

Project Reflection – How to Build a World: Stereoscopes, Tourism, and Land in Zion National
Park
Emma Duggleby

In partial fulfillment of a Bachelor of Arts Degree in Environmental Analysis and Media Studies,
2022-23 academic year, Scripps College, Claremont, California

Readers:
Carlin Wing
Char Miller

Content and Context

My project, at its core, questions how representations of the environment and land impact how we relate to and live in it. Through a set of stereographs (think 19th century VR) depicting Zion National Park, this project specifically looks at how apparently three-dimensional images frame the land they depict and how these frameworks have supported certain colonial and extractivist values over others. This project began by engaging how landscape, especially the desert, is imagined. From here, I specifically narrowed in on Zion National Park as the site for a case study on the links between these many use-based approaches to land and the realities of its physical landscape. The structures built around the park, too, normalize these values through a reliance on tourism and entertainment, pushing them as unquestioned truth rather than made over time. These historical depictions have ultimately continued to perpetuate an image of land as valuable due to its extractive use to humans, particularly colonial settlers.

This project particularly focuses on the apparatus of the stereoscope for three main reasons. One, it reveals what characteristics people were historically looking for when they gazed at land and depictions of land. Often, they cited how the perception of depth made the landscape in the image seem more “real.” Two, stereoscopes are mostly regarded as a form of mass media. This allowed the landscape they depicted to come to the viewer rather than the viewer going to the landscape, changing the dynamics of the interaction. In addition, this allowed viewers abroad to fashion the landscape within their own ideals rather than the realities of actually being in a space. And three, they are formatted like a tour. This arrangement reframes these images, and the colonial perceptions of land they carry, as consumable entertainment; viewers are told exactly how to see the land and what histories to find there. Entertainment also

represents a sphere where these ideals become part of daily habits of consumption and naturalized as such. All in all, the stereoscope, with its call to mass media entertainment and tourism, structure landscape within colonial myths. These imaginaries are forwarded as natural and innate, rather than built and continually retold.

I am working on this project as a personal reminder that there are always other stories of human-land relationships that can be told—ones not based in extractivism and colonial histories. It is a response to a lot of the “doomer” mentality I’ve felt as a method of coping with the seeming inability to address climate and environmental issues. This isn’t to say that these issues aren’t serious and pressing, but that continually repeating how nothing can be done seems unhelpful at best. This project is hopefully a personal call to remember how these use-based and colonial structures have been built up – not to be naïve about their harm and violence – but to figure out how to poke holes in their “all-powerful” narratives. It is also perhaps a pitch for the role media studies could take in environmental issues, and, at its core, why the stories we tell ourselves about the land and ecosystems around us matter. In addition, while this project focuses more on tearing down and exposing this capital-colonial story itself, I hope that it does so as a way to open up space for many other stories to be told instead. Hopefully, by looking at how narratives about our environments have been built, my project can be just one method of many through which to reframe environmental issues as *able to be* addressed.

This project consists of three pieces. The first is a VR 360° video made in Unreal Engine 5. It depicts a fictional tourist view in Zion National Park as if it were on Mars. This scene appropriates staples of current day and early 20th Century tourism: a bus stop, informational signs about the “view,” a vending machine, a guidebook, and a ton of advertisements. By placing these items in front of the view, I hope to represent the number of ways capital and settler values

continue to pervade our relationships to “natural” landscape, even while we are there. The space contains signs advertising other locations and products, contextualizing the tourist view as just another place sold for consumption. In addition, the landscape is placed on a fictional future Mars, hopefully as a way to bring attention to the ways historical devaluations of desert lands based on a colonial ethic of utility continue to pervade current views of land, even something so seemingly futuristic as discussions around settlement of Mars. The rhetoric used also often nods heavily to science fiction, another parallel I am interested in drawing between a colonial story forwarded as truth and the presumed fiction of sci-fi. To further reveal the fiction in how we discuss and look at land, I aim to make true immersion in this scene awkward, so the signs obscure the view and viewers are always aware of the gallery space. This too hopefully draws attention to the many outside factors that dictate how people relate to and view their environments.

