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Frontier Exceptionalism: The Representation of Nature and Race in Thomas Cole's Art and PBS's "*Frontier House*"

Tzu-I Chung
University of Arizona, U.S.A.

Abstract

In this paper, I juxtapose and connect the vision of nature on the frontier in Thomas Cole's paintings and that in the 2002 PBS program *Frontier House*. In doing so, this paper reveals the relationships between the cultural construction of nature on frontier and its referent, America's natural environment, at its most dramatic transformative stages during the early nineteenth century and at the turn of the millennium. At those transformative moments, Cole's frontier paintings and the PBS program each attracted large contemporary audiences as they spoke to their audiences' imagination of and aspirations to the frontier and its backdrop of pristine nature. I explore the popular visions of the frontier in Cole's artistic expression and in the PBS program as a contested and a reconciling place where past and present meet. The appeal of both visions of nature in Cole's frontier paintings and the PBS *Frontier House* for their contemporary audiences, I argue, comes from their proposed solutions to the conflicts between nature and culture when environment was rapidly transformed by the progress of civilization. Both visions resonate with the nostalgia for a pre-industrialized world, while they simultaneously endorse the contemporary material comfort and industrial improvement in light of the environmental hardships, thereby upholding the status quo and the infrastructure that made the conquest of nature possible. This paper thus explores the interdisciplinary possibilities in the field of ecocriticism,

Tzu-I Chung received her Ph.D. from the interdisciplinary program in Comparative Cultural & Literary Studies at the University of Arizona. Her teaching and research interests include, but are not confined to, transnational American and Asian Studies, representation in critical race theories, American literature and art history, cultural studies, postcolonialsim, and environmental justice movement. She has been teaching at the University of Texas at El Paso. E-mail: tchung66@yahoo.com

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reveals curious results about the clear link between the past and present predicaments in the relationships between nature and culture, and testifies to the frontier as a contested place of both lasting charm and continuing dispute in the American lives.

Keywords: frontier, environment, art, media, representation, ecocriticism, nature and culture

The idea of nature contains, though often unnoticed,
an extraordinary amount of human history.
– Raymond Williams

Every view of nature carried with itself a powerful American self-image.
– Barbara Novak

In this essay, I want to take a step forward to explore possibilities at the intersection of the fields of Ecocriticism and Cultural Studies. Today, the interdisciplinary study of literature and environment is constantly expanding in its scope of inquiries. "Ecocriticism," according to Scott Slovic, "is being redefined daily by the actual practice of thousands of literary scholars around the world" (161). My goal here is to "redirect critical attention toward [cultural productions'][1] engagement with the physical environment" (qtd. in Oppermann 110). The question I have in mind is how people grapple with the question of nature and environment, and culture in today's fast-changing world. As scholarships on Ecofeminism, environmental justice movement, and cultural studies have demonstrated, any analysis of environment and culture is not complete without reference to race, class, and gender (Adamson *et al.* 12).[2] I therefore use race and gender as points of reference and context to explore the view and treatment of nature that are manifest in cultural texts and people's daily lives. At the same time, the present culture cannot be fully grasped without an understanding of the past. This article is then an experimental comparative study, with frontier as its center stage, that intends to reveal a more complete picture of the connections between the past and present, and between nature in ideas and in people's real lives, and between the studies of Ecocriticism, and Cultural Studies.

This essay starts with Thomas Cole's art, as his art works were and are still influential to contemporary visions of frontier and nature in both the nineteenth and the twenty-first centuries. To this day, Thomas Cole's 1836 work, *The Oxbow*, hangs prominently as a significant centerpiece in the American Wing at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York. Every day thousands of visitors to the museum view this American painting. In its middle foreground is the

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[1] The term "cultural productions" is adopted from *The Environmental Justice Reader: Politics, Poetics, and Pedagogy* (Adamson *et al.* 4). It denotes cultural texts that were and are influential in informing our ideas within historical, cultural and social contexts.

[2] See Greta Gaard's introduction to her edited volumes on Ecofeminism, and the introduction in Adamson *et al.* See also feminist scholarships on globalization such as *Political Economy, and the Body: Global Perspectives* Youngs, Gillian, ed. (NY, 2000), in which several contributors demonstrate that divisions of class, race, nationality, ethnicity, and sexuality intersect with gender inequality as a global issue.

figure of Cole himself, working on *The Oxbow*. Cole's image is lastingly fixed as "an American producing American art, in communion with American scenery" ("Description"). Under Cole's influence, landscape painting replaced portraiture and history painting as the dominant genre throughout most of the nineteenth century. This significant turn in American art history has been closely associated with many pressing nineteenth-century concerns including evolving ideas about nature and culture, the progress of civilization, history and industry, and the frontier. His vision of art, nature, and nation was crucial to the formation of the nineteenth-century artistic taste and attitudes towards their native land and natural world in the U.S. These issues were central to Cole's time, an age of tremendous political, religious, economic and cultural transformation, and are fundamental in Cole's art as well. Cole's visions of nature resonate with a defining moment in U.S. history that in many ways still informs the contemporary American society.

I will examine how Cole's work was unlike many of his fellow landscapists, with its ambivalent attitudes towards progress, and how his romantic approach to issues of nature, nation, race, and gender still resonates today. Cole's work has been the main focus of several Metropolitan Museum of Art exhibitions held in 1987, 1994, and 2002. Focusing on two Cole paintings, *The Oxbow* (*View from Mount Holyoke, Northampton, Massachusetts, after a Thunderstorm*) and *The Hunter's Return*, I want to look at how discourses of nation, nature, race and gender come into play in his representation of nature and the frontier. I approach such representations of the frontier as a constitutive process, a site on which multiple discourses converge to give meaning and purpose to these representations at specific historical moments. To explore the implications of the currency of his art and the contemporary gap between the academic and public understanding of the frontier and its consequences, I also juxtapose the discourses of nation, nature, race, and gender in Cole's works and the 2002 PBS program *Frontier House*. This comparison reveals the ways in which Cole's contemporaries and the Frontier House participants reconcile those unsettling issues in the face of lamentable environmental changes, racial conflicts and gender inequality. Cole's works evoked imperial nostalgia which romanticized the environmental, racial, and gender injustices with regret, whereas the PBS program reveals how the participants, producers, and audience learn to come to terms with the twenty-first-century status quo in current environmental crisis and seemingly more balanced multiracial and gender relations through the journey to the reconstructed frontier past. In this way, the popularity of Cole's and PBS representations resonate with their audiences' imagination of and aspirations to the frontier, and its backdrop of pristine nature as the source of the nation's regeneration.

