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SANTA CRUZ

INSTANT MESSENGER: THE PONY EXPRESS, MEDIA, AND MODERN VIRTUALITY

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction

Of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

In

FILM AND DIGITAL MEDIA

By

Christina Corfield

December 2018

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Vice Provost and Dean of Graduate Studies

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Abstract

Instant Messenger: The Pony Express, Media, and Modern Virtuality

Christina Corfield

This dissertation explores the power that messaging systems play in the symbolic structures of American identity by focusing on the legendary status of the Pony Express in film, literature, commemorative events, and historical site museums. In four chapters and two multi-dimensional installation artworks combining performance, painted sets, and digital viewers, I examine persistent myths surrounding modern American identity and American exceptionalism as articulated through technological development and communications infrastructures. Using a media archeological method to examine the idea of media as message bearers and organizational frameworks, this project engages with theorists of media and modernity from Walter Benjamin and Marshall McLuhan, to infrastructural theorist John Durham-Peters, as well as Lisa Gitelman and Jussi Parikka. Situating the Pony Express as a feature of an American cultural mythology that supports a wide array of twentieth and twenty-first century modes of conveyance, this project seeks to understand what is at stake with the mythological deployment of communications infrastructures past and present.

This is a project about the role of media in media history, and the role of absence and historical loss in shaping the underlying meaning of technologies of communication that are themselves portrayed as empire-building entities. Using a mixture of traditional archival methods (spanning rare materials, artifactual

collections, official histories) and new media tools (digital code and videography) the

dissertation brings questions of virtual communication into the present moment to ask

the reader and viewer about the immediate context of our message delivery habitats.

Acknowledgements

Introduction

This dissertation has been guided by three key motivations. First, to add to an expanding body of scholarship that challenges the parameters by which we classify and define "media", and in which media's relationship to "newness" can likewise be questioned or interrupted. Second, to historically trace the role of media in constructing a technologically defined sense of American modernity and thus American identity as it has shifted from the early- to mid-nineteenth century into the twentieth century, and third, to demonstrate the importance of how media are imagined to how they are understood, valued, and put to use in culture by individuals, communities, private companies, and governing institutions. Through the imaginative projections of popular culture, which refigure media as subjects - content rather than as the physical devices, social protocols and geographical and political networks that have made communication immediate - we can see the ways in which media frame our connection to concepts of pasts and futures, geo-political boundaries, and the representation of group identities as configured through nationalism and technology.

Running for a mere eighteen months between spring 1860 and fall 1861, the transcontinental Pony Express was a messenger service that prefigured the telegraph and the railroads in the American West. Carrying letters, telegrams, and special edition, aggregated newspapers all printed on tissue paper to reduce weight, the Express was the fastest long-distance courier in North America at the time covering almost 2000 miles from St. Joseph in Missouri to Sacramento in California. Privately owned and operated by the Central Overland California and Pikes Peak Express

Company, it was the latest venture for business partners William Russell, Alexander Majors and William Waddell who made their vast fortunes and solid reputation through freighting.[1] Horses were ridden at full speed for as long as they could stand, usually ten to fifteen miles, and so relay stations were built roughly that far apart on flatter regions, and closer together in more challenging terrains such as the Rocky Mountains. Each rider covered roughly one hundred miles, changing horses six times on their stretch of the route but never stopping, even if it meant riding for days. "Home" stations were where a change of rider occurred, and were usually equipped with beds for riders to rest and sleep before the next package of messages arrived. Not dissimilar to the telegraph, the Express was an information technology that carried nothing other than information. No passengers, nor money nor anything else other than messages on tissue paper. However, despite its speed, the Express was poorly patronized. At five dollars per half ounce, use of the Express was a luxury afforded only to private businesses, the United States government and military, and newspaper companies. Yet despite this high tariff, the entire system of riders, horses, relay stations and their keepers proved too expensive, and Russell, Majors and Waddell declared bankruptcy and sell the company amid great scandal by the end of the eighteen months of the Express's tenure.[2]

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[1] For a history of Russell, Majors and Waddell see Raymond Settle and Mary Lund Settle, *Empire on Wheels,* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1949).
[2] For a description of the complicated demise of the Express, and the scandal that surrounded John Russell at the end of the Express's tenure, see Joseph J. Di Certo, "Passing into History," in *The Saga of the Pony Express,* (Missoula, Mon: Mountain Press Publishing Co., 2002), 189-204.

In 1860, the Pony Express represented the social, cultural and economic shifts taking place in the United States as it changed from an agrarian to an industrial nation. The fastest long-distance messenger of its time, preempting the transcontinental telegraph by eighteen months and the transcontinental railroad by nine years, the Express was a huge and complex operation, powered by a deceptively simple relay of boys on horses stretching across two thousand miles from Missouri to California. Even though the Express didn't rely on the latest machine technology to carry out its task, its purpose and its function – to rapidly and reliably keep information in a state of constant circulation - marked it as a qualitatively modern technology. Yet the Express did more than simply deliver messages. It ordered time and space according to urban needs and the rising importance of information as a form of capital (specifically rural and unincorporated space, as well as the peoples who then occupied that space). What made the Express new was not innovative design, nor the use of cutting edge technology, but rather innovative implementation in a specific context. Its efficiency wasn't powered by the tireless force of coal-fueled engines, or electrical pulses sent through wires, but by the nuanced and intimate relationship of horse and rider to the terrain they crossed. The Express, then, was unlike many communications technologies that existed in a rapidly industrializing United States. The Express was simultaneously old and new, simple and complex, familiar yet different, an assemblage that was composed of varying materialities, intelligences, and traditions, but it is the Express's familiar yet different character that has made it such a powerful icon for representing American futures and American

pasts, acting as a stabilizing symbol in times of social and technological shift. Yet the stability that the Express-as-icon offers, must equally be acknowledged as hegemonic, working to enforce and maintain the power of American modernity as defined by white European-American history and culture, while casting indigenous communities and cultures as examples of backwardness, inefficiency, the opposite of civilization, and that which was to be avoided. My digital peep box projection device, *Transcontinental 1860*, articulates many of the concepts raised throughout these chapters, in an illustration of mapping, recording and imagining of territories as a way to align communications systems and technologies with the exercise of cultural and political power. Animation of the route of the Express is viewed across three hand-made peep boxes, which provide miniature viewing environments that frame the video, played on a loop, with contemporary scenes of social resistance, acts of pushing back against expansionist and colonizing politics that remain alive and well in the twenty-first century.

The questions taken up here, and which stretch from 1860 into our present moment, are the following: what constitutes communication and connection, and how do message carriers, as media themselves, enact or embody them? As David M. Henkin has rightly argued in his analysis of the rise of mid-nineteenth century American postal culture, "For social, cultural, and political history, the question is not how fast information travels in absolute terms or relative to previous records for land speed, but how new media connects physically separated parties within a shared

temporal framework."[3] The power of the post extends beyond mere functionality because as well as delivering the information they carry, messengers also manifest modes of communication that express the political and economic power of those who use the messenger as well as those who own and operate it. This in turn raises questions of access and legibility which warrant investigations into how social and cultural power can be embedded in the same message-bearer, articulating and enforcing that power through the messenger's visibility and its reach. What is also important to understand, especially for this dissertation, are the historical circumstances that allow those new media to connect separated parties, and which make access to those media a privilege afforded to some but not others. What does a "shared temporal framework" mean, and how does access to that framework alter when the messenger, as an icon, also relays information about national identity? Who are included and who are excluded? How do media, as inherent message-bearers, manifest social and cultural infrastructures as well as structures of power?

Henkin has described popular conceptions of the Express and its importance to postal and/or communications history as "confused." Pointing out that the Express has been assigned major cultural and historical value due to its speed as well as its role as a cross-over technology, symbolizing the move from horse-power to machine power, Henkin's remark helpfully raises questions that illustrate the crux of this dissertation project. Why *is* the Pony Express thought of, or imagined, or, in Henkin's

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[3] David M. Henkin, *The Postal Age: The Emergence of Modern Communications in Nineteenth Century America,* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006), 16.

words "assumed" to be so important in American history, not to mention communications history? What *is* the difference between what a medium *does* and how it is perceived more broadly, and what are the stories that get told to explain this gap? How do we understand media by imagining or mythologizing them?

As a subject through which to study media, the Pony Express provides an example that allows us think about media as separate from machines at a time when the presence of machines was on the rise, but as a media form that has always been encountered through its own remediation, it also allows us to think about media as partly constituted in collective, imaginative terms that emerge from social and cultural traditions. The Express provides an especially interesting subject because it is embedded in traditions of both communications and visual media, and certainly, as an example that defamiliarizes media, it demonstrates media newness defined by an anachronistic technological context, thereby challenging traditional, linear narratives of technological development and revealing the complex ways in which various media can overlap or intersect rather than neatly follow on from one another. In addition, the Express's potency as an image affected the way it was put to work in culture. As a symbol of long-distance communication, it provided a relatable corollary to a process that remained mostly invisible and abstract, but as an icon, the Express would prove to be most forceful while conjuring futures or pasts for European Americans. However, while the Pony Express enables imaginative potentials, what Jussi Parikka, quoting Zoe Beloff, has called the "dreamworlds" of

media, it also makes very clear how that imaginative potential can be co-opted.[4] For example, although the Express mediated ideals of heroic manhood in the mid-nineteenth century, and although it revealed the horse to be a fundamental component, both in body and in intelligence, of its reliability and efficiency, these effects became obscured as the Express's popular image was absorbed and recycled in popular culture.

As media and film scholar Jeffrey Sconce has shown, the "media folklore" produced within imaginative spaces of popular and mass culture in response to emerging new media reveals how media are understood as part of what Sconce calls broader "cultural mytholog[ies]."[5] There are many misconceptions about the Express that reveal its connection to mythologies of American exceptionalism and mythic historical narratives that invoke and endorse sentiments of patriotism. The clearest illustration of the Express's relationship to such media folklore is its affiliation with the American West and that geographic and historical region's attendant mythologies of white settlement and supremacy, as well as mythologies of the inevitability of technological development and modernity. This illustration exposes how media are made to mean and made to communicate in a different way when they are represented in popular culture, explaining why the Pony Express is not simply seen as a long-distance messenger, but is also understood as an enduring symbol of the "American

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[4] Jussi Parikka, *What is Media Archeology?,* (Cambridge, UK; Malden, MA: Polity Press, 2012), 52.
[5] Jeffrey Sconce, *Haunted Media: Electronic Presence from Telegraph to Television,* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2000), 4.

spirit" and an example of Manifest Destiny at work. Looking at the way societies

imagine media also provides an opportunity to think about how media work to

produce virtual worlds, whether those worlds are reflections of the present, past, or

future. In the current technological moment, in which the ubiquity of the internet

reaches across most of the globe, terms such as "virtual" or "virtuality" have become

increasingly attached to the realm of cyberspace and digital culture. Yet, older media

like the telegraph, telephone, radio, and television enabled virtual or tele-

communication, connecting people to and immersing people in other spaces, places

and times.[6] The Pony Express's virtuality makes it a powerful icon that alters the

meaning of communication itself. A site where myth and history converge, the

Express-as-icon is partly actual, based on locatable and verifiable facts, and partly

imaginative, malleable and adaptable to cultural and historical contexts and needs.

Current cultural mythologies of escape that surround virtual reality, for example,

which frame the technology as that which provides access to alternate worlds and

alternate selves, can be read against similar cultural myths made visible through the

Express's powerful symbolism, drawn upon to conduct imaginative excursions to

faraway unincorporated territories and to idealized futures or pasts. I have traced the

way the Pony Express has been written into American history and how it has been

commemorated as a medium of communication to make visible the ideological

implications of such writing and commemoration, the rhetoric of which remains

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[6] Henkin has also argued that postal culture acted similarly by allowing parties at a
distance from one another, particularly in mid-nineteenth century America, to
immerse themselves in another's worlds. Henkin, *Postal Age,* 29.

visible in the promotion of the latest communications devices or apps. Yet, in addition to the reasons of marketing and profit, celebratory rhetoric can frame intangible and complex concepts in a meaningful way.

The Express has always been powerfully alive in the American popular imagination, but it has, from its beginning, always been encountered and made meaningful "as a representation first," to use Jennifer Peterson's phrase.[7] Whether as a messenger or later, as an icon, the Express has always existed as a virtual phenomenon, each iteration reworking or building on previous representations, while as a historical subject remaining tantalizingly out of reach. This has been due to several reasons. The Express was, for many people in 1860, an invisible messenger, running across terrains far removed from urban centers. In addition, much of the Express's history has been lost or is unrecoverable, and furthermore, the Express has always been deeply embedded within American myths, specifically those of the American West. Thus, what has come to be understood as the Express's official historical narrative, has been drawn from the murky depths of half-forgotten memory, hearsay, fictionalized reenactments and other traditions of tall-tale-telling all of which have blurred the boundaries between the Express's historical and mythic identities. By the early twentieth century this blurriness had made memorializing the Express a problem, but by the mid-twentieth century, as the social and political climate of the United States became increasingly polarized during the Cold War and subsequently in

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[7] Jennifer Lynn Peterson, "'The Nation's First Playground': Travel Films and the American West 1895-1920" in *Virtual Voyages: Cinema and Travel,* editor Jeffrey Ruoff, (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006), 80.

the rise of counter-culture and civil rights movements, the Express emerged once again in spaces that both commemorated and commercialized its image to sell a specific and sanitized idea of American history. However, concepts of heritage, and the adoption of the Express as a symbolic prop with which to imagine and celebrate pasts that differ from hegemonic versions of United States' history, demonstrate the underlying mutability of the Express-as-icon, and how it need not defer to the undergirding myths of "official" culture. My installation *Pony Players' Review*, focuses on interrupting the heroic ideological narratives normally associated with the Express. Using an interface inspired by a theme park map, *Pony Players' Review* is an interactive video installation in which iconic images from current events are paired, through the use of a QR code, with specific video vignettes, allowing for a critique of the ideologies and myths promoted through the popular image of the Express and which continue to undergird narratives of American greatness or exceptionalism today.

While various commemorative events have attempted to locate the idea of the Express in the material world as part of celebratory processes that confer historical meaning and value to the messenger–for example, its inclusion in civic parades, or through other traditions of community-building–the museum spaces dedicated to the Express in St. Joseph Missouri provide fascinating, if contrasting, examples of how a more concrete rather than ephemeral sense of materiality has been foregrounded to compensate for the Express's inherently unstable and blurry identity. The museum displays at The Pattee House Museum, and the Pony Express National Museum, act

as interfaces to unreachable realms. While the Pattee House abounds with historical artifacts, and the Pony Express National Museum is mostly composed of reconstructions, both are spaces in which experiences that assert tactility and materiality aid in stitching together the Express's fragmented and contested history. Yet in these museums, the greatest tension lies in the fact that the Express's popular image seems inescapable as a point of reference, instead seeming almost necessary to fill in the historical gaps that remain. The Express as a virtual phenomenon continues to assert its dominance in these spaces, and as a consequence, the Express's existence is enshrined as a historical-fictional composite, in which photographs of actors playing Express riders are as historically valuable as a mid-nineteenth century mail sorting desk used by actual Express employees, or a shawl worn by a woman who witnessed the Express's inaugural run out of St. Joseph is as effective a prop to invoke the idea of a point of origin of the Express, as are recently crafted effigies of a horse and rider about to dramatically burst through the stable doors. Ultimately these museums reveal the tension between the image of the Express and the material infrastructures either left from the past or recreated in the present, that communicate the idea of the Express as part of a larger concept – that of American history.

In Chapter one I discuss American modernity in the mid-nineteenth century. I describe the Express's role as an information technology that was crucial to western expansion, and focus on the cultural role of technology in negotiating an identity for European Americans at a time when industrial development remained for the most part on east and west coasts. I suggest that the Pony Express acted as an intermediary

between the technological present of 1860 and the technological and political futures imagined for the United States through transcontinental transportation and communications systems. I move on to discuss how the popular image of the Express was adopted and developed in the twentieth century to anachronistically represent industrial modernity and cutting edge communications technologies as part of an American tradition of white, European American community growth and settlement, and the expansion of United States' power, both at home, and internationally.

Chapter two analyzes the function and construction of the Express as a medium. Outlining its assemblage-like constitution through its intersection with other technologies of the time, I also demonstrate how the Express was different from machine technologies through the generation of affective connections between horse, rider, and the public-at-large. As a result, I also evaluate the Express's cultural and social power as articulated through the importance of the horse in nineteenth century society, as well as shifting ideals of white, European American manhood. I trace the Express's intriguing relationship to media more generally, especially as that relationship has been conveyed in and across visual media from the nineteenth and particularly in the twentieth centuries, thus tying the Express to histories of both networked and spectacular modes of communication.

Chapter three focuses on the concept of virtuality, arguing that the virtual, despite its current associations with digital culture, can be used to describe systems or subjects that are too complex or too abstract to grasp in any meaningful way. Mapping its connection to and embeddedness within visual traditions and myths of

the American West, I go on to track the varied environments and practices that have given the Express virtual form, from its inaugural run in April 1860 to subsequent memorials. Rather than looking at examples from dime novels, cinema and television, I specifically focus on the ways the Pony Express has been rendered virtually through "live" events, from civic pageantry in the early twentieth century to its centenary celebrations in 1960. Assessing how the Express has been employed to promote and sponsor specific social and political ideologies during these commemorative events, I establish how the Express has been mobilized to create and celebrate national community, as well as varied regional and cultural heritages.

Chapter four extends discussions of memorialization started in chapter three but shifts the objects of discussion to the museums commemorating the Pony Express in St. Joseph, Missouri. Comparing strategies of display, emplotment and imaginative engagement, I analyze how each museum adopts diverging strategies to de-virtualize the Express. Foregrounding materiality and haptic experience, the museums bring the Express out of the virtual realm and into the space and time of the museum visitor, filling in any unknown parts of the Express's story by redirecting visitors' attentions to its familiar, popular image. A hall-of-mirrors effect is generated so that both fictional and actual Expresses are celebrated in the museum space, but unlike screen representations of the Express, these commemorative representations are not taken as fiction but rather as historical fact.

To conclude, this project, drawing on methods of defamiliarization to analyze media as phenomena that intersect with but need not be bounded by machine

technologies, my research into the Pony Express has been guided and shaped by the concept of anachronism. Through the Express's anachronism, newness is revealed as an idea that confers value on media as phenomena that channel perception and exercise the imagination, specifically around ideas of "American-ness." The Express's anachronism has also made visible the processes by which myth becomes history, and is used to justify questionable social and political actions – a narrative that it particularly relevant under the current administration whose promise to return the US to a state of "greatness" plays on fears of losing a specifically defined idea of American identity. As a hybrid scholar-practitioner, a "new media" artist making work about old technology in a PhD program, the idea of anachronism has provided fertile ground on which to think about the value of context to the production of new knowledge, and I see great benefits in looking to older models of media to explore alternate paths with which to navigate, reclaim, and author different narratives to that which is given. Emphasizing materiality, privileging demystification and re-authoring historical content, I make my projects against the grain of our technological environment, against the grain of the archives and repositories where I find primary sources, and against the grain of the academy, as part of a dialectical process. Much like the surprising connections that emerge through media archeology, anachronism promises to loosen the associations we make when thinking through terms such as "new," "media," "technology," "scholarship," or "art." Through its displacement effect, anachronism forces alternate associations and narratives, and perhaps even provides new visual languages with which to consider and write historiographic texts.

As we all battle with the growing optimization of information and knowledge economies in which innovation and survival seem to blur together, themes that have driven this dissertation - newness and redundancy, adaptation and betterment – seem especially pertinent, as the structural changes affecting educational institutions alter the environments to which we contribute as the message-bearers we are.

Chapter One:
The Pony Express and Technological Modernity in America

It might be hard at first to think about how the Pony Express aided in developing modernity in mid-nineteenth century America, or even how it began to symbolize the changing qualities of that modernity as the nineteenth century ended and the twentieth century began. After all, the Pony Express did not resemble scientific progress or complex engineering. However, the contribution of the Express to an industrially maturing and politically expanding United States reveals a limbo-modernity shifting from one state to another, not fully reliant on the newness of technological innovation, yet constituted, normalized, and maintained by the incessant, and increasingly rapid flows of information that would come to define the modernity of the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Furthermore, the Express itself is an assemblage of both old and new elements perfectly suited to the modernity in which it existed and the modernity toward which the nation strove. At the same time, however, the Express was a failure, paradoxically celebrated for the task it carried out, yet poorly patronized and envisioned merely as a stop-gap technology. The Pony Express, both as a messenger in 1860, as well as an historical icon from the 1870s onwards, provided important practical and cultural infrastructure that aided in the organization of the economic, political and social worlds of white, European American settlers. Remaining a presence in popular culture and in the American popular imagination to this day, the Express acts as an anachronistic symbol of efficient, modern communications and American technological exceptionalism. I have explored these qualities of the Express in a visual project titled *Transcontinental*

1860, which I will refer to throughout this chapter, and in which old and new

technologies of vision highlight how the Express symbolized American expansion

and acted as an icon that provided specific meanings for spaces and processes that

were little known or understood by European American populations on the east and

west coasts.

By the late 1850s, California had grown in economic and political importance,

but remained socially and politically isolated, despite its rich resources. In the east,

U.S. territory reached only as far as Missouri, while other mid-west territories still in

their infancy were not believed by the majority to have any future as states

themselves.[1] Despite having been occupied for generations by many Native American

peoples, the land that separated the eastern and the western states remained mostly

unknown by white, European Americans moving westward. However, as territories

were slowly acquired, and lands beyond the Mississippi were increasingly viewed as

possessing abundant natural resources, more European Americans, as well as newly

arrived immigrants, began to move west and settle in greater numbers.[2] As a

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[1] A.L. Stimpson, *History of the express companies: and the origin of American railroads. Together with some reminiscences of the latter days of the mail coach and baggage wagon business in the United States,* (New York: 1858). Newspaper clippings entitled "Pony Express" tipped in front. 44656, The Huntington Library, San Marino, California, (hereafter cited as *Stimpson's History of the express*, Huntington Library).

[2] For a detailed account of the movement of Europeans and European-Americans westward, as well as the development of settlements and "cities" of 2500 people or more, see Richard A. Bartlett, "The Sweep Across the Continent: Final Phase" and "The Urban Frontier" in *The New Country: A Social History of the American Frontier 1776-1890,* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1974), 83-116, 399-440. https://archive.org/stream/newcountrysocial00bart#page/n9/mode/2up (accessed 01/11/18).

consequence, western expansion was rationalized first through ideologies that sanctioned that expansion, and second by myths that conveniently omitted the devastation that expansion wrought on indigenous communities, instead framing the process as peaceful, inevitable and necessary for white, European Americans to achieve their destiny.[3] Futurity was an important part of the modernity of the United States in the nineteenth century, and ideologies such as Manifest Destiny tied futurity to expansion, enacted by and symbolized in the institutions and technologies that aided in that task. What these ideologies engendered was a palpable sense of national development and forward motion, in which the potential future of the United States was what was to be prioritized above all else.

The technologies of both the steam locomotive and the telegraph existed at the same time as the Pony Express, but the infrastructure required for the use of cutting-edge transport and communication technology across the continental U.S. was problematic, mostly because of the exorbitant costs that building such infrastructure would incur. Instead, long distance travel and communications remained tied to technologies of the steam boat (which required at least a month to travel via the Isthmus of Panama), and the stagecoach (which was less reliable still and took about twenty days). In addition to these factors was the impending Civil War. Growing

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[3] For examples of the "new" Western histories that developed in the 1980s, and that strongly disagreed with the tenor and emphasis of previous scholarship on the history of the American West, see *Trails: Toward a New Western History*, editors Patricia N. Limerick, Clyde A. Milner II, and Charles E. Rankin, (Lawrence, KA: University Press of Kansas, 1991); Patricia N. Limerick, *The Legacy of Conquest: The Unbroken Past of the American West,* (New York: Norton, 1988).

dissatisfaction in the southeastern states and impending secession induced a feeling of unease on the part of the federal government and the northeastern states which, in turn, led to concerns about securing California as a northern stronghold and thus safeguarding its capital as well as its western seaboard.

The Pony Express served and symbolized American modernity, occupying a position both within and without genealogies of technological development, showing that nineteenth century modernity, while accelerated and privileged in the technological, did not remain discretely situated in technological realms. In addition, while symbolizing the future modernity of the nation in the nineteenth century, the Express would be appropriated in popular culture well into the twentieth century. Conjuring specific qualities of modernity in contemporary technologies, the symbol of the Express solidified the political, economic and cultural identity of the white, European American United States, as defined by technological achievement.

"Modernity" is an indefinite term invoking many variations to its chronological parameters and its defining characteristics. I focus on the mid-nineteenth century, a time in which experimental science had solidified into a respected discipline, and technology had expanded the industrial landscape producing higher manufacturing rates, an influx of labor to urban centers, and an accelerated development of capitalist economies.[4] Increased mechanization in manufacturing,

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[4] For accounts of the United States transition from agrarianism to industrialism, see Leo Marx, *The Machine in the Garden: Technology and the Pastoral Ideal in America,* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1964, 2000); John Kasson, *Civilizing the Machine: Technology and Republican Values in America, 1776-1900,* (New York: Hill & Wang, 1976, 1999); Alan Trachtenberg, *The Incorporation of America:*

transport and communications defines the modernity that this project takes as its model, but it does not demarcate the bounds of that modernity either. Whether there is a border between the mechanical and non-mechanical, or between the modern and whatever is outside of modernity, is of central concern here, as the Express raises questions about such boundaries. The Pony Express does not fit into fully modern *nor* fully traditional categories. As much as it may have symbolized the agrarian ideal, the Express worked for distinctly urban systems and organizations, *not* the self-sufficient yeoman farmer associated with agrarianism. Yet neither is the Express fully modern, not least because of the physicality of the Express, but also because its effects do not neatly align with modern urban mechanized living. Effects that would come to be associated with urban modernity such as alienation, fracture and shock find no place within narratives of the Pony Express. Despite its riders and horses working on a rigorous schedule, sometimes to the point of absolute physical exhaustion, a rider's personal connection to both his horse and the terrain he crossed (as well as the horse's suitability to crossing the terrain it was assigned) was what often ensured the fastest communication. The Pony Express therefore occupies a position of in-between-ness representing a limbo-modernity, neither fully old and agrarian nor fully new and modern, neither fully rural nor fully urban, an assemblage that inhabits both and

Culture and Society in the Gilded Age, (New York: Hill & Wang, 1982, 2007); David E. Nye, *American Technological Sublime,* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1994); Jackson Lears, *Fables of Abundance: A Cultural History of Advertising in America,* (New York: Basic Books, 1995); Ben Singer, *Melodrama and Modernity: Early Sensational Cinema and Its Contexts*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 2013), 17-21.

neither at the same time. These qualities of the Express make it particularly well-suited to investigate this in-between modernity and its relationship to newness and technology. As new media theorist Lisa Gitelman has argued,

> there is a moment, before the material means and the conceptual modes of new media have become fixed, when such media are not yet accepted as natural, when their own meanings are in flux. At such a moment, we might say that new media briefly acknowledge and question the mythic character and the ritualized conventions of existing media…[5]

By making media strange—in this case, by disconnecting processes of information exchange from machines and technological devices—we can learn how a specific medium and its social and cultural meanings become normalized. In addition, by deconstructing the representational power of a medium, we can understand how specific ideologies are in fact embedded in the physical and imaginative architectures embodied and enabled by those media. As a short-lived medium both old and new in its materiality and function, the Pony Express is symbolic of the shifting social, economic, cultural and political terrains of the United States in the mid-nineteenth century. Analyzing the Express aids in locating which parts of that shifting modernity are read as new, which parts read as old, and how new and old elements are carried forward into the technologies and communications systems that overlap and follow it. For example, in my piece *Transcontinental 1860,* a video played on a Smartphone is installed within a handmade peep box. I purposely sought to both emphasize and

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[5]*New Media 1740-1915,* eds. Lisa Gitelman and Geoffrey B. Pingree, (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 2003), xii.

juxtapose the old and new technologies of vision, aligning them in function as they visualize the route of the Express. Both technologies contribute to the spectacular circulation of imaginative geographies that articulate the relationship of the Pony Express to systems of representation and processes of colonization that contribute to national expansion and cultural hegemony (Fig. 1).

The broader function of the Pony Express in 1860 was to expand and naturalize an American modernity further west, thus maintaining the efficiency of a steadily growing national machine. The regularity and reliability of the service

Fig 1. A handmade peep box with Smartphone installed behind, couching one technology within the other. Photo by author.

offered by the Pony Express established a firm sense of regulated and ordered time, linking the delivery of information to a pre-set schedule. In a letter dated January fourth, 1861, Augustus Richardson of the Overland Mail Company described the Pony Express as "regular as a clock" and "…so sure and regular that we bet on it now."[6] A few months earlier in June of 1860 while the running of the Pony Express had been suspended due to ongoing violence with the Paiute in Utah territory, Richardson noted that "…it is very doubtful when they will be able to commence again. Meanwhile, I hope Butterfield will establish a Pony over their route as it has now become almost a necessity."[7] In fact, so well established and necessary was this schedule that other communications institutions not only used it to send urgent financial and business materials, but also seem to have used it as a news service. As Richardson again, wrote: "…news coming at rapid rate over Pony would very much reduce the newspaper mail – since the Pony was in successful operations, the sale of Atlantic newspapers nearly stopped!"[8] Here, we have the "Pony" regulating time and information, as well as naturalizing the schedule to such a degree that the expectation of timely delivery has become a "necessity." The rapidity of delivery performed by the Express generated a sense of forward momentum that contributed to a growing feeling of national futurity. In addition, the Express's reliability strengthened

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[6] Augustus G. Richardson to Frank Stevens, 4 January 1861, Augusts G. Richardson Papers 1860-1866, mss RN1-59, The Huntington Library, San Marino, California (hereafter cited as Richardson Papers, Huntington Library).

[7] Augustus G. Richardson to Frank Stevens, 4 June 1860, Richardson Papers, Huntington Library.

[8] Richardson to Stevens, 4 June 1860.

expectations of such a future, solidly tying the growth of the United States to an expanded information network that relayed intelligence across great distances and at great speed. Time and space were not so much annihilated as they were, in fact, acknowledged as fundamental to the American experience, while the ability of communications technologies to contain and demarcate these boundaries worked to create a sense of exceptionalism. However, the American experience I describe here might be better classified as the white European American experience as the Pony Express, while aiding in the establishment of time and space for white settlement and representing the progress and futurity of the United States, simultaneously represented the incremental encroachment upon and ongoing erosion of indigenous life and culture. The modernity that the Pony Express helped to establish was exclusive and exclusionary, and concepts such as productivity, efficiency, and progress culturally represent the ways in which white, European America was codified to omit and suppress experiences and cultures that did not reflect its own "modern" template.

The modernity of mid-nineteenth century America was not yet the modernity of the late-nineteenth century urban center, governed by what would be described by critics and thinkers from Georg Simmel to Walter Benjamin as a shocking and mercilessly stimulating set of phenomena. The contemporary moment of the Pony Express in 1860 was governed by a different chaos – irregularity of communication, uncertainty of information, a national geography dispersed and intermittently

populated.[9] Most politically and financially important cities on both east and west

coasts benefitted from improved transcontinental communications, as the Pony

Express spread the effects of urban modernization beyond city parameters, re-

organizing rural geographies and territories yet to be settled, developed, or "civilized"

by European Americans.[10] In this social milieu, the regulation of time and the

establishment of a reliable, constant, and up-to-date information service that linked

distant California to the financial and business centers of the east coast and Europe,

represented a modernity to be strived for. Representing this American modernity was

the Pony Express, which linked national productivity to national unity not by the

cold, unfeeling machinery of cutting edge technology, but using the most personable

and emotionally accessible of American resources – men and horses.

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[9] Several scholars and thinkers have written about the experience of technological modernity as composed of ceaseless stimulation, a fractured sense of time, and most aggressively, of shock both physical and mental. This shocking modernity reaches its apex in the late nineteenth century city as the mechanization of work and leisure time produce an increasingly restrictive and alienating quotidian experience for inhabitants. For descriptions of such technological modernity, see Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Its Mechanical Reproducibility" in *Critical Visions in Film Theory*, editors Timothy Corrigan and Patricia White, (Bedford/ St. Martin's, 2011), 230-252; Karl Marx*, Capital: A Critique of Political Volume I*, Electric Book Company, 2000. ProQuest Ebook Central, https://ebookcentral-proquest-com.oca.ucsc.edu/lib/ucsc/detail.action?docID=3008518; Wolfgang Schivelbusch, *The Railway Journey: The Industrialization of Time and Space in the Nineteenth Century*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2014), 113-170; Georg Simmel, "Metropolis and Mental Life", in *The Sociology of Georg Simmel*, editor Kurt H. Wolff, (Glencoe: Free Press, 1950), 409-424; Ben Singer, *Melodrama and Modernity: Early Sensational Cinema and Its Contexts*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 2013), 17-21.

[10] Thanks to Alex Hudgins Bush, who suggested this idea to me at the "& Media" graduate student conference held at UC Berkeley in September 2016.

The cultural impact of technological modernity, which contributed in part to the growing self-awareness of European Americans to their American-ness, was mutually constitutive. As technologies of transport, communications and manufacture raised Americans' awareness of geography, imagined community, and an improving domestic economy, Americans in reaction produced cultural narratives that solidified the roles of technology both as practical tools and ideological symbols.[11] The imagined Pony Express was thus framed as a heroic institution charged with the guardianship of national unity through the maintenance of information networks and data flows. Symbolizing a modernity anachronistic enough to appeal to nostalgia and non-threatening change, the Express simultaneously appeared modern enough to be desirable and seem inevitable as part of the coming-of-age of a nation state. The preservation of the principles of westward expansion, white European American settlement, and the preservation of communication lines, meant that the Pony Express was transformed over time into a symbolic custodian of national history.

Narratives such as those described above began to appear in the early twentieth century as a desire to remember the history of the Pony Express emerged in historical societies. In 1900, J. M. Guinn published a brief history of the Express that positions it within the "dark ages" of California fifty years prior, and leading to what he described as the ability to enjoy "…our daily newspapers before breakfast,

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[11] Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Spread of Nationalism*, (New York: Verso), 2006.

chronicling the history of the whole world for the present day."[12] Guinn makes clear

the Express's importance as an information technology, stating the urgency for

information for people who were isolated in various ways from their homes or from

the main political body of the United States in the mid-nineteenth century. For

example, Guinn emotionally declares that the lack of information delivered by the

postal service was responsible for the severe melancholy of miners separated from

their families on the west coast, but he goes even further by stating that the deaths of

some 10'000 Union soldiers during the Civil War – deaths attributed to "nostalgia" –

was so severe a national disgrace that a "defective" postal service should have been

"indicted for manslaughter."[13] Thus Guinn sets the scene for a heroic and reliable

information network and circulation system to correct what he believed to be a

chaotic and untrustworthy postal service that required disciplining. The Express

emerges as that necessary system, responsible for introducing the order needed to

improve and encourage modernity to flourish in the United States, pulling isolated

states out of their darkness and into an illuminated, incorporated national future.

Later, AT&T's 1941 short promotional film *Long Distance!* places the

telephonic technology of AT&T within a vast framework of geographical, social,

technological, and historical phenomena, thereby creating an image of the United

States as a nation created and bound together by the desire to communicate. Not only

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[12] J. M. Guinn, "The Pony Express" in *The Annual Publication of the Historical
Society of Southern California,* (Los Angeles: Historical Society of Southern
California, v. 5, 1902), 168.
[13] Guinn, "The Pony Express," 169.

is this picture painted to suggest that these phenomena are, in fact, the result of forces generated by a European American spirit, but it is also presented as part of a tradition that stretches as far back as the founding of the republic. Describing the telephone wires of 1940s America, the narrator tells us,

> These vital transcontinental arteries scale the mountain rampart of the east that once hemmed in the builders of the infant republic. They stretch across the prairies where the covered wagon made its plodding and heroic way…they traverse the land where once the cry rang out, "remember the Alamo," they span the deserts of the southwest where Coronado's men once bore the banners of old Spain.[14]

Historical communications networks of the continental U.S., of which the Pony Express is featured as a "pioneer" example, are folded into a patriotic, empire-centric narrative that ties together explorers, settlers, entrepreneurs and engineers in their westward conquest of space, and then time (Figs. 2-8). After a montage of shots showing telephone poles spanning an array of American geographies, the narrator goes on to tell us that this network is "so extensive that no man has ever seen them all." This phrase invites viewers to imagine the scale of such a network, fastening the meaning of these words to the fulfillment of Manifest Destiny. The breadth of this network, which the film shows was achieved by Americans and American institutions like the Pony Express, creates a sense of community and nationhood, and historicizes the contemporary telephonic communications system by highlighting important trade

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[14] American Telephone and Telegraph Company, Film, *Long Distance*. Audio Productions, 1941, http://archive.org/details/long_distance.

and communications routes (within which the Pony Express is positioned). Conjuring a genealogy or tradition of American modernization through technology, the film ends with the words "long distance," which transform the simple act of making a phone call into the culmination of centuries-long processes.

The narrative strategies used in AT&T's film are certainly not isolated, and scanning the marketing of communications technologies in the twentieth century reveals a repeated use of the Pony Express as an historical icon that conjures an older form of communication while nostalgically representing the very modern principles of speed and efficiency for which the newer, more modern technologies are being advertised. By evoking a sense of "look how far we have come," the Pony Express is positioned as part of a genealogy of technologies that represent American modernity at its most advanced, thereby suggesting that technological advancement is historically inevitable, socially acceptable, and part of a national tradition.

