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Como Citar | How to cite:

Smith, L. (2022). *Além das questões superficiais: Visões perturbadoras de uma paisagem ocidental americana*. *Revista De Comunicação E Linguagens*, (57), 67-85. <https://doi.org/10.34619/oijo-u6iv>

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.34619/oijo-u6iv>

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Beyond Surface Matters: Unsettling Views of a Western American Landscape

*Além das questões superficiais: Visões
perturbadoras de uma paisagem ocidental
americana*

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Abstract

Photographer Glenn Rand's (b. 1944, USA) *Nevada 1979* features a passing car on Interstate 80, an industrial site, and the Humboldt River Valley in Eureka County. This place appears through laconic title to be at once particular to a settler nation, history, and poetic imagination, as well as revelatory of no place at all. Rand's random western road trip offered him an opportunity to raise awareness of vision through kinesthetic sensation. Among many of his artistic peers, a photograph's location was an arbitrary departure point for exploring surface matters. This paper redirects the attention on the artist's formalist concerns to investigate the complex and conflicted narratives Interstate 80 implicates. It inserts this picture into the longer story of modernist formalism and American landscape photography where travel and aesthetic landscape views are indicative of settler-colonial visibility. Upon its completion in 1986, the interstate was designated as a symbol of American freedom, particularly the freedom of mobility. But to see the highway in this way depends on erasing the colonial encounter and Indigenous presence. The Humboldt River valley pictured in

Nevada 1979 is part of the larger Newe (Western Shoshone) territory in the Great Basin region. It is not an arbitrary vista; it crosses through a cultural landscape, a place that embodies Newe values, identities, and memories. Further, Interstate 80 was built on top of an historical path that guided settlers westward to California. It was also aligned with the path of the first transcontinental railroad. The environmental and social impact of settler influx into this region was significant.

By extending Rand's concerns with motion to study of the various pathways, migrations, and roadblocks encoded in that landscape, this paper unsettles this image. It counters historical blindness and artistic disengagement with land that obscured Indigenous presence and authority in the Americas.

Shoshone | Interstate 80 | photography | decolonial visuality | landscape

Keywords

Resumo

Em *Nevada* (1979), o fotógrafo Glenn Rand's (nascido em 1944, EUA) mostra um carro a passar pela autoestrada Interestadual 80, uma área industrial, e pelo vale do rio Humboldt, no Condado de Eureka. Através deste título lacônico, este lugar parece ser, ao mesmo tempo, específico de uma nação colonizadora, da sua história e imaginação poética, e revelador de nenhum lugar. A viagem aleatória de Rand para o oeste ofereceu-lhe uma oportunidade de aumentar a consciência da visão através da sensação cinestésica. Entre muitos de seus colegas artistas, a localização de uma fotografia era um ponto de partida arbitrário para explorar questões de superfície. Este artigo redireciona a atenção das preocupações formalistas do artista para investigar as narrativas complexas e conflitantes que a autoestrada Interestadual 80 implica. O artigo insere esta imagem na história mais alargada do formalismo modernista e da fotografia de paisagem americana, onde viagens e paisagens estéticas são indicativas da visualidade colonizadora.

Após a sua conclusão em 1986, a interestadual foi considerada símbolo da liberdade americana, particularmente da liberdade de mobilidade. Contudo, ver esta autoestrada desta forma implica apagar o encontro colonial e a

presença indígena. O vale do rio Humboldt retratado em *Nevada*, em 1979, faz parte do território maior dos Newe (Western Shoshone,) na região da Grande Bacia. Não é uma visão arbitrária; ele atravessa uma paisagem cultural, um lugar que incorpora valores, identidades e memórias Newe. Além disso, a Interstate 80 foi construída no topo de um caminho histórico que guiou os colonos para o oeste até a Califórnia. Também foi alinhado com o caminho da primeira ferrovia transcontinental. O impacto ambiental e social do fluxo de colonos nesta região foi significativo.

Ao alargar o interesse de Rand pela questão do movimento ao estudo dos vários caminhos, migrações e bloqueios codificados nesta paisagem, este artigo perturba [“unsettles” — descoloniza] esta imagem e contraria a cegueira histórica e o desengajamento artístico com a terra, que produziu o obscurecimento da presença e autoridade indígenas nas Américas.

Shoshone | Interstate 80 | fotografia | visualidade decolonial | paisagem

Palavras-chave

Photographer Glenn Rand's (b. 1944, USA) *Nevada 1979* features a passing car on Interstate 80, an industrial site, and the Humboldt River Valley in Eureka County. This place appears through laconic title to be at once particular to a settler nation, history, and poetic imagination, as well as revelatory of no place at all. Rand's random western road trip offered him an opportunity to raise awareness of vision through kinesthetic sensation.¹ Among many of his peers, a photograph's geographic location was an arbitrary departure point for exploring art's surface matters. Rand's picture provides an opportunity to look more closely at the highway in the western American space. This paper redirects the attention on the artist's formalist concerns to investigate the complex and conflicted narratives Interstate 80 implicates. It inserts this picture into the longer story of modernist formalism and American landscape photography where travel and aesthetic landscape views are indicative of settler-colonial visibility. By reversing the artist's signifiers for motion and stillness, as well as revealing how some of the pictured

¹ Author interview with the artist, July 2015.

forms reference historical trauma and ongoing challenges to Indigenous sovereignty, this paper counters mid-twentieth century settler artistic disengagement with and the aesthetic expropriation of land in the Americas.