The second piece is a guidebook describing the VR scene. It walks viewers through a specifically use-based way of viewing this landscape, introducing fictional histories, corporations, and stories to the VR scene. It takes its inspiration from multiple early 1900s guidebooks of Zion National Park and appropriates both the language and the many advertisements they are using to sell the landscape to tourists. These “vintage” ways of presenting a landscape hopefully draw attention to often how literary these ways of constructing and relating to place are. In addition, I hope this strangely historical framing device reveals how unnaturally this rhetoric frames the land it is projected onto and gives people pause on how our own language takes after the same extractivist values in these pages. This guidebook is also a physical object in the gallery, requiring viewers to take off the VR headset if they want to read it. This physicality, then, means that if viewers want to follow the tourist narrative and see what the

guide is pointing out, they must continually step out of the landscape and recognize its status as a VR simulation.

The third piece is a select number of the original stereograph images that I have drawn over. Each image contains a colorful illustration of a story about Mars I have come across in my research, such as: a site for hostile alien life, an ancient ocean, a site to possibly find water, a place to settle, a place to transform, or a place to conquer. In these illustrations, each story becomes equally as plausible as the other, demonstrating the choice we have to pick a different story than one forwarded by an extractive settler-colonialism. The current rhetoric of land and Mars as a place for extraction is not treated as the most “natural” or ideal, but only one of many choices. This layering therefore hopefully disrupts the “naturalness” of the older stereoscope image and draws attention to how it too has been framed along certain ideological lines to tell a specific story. The stereo images therefore depict just one way desert land has been imagined among the many other versions of these stories, even if they seem more “real” than my drawn illustrations.

Theory

This project draws on many media and environmental theories, though I will only introduce those that are central to my thesis here. The first media theory, proposed by Walter Benjamin in *the Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproductions*, holds that mass media allows the image of a place to be taken from its physical context and transported to the viewer directly. An audience can therefore view an object outside of its direct context and place it in an environment it otherwise could not have been in. My project specifically relies on mass media’s ability to alter this sense of distance due to how photographic representations of land remove the

viewer from the physical place. This embodied sense of being in a space becomes crucial due to how the stereoscope and VR both attempt to recreate the same appearance of all-encompassing depth. This project also speaks to John Urry's *Tourist Gaze*, which documents the certain positionality that being a tourist creates. He explains that not only does tourism relate to some sense of "going away" to someplace that is unlike the viewer's daily life, it also relies on there already being some cultural value ascribed to the view. For my project, then, Urry's theory supports how tourism and entertainment reify pre-existing capital-colonial values in these landscapes rather than travellers independently going there for a sense of "home" or non-extractive relationality. These views, therefore, become objects of consumption, packaged in a pre-existing rhetoric of value and use. Jonathan Crary's examination of the stereoscope as a technology deeply entwined with modernity further connects the technology's representations of land with their specifically 3D nature. He asserts that consumers pointed toward the stereoscope's peculiarities as evidence of their images being more "real" or "tangible." Finally, Lisa Gitleman's *Always Already New* recognizes how what we often call "new media" are grounded in long histories. VR, in this sense, is not the new technology that many celebrate but has its roots in the 1800s stereoscope (and most probably even longer histories of visual culture). This complication of "newness" is critical to my project, as I am looking to warn about the pre-existing values embedded in these "cutting edge" 3D technologies.

I also look to environmental theory to discuss the nature of landscape and its representation in current media. Nicholas Mirzoeff serves as one important theoretical basis for discussions of landscape and environmental issues in media studies. His work foundationally speaks to how environmental theory fits into core tenants of visual culture, such as aesthetics, performance, and the power structures implicated by sight. In my project, his work bridges the

gap between the colonial roots of environmental histories and the current literature in media studies. Another environmentally rooted theory I speak to is Rob Nixon's idea of *Slow Violence*. This concept explains that forms of environmental violence often occur over longer time scales, which makes them difficult to perceive or represent. For this project, these violences are represented in media's ability to carry ideas and images forward through time. I also want to mention William Cronon's work examining how US culture and policy often separates wilderness and nature from human works and built environments. It is this definition of nature as separate from the human that much of the capital-colonial narrative of land I am analysing relies on. If nature is regarded as separate, then it becomes something that people can travel to, consume, then return to "normal" life. Finally, bridging a divide between the environment and historical forms of media, Rebecca Solnit's *River of Shadows* examines how technology physically intersects with US Western places, not just in its representation, but in its apparatus as well. Her discussion of the railroad is particularly relevant for my project, as it examines how technologies of movement in the West impacted how people physically moved through land.