I

During his lifetime, Thomas Cole (1801-1848) witnessed an unprecedented turning point in American history. His family had immigrated from England when he was seventeen. Between 1803 and 1845, he saw the United States triple its size and become a continental nation.[3] The accelerated process of industrialization resulted in rapid urbanization and the commercialization of agriculture. These developments helped fuel the westward expansion to come and forever changed the American landscape as the nation gradually shifted from an agriculture-based society to an industry-based capitalist economy, beginning in the Northeast.

Cole's debut in 1825, as well as his rise to fame, coincided with two historical events: the promulgation of the Monroe Doctrine and the opening of the Erie Canal (Flexner 145). The Doctrine warned European nations away from the hemisphere, furthering the U.S. national policy of regional control. The Erie Canal made direct trade between the Eastern seaboard and the expanding West possible. The interior of the American continent was thus connected to the Atlantic Ocean with New York City as its gateway, assuring the economic leadership of the city. For the first time in American history, travelers had a close view of "a splendid microcosm of the young nation," enjoying nature alongside industrial progress (Burner *et al.* 523). In 1829, Cole himself joined the throngs of travelers going up the canal, and in his journal praised the wonders of commerce and industry springing up all along the artificial waterway. At the same time, a new class of merchants rose to wealth as they operated within their own continent. These capitalists were also expansionists who were to become major patrons of the landscape artists such as Cole and those others who celebrated American nature and frontier (Truettner 31; Boime).

Intellectually, the discovery of American nature and landscape was an artistic as well as a literary movement in the early nineteenth century. In fact, the early nineteen-century interest in nature and landscape was not unique to the United States.[4] Although there was a new respect for "the unspoiled nature" on both sides of the Atlantic, the U.S. was the only nation to fuse this interest with a nationalistic pride. As industrialization swept through the Old World, nature in its early state uncontaminated by human touch became harder to find. The

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[3] In 1803, Thomas Jefferson signed the Louisiana Purchase; in 1819 Florida was purchased; in 1845 Texas became a state.

[4] This emphasis on nature and landscape could be found abroad in Jean Jacques Rousseau's concepts of natural primitivism, Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph Schelling's *Naturphilosophie*, and William Wordsworth's "God in nature," as well as Cole's contemporary domestic works such as Emerson's "Nature" (Novak 61).

New World of America, with its abundant natural beauty and resources, unexploited by the white race, was found to be an ideal place to realize Rousseau's concept of primeval paradise than any European country.

It was also a time when intellectuals started calling for a distinctively American culture; the sentiment of this cultural turn is best characterized in Ralph Waldo Emerson's 1837 speech "The American Scholar." During the first half of the century, in his Leatherstocking series, James Fenimore Cooper expressed an awed feeling for the grandeur of America's virgin forests. In his sketches and stories, Washington Irving lent a pictorial charm to the Catskill mountain region and the Midwest. In his poetry, William Cullen Bryant praised America's natural wonders (Tymn xiv). These American writers thereby shared and appreciated many of Cole's artistic intentions and mode (Merritt 12-3).

The development of the first native landscape school paralleled the American Romantic literary movement. In his youth, Cole and his family fled the smoky sky of industrialized England and spent years on the Ohio frontier, which exposed and attached him to the more pristine nature in America, intensifying his appreciation for it. When he arrived in New York in 1825, he quickly discovered the picturesque beauty of the mountains near the Hudson (Tymn xix). In his "Essay on American Scenery" (1836), Cole distinguishes America from Europe by calling attention to "the most distinctive...characteristic of American scenery" – "its wilderness" (8). His art offered an initial framework for development of landscape paintings. Two of Cole's paintings *The Oxbow* (1836) and *The Hunter's Return* (1845), which were completed during the midpoint and last stage of his life and career and considered among his most popular works, are characteristic of the basic structure of many later American landscape paintings of the frontier.

II

Thomas Cole's *The Oxbow* provided a popular artistic narrative in a framework that corresponded to prevalent discourses of land, nature and the nation's future among the early nineteen-century Northeastern elites. "Constructions of nature," Donna Haraway indicates, are oftentimes "riddled by the dominations of race, colonialism, class, [and] gender" (2). In *The Oxbow*, Cole depicted an actual scene just south of Northampton, Massachusetts, that contained "the oxbow," a dramatic bend on the Connecticut River. *The Oxbow* presents a panoramic and expansive view of the scene from above, a way of viewing shared by all artists across generations and schools with few exceptions in the nineteenth century (Boime 35). Art historian Albert Boime calls this design "the magisterial gaze,"

a commanding gaze that defines the relationship between the viewer and American nature:

> the domination of the land and landscape through the magisterial gaze of Cole and Bryant conjures up the ineffable sense of domain through the metaphorical idea of being the master of all they survey. This occurs only in a purely American context that no longer has to depend on European imports for its economic and cultural life. (89)

The visual and physical control of land serves as a foundation for constituting American nationhood. Moreover, under the magisterial gaze, the land in *The Oxbow* endlessly recedes into the background in peaceful sunlight, signifying infinite hope for the nation lying beyond the horizon. This commanding view thus embodies a cultured American elite's exaltation on beholding the expanding territory.

Within this framework, landscape paintings such as *The Oxbow* resonate with many mythic narratives that inform American perceptions of nature. Cultural historians such as Perry Miller and Henry Nash Smith have argued that many Americans conceived of their exceptional national character as a domestication of the vast 'virgin land' to realize "the Garden" in the New World. Having left behind the crowded civilization of Europe for America, settlers recreated themselves as denizens of a new nation on the supposedly vacant land.

Significantly, this conception of nature's nation is also gendered. The idea of nature, already being gendered as female, embodies the nationhood, whereas the primary agents that take and work the land are almost always depicted as male. Since the time of early exploration and settlement, European and American male colonists have imagined themselves nurtured and gratified by entering a maternal and erotic landscape. In the artistic tradition that starts with early images such as Theodore Galle's *America* (1580), American nature is always personified in a female, an object of interest and possession in the eyes of the male explorer. Annette Kolodny describes this symbolic feminization of nature as creating a psychological bond between male settlers and their new land. The tradition of feminizing landscape has been inherent in the national history. In Thomas Cole's writing, even though nature is considered a sacred place where people seek God's order, nature is always referred as "she" which is always seen or observed by a subject referred as "he" (9).

At the core of these mythic traditions, then, are the contradictory conceptions of nature. The idea of nature is central to defining American uniqueness even as everything associated with nature is subsidiary (Stein 6). Leo Marx detects the inner conflict of this conceptualization of 'nature's nation,' in Miller's term, between the desire for the pastoral life and the drive for the civilized, industrial progress that endangers the very existence of garden – nature itself. Nature is

contradictorily construed as the very ground of nation and yet also the converse of civilization to be settled, as Roderick Nash suggests in *Wilderness and American Mind*. In addition, the imagery of the feminized future almost always induces violence, as male settlers inevitably "violate" the new continent represented as the mother/lover whose overtures initiate conquest. Clearly, such contradictory views of nature come from the need to subject nature to the nation's needs, control, and exploitation.