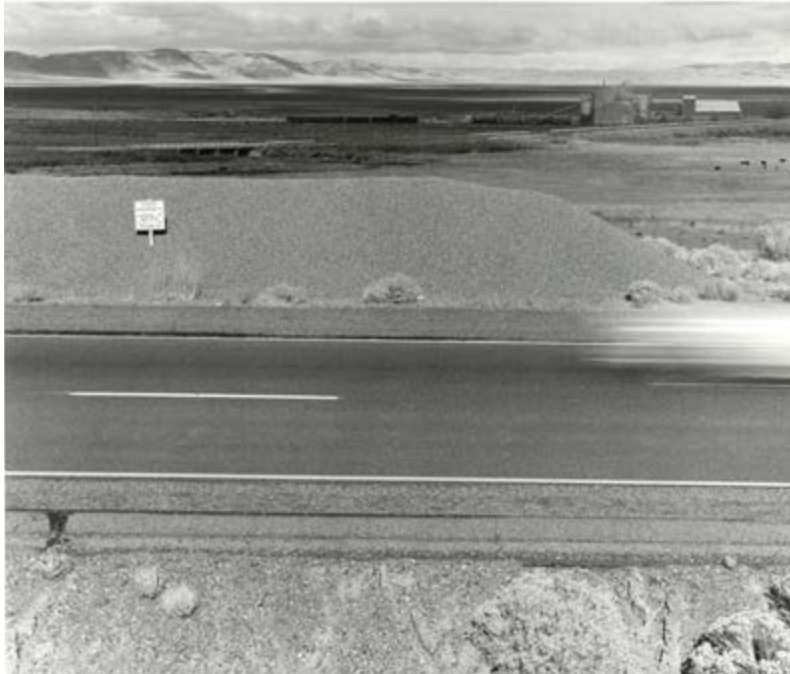


Image 1
Glenn Rand, *Nevada 1979*.
Courtesy of the Eli and Edythe
Broad Art Museum, East
Lansing, Michigan. (11x14”).

Nevada 1979

In 1979, Rand was traveling to the west coast along I-80 and impulsively stopped to photograph this view facing north, near the Dunphy exit. In a 2015 interview, he said was interested in “the spatial realities of the location. The road was going to be there regardless, but the vastness of the landscape, which adds visual weight (thus stillness), and the gravel pile with the sign that “locks” the stillness, meant that eventually a vehicle would come to create the image I wanted.”² A car did pass, and Rand caught its imprint as it moved across the middle of the nearly square frame. (Image 1) The photo became part of a series entitled *Exafference/Reafference: A Perceptual View Through Photography* that Rand developed for a 1981 exhibit at Purdue University.³

All of the *Exafference* images explore motion and stillness. During his doctoral studies in Higher Education Administration, Rand took classes in perceptual psychology. He

² Ibid.

³ More recently, *Nevada 1979* was featured in the historical section of the landscape exhibit *Trevor Paglen: The Genres* at the Eli and Edythe Broad Art Museum, March 25 — September 27, 2015. There was no information presented on the photograph or the photographer in this exhibit, and little in the museum’s files when the author began her research. <http://broadmuseum.msu.edu/exhibitions/trevor-paglen-genres>

intended to apply that knowledge to his art using photography. Rand noted, “I was interested in the moments when you feel a sensation as a result of looking and seeing motion in the field of view.”⁴ In *Nevada 1979*, the place, the northern Nevada river basin was an arbitrary formal element with which to raise a viewer’s awareness about vision.

A couple of the other nine images in *ExaffERENCE* might also be identified as landscapes, but Rand does not identify as a landscape photographer. Rather, Rand’s body of work over the last fifty years reveals a long-term engagement with formalism. *Nevada 1979* is a black and white photograph divided horizontally by three planes; the lowest plane along the south side of the highway is occupied by a narrow strip of gravel and a few plants. The highway and what appears to be a pile of gravel on its northern side occupies the middle zone. The upper third of the image shows the Humboldt River, grassland, and a road crossing the river to an industrial site and a railroad. In this way, Rand frames a balanced composition of lines, shapes, and tones.

Rand’s practice follows in the artistic vein of Robert Frank, Lee Friedlander, Stephen Shore, Ed Rusha, and Garry Winogrand, among others of this mid-to-late twentieth century generation. Many of their images captured the thrill of mobility and of individual freedom as expressed by modern American car culture and the westward road trip.⁵ Others have read their photographs as ironic metaphors of the deteriorating environmental state of the nation and the lost American dream.⁶ Like these photographers, Rand observed and recorded rural and urban scenes. They were travelers of US highways and city streets, sometimes venturing to other parts of the globe. The artists moved through the spaces, captured a moment, then journeyed onwards. In this way, Rand’s road trip might also be understood as contributing to his photographs’ visual tension between motion and stillness.