The White Truck Company evoked the Pony Express to promote its new mail delivery fleet in 1941. The company's new mail sorting buses were endorsed as "open[ing] a new epoch in the colorful annals of the U.S. Mail Service," equating its new buses with the Pony Express to draw attention to the national service of delivering United States mail, but also to evoke a sense of organization and expediency (Fig. 9). Advertising its services and products as part of a great and on-going nation-building project, broadcasting and communications giant RCA used the Pony Express to claim, "the Services of RCA in every field of radio and sound could

Figs. 2-8: The imaginative terrain of the U.S., constructed in part by a network too big for any one person to see, yet unified by a history of westward expansion and transcontinental connection. Screengrabs from *Long Distance,* AT&T, 1941.
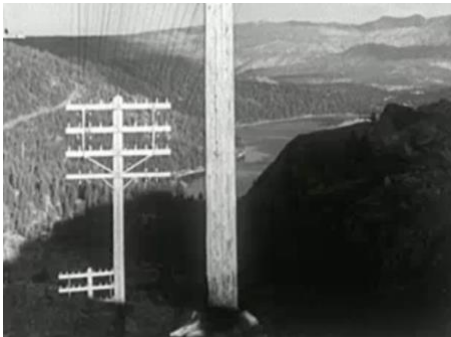
have contributed immensely to building our country in 1860. But…the contribution they could have made is in no sense greater than the actual contributions they are making to our civilization today."[15] Using the Express to align technologies of communication with processes of "civilization," which are in turn representative of modernization, RCA equates the task of the historic Express with its modern messenger counterpart, the radio. Keeping the nation connected, and being a part of that network by owning and using an RCA radio is here marketed as a "civilized" form of citizenship. The Crosley Radio Company, in comparison, emphasized quality and reliability in an advertisement from 1924, comparing its products to the excellence of service delivered by the Pony Express, thus associating its radios with clarity of information over the airwaves (Fig. 10). A 1959 advertisement for aeronautical and automotive engineering giant Bendix systems updates the configuration of this old relay system by stretching the narrative of American modernity into space and towards another "uncivilized" frontier. In the advertisement, graphics of a Pony Express rider charging along to meet another rider and pass on the mail are juxtaposed with background graphics of the earth, an airplane, and a satellite relaying information in a similar manner (Fig. 11).[16]

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[15] Radio Corporation of America, "Radio Would Have Made The Pony Express <u>A Local</u>!", Print advertisement in *Broadcasting and Broadcast Advertising*, Broadcasting Publications Inc., Vol 18 No. 11, 115.
[16] The Bendix Corporation was an engineering company that manufactured aeronautical, automotive and other electrical parts for over sixty years, from the 1920s to the 1980s.

Each of these advertisements emphasizes the "modern" or the today-ness of their products, but the modernity constructed through the Pony Express is not straightforwardly "new." What makes these products new is not the technology although that certainly is being privileged, but the *quality* of their function, whether that quality be related to speed, clarity or consistency of information. The Express evokes a modernity of efficiency while keeping intact a nostalgic and traditional iconography that decisively labels each product and service rendered unquestionably American. Therefore, technological modernity as conjured by the Express is not the result of technological innovation but rather of American tradition. It is the iconographic connection to an idealized American past that is mobilized to promote the ideal quality of the products advertised, while simultaneously connecting the idea of excellence with concepts of American-ness. The image of the Express, thus endorses American modernity as a part of an ongoing, inevitable process of betterment.

Cultural Histories of American Modernity and the American West

Pre-Civil War America was filled with hope about the land west of the Mississippi, filled with untapped resources that could boost national industrial productivity and growth, as well as build international trade. The West came to symbolize the future of the United States, and the paths cut towards the Pacific Ocean rendered by emigration and communications routes added to a feeling that the best was yet to come for the young nation. Beyond economic and political development, however, historian Frederick Jackson Turner believed that the West had played a

fundamental role in culturally defining the American character and American life. Yet, in 1893, Turner gave a speech in which he declared that the American frontier in the West no longer existed. Turner's declaration came at a time when increasing numbers of people were moving to cities to find work, mechanization in transport, communications, manufacture and leisure had penetrated from coast to coast, and the borders of the United States, already covering half of the North American continent, would within the decade, be extended to territories abroad.[17] Alan Trachentenberg has described Turner's project as being guided by the need to provide "a coherent, integrated story of its beginnings and its development," a need, as Trachtenberg notes,which was also shared by Theodore Roosevelt in 1889's *The Winning of the West,* (although Roosevelt's concern was more rooted in promoting white supremacy and defining American-ness in racialized and gendered terms).[18] By the start of the twentieth century, then, the American West had risen in the popular imagination to embody a region in which concepts of American identity could find a cultural corollary. The mutually constitutive processes of "civilization" and modernization that the symbolic West and the white, European American man underwent together in the popular imagination was further investigated by Henry Nash Smith in *Virgin Land*

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[17] For more about the phenomenon of World's Fairs as testaments to modern Western civilization, and as a cultural opposite to the rise of popular cultural attractions such as Coney Island, see John F. Kasson, *Amusing the Million: Coney Island at the Turn of the Century,* (New York: Hill & Wang, 1978); Lauren Rabinovitz, *Electric Dreamland: Amusement Parks, Movies, and American Modernity,* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012); Robert Rydell, *Fair America: World's Fairs in the United States,* (Washington [D.C.]: Smithsonian Institution Press, c2000).
[18] Alan Trachtenberg, *The Incorporation of America: Culture and Society in the Gilded Age,* (New York: Hill & Wang, 1982, 2007), 11-17.

Fig.9. White Trucks advertise their new "Highway Post Office" between Harrisonburg, VA and Washington D.C., on which mail is sorted as the bus travels to its destination.
http://postalmuseumblog.si.edu/2010/05/bus-not-horse-power.html

Fig. 10. The Pony Express is used as a symbol of instantaneous, reliable information delivery in the marketing of Crosley Radios in 1924. Radio News, November 1924, 739. http://mirror.thelifeofkenneth.com/sites/www.americanradiohistory.com/Archive-Radio-News/20s/Radio-News-1924-11-R.pdf

Fig. 11. The Pony Express as an American Tradition. Advertisement for the Bendix Aviation Corporation in *Aviation Week,* December 14, 1959, 127.
https://archive.org/stream/Aviation_Week_1959-12-14#page/n63/mode/2up

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published in 1950. A cultural narrative of the changing attitudes towards the American West from pre-revolutionary days to the end of the nineteenth century, Smith argued that the ideal of American modernity began with the myth of America as a garden, a myth politically and socially symbolic for the beginnings of the new republic. As Smith argued, these mythic narratives painted America and the American West especially as a land of abundance that provided her people with space and fertile soil, allowing those people to distinguish themselves from the old world and the old order of Imperial Britain. These are the myths that gave rise to the agrarian ideals of Thomas Jefferson in the late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth centuries, but which were soon upended by the unexpected volumes of produce generated by American industry.[19]

Understanding the American West in relation to American modernity, however, would have to account for the increasing presence of technology, not only in industry but also in cultural and popular spheres. Writing just over a decade after Smith, cultural historian Leo Marx took the myth of America as garden as a starting point to investigate how machines were incorporated into that mythic narrative. Marx argued that inserting machines into the garden myth worked to naturalize the presence of machinery, which, at the end of the eighteenth century and beginning of the nineteenth century, represented the morally and socially corrupt principles that governed the new factory industries pioneered in Great Britain. Thus, to overcome

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[19] Henry Nash Smith, *Virgin Land: The American West as Symbol and Myth*, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1978, 1971, ©1950), 156.

this strong association with the old world, the machinery of American industry had to be reinvented culturally. Through re-contextualization, new technology was presented not as a European transplant that threatened to destroy the new republic through its degrading and unjust systems of production, but as working in harmony with the land and the people, thus generating higher degrees of output as well as products of superior quality. Technologies of industry thus provided European Americans of the early nineteenth century with cultural symbols through which to forge an identity based on exceptionalism, and it was into this cultural milieu that the Pony Express emerged as a communications technology, and simultaneously developed as an icon.

The Express has often been relegated to categories labeled pre-Civil War, pre-telegraph or pre-railroad, as if what came before the modernity of machines was simply waiting for that modernity to happen. Some citizens of the United States in 1860 *were* waiting for that modernity – they called it Manifest Destiny – but the Pony Express reveals what might be considered a modernity-of-the-middle, not just because it ran across the middle of the United States, but because it also represented a shift in the social, cultural, political, and economic realities of nineteenth century America. The country had moved beyond its pastoral roots to more economically empowering ideals - those of industry guided by capitalism - and this emerging modernity-of-the-middle was empowered not by cities or by machinery, but by geography, speed, and information.

It might be helpful to classify this in-between state with the help of Georg Simmel's well known essay "The Metropolis and Mental Life" in which Simmel

outlines the psychological effects of urban modernity at the turn of the twentieth century. Using a comparative method to analyze the qualitative difference between life in rural areas and life in cities, Simmel makes an interesting point about how the effects of urban living extend outward toward the surrounding rural areas and even beyond. Simmel writes:

> Man does not end with limits of his body or the area comprising his immediate activity. Rather is the range of the person constituted by the sum of effects emanating from him temporally and spatially. In the same way a city consists of its total effects which extend beyond its immediate confines. Only this range is the city's actual extent in which its existence is expressed.[20]

The urban center requires what is beyond its parameters to be organized socially and politically into a form that will enable, maintain, and support its function. The "unknown territories" beyond the states in the east and California in the west needed to become useful to the social, economic and political systems developing in the United States. These processes of organization and incorporation were, in fact, already ongoing as European American populations moved westward, new states gained entry to the Union, communications and transportation networks expanded, scientific, military and transportation parties pushed into and researched unknown regions, and the management of indigenous communities was mediated by the Indian Affairs branch of the U.S. government. The Pony Express proved to be an invaluable agent of these processes of "progress" as its rapid movement and its growing cultural

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[20] Simmel, "The Metropolis and Mental Life", 419.

persona would render socially and ecologically hostile territories malleable, compliant and accessible. As Europeans were expanding their railroad networks and building their manufacturing and leisure industries thus altering perceptions of space and time, the Pony Express was equally redefining how European Americans perceived the space between east and west coasts.[21]

However, enabling communication in faster and more durable ways would require the assurance of a secure route across which to travel. In 1860, most transcontinental traffic would have consisted of Butterfield stagecoaches carrying passengers as well as the U.S. mail from St. Louis, Missouri and Memphis, Tennessee to San Francisco. The Butterfield stagecoaches took a route that arched down towards the south, traveling through what is now Texas and New Mexico, and entering California from its southern end. This southern route, known as the Oxbow Route, was utilized so that the service could run during the winter months, avoiding snow and other hazardous weather therefore providing a more regular, if slower, service to the West. The central route lay directly across the middle of the country stretching from Missouri and Kansas through what are now Nebraska, Colorado, Wyoming, Utah and Nevada. Following older Native American trails, this route was known to many westward-travelling emigrants, as this was the route taken to get to the California gold fields during the gold rush of the late 1840s, the Mormon capital of Salt Lake City, and branching off in Wyoming, to settlements in Oregon Territory. In

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[21] For an excellent description of how the railroad changed perceptions of time and space in Europe and in the United States, see Schivelbusch, *The Railway Journey*, 89-112.

planning the Pony Express's route, Russell, Majors and Waddell agreed that a single

man on a horse would be able to endure the fierce winter weather experienced along

the central route and that, in the interests of saving time, this route rather than the

Oxbow Route, which was six-hundred miles longer, would be preferable.[22] The

successful running of the Express across the central route, a route that would later be

followed by the telegraph and the transcontinental railroad, proved the trail to be a

viable year-round route, and an efficient option for transcontinental travel. The

efficiency of the route meant both the speediest trail to the west coast, but also, in the

run-up to the Civil War, the safest route for information to travel without the fear of

interruption by Confederate forces. During the time of the Pony Express, however,

the dream of a modern America joined from coast to coast by transcontinental travel

and communications had yet to be implemented with any speediness, or solidified

through institutionalization. Despite the passing of the Telegraph Act in 1860, which

started construction of the first transcontinental telegraph system, the railroad that

would follow the wires would be another nine years in the making.

Part of this central route was already politically secured and recognized as

fully fledged states, but the yet-to-be-incorporated territories that made up most of the

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[22] A particularly excellent account can be found in Arthur Chapman, "Mail Routes in Dispute" in *The Pony Express,* (New York: G.P. Putnums's Sons, 1932), 56-74. Other accounts of how and why the central route was preferable to the more southerly Oxbow route, see Roy S. Bloss, *Pony Express: The Great Gamble,* (Berkeley, CA: Howell-North Press, 1959), 12; Joseph J. DiCerto, *The Saga of the Pony Express,* (Missoula, MT: Mountain Press Publishing Co., 2002), 23; Howard R. Driggs, *The Pony Express Goes Through,* (New York: Frederick A. Stokes Co., 1935), 22-23; Raymond W. Settle & Mary L. Settle, *Saddles and Spurs: The Pony Express Saga,* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1955), 20-22.

geography between Missouri and California were yet to be guaranteed as permanent

terrain to be crossed in the future. The Express's path was in part dictated by the

professional freighting histories of the proprietors of the Pony Express, histories

attached to the outfitting and maintenance of United States military posts as far west

as Utah. It was this freighting business that made William Russell, Alexander Majors

and William Waddell rich and famous for the territory they covered across the

continental United States. Transportation routes that ran from St. Joseph to Denver, as

well as St. Joseph to Salt Lake City were already owned and operated as freight and

stagecoach lines by the three entrepreneurs, and shortly after deciding to establish the

Pony Express, stagecoach lines running from Salt Lake City to Sacramento were

quickly bought by the newly formed Central Overland California and Pikes Peak

Express Company to create an uninterrupted route that spanned half the continent.[23] I

visualize the seamlessness of this route in my video *Transcontinental 1860,* in which

Figs. 12-13. Above, the Pony Express route is envisioned as a seamless landscape, painted onto
acetate, and layered with images that mark the land as both the home of indigenous communities and
as claimed by the United States.

[23] Raymond Settle & Mary L. Settle, *Empire on Wheels,* (Stanford, CA: Stanford
University Press, 1949).

representation of the terrain between Missouri and California across which the Express ran, are figured as a continuous landscape (figs. 12-13). However, this landscape is punctuated by markers denoting both United States territories and states, as well as the indigenous communities the land was taken from, thus indicating the social and political re-classification of the land that optimized the Express's mobility.

Yet, the history of seamless information flow is not only tied to historically sanctioned routes trodden by Native Americans and emigrant trains, but also to histories of corporate acquisition and consolidation, aligning American modernity with the growth of corporate America. In fact, in an effort to recuperate some of their financial losses, the Central Overland California and Pikes Peak Express Company sold its route and relay stations after the Pony Express stopped service. These routes would subsequently belong to nineteenth century America's stagecoach king Ben Hockaday, adding to a business empire that would, by the end of the century, span the entire country.

On September 15, 1866, the *London Penny Illustrated Magazine* published an article about the Pony Express describing its function, its economic importance, and its relationship to other communications technologies of the time, focusing on the relay of information contained in its mail bags:

> …under [the rider]… is the bag of letters so anxiously looked forward to in New York, for they tell important things – how ships have sailed for Europe laden with California gold, of terrible wrecks and losses, or of rising markets and great gains, or perhaps how the votes have counted that have decided the destiny of States. Not only to America is this bold and solitary rider's leather

saddle-bag of interest, but on to Europe will electricity and steam send many a long looked for message which it contains; and the merchant on many a change in the old world will tell of news he has received so soon from the farthest shores of the Pacific. He little knows and less cares for the hair breadth dangers run by this lonely courier of the plains and mountains…[24]

To the merchant in London, the different technologies that deliver his longed-for intelligence are irrelevant and indistinguishable from one another. It is the information itself, and the speed with which it is delivered that is of sole importance, emphasizing the short term cycling and incessant movement of new information required by capitalism. Long distance communication is directly linked to urban sites of trade far removed from the "plains and mountains" that pony and rider must endure but suggests that the Pony Express, as part of a larger system of information distribution is partly responsible for keeping the engines of the national and international markets stoked with fuel. In fact, it has even been noted that so reliable and fast was the Pony Express, that the British government used it to send intelligence of their trade with the Chinese back to London as it was more efficient than sending the information by sea.[25] Connecting the important financial centers of San Francisco, New York and London, the Express made clear the need for faster and

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[24] *London Penny Illustrated News*, September 15, 1866, http://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/viewer/BL/0000693/18660915/018/0007 (accessed 06/17/15).

[25] See Root and Connelley, *The Overland Stage to California,* 124; Glenn D. Bradley, Waddell F. Smith, and Raymond W. Settle, *The Story of the Pony Express*, (San Rafael, Calif: Pony Express History and Art Gallery, 1969),72; Bloss, *Pony Express, the Great Gamble*, 41.

more durable forms of long distance communications, while the development of its popular, romantic image simultaneously kept its reputation neatly separate from the "vulgar" worlds of commerce, trade, and finance.

In the social sphere, information carried by the Pony Express via special edition newspapers and telegrams, was eagerly awaited by the increasing population of California, who longed for information about current events in "the States." In addition, this urge for news was accompanied by a growing discontent with other forms of mail and transport systems that were extremely expensive and poorly managed. This excerpt describes attitudes towards steamship transportation:

> We wish to offer no plea in justification of the exorbitant rates of passage charged, nor the over-crowding and other abuses to which travelers have to submit, simply because they cannot help themselves; but to ask a question arising from the circumstances of the ease. "After all, what could we do without them – until the railroad is built?" and which at present appears very doubtful…let us not forget the other ingratitude – however great the humiliation we may feel, that through the selfish conniving of interested politicians, who cannot be accredited with being statesman – a greater good, the Pacific Railroad, is indefinitely postponed.[26]

Not only does this account paint a negative picture of the state of mail and transport services to the West in mid-nineteenth century America (despite its welcome arrival by Californians), but it also reveals a deep distrust of the systems and peoples in charge of providing adequate transport and communications infrastructure. A feeling

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[26] "The Pony Express," *Hutchings' California Magazine* 5, no. 1 (July 1860), 2.

of helplessness is conveyed in the face of companies flagrantly overcharging while keeping service below average, and individuals in public office working for personal gain rather than public good. This account, which is part of an article about the Pony Express, describes the Express as a messenger in lieu of the railroad, but it simultaneously reveals cracks in a teleological narrative of "progress." Not only does the Express seem much more reliable and preferable than any other service available, the belief in future transcontinental transportation seems rather dim and disenchanted. In the narrative embedded in this article, the Express is a make-do communications system, the best of a bad situation, and better than no communication or months-long communication via steamship. In modernity, information continues to circulate, thus to participate in and benefit from this circulation of information, the best available, if not the most ideal system will do. This paints a picture of an American modernity that, outside the confines of large cities, is still chaotic and unwieldy, and the make-do nature of the Express reflects this modernity's amorphous and fluctuating quality as it seems to have been in 1860.

Yet, the unwieldiness of American modernity should be contextualized by the changing perceptions of time which were occurring across different cultural spheres, from the sciences to the arts. Stephen Kern has described how the concept of "absolute" time first propounded by Isaac Newton in the seventeenth century – singular, linear, and experienced in the same way by all – was increasingly challenged as the nineteenth century progressed. The growth of transportation, communication, military and economic networks across the United States and Europe

revealed the need for a centralized, standardized, global system of time to coordinate the movement of people, goods, and other assets across many time zones. The result was the development in 1884 of Greenwich Meantime at the Prime Meridian Conference in Washington.[27] The standardization of time would take place twenty years after the Pony Express, but even in 1860 the Express's schedule, which was charted by the number of hours it took to run from one geographic point to another, revealed the growing importance of developing a standard of measurability that privileged the relationship of information to speed.[28] Kern describes how thinkers, including sociologist Emile Durkheim, understood time as having a "social relativity" in which "Societies organize their lives in time, and establish rhythms that then come to be uniformly imposed as a framework for all temporal activities."[29] Thus, organizing time means organizing society and organizing people. The measurability of time through the movement of the Express would help define how Americans – divided across what we now think of as three separate time zones, but which would have been a multitude of local times in 1860 – perceived themselves as a unified geopolitical entity. Newspapers in both the east and the west of the U.S., as well as

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[27] Stephen Kern, "The Nature of Time" in *The Culture of Time and Space 1880-1915,* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1983), 12, https://archive.org/stream/cultureoftimes00kerr#page/n0/mode/2up (accessed 01/09/2018).

[28] Joseph Di Certo has noted the schedule broken down and published in the *St. Joseph Weekly West* according to the following geographic points and their hours' distance from St. Joseph. Marysville (12 hours), Fort Kearney (34 hours), Fort Laramie (80 hours), Fort Bridger (108 hours), Great Salt Lake (124 hours), Carson City (188 hours), Placerville (226 hours), Sacramento (234 hours), San Francisco (240 hours). In DiCerto, *Saga,* 45.

[29] Kern, *Time and Space,* 19-20.

abroad, published the Express's arrivals and departures at specific stations and forts on its route alongside the news and information it carried. For example, newspapers frequently printed news "by Pony Express" in the following manner,

> Pony Express, with SF advises to the 30th passed Ft Kearney on the 14th. Dull trade except domestic produce, senatorial contest still unsettled. Ft Kearney sent to NY telling the PE with dates to the 3rd Feb passed on the 18th at 5.30pm[30]

The temporal framework provided by the Express transformed a heterogeneous and fragmented country into a homogenous nation, and the social synching of temporal activities made possible by the delivery of information via Pony Express generated a political identity inextricably linked to the rapid and continuous flow of information from one side of the country to the other. Such virtual rendering of far-away territories was a defining effect of the Pony Express, making territories that were once unknown to those in the east and in the west, visible, and linking information, speed and expanding national boundaries to the idea of a modern American future. Distance, as Kern has argued, was "…created by technology and mediated by urbanism and imperialism," so while the Express aided in the conception of a united nation organized geographically and temporally by the technologies of modernity, indigenous communities already dwelling on the land were often elided from such

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[30] *Evening Standard*, March 4, 1861.

Fig 14. Cover of *Hutchings California Magazine,* July 1860.

narratives of expansion, which conveniently made room for the assumption that the

land was waiting to be organized in a proper fashion.[31] In fact, historian of technology

David E. Nye has argued that European American "foundation" stories helped to

naturalize European-American claims to regions of the United States, and in this

regard, the Pony Express as an icon, played its part in naturalizing the expansion of

the United States as part of white, European American destiny.[32] In fact, the

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[31] Kern, *Time and Space,* 240.

[32] David E. Nye, *America as Second Creation*, (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 1994), 5.

virtualizing of territories into potential political provinces achieved by the Express

foreshadows the power of later modern techniques that rendered places and peoples

of distant (and not so distant) countries knowable and controllable when visible

through the technologies of imperialism.[33]

From its inauguration, the Express's symbolic power was connected in part to

its transcontinental route, which provided an opportunity for those people who did not

ride for the Express company, to imagine crossing the country. Only a few months

after it started running, *Hutchings Illustrated California Magazine* published an

article on the Pony Express in which its route was described, and images of

Expressmen on their mounts were pictured in different weathers and terrains (Fig.

14). At one point, the article reads:

> …as many of our readers have probably never crossed this portion of the
> continent, perhaps they would like to accompany the pony – at least in
> imagination – for the purpose of seeing the country; which, if it be not as
> instructive, or as life-like as an actual trip, can be taken in less time, at a
> smaller expense, and with considerably less fatigue, danger, inconvenience
> and exposure than is traveled by every expressman on the route.[34]

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[33] For scholarship on the development of virtual tourism and the connection of
expanding Imperial geographies to photographic and moving image technologies, see
Paula Amad, *Counter Archive: Film, the Everyday, and Albert Kahn's Archives de la
Planète,* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010); Jennifer Lynn Peterson,
Education in the School of Dreams: Travelogues and Early Nonfiction Film,
(Durham: Duke University Press, 2013); Lauren Rabinovitz, "More than the Movies:
A History of Somatic Visual Culture through *Hales Tours,* IMAX, and Motion
Simulation Rides," in *Memory Bytes: History, Technology, and Digital Culture,* eds
Lauren Rabinovitz and Abraham Geil, (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004), 117-
147.
[34] "The Pony Express", in *Hutchings Illustrated California Magazine*, July 1860 Vol
5, No. 1.
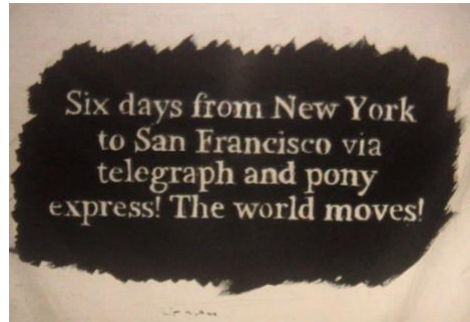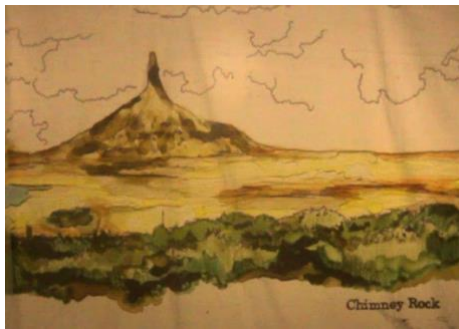
Figs. 15-18. Peep boxes that frame the route as part of current, ongoing social and political processes to make land "useful" to the functioning of modern society, including the Flint, Michigan water crisis and the indigenous resistance at Standing Rock, North and South Dakota.

The Pony Express is described here as a potential vehicle through which to virtually experience unknown regions. Yet, rather than simply providing an opportunity through which to write an entertaining description of distant regions, a connection is here being made between perceptions of time and space and the media that frame those perceptions. While the Express is being used as a guide to channel the imagining of distant territories, it is framed using the rhetoric of dime novel adventure, at once offering narratives of national progress in tandem with mythic heroism. Inserting snippets of this article into the moving panorama of *Transcontinental 1860,* viewers are prompted to engage with the landscape through

their imagination using the phrases presented. Layering the rhythmic sounds of hoof-beats, trains rolling over tracks, and the tick of a clock, further prompts associations of the landscape with the technologies that will, following the Express, continue to frame and order it, making it "useful" for the expansion of modernity. In addition, I emphasize the continued relevance of the "organization" of the land through the representation of current social and political events such as the Flint, Michigan water crisis, and the protests at the Standing Rock reservation in North and South Dakota, to make visible the ongoing struggles and tensions that become articulated through the intersection of technological modernity, capitalism and land rights (figs. 15-18).

Nye argues that technology has always taken a central place in structuring narratives that educate generations of Americans about their relationship to the land. For Nye, Americans have used various technologies as cultural symbols to understand their geographical and political context, thus allowing a train, a mill, or an axe to hold the same cultural value and achieve the same political goal. These are narratives that endow technology with social meaning, changing their use value from what they achieve practically, to what they represent poetically, and eventually what they cement, ideologically.[35] So, to use Nye's examples, an axe producing a clearing in a forest becomes a symbol of independence, and a mill producing flour or lumber becomes a symbol of community and commercial growth. As an information technology, the Express has likewise undergone a similar transformation. On one the one hand, the Express facilitates the communication and development of industrial

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[35] Nye, *America as Second Creation*, 1-8.

processes, and participation in an information economy that circulates physical resources as abstractions to optimize their value as tradeable and lucrative assets. On the other hand, however, the Express also acts as a symbol of national growth, unity and futurity.

In what was fast becoming a mechanized world, the Express was described through a comparison to other technologies of modernity. In this example from an edition of the *St. Joseph Democrat*, the movement of the Pony Express is measured against a well-known technology of vision in a comparison that presents the territories of the soon-to-be United States as an idealized, consumable landscape:

> Take down your lamp and trace the footprints of our quadrupedantic animal…away they go, rider and horse – did you see them? They are in California, leaping over its golden sands, treading its busy streets. The courser has unrolled to us the great American panorama, allowed us to glance at the future home of a hundred million people and has put a girdle round the earth in forty minutes. Verily, the riding is like the riding of Jehu, the son of Nimshi; for he rideth furiously. Take out your watch! We are eight days from New York, eighteen days from London.[36]

Similar to the article in *Hutchings Magazine,* here readers are asked to envision the Pony Express imaginatively, and in so doing equate its task not with the delivery of news or mail but with the delivery of images of the North American continent as they might appear on the painted canvas of a moving panorama. Calling upon the known and popular entertainment of the moving panorama rather than on specific natural

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[36] *St. Joseph Democrat*, 1860, in Glenn D. Bradley, *The Story of the Pony Express*. (San Francisco: Hesperion House, 1960), 63-64.

sites or historical routes, the article gives a visual and dramatic corollary to what is a non-visual medium. Furthermore, providing an imaginative framework for readers to conceptualize known and unknown territories of the United States as an imagined community further endorsed the ideal of a *united* States at a time of impending internal rupture. As showman John Banvard's Mississippi river journey spectacularly remediated the river to yield "knowledge" about the geographic and social terrain along its banks, it presented the experience as a leisure cruise, a form of virtual tourism that, as Alan Trachtenberg describes "…becomes yet another form of acting upon the land."[37] The comparison of the Express to the moving panorama suggests a similar spectacular modernity, constructed through images and mobilized through technologies of vision as part of a colonization process enacted by technology and normalized by its repeated representation in popular culture. My development of *Transcontinental 1860* draws directly from this concept. Representing the Express as a geography rather than as the image of a man on a horse acts to separate its heroic, dramatized persona from the processes of organization enacted by it as an agent of "progress." My choice to house the video in a peep box – a medium that functioned both as an amusement and a pedagogical tool with which to teach viewers about the "rules" of perspective – was to connect the representation of the Express-as-landscape to both theatricality and discipline.

The peep box became a highly popular form of souvenir when it was mass produced in paper form in the early nineteenth century, but had also been popular as

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[37] Trachtenberg, *Incorporation*, 19.

an amusement both in the private parlors of the rich or as part of itinerant

entertainment available to anyone who could pay a small fee on the streets of larger

cities and smaller towns.[38] As a paper souvenir, cheaply available for purchase, these

peep boxes most frequently displayed landscapes and tourist views of cities across

Europe, but also celebrated many feats of engineering such as canals, railroads,

tunnels and grand exhibition spaces.[39] Thus, through paper peep boxes far away lands

as well as new technology were spectacularly remediated and inserted positively into

the popular imagination. The celebratory nature of the content of these souvenirs, as

well as their mobility – weighing very little, and not that much larger than a postcard

– drew me to the peep box as a miniaturized theater of exhibition for

Transcontinental 1860. Thematically speaking to the commercialized representation

of landscape and information technology, the peep box provides an appropriate

medium through which to refigure the Express, and, in addition presents a historical

corollary to the smartphone which is installed behind each box. The peep box's 3D

reality effects, which are most powerfully felt when experienced via the peep hole,

render the box a form of media that figures virtual worlds (much like the smartphone)

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[38] For introductory histories of the peep box see Ralph Hyde, *Paper Peep Shows: The Jacqueline and Jonathan Gestetner Collection,* (Woodbridge: Antique Collector's Club, 2015), 10-65 and Barbara Maria Stafford, "Revealing Technologies/Magical Domains," in Barbara Maria Stafford and Frances Terpak, *Devices of Wonder: From the World in a Box to Images on a Screen,* (Los Angeles: Getty Publications, 2001), 105-109.

[39] The most famous of these feats of engineering include the Ludwig Canal in Germany (1843), the Nürnburg and Fürth Railway also in Germany (1837?), the Thames Tunnel in London (1851), and the Crystal Palace Exhibition in England (1851). Beautiful examples can be found in Hyde, *Paper Peep Shows,* 151, 159, 166, 169, 204.

and enforces an "ideal" view, yet unlike the smartphone, it is easy for any viewer to also see the construction of the peep box when it is fully extended and each slide or scrim is visible. Thus, the peep box offers both a perfect view of a virtual environment through the peep hole, as well as a view of the structure of the box which transforms the experience into a form of pedagogy. It is the pedagogical, critical potential of the peep box that led me to my choice of content – social unrest and political protest. Rather than straight forwardly reconstructing the peep box according to the traditions of the nineteenth century, I have taken the act of reconstruction as an opportunity to draw critical lines between media of the past and the present, and the cultural and political contexts that those media exist within.

Importantly, the technological anachronism of the Express, which separated it historically and symbolically from the future of railroads and electric communication, aided in naturalizing the pairing of speed and data that the Express enacted, showing the pairing as a constituent element of modernity and a much-needed aggregation for the future United States. What this process of naturalization also achieved was the maintenance of well-established structures of power that enforced hierarchies already advantaged by political or economic status. A simple horse-and-rider messenger system, the Express was in fact the interface to much larger organizational structures that delimited and encompassed national geography, the international stock market trade, land ownership, the first transcontinental highways, printing and paper-making technologies, and the labor of specific animal and human bodies, to name a few. Therefore, the delivery of mail from Missouri to California did not just streamline

communications between the east and the west coast of the United States, it created

new systems of power and value based on the rapidity of such exchanges. To gain

privileged information at shorter and shorter intervals meant that those who were able

to pay for such a service occupied a position of social, political and economic power

greater than those who had to rely on steamship or stagecoach systems. Those who

allied themselves with the Express, and in so doing with the modernity towards which

the nation was moving, would be able to embed themselves economically, politically

and culturally in the newly forming industrial America. However, the ways in which

the information/speed/power configuration was translated into popular culture

obscured the relationships between the elements configured, reducing the narrative of

the Pony Express to an ideology in which good and bad are represented on one side

by patriotism and modernity, and on the other side by insubordination and regression.

The speed with which the Pony Express delivered long-distance mail was

unprecedented in the mid nineteenth century. The next fastest delivery service (by

stagecoach) took twenty-five days, and steamship took a little over a month. In most

historical accounts of the Pony Express, it is this speed that distinguishes it from other

transcontinental communications technologies. However, its achievement lies also in

its non-mechanical make-up and its ability to enact the task of the transcontinental

telegraph. Unlike other forms of communication of the time, the Pony Express carried

only information. Neither passengers nor packages of any kind were relayed by Pony

messenger, and the letters that were carried had to be printed on tissue paper to save

on weight, encourage rapidity and enable constant movement. In comparison,

stagecoaches needed to stop to rest their horses, drivers and passengers, but the Express ran twenty-four hours a day for ten days straight switching riders and horses in a relay so as not to delay the mail by any more than two minutes at each station. The ability of the Express to remain in movement at all times contributed to why it kept such exceptional time and came to be relied upon to guarantee the newness and relevance of the information being delivered. The efforts made to record and report the running of the Express demonstrates an increasing desire to validate the quality of information via its newness, ensuring its social, economic and political value via its incessant circulation and constant renewal. In fact, several accounts note that a time card was kept in one of the pockets of the mail bag which was transferred from rider to rider.[40] This time card was used to record the arrival and departure times of the mail and was opened only at "home" stations where there was a change of rider. When tied to information circulation and exchange, speed becomes the expression of a desire for immediacy. However, immediacy is not only related to a desire for increased volumes of information, but also to a sense of an impending, idealized American *now*. The Express mediates between the actual state of the United States in 1860, and the preferred/hoped-for/fate-driven vision of itself yet to materialize. Immediacy and futurity become inextricably linked, revealing the beginnings of an information economy that reduced the time taken for long distance information exchange while making a great American future palpable and imminent.

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[40] Bradley, *The Story of the Pony Express*, 71; C.W. Guthrie, and Bart Smith, *The Pony Express: An Illustrated History*, (Guilford, Conn: TwoDot, 2010), 23.

The tenure of the Pony Express was remarkably short, merely eighteen months, and since its discontinuance, the Express has been framed simultaneously by its necessity as well as by an acknowledgment of its specific shelf life. On the night of its inaugural run, Jeff Thompson, the Mayor of St. Joseph in Missouri, described the Pony Express's future in the following terms, "Hardly will the cloud of dust, which envelops the rider die away before the puff of steam will be seen upon the horizon."[41] On the same night, Alexander Majors, one of the founders of the Pony Express also recognized that the Express was laying a path soon to be followed by the railroad, stating that the Express was "but the forerunner of a more important and greater enterprise, which must soon reach its culmination, viz the construction of a road upon which a tireless iron horse will start its overland journey."[42] Both these comments suggest, if not a planned obsolescence, then certainly an acceptance of the stop-gap nature of the Pony Express, and while there are accounts that suggest that the organization of the Pony Express was based on a wager (which would prove the validity of the central route as the most efficient route for transcontinental communication), it is questionable that the establishment of the Pony Express was ever conceived with any long-term service in mind. The Pacific Telegraph act of June 1860 was passed a mere two months after the commencement of the Express, setting up a count-down of sorts before the "Pony" was put out of business. Yet counter to

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[41] Waddell F. Smith, *Summary of the History of the Pony Express*, (San Rafael, CA: Pony Express Museum, c1960). Pamphlet Boxes of Materials on the Pony Express, Folder 2. pf F594 .P18. Courtesy of The Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley.

[42] Smith, *Summary of the History of the Pony Express*, The Bancroft Library.

popular histories of the Express, the telegraph was the least of the reasons that the

Express ceased service. The cost of using the Pony Express service prohibited many

from patronizing it, and even those in business such as Augustus Richardson of the

Overland Mail Company remarked in one letter of May 4, 1860 that he waited a week

to write because "[he] did not have enough of interest to communicate to warrant the

expense of $5."[43] Two weeks later, after only a month of service, Richardson also

noted in a letter to his superior that "the Pony makes scheduled time but I regret to

say that it is not well patronized at this end and worse at your end."[44] This is one of

the paradoxes of the Express. For all the celebration that surrounded its institution and

its achievement, it was, from start to finish, poorly patronized, and as a result, the

discontinuance of the Express was, in large part, due to the immense debt that the

Central Overland California and Pikes Peak Express Company accrued to run the

system, resulting in a loss of over half a million dollars in 1860 (over ten million

dollars today).

Many historians of the Express weigh the shortness of the Pony Express's

tenure and its financial failure against its service to the United States, accounting for

the subsequent popularity of its historical persona by claiming, as Mildred Haven

Vernon did, that "only its national purpose justified its existence."[45] Certainly, as

Thompson and Major's comments testify, the Express was viewed or at least framed

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[43] Richardson to Stevens, 4 May 1860, Richardson Papers, Huntington Library.
[44] Richardson to Stevens, 26 May 1860, Richardson Papers, Huntington Library.
[45] Mildred Haven Vernon, "The Daily Overland Mail to the Pacific, 1861-1869" (dissertation, University of California, Berkeley, 1923), 27.

by its service to a greater national good, to a future in which the whole continent was networked and strengthened by the iron horse. In this sense, the Pony Express as a venture is turned, by its champions, from a failure into a useful endeavor, as older forms of communications technology make room for newer ones, and an older, smaller nation develops into an expanded modern version of itself.