In the end, I wanted to use these theories to reveal how the views and relationships tourism and media enable are constructed. Again, I wish to point toward the wider stories we tell about our environments and our relationships to them, and where these have been built up.

Genre, Medium, and Influences

By combining environmental theory with media theory, I hope this project fits in with current trends in media practice that focus on human relationships with the environment. This project relates to other forms of new media and multimedia practice by combining multiple mediums, such as illustration and 3D compositing, into a piece.

Multiple artists and works have informed this project. One has notably been Oliver Laric's *Versions*. In it, he compares media and art across temporal and spatial scales to highlight the similarities and collective nature of artmaking. He specifically incorporates mass media and entertainment, bringing the piece out of the realm of "high art" into the everyday experience of artistic expression. By focusing on the stereoscope and VR, I hope to evoke this same side-by-side comparison of the repetitions in media production. In addition, I have looked to both Patrick Nagatani and Joan Fontcuberta for their works on the American West and 1950s American culture as a whole. Nagatani's *Nuclear Enchantment* collages and layers images over each other to draw connections across what seem to be distinct historical moments, similar to Laric's work. These seemingly disjointed layers form a cohesive scene examining the role of nuclear politics and tests in New Mexican landscapes and lives. I am interested in engaging this blending of historical time periods to directly compare their often hidden similarities in my own project. Fontcuberta's *Sputnik*, in contrast, looks to Cold War culture to interrogate how photography is often taken as truth. By creating photographs of an alternate history, he comments on how media can represent (or misrepresent) reality and fiction, especially in relation to larger politics of truth. His strategies for building this imaginary world, especially through photography, speaks to my project's aim to point out these fictional realities (or real fictions) in media. Artistically, many of my illustrated posters are inspired by Hannah Rothstein's *National Parks 2050*, where she reimagines these classic posters after the events of environmental catastrophe. While only two of my layouts directly reference WPA National Parks posters, most of them appropriate 1940s and early 1900s aesthetics in some way. I was particularly inspired by Rothstein's ability to comment on both current and historical cultural trends by appropriating certain vintage aesthetics. Finally, the format of a tour in Janet Cardiff's *Her Long Black Hair* served as an inspiration for how I

could lead viewers through an immersive experience while critiquing the format of the tour.

Although I am not moving an audience through space, I found Cardiff's use of multiple mediums layered on top of each other useful for complicating how people are interacting with the multiple spaces I am looking to create.

In addition, because my work draws heavily on mass media and pop culture, many of my influences are science-fiction adjacent entertainment. Of these, Ray Bradbury's *Martian Chronicles* and the Bioshock game series were both critical examples of what worlds that blend "retro" aesthetics with contemporary issues functionally look like.

Reflection

One of the most difficult conceptual blocks from the beginning was switching from writing a theory-based critique of imagined land use to an experience-based artwork that implicitly presented these themes. Much of my work centers the theory I have read, and it often directly incorporates their quotes into the pieces themselves. This project, however, does not directly reference any outside sources, so the theory is instead background informational research. Throughout the process, it was difficult to let the work speak for itself and to push against my tendency to overexplain the background for every decision I made. In this way, I had to trust that my theoretical and historical research was coming through in the presentation of my work itself.

Faculty and peer feedback was critical to the production of this project. My professors helped introduce me to theory and artists that are thinking in the same vein as my own interests. In addition, their feedback was critical for helping me work through the tone of my project. I had been worried that by appropriating colonial images and rhetoric, I would be reproducing them

rather than critiquing them. Working with my professors, however, helped me narrow in and clarify the specifics of my project and elucidate the satirical tone. Similarly, they each challenged me to think of the bigger connective tissue between my ideas and the execution of my pieces, which I had been struggling with. In the end, they pushed me to think about what I wanted from this project and what I would enjoy making rather than worrying about the nature of the final product.