Landscape Pictures and Settler-Colonial Visuality

Rand’s thesis for *Nevada 1979* reflects a Western tradition of representing nature as static, while the human-built landscape of cars, railroads, and highways are the indicators of mobility. The photographer also relies on his invisibility and singularity as a viewing subject. These practices are not only characteristics of nineteenth-century Euro-American pictorial arts, but that of art critic Clement Greenberg’s and Museum of Modern Art curator John Szarkowski’s mid-twentieth-century modernist formalism as well. Within these traditions, artists transformed nature into an aesthetic experience by horizontally framing balanced forms from singular vantage points. This view of land was set into place on canvas or paper for perpetuity.

⁴ Author interview with the artist, July 2015.

⁵ David Company, “A Short History of the Long Road,” *The Open Road: Photography and the American Road Trip*. New York and London: Aperture, 2014, p. 16. Rand looked to them for inspiration while developing an aesthetic direction in the 1970s. Author interview with the artist, July 2015.

⁶ Kelly Dennis, “Landscape and the West: Irony and Critique in New Topographic Photography,” *Cultural Landscapes in the 21st Century*, Forum UNESCO University and Heritage 10th International Seminar, Newcastle-upon-Tyne, 11-16 April 2005. <https://citeseerx.ist.psu.edu/viewdoc/download?doi=10.1.1.494.1882&rep=rep1&type=pdf>

The stillness of nature in *Nevada 1979* is emphasized by the nearly square frame and high horizon line. Additionally, with mountains nearly pushing the sky out of the picture, the landscape is flattened, and the vista is constrained. These choices contrast with the traditional horizontal format for the landscape genre, which enhanced the illusion of great space. Rand's image might appear to mirror the deconstructive strategies used by New Topographics photographers in the 1970s to expose the mid century domestic containment of land. Photographers Robert Adams and Lewis Baltz, for example, used square frames and high horizon lines to flatten and disorganize their views. They intended to challenge Western landscape conventions. Rather than heroic emblems of expansionism and national progress, Adams' and Baltz's landscapes conveyed the debilitating force of urban sprawl.⁷

Rand, however, has denied that his *Exaffference* images had any connection to the New Topographics works. He was solely focused on the pictorial design within the frame.

In general, I didn't like much of the work. But I was aware of it of course. I wasn't thinking about it though as I was creating the photos that became the *Exaffference* exhibit. It was the environment of the day, and it was part of what was going on around me, but I had moved on from the New Topographic aesthetic to start this work⁸

Thus, in terms of a landscape art tradition, *Nevada 1979* is a product of and maintains Western nineteenth-century landscape representations and modernist art practices. Numerous scholars have connected Euro-American landscape representations to a settler-colonial visibility. W. J. T. Mitchell has argued the early landscape paintings were bound up with European imperialism. Nineteenth-century artists and photographers hunted, captured, and packaged landscapes as emblems of national identity, Manifest Destiny, and progress during the period of U.S. westward expansion. The detached and static view rendered nature into prey such as minerals and pristine real estate, but generally eliminated signs of class or racial relations.⁹ Scholar Leslie Marmon Silko (Laguna Pueblo) has written that the Euro-American viewpoint of land obscures its connections to humans and art that are significant for many Native artists: Pueblo potters, and the creators of petroglyphs and oral narratives, never

conceived of removing themselves from the earth....A portion of the territory the eye can comprehend in a single view does not correctly describe the relationship between the human being and his or her surroundings. This assumes the viewer is somehow outside or

⁷ Dennis. p. 3.

⁸ Author interview with the artist, July 2015.

⁹ W. T. J. Mitchell, "Imperial Landscape," in *Landscape and Power*, W.T. J. Mitchell, ed. The University of Chicago Press, 1994, pp. 14-17.

separate from the territory he or she surveys. Viewers are as much a part of the landscape as the boulder they stand on.¹⁰

In a Puebloan perspective, artists' works reveal their relations with their worlds. Tiffany Dang has argued that by erasing movement in landscape representations, settler authority is affirmed over those spaces. "The core tenet of colonialism is access to and control of territory.... Since at least the 15th century, the discipline of landscape has played a crucial role in European colonialism."¹¹ This is achieved artistically by erasing violent histories and ongoing fights for Indigenous self-determination. The revelation of peoples' journeys through or battles over spaces would reveal the instability of settlers' claims to possess them.

The post-World War II period presented another westward expansion, which was fueled by a "newly-mobile middleclass tourist experience."¹² Their leisurely journeys were facilitated by increased federal funding for the interstate highway system. The western landscape remained a visual locus for the expression of Euro-American individualism and freedom in the Cold War era. But landscape pictures largely continued to establish clear boundaries between art and life, as art historian Greg Foster-Rice has explored.¹³ This was especially apparent in the West Coast landscape school established by Edward Weston. In the East, John Szarkowski also encouraged modernist photographers to follow such practices. In his 1966 exhibition and catalogue, *The Photographer's Eye*. "It was the photographer's problem to see not simply the reality before him, but the still invisible picture, and to make his choice in terms of the latter."¹⁴ Weston, along with Paul Strand, Edward Steichen, and Harry Callahan are among those mid-century photographers who avoided direct transcriptions of the world and turned nature into abstract compositions. Seemingly devoid of politics, this aesthetic practice facilitated a patriarchal response to nature, as Deborah Bright has shown. Women were long excluded from the canon of Western landscape photography due to an essentialist gender theory that posits them as too intimately tied to nature and unable to "define themselves in opposition to it". By contrast, Euro-American male artists "choose to interact with nature and bend it to their will" and were therefore better equipped to represent it.¹⁵ Bright's thesis resonates with the workings of settler

¹⁰ As quoted in Ferguson, T.J., and Chip Colwell-Chanthaphonh. *History is in the Land: Multivocal Tribal Traditions in Arizona's San Pedro Valley*. Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2006, p. 29 and 30.