Representing Modernity Beyond the Nineteenth Century

As a symbol, the Express was always more successful as an expression of the desires of geo-political and capitalist expansion than it ever was a widely used means of communication. Its posthumous place in American history explains why the Express functioned so powerfully as an icon, outweighing what it was as a business venture or even as a transcontinental messenger. Yet how did the Express's symbolism as a harbinger of modernity take form in the popular imagination, and how was the Express made to speak to the changing social conditions of late nineteenth century and twentieth century modernity?

The prioritization of the mailbag and the maintenance of its continuous movement repeatedly represented by the exclamation "the mail must go through!" provides most of the drama in popular cultural representations of the Express. The running of the Express and the successful delivery of the information it carries is frequently shown as a high stakes activity in which the futurity of the nation itself "rides in the mailbags." Modernity and its promise of political and economic power for the rapidly expanding United States is what hangs in the balance as the lone rider gallops across screens both large and small. Furthermore, a mixture of urgency and

speed are intimately linked to the *kind* of information carried, which is usually of national and historical significance. A frequently-cited example, based in fact, is the delivery of the news of Abraham Lincoln's election as President, and/or his subsequent inaugural address. The threat of civil war and the fear of California seceding was high in 1860, and safeguarding the Union meant constant, reliable information exchange that would improve the weak political and economic ties California had with the rest of the United States. Lincoln's election symbolizes both the turning point that precipitates the traumatic fracturing of the nation as well as the increased importance of maintaining the security of the information destined for California. Representations of the Pony Express, however, are never simply driven by the delivery of nationally important information, but always also ideologically represent a new era in American history that places communications technologies, the Union and a progressive society (symbolized by the anti-slavery figurehead of Lincoln) on a forward trajectory towards the modern America of the twentieth century.

The characterization of the Express in these popular cultural examples illustrates processes of romanticization and idealization that bolster a simultaneously nostalgic *and* modern model of industrial modernity, the qualities of which are unproblematized and naturalized through their embeddedness in the myths that are carried forward by each dime novel, film, or television show. Adopted throughout the twentieth century as a subject through which to promote both a patriotic vision of American history, as well as a positive image of industrial modernity, the Pony

Express's distinct role in fictional narratives reveals the changing social, cultural and political face of American modernity both nationally and on the international stage. From a selection of the scenes I focus on here, I built the foundation for *Pony Players' Review,* a video installation comprised of twenty-six video vignettes. The selected scenes are presented as short video reenactments, highlighting the ideological characterization of the Express and its employees. Although the scenes are taken from sources that range in time from the 1870s to the 1950s, and across media from dime novels to films to television, the project draws all these sources together to point to the ideological identity of America the Express has symbolized as an icon.

In the late nineteenth century, dime novels such as Ned Buntline's *Buffalo Bill's First Trail, or Will Cody The Pony Express Rider*, released in 1888 as part of Beadle's New York Dime Library, presented the system of Pony Riders in relay as an untouchable alarm system. As Omaha Charley, the villain, responds when one of his men ask why the gang does not simply kill Buffalo Bill outright, "There's no treasure on a Pony boy's back. And they're true to their hour. Let one miss his time and the whole line would swarm with blue coats looking for them that's stopped them." However, by the early twentieth century, infiltration and corruption have become a part of the system. The tension in Paramount's 1925 *The Pony Express* (dir. James Cruze) revolves around the use of the code word "Eureka!" to alert corrupt Pony Express employees of mail to be interrupted, mail that contains information favoring Union forces. The system comes close to failure because the same system that

circulates legitimate information is used to communicate nefarious information as well. It is important to note, however, that the climax of the film is not capturing of the corrupt agents but a Native American attack on the town of Julesburg. In this context, the corrupt agent – a known criminal – is in cahoots with a mixed-race man, who, when short-changed, seeks revenge by gathering his Native American compatriots and storming the town. Here, the criminality that can potentially break the system is explicitly racialized, aligning Native American characters on the side of destruction, savagery and violence, while the Express and its virtuous, white employees (which, by the end includes the criminal agent), symbolize modernity and national growth. The binary set up by the film's narrative therefore pits modernizing forces against "uncivilized" chaos, signifying that a distinctly white modernity must be upheld at all costs if brown, black or red "savagery" is to be avoided.

One of the central myths supported and prolonged by Pony Express dramas is that national expansion was a consequence of inevitable forces of modernity and American ingenuity. Growing out of the centuries-old myth of Manifest Destiny, this becomes a particularly popular theme at times when unification, solidarity, and national prestige seem tenuous. For example, despite American cinema in the 1930s being dominated by the gangster genre as depression-era audiences sought characters whom they felt were dealing with similar issues of social and economic struggle, Pony Express films affirmed ideals of consensus and community integrity in an effort to instill a sense of pride in the heritage of American modernity, with which modern

audiences had become disenchanted.[46] *Cavalcade of the West* (dir. Harry L. Fraser, 1936) starring famed B-Western Actor Hoot Gibson, relates genealogies of western expansion as a Pioneer/settler mother begets a Pony Express rider son, mixing mythologies of national history with concepts of heredity and inheritance. Gibson tries to sign up to be a Pony Express rider only to be rejected by the agent, whose daughter he is courting. Gibson's mother (played by Nina Guilbert) chastises the division agent, Mr. Christian, with a patriotic monologue,

> The Pony Express is bigger than any woman and her son – or his sweetheart. You've promised the people of this nation something they think is impossible and you've got to make good on that promise…but it will take the best men you can get. There will be times when bravery and courage will carry on, and when the bodies of your men will stand more than human flesh can endure, when they have to ride through fire and flood, and over mountains and blazing deserts. But this war on time must be won. The mail must go through.[47]

Delivering the mail is equated with the taming of time and the conquest of a landmass that must, at all costs, be unified. Beyond the material realities of bodily stress and emotional sacrifice, the fulfillment of the promise made to the American people takes precedence. Yet nowhere is community unification more clearly articulated than the final scene when mother is reunited with her lost son Ace. Having been stolen as a child and raised as an outlaw, Ace is saved from hanging by his brother, who

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[46] See Stephen McVeigh, "Western Film from Silent to Noir" in *The American Western*, (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007), 58-75.
[47] *Cavalcade of the West.* Film. Directed by Harry L. Fraser. USA: Diversion Pictures, 1936, https://archive.org/details/cavalcade_of_the_west.

convinces the community to take him in and rehabilitate him. The Pony Express is thus cast as both the vehicle which will bring the people of America together through faster communication, but is also, through the actions of its heroic rider, responsible for community realignment and accord.

In *Winds of the Wasteland* (dir. Mack V. Wright, 1936), changing times and changing professions are illustrated by two enterprising ex-Pony Express riders (John Wayne and Lane Chandler). The climax of the film – a race to determine who will get a stagecoach mail contract – results not in personal glory, but the reanimation of a town previously cut off from civilization (Figs. 19-22). By the end, the former ghost town of Crescent City has been rejuvenated and its population boosted, thanks to the result of Wayne and Chandler's expert speediness. Set to become a fully functional and thriving part of a larger political body, Crescent City gains a post office, through which the arteries of communication are maintained and empowered by Wayne and Chandler's stagecoach line. In this instance, the skill of speedy horsemanship gained by working for the Express enables the young men to rebuild and expand the community, finally incorporating it, and ultimately modernizing the town.

By the early fifties, a post-war climate of prosperity seemed increasingly to stand in the shadow cast by nuclear weapons. The development of the Cold War and rising nuclear tensions meant that such new technology was represented within clearly ideological contexts. Community leadership in these stories is frequently framed by the American-ness of the emerging modernity, which characterizes leadership through its role as a moderator of varying kinds. Stanley Corkin reads

Figs. 19-22: The town of Crescent City grows as the result of the ingenuity of two former Pony Express riders. The town officially comes into its own when it receives a Post Office that links it to the rest of the country by a stage coach line. Screengrabs from *Winds of the Wasteland*, dir. Mack V. Wright, 1936.

Westerns of this period of post-war U.S. prosperity as centering on themes of economic expansion and growth, reflecting the logic found in the expansionist Marshall Plan, and certainly a theme embodied by the Pony Express's role in the expansion of the United States during the nineteenth century.[48] After World War Two, there is a pronounced identification of the successful completion of the Express's task with American power and political responsibility. These examples indicate how the United States negotiates and maintains its power, but they also

[48] Stanley Corkin, "Cowboys, Free Markets, Wyatt Earp, and Thomas Dunson: *My Darling Clementine*, and *Red River,*" in *Cowboys as Cold Warriors: The Western and U.S. History,* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2004), 19-50.

reveal a fundamental fear of losing that power through losing a grip on modernity itself. A further example of this can be seen in Paramount's *Pony Express* (dir. Jerry Hopper, 1953), which shows California's declaration for the Union transported both in the Pony's saddle bags but also orally, as the voice of each successive rider erroneously yells "California's first to Stand Against Slavery." Diegetically, this statement acts as a legitimization of California's political power (and thus its place within the Union), reassuring the population of the State that those who represent them in Congress act in their name for a progressive and unified national future. Waiting for the Pony Express to arrive, however, enemies of the Union plant the seeds of doubt and distrust by suggesting of the Government "They've fooled us with [the Pony Express] just like they've fooled us with everything else." Trust in the political system of the United States is tied directly to trust in secure and reliable information relay between those represented and those who represent, and the literal voicing of the anti-slavery message from rider to rider embodies this chain of communication between east and west.

In another example, the Pony Express mediates between social spheres rather than geo-political territories. Republic Pictures' *The Plainsman and the Lady* (dir. Joseph Kane, 1946) focuses on St. Joseph as a town divided, with the west of St. Joe "given over to the stock drovers and cowboys," while east St. Joseph is "brick-built" and "a little stuffy" (Figs. 23-26). Between the rough-and-ready types who populate the saloon and the civilized gentry who throw balls in big houses, stand the

Figs 23-24. The saloon in west "St. Joe", and the Banker's ball in east "St. Joseph." Screengrabs from *The Plainsman and the Lady,* dir. Joseph Kane, 1946.

Figs. 25-26. The trigger-happy cowboys who ride through the streets, followed by a dignified carriage on its way to the Banker's ball. Screengrabs from *The Plainsman and the Lady*, dir. Joseph Kane, 1946.

protagonists who are able to navigate both worlds comfortably. Clearly meant to signify a differentiation in social class, the well-to-do refer to the city as St. Joseph, chastising those in-betweeners who cling to the more colloquial "St. Joe." The Pony Express is the dream of Senator Gwinn of California who desires to remove the "block in progress to the whole nation" that a lack of communication with California represents. St. Joseph is a microcosm of the United States, and expansion westward seems necessary to avoid Europeanization and the corrupting influence from the east brought to town by the technologies that link St. Joseph to the eastern seaboard. However, such westward movement must retain some semblance of order to not fully

collapse into lawlessness. The moderation between high civility and chaos is diegetically presented as an ideal, but when extrapolated, suggests that post-war American modernity is qualitatively different from that which existed in other countries previously, and is better suited to the newly emerging modernity under U.S. political, economic, and cultural guidance.

Further illustrations that promote the U.S. as a dominant model for twentieth-century modernity include *Devil Riders* (dir. Sam Newfield, 1943) starring Buster Crabbe as the Pony Express operator who works with the local stagecoach company to fend off outlaws trying to steal the mail contract. By the end of the film, with the stagecoach dominant and the Pony Express in decline, Crabbe tells love interest Sally (Patti McCarthy) that he isn't sad that the Express is ending because: "...its served its purpose…things change, Sally, and we've gotta change with them." Similarly, in Gene Autry's *Last of the Pony Riders* (dir. George Archainbaud, 1953), Autry's character, a seasoned Pony Express rider, argues with his boss and Express operator Tom McEwan (John Downey), claiming that sticking blindly to the Express over other methods of communications means "you will be stuck!…the Pony Express is through, it's served its purpose…and now we're getting the telegraph…and some day there will be railroads across this country. The world's moving, Tom, and you've got to move with it!" Progress, new technology, and the modern "civilized" world must be accommodated by the sweeping away of old methods of communication and old ways of thinking. Likewise, myths of the old American West must be updated if those

myths are to validate the ability of the United States to lead the world in a new phase of modernity in the post-war world.

In a more nuanced example from "Pony Express Vs. Telegraph," episode two from the second season of the film serial *The Adventures of Wild Bill Hickok* (Romson Productions, 1951-58), communications technologies are pitted against one another culminating in a stability that emerges when old and new are balanced in partnership. "Pony Express Vs. Telegraph" involves the accusation of a Pony Express rider of the murder of a telegraph company employee. Bob Ridgeway (Dan Haydon) and other Pony Express employees stand together, while the villains who run the telegraph company scheme to frame Bob for the deed. Speaking against the idea that Bob acted to destroy the telegraph company and prolong the life of the Pony Express, an employee states "do you think any of us would be fool enough to think that he could stop history in the making?" An accusation describing the crime as an act of desperation is rebuffed as ludicrous in the face of what Express employees work for – not a stable, long term livelihood, but for history, and thus for the future. Viewers' knowledge of Bob's future plans to turn to ranching, and settle down with his telegraph operator sweetheart, confirm this. The attempt to stop the Express in this film is about breaking the flow of information, but it is more pointedly about creating distrust within the community that the Pony Express serves, establishing doubt as to whether such a company should be entrusted with the important task of transporting sensitive material, and making history in the name of the United States. In the end, however, Bob is proven innocent and his partnering with an employee of the

telegraph company suggests a future in which new technology is not a threat but is figuratively wedded to the settlement and expansion (geographically and biologically) of the nation.

By early 1960s, a general feeling that the golden age of the Western had long passed was widespread. As Stanley Corkin argues, the myth of the West is openly represented as kitsch, nostalgically looked back to, but also eviscerated, populated by directors such as Sam Pekinpah who "…see glory more compellingly as a matter of the U.S. past and not its future."[49] Focusing on the later films of John Ford, Bob Beatty and Mike Yawn have also argued that the idealized perspective embodied in films from the 1940s and 50s disappears by the early 1960s, replaced by a disenchanted and even cynical view of the myth of the West compared to earlier examples.[50] Pony Express themed dramas, notably absent from large screens during the 1960s, still appeared on small screens before completely disappearing as a subject for a further ten years. To a degree, these television shows are similar to Western films made around the same time in that they are not straight forward celebrations of America's past. Shifting their focus from the triumphant exploits of young riders, even presenting younger employees as too romantic or too eager for action, each show emphasizes the stalwart and stabilizing masculinity of authority figures such as

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[49] Corkin, "Imperialist Nostalgia and the road to Vietnam: *Lonely are the Brave, Ride the High Country*, and *The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance*," *Cowboys as Cold Warriors,* 205-244.
[50] Bob Beatty & Mike Yawn, "John Ford's Vision of the Closing of the West: From Optimism to Cynicism," *Film and History: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Film and Television Studies,* Vol. 26, Numbers 1-4, 1996, 6-19.

fathers or division agents. These older characters act as unglamorous yet powerful

nodes, instrumentally guiding the trajectory of each dramatic narrative, and I would

argue, the history depicted.

California National Productions television show *Pony Express,* produced in

1959 as part of the Express's centennial celebrations, visualizes the organizational

structures and organizational labor behind the messenger service, filtering them

through the experiences of division superintendent, Brett Clarke (Grant Sullivan).[51]

Clarke is responsible for maintaining his division of the Express's route, and is who

we follow each episode as he fixes problems that arise, such as a land dispute that

compromises the route, a drunken and belligerent station attendant who isn't up to his

duties, or the requisitioning of a relay station by a criminal on-the-run as he hides

from authorities. Riders dart in and out of the narrative as the mail "goes through,"

acting as timely reminders of what Clarke is working to maintain, but we the

audience remain with Clarke. Much like earlier examples of characters who are able

to navigate divergent social worlds, Clarke is a bureaucrat who prefers to work hands-

on, using his level-headedness and experience in the field to deal with each problem

as it presents itself. It is Clarke, not the riders who successfully keeps the mail going

through, suggesting that despite the bureaucracy associated with industrial modernity,

it is organizational authority (here figured as an older white man) that remains

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[51] California National Productions was a subsidiary company of the National Broadcasting Company (NBC) based in California. As part of a syndication division, CNP started producing *Pony Express* in 1957. The series screened nationally as part of the centennial celebrations of the Pony Express from 1959-1960.

instrumental to the functioning of the system, offering systemic as well as social stability.

The 1966 double episode of *Bonanza* (NBC, 1959-1973) titled "Ride the Wind" used the rigorous schedule of the Pony Express to emphasize the deceptive romance that shrouded the job of riding. However, the seemingly critical perspective of "Ride the Wind" is tightly hemmed in by the promotion of patriarchal genealogies, and the centrality of father figures to the stability and harmony of both these episodes as well as the serial itself. *Bonanza* was a show based around the experiences of one family, the Cartwrights, specifically focusing on the relationship of a father to his sons. As one might expect then, the episodes of "Ride the Wind" are permeated with meaning generated by father-to-son interactions and father-to-father interactions, placing storylines developed by the Pony Express alongside drama centered on broken masculine genealogies and potential familial rupture.

"Ride the Wind" concerns the seduction of Little Joe (Michael Landon) by the idea of riding for the Pony Express and the pursuit of personal fame by one of the Pony Express's organizers, Curtis Wade (Rod Cameron). As Little Joe ignores his brother's and his father's concerns for his safety, he joins the Express company, but despite Little Joe's ability to outrun Native American attacks on his horse, his fellow riders die around him. The romance of riding, which initially gathers idealistic young men in throngs to the offices of the Pony Express company, is contrasted to the reality of an advancing modernity and labor practices which privilege the system over the individual. The Pony Express represents the coming of a new way of life, whose

seductive and exciting qualities affect the desires of both younger and older men. Unlike other dramas about the Express, "Ride the Wind" draws attention to the problematic consequences of a society in need of increasing amounts of information at increasing rates of circulation. Yet ultimately, the critique of these seductive qualities is made good by the re-unification of father and son who are brought together against Wade and against other examples of broken father-son relationships presented across the episodes. As Ben Cartwright, in voice-over at the end comments, "I think as long as men are alive, they will remember and they will tell tales of those riders who blazed their way into the history of our nation." The Cartwright family remains intact, and like the show itself, which was hugely popular, remaining in production for fourteen years, the Pony Express keeps running, both diegetically and in the American imagination.

Conclusion

The Pony Express remains a powerful symbol of a moment of fundamental change in the political, economic and cultural development of the United States. The mid-nineteenth century was a period of transition in which American modernity had not yet fully solidified into the highly regimented and standardized technological modernity of the late-nineteenth century city. American modernity in 1860 was a limbo-modernity in which the desires and the manifestations of an emerging industrial future were becoming visible, and the social and political structures of the early republic were beginning to shift. The Pony Express draws attention to the importance not of developing cities but of political and imaginative spaces in-

between urban centers. In the nineteenth century, the future of the United States may have been symbolized and ultimately embodied in the West, but connection with San Francisco was not the only goal of such dreams of expansion. The prioritization of information as a form of capital contributed to new understandings of time and space, linking the organization of national geography to data circulation and a naturalization of modes of information exchange based on rapid relay infrastructures. For urban modernity to flourish, the rural (as it was figured ideologically as well as geographically) had to be integrated into modernity's systems, thus ensuring efficient information flow and endorsing the image of a unified and stable contiguous nation.

Ideologically, the Express has over time been absorbed into narratives of national development and exceptionalism that describe American modernity as an inevitable and unique phenomenon. Frequently used as a symbol of individualism that represents a distinct American modernity – neither fully technological nor fully urban – the Pony Express extends myths of America as garden and American technology as privileged into the early-twentieth century, promoting an identity for the United States and its citizens that relies on paradoxical qualities of old and new. The Express would symbolically endow the modernity of late-nineteenth and even twentieth century America with the cultural capital of a pioneer past that enforces ideals originally disseminated through the myth of Manifest Destiny. However, this pioneer past would be cross-pollinated with concepts of political maturation, positioning the United States of the twentieth century as the culmination, the ultimate achievement of mythic, technological, social, and political processes. Therefore, the Pony Express

does not simply act as a nostalgic portal to an idealized past, but is a potent symbol that bridges old and new, east and west, pastoral and modern, organic and mechanical, myth and history.

Chapter 2:
The Pony Express As Medium, the Pony Express In Media

For the last twenty years, numerous scholars including Thomas Elssaeser,

Anne Friedberg, Lisa Gitelman, Carolyn Marvin, and Jussi Parikka to name a few,

have carried out work that has emphasized the continued importance of older, or even

obsolete technologies to the way we understand and interpret contemporary

technology.[1] As I argued in chapter one, the Pony Express can easily be understood as

a form of nineteenth century information technology, facilitating and inaugurating the

rapid and incessant relay of information across long distances. Yet what makes the

Express a *medium* is much more complex. To understand how the Express shaped

communication and the role it later played as an ideological symbol aligning white

European American identity with technological exceptionalism, a broader conception

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[1] For examples of scholarship that has questioned the newness of new media, see Jonathan Crary, *Techniques of the Observer: On Vision and Modernity in the Nineteenth Century,* (Cambridge, Mass: The MIT Press, 1990); Anne Friedberg, *The Virtual Window: From Alberti to Microsoft,* (Cambridge, Mass: The MIT Press, 2009); *New Media 1740-1915,* eds. Lisa Gitelman and Geoffrey Pingree, (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2003); Erkki Huhtamo and Jussi Parikka, *Media Archaeology: Approaches, Applications, and Implications*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011); Friedrich Kittler, *Gramophone, Film, Typewriter,* translators Geoffrey Winthrop-Young and Michael Mutz, (Stanford, Calif: Stanford Univeristy Press, 1999); Carolyn Marvin, *When Old Technologies Were New: Thinking about Electric Communication in the Late Nineteenth Century*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988). For examples in the popular press of nineteenth century visual technologies that contextualize contemporary VR technology see, Steven Johnson, "Want to Know What Virtual Reality Might Become? Look To The Past," *New York Times,* Nov 3 2016, https://www.nytimes.com/2016/11/06/magazine/want-to-know-what-virtual-reality-might-become-look-to-the-past.html?mcubz=0 (accessed 03/20/17)); Katherine Schwab, "Paper Peepshows Were the Virtual Reality of the 19th Century," August 4 2016, https://www.fastcodesign.com/3062465/paper-peepshows-were-the-virtual-reality-of-the-19th-century (accessed 09/26/17).

of what media are and what media do must be understood. I am interested in looking beyond media as tools to the deeper effects media have on shaping communication itself, as well as understanding more broadly the connections between the materiality of a given medium to its ideological alignment and semiotic power. In essence, I am interested in understanding how specific mediums generate specific meanings separate from the content they carry.

Whether thought of as technological objects, systems of dissemination, sets of social protocols to receive and send information, or assemblages of all of these, media are fundamental to human existence. While media help us communicate in a variety of ways, they influence how that communication is constructed, received and understood. If we are to understand the full significance of the Pony Express as a medium, we need to understand it both as a node through which messages and information travelled, and as imparting its own messages. The Express is both a *method* of communication with far reaching effects, but it is also a *form* of communication.

John Durham Peters and Jussi Parikka have both looked back to elemental and geological subjects to expand and complicate the way we understand how media communicate, and how that communication shapes and influences our perception of the world. For example, Durham Peters has argued for an understanding of media composed from both "the natural and the cultural," reminding us that the association of media with newspapers, radio, television and the internet to name a few, is

relatively recent.[2] Durham Peters reads the interactions between human culture and the natural world as a form of communication that warrants serious attention as it reveals how media "provid[e] conditions for existence… and become infrastructures and forms of life."[3] Likewise, my project views media as that which, at a more fundamental level, structures what communication is, not just across space but also across time. The Pony Express allows us to decouple the idea of media from machines and devices, but it also reveals the complicated relationship between a medium and its popular representation which makes it continue to signify in a multitude of ways, even when that medium no longer exists. This is not the deep time of media as engaged by Parikka, but rather a time that is both delimited by a medium's lifespan, and yet is not fully contained within it; a time that ultimately allows us to see how humans live, work and *imagine* through media.[4]

As Carolyn Marvin has pointed out, media are not "fixed, natural objects" simply comprised of material interfaces. Media also necessarily include the comprehension of cultural codes and the formation of social habits that change over time and through use.[5] Indeed, over time, the Express has been transformed into a symbol that communicates not through the flesh and blood of horse and rider, but by its semiotic power. Since the 1870s the Express has had a presence in popular culture,

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[2] John Durham Peters, *The Marvelous Clouds: Toward a Philosophy of Elemental Media*, (London: University of Chicago Press, 2015), 2.
[3] Durham Peters, *Marvelous Clouds,* 14.
[4] Jussi Parikka, *A Geology of Media,* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2015).
[5] Marvin, *When Old Technologies Were New*, 8.

appearing in dime novels, live performances, films and television shows. With each iteration, it has delivered ideological information tailored to a new generation of Americans, made to speak to the culture in which they live. However, as we will see, despite its anachronistic form, the Pony Express is repeatedly framed as having a privileged relationship to the media that represent it, providing an apt example through which to illustrate Marshall McLuhan's dictum "the medium is the message," linking media history to American history in a mutually constitutive way.

In 1964 McLuhan theorized that each new medium contained earlier iterations or versions of itself, further explaining that "…the 'message' of any medium or technology is the change of scale or pace or pattern that it introduces into human affairs."[6] Describing media as "extensions of man," to use McLuhan's words, does not refer simply to a medium as a body-extending tool, but as social and cultural infrastructure. By thinking of the Pony Express in relation to developing forms of communications and transport technology, nineteenth century Americans could imagine a national future held together with vast technological networks. As both messenger and icon, the Express facilitated in normalizing many processes of change underway in the mid nineteenth century, acting as the interface to much larger organizational systems that delimited and encompassed national geography, the international stock market trade, land ownership, transcontinental highways, printing and paper-making technologies, and the labor of specific animal and human bodies, to

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[6] Marshall McLuhan, *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man*. 1st MIT Press ed. (Cambridge, Mass: The MIT Press, 1994), 8.

name a few. Lisa Gitelman and Anne Friedberg have both described the normalizing

effects of media as an inherent ability to frame collective perceptions of time and

space, as well as concepts of public and private. Certainly, my use of multiple

framing devices (the peep box and the Smartphone) for *Transcontinental 1860* is a

direct allusion to this concept.[7] Therefore, reading representations of the Pony

Express as depictions of these normalizing and framing processes can help to identify

and clarify the kinds of mediating effects that were engendered by the Express. For

example, on September 15, 1866, the *London Penny Illustrated Magazine,* which

published articles of news with accompanying illustrations for the British public,

included an article about the Pony Express describing its function, its economic

importance, and its relationship to other communications technologies of the time:

> …under [the rider]… is the bag of letters so anxiously looked forward to in
> New York, for they tell important things – how ships have sailed for Europe
> laden with California gold, of terrible wrecks and losses, or of rising markets
> and great gains, or perhaps how the votes have counted that have decided the
> destiny of States. Not only to America is this bold and solitary rider's leather
> saddle-bag of interest, but on to Europe will electricity and steam send many a
> long looked for message which it contains; and the merchant on many a
> change in the old world will tell of news he has received so soon from the
> farthest shores of the Pacific. He little knows and less cares for the hair
> breadth dangers run by this lonely courier of the plains and mountains…[8]

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[7] Gitelman & Pingree, *New Media,* xvi; Anne Friedberg, *The Virtual Window: From
Alberti to Microsoft,* (Cambridge, Mass: The MIT Press, 2009).
[8] London Penny Illustrated News, September 15, 1866,
http://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/viewer/BL/0000693/18660915/018/0007
(accessed 06/17/15).

Despite articulating his point in rather romantic language, the writer here cuts through the romance to assert that adventure is not the point of the Pony Express, information is. National politics as well as international trade rely on the Express to run at its rapid rate to keep the engines of the national and international markets stoked with informational fuel. The abstraction of both the labor of the horse and rider, as well as the information they carry is here highlighted to show how the Express intersects with electric and steam powered technologies, as well as frame the task of information delivery as a constituent part of the modernizing world.

The concept of framing is really a concept of boundaries, and as much as media frame our view of the world, they also precipitate and enforce other boundaries. In the United States, the history of ceaseless information flow signified by the Pony Express must be recognized as being enabled by histories of corporate acquisition and consolidation as well as the national geopolitical expansion I discussed in chapter one. The Express's path was in part dictated by the professional freighting histories of the proprietors of the Pony Express – Russell, Majors and Waddell – who were known for outfitting and maintaining United States military posts as far west as Utah.[9] Empire, both corporate and national, is here enabled

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[9] The transportation routes of Russell, Majors and Waddell ran from St. Joseph to Denver, as well as St. Joseph to Salt Lake City and were already owned and operated as freight and stagecoach lines by the three entrepreneurs and shortly after deciding to establish the Pony Express. Additional stagecoach lines running from Salt Lake City to Sacramento were quickly acquired by the newly formed Central Overland California and Pikes Peak Express Company to create an uninterrupted route that spanned half the continent and across which the Pony Express ran. For more on the freighting business of Russell, Majors and Waddell, see Raymond and Mary Settle, *Empire on Wheels*, (Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 1949).

through the Express's extended infrastructure which mapped out and secured private and federal interests. Yet, embedded within these federal "interests" are the accompanying histories of the disenfranchisement of indigenous peoples and the territories and cultures that were annexed and suppressed to clear a way for national expansion and private, corporate growth. Within the history of the Pony Express, this conflict of interests, on the one hand signified the national growth of the United States and on the other hand the survival strategies of indigenous peoples, which became most visible in the spring of 1860 in which an escalating storm of violence halted Express service for several months. After struggling to survive in the Utah and Nevada territories, the Paiute peoples responded to conditions of near starvation with several violent attacks on European American posts including Pony Express stations, and in retaliation, a combination of United States Army and independent militia attacked Paiute settlements.[10]

The Idea of Newness

Describing a medium as "new" is much more about its context than it is about its form. The anachronistic form of the Express represented both what was soon to pass and what would take its place, but despite its retrograde appearance, the Express promised newness and symbolized a better, more connected future for European Americans. Old media make clear that "newness" arises from a confluence of specific

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[10] Detailed accounts of the Paiute War can be found in Settle and Settle, *Saddles and Spurs,* 144-161; Bloss, *the Great Gamble,* 63-94; For a good description of relations between the Pony Express and the many Native American nations along its route, see Chapman, *Pony Express,* 198-212.

circumstances. The perceived social value of the medium, the political and economic stakes of its employment and the current state of technological development all contribute to the meaning of a medium's perceived "newness," and the way the Express both privileges, cements and upsets the *idea* of newness reveals how important this concept is to ideals of progress and modernity. In fact, Raymond Williams' description of "residual" culture as that which functions "…not at all as an element of the past, but as an effective element of the present" illustrates how the Express, within its own historical context, was in use as an effective communications system.[11] Williams continues to state that "A residual cultural element…will in most cases have had to be incorporated if the effective dominant culture is to make sense in these areas," and the Express, resembling something from an American past rather than an American "now" – which would have included trains, telegraphs, and other new technologies which were all fast becoming a part of a dominant technological culture – shows how an anachronistic technology might have worked to normalize, both practically and culturally, the newer forms of communication that were emerging as important technological and social modes.[12]

Yet the power of the Express as a social and cultural mediator might also be explained through the idea of remediation. As I mentioned earlier, Marshall McLuhan first described a theory of remediation by suggesting that the content of each medium

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[11] Raymond Williams, "The Dominant, the Residual, the Emergent" in *Marxism and Literature*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), 122.
[12] Williams, "The Dominant…," 123.

is another medium.[13] Rick Altman as well as David Bolter and Richard Grusin similarly theorized remediation as a process in which new technologies and their new languages of representation, emerge (or are re-formed) and are celebrated and subsequently normalized, with Bolter and Grusin describing the process as a "complex kind of borrowing."[14] There is always the danger of uncomplicated, linear thinking in theories such as remediation with the suggestion that one medium leads to the next and so on until it reaches its pinnacle in the present, but media are inherently more complex. The parallel development, implementation and use of both the Pony Express and the transcontinental telegraph is a perfect example of how two histories may not neatly follow on from one another.

The telegraph and the Express worked in tandem from 1861 onwards, the Pony Express filling in the gap between the ends of the eastward and the westward telegraph lines as they were being constructed. One British newspaper reported that, in February of 1861, "The President's message was published in San Francisco on the 19th having been telegraphed entire—first from St. Louis to Fort Kearney to overtake the Pony, and then from Sacramento."[15] This leapfrogging of information from the telegraph to the Express clearly shows the inter-reliance of both technologies on one another for complete transcontinental communication. One does not compete with the

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[13] McLuhan, *Understanding Media,* 8.
[14] Rick Altman, "Toward a Theory of the History of Representational Technologies," *Iris,* no. 2, 1984, 111-125; J. David Bolter and Richard Grusin, *Remediation: Understanding New Media*, (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 1999), 45.
[15] Jersey Independent and Daily Telegraph, January 23, 1861, http://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/viewer/bl/0001087/18610123/035/0002 (accessed 06/17/15).
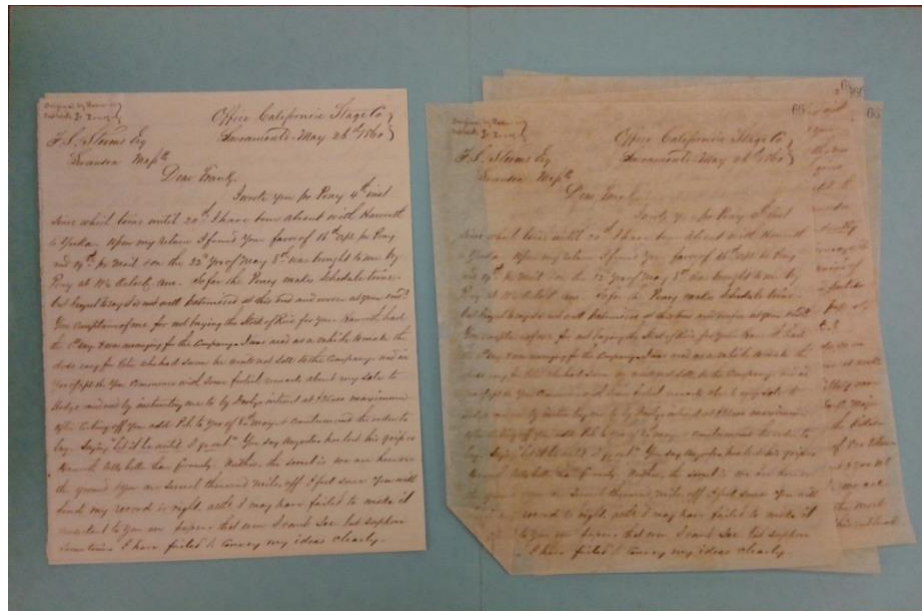
Fig 27. An original heavy paper letter sent by steam ship (left), and its copied tissue paper counterpart, sent by Pony Express (right). mss RN1-59, Augusts G. Richardson Papers, The Huntington Library, San Marino, California. Photo by author.

other, but rather supplements and strengthens the system of data flow with which the Pony Express intersects and through which it is partially constructed.

The Express's intersection with yet more technologies of communication are visible in letters sent between an employee of the Overland Mail Company, to his supervisor in Massachusetts (Fig 27). These letters appear in duplicate—one sent by steamship via Panama, the other copied onto tissue paper and sent by Express overland—and act as physical manifestations of the relationship between the Express, the stagecoach, and the steamship, as well as paper making and printing technologies employed to produce the paper duplicates sent "via Pony." What is revealed by the letters is a network of associated technologies which destabilize the concept of newness in relation to representational technologies, and it is this kind of networked remediation that I have chosen to represent or speculate on in *Pony Players' Review.*

Figs. 28-29. Reenacted scenes from *Pony Players' Review* present speculative scenes demonstrating acts of maintenance. Left, how to copy a letter, right, how to tack a horse.

The video installation, which is comprised of several short vignettes, shows reenacted scenes from Pony Express themed popular culture. Yet, alongside these dramatic scenes I also present speculative scenes that demonstrate the other forms of communications technology at work that intersect with the Pony Express system. For example, I include scenes of how to operate an early copying press, and the sending of a telegraph message. These brief scenes are shot in an informational style, with actors facing and addressing the camera to emphasize these scenes' difference from their dramatized counterparts (figs. 28-29).

The iconic power of the Pony Express obscures the Express's reliance on other media and technologies to produce and transport its content, and this obscuring effect makes the Express appear individually exceptional. Similar to the moving panorama comparison I pointed out in chapter one, in which a magazine article about the Express compared imagining a horse and rider traveling across the terrains of North America to a moving panorama performance, associations continued to be

made well into the twentieth century that linked or compared the Pony Express to other technologies and media forms.

For example, in the Greyhound Bus Company's 1956 promotional film *Freedom Highway,* a Greyhound bus filled with passengers embarks on a cross-country journey traveling from San Francisco to Washington D.C. As the bus moves across the country, so the protagonist – a Boy Scout – learns about different eras of American history, starting most recently in the West, and ending at the American War of Independence in the east. As the bus travels the same route as the Pony Express, denoted by the commemorative roadside markers that speed past at the beginning of the segment, a comparison is drawn between the Express and the bus, but this comparison is extended to include the stagecoach and the telegraph as the Boy Scout reads from the Pony Express history book he has brought with him (figs. 30-33). This route is a historically well-traveled one, but the film acts as a lesson in the history of the expansion of national borders and white European American settlement. Therefore, to be able to travel the route via Greyhound Bus is to be a part of an American tradition, a tradition that seems particularly constructed for, and populated by, white European Americans from a young secretary to a football star to a mourning father to a Boy Scout. However, *Freedom Highway* also suggests that the act of traveling across the country by bus is a hands-on way to learn about the nation and in so doing, learn about its history. Firsthand experience, mediated by the bus, activates a long citizenship lesson that does not come from the facts in the boy's
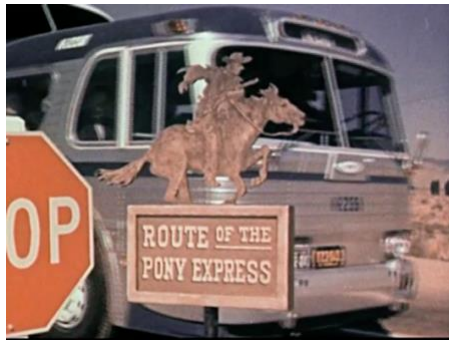
Figs. 30-33. The Pony Express is imaginatively reconstructed by a Boy Scout as he simultaneously reads about its history and experiences the route itself courtesy of the Greyhound bus he is on. Screengrabs from *Freedom Highway*, dir. Harold Schuster, 1956.

history book, but from the convergence of those sanctioned historical facts with the action of seeing (and importantly, imagining) the country with his own eyes.