In the midpoint of his career, as national progress was unfolding, Cole urged people to cultivate a taste for American scenery of rural nature (17). Wild or undisturbed nature, observe Nash (1982) and Marx (2000) in their works, can only be valued in hindsight, once the sprawl of civilization has threatened it with extinction. Cole's attitude towards such development was ambiguous. Cole differed from his followers such as A. B. Durand and Frederick Church, among others, all of whom were American born. Raised in the pre-Civil War Northeast that claimed peace and prosperity as the base for progress, they saw American nature as a physical manifestation of a benevolent God (Flexner 146). They developed the framework set by Cole in their optimistic paintings, which were regarded by the broad American public as revealing the glory of the divine creation.

Cole, on the other hand, brought up in England witnessing the consequences of industrialization, remained haunted by what the linear progress might bring. Seeing the dilemma between sustaining a nature's nation and a progress-driven society, Cole composed his grand production between 1834-1837: *The Course of Empire*. This five-piece series presented a cycle of an empire born out of nature, reaching the height of civilization, and eventually fading into desolate wilderness. The role of human civilization in the tragic historical cycle, like that in the cycles of nature, seems beyond human control. According to Cole's description of the fourth canvas, *Destruction*, "Ages may have passed since the scene of glory, though the decline of nations is generally more rapid than their rise" (qtd. in Truettner and Wallach: 93). The series could have been a lesson for its American audience, but it achieved public success without the lesson delivered. Even though the devastated city in this series is ostensibly anonymous, for instance, Cole's contemporary American critics read it as Jerusalem on the eve of its fall to Rome. Delighted reviewers and public audiences in the Northeast avoided any possible parallels between America and empire in the series, enjoying it as "stories of other lands" (qtd. in Miller 1993: 33).

In the spring of 1836, as a relief and change of pace from months of laboring on *The Course of Empire*, Cole painted *The Oxbow*, in which he conceded more to public opinion. In a letter dated 2 March, 1836, Cole wrote to his patron of *The Course of Empire*, Luman Reed:

> I shall take advantage of your kind advice (and Mr. Durand's) and paint a picture expressly for the exhibition and for sale. The only thing I doubt is that I may be able to sell the picture. . . . Fancy pictures seldom sell and they generally take more time than views, so I have determined to paint one of the latter. (qtd. in Merritt 30-1)

The result was a work of "art" supposedly transcending the "mere view" (Novak 77).

In *The Oxbow,* then, Cole presents American nature, free of contradictions, by collapsing temporal and spatial boundaries and juxtaposing the past, present, and future of the national nature on the same canvas, a design to be found in many later landscapes. The canvas is largely divided in two: on the viewer's left, dark clouds overshadow the wilderness; on the right, soft light brightens the greens and yellows and the gentle rolling landscape of farms. Here, the contrasting views of nature from colonial times are reconciled in a bright prospect. The garden in the New World is cultivated successfully on the right lowlands and small hills, stretching back for miles and miles as indicated by shrinking details in clear sunlight. Nearby neat farms can be seen prospering with growing crops. Human habitations are visible by the smoke from their homes scattered in farmlands. A couple, a well-dressed gentleman and his wife, can be seen walking along the farms, enjoying the peaceful American garden. This pleasing cultivated landscape pictures the American pastoral dream so well that it was chosen to appear on the Metropolitan magazine cover which featured the exhibition of Hudson River School paintings entitled "American Paradise" in 1994.

In dramatic contrast to this view of cultivated nature is the wilderness at the left, what Cole believes to be "the most distinctive" feature of America, in which we see "the sublime melting into the beautiful, the savage tempered by the magnificent" (8-9). The dark storm clouds over the wilderness and the blasted trees and gnarled tree trunks in the foreground, among which the only remaining tree bends seemingly under the storm, testify to the uncontrollable power as well as the sublimity of nature. Behind the foreground is dark green unbroken foliage, signifying the primeval forest that is receding at the edge of the cultivated landscape. Cole sees the prospect of American wilderness in such scenes:

> in looking over the yet uncultivated scene, the mind's eye may see far into the futurity. Where the wolf roams, the plough shall glisten; on the gray crag shall rise temple and tower – mighty deeds shall be done in the now pathless wilderness; and poets unborn shall sanctify the soil. (16-7)

The pastoral civilization,[5] an ideal civilized society founded in harmony with nature,

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[5] The pastoral here denotes the ideal society, an idea borrowed from the Virgilian tradition by European Americans to define the new world. See Leo Marx, 3-6.

seems gradually and peacefully to replace the wilderness, being as beautiful in its order as nature is in the sublimity of wilderness. "As the undeveloped land is subjugated to development and speculation, landscape assumes a pregnant role in masking the commercialized objectives of those who promote it" (Boime 89). *The Oxbow* can be interpreted to assume this role in naturalizing the conquest. The wild forces of nature as shown on the blasted trees and scattered tree trunks seem to justify human actions to subdue the wilderness in exchange for the ordered garden. In addition, the contrast between the darkness shadowing the wilderness and the light brightening the civilized world here also became an often-used metaphor in the later nineteenth-century landscapes. As Boime points out, it was Cole's ability to encode in his landscape "the idea of futurity and progress" that made his work so saleable (8). In *The Oxbow*, the storm seems to be receding – indeed, the complete title indicates it is a view after a thunderstorm – the light of civilization is rising to enlighten the now forested wilderness. As this landscape could be perceived as a peaceful transition into the future and progress, the painting, despite Cole's pessimism about selling it, was bought for $500 after its exhibition by Charles Talbot of New York. Many contemporary scholars have criticized Cole for showing no remorse for the recession of the wilderness in the painting (see Boime and Truettner).

As a romantic artist, Cole lamented the passing of wilderness by capturing its beauty and sublimity and calling for its appreciation, while also debating the future of civilization. In *The Oxbow*, as William Cronon has suggested, "in the lazy turn of the great oxbow – echoed by the circling birds at the edge of the storm – we can make out the shape of a question mark: where is all this headed?" (qtd. in Johns) The question mark resonated with many of Cole's contemporary concerns and the debate about the future. The questions lying between civilization and wilderness bespoke the artist's and people's anxiety and uncertainty about the disappearance of wilderness from American scenery and the march of utilitarianism. Cole expresses his unease about the concerns of his time: "a meager utilitarianism seems ready to absorb every feeling and sentiment, and...improvement in its march makes us fear that the bright and tender flowers of the imagination shall all be crushed beneath its iron tramp" (6).