I also appreciated the encouragement from my peers to have fun with the concept. During the process, I was often so worried about the actual artistic and conceptual pieces that I would forget how satirical my proposals could be. My peers especially were the ones who pushed me to lean into the science-fiction elements of my work and to bring out the playful elements of these narratives. In addition, they pointed out the absurdity of much of the current rhetoric around Mars, reminding me of a great avenue to poke holes in cultural narratives that present themselves as serious and all-powerful in their logic.

Looking back, I am shocked by how much I have made and written over the course of the year. There is, of course, much I would add if I had the time, but I never expected to get as far with the project as I have. Even up to a few weeks ago, I was not entirely sure how all the pieces would fit together. In this vein, the most surprising aspect of creating this project to me is that it was narrow and focused enough to reach a cohesive end. Coming into the semester, I was very unsure of what I wanted to do, and I remained unsure for the first month or so. I found it difficult to pare down all the research I had previous done and figure out how to translate it into a project that still spoke to broad ideas from my paper. Because of this indecision, I worried my piece would try to address too much and thus be too fragmented. In addition, I initially found letting go of many of my ideas very difficult and had to continually challenge myself to allow some aspects

of a topic to go unaddressed. That is, through this process, I learned that focusing in on one aspect of my idea allowed me to dig into my topic and better speak to what I wanted.

In addition, I did not think this would be a challenge, but figuring out what my installation would look like has been difficult. Throughout the semester, my main focus had been on creating the material itself rather than a cohesive method of presenting it. The stereoscopes and VR-scape are technologically similar, but I had been wondering how, in the context of my focus on landscapes, they were conceptually linked. I had previously thought I would merely place them side by side in the gallery as a simple installation comparing the two technologies. My peers, however, suggested that I set my work in a faux travel agency to continue to push the absurdity and almost commercial aspect of “selling a landscape.” The installation, therefore, not only became a way to showcase the work I have done but also to bring the contextual theory behind my project into the gallery space.

Ultimately, the journey to completing my thesis project has been about taking my research and narrowing it into a project that I could have fun with. With support from the input of my professors and peers, I hope that this work points to the many views that are projected onto land, especially those stemming from capital-colonial ethics of use and value. I wish to point out how these views are not natural or completely unapproachable but are rather the product of a history characterized by change and intentional construction of fiction and reality.

Bibliography:

- Alexander, J. A. P. "Landscape and Power." *Perspectives on Place*, Routledge, 2015.
- Benjamin, Walter. *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction*. p. 26.
- BioShock Infinite*. Irrational Games, 2013.
- Bradbury, Ray. *The Martian Chronicles*. 1950.
- Cardiff, Janet. *Her Long Black Hair*. 2004. <https://cardiffmiller.com/walks/her-long-black-hair/>.
- Crary, Jonathan. *Techniques of the Observer: On Vision and Modernity in the Nineteenth Century*. MIT Press, 1990. *Internet Archive*,
http://archive.org/details/techniquesofobse0000crar_i9a2.
- Cronon, William. "The Trouble with Wilderness; or, Getting Back to the Wrong Nature." *Uncommon Ground: Rethinking the Human Place in Nature*, W.W. Norton & Co, 1995, pp. 69-90. https://www.williamcronon.net/writing/Trouble_with_Wilderness_Main.html.
- Fontcuberta, Joan. *Sputnik*. 1997. <https://www.juanmagonzalez.com/fontcuberta/sputnik.html>.
- Gitelman, Lisa. *Always Already New: Media, History, and the Data of Culture*. Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 2006.
- Holmes, Oliver Wendell. "THE STEREOSCOPE AND THE STEREOGRAPH." *The Atlantic*, 1859.
- Hyde, Anne F. "Cultural Filters: The Significance of Perception in the History of the American West." *The Western Historical Quarterly*, vol. 24, no. 3, Aug. 1993. *DOI.org (Crossref)*, <https://doi.org/10.2307/970755>.
- Jensen, Jakob Linnaa. "Online Tourism: Just like Being There?" *Re-Investing Authenticity Tourism, Place and Emotions*, edited by Britta Timm Knudsen and Anne Marit Waade, Channel View Publications, 2010.

