Anthropology of nostalgia: primitivism and the antimodern vision in the American Southwest, 1880-1930

**Author:** York, Christopher W. (Christopher Warren), 1972-

**Citable URI:** http://hdl.handle.net/1721.1/39224

**Other Contributors:** Massachusetts Institute of Technology. Dept. of Comparative Media Studies.

**Advisor:** William Uricchio.

**Department:** Massachusetts Institute of Technology. Dept. of Comparative Media Studies.

**Publisher:** Massachusetts Institute of Technology

**Date Issued:** 2001

**Abstract:**

Introduction: Zoo, garden, arcade--three places emblematic of European society's pleasure in and subjugation of animal and plant nature, of the texture of civilized life in a world created by Industry and Progress. This triad, it seems, would stand in opposition to Lummis' oft-repeated formula of "sun, silence, and adobe," and the vision of stillness in the Southwestern hinterland that it evokes. Indeed, few other regions of the United States have so consistently nurtured the cult of the primitive and the peasant that inheres in Lummis' simple paean to adobe. Indian and Hispano both build from adobe; and it, being earth, absorbs these populations back into the land, wedding artisanal, agrarian, and pastoral lives into an integrated vision of ethnicity and region, a spirit of the desert and of the sky. Here only, the modernist regional aesthete would argue, could the authentic American pastoral be found: "there is that genuineness of unfettered simplicity; the closeness to elemental realities in peasant life, which only in New Mexico, of all states, is indigenous." Hence the modernist Southwest was manifestly not a place of Victorian zoos, picturesque gardens, or Parisian shopping arcades. And yet, I would like to argue, the evanescent afterimages of these places--the ways of being and relating that they nurtured and expressed--appear before and behind the crystalline pictures of snow-blanketed desert and azure sky, the lines of Pueblo dancers, the Hispano santero with his wood and his knife, distorting and fragmenting any purely localist vision of Southwestern regionalism. The scent of piñon smoke mingled in the nose of the newly-arrived traveler with smog from factories in New York, Chicago, or Boston, and smelled all the more pungent because of this mixture.

**Description:**

Thesis (S.M.)--Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Dept. of Comparative Media Studies, 2001.; This electronic version was submitted by the student author. The certified thesis is available in the Institute Archives and Special Collections.; Includes bibliographical references (leaves 120-123).

**URI:** http://dspace.mit.edu/handle/1721.1/39224

http://hdl.handle.net/1721.1/39224

**Keywords:** Comparative Media Studies.

Show full item metadata

**Files in this item**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Size</th>
<th>Format</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>51998083-MIT.pdf</td>
<td>32.31Mb</td>
<td>PDF</td>
<td>Full printable version</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The range and specificity of anthropological research and the involvement of anthropologists in work outside of academic life have also grown, leading to the existence of many specialized fields within the discipline. Theoretical diversity has been a feature of anthropology since it began and, although the conception of the discipline as "the science of humanity" has persisted, some anthropologists now question whether it is possible to bridge the gap between the natural sciences and the humanities. The first use in English of which I am aware is Jacques Maritain, *Antimodern Or Ultramodern? : An Historical Analysis Of His Critics, His Thought, And His Life* (New York: Elsevier, 1976), by Brooke Williams Smith. The first addition of the "ism" I know of is *The Rise of Popular Antimodernism in Germany: The Urban Master Artisans, 1873-1896* (Princeton U. P., 1978). In 1981 Appeared *No Place Of Grace : Antimodernism And The Transformation Of American Culture, 1880-1920* (New York: Pantheon) by T. J. Jackson Lears. Lears discusses antimodernism at length. He begins, "Toward the end of the nineteenth century, many beneficiaries of modern culture began to feel they were its secret victims. As Native Americans were systematically annihilated through American governmental policies, nostalgia for Native Americans and especially for Native American culture grew. By 1900, anthropologists such as Franz Boas, Frank Cushing, and Mooney had published studies of individual tribes emphasizing the complexity of Native American societies, also representing them as "artisans of a high order" (Trueittner 24). The curio trade was at its height between 1880-1930 (Berlo, Introduction 8; Cohodas 89), and the works came predominantly from the Navajo and Pueblo tribes of the Southwest. Weber's appreciation for the quilts and baskets that came through the craft markets was documented in *Camera Work*.