¹¹ Dang, Tiffany Kaewen, "Decolonizing Landscape," *Landscape Research* 46:7, p. 1008-1009.

¹² Dennis, p. 3

¹³ Greg Foster-Rice, "'Systems Everywhere': New Topographics and Art of the 1970s," in *Reframing the New Topographics*, Greg Foster-Rice and John Rohrbach, eds. Center for American Places at Columbia College Chicago, p. 57-59.

¹⁴ Quoted in Foster-Rice, "'Systems Everywhere', p. 60.

¹⁵ Deborah Bright, "Of Mother Nature and Marlboro Men: An Inquiry into the Cultural Meanings of Landscape Photography," in *The Contest of Meaning: Critical Histories of Photography*, Richard Bolton, ed. MIT Press, 1989, p. 139.

colonial visibility and the (largely male) artistic seizure of the western United States.

Given the ways this image can reinforce a colonial way of seeing, a decolonial approach to understanding Rand's picture is warranted. It will destabilize the dichotomy between nature and humans, as well as technological motion and environmental stillness. It will further undermine the artist's singular viewing position by engaging Indigenous relationships to this place and revealing the environmental impact of settler resource extraction.

Colonial Pathways

The scene pictured in *Nevada 1979* is distinct to the 1970s in many ways, but also implicates several preceding centuries of settler encroachment and Indigenous disenfranchisement. A closer look at the highway in *Nevada 1979* as a colonial pathway reveals its simultaneous operation as roadblock. The motion created by the car can also signify the historical legacy of settler technologies used to impede Indigenous sovereignty. In Rand's photo, it is the twentieth-century paved auto trail that is foregrounded. Originally called Victory Highway, Interstate 80 was part of a transcontinental highway envisioned by the Victory Highway Association in 1921. It was planned to commemorate the nation's military achievement, as well as the American forces who died in WWI. When the United States began numbering their highways in 1926, Victory Highway became US 40. Interstate 80 closely follows and frequently overlaps with the original route of Victory Highway and US 40.

President Dwight D. Eisenhower perceived highways to be critical to the advancement of the nation's economy and security during the Cold War period. For this reason, he signed the 1956 Federal Aid Highway Act to facilitate the construction of the interstate highway system. Popularly known as the National Interstate and Defense Highways Act (Public Law 84-627), this funding made the creation of I-80 possible. At its completion in 1986, Federal Highway Administrator Ray A. Barnhart published a commemorative article entitled, "America's Interstate: A Monument to Freedom!" In it he proclaimed the highway to be a symbol of American freedom, particularly the freedom of mobility.

Like other freedoms we celebrate as Americans, the freedom of mobility is exercised daily and is regarded as our national birthright...In most countries throughout the world today, we know that freedom of movement of people is severely restricted by a variety of

“roadblocks,” both literal and figurative. In the Soviet Union, for example..... But in the United States, it is a significant measure of ... “liberty” ...¹⁶

Barnhart’s perspective on the highway as a symbol of American freedoms depended on erasing the colonial encounter and the Indigenous dispossession of the land upon which the highway was built. He intentionally points to the Soviet Union as a nation who has restricted mobility but fails to acknowledge the ways the US has done so as well. The US acquisition of road space required the containment of Native peoples. While Rand relies upon the stillness of the 1979 landscape to enhance the sensation of the car’s motion, the land pictured wasn’t so inert. It had been significantly disturbed by settlers; it was a highly human-altered environment. Interstate 80 was built on top of the California Trail and next to the first transcontinental railroad. Today the highway runs about 2900 miles from San Francisco to Teaneck, New Jersey. In Nevada, it follows the path of the Humboldt River. The river curls alongside and across Interstate 80 for about 225 miles, from its headwaters in Elko County to its terminus in the desert of northwest Churchill County. Between 1840 and 1870, countless numbers of European settlers from the East began making their way westward.¹⁷ Like Rand and many of today’s highway drivers, settlers generally just passed through the Humboldt River Valley region to get somewhere else; mostly their destinations were California.