In an age of great transformation, Cole, along with other intellectuals such as Cooper, started a national romantic tradition of artistic attitudes towards progress; they represented idyllic images of the passing wilderness and condemned the evils of civilization, while accepting its march as inevitable. Cole states:

> I cannot but express my sorrow that the beauty of such landscapes is quickly passing away – the ravages are daily increasing – the most noble scenes are made destitute . . . another generation will behold spots, now rife with beauty, desecrated by what is called

> improvement; which, as yet, generally destroys Nature's beauty. . . . This is a regret rather than a complaint; such is the road society has to travel; it may lead to refinement in the end, but the traveler [sic] . . . dislikes the road. (17)

Where the road led people remained a question mark for the artist, whose admiration for American nature was genuine. However, his philosophy is founded upon the dualistic conception of wilderness, separating human from nature. When he argues for the appreciation of American nature, everything associated with nature is understood on the grounds of human needs. This was why, even with his ambiguity towards the progress, certain rhetoric in his art was read and developed to become an "imperialist nostalgia," in anthropologist Renato Rosaldo's term, that romanticized what was lost in the march of modern industrial and political progress.

One of the pressing public issues during Cole's time, for instance, was what to do with the American Indians. When in office, President Andrew Jackson (1829-1837) developed new Indian policies that culminated in the passage of the Indian Removal Act in 1830. During the same year, the rise of the United States was linked to the history of Indian decline in the Capitol guidebook, which was to become common rhetoric (Scheckel 129). At this time, American Indians seemed to be a passing race in public consciousness. In popular culture during the 1830s, for example, John Smith's rescue by Pocahontas was recurrently evoked in various cultural forms as a "myth of national origins," that would legitimate the act of conquest by celebrating Pocahontas's subjugation to the white culture (Scheckel, 41). Dana Nelson rightfully attests that American Indians in nineteenth-century art continually functioned as a "multiuse repository" (101) for justifying conquest and "validating whiteness *qua* civilization" (66).

In Cole's art, the primary agent of this national drama of progress is always a white male, to whom nature and everything associated with nature such as American Indians is subjugated. In Cole's *The Oxbow*, the only active agent represented is Cole himself, working on the creation of American art in the middle ground between civilization and wilderness, where he is the creative link. His agency is most evident in that he looks back at the audience, as if winking at us, acknowledging his awareness of the audience's gaze. The presence of American Indians, on the other hand, like that in his other American landscapes, is hard to detect. The background forest of *The Oxbow*, where a circle of birds flew out of the top of trees at the edge of the storm, seemingly being disturbed by something in the forest, reveals a tiny head of a typical American Indian image under Cole's brush, suggesting that there might be a few more of them hidden by the foliage.

As American Indians failed to establish dominion over the natural world,

Rachel Stein convincingly elaborates, Euro-Americans viewed them as subhuman beasts who blended into the landscape rather than lording over it; this view is manifest in Cole's art. Cole reflects: "the American continent, now the United States, rested [before colonization] in the shadow of primaeval forests, whose gloom was peopled by savage beasts, and scarcely less savage men" (7). In *The Oxbow*, as in his other works, the presence of American Indians is always passive. Although human figures in general are comparatively small in Cole's work, white presence is afforded agency whereas that of American Indians is oftentimes much more minute and their posture makes them blend easily into the natural world. Moreover, regardless of differences from tribe to tribe, the American Indians are always adorned with a red-feather headdress and, in other paintings, similar-colored body and clothes, that corresponded to the tips of the blasted trees or autumn leaves. They are subsumed by nature of Cole's landscape where they, like autumn leaves and other animals in the wilderness, "naturally" disappear into the background. When Cole recalls the historical associations on American landscape, he speaks of "the great struggle for freedom . . . worthy of poet's pen or the painter's pencil" – the American Revolution (16). He further suggests that "American associations are not so much of the past as of the present and the future" (16). This total erasure of American Indians from American history epitomizes the rhetoric behind Cole's composition of 'natural' landscapes. Engraved on each landscape, as Joni Adamson argues, are "patterns of social injustice that encompasses people and environment" (20). In Cole's artistic vision, such injustice is naturalized and romanticized.

Toward the mid nineteenth century, with industrial progress in full swing, landscape paintings such as Cole's *The Hunter's Return* (1845), considered "one of Cole's finest American views" (qtd. in Merritt 39), started to evoke nostalgia. Cole believed that "we are still in Eden; the wall that shuts us out of the garden is our own ignorance and folly" (17). In *The Hunter's Return* and his other piece *Home in the Woods* (1847), Cole's audience found Eden on the frontier. *The Hunter's Return* centers on an opening in the forest, beside a transparent lake, an idealistic frontier dwelling. On the viewer's right stands a settler family's log cabin, around which women are attending to household chores and children are playing. Tree stumps, indicating husbandman's work, and blasted trees, symbolizing the sublime power of nature, stand together on the foreground. Here human cultivation and natural power appear in peace and harmony. From the forest thicket on the left two bluff hunters approach with a deer slung on a pole and borne on their shoulders. One waves his cap to the wife standing by the cabin door and holding up their infant to greet his return. The eldest son hurries on ahead. Around the peaceful scene tower the evergreen firs, maples, oaks, and beeches, the foliage of which "kindled with all the splendid dyes of an American

autumn. . . . [For Cole's patron, it] is altogether a beautiful and most authentic illustration of American life and nature" (qtd. in Merritt 39). For Cole's general nineteenth-century audience, it was the "most pleasing" landscape, in which "everything wears nature's brightest apparel," that enabled people to "breathe again" (Parry III 339). Such romanticism, as I suggest in the next section, is still at work today in the popular television series *Frontier House*.

People in the Northeast amid speeding urbanization and industrialization found such frontier scenes the most popular among Cole's works; this vision of nature and the American Eden in the representation of the frontier helped them find reconciliation and conciliation in the conflicting needs for industrial progress and pastoral peace. When the westward expansion became the trend in the mid nineteenth century, the images of the American garden were constantly in development. Frontier, in between civilization and wilderness, was regarded as where "the best of human condition" was possible (Marx 100). This in-between space then became the ideal location to realize the American dream to civilize the New World – the "errand into the wilderness," to borrow Perry Miller's term – and simultaneously a place to pursue a freer, 'more natural' life away from the crowded, civilized nineteenth-century Northeast. In the pleasing landscape of *The Hunter's Return*, the social hierarchy of civilization is replicated on the frontier, a space seemingly free of social paradoxes. The American Indians, in contrast to earlier paintings, are completely extinct from this "free land" promised for white Americans.

