaped by the narratives and ideologies of their time. The museum's content specifies how sensational Indian stories fueled fear and prejudice. It also details how the Donation Land Act of 1848 promised free land to settlers without first extinguishing Native title, setting up an "explosive" conflict over land. The violence of colonization is recognized as having emerged out of colonial discourses on the Native other and colonial policy. By continually oscillating between these two poles of individual responsibility and structural conditions, however, the violence of colonization can always be disavowed by shifting blame from one to the other. Either way, it is removed from the 21st century museumgoer.

The ambivalence around settlers' agency within the violence of colonization runs through the museum and the visitor experience. Most of the museum focuses on the logistics and experiences of the Oregon Trail settlers, leaving aside questions about the larger socio-political conditions which drove colonization in the first place. However, the first gallery after the wagon train diorama attempts to explain the larger context for the trail and its settlers. As visitors enter the gallery, they encounter a placard showing John Gast's allegorical depiction of Manifest Destiny, *American Progress,* reading "The Stage is Set."[59] Informational panels about "Oregon Fever," westward expansion, and

[59] Though referring to the events and the social climate leading up to the Oregon Trail years, "The Stage is Set" could also describe how this gallery prepares visitors to understand their own journey through the museum, continuing the work of the wagon train diorama.

the predecessors to the Oregon Trail (Lewis and Clark, trappers, naturalists, and missionaries) line the walls.

The geopolitical context for the Oregon Trail is discussed, but only perfunctorily. Displays about the specifics of wagons, packing, and departure times take up more space than ones about policy and politics. The Pacific Northwest, one panel explains, was "at one time or another" claimed by four countries: Spain, Russia, Great Britain, and the United States. There is little mention of the Indigenous people who already inhabited the west, let alone their long-established and complex modes of spatial production and political organization.[60] The "Oregon question"—that is, who has rightful claim to the Oregon Country—is described as a battle between the US and European powers over whose "right of discovery" was most legitimate. At the top of that same panel is a large quote from the 1844 Democratic National Convention: "Our title to the whole of the Territory of Oregon is clear and unquestionable…." The geopolitical overview is noticeably impersonal, separating the actions and decisions of the settlers themselves from the policies and politics which gave rise to the trail in the first place.

Peppered throughout the informational placards are phrases implying the inevitability or irresistibility of the United States' expansion west, often deflecting the matter of settlers' own complicity in the region's conquest and colonization:

[60] Throughout this gallery, Indians are described as obstructions removed to open land to settlement, "wild" objects of curiosity, targets for religious conversion, or unfortunate victims of civilization. They are not described as political beings in any way.

- [America] beckoned with meadows, forests, mountains, rivers, fish, tobacco, gold, and freedom from kings and queens.
- The western frontier beckoned to an entire generation.
- Good reasons to go, no reason to stay.
- America in the mid-1800s was filled with restlessness. Many were possessed by a 'species of madness' that pulled them to the west in droves.
- The government moved Indians to open up new frontiers for settlement. Lewis Linn's proposal for 'donation lands' of up to a square mile per settler pulled on many a farmer's heartstrings. Settlers responded to the tempting news about Oregon: fertile soil, a healthy climate, adventure, missions, fish and furs.

These explanations for why American settlers moved west frame American expansion as a natural, irresistible, and inevitable force. Americans were "possessed," "pulled," and "tempted." Within the museum's unidirectional organization of the museum—both temporally and geographically—the visitor is similarly "pulled" to Oregon as they navigate the exhibits. When the agency of the settlers is acknowledged, it is either framed in terms of patriotism (pursuing

Manifest Destiny) or the logistics of preparing for the journey.[61] The first is presented as laudable (if misguided), the second innocuous.

Throughout much of the museum, the trail pioneers are described as intrepid, resourceful, and determined people who had to make tough choices and face tremendous hardship in order to come to Oregon. It is a heroic characterization, despite the NHOTIC's explicit attempts to avoid hagiography by acknowledging their flaws. In the "Stage is Set" gallery, however, the trail pioneers are characterized as being swept up in something, whether "Oregon Fever" or a "tide of tension, new technology, and faith in America's 'destiny.'" The language reiterates the idea of inevitability, but beneath the surface is a question about who is responsible for the colonization of the west, a story we have been told had tragic consequences. Thankfully for the museumgoer "playing pioneer," most of the responsibility for colonizing the west seems to fall at the feet of impersonal forces: foreign affairs, economic depression, disease epidemics, Oregon boosters like Hall Jackson Kelley, and government policy. Settlers were only responding to these conditions, perhaps acting out of patriotic devotion or personal desperation. The overall message about the people whom visitors are asked to identify with seems to be, "You can't blame them for what happened!"

[61] On the panel showing Gast's *American Progress*, the text below reads, "By the 1840s, many dreamed of helping the nation achieve its destiny." Patriotic duty is given as a reason that settlers moved west, but it is not clear how visitors are meant to feel about it. Is this supposed to be lauded and aspired to? Or is it something to see as misguided in retrospect?

The ambivalence around agency is repeated throughout the museum at several “decision point” displays. Each consists of a series of panels with questions or options written on them with responses concealed beneath. “Decisions at South Pass” is one of these displays, inviting visitors to imagine the kinds of decisions settlers had to make at this point in the journey. The introduction reads “South Pass loomed as a point of uncertainty…. Here’s your chance to choose your fate at South Pass.” Despite the impression of choice, looking through the five different scenarios and the hidden responses beneath, it soon becomes clear that there is one “correct” choice. The first panel describes the many branching paths of the trail at this point and assures visitors that there is no “right call,” because all “permitted westward travel.” As long as you keep moving west, you’re on the right track.[62]

Another panel brings up the option of the Mormon Trail, informing visitors of the hysteria and fear around Mormons at the time. “If your train shares those feelings, then don’t go to Salt Lake,” the panel concludes, seemingly excusing anti-Mormon sentiment. Another characterizes the California Trail as an option for “venturesome” people seeking “quick riches” rather than the “steady farmer types who went to Oregon,” and another chides the Applegate Trail as a risky choice. Finally, one panel asks, “How about turning around and going home?” The answer beneath: “This is definitely not a good idea! South Pass is really a

[62] In his introduction to *Simming*, Scott Magelssen describes a similar interactive exhibit at the Reagan Presidential Library, albeit a more immersive one. The decision panels at the NHOTIC are essentially a lower-tech version of this exhibit.

‘point of no return.’ You’ve made this commitment…. Keep going west! That’s your best choice.”

Despite the impression of choice, many of these panels reinforce the idea that heading west to Oregon is the only reasonable option. Visitors are guided to see certain options as the safest and most prudent ways to make it to Oregon and consistently urged to keep moving west. There is never an option in the NHOTIC for visitors to choose not to travel the trail; the museum does not encourage visitors to consider a possibility in which the Pacific Northwest was never colonized by the United States or any other colonial power. These decision points not only perpetuate the idea that the colonization of the Pacific Northwest was inevitable, but also that it was the result of a series of reasonable choices. It was the outcome of “common sense.”

At the final decision point, a panel asks, “The Donation Land Act provided up to 320 acres per adult man or woman—should you get yours?” The answer beneath affirms claiming land as a matter of common sense: “Of course, but you had better hurry.” The panel conveniently omits the fact that the Donation Land Act of 1850 was only available to white men, “half breeds” (50% white, 50% Indian), and married white women; the law excluded people of African descent, Kanaka Maoli (Native Hawaiians), Indians, and Asians. Nor is any mention made of the fact that the Act was passed prior to the signing of any treaties with the Indigenous people of the Oregon Country. The identity of the museumgoer

seems not to matter in this case; here, everyone is covered by the presumed universality of the white settler.

In the museum's final gallery, the "both/and" ambivalence of the NHOTIC recurs. Here, a small diorama shows a white pioneer family gazing down at a miniature version of their newly platted and "improved" land claim. Behind the newly settled family is a display about the Indians of eastern Oregon. One placard is prominently titled "When Oregon Was Indian Land," reiterating the idea that a Native Pacific Northwest is a historic, not contemporary, reality. However, nearby is a second placard titled "Eastern Oregon Indians Today" which describes the ongoing presence of Native people in the region, seemingly undermining the claim of the first placard. Though acknowledging the tribes' government-to-government relationship with the United States, implying Native sovereignty and autonomy, it characterizes their rights as ones "upheld" by the Supreme Court and therefore subject to the settler state. Even though it acknowledges the tribes as political entities, the placard does more to mark Oregon Indians' distinction from the settler majority as a matter of culture, describing them as "modern people informed by age-old beliefs, languages and attitudes" who "remain a presence and a voice in Oregon today."

Earlier in the museum, a placard describes the encounter between settlers and Indigenous peoples as a collision of Native and settler worlds, worlds which "normally orbited in different galaxies." This earlier language points to the coexistence multiple spaces and their incommensurability, but this idea has

disappeared by the final gallery. The collision of different worlds is replaced by a narrative recounting the peaceful incorporation of Indigenous peoples into the modern, multicultural settler state overseen by the authority of the U.S. government. As Mark Rifkin notes, the emphasis on cultural difference conceals the matter of space in settler colonialism, while simultaneously reasserting whiteness as a norm from which difference deviates from:

> Characterizing 'boundaries' as cultural makes 'space'…almost entirely metaphorical, delinked from actual places, land claims, and modes of occupancy, abstracting from the particular kinds of sociopolitical mappings at play…in order to place them in the same analytic frame. 'Culture' comes to mark the difference of nonwhiteness per se rather than indexing the normalization of specific formations of residence, land tenure, and political belonging. (Rifkin, *Settler Common Sense* 21)

As visitors exit the museum's galleries and back into the "real" world, they are assured that the "tragic consequences" of colonization are safely in the past, Oregon Indians are valued members of the multicultural settler state, and the status quo of white, settler belonging is unproblematic.

Throughout the museum, the visitor's own enactment of westward settlement is characterized as inevitable and common sense, the result of this journey being present-day Oregon. Encouraged to identify with the settlers who crossed the trail, visitors are repeatedly interpellated as "history makers" through the use of second-person direct address, interactive decision points, and by their

choreographed movements through the exhibits. To avoid any unpleasantness created by this alignment between visitor and settler, the museum's discursive content emphasizes their admirable qualities—bravery, perseverance in the face of hardship, and patriotism. The museum perfunctorily acknowledges the violence and destructiveness of colonization for the region's Indigenous people but avoids reckoning with settlers' complicity in the larger structures and processes of colonization. The colonization of the Pacific Northwest may have had tragic consequences, but they just "happened," and the settlers were swept along in the tide, making the best of the situation. At the NHOTIC, playing pioneer assuages any potential guilt over the past and affirms colonization as historic, but also conceals the specificity and constructedness of settler space and the existence of distinct Indigenous spaces. As visitors perform the role of the settler, they work to naturalize a single spatial imagination conceived around the settler and their journey, leaving little room for alternatives.

III. The Material Conditions of the Sesquicentennial Museums

As detailed, the performances made possible through the NHOTIC's content and design work to rationalize white settlers' physical presence within, and their possession of, the land of the Pacific Northwest. However, as Aileen Moreton-Robinson writes in her theorization of whiteness and possession, settler

belonging does not exist outside of the structural conditions of the settler state.[63] "The right to be here and the sense of belonging it creates," she writes, "are reinforced institutionally and socially; personal profound sentiment is enabled by structural conditions" (Moreton-Robinson 18). The (re)production of a settler status quo through the museum—including its conceptions of space, the Other, and affective sensations of belonging—occurs within the broader social and economic structures which make settler belonging possible in American society more broadly. This includes the economic and political goals of the local communities and organizations which championed, funded, and built the NHOTIC. Regardless of the differences across the four sesquicentennial museums, each operates within the context of the existing settler colonial structures in which they emerged and/or operate.

The NHOTIC and the other sesquicentennial museums along the Trail were originally conceived as economic resources in addition to any potential they may have had as historical or cultural resources. Repeatedly throughout their 1988 report to the Oregon governor, the Oregon Trail Advisory Council described the Trail as an underused resource ripe for development. "The challenge confronting our state," they cautioned, acknowledging the often adversarial relationship between preservation and development, "is how best to weave a balance between historic preservation and economic promotion" (Oregon Trail

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[63] Moreton-Robinson explicitly points to "white possession and power configured through the logic of capital" as the structural conditions of the settler state (Moreton-Robinson xxi).

Advisory Council i). The solution, they proposed, was to bring preservation and economic development together, using the former as a resource for the latter. In addition to supporting the construction of new interpretive centers, the Council also recommended more broadly capitalizing on the Trail's potential as an attraction by connecting it to the existing tourism infrastructure of the state. "General promotional material on Oregon tourist attractions should include information about the Oregon Trail," the report states, suggesting better inclusion of information in highway maps, tourist brochures, marketing campaigns, and slogans (Oregon Trail Advisory Council 6).

Leveraging the Trail as an economic resource was not a new idea in the late 1980s, as Chapter One makes clear, but rather the latest effort to do so. Early efforts to mark the Trail and create memorial highways along its route relied on economic arguments as well as appeals to patriotism and the legacy of the pioneers. Road building is one example. Local efforts to build and/or designate memorial highways along the route connected Trail preservation with a nation-wide "good roads" movement advocating for better highway infrastructure to aid commerce and tourism. One of the first legislative efforts for trail preservation was Washington Congressman William Humphrey's 1911 bill to fund Oregon Trail markers. In support of the Humphrey bill, the Washington state legislature urged its passage in 1913. A marked route, they argued, would preserve the memory of the pioneers, increase patriotism, and "stimulate, and eventually guarantee the building of a national highway so much needed by the producing

classes of our country" (State Highway Board 230). The Oregon Trail, a driver of capitalist expansion in the 19th century, could once again serve the growing economy of the Pacific Northwest in the 20th.

The sesquicentennial museums' ability to tap into a growing tourism and "experience economy" were the latest opportunities to exploit the trail's economic potential. Though all four museums were proposed as part of the state-wide celebration, each project was spearheaded by local communities and reflects the desires, goals, and economic conditions of those communities. The content and design of the NHOTIC emerged from the Baker Valley's existing settler society and their efforts to secure their community's future.[64]

A downturn throughout the 1980s in Oregon's natural resource economy had prompted local and state leaders to look for new economic engines. A group of citizens in Baker City turned to tourism to save their flagging economy, publishing a report entitled "Comeback on the Oregon Trail." The report requested state funds in order to develop a proposal for an Oregon Trail National

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[64] Local efforts to leverage the trail and its history for economic benefit date back to the 1920s in the Baker Valley. One of the first organizations solely dedicated to the preservation of the trail was formed in Baker City in 1922 by Walter Meacham: the Old Oregon Trail Association. The association had three stated purposes for organizing. The first two were about the legacy of the trail and its pioneers, the third concerned tourism. Meacham and his organization worked hard to attract interest to the trail, installing monuments, distributing thousands of booklets, creating windshield stickers, and even staging a large-scale pageant attended by President Warren Harding. In his speech to the organization in 1927, Meacham exhorted his fellow members to consider how they might get motorists to "tarry" and enjoy the back roads and sites just off the trail. "We should remember," he explained, "that the tourist does not have to come over the old Oregon Trail but that by making its roadbed the best in the west and telling the world of its history, its traditions and its scenery, the tourist will want to drive over it" (Meacham, *President's Annual Report*). A productive heritage economy, Meacham insightfully pointed out, requires both a physical infrastructure of tourism and the promotion of the trail as worthy of notice.

Monument at Flagstaff Hill in partnership with the Bureau of Land Management. The report cited a collapsing natural resources economy, existing studies showing the potential for a tourism economy in the region, and the success of other historic sites like Scotts Bluff National Monument and Fort Clatsop National Memorial, concluding:

> There is nothing in the inventory of national historic assets that better symbolizes the pioneer spirit than the Trail, and nothing is better positioned to capture the imagination of the American people. This proposal suggests a way in which the resource can benefit Northeast Oregon while offering all Americans access to an important historical experience. (The Baker Industrial Development Commission 6)

The report reveals the economic motivation for creating a captivating and imaginative experience of the Trail and its history for visitors.[65]

Many of the sesquicentennial events were temporary, but a 1994 retrospective report on the sesquicentennial events published by the Oregon Trail Coordinating Council (the body overseeing the statewide celebration) named the four museums being built along the route a “vision for the future” (Oregon Trail Coordinating Council 3). This more permanent tourist infrastructure created an enduring incentive for managing organizations and local supporters to

[65] Recent survey data shows about 90% of visitors come from outside the greater Pacific Northwest, mostly from other parts of the United States, fulfilling (at least in part) the report’s promise of drawing people to eastern Oregon (Bureau of Land Management and Vale District Office 9).

maintain the museums' broad appeal. The potential for these museums to function as community assets has from the beginning exerted pressure on the design and operation of these facilities. The continuing success of these museums, and by extension their benefit to the community, requires a steady supply of visitors and funding. Success, then, must be defined in terms of visitation and revenue in addition to matters such as historical accuracy, accessibility, or pedagogical effectiveness. The future security of the museum is at least partially dependent upon creating an engaging, relevant, and overall positive experience for museumgoers.

When interpretive or educational goals are dependent on financial and institutional stability, how does that shape the visitor experience? When a museum is linked with the economy of a community and their hopes for the future, how does that limit what the museum can do in interpreting the Trail? Recognizing these museums as tools for advancing the interests of the communities and organizations which built them reveals one way they work to reproduce the material conditions from which they emerge. For settler-oriented museums like the NHOTIC, they are effectively indebted to celebrating and perpetuating the settler societies which provide the financial support necessary to stay in business. These museums promise to "bring history to life" and give visitors a chance to "walk in the footsteps of the pioneers," but when the museums must maintain the support of visitors and funders, there is little incentive to challenge dominant understandings of settlement and non-Native

occupancy. What is experienced, therefore, is governed by settler subjectivity, space, and modes of inhabiting.[66]

In her 1998 history of the NHOTIC, Dorothy Wooters reiterates the center's role as an economic boon, but also describes the efforts of local leaders to open the NHOTIC as an "inspiring pioneer saga," taking up the aggrandizing language of pioneer hagiography. She compares Baker City's local leaders to their pioneer forebearers, using phrases like perseverance, "daring to dream," and "indominable determination" to describe their work. Building the NHOTIC, she writes, continued in the tradition of the "pioneering, spirited, progressive people who had created Baker City…and developed it to its 1900 height of glory" (Wooters iv). Like the Trail marking projects undertaken before them, building the NHOTIC and all that it entailed (e.g. organizing, fundraising, advocacy, volunteering, etc.) gave Baker City's settler community tangible ways to help secure their own future and stability in the face of economic uncertainty.

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[66] The power of a project like the NHOTIC to reassert settler power and legitimacy should not be underestimated. It is not an isolated project, but one iteration of the same colonial project instigated in the late 18th and early 19th centuries in the Pacific Northwest. As both as an economic project and a touristic, museological experience, the NHOTIC is made possible by, and responds to, the pressures and incentives of settler colonial capitalism. Even if the museum *experience* was drastically changed so that it more ethically reckoned with the history and legacy of the Trail, the *museum-as-institution* could still propagate settler colonial norms and structures around land, property, capital, and power. A shift in content would not necessarily mean a shift in the role of the museum as a social and economic institution benefiting the settler state and its white, settler majority.

III. Interval: Representing Parallel Histories

At the other end of the Oregon Trail from the NHOTIC is an attempt to acknowledge the existence of an Indigenous world distinct from settler colonialism. Like the NHOTIC, Oregon City's End of the Oregon Trail Interpretive Center (EOTIC) is designed to put visitors in the role of the settler moving west along the Trail. The museum is similarly organized as a journey from east to west, ending in a gallery representing early Oregon City. Throughout, activities such as candle-making, pioneer dress-up, and signing a replica land deed give visitors opportunities to imagine themselves as settlers.[67] The primary exhibits of the EOTIC do similar work as those of the NHOTIC, so I will not focus on those. Instead, I analyze the recent inclusion of material contributed by the nearby Confederated Tribes of Grand Ronde (CTGR).

Originally planned as a much larger complex, the $6.2 million center opened in 1995, two years later than planned and much smaller than the $43 million center first proposed (Williams). The master plan for the center envisioned a complex including an interpretive center, a living history village, a 1,000-seat

[67] Perhaps the most notable of these activities is the latter. Atop a desk representing Oregon City's land office, a sign reads, "Sign a land claim and take it with you!" A pile of replica claims sits next to it, each printed with "NOT AN OFFICIAL DOCUMENT" at the bottom to remind visitors that these deeds are not legally binding. The statement draws attention to the fabricated nature of the activity, but also raises questions about why signing a claim in Oregon City's original land office in 1849 was deemed effective and legitimate while signing this document at the EOTIC is not. The replica land claim, however, does have its own efficacy. It may not enable the distribution of land as property, but it does normalize the conditions of land grants themselves, e.g., US authority, property law, and white possessiveness. It also conceals the existence of Indigenous land claims, geographies, and modes of inhabiting that preceded—and continued within and alongside—colonization.

performance amphitheater, a memorial park, a “Trail Encampment” facility for educational field trips, and a themed “Festive Marketplace” filled with specialty restaurants and shops. Due to a shortage of funds and an eagerness to open, a smaller center was built comprised of three main buildings designed to look like a semi-circle of covered wagons.

Though only a fraction of what had been envisioned was built, the center had a strong opening, riding the surge of interest in the Oregon Trail generated by the sesquicentennial year. However, attendance soon dropped and the center suffered a series of challenges over the next 15 years, making it increasingly difficult for the center to sustain itself financially. The center flooded during the 1996 Willamette River flood and the post-9/11 downturn in tourism forced the center to close for a month. During a windstorm in 2003, the covering on one of the wagon buildings (the “canvas” on the wagon’s steel hoops) was torn off. With no money available for repairs, the steel hoops were uncovered and began to rust. In 2009, the center closed indefinitely due to lack of funds. While its parent organization, Clackamas Heritage Partners, looked for ways to stay afloat and reorganize, the center sat quiet until 2013. After securing new grants and funding sources, as well as new partners in Clackamas County Tourism, the city of Oregon City, Oregon State Tourism, and the Confederated Tribes of Grand Ronde, the center reopened in 2013 with refreshed exhibits and programs.

The partnership with the Confederated Tribes of Grand Ronde (CTGR) included a grant from the CTGR’s Community Fund for a “Parallel History”

project.[68] This included new interpretive panels outside the museum and some additional material inside the museum, mostly in the Oregon City gallery. The new interpretation focuses primarily on the Clowewalla and Clackamas Chinook, the bands indigenous to the immediate area. The newly added interpretive panels are arranged in an arc lining Abernethy Green, a large open grassy space bordered by the wagon buildings.[69] They are interspersed among other panels on the history of Oregon City and its early settlers and mostly set back a few inches from those about settler history. The panels also use italicized text, differentiating it from the plain text on the panels about settler history. This difference in text implies a difference in voice, reinforcing a Native/settler distinction and giving the CTGR panels the effect of appearing divergent from an established white settler normalcy. Despite filling in a significant gap in the EOTIC's interpretation of the region and its history, the incorporation of the material within the existing space continues to give the impression that Indigenous peoples, perspectives, spatialities, and temporalities are secondary. The closer, plain text panels seem to tell "History" with a capital H, while the CTGR panels are cast as minoritarian back-up players.

The arrangement of material limits the ability for the perspectives, stories, and histories of the CTGR to critique the EOTIC's historical and geographical

[68] The CTGR had previously donated to the EOTIC for the creation of its feature film, *Bound for Oregon*, and has been an active philanthropic force in the region since 1997.
[69] Abernethy Green is the former site of George Abernethy's store which served as a de facto end of the trail for families arriving in Oregon City during the early years of the trail. As such, it has been designated as the end of the trail.

imagination. Instead, the CTGR panels appear as a plea for inclusion within the settler state and its version of history, what Laura Helton et al. have described as the failure of historical recovery.[70] The notion of inclusion is explicit at the front entrance of the museum where a signpost greets visitors. It explains the center's emphasis on the history of the state, city, county, and the Oregon Trail from the 1840s-1880s, "including the parallel Native American history." While this phrase reiterates a conception of inclusion and incorporation within a dominant settler history, it also emphasizes the idea of *parallel* history. Parallel brings to mind several ways of imagining history. It implies distinct trajectories which do not and will not meet, but given the emphasis on the past, it also could imply two trajectories that *were* previously distinct but have since unified into a single shared history post-contact. Parallel also implies equality and autonomy—neither trajectory is subordinate to the other, nor is either trajectory dependent upon, altered, or disrupted by the other.

The CTGR panels seem to allow for all of these possible meanings for the notion of parallel. They feature stories of creation, accounts of pre-colonial life, and the cultural and spiritual significance of Tumwater (Willamette Falls)—each indicating a distinct and autonomous trajectory. They also recount the effects of

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[70] Writing about the problem of recuperation within African-American history, Helton et al. question the assumption that recovering lost histories can effectively critique the histories and historiographical practices that left them out in the first place. They argue: "Recovery must have a political purpose beyond documenting black presence, or it is merely a plea for inclusion within the foundational promises of liberal modernity—a critique of its boundaries but not of its essence" (Helton et al. 11).

colonization like the forced marches to the newly created Grand Ronde Reservation and the formation of the Confederated Tribes of Grand Ronde, a new post-colonization communal identity comprised of many tribes and bands. Though perhaps not a single history, the latter recognizes the ways that the trajectories of the CTGR's constituent communities were forever altered and entangled with those of Euro-American settlers.[71] The panels acknowledge the dual reality of indigeneity described by Natchee Blu Barnd. Indigeneity, he writes, is defined both by people and practices particular to the land developed prior to European arrival *and* in relation to the colonizer, functioning as "the supposed precondition of, as well as ongoing foil to, colonial completion" (Barnd 3). Indigeneity is both/and, always marking modes of inhabiting developed in relation to a specific landscape *and* a relationship to the colonizing, exogenous Other.

The moment of encounter between the Clowewalla and Clackamas Chinook and Euro-American settlers forever changed what had been distinct (and perhaps parallel) trajectories, but it would be too simple to insist that this encounter created a single unified trajectory in their stead. The mere inclusion of the CTGR panels hint at the complex existence of multiple incongruous spaces, nonsynchronous temporalities, and dialectic relationships between settler and

[71] In the final gallery of the museum is a map added by the CTGR of the tribes' ceded lands, a huge swath of what is now western Oregon reaching from the Columbia River in the north to the present-day California border. The map details the six different treaties signed by the various tribes and bands that were relocated to Grand Ronde. It is a different geography of settlement than one oriented around the Oregon Trail journey, emphasizing the radical transformation of western Oregon caused by colonization. This geographic imagination presumes an existing Indigenous space forever altered by the Trail (but not completely erased) rather than a space founded and created by settlers.

Native. At the very least, it hints at an encounter that was, and remains, messy. The interspersing of the Indigenous history panels and the settler history panels attest to this reality to some degree. However, the prominence and style of the settler history panels reasserts the primacy and centrality of white settler history, giving visitors the impression that Indigenous peoples and histories provide a background or supplement to settler history. The acknowledgment of multiple spatialities and temporalities—a reality implied by the phrase parallel histories—is effectively concealed by a representation of settler power. The total effect is of a shared and inclusive present governed by settler narratives, spatial regimes, and power.

Perhaps no better symbol of the secondary status of Indigenous peoples at the EOTIC is the row of flags lining the parking lot. In addition to the Oregon state flag, it includes the United States flag and the flags of the other Oregon Trail states: Missouri, Kansas, Nebraska, Wyoming, Idaho, and Washington. The final flag in the row is the flag of the CTGR. The flag was lowered about a foot lower than the other flags when I last visited in 2018. Given the importance of flags to signify sovereignty and the nation-state, the lower position of the CTGR flag makes a strong declaration about tribal sovereignty in relation to the settler state.

IV: Tamástslikt Cultural Institute

The NHOTIC invites visitors to perform the role of the Oregon Trail settler, using representation and performance to legitimize non-Native territorial occupation and position non-Natives as the inheritors of a proud pioneer legacy. The EOTIC does similar work, but with the addition of interpretive material supplied by the CTGR on the Indigenous people of the lower Willamette Valley. In both, a variety of methods are used to avoid reckoning with the full reality of settler colonialism and deny the coexistence of multiple spatialities within the Pacific Northwest. This includes the historicization of Indigenous peoples and the subsumption of Indigenous temporalities and spatialities into a single settler history and geography. While the contributions of the CTGR point to a more complex reality of multiple temporalities and spaces, their arrangement within the EOTIC diminishes their ability to challenge the dominance of a settler spatial regime.

Over and over along the route of Oregon Trail tourism, the embodied experiences of visitors—what I have called rehearsive experiences—work together with discursive frames to naturalize settler modes of producing and inhabiting space. One of the stops along this route is Tamástslikt Cultural Institute, owned and operated by the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation (CTUIR). Tamástslikt provides a very different setting for playing pioneer, utilizing the same technologies of the museum to give non-Native

visitors different ways to understand their presence within the land of eastern Oregon.