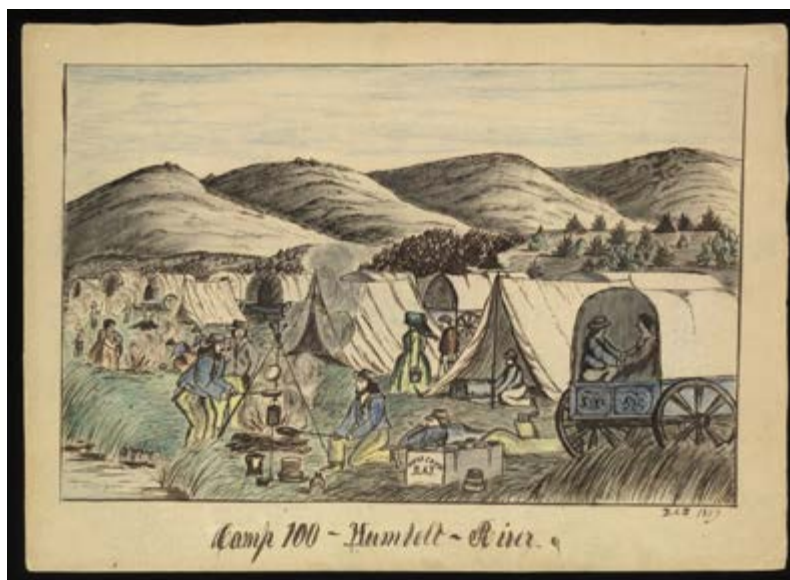


Image 2
Daniel Jenks, *Camp 100*
— *Humboldt River, western Nevada*, 1859. Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division. Washington, D.C., LC-DIG-ppmsc-04819.

¹⁶ Ray A. Barnhart, “America’s Interstate: A Monument to Freedom!” *U.S. Highways*, Federal Highway Administration (FHWA), Fall 1986 posted on Highway History (website), U.S. Department of Transportation, Federal Highway Administration, Happy 30th Anniversary National System of Interstate and Defense Highways — Interstate System — Highway History — Federal Highway Administration (dot.gov), 6/26/2017.

¹⁷ Steven J. Crum, *The Road On Which We Came: A History of the Western Shoshone*. Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1994, p. 18.

Trail rest stops beside the Humboldt River, allowed settlers to take advantage of the springs and grasslands. The ecological effect of their presence can be seen in a drawing by Daniel Jenks who emigrated westward in 1859. (Image 2) Jenks recorded his journey in a diary accompanied by illustrations. This picture of a typical settler camp, while focused on the subject of romance, inadvertently shows grasses bent down due to the weight of their tents, bodies, and wagons.¹⁸ To the left of this scene, other men and women forage for wood or other material for their fires from a fairly barren landscape; the area was well-stripped by settlers of anything resembling trees and shrubbery. Over the years, the constant use of these food resources by settlers and their stock caused their depletion and resulted in famine for the Indigenous people in the area, the Newe (Western Shoshone). By the 1850s, the route was reduced to dust, having been stomped on weekly by thousands of iron-clad hooves and wagon wheels.¹⁹

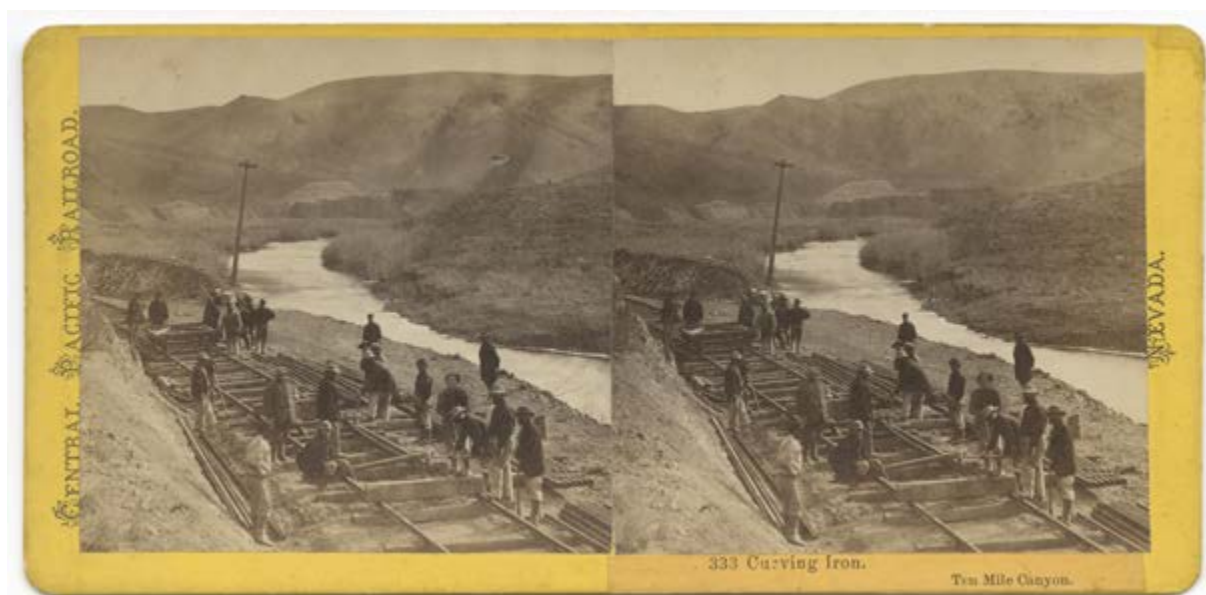


Image 3

Alfred A. Hart, Curving Iron. Ten Mile Canyon. #333, c. 1863.
Courtesy of the California History Room, California State
Library, Sacramento, California.