Furthermore, *The Hunter's Return* illustrates the gender divisions of the time, which the frontier life might have reinforced. Nature's virgin interior becomes the frontiersmen's stage for exploring their masculinity, who felt overwhelmed in the industrialized urban society in the nineteenth-century Northeast. They hunt game to provide for their family, gradually domesticating the environment for their use. Women and girls, by contrast, are strictly confined to the domestic sphere men built for them – in and around the solitary log cabin. They are the present and future bearers of the tradition of civilization, being bound to the only symbol of civilization – the log cabin – and being the reproducers of the civilized generations to come. The eldest son here is the only one who occupies the middle link of the two separate worlds of wilderness and civilized space. He is representative of the next generation of new Americans who have cultivated the frontier and will be the master of the land/nation. Such frontier scenes were a most popular cultural invention of an artificial American nature, in which men are both at ease with and in control of nature, a prospect most reassuring and gratifying for nineteenth-century Northeastern audience. The romanticizations in the representation of gender issues are still at work today, as I will discuss in the next

section on *Frontier House*. Lying at the heart of every western culture's favorite story about itself, as Adamson points out, are the roots of injustice and environmental degradation (29). Regardless of the consequences, the appeal of this story of the frontier is still alive in our contemporary lives.

Cole provided his nineteen-century audience and patrons, most of whom were elites in the Northeast, with a popular vision of "the possibilities of the national landscape" ("Description"). During the colonial period, two contrasting views of nature and land in America illustrated people's projected fears and desires – wilderness and garden (Herzogenrath 85). In the bleak environment of New England, Puritans had to constantly struggle with the elements of nature and pursue God's ways in the absence of European order. For them, the wild environment lurked with bizarre animals, heathen natives and devils which threatened to corrupt reason and holiness of the God-chosen community of people. The Puritan literature and art thus presented the unknown nature as wilderness, the antithesis of civilization. In other early colonies such as Pennsylvania and Virginia, on the other hand, colonists were encouraged by the British colonizing enterprises to embrace the natural abundance, filled with raw materials to build a new society. Free from the corruption of the old world of Europe, they see the natural environment in American colonies as God's offered to men for a second chance. Nature therefore was viewed in those colonies as garden, an asset central to the definition of the New World, a new Garden of Eden awaiting human cultivation. From the beginning of the American government, its sovereignty was grounded in physical control of land (Bright and Geyer, Bender: 74). What began with Thomas Jefferson and James Madison as an argument for liberty through equality of condition became in the Jacksonian era a doctrine of expansionism (Bright and Geyer, Bender: 74). Cole and his followers during this era incorporated divergent views of nature to represent American landscape. In the course of the nineteenth century, territorial expansion became the "manifest destiny" of America. Simultaneously, the story of the frontier as national fulfillment and personal self-renewal was to be canonized by Frederick Jackson Turner at the century's end: "The existence of an area of free land, its continuous recession and the advance of American settlement westward, explain American development" (27). Turner argued that the close of this western frontier was the end of the American source of rejuvenation.

Cole's most well received works during the nineteenth century were those on American native scenes: American nature and frontier (Novak 71-2). These scenes afforded the audience living in a tumultuous age a certain defining sense of distinctive Americanness that bespoke the promising prospect of future. Actually Cole critiques this general attitude in American public's preference for "things

not thoughts" (qtd. in Novak 78). In the U.S., the study of the national frontier has dominated historiography as it never has elsewhere (Duara, Bender 32). This frontier historiography, through such ideas as manifest destiny, often tended to moralize national expansionism throughout the twentieth century, what many believe to be "the American century." Although the domestic frontier closed, the international frontier opened to continue the expansion. American dealings with this international frontier, I argue, are oftentimes justified based on colonial typologies found in early America. The frontier since the nineteenth century has become a popular metaphor that is still at work today.

In the twentieth century, Cole's art has inspired diverse responses. The last decades of the century witnessed a vigorous criticism of the frontier narrative in various cultural texts. Since the 1960s, art historians have traced the ways in which Cole and his fellow artists "enlisted their talents serving progress" (Truettner vii) and have analyzed their landscape paintings in terms of their nationalistic view, one that reflects ideas of nineteenth-century expansionism and manifest destiny. Indeed, in certain scholarly perspectives, Cole's art is only studied by "a small number of academics" and only "for its historical value" today due to its being more comforting, less complex and challenging than, say, the writings of Henry David Thoreau (Smithson 110-1).

I would argue, however, that we study Cole, among other reasons, for the national tradition he started that still echoes today. Cole's complex, ambivalent attitude towards progress was and is a quality often lost to the general audience of the nineteenth century and later. Cole's works are certainly comforting to a degree, but it might be just the reason why they still feature in the major blockbuster art exhibitions today. His art resonates in our globalized world beyond all scholarly comment. In reality, the profound gap between the public imagination and scholarly trends has emerged dramatically in examples of popular culture, such as the well-liked site of Frontierland in Disneyland (Limerick, Grossman: 72) or in the controversy over "The West as America," a 1991 exhibition at the National Museum of American Art (Grossman). Labels accompanying the popular western images explicitly referred to these paintings as "ideological narratives," castigating them for their ideas about race, class, gender, and war (Grossman 4). This exhibition generated responses ranging from accolades to vehement dismissals. As Patricia Limerick demonstrates with powerful examples, despite the shared roots in nineteenth-century historical tradition, the popular understanding and the scholarly effort to reckon with the complex history of the frontier "share almost no common ground" (Grossman 79).

In light of this gap between the public and academe, I want to articulate the resonance and appeal of Cole's romantic vision of and approach to American

nature and frontier in the popular TV series *Frontier House*. Narratives and approach that informed American perceptions of nature and frontier in Cole's art are to be found in the public and participants' response to the PBS project, *Frontier House*. An analysis of this resonance can thus help us connect the present and past, locating the root of today's perceptions of nature and their consequences. I can then explore the cultural and political palpability of certain discursive constructions of American nature and frontier, race and gender, that has contributed to Cole's currency in our time, and to the popularity of *Frontier House*, simultaneously binding the two narratives together.

III

Every episode of the widely popular 2002 PBS program, *Frontier House*, is introduced with the following statement: "Fictionalized, mythologized, often romanticized, now see the real experience of life on the frontier" (Brown and Chermayeff).[6] This program has sent three modern families to experience what life as homesteaders may have been like on the American frontier in 1883. As the narrator claims in the program: "Even today the quest for the American dream echoes loudly" (Brown and Chermayeff). This claim is substantiated by the fact that more than 5,000 families across the country applied to participate in the project. As the series associate producer Mark Saben notes, the overwhelming number of applications and their outstanding qualities testify to the degree to which "this project has such a broad appeal and has seemed to strike a chord with the American people." Certainly, to this day, many Americans still consider the "so-called pioneer spirit of the 'Old West' as the one that 'forged' the nation" (Truettner 28). Gordon Clune, one of the participants, for example, identifies with this collective history of the American West even as an immigrant from Canada. He explains his interest in the project as a desire to "understand what our ancestors have done," because they were "great people" and "America [as] a great country is from" (Brown and Chermayeff). Moreover, different participants in the project admit their previous image of the frontier as "charming" and "romantic," a "Garden of Eden" (Brown and Chermayeff). In light of this prevailing perception of the frontier, the program producer explains the goal of *Frontier House*: "Life in the American West has been greatly romanticized and mythologized. We wanted to peel away some of that veneer" (qtd. in Wrobel 147).