In her book *The Common Pot*, Lisa Brooks addresses the inadequacies of inclusion or addition to address the power and violence of the settler state, specifically in practices of history. Instead, she focuses on the centrality of space and its potential to transform our understanding of history and American society, asking:

> What happens to our view of American history when Native narratives are not just *included* by *privileged…*? What happens when we put Native space at the center of America rather than merely striving for inclusion or minority viewpoints or viewing Native Americans as a *part* of or on the *periphery* of America? (Brooks xxxv)

Tamástslikt is an example of what Brooks describes, the privileging of Native space, utilizing the form of the museum. At the EOTIC and the NHOTIC, Native peoples are seen as either part of the settler state or on its periphery. By centering and privileging Native space, Tamástslikt provides a completely different orientation toward the land of eastern Oregon, the history of the Oregon Trail, and the presence of non-Natives within the land of the Columbia Basin.

Background

The catalyst for Tamástslikt was the 1993 sesquicentennial and the Oregon Trail Advisory Council's recommendation for an interpretive center on the

reservation, but the center is part of a much longer effort by the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation (CTUIR) to assert and protect tribal sovereignty and self-governance. It is an effort reaching back to the 1855 Treaty negotiated with the Cayuse, Umatilla, and Walla Walla people (the constituent tribes of the CTUIR). "From our perspective, modern sovereignty began in 1855 with the signing of the Treaty that made the Umatilla Indian Reservation our homeland" write Charles Luce and William Johnson, former tribal attorney and Chief Judge of the Umatilla Tribal Court, respectively (Karson et al. 188). Luce and Johnson specify *modern* sovereignty, a distinction which acknowledges 1855 as a turning point for the Cayuse, Umatilla, and Walla Walla people. Much of what existed for the tribes prior to 1855 is gone and cannot be reclaimed, as former tribal Chair Antone Minthorn explains:

> The CTUIR lost a tremendous amount of resources and culture from the time of Lewis and Clark in 1805 and the 1855 Treaty signing, but we can never go backward to make things right. That is done. It is over. The only way we are going to recover what we have lost of our original reservation promise is to move forward using the sovereign powers we have retained. We have to learn how to use our sovereign powers to rebuild our nation and take our place in this world. (Karson et al. 86)

Luce and Johnson add, "We must, as our ancestors did, maintain the vision of our sovereignty…while adapting to new predicaments" (Karson et al. 188). Though Luce and Johnson argue that the tribes' modern sovereignty began in

1855, they and Minthorn clarify that their sovereignty did not originate then, but rather adapted in response to new conditions. The sovereignty of the Cayuse, Umatilla, and Walla Walla peoples predates their treaties with the United States.

In the 20th century, the tribes pursued new ways to assert and protect their sovereignty. This included the establishment of a constitutional government in 1949, assuming operations of federal programs under the Indian Self-Determination and Education Assistance Act of 1975, and the formation of the Columbia River Inter-Tribal Fish Commission with other Columbia River tribes in 1977.[72] In the 1980s, the tribe established a language program, a Head Start early childhood education program, a fire district, a grain elevator, and expanded their health clinic. In 1988, they laid out ten projects for the future, including the Wildhorse Casino Resort and the Tamástslikt Cultural Institute (Miller 59). These projects have bolstered the tribes' ability to assert their sovereignty, pursue self-determination, generate economic growth, provide employment opportunities for members, educate future generations, and preserve language and culture.[73]

Despite the role of Tamástslikt in the tribe's political, economic, and cultural resurgence, when described in the context of the Oregon Trail sesquicentennial celebration, the Oregon Trail Advisory Council's 1988 report, or much of the non-tribal marketing about Tamástslikt, the institute is almost entirely

[72] The Confederated Tribes of Warm Springs, the Yakama Nation, and the Nez Perce Tribe make up the other members of the commission.

[73] It should be acknowledged that these efforts must operate to a certain degree within the political and economic structures of the settler state, either by choice or by necessity, a fact I will return to later in the chapter.

defined in relation to the Oregon Trail. Its purpose or value is generally framed in terms of being able to provide an Indigenous perspective on the Trail's history and legacy.[74] In a 1994 report published by the Oregon Trail Coordinating Council (successor to the Advisory Council), the CTUIR's then unnamed interpretive center was described as one which "tells the story of the impact of Euro-American contact on the Indigenous people. It will complete the Oregon Trail story by focusing on the historical and contemporary impacts of the Oregon Trail migration on Tribal culture and will de-mythologize the history of the Western Movement" (Oregon Trail Coordinating Council 27). In other words, Tamástslikt is the other side of the coin, the missing half of the story told thus far. Tamástslikt does provide a different perspective on the Oregon Trail and the CTUIR are well suited to provide an Indigenous interpretation of that historical event and its legacies. Yet this is a small part of what this center and its museum do.[75]

The importance of Tamástslikt to the CTUIR's ongoing project of sustaining and protecting self-determination, sovereignty, traditional lifeways, and land are not incidental to the visitor experience. Rather, they are central to understanding how the exhibits script and choreograph visitors' experience of the

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[74] One brochure advertising five different museums along the Oregon Trail in the late 1990s was titled "*Five Different Perspectives. One Big Story*," reducing Tamástslikt to one view of a common history and geography (Rose 232).

[75] The title of "cultural institute" was intentionally chosen for Tamástslikt to reflect the multiple functions of the facility. In addition to the museum, Tamástslikt contains tribal archives and spaces to support the ongoing cultural life of the CTUIR.

museum. If museums offer “a model for experiencing life outside its walls,” then understanding what Tamástslikt is doing requires understanding its larger purpose within the life of the CTUIR, not just in the context of Trail interpretation (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, *Destination Culture* 51).

Visiting Tamástslikt

For the vast majority of visitors, getting to Tamástslikt means driving along Interstate 84, which generally follows the route of the Oregon Trail. Brown highway signs reading “Museum—Tamástslikt Cultural Institute” alert drivers approaching exit 216. Just below these signs are the signs for the Oregon National Historic Trail, its covered wagon logo letting travelers know that Tamástslikt is an Oregon Trail site. To get to the museum from the freeway, drivers must drive past many of the CTUIR’s other enterprises: the Arrowhead Travel Plaza, the Wildhorse Casino and Cineplex, an RV park (where I camped for the night when visiting in 2019), and the Wildhorse Golf Course. Just past the golf course, however, the road changes and enters what feels like a qualitatively different space.

The road begins to wind gently through fields, taking an intentionally indirect route to the center. The interpretive center is not immediately visible; instead, the drive offers visitors views of the surrounding fields, the Blue Mountains, and the sky. When I first visited the museum with my dad in 2017, he made a comment to the effect of “Where are we going?” It is a deliberate design,

inviting visitors to move through the land differently and pay attention to their surroundings. As we approached the center, set atop a gentle hill and facing towards the mountains and the Umatilla River valley, the neon world of the travel plaza and casino felt far away. Though a golf course borders Tamástslikt on one side, the building is oriented toward the mountains, plains, and river valley. Roberta (Bobbie) Conner, director of Tamástslikt Cultural Institute, has said the center is “as much about a place as it is about a people” and that emphasis comes through as soon as visitors begin driving the winding approach (Baker).

Inside the entrance lobby of the center, a large mural of the now-submerged Celilo Falls covers one wall. For thousands of years, people from around the entire region came to fish at the falls, considered to have been the greatest salmon fishery in the entire Columbia basin. On March 10, 1957, however, the falls disappeared when the floodgates of the newly constructed Dalles Dam were closed and rising waters silenced its roar. Covering the mural of the falls are rows of metal salmon etched with the names of donors and other friends of the institute. The NHOTIC had a similar wall, but it features terra-cotta squares on the exterior of the building laid out in a vaguely western or southwestern pattern, like an Apache-styled argyle. The mural of Celilo Falls, by contrast, is an assertion of the centrality of the land (and its bounty) to the life of the CTUIR.

The museum portion of the center is down a long hallway. The first time I visited Tamástslikt (with my dad in 2017), we began our museum experience in

the Coyote Theater. A circular space with a fake campfire in the center and a domed screen, the theater introduced us to the figure of Coyote and the cosmology and mythology of the CTUIR. Coyote serves as a guide throughout the entire museum, offering a mythical trajectory which parallels (or maybe coexists, infuses, or intertwines) the historical and cultural narratives that comprise the majority of the museum's information.

As an introduction, the theater provides a certain kind of orientation that entering the exhibits directly does not. I do not mean content-wise, the stories of Coyote (Ispilyáy) and the origin of the Natítayt (the People) are provided on placards as you enter the exhibits. Rather, the Coyote Theater puts visitors around a campfire looking up at a starry sky. A small round space, the theater evokes the traditional lodging of the CTUIR, teepees and tule reed lodges. It is intimate, dark, and circular and has us look toward the sky. It is across this sky that the story of Coyote plays out. Recounting Coyote's defeat of a great monster and his saving of the plants, animals, and people, the narration tells us: "We always give thanks to the Creator for the water, the land, and the animals. Welcome to the land of the Natitayt [the people]" (Curry). It is a strikingly different way of introducing the content of this museum—and the people of the CTUIR—than the other museums on the trail. We look to the sky, we learn the legend of Coyote, and we are welcomed to the land.

Exiting the theater, we walk through faux basalt archways covered in pictograms. It is through these archways that I entered on my second visit. Even

without the Coyote Theater presentation, the rock walls (with placards about Coyote embedded within them) provide me with a specific orientation, one about the relationship between cosmology, the people, and the land. Upon entering the exhibit space, the sounds of birds and coyotes fill the air. A distant bell sound can be heard from another gallery in the museum, but it is noticeably distant. The immediate sensation is of being outside. Having grown up in Washington and spent time in the Columbia Basin, the basalt rock immediately conjures up its specific climate and topography: arid grasslands, rolling mountains, sage brush, warm summers, snowy winters, and wide-open spaces. I suppose visitors from outside the region do not have this association, but I find it to be an effective evocation of the landscape. It grounds me in this specific place and establishes the centrality of land to the work of the museum.

In contrast to the NHOTIC, the first galleries of Tamástslikt are designed to emphasize the land as a place to inhabit, not a land to cross or possess. The first gallery to my right focuses on the traditional seasonal rounds of the Cayuse, Umatilla, and Walla Walla. As I begin to move my way around the circular gallery, I read an introductory placard titled “Our Land and Life.” The glass cases lining the gallery are filled with artifacts. Each is given context in relation to the land of the Columbia plateau and the life of the Cayuse, Umatilla, and Walla Walla peoples. They are not displayed as standalone cultural artifacts as is common in many museums, but rather used to demonstrate the connection the people of CTUIR have had with the land and how their survival has long depended on what

the land gives them. “Our survival required a close relationship with the animal world,” reads a sign. Another reads, “From the land the Natítayt (the People) gained in knowledge,” challenging any assumption that the relationship between the Natítayt and the land is solely about material survival. The land is something to learn from as well.

Just after the exhibit on seasonal rounds is a large diorama which again asserts the importance of land. A large diorama spans the length of the opposite wall, marked by a sign reading “Ocotuin [a Cayuse chief] Obtains the Horse.” Most of the diorama is a large panorama of Wallulla Gap on the Columbia river featuring the Twin Sisters rock formation. Two figures on horseback stand prominently in front of the panorama. The Cayuse were renowned for their horsemanship, obtaining the horse circa 1730 before direct contact with Europeans. The Cayuse breed eventually gained a renowned reputation and horses soon became an integral part of life for the plateau tribes. The position of the figures against the panoramic backdrop is, technology-wise, a very old fashion style of display, but it does insist on understanding the Cayuse in relation to the land they inhabit.

The horse, while introduced to North America by the Spanish and a material legacy of conquest, is here presented in a pre-colonization landscape. The prevalence of horseback Indians from film, television, novels, and other popular media make it difficult to recognize the horse as part of the trans-Atlantic exchange (also known as the Columbian exchange). When cowboys or pioneers

encounter Indians on the frontier in these stories, usually Plains Indians, they almost always are on horseback. Encountering the image of horseback Indians in traditional regalia easily conjures up the stereotypical settler-Indian encounter of the Western, only this time there are no settlers to be seen. At least not in the diorama. Instead, the horseback Indians are surveying a world without non-Native settlers. The only settler here is me.

Already, I feel like an outsider, but not an unwelcome one. I do not see myself in these exhibits. I do not feel I am meant to identify with the "our" mentioned in the text. I am not "the People." Not only am I a white settler but I am visiting Tamástslikt as part of my own Oregon Trail journey along the historic route of the Trail. This visit, like many visits to this museum, is part of the Trail's larger invitation to play pioneer through tourism. For those coming to Tamástslikt after visiting other sites along the trail, they are already primed to align themselves with the settler moving west. Even when exiting the freeway to come to the center, I was guided to the museum by signs emblazoned with the Oregon National Historic Trail logo. Arriving at Tamástslikt and moving through the exhibits, I feel as if I am entering into someone else's space. Yet, my presence does not feel unwelcome; instead, I feel invited to be in this space and learn.

The exhibits are organized into three main sections ordered chronologically: "We Were," "We Are," and "We Will Be." Unlike the NHOTIC or the EOTIC, the route through the museum does not represent a journey across space. From start to finish, I remain in the Columbia Basin, moving through time

but staying in place. Organized in this way, the exhibits recount the changes that have occurred to the land and the Cayuse, Umatilla, and Walla Walla due to colonization. Foreign objects (including the horse) and disease arrived first, then the Lewis and Clark expedition came through in 1805. This is followed by displays on fur companies, missionaries, and Oregon Trail settlers. The history of colonization is told from the orientation of the CTUIR, rooted in the land of the Columbia Basin looking out. “They arrived from the East” is used to describe the arrival of settlers; the arrival of fur companies is described as “an unprecedented intrusion into ancestral lands.” There is no spatial imagination of discovery here, but rather a spatial orientation that sees American settlement as a persistent and unyielding invasion of foreigners into the Columbia Plateau tribes’ lands which disrupted existing ways of life. Settlers are not called emigrants, nor are they the heroes of the story, but rather threats to existing ways of life in the Columbia Basin.

One notable example of this recasting of roles is the display about the killing of missionaries Marcus and Narcissa Whitman and twelve other settlers by the Cayuse at Waiilatpu. This event captured the imaginations of Americans, inflaming anti-Indian violence throughout the Northwest and popularizing ideas of violent, bloodthirsty Indians.[76] The Whitmans became martyr-like figures and their deaths galvanized efforts to subjugate the Columbia Basin tribes.

[76] It also spawned several theatrical pieces about the Whitmans and their deaths. See Vaughn, Chelsea K. “Killing Narcissa: Race, Gender, and Violence in Recreations of the Whitman Incident.” *Oregon Historical Quarterly*, vol. 115, no. 3, 2014, pp. 380–413.

Tamástslikt's interpretation of the event reveals the significant differences between Cayuse and American notions of justice, legality, and rightful inhabitance—all of which stem from how space is imagined. In response to the popular narratives about the event, a display titled "By Native Law they Enforced their Decision" frames the Cayuse action as a legitimate legal and political act. The killings at Waiilatpu were a response to the deaths of roughly two hundred people treated by Marcus Whitman during a disease epidemic. Already living "under adverse conditions in our own homelands," including an increasing number of settlers aided by the Whitman mission, the Cayuse sought a response. "A traditional council of law was formed," the display reads, "and a decision rendered." In this telling of the event, the Cayuse are a political entity making a legally sanctioned decision to protect their homelands against the threats of invaders. This way of imagining the Cayuse is difficult without the correct spatial orientation; it first requires understanding the land as Cayuse land, not land entitled to American settlers.

As a white settler accustomed to identifying with white settlers in history, this display is not designed to assuage my guilt or discomfort. Marcus Whitman, a long-established hero in Washington state history, is recast in the role of a man threatening the lives of the Cayuse people. Reframing this history using an Indigenous spatial orientation made me reconsider my presence in this space. I still felt welcome, but I also felt an invitation to inhabit this space with more care, consideration, and a more open mind.

As I took notes on the display, I overheard another man (one of the only other visitors in the museum at the time) say to his wife, “I don’t blame ‘em.” It sounded like a statement of empathy, an affirmation of the legitimacy of the Cayuse’s actions. The couple was older and white, fairly typical for the kind of visitors I saw at the sesquicentennial museums. The comment struck me something akin to the NHOTIC describing the pioneers as intolerant, attributing the tragic consequences of colonization to the personal flaws of the settlers. The visitors’ comment appears to reduce the events at Waiilatpu to an adjudication of the past, determining whether the choices of the Cayuse were defensible or not.

The ambivalence of the man’s comment—did he feel the same invitation I did or was it a move to innocence—indexes a gap that exists between the museum’s design and the experience of the visitor. As a museum space, Tamástslikt leverages the experiential potential of museum to immerse visitors into a different way of imagining and inhabiting the land of the Columbia Plateau. Compared to the tactic of adding content to a settler-oriented experience, such as the CTGR’s panels at the EOTIC, Tamástslikt is more effective at creating an experience of a Native spatial regime distinct from the settler state. This is easily seen in the first galleries, where a geography of the Columbia Basin governed by Indigenous knowledge and practices is established. In them, we are introduced to different ways the Cayuse, Umatilla, and Walla Walla have practiced space

over generations: storytelling, seasonal rounds, intertribal trade, mutual care, and intimate knowledge of the land resulting from their long-standing tenure.[77]

Despite the title of "We Were," the galleries refute the NHOTIC's labelling of Indigenous people using chronological precedence and instead, insist on using geographic inhabitance. They reveal another way to inhabit the land outside of settler colonialism, empire, and capitalism, one that existed in robust ways historically and still exists today in the CTUIR. In later galleries, as the events of colonization are recounted, the primacy of Native space persists, providing a constant frame of reference for the visitor experience and creating the opportunity for non-Native visitor's physical presence to be defamiliarized, denaturalized, and delegitimized.

Even so, visitors come with their own preconceptions of history, colonization, and Indigenous peoples, making this realization of this effect unassured. All visitors come with their thoughts, feelings, and bodies conditioned by generations of colonization. To expect a single museum experience to overcome the power and reach of settler colonial structures, logics, and practices is unreasonable. However, by positioning the visitor's body (especially white settler bodies) within a different way of imagining and inhabiting the land of eastern Oregon, Tamástslikt does hold the potential to cast doubt upon the legitimacy and normalcy of settler space. In this way, Tamástslikt does what Lisa

[77] On the CTUIR's webpage, their history begins: "Water was created first, life and land were created next, land promised to take care of all life, all life promised to take care of the land."

Brooks, David Chang, and others have shown: by privileging and centering Native people, histories, and geographies, attention is directed to what is often overlooked or ignored by American settler society, and also enables us to see the operations of settler colonialism more clearly.[78]

This capacity for altering our conception of settlement is apparent in the next section of the museum focused on the Cayuse, Umatilla, and Walla Walla's loss of their land base. The text of the placards does not emphasize theft or loss but *marking*. The placard describing the treaties signed by the Columbia Plateau tribes is titled "They are Marking the Land." It is an important phrase that articulates a specific way of conceiving the collision between Native and settler spaces. The Indigenous space established in the beginning of the museum—governed by seasonal rounds, relational intimacy with the land, and generations of inhabitance—is not erased or destroyed but *marked*. The primacy of Native space continues to be asserted, characterizing the settler regime of treaties, claims, surveying, and allotment as an imposition upon the land, not its transformation or transmutation into something other than itself. Nor is it a supplanting of Native land by settler land, or the transfer of property from Native ownership into settler ownership. It is certainly not the settlement of "free" land. Rather, the exhibit makes clear that the land foundational to the identities and

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[78] See Brooks, Lisa Tanya. *The Common Pot: The Recovery of Native Space in the Northeast*. University of Minnesota Press, 2008; and Chang, David A. *The World and All the Things Upon It: Native Hawaiian Geographies of Exploration*. University of Minnesota Press, 2016.

lives of the Cayuse, Umatilla, and Walla Walla has been a constant despite the changes wrought by colonization—marked, perhaps, but still present.

Continuing on, a new area details the post-treaty life of the CTUIR; it is titled "Marked Land." A placard informs me, "The ratification of the treaties and the establishment of the Umatilla Indian Reservation ushered in an era of radical change. The marked land now governed our lives." A new spatial regime dominates the lives of the tribes. In a display about allotment, a large photograph of land surveyors fills the entirety of one wall. Two rows of men, some on horseback, look at the camera—all white, all stoic. Though armed only with tripods and other tools, they have an intimidating look to them, a look imbued with the threat of violence. "Land remains a constant element in our quest for Tribal autonomy…," reads a placard. If land is life for the CTUIR, then the surveyors—the markers—are existential threats. Curiously, when describing allotment, it states "They are allotting their marked lands;" the marked lands are attributed to the settler state, not to the tribes. It reads as an acknowledgement that the marked land is something qualitatively different from the land integral to the tribes' sovereignty and life. It is a subtle acknowledgement of two distinct spatial regimes, one Indigenous and one settler.

As I move down a ramp, displays on both sides detail the history of these treaties. Quotes from tribal members reiterate the importance of the land and the role of treaties in protecting their rights, which pre-date the arrival of colonizers. The centrality of land and the pre-colonial origins of the tribes' sovereignty

continue in the next section of the museum, “We Are.” It is a much smaller portion of the museum but details different aspects of tribal life today. It discusses the tribes’ being granted US citizenship, but reminds visitors “Our history, identity, and Tribal sovereignty are inseparable from the land. From time immemorial, it has always been so.” It details a history of warriors that includes 20th and 21st century military service, explaining, “We are the protectors of our homelands…. Today, we are all warriors in the sense that we are defending the land, the water, the fish, our cultural lifeways and Tribal sovereignty.” The revival of tribal languages is celebrated, but as James Lavadour, the CTUIR language program coordinator explains, this too is about land: “When you use the words from this land it creates a bond between you and the land.”

The final section of the museum is almost nonexistent. Fittingly, “We Will Be” is yet to come. However, the final content of the museum includes a placard stating once again, “Our life is the land.” A curving corridor takes you to the museum’s exit. On one wall in large letters is the phrase, “We will never fade;” on the opposite wall a large photograph takes up the entirety of the wall. It is from the 1906 Frontier Days festival in the nearby (off-reservation) town of Walla Walla, and shows about 40 individuals from the Cayuse, Walla Walla, and Umatilla tribes in full regalia. It is a stunning photograph and given the chronological ordering of the museum, it seems rather out of place. 1906 was arguably a low point for the tribes in terms of their land base and control over it. From the Treaty of 1855 through the Slater (1885) and Dawes (1887) allotment

acts, the tribes' land base had been reduced from over 6.4 million acres to 158,000 acres. At the time the photograph was taken, new legislation was being enacted giving the US government new power to sell reservation lands.[79] Yet as the photograph attests, the people of the CTUIR remained.

I am left with this final image as I exit the museum. The image juxtaposed with the future-tense "We Will Be" opens up a space to consider a different temporality that is not so linear or fixed. The past of the CTUIR, the photograph insists, is also its future. While this notion could be read as a statement of recuperation or revival—and given the tribes' efforts at cultural revitalization, could certainly be one—it also points to an orientation that is not primarily governed by time, but by space. In the NHOTIC and EOTIC, visitors move across space and through time. In Tamástslikt, visitors move through time but remain in space, giving them an experience of the land surrounding them as it is imagined and inhabited by the people of the CTUIR. Despite a chronological ordering, time is less rigid in this orientation. The emphasis on land and its continual inhabitation by the Cayuse, Walla Walla, and Umatilla makes it more difficult to historicize colonization. It makes the argument that resisting and undoing the violent effects of settler colonialism, capitalism, and empire is primarily a matter of space, not time. How we inhabit the land matters more than how we tell history.

[79] See https://ctuir.org/history-culture/history-ctuir

The Limitations of Experiencing Native Space

As noted earlier, Tamástslikt is part of a larger effort by the CTUIR to secure their sovereignty, self-determination, and culture, including Indigenous modes of inhabiting. Overall, the institute is meant to serve the interests of the CTUIR, providing them with a facility for cultural preservation and revitalization, education, and economic opportunity. This includes using the museum to educate non-Native visitors about the "cultures, histories, and contemporary lives" of the CTUIR, one of the institute's stated goals. In doing so, the museum also reveals the violence of the settler state and its specificity as one spatial regime among many, refuting any impression that settler space is natural, totalizing, or superior. In doing so, the museum invites visitors to question the legitimacy and goodness of the settler state (and by extension, the legitimacy of settler presence in the land of the Columbia Basin). Within the broader tourist landscape of the Trail which encourages tourists to imagine themselves as settlers crossing the Trail west, Tamástslikt creates a very different context for performing the role of the pioneer. No longer is the settler the hero overcoming daunting obstacles in search of a better life. Instead, the settler is an invader bringing destruction to an already thriving world. To imagine oneself as the inheritor of the pioneer legacy at Tamástslikt—as a modern-day pioneer—means understanding oneself as the benefactor of a system predicated on the destruction of Indigenous peoples and societies.

At the same time, by capitalizing on the Umatilla Reservation's lucrative location along the Oregon Trail tourist route, Tamástslikt also benefits from the larger structures of historical and cultural tourism and settler capitalism.[80] In seeking to advance tribal interests—which inherently critiques the legitimacy and sovereignty of the settler state—as well as profit from visitation by non-Native tourists, Tamástslikt points to the limitations of the museum experience. To what extent can a museum experience challenge the power of the settler state when it operates within the structures and expectations of settler capitalism and tourism? This includes the perception that such an experience is primarily cultural, which, as discussed earlier in this chapter, Mark Rifkin rightly notes is an abstraction which erases the material distinctions between the production of settler and Indigenous spaces and reconstitutes them as primarily racial differences.[81] For visitors already primed to operate within the larger landscape of Oregon Trail tourism and settler colonial logics of racialization and cultural difference, the museum experience provided by Tamástslikt may not be enough to unsettle settler belonging.

[80] The decision to participate in the sesquicentennial celebration and take up the Oregon Trail Advisory Council's recommendation for a museum on the reservation was not solely an economic one. The CTUIR decided it was worth having Tamástslikt associated with the Trail and its sesquicentennial if they had the opportunity to tell their own story. They got involved on the condition that they would have total control of the project.

[81] "Characterizing 'boundaries' as cultural makes 'space' and 'zone' almost entirely metaphorical, delinked from actual places, land claims, and modes of occupancy, abstracting from the particular kinds of sociopolitical mappings at play in different instances in order to place them in the same analytic frame. 'Culture' comes to mark the difference of nonwhiteness per se rather than indexing the normalization of specific formations of residence, land tenure, and political belonging" (Rifkin, *Settler Common Sense* 21).

In the lobby of Tamástslikt is a display that fuels the expectation of cultural difference. It is a cardboard cutout of a historic photo of a Native man and woman in traditional regalia. The faces have been cut out so visitors can take photos as the couple. The man is standing and is wearing a large feather headdress, the woman is seated and has two long black braids. A word bubble has been imposed reading "Tamástsliktyaw Wínam! (come to Tamastslikt)" and a large scrawl at the bottom states "Greetings from Pendleton Oregon!" When I entered the lobby, I was taken aback by the cutout's blatant invitation to "play Indian," especially given the historical and culturally specific content of the photograph.

The cutout calls to mind the work of Philip Deloria in *Playing Indian*. Given Tamástslikt's inclusion within the larger tourist landscape of the Oregon Trail, how might playing Indian, even in this small way, help non-Native tourists like myself feel more at ease in this space? Might this cutout help make the contradictions of settler colonialism more "harmonious" for the visitor, as Deloria argues? Playing Indian, Deloria argues, has provided Americans (especially white settlers of European descent) ways to quiet the dissonance of settler colonialism's contradictions, to give the effect of the settler and Indian being able to coexist in harmony. "Acting Indian," he writes, "brought dialectical interplay to a standstill. It froze contradictions into equivalence. It made them part of the material world" (P. J. Deloria, *Playing Indian* 185). Even though the context of the cutout within a tribal cultural institute seemed to grant me permission to play

Indian in this small way, I did not feel comfortable doing so. Despite the potential dialectical standstill described by Deloria, I do not think I could avoid the discomfort of putting my face on an Indian body, even in this ostensibly permissive environment.

How might this cutout help white, non-Native tourists feel more comfortable in the museum? How might it undermine the otherwise unsettling work of the exhibits by reinforcing the notion that the difference between settler and Indigenous is primarily cultural and historical? Tamástslikt, along with the other projects undertaken by the CTUIR over the past 40 years—including partnerships with government, tribal, and private organizations—have made many things possible for the Tribes: cultural preservation and revitalization, culturally-aligned natural resources management, higher rates of employment, financial security, and, arguably most important, an increased land base (Miller 61–62). In short, they have been powerful tools for securing tribal sovereignty, self-determination, and futurity. At the same time, however, these projects' entanglement with the settler state, non-Native historical tourism, and settler capitalism's logics of possession and extraction indicate their limitations.[82] The CTUIR has clearly found a way to advance their interests in the face of the settler state, but to what extent is their capacity to unsettle Oregon—a potential seen in

[82] To be clear, my critique is not predicated on a concept of cultural purity having been corrupted by the settler state and its institutions. Rather, the entanglement of Tamástslikt with the Oregon Trail tourist economy raises questions about the degree to which it reproduces the very spatial conditions governed by, and productive of, settler colonialism.

Tamástslikt's privileging of Native space—hampered by the pressures, demands, and expectations of the very structures they must work within to survive?