¹⁸ Sara Duke, "Journals of a Pioneer Argonaut, Daniel Jenks" (transcript of video presentation), Journeys & Crossing webcast, Library of Congress <https://www.loc.gov/rr/program/journey/jenks-transcript.html>, July 20, 2010. The drawing shows several tents and covered wagons encamped on the banks of the Humboldt River in western Nevada. Both women and men prepare food over open fires, haul water, and prepare bedding. In the foreground, inside a covered wagon, a couple courts. Jenks and his party reached here on Friday, July 22, 1859. <https://www.loc.gov/resource/ppmsc.04819/>

¹⁹ Crum, p. 17-18; Harold Curran, *Fearful Crossing: The Central Overland Trail Through Nevada*. Reno, NV: Great Basin Press, 1982, p. 43 and 45; Richard O. Clemmer, "Pristine Aborigines or Victims of Progress?: The Western Shoshone in the Anthropological Imagination," *Current Anthropology* 50(6), December 2009, pp. 858-859.

Further changes to the Humboldt River region were made by the building of the railroad. In 1868, the Central Pacific began laying tracks through Nevada. This was the eastward leg of the first transcontinental railroad; the Nevada section followed the Humboldt River. Euro-American photographer Alfred Hart documented this construction. One of his stereographs featuring a crew laying track along the river, provides insight into the massive amounts of timber, and thus tree removal, railroad building required. Additionally, Hart's photo illustrates some of the necessary destruction of landforms crews caused through the creation of cuts and tunnels. Hart obscured that damage by placing his camera high, allowing the railroad to mirror the river's passage across the land. From the bottom left-hand corner, the railway reaches out and invites viewers to advance into the space. The railroad curves through the landscape like a natural waterway, while the Humboldt River is pushed to the background. In this way, Hart privileges the modern mode of transportation to move viewers through the landscape and toward the future.

As the principal photographer for the Central Pacific Railroad's construction, Hart likely intended his images of railroad building to connote Western civilization's technological ingenuity. Those who employed him were interested in using photographs to enhance public enthusiasm for their venture. Promotional brochures and guidebooks commonly assured potential passengers of their safety in traveling through wild terrain, as well as applauded the U.S. conquest of nature.²⁰ Non-Native rail travelers' security from Native peoples was implied if not overtly stated. If Native Americans appeared in the pictures or texts, they commonly served as docile emblems of the past or unappealing beggars. Such descriptions, for example, appear in George Crofutt's *New Overland Tourist and Pacific Coast Guide* (1878-79):

At this station [Elko, Nevada]—and almost every one to the westward—can be seen representatives of the Shoshone or Piute {sic} Indians, who come around the cars to beg. Any person who wishes to tell a big “whopper” would say, they are clean, neatly dressed, “child-like and bland,” and perfumed with the choicest attar of roses, but an old plainsman would reverse the saying in terms more expressive than elegant.²¹

Crofutt's demeaning depiction, besides impeding visibility to the destruction by settlers and railroads on Shoshone traditional economies, further justifies US expansionism.

²⁰ Nancy K. Anderson, “The Kiss of Enterprise,” in *The West as America: Reinterpreting Images of the Frontier, 1820-1920*, William Truettner, ed. Washington, D. C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1991, p. 241, 265-266.

²¹ Crofutt, George A. *Crofutt's New Overland Tourist, and Pacific Coast Guide*. Denver, Col: The Overland Publishing Company, 1883, p. 127, doi: <https://doi.org/10.5479/sil.109290.39088002464121>



Image 4

PC0002, Alfred A. Hart Photograph Collection, Box 1, #323. Shoshone Indians Looking At Locomotive On Desert, c. 1863-1869. Courtesy of the Department of Special Collections, Stanford University Libraries.

Post-Civil War period American artists and photographers like Alfred Hart were indubitably aware of the symbolic potential of the American West and trains to connote national power and white privilege. As is underscored in John Gast's 1872 painting, *American Progress*, the Nation's future passage depended on technological progress and driving the perceived unsophisticated Natives out. A similar message can be inferred by Hart's choice to document a group of informally posed Shoshone people against a rigid and monumental steam engine. (Image 4)

The Union Pacific railcars resting in the upper third of Rand's *Nevada 1979* also creates an historical juxtaposition of transportation modes. The speed of the most advanced vehicle in the foreground, the car, is enhanced by the arrested motion of the older machine. A hundred years since *American Progress* however, Native peoples are nowhere to be seen in Rand's frame. It's as if their lack of cultivation to which Crofutt's description alludes finally caused them to disappear. Of course, Rand didn't intend to frame a picture of transit history or national advancement (as Gast did), nor did he purposely exclude Newe people. But nonetheless, *Nevada 1979* was a figment of settler visuality just as Gast's and Crofutt's was, as has been shown.

The Newe and a Relational Landscape

How might *Nevada 1979* be unsettled? One way is to reverse the signs Rand intended to serve for motion and stillness. The paper has already examined the ways US roadways can be read as barriers. The car's motion, while blurred, can also be seen as fixed by the camera's lens. It is also possible to re-envision the expanse of landscape as vibrant, rather than as "weighted" or energetically hindered. The water and land pathways pictured in *Nevada 1979* cross through Western Shoshone (Newe) homelands and provided (and still do) access to important subsistence resources. The routes cross through a place that invokes Newe values, identities, and memories. Their lands extended from Death Valley to northwestern Utah.