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[6] *Frontier House* is one of the four PBS "living history projects" to date. The ones preceding it include *1900 House* set in Victorian England, and *The 1940s House* in World War II Britain. *Frontier House* was the first one set in an American context. The next one in the series was *Colonial House* set in a 1628 American colony, aired in Spring, 2004.

From late May to early October 2001 in backcountry Montana, what the three families struggle through demonstrates "a good deal about the rigors of frontier life" (Wrobel 149). That, in terms of achieving the producers' goal, makes *Frontier House* "a resounding success" for many (Wrobel 150).[7] It has been one of the most watched mini-series on PBS and been re-broadcast several times since it first aired. The show is acknowledged to have de-romanticized frontier life and nurtured "the public's historical consciousness" (Wrobel 150). More than twenty history consultants worked to provide period supplies and practical guidance for the three families in their attempts to survive and thrive as homesteaders. Without modern conveniences such as running water, electricity or toilet paper, the families were challenged on many different levels of survival: to provide themselves with shelter and food, to stay healthy, to keep their farms running, to prepare for the winter, and to live with each other, among other things. In this process, those modern pioneers have had to live with much difficulty and drudgery, such as routinely hand washing clothes and scrubbing dishes. These struggles have been emphasized in the program to show how "life was much harder in the early days of white settlement" (Wrobel 150).

Smoothly woven into these frontier narratives is the well-researched historical information which presents the similarities and disparities between the past and present about race and gender in particular. For one thing, the program strives to present racial diversity on the frontier, an effort praised by critics. The choice of an interracial couple, Nate (of African descent on his father's side) and Kristen Brooks from Boston, in the project serves as a natural entry into discussion of racial segregation in 1880s. Three months into the project, the families decide to build a period frontier school for their children. In their preparation, the other two families – the well-off Clunes from Southern California, and the middle class Glenns from Tennessee – unanimously abandon the idea of a public school on government aid which would prevent the Brooks' children from attending it. Moreover, when families are starving during the first five weeks, Dale Old Horn, a Crow Indian, "in a gesture that turns history on its head," brings a mule deer a Crow Indian team has hunted to feed the homesteaders (Brown and Chermayeff). This incident also gives Dale Old Horn a chance to state his perspective on the Homestead Act, which starved out many Crows in 1880s. In addition, the local general store designed for the project is run by Hop Sing Yim, indicating the presence of Chinese population on the frontier at

[7] Several commentators compare *Frontier House* and other living history projects to the currently overflowing reality shows and in the general opinion the PBS projects are the only few intelligent among them (Martin 23).

the time. Altogether critics believe that this "emphasis" on racial diversity is a "welcome corrective" to the racism of 1880s (Wrobel 149).

The reenactment of nineteenth-century gender roles and the tension it created is another focus in *Frontier House*. From the beginning, domestic skills consultant Susan Cain laid out the ground rules clearly: "The way this project is going to work is: men will be doing the roles outdoors, and we women will be working within the home" (Brown and Chermayeff). The lifestyle and domestic order thus unfold throughout the program are vividly reminiscent of the ideal frontier scene depicted by Cole and favored by his nineteenth-century (mainly male) audience. The voice-overs also address the sexist laws of the period that deprived women of their legal rights upon marriage. At the end of the project, the three men of the families all could say they enjoyed it, and could really live there. "In five years," Gordon Clune says, "I could have this place really wired" (qtd. in Stewart 47). Nate Brooks and Mark Glenn found it hard to leave the result of their hard work: the cabin, the chicken coop, the garden, the root cellar, the fences, chopped woods, among others, almost all of which were made with their own hands.

On the other hand, during the course of the project, the three women felt trapped in that lifestyle for many reasons. Their work was repetitive and routine; their daily schedule went: "sewing, cooking, making bread, sanitary..." (Brown and Chermayeff). Furthermore, while men could show the result of their hard work in the things they built, most of the women's daily labor vanished with eaten food and washed dishes, and they had to start almost everyday with the same routine. Karen Glenn's marriage cracked under what seemed to be the tension of incongruent gender roles, and she suffered physical pains from the daily work. For her, the "Garden of Eden" at the beginning later "turned into hell" (Brown and Chermayeff). Adrienne Clune felt like she had "been sentenced to five-month hard labor," with a household of six to attend to, and suffered bouts of depression which never happened to her before. Kristen Brooks sums it up: "This place is men's playground. We [women] are just the [backstage] supporting staff" (Brown and Chermayeff).

Frontier House thus ends with some good and intelligent history and life lessons, at least for many critics who have commented on it. In the last segment of *Frontier House*, the participants are back in their modern lives, six months after leaving Montana, and are concluding their frontier experiences with lessons they have learnt. As they enjoy modern convenience and freedom, they also feel the excess of possessions. Adrienne says she shops and drives less, while Karen and Kristen give up things like dishwashers and cable TV. Upon leaving the project, Adrienne believes she would never complain about her workload in contem-

porary life because nothing could be as hard as frontier life for her. In her new house in Malibu, California, however, she talks nostalgically about the much tighter family relationship on the frontier.

In the end, *Frontier House* is about the twenty-first century (Poniequzik 69). Its most salient lesson is our alienation from family, people, work and nature (Poniequzik 69; Brown and Chermayeff). At the same time, nonetheless, all of them but Mark Glenn believe that this is the century in which to live. Both Adrienne and Kristen praise technology such as washing machines, which Kristen calls "God's gift to the world" that liberates our lives (qtd. in Stewart 48). The general message of the program is then "people should better remember and appreciate the hardships of their forebearers as they enjoy contemporary comforts" (Wrobel 149).

Still, the discourses of race, gender, and nature in *Frontier House* are rather unsettling. To a certain extent, the manner in which those discourses are posited in *Frontier House* are similar to Cole's approach to them in his art. Even though times have changed and, in many ways, "improved" since the nineteenth century, the ways in which these discourses contribute to shaping how Americans view and represent ourselves still stand and continue to connect us with the collective past with which people are encouraged to identify.

While *Frontier House* intends to emphasize racial issues by representing racial diversity on the frontier, at times their efforts at such appearance of pluralism underplay "the real experience of life on the frontier" that the program claims to present. The problems of racial hierarchy in the 1880s and in our contemporary life, for instance, are completely glossed over by what appears in *Frontier House*. The two white families, the Clunes and the Glenns, demonstrate the up-to-date spirit of political correctness and pluralism when they decide to forego government aid so that the Brooks' future interracial children can also attend their school against the racist law in 1880s. In fact, to emphasize this spirit, Mark Glenn goes into an emotionally-charged tirade: "Do we decide if Nate's kids can go to school with ours? Yea. . . . Why the hell'd we come out here if we are going to have someone tell us what to do . . . against what we feel?" (Brown and Chermayeff) As Mark and the others all express their desire to have their children educated alongside the Brooks' children, they take pride in overcoming or ignoring the prevailing racist assumptions of the 1880s which viewed anyone of African descent as subhuman. However, they also fail to see their own susceptibility to the hierarchical construction of race. This hierarchy grants them the right to decide the rights of children of African descent, a right they accept and wield generously with, in Mark's case, a sense of entitlement.