V: Conclusion

These museums along the Oregon Trail operate in different ways at different scales. The settler-oriented museums reproduce settler spatial orders through a combination of techniques: narrative and discourse, the positioning of visitors in relation to displays and the surrounding landscape, encouraging role-playing, and as institutions within a tourist economy. All work to normalize the settler spatial regime which governs the land of the Pacific Northwest. As they utilize these mechanisms to secure settler legitimacy and power, they conceal the very operations which allow settler space to seem given, including those of representation, abstraction, and rationalization. One of the best examples of this is the conclusion to the NHOTIC's feature film, *West to Oregon*:

> Many come to understand that the Oregon Trail is an attitude, a state of mind, an indominable spirit of independence and adventure, a willingness to set goals and take risks, and reach out for a dream. Putting faith in one's ability to overcome any obstacle and in the end emerge from the toils. Today we are still a country of movement and change, uprooting our lives to find better opportunities and new beginnings. This has always been the promise of America.

Abstracting the Oregon Trail from its historical and material realities into a platitude about the American dream enables those who benefit from white, setter supremacy to unproblematically connect their physical presence in the Pacific Northwest with the history of colonization.

Attempts to amend pro-settler representations of the Trail, its history, and geography usually fall short because of their failure to address the conditions which have make such representations inequitable and inadequate in the first place. In the NHOTIC and EOTIC, settler space exists as a background against which the story of the Oregon Trail unfolds. Settler space—a historically and culturally specific construct—is presented in these museums as the natural container within which the events of the Oregon Trail occurred. When visitors embrace the role of the settler in these museums, they do so against the backdrop of settler space; if visitors bristle against their interpellation as settlers and refuse to accept that alignment, they still do so against the backdrop of settler space. Regardless of how the history of the Oregon Trail is represented, unless the question of space and its production is interrogated, the power and stability of settler colonial space is undisturbed. This also extends to the social and economic roles played by these institutions.

In Tamástslikt, a different environment is provided for the Oregon Trail tourist: the Native space of the Cayuse, Umatilla, and Walla Walla people. This draws new attention to settler space and opens up the possibility for non-Native visitors to reconsider their relationship to the land, the Indigenous Other, history,

and their own presence within the Pacific Northwest. Though this museum experience exists within larger structures of tourism and capitalism, it still enables visitors to recognize settler space for what it is: produced. It also reveals the violence inherent to settler space, utilizing a spatial orientation to insist on its ongoing nature. It shows the potential for utilizing the technologies of the museum to unsettle and destabilize the power of settler colonialism in the Pacific Northwest.

Though the NHOTIC and Tamástslikt are located 94 miles apart, on either side of the Blue Mountains, they are not merely different perspectives on a single shared history. Nor do the worlds they create within their exhibits merely indicate the plurality or heterogeneity of space. Rather, they reveal contradictory spaces: a settler space predicated on the misrecognition, subjugation, and elimination of Native space; and a Native space existing beyond the realm of the settler state, governed by Indigenous knowledge and practices. The juxtaposition of these two spaces reveals a contradiction which cannot be reconciled through more inclusive representation, the rewriting of history, or more diverse and inclusive participation within the existing settler state. When the spatial conditions which dominate these lands are not addressed, the violence of colonization and its attendant phenomena will persist, such as white supremacy, economic exploitation, and ecological destruction. When we can see space for what it is—produced, social, and distinct from the land—and see alternatives which offer different possibilities for how to imagine and inhabit the land, we are then able to

build a new spatial regime governed by different logics, practices, and desires. It is only then that the violence and inequity of the settler state has the possibility of being historical.

The Oregon Trail Pageants, 1926-1950:

Bodies, Temporality, and Settler/Siletz Futurities

Introduction

In August of 1926, the town of Eugene, Oregon staged the first of seven monumental historical pageants that came to be known as the *Oregon Trail Pageants*. With a strong focus on the Oregon Trail years, these pageants depicted a history of Euro-American colonization of the Pacific Northwest on massive outdoor stages with casts of thousands and audiences of thousands more. Every few years, they brought the history and mythology of the Oregon Trail and its pioneers to life on stage through music, dance, poetic narration, dialogue, and spectacle alongside ancillary activities such as dances, barbecues, parades, boxing matches, air shows, carnivals, and beard-growing competitions. Over time, the scope and interpretation of local history shifted, but for 24 years until the last pageant in 1950, these theatrical celebrations shaped the historical imagination and community identity of a generation of Eugene-area residents.

The *Oregon Trail Pageants*, however, were more than representations of the past. These performance practices worked to normalize the present and secure a future. As historian David Glassberg writes in his work on American historical pageantry, practitioners of the form saw pageantry as "a dramatic public ritual through which the residents of a town, by acting out the right version of their past, could bring about some kind of future social and political

transformation” (Glassberg 4). For the *Oregon Trail Pageants*, “future social and political transformation” was not transformation into a new state of things, but the continuing legitimization and fortification of a white, settler colonial status quo. As the closing lines of the final pageant made clear, the future aspired for was the preservation of settler power and legitimacy:

> Lift a shout of glad arrival—
>
> Journey’s end—the Land of Promise—
>
> All but lost a thousand times—
>
> Almost despaired of through the faintness—
>
> But won at last—to hold, to love, to cherish—
>
> Our land—our home—our state—Oregon.
>
> (Eugene Pageant Association, *Oregon Trail Pageant 1950* 26)

Importantly, as performers took the stage, they embodied a version of the past crafted by pageant organizers, making it tangible and immediate—a visceral reality for themselves and audiences alike. Men grew bushy beards and women donned calico dresses for the festivities, transforming themselves into history itself, just as the townscape was covered in slabs from the lumber mills to give the effect of a pioneer town.[83]

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[83] Despite my focus on those performing in the pageants and parades, laboring bodies offstage also worked to make the pageants a reality. Local organizations—churches, the YMCA, the Boy Scouts, etc.—rallied their membership to take responsibility for organizing and raising funds for the pageant festivities. Laboring bodies stitched costumes, built massive set pieces, wrangled horses and oxen, printed posters, made phone calls, and many other quotidian acts that fueled the pageants’ success over the years.

As the bodies of performers brought history to life on stage, the narratives and representational frameworks of the pageants simultaneously temporalized the bodies of performers and audiences. The people—both performers and the community they represented—were positioned in time, oriented within the temporal order created by the pageants' narrative. Just as the museums discussed in Chapter Two orient visitors' bodies in the landscape of eastern Oregon, the pageants oriented participants' bodies within specific temporalities.

This relationship between bodies and temporality provides the focus and scope of my interrogation into the *Oregon Trail Pageants*. What can the pageants reveal about the role of time and temporality in the operations of the settler state? How might a focus on the body destabilize the authoritative claims of the pageants' dominant historical narratives about Eugene and Oregon? How do different bodies—specifically Native and non-Native—navigate this space and how do we make sense of their presence? How does embodied action in these public spaces work to secure a future for both Native and non-Native communities? In order to interrogate these questions, I primarily focus on the first pageant celebration in 1926 and its two main features: a historical pageant entitled *Klatawa: a Pageant of Transportation* and the Pioneer Parade.

I: The Trail to Rail Celebration, 1926—an Ordering of Time and Bodies

Klatawa: a Pageant of Transportation was the centerpiece of the Trail to Rail Celebration, a multi-day event held to commemorate the completion of the

new Cascade Line of the Southern Pacific Railroad.[84] The new rail line had been under construction for two decades and was heralded by community leaders as a vehicle for new economic growth, trade, and commerce. The pageant was themed accordingly, depicting Eugene's history as a transformation from a pioneer frontier defined by the Oregon Trail to a modern center of commerce, fortuitously situated on the new railroad.[85] "There is no more dramatic episode in the history of the world than that of the development of transportation in the Oregon Country in the past seventy-five years," boasted pageant committee chair L.L. Ray in the program notes (Trail to Rail Association). Utilizing poetry, dance, music, and spectacular scenery, *Klatawa* recounted the history of American exploration and settlement of the Pacific Northwest through the theme of transportation.[86]

The choice to stage a pageant to celebrate the new railroad was not an unusual idea for 1926. Beginning in the late 19th century, historical pageantry grew to be a popular form of civic celebration in the United States, often

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[84] The title *Klatawa* comes from a Chinuk Wawa word meaning "to go" or "to travel." Chinuk Wawa, or Chinook jargon, is an Indigenous language primarily derived from the Chinookan languages of the lower Columbia River. It was historically used as a trading or contact language across the diverse linguistic landscape of the region and developed into a creole over time. Today, the language's resurgence and preservation has been spearheaded by the Confederated Tribes of Grand Ronde, who have multiple language education initiatives for Chinuk Wawa.

[85] In addition to *Klatawa*, the Trail to Rail Celebration and subsequent pageants included various ancillary activities including parades, barbecues, dances, air shows, boxing matches, concerts, beauty pageants, and beard-growing contests. The town was decorated with temporary murals and businesses clad their fronts with cast off slabs from the lumber mills. The pageants, especially the earlier iterations, were more than performances, they were town-wide festivals reaching into many aspects of civic life.

[86] For a very different take on the connection of transit and Empire, see Byrd, Jodi A. *The Transit of Empire: Indigenous Critiques of Colonialism*. University of Minnesota Press, 2011.

commemorating important local or national events.[87] Like many cultural trends, the popularity of pageantry in the Pacific Northwest lagged behind the eastern United States, but by the 1920s, *Klatawa* was one of many pageants staged in the region. These included Walla Walla's *How the West Was Won* (1922), Walter Meacham's *Top o' the Blue Mountains* near Baker City (1923), and Portland's *Rosaria* pageants directed by Doris Smith, the director for all seven of the *Oregon Trail Pageants*.

Pageantry was not only about history, but was also about place, as early 20th century pageanteer William Chauncy Langdon explained in a 1914 edition of the American Pageant Association bulletin. "[T]he pageant is drama in which the place is the hero and the development of the community is the plot," he wrote, "The place, the grounds on which the pageant is performed, is the visible representative of the community whose life-drama the pageant presents" (American Pageant Association 25). Staging the history of transportation in the Oregon Country was more than storytelling, it was also a means to connect a community to the place they lived and the land they occupied. As participants performed the history of Oregon on stage and in the streets, they asserted a claim about that place and who belongs in it.

Key to the pageant's claims about place and belonging was the connection it drew between transportation and the advancement of white Euro-

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[87] The size of the Eugene pageants were even modest compared to some of these pageants. The 1914 pageant celebrating St. Louis' sesquicentennial was one of the largest theatrical events in the United States, with a cast of 7,000-7,500 and estimated audiences of 100,000 per night.

American civilization. Pageant episodes featured different modes of transportation, sequentially organized to mark the evolution of civilization in the region. This equation between technological development and the progress of civilization was proclaimed by the pageant narrator (also named Klatawa) in the show's opening: "Give heed, oh people, and you shall see unfolded/A pageant of locomotion/Depicting in successive stages/The evolution of the movement of man/In this the Oregon Country…/Each phase marking a step/In the progress of settlement and civilization" (Trail to Rail Association 6). Like the name Trail to Rail suggested, the pageant positioned the new rail line as the direct evolutionary descendant of the Oregon Trail itself. More than an economic boon, the railroad indicated that Eugene's white settler community was at the forefront of civilization's development.

In *Klatawa*, this trajectory of development began with modes of transportation attributed to the Indigenous people of the region (walking, canoes, and horses), continued with the sailing ship of American Robert Gray entering the Columbia River and the years of emigration over the Oregon Trail, and finished with the present-day wonders of rail, highways, and air travel.[88] The Pioneer Parade's series of parade entries were roughly organized along the same timeline of technological evolution: from entry number 9—"The Cave Men"

[88] The final episode featuring rail and air travel describe both as the surpassing of natural limitations. The new Cascade Line, the narrator proclaims, "split the barrier" of "adamantine" mountains, proving that the people of Oregon would not be "thwarted" any longer. Air travel—brought to life by an airplane flyover—showed that man was no longer earth-bound and would follow the pioneer spirit to the "last ethereal frontier" (Trail to Rail Association 15–16).

of Grants Pass, complete with furs and clubs—to entry number 108—"Modern Airplane." Unlike *Klatawa*, which had non-Native performers in redface perform Native characters in various episodes, the Pioneer Parade featured actual Native people. A group of approximately 30 Siletz Indians, mostly dressed in traditional regalia, were entry number 10 out of 111, labeled in the pageant program as "Group of Native Americans (the early Coast Indians had no horses.)—Indians from the Siletz Reservation" (Trail to Rail Association 18).[89] When the Siletz people stepped into that space, they stepped into a role created for them by the organizers of the pageant and parade: entry number 10 marking the stage of development between cave men and the coming of white settlers.

Photos of the Siletz Indians marching in the parade depict Abe Logan leading the group, his attire of white shirt, slacks, and a waistcoat standing out as an exception among the rest of the group who are all dressed in some form of regalia.[90] Logan was the point of contact for parade organizer Cal Young in

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[89] The Confederated Tribes of Siletz Indians (CTSI), as they are known today, are a confederated nation made up of many constituent communities from what is now called Oregon and northern California. The ancestors of the present-day CTSI spoke 10 different languages and numerous dialects. Although the Indigenous people of the Northwest coast traditionally have had village-based identities and polities, the utility of grouping people into "tribes" or linguistic groups has been common in the post-colonization era. The CTSI lists the following as constituent tribes: "Clatsop, Chinook, Klickitat, Molala, Kalapuya, Tillamook, Alsea, Siuslaw/Lower Umpqua, Coos, Coquelle, Upper Umpqua, Tututni (including all the lower Rogue River Bands and those extending up the coast to Floras Creek and down to Whales Head), Chetco (including all of the villages from Whales Head to the Winchuck River), Tolowa, Takelma (including the Illinois Valley/mid-Rogue River and Cow Creek peoples), Galice/Applegate, and Shasta" (Confederated Tribes of Siletz Indians).

[90] Two photographs from the Lane County Historical Museum are identified as being from 1926. The others are from a personal collection of photographs labeled "1st Eugene Pageant" [*Ellmaker Photo Album (Eugene Pageant)*. c1926. Special Collections & University Archives, University of Oregon Libraries, Ellmaker family papers, 1768-2005.].

subsequent editions of the Pioneer Parade—the Siletz were listed as entries in the first four editions of the parade—and presumably served in the same role for the 1926 edition. A knowledgeable source of Siletz history, he was also a leader who persistently advocated for the upholding of Siletz treaty rights and the restoration of tribal lands.[91] Other recognizable figures in the photographs include Minnie Lane (Molala), Colusa Williams, Hoxie Simmons (Galice Creek Athapaskan), and Archie Ben.[92] Lane was a renowned basket maker. Simmons—the last fluent speaker of Galice, an Athabaskan language from what is now Southern Oregon—was, like Logan, an important archive of Siletz historical and cultural knowledge and was frequently cited by historians and ethnographers. Ben would become a central figure in the cultural and political resurgence of the Siletz in the coming decades. To the spectators lining the streets of Eugene that day, none of this mattered. The Siletz Indians—a community with rich and complex histories, identities, cultures, and potentials—were listed simply as “Group of Native Americans.”

This objectification of the Siletz people was not accidental, but a deliberate part of the narrative being advanced about the white settlers of Eugene and

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[91] Logan spoke at a BIA hearing on the the Wheeler-Howard Act, or Indian Reorganization Act, in 1934 reminding the government agents of the “white people’s” continual string of broken promises and disregard for Indian people (*Proceedings of the Conference at Chemawa, Oregon, April 8 and 9 [1934] to Discuss with the Indians the Howard-Wheeler Bill in United States*). One month before at a tribal council discussion about the legislation, Logan plainly states what mattered more than self-governance: “Instead of self-government we want our treaties settled. Our old folks lost our lands, now we want what we have coming” (*Tribal Council Minutes, 1931-1954*).

[92] Thanks to Robert Kentta, Cultural Resources Director for the Confederated Tribes of Siletz Indians, for helping with identification.

Oregon. In order to position the contemporary people of Eugene as the rightful inhabitants of the land, the Indian had to be reduced to a figure more primitive than settler society. These narratives of transportation and civilization's evolution made it clear to participants and spectators that the Indigenous people of the land had been justly superseded by the settler state. Underpinning this rationalization was a specific conception of time.

The ordering of time was one of historical pageantry's primary functions as a theatrical form. In his work on American historical pageantry, historian David Glassberg argues that pageantry helped locate a community in time by positioning them "in a succession of past and future generations" (Glassberg 1). The representations of the passage of time created on the pageant stage—utilizing narrative, poetry, imagery, spectacle, music, and dance—made time and history tangible for the community, creating an effect of the past "come to life" in the present. The ability to translate historical reality (ostensibly) into a visual, aural, and affective community experience made pageantry a powerful medium through which people could claim a sense of historicity. As Glassberg writes, "The succession of episodes across the pageant grounds placed past, present, and future within a single framework, offering a coherent plot within which local residents could interpret their recent experiences and envision their future progress" (Glassberg 139). In *Klatawa* (and each edition of the *Oregon Trail Pageants*) the spectacle on stage provided a way for the settler community to

understand themselves in time—usually at the leading edge of a progressive, linear timeline.

Pageantry was also seen as an effective tool to shape the future. Historical pageantry was used by practitioners to address a wide variety of social issues, from mobilizing for war to address the consequences of modern industrialism, but performing history was believed to be a way to usher in a promising future.[93] Importantly, this belief is dependent on both performance—embodied and affective—and representation.

I don't dispute the future-making potential of pageantry, but perhaps not in the way pageant boosters of the turn of the century imagined. In the *Oregon Trail Pageants*, the performing body became a medium *through* which, and *upon* which, the future was secured. This was true for the white settler majority as well as the Siletz people—both utilized this space of performance to secure their own futures and the conditions necessary for their future flourishing. To show how this operated in 1926 (and beyond), I will trace multiple threads constitutive of—and connected to—the 1926 events, as well as with broader Siletz and settler histories, cultures, temporalities, and futures. By tracing the different threads entangled with the 1926 pageant and parade, I offer a more complex picture of

[93] Some have speculated that the Trail to Rail Celebration was partly a reaction to a recent surge in the Ku Klux Klan in Oregon during the early 1920s and offered a more positive and less antagonistic vision for the future. For more, see: Eckard V. Toy. "Robe and Gown: The Ku Klux Klan in Eugene, Oregon, During the 1920s." *The Invisible Empire in the West: Toward a New Historical Appraisal of the Ku Klux Klan of the 1920s*, edited by Shawn Lay, University of Illinois Press, 2004.

the interactions between historic representation, embodied practices, and temporality, and of the role of that dynamic within settler colonial Oregon.

II: The Construction of Time in *Klatawa*

The episodes chosen for *Klatawa* by the pageant committee and described grandiosely by pageant author W.F.G. Thacher presented the passage of time as the story of transportation. It equated this sequence of different modes of transportation with the advancement of civilization itself, positioning the Eugene community at the leading edge of modernity and human progress. Each new mode of transportation introduced into the Oregon Country was characterized as a moment which propelled the ongoing evolution of civilization in the region. From the introduction to the closing chorus of “Oregon, My Oregon,” the audience was guided through a teleological history of Oregon. *Klatawa*’s historical narrative of transportation and civilization was built upon a conception of time as linear and progressive, a temporal trajectory moving unidirectionally from a primitive past to the promising modernity of the present and future.

The themes and timeline of the pageant were duplicated in the Pioneer Parade, which quite literally created a sequence of entries marking the passage of time. The processional nature of the parade evoked what Walter Benjamin called “homogeneous, empty time,” an idea that sees time as outside of culture and instead as a natural “container” in which events exist (Benjamin 261). This

conception of time supports “a universal history,” the mustering of a “mass of data to fill the homogeneous, empty time” (Benjamin 262). This operation, as Dipesh Chakrabarty explains, “entails the further assumption that it is always possible to assign people, places, and objects to a naturally existing, continuous flow of historical time” (Chakrabarty 71). The notion of homogeneous, empty time—often believed to be “natural”—provides an illusion of neutrality when constructing historical narratives and assigning people, places, and events within them.

This homogenization and universalization of time is perhaps best captured by the pageant narrator’s self-introduction at the beginning of *Klatawa*. Klatawa characterizes himself as a natural, ever-present force—like a god or spirit—who has always propelled humanity forward:

> In the dim beginnings of all things it was I, Klatawa,
>
> Who guided man on his first timid wayfarings.
>
> It was I who showed him how to shape the wheel
>
> That he might move his goods from place to place.
>
> It was I who prompted him to fashion the first boat
>
> And to capture the wind in its sails.
>
> It was I who inspired him to probe the secrets
>
> Of steam and gas and electricity
>
> And to harness their energy

To curious and mighty engines of locomotion.

And ever have I driven him over land and water—

And through the air—restless, searching.

From the east toward the west have I driven him—

More and more swiftly—

Ever toward the setting sun. (Trail to Rail Association 5–6)

Notably, the direction of this motion described by Klatawa is toward the setting sun, both a temporal marker of "later" in a timeline and a geographic marker pointing westward. To move west is conflated with moving forward in time, and thus forward in the evolution of civilization. The advance of time has been equated with the development of transportation technology, which has allegedly been spurred on by a natural and universal "spirit of Motion." From the invention of the wheel through air travel, all of humanity falls into this timeline of travel.

Yet *Klatawa* modified this thesis by characterizing the specific actions of people—mostly American explorers and settlers—*as* the advance of time itself. This is best seen in the sixth episode of *Klatawa*. Entitled "Evolution of Transportation," the episode had a small parade on stage to recap the history told so far in the pageant. The procession began with "The Burden Bearer"—an Indian character on foot—and ended with a motor bus. In between was a host of different characters: missionaries, a circuit rider, the Pony Express, a prospector, a stagecoach, a bicycle, and so on. At the end of the episode, to cue the procession's exit, the narrator Klatawa proclaimed: "Let time reverse itself/Oh

ancient and memorable days/Return once more, and yield to us thy hoarded memories/Let the movements of man in all their phases/From the earliest day up to the present time/Pass in review" (Trail to Rail Association 13). This reversal of the procession was equated with the reversal of time itself, each person or vehicle representing a different point in time. Instead of progress moving unidirectionally through empty time, the procession of the characters and vehicles *is* the passage of time itself—as one moved forward (or backward), so did the other.

The end of the pageant reiterated this equation between the progression of time with specific actions around transportation. Perhaps most central is the Oregon Trail itself. In an original song titled "Trail to Rail," the chorus sang, "Across the distance of the changing years…/A smooth trail and a clear trail/We've left behind us for those that follow" (Trail to Rail Association 15). The song spatializes time, with temporal difference being described in terms of the geography (and colonial utility) of the Oregon Trail and its westward direction. The progress of transportation and civilization was described as trailblazing, with past accomplishments of the pioneer generation enabling future generations to move even further into the future.

The final episode, "The Air Lanes," describes the "frontier" of flight as the newest period of time: "There comes the new day/The next cycle/The pioneers of the air/Following a star-blazed trail/To the last ethereal frontier" (Trail to Rail Association 16). It is not so much that these leaps forward happen in time, but

are the unfolding of time itself, creating the newest part of an ongoing trajectory from past to present to future. Unlike Benjamin's thesis of empty, homogeneous time, in *Klatawa*, time does not steadily and evenly move forward or provide a neutral and natural container for the events of history; rather, it is a process punctuated and propelled forward by momentous occasions in Oregon's settler colonial history, especially the accomplishments of white, American settlers.[94]

This conflation between colonization and time put an onus onto the participants and spectators of the pageant. The future of Oregon and its continued development is not inevitable, the pageant posits, but dependent on continuing in the tradition of the Pioneer—exploring new frontiers, advancing civilization, and holding on to settler heritage, including the land itself. The pageant's closing song, the soon-to-be-official state song "Oregon, My Oregon," reiterated this connection between settler action and the unfolding of time itself, linking empire building and conquest with the temporal and developmental advancement of Oregon: "Land of the empire builders/Land of the golden west/Conquered and held by freemen/Fairest and the best/Onward and upward

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[94] The use of the Oregon Trail as a metaphor for the advancement of time itself echoes a key aspect of Oregon's settler colonial mythology since the 1840s: a logic of settler sovereignty and polity that holds that Oregon was built by the individual actions of white settlers, from the establishment of the Oregon Provisional Government in 1843 through the decades of settlement via the Trail and into contemporary politics of activism, protest, and anti-government sentiment. It is a more robust version of the American ideals of individualism and self-government, bolstered by the myth of the Pioneer. Recent examples of predominately white, settler-led actions such as the Occupy Portland movement in 2011, the hostile takeover of the Malheur Wildlife Refuge in 2016, and even the months-long demonstrations and actions at the Federal courthouse in 2020 all reveal a common logic of settler sovereignty despite their significant differences in political ideologies and tactics.

ever/Forward, and on and on/Hail to thee, Land of Heroes, My Oregon." *Klatawa* closed with an assertion of settler sovereignty over the land of Oregon ("conquered and held by freeman") but also over time. It advanced a way of thinking about time that claims American settlers are responsible for the advancement of time itself, via Lewis and Clark, the Oregon Trail, and the new Cascade Line of the Southern Pacific.

The Figure of the Indian in Settler Time

This notion of sovereignty over time, or that the trajectory of Oregon's settlers was equivalent to the trajectory of time itself, is a powerful affirmation of the supremacy of Oregon's settler state. This affirmation comes into sharp focus through the pageant's use of the Indian as a contrasting figure; however, the Indian is not primarily characterized as an oppositional figure, a stereotypical role common to Westerns and frontier stories.[95] In the pageant's opening lines, narrator Klatawa described it as a story of "the movement of Man in this the Oregon Country," making no distinction between the stories of white settlers and the Indigenous people of the region. That is, there is not one story for Indigenous people and one for American settlers. Though moments throughout laud the settlers' conquest of the land, this is not a story of conflict between settlers and

[95] I use the term Indian here to indicate how settler colonialism in practice tends to regard American Indians as an undifferentiated group whose primary value is determined through their relation to settlers. I use tribal designations when speaking about specific American Indian groups as much as possible in this chapter.

Indians. Instead, there is a single story in which the two groups are differentiated by their respective positions in the timeline depicted onstage and in the parade. The modes of transportation ascribed to the local Indigenous people—foot, canoe, horse—are superseded by the sailing ships, wagon trains, automobiles, railroads, and airplanes of the settlers.

Within this timeline, the Indian's relationship to settlers is not oppositional, but sequential. The figure of the Indian in the pageant served as a "before" for the settlers' "after," providing a reference point against which the settlers' technological superiority—and therefore their advanced evolutionary position—could be measured, thus justifying their invasion and settlement of the land as an act of civilizing and improvement.[96] This characterization did two things. It transformed Indigenous people from obstacles standing in the way of settler society—contemporaneous inhabitants with existing claims to the land—into pioneers themselves preparing the way for it, a claim famously advanced by Frederick Jackson Turner in his landmark 1893 address "The Significance of the Frontier in American History." *Klatawa*'s narrative of transportation is nearly

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[96] Oddly enough, *Klatawa's* narrative began with a Prelude about the Maya, erroneously suggesting a shared geography between them and Oregon. The episode described how this "ancient and mighty people" was supplanted by "Barbarians of the North." In his review for the *Register-Guard* newspaper, Frank Kay Eddy described the staging of the transition between the Maya prelude and "Episode I—the Early Coast Indian" as "the coming of rude tribes which swept over the *ancient cultured people* of pre-historic America" (Eddy, emphasis mine). The inclusion of the Maya in the pageant stems from a romanticized, nineteenth-century belief that the United States was the cultural heir to the Mayan empire (or at least the rightful custodian of their legacy), an Indigenous society apparently worthy of admiration and conveniently ancient, unlike contemporary Indigenous people in Oregon. See: Evans, R. Tripp, *Romancing the Maya: Mexican Antiquity in the American Imagination, 1820-1915*, (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2004).

identical to how Turner explained the way Indians “pioneered the way for civilization”: “The buffalo trail became the Indian trail, and this became the trader’s ‘trace’; the trails widened into roads, and the roads into turnpikes, and these in turn were transformed into railroads” (Turner 14).[97] The supersession of Native peoples by American settlers not only positions Eugene’s settler society at the forefront of civilization and progress, it also renders the Indigenous societies (and people) of the Pacific Northwest obsolete.

The manifestation of this trope through the spectacle of mass-scale pageantry and performed by the bodies of friends and neighbors gave these specific conceptions of time and history the effect of historical and natural fact. I will elaborate on the effect of naturalizing settler colonial logics and narratives via the body later in this chapter, but first want to draw attention to the work that temporalizing both Siletz and white settler bodies in this sequence accomplishes. *Klatawa*’s narrative and trajectory performed a conceptual “sleight of hand,” as geographer Doreen Massey puts it, turning “geography into history, space into time” and rearranging contemporaneously coexistent bodies, knowledges, spatialities, and temporalities into a linear sequence (Massey 11). This “sleight of hand” transforms the still-present Siletz people from potential threats to the settler project into the lingering remnants of what preceded colonization.

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[97] During the “Evolution of Transportation” episode, the narrator proclaims to the audience: “Gone forever the slow-paced movement that our forbears [*sic*] knew. Instead, locomotion swifter than the fleetest beast that spurns he ground, more powerful than the yoked might of all the beasts. Traffic multiplied a thousand-fold. The pulse of all life quickened to an electric velocity—thus the transportation of the present.”