The television show *Pony Express,* produced by a subsidiary of NBC and which ran for just one season from 1959-60 to commemorate the Express's centennial, plays on the structural similarities between the Express and a contemporary counterpoint, in this case, television (fig. 34). A promotional poster describes the show with the following copy,

> Like the immortal riders themselves, one PONY EXPRESS episode picks up where the last one left off. Running skirmishes with Indians, bushwackers, and the forces of nature over a 1,966-mile trail provide compelling action for scene after scene, episode after episode. The gripping dramas of PONY

EXPRESS have no need for contrived situations. Their springboard for action and reality is indelibly inscribed in the history of the West…

In this description, the relay of riders is likened to the episodic structure of the television serial or even to the back-to-back programming of mass entertainment. The Express provides a standard against which television is being measured, acting as a legitimating, comparative medium at a time when owning a television (as well as a home and a car) was an ideal. In fact, there are worthwhile comparisons to be made between the growth in popularity of television in the 1950s and the popular image of the Express, especially in terms of who television spoke to, or worked for. As Lynn Spigel has pointed out, "it was the particular aim of the mass media – especially
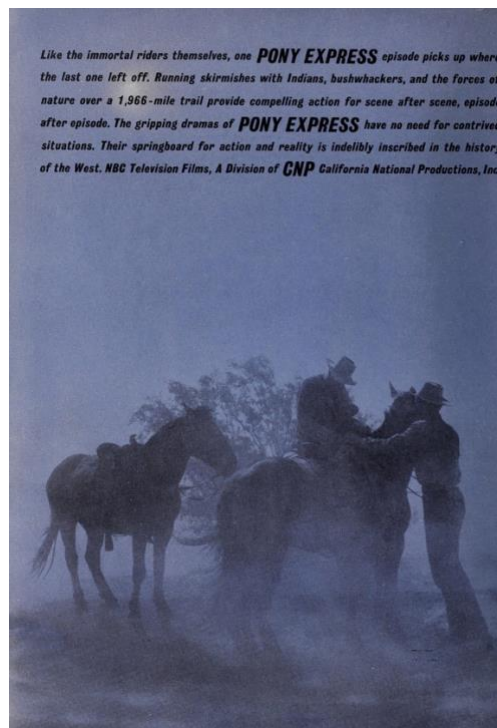
Fig. 34. Advertisement for CNP's *Pony Express,* (1959-60) which draws a direct comparison between the structures of the Express and Television programming. Advertisement in *Broadcasting,* Dec 14, 1959, 2. http://archive.org/stream/broadcastingtele57unse_0#page/n1233/mode/2up

television – to level class and ethnic differences in order to produce a homogenous public for national advertisers," however, Spigel also points out that the "homogenous public" of television was frequently exposed to programming and advertising developed especially for white European Americans.[16] What makes the Express and the television comparable beyond their structural similarities is the act of national homogenization rendered through the promotion of an ideal American identity made visible in white European American bodies, culture, and history. Claiming that the show has "no need for contrived situations," the promotional poster for the *Pony Express* show presents the Express as a naturally suitable subject for mass broadcast entertainment. The historical and cultural capital of the Express is taken as a given through its "indelible inscription in the history of the West," thereby positioning the Express as a subject of veneration and pedagogical worth. By representing the Express, then, television is endorsed as a pedagogical tool. Disseminating historical and ideological information across great distances via various national and regional broadcast networks, television delivers messages that unite the nation in commemorative celebration not only of an old messenger system, but also of the hegemony of white European American narratives that make up the Express's mythology.

The Pony Express's remediation as an icon in popular culture appears in popular print, cinema, on television and has most recently been appropriated by

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[16] Lynn Spigel, *Make Room For TV: Television and the Family Ideal in Postwar America,* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 6.

Google as a namesake for their proposed Gmail integrated bill payment system.[17] The earliest example of this form of remediation however, appeared in 1872, in the allegorical painting *American Progress* by John Gast. In this painting, the Pony Express is literally placed alongside the technologies of the stagecoach, the train and the telegraph, but also present are pioneer wagons and '49ers on foot, traversing the plains of America from the east where ships and cities have been established. The image suggests a land split in two between past and future, new and old, east and west. Laid out almost chronologically from right to left, Buffalo and Native Americans flee into the darkness on the far left (perhaps symbolic in the painting's time of the "uncivilized" world, but symbolic also of the fate of those many Native American peoples and communities who would suffer massacres and deterritorialization by aggressive European American settlement). This painting is an image of a history of remediated American technologies, as well as a piece of propaganda for ideologies of white supremacy, European American "civilization," and expansionist politics. Showing the re-organization of the land, the painting illustrates the "beneficial" influence of white emigrants, technology and business, framed visually by the westward movement of white Americans who leave greener

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[17] The Pony Express has been the subject of countless dime novels, films, and television shows, the last of which was ABC's *The Young Riders*, that ran from 1989-1992, and starred Stephen Baldwin as Buffalo Bill and Josh Brolin as Wild Bill Hickok. For information pertaining to Google's proposed Gmail integrated bill payment system, see http://recode.net/2015/03/24/google-working-on-project-to-let-you-receive-and-pay-bills-directly-inside-gmail/ (accessed 10/02/2016), http://www.paymentssource.com/news/technology/gmail-bill-pay-is-a-bigger-threat-to-banks-thasn-google-wallet-3020942-1.html (accessed 10/02/2016).

and more fertile land in their wake in opposition to the dark, uncultivated land into which the Native Americans flee.

Commissioned by the American travel guide publisher George Crofutt, the painting was turned into a chromolithographic print and inserted into many of Crofutt's guides, which achieved wide distribution thanks to rising mass production practices and the growth of urban consumer publics. The painting's remediation in print figures the remediation of American technologies as part of United States' geo-political "progress," institutionalizing the image of the Pony Express as part of expansionist histories of the United States, as well as a part of the growing tourist industry which turned the landscapes and vistas of the North American continent into consumable experiences. Ideologies of westward expansion, embedded both in the image as well as in the guidebook format through which many would have encountered the image, present the Pony Express as a representative of a larger imperial order, signified through the titillating, feminized, and skimpily dressed figure that wears the "star of Empire" and behind whom all technologies follow.[18] Unlike aggressive Columbia with her cap of liberty that speaks of revolution and independence, this female symbol is far more sexualized and fecund, representing the reproductive womanhood that will, through colonization, people the land which will be made equally submissive, fertile and productive.

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[18] Martha A. Sandweiss, *John Gast, American Progress, 1872*, http://picturinghistory.gc.cuny.edu/john-gast-american-progress-1872/ (accessed 02/24/2017).

Late nineteenth century dime novels transformed the Express into an icon that set the social and cultural coordinates of the future of the United States. One example of such a figuration is the Beadle and Adam's Half Dime Library publication *Dick Darling* by Frederick Whittacker, first published in 1874. First emerging in the 1830s and 1840s after developments in printing technology allowed for greater volumes of production, dime novels, which were an industry unto themselves with authors expected to produce vast quantities of copy based on formulaic narratives, were hugely popular.[19] Improved literacy in the mid-nineteenth century, promoted by compulsory education, meant that dime novels were read by a variety of working-class publics, from boys and girls to adults, men and women, and immigrants. Mass circulation, encouraged by an increase in lending libraries by the end of the nineteenth century also played a significant role in the power and popularity of dime novel literature.[20] Among the predominant genres produced, which included mysteries of the city, detective stories, and tales of romance, were Westerns. *Dick Darling*, one such Western, follows the adventurous and romantic exploits of its teenage protagonist, a Pony Express rider who is posted at a fictional relay station in Nevada Territory. In one scene, Dick justifies his steadfastness in cleaning his pistols to his slovenly Kentuckian partner by acknowledging his role as a representative of order and discipline, "…what's the use of sinking to the level of the beast because we

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[19] Michael Denning, *Mechanic Accents: Dime Novels and Working-Class Culture in America,* (London, New York: Verso, 1987, 1998).

[20] David Kazanjian, "The Dime Novel" in *American Novel 1870-1940: Volume 6,* eds Priscilla Ward and Michael A. Elliot, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 274-288.

seldom see anything but horses? I believe in civilization myself and you know, Jack, we're pioneers of civilization out here." His partner responds "Civilization be durned!...We're out hyar to kerry the mails and keep off Injins from Uncle Sam's stock, that what we're hyar for. I'd like to see a Ute brave go fur your sculp some morning! Guess he'd shake the civilization outen you in short order…"[21] Darling's higher ideals mark him out as the obvious hero of this story, while his partner remains defiantly practically minded, unwilling to accept the bigger task with which they, as Expressmen, are charged. The Kentuckian aligns civilization with wasteful, vain activity rather than discipline and order, while Darling expresses that civilization is a system to invest faith in, something to be cultivated like the land, something that has symbolic power visible in agents such as himself and the larger system of the Pony Express. This power, then, fragile as it is when located at a relay station in the middle of nowhere, must be protected, and the Native American "brave" acts as the symbolic force that can powerfully remove "civilization" from any single man or larger organization, reducing them to "the level of the beast." Native American culture is assigned a place in opposition to "civilization" which becomes distinctly racialized as a quality of American modernity, and held as a social and cultural ideal.

Other figurations of the Express in dime novels include many Buffalo Bill titles such as Ned Buntline's *Buffalo Bill's First Trail: or, Will Cody, the Pony Express Rider,* from 1888, or Prentiss Ingraham's *Buffalo Bill's Saddle Sharps, or, The Pledged*

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[21] Frederick Whittacker, *Dick Darling, the Pony Express Rider,* (New York: Beadle and Adams Half Dime Library, Vol. 3 No 43, 1874), 1.

Pards of the Pony Express from 1901 (fig. 35). These stories acknowledge the

Express as a formative influence on Cody, but mostly provide a premise for

dangerous scenarios and adventures, remote Western settings, and fearsome

adversaries, all of which promote the gallantry of the riders and the importance of

their task "laying the cornerstone of a grand civilization to spring up along their then

desolate and dangerous pathway."[22] Yet, the representation of the Pony Express in

dime novels did not necessarily have to include the Express in the story itself. Buffalo

Bill became such a huge icon of the nineteenth century American West, he could

symbolize many aspects, institutions, or events in the West's history, and his Wild

West show would cement his association with the West in the popular imagination.

However, Prentiss Ingraham's *Pony Bob: The Reckless Rider of the Rockies,*

published in Beadle's Boy's Library in 1885, also illustrates how the persona of the

Express, more than the fame of its protagonist, provided potential readership. *Pony*

Bob purports to be the story of one of the Express's most famous riders, Robert "Pony

Bob" Haslam, and despite the dime novel's story not involving the Express in any

way, readers most likely would have read with the Pony Express in mind because

what defined Pony Bob as a subject worthy of dime novel fiction was his *association*

with the Express, acknowledged in the dime novel's conclusion,

> After the close of what was known as the 'Mormon War,' Pony Bob, having
>
> won a reputation as a most dashing and daring rider, and a youth who knew no

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[22] Prentiss Ingraham, *Buffalo Bill's Saddle Sharps: or, the Pledged Pards of the Pony Express,* (New York: Street & Smith, 1901), 1.
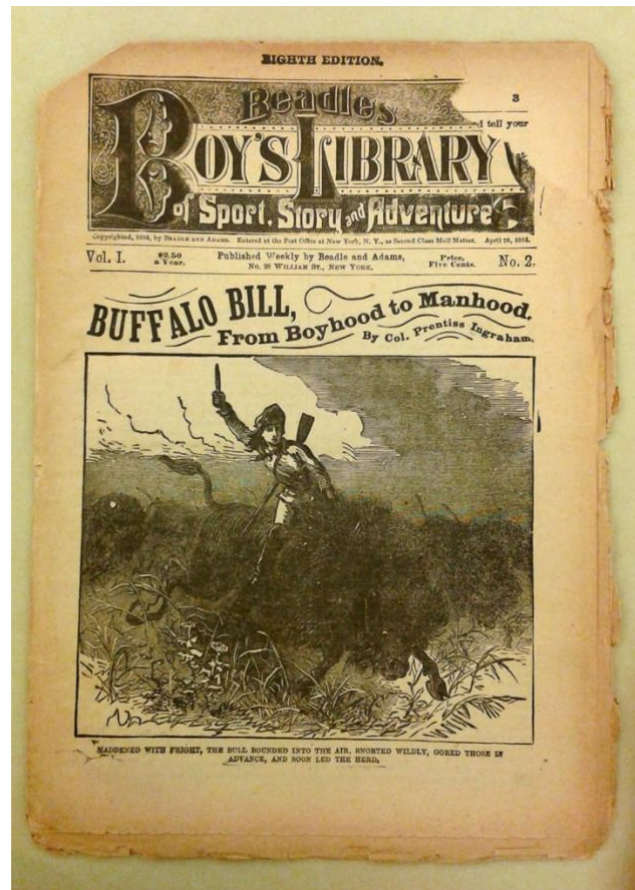
Fig. 35. Cover of dime novel that dramatizes Buffalo Bill Cody's life, including his tenure as a Pony Express rider. Col. Prentiss Ingraham. *Buffalo Bill from Boyhood to Manhood.* New York: Beadle and Adams, 1888. RB 43137. The Huntington Library, San Marino, California. Photo by author.

such thing as fear, was engaged as Pony Express Rider on an Overland trail full of dangers and hardships.

His run was from Smith's Creek to Fort Churchill, one hundred and thirty miles through Indian country, which was also infested with road-agents, and many were the narrow escapes that he made.[23]

Even if readers of *Pony Bob* did not know who Haslam was, the story, which pits

Haslam against a Mormon militia around Salt Lake City, makes a clear alignment of

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[23] Prentiss Ingraham, *Pony Bob: The Reckless Rider of the Rockies,* (New York: Beadle and Adams, 1885), 29.

the honest and loyal teen hero to his later career as a Pony Express rider, and is used to draw comparisons to the deviant, anti-United States Mormons known as the "Destroying Angels." Bob is clearly positioned as apart from Mormonism which is framed as unjust and cruel not only through the description of the Angels' leader, but also, as the novel emphasizes, the Angels' use of torture against those who they see as enemies of the faith. The fanaticism and violence of the Mormons, no doubt drawing on public knowledge of the Mormon Wars of the 1850s, figures religious extremism as a threat to the United States, an enemy that pledges loyalty to the wrong master.

Beyond dramatic, ideology driven narrative, the cultural remediation of the Express also illustrates how coast-to-coast communication was compressed into the symbol of the horse and rider. While "the Pony Express" signifies transcontinental communication, representations of it do not usually acknowledge the many other technologies and systems involved in coast-to-coast message delivery. St. Joseph and Sacramento may be shown as end points of the route, and occasionally, mail delivered from the east by train may be mentioned, but the dynamism, drama and general work of transcontinental communication focuses heavily on the horses and riders. Before the completion of the transcontinental telegraph, the fastest way to send messages from San Francisco to New York would have been via a network of interconnected transportation and communications technologies. In 1860, sending a message via Pony Express would have involved separate rail networks based in the east, which would all transport their mail to Hannibal in the east of Missouri where parcels, letters and telegrams would be sent via the Hannibal and St. Joseph Railroad

line to the western end of the state in St. Joseph, where the Pony Express had its eastern headquarters. In addition to rail lines, there were also telegraph lines that ran in both eastbound and westbound directions and ferry boats that crossed from Missouri to Kansas in the east, and Sacramento to San Francisco in the west. Considering the complexity of transcontinental communication in mid-nineteenth century America, the simplification of the process in popular entertainment is understandable. Reducing the communications system to an easily relatable man-on-horse relay makes the idea of sending a letter eastwards or westwards much more graspable as a process. Yet, it is also appealing as a subject, filled with adventure and excitement, and easily made to fit the templates of the Western genre as well as across entertainment forms. The story of the Express contains all the elements required to produce a marketable product, but to understand the enduring power of the horse and rider as emblems of an American national identity, we have to understand the semiotics of horses and riders in a shifting social, cultural, and political context. By analyzing the changing ideals of white European American boyhood and manhood, and by acknowledging the socially and culturally central role of the horse in the development of technological modernity in the United States from the mid-nineteenth century through to the Express's centennial one hundred years later, we can better understand the Express's continued and powerfully meaningful presence in the American popular imagination.

The Affective Infrastructure of the Express

The power of the materiality of the Express relies on a reaction to the increasing presence of machines and automation in mid-nineteenth century America. For example, the difference between the flesh and blood of the horse and rider gains great affective value in contrast to the metal wires of the telegraph, and the iron body of the railroad engine. A testament to this emotional force can be felt in a eulogy published in the *Sacramento Bee* after the Pony Express was finally put out of business in October 1861:

> For the good thou hast done, we praise thee; and, having run thy race, and accomplished all that was hoped for and expected, we can part with thy services without regret, because, and only because, in the progress of the age, in the advance of science, and by the enterprise of capital, thou hast been superseded by a more subtle, active but no more faithful public servant…nothing with blood and sinews was able to overcome your energy and ardor, but a senseless, soulless thing that eats not, sleeps not, tires not – a thing that cannot distinguish space – that knows not the difference between a rod of ground and the circumference of the globe itself, had encompassed, overthrown and routed you.[24]

This "thing," the railroad (but which could be any late-nineteenth century automated factory machine), is beyond the human or the animal world. It does not share the weaknesses of living creatures, and does not appreciate or know the land on which it functions. Nor does it appreciate its privileged position on it. Despite acknowledging the similarity in labor of the Express to the mechanical technologies that follow it,

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[24] Sacramento Bee, Oct 26, 1861.

this short, heartfelt description suggests that the Express acknowledges the environment across which it runs, making its labor meaningful in a specifically patriotic way. In opposition, the soulless technologies of modernity cannot tell the difference between United States land and the land of any other place, and the labor the Express enacts is deemed preferable to the tireless efficiency of the railroad, signaling an affective shift in the technologies and media of the dawning industrial age. The task undertaken by the Pony Express is productive precisely because of the special relationship of horse and rider to the terrain they cross. Not only does the Express essentially tame what is imagined to be a wilderness, but by self-consciously doing so, it becomes an active participant, an example of good citizenship, rather than a mere tool. In fact, the affect revealed in this description best speaks to what Akira Lippit has described in *Electric Animal* as part and parcel of the effects of modernity, in which "Modernity can be defined by the disappearance of wildlife from humanity's habitat and by the reappearance of the same in humanity's reflections on itself."[25] It would make sense that the Express, in giving way to machine technology, would be described as enacting the task of a moving panorama, or likewise embodying "the progress of the age…the advance of science…the enterprise of capital," an embodiment that we still live with as we continue to categorize engine power through "horsepower," a designation invented by James Watt when he developed his steam

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[25] Akira Mizuta Lippit, *Electric Animal: Toward a Rhetoric of Wildlife,* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000), 3.

railroad engine.[26] Yet, beyond Lippit's astute observation, the specific cultural and social importance of the horse is also worth recognizing and investigating. What made horseflesh so influential, so endearing?

The horse's relationship to the early development of both the agricultural and the industrial revolutions as outlined by Susanna Forrest in *The Age of the Horse*, concretely embedded the creature in the cultural, social and economic shifts that occurred in Western society from the mid-eighteenth and into the nineteenth centuries.[27] Selective breeding had made horses much more powerful and efficient to carry out their various tasks. As Forrest describes in one particularly illustrative paragraph, by the late-nineteenth century in Britain, horses provided the base infrastructure for the circulation and sometimes even manufacture of goods required for one horse-handler's breakfast,

> At 7am our man is up. He has a lamp lit, filled with oil purchased from a horse cart, and a hearty breakfast, delivered last afternoon by the butcher's boy on a smart hackney […] His shirt has come back from the laundry with a horse that used to do six days' cabbing a week and is now down to three, plus the moonlighting for the laundry. His toast is made from bread baked in an oven heated with bricks of 'turf' made of bark ground by a horse turning a mill in Bermondsey.
> He drinks his tea, brought from the docks to the tea merchant by vanners, and thinks of the day's work ahead of him, and what envelopes will have arrived on his desk. The Post Office horses have begun their dashing about

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[26] Clay McShane and Joel Tarr, *The Horse in the City: Living Machines in the Nineteenth Century*, (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2009), 3.
[27] See Suzanna Forrest, "Hay Is Biofuel," *The Age of the Horse: An Equine Journey Through Human History,* (New York: Atlantic Monthly Press, 2016), 149-210.

town…they are also skivvies to the railways, keeping up the rush of incoming and outgoing envelopes […][28]

The horse became so crucial to the modern city that it contributed to the structure of the city itself, with its routes connecting inner city areas of commerce to newly emerging suburbs through horsecar and omnibus tracks. It enabled commerce, delivering and moving freight and powered the engines of many factory machines.[29] Yet, beyond acting as infrastructure themselves, horses also contributed to the laying of infrastructures of the coming technologies that would ultimately replace them, for example, bringing the materials necessary for constructing roads in late-eighteenth century Britain, as well the construction of the railroads in early to mid-nineteenth century America. Horses also did mine work, aiding in the extraction of raw materials that would fuel the coming steam age. In short, the industrial revolution in Britain, Europe and the United States could not have developed so rapidly if not for the foundational work of horses.[30]

Complicating the issue of affect, yet affirming the centrality of horses in the development of an industrial society in the nineteenth century, Clay McShane and Joel Tarr have argued that horses were viewed in nineteenth century America as nothing but machines, the best tools if correctly bred and used, to work within a

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[28] Forrest, *The Age of the Horse,* 160-161.
[29] McShane and Tarr, see particularly "Powering Urban Transit," and "Epilogue, the Horse, the Car, and the City," *The Horse in the City,* 57-83, 178-182.
[30] Forrest describes how one inventor designed a train whose engine was disguised to resemble a horse so as not to scare the other horses, who "he could not imagine disappearing from the streets." Forrest, *The Age of the Horse,* 179.

capitalist system of increasing productivity and profit. Citing Robert Bakewell, a nineteenth century breeding pioneer, and Carl W. Gay's *Productive Horse Husbandry* from 1914, in which Gay claims that "the horse is looked on as a machine, for sentiment pays no dividend," McShane and Tarr paint a picture of the horse's role in the city as defined by its cost effectiveness.[31] Yet, as I mentioned in chapter one, the Pony Express varies from this image in some respects.

Despite the diminutive "pony" in the organization's non-official name, the stock used by the Central Overland California and Pikes Peak Express Company were very well-bred horses, selected for their ability to cope with the terrain most dominant in their division. This meant that breeds such as those from Kentucky stock commonly known for their speed were used across the flatter terrains, while hardier, wilder breeds such as the California Mustang known for their strength and stamina, were used across the challenging mountainous areas.[32] In addition, to make each horse run at peak performance, each was fed the best grain and cared for extremely well. Even Mark Twain commented on the horses' treatment, noting that each horse was "born for a racer and fed and lodged like a gentleman."[33] All considerations were governed by the need for speed to maintain a schedule that would allow

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[31] Carl W. Gay, *Productive Horse Husbandry* (Philadelphia: J. Lippincott & Co., 1914), 1. Quoted in McShane and Tarr, *The Horse in the City,* 3.
[32] For a description of the horses used for each stage of the route, see Settle & Settle, *Saddles and Spurs*, 44; William Harold Floyd, *Phantom Riders of the Pony Express*, (Philadelphia: Dorrance, 1958), 49; J. Lee Humfreville, *20 Years Among Our Hostile Indians*, (New York: Hunter & Co., 1899), 423.
[33] Mark Twain, *Roughing It*, The Mark Twain Library, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011), 8.

transcontinental communication in ten days. In this way, the Pony Express's horses were fine-tuned instruments. Furthermore, the structuring of the relay routes at intervals of roughly ten to fifteen miles apart, depending on terrain, was also a response to knowledge of how long a horse can run at top speed before it tires and loses its strength. However, there are many examples in which the relationship between horse and rider supersedes views such as Gay's. Several accounts by riders tell of the intelligence and homing instincts of the horses employed by the Pony Express.[34] In these cases, horses were granted agency as riders were unable to navigate between one station and the next on their section of the route, either due to terrible weather or excessive physical fatigue, the horses guiding the mail to the safety of the nearest relay station. In addition, riders would also use their horses to gauge their progress when visibility was bad or when they were unsure of the danger they were in. Tales from "Pony Bob" Haslam and Howard Egan respectively tell of watching their horses' ears for signs of stealthy attackers, and listening to their horses' hoofs on the ground to judge the terrain and thus their correct route as they were travelling in bad weather.[35] Such stories demonstrate the assemblage-like nature of the horse-and-rider system and represent a medium driven by animal as well as human intelligence working together symbiotically. The riders, in turn, had to know

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[34] For accounts of horses navigating to Pony Express stations and aiding riders in avoiding ambushes, see Di Certo, *The Saga of the Pony Express*, 167, 185; Driggs, *The Pony Express Goes Through,* 62-69, 149.

[35] Haslam quoted in Majors, *Seventy Years on the Frontier,* 173-193; Howard Egan quoted in *Pioneering the West,* 198-201, https://archive.org/details/pioneeringwestt00unkngoog (accessed 06/30/16).

how to handle expensive horses, and knowing how to take good care of his animal was a skill of utmost importance when men were recruited to work as riders.

Ideologically, the efficiency engendered by the selection and treatment of horses according to knowledge based in Western biological and agrarian science, fed the belief that European Americans were making "better" use of the country's natural resources. Careful breeding, feeding and treatment of the horses improved their natural abilities, which were left "unimproved" in the out-run horses used by indigenous communities (a comparison repeatedly made in histories about the Pony Express and continued in popular culture).[36] The horse, as an integral part of the Pony Express, served the purposes of the United States not just in the realm of communications, but also as a political and ideological symbol, demonstrating the superiority of scientific and practical knowledge of white European Americans. The horse has remained one of America's representative animals. Its role as a long-distance messenger for the United States is more complex than simply acting as a prop for European American masculine individuality, or as a symbol of the power and force of United States expansionism. Within the complex iconography of the Pony Express, the horse has come to symbolize an ideal American condition, a balance of inherent wildness and nature tamed, which is perhaps why it remains popular as a

[36] Nye, *America As Second Creation,* 37; To read about Pony Express horses outrun horses used by Native American tribes, see Driggs *The Pony Express Goes Through,* 67; Settle and Settle, *Saddles and Spurs,* 44-45; Di Certo, *The Saga of the Pony Express,* 43, 165; Chapman, *Pony Express,* 89.

symbol both in the Western genre as well as in advertising, cinema and television

shows today, such as HBO's *Deadwood* (2004-2006) (figs.36-39).

In the opening sequence of *Deadwood*, what appears to be a wild horse runs

through a forest and through streams before slowing its pace as it enters a small dirt-

floored town. Ambling down Deadwood's streets, the title sequence ends with the

horse walking past a water trough, which viewers see in slow motion as the show's

title fades in and out over the upside-down reflection of the horse in the water. Just

like the town of Deadwood's eventual incorporation into the United States, the

horse's "civilization" within the town - its pace slowed to a walk – concludes with an

image of its own reflection, turned on its head. This reflection is not the horse itself,

and viewers are left at the end of the sequence with only an image, a virtual

Figs. 36-39. The wild, idealized spirit of the unincorporated settlements and territories of mid-nineteenth century America is symbolized by the horse that runs from the forest into the town. Screengrabs from *Deadwood,* HBO, 2004-2006.

counterpart, a mythic horse which speaks to the town's mythic history most famously

marked by its association as the place of death of "Wild Bill" Hickok. The horse,

then, is a symbol of the white, European American West as it was settled,

incorporated, and turned into myth, but the symbolism works because of the horse's

deep cultural associations with the Western genre as well as with wildness and the

conquest of the natural environment by European Americans.

As part of her analysis of the Western film genre, Jane Tompkins reads horses

in Westerns as signifiers that not only denote a pre-machine dominant era in the

American West, but also connote "…material presence, their energy and corporeality

call[ing] out to the bodies of the viewers, to our bodies."[37] Tompkins argues that the

horse is an overlooked and undervalued sign that is purposefully made visible to

viewers,

> …so we can vicariously be in contact with their flesh, feel their breath, sense
> their strength and stamina, absorb the flow of force. Horses are there to
> galvanize us. More than any other single element in the genre, they symbolize
> the desire to recuperate some lost connection to life.[38]

I agree with Tompkins here, particularly when considering moving image media,

which makes animal presence particularly nascent as the snorting of the horse, the

flaring of its nostrils and tensing of its musculature in mid-gallop is captured by the

camera.

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[37] Jane Tompkins, *West of Everything : The Inner Life of Westerns*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), 94. ProQuest Ebook Central, http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/ucsc/detail.action?docID=2033543.
[38] Tompkins, *West of Everything,* 94.

In many Pony Express dramas viewers are visually hailed to take a position at the side of the pony and to ride along with the information so eagerly waited for around the world. The imaginative act of riding alongside the Pony Express is connected with a powerfully *felt* identification – with the task of riding first, and a sense of national history and purpose that the Express represents, second. From B-Westerns such as *Cavalcade of the West* from 1936, to Gene Autry's 1946 *Last of the Pony Riders,* and across into TV Westerns such as *Bonanza's* "Ride the Wind" in 1966, and NBC's *The Young Riders* from 1990, the visual trope of the galloping

Figs. 40-43. The physical force and speed of the Pony Express are consistently related to the viewer through the visual tropes of the mid- and close-up shot focusing on the horse's panting head and its pounding hoofs. Screengrabs from *Cavalcade of the West,* dir. Harry L. Fraser, 1936; *Pony Express,* dir. Jerry Hopper, 1953; "Ride the Wind Parts 1 & 2," *Bonanza,* NBC, Season 7, Episodes 17 and 18, 1966.

horse's panting head or thundering legs, are repeatedly presented in the same set of

recurrent shots that focus on horse and rider in motion (figs. 40-43). These close-up

shots emphasize the horse's speed and power and provide a dynamic material symbol

for viewers to imagine and think through hidden or invisible processes of information

relay, giving the horse momentary visibility that, according to Tompkins, is usually

pushed to the background. These close-up shots of the horse, however, are not

exclusive to Pony Express dramas, and regularly feature in Western films and shows

of all kinds. In the narrative context of the Pony Express, however, these shots

intimately connect infrastructures of western expansion with communications and

information infrastructure, through which American technology and American history

occupy the same ground. These are also shots which have remained within the realm

of fictional commercial film and television, employed to accentuate the drama not

only of speed, but of the "conquering" of time.

I have visually expressed the connection between the visibility of horses and

the disciplining of time through my inclusion of stop motion animation at the start of

Transcontinental 1860. The brief animation that shows three zoopraxiscopes spinning

next to one another presents the handing off of a mail bag from one person to another,

the panting head of a galloping horse, and a small full body image of a running horse

(drawn from Edweard Muybridge's photographs). Not only do these images recall

those persistently used in Pony Express themed drama, but they also draw

connections to early forms of visual technology that capture and then reanimate at

will, the subject rendered. The looping image presents elements of the Pony Express

in perpetual motion, with the running of the horse and the handing off of the mail as parts of a process necessarily repeated *ad infinitum.*

Additional visual tropes that are repeated in Pony Express themed fictional drama include the mail bag switch-off, where a rider hands the mail bag, mid-gallop, to another rider or alternatively arrives at a relay station, jumps with the mail bag off one horse and swings himself onto an already running second horse (figs. 44-45). These types of shots draw attention to both the relay structure of the Express as well as the onward journey of the mailbag, transforming imaginative illustrations of literal information relay into physical experiences of what is usually never seen. Viewers of these scenes can imagine the journey of the mail bag and its contents across the country, and thus acknowledge not only processes that are usually invisible, but also the actors who make those processes possible – the riders, but also the horses which, according to Tompkins, "are precisely what meets the eye," yet remain decidedly invisible.[39]

Figs. 44-45. The mail is passed on from rider to rider, giving viewers an imaginative and visual corollary to the processes of information relay that are usually invisible. Screengrabs from "Ride the Wind Parts 1 & 2," *Bonanza,* NBC, Season 7, Episodes 17 and 18, 1966; *Pony Express,* dir. Jerry Hopper, 1953.

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[39] Tompkins, *West of Everything,* 90.

Figs. 46-48. A speculative scene in *Pony Players' Review* depicts mail arriving at a station and being processed. The time card is signed and placed back in the mail saddle.

Media theorist Lisa Parks has written about artists' visualizations of infrastructure and focuses particularly on how some projects invoke what she describes as an "infrastructural disposition," enabling viewers to "imagine the existence, shape, or form of an extensive and dispersed media infrastructure that cannot be physically observed by one person in its entirety." Parks' concept allows viewers to "see" the movement of content from one place to another, presenting viewers with the imaginative opportunity to think about "other forms of content distribution in the[ir] present."[40]

As with the inclusion of speculative scenes that represent the varied technologies associated with the Express, *Pony Players' Review* also includes speculative scenes of infrastructural maintenance. Scenes that demonstrate how to look after a horse, for example, are included, as are the receiving, sorting, and stamping of mail at an Express station (fig. 46-48). Drawing directly from Parks' ideas, these speculative scenes intermingle with the dramatized, fictional reenacted scenes to form the project, visualizing the Express as the messenger it was, and

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[40] Lisa Parks, "Stuff You Can Kick: Toward a Theory of Media Infrastructures." In *Between Humanities and the Digital*, MIT Press, 2015, 357-359.

interrogating how its function as a messenger became conflated with its icon, which allowed imaginative access to places that viewers would never be able to go. The Pony Express represents a materially and historically locatable form with which to think through seemingly disembodied and abstract methods of communication, linking the nineteenth century to the twenty-first century through steamships and telegraphs to the internet.

Mediating American Manhood

The embodiment and visibility of national power would come together most potently during the mid- to late-nineteenth century in shifting concepts of manhood and masculinity, repositioning the Pony Express rider in the popular imagination as an archetype of American exceptionalism. Michael Kimmel has shown that the mid-nineteenth century ideal of American manhood was most popularly depicted in the American West, bolstered by the famous imperative of New York newspaper editor Horace Greely, who ordered American male youth to "go west…and grow up with the country."[41] Myths of American manhood as self-sufficient, half-wild, and dominant in their environment were already present in the popular imagination as represented in James Fenimore Cooper's leatherstocking character, or exemplified by what Richard Slotkin has called "the legend biographies" of men such as Daniel Boone, Davey Crockett, or Kit Carson.[42]

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[41] Michael Kimmel, *Manhood in America: A Cultural History,* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 44.
[42] Richard Slotkin, *The Fatal Environment: The Myth of the Frontier in the Age of Industrialization, 1800-1890,* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1998), 374.

However, although mobilized in popular culture to exemplify and promote the robust, virile, white American manhood associated by the mid-twentieth century with heroes of the Western genre, Pony Express riders were different from this archetype. Riders were mostly teenage boys, barely out of boyhood with an average age of sixteen or seventeen, some as young as fourteen and in a couple of cases even twelve years old.[43] Due to their task, these boys were not the athletic men later promoted as the epitome of manliness, but were instead small, lean and light to not slow their horses. Yet, this is not to say that riding for the Express was easy work. Spending extended periods in the saddle was physically brutal, requiring great endurance and strength from the young men who participated. Beyond grueling winter conditions which had some riders on their horses for twenty-four or more hours in blizzards and storms, as well as the risks of attack from wolves, hostile road agents and Paiute defending their territories, Arthur Chapman describes the effect of riding seventy-five to one hundred miles a day – the standard length of one rider's route – in the following way:

> Few of the applicants realized what it meant to keep up such a terrific pounding day after day. Not many of the eighty riders signed for the start, [sic] carried through the ensuing nineteen months of the existence of the Pony Express. Some dropped out after a few weeks in the saddle. One or two went into quick consumption. Many a rider finished his "run" bleeding at the mouth and nose.[44]

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[43] George J. Remsburg, "Pony Express Riders I Have Met: David R. Jay," *Pony Express Courier,* October 1934, 6. Raymond Settle Scrapbooks, Raymond W. Settle Collection, William Jewell College, Independence, MO.

[44] Chapman, *The Pony Express*, 85.