Numerous scholars have observed the ways that Indigenous peoples conceptualize landscape culturally through verbal discourse. "The place names and stories associated with landscapes serve as metaphors that both influence how people view themselves and affect patterns of social action."²² T. J. Ferguson and Chip Colwell-Chanthaphonh have recently summarized much of the literature on Native American landscapes. They focus on land as history. It not only physically sustains(ed) the community, but further maintains(ed) a sense of unity and belonging within it. It evokes Indigenous origins, migrations, and commemorates past events. Native American landscapes connect their past with the present, time with space, and their ancestors with living people. "Learning about the past by moving through and experiencing a landscape reproduces the connection between the ancestral past and the land itself."²³ People are relational to the land, not exterior to it. In this perspective, land is dynamic and fluid, not a static form.

The historical and social significance of the Newe lands to their identity has been documented by Shoshone historian Steven J. Crum. This is high desert country; the area averages 5-10 inches of rain annually. The most visible vegetation in the northern region is sagebrush; juniper and pinyon pine trees are abundant at higher elevations. Up to the mid-nineteenth century, a well-watered area like along the Humboldt River was a source for grass seeds and fish, among other useful materials and foods. They hunted and gathered a wide variety of foods but were careful amidst such a precarious ecosystem not to exhaust a resource. By far, the most important food was the pine nut. Families met in the fall to harvest it. Ceremonies conducted before and after the harvest expressed appreciation for another year's abundance.

Crum has further documented the way the landscape embodies Newe origins:

According to their oral tradition, the Newe were placed in their homeland by the Creator (Uteen Taikwahni),... Once placed on the land, two ... women instructed the coyote to carry a large, pitched water basket with him on his journey into the Basin area. Coyote was

²² See "Landscapes as History and Sites as Monuments," in Ferguson and Colwell-Chanthaphonh, pp. 27-30.

²³ Ibid, p. 31.

specifically told not to open the lid. Moved by irrepressible curiosity, he periodically opened the basket during his trip. The beings concealed inside jumped out here and there. The Newe believe this explains why they live over a large area.²⁴

Besides their emergence then, the story clarifies why the Newe historically lived in small family groups, each inhabiting a particular place over a wide range of what is now Nevada. These relationships were guided by connections to the land.

Treaties and Land Claims

Another method for unsettling colonial visibility in *Nevada 1979*, as inspired by Tiffany Dang's above-mentioned thesis, is to reveal the historical and ongoing battles for Indigenous self-determination related to the pictured space. The US government began formally disrupting Newe land relations and authority when they secured legal access to build travel routes. Congress passed the Pacific Railway Act in 1862 to pave the way for the transcontinental railroad. Fort Ruby was built this same year by the U.S. Army to stem Shoshone raids on the Pony Express and settler caravans. Faced with starvation, the Newe often resorted to raiding the increasing number of white settlements for provisions. Most of these conflicts took place along the Humboldt River. Fort Ruby was staffed by Colonel Patrick Connor who notably gave his troops the order to hunt down the Newe and shoot them indiscriminately.²⁵ The following year, the Nevada Newe agreed to the Ruby Valley Treaty to bring an end to conflicts with settlers and the military. The government's intention was to turn the Newe into farmers and cattlemen. The treaty permitted "whites to build military forts, mail stations and settlements on [Newe] lands. [It] granted whites the right to explore and extract mineral wealth from their lands. The Shoshones 'defined' the area of their territory, ... and consented to move to reservations established within their treaty territory."²⁶ But, according to many sources, they never gave up title to their lands.

In 1979, when Glenn Rand took his picture, the government ruled that the Western Shoshone had lost title to their land in the 1863 Ruby Valley Treaty. This ruling was the culmination of decades of dispute over an estimated twenty-four million acres outlined in the treaty as Western Shoshone territory. Beginning in 1946 when President Truman signed the Indian Claims Commission Act, tribes could begin suing the federal government for past injustices. Some Newe groups hired lawyers to pursue a cash settlement for Ruby Valley treaty territory, others were against doing this. The latter groups claimed Western Shoshone lands outlined in the 1863 treaty had never legally

²⁴ Crum, p. 1.

²⁵ Ibid, p. 23 and Clemmer p. 860.

²⁶ All the Basin Newe became known as the "Western Bands of Shoshone" or "Western Shoshones" because of the Ruby Valley Treaty. The treaty did not include those Shoshone living in central and southern Nevada, or those living in eastern California. Crum, p. 25 and 26.

passed into government hands; therefore, there were no grounds to pursue a cash settlement. After the 1979 decision, the government authorized the Clerk of the Court of Claims to set up an account for \$26 million in compensation. Most Shoshones rejected the payment because their land had never been and still wasn't for sale. Subsequent appeals in 1980 and 1985 indicated that whereas they had not lost title in 1863, or in subsequent years, they lost it with the 1979 ruling.²⁷



Image 5
Nevada 1979, detail.