This transformation of spatial co-presence into temporal sequence is part of settler colonialism's eliminatory logic. As long as Native people remain present, the legitimacy and security of the settler state is threatened.[98] The perceived threat posed by this presence was on display in a Eugene *Guard* article four months prior to the Trail to Rail Celebration on April 14th. The large banner headline of the edition boldly declared, "Indians on Warpath," the sub-headlines reading "Two Towns in Klamath Area are Menaced; Indian Braves, Indulging in Liquor, Dare Whites to Make Arrests; State and County men are Powerless to act Under Ruling" ("Indians on Warpath"). The article detailed a recent court decision that ruled that the Indians of the Klamath Reservation were wards of the government and were "immune from arrest by anyone but United States officials as long as they remain on the reservation" ("Indians on Warpath"). The article provides a window into settler fears about Indians in Oregon at the time of the pageant. Despite no reports of violence, the actions of the Klamath Indians were described as warfare, no differently than a newspaper might describe the armed resistance of the Lakota, Northern Cheyenne, and Arapaho at the Battle of the Greasy Grass (also known as the Battle of Little Bighorn).[99]

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[98] As others have noted, all that is needed for Native people to disrupt the settler project is to stay in place (Wolfe, *Settler Colonialism and the Transformation of Anthropology* 1; Veracini, *The Settler Colonial Present* 41).

[99] One of the common logics employed by settler colonialism (and imperialism more generally) is to recode acts of aggression as self-defense, concealing the violence of colonization behind claims of innocence and victimhood.

For white residents of the towns on the reservation (and readers of the newspaper), the Klamath Indians' assertion of their political status under the terms of their treaty with the United States (seen from the settler perspective as a rejection of settler law and order) was equivalent to an act of war which left settlers vulnerable. The article called for quick action, portending violence with a quote from local prosecutor E.L. Elliot: "Something must be done, and done quickly, or someone is going to be hurt" ("Indians on Warpath"). It is a telling article about Oregon in 1926, revealing the degree to which the maintenance of the established order is reliant on the subjugation of the Indian. It isn't so much that the Klamath Indians might physically harm a settler, but rather that the Indians' evasion of local law and order challenges settler legitimacy and authority and undermines the very stability of Oregon's settler society.

By transforming co-presence into temporal sequence, the contemporary political and territorial claims of the Siletz, Klamath, and other Indigenous nations are ignored and any potential tensions created by a spatial coexistence with still-present Indigenous people are smoothed over. The Indian has been transformed from a co-present Other into a historical predecessor, their near destruction reframed as the inevitable result what Turner called the "disintegrating forces of civilization [that] entered the wilderness" and what *Klatawa* depicted as the advancement of time itself by white settlers (quoted in Huhndorf 58).

As representation, *Klatawa* leveraged a linear historical narrative using the figure of the Indian to create an articulation of time that was, on its face, also

linear. Its temporal sequencing provided a solution to the spatial conditions of settler colonialism and contemporary anxieties about the "Indian problem."[100] But what happens when the Indian is suddenly present in front of you, no longer relegated to the past but marching in the streets? How does a consideration of embodied presence and performance challenge the representational maneuvers of *Klatawa*?

III: The Presence of the Siletz People

When the Siletz people marched through the streets of Eugene on August 19, 1926, they were placed within the narratives and temporalities established by *Klatawa* and the Trail to Rail Celebration. Parade organizer Cal Young explicitly sought out their presence so that the timeline of progress could be complete. In the weeks leading up to the pageant festivities, Young sent out letters to area Indian Agents soliciting the participation of Indians in the parade. In his letter to Klamath Agency Superintendent L.D. Arnold, the U.S. Indian Agent at the Klamath Reservation southeast of Eugene, Young explained his need for their presence:

> One of the many features of this parade will be the mode of traveling by the Indians when the whites first came to this state. We feel that this

[100] As geographer Natchee Blu Barnd notes, identity categories of settler and Indigenous are always about spatial conditions. These categories "always rest on the relationship between physical presence on a specific land and belonging, on relationships to home and belonging" and "point to ongoing and conflicting practices of space-making (inhabiting)…" (Barnd 10).

> celebration is a state affair and that your agency would be very glad to help us out in making this celebration a complete success. Do you think it possible to send 25 or 30 Indians to take part in our parade and pageant? (Young)

Notably, the letter was not an invitation to the Klamath Indians to join the pageant festivities; it was, in effect, a request for a loan. He described Indians like curiosities or artifacts needed to complete the collection he was assembling, alongside other needs like oxen, wagons, and stagecoaches. In a second letter to Arnold, Young asks what it would cost "to use them and return them to your agency," "them" being the Indians of the Klamath Reservation (Young).

Nobody from the Klamath Reservation participated in the parade, but the group from Siletz did and their agreement to do so was newsworthy. The Albany *Democrat-Herald* informed readers of the "latest attractions secured" for the Pioneer Parade: "a delegation of 30 Indians from Siletz Indian reservation near Newport" ("Local Interest"). Another article in the nearby Corvallis *Gazette-Times* explained how Young had visited the reservation the day before to secure their participation, using the slurs "bucks and squaws" in their headline to describe the Siletz people. Both articles promised "tribal garb and customs of the redmen" and explained they would travel in the parade "as they did before civilization gave them different modes of travel," that is, on foot ("Siletz Bucks"; "Local Interest").

Little else about the Siletz people was noted.[101] The articles described them as little more than exotic spectacles whose primitiveness bolstered the celebration's claims about the superiority of white settler civilization.

All of the reasons why the Siletz chose to participate in the parade are unknown. The Siletz Indians participated in the first four editions of the Pioneer Parade—in 1926, 1929, 1934, and 1937—before disappearing from the roster of entries. We know from correspondence in later years between Abe Logan and Young that they were paid for their appearances.[102] Siletz Tribal Council member and Cultural Resources Director Robert Kentta speculates that marching in the parade, like other public appearances made by the Siletz in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, was a way for them to defiantly remind the people of Oregon that they had not disappeared, despite the best efforts of the settler state. He speculates their thinking at the time was perhaps along the lines of: "we know they don't like us, have taken most of what we had, screw them, we'll go have a good time anyway, and show them we are still good people, not bitter...in spite of it all."[103] There is also the possibility, Kentta notes, that it was an opportunity to

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[101] The *Democrat-Herald* article did misleadingly state that "The Indians on the Siletz have always lived on the coast," ignoring the complex and geographically expansive history of the Siletz peoples, made up of many villages and bands who came from multiple regions of what is now Oregon and Northern California. One of the many examples of the reductive ways that Native people were (mis)perceived by white settler society. ("Local Interest")

[102] A July 1934 correspondence with Young reveals a discussion over the compensation offered by Young and the pageant organization. In his letter to Young, Logan pushes back on a lowball offer of $7.50 per person. Logan points out the sum was half of what they were paid the previous time (1929) and tells Young they will do it for $10. Young doesn't budge and demands a prompt reply. "I must have Indians," he writes, adding this final threat, "If I cannot get you, I will have to take those in Southern Oregon" (Young). The Siletz were named in the pageant program for that year and mentioned in the newspaper, presumably meaning they accepted Young's lower offer.

[103] Personal correspondence with Kentta, email messages May 2017 and April 2019.

show pride in ancestry and traditions at a time when these were marginalized or disallowed in society.

Ostensibly, given Young's letter and the framework of the pageants, the parade was a space of exploitation, utilizing the Native body to advance a narrative of white settler superiority. In this way, it was yet another example of settler society historicizing and dehumanizing Indigenous people in order to advance logics of racial and cultural superiority. Their presence in the parade affirmed popular racial logics like Lewis Henry Morgan's savage-civilized scale or what Jean O'Brien calls the "temporalities of race," a kind of thinking that "implicitly argued that Indians can never be modern because they cannot be the subjects of change, only its victims" (O'Brien 107).[104]

On the other hand, their mere presence refuted the idea that Indians were relics of the past. Events like the Pioneer Parade have long been used by Indigenous people as opportunities to assert their continuing presence in "the teeth of Empire," to borrow Audra Simpson's phrase (A. Simpson 158). Abe Logan's choice to lead the group wearing shirt, vest, and slacks was a strong counterpoint to any claim that Indians could not be modern, defying the stereotypes of Indians as primitive savages. Even if their presence was exploited by organizers to advance settler colonial narratives, it did not preclude the

[104] Anthropologist and cultural evolution theorist Lewis Henry Morgan popularized the notion that human societies existed along a savage-civilized scale in his 1877 work *Ancient Society, or Researches in the Lines of Human Progress from Savagery through Barbarism to Civilization*. American Indians have long been imagined and represented as savages in this way by settlers to advance and justify the settler colonial project.

parade from being utilized by the Siletz people for their own benefit. As Adria Imada and Linda Scarangella McNenly have shown in their work on hula and Wild West shows, respectively, Indigenous peoples have long navigated exploitative moments of public appearance like this for their own benefit.[105] These benefits have included work, freedom of movement, the assertion of identity and sovereignty, and the continuation of Indigenous practices and knowledges in the face of assimilation campaigns. Importantly, both can occur simultaneously, revealing the multiplicity of currents that run through these moments of performance.

Despite the pageant and parade casting them as historic relics, showing up in that space was a clear assertion of a shared present between Siletz and settler. As O'Brien and others like Philip Deloria have shown, insisting on coevalness between Native and non-Native people can powerfully elucidate and undermine the workings of settler colonialism (P. J. Deloria, *Indians in Unexpected Places*; O'Brien). However, despite the importance of coevalness in the face of ongoing attempts to cast Indigenous people as anachronistic or incapable of change, Mark Rifkin has also noted that "an emphasis on coevalness tends to bracket the ways that the idea of a shared present is not a neutral designation but is, instead, defined by settler institutions, interests, and imperatives" (Rifkin, *Beyond Settler Time* viii). What does it mean to frame the Siletz in the Pioneer Parade as coeval with Oregon's settler society? Given the

[105] See Imada (2012) and McNenly (2015).

tendency to assume settler conceptions and experiences of time as "natural" and Indigenous temporalities as cultural constructions, an insistence on coevalness raises the question of shared time and who or what defines it.[106]

Instead of considering the parade as a shared temporal present or a shared moment in time, considering it as the copresence of bodies in space allows for a more accurate and nuanced analysis. Defining the parade as shared space rather than shared time reveals an encounter between two communities with differing histories, different origins, and different ways of orienting themselves within and with time.[107] By recognizing this temporal multiplicity, we can consider the specificity of different temporal formations without recourse to a "neutral" or "universal" middle ground, thus eschewing the habit of defaulting to settler colonial temporality. We can also better see how embodied practices become vehicles for making temporalities tangible and for materializing futures, whether settler or Siletz.

Recognizing the multiplicity of temporality requires interrogating the markers which define and organize a given history or temporal trajectory—what

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[106] As Rifkin writes, "Asserting Indigenous people's and peoples' presence in the present, as opposed to casting them as anachronisms, does not necessarily redress the violence perpetrated through the organization of history around the coordinates of settler occupation—the treatment of non-native temporalities as the baseline for marking Native being-in-time" (Rifkin, *Beyond Settler Time* 1).

[107] This is one of the defining characteristics of space, as Doreen Massey argues, space as "the sphere of possibility of the existence of multiplicity;" multiplicity not being a static collection of things/people/etc., but the coming together of what she calls trajectories or stories—terms which capture "the process of change in a phenomenon" (Massey 10, 12). This includes specific conceptions and experiences of time; therefore, embedded within any space is a multiplicity of temporalities, not a single temporal framework within which objects coexist.

Rifkin refers to as the "frame of reference" necessary for registering "being-in-time" (I would add being in place, given the relationship between rightful territorial belonging and linear temporality in the pageants' histories).[108] For example, *Klatawa*'s clear narratives organized around transportation, racial supremacy, and the evolution of civilization provided the frame of reference for both Oregon's Indigenous peoples and its white settlers, locating both within a specific history and social hierarchy. What happens when we reframe the presence of the Siletz using Siletz frames of reference? What can be registered when the background established by *Klatawa* is replaced by Siletz histories, temporalities, temporal orientations, and embodied practices?

To "recalibrate" the Pioneer Parade against Siletz frames of reference, I turn to a practice called Nee Dosh, otherwise known as the Feather Dance, and establish a different trajectory within which the Pioneer Parade exists. This trajectory traces a history of Siletz dance practices and public appearances separate from the narrative of colonization and progress established by the pageant.

[108] Drawing from Einstein's work on the relativity of time, Rifkin argues that any assertion of "being-in-time" necessarily relies upon some kind of background or frame against which it can be measured. Given settler colonialism's reliance upon temporal sequencing and progressive time to justify their colonization and occupation of Indigenous homelands, "being-in-time" is also always a matter of being-in-place. Repeatedly throughout the *Oregon Trail Pageants,* Oregon is referred to as the "last and best frontier," the culmination of whichever long history the pageant is retelling.

The Trajectory of the Feather Dance/Nee Dosh

When Abe Logan, Archie Ben, Hoxie Simmons, and the others from the Siletz Reservation marched in the 1926 Pioneer Parade, the Siletz Indians had been making public appearances in regalia for decades. This included marching in parades and performing the Feather Dance/Nee Dosh at festivals, rodeos, clambakes, and tourist sites. By the turn of the 20th century, the Feather Dance was a well-established attraction in the region, especially in the coastal communities of Toledo and Newport and at Siletz itself. The dance was performed at Newport's Fourth of July festivities for over 25 years, becoming an expected part of the celebration (Youst and Seaburg 112). The frequent performance of the dance made its absence at events notable, so much so that it was worth mentioning in newspaper coverage. An 1894 article in Toledo's Lincoln County Leader about the Drift Creek July 4th celebration states emphatically that despite having no Indian Feather Dance, "We Did Have A Good Time" ("Glen Items"). The absence of the Feather Dance from a festival at Siletz three years later was the subject of a letter to the editor in the same paper. Local "young folks" were disappointed they could not attend the festivities that year, the author writes, but were consoled upon learning the feather dance was not performed, "as that was the main thing they wanted to go for" (Tinker).

Long before becoming an attraction on the Oregon Coast, the Nee Dosh originated with the Athapaskan peoples from what is now called southwest Oregon and northwest California. Though it came to be known as the Feather

Dance, Nee Dosh is also known as the World Creator dance. It was a major ceremony for the Tutuni people—one of the communities who came to Siletz when forced to leave their lands after the creation of the Coast Reservation in 1855—and was also practiced in Tolowa, a community in what is now called northwest California. When the Nee Dosh came to Siletz after the 1855 treaty, it joined other dance traditions that grew out of post-colonization life. This included the Ghost Dance movement of the 1870s and 1880s, most widely known for its connection to the massacre at Wounded Knee in 1890, which came to the Siletz and Grand Ronde reservations from California in the 1870s.[109] Its local manifestation at Siletz was called the Warm House Dance and six Warm House Dance houses were quickly built on the reservation.

The Warm House Dance movement provided the Siletz people a way to move forward after the horrors and tragedies of American invasion and the continuing onslaught of assimilation practices. Like the Ghost Dance, the Warm House Dances "promised the return of ancestors…and the return of tribal autonomy" and became strategies for "moving into a new world" using anchors in the old, writes Charles Wilkinson in his history for the CTSI (Wilkinson 198). It promised a new future for the Siletz peoples, but one grounded in the past.

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[109] Commenting on the Wounded Knee massacre, Nick Estes (Kul Wicasa Oyate, Lower Brule Sioux) notes how the Ghost Dance was always more than a dance to the American government: "But if it was *just* dancing that was the threat, then why did the United States deploy nearly half its army against starving, horseless, and unarmed people in order to crush it" (Estes 24)? Native dance has never been just dancing, but a sign of Native life and a stubborn resistance to the United States' desires for control and dominance of Native people and land.

Coquelle Thompson (Upper Coquille) described the arrival of the dance to Siletz via a man named Bogus Tom, “He [Tom] said we were Indians and should not believe the white ways. ‘They put things down in books, anything they want. We Indians see what is right. We have to give these dances. They are right for us’” (Wilkinson 199). Even though the promised return of the dead did not materialize as hoped for, the Warm House Dance provided the Siletz peoples with hope and continued Indigenous lifeways during a dark and uncertain time. As Wilkinson writes, “With assimilationist pressures swirling all around, the Warm House Dance afforded a much-needed link to the great dancing traditions of the western Oregon tribes. With all of its limitations, the Warm House Dance helped keep old embers burning” (Wilkinson 200). Dancing offered the Siletz people a path toward an Indigenous future in the face of tremendous pressure to abandon Indigenous identity, culture, and sovereignty.

As part of the effort to assimilate the Siletz people and eliminate tribal dances and culture, all six dance houses built on the Siletz reservation in the 1870s during the Warm House Dance movement were burned to the ground by federal agents by the end of the decade. Despite these efforts and the passage of the Indian Religious Crimes Code in 1883 forbidding Indigenous dance practices, the Siletz people were still dancing decades later. In his annual reports from 1919-1922, Office of Indian Affairs Superintendent Edwin Chalcraft repeatedly noted the lingering presence of the Feather Dance but assured his superiors that it was benign. “A few of the more worthless element among the

Indians still participate in a feather dance, occasionally, which has no religious nor political significance," he wrote in 1919. The following year, Chalcraft again noted that "a few of the less progressive element…have kept up the feather dance," but not to excess and only a few times a year: "I am of the opinion that the feather dance will also disappear in a short time," he concluded (Chalcraft).[110] In all four reports, Chalcraft insisted the dance had no political or religious significance and would soon disappear, revealing an anxiety around dances like the Nee Dosh as threats to settler assimilation efforts. Either Chalcraft believed the dance was actually non-religious and apolitical (a misrecognition of its significance for the Siletz people) or he insisted it was despite knowing otherwise to appease his superiors and excuse its persistence at Siletz (an attempt to prove the effectiveness of federal bans on dancing and assuage settler anxieties).

The Feather Dance survived these years in spite of the 1883 Indian Religious Crimes Code in several ways. Because an explicit acknowledgement of the religious significance of the Feather Dance was not allowed, dancing moved underground after the dance houses were burned and was practiced in people's homes to avoid federal persecution. It also became, in the words of Tribal Council Vice Chairman Bud Lane, "this thing that hitchhiked on to other events," a reference to the many public performances of the dance at local events

[110] Note Chalcraft's use of the term "progressive" to differentiate between those who are amenable to assimilation into settler society and those who continue to practice Indigenous dances, another glimpse of the temporalities of race and civilization underlying US Indian policy.

(SmithsonianFolklife). While the dance persisted underground at Siletz, the dance survived publicly as entertainment, seen by the settler public as a safe relic of the past. What was performed in public was, according to Abe Logan, a "white man's show": "The whites used to call the Indians to put on a show, so they used the Dream dance feathers and songs and called it the Feather dance" (du Bois 35). The Feather Dance/Nee Dosh was regularly performed at local festivals at the turn of the 20th century. When perceived by settler society as a cultural artifact or spectacle—a seemingly safe, contained, and apolitical demonstration of exotic or "savage" Indianness—the dance was embraced and welcomed by white settler communities.

The persistence and popularity of the dance in white settler communities can be traced in the local press. Descriptions of the dance were usually combined with coded assurances of its benign nature and the successes of assimilation. A 1918 *Lincoln County Leader* article praised the Siletz Indians' recent performance of the dance for soldiers in Waldport, but most of the article is focused on their successful assimilation into settler society: the integration of Indian children into public schools, Indian citizenship and army service, and recalling the urging of the late Depoe Charlie, a "full blooded Indian" who urged his people to "take up the new and better ways of the white man's civilization"

(“Siletz”).[111] Four years later, the paper contextualizes the dance within the ideology of assimilation again, though more harshly. It describes a big dance put on by “the old people” in response to a payout made by the agency superintendent for the sale of tribal timber land, concluding, “The Indians know now they are cut loose from the government and they must hoe their own row with the white race. So it comes down to survival of the fittest.” The dance is also explained as nothing more than a fun activity: “It is harmless and looks well and I am sure no ones [*sic*] morals will be hurt by it” (“Siletz”). The paper even suggests the dance would be a good addition to public schools for the exercise it provides.

Despite settler society’s claims about the decline and disappearance of Indigenous life, the Siletz people’s embodied practices of dancing and public appearance offered an avenue to sustain Siletz life through decades of explicit attempts to suppress it. Kept alive by events like the *Oregon Trail Pageants* and private home dances, the Feather Dance continued to fuel Siletz life despite

[111] The citation of Depoe Charlie to rationalize the superiority of white settler civilization completely erases the many ways he worked throughout his life to preserve Siletz life and land. Charlie was from the Ya-shu-eh (Joshua) band of the Tutuni along the Rogue River and is the namesake for Depoe Bay, Oregon, which is located on his family’s allotment land. Depoe Charlie is recognized for keeping the Tutuni creation story alive through the period of removal to Siletz, spreading the Ghost Dance from Siletz to southern Oregon and northern California, and a speech given to a federal Inspector from the BIA in 1873 protesting a proposal to open the Siletz reservation to further settlement by whites. In this speech, Depoe Charlie explains how the Siletz people are working to become “good” as the church has taught them to be and advocates on behalf of his people to have what is necessary to thrive: a sawmill, a flour mill, wagons, and the ability to sell their goods. Adopting “white man’s civilization” was not about assimilation, but about survival and ensuring Siletz futurity. He explicitly tells the inspector that it is also about maintaining the Siletz land base: “I don’t want them to take this land from us; want you to keep this in your heart” (Wilkinson 210; “Early History & The DePoe Family”).

consistent efforts by the settler state to eliminate it. Even as a “white man’s show,” the Feather Dance was a seed waiting to fully germinate. When seen in the context of this trajectory, the simple act of marching in the Pioneer Parade can be seen one act among many that connected an Indigenous, pre-colonization past with an Indigenous future sustained in the face of ongoing attempts to undermine sovereignty, eliminate Indigenous language and culture, and dispossess Indigenous peoples of their land.

IV: The Body, Temporal Orientations, and Performance

The presence of the Siletz in Eugene that day was about more than indexing a different timeline or trajectory than that established by the pageant and parade. The physical presence of the Siletz people in the streets of Eugene also indexed a different set of temporal orientations than those shaping the pageant’s imagination of time, space, and belonging. Mark Rifkin emphasizes temporal orientations over discrete conceptions of time in his theorization of settler temporality. To think of temporal orientations, he writes, regards time as something other than a container holding events. “Being-in-time,” Rifkin suggests, is not a moment with a “successive series of presents,” but a present containing within itself “an impetus born from what’s been and directed toward particular goals, ends, horizons” (Rifkin, *Beyond Settler Time* 17). Differing temporalities are not merely a matter of different perspectives on the same series

of events, or parallel timelines, but also a matter of differing orientations, born from differing conditions, that move us toward specific ends.

By paying attention the body in performance during these events—both Siletz and settler—the significance of temporal orientation becomes clearer. In the midst of these settler temporal orientations are the people from Siletz, bearing witness to a different set of temporalities and temporal orientations. The practice of Nee Dosh provides a potent example of this difference. More than an artistic expression, Nee Dosh was a vehicle for the Siletz people to renew and maintain right relationships among themselves and between themselves and the world around them. Charles Wilkinson describes the dance and its purposes:

> At Nee Dosh, a dance still held today, the prayers are chanted, one by one, explaining how the world was put together and thanking the Creator for making the land, the people, and the animals and for giving them *duh-neh*, their place. A world renewal ceremony intended to 'fix the world,' the prayers remind the people of the blessings of the Creator and their responsibility to keep the world right. (Wilkinson 26)

Unlike the linear, progressive temporality of the pageants, Nee Dosh reveals an underlying circular temporality organized around return, renewal, and balance. One man from Tolowa described the dance as follows: “Every year we go to the center of our world…this is where life began for our people…” (Wilkinson 26).

Nee Dosh is also about place, as Wilkinson notes. He elaborates on the Siletz idea of *duh-neh*, writing: “This is the one place where a person is from,

where all the people all the way back are from, where the ancestors are buried. This is the only place, the heart place. There can be no other place" (Wilkinson 17). The future brought about through Nee Dosh is not to come, a new frontier, but what has always been; it is not attained via progress, evolution, or a linear journey from past to present, but by an emphasis on sustaining and maintaining balance of what has been. Or perhaps more accurately, *where* you have been.[112]

This notion of place evoked in Nee Dosh is noticeably different from the pageant's assertion of Oregon as the "last and best frontier," a promised land for the weary pioneer. The temporality is not dependent on what is to come—it does not promise future redemption or a more evolved state, nor is it conceptualized as a linear movement toward a new frontier. It is more characteristic of what Paula Gunn Allen (Laguna Pueblo) describes as "achronicity": "Achronicity is the kind of time in which the individual and the universe are 'tight'…. It is a sense of time…knitting person and surroundings into one…" (Allen 71–72). Gunn Allen's term is useful, but potentially deceptive; Nee Dosh is not merely the negation of chronological time or the absence of temporal motion. What Wilkinson describes is similar to Giorgio Agamben's description of Greek time. The circular temporality of Greek time, he writes, "has no direction…it has no beginning, no

[112] This is not to say that settler temporalities are not also connected to land and modes of inhabitance. They are, just differently connected, governed by a different set of logics, practices, and imaginaries. As Patrick Wolfe writes, "[W]hen settlers dispossess Natives of their land, they violate a collective life-world. Correspondingly, in replacing that life-world with a social system based on an instrumental concept of land as alienable property, settlers create a new and fundamentally alienated alternative life-world of their own. Settler social institutions are not less tied to land than Native ones. They are differently tied" (Wolfe, "Recuperating Binarism" 268–69).

middle, and no end." But, he adds, it is not absent of motion: "it has them in so far as its circular motion returns unceasingly back on itself" (Agamben 92). The circular and sustaining temporality of Nee Dosh may emphasize territorial *presence* over a chronological *present*, but it is not static. It is a circular movement, which, as Henri-Charles Puech writes, "guarantees the unchanged preservation of things through their repetition and continual return" (quoted in Agamben 92).[113]

The circular temporality of Nee Dosh also indexes a relational mode of inhabitance marked by interconnection and obligation. In a 1975 interview with tribal member Robert Rilatos, he describes a set of ceremonies held at Depoe Bay in the 1940s. His description explicitly points to the temporal orientation of obligation embedded within Siletz ceremonial practices:

> [T]hey'd spend weeks or months, or whatever it took to gather all the provisions that was necessary. So, the encampment didn't last for one day, it lasted till they filled their provisions, their supplies. And in the meantime, they were always in festivity, because in Indian history, in the culture, they gave Thanksgiving [sic] to everything, everything, and they done it by dancing, whether it was the sun or the moon, or whatever, time had no meaning. Time is meaningless. (Rilatos 12)

[113] Puech emphasizes the "unchanged preservation of things," but the Siletz people have undergone immense changes since the settling of Oregon. What has been preserved are some links to a pre-colonization past and the specific lifeways, temporalities, and modes of inhabitance of their constituent communities.

What Rilatos describes is a practice, culture, and history not dependent on arriving at a specific point in linear time or development, but on fulfilling what is necessary in order to properly give thanks. The "right" time was determined by what was required to maintain readiness or balance, to fulfill an obligation of gratitude.[114]

Rilatos points to a very different sense of time than what *Klatawa* articulated. In *Klatawa*, time (or its specific construction of time) is *crucial* to its labor of justifying the superiority of white settlers over the region's Indigenous inhabitants, and therefore, rationalizing settler possession and occupation of the land. What Wilkinson and Rilatos describe is a recursive temporality in which place, *duh-neh*, provides both the impetus and the end point—perhaps renewing the "tight" bond between self and surroundings that Gunn Allen describes. It is a temporality born of a relationship with place, not a temporality utilized to legitimize power over place.

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[114] As Wilkinson notes, the labor required to maintain Siletz life, including the preparation required for ceremonies like Nee Dosh, often went unrecognized by white settlers. The reductive identities imposed on the Siletz by settler society completely missed the value and underlying complexity of Indigenous life. If it did not fit into the schema of the settler worldview, it was either unrecognized or misrecognized as incompetence, laziness, or savagery. He writes: "How could the white people have failed to appreciate the intense labor of making salmon nets, spears, and cedar canoes and then harvesting the catch, often in driving Oregon rains? The weeks of preparation, the precision, and the spirituality that bathes the traditional Nee Dosh dances in the dance houses constructed of cedar planks? The grace of a fine basket crafted of spruce roots and hazel sticks with intricate design and the long labor it took to gather and twin the materials?" (Wilkinson 176)

The Complexities of Settler Time

Yet, in *Klatawa*, the logics of settler colonialism like cultural hierarchies, linear progressive time, and white supremacy also shaped an orientation that was directed toward the ongoing maintenance of a relationship to place. Granted, it was a different relationship to place, but when the settler community of Eugene performed the pageants' versions of history, the distance between past and present established by their narratives collapsed. At the very least, the difference between past and present were conflated. The performing settler body—the primary medium through which history was being materialized—created an effect of experiencing "real" history. The performing body testified to the validity of the pageant's representations by making them seem real to participants and spectators. In doing so, the effect of history-made-present through the performing body revealed temporalities that were, in actuality, more recursive and cyclical than strictly linear, belying the dominant temporalities of the pageants, i.e., linear, progressive, and unidirectional.