Such descriptions caused historian Roy Bloss to wonder why young men would sign up to work for the Express since there were better financial opportunities in the cities or in the Washoe mines. Bloss ultimately came to the somewhat romantic conclusion that it must have been "youth itself, and youth's flight from adolescence and an urge to risk the unknown."[45] Yet there is reason to Bloss's somewhat whimsical conclusion. Arthur Chapman's earlier work corroborates Bloss' conclusion as Chapman notes in 1932 that of the former riders he spoke with, many described wanting to escape their "hum-drum" lives in the States and find excitement, free from the restrictions of familial and State governance.[46]

In the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, the period of a man's life between boyhood and manhood was an undefined and uncertain time. No longer fully a boy yet neither fully a man, neither living at home nor with a home of his own, a young man in this period of his life was loosely termed a "youth," and it was during this time, according to Anthony Rotundo, that young men of the early nineteenth century would "…mark time while he chose a course for the future."[47] Some riders came from far and wide, especially those who rode the eastern part of the route, but others, especially on the western end were raised locally "where boys grew into manhood virtually on horseback," and had expert knowledge of the geographical and

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[45] Bloss, *Great Gamble,* 33.
[46] Chapman, *The Pony Express: The Record of a Romantic Adventure in Business,* 224.
[47] Anthony Rotundo, *American Manhood: Transformations in Masculinity from the Revolution to the Modern Era,* (New York: Basic Books, 1993), 56.

social terrain he was to cross.[48] Many Mormons rode for the Pony Express in the

west, for example, as the route passed through Salt Lake City, and historian of the

West, Raymond Settle, notes that the severity of their upbringing (the Mormons at

that time being incredibly poor), as well as their good relationships with the Native

American communities close to their settlements, suited them well to ride for the

Express.[49] As Rotundo argues, "The constant changes of place during youth signified

more than a search for employment and adventure; they reflected an uncertain sense

of self."[50] Though some riders went on to careers that differed little from Pony

Express work in terms of adventure, uncertainty, or constant mobility such as gold

seeking, freighting, bull-whacking or continuing to ride express mail routes in other

parts of the country, many pony riders found more stable work with the railroad and

ranching, law enforcement and trading.[51]

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[48] Bloss, *Great Gamble,* 33; For an account of how riders were recruited, see Chapman, *Pony Express,* 85-86; Bloss, *Pony Express the Great Gamble,* 31.
[49] Settle & Settle, *Saddles and Spurs,* 43.
[50] Rotundo, *American Manhood,* 60.
[51] For histories of Pony Express riders see Di Certo, *The Saga of the Pony Express,* 161-188; Chapman, *Pony Express,* 213-235; Settle & Settle, *Saddles and Spurs,* 73-112; Also, George J. Remsburg, "Pony Express Riders I Have Met: 'Yank' Rand," *Pony Express Courier,* September 1934, 8, Raymond Settle Scrapbooks, Raymond W. Settle Collection, William Jewell College, Independence, MO; George J. Remsburg, "Pony Express Riders I Have Met: 'Charley' Cliff," *Pony Express Courier,* December 1934, 13, Raymond Settle Scrapbooks, Raymond W. Settle Collection, William Jewell College, Independence, MO; George J. Remsburg, "Pony Express Riders I Have Met: Don Rising," *Pony Express Courier,* November 1934, 6. Raymond Settle Scrapbooks, Raymond W. Settle Collection, William Jewell College, Independence, MO; George J. Remsburg, "Pony Express Riders I Have Met: Henry Avis," *Pony Express Courier,* January 1935, page unknown. Raymond Settle Scrapbooks, Raymond W. Settle Collection, William Jewell College, Independence, MO; George J. Remsburg, "Pony Express Riders I Have Met: 'Buffalo Bill Cody'," *Pony Express Courier,* January 1935, 19. Raymond Settle Scrapbooks, Raymond W.

Yet, shifting ideals of manhood that appeared in reaction to the industrializing or "civilizing" of much of the United States in the late-nineteenth century changed the Express rider from a "youth" that was simply "marking time" into a symbol of burgeoning manhood shaped by the trials and hardships of frontier living. As young men, the masculine heroes of the late-nineteenth century made their careers and reputations in the states and territories of the mid- and far-west, and much of this reputation-making involved violence and domination of peoples and the natural environment.

On the one hand was the martial ideal, personified in military "heroes" such as George Armstrong Custer. Custer had attained the rank of general when only twenty-four years old, earning him the nickname "The Boy General" in the popular press. Yet Custer really made his career in the Indian Wars of the late 1860s and early 1870s.[52] Custer's cruel and indiscriminate murdering of Southern Cheyenne at the Washita river in 1869 was over written by his rapidly heroized "last stand" against the Lakota Sioux/Cheyenne coalition at Little Bighorn, and as Laura McCall has pointed

Settle Collection, William Jewell College, Independence, MO; George J. Remsburg, "Pony Express Riders I Have Met: 'Mike' Whelan," *Pony Express Courier,* date unknown. Raymond Settle Scrapbooks, Raymond W. Settle Collection, William Jewell College, Independence, MO; John G. Ellenbecker, "Pony Express Riders I Have Met: Richard Cleve," *Pony Express Courier,* June 1936, page unknown. Raymond Settle Scrapbooks, Raymond W. Settle Collection, William Jewell College, Independence, MO; Herb Brame, "A Married Pony Express Rider With Four Children," *Pony Express Courier,* November 1935, page unknown. Raymond Settle Scrapbooks, Raymond W. Settle Collection, William Jewell College, Independence, MO.
[52] For more on Custer's career and his self-construction in the popular press see Slotkin, "The Boy General, 1839-1876," in *The Fatal Environment,* 371-431.

out, "…by portraying Custer's death as coming in a charge, as several nineteenth-century artists preferred to feature it […] the aggressive masculine initiative of the West was affirmed."[53] On the other hand, William Cody was born and raised on the frontier where he acquired the horsemanship and shooting skills that formed part of his popular persona. Cody claims he rode for the Pony Express when he was fifteen, later hunting buffalo for the United States army with overwhelming success, thus earning him the nickname "Buffalo Bill."

The fictional character of "pony-boys" as they were known in popular culture was to appeal to and educate post-Civil War generations of American boys and youths, and as a consequence, represented different expectations of manhood and masculine behavior that had previously emphasized "strength of character."[54] These pony-boy characters were represented as self-sufficient, showing wisdom beyond their years, and in addition – as one might expect of a hero – honor, courage and stamina to deal with the trials of life on the trails. In Ned Buntline's 1888 addition to Beadle's Dime Library, *Buffalo Bill's First Trail, or, Will Cody the Pony Express Rider*, an eighteen-year-old Cody gives advice to a school friend, telling him to: "quit your musty old school room and come out on the plains to live […] It is a free, wild life, and just what'll make a man of you while you're yet a boy in years, like me."[55]

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[53] Laura McCall, "Introduction," in *Crossing the Great Divide: Cultures of Manhood in the American West,"* (New York: Routledge, 2001), 4.

[54] Rotundo, *American Manhood,* 222.

[55] Ned Buntline, *Buffalo Bill's First Trail, or, Will Cody the Pony Express Rider,* New York: Beadle's Dime Library, Vol 40 No. 517, 9. Other examples of dime novels whose heroes are pony riding boys include, Whittacker, *Dick Darling, The Pony Express Rider,* (New York: Beadle and Adams Half Dime Library, Vol. 3 No

Such advice acts as a template for what young men should emulate and certainly what they should idealize if they wish to become the kind of example of manhood that Cody (and others) constructed "Buffalo Bill" to be.

In the twentieth century however, pony-boys such as Johnny in Gene Autry's *Last of the Pony Riders* (1946), or Bob Ridgeway in *The Adventures of Wild Bill Hickok* (1950)*, or any of the riders who flit in and out of California National Productions' *Pony Express* television show from 1960, are portrayed as young men still in need of guidance from an older, experienced, father figure. Protagonists in these dramas equate the replacement of the Pony Express by the telegraph and ultimately the railroad with the growing up of the nation which, it is made clear, the boy-riders must also do, often by moving into more stable and longer-lasting professions such as setting up a stagecoach line or ranching. In these dramas, not too dissimilarly to how the actual Express might have affected the lives of its riders, the Pony Express seems to act as a personal primer for young men, an adventure for American boys to prove their mettle and build character before engaging the manly task of settling the (protestant, European) country both biologically and geographically.[56]

43, 1874).; Colonel Prentiss Ingraham, *Little Grit, The Wild Rider; or, Bessie, the Stock-Tender's Daughter,* (New York: Beadle's Half-Dime Library, Vol 3, No 197), 1881.; Colonel Prentiss Ingraham, *Pony Bob, The Reckless Rider of the Rockies. A True History of the Life of R.H. Haslam, Who Made Himself Famous as a Pony Express Rider and the Flying Courier in the Rocky Mountains a Quarter of a Century Ago,* (New York: Beadles Boy's Library, Vol 1, No 83), 1883.

[56] To view examples of films that illustrate Pony riders settling down to "grow up" with the country, see, Bill Raynor, "Pony Express Vs. Telegraph", *The Adventures of Wild Bill Hickok,* season 2, episode 2, directed by Frank Macdonald, aired October

By the 1950s and 60s, with the country now "grown up," the myth of white

American manhood endured but had become intimately tied to myths of technological

achievement and authority. Frequently in Pony Express dramas of this time, the

United States, American manhood and American technology seem to reach maturity

at the same time. Produced in 1977, the NBC made-for-TV movie *Peter Lundy and*

the Medicine Hat Stallion, still provides a clear example of how myths that instruct

and inaugurate boys into American manhood remain entwined with motifs of

domination over nature, personal self-sufficiency, and national duty. The plot

revolves around Nebraska teenager Peter (played by Leif Garrett). To escape his

unemotional and cold father who pushes him to be self-sufficient, Peter nurtures a

meaningful relationship with his horse, indulging in moments of spiritual freedom

when he rides away from his father's store. In this drama, the Pony Express functions

as an opportunity for Peter to be self-sufficient through his love of riding, and while

this ultimately wins over his father against whom Peter can finally stand up, it is

Peter's heroic run to deliver Lincoln's inaugural address that signals his arrival into

manhood. The symbolic climax of Peter's coming-of-age is when he must choose

between saving his horse's life or delivering the message. In this example, the

Express acts as a medium through which Peter can be inducted into manhood, and

become a productive member of his community and his country. The significance of

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21, 1951, (UCLA Film and TV Archive), Videocassette (VHS); Joseph O'Donnell, *Devil Riders*, directed by Sam Newfield, (1943; Los Angeles: Eddie Brandt's Saturday Matinee), Video Cassette (VHS); Ruth Woodman, *Last of the Pony Riders,* directed by George Archainbaud, (1953; Chatsworth, CA: Image Entertainment, 2007), DVD.

the inaugural address, which was an appeal to unity aimed directly to the citizens of Southern states on the brink of secession, is particularly important here as Peter's delivery of such a message westward is, likewise, a unifying act, bringing together east and west (rather than North and South).

Beyond individual identity and behavior, pony riders also provide a template for group identity in which good communication and thus a unified nation results from clearly-defined and well organized masculine group identity. The importance of understanding American manhood as strengthened when constituted as a group of individuals, can be traced to the rise in fraternal organizations in the early- to mid-nineteenth century as more and more young men left home to "mark time." These

Fig. 49-51 Excited young men group together as the Express runs through town. Later they collectively share the pain of a rider's death. Screengrabs from "Ride the Wind Parts 1 & 2," *Bonanza,* NBC, Season 7, Episodes 17 and 18, 1966; *The Young Riders,* ABC, 1989-1990.

organizations, and their members acted as surrogate family for many youths who felt

homesick or uncertain of the path ahead of them, offering preparation for

"…overcoming long-set patterns of behavior that could hinder their quest for manly

achievement."[57] Ned Buntline's 1888 dime novel *Buffalo Bill's First Trail*, makes

this intersection explicit as a villain, while trying to concoct a plan to ambush a single

rider states, "The riders all know each other and pass the word along the line from

one to the other almost as easily as we could send a telegraph message where the

wires were up!"[58] The strength and the efficiency of the rider's network, like the

working of telegraphy itself, provides immediate security to the young men working

for the Express but also ensures the security of the greater political community the

men represent ideologically. European American manhood when correctly expressed

as a shared experience is associated with the technological efficiency implied in the

laying of telegraph infrastructure. In the twentieth century, this cohort or brotherhood

of young men continued to be visualized as a single entity with groups of riders

knowing one another, bunking together, building friendships and sharing pains and

passions that reflect the strength of their bond both as Express riders and as a social

group. *Bonanza's* 1966 "Ride the Wind" double episode shows the young men of

Virginia City sharing an excitement for the romance of working for the Pony Express.

At the beginning of episode one, clusters of young men line up across the screen

outside the Express office to enlist and whoop-it-up as a rider and pony dart through

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[57] Rotundo, *American Manhood,* 62-71.
[58] Buntline, *Buffalo Bill's First Trail,* 4.

the town, sharing each other's adolescent excitement. Later in the episode, as individual riders die, the loss is collectively felt in the bunk room as a small group gathers around a deceased rider's bed, their initial boyishness and romanticism abruptly ended by the realities of the task they have agreed to perform (figs. 49-51). Likewise, the premise of NBC's *The Young Riders* of 1990 is the collective education of a group of pony riders, who grow to know and learn from one another over the course of three seasons.

However, the most influential of commentators on masculinity, whose effect is still visible today in the figure of the authoritarian, action-oriented patriarch, was Theodore Roosevelt, whose concept of the "strenuous life" would promote outdoor living, physical prowess and the "masculine primitive," aligning ideals of white European American manhood with national dominance.[59] This dominance would be honed through emulating "primitive" cultures which would tap into the inherently "savage" nature that characterized "passionate" manliness. Ideas of primitivism and savagery were constructed through gendered and racialized others, against which white American manhood could draw and yet define itself as separate and superior. My re-figuration of the Express rider in *Pony Players' Review* however, purposefully re-casting the riders as women of color, is a response to the hegemony of white, European American male histories in representations of the Express (fig. 52). Re-

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[59] Rotundo, *American Manhood,* 228; McCall, "Introduction" in *Across the Great Divide,* 1-24; Theodore Roosevelt, "The Strenuous Life," in *The Strenuous Life: Essays and Addresses,* (New York: The Century Co., 1902), 1-24, https://archive.org/details/strenuouslife01roos (accessed 9/26/17).

Fig 52. In *Pony Players' Review* riders are recast as women of color.

presenting the Express by calling upon its symbolic function as a "maker" of productive citizens and its vetting of "heroes," I address the gendered and racialized politics of representation it has been used to endorse or distort.

However, there are no records, mentions or even rumors of women ever having sat in the saddle. Along the trail in 1860, many of the relay stations were run by families in which women cooked, tidied and cleaned – important jobs of maintenance in terms of keeping the riders well fed and comfortable during their rest periods. In popular culture, however, the American Western offered female characters the opportunity to step into thrilling roles and situations, such as in Kalem's 1912 *The Pony Express Girl* (dir. Pat Hartigan). This film is, unfortunately, no longer extant but a description of the drama tells us that May (played by Marin Sais), rather than being a career rider, comes to the rescue when her sweetheart is injured by robbers, delivering the mail and locking up the villains. Without seeing the film, of course, it is impossible to judge how the heroine's womanhood is portrayed, but knowledge

that Marin Sais was known in 1912 for playing independent heroines in Kalem's Westerns contributes to a speculative reading of May as a character mobilized to *actively* support and maintain the pony rider's role. May's function is representative of the kinds of role women have been assigned as characters in Pony Express dramas. The pioneer mother in *Cavalcade of the West*, by making her patriotic speech, explains and lobbies for the greater national purpose of the Express, convincing the Express company to give her son a job that will maintain a promise to "the American people"; Bob Ridgeway's telegraph operator sweetheart in *The Adventures of Wild Bill Hickok* is a symbol of what awaits Bob when he leaves the Express – a ranch and a family as well as peace between the Express and telegraph companies; Denny (Jan Sterling) in Paramount's *Pony Express* of 1953, who acts as a surrogate teenage sister to both Buffalo Bill Cody (Charlton Heston) and Wild Bill Hickok (Forrest Tucker), and whose misplaced affection toward Cody results in her death, acts to free Cody from a potential relationship with another female character, thus allowing Cody-as-icon to carry on his adventures and retain his mythic persona as the film ends. Women maintain the imperatives of the Express, not unlike the women who would later occupy actual positions as telegraph and telephone operators, performing invisible tasks that allow the circulation of information to retain its speed and the circulation of imagery that maintains mythic narratives, while also symbolizing the social and moral center of the drama. Yet, each of these women characters never attain full agency or autonomy, remaining indebted to, dependent on, or fully dedicated to their masculine partners, idols, or family.

Absent from most Pony Express dramas, however, are indigenous women. Despite indigenous women having historically played major roles in events that affected the Pony Express, these women are only marginally present in accounts of Pony Express histories and their subsequent popular representations. The kidnapping and sexual assault of two Paiute girls by Express employees who looked after Williams Station in Nevada territory proved the tipping point of escalating tensions between white Americans and the Paiute peoples in Utah and Nevada in the spring of 1860, and would eventually halt Pony Express service for several weeks. Many attendants who looked after relay stations on the Express's route, as documented by Horace Greeley and Sir Richard Burton in their transcontinental travel diaries, had Native American women as partners to help look after the stations, and had fathered children with them.[60] Where white European American women provided a moral center to many narratives of United States expansion, settlement, and national identity, indigenous women's experiences have been ignored or marginalized, and have subsequently not been assigned a proper place in the larger history of the Express or in its later representations. Beyond the scope of this dissertation, it is worth noting that one woman whose perspective on this issue could be instructive, is Paiute Sarah Winnemucca, sister to Chief Winnemucca, elder of the Northern Paiute

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[60] Sir Richard Burton, *The City of the Saints: and Across the Rocky Mountains to California,* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1862), https://archive.org/details/cityofsaintsacro00burt (accessed 03/29/18); Horace Greeley, *An Overland Journey, from New York to San Francisco in the Summer of 1859,* (New York: Saxton, 1860), https://archive.org/details/overlandjourneyf00gree (accessed 03/29/18).

peoples who stood against American militia in Utah territory during the spring of 1860. Sarah had been sent to live with a white American family when she was a child, and later, she published books on her experiences during that period and before as part of her efforts as an advocate and activist for indigenous peoples' rights.[61]

It would be the representation of indigenous manhood that would prove central to the changing conceptions of white European American manhood in the nineteenth century, and would remain central to white European American identity well into the twentieth century. Theodore Roosevelt made direct connections, as he believed them, between American manhood and American identity in his writings and speeches, claiming, "As it is with the individual, so it is with the nation."[62] David Anthony Tyeeme Clark and Joane Nagel have argued that historical texts that appear during the last three decades of the nineteenth century, which document relations between indigenous peoples and European Americans reveal "not only a battle over the control of land and resources, but a struggle that determined in many ways the definition of white manhood and the shape and content of American national and, thus, masculine identity."[63] Clark and Nagel claim that the dispossession of indigenous peoples extended to their cultures as European American men adopted

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[61] For initial texts, see Gae Whitney Canfield, *Sarah Winnemucca of the Northern Paiutes,* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1983; Sarah Winnemucca Hopkins & Mary Tyler Hopkins, *Life Among the Piutes: Their Wrongs and Claims,* (Boston: For sale by Cupples, Upham & Co, 1986).
[62] McCall, "Introduction" in *Crossing the Great Divide,* 2.
[63] David Anthony Tyeeme Clark & Joane Nagel, "White Men, Red Masks: Appropriations of "Indian" Manhood in Imagined Wests," in *Crossing the Great Divide: Cultures of Manhood in the American West,"* (New York: Routledge, 2001), 111.

behaviors or characteristics they attributed to indigenous men in order to "improve" their own "over-civilized" masculinity. From the establishment of organizations such as Ernest Thomas Seaton's Woodcraft Indians, which was created to teach white European American boys manliness through "Playing Indian," to the representation of white masculinity made on the frontier through its interaction with "the Red man," visible in Wild West shows to Hollywood films to television, each version of such cultural appropriation acts as an extension of the colonization project that was taking place through western expansion.[64]

The symbolism of the Native American has changed considerably from the era of the dime novel at the end of the nineteenth century, during which time characters were simply and brutally stereotyped as the ugly, lazy, child-like, hostile, jealous antithesis to the pony rider, who was, in no nuanced way portrayed as ideal and necessary to the advancement of "civilization."[65] Remnants of this tradition are still visible in James Cruze's 1925 *Pony Express* in which a Pony Express rider Frisco Jack (Ricardo Cortez) is, at the grand finale of the film, overwhelmed by a sudden Native American attack on the city of Julesburg. This attack is headed by "half-breed" Charlie Bent (Frank Lackteen) who has been swindled by his Confederate bosses and seeks revenge. After this attack, even Express agents who worked against the Union are forgiven for their crimes, suggesting that the greater threat to the future of the United States is not internal division nor even crimes perpetrated by European

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[64] Clark & Nagel, "White Men, Red Masks," 117-123.
[65] Whittacker, *Dick Darling,* 1874.

Americans, but the victory of chaos (symbolized by indigenous "savagery"), which threatens through its seeming lack of order as well as its violence. Particularly notable is Charlie's mixed heritage, which also inherently implies that the blending of bloods will result in a "savage" character. Even in Paramount's *Pony Express* of 1953, Charlton Heston's Bill Cody is constantly hounded by Yellow Hand (Pat Hogan), who, in a bid to create a reputation for himself wishes to challenge and defeat Cody in one-to-one combat. Both in Yellow Hand's challenge as well as in the battle itself, the character of Cody is presented and subsequently upheld as the better man, while Yellow Hand is depicted as obsessive, and overly aggressive for reasons of personal ambition and social standing. Cody, in comparison, is aligned with the grander, more "noble" task of establishing the Pony Express, thus contributing to the expansion of the United States, and the westward movement of "civilization."

Yet there are also representations of the "friendly" Native American, depicted as level-headed and neutral, rather than indiscriminately hostile, willing to work for one group against another if the price is right. Angela Aleiss and Brian Henderson have both written about the depiction, in American cinema, of Native American assimilation into white society, arguing that films such as *Broken Arrow* (dir. Delmer Daves, 1950), and *The Searchers* (dir. John Ford, 1956), acted as instructional texts for both white and non-white American viewers. Teaching that "peaceful coexistence between Indians and whites was achieved only through the loss of Indian identity," and an "…affirmation of white-Anglo values within Indians themselves," the white-Anglo values promoted in these films are specifically those that promoted the

superiority of white, European American masculinity and patriarchy during the rise of the Cold War, when the idea of foreign threats, or threats from within were gaining political, cultural and social force.[66] In this context, the representation of indigenous characters as amicable allies of honorable white men in Express themed drama might better be read as part of a cultural road map that depicts indigenous peoples as "good" when they themselves recognize United States expansion (and its agents) as part of an honorable and necessary process.

By the mid-twentieth century, Pony Express themed film and television dramas featured Native American characters who are used as a smoke-screen by the real European American enemies of the Express, who employ them to act as their henchmen. Themes of honor and loyalty are emphasized through Native American characters who acknowledge the superiority of the Express employees compared to their European American adversaries. For example, at the end of the episode "Duel at Devil's Canyon" from the 1960 California National Productions' *Pony Express* television show, division agent Brett Clark (Grant Sullivan) defends the Express route from a former convict (John Alderson) who claims as his, a section of the land through which the route runs. The ex-convict, Cutter, employs a group of Native American braves to guard the land, a political move that could precipitate an indigenous "uprising" if not played right by Clark, but in the end Cutter is shown to

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[66] Angela Aleiss, *Making the White Man's Indian: Native Americans and Hollywood Movies,* (Westport, Conn: Praeger, 2005), 90; Brian Henderson, "The Searchers: An American Dilemma," in *The Searchers: Essays and Reflections on John Ford's Classic Western,* eds. Arthur M. Eckstein & Peter Lehman, (Detroit, Mich: Wayne State University Press, 2004), 47-73.

be dishonorable, leading the Native Americans to side with Clark and part ways with "no bad blood." While the Native American characters may be simply surviving in what is a European American's world, it is the character of Clark who is ultimately held up as the principled, noble white man. "Good" Native American characters, then, while seeming autonomous, actually act as vehicles through which to distinguish good models of European American manhood from the bad, while acting as obedient and pliable allies for the larger project of national expansion.

Bonanza's double episode "Ride the Wind" is a little more complicated, but at the story's core the character of Chief Winnemucca is mobilized to emphasize the importance of masculine heredity as Ben Cartwright travels to speak with the elderly Chief and implore him to stop violence against the Pony Express. Winnemucca's resolve to not help Cartwright, it is made clear to viewers, is spurred by his experience with social injustice, a distrust fueled by the United States government's record of breaking treaties with indigenous peoples. However, Cartwright approaches Winnemucca as one father to another, believing that as such they share a common emotional experience through which they can relate. Later in the episode, Little Joe, working alongside his father, saves Winnemucca's son from lynching at the hands of crazed egomaniac Curtis Wade, thus salvaging not one but two family lineages and maintaining the good faith between the local indigenous community and European American settlers. Despite Winnemucca remaining non-violently hostile and unresponsive to Cartwright throughout the double episode, the bonds of masculine heredity (as defined by white European American culture), and the maintenance of a

patriarchal social order act as the common ground on which the cultural or racial

differences that separate Winnemucca and Cartwright may be overcome, or at least

mollified.

Pony Express narratives, then, are exclusively white European American male

narratives, but they are narratives that have been crucially organized by their

interaction and overlap with other identities that ultimately reinforce the role of the

Express rider as heroic, or the institution of the Pony Express as safeguarding the

values of an expanding, white European American society. Native American

characters are repeatedly used as symbols in Pony Express dramas to emphasize the

larger systems or forces at work in the ideological foundation of the United States. In

these narratives, indigenous characters and storylines act as short-term distractions or

conduits through which the power of white American men and the hegemony of the

European American history of the United States may be reinforced. Thus, in

representations of the Express, as with the emblem of the horse, the white European

American frontiers-boy serves ideologically to promote the future of the nation as

best in the hands of men produced by the trials of working for the Express, men who

form a lineage of mythic frontiersmen that provide a template for American identity.

Conclusion

The Pony Express provides an excellent example of the assemblage-like

nature of any medium. Formed by, and intersecting with the technologies and

histories of many other media, the organization of the Express resulted in important

political and cultural infrastructural developments that would connect the east and

west coasts of the United States through uninterrupted flows of information. At the same time, the Express solidified a sense of American identity as emerging from, and mutually constituted by the media through which Americans lived their lives. In the United States in 1860, technology and engineering was already a source of national pride but the Pony Express, as a part of an increasingly technologized and industrialized world, shows that despite being celebrated for their engineering, technological wonders such as the telegraph and the railroad did not fully embody or represent the American experience.

As complex socio-cultural infrastructures that construct and disseminate meaning, media are fundamentally important in the imaginative lives of those who use them. The remediation of any medium creates phantom versions that become potent symbols with which to imagine states of being as well as identities, whether part of pasts, futures or alternate presents. The Pony Express has, from its beginning, been such a phantom medium, figured not only in the horse and rider but in the multitude of other technological machinery that extended the Express's role from messenger to time-keeper to organizer of geographies and beyond. Culturally, the Express was projected into the technological futures of the United States, but its real importance lay in its obsolescence. As much as it was a medium that symbolized the future, it was at the same time and from its start, a placeholder whose anachronistic body emphasized the need for the new that would characterize the coming age of ceaseless technological, informational, and economic exchange.

The Express's potency as an icon of a pre-mature or adolescent United States, filled with potential yet to be realized, became figured in the bodies of the horse and the rider. Bringing together ideals of United States' nationhood and the dominance of white masculinity over "nature," the Express presented Americans with an iconography that represented the "conquering" of "uncivilized" territories, and the control of "base" instincts. Yet, the ubiquity of the horse and rider in the American popular imagination does not fully encompass the history of the Express, but rather acts as an illustration of the hegemonic position of white, European American, masculine narratives as those that are consistently held up as representative of the American historical experience.

Chapter 3:
Virtual Communication, Virtual Subject

How we communicate today – via pocket sized, screen-based devices, for the most part – could be easily described as a series of virtual experiences as we send and receive vast amounts of information across the intangible realms of the internet. Yet analyzing the pairing of virtuality and communication reveals surprising trajectories for histories of communications technology and media more broadly. The Pony Express's virtuality needs to be explained in a variety of ways. First, as the privileging of information transmission and the speed by which that information is sent. As a messenger, carrying only letters, telegrams and newspapers, the Express stands in great contrast to other nineteenth century forms of communications technologies which remained connected both materially and infrastructurally to freight and passenger shipping as well as information delivery. In addition to this difference, the Express was also an invisible messenger, located and operated at a geographical distance from urban hubs in the east and west. Journalist Tom Standage argues in *The Victorian Internet* that connections between the nineteenth century's electric telegraph and the twenty-first century's internet can be made based on each mediums' ability to dematerialize the information the technologies transport. Changing messages into electric impulses or binary code allows for faster information relay as the messages are translated into a form *optimized* to be carried by each medium. I argue that the Express can be aligned with the technology of the telegraph as its speed and its structure can be understood as part of an optimization process that required the prioritization of information over freight. Yet, the Express also remains

different from the telegraph as its optimization process involved a *re*materialization rather than a *de*materialization of content with messages remaining in their original form and language, despite being copied onto tissue paper to limit weight.

Importantly, however, the concept of virtuality is also broadened by thinking about it through the concept of myth. By analyzing the Pony Express's enduring mythic image and its relationship to the already mythologized region of the American West, new connections between media and myth-making can be seen, and the way in which specific ideologies become embedded within media on an ontological level can be tracked. Important questions arise in such analysis, for example, how are technologies and media of communication imagined before they are publicly instituted and/or used, and what systems of representation structure the meanings of that imaginative act? The materiality of the Express remained culturally and socially tangible and meaningful, and, like the railroad and the stagecoach has since been incorporated as an icon into the realms of American myth. The Pony Express as we understand it today is a mythic giant, but the fame the messenger acquired in its lifetime was nothing compared to what it would become in the decades following the end of its tenure. Its place in American history, which lies at the boundary of where that history meets myth, tenuously positions the Pony Express with its hooves half in the factually delimited realm of history and half in myth. Gaps in knowledge about the Express have fueled debate about certain aspects of the messenger's history and have contributed to the Express's virtual construction in and through myth. In other words, various myths have provided the narratives with which to fill gaps in the

Express's story, making that story amenable to dissemination in popular culture. This process, by which the Express was represented in the cultural realm separate from its referent, did not happen after the Express had been decommissioned, but rather at the same time, beginning at its inauguration. Thus, the Express was experienced as a cultural phenomenon via various virtual modes transcribed in the visual and literary traditions of the Western genre, as well as in the social rituals of national and civic commemorative displays simultaneous to the experience of it as a long distance messenger. This chapter will examine how the Pony Express adds new meaning to conceptualizations of virtuality based on themes of space and time, distance and myth.

The Pony Express had never been a successful messenger service. Its eventual replacement by the transcontinental telegraph shows that even as a transporter of information *only*, the Express simply was not fast enough, and high rates of service ensured that only the wealthiest of individuals or organizations could afford its speed, leaving most of the population to wait weeks or months for correspondence. In fact, most of the population of the United States had no direct contact at all with the horse and riders who carried the messages along the route. For most people, the Express had no function in their daily lives and remained separate from any quotidian applications. The central offices of the Pony Express Company were based in Missouri, which meant that as a business it was largely invisible, especially on the east coast, as letters and messages were sent west to St. Joseph via separate train and telegraph companies. Moreover, the technologies of the telegraph, the railroad and the

stagecoach, which were employed by numerous communications and transportation companies by 1860, would have been consistently visible through the presence of regional business offices, and in the case of the railroad and telegraph, the infrastructures of telegraph poles and wires, train tracks and stations. In fact, by 1860, the use of the telegraph, railroad and stagecoach had been normalized as methods of communication in the urbanized areas of the east and the west. The Pony Express, however, was geographically removed from eastern and (to a lesser extent) western hubs. Thus, as a company as well as a method of communication, the Pony Express was not socially or culturally assimilated into the lives of urban populations. This meant that for a lot of people, the Pony Express remained visible only as a virtual subject in the popular press, appearing regularly in print but separate from their practical lives.

The Express's opaque and contentious history has played no small part in its virtualization. From the story of how the Pony Express was first conceived, to debates among professional and amateur historians of whom the first rider was out of St. Joseph in 1860, to the involvement of Wells, Fargo, & Co. at the end of the Express's tenure, the story of the Pony Express has been part conjecture, part historic fact and part fabrication. Many original documents belonging to the Pony Express company were lost during the Civil War or through mismanagement and, as early historian of the Express Arthur Chapman points out, since the Pony Express was a private rather than a federal institution, the keeping of official records was not enforced. All of this has consequently led to a great deal of debate and speculation on certain factual

points, making it ripe for absorption into the mythology of the American West, the gaps in its history being subsequently filled by dramatic fictions and the elaborate set dressing of dime novel authors and Hollywood producers.

Journalist Christopher Corbett, the first writer to chronicle the relationship between the fictional and factual Pony Express in 2003, wrote "…the story of the Pony Express, lost in the hard years of the Civil War, became in time a recovered memory. First, America forgot the story of the Pony Express, then America remembered, and in memory, America remembered big."[1] Corbett's point can help explain why the Pony Express, as short lived and as poorly patronized as it was, later ballooned into the iconic messenger of the Old West that we remember today. The shadow of national trauma that obscured recognition of the Express is culturally healed by "remembering big," with focus placed on the symbolic power of the Express. This symbolic power is best described in an *American Trails Courier* pamphlet published during the Express's centenary in 1960. The pamphlet describes the Express as embodying "the courage, stamina and loyalty that made America," and "the finest characteristics of our free way of life—enterprise, courage, fidelity to duty, and a conviction that any worthwhile goal may be achieved through diligence and hard work."[2] The transformation of the Pony Express into an ideological symbol reforms and refigures it in cultural and popular spheres. Within these spheres the Express is no longer simply a messenger but a symbol of national unity rather than

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[1] Christopher Corbett, *Orphans Preferred: The Twisted Truth and Lasting Legend of the Pony Express*, (New York: Broadway Books, 2004), 8.
[2] American Trails Courier pamphlet; USPS pamphlet *The Saga of the Pony Express 1860-1861.*, c. 1960.

national rupture, representing hope and progress in precarious times and helping to stabilize and standardize a national identity idealized in nostalgia. The figuration of the virtual Pony Express – that is, the Express that is most widely known – is what I investigate in my visual work, moving across media and employing multiple visual strategies, from hand drawn maps to video reenactment to QR codes, to demonstrate the dispersed and enduring presence of the Express-as-symbol in American cultural spheres.

The term "virtual" has consistently been used to describe states or realms beyond or separate from our own actual world, both in space and in time. Yet, as digital culture theorist Pierre Lévy argues in *Becoming Virtual*, virtuality is more complex than this definition.[3] For Lévy, the virtual involves processes of becoming that result in a "change of identity, a displacement of the center of ontological gravity of the object considered."[4] Lévy's concept of ontological difference is helpful, clarifying the distinction between the Express as messenger, comprised of men and horses, stations, geographies, and technologies of communication, and the Express as icon, ideologically and imaginatively powerful, constructed and propagated across many forms in popular culture. The virtual is not the opposite of the real, yet it is ontologically different, existing through actual-world infrastructures such as the hardware and software of computers, the network of fiber-optic cables laid across

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[3] For a summary of how the term "virtual" has historically been used, see Rob Shields, *The Virtual*, (London: Routledge, 2002), 2-14; also, Anne Friedberg, *The Virtual Window: From Alberti to Microsoft,* (Cambridge, MA: 2009).
[4] Pierre Lévy, *Becoming Virtual: Reality in the Digital* Age, (New York: Plenum Trade, 1998), 26.

continents and on ocean floors, and the flesh-and-blood users around the world. These material infrastructures can be traced back along many lines, revealing the varied histories of virtual experiences. For example, those experiences focusing on moving images might focus on the technologies of the cinema, the magic lantern and the camera obscura; another history could interrogate aural or oral experiences in which case the telephone or radio might be an interesting line of enquiry; yet another history could follow fully immersive environmental experiences, which might better be explored through investigating panoramas, dioramas, theme park histories and histories of tourism.[5] However, the power of these infrastructures and the symbolic narratives they disseminate are organized by the discourse that structures them, and the discourse that has codified the Express has historically and culturally positioned it within the realms of myth where it borders history, and at this blurry border the Express has been transformed into a blurry subject.

The Pony Express messenger of 1860 was a complex and dispersed system which, on the one hand, produced the fastest transcontinental communication possible, but on the other hand, was so huge and complex that its workings became obscured and illegible to most people. Parts of the system, however, were more visible than others. For example, the structure and route of the Express was known, but the continuous movement of the horses and riders who traveled *through* these

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[5] For histories of technologies that recreated historical scenes before cinema, see Erkki Huhtamo, *Illusions In Motion: Media Archeology of The Moving Panorama and Related Spectacles,* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2013).; Stephan Oettermann, *The Panorama: History of a Mass Medium,* (New York: Zone Books, 1997).

spaces both eastwards and westwards, was not. Just as information runs along telegraph or telephone lines or fiber optic cables today, the horses and riders (and the content of the mail bags) became unlocatable when they traveled between stations. Rather than the permanence of iron tracks or poles and wires, the ephemeral, continuous movement of human and animal bodies became the connective tissue that enabled information exchange. The scheduled departures and arrivals of the Express meant that there was a good chance of knowing when and where riders would appear, but in movement they remained unknown and obscure, and yet it was movement that was required to make the Express work as a messenger. The movement of horses and riders between stations enacted not just a connection between stations, but also continually renewed the virtualization of the horse and rider as it stopped and started at points along its route. Stations were points of renewal, points of manifestation and readability for the information as it traveled along the Pony Express route. Some stations merely housed horses and a station attendant, acting as points to change mounts, while others were "home" stations where riders could rest, and were occupied by families. The visibility of stations was enhanced if they doubled as telegraph offices or hotels, which meant that there were people making use of them every day. The visibility of other stations, however, arose through events that happened at them which were subsequently recorded in newspapers and other historical documents. Across a network of close to one hundred stations used by the Pony Express, there must have been many such events that were not reported, and so the visibility of those posts remained obscure, to be realized only in the American

popular imagination. Yet it is crucial to acknowledge that the 1966 miles covered by the Pony Express was not a no-mans-land. Many of the reports about stations on the western part of the route reveal the social tensions which often erupted into violence between indigenous communities and European American settlers. Just like the web today, access to and across unincorporated territories was negotiated and paid for, and the political and economic factors that determined who had access to those areas privileged white European American settlement.

Rob Shields, who analyzes our current understanding of the virtual filtered through digital technologies, argues that the virtual realm is a liminal space, similar to theme parks or vacation resorts. A state of being, idealized and parallel to our own. It is a phenomenon that must be encountered and understood on its own terms as a free-standing reality that generates real-world effects.[6] My interest in Shields' concept of the virtual is its resonance with scholarship on the development of the American West as a virtual terrain, a transformative space that developed alongside the historical and geo-political expansion of the United States. The terrain crossed by the Pony Express—the terrain of the American West—has a long and well documented history as a terrain virtualized through processes of myth-making which were informed by the ideological narratives of westward expansion, as well as the growth of an economy driven by industrialization. Tracing the partial visibility of the Express and how that visibility was shored up by discourse that promoted and maintained American myths of the West, reveals how the Express was both constituted virtually

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[6] Shields, *The Virtual,* 20.

and how, in turn, the Express bolstered myths of the American West already in place. The virtual West was where the Express existed for many people, and what provided a framework to imagine what the Express was.