On the other hand, while the two white families are happy to inform the

Brooks of the 1880s racist law and their modern non-racist decision, Nate views it differently. Regardless of the sense of modern improvement that the two white families share, he expresses his doubts based on his personal experience of racial discrimination in modern-day life. The fact that people today laugh at the racist history of 1883 Montana, he indicates, often leads them to ignore the common racism and racist stereotypes that are "still very much alive today" (Brown and Chermayeff). This comment curiously resonates with how American Indians and Asian Americans are represented in *Frontier House*.

In the six-hour show, the reference to American Indians takes up less than five minutes. In an event that replicates certain racist stereotypes, Dale Old Horn makes his appearance only when the families are adjusting to the harsh reality on the frontier and in need of help. In the beginning of the project, Gordon Clune protests vehemently when the families are informed of the current law against hunting game out of season. With prepared vintage guns for himself and his sons, he cannot accept that "in America you have something like that, I feel very very disappointed by how little this part of the West is emphasized" (Brown and Chermayeff). For Gordon, hunting and the frontier are inseparable; hunting represents the most significant part of the Old West he seeks to relive, a crucial element of frontier life that could nurture masculinities in him and his sons. While they enjoy the venison as a gift from Dale Old Horn, they listen to his account of history, in which the Homestead Act prohibited the Crow Indians from hunting and so two out of three Crows starved and died during the late nineteenth century. Yet, the homesteaders – Gordon included – nod silently. The incident, unlike many others in the show which solicit the participants' reflections, is cut directly back to show how the families resolve to work harder so they would not have to depend on such gifts. The narrator comments in passing: "The free land comes at a price, only it was paid by the American Indians" (Brown and Chermayeff). So ends the brief appearance of American Indians. This staging for the Indians to feed the pioneers when they first arrive and struggle with the elements, moreover, is reminiscent of a favorite national origin story of the first Thanksgiving dinner, reinforcing the image of peaceful colonization. All the racial contradictions, as Dale Old Horn's story, are dislodged in the historical past, seemingly distant from the viewers' contemporary world.

The presence of Asian Americans on the frontier is also acknowledged briefly in *Frontier House*, and it also includes the sense of current-day racial profiling. To represent racial diversity on the frontier, the producers choose to replicate a period store run by Chinese American Hop Sing Yim to provide for the families. His importance is emphasized by the families, who consider him the only available mailman, supplier, and trader for all kinds of services, food, and

money exchange. He always appears in a neat uniform, whether in his store or at delivery, with a white starched shirt, a black apron, and oiled hair. His much-valued service seems to put him on equal footing with the homesteaders, and his brief appearance, like Dale Old Horn's, happens only when families are in need. However, other than his function, Hop Sing Yim has no agency in this program; he is not even given a chance to tell his story. These modern families transplanted to 1883 Montana accept his service pleasantly, conveniently oblivious to the fact that the 1882 Exclusion Act deprived the Chinese population, including the store keeper, of their right to citizenship. In other words, no Chinese person was entitled to anything that the homesteaders took for granted: the ownership of land or other civil rights. Unlike the other vivid cast members from the three families in the project, Hop Sing Yim in his uniform evokes the passive image of pre-World War II Chinese Americans being confined to service-sector jobs in American society.

The racial diversity praised by the critics in *Frontier House* is a romanticized vision which masks a tremendous amount of history that might be "too much" for the general audience. In *Frontier House*, which claims to offer "the real experience of life on the frontier," the reconstruction of the American frontier is made easy for its focus on the homesteaders; the life of other ethnic groups, which made homesteading possible, are not taken into consideration beyond their mere presence or service. Under the appearance of diversity, the historical setting is thus white centered, recalling how the non-white populations in reality were not perceived as fully human nor equally eligible under the Homestead Act. Within this setting, although racial violence is not totally masked in a romanticized view such as Cole's, the past contradictions between races remain in the past, worthy only of a passing comment. In the place of colonization is the modern appearance of racial diversity and mutual civility between races in the program, bespeaking the improvement in the modern attitude towards racial and ethnic differences. The program producers and participants through their liberal stance thereby dislodge all racism and subsequent conflicts in the past, representing a liberal world of the present. The racially diverse appearance in the PBS program thus serves as a reconciliation and a politically correct revision of the past, endorsing the present-day multiracial relations through multiculturalism and the absence of racial conflicts.

Similar mechanisms seem to be at work in the representation of gender issues in *Frontier House*. In the interviews toward the end of the program, all the adult participants are asked to comment on how twenty-first-century women fit into nineteenth-century life, but never on how modern men fit into frontier life. What this question implies is that nineteenth-century and twenty-first-

century women live completely opposite lives. The program has proved a clear point: by assigning women a strict schedule of chores to follow, which is much more specific and repetitive than men's, they have shown the difficulties and frustrations of these modern women in that situation. The three women, along with the viewers, find it much easier to live in the modern world, in which the gender roles are much less restricted. As such, the consensus on the improvement of modern-day life is reached, and the twenty-first-century status quo is embraced through the revelation of the past injustices and conflicts.

The only one who ever criticizes the modern-day gendered wage system is Karen Glenn, whose marriage falls apart in the course of the program for apparently gender-related reasons. In the many clips that record her and Mark's fights, she appears to challenge the typical gender roles in the family, insisting on herself being the pivotal person and refusing to answer to Mark. Yet the focus of the editors' cuts has made her seem more aggressive and unlikable. Therefore, her passing comment – "women and men are still getting paid differently for the same work [as 1883], we really haven't evolved as much as we like to think we have" – is easily denigrated by the avoidance for its bitterness and lack of balance. It does not change the lesson for Adrienne and Kristen, and for those who identify with them, that our time is the century in which to live in terms of gender equality.

The image of nature on the frontier in *Frontier House* is evocative of the bifurcated view in Cole's landscape: it is divided between "nature's fury" in the wilderness and "nature's beauty" on the cultivated homestead. This perception of nature is again based on the human ownership and control of nature. When the families first arrive on the "virgin territory" in Montana, as the narrator calls it, the first thing Gordon Clune does is to take his sons to survey the land, stressing to them "all the land you can see, all the way to that mountain . . . is our land" (Brown and Chermayeff). The families' first response is to praise nature's beauty of the "promised land" over which they claim ownership and will soon change and cultivate. Later, as they struggle to survive as homesteaders, Gordon, for instance, explains their task as a competition between "family versus nature, family versus the elements" (Brown and Chermayeff). Central to this perception of nature is still the dichotomous division between humanity and nature.