Traces of this phenomena are present across the lifespan of the *Oregon Trail Pageants*. An article in the newspaper's July 25, 1941 edition described the Pioneer Parade as an irruption of the past into the present made possible through the bodies of the participants: "History came alive and real life stopped Friday morning while Lane county's pioneers and their children and their children's-children told the story of civilization's winning of the west in a colorful panorama of pioneer days" ("50,000 Watch Panorama of Early Days"). The

parading bodies provided a direct link to a bygone era, but embodied performances also provided evidence for the veracity of the pageants' depictions of history. In a retrospective 1953 editorial in the Eugene Register-Guard, the editors described the pageants as being more "genuine" when compared to other representations of the past, in part because there were "so many people who had only to re-live what had been a part of their lives" (Editorial Board).[115] As participants "enfleshed" the particular historical imagination being represented on stage and in the parades, they supplied the pageants' claims with tangible substantiation, conflating theatrical representation with historical reality.

However, participants' bodies did not merely testify to the veracity of the representations created on stage, they were also the locus of history itself. In her work on reenactment, previously discussed in Chapter One, Rebecca Schneider resituates the site of history from the historical event in the past to the embodied practices of transmitting knowledge of the past in the present. History, she proposes, is not a "set of sedimented acts" secure in the past, but "the act of securing any incident backward—the repeated act of securing memory" in "ritual repetition" (Schneider 104). The enactment of history is more than a representation of the past "in the flesh," but the working out of the past in the present. Through performance, the past was being newly created in the present.

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[115] For many participants in the early years, the pageant narrative was about their own personal history of crossing the trail and settling the Willamette Valley. Perhaps the most famous pioneer present at the 1926 Trail to Rail Celebration was Pioneer Parade Grand Marshall Ezra Meeker, who also appeared onstage in *Klatawa*. In later years, the pageant was still personal history, albeit mostly the story of participants' parents or grandparents.

Schneider argues this repeated ritual of securing the past is necessitated by the inherent incompleteness of “pastness” itself, writing: “[I]t is the very pastness of the past that is never complete, never completely finished, but incomplete: cast into the future as a matter for ritual negotiation and as yet undecided interpretive acts of *reworking*” (Schneider 33). Perhaps, but in a settler colonial context, to characterize the past as incomplete resonates differently. As Lorenzo Veracini notes, “settler society is always…a society ‘to come,’ characterised by the promise rather than the practice of a truly ‘settled’ lifestyle” (Veracini, *Settler Colonialism a Theoretical Overview* 23).[116] The persistently “unsettled” nature of settler colonialism is largely due to the continual presence and resistance of Indigenous people, as well as the inability of settlers to completely forsake or separate themselves from the violent mechanisms which facilitate and legitimize their territorial occupancy and political power.

Thus, historical reenactment on the pageant stage must be understood as responding to (or compelled by) the inherent instability of both Oregon’s spatial conditions and the identity category of settler itself. “Working out” a past of settlement and colonization on the pageant stage is therefore also an attempt to “work out” contestations around land, belonging, and power, for all colonized land

[116] By incomplete, I do not mean an easily corrected flaw or an unfinished process to be inevitably completed in the future, but an indication of internal contradictions or dialectical tensions not easily resolvable. Perhaps instead of incompleteness, it is more appropriate to think of “incompletability.”

is contested land.[117] The body, carrying out the pageants' reworking of Oregon history, becomes not merely the "locus of history," but a mechanism to resolve the tensions inherent in the settler colonial condition.[118]

The potential for the body to give the pageant's narratives power and legitimacy, as well as smooth over settler colonial tensions, can be glimpsed in an interview recorded as part of a retrospective oral history project about the pageants for the Lane County Historical Museum in 1987. Mary Eva Culver was a participant in the 1947 pageant and described the experience of performing on stage; her mother-in-law, Mabel Culver, described her experience seeing multiple editions of the pageants and parades. Not only did this interview show traces of the continual "working out" of settler society via embodied practice, but Mary Eva's recollections also described an affective and embodied experience that muddles neat divisions of past and present, physical sensation and historical truth, and the self and the state. Her own experience of time in the moment of performance—multiple, non-linear, recursive—belies the linear chronology of progress that undergirds many of the pageants' claims while simultaneously relying upon ideas of past, present, and future.

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[117] I once again refer to Mark Rifkin's excellent diagnosis of this reality, regardless of whether or not one is aware of it: "The fact that there is not, or I do not perceive there to be, an active political struggle over the place I inhabit does not mean it and my apprehension of it somehow exist outside or beyond ongoing histories of settler–Indigenous negotiation, antagonism, and conflict" (Rifkin, *Settler Common Sense* xvi).

[118] This is also one of Philip Deloria's primary arguments in *Playing Indian*, as mentioned in Chapter Two. The indeterminacy of American identity and its inherent contradictions, he argues, can find stasis, at least temporarily, through the performing bodies of white settlers "playing Indian." See: Deloria, Philip Joseph. *Playing Indian*. Yale University Press, 1998.

In her interview, Mary Eva described the pageants as an opportunity to "be in touch with our roots," where "family members could…act the role of some of their ancestors" (H. Simpson 2). To be "in touch" seems to be about more than remembrance or commemoration, but something more in line with Schneider's use of the phrase: "To touch is not to become coextensive…but it is to (partially) collapse the distance marking one thing as fully distinct from another" (Schneider 35). Mary Eva described seeing performers "coming down in the wagon, and they would really be their, their ancestors," to which interviewer Hugh Simpson replied, "That's right" and "Absolutely" (H. Simpson 3). The conflation of past and present, of representation and reality, is reiterated by Mabel when describing the Pioneer Parades: "I just felt like I was seeing these pioneers, uh, family of mine, going by…It was very real" (H. Simpson 10). For the Culvers, the past manifested on stage and in the streets of Eugene, and the past of historical fact, were blurred together into a single reality.

This experience was not merely temporal conflation on the part of the Culvers and other participants, but also an effect of performing that Shannon Jackson describes as "ideologically binding its embodied performers" (Jackson 358). In her work on settlement-house theatre, Jackson shows how the binding of performers and specific ideologies can occur without notice, "naturally and by example," as one settlement-house theatre participant reflected (Jackson 358). We can see this in Mary Eva's description of her experience performing in the pageant. She described more than a connection with the past (or collapse of past

and present), but also as an experience in which individual and communal identity becomes equivalent to Oregon itself:

> So there we were, and we didn't have to proclaim our pride, you know, and we still don't, it was there, in every movement that we made, and, uh, when we acted our role, no matter if it was minor or, or really prominent, why, uh, we could bring a sense of real belonging to that spectacle…. It was sort of our individual contribution that made that performance real, you know? Real for us, and real for them, and real for each other, that watched and all…. And that's what happened, you know, it just lifted us off our feet and, in, into the feel of it didn't it…? Cause I was I, and you were you, and uh, together we were Oregon…. (H. Simpson 3–4)

Mary Eva described the sensation of historical veracity that embodied practice can provide, but also described an experience of conflation between self and the settler state itself. *We were Oregon*. It is an ideological binding between body, sensation, and the many rationalizations of settler presence advanced through the pageants. The political and historical imagination represented on stage, its territorial claims, and its immediacy are all operationalized through the embodied and affective experience of performance. It was there in "every movement we

made," she said, a binding of self and state—and by extension, the *land* encompassed by the state—at the granular level of a body in action.[119]

What Culver described was not merely a social phenomenon but was dependent on political claims to Indigenous lands. The sensations felt by Mary Eva were made possible by the quotidian practices of settler inhabitance, ideologies of racial and cultural superiority, and the temporal formations crafted by the pageants and parades. The experience of performance translated the representations created on stage—of history, of time, of whiteness, and of Oregon—into felt sensations of certainty, something that participants other than Culver likely felt as well. This is the "settler common sense" described by Mark Rifkin, an affective formation arising from settler institutions and territorial claims providing sensations of certainty, normalizing presence and power, and providing "generic conditions of possibility for occupancy, association, history, and personhood" (Rifkin, Settler Common Sense xv). The conditions which enabled Culver's identification with Oregon were both the broader social and spatial conditions of settler colonial Oregon as well as the specific narrative and

[119] Grant Farred describes a process of re-narrativizing expropriation, in which the violent events of colonization are transformed into a historic affiliation with the land "to ensure that there is no difference between the settler and the land" (Farred 797). The pageants' use of the Oregon Trail as a motif over the years provided an effective way to re-narrativize the expropriation of Indigenous homelands by American settlers, but only insofar as land and the settler space of Oregon were imagined as equivalent. When Culver concluded "We were Oregon," she was declaring an affiliation with a political state and/or social community. The equivalence between those sociopolitical formations and the territory they occupy are presumed, but it is dependent on a host of practices, logics, and ideologies which obscure or deny other coexistent ways of imagining and inhabiting the land, especially those of the region's Indigenous communities which pre-date and survive the imposition of settler colonial regimes.

ideological frameworks of the pageants and parades themselves. It was the embodied and affective experience of performance, however, that made the connection feel real and natural.[120]

Importantly, Culver also described this experience as a practice of future-making. It was more than merely making the past feel real and relevant: "In that pageantry and the music and communication I kind of got in touch with the future commitment to Oregon as it is today for me and my seventh-generation grandchildren" (H. Simpson 6–7).[121] For her, the affective and embodied experience of performing renewed her commitment to Oregon's settler colonial project, citing "our future dreams" as a "very precious beacon" guiding the way (H. Simpson 7). The experiences generated by the pageants—framed and interpreted through their historical narratives, temporal trajectories, and abstractions of the Oregon Trail—created new ways for participants and spectators alike to commit themselves to Oregon's settler colonial project, renewing its claim to the land and further securing its future.

When the body is made a focus of the *Oregon Trail Pageants*, a more complex dance between temporality, performance, and settler colonial Oregon emerges. The impetuses driving settler temporal orientations can be more clearly

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[120] What Culver describes is similar to one of the outcomes of what Scott Magelssen's calls "simming," the activation of a simulation's narratives and ideologies—here the pageants' simulations of the past—and the creation of new meaning through participatory performance (Magelssen, *Simming* 6).

[121] Culver's use of "seventh generation," a phrase originating from the Great Law of the Haudenosaunee, the confederacy's founding document, is presumably without irony.

identified, impetuses inherent to the instabilities of the settler colonial condition: contested land, unsettled identity, and the ongoing "problem" of Indigenous presence.

However, alongside these settler performances and temporalities, there was another set of practices with its own embedded temporalities, impetuses, and orientations. As the Siletz people marched in the parade, they did so against the backdrop and representational frameworks established by the pageant and parade. Their physical presence in the streets of Eugene was interpreted and given meaning to spectators by these frameworks. Yet, within this context, their proud assertions of Indigeneity refuted the pageant and parade's attempts to historicize them. Additionally, their presence marked a completely different set of frameworks, including the indomitable trajectories of the Siletz peoples and the circular temporalities of renewal embedded within their embodied practices. Seen against this frame of reference, the act of marching in the parade is revealed as one among many ways the Siletz people have sustained Siletz life and culture amid Oregon's efforts to eliminate and subjugate Indigenous life, land, and sovereignty.

Perhaps most crucially, their presence introduced a different set of temporalities and orientations into the settler space of Eugene, one that existed alongside—and outside—those established by settler colonial desires and priorities. The introduction of these differing ways of imagining and inhabiting time and space—as exemplified by Nee Dosh—registers as a powerful, if subtle,

critique of settler claims to superiority, legitimacy, and universality. This critique was not necessarily defined by open and hostile resistance to colonization, or solely by a rejection of anachronization, but rather by its ability to foster and sustain possibilities for life, inhabitance, and identity beyond the settler state. In this way, it could be considered "counter-colonial," following Vincente Diaz and Adria Imada.[122] Like the hula performers Imada writes about, Siletz paraders "inserted and created discrepant scenarios for themselves" in this space of exploitation and "managed to seize their time on and off the stage for their own discrepant practices and desires" (Imada 17). Along with other embodied practices and utilizations of public appearance, the Siletz people's march through the streets of Eugene actively nurtured Siletz life and eschewed settler impositions on Siletz space, time, land, bodies, and futurity.[123]

V: Coda

A binary is often reiterated regarding settler and Indigenous temporalities—the former dependent on the flow of linear, progressive time; the

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[122] For more, see Diaz (2010) and Imada (2012).

[123] In addition to continuing to dance Nee Dosh, the Siletz people have begun another embodied practice which sustains Siletz life and their connections to their lands. In 1995, the CTSI ran the first "Run to the Rogue," a 234-mile retracing of the journey their ancestors were forced to take when forcibly removed from the Rogue River region up to present-day Siletz. As tribal members walk or run the route, they commemorate the past but also renew their connections with their ancestral homelands. The route takes them from the current tribal headquarters in Siletz, through the former sites of constituent villages and ends at the site where, in 1856, headmen Tyee George, Limpy Tyee, and Tyee John met with Col. R.C. Buchanan to end the Rogue River Wars and agree to go to the reservation.

latter on something more oriented around place. Vine Deloria, Jr. (Lakota, Standing Rock Sioux) emphasizes this distinction in his work on religion, *God is Red,* writing:

> American Indians hold their lands—places—as having the highest possible meaning, and all their statements are made with this reference point in mind. Immigrants review the movement of their ancestors across the continent as a steady progression of basically good events and experiences, thereby placing history—time—in the best possible light…. The very essence of Western European identity involves the assumption that time proceeds in a linear fashion…. (V. Deloria 61)

While Deloria may be correct in his generalization of the differences between settler and Indigenous sources for ideology and meaning-making, this bifurcation of time and space often leads to linear time being seen as the *only* form of settler temporality.[124]

This presumption was recently reiterated by Nick Estes (Kul Wicasa Oyate, Lower Brule Sioux) in his 2019 book on Indigenous resistance, *Our History Is the Future*:

> Settler narratives use a linear conception of time to distance themselves from the horrific crimes committed against Indigenous peoples and the

[124] Hence the value of Rifkin's emphasis on temporal orientations, not discretely defined temporalities. This not only allows for the consideration of multiple temporal formations, but an interrogation of a given temporalities conditions of emergence, intentions, end goals, effects, and qualities of flow.

> land. This includes celebrating bogus origin stories like Thanksgiving. But Indigenous notions of time consider the present to be structured entirely by our past and by our ancestors. There is not separation between past and present, meaning that an alternative future is also determined by our understanding of our past. Our history is the future. (Estes 14–15)

While Estes is correct that settler narratives often employ linear time for their own purposes, it is not the only temporality produced and leveraged by the settler state to legitimize itself and preserve power. Settler society may *claim* that time is linear and thus, the "horrific crimes" of the past are distant, but as Patrick Wolfe and others have shown, settler society is, like Estes writes of Indigenous presents, "structured entirely by our past and by our ancestors."

Understanding the differences between settler and Native societies is necessary and important. Wolfe has argued that we cannot fully reckon with the realities of settler colonial societies—and the fundamental issue of land at their centers—without recognizing the primary binary between settler (invader) and Native.[125] One of the strategies of settler states to obscure this fundamental binary is to emphasize pluralism or multiculturalism. Instead of being recognized

[125] In "Recuperating Binarism: a Heretical Introduction," Wolfe writes about the fundamental binary implied by the idea of the settler colonial frontier: "For all its empirical inadequacy, the concept of the frontier has the virtue of expressing the protean fact of a historical coming together of societies that had previously been mutually discrete. Prior to a certain point or points, their separateness had been unqualified…. Behind all the indeterminacy, the frontier is a way of talking about the historical process of territorial invasion—a cumulative depredation through which outsiders recurrently advance on Natives in order to take their place. Go back far enough, in other words, and there can be no disputing the existence of an unqualified empirical binarism." (Wolfe, "Recuperating Binarism" 257)

as distinct sovereign peoples with discrete histories and cultures from the settler state, Indigenous peoples are often defined as one part included or subsumed into a diverse melting pot.[126] Binarism is useful to cut through these claims which ignore Indigenous sovereignty, deny Indigenous rights to land and resources, and, as Francis Fukuyama put it (in another context) in his infamous essay "The End of History," falsely declare "the total exhaustion of viable systematic alternatives" (Fukuyama 3). By acknowledging the persistent existence of "life-worlds" outside of and beyond settler society, the settler-Native binary can refute the so-called universality of settler colonial ideologies and affirm the validity of Indigenous life, culture, and political sovereignty.[127] However, equating the settler-Native binary with two singular conceptions of time overlooks and underestimates settler colonialism's tenacity and adaptability in preserving itself.

Focusing on the matter of temporality over the entirety of the *Oregon Trail Pageants* reveals settler society's utilization of multiple temporalities to preserve its own power. This includes the ways that the performing body complicates the representation and experience of time, as described above, but it also includes

[126] The 1941 pageant had an episode titled "America, the Melting Pot" featuring dances with different ethnic origins—Spanish, Scandanavian, Irish, Scottish, etc. The final dance in the "melting pot" was an "Indian Dance." Indigenous people were reduced to being one ethnic group among many. This reduction of sovereign Native nations into one among many racial or ethnic group in a multicultural America is still very common. For example, in an exhibit about the historic diversity of Salem, Oregon at the Willamette Heritage Center, Native people are listed and featured as one of many people who have called the city home. The exhibit introduction reads: "Over the centuries, thousands of families have called Salem 'home'—from Native American families, to those of early settlers, to newly arriving immigrants, to modern families."

[127] Wolfe uses the term "life-world" to signify that the fundamental territoriality of settler colonialism is "not merely a statement about real estate," but reflects the violation of an existing "collective life-world" with another one based on alternative ways of being tied to the land (Wolfe, "Recuperating Binarism" 268–69).

the pageants' shifting historiography over time. All seven iterations of the pageants presented the history of settlement via the trail as the future for Eugene, dispelling Estes' notions that linear time is about distancing settler societies from past horrors.[128] In the *Oregon Trail Pageants*, linear time is always used to argue that the past is *not* distant from the present and is a gateway to the future. The titular metaphor for the Trail to Rail Celebration explicitly describes the present as a continuation or expansion of a glorious past. The successors to *Klatawa* made a similar case, rewriting and reimaging history to respond to changing socio-political conditions. No matter what challenges or promises the contemporary moment presented, the mythology of the Oregon Trail was always relevant for Eugene and the key to securing a better future.

In the 1929 pageant, dedicated to a dwindling pioneer generation, the future was to be secured by indulging humanity's natural and persistent desire to explore and seek out new frontiers, the same desire that drove the colonization of Oregon (and propelled time itself forward, like in *Klatawa*). In 1941, on the eve of World War II, that exploratory desire was replaced by humanity's continuing pursuit of freedom and democracy.[129] In 1947, two years after the close of World

[128] There are many ways in which settler colonial societies obscure their historic and present violences. Distancing via historicization is only one way.

[129] The 1941 pageant is the most explicit in articulating white supremacist ideology. Eugene itself is described as "the fusion" of "two mighty currents"—the land of Oregon and the white race—and the pageant is divided into sections on each, the land and the race. Pageant committee chairman L.L. Ray explained that Native people fit into the first half of this new dramatic structure in a letter to a local newspaper editor: "The Indian scenes can be placed immediately following [the first episode] so as to show the Indian here while the land rested and waited through the ages for the coming of a race of men worthy to occupy it" (Ray).

War II and in the throes of the baby boom, the pageant focused on domestic and civic themes, closing with yet another interpretation of the Oregon Trail: "The trail that is man's endless quest/For home and peace and happiness/leads onward to the future" (Eugene Pageant Association, *Oregon Trail Pageant 1947* 27).

The pageants created multiple different frameworks through which participants could understand themselves, their relationship to the land, and their relationship to the Indigenous people of the region. No matter which trajectory was traced through time and no matter how history was interpreted, it worked to rationalize a white settler status quo. While these narratives may appear to be reliant on linear conceptions of time, they all presented the future as a preservation of the past. The pageants' shifting and flexible historiography continuously made the past *present*, collapsing the distance between the two and imagining the future as a continuation of the colonization work ushered in by the Oregon Trail. This includes holding on to the possession of land, the expansion of extractive capitalism, and the development of settler institutions.

In 1950, the final pageant was once again restructured. It's primary organizing theme was now the geographical Oregon Trail journey from Missouri to Oregon. This western journey was linear, but temporally the pageant was arranged as a seasonal cycle. The pageant began with a large procession of present-day Eugene life, representing a wide-range business, service, educational, religious, and cultural groups. What paraded on stage was described as "the fruiting of the seed" planted by the Oregon Trail pioneers and

the “heritage they left to us” (Eugene Pageant Association, *Oregon Trail Pageant 1950* 10, 13). Following this “end point” of the present day, the pageant began the story of a wagon train heading to Oregon. The beginning of this story was not set at a specific point in history (other than a general “past”), but it was a specific season: spring. As the journey continued in the story, the seasons changed, eventually returning to spring, only now with the characters in Oregon. Time cycled back to the beginning, but the geography had changed.

As the pageant closed, The Pioneer proclaimed to the audience: “Spring once more—the season’s wheel full-turned…/Journey’s end—the Land of Promise/All but lost a thousand times/Almost despaired of through the faintness/But won at last—to hold, to love, to cherish/Our land—our home—our state—Oregon” (Eugene Pageant Association, *Oregon Trail Pageant 1950* 26). It is both the completion of a journey and the beginning of yet another cycle.

The Pioneer’s implicit charge to the audience is not to look toward the future as it had been in all the previous pageants, but a call to maintain, preserve, and hold on to the present. Chronological time moved to the background and seasonality became the dominate conception of time. The return to spring—a time of renewal and rebirth—points to perpetuation, rather than progress. Unlike previous pageants, the temporal trajectory of the 1950 edition pointed toward a nonspecific past and moved circularly back to the present. What had been, remains so now, and will forever be *as long as* the work to remember and honor the past continues. Which means continuing what Doreen Massey

describes as “the universalisation of a way of imagining space [e.g. Oregon]…which underpinned the material enforcement of certain ways of organizing space and the relationship between society and space,” e.g. the capitalist exploitation of resources, racial hierarchies, the suppression of Indigenous self-determination, and the exaltation of the pioneer (Massey 65). The result is the same, however—a legitimization and naturalization of white, settler occupation of the land.

While the pageants continually reworked the past on stage to maintain a settler status quo after *Klatawa*, the Siletz people continued to deftly navigate the challenges posed by that status quo to secure Siletz life, sovereignty, and futurity. Throughout a tumultuous period in the mid-20th century during which the tribe navigated a difficult period of shifting federal Indian policy, eventually resulting in termination in the mid 1950s, dance remained a part of tribal life. After decades of public appearances in parades, etc., the Siletz began hosting their own powwow in 1940, no longer only relying on events like the pageants to publicly practice their own culture. It was organized by some of the same people who marched in the Eugene parades, Archie Ben and Hoxie Simmons (“Indian Homecoming Festival to Be Held Sunday at Whale Cove”).

In the 1970s, the Feather Dance/Nee Dosh became a key component of Siletz cultural resurgence, especially after a political campaign culminated in tribal restoration in 1977, the second tribe in the U.S. to regain federal recognition. Archie Ben is widely seen as one of the key figures during this period

for keeping Siletz traditions alive throughout this period.[130] Bud Lane has described how the renewed interest in the Nee Dosh spurred an increased interest of Athabaskan languages in order to perform the songs, prayers, and other demands of the dance (SmithsonianFolklife).[131] In 1996, the first dance house since the 1870s was built at Siletz and once again, the Siletz people had a home for Nee Dosh. In 2011, members of the tribe performed the Nee Dosh at the National Museum of the American Indian in Washington, D.C., a far cry from the U.S. government's policies toward dance a century before.

The pageant and parade in 1926 provide a way to better understand the entanglement of historical representation, embodied performance, and temporality in settler colonial Oregon. In this chapter, I have shown multiple possibilities for how performing bodies mobilize different temporalities and work to both preserve settler power and to challenge and undermine the effectiveness of those operations. Both the settlers of Eugene and the Siletz people utilized the pageants as opportunities to solidify community identity, advance specific notions of occupancy and inhabitance, and to ensure the future flourishing of their communities. This reveals the unfinished nature of both communities and the

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[130] A caption for a photo of Ben in Wilkinson's book describes him as follows: "Archie Ben was a central Siletz figure for decades. He served regularly on the Siletz Tribal Council and was stalwart in preserving tribal traditions. Admired for his commitment to the old ways, he instructed young people in Nee Dosh, arranged for public dances in area locales, and helped put on dances in peoples' homes" (Wilkinson 290).

[131] The website for the Siletz Tribal Language Project has a specific vocabulary lesson for the Nee Dosh.

ongoing instability of the social and spatial conditions of Oregon in this period and beyond.

Importantly, when the pageant and parade are framed as a coming together of two different communities in a shared space, rather than in a shared time, the so-called universality of settler narratives about time can be dispelled. The culturally and historically specific nature of both settler and Siletz embodied practices (and their embedded temporalities and temporal orientations) are elucidated, thus making it easier to imagine time, space, and inhabitance in different ways. At the same time, common assumptions about settler time can be reconsidered and the tenacity and adaptability of settler colonialism can be appropriately acknowledged. Overall, the dynamism and multiplicity of settler and Indigenous (Siletz) temporalities in the *Oregon Trail Pageants*—unlike claims of "the total exhaustion of viable systematic alternatives," as Fukuyama put it, or the oversimplified binaries of settler and Indigenous time—present an opportunity to work through the past in order to think otherwise.

Playing the Trail, Performing Nostalgia:

Reiterating *The Oregon Trail* Video Game

Introduction

In September 2018, I competed in the Willamette Heritage Center's 7th annual *Oregon Trail Live!* event in Salem, Oregon. Along with my "wagon party" (my brother-in-law, nephew, and niece), I crisscrossed the grounds of the history museum completing a series of activities to reach the "end of the trail." We buried an ill-fated team member (a paper doll) and wrote their epitaph on cardboard tombstones. We hauled a wagon uphill filled with "meat" (a person in a cow costume) in the "meat carry." We ran a three-legged race to an outhouse in the "dysentery race." Despite the activities being geared toward elementary-aged children, many of the participants were, like me, adults approximately 25-45 years old without children. One team of 20-something women wore calico skirts, bonnets, and carried matching tote bags reading "Get in losers! We're going to die of dysentery!"

In their marketing for *Oregon Trail Live!*, the Heritage Center called it "a unique and fun way to learn about the Oregon Trail," but I suspect many would find a "meat carry" or "dysentery race" to be bizarre ways to teach the history of the Oregon Trail. This is because *Oregon Trail Live!* was not a reenactment or simulation of the historical journey across the Trail, but a live-action version of the popular educational video game *The Oregon Trail*. As we hunted with Nerf

guns and floated a wagon made of craft supplies across a kiddie pool, we weren't reenacting a journey across the Oregon Trail; instead, we were reenacting what the Heritage Center described as "the Oregon Trail (as portrayed by the video game)" (Willamette Heritage Center).

The idea for *Oregon Trail Live!* was first pitched to the history museum by local journalist Kelly Williams Brown in 2012. "[*The Oregon Trail*] has all of these touchstones that have made it into the culture," Brown told *The Atlantic*, "We thought: Someone has to do this" (Grosvenor, "Going West"). The event garnered local and national media attention—with stories by the *Portland Mercury, NW News Network, Polygon,* and *The Atlantic*—and was such a hit that the Heritage Center made it an annual event.[132] As Williams Brown rightfully noted, *The Oregon Trail* is a cultural touchstone for many. The game flooded school districts across the country throughout the 1980s and early 1990s as personal computers were adopted for educational purposes. As it did, it became one of the best-selling computer games of all time and gained an outsized influence on an entire generation's perception of the historic Oregon Trail.[133]

[132] That is, until it was suspended during the COVID pandemic in 2020.

[133] The most common response I get when discussing my dissertation research is whether or not the computer game is part of the project. These questions are often followed by specific memories of playing the game as a child, usually on an Apple II computer at school. Many have also stated that the game is the only thing they remember about the Oregon Trail from school. In a recent conversation with an old college roommate, he told me that *The Oregon Trail* computer game may have been the only thing he did in school related to the Oregon Trail growing up in California. At least, it is all he remembers now.

The widespread use of the game in schools led to it being a commonly shared experience among children in this era. Journalist Anna Garvey has described this micro-generation as the "Oregon Trail Generation," due to the ubiquity of the game for kids in this period and its ability to index their unique relationship to technology (which I discuss in more detail later on) (Garvey). "Talk to any adult between 21 and 41 years old" wrote Steve Pepple in a 2016 story for *Medium*, and they will have "vivid, formative memories of playing that game" (Pepple). Kevin Wong, writing for *Vice*, surmises that "Every American school student of the past 30 years has fond (traumatic?) memories of oxen dying, wagons catching fire, loved ones drowning in the Green River, and hunters shooting 1,200 pounds of food but only carrying 100 pounds back to the wagon" (Wong). The game, he rightfully notes, "is famous to the point of parody" (Wong).