In this virtual space, myths were created, including stories of dramatic rides and heroic riders escaping from aggressive foes. Riding alone along their part of the Express route, each rider had no other witnesses to testify that their experiences were true or that certain events even happened at all. This is not to say that all accounts by former Express riders are fictions, but there are several factors that contribute to taking such accounts with a grain of salt rather than as straight forward historical fact. For example, some of these accounts were recounted by secondary reporters who spoke to the riders when they were very old. Other accounts were taken from descendants of riders or from other people who knew riders as friends or by reputation. In effect, these stories further entrench the Express in myth. Yet, the Express didn't gain its cultural power simply by carrying out its job effectively, although that certainly played its part. The Express's power lay in its interaction with, and its relationship to the terrain across which it ran, a terrain that was itself virtualized through persistent mythologization and by processes of fictionalization, idealization and commercialization.

By the 1860s the American West was already well represented in the visual and literary arts. Both in the elite academy through paintings by famous artists such as Albert Bierstadt and in the commercial realm through mass produced, romantic lithographs sold by companies such as Currier and Ives, images of the American West

were well established and popular.[7] Visual representation of the American West continued in the 1870s through the subsidization of photography by railroad companies that wanted to promote their expansion projects through the simultaneous photographic documentation of their construction. As Jennifer Peterson has argued, railroad companies continued their sponsorship of Western landscapes through the early cinematic form of the travelogue in the late 1890s and early 1900s, encouraging a growing tourist interest in the region. Before the development of the automobile industry and the transcontinental highway system in the early twentieth century, Peterson points out, "the west's landscapes and locales were consumed as *representations* first and foremost." [8] The virtual travel developing through the railroad system in the nineteenth century, and the effects of that development on other emerging cultural industries such as tourism best exemplify the virtual mobility I see the Pony Express embodying and being embodied within.

The development of the American railroad system in the 1830s would make the most self-aware use of photography in its marketing, catering to growing popular demand not just for mobility but also for the experience of the *fantasy* of travel and the fantasy of a growing number of "destinations" nation-wide. As railroad routes pushed further west, so tourism companies marketed the West as a destination one could experience for a set price. For example, Fred Harvey's famous chain of eateries

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[7] Edward Buscombe, "Inventing Monument Valley: Nineteenth Century Western Photography and the Western Film" in *Fugitive Images,* edited by Patrice Petro, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995), 88-90.
[8] Jennifer Lynn Peterson, "'The Nation's First Playground': Travel Films and the American West 1895-1920" in *Virtual Voyages: Cinema and Travel,* editor Jeffrey Ruoff, (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006), 80.

and hotels, which ran alongside the Kansas Pacific Railroad starting in 1876, and later, the Atchison, Topeka and Santa Fé Railroad routes, played a large part in selling the West (and its indigenous inhabitants) to wealthy, white middle-class tourists who wanted to experience the wild West in safety.[9] From the 1920s onwards, the growth of the automobile industry meant that more people could travel easily out of their local communities to vacation in other parts of the country, visiting sites of historic and cultural interest. Dedication of the Lincoln Highway, which ran from Times Square in New York City to Lincoln Park in San Francisco, and which would be followed by the interstate highway system, further encouraged road-trip vacationing. At the same time, sites such as Colonial Williamsburg in Virginia and Plimouth Plantation in Massachusetts became popular destinations known for their attention to historic detail, rising in popularity after World War II. By 1960, history tourism was a booming industry and the centennial celebrations of the Pony Express, riding on the general popularity of such historically oriented activities, was absorbed in the nationwide enthusiasm.

Growing accessibility to the West via the expansion of railroad networks, and the subsequent commercialization of the experience of traveling and vacationing, created a powerful image of the West in the American public imagination that was romantic, safe, and ultimately consumable as a product. The romantic iconography of the Pony Express directly referenced life in Western territories, and would act as an unwitting spokesperson for the idealized image of the American West. By the

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[9] Buscombe, "Inventing Monument Valley," 98-103.

twentieth century, the hugely popular image of the "wild" West had become a symbol that represented the United States as a nation, and the power of that idealization lay in nostalgia for a time before machines and before advanced industrialization. Only fifteen years before, the Express had heralded progress and American futurity, but by the end of the century it represented an imaginative escape from the conditions that those ideals had ushered in.

The end of the nineteenth century was a socially and economically turbulent time as the U.S. economy went through several periods of boom and bust. Economic depressions and social discontent resulting in violent protest were the consequence of several shifts in industrial work practices, including the increasing implementation of machinery, worsening rates of pay and deteriorating working conditions, all of which induced workers to strike *en masse*. The railroad strike of 1877, which began in West Virginia but which quickly spread through other cities in the Midwest ended in the suppression of strikers with local militia and federal troops. Seventeen years later, the Pullman Strike of 1894, another nationwide strike which also ended in the forcible suppression of strikers, halted freight and passenger rail transportation west of Detroit and pitted the American Railroad Union against the Pullman Company in a battle concerning lowered wages.[10]

As a form of escape, nostalgia was powerfully appealing to many and it was in the 1870s and 1880s that the first popular stories about the Pony Express began to

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[10] For a description of the social consequences of an increased mechanical presence in the work force, see Alan Trachtenberg, "Mechanization Takes Command," *The Incorporation of America: Culture and Society in the Gilded Age,* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1982), 38-69.

emerge on the mass market.[11] The dramas featured in dime novels, for example, as Henry Nash Smith, Richard Slotkin and Michael Denning have all pointed out, drew from myths of the frontier West as wild garden, constructing quintessentially American landscape and quintessentially American stories.[12] Responding to nineteenth century tastes for melodrama, however, dime novel publishers reworked successful narrative formulas that traded in suspense and violence. Dime novels that featured Express riders as their heroes focused less on the Pony Express as a messenger and more on painting the heroics of its riders in broad, violent strokes.

Beyond dime novel representations, the Pony Express was also featured as an exciting and thrilling scene in Buffalo Bill's Wild West Show. The show presented the West as a series of scenes discretely performed by authentic actors including sharp shooters, skilled horsemen, and Native American performers, blending dramatic and erroneous interpretations of American history with the dramatic interpretations of the life of William F. Cody. Premiering in 1883, the Pony Express chapter of the show demonstrated "…how the Letters and Telegrams of the Republic were distributed across the immense Continent previous to the Railways and the Telegraph."[13] In addition to many anecdotes and facsimiles of official documents that promoted Cody's prowess living the frontier life, the program that accompanied the

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[11] For an account of how the Western genre intersects with the social and economic histories of the end of the nineteenth century, see Stephen McVeigh, *The American Western,* (Edinburgh: The Edinburgh University Press, 2007), 1-12.
[12] Smith, *Virgin Land,* 50-122; Michael Denning, *Mechanical Accents: Dime Novels and Working Class Culture in America,* (New York, Verso, 1998), 9-26; Richard Slotkin, *Fatal Environment: The Myth of the Frontier in the Age of Industrialization,* (Norman: University of Oklahma Press, 1998), 81-106 & 201-207.
[13] *Buffallo Bill's Wild West and Congress of Rough Riders Programme,*1893, 2.

show added to the mythologizing by including a number of literary sketches of events and characters associated with life in the Old West. The only information about the Express, a short paragraph on page thirty-one, focuses on Cody's famous three-hundred and twenty-four mile ride, giving no other information about the messenger at all, ostensibly cementing the Express to Cody's mythic stage persona.[14] Less ostentatious but no less influential was the Pony Express's association with "Wild Bill" Hickok. While in the service of the Pony Express Company as a station attendant, James Butler Hickok had his first famous shoot-out at Rock Creek station in Nebraska where he was posted. Hickok would later become known as "Wild Bill," and while his story never reached the same level of dramatization as Buffalo Bill Cody's did (partly because unlike Cody, Hickok hated performing on stage), the enduring legends of these two men have, in American popular culture, overlapped with, altered, and permanently colored the history of the Pony Express.

The cultural power of Cody's show arose from its process of mythologization which separated its subjects from the realm of myth, and placed them in the realm of history. According to Kristen Whissel, Cody's show did not simply present the Express and its other acts as a theatrical show, but framed its display by asserting a level of authenticity that leant historical authority to the scenes it depicted. Whissel argues that the Wild West show incorporated its audience into its historical scenes by first creating a space for an historical observer, and then by encouraging audiences to view the historical re-enactments in the position of historical witness. The result of

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[14] *Buffalo Bill's Wild West,* 31.

such audience involvement was a collapse of spectatorship and witnessing, history and spectacle, actual experience and virtual experience.[15] Of course, this collapse requires an imaginative leap – the audience is, after all, still watching a show rather than occupying an actual battlefield – but importantly, a strong emotional experience is created in which historical representation becomes directly linked to first-hand experience on the scene. In effect, the spectacle becomes "real" by camouflaging the imaginative leap with the haptic experiences of reenactment in which times present and past seem to coalesce. For the Pony Express, this camouflaging was particularly powerful for filling-in the gaps of what remained a little-known chapter in United States' history. With little actual information to counter such spectacular, fictional displays, representations of the Express became consumed *as* its history. Even after a great amount of historical work on the Express had been carried out in the 1920s and 1930s, twentieth century representations of the Express would continue to draw on fictions that had developed in late nineteenth century dime novel and Wild West Show culture, ostensibly keeping the history of the Express inseparable from the mythic image of the American West. The virtualization of the Express, then, must be understood through the desire to document and memorialize it, which involved the disciplining of known facts about the Express into an agreed-upon history. Yet history itself, as theorist of history Hayden White has asserted, is "… the signifier of a concept rather than a *reference* to a thing or domain of being having material presence […] the nature of which must remain conjectural – indeed, must remain a

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[15] Kristen Whissel, *Picturing American Modernity*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008), 68-74.

possibility only and therefore a 'fiction.'"[16] The historical Pony Express is firmly

placed in an imaginative space. It is no longer simply a communications system, but

rather an icon, cultural shorthand for describing a time and a place in an imagined

American past.

As a subject, the Pony Express has always fittingly been contextualized in

historical terms, whether keeping time by keeping its schedule, channeling

speculative technological and political futures, or acting as a node through which

American history is formulated and represented. Yet by the twentieth century, the

blurriness of the line between Pony Express history and Pony Express fiction was

openly acknowledged as both a requisite and problematic part of its memorialization.

In 1935 Howard Driggs described his approach to recounting the history of

the Express as reaching beyond historical fact. Driggs' project was to see the Pony

Express "brought back to life in all its feeling and color only as one meets the actors

in that drama and hears them re-enact in a casual and natural way the parts they

played in it."[17] For Driggs, the power of the Express as a historical subject cannot

simply be summed up through a dry rendition of facts, but must be re-lived as if

encountering the Pony Express in daily life – although imbued with the drama of

knowing its historical importance rather than simply experiencing its practical role as

a messenger. Early twentieth century historians of the Express were drawn to the

subject partly because of its patriotic, romantic, and exciting story, but also by a need

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[16] Hayden White, *The Practical Past*, (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2014), x.
[17] Driggs, *The Pony Express Goes Through,* xiii.

to correct a history that had been, in their opinion, besmirched by the repetition of false facts and tall tales. Roy Bloss, for example, saw his contribution to Pony Express historiography as "…an endeavor to throw light on certain shadowed areas and to fill some complete voids with substance. Whenever sympathetic legend or nostalgic romance has threatened to collide with objective deduction (a recurring hazard in this lore-laden subject) objectiveness deliberately has been given the right-of-way."[18] Yet while these early twentieth century historians worked towards remembering a forgotten chapter of American history, they were also invested in authenticating histories of the Pony Express, sorting the chaff of contradicting information and ornamented storytelling from the good wheat of corroborated historic fact. As one educational pamphlet from the Express's 1960 centennial commemorations states, "This 'playing up' of exaggerations is a disservice, especially to boys and girls. Tell the truth."[19] The reliving of history, particularly national history, must be honest according to these historians, and one way to ensure the truth is to safeguard the authenticity of the facts of the story. But what processes of authentication have been used and what do they have to do with the facts of history?

Rob Shields has argued that "techniques of the virtual create the illusion of presence through props, simulations, partial presences and rituals which invoke the past."[20] The use of props and simulation are strategies that have been used for

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[18] Bloss, *Pony Express: The Great Gamble,* v.
[19] American Trails Courier Pamphlet.
[20] Shields, *The Virtual*, 41.

hundreds of years to realistically recreate historical battle scenes, natural disasters or events. The lineage of these recreations can be traced back along historical lines to the Eidophusikon – an eighteenth century miniature theater with built-in sound and visual effects operated by a single performer – as well as to Panorama painting to later adaptations of immersive theater, dioramas, wax museums, and cinema.[21] In fact in the twentieth century, the heightening of realism through the inclusion of authentic historical props was used as a marketing strategy for Hollywood films. For example, Dorothy Masters of the New York Daily News wrote in her review of Paramount's *Pony Express* of 1953 that authentic 1860 bath tubs were used; a press book for *Cavalcade of the West* (1936) notes how Hoot Gibson's costume was modeled after an item in a private collection and how Gibson's co-star Rex Lease, an avid collector of Western Americana reportedly owned the ivory-handled pistols that once belonged to Wild Bill Hickok; press books from *Riders of the Pony Express* (1949) starring Ken Curtis, tell of the use of "authentic relics" borrowed from avid Pony Express artifact collector G. Stone of California. [22] Calling to attention the use of such objects or the processes of design and construction that assure the authentic representation of

[21] See Vanessa Schwartz, "Cinematic Spectatorship Before the Apparatus: The Public Taste for Reality in *Fin-de-Siècle* Paris", in *Cinema and the Invention of Modern Life,* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995) 297-319.; Alison Griffiths, *Shivers Down Your Spine: Cinema, Museums and the Immersive View,* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008).

[22] Dorothy Masters, review of *Pony Express*, New York Daily News, Charlton Heston Collection, Vol 4 of 10, Margaret Herrick Library.; Hoot Gibson's costume was modelled on one in the collection of Donna Montoya of Baja, California, in Press books for *Cavalcade of the West*, Janus Barfoed Collection, Margaret Herrick Library; Ken Curtis Press Books, Janus Barfoed Collection, Margaret Herrick Library.

history signals to viewers that the imaginative experiences they will go through are truthful and accurate. But why is this important? According to Shields, techniques of virtual experience such as those described above, generate reality effects that make the act of metaxis – an imaginative action that pulls together the actual world and the abstract world of meaning to create an in-between state – stronger for viewers.[23] These props validate the imaginative exercise that viewers participate in, while remaining self-aware of the illusion and of the impossibility of actually experiencing the past outside of symbolic systems of meaning. Whether walking through full size dioramas in a museum, riding in a re-run that covers the same geographic route as the Express, or participating in a city-wide pageant at which the town and its inhabitants are dressed up to look like they occupy a different time, it is in the half immersed, half aware state of metaxis that participants can engage with the emotional, social or political core of what is represented, generating meaning relevant to their present. The attention I draw to the props in my video work functions in the same capacity. Clearly made of cardboard, my props direct viewers' focus to the imaginative processes required to enliven history. Despite my realistic painting of each prop, designed to draw viewers in, their inescapable illusory purpose works to ultimately keep viewers at a self-aware, critical distance.

It is worth stating that reenactment is different from metaxis. While metaxis enables the experience of a liminal state or space, which allows for self-awareness and critique, reenactment when at its most powerful, fully enfolds the participant in

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[23] Shields, *The Virtual,* 39.

its world. For example, Rebecca Schneider's conceptualization of reenactment in her book *Performing Remains* focuses on the power of live reenactment to provide the force with which to imagine a historical time or event. Similar to the effects generated at Buffalo Bill's Wild West Show, Schneider argues that reenactment is about presence. Less ambivalent than acts of metaxis which render the experience symbolic, Schneider insists that the power of live reenactment is based on "real" presence, not illusion. Performance acts as a gateway to a historical encounter always *lived* and embodied. However, this kind of live experience is not how most people now, or in the past, have encountered or commemorated the Pony Express, with most civic or national celebrations of the messenger remaining in symbolic realms that prioritize the present rather than the past, or rather the present as an outcome of the past.

Initially honored in 1919 by a line of roadside markers, more solid commemorative efforts were called for after many of the Pony Express route markers disappeared, perhaps stolen.[24] Later, in the 1950s, Pony Express historian William Floyd argued for the importance of enduring commemorative markers as visible encouragement for the study of geography and history, and for use in the education of children through field trips and excursions to sites at which historical events of national importance occurred. Floyd's history of the Express was in part driven by a desire to correct the "persistent and continuing misrepresentation of facts" that "plagued" histories of the Express, and which obscured the importance of the Express

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[24] William H. Floyd describes this in 1958 and calls for more sturdy markers and plaques through which travelers and tourists may experience and be reminded of geographic spots related to important sites of American history. *Phantom Riders of the Pony Express,* 78.

as a messenger.[25] Preservation of historic sites and the commemoration of the Pony Express after decades in obscurity became palpable in the 1950s as the centennial of the Express drew near and organizations on east and west coasts were founded to help organize the events that would structure a nation-wide celebration. The Express had already been folded into earlier commemorative or celebratory events, such as a re-run of the Express route as part of a series of commemorations of the "Days of '49" in 1923, or San Francisco's Automobile Day pageant in May of 1921 at which William Pridham, a former Express rider, was guest of honor to celebrate the evolution of transportation.[26] The "Days of '49" pageant, held in a number of cities across the mid and far west, closed with a re-run of the Pony Express route, enabled by a team of Reo Speedwagons headed by long distance driving record-breaker Charles H. Bigelow. This very popular event drew clear comparisons to the technologies of the nineteenth century and the technologies of 1920s, privileging the masculine prestige of record-breaking speed that connected the Express to the Reo Speedwagon and its well-known driver. The Automobile Day pageant was slightly different. The presence of Pridham, who had place of honor next to the pageant's Grand Marshal, and who oversaw a procession of different transportation technologies from cowboys to old bicycles to new cars, all displayed with actors in "costumes from the times," transformed the event from a mere parade promoting technological "progress" and the brand new automobile industry, into something

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[25] William H. Floyd 3rd, *Phantom Riders of the Pony Express,* (Dorrance and Company, 1958), 27.
[26] San Francisco Chronicle, May 11, 921.; Los Angeles Times, Sept 16, 1923.

more historically significant akin to a living history lesson. Pridham, who was quoted as saying "I feel it is a wonderful thing that in my life I have seen Western transportation advance from the Ox-drawn prairie schooner to the mail plane," acted as a living archive, the real historical artifact to be viewed and celebrated, embodying the "evolution" of transportation and westward expansion that was being honored.

Yet, other commemorative events leading up to the centenary of the Express were more playful in spirit, continuing to blur the lines between the historical and mythic Express. Activities including balls, rodeos, parades, musical theater and costume pageants celebrated the culture of the European American West and were established as popular events on civic calendars. At Monrovia, California's "Monrovia Day Fair" celebrations of 1960, in which a televised parade, a mustache contest, and an industrial show were all included, Grant Sullivan and Don Dorrell, stars of California National Production's *Pony Express* television serial, were invited to preside as co-Grand Marshals. Unlike earlier celebrations the blending of the past, the present, and the mythic at the Monrovia Day Fair commemorates an ideal past in a self-aware gesture that embraces an image of the Old West as reimagined in popular culture.[27] Rather than a "real" Pony Express rider, the 1960 celebration asks actors who played Pony Express employees to preside over the event rather than historic figures or civic leaders. This is not to say that the celebrations in 1921 or 1923 were not self-aware. The parades of the 1920s also featured folks in costumes. Yet such commemorations of history, which conflate the fictional with the factual – thus

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[27] Los Angeles Times, May 8, 1960.

producing a past-as-fiction – were fully-fledged phenomena and an accepted form of national celebration by 1960.

Nowhere was the past-as-fiction more clear than at tourist sites such as "Frontierland" at Disneyland, which opened in Anaheim in 1955, and "FreedomLand U.S.A" in the Bronx, New York, that opened its doors in 1960 (and closed them in 1964). These parks engaged visitors with fun rides celebrating a mythic shorthand of American history, separate from associations with civic institutions or larger forms of governance, fantasy spaces cut off from the world that allowed visitors to easily, safely, and light-heartedly enjoy and interact with their attractions. Disney's "Frontierland" featured rides that openly blended popular historical fictions with American history. "Tom Sawyer Island," on which "Tom and Huck's tree house" stood, is placed next to recreations of a fort and a burning settler cabin. Essentially celebrations of Americana, these theme parks were filled with highly curated and simplified representations of United States history that appealed to a nostalgic sense the past, and obfuscated any messiness that actual history would have provided. FreedomLand U.S.A divided its park into sectors that represented different, yet specific periods in American history with attractions and scheduled shows relating to historical events or myths. The park included "Little Old New York: 1850-1900," "Chicago: 1871," "The Great Plains: 1803-1900," and "The Old South West: 1890" to name a few. Visitors could help firemen extinguish the flames of the Old Chicago fire, experience the 1906 earthquake in San Francisco, or ride a horse drawn wagon through Civil War reenactments in the "New Orleans-Mardi Gras" area. The Pony

Express featured too as a form of transportation that took visitors from "The Great

Plains" to "The Old Southwest." In addition, there were also Pony Express riders who

would ride in to "Fort Cavalry" to pick up mail deposited by visitors, who could then

pick up their letters later in a different part of the park, where they had been

"delivered."[28] The reductive and short-hand structure of these parks have provided a

template for an QR interface I have developed in the form of a theme park map,

through which viewers of my video reenactments can access video content. By using

their phones to scan QR codes on a Disneyland-style oversized map in the shape of a

storybook, viewers of *Pony Players Review* can watch various video vignettes that

portray both "real" and speculative histories of the Pony Express (fig. 53).

Prioritizing entertainment over education, both Disneyland and FreedomLand U.S.A

reveal broader cultural and political shifts happening in mid twentieth century

America. Historian Michael Kammen has described the commercialization of

nostalgic versions of American history as a reaction to a growing feeling of

disconnection to history, a disconnection that created social and generational

divisions in the post 1960s world. Such curated representations of the past were

adopted by the conservative right to promote the ideological agendas of Cold War

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[28] See http://freedomlandusa.x10host.com/Freedomland%20Postcards.htm
Freedomland U.S.A's remembrance of the past has, in the present, become even more
virtualized as former child visitors have collated ephemera from the park into online
repositories. Home movies on Youtube, photographs on a Facebook page, and old
postcards and commemorative booklets recirculating through eBay, are just some of
the ways in which the park continues to exist virtually, and operate as a symbolic
gateway to America's history. For an example, see
https://www.facebook.com/Freedomland-USA-The-Worlds-Largest-Entertainment-
Center-246939775358072/?rc=p (Accessed November 13, 2018).

politics, and later, to safeguard social values and roles which were being dramatically, and in some cases violently, challenged by the social and political push back against the Vietnam war, the growing civil rights movement and the rise of second-wave feminism.[29]

Local and national commemorative events during the 1950s and 60s deeply embedded the figure of the Express into the civic and personal lives of individuals to reassert the hegemony of conservative cultural norms in the face of the growing

Fig. 53. The interface of *Pony Players' Review* which viewers scan with their phones to access video content embedded in the map which imitates theme park maps from the 1960s.

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[29] Michael Kammen, *The Mystic Chords of Memory: The Transformation of Tradition in American Culture,* (New York: Knopf, 1991), 516-704.

counter-culture movements. Events such as the crowning of a "Miss National Pony Express" both on the state and national level, for example, replicate a coming-of-age ritual for many young American white women, who, judged on their "beauty, western accomplishments, personal appearance, western attire and horsemanship" are assigned a social place and function through the mediation of a recognized historical subject and the invocation of a national history. (fig. 54) [30] The Miss National Pony Express pageant folded present day rituals that acculturate particular social groups (here, young white women) and aligned those rituals not only with a national identity, but also with specific, strictly mandated social and cultural roles. Rather than acknowledging women's presence in Pony Express history, assigning them a legitimate place alongside the men who rode, organized or managed parts of the system, the Miss National Pony Express Pageant instead reinscribes women's relationship to the Express as tangential and tenuous. While the pageant recognized each woman's "western accomplishments" and horsemanship, the inclusion of women in such a celebration ultimately regulates and restricts the visibility of women's activity in history and ultimately as citizens. Thus, the reanimation of national, historical subject matter acts as an endorsement of conservative political and social agendas by associating specific social or cultural activities with subjects represented as "traditionally" American.

The celebrations around the Pony Express's centenary in 1960 incorporated a host of activities in which geographically dispersed groups participated in events to

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[30] F. Leland Elam, "Centennial Celebration of the Pony Express: Part Three", *The Horse Lover's Magazine*, July 1960, 32.

MISS UTAH PONY EXPRESS, Connie Jones (center), daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Earl E. Jones of North Ogden and her two lovely attendants, Sue Anderson, daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Shirl R. Anderson of Bountiful, and Lynette Larsen, daughter of Mayor and Mrs. G. Calvert Larsen of Ephraim.

Fig 54. Winner and runners-up for the Miss. Pony Express competition in Utah. Unidentified magazine clipping, Raymond Settle Collection, scrapbook 3, page 83, Courtesy of Charles F. Curry Library, William Jewell College, Liberty, Missouri.

memorialize and celebrate the Express and its inaugural run. Although the U.S

government was not involved in planning any commemorative events,

commemorative medals produced by the U.S. mint, (approved for minting by Act of

Congress) were specially produced for those who took part in the centennial re-run.[31]

The primary event was privately organized by the National Pony Express Centennial

Association and its local affiliates, and was a re-run that was scheduled to take place

between St. Joseph and Sacramento in the spring of 1960. Hundreds of riders and

their horses ran with a mail bag carrying one thousand letters.[32]

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[31] "Review of the History of the Pony Express," Library of Congress pamphlet, c. 1960.

[32] F. Leland Elam, "Centennial Celebration of the Pony Express: Part Two", *The Horse Lover's Magazine*, July 1960, 24.

The California section of the re-run had strict rules for entry, including age and gender restrictions that privileged young men, as well as requirements for excellent horsemanship, ownership of a healthy horse and "…a good reputation for honesty and integrity." Final preference, however, was given to "native sons of California with additional preference given to the number of generations that his ancestors are native Californians."[33] What is classified as "native" here, is not men of indigenous or Mexican descent, but rather the depth of white European American settlement as expressed specifically through, or as aligned with United States' history; one can imagine the most "native" of these young men being those whose family history dates back to the "'49ers," just before California became a state. Several newspaper reports highlighted the fact that grandchildren of the founders of the Pony Express would be riders on the California end of the re-run. These descendants of Pony Express founders or riders retain the aura of the original Express, therefore lending historical prestige to the event and "nativizing" the European American history celebrated. The eligibility of each participant and hence his ability to strengthen the fidelity of the re-enactment rests partly on ideals of heredity, raising questions about engagement with, understanding of, and true social inclusiveness of the history re-enacted. Historical authenticity sanctioned by heredity creates problematic associations with legacy and inheritance as traditions that safeguard biological, cultural and financial capital, leaving little room for the experiences of

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[33] Elam, "Centennial Celebration of The Pony Express: Part Two", 26.

other social groups such as recent immigrants, as well as indigenous peoples whose connection to the land pre-dates white settlement.

Ideas of heredity and of inheritance, which seem contradictory to the fundamental ideals of the United States as a nation built on new beginnings, are symptomatic of a distorted ideal of American-ness that seems hard to shake when memorializing the messenger. Much memorialization focuses on the white European American experience and is silent or merely whispers when remembering other social or cultural groups. One example of such an ideal narrative can be found in the Pony Express Museum in St. Joseph, Missouri, in which parallels between the old frontier and newer frontiers are made legible in a glass cabinet that houses a photograph and letter once belonging to Pony Express rider Billy Fisher. Next to these artifacts is a photograph of his descendant Dr. William F. Fisher, NASA astronaut. A tag next to the photographs informs us that in August 1985, Dr. Fisher carried with him onboard the space shuttle *Discovery* items associated with the Pony Express, including a letter written by his great grandfather (fig. 55). Pushing the myth into the unchartered realms of space, the American frontier continues to produce American heroes, emphasized here by the Fisher family's lineage and its celebration in the museum. An embodiment of an American frontier tradition, the Fisher family's narratives represent a direct, embodied link from past to present, drawing on the prestige associated with the American Space Program whose history has, in the past, likewise generated feelings of national pride and collective, nation-wide celebration bringing together a heterogeneous community.

Figure 55. The American frontier tradition alive and well in the Fisher family. Display at the Pony Express Museum, St. Joseph, MO. Photograph by author.

Heritage establishes tangible links between the past and the present, providing individuals and groups with a concrete sense of identity, a history to "claim" and thus insert themselves into. The documentary film *Spirit of the Pony Express* (dir. C.J. LongHammer, 2011), which captures many of the activities surrounding the 150th anniversary celebrations of the Pony Express in 2010, provides an illustration of such solidifying of identity. While most of the film romantically remembers the Express, at one point, Suzanne Lehr of the Mount Mora Cemetery Preservation Association in St. Joseph, Missouri, recounts an experience she had with a small group of local youths.

This group of young adults vandalized the cemetery (in which the bones of former Pony Express riders are interred), and were subsequently court mandated to go on a tour of the cemetery with Lehr as part of their sentences. Lehr tells us that she quickly realized the local boys had no idea about the historic significance of the site and of the people contained within it, opining that while the boys had not learned anything "in the back row" of the classroom, the historic site had a direct effect on them, invoking respect and remorse from each offender. Lehr's distinction between the environments of the classroom and the cemetery – a distinction which she qualifies as a "different way of connecting to history," making it "come alive" – suggests that creating an awareness of local heritage has a restorative function. Asking the teen offenders to align themselves with the teen riders whose graves are included in the cemetery is shown to be an effective strategy to build a sense of self and a sense of place, and in this specific case, offer rehabilitation and re-induction into the local and national community.

While the Fisher family legacy represents one tradition of frontier heritage and Suzanne Lehr's cemetery tour demonstrates another kind of heritage that holds socially restorative power, other groups have looked to the iconicity of the Express to celebrate overlooked or misrepresented heritages of the American West. On Black rodeo circuits today, a Pony Express relay race has become part of the rodeo programming. This event is about speed and horsemanship, as two teams of eight riders race around a small track handing batons off between team mates. Listening to a short interview with two participants, Twaun Orange and David Love of the team

"Country Boyz" based in Spencer, Oklahoma, it is clear that representing the Pony Express is not the explicit point of the event. According to Orange, it is about the celebration and commemoration of Black cowboy heritage, a way to pass on historical information from one generation to the next, to build a sense of self and knowledge about a community. As Orange states, "There's been Black cowboys since the cowboy days…there are a lot of Black cowboys on the circuit now…It's important for [Black cowboys] to keep doing it. We always want the kids to be participating, to keep the thing going on, because it's the kids that will keep it going on after us." Love agrees, "We grew up on riding. That's all we do, is ride, break horses and train them, get them ready for this event. The Pony Express […] It's a tradition thing, because it was before us and before them."[34] During this relay race, American Western history and Black cowboy heritage intersect through the icon of the Pony Express, making socially, culturally and historically meaningful experiences for the participants, their families, and their communities as teams from different cities and states participate. However, unlike the annual, nationally planned Pony Express re-run, participation in the Pony Express relay race does not align the participants with a national history, a history from which their presence as well as their contributions as Americans have been traditionally excluded. Instead, the Express provides a framework to articulate an American identity built on different

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[34] "Pony Express at the Rodeo in Oklahoma," https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NleR4eBeMeY posted by Struggle and Hope, July 5 2014, accessed Jan 25 2017; "The Contributions of Black Cowboys," http://struggleandhope.com/stories/black-cowboy-history/ (accessed January 25, 2017).

cultural and historical traditions. As much of this chapter has articulated, much

figuration of the American West in the nineteenth century has enforced the space as a

strictly white, European American domain. In remembrances of events or places,

even the most commercialized of commemorations has promoted an overwhelmingly

white European American image of American Western history. The dominance of

this image as it moves through varied spaces and places of commemoration expresses

the power of contextual and cultural evacuation that processes of myth-making (and

virtualization) enables. The image of the "Old West" that has been disseminated

through Pony Express stories, images, and commemorative events is an image that

has consistently and systematically overwritten and omitted histories that would

present a more diverse image of a space and time that has been promoted and

consumed as quintessentially American. The fact that this image is frequently tied to

spaces and events of historical commemoration has, therefore, endorsed the idea that

such images represent an official American history to which white European

Americans have a privileged claim. Even today on professional rodeo circuits, the

hegemonic power of this claim remains in place. Events such as the Calgary

Stampede or the Professional Rodeo Cowboys Association represent the sport at its

highest level, but African American membership and participation are still small

compared to their European American colleagues, and racism is still prevalent in the

sport.[35]

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[35] To trace the line between Black cowboys and rodeo as well as other popular
representations of Black cowboy heritage, see *Black Cowboys in the American West:
on the range, on the stage, behind the badge,* editors Bruce A. Glasrud and Michael

A much overlooked and certainly under-represented chapter of American

Western history is that of the African American cowboy, who in the late-nineteenth

century counted one in four cowboys working in the West. Many free-men in Texas

who had gained skills in cattle tending while working on ranches as slaves before the

Civil War, found themselves in demand in the cattle industry after the war, but as the

industry and profession lagged, entertainment such as Wild West shows and rodeos

rose in popularity.[36] African American cowboys had participated in rodeo since its

inception in the late nineteenth century, with figures such as Bill Pickett (who was

known as the "Dusky Demon") becoming prominent figures. But as the popularity of

rodeo grew after World War II, discrimination enforced by Jim Crow laws made it

increasingly difficult for African American cowboys to find work. In response, the

Negro Cowboys Rodeo Association was established in 1947. Today, events such as

the Bill Pickett Invitational Rodeo include reenactments and history highlights as well

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N. Searles, (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 2016); For more about the
Calgary Stampede see http://www.calgarystampede.com/stampede/rodeo (accessed
April 26, 2017); http://www.prorodeo.com/ (accessed April 26, 2017). In an online
article about eight-time pro-rodeo world championship winner Fred Whitfield, both
Whitfield and fellow cowboy and competitor Cory Solomon state that their careers
have been harder by the "overwhelming whiteness of their sport and the racism, both
overt and subtle, that accompanies it." Paul Wachter, "Fred Whitfield and the Black
Cowboys of Rodeo," https://theundefeated.com/features/fred-whitfield-and-the-black-
cowboys-of-rodeo/ (accessed April 26, 2017); For more on the Bill Pickett
Invitational Rodeo see http://www.billpickettrodeo.com/index.php (accessed April
26, 2017).
[36] For histories of African American cowboys and Black pioneers in the West, see
William Loren Katz, *The Black West: a documentary and pictorial history of the
African American role in westward expansion of the United States*, (New York:
Simon & Schuster, 1996); Monroe Lee Billington and Roger D. Hardaway, *African
Americans on the Western Frontier,* (Niwot: University of Colorado Press, 1998).

as the Rodeo competition to extend the event from a sporting event to a cultural one. The Bill Pickett Invitational Rodeo celebrates Black cowboy heritage and culture in an annual nation-wide tour, now in its thirty-third year that covers the breadth of the country, from Oakland, California to Atlanta, Georgia and up to Washington D.C.

The claiming of the Express as part of a national history, enabled and constructed by European Americans has played a considerable role in the prioritization and valuation of white European American experience over other experiences of American history. Yet, as the example in Spencer, Oklahoma shows, the Express-as-icon – that is, the virtual Express – is much more flexible as a signifier, less tied to specific meanings of national history or identity than might be assumed. Between the actual messenger and its many virtual iterations spread across time and across media, there is a considerable gap and it is in this gap that the meaning, or perhaps the usefulness of the Express-as-image can be reassigned or made to work in different ways. With this in mind, I have sought to re-write the story of the Express in my artwork using varied media and looking at varied histories to challenge the given association that the Express is exclusively aligned with white European American peoples' identity. The Express-as-icon is inherently malleable, and is more than just a man on a horse. Therefore, I have chosen to figure the Express as a landscape, animated and framed through the miniature theater of peep box displays. At the same time, my treatment of the Express in popular culture is also reimagined with a different and diverse cast, following a different myth, ideally

suggesting a different future from what the current American social, cultural and political moment allows.

Conclusion

As a subject that is riddled with historical gaps that make it amenable to mythologization, the uncertain, unstable and blurry identity of the Pony Express adds to its mystique. Whether in books, on screens, at historic sites, or as part of larger city-wide festivals, the Express-as-icon has acted as a symbolic prop with which to imagine the past and therefore order the present. The virtual Pony Express is a cultural phenomenon whose powerful and persistent presence in popular, commercialized forms of historical remembrance has continued to create palpable links between American pasts, presents and futures. Emerging in spaces and places of local or national memorialization, the Express-as-icon has been adopted to simultaneously entertain, distract, celebrate and revere American history. Specifically, it has been adopted as a figure that communicates a privileged and distinctly white European American history to a broad population. Yet, as an icon, the Express has remained symbolically open and flexible enough to be adopted by groups traditionally misremembered, misrepresented or simply omitted by official history-makers, and instead used to celebrate traditions, peoples and histories that fall outside of the canon. Yet, for the flexibility of its symbolism and its power as an icon, the virtual Express must always be de-virtualized to create meaning for a community, and its re-figuration within experiences of leisure such as within theme parks, as well as within specific social traditions, such as the crowning of a beauty queen or a local

rodeo, have embedded it in the cultural life of regional and national communities in

ways that emphasize its fabled and mysterious role as a messenger that bridged

spaces, times, people and events.