Turning to the road sign in the upper left of Rand's picture, there stands another seemingly innocuous element. But the sign's text further implicates more ways the settler-government imposed itself on Indigenous lands, as well as introduced hazards to human and environmental health. It reads, "State Property: Removal of Material from Right of Way Prohibited". It's not clear what exact material the sign references. Though through word and form, it sets up a roadblock, an arrestive moment in the scene, as well as to movement within this Newe landscape. The sign was another static element

²⁷ Crum, p. 181-183. Due to the refusal of the Nation to accept the settlement, the money sat in an account undisturbed until the Western Shoshone Claims Distribution Act of 2004 became law, authorizing payment. Today many Shoshone have received checks from this fund; some have still refused to accept payment. Kathie Taylor, The Dann Sisters: Searching for Reciprocity for the Western Shoshone," *Nevada Magazine*, Nov-Dec 2015. <https://nevadamagazine.com/issue/november-december-2015/7212/>

Rand picked out to contrast to the blurred white form of a car at the right. It also works to direct the viewer's eye back into the space along a diagonal line. The structure sitting diagonal to the sign, in the upper righthand corner of Rand's picture is Dunphy Mill, a barite crushing facility.

It's possible that the material alongside the highway is barite gravel. Barite is a mineral and today is primarily used in oil and gas well drilling to control hole pressure. It is mined thirty-five miles north of Dunphy. It is trucked to the mill to be crushed, and "either shipped in crushed form or milled into powder." As the baryte is processed, some of the crushed gravel is stockpiled and used as road base material.²⁸ Historically, baryte was used to produce white lead paints. The mill was built in the 1960s by NL (National Lead) Industries, the lead smelting company who created Dutch Boy titanium paints. Prior to this, the barite had been shipped to Modesto, California to be ground. In 1977, the Consumer Product Safety Commission issued its ban on lead-containing paints. Three years later, just a year after Rand stopped along I-80, NL Industries sold off the Dutch Boy brand. It sold the Dunphy Mill in 1993 but continues to encounter lawsuits over its lead paints. Today the mine and mill are operated by Halliburton Energy Services. Founded in 1919, the multinational petroleum corporation that has been involved in numerous political and environmental controversies since at least the 1990s. In this light, the highway sign in *Nevada 1979*, declares the presence of US control over the space and natural resources amid and beyond its position in the picture. From Rand's singular viewpoint, the sign, like a scare eye, reinforces and returns the settler-colonial gaze.

Corporate mining continues in the 21st century all over Nevada, and so does over a century of Shoshone legal battles. Some mining projects have threatened Shoshone gravesites, disturbed ritual grounds, harmed important water sources, and reduced access to pine nuts. The Ruby Valley treaty allowed settlers to mine, cut timber, and extract other natural resources but, as of 2018, no royalties have ever been paid to the Shoshone.²⁹ According to Peter D'Errico, a consulting attorney on Indigenous issues,

The U.S. Bureau of Land Management has run roughshod over Western Shoshone lands, permitting international mining corporations to expand operations, without any input from or compensation to the original inhabitants of the land. Litigation has, to date, not been successful.... Extraction of resources without regard to community integrity is a hallmark of colonialism. It continues in the guise of international business.³⁰

²⁸ Daniel L. Turner, "Rossi Mine — Barite, Elko County, Nevada," and "Dunphy, Eureka County, Nevada" *Elko County Rose Garden*, Elko Rose Garden Association, 2000-2005. Rossi Mine — Barite, Elko County, Nevada (schopine.com) and Dunphy, Eureka County, Nevada (schopine.com)

²⁹ "Western Shoshone Nation," *Earthworks.org*, https://www.earthworks.org/stories/western_shoshone_nation/

³⁰ Peter d'Errico, "Gold Mining Doesn't Glitter," *Indian Country Today*, updated: September 12, 2018 (original: November 18, 2012) Gold Mining Doesn't Glitter — ICT (indiancountrytoday.com).

While Glenn Rand intended for the sign to “lock the stillness” of the visual space in *Nevada 1979*, the knowledge of the ongoing Western Shoshone resistance to resource extraction renders this form unstable.

By the 1970s, rather than symbols of American freedoms, highways more frequently signified conflicted American dreams. It became clearer that more roads led to more cars and, according to curator David Company, urban congestion and its environmental impact could no longer be ignored. Studies of the safety of American highways brought new attention to roads as greater threats to American lives than the Vietnam war.³¹ The damage of national roads and settler pathways to Indigenous peoples’ lives has a much longer legacy. To Glenn Rand in 1979, the northern Nevada river basin and the highway were arbitrary formal elements with which to raise a viewer’s awareness about vision. This paper extended Rand’s metaphors of motion and stillness to the study of the various settler-colonial pathways, migrations, and roadblocks seen and encoded in that landscape. It reversed the signs. It subverted a formalist blindness to and disengagement with the pictured place. By reinvesting Rand’s landscape with Indigenous cultural meaning and memory, their presence and authority were made visible. The violence of the colonial encounter related to the pictured space and the associated legacy of Indigenous self-determination were recognized. This destabilized settler aesthetic claims to and expropriation of this western landscape. To nurture more just and sustainable relationships with each other and the planet, a decolonial visuality compels us to move beyond the surface matters of vision.

³¹ Company p. 29.

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Received Recebido: 2022-09-29

Accepted Aceite: 2022-02-16

DOI <https://doi.org/10.34619/oijo-u6iv>