



MALMÖ UNIVERSITY
FACULTY OF CULTURE
AND SOCIETY

AMERICAN PROGRESS

A Foucauldian Discourse Analysis



American Progress (Gast 1872)

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One-Year Master (15 ECTS)
Spring 2017
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Submission: 24th May

ABSTRACT

19th century America is shaped greatly by territorial expansion into Native American lands. A famous painting which represents this process is called *American Progress* by John Gast. This study argues that the display of power between the settlers and the Native Americans in the painting mirrors the dominant discourse on 19th century westward expansion. So, the analysis is concerned with how the settlers are constructed, how the Natives are displayed and how this results in a power hierarchy. These findings are then compared to 19th century discourse on the westward movement. The analysis is guided by the methodological tool of Foucauldian discourse analysis. The analytical steps are informed by the two American Studies scholars Angela Miller and Martin Christadler. The research is based on pragmatism with a leaning towards constructivism. This study finds that *American Progress* contrasts civilisation and nature in similar ways as this dichotomy is established in the discourse of the 19th century. Westward expansion in the painting and in 19th century discourse is justified by constructing the Natives as godless and the settlers as godly. The difference in brightness in *American Progress* supports the dichotomies of civilisation and nature as well as godliness and godlessness.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT

1	INTRODUCTION	1
2	CONTEXT AND RELEVANCE.....	2
3	THEORY AND LITERATURE REVIEW	3
3.1	Representation.....	3
3.2	Representation in culture.....	3
3.3	Discourse	4
3.4	Power.....	4
3.5	Power/knowledge	5
3.6	The American Frontier.....	5
3.7	Representation in landscape painting.....	6
3.8	Summary.....	8
4	RESEARCH PARADIGM.....	8
5	METHODOLOGY.....	10
5.1	Structure.....	11
5.2	Steps	12
5.3	Sample.....	13
5.4	Ethical considerations	14
5.5	Limitations and weaknesses.....	15
6	ANALYSIS	17
6.1	Civilisation and nature.....	17
6.1.1	Civilisation	17
6.1.2	Nature.....	18
6.1.3	Westward expansion.....	19
6.2	Godliness and Godlessness	22
6.2.1	Godliness	22
6.2.2	Godlessness	23
6.2.3	Westward expansion.....	23
6.3	Brightness and darkness.....	26
6.3.1	Brightness.....	26
6.3.2	Darkness	26
6.3.3	Westward expansion.....	26
7	DISCUSSION	29
7.1	Future research	31
8	CONCLUSION	32
	WORKS CITED	34

1 INTRODUCTION

Painted in 1872 by John Gast, the lithography *American Progress* is deemed one of the most iconic 19th century American paintings (Thrush, 2016, p.554). It portrays the clash of settlers and Natives on the American Frontier. It thematises various interconnected American issues such as the Frontier, Manifest Destiny, “the Native”, the role of settlers and the construction of culture and nature. Even at first sight, the viewer becomes aware of the dualistic presentation of the image. The right half stands in stark contrast with the left side. Juxtaposed with the noble depiction of the settlers, the Natives are constructed as savages.

An in-depth analysis of this painting is crucial as it represents the discourse of such an important period in the United States. The era of expansionism in the 19th century not only shapes the thinking of modern Americans, but obviously changes the course of America’s history to a large degree. This painting, especially, requires a close reading in order for one to become aware of the symbols as well as the implications entangled in the various elements of the image. Only then does one become aware of the socio-historical discourse it reproduces. For Foucault, a discourse does not only reproduce, but it also produces what is considered “true” at the time (Carabine, 2001, p.268). So, to a certain extent, one could argue that it is helpful to interpret a painting like *American Progress* because it is integral to how we speak about 19th century westward expansion.

Over the past two years, 19th century American paintings have repeatedly been my object of study. Probably due to my background in American Studies, I am especially interested in the intersection of themes like the Frontier, Manifest Destiny and Native Americans in the context of 19th century depictions. I have already conducted this study on a smaller level with good results. That is why I am confident to pursue my interests in a larger scope.

The aim of this paper is to argue that the way in which the two sides of the painting are established, forms a strong hierarchical power structure between the settlers and the Native population. Not only does this study apply Hall’s concept of *representation* and Foucault’s idea of *power*, but it also contextualises the power play with texts on the Frontier by the two famous contemporary American writers De Crèvecoeur and Turner. Lastly, with the help of modern scholars writing about 19th century landscape paintings, the results from the painting are compared with 19th century discourse on westward expansion. More concretely, the guiding question is:

How does the display of power between the settlers and the Native Americans in John Gast’s *American Progress* reflect 19th century discourse on westward expansion?

2 CONTEXT AND RELEVANCE

First, one needs a basic understanding of the socio-political and cultural happenings of the 19th century in order to grasp the meaning behind a painting from this time. No other century shapes the American map more than the 19th century. In the early 19th century, the nation is only just over 20 years old and consists of less than 20 states. After the Louisiana Purchase in 