Chapter 4:
De-Virtualizing the Pony Express in the Pony Express Museums of St. Joseph, Missouri

Unlike other historically important communications technologies, there is very little to preserve of the Pony Express. There is no engine, golden spike or telegraph key. In fact, the buildings in St. Joseph that have been converted into museums are perhaps the closest to Pony Express artifacts that are accessible to the public. Walking around these museums however, requires a suspension of the desire to understand or learn about the Express following a linear, narrative route. Instead, visitors must encounter the Pony Express as part of an exercise in imaginative piecework, patching together what is a dispersed and de-centralized historical phenomenon into a meaningful, if virtual, historical subject. A trip to the Pony Express National Museum or the Patee House Museum compels visitors to decode their various scenes, activities, or glass case displays, approaching them as "indirectly or differentially meaningful, rather than directly significative."[1] Each history museum represents the Express differently, but it is the scarcity of artifacts related to the Express that pushes those who seek historical and narrative cohesion into a state of imaginative pro-active viewership, working against what Richard Handler and William Saxton have described as the "…wholeness that historical narratives can

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[1] Art historian Donald Preziosi described a similar experience during his own visit to the maze-like, and overwhelming Sir. John Soane's Museum in London. Donald Preziosi, "The Astrolabe of Enlightenment," in *Brain of the Earth's Body: Art, Museums, and the Phantasms of Modernity,* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003), 90.

provide."[2] Handler and Saxton's analysis of living history museum practices focuses on the power of enfolding visitors in immersive experiences, but the history of the Pony Express does not provide that wholeness, and visitors' perceptions of the Express are bounced between historical artifacts of the actual messenger, and historical artifacts of its popular cultural embodiments. Fictional representations of the Express fill the unknown spaces between known, verifiable points of historical reference, making it difficult to parse the mythologized image from actual, historical information – a quality I explore in my video installation *Pony Players' Review,* which incorporates the blurry and complex representation of the Express at the St. Joseph museums by mixing real and unreal, fact and fiction within the same aesthetic and narrative world. Yet, whether it is the fictional or the actual Express that is being commemorated, what is interesting in the museums of St. Joseph are the strategies adopted to de-virtualize the Express, bringing it out of the realms of history and myth into the material reality inhabited by visitors. Materiality and tactility are the preeminent qualities invoked in these museum spaces, drawing a line between the fantasy images presented on screens or pages in popular fiction, and the embodied experiences offered by the museums which blur the boundaries between virtual and actual domains. In *Pony Players' Review*, I push against the clarity of the distinction between the sensual worlds of the museums and the seemingly self-enclosed, image-privileged story worlds of the popular screen, questioning the parameters of what

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[2] Richard Handler and William Saxton, "Dyssimulation: Reflexivity, Narrative, and the Quest for Authenticity in "Living History"," *Cultural Anthropology*, Vol. 3, No. 3 (Aug, 1988), 242-260.

defines the real from the unreal by emphasizing time, performance, aesthetic traditions of realism, and the materiality of the hand-made sets.

From being the heroic subject of stock Western genre movies to a symbol of reliability and endurance that sells a wide range of products, the image of the Pony Express in the American imagination has endured over time. In fact, the persistent remediation of the Express has blurred the historical subject with its icon such that distinguishing where historical fact begins and fiction ends is extremely difficult, if not impossible to determine. As I outlined in chapter three, the Pony Express has, from its beginning, been embedded within various American myths, and this has resulted in historical epistemologies being re-routed from fact to the specious realms of fantasy. Whether iconic or historical, the Pony Express remains present in the public imagination and continues to mediate the American relationship to a sense of national identity. However, the Express demonstrates processes of mythologization at a further extreme as the iconography of the Express dominates its representation, and the symbol of the man-on-a-horse acts as shorthand for all that the Pony Express epitomizes in terms of United States expansion and European American settlement, white supremacy, indigenous disenfranchisement and the hegemony of masculine narratives as canonical texts of American history.

While I have focused up to this point on popular entertainment, as well as on commemorative representations, I turn my attention in this chapter to contemporary history museums, which evoke associations not with thrill and distraction, but with a sense of national or historical prestige. Museum spaces are held to a different cultural

standard than popular entertainment, where the expectation is not of escapist fantasy, but of preservation and pedagogy in the service of celebrating and promoting pride related to national identity. Visiting the history museums of St. Joseph is a ritual that offers visitors the opportunity to build cultural capital in a specifically patriotic way.[3] Building on knowledge cultivated by learning about the Express in school, as well as through watching films or television shows, visiting a history museum promises to enhance that knowledge by more closely connecting visitors to objects and information associated with the "real" Express. This enhancement is achieved by de-virtualizing the Express, transforming its image from one associated with drama to one accessibly connected to day-to-day existence. In the museums of St. Joseph, Missouri, the promise of information about the historical Express is embedded within material structures that either embody the historicity desired through historical artifacts or achieve a high level of realism through reconstruction, thereby acting as imaginative props. In both cases, the materiality of the objects on display tangibly manifests the Express, affectively enhancing visitor experience by allowing their materiality to be read and grasped through a sense of proximity, feeding desires to know and encounter what will always remain out of reach. Unlike the dramas seen on screens large and small which are encountered as the fictions they actually are, museum spaces promise to de-virtualize what is virtual, absent, or separate from our reality in time and space. By employing techniques that foreground tactility and the

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[3] I draw on the concept of cultural capital as laid out by Pierre Bourdieu, "The Forms of Capital," in *Handbook of Theory and Research for the Sociology of Education,* editor John G. Richardson, (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1986).

haptic to build affective connections, the Express is given meaning not through drama mediated by TV or cinema but through embodied knowledge.

In the mid-nineteenth century, St. Joseph was a bustling frontier town which, alongside Independence, Missouri, and Leavenworth, Kansas, acted as a departure point for groups moving into the unknown West. The eastern headquarters of the Pony Express company was based in St. Joseph which, a little later, was also the town where Jesse James was famously shot and killed. Present day St. Joseph is home to several museums: The Pony Express National Museum, the Patee House Museum, the Jesse James Home Museum, and the Robidoux Row Museum. The Patee House and the Pony Express National Museum are now permanent memorials to the Pony Express. Both these museums invite visitors to enter spaces in which the historical Pony Express operated. The Patee House was the bureaucratic headquarters of the Express company, while the Pony Express National Museum is housed in the building that used to be the Pony Express stables. The museums are located within two blocks of each other.

After its initial construction and use as a stable from the early 1850s through the late 1880s, the Pony Express National Museum building had been, until 1960, used by several manufacturing companies including a shirt factory. In the 1950s, during the run-up to the Express's centennial, the building, which was in severe disrepair, was bought and renovated from a brewery into a museum space by a group of local civic and private organizations, and in the 1990s was renovated again to transform the structure back to its original size. The museum is a small but well

organized series of rooms that follow a horseshoe layout through which visitors move

past and through different displays ranging from life-sized and miniature dioramas,

traditional glass case displays, theatrical tableaux, and even an excavated hole in the

floor into which visitors may gaze to see the original foundations buried from Pony

Express days. The museum employs multiple physical perspectives to engage its

visitors including immersive and interactive activities, and while the museum

includes a few historical artifacts, most of the techniques employed to represent

history focus on the imaginative reconstruction of historical scenes.

Two blocks east from the Pony Express National Museum is the Patee House

Museum. Part of the Patee Town Historic District, the Patee House was once a luxury

nineteenth century hotel built to capitalize on the development of St. Joseph after the

inauguration of the Hannibal and St. Joseph railroad station. The building was

constructed and opened in 1858 by businessman John Patee, and became one of the

best-known establishments west of the Mississippi River. On the ground floor of the

hotel itself, the Pony Express company established its bureaucratic headquarters, and

it was from here that mail would start its westward journey to California. After the

Pony Express, however, the building was used for many purposes. It was a

courthouse during the Civil War, a women's college until the late 1860s, a hotel once

more, a women's college again through the 1870s, and a garment factory from the

mid 1880s to the late 1950s.[4] The large building has operated as a museum since the

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[4] See Patee House Museum's website for a description of their history, https://ponyexpressjessejames.com/our-history/ (accessed 05/03/2018).

early 1960s and is St. Joseph's only National Historic Landmark. The Patee House Museum presents visitors with room after room of artifacts, some of which are directly related to the Pony Express, such as the artifacts found in the Pony Express Company's office, but others are more tenuously linked, simply overlapping with Pony Express history to relate information about the St. Joseph area more broadly.

Tradition, Myth, and Simulation

Representations of the Express first emerged later in the nineteenth century with the rise of the Western as a genre in literature and popular culture. Yet, despite its initial appearance in mass entertainment, the Express was still a representative of United States history and tied to traditions that celebrated and commemorated national historic events, places and peoples. In his investigation of tradition in American culture, *Mystic Chords of Memory,* Michael Kammen unpacks the dense and complex history of tradition-making in the United States since the establishment of the Republic in the late eighteenth century. Kammen explains that the stories immortalized in tradition can act as cultural tools to create a unified, cohesive, imagined community through "official culture," bringing together a diverse nation of varied religions, ethnicities and regions. However, Kammen also points out that this consensus can be illusory, as traditions can prioritize certain stories over others and assert cultural and political dominance in collective memory, either determining distinct roles for specific groups or omitting those groups altogether.[5] In the context

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[5] Michael Kammen, *The Mystic Chords of Memory: The Transformation of Tradition in American Culture,* (New York: Knopf, 1991), 4-5.

of United States history, official culture has been exclusionary and hegemonic, privileging and benefiting the white European American (and frequently masculine) experience over the experiences of people of color, indigenous peoples, women or immigrants.[6] This historical narrative acts not as a true unifier, but as an exercise in social and cultural power. Quoting Robert Penn Warren, Kammen writes "to be an American is not…a matter of blood; it is a matter of an idea – and history is the image of that idea."[7] American identity, as illustrated by historical narratives, is constituted of virtual potentials – beliefs, ideals, concepts – but it is the representation of history that gives those potentials, and therefore, American identity, its form and its imagistic power. Images of history, like those of the Pony Express, then, are virtual representations of American identity, manifestations of something intangible but powerfully meaningful in the actual world.

Indeed, the power of images to provide meaningful form to an elusive subject has kept the idea of the Express alive and well in the American imagination, but the idea that the Pony Express might only be knowable and relatable through images pushes it into the territory of myth. French philosopher and semiotician Roland Barthes described myth as speech that is "stolen and restored," the process of restoration altering what has been stolen so that what returns is in fact only the

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[6] I refer here to the idea of hegemony as described by Antonio Gramsci, particularly his conception of positive and negative institutions and their roles in producing consensus. Antonio Gramsci, "Hegemony, Intellectuals and the State," in *Cultural Theory and Popular Culture Reader,* editor John Storey, (Harlow: Prentice Hall, 1994, 2nd edition 1998), 153-164.

[7] Kammen, *Mystic Chords,* 11.

appearance of the original, evacuated of its individuality, its history, and its unique

position in culture.[8] However, the problem with applying Barthes' theory here, is that

it pre-supposes an original from which to steal, and the Pony Express does not

entirely fulfill this prerequisite. Apart from buildings associated with the Pony

Express in St. Joseph and Sacramento that have been restored, few of the Express's

relay stations still stand, and even less survives that can be attributed directly to the

Pony Express company such as letters between its management, photographs of riders

and stations, press clippings, and bibles that were purportedly given to riders to carry

with them once they signed up.[9] Even the Smithsonian's Postal Museum lacks an in-

house collection of Pony Express artifacts, having to source items from private

collectors when putting on exhibits. Some artifacts such as saddles have been

recreated (for museums or for the annual re-run) but must represent approximations

only. Therefore, celebrations of the Pony Express's achievements, and retellings of its

connection to American history must be imagined, guessed, or creatively interpreted.

Yet, the power of the Express as a subject of both historical and cultural importance

remains rooted in its virtual nature and in fantasies or ideations of American identity

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[8] Roland Barthes, "Myth Today," in *Mythologies,* trans. Annette Lavers (New York: Hill and Wang, 1972, 1997), 125.
[9] According to the last in depth study of the history of the Pony Express, the only remaining Pony Express stations either complete or in ruins are locatable at Fort Bridger and Fort Laramie in Wyoming, Fort Kearny, Gothenberg, and Rock Creek in Nebraska, Julesburg in Colorado, Hollenberg and Marysville in Kansas, and the Patee House in Missouri. I would also add the B.F. Hastings Building, part of the Wells Fargo Museum in Old Sacramento, which has undergone reconstruction since the 1960s. A list of stations can be found in Joseph J. Di Certo, *The Saga of the Pony Express*, (Missoula: Mountain Press Publishing Co., 2002).

and nationhood, as well as in the American modernity and technology that it represents.

The reconstruction of the history of the Pony Express by professional historians such as Raymond Settle, Roy Bloss and Arthur Chapman among others, pieces together fragmented and dispersed information that is partly composed of verifiable facts, cross checked and corroborated by other sources, but also partly composed of information that is more questionable, more in need of verification, and which makes the historical narrative collated somewhat less stable. As with many histories, the historical narrative that is known of the Express restores only a limited and imperfect image, but the Express's narrative is especially unstable as the "facts" that form the base of the narrative may be entirely fictional, misremembered, or purposely skewed. Memorializing that history or that image, then, can easily contribute to the ongoing mythologizing of the Express fed by over a century's worth of popular cultural fantasies.

As I have argued, the actual, historical Pony Express was primarily knowable through its effects as well as through the descriptions and images disseminated by people and institutions unrelated to the messenger company. It might, therefore, be more accurate to describe the Express as a simulacrum, devoid of an original, constantly pointing towards reproductions of itself rather than any actual historical subject. French cultural theorist Jean Baudrillard described his concept of the simulacrum as that which is,

…no longer a question of imitation…It is a question of substituting the signs of the real for the real, that is to say of an operation of deterring every real process via its operational double, a programmatic, metastable, perfectly descriptive machine that offers all the signs of the real and short-circuits all vicissitudes.[10]

The concept of the operational double to which processes of meaning-making are attributed, resonates with how the Pony Express has been memorialized and represented, but it also explains how it actually exists, and has existed as long as it has been in public memory. The "real" Pony Express is that which is easily read as part of larger myths envisioned on screens large and small, or on the pages of romance or dime novels, and it is the recognition of this that perhaps drives people to museums such as those in St. Joseph, in search of more concrete evidence, more tangible examples of revival.

The Museum Context

History museums are traditionally places where objects of cultural value – including works of art and historical artifacts – are housed, cared-for and exhibited. They are spaces in which displays act as interfaces for visitors to imagine unreachable realms and make meaningful historical and cultural connections to what is contained within, thereby invoking feelings of reverence.[11] In history museums, attention is not coerced from visitors but is a consequence of what is represented. Stephen Greenblatt has described this reaction as the result, on the one hand, of "resonance," an

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[10] Jean Baudrillard, "The Precession of Simulacra," in *Simulacra and Simulation,* trans. Sheila Faria Glaser (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1994), 2.
[11] Rob Shields, *The Virtual*, (London: Routledge, 2002), 20.

awareness generated by the display of the broader social, cultural and political forces

that affected and formed the history represented, and on the other hand, "wonder," an

immediate emotional reaction of "exalted attention" to the display.[12] The Pony

Express National Museum, which commemorates the Express mostly through the

reconstruction of historical scenes and the presentation of virtual encounters with

isolated elements of the Express's history, aligns with Greenblatt's concept of

"resonance" in which displays "pull the viewer away from the celebration of isolated

objects and toward a series of implied and only half-visible relationships and

questions."[13] Resonance works best in this museum, and perhaps with the subject of

the Express more broadly, because it arises within gaps of historical knowledge as

well as between the visually engaging displays, providing information that might help

visitors bring fragmented parts of the Express's history together. Resonance

establishes context, both visually and intellectually, and in all the varying displays

found at the Pony Express National Museum, what is visualized is that which is

ultimately unknowable. At this museum, visitors remember the Pony Express by

imagining everything that surrounds it. From the literal historic building that houses

the Pony Express National Museum itself to the reconstructed displays found within

its walls, visitors create an imaginative virtual environment into which the Express

can be inserted. Beyond the brick walls of the front of the building that was once the

Pikes Peak Stables, a series of rooms, displays and informational labels continue to

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[12] Stephen Greenblatt, "Resonance and Wonder" in *Exhibiting Cultures: The Poetics and Politics of Museum Display,* (Washington: Smithsonian Books, 1991), 42-56.
[13] Greenblatt, *Resonance and Wonder,* 45.

show the fragility of the Pony Express as a subject. Teetering between history and myth, concrete artifact and imaginative fabrication, the Pony Express is fully a medium of resonance requiring of those who seek to know or remember it, the ability to read between the lines of the visible representation to trace its largely absent body.

Greenblatt points out that, "Museums function partly by design, and partly in spite of themselves as monuments to the fragility of cultures, to the fall of sustaining institutions and noble houses, the collapse of rituals, the evacuation of myths, the destructive effects of war, neglect and corrosive doubt."[14] Indeed, while history museums preserve the memory of the most important parts of a society/culture/nation's past, asserting, reassuring, and re-inscribing those defining elements as immutable and essential to that society/culture/nation's identity, they simultaneously speak to the loss of those elements, and to the inevitable instability of the social, political, and cultural forces that also contribute to the forging of identity. The museums of St. Joseph balance the virtuality of the Express-as-icon with structures of display and engagement that allow resonance to act as a framework for reception. However, as resonance encourages the construction of meaning in the spaces between objects on display, displays themselves focus on tactility, presenting the Express as part of an experiential world rooted in materiality, and knowable through embodied knowledge.

The material de-virtualizing of the Express creates fetishes of the objects used to represent it, transcribing the symbolic fullness of the Express into the material

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[14] Greenblatt, *Resonance and Wonder,* 43-44.

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qualities of each display, while retaining the Express's mystery, and filling each

exhibit with a potential for generating "wonder." [15] Nowhere is this more clearly

articulated than in a glass case display in the Pony Express National Museum, in

which a rather drab shawl, apparently worn by the cousin of the first rider out of St.

Joseph as she watched the Express's inaugural ride (fig. 56). Not integrated into any

scene, the shawl's purpose is of display only, to generate a sense of wonder and to

emotionally enfold visitors into the Pony Express's narrative as put forth by the

museum. However, as a historic relic that possesses an aura – a phenomenon

described by cultural theorist and critic Walter Benjamin as "the unique quality of a

distance" – the shawl can take us only so far towards a meaningful connection to the

historical Express.[16] Instead, the shawl becomes a mirror to the visitor's desire to also

witness that enigmatic beginning and pluck a hair from the inaugural pony's tail.[17]

However, such fetishization need not be constrained to the historical artifact

alone. In fact, the desire to be closer to the Pony Express is readable across the many

forms of historical reconstruction that are exhibited in the Pony Express National

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[15] My use of fetish here comes from Lacanian psychoanalysis, as followed by Octave Mannoni in *Clefs pour l'imaginaire; ou, L'autre scène,* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1969).

[16] Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction" in *Illuminations,* trans. Harry Zohn (New York: Schocken Books, 1969), 222-223.

[17] It has been noted that in St. Joseph on the Express's inaugural night, the rider's horse became disturbed and had to be put back in its stall because so many people were plucking hairs from its tail for souvenirs. For months afterwards, items commemorating the Express's first ride, such as watch chains made from the Pony's hair, could be found and purchased in St. Joseph. See Arthur Chapman, *The Pony Express: The Record of a Romantic Adventure in Business,* (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1932), 105; Raymond Settle & Mary Lund Settle, *Saddles and Spurs: The Pony Express Saga,* (Lincoln, NB: University of Nebraska Press, 1955), 56-57.

Museum, all of which prioritize materiality and draw on tactile knowledge for effect.

My visual work on the Pony Express draws explicitly on this concept. I similarly

cultivate a highly visible materiality in my sets and props. While these videos draw

on Express-themed popular culture for their content, their aesthetics point not towards

seamless realism as achieved in cinema and on television, but rather to an amateur

realism which curls at the edges, reveals its fallibility, and stresses the textures and

material qualities of its construction. My props, and their relationship to the actors

who populate their space in *Pony Players' Review* are fake fetishes. Rather than

Fig. 56. A shawl on display in the Pony Express National Museum. This shawl was apparently worn by the cousin of the first rider out of St. Joseph on the evening of the Pony Express's inaugural ride. Photo by author.

offering proximity, they are placed at a distance to the viewer through their mediation. However, despite not being what they are painted to represent, my props are still very obviously cardboard and their texture is palpable (figs. 57-58). The effort taken to render each scene real, paired with the inescapable denial of that realism by the presence of the "real" actors who interact with these props, speaks to the desire to get closer to the "real" Pony Express only to be denied by the inevitable and obvious passage of time that separates now from then, and the volatile forces that have scattered what remains of the historical Express too far and wide to recapture. In the museums of St. Joseph, there is a similar desire and denial as moments in time are obsessively frozen and rendered in minute (handmade) detail, and artifacts, arranged as they were in 1860, remain unused and gathering dust. The biggest denial of all in these spaces, however, is the deferral to the Express-as-icon, an attempt to grasp a subject that is, and has always been, elusive and incomprehensible.

The Pony Express Museums of St. Joseph

The representation of the Pony Express, and the organization of its history within the Pony Express National Museum and the Patee House Museum is similar in that both museums present visitors with a multitude of historical threads. Neither museum tells a clearly linear history, but instead both rely on representing the Express from a multitude of differing perspectives. At the Pony Express National Museum, the visitor's physical position in relation to each display shifts. From physically entering recreated scenes, to looking into self-enclosed environments, each of these physical shifts also requires a perceptual shift that requires visitors to switch

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Fig. 57-58. Stills from *Pony Players' Review* shows the interaction of the cardboard props and sets, and the actors who work with and within them.

spectatorial positions, moving from being a physical part of the scenes recreated, to that of an observer on the outside.[18]

After entering the museum and paying admittance, visitors have the option of watching a short film about the Express in a small room with saloon-style doors. From there, visitors enter the historical area of the stables, and find themselves face-to-face with life size replicas of the blacksmith's corner and a dynamic scene which represents the exact moment in time that the Pony Express began running (fig 59). The investment in aesthetic realism counter-balances qualities that mark the scene as a reconstruction, such as the inclusion of effigies, or the texture of the cardboard or cloth onto which props or backdrops are painted. Furthermore, as visitors physically share the stable area with the effigies, any barrier between dramatic, theatrical space

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[18] I take the concept of a disciplined observer from Jonathan Crary's historical account of the prioritization of vision in the nineteenth-century, and the positioning of the observer within the mechanics of vision-technologies. Jonathan Crary, *Techniques of the Observer: On Vision and Modernity in the 19th Century,* (Boston, MA: The MIT Press, 1992).

Fig 59-60. A recreation of the stables in the Pony Express National Museum, St. Joseph, Missouri. On the beam on the left, a very small label and underneath it, a small square QR code can be seen. In the main area of the historic Pikes Peak stables, effigies of horse and rider occupy the same space as visitors. Above the door, a sign tells of the exact date and time the first ride started through the historic doorway. Pony Express National museum, St. Joseph, Missouri. Photos by author.

and the lived space of the visitor is broken, creating a seamless environment in which the imaginative and actual blend together. The aesthetics of realism are crucial to the immersiveness of the historical scene, and the reality effects of each display in the stable area become prioritized in the place of missing artifacts. In addition, the effigies of a horse and rider are positioned so that they appear to be about to burst out of the stable doors. Occupying the privileged position of witnessing the exact moment of commencement, visitors are immediately positioned *within* a scene of history, and as if to draw further attention to the moment, a sign above the stable doors reads "Moment in Time: 7.15pm, April 3rd 1860, the Pony Express begins" (fig. 60). Witnessing the commencement of the Pony Express in this way instills a prestige to the act of viewing, and to the presence of visitors in that historic space, making them patriotic Americans rather than merely neutral observers. However, while the dynamism of the opening scene may be exciting for visitors, and does an excellent job activating the space imaginatively as well as physically, it is also highly fetishistic, turning the space into a place for the reverence of myth. The fetishism of this scene, evoked by an illusion of access to the past, conflates historic material artifact (the stables themselves), with dramatic, material reconstruction (the effigies, the banner over the door). History blurs into myth and the museum setting sanctions that action by endowing it with social and cultural value.

At the Patee House, historic rooms once used by the Pony Express company are not populated with effigies, but remain as rooms simply filled with historical artifacts. A large counter fills most of the space, and on a pair of slim double doors
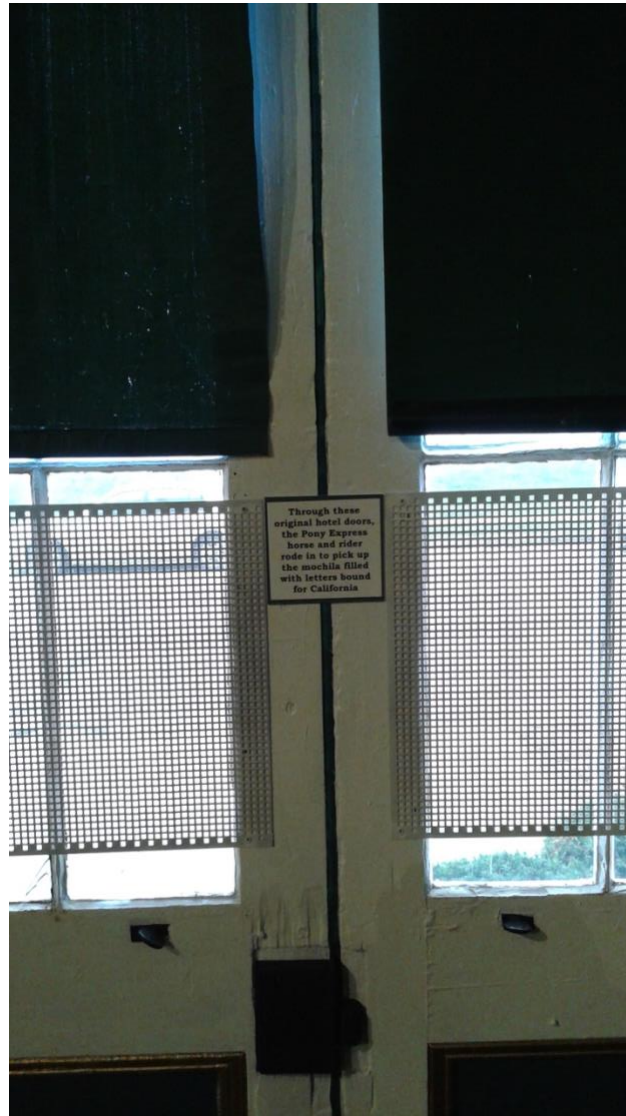
Fig. 61. The original Pony Express office in the Patee House Museum, St. Joseph Missouri and a close-up of the dramatic label that draws visitors' attention to the historic doors through which riders would pick up the mail. Photo by author.

that lead directly onto the street outside, a small, unassuming paper sign reads

"Through these original hotel doors, the Pony Express horse and rider rode in to pick

up the mochila filled with letters bound for California" (fig. 61). A rather dramatic

scene is implied in this simple descriptive label, but while there is no visible

reconstruction, and the doors remain closed and locked, the descriptive prompt allows

visitors to take a moment to conjure the scene, or imagine the people delivering or picking up messages (a scene which might be enhanced by the experience of having seen the effigy of horse and rider about to enact the same scene at the Pony Express National Museum). Such conjuring relies on creating a sense of dramatized adventure. The image of rider and horse bursting forth onto the streets of St. Joseph represents the commencement of the Express's westward journey, but it also signifies the potential exploits the young riders will encounter as the mail bag travels to its destination. As the museum commemorates the Express through the conservation and exhibition of the Express's historic offices, the affective energy of the scene described arises from the tension between fact and fiction. Knowledge about the historical Pony Express is activated by the thrill associated with its alter-ego, augmenting memories of the historical messenger to produce an "operational double" that creates powerful cultural effects in lieu of historical meaning.

There is too much missing from the Pony Express's history not to have its proxy fill in the gaps, and there is too much myth surrounding the Express to avoid the conflation of history and tall tale. Perhaps it is appropriate that one of the most quoted historical descriptions of the Express is found in American writer and humorist Mark Twain's autobiographical novel *Roughing It,* first published in 1872. At the start of the novel, Twain describes watching a Pony Express rider dash by his stagecoach bound for Nevada.[19] Whether stagecoach passengers actually saw Pony

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[19] Twain describes the experience of "seeing" the Express thusly, "So sudden is it all, and so like a flash of unreal fancy, that but for the flake of white foam left quivering and perishing on a mail-sack after the vision had flashed by and disappeared, we

Express riders is near impossible to determine, but Twain's literary reputation for blending actuality with satirical fantasy aptly illustrates the enigmatic figuration of the Express. The Pony Express has always existed as a historical-fictional composite, whose "original" has, for so long, been interchanged with its popular image. As with most history museums, the Pony Express National Museum and the Patee House Museum reveal the careful negotiation between the desire to remember what there is little record of, and the compensatory techniques that conjure the popular image of the Express in virtual form when the historical record falls short. What distinguishes these specific museum spaces is their celebration of the fiction of the Express as a historical phenomenon as much as the actual Express itself. Despite using very different strategies of display, each museum embraces the gaps in knowledge about the Express and fills them with images and realities that continue to represent the Express as a popular historical "theme" as much as a historical subject.

Nowhere are these compensatory techniques more literally tied to the digital realm than in the Pony Express National Museum's use of QR codes, incorporated into displays to animate each scene with audio effects and other activities. Quick Response Codes (QR codes) are square, scannable barcodes that are most frequently used in marketing. These codes allow consumers to use their smartphones to access information about products by scanning the code, and subsequently being guided to a website or host page online. The QR codes dotted around the Pony Express National

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might have doubted whether we had seen any actual horse and man at all, maybe." Mark Twain, *Roughing It*, (North Scituate: Digital Scanning, Incorporated, 2001), 70-72, Accessed December 18, 2017, ProQuest Ebook Central.

Museum directly connect visitors to sound effects, fictional audio scenes, and a quiz that guides visitors around the museum's displays, mediating visitor experience of the museum as well as its contents via a digital device. Connoting new technology, digital culture, and the engrossed, dependent relationship that users have to their Smartphone devices, QR codes further abstract the Pony Express as a subject. Not only are the codes themselves aesthetically abstract - composed of black and white squares arranged in different formations within a larger square format – they remove visitor engagement from the museum space, sequestering it to a small, personal device. Unlike the rest of the displays at the museum which promote imaginative engagement through physical proximity to reconstructed objects and scenes, the QR codes redirect visitor attention to webpages and online content.
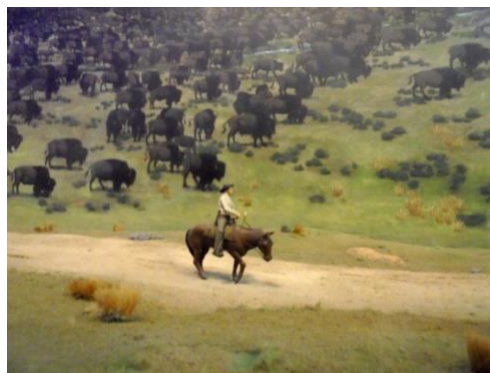
Figs. 62-64. A panorama and details of the miniature diorama installation at the Pony Express National Museum, St. Joseph, Missouri. Details reveal a miniature scene on the prairies, and another in the Sierras as a rider leads his horse through a snow drift. Photos by author.

Other than physical proximity, however, strategies of tactile engagement provide gateways to the virtual recovery of the Pony Express that create meaning from embodied experience. Tactile intelligence connects us to our own physical world, and applies physical-world knowledge to the symbolic realms of representation. For example, in the Pony Express National Museum, haptic effects triggered through motion-sensors augment the experience of looking at an installation of miniature dioramas (fig. 62-64). In this display, a flashing lamp denotes a lightning storm on the prairies, a heat lamp denotes the searing heat of the Great Salt Lake desert, and cold air fans denote the bone-chilling winds of the snowy Sierras. As a representation of the varying geographies of the North American continent and an illustration of the huge length of the route, the diorama installation adequately depicts the great distance covered, but the display is also an accretion of tactile experiences that signify the historical subject through layering multiple, tangible elements. The effects are simultaneously engaging and distancing. The self-containment of each beautifully rendered scene is visually absorbing, and yet the comprehension that a cold fan is blowing, or that a heat lamp is inducing a feeling of physical discomfort creates a sense of self-awareness that makes those haptic effects readable as signs, meaningful not simply as representations of environmental conditions, but also of the physical hardships riders faced, and their fortitude against the elements.

Within the same room as the dioramas are other examples of how reconstruction is employed to forge a connection to history through materiality and tactility. A large reconstruction of a Conestoga wagon, as well as a replica of a

wooden Pony Express relay station that resembles a log cabin, allow visitors to enter and explore their space, but their existence as icons of the American West makes them easily readable as objects belonging to the mystified realms of a mythologized American history (fig. 65). Within the museum, these objects are meant to explain the social, cultural and historical context into which the Express emerged and functioned, but the power of the iconography of the mythologized West which is also invoked through their presence turns the room into a semi-fictional space, summoning both historical facts as well as virtual images of an imagined American time and space. On the other side of the room is a theatrical tableau depicting an imagined meeting of the three Pony Express founders, as well as an epic series of miniature dioramas representing the Express's route from the forests and prairies of Kansas, to the Sierras in California. The tableau and its effigies act much in the same way as those in the front of the stables, presenting visitors with a fictional glimpse of what a meeting

Fig. 65. Installations of the Conestoga wagon and the Pony Express station replicas in the Pony Express National Museum, St. Joseph, Missouri. Photo by author.

between Russell, Majors, and Waddell might have looked (and sounded) like (fig. 66). However, this scene does not make visitors a part of its world as the stables, wagon, or station reconstructions do. Rather, a strict boundary is maintained between the display space, and the space of the visitor, who becomes an observer. While visitors are still offered a privileged view – observing a private meeting between three renowned business men – and given an equally privileged experience of listening in on their conversation via QR code, each visitor remains in a passive position outside the display instead of within it. Visitor's experiences of the scene are much more controlled and determined compared to the stables, in which the individual is free to wander about the space as she likes. There is a distance to this display then, as there is with the dioramas which are housed behind glass, and yet each of these displays retain their intimacy through proximity. The display spaces are small and intimate, allowing material detail to be readable thus engaging observers in the scene through generating a feeling of wonder.

Likewise, the miniature dioramas which are realistically and carefully detailed, shrink the drama of each scene to make the huge and perilous route of the Express manageable, resembling a cinematic montage in which space and time are abbreviated. Visitors can stroll past, taking in the whole route, or they can pause and look more concertedly at the beautifully painted backdrops and miniature models, observing a looted and burned relay station, an exhausted rider trudging past a herd of Buffalo, or a rider gesturing to a wagon and its inhabitants making their way through the snowy drifts. The wonder generated by each display in this room of the museum

Fig. 66. A theatrical reconstruction of a meeting between the three Pony Express founders. Pony Express National Museum, St. Joseph, Missouri. Photo by author.

arises from noticing how reality effects are rendered in each scene; how the snow is rendered, how the trees painted, and how the 2D and 3D elements combine to produce a realistic environment. Successful effects reveal each material element as a tactile prop that engages the imagination and guides visitors through a virtual journey.

The power of tactile knowledge comes from its inherence in the body. Yet this knowledge does not occur, according to Walter Benjamin, in a state of attentiveness, but is rather an unconscious intelligence that informs how we behave and position ourselves in culture. As Benjamin noted,

> …the tasks which face the human apparatus of perception at historical turning points cannot be performed solely by optical means, that is, by contemplation, alone. They are mastered gradually by habit, under the guidance of tactile appropriation.[20]

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[20] Twain, *Roughing It*, 240.

While tactile elements can certainly be read visually, they are interpreted and understood in an embodied way, informed by an expanded experiential world as well as the time and place that an individual finds herself. Associating tactility with habit, which is defined by being *felt* rather than being *seen*, Benjamin argues that such knowledge has the power to disrupt conscious modes of perception, creating a receptive mode in which to absorb, to "take into oneself" an idea, a work of art, or in this case, a historical narrative. In the Pony Express National Museum, this tactility becomes readable through the hand-crafted labor of the dioramas, and in the construction of its tableaux, aiding in imaginative processes guided by senses other than vision.

Focusing on the materiality of objects, however, does not preclude those objects' tangibility when represented in virtual realms that traditionally privilege vision, such as video. Although film and video are technologies of vision, they are also technologies of time, and they can emphasize that which is not always comprehensible. As Laura U. Marks has described in *The Skin of the Film*, "Film/video is able to reactivate the presence of the fetishized object, as the (audio)visual image yields to the things it cannot represent."[21] As opposed to photography, video and film register time and communicate its sensation, and provide viewers with the ability to feel things beyond vision. To capture a flimsy set made of cardboard, for example, that wobbles and reacts to the actors who move within it,

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[21] Laura U. Marks, *The Skin of the Film: Intercultural Cinema, Embodiment, and the Senses, (*Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2000), 114.

film and video can communicate the set's material qualities. The power of the *image*

that remains self-contained, rigid and dominant in the photograph, cracks and reveals

its actual-world-ness when the element of time is introduced. The image is no longer

simply the image, but points towards actual *things* in the world. It is the visibility of

this actual-world quality in film and video that Marks sees as offering the potential

for sensual experience. My purposeful use of different materialities in *Pony Players'*

Review, each of which play off one another, guards the tactility of the scenes I

construct against the mediating power of the lens. My props maintain their power as

signs, not simply of what they have been painted to represent but as sheets of

cardboard that signify that material's practical accessibility and adaptability, its social

uses, and its DIY, political connotations.[22] Tactile and digital elements are not in

opposition but rather exist in tension, similar to the undefined and reorganized

distinction between the historical and fictional scenes reenacted from Pony Express

films, books, and dime novels which constitute the video's content.

 However, techniques of de-virtualization need not only apply to

reconstructions, or fictional representations of historical subjects. Historical artifacts,

as traces of times and places long past, are particularly potent as props that conjure

the idea of history, invoking powerful emotional responses from visitors. It is amidst

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[22] In an interview, artist and media archeologist Zoe Beloff described her use of
cardboard while reenacting the Brecht play "The Days of the Commune" with the
Occupy Wall Street community as adopting "the language of protest." Jennie Hirsh,
"Days of the Commune: An Interview With Zoe Beloff," *Art in America,* May 3
2013, accessed December 21 2017, http://www.artinamericamagazine.com/news-
features/news/days-of-the-commune-an-interview-with-zoe-beloff-/

the vast collection of historical artifacts at the Patee House Museum that the Express can be excavated and its story summoned. A first impression of the museum suggests an institution invested in presenting visitors with a history of St. Joseph and the surrounding region as static and (literally) dusty, something to be observed and left as it is. Objects from different time periods share the same space and there is a randomness to the objects displayed that, in part, reflects the messiness of history itself. In fact, due to the wealth of historical objects the Patee House Museum stores, it appears to make all the history of the building visible at the same time, privileging access over legibility and leaving visitors to do the work of parsing out different histories, stories, and time periods on their own (fig. 67). In the museum, the Pony Express offices sit opposite an apothecary, and in the corridor that runs in between the offices and the apothecary, several buggies from different times in the nineteenth and early twentieth century are also displayed. The historic building itself is the only cohesive element in an otherwise disorienting experience, and embedded within this thick palimpsest of St. Joseph history, the Pony Express peeks out here and there. On the ground floor are the Pony Express offices, and in the main hall beyond the entrance foyer, the great Hannibal and St. Joseph railroad engine that brought mail from the east, is installed, dominating the space. On the second floor, there is the ballroom, where riders lucky enough to have the first stretch of the route between St. Joseph and Seneca, Kansas, could relax and attend dances. There is no single, dedicated space given to the Pony Express, but rather, it is dispersed throughout the museum, requiring visitors to read between the layers of history, or between the

Figs. 67-68. Leading away from the Pony Express office, the main space of the west wing of the Patee House Museum is populated with a series of buggies from various time periods; On display on the second floor of the Patee House Museum, an empty box of commemorative candies sits behind a glass case. Produced by local confectioner Chase Candies, the chocolates were made for the Express's centennial in 1960. Patee House Museum, St. Joseph, Missouri. Photos by author.

artifacts themselves to find narrative strands or singular subjects.