If *Oregon Trail Live!* was a singular event, it would be little more than a curiosity, but it is not the only event of its kind. Earlier in 2018, the same year I "hit the trail" in Salem, similar events were staged by historical organizations in Missouri and Colorado.[134] Ten months later, I was running through the streets of Oregon City in another live-action version of the game: the 5th annual *Oregon Trail Game 5k* run. In 2016, local theater company Portland Center Stage

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[134] The History Colorado Center's *The Oregon Trail: IRL* in January and Jackson County Historical Society's *Live Action Oregon Trail Game* in May (in Independence, MO no less). Kylie Holloway and Michael Salgarolo produced a similar event called *Ride or Die: Oregon Trail Live* at the venue Caveat in New York City in May 2019. Their event, however, was in the style of bar trivia or a drinking game, but incorporated the same kinds of For more, see: https://ncph.org/history-at-work/the-oregon-trail-live-qa.

produced Bekah Brunstetter's play *The Oregon Trail*, also based upon the popular game. Even Portland's sports teams have embraced *The Oregon Trail.* In 2018, the NBA's Portland Trailblazers released a schedule announcement mimicking the game and the MLS' Portland Timbers have sold two different supporters' scarves themed after it.

In the last 15 years or so, a remarkable number of adaptations, parodies, and citations of the game have flooded American popular culture. These include parody games like *Thule Trail* (2007) from roof rack company Thule, *Fall Out Boy Trail* (2009) from rock band Fall Out Boy, the zombie spoof *The Organ Trail* (2010), and *Travel Oregon: the Game* (2017) from the Oregon Tourism Commission. A card game, a board game, a handheld version of the original game (shaped like a 1980s personal computer), a *Minecraft* version of the game, and choose-your-own-adventure books.[135] Stage plays, stage musicals, poetry volumes, novelty books, parody sketches, and YouTube videos. Twitter feeds, internet memes, web comics, t-shirts, GEICO ads, fun runs, bar crawls, and even a Lyft promotion featuring covered wagon rides in downtown Portland. *The Oregon Trail* has been repurposed, repackaged, and remediated in countless ways in recent years, creating a genuine renaissance for the game roughly 30

[135] The latter is a mash-up of two beloved icons from the 1980s and 1990s, the game and the popular *Choose Your Own Adventure* book series from Bantam Books.

years after it reached peak popularity as a computer game. Even the top search result on Google for "Oregon trail" is a link to an online version of the game.[136]

The Oregon Trail's renaissance in American popular culture has given new life to the Trail yet again, this time constructed through the game's narratives, gameplay, and aesthetics (and frequent citation of 19th century maladies). These new iterations of the game reproduce its limited, settler-oriented representation of Oregon Trail history and geography and extend the game's influence in shaping public perceptions of settler colonialism in the Pacific Northwest. At the same time, these playful and fun adaptations also provide the "Oregon Trail Generation" opportunities to indulge their nostalgia for the game and recall the pleasures of being a kid in the 1980s and 1990s.

The relationship between the game's representation of the Oregon Trail and nostalgia is the primary focus of this chapter. The game's ability to generate nostalgia for childhood is the reason for its recent cultural renaissance, something captured by blogger Jason Cosper in his review of one of the earliest examples of this phenomenon: a t-shirt sold on the online store Busted Tees in March 2005. Designed by Ramit Sethi, the shirt showed a cartoonish covered wagon and the phrase "You have died of dysentery."[137] On his t-shirt blog *Preshrunk,* Cosper writes:

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[136] Two of the top three results as of March 2022 are links to the game. The top result is a link to the game hosted on Travel Oregon's website, followed by the Oregon Trail Wikipedia entry and another link to the computer game hosted on ClassicReload.com.
[137] As far as I can tell, Sethi's shirt popularized the use of this phrase, and dysentery itself, as a quasi-metonymic shorthand for the game.

> When I was in 4th and 5th grade, we used to get an hour a week in our school's computer lab. Every week we'd arrive to three dozen Apple IIs loaded with *Carmen Sandiego* and *Oregon Trail*. Ah, *Oregon Trail*…I spent three arduous weeks trying to circumnavigate the Columbia River. After that, I spent six weeks trying to hunt enough buffalo to feed my party. All the while my party kept dying of dysentery and cholera…. I adore Busted Tees' 'You Have Died Of Dysentery' shirt. It reminds me of swing sets, pizza day in the cafeteria, cub scouts and kickball. (Cosper)

Cosper recalls details of the game that were grounded in historical reality: the navigational challenge of the Columbia River, hunting bison, and potentially deadly gastrointestinal diseases. But these recollections of the game are couched in memories of when and where he played it, even citing the specific computer model most widely associated with the game, the Apple II. The t-shirt itself, he summarizes, recalls specific memories of childhood that have nothing to do with game or the historical events it represents.[138]

For events like *Oregon Trail Live!* (OTL) or the *Oregon Trail Game 5k* (5k), this combination of historical representation and nostalgia creates an experience for participants that operates in two different, but overlapping, registers. The first

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[138] Chris Welch, writing for *The Verge*'s Circuit Breaker blog in 2018 concluded his review of the handheld version of the game with a similar sentiment to Coster's 13 years earlier: "Everything feels authentic and true—true *enough*, anyway—to the experience I had in grade school crowded around a computer with my classmates" (Welch). For Welch, the historical referent for the game was not the 19th century experience of crossing the Trail it represents, but childhood experiences of playing the game.

is the game's representation of the history and geography of the Oregon Trail. The second, for someone of the "Oregon Trail Generation" like myself, is the personal memories of when and how we played the game as children. Thus, to relive our childhood through these nostalgic iterations also means reenacting and reproducing the game's narratives of colonization.

In this chapter, I use OTL and the 5k to interrogate how recent iterations of *The Oregon Trail* game participate in normalizing and obfuscating the ongoing colonization of the Pacific Northwest. In order to do so, I first trace how this game became the dominant way my generation came to imagine the Oregon Trail. Subsequently, I examine how participatory events like OTL and the 5k integrate the game's limited representation of Trail history and geography into affective experiences of nostalgia. As I do so, I ask the following questions. How has the game shaped public perceptions of the history and geography of the Oregon Trail? What frameworks for understanding the Trail, its settlers, and colonization does it (re)establish and perpetuate? What happens when those with personal memories of playing *The Oregon Trail* as children act out the narratives and scenarios of the game as adults? What emerges in the interaction between the game design, the game's settler colonial narratives and logics, and the affects, memories, and associations aroused by enacting the game and "playing settler"? Finally, in what ways does nostalgia for *The Oregon Trail* operate as a move to settler innocence and a legitimization of settler inhabitance?

I: The History of *The Oregon Trail*

Though several versions of *The Oregon Trail* have existed over the past 50 years, the 1985 version designed by R. Philip Bouchard is almost exclusively the source material for contemporary reiterations and adaptations of the game.[139] It was the first version to be made available to the public (as opposed to being exclusively distributed to schools) and the first version to include extensive visual graphics. In the game, players are cast in the role of settlers crossing the Oregon Trail in 1848, represented as a linear journey from Independence to Oregon City punctuated by obstacles that must be overcome. Before beginning the journey, players choose a character (farmer, carpenter, or banker), buy supplies from the general store, and determine when to leave Independence, MO. Once on the trail, players progress past a series of landmarks en route to Oregon City, OR, including rivers, forts, mountain ranges, and notable landscape features (e.g., Chimney Rock or South Pass). Those who make prudent choices and manage their resources well are greeted with the following message at the end of the game: "Congratulations! You have made it to Oregon!"

While playing, the primary game screen shows a covered wagon and ox moving left along a side-scrolling landscape with information listed below about the date, weather, distance traveled, and party health. Players must manage travel logistics and respond to various challenges, for example: how fast to travel,

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[139] This history covers the development of the game from 1971 up to the release of *Oregon Trail II* in 1995. Several versions of the game were released after this, including the most recent version released in 2021, available on Apple Arcade.

how much food to ration, what to do when a wheel breaks, whether or not to rest, whether or not to trade, and how to cross rivers (ford, float, or ferry). Players can trade with other travelers, hunt for food, and resupply at the forts along the way. At each landmark, players can take in colorful and pixelated scenic depictions of the landscape, showing scenes like the North Platte River, Fort Laramie, or the Blue Mountains. If players survive the gauntlet of potentially fatal misfortunes along the way—exhaustion, cholera, snakebites, etc.—they arrive in the Willamette Valley and are assigned a game score.[140]

Like each representation of the Trail over the years, the 1985 version of *The Oregon Trail* establishes a specific way to imagine the history and geography of the Trail. As an educational simulation of the settler experience crossing the Trail, the choices made by game designers were not merely technological or pedagogical choices, but also historiographical ones. These choices included gameplay mechanics, visual representations of space, the incentives of the game, how Indigenous people were (and were not) included, how new technologies were leveraged, and how historical accuracy and authenticity was established. All of these factors worked to create a specific

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[140] The score is determined by a number of factors including how many resources players have when they arrive in Oregon, how many wagon party members survived, and which character players chose to play as. The game explains that the more resources you have available to you as you start a new life in Oregon, the more chance you have to succeed. It also explains that farmers were needed most in Oregon, followed by carpenters, and then bankers. If you choose farmer as your character, you receive a points multiplier of 3x (2x for carpenters).

intelligibility for the Oregon Trail in the late 20th century.[141] This process of selection led to a game that reproduced existing biases in Oregon Trail history, was narrow in scope, and completely erased from view the catastrophic effects of American colonization on the Indigenous worlds of the Pacific Northwest.

How the game represented the Trail would arguably be unimportant if not for its massive success. As the game was distributed nationwide as part of a growing educational technology ecosystem, it became the most well-known depiction of the Trail for a generation of kids. For many peers of mine, *The Oregon Trail* game is the first (and perhaps only) thing they mention when my dissertation research comes up. The impact of this game on a generation's understanding of the Oregon Trail cannot be underestimated. Its earlier successes also established specific conventions that subsequent versions of the game (and its nostalgic iterations) have continued to repeat, acting as imaginative inertia that further entrenches *The Oregon Trail* within our historical consciousness. In this section, I trace the development of the game from a

[141] I use the term intelligibility here following Michel de Certeau, who writes about the historiographic operation as a process of selection and separation. History is a practice of the present, mobilized in the service of specific objectives, and often by those with power. The creation of a specific intelligibility for a historical event is a practice of selecting and separating "what can be understood" from "what must be forgotten" (de Certeau, *The Writing of History* 4). In order to maintain a positive narrative of the American colonization of the Pacific Northwest, certain aspects of it must be centered (settler perseverance, capitalist expansion, winning the Oregon Country from the British) and others must be forgotten (e.g., the invasion and destruction of Indigenous societies, the ongoing subjugation of Indigenous people, ecological destruction, and racist policies). The choice by game creators to highlight certain aspects of the Trail's history and geography and not others is a historiographical operation like that described by de Certeau, establishing a specific intelligibility through the technology of computer gaming.

simple idea by three student teachers in Minnesota to one of the most popular computer games of its time.

The Trail Began in Minnesota

The origins of the popular 1985 version of *The Oregon Trail* can be found off the trail in Minneapolis fourteen years earlier. In 1971, three college students—Don Rawitsch, Bill Heinemann, and Paul Dillenberger—were finishing their teaching degrees at Carleton College and living together in Minneapolis while student teaching at local junior high schools. Rawitsch was teaching 8th grade history and was searching for a unique way to teach his students about the United States' westward expansion. “I started experimenting with what a board game might look like, with a massive map of the western United States,” Rawitsch told Kevin Wong in a 2017 article for *Vice*, “It had not occurred to me to put this on a computer, since I had no computer programming experience” (Wong). However, his math-teaching roommates, Heinemann and Dillenberger, had taken coursework on computer programming at Carleton and saw the potential for Rawitsch’s game to be adapted into a computer game. Together, the three developed the first version of The Oregon Trail, then called *OREGON*.

Unlike later graphical versions, the first version was entirely text-based. It was played using a Teletype machine that would communicate with a much larger mainframe computer housed offsite. When inputs were typed into the machine, it would communicate with the computer, get feedback, and print out

the results on a scroll of paper. Perhaps the most notable of the game's innovations was how players “hunted” while on their journey. Heinemann explains how he exploited one of the functions of BASIC programming to create an experience of hunting for kids:

> One of the things that BASIC had built into its language was a variation of the INPUT command, where you could not only accept input, but be notified of the length of time it took to respond. I thought, 'Aha! This is perfect for hunting. I'll tell the students to type BANG.' If the students spelled it wrong or took too long, they got nothing. The faster they typed, the more meat they got and the more positive comment they received. (Wong)

Over the course of about a week, Heinemann and Dillenberger worked after hours in a small storage closet that housed the teletype machine at Bryant Junior High and created an interactive, text-based experience of traveling the trail.

Jessica Lussenhop's 2011 article in *City Pages* includes a good summation of what it would have been like to play the original teletype version:

> With no monitor, the original version of *Oregon Trail* was played by answering prompts that printed out on a roll of paper. At 10 characters per second, the teletype spat out, ‘How much do you want to spend on your oxen team?’ or, ‘Do you want to eat (1) poorly (2) moderately or (3) well?’ Students typed in the numerical responses, then the program chugged

through a few basic formulas and spat out the next prompt along with a status update. (Lussenhop)

By today's standards, it may not sound exciting, but it was an immediate hit among Rawitsch's students. They even began to form teams and divide labor in order to play—one person kept track of money, one kept track of distanced journeyed, and one typed commands (Lussenhop; Wong). When the program was uploaded to the library of programs accessible by any teletype machine in the district, Heinemann and Dillenberger introduced it to their math students across town. They remember kids lining up before school at the teletype to get a turn.

The original version of the game established certain conventions that provided a foundation for subsequent versions of the game. Perhaps most significant was putting players in the role of settlers traveling the trail to Oregon. Creating a virtual simulation of the settlers' journey was the purpose of the game from the start, from Rawitsch's original board game through every subsequent edition.[142] The first-person gameplay of *The Oregon Trail* is not unusual for computer games by today's standards, but it was what set it apart from other programs at the time. As Rawitsch recalls about the 1971 version, even basic technology exploited effectively "allowed Oregon Trail to be, well, a game, but more a simulation" (Hanson). As Heinemann notes, this simulation effect is what

[142] The 1980 version of the game explicitly stated the goal of simulation on the opening screen, "This program simulates a trip over the Oregon Trail from Independence, Missouri to Oregon City, Oregon in 1847."

separated *OREGON* from any other computer program then available, most of which dealt with mathematics and logic: “They were nothing like *Oregon Trail*, I mean, not even in the same league” (Hanson). By prioritizing the settler experience traveling on the Trail, Rawitsch, Heinemann, and Dillenberger established an orientation toward the Trail that functioned as a constraint for all subsequent versions, delimiting how the Trail could be imagined.

Another aspect of the original version that persisted throughout subsequent redesigns was the gameplay of choice-making through a progressive series of decision points. In their “journey” on the trail, players had to successfully overcome a series of challenges in order to reach their final destination: Oregon. It was a linear, unidirectional progression across the West marked by decision points representing logistics, geographical obstacles, and threats to health and safety. How players answered determined whether or not they would successfully make it to Oregon. This gameplay was partly the outcome of trying to simulate the settler journey, which was for most settlers a challenging, unidirectional journey from the Midwest to Oregon. It was also a reflection of the technological limitations used by Heinemann and Dillenberger. A game design in which players progressed through a series of questions and prompts leveraged the call-and-response style of programming made possible by BASIC programming and a time-sharing computer. The effect was the reduction of the United States’ colonization of the West to a series of individual decisions by individual settlers.

When their student-teaching ended, the three creators of the game deleted the program from the machines. Before deleting it, Rawitsch printed out the program's code, about 800 lines. That appeared to be the end of the trail for *OREGON* until Rawitsch got a job with a pioneering public agency three years later—the Minnesota Educational Computing Consortium, better known as MECC. It was this innovative agency that provided the infrastructure necessary for *OREGON* to reach a wider audience. As this new educational technology ecosystem grew in Minnesota, the popularity of *OREGON* accelerated its growth, allowing it to extend the game's influence nationwide.

Minnesota Educational Computing Consortium (MECC)

In 1973, the State of Minnesota created MECC to develop and coordinate the use of computers in education across the state. MECC was the culmination of (and answer to) a series of educational computer networks that had been established across the state. This included the Minneapolis School District's system used by Rawitsch, Heinemann, and Dillenberger; Total Information for Educational Systems, or TIES, a network among 25 Twin Cities-area school districts; and the Southern Minnesota School Computer Project out of Mankato.[143] All of these networks were time-sharing computer networks, with

[143] The Minneapolis School District was connected with the Dartmouth Time-Sharing System, the first successful large-scale time-sharing network developed in 1963. BASIC programming language was developed for this system. When Pillsbury bought a GE-635 computer, the same system at Dartmouth, the district began renting time from them instead.

teletype terminals in schools communicating with a central mainframe computer.[144]

MECC built on the success of these earlier networks and made computer technology available statewide, leveraging economies of scale to provide computer access to the vast majority of Minnesota K-12 students. During the first year of the system's operation (1974-1975), it reached 84 percent of public school children in Minnesota (Rankin 162).[145] It wasn't just access that expanded, it was also use of the system for instruction and student leisure that grew. By the 1977-78 academic year, 42 percent of courses had used computer simulation games with students (such as *OREGON*) and an average of over 5,000 user sessions were occurring per day. MECC made computer use a regular part of student life across Minnesota.

Three years after creating *OREGON* with Dillenberger and Heinemann, Rawitsch got a job with MECC. Without this, it is unlikely that *The Oregon Trail* game as we know it would have ever existed. As Rawitsch recalled, "I asked the fatal question, do we need any more programs to put in the library of the

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[144] Minnesota became a powerhouse in computer technology in the 1960s and 70s, with UNIVAC, Control Data, Honeywell, Cray, and IBM Rochester calling the state home. The development in educational computer use was greatly aided by this computer-friendly ecosystem.
[145] This had an outsized impact for districts outside the Twin Cities' metropolitan area, as Joy Lisi Rankin notes in her history of MECC: "Before MECC, only 14 percent of Minnesota students with access to instructional time-sharing were outside the Twin Cities metropolitan area. Once MECC implemented a statewide time-sharing system in 1974–1975, that number tripled to 46 percent" (Rankin 162).

computer we were setting up to serve the entire state of Minnesota" (Hanson)? The answer was yes and Rawitsch added the game *OREGON* to the system.[146]

When Rawitsch uploaded *OREGON* to MECC's mainframe, he rewrote some of the code to be more historically accurate. To do so, he scoured Trail settlers' diaries and noted the frequency that certain events, maladies, and weather were mentioned and used those figures to change the probabilities for different outcomes in the game. "Now we had an application that not only was pretty interesting to people because of what it did, but we could make the claim that it was also educationally sound," he recalled (Hanson). This was the first of many decisions that sought to improve the historical accuracy of the game over the years.

The game that had captivated Minneapolis school kids three years earlier was now available to kids statewide. Rawitsch recalls that *OREGON* was accessed more than any other by a wide margin, surpassing 10,000 times a week: "The only other program on the large system that was used more was an early email type of thing" (Hanson; Lussenhop). It wasn't until the arrival of personal computers in the late 1970s that kids outside of Minnesota had the opportunity to travel the virtual trail. In 1978, MECC began looking for a computer model to distribute to Minnesota school districts and put out a bid for a contract.

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[146] By handing *OREGON* over to MECC, Rawitsch effectively prevented Heinemann, Dillenberger, and himself from ever profiting off their creation. As Rawitsch explains, when they created the game in 1971, nobody imagined that software could be marketed and sold for a profit. Their primary interest was using the program for education.

A small company out of California called Apple won the bid. MECC purchased 500 Apple II computers and began a long relationship with the company, helping cement Apple's dominance in the education sector over the next two decades.[147]

OREGON was redesigned for the Apple II, introducing new gameplay elements like a graphical version of hunting in which a single white deer would pass across the screen. The new version of the game was accessed via floppy disks rather than mainframe computers, so MECC was able to distribute it beyond Minnesota for the first time. They established a licensing program in which districts could pay a flat fee for MECC's software. Over 5,000 districts subscribed—roughly a third of all school districts in the nation (Lussenhop). A game that was first played by a single social studies class at Bryant Junior High School in Minneapolis could now be played by children across the nation.

The 1985 Redesign

In 1984, the game was completely redesigned by R. Philip Bouchard along with John Krenz, Charolyn Kapplinger, Shirley Keran, and Bob Granvin. The new version, released in 1985 and newly titled *The Oregon Trail,* introduced many of the elements people now associate with the game, including its

[147] MECC's decision to purchase Apple II computers for Minnesota school districts influenced many districts across the United States to do the same. The success of Apple as a company is directly connected to the success of MECC's educational software for the Apple II.

pixelated aesthetic.[148] It was the first fully graphical version of the game, adding visual depictions of the landscape and notable geographical landmarks for the first-time. The 1985 version was also the first to be made available as a stand-alone program, rather than included as part of an educational software package, and the first to be marketed to home users. Bouchard and his team took the existing frameworks of the game and expanded them, maintaining the focus on simulating the settler journey via a linear progression through a series of decision points.

In the 1985 version, the simulation of the Trail begins with two primary options on the start screen, both of which reestablish a settler-oriented framework for understanding the trail. Selecting “Learn about the Trail” brings up the following text on the screen: “Try taking a journey by covered wagon across 2000 miles of plains, rivers, and mountains. Try!” Subsequent screens ask a series of rhetorical questions about navigating rivers, making decisions about supplies, and managing resources. “If for some reason you don’t survive,” the section concludes ominously, “don’t give up! Try again…and again…until your name is up with the others on The Oregon Top Ten.”[149] There is no broader historical context, not even a map. What is learned about the Trail is what to

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[148] On his website, Bouchard lists 21 of the specific innovations added to the game in the 1985 redesign, including, “crossing rivers, stopping at landmarks, naming your party members, contracting diseases such as dysentery, carrying meat back to the wagon, choosing a profession, carrying spare parts, seeing daily weather updates, talking to people along the way, having members of your party die, erecting tombstones, and earning points based on your performance” (Bouchard, “The Oregon Trail”).

[149] The Oregon Top Ten was the high score list. The default names in the list were notable pioneers who crossed the trail, including Ezra Meeker.

expect in the *game*, conflating the gameplay with the historical journey itself. Above all, one message comes across: keep persevering until you make it to Oregon and place your name among the heroes of old.

The second main option on the start screen is “Travel the Trail.” Selecting it guides players through several screens which prepare them for the journey: selecting a profession (banker, carpenter, or farmer), naming the wagon leader and members of the party, choosing which month to depart, and purchasing supplies for the journey. The only information given is meant to help players make good choices about these logistical matters. Even basic questions about what the Oregon Trail is or why anyone should undertake the journey are not addressed before players set out from Independence circa 1848. Once on the “trail,” a travel screen appears and an avatar (a covered wagon pulled by an ox on the right hand of the screen) begins moving along a flat green surface. Listed below is information showing the date, weather, party health, food rations, the distance to the next landmark, and how many miles have been traveled so far. This Oregon Trail, the game makes clear, is solely about the navigation of the route by American settlers.

The settler-orientation of the game is not merely a matter of representation, but also one of identification, given the first-person gameplay. Settlers are the only characters in the game with whom kids can identify. This feature was lauded by editor Marcia Klafter in her 1987 review of the game for *TEACHING Exceptional Children*: “Participants are asked to see things from the

point of view of others, to value these individuals, and to ‘experience’ life from the perspective of a 19th century traveler” (Klafter 94). The simulation effect was seen by many contemporary reviewers as one of the strengths of the game. “Simulations,” Steve Bailey wrote in his 1987 review of social studies games, “have the advantage of highly motivating students and allowing them to apply some of what they have learned in class” (Bailey 24).

The alignment of players with American settlers is aided by the use of second-person pronouns. The game continually refers to “you” when referring to the settler characters being played.[150] When a list of options is given to players, it begins “You may.” When players are required to make a choice, the game asks, “What is your choice.” When players reach a landmark, the game asks, “Would you like to look around.” The use of second-person pronouns encourages players to identify with the American settler heading west, not merely observe them doing so. In the 1985 redesign, Bouchard added the ability to name the members of your party, giving additional opportunities for personalization.[151] With personal names, events don’t happen to nameless figures, they happen to you and whomever you listed as your party—friends, family, or perhaps even pets.

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[150] Ironically, the popular phrase “You have died of dysentery” used in contemporary memes is not an example of second person language from the game. When maladies occur to party members, third-person language is used, for example, “Jacob has died of dysentery.” The popularity of the phrase has created a misremembering of the actual gameplay, which uses the names of the party members entered by the player in the beginning.

[151] This also created opportunities to hack the game by naming your party members childish names like “booger,” “poop,” and the like. One of the memorable opportunities for personalization was the ability to write an epitaph on the tombstones of party members who died. This resulted in the now-famous “Here lies andy, peperony and chease” meme, a widely reproduced epitaph that itself was a play on Tombstone Pizza’s famous commercials from the 1990s.

In his review of the game's successor, *Oregon Trail II*, teacher Bill Bigelow notes that the decision-making gameplay used by both versions also helps to align players with a settler perspective: "The enormous number of choices offered in any one session…is a kind of gentle seduction to students. It invites them to 'try on this world view and see how it fits'" (Bigelow 84). Importantly, Bigelow notes, it is not merely an identification with a character that is invited, but the adoption of their *frame of reference*. It is this alignment between the player and settler frames of references that significantly delimits what players are able to understand regarding history and geography of the Oregon Trail when playing the game. It is not merely a settler perspective that is privileged, but a host of frameworks that normalize colonization and conceal its destructive effects.

One of these frameworks is the choice-making gameplay established by Rawitsch, Heinemann, and Dillenberger. This design frames the process of colonization and settlement as a series of personal choices by individual settlers, not as the granular level enactment of macro policies, narratives, and ideologies. This focus on the individual reifies the well-worn mythology of pioneer hardship, that is, that settlers "earned" the right to land in Oregon by successfully navigating the challenges of the Trail.[152] In the game, the cumulative efforts of players' choices determine whether or not players make it to Oregon. Those that successfully endure the hardships thrown at them by the trail—e.g., weather,

[152] Bigelow argues that the frustration and tedium of the gameplay itself generates in players the effect of feeling deserving of the land upon arrival in Oregon, that "our labors in transit should be 'richly rewarded' with the best land we can find" (Bigelow 90).

river crossings, disease, food shortages—are rewarded by a homestead in the Willamette Valley. Players then get a game score based on a formula which privileges health, supply levels, and choice of profession.[153]

Just as Rawitsch updated the game's probabilities to reflect historical accounts of the journey more accurately, Bouchard also introduced new details that further enhanced the game's claim to historical authority. These included opportunities to talk to people along the trail and learn more about it, a new trading system, more complex system for managing resources and logistics, and more detailed models for weather, seasons, and health. All of these innovations in complexity and detail gave the impression of historical accuracy. Along with creating "more opportunities for the player to explore, experiment, and make decisions," a tighter "integration with the real geography of the Oregon Trail" was another objective of the redesign (Bouchard, "The Oregon Trail"). Real geographical landmarks became the primary way to measure and mark progress along the route of the trail. These included river crossings, natural features (like Independence Rock), and forts, both U.S. military forts and fur-trading forts.

The use of specific geographical features further substantiated the educational claims of the game, despite it doing little else than teaching students a series of places abstracted from their historical, social, geological, and ecological context. Rivers are obstacles for settlers bound for Oregon, nothing

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[153] The game states that farmers and carpenters were needed more than bankers in the "new land," therefore players who chose those professions garnered more points upon arrival.

more. Natural features are markers of progress on the journey, nothing more. Land was a surface to be crossed (as depicted in the travel screen) and a prize to be won (an Oregon homestead), not a complex set of relationships between humans and non-human life, let alone the territory of sovereign, Indigenous nations. It was a digital manifestation of the spatial imagination of conquest described by geographer Doreen Massey, differentiating between the active makers of history—settlers moving across the screen—and whatever was "found" along the way (Massey 4).

How Bouchard integrated real geography into the game is part of how the game normalizes settler colonial frames of reference. Forts, for example, are one of the primary landmarks denoting progress in the game. They are depicted as places of aid for those on the Trail, not imperial incursions into foreign territory facilitating the colonization of Indigenous lands and actively suppressing Indigenous life and sovereignty. Yes, forts did aid the settlement of the West, but to only understand forts as an aid to settlers is an incomplete understanding of the US military's role, concealing the aggression and violence of settler colonialism.[154] In addition, when approaching forts on the travel screen, the fort icon always has an American flag flying above it, despite the fact that not all the forts featured were American military forts (some were fur-trading company

[154] This violence is further concealed by the presence of Native figures in the illustrations of the forts in the game. Fts. Bridger, Laramie, and Walla Walla all show a peaceful Native presence at the forts. The impression is that Indigenous people coexisted peacefully with the US military and passively accepted the invasion of their lands by the United States.

outposts). The impression given is that the Trail continuously ran through American territory, something that was debatable in 1848. American claims to the lands west of the Missouri River were still precarious at this time, as well as presumptive of the ability for American colonization to succeed and the extinguishment of Native title to be completed.[155]

Along with a more accurate geography, Bouchard featured more Indigenous people in the 1985 redesign of the game. Though rarely mentioned in the text of the game, Indigenous figures are featured in several of the game's visual depictions of the trail route. When players reach landmarks, they have the option to "look around." The screens showing the landmarks often include depictions of Native people or encampments of Tipis. Unlike many popular representations of wagon trains in books and film, *The Oregon Trail* does not depict Indigenous people as threats to settler safety, but rather as part of the landscape of the trail.[156] They are merely additional features to be discovered by settlers en route to Oregon.