The sponsors of *Frontier House* and their advertisements at the beginning of every episode also implicitly suggest certain lessons about understanding the role of nature and our world. Bob's Red Mill Natural Foods promotes their products as "all-grain, all-natural . . . to your good health" (Brown and Chermayeff). This promotion evokes nostalgia for pre-industrial, unpolluted and organic sources of food, and for an unpolluted natural environment signified by the frontier.

The other two sponsors, on the other hand, focus on the lessons from the hardships of the frontier. Alfred P. Sloan Foundation funds the project to "enhance public understanding of the role of technology in society" (Brown and Chermayeff). This public understanding that the Sloan Foundation is trying to enhance is elaborated in the next sponsor's pronouncement: "Life on the frontier would have been different with GP brands like . . . bath tissue, Brawny towels, and Dixie cups and plates. . . . We make the things that make you feel at home" (Brown and Chermayeff). Against these words describing modern products are the scenes from *Frontier House*, in which the inconvenience of the frontier privy, the lack of toilet paper, and the unsanitary rag used to wash dirty dishes are dramatically shown. Technology is thus closely associated with modernity in our world, symbolizing comfort, progress, convenience that characterize our lives in this view. The price of environmental degradation in this process, however, is underplayed in the celebration of technology.

IV

Significantly, much resonance of Thomas Cole's ideas of nature, race, and gender can be found in *Frontier House*, as contemporary participants strive to grapple with their twenty-first-century situation based on their ideas of the frontier past. Like Cole's *The Oxbow*, *Frontier House* tells a two-fold story. Through the dichotomy between the wilderness and garden, Cole laments the passing wilderness while he simultaneously appreciates the order and beauty of the cultivated garden. *Frontier House* evokes nostalgia for a pre-industrialized world and uncontaminated natural environment, while the hardships of the frontier endorse the material comfort and social improvement of our modern world, celebrating the superiority of the cultural values circulated in the U.S. In Cole's artistic world, there is no contradiction in the peaceful transition to the human control of land. *Frontier House* enacts contradictions in terms of race, gender, and nature. However, the major part of the show is taken up by the primary focus on fights and arguments, often found in Reality TV, between the Clune and Glenn families and among the Glenns. As one critic points out, "it's hard for the civics lessons to compete with a civil war" (Peyser 77). The Brooks, the neighborly and mellow interracial couple, thus get relatively little screen time (Ponieqozik 69). In this way, the issues of race, gender, nature, and American history give way to – and are obscured by – the drama between the modern pioneers. While the contradictions involved in those issues are mainly attributed to the past in several passing comments, these issues seem to be settled and resolved in our modern world. At the same time, the price of industrial progress and technology

that have been paid by the racialized, gendered others and natural environment is glossed over in the appearance of improvement and progress.

Both Cole's art and PBS's *Frontier House* were and are interpreted in ways that reinforce the status quo of their time by glossing over the critical issues of race, gender, and nature, even as their creators expressed intentions to express ambivalence and to raise unsettling issues of their time. Confronted with the rapidly transforming, industrializing world, Cole openly lamented, regretted, but expressed that he could not complain about the passing of 'pristine nature' and 'noble savages' associated with it. His artistic vision of the frontier helped his contemporary viewers reconcile their conflicting fear and desire of industrial progress and of nature as wilderness and garden. In contemporary world, the spread of consumerist values and economic expansionism of transnational corporations, such as *Frontier House*'s sponsor GP, as global processes, is implicated in the program as benign to people and their lives. By looking into the past and showing the modern families struggles in the frontier setting, the producers of *Frontier House* also fictionalize the frontier experiences by celebrating the settler heroes and heroines who had gone through such hardships and made sacrifices to make modern American possible. The project gives us the impression of how much things have improved today on various levels, while our alienation from family, people, and nature is construed as a necessary price to pay, as concluded by the participants. This price – what and how much has been lost in the process of industrial progress – is an issue addressed in the program only through a few sporadic comments by participants. Cole's romantic landscape and the drama in *Frontier House* thus lull their audience into a sense of pleasure that upholds status quo while supporting the infrastructure that has made the conquest of the frontier and later progress possible: racial and gender inequality, alienation from and simultaneously control over nature, and selective interpretation of history.

Furthermore, the forms in which these ideologically saturated messages are conveyed, in general, are considered a neutral channel of expression. During Cole's time, it was commonly believed that "In every kind of art, truth to nature is an imperative law. . . . Truth-telling about nature, external nature and internal, the creation, in short, is the great end and aim of art" (qtd. in Novak 71). As an exalted form of expression of truth that should "sublime and purify thought, by grasping the past, the present and the future," art was afforded a certain sheen of objectivity even though it was mainly supported by the elites and capitalists of the time (Cole 3). In the twenty-first century, public television enjoys a similar status that assumes a morally higher position and neutrality than other channels of mass media. PBS is generally considered to be *the* television channel for thinking intellectuals, a network which inspires originality, tolerance, and

connectedness, oftentimes ignoring the fact that it receives funding from transnational corporations that have vested interests in certain representations of race, gender, nature, and technology. As such, the ambivalence and inequalities in the cultural ideas that Cole and PBS projects attempt to decipher are both revealed and obscured in the process.

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邊境的例外主義：托馬斯・科爾的藝術與「邊境小屋」中自然與種族的再現

摘　要

本文對比觀照托馬斯・科爾(Thomas Cole)繪畫作品與2002年美國公共電視節目「邊境小屋」中邊境自然的觀點，藉以顯現出在十九世紀初期與千禧年交替變化最劇烈的階段中，邊境自然之文化建構與美國自然環境之間的關係。不論是科爾描繪邊境的畫作，或是美國公共電視的該節目，都吸引了廣大的觀眾，驗證了當代觀眾對邊境生活及原始自然的想望。我將探討科爾的藝術表現與「邊境小屋」節目中的普遍視野：邊境作爲過去與現在的交會之地，一個既富爭議又帶來和諧的地方。個人主張，兩者對觀眾的吸引力來自於這兩種自然的視野，針對文明演變中，環境的迅速變遷所造成文化與自然之間的衝突，所提供的解決之道。兩者鑒於環境問題困局之觀點，既與工業化前的世界產生鄉愁的共感，同時也認同現有的物質安逸及工業進步；既維護現狀，亦確立了讓征服自然成爲可能的基礎架構。因此本文將探討生態論述中跨領域的各種可能，同時也揭示新奇的結論：自然與文化的關係中，過去與現在所處的困境之間的清楚關連性。本文同時也證實了，在美國生活型態中，邊境是一個保有持續魅力及爭議之所在。

關鍵字：邊境，環境，藝術，媒體，再現，生態論述，自然與文化