While this sounds as though the Patee House Museum experience is one of resonance, the sheer volume of artifacts speaks also to wonder. Filling up the rest of the museum, many of the items on display date from the mid- to the late-nineteenth century, but there are also contemporary pieces of more surprising, ephemeral quality. Some of these ephemeral objects act as links that bind together the area's past and

present. For example, one wall-mounted display case holds a box of what once contained Pony Express candies, produced for the Pony Express's centennial by St. Joseph based confectioners Chase Candies (fig. 68). Illustrating the town's historic transport and communications history, and its more contemporary manufacturing industries (Chase Candies still produces the Cherry Mash), the box visualizes the town's changing economies which meet at a moment of civic celebration. In fact, the curation of the Patee House leads to interesting connections between the many different histories represented, as well as unexpected discoveries amongst the museum's collection.

Squeezed to one side of the Hannibal and St. Joseph Railroad engine, there are a great number of other vehicles from the Civil War to the first World War eras, except for a small orange-red sports car from the 1980s. This item, we learn from its identifying label, was once owned and subsequently gifted to the museum by a very young Josh Brolin, who played Wild Bill Hickok in ABC's *The Young Riders*, first broadcast in 1989. *The Young Riders* was the last widely distributed television show completely dedicated to the subject of the Pony Express, and enjoyed modest success during a Saturday night primetime slot, outperforming previously popular shows.[23] Commemorative photographs of the actors' visit to St. Joseph, placed in the historic office space of the actual Express Company, blur historical and the fictional

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[23] Ron Miller, "'Young Riders' thriving on Saturdays after surviving Thursday shootout," *The Baltimore Sun,* Nov 20 1990, http://articles.baltimoresun.com/1990-11-20/features/1990324164_1_young-riders-young-guns-twin-peaks (Accessed 05/23/1017)

Figs. 69-70. The original Pony Express office in the Patee House Museum, St. Joseph Missouri, and photographs on display in the same room. These photos commemorate a visit made to St. Joseph in 1989 by the cast of NBC's *The Young Riders,* which was the last major television show to feature the Express as a subject. Patee House Museum, St. Joseph, Missouri. Photos by author.

representations of the Express (fig.69-70). Unlike the desks and documents on display in the Company offices, the car is a truly tangential artifact to Pony Express or even St. Joseph history. Brolin's car, and the photographs of the actors' visit commemorate not the historical Pony Express, but its imagined televisual representation, and while the photographs recorded an actual event in the history of St. Joseph, the celebration captured really focuses on the promotion of a highly-fictionalized TV show *based on* the Pony Express. Yet, despite the car not relating directly to the Express, its inclusion in the collection speaks to the Express as cultural phenomenon, and *The Young Riders'* elevation of the town and its history in the public imagination. Brolin's car can hardly be described as an object of wonder compared to the sorting desk located in the Pony Express Company's offices, although Brolin's subsequent fame might explain the museum's acceptance and exhibition of it next to the Hannibal and St. Joseph Railroad engine. Yet, all these historical artifacts remain together under the same roof, part of the same history, that is, part of the same image of an idea.

Conclusion

From its first appearance in popular culture in the 1870s to its continued presence in cinemas and on small screens through the 1950s, the Pony Express was adopted as an icon that offered escape from the effects of modernity. Positioned as a quintessential American icon, the Express offered stability to a shifting sense of national identity. Paradoxically, as an icon that once aided in the conception of societal change by drawing on myths of a great American future, the Express is now celebrated through commemorations of myths of an idealized and mystified "great"

American past. The Express's contentious and hazy history makes it a pliable and convenient subject for mythologization, and since its retirement in 1861, it has undergone considerable cultural reworking to fill gaps in its historical record. The power of its iconography has been indelible, and mass media representations of the Express have become so entwined with representations of its history, that one cannot be separated from the other, leading to the possibility that the Express has become a simulacrum, endlessly reconstructed from earlier representations.

Nowhere is this blurring of factual and fictional representations more directly tied to the celebration of national heritage than in the history museums of St. Joseph, Missouri. As spaces in which knowledge about national, regional, and cultural histories are commemorated, and specific narratives enforced as those that bring together diverse communities under a singular national identity, history museums act as guardians of memory. Museums are, therefore, inherently spaces of virtual experience as places, peoples, and events are remembered. The Pony Express, as a subject only ever known through its virtual presence, undergoes significant de-virtualization in the museums of St. Joseph, as alternative methods of writing history focusing on tactile methods of representation, and the invocation of "resonance" or "wonder" emphasize embodied intelligence and the materiality of each reconstruction. This approach, which I adopt in my visual work, emphasizes vernacular materials and handcraft, encouraging imaginative self-awareness and critical distance, presenting the Express as a phenomenon constructed by a

complicated network of both fictional and factual narratives that are inextricably

linked.

Conclusion

This dissertation set out to investigate alternate, non-mechanical forms of media, and by so doing, interrogate the ways in which media communicate and organize our understanding and perception of concepts such as national identity, history, the virtual and modernity. The overlooked and under studied Pony Express provided an example through which to discuss and explore these ideas by defamiliarizing and decoupling concepts of media from machine technology, a strategy that aided in the production of new visual work that articulated the tensions raised in the project between the actual and the virtual, the materially embodied and the machine mediated, scholarship and praxis. Anachronism came to exemplify the crux of this dissertation's broader project, leading to important questions that connected media, broadly conceived, to the idea of newness and our reliance on the idea of newness to help guide our understanding of how media work and how valuable they are as objects and systems that channel perception, and as agents of imaginative exploration.

Media have always aided in the imaginative labor required to think of the future, remember the past, or create alternatives or enhancements to the present, and I have shown how the Pony Express has, at varied times during its tenure as a messenger and as an icon, enabled each of these imaginative actions. In addition to organizing times and spaces, the real and the unreal, the Express has been a powerful exerciser of the imagination. This dissertation has traced the myths associated with the Pony Express, and has made visible the ways in which those various myths are

still present and powerful as cultural signifiers of "American-ness" that have aided in imagining identity and community. In a time when those in power wish us all to look back and recognize the "great" America that no longer exists (or *ever* existed), tracing such myths, revealing their inherent mutability, and demonstrating their intimate connection to technology and media is a crucial exercise in self-awareness. Reclamation – the idea that something lost can be reconstructed – also gets to the heart of this dissertation, and speaks to the way that media often "fill in the gaps" between people, places, time periods and ideas, and at worse, skews and distorts the information used to do the "filling in." One of the most compelling ways that media do this is by defining the parameters of what users can imagine, whether that imagining defines national borders, exemplifies behaviors and ideals of masculinity, or envisions the circulation of information in various forms and across various networks.

Similar to our own networked present, the United States in 1860 was a society that was well connected via various systems and technologies of communication. Whether embodied in wires, wheels or hooves, transportation and communication was becoming faster, and as a result the desire for information about people, places, trade and the state of the Union, was at a premium. High demand meant that each of these methods connected to and relied on other systems and technologies to enable circulation and improve efficiency. Yet if media aid in processes of identity formation, then looking at the Pony Express reveals how media connect and endorse toxic mythologies that make national identity formation not a process open to all, but

a forgone conclusion and a privilege for only a few. The Express may not resemble the networks or hardware we are now familiar with, but its anachronism and its embeddedness in some of most potent mythologies in the American popular imagination makes clear how systems of communication can become mythologized, perpetuating dominant narratives that preserve the status quo. The Express symbolizes a moment of change in the social, cultural, political and technological history of the United States, but it remains pertinent as the U.S. once more undergoes fundamental change in its political, economic, technological and cultural development.

What role are media playing in this latest change, and what are we being asked to imagine to justify the changes that are happening? What does it mean, for example, that during Mark Zuckerberg's appearance before Senate congressional leaders to explain Facebook's complicity in the Cambridge Analytica scandal – in which the private information of tens of millions of American voters was harvested in a gross breach of privacy – he was repeatedly congratulated by Senators on establishing such a powerful and successful *American* company? What do such congratulatory platitudes *do* in such a context? What narratives do they activate, pull from, or endorse?

In 1860, the prioritization of information as a form of capital contributed to new perceptions of time and space, with the Pony Express system linking the organization of national geography to data circulation and to the naturalization of information exchange based through rapid relay infrastructures. Today, as the Cambridge

Analytica/Facebook scandal illustrates, the conception of information as both financial and political capital continues to define the way we understand space – public and private space in this instance. Yet, as scholars and as educators, viewing information as capital strikes a different chord, a chord that is changing the classroom and the university as an educational institution. The questions I raise about media and information economies are questions to be asked not only of the content of this dissertation but also of its form. As the academy further develops research/praxis PhDs, and as the academic job market changes to emphasize desirable qualities in candidates that reflect knowledge and expertise spanning both praxis and scholarship, questions of newness and betterment, communication and message-bearers (which educators, scholars and artists are) raise their heads and become visible within contexts that, on the one hand suggest innovation, but on the other hand equally suggest instability and a need for survival.

My work has developed and adapted to accommodate my growth as a scholar, and just as redundancy, adaptation and the novel application of practical knowledge were some of the qualities that made the Express workable as a long-distance messenger in its historical moment, they are also qualities that I have drawn from to create new visual work and create a multimedia dissertation that straddles disciplines and forms. The artworks I have produced for this dissertation represent both older forms of media (in the peep box) and the more contemporary developments (in my use of QR Software). Yet it is the older media – those that can be made at home and do not require updating as hardware becomes obsolete and new software renders files

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unreadable – that I find most pertinent to our current political moment and most engaging as objects, reflecting this dissertation's underlying themes. Looking backwards or embracing anachronism need not represent a turn away from the present, but may in fact reflect a reaction to it. Working under the umbrella of obsolescence provides favorable circumstances for thinking about survival, not just practically but also imaginatively, and by looking at historical media – those objects, systems, and protocols that define and describe the world – potential templates may be found for how to navigate, reclaim, and author a different narrative to what is given.

Appendix

Figure 71. *Pony Players' Review* augmented reality interface map. Acrylic paint on cardboard. 93 inches x 130 inches.
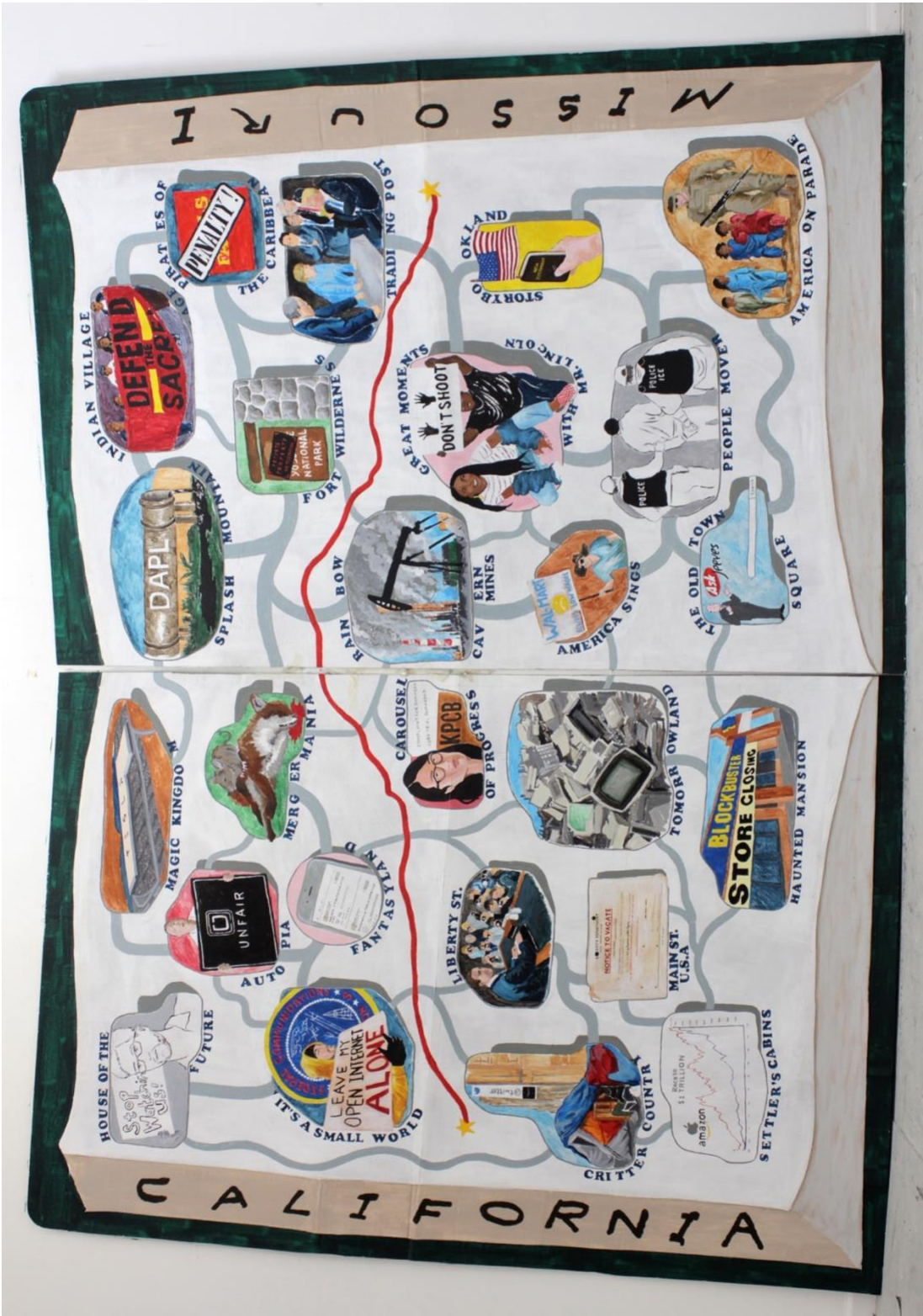
Figures 72-73. *Pony Players' Review* map detail 1, "It's a Small World" with video still from QR code accessed video.

Figures 74-75. *Pony Players' Review* detail 2, "Indian Village" with video still from QR code accessed video.
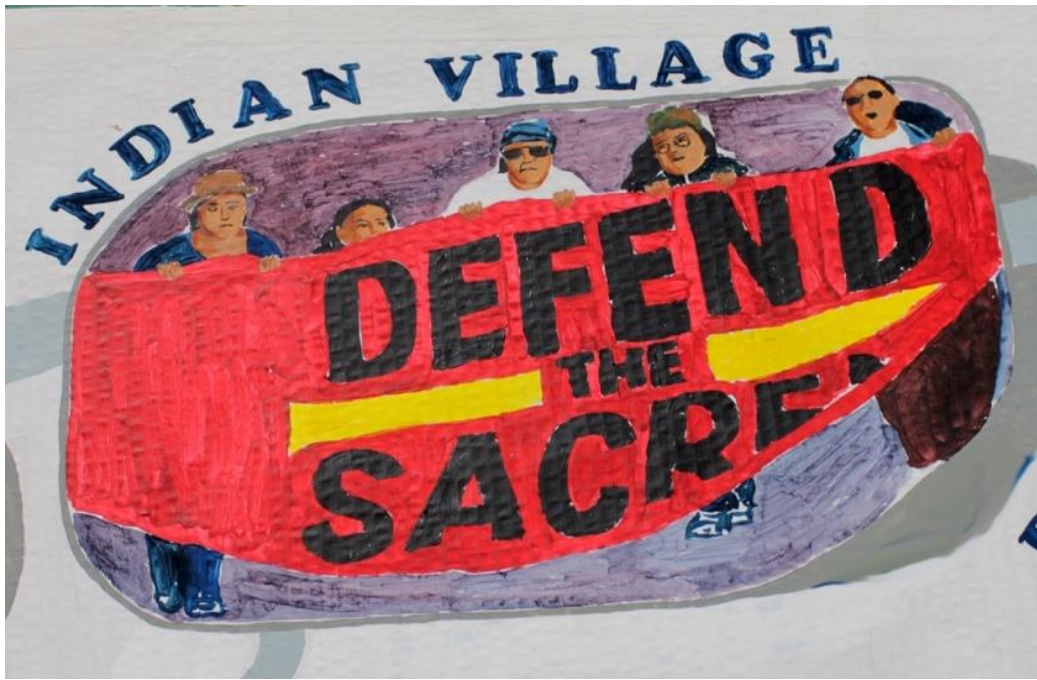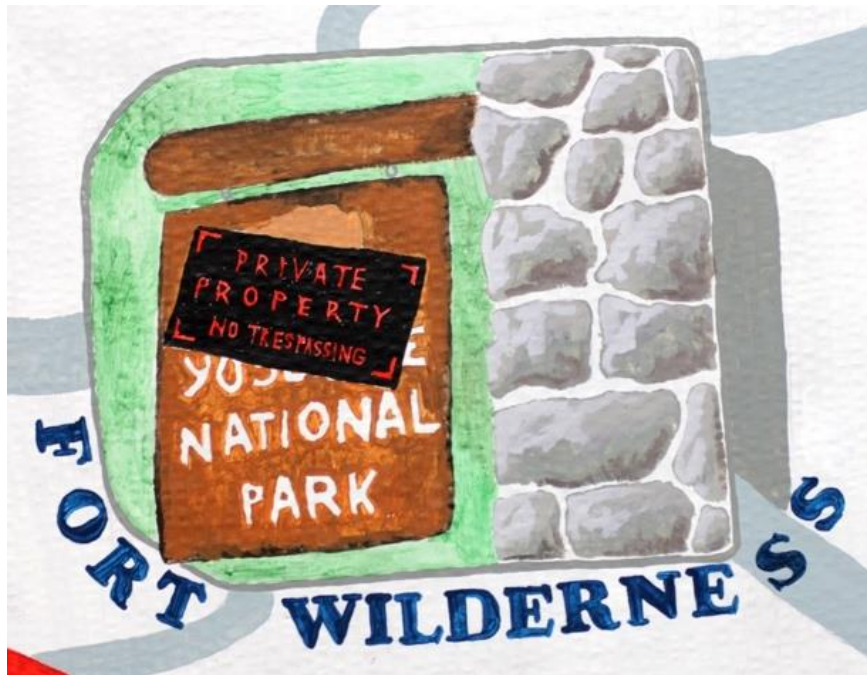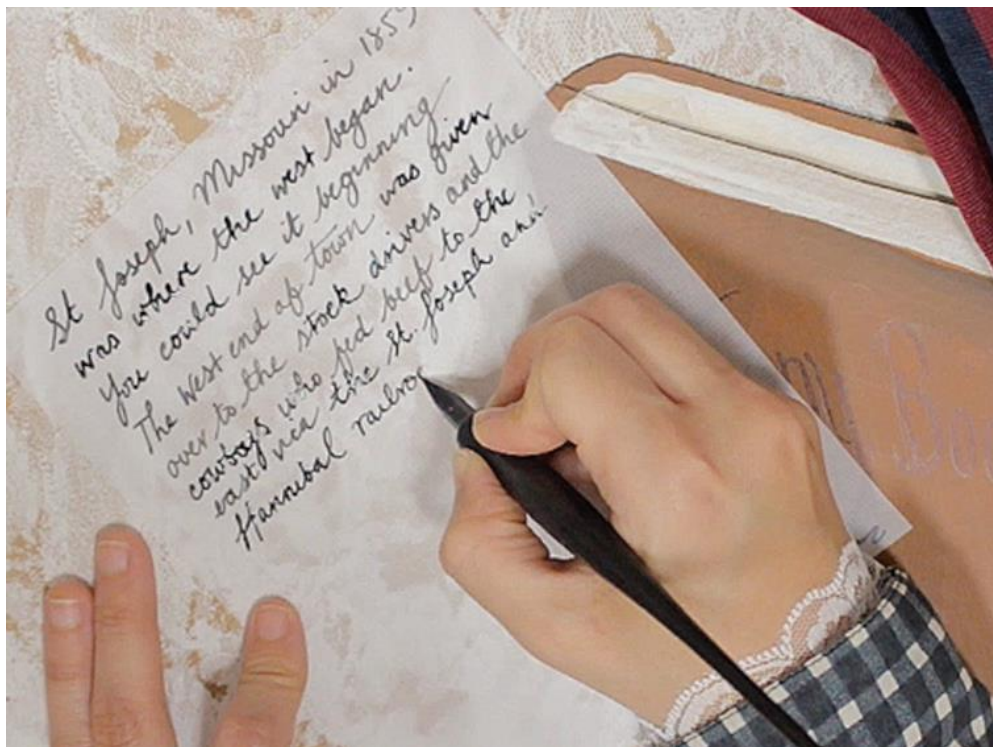
Figures 76-77. *Pony Players' Review* detail 3, "Magic Kingdom" with video still from QR code accessed video.

Figures 78-80. *Pony Players' Review* detail 4, "Merger Mania" with video still from QR code accessed video.

Figures 81-83. *Pony Players' Review* detail 5, "Pirates of the Caribbean" with video still from QR code accessed video.

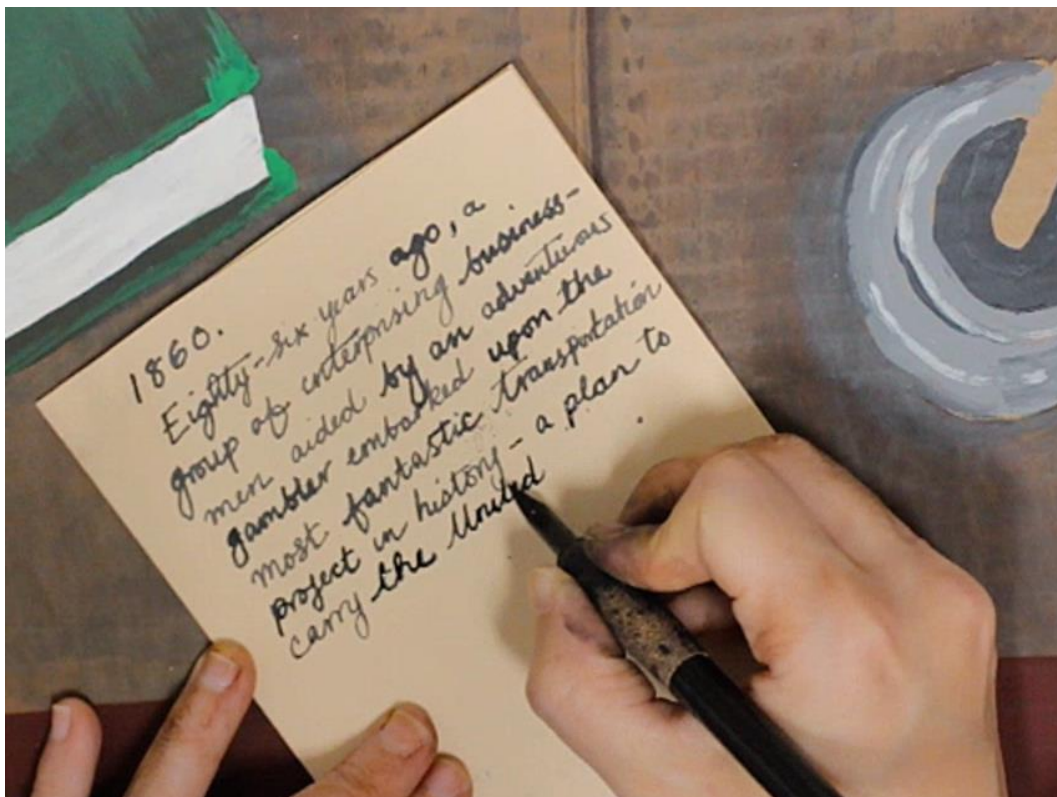Figures 84-85. *Pony Players' Review* detail 6, "America on Parade" with video still from QR code accessed video.
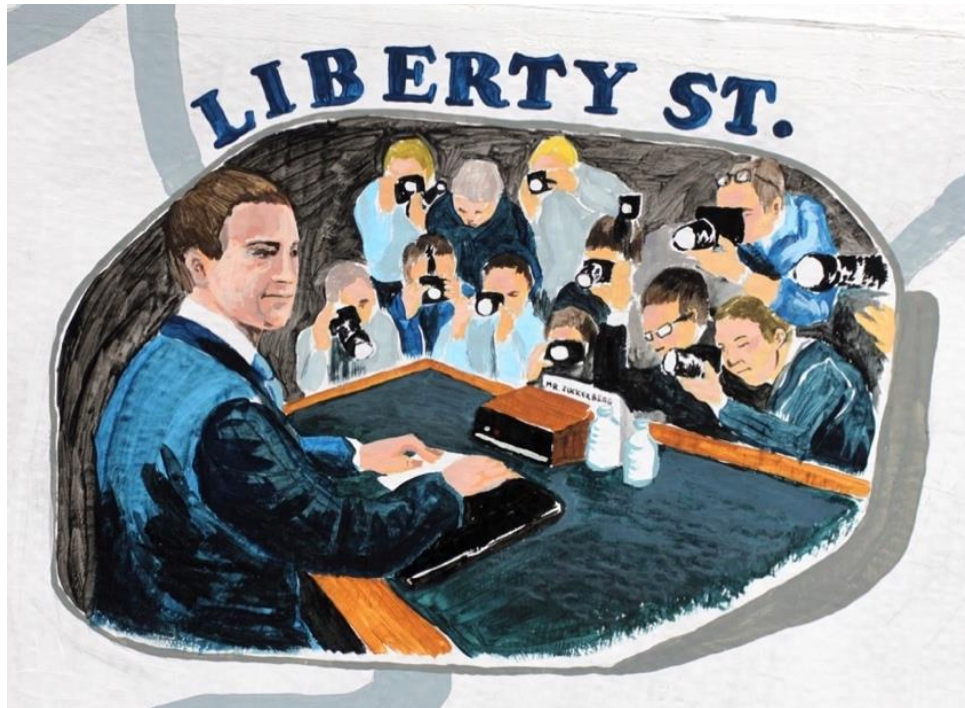
AMERICA ON PARADE

Figures 86-87. *Pony Players' Review* detail 7, "Fort Wilderness" with video still from QR code accessed video.

Figures 88-89. *Pony Players' Review* detail 8, "Trading Post" with video still from QR code accessed video.

Figures 90-91. *Pony Players' Review* detail 9, "Liberty Street" with video still from QR code accessed video.
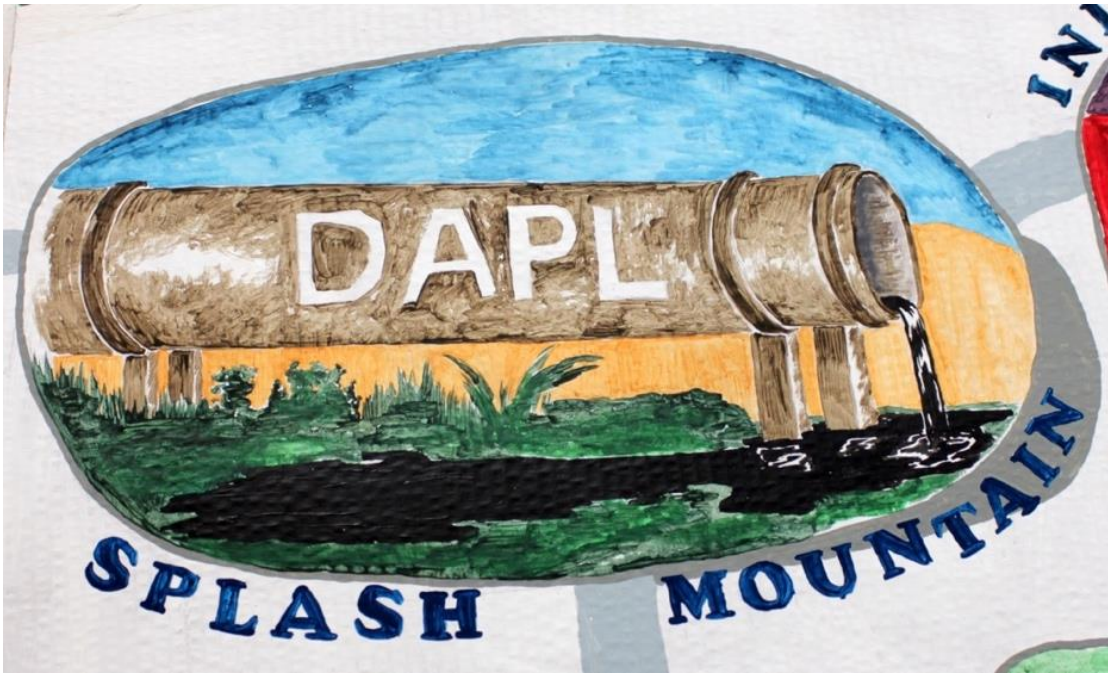
Figures 92-93. *Pony Players' Review* detail 10, "Storybookland" with video still from QR code accessed video.

Figures 94-96. *Pony Players' Review* detail 11, "House of the Future" with video still from QR code accessed video.
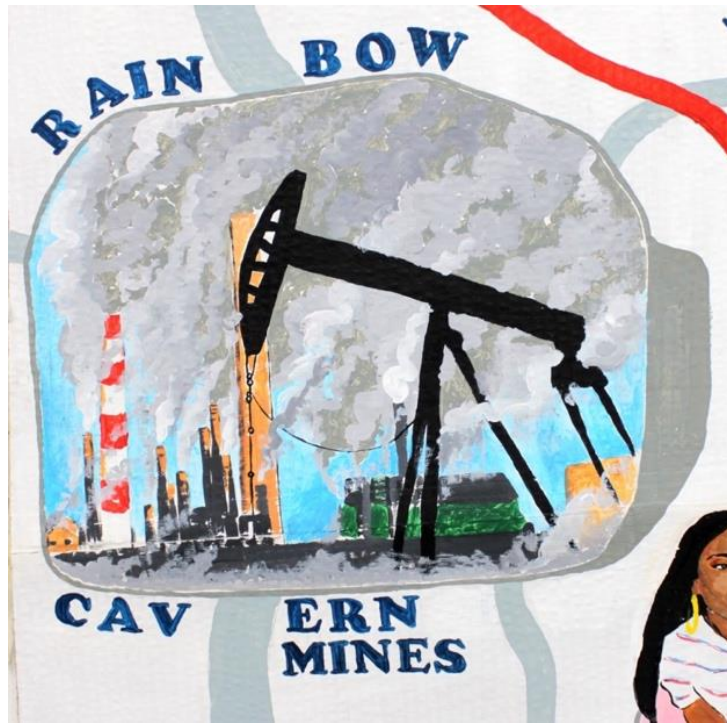
Figures 97-98. *Pony Players' Review* detail 12, "Splash Mountain" with video still from QR code accessed video.

SPLASH MOUNTAIN

GOLD DISCOVERED!
1848

Main Trail of the 49'ers'
1849

OMAHA

Figures 99-101 *Pony Players' Review* detail 13, "Tomorrowland" with video still from QR code accessed video.
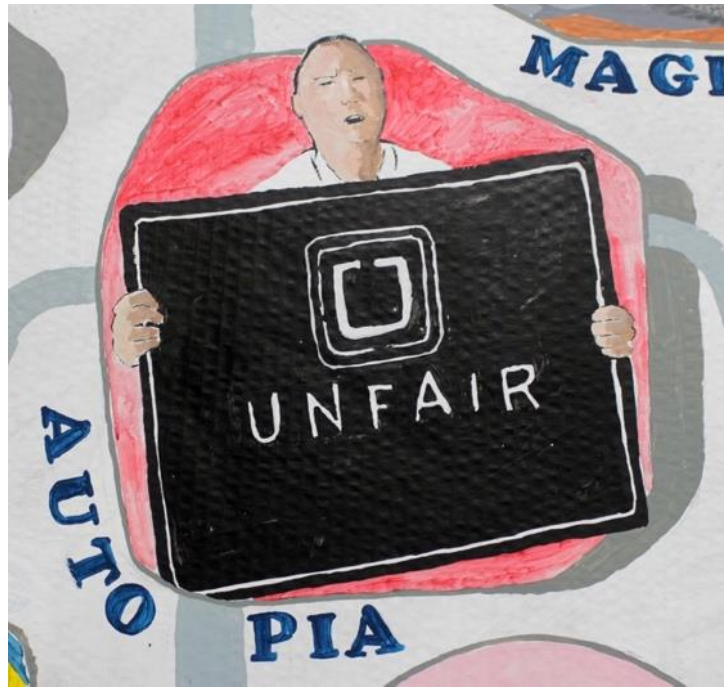
Figures 102-103 *Pony Players' Review* detail 14, "Rainbow Cavern Mines" with video still from QR code accessed video.

Figures 104-105. *Pony Players' Review* detail 15, "Main St. U.S.A" with video still from QR code accessed video.

Figures 106-107. *Pony Players' Review* detail 16, "Autopia" with video still from QR code accessed video.

Figures 108-109. *Pony Players' Review* detail 17, "Settler's Cabins" with video still from QR code accessed video.

Figures 110-111. *Pony Players' Review* detail 18, "Fantasyland" with video still from QR code accessed video.

Figures 112-114. *Pony Players' Review* detail 19, "The Old Town Square" with video still from QR code accessed video.

Figures 115-116. *Pony Players' Review* detail 20, "People Mover" with video still from QR code accessed video.

Figures 117-119. *Pony Players' Review* detail 21, "Carousel of Progress" with video still from QR code accessed video.

Figures 120-121. *Pony Players' Review* detail 22, "America Sings" with video still from QR code accessed video.
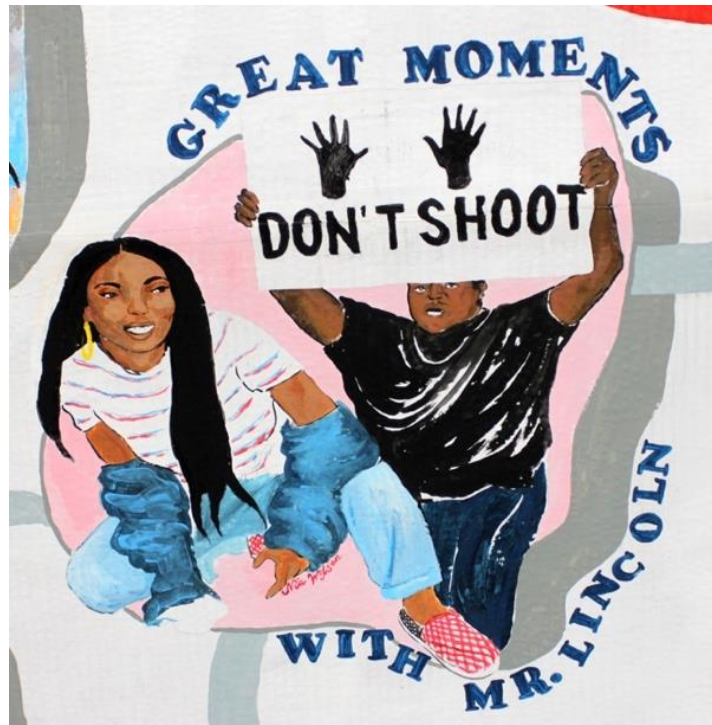
Figures 122-123. *Pony Players' Review* detail 23, "Haunted Mansion" with video still from QR code accessed video.

Figures 124-125. *Pony Players' Review* detail 24, "Critter Country" with video still from QR code accessed video.

Figures 125-126. *Pony Players' Review* detail 25, "Great Moments with Mr. Lincoln" with video still from QR code accessed video.

Figures 127-128. *Transcontinental 1860* installation. Three paper peep boxes, three Smartphones, table. Dimensions variable.

Figures 129-130. "Ruins of the Merchant's Exchange" peep box. Watercolor paper, hand-made marbled paper, ink, gouache, book board. 4.5 x 7 x 16 inches (extended), and peep view.

Figures 131-132. "Across the Continent" peep box. Watercolor paper, hand-made marbled paper, ink, gouache, book board. 4.5 x 7 x 16 inches (extended), and peep view.
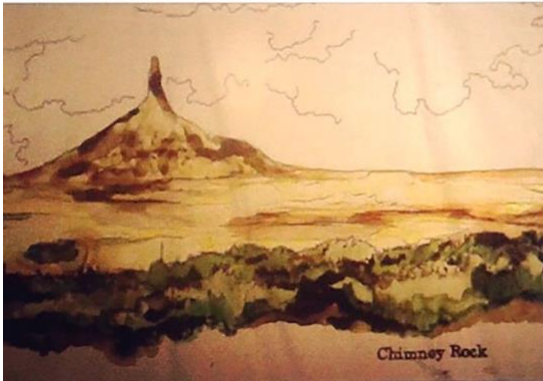
Figures 133-134. "The Old Oaken Bucket" peep box. Watercolor paper, hand-made marbled paper, ink, gouache, book board. 4.5 x 7 x 16 inches (extended), and peep view.

Figures 135-138. Stills from the digital video *Transcontinental 1860,* 2017-18, 8-minute loop, with QR video link.

Chimney Rock

Six days from New York to San Francisco via telegraph and pony express! The world moves!

ARCHIVAL COLLECTIONS

Huntington Library, San Marino, California.

Margaret Herrick Library, Los Angeles, California.

Michael and Margaret B. Harrison Western Research Center Collection. UC Davis, Davis, California.

Raymond Settle Collection. Charles F. Curry Library, William Jewell College, Independence, Missouri.

UCLA Film and TV Archives, Los Angeles, California.

Western Americana Collection. Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley, California.

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