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[155] Congress officially created the Oregon Territory in August of 1848, two years after the United States and Great Britain signed the Oregon Treaty, ending a joint occupancy agreement and establishing a border at the 49th parallel. At the time, the United States had not yet signed any treaties with the Indigenous people of the Pacific Northwest despite their claim to the territory. Popularly, it was not uncommon for settlers traveling the trail to refer to the Oregon Country and points west of the Missouri River as extra-American space, often describing the feeling of "leaving the country" when setting out for Oregon. The Trail was part of the American machine for colonizing the newly claimed land; it was the mechanism for Americanizing the foreign lands of the Oregon Country.

[156] This is a commonly misremembered part of the game. In an article about the 2021 version of the game, Jazz Halfmoon, member of the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservations describes her difficulty identifying with the game. "'I remember being like, 'Oh, like the Indians killed off somebody in your wagon train…and then being like, 'Oh, we're Indians, you know'" (King). Despite Halfmoon's memories, the game never included Indians attacking wagon trains. Players could be attacked by thieves or riders, but they were never identified as Indians.

In the game, Indigenous figures are shown as friendly, usually talking with settlers, trading at forts, or living harmoniously with the people invading their lands. Players rarely interact with Native characters, but when they do, Native people play the role of guides who can be hired to help your party safely navigate river crossings. In one landscape screen depicting the Snake River, a Native man on the left side of the screen gestures toward the river canyon with open arms as if to say, "Welcome! Right this way!" While none of these depictions reinforce negative stereotypes of Indigenous people as violent "savages" attacking wagon trains, they nonetheless give the impression that American colonization was a peaceful process welcomed (or at least passively tolerated) by all Indigenous people. "*The Oregon Trail* hides the nature of the Euro-American invasion," as Bigelow notes, explaining:

> [I]t simply fails to inform simulation participants what happened between settlers and Indians. To *The Oregon Trail* player, it doesn't feel like an invasion; it doesn't feel wrong…. The only person that matters is the simulation player…. (Bigelow 90).

The final landscape scene in *The Oregon Trail* shows verdant and pixelated *terra nullius*—land belonging to no one—ready to welcome weary trail pioneers. Any

presence of existing Indigenous life or resistance to colonization is nowhere to be seen.[157]

Bouchard's redesign of the game was massively successful for MECC, providing a generation of kids a framework for imagining the history and geography of the Oregon Trail. The educational technology ecosystem created by MECC and its forebears enabled the game to reach massive numbers of kids over many years. Further adaptations of the game were made for Microsoft's DOS operating system and later, for Mac and Windows mouse-based operating systems. By 1995, *The Oregon Trail* accounted for a third of MECC's revenue (Bouchard, "The Oregon Trail"). Later that year, MECC released another full redesign of the game called *Oregon Trail II* just before being bought by SoftKey. By this point, the game had become the most widely distributed educational computer game of all time, becoming a near-ubiquitous feature of a generation's educational experience.[158]

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[157] In 2019, Indigenous game designer Elizabeth LaPensée (Anishinaabe, Métis, and Irish) released *When Rivers Were Trails* in collaboration with the Indian Land Tenure Foundation and Michigan State University's Games for Entertainment and Learning Lab. The game mimics the structure and gameplay of *The Oregon Trail*, but players navigate through the Midwest and West during the era of Indian removal and allotment. Players play as an Anishinaabeg character displaced from their home in Minnesota in the 1890s and must make decisions on how to interact with other Native and non-Native people while trying to maintain both material and spiritual wellbeing with traditional foods and medicines. The game incentivizes generosity, reciprocity, and ecological balance while emphasizing tribal sovereignty, Indigenous resistance, and the destructive effects of US Indian policy.

[158] There is some evidence suggesting that even when kids played it at school, it was as a leisure activity during breaks or as a reward for completing classwork early, not an integrated part of their curriculum (Wallace). MECC provided a teacher's guide for the game that included substantial guidance on using the game in class and building lessons around it, including suggested assignments. It is a wealth of information, but it is unclear how often this resource was utilized or how often the game was incorporated into lesson plans.

Critiques of *The Oregon Trail*

Despite the popularity of the game, it has not been universally beloved. The game and its educational claims have drawn scrutiny from educators and cultural commentators for decades. In his 1997 review of *The Oregon Trail* series, Bigelow did not pull any punches, stating plainly, "In fundamental respects, *The Oregon Trail* is sexist, racist, culturally insensitive, and contemptuous of the Earth. It imparts bad values and wrong history" (Bigelow 85).[159] Twenty years later, Katharine Slater echoed Bigelow's critique of the game's centering of a white settler frame of reference. "[T]his player-character alignment assumes a worldview that requires player assimilation to a raced and gendered default," she writes, "if you want to be part of this experience, if you want to occupy the center of the narrative, you need to assume a white male avatar" (Slater 377).

The problems with the game are not limited to matters of race and gender, as Slater notes, but also include the spatio-temporal concepts organizing the game's representation (or simulation) of history. The emphasis placed on traveling to Oregon quickly, what Slater calls "geographies of urgency," implicitly equate spatial conquest with a temporally-defined notion of cultural, colonial, and ideological progress (Slater 389). The more quickly players make the journey, the sooner the goal of settling Oregon can be achieved and American progress can

[159] Part of Bigelow's concern with the game is that "the simulation begins from no moral or ethical standpoint beyond individual material success," a lodestar that does little to curb the many problematic biases and viewpoints that emerge throughout the game (Bigelow 91).

be advanced. These “geographies of urgency,” journalist Nina St. Pierre reflects, whet colonialism’s insatiable desire for expansion. “The pixelated avatars we assumed every Wednesday,” she writes, “remind us that…colonization isn’t a destination, but an appetite. One that, contrary to [Frederick Jackson] Turner’s thinking, marches steadily on” (St. Pierre). The wagon party may eventually arrive in Oregon, but the game’s valorization of growth and expansion persists.

For the most part, historical inaccuracy is not one of the problems with the game. It may be limited, biased, and lacking diverse ways of understanding the Trail, but its depictions can, more or less, be backed up by historical fact. Rather than historical *inaccuracy* being a problem, it is historical *accuracy* that makes *The Oregon Trail* problematic. “Historicism in *The Oregon Trail*,” Slater explains, “is both the game’s purported reason for existence and the camouflage that it uses to mask subjective choices that privilege the master narrative of white male settlement” (Slater 381).

The addition of more detail and more diverse historical perspectives in 1995’s *Oregon Trail II* did little to change this double movement of establishing historical authority and concealing historical bias. As Bigelow notes in his assessment of the more comprehensive *Oregon Trail II,* the “gobs of information” included in the game—including contrasting opinions and more player choices—continued to conceal an “ideological map” that privileges the settler and ignores the disastrous consequences of settlement. The fundamental problem, he concludes, is not too little information:

> Loaded with facts, it feels comprehensive…. But the simulation begins from no moral or ethical standpoint beyond individual material success; it contains no vision of social or ecological justice, and, hence, promotes a full litany of sexist, racist, and imperialist perspectives, as well as exploitative perspectives of the earth. And simultaneously, it hides these biases. (Bigelow 90–91)

The flaw of the game is its sole interest in the success of the colonial project. The immense amount of historical data that informed the game's design (something Bouchard continues to laud about the 1985 redesign) conceals the historical reality of the Trail behind a veneer of accuracy.[160]

For less popular games, these problems may not matter much, but *The Oregon Trail* is a cultural behemoth. For the "Oregon Trail Generation," as Slater points out, the game "constituted multiple important firsts: likely their first exposure to narratives of nineteenth-century westward expansion, their first narrative-based computer game, and, for many, part of their earliest contact with a personal computer" (Slater 376). It is this for this reason that historian T.J. Tallie argues that we should ask for more from *The Oregon Trail*, especially the

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[160] In a response to a review of the 1985 redesign, Bouchard details the extensive research and design process his team undertook to make the game accurately reflect history, something he also does on his website died-of-dysentery.com (note his appropriation of the phrase popularized by Sethi's t-shirt) (Bouchard, "Response by Publisher to Review of 'Oregon Trail'"). The focus on historical accuracy recalls Scott Magelssen's critique of living history museums, which claim to be "real history by virtue of their attention to detail" (Magelssen, *Living History Museums* xii). "Authenticity" is less an ontological category, Magelssen argues, than it is the product of a performative operation that creates "accuracy and authenticity" (Magelssen, *Living History Museums* xiv).

newest versions of the game. Playing the game, he writes, conscripted us into something more than a game or history lesson:

> [A]s children we were somewhat unwittingly invited into the gamification of colonialism. As those Conestoga wagons rolled westward, our bankers flirting with dysentery and grueling paces, we placed ourselves in pixelated portraits of pioneers on flickering screens…. But these games were also cosplaying conquest, rendering irreparable destruction as a pleasing form of play. (Tallie)

As the game established a very specific way to imagine the history and geography of the trail to untold numbers of kids, this intelligibility was woven into the everyday lives of those children. The game's representations of the Trail became entangled with the experience of playing the game—entangled with pleasure, with school, with gaming, and with technology. This entanglement of representation and experience created the conditions for the game's 21st century resurgence in popularity.

II: The Game Redux

When Busted Tees began selling Ramit Sethi's "You have died of dysentery" shirt in March 2005, it marked a new phase in the life of *The Oregon Trail*: nostalgic iteration. The widespread availability of *The Oregon Trail* to children in the 1980s and 1990s planted the seeds for its reemergence as a nostalgic pop culture icon post-2005. Contemporary memes, parodies, and

adaptations of the game have flourished in the age of social media, riding a cultural wave of remakes, reboots, and nostalgic fascination with the late 20th century.[161] As *The Oregon Trail* began circulating in new forms, its settler colonial logics, narratives, and frameworks continued to circulate as well. The specific representation of the Trail established by the game in the 1980s was now being consumed and experienced in new ways, including embodied, participatory reenactments.

In this section, I focus on two events that capitalized on the renaissance in popularity for the game: *Oregon Trail Live!* (OTL) and *The Oregon Trail Game 5k*. Drawing on the frameworks, gameplay, and features of the 1985 version of the game, both events reproduced the limited and problematic ways of imagining the history of settler colonialism in the Pacific Northwest. However, as embodied, interactive events, OTL and the 5k also provided new ways for these frameworks and logics to be experienced. As these events mingled the norms and logics of settler colonialism with affective sensations, physical exertion, performances of identity, and personal memories of playing the game, they blurred the lines between historical reality, historical representation, and feelings of nostalgia.

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[161] The list of recent reboots capitalizing on nostalgia for 1980s and 1990s media is fairly astounding: *Fuller House, Saved by the Bell, Punky Brewster, Bel-Air, Scream, I Know What You Did Last Summer, Ghostbusters, Doogie Kameāloha M.D., The Wonder Years, The Mighty Ducks: Game Changers, Roseanne,* and many more.

Oregon Trail Live!* and the *Oregon Trail Game 5k

Over 30 years after Bouchard's redesign of *The Oregon Trail*, I "hit the trail" in OTL at the Willamette Heritage Center as described in the beginning of this chapter. Ten months after the event, I was competing in another iteration of *The Oregon Trail* (once again with my brother-in-law). This time, we were running through the streets of Oregon City for the 5th annual *Oregon Trail Game 5k*, an event with no obvious educational aim. The run was put on by the Downtown Oregon City Association, a non-profit working to revitalize the city's historic downtown. Oregon City is known as the end of the Oregon Trail and was the first incorporated American city west of the Rockies, a fitting location for a run themed after the video game.[162] Wearing race bibs showing a group of settlers running toward a finish line, we began downtown and ran a scenic loop past the city's renowned municipal elevator, past the home of John McLoughlin (town founder and the "Father of Oregon"), and along the bluff-top McLoughlin Promenade above tumwata/Willamette Falls.[163] Most runners wore the official race t-shirt showing three figures running past a mountain backdrop and city façade (featuring the city's municipal elevator), all in the pixelated aesthetics and color

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[162] While Oregon City was the primary destination for early travelers on the trail, in part because it was the location of the land office where settlers could claim land for a homestead, it was one of many endpoints of the trail route known as the Oregon Trail.

[163] The falls, known as tumwata in Chinook, has long been a significant site for local Indigenous people, drawing people from around the region to its historically productive fishery. In 2019, the Confederated Tribes of Grand Ronde purchased the 23-acre site of the recently closed Blue Heron Paper Company mill. They are in the midst of an ambitious redevelopment of the site to create better access to the falls, provide environmental restoration, and, like their ancestors before them, return to the role of being stewards of the falls.

scheme of the 1985 game. Others, however, wore calico dresses, bonnets, plaid shirts, and other pioneer-ish clothing to better fit the role of Oregon-bound settlers.

The run mimicked the gameplay of *The Oregon Trail* by including five decision points where we had to make choices. “Turkeys!” one decision point read in a pixelated typeface, “Do you want to stop and hunt or keep going?” “Wonky Wheel!” read another, “Do you want to fix your wagon or keep on going?” At each decision point were two buckets filled with slips of paper denoting the two options, the consequences of each choice printed on the slip—e.g. “Your poor skills cause more damage to your wagon”—along with a code to be scanned at the end of the race. The decision points did not affect the race route but did affect the “game outcome” determined at the end when the decision slips were scanned. Like the game, the cumulative effect of our choices determined whether we made it to Oregon or met an unfortunate fate.[164] Upon arriving at the finish line, a large inflatable arch with a graphic of Mt. Hood greeted us and we were given race “medals” made of 3.5 in. floppy disks.

OTL and the 5k were both simple versions of what Scott Magelssen has called “simming.” Simming, Magelssen writes, is “a simulated, immersive, performative environment…in which participants played out a scripted or improvised narrative in order to gain or produce understandings of a situation

[164] Despite finishing the race, I apparently did not make it to Oregon. My game outcome was “Your food was stolen and you starved to death.” My brother-in-law also died of starvation.

and its context" (Magelssen, *Simming* 3). Importantly, Magelssen notes that simmings do not establish "faithful re-creation as a criterion for success, [but] instead can be judged by the ways in which they create new experiences that draw on, play with, wink at, or otherwise comment on the events they reference" (Magelssen, *Simming* 10). While simmings represent and simulate established referents, they simultaneously create new experiences for participants by leveraging the embodied, affective, and theatrical elements of participatory performance. They are likenesses that create new experiences using existing narratives and situations (Magelssen, *Simming* 9).

The pedagogical outcome noted by Magelssen—producing understanding of a situation and its context—is certainly what MECC, Bouchard, and the game's creators had in mind; the game's virtual simulation of traveling the Trail was intended to provide students a greater understanding of the settler experience. The Willamette Heritage Center had the same intention in mind for OTL, promoting the event as "an excellent educational opportunity… making history accessible, memorable, and FUN!" (Willamette Heritage Center). One participant I spoke with agreed, telling me he liked how OTL "sneakily" taught us facts about the Trail as we moved through the activities.

Because both OTL and the 5k utilized *The Oregon Trail* as a referent, the understandings produced through participation in these events are not straightforward. By using *The Oregon Trail* as their source material, both events created new opportunities to experience and understand the multiple and

intertwined situations and narratives embedded within the game. These include the game's historical referent—the 19th century history and geography of the Oregon Trail—but they also include the Trail as represented by the game and participants' own memories of playing the game as children. What happens when these different situations and their contexts (to use Magelssen's terms) are collapsed into a single experience like OTL or the 5k?

Stuck on the 1985 Trail

In order create effective live-action versions of the game, which was the entire point for both events, OTL and the 5k had to adopt identifiable aspects of the game's design. The result was two events that were stuck on the narrow, gamified version of the Oregon Trail as constructed by Bouchard's 1985 version. For example, to replicate the gameplay, participants had to take the role of the settler traveling to Oregon. The information packet sent to OTL teams by the Heritage Center interpellated us as settlers before we even arrived. It was addressed to "Brave Pioneers" and encouraged us to dress in costume (a prize was given to the team with the best costumes). Likewise, to run the 5k was to be interpellated as American settlers, even if participants did not choose to dress like pioneers while running. Our race bibs included characters, but instead of the game's selections of banker, carpenter, or farmer, we were assigned one of three professions related to major race sponsors: doctor, builder, or brewer. Along the course, arrows drawn in sidewalk chalk pointed the way and referred to runners

as “pioneers” or “wagons.” This small addition ensured we remembered that we were “traveling the trail” as we ran through the streets of Oregon City.

Both events also adopted the game’s primary gameplay mechanism—choice-making at obstacle points—reiterating the notion that the Oregon Trail was a history of individual settlers making individual decisions. Success in both events was defined as completing a defined route by navigating a series of logistical challenges and threatening misfortunes. The prize was getting to settle in Oregon. The stated objective of OTL was “To homestead in Oregon having successfully met all the challenges marked on your map.” Neither event scrutinized or drew attention to the game’s frames of reference and how they constrained and contoured our understanding of the historical Oregon Trail. Instead, the game’s representation of the Trail was accepted and celebrated by each event with little being done to expand upon the game’s limitations.[165]

By reproducing the game’s limited and settler-oriented representations of the Trail, participants were ostensibly learning about the historical reality of the Trail, but were in actuality, simply relearning the long-dominant narrative advanced by the game that the Oregon Trail is about settlers persevering

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[165] OTL was designed as an extension of the existing educational mission of the Willamette Heritage Center. The hope by organizers would be that participants return to the museum and learn more about local and state history. Prizes for the event did include passes and memberships for the Center. For the 5k, however, little about the event was educational in nature. Despite running past locations significant to both Oregon history and the Confederated Tribes of Grand Ronde, whose Clowewalla and Clackamas Chinook ancestors lived by the falls, nothing was done to elucidate this history for runners. The booths and attractions set up around the finish line primarily featured local businesses and organizations, only one of which was related to local history, the Curtis Heritage Education Center. They brought a covered wagon to the event and shared information about what it was like to travel the trail in the 19th century.

through hardship to build a new life in Oregon.[166] Despite the claim by the Willamette Heritage Center that OTL was an educational opportunity that made history accessible, what it did was teach the game's version of history to participants.

Reenacting *The Oregon Trail*, Performing Nostalgia

These two events were not only simulations of the computer game, but also simulations of *playing* the game. By that, I mean they created opportunities for participants to approximate the experience of playing the game as children. OTL and the 5k provided participants with new ways to reconnect with the game and the *other* period of time it represents—the 1980s and 1990s. Magelssen notes that "simulation will often have its own efficacy separate from the event or action it references," using shooting free throws, trying on clothes, and the Christian ritual of communion as examples that provide meaning and pleasure apart from the events or activities they reference (Magelssen, *Simming* 4). Likewise, both OTL and the 5k simulate *The Oregon Trail* game (and its

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[166] The credibility of the Heritage Center as an authoritative institution of local history certainly created opportunities for the conflation of the game's representations and historical reality. As Magelssen notes in his work on living history museums, historical authenticity has a lot to do with how a "museum has managed its reputation as a rigorous, authoritative institution, and the degree to which visitors perceive and put stock in this reputation" (Magelssen, *Living History Museums* xiv). Even if one discounts the silliness of an event like OTL, the credibility of the Heritage Center bolsters the underlying narratives and viewpoints reproduced through the event. OTL's legitimacy as an educational event is further bolstered by it being named Winner of the Outstanding Museum Educator award from the Oregon and California Trails Association, a fact proudly noted in the event's promotional information.

representations of history), but they also produce pleasurable affective experiences unconnected to the content of the game or the historical event it represents.[167] As such, these events are also practices of nostalgia for many.

References to nostalgia almost unfailingly accompany contemporary iterations and adaptations of *The Oregon Trail*, including these two. Emily Grosvenor of *The Atlantic* concludes her review of OTL by naming nostalgia as one of the primary experiences created though participation: “The nostalgia is intense, the group bonding quotient is high, the survival rate is through the roof” (Grosvenor, “Going West”). The marketing for History Colorado’s copycat event explicitly drew connections between reenacting the game and childhood nostalgia, stating:

> “Remember getting a pass from social studies class to play the old computer game *The Oregon Trail*? Join us at the History Colorado Center as we bring the classic game (but not social studies class) to life with The Oregon Trail: In Real Life (IRL). Relive your childhood, as the vintage The Oregon Trail video game becomes a live-action experience set throughout the museum.” (“The Oregon Trail: IRL”)

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[167] The efficacy and popularity of *The Oregon Trail* itself were also largely separate from the history it references, as technology journalist Dennis Scimeca has noted. Its compelling gameplay was the “X factor” that set *The Oregon Trail* apart from many other educational games at the time, Scimeca argues, not the content itself. He likens it to James Naismith’s development of basketball and its original goal of getting students to exercise during the winter months. By making a game fun and engaging, it can more effectively serve it’s intended pedagogical function. “The solution [to designing educational games] may be to worry less at the beginning about what a game actually teaches and instead make sure it’s a game in the first place” (Scimeca).

In her race preview article about the 5k for *Run Oregon*, Meg Roberts begins by recalling her own experiences of playing the game as a child: "The absolute best day in computer class was Fridays when we got to play Oregon Trail… [F]or one glorious half-hour a week, I got to name five friends to try and survive the perilous trek out west." Despite the positive memories of playing the game, she reassures readers that the run "way cooler than a computer game" (Roberts).

Unlike previous manifestations of Oregon Trail nostalgia detailed in previous chapters—e.g., the rise of pioneer societies in the late 19th century or Ezra Meeker's trail-marking campaign in the early 20th—the nostalgia generated by iterations of *The Oregon Trail* is not a response to the dying out of the pioneer generation or fears about their legacy being lost to the march of time. These previous forms are what cultural theorist and playwright Svetlana Boym has called "restorative" nostalgia, the same phenomenon that often drives nationalist movements and attempts to return to an idealized past (e.g., "Make America Great Again"). The childhood nostalgia generated by iterations of the game are instead more like what Boym calls "reflective" nostalgia:

> [R]eflective nostalgia is more about individual and cultural memory…. If restorative nostalgia ends up reconstructing emblems and rituals of home and homeland in an attempt to conquer and spatialize time, reflective nostalgia cherishes shattered fragments of memory and temporalizes space. Restorative nostalgia takes itself dead seriously. Reflective nostalgia, on the other hand, can be ironic and humorous. (Boym 49)

Meeker's trail markers sought to spatialize time, fixing and preserving an idealized past across the physical landscape of the Pacific Northwest. Contemporary adaptations of *The Oregon Trail*, on the other hand, create momentary spaces where the past can be relived; or, at least, where we can playfully reflect on the distance of childhood and experience the pleasurable ache of a past that can never be retrieved.[168]

This inability to truly retrieve the past is not a failure of nostalgia but is, in fact, its primary feature. "The nostalgic is enamored of distance," writes literary critic Susan Stewart, noting that actual restoration would eradicate nostalgia (and therefore, any pleasures associated with it):

> For the nostalgic to reach his or her goal of closing the gap between resemblance and identity, *lived* experience would have to take place, an erasure of the gap between sign and signified, an experience which would cancel out the desire that is nostalgia's reason for existence. (Stewart 145)

Playing *The Oregon Trail* game as an adult may evoke memories and feelings, but it cannot close the gap between past and present. The game in new forms, especially participatory ones, may provide a new "*lived* experience" that helps close the gap between resemblance and identity; or, more accurately,

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[168] Journalist A.E. Osworth wrote an article for queer media website *Autostraddle* titled "DOS Games Are My Madeleines," equating the revamped 1992 version of the game, *Oregon Trail Deluxe*, to Marcel Proust's *In Search of Lost Time.* In the article, they write that like Proust's madeleine, the game transports them to another time, "very specifically to fourth grade" (Osworth).

establishes a new relationship between the original referent and one's present-day identity. As approximations, adaptations, and simmings, they satisfy the "desire that is nostalgia's reason for existence," as Stewart writes, while still preserving nostalgia itself. Their novelty creates a fresh way to experience childhood memories anew as adults, a new way to scratch the itch of nostalgic longing without actually returning to the past or eradicating the very essence of what makes nostalgia enjoyable.

The very impossibility of returning to childhood is perhaps why events like OTL and the 5k are so appealing for those that played the game as children. As Linda Hutcheon suggests, it is "the *irrecoverable* nature of the past" that nostalgia is dependent upon for its "emotional impact and appeal" (Hutcheon and Valdés 19–20). Performance, as an embodied and affective practice, offers a visceral way to re-experience a taste of what has been lost, but, as Hutcheon adds, it "is rarely the past as actually experienced, of course [but] the past as imagined, as idealized through memory and desire" (Hutcheon and Valdés 20). Actual childhood experiences are certainly not all pleasant or superior to adult life, but childhood is also easily imagined as an age of innocence when we were blissfully unaware of the responsibilities and difficulties of life.

For this micro-generation, however, the rosy glasses of nostalgia may be enhanced by the rapid changes to our relationship with technology over the last 30 years. In her essay about the "Oregon Trail Generation," Anna Garvey suggests that the desire for childhood pleasures long since passed is partly the

result of very material changes in the lives of this generation, changes indexed by *The Oregon Trail* itself. The contemporary popularity of the game, she argues, may have as much to do with the specific technology that brought *The Oregon Trail* into our lives as it does with the game itself. “We came of age just as the very essence of communication was experiencing a seismic shift, and it’s given us a unique perspective that’s half analog old school and half digital new school,” she writes (Garvey). The nostalgia around the game is also a longing for a prelapsarian moment before the arrival of the internet, social media, and smart phones:

> Those born in the late 70s and early 80s were the last group to have a childhood devoid of all the technology that makes childhood and adolescence today pretty much the worst thing imaginable. We were the last gasp of a time before sexting, Facebook shaming, and constant communication. (Garvey)

The desire to “relive childhood” by reenacting the game may not be a general desire for childhood overall but may instead be desire for a time before the technological genies of the internet and social media were let out of the bottle.

By the same token, *The Oregon Trail* is also associated with the many positive and exciting memories of technology. At a time when most Americans did not have personal computers at home, *The Oregon Trail* was part of many people’s introduction to computers and all the possibilities they promised. “We were the first group of kids who grew up with household computers,” Garvey

writes, “but [they were] still novel enough to elicit confusion and wonder…. [W]hen we first placed our sticky little fingers on a primitive Mac, we were elementary school kids whose brains were curious sponges…” (Garvey). As Meg Roberts notes in her 5k preview, “Although typing skills have been more useful than my deer ‘hunting’ ones, those were the days when I learned how cool computers could be” (Roberts). Playing *The Oregon Trail* was an exciting experience of new technology, one that grew both more wonderful and more frightening over the years.

The nostalgic pull generated by *The Oregon Trail* saturates recent iterations, including OTL and the 5k.[169] Both events leveraged the generational popularity of *The Oregon Trail* to connect participants to the work of their respective producing organizations. As told by Grosvenor, when Kelly Williams Brown approached the Heritage Center with her idea for OTL, they were “quickly on board, seeing in a live-action Oregon Trail a chance to capture the attention of two hard-to-reach audiences for historic museums: young families and young adults” (Grosvenor, “Going West”). Similarly, the 5k was effective at bringing hundreds of people to downtown Oregon City from other parts of the region.[170] The year Grosvenor participated in OTL (2014), she noted that more than half of the teams were families. There were families with children at both events when I

[169] The choice to award runners 3.5” diskettes instead of medals is a prime example of the 5k’s exploitation of technological nostalgia.
[170] Blogger Abby Meek writes about meeting someone who came all the way from Missouri to run in the 2017 edition of the race (Meek).

participated, but most participants were in their mid-20s to mid-40s, and many participated without children. This was true despite the activities at OTL being mostly geared toward children and families, creating a mismatch between the enthusiasm of the "Oregon Trail Generation" and the event itself.

The data on who participated in the 5k in 2019 also suggest a disproportionate popularity of the event with the "Oregon Trail Generation." Out of 425 participants, a significantly larger-than-average share of runners were under 20 years old (especially under 12 years old), and a significantly smaller-than-average share of runners were in their 20s or over 50.[171] The ages most likely to be familiar with *The Oregon Trail* and their children made up the bulk of participants. The predominance of this age group at both events indicates the power of *The Oregon Trail* to attract this generation compared to other age categories. My elementary-aged teammates at OTL (my niece and nephew) had little, if any knowledge of the game before we participated. For them, the activities did not call to mind the game, nor did they evoke personal memories of playing it. They connected parts to what they learned in 4th grade Oregon state history, but other aspects of the event were too specific to the game to make sense to them.[172] To them, the reason for the event itself was not entirely clear.

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[171] Averages are based on the demographics of 133 5k races run in the United States analyzed by RunRepeat.com. In the 2019 Oregon Trail 5k, 10% of participants were over 50, compared with 20-25% nationally; 24% were under 20, compared with about 5% nationally; and 12.9% were 20-29, compared with 20-25% nationally.

[172] These included the three-legged dysentery race (a nod to the now immortalized misfortune) and the meat carry (an allusion to the 100 lb. limit to how much meat you could carry back from a hunting expedition).

In contrast, the resonance of both events with the "Oregon Trail Generation" was evident when I participated. At OTL, teams enthusiastically participated and enjoyed themselves, despite the clear mismatch between them and the activities seemingly designed with elementary-aged children in mind. One team dressed in bonnets and dresses had made matching tote bags emblazoned with "Get in losers! We're going to die of dysentery!" in *The Oregon Trail*'s classic aesthetic, the line itself a parody of the 2004 movie *Mean Girls*. Another pair of women named their team after another nostalgic allusion to childhood, Hattie Campbell, a character who traveled the Oregon Trail in the *Dear America* children's book series. We are the "generation of the game," they told me, adding that part of the draw was their memories of playing the game in 4th grade. Nostalgia was not the only feeling circulating that day. One participant told me that reliving the game gave him a sense of pride as an Oregonian, connecting it to Oregon's "pioneer spirit."

To embrace of *The Oregon Trail* seems to have as much to do with nostalgic embraces of childhood, social identity, and even Oregonian pride as it does with what the game originally intended to teach. The enthusiastic participation of the "Oregon Trail Generation" at these events speaks to the significance of this game in their lives and at least for some, reveals nostalgic

desires to recapture the feelings and experiences connected to it.[173] For those of us who played *The Oregon Trail* as children, reenacting the game is both an experience of reproducing its problematic representations and an experience of enjoying the pleasures of nostalgia, including affirmations of identity. Even if we acknowledge the problems with the game's version of history, those same representations have been integrated into who we imagine ourselves to be. They are entangled with joy, our sense of identity, our childhood memories, and our relationship to technology.

III. Nostalgia as a Settler Move to Innocence

While the game originally sought to educate children about the Oregon Trail, its current manifestations trade in nostalgia, childhood innocence, and generational identity. It is this tangle of history, representation, affect, and personal memory that makes these events and other citations of *The Oregon Trail* troubling. To what extent do these iterations cloak the realities of settler colonialism with nostalgia. As Lorenzo Veracini writes about settler colonialism, "The more it goes without saying, the better it covers its tracks" (Veracini, *Settler*

[173] In addition, these events entangled the game's narratives and representations with physical sensations produced through participation, something which I do not believe should be discounted. For example, the physical exertion required to successfully run a 5k certainly resonates differently when layered atop narratives of settler hardship and perseverance. What potentially arises when the sense of accomplishment at reaching the finish line is mingled with stories of settlers arriving in Oregon after a difficult journey? Linking colonization with physical sensations of relief and satisfaction may work subtly to normalize these logics and actions as good. Similar to what Bill Bigelow notes about playing *Oregon Trail II*: the experience of frustration and difficulty created by the game can lead players to feel they *deserve* land upon their arrival to Oregon, a rich reward for their "labors in transit" (Bigelow 90).

Colonialism a Theoretical Overview 15). By utilizing the game as source material, events like OTL and the 5k deflect attention away from the historical reality of colonization. The tracks of settler colonialism present in these events and locations may ironically be covered by the explicit citation, affirmation, and reenactment of the very thing leaving those tracks—the Oregon Trail.

This deflection allows contemporary iterations of *The Oregon Trail* to function as "settler move to innocence," what Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang describe as "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" (previously discussed in Chapter Two) (Tuck and Yang 10). As participants reiterate and reenact the game's limited, settler-dominant simulation of history, they are buffered from the very real violence and destruction of colonization. Instead of having to reckon with the historical and present-day realities of colonization, participants can instead relish in the comfort of nostalgia. Even as the Trail is explicitly cited, our attention is directed toward the game and our own personal memories of it and deflected away from settler colonialism itself.

By functioning as settler moves to innocence, events like OTL and the 5k become yet another mechanism for legitimizing settler inhabitance in the Pacific Northwest. To close this chapter, I offer two examples from recent iterations to consider. The first is from OTL and the second is from a play produced in 2016

by Portland Center Stage in Portland, OR: Bekah Brunstetter's play also titled *The Oregon Trail*.

Playing Settler in *Terra Nullius*

For an event like OTL, indulging nostalgia also means rehearsing some of the commonplace practices which sustain settler modes of inhabiting. An example of this was the final activity we had to complete: claiming and improving land. In the OTL information packet, the objective of the event was stated as follows: "To homestead in Oregon having successfully met all the challenges marked on your map" (Willamette Heritage Center). Like the computer game, the packet provided no further information about the implications of homesteading for the existing Indigenous societies occupying the same land.

After completing all of our challenges and passing our "Homestead Exam"—a short quiz based upon a few Oregon Trail facts scattered around the Heritage Center grounds—we sign a land deed and are given kebab skewers and string to physically stake our claim in the grassy lawn behind the Old Mill building.[174] The deed used the language of land claims issued circa 1850, but used the date of the event—September 8, 2018—as the date the claim commenced "in pursuance of the requirements…of residence and cultivation."

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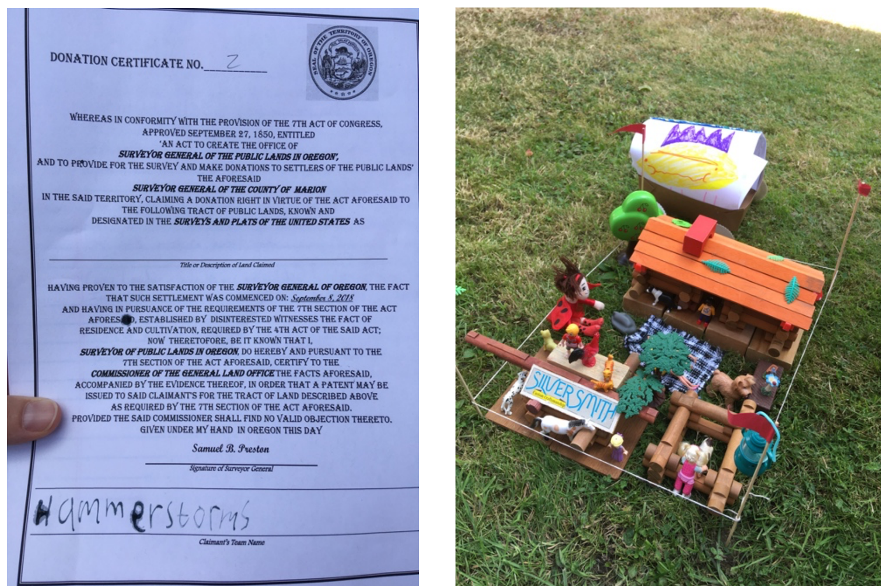
[174] The "exam" was the most obvious educational element of the event and does not have a parallel in the game. Examples of the information needed to pass the exam included: the second leading cause of death on the trail was accidental shooting; on average, it cost a family $500 to cross in 1850s; and wagons were circled at night to corral livestock (not to protect against Indian attacks as movies often depicted).

The lawn was completely empty, an open expanse of green grass—the OTL equivalent of *terra nullius*. As we staked our claim on the empty lawn representing the Willamette Valley and built our homestead out of Lincoln Logs and wooden blocks, little was done to disabuse us of the notion that we, the Oregon Trail settlers, were building a new life from nothing, or as my nephew described it, with “free land” (see fig. 2).



DONATION CERTIFICATE NO. 2

WHEREAS IN CONFORMITY WITH THE PROVISION OF THE 7TH ACT OF CONGRESS,
APPROVED SEPTEMBER 27, 1850, ENTITLED
'AN ACT TO CREATE THE OFFICE OF
SURVEYOR GENERAL OF THE PUBLIC LANDS IN OREGON',
AND TO PROVIDE FOR THE SURVEY AND MAKE DONATIONS TO SETTLERS OF THE PUBLIC LANDS'
THE AFORESAID
SURVEYOR GENERAL OF THE COUNTY OF MARION
IN THE SAID TERRITORY, CLAIMING A DONATION RIGHT IN VIRTUE OF THE ACT AFORESAID TO
THE FOLLOWING TRACT OF PUBLIC LANDS, KNOWN AND
DESIGNATED IN THE ***SURVEYS AND PLATS OF THE UNITED STATES*** AS

Title or Description of Land Claimed

HAVING PROVEN TO THE SATISFACTION OF THE ***SURVEYOR GENERAL OF OREGON***, THE FACT
THAT SUCH SETTLEMENT WAS COMMENCED ON: *September 8, 2018*
AND HAVING IN PURSUANCE OF THE REQUIREMENTS OF THE 7TH SECTION OF THE ACT
AFORES[illegible]D, ESTABLISHED BY DISINTERESTED WITNESSES THE FACT OF
RESIDENCE AND CULTIVATION, REQUIRED BY THE 4TH ACT OF THE SAID ACT;
NOW THERETOFORE, BE IT KNOWN THAT I,
SURVEYOR OF PUBLIC LANDS IN OREGON, DO HEREBY AND PURSUANT TO THE
7TH SECTION OF THE ACT AFORESAID, CERTIFY TO THE
COMMISSIONER OF THE GENERAL LAND OFFICE THE FACTS AFORESAID,
ACCOMPANIED BY THE EVIDENCE THEREOF, IN ORDER THAT A PATENT MAY BE
ISSUED TO SAID CLAIMANT'S FOR THE TRACT OF LAND DESCRIBED ABOVE
AS REQUIRED BY THE 7TH SECTION OF THE ACT AFORESAID.
PROVIDED THE SAID COMMISSIONER SHALL FIND NO VALID OBJECTION THERETO.
GIVEN UNDER MY HAND IN OREGON THIS DAY

Samuel B. Preston

Signature of Surveyor General

Hammerstorms

Claimant's Team Name

Figure 2, homesteading at Oregon Trail Live! (author photo)

The homesteading activity simulated the historic process by which settlers attained land in the Willamette Valley but was also an invitation to practice the mechanics of colonization.[175] Not only did it replicate the historical process of settlement facilitated by the Trail, but it also normalized the concept of land possession underlying settler colonialism itself. By signing the deed, “surveying” our land with skewers and string, and “improving” the land with Lincoln Logs, we

[175] Homesteading is not an activity players undertake in the game itself but obtaining land in Oregon is referenced.

were performing the attendant practices of land ownership and commodification.[176] We were practicing a ritual commonplace in our society, the transformation of land into property. Colonization is often described as the theft of land, but as Robert Nichols has shown, American settler colonialism is actually a "large-scale transfer of land that simultaneously recodes the object of exchange...it is thus not (only) about the transfer of property, but the transformation [of land] into property" (Nichols 12). Did participants recognize our fun activity as a process of abstracting land, transforming it into property, and enabling it to be claimed and possessed by settlers? Did we understand our actions as imposing a culturally specific ideology of space onto the land of the Willamette Valley in order to rationalize our occupation of it?

No one explained this to us, nor did anyone explain the impacts of our newly signed deed and its concomitant enforcement on the Kalapuya people Indigenous to the central Willamette Valley. As we built our little toy homestead, I asked another participant—a white, middle-aged man—to describe his experience of the event that day. He tells me it reminded him "how hard the original people out here had it." By "original people" he did not mean the Kalapuya, but the Oregon Trail "pioneers" who settled there. It is an unsurprising account of history given OTL's source material, a game that features the settler

[176] Though not made explicit in OTL, the discourse on improvement—one of the earliest means of delegitimizing Indigenous claims to land in colonial America—was what we enacted by building a homestead out of toys on the lawn. This is the logic that courses through dominant mythologies of pioneers civilizing the wilderness and building a new life from "nothing."

as the default Oregonian. I wonder if his response would be different if the lawn had been populated with people, villages, camas fields, and other indications of Oregon's Indigenous societies? What if OTL teams had to stake a claim in an already named and populated space with established histories and active cultures? What ways of thinking and feeling might be produced if participants were asked to simulate the (historically accurate) invasion of Native space? How would that change how participants understand themselves, their relationship to this land, and *The Oregon Trail* game?

Yet again, the narratives of pioneer hardship advanced by *The Oregon Trail* and concepts like legally-sanctioned land possession are help constitute "settler common sense," Mark Rifkin's name for the "structures that enable non-native access to Indigenous territories come to be lived as given, as simply the unmarked, generic conditions of possibility for occupancy, association, history, and personhood" (Barnd; Rifkin, *Settler Common Sense*). With no ability to see these settler colonial frames of reference *as* frames delimiting what is possible to imagine, they fade into the background as common sense at the same time that they actively create the conditions for non-Native identity, life, and power. As we rehearsed the everyday mechanisms for colonizing Indigenous homelands, the date on our fake land deed unintentionally reminded us that they are still at work.

The Oregon Trail as Abstract Metaphor

In Bekah Brunstetter's play, *The Oregon Trail*, we are introduced to Jane, a 20-something woman dealing with depression and struggling to find her purpose in life. To escape the dismal prospects of her real life, she plays one of her favorite childhood games: *The Oregon Trail*. As she plays, the hardships and misfortunes of her game character (called Then Jane) parallel those of her real life until the game begins to actively intervene in her life. A narrator named "Game"—mimicking the game's second-person style instructions—pushes Jane to persevere through her challenges. It takes Jane on a Christmas Carol like review of her young life and the choices she made (and didn't make) that ostensibly led her to her quarter-life crisis. Focusing on boys and Drama club rather than academics in high school. Failing to get into a private liberal arts college and studying Media Studies at a mediocre state school instead. Getting fired from her first job post-college, moving in with her parents, and being "too arrogant for both menial labor and also Starbucks" (Brunstetter 35). Choosing to play *The Oregon Trail* or watch television rather than do something more useful with her time and energy, like charity or reading the news.

Adopting *The Oregon Trail*'s unidirectional gameplay of decisions and consequences, Jane's life up unto this point is characterized as the collective consequences of personal decisions. Setting aside the near-complete disregard that Jane's malaise may legitimately be the result of clinical depression, Brunstetter reiterates the individualist narrative about life choices, ignoring the

possibility that larger forces could share in the responsibility for Jane's current predicament. In reiterating tired stereotypes of the "failed adult"—weight gain, living with parents, unemployed, not serious academically, wasted money on a "worthless" degree—Brunstetter has created the impression that success in life is dependent on making the "right" choices at crucial junctures. Making the wrong choice may lead to abject failure. In Oregon Trail meme-speak, you will "die of dysentery."

Brunstetter uses the game's frameworks and devices to reassert the mythos of settler perseverance in the face of hardship, establishing a moral compass for the show: just keep going. At the end, after a chance encounter with the grave of her pioneer ancestor (presumably Then Jane), Jane explains to her sister what she's realized through the course of the show, relating her feelings to the experience of her forebears who crossed the Trail:

> JANE: Just like everybody who came before you. They were alive, and so – so are we.
>
> MARY ANNE: Yeah, I get that, what's your point?
>
> JANE: I don't know. They were strong, cause they had to be. And so maybe, so're we. And maybe when we feel this—the—*(She still can't quite name it. Puts a hand on her gut.)* Maybe that's just our bodies remembering them. (Brunstetter 85–86)

Her sister comments that this conclusion is very sad, to which Jane replies, "it makes us remember where we came from. And where we're going. And why

we're going there, at all" (Brunstetter 86). The play concludes soon after, with the final lines of the play repeating the final words from the arrival screen in the game, "Congratulations. You have made it to Oregon."

In Brunstetter's play, *The Oregon Trail* game is the latest vehicle for reasserting the very same narratives of settler hardship and perseverance that have been told for generations. The Trail is abstracted from its historical reality as an invasion of settlers carrying out a violent, wholesale transformation of an Indigenous Pacific Northwest into an American colonial world. This abstraction turns the Trail into a metaphor applicable to the daily life of a 20-something woman in the 21st century. It tells audiences that the pioneer legacy is an affective and embodied legacy that grounds us ("where we come from"), guides us ("where we're going"), and gives us purpose ("why we're going there"). This is a settler move to innocence par excellence, newly cloaked in the familiar aesthetics and conventions of a computer game from 1985.

IV. Conclusion

When Rawitsch, Heinemann, and Dillenberger created *OREGON* in 1971, they had no intent for the game beyond utilizing the school district's time-sharing computer system to enhance Rawitsch's teaching. But *The Oregon Trail* arguably became the dominant way an entire generation of children came to understand the history and geography of the Trail. As the game introduced children to its settler-oriented representations of the Trail, those representations were

entangled with the experience of childhood, school, and new technology. These experiences of the game as children created the conditions for *The Oregon Trail*'s reemergence in the early 21st century as an object of nostalgia. The game found new life in a bevy of adaptations, parodies, and remediations which have provided children of the "Oregon Trail Generation" to relive (in new ways) childhood memories and assert generational and geographic identities.

These nostalgic iterations continue to reproduce and rehearse the narratives, logics, and practices upholding settler colonialism in the Pacific Northwest. This includes the game's centering of white settlers, its emphasis on individual choices and hardship, and its erasure of the destructive impacts of colonization for Indigenous people, life, and lands. At the same time, the game and the nostalgia generated by it work as a settler move to innocence, deflecting attention away from the lasting impacts and ongoing operations of colonization. To paraphrase historian T.J. Tallie, these events cosplay conquest and render irreparable destruction as a pleasing form of play. As the norms upholding settler colonialism are abstracted from the material realities of colonialism, filtered through *The Oregon Trail,* and made accessible through fun, affective, and interactive experiences, their importation into the everyday fabric of our lives becomes ever more veiled. What began as a representation of the Oregon Trail using new technology in 1971 has become an integral part of an entire generation's sense of self, facilitated by events like OTL and the 5k.

The recent renaissance of *The Oregon Trail* game is just the latest way that the history, mythology, and geography of the Oregon Trail has been mobilized in the Pacific Northwest (and beyond) for the benefit of a settler colonial status quo. Like the Pioneer Mythology that emerged in the late 19th century and Ezra Meeker's early 20th century campaign to mark the Trail, *The Oregon Trail* and its nostalgic iterations work to sustain the norms and logics of settler colonialism. Unlike those earlier movements, however, the pioneers valorized by *The Oregon Trail* nostalgia are digital avatars traveling a pixelated version of the American west displayed on a computer screen. These nostalgic iterations of the game are not celebrating the Pioneer generation of the 19th century, but the "Oregon Trail Generation" of the 1980s and 1990s. The end result, however, remains the privileging of settler claims to the land and the rationalization of non-Native presence in the Pacific Northwest.

Conclusion

Throughout this dissertation, I have shown how a range of performance practices have utilized the history, geography, and mythology of the Oregon Trail to maintain and normalize settler colonialism within the Pacific Northwest. This has been especially true in the state of Oregon, where recounting, reinterpreting, and reenacting the history of the Oregon Trail has been a central part of Oregonian identity and culture for nearly 150 years. The Trail has proven to be a useful tool for Oregon's settler project far beyond its years as a travel route, adapting and shifting with each new generation to remain relevant and vital to settler society's ongoing maintenance. Whether mobilized through trail preservation, historical pageantry, or childhood nostalgia, the Trail has been a durable and capacious framework for interpreting and legitimizing non-Native presence in the land of the Pacific Northwest.

To conclude, I return to historian Coll Thrush's question that set the course for much of my project: "What does it mean to belong to a place that isn't yours?" The potency of this question for me has always been found in the double meaning of the phrase "what does it mean," which implies both the *processes* and *consequences* of belonging.

In the first sense, the question asks how the *process* of belonging works, that is, *how* does one come to belong to a place? This is a question about the mechanisms, structures, and conceptual frameworks which make claims of

belonging possible, a question I have brought to bear upon the settlers of the Pacific Northwest. Elucidating these processes helps dislodge the category of settler (and settler practices) from the default position of normal or natural. As Corey Snelgrove has succinctly noted, “If we don’t understand how settlers are produced we run the risk of representing settlers as some sort of transhistorical subject with transhistorical practices” (Snelgrove et al. 22). As this dissertation has shown, the normalcy of settlers and settler colonialism in the Pacific Northwest is very much a historically produced phenomenon that continually renews itself.

In the previous chapters, I have focused on the role of performance in these processes, specifically performances of Oregon Trail history, geography, and mythology. Each chapter details how these performances have utilized representation, embodied action, narrative, affect, and performative materialization to produce settler identity and belonging within the Pacific Northwest. These processes have included:

- (Re)producing settler spatial regimes and settler colonial geographies.
- Privileging settler narratives and orientations, and the positioning of settlers as the rightful inhabitants of the Pacific Northwest.
- Abstracting the Trail from its historical and material realities to transform it into a widely applicable metaphor for various contemporary concerns.
- Reenacting and rehearsing assertions of territorial sovereignty and other practices of colonization (like rituals around private property).

- Generating embodied, affective experiences which help integrate settler colonial norms into positive articulations of settler identity and occupancy.

The cumulative effect of these practices has been an ongoing affirmation of the frameworks and structures that enable settlers to understand themselves as the rightful inhabitants of the lands they occupy.

The phrase "what does it mean" also raises questions about the outcomes or consequences of belonging. For settlers in the Pacific Northwest, past or present, what are the implications of claiming to belong? What are the byproducts of the processes described above? First among these relates to the territorial dynamic of settler colonialism itself. The performances detailed in this dissertation are not merely performances of history but are practices which shape our relationships to the land we inhabit. All claims of settler belonging are dependent upon the historic and ongoing expropriation, occupation, and control of Indigenous homelands. Put another way, the frameworks and structures (whether discursive or material) that enable non-Native inhabitants to obtain a sense of rightful belonging are inseparable from ongoing contestations over land. Belonging is never a "settled" matter.

Settler claims of territorial belonging require the validation of the settler state's apparatus for legitimization, an apparatus dependent upon the obfuscation, subordination, or denial of alternative possibilities for inhabitance, sovereignty, or coexistence. Most notably, this has included those evidenced by the ongoing vitality of the Pacific Northwest's Indigenous communities and their

respective life-worlds. As Mark Rifkin has so bluntly stated, many of the experiences settlers have of selfhood and identity—experiences arising from our inhabitance of a specific place—come at the expense of Indigenous claims to the same places (Rifkin, *Settler Common Sense* xvi).

Despite the importance of the settler-Indigenous binary in understanding American settler colonialism, I want to emphasize that this binary is not a deterministic constraint on what is possible regarding inhabitance, relationality, or forms of collectivity, i.e., we are not limited by existing settler or Indigenous formations and practices.[177] Nor is this binary indicative of fixed identities that are transhistorical, immutable, or inevitable. Still, the settler-Indigenous binary is a fundamental dynamic that structures our present-day settler colonial society and all who inhabit it. It is a binary that indexes a relationship between differing conceptions of, and relationships to, mutually occupied land.

The problem with the practices analyzed in this dissertation is their limited ability to acknowledge, engage with, and respond ethically to the existence of

[177] It is also important to avoid assuming that either settler or Indigenous modes of inhabiting land are inherently superior to the other. (Nor can we easily define the categories of settler or Indigenous as monolithic or absent of internal differences.) As environmental historian Richard White has written about the colonization of the Pacific Northwest, "Any environment inhabited by human beings is, to varying degrees, a human-dominated ecosystem. The question is not domination per se, nor civilization versus wilderness, but rather how an environment is dominated and with what results" (White 111). While White's use of "domination" may not adequately capture the full spectrum of ways that humans relate to the lands they inhabit, he appropriately notes that value judgments about a given practice or regime must be made on the basis of their effects.

possibilities outside of the dominant frameworks of settler colonialism.[178] In each chapter, I have shown different ways in which performance practices have taken for granted and relied upon existing settler colonial conditions in order to legitimize the presence of non-Natives in the lands of the Pacific Northwest. This includes:

- The ongoing assertion of settler sovereignty through a reproduction of settler geographies and the physical transformation of land (Chapter One).
- The use of established historical narratives and geographies to orient museum visitors within settler spatial regimes (Chapter Two).
- The use of linear, progressive temporalities to create experiences of history that rationalize colonization through claims of racial and cultural superiority (Chapter Three).
- The uncritical reproduction of *The Oregon Trail* video game's limited frameworks for imagining history and geography in order to create experiences of nostalgia (Chapter Four).

These practices have helped sustain the ongoing colonization of the Pacific Northwest, but they have also constrained our ability to imagine alternative articulations of belonging that do not rely upon domination, racial superiority, capitalist expansion, or the possessive logics of property. The collective effect of

[178] These frameworks have produced ways of relating to the land and its Indigenous inhabitants that are defined by domination, a logic of Native elimination, capitalist exploitation, possessive logics of property, and temporalities of never-ending progress and improvement. They are also defined by Indigenous resistance, cultural reclamation, political revitalization, and the strategic navigation of an oppressive colonial regime.

these performances has been a belligerent insistence on limited and limiting ways of imagining and practicing inhabitance which do not adequately reckon with the dynamism and multiplicity of shared copresence, nor encourage ethical practices of engagement across lines of difference.

The settler state always claims to be capable of overcoming its own limitations and becoming the vehicle for a better future, something that the mythos of the rugged Trail pioneers has always promised. Yet, I believe Herbert Marcuse's diagnosis of the post-war world from *A Note on Dialectic* also applies to America's contemporary settler state:

> The established reality seems promising and productive enough to repel or absorb all alternatives…. [I]nsistence on the dynamic character of the status quo, on its constant 'revolutions,' is one of the strongest props for this attitude. Yet this dynamic seems to operate endlessly within the same framework of life: streamlining rather than abolishing the domination of man, both by man and by the products of his labor…and tends to delay indefinitely…the emergence of new modes of existence with new forms of reason and freedom. (Marcuse vii)

The ongoing performance of the settler state—and its concomitant spatialities, temporalities, and frameworks for belonging—continues to delay the emergence of new modes of existence within the Pacific Northwest and beyond, whether or not it manifests through the mythos of the Oregon Trail. Settler colonialism is incapable of superseding its own inherent conditions; real change requires a new

framework of life, one that acknowledges the complexity and complicity of living in the Pacific Northwest today.[179]

Complexity and complicity, as political theorist Alexis Shotwell argues, make up "the constitutive situation of our lives," and therefore, cannot and should not be avoided. But these realities make moving toward a world with "less suffering and more flourishing" an exceedingly hard task. The target constantly shifts, it is uncomfortable work, and it cannot be achieved by a delusional insistence on purity (that is, a desire for simple solutions or absolution from our complicity in harm). It is also a task requiring us to grapple with past, present, and future, as she notes:

> It is hard for us to examine our connection with *unbearable pasts* with which we might reckon better, our implication in *impossibly complex presents* through which we might craft different modes of response, and our aspirations for *different futures* toward which we might shape different worlds-yet-to-come. (Shotwell 8)

The difficulty of navigating this reality cannot be adequately assuaged by finding the "right" regime to govern our lands and our lives. Rather, it requires a critical and ethical practice that continually asks (in both senses of the phrase) what it means to belong—here, in this land, with one another.

[179] What exactly this may entail is beyond the scope of this project. I do believe it requires a radical change in how we imagine and practice our relationship to land, including challenging logics of possession, property, and control. I also believe it requires a robust defense of Indigenous sovereignty and treaty rights, including support of the land back movement.

Future Trajectories for this Work

Within theatre and performance studies, there is an abundance of work that emphasizes the liberatory potential of performance and its capacity to act as a vehicle for transformative change, or at least, as a strategy for resistance, subversion, and survival. This includes a wide range of scholars and practitioners like Bertolt Brecht, Augosto Boal, Jill Dolan, and Jose Muñoz. I too believe in the power of theatre and performance to bring about transformative change, but I also believe it is important to scrutinize the ways in which performance practices also work to uphold systems of domination and reproduce harm. These are not two discrete types of performance but can often occur simultaneously. The *Oregon Trail Pageants* arguably brought a stronger sense of meaning, purpose, and unity to the Eugene community. At the same time, it was a practice celebrating colonization, environmental exploitation, white supremacy, and the subjugation of Oregon's Indigenous people. Moving forward, I am interested in continuing to elucidate how other performance practices operate similar to those in this dissertation, i.e., reproducing the fundamental inequities and harms of settler colonialism in spite of their positive social impacts.

Regarding the chapters in this dissertation, each one could have sufficiently provided enough material for an entire dissertation. There is much more to say about each topic and many objects and events that were not included. I would be interested in expanding upon the social and material

conditions from which these practices emerged, exploring further the connections that different manifestations of the Trail have had with contemporaneous economic, social, and political realities. I have done some of this work here, but believe more can be done, especially regarding the fourth chapter.

I would also like to continue my research into other ways that settler sovereignty and territorial occupation have been asserted in Oregon. This includes counterculture movements of the 1960s and 1970s, conflicts over natural resources like fish and timber, land use policies of the 1980s and 1990s, environmentalism, and recent political activism like Occupy and the Malheur National Wildlife Refuge takeover. Despite the diversity of these movements politically and ideologically, they have not, for the most part, occurred outside the frameworks of settler colonialism. I believe the same methodological emphasis on performance and space would be useful when applied to these movements and events.

Lastly, this work supports a continued investigation into the alternative geographies, temporalities, and modes of inhabiting that coexist with(in) the settler states of the Pacific Northwest, including those of the region's Indigenous communities and also those of non-white settlers or arrivants throughout the 19th and 20th centuries. This includes Chinese and Japanese immigrants, Black settlers, European immigrants around the turn of the 20th century (like my own ancestors), and Latinos, especially those who have powered the Northwest's agricultural economy.

I look forward to using this dissertation as a springboard for opening up new avenues of historiographic thought, particularly as it relates to the places we inhabit.

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