Jones, Karen R., and John Wills. "Re-Creation and the Theme Park West." *The American West*, Edinburgh University Press, 2009, pp. 305–23. *JSTOR*, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.3366/j.ctt1s473v5.16>.

"Keystone View Company." University of Massachusetts Special Collections & University Archives. <http://scua.library.umass.edu/keystone-view-company/>. Accessed 11 Dec. 2022.

Keystone View Company. "Bryce and Zion National Parks." Norman Ackerman Stereoview Collection, Box 1, Claremont Colleges Special Collections, Claremont, CA.

Krauss, Rosalind. "Photography's Discursive Spaces: Landscape/View." *Art Journal*, vol. 42, no. 4, 1982, pp. 311–19. *JSTOR*, <https://doi.org/10.2307/776691>.

Laric, Oliver. *Versions*. 2010. <https://anthology.rhizome.org/versions>.

Malin, Brenton J. "Looking White and Middle-Class: Stereoscopic Imagery and Technology in the Early Twentieth-Century United States." *Quarterly Journal of Speech*, vol. 93, no. 4, Nov. 2007, pp. 403–24. *DOI.org (Crossref)*, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00335630701593998>.

"Mars Explorers Wanted posters." Mars Exploration Program, 2009. <https://mars.nasa.gov/multimedia/resources/mars-posters-explorers-wanted/>.

Masteller, Richard N. "Western Views in Eastern Parlors: The Contribution of the Stereograph Photographer to the Conquest of the West." *Prospects*, vol. 6, Oct. 1981, pp. 55–71. *DOI.org (Crossref)*, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0361233300003355>.

Mirzoeff, Nicholas. *How to See the World: An Introduction to Images, from Self-Portraits to Selfies, Maps to Movies, and More*. Basic Books, a member of the Perseus Books Group, 2016.

---. "Visualizing the Anthropocene." *Public Culture*, vol. 26, no. 2, 2014, pp. 213–32. *DOI.org* (*Crossref*), <https://doi.org/10.1215/08992363-2392039>.

Murray, W. H. *Zion National Park, Bryce Canyon, Cedar Breaks, Kaibab Forest, North Rim of Grand Canyon*. Union Pacific Railroad Company, 1925. *Project Gutenberg*, <https://www.gutenberg.org/cache/epub/47397/pg47397-images.html>.

Nagatani, Patrick. *Nuclear Enchantment*. 1988-1993. <https://www.patricknagatani.com/pages/nucenchant.html>.

Nixon, Rob. *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor*. Harvard University Press, 2011.

Pietrobruno, Sheenagh. "The Stereoscope and the Miniature." *Early Popular Visual Culture*, vol. 9, no. 3, Aug. 2011, pp. 171–90. *DOI.org* (*Crossref*), <https://doi.org/10.1080/17460654.2011.601159>.

Pratchett, Terry. *The Hogfather*. HarperCollins Publishers, 1996.

Robbins, Jim. "How A Surge in Visitors Is Overwhelming America's National Parks." *Yale E360*, 31 July 2017, <https://e360.yale.edu/features/greenlock-a-visitor-crush-is-overwhelming-americas-national-parks>.

Solnit, Rebecca. *River of Shadows: Eadweard Muybridge and the Technological Wild West*. Viking, 2003.

Rothstein, Hannah. *National Parks 2050*. 2017. <https://www.hrothstein.com/#/national-parks-2050/>.

Sailor, Rachel McLean. "Western Landscape Photography: Then and Now." *Oregon Historical Quarterly*, vol. 116, no. 1, 2015, pp. 92–109. *JSTOR*,

<https://doi.org/10.5403/oregonhistq.116.1.0092>.

Urry, John, and Jonas Larsen. *The Tourist Gaze 3.0*. SAGE Publications Ltd, 2011. *DOI.org*

(*Crossref*), <https://doi.org/10.4135/9781446251904>.

Waite, Nathan N., et al. *A Zion Canyon Reader*. University of Utah Press, 2014. *ProQuest Ebook*

Central, <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/claremont/detail.action?docID=3443922>.

Zion National Monument, Utah. United States Railroad Administration, 1919. *Internet Archive*,

<https://archive.org/details/zionnationalmonu00unit/page/2/mode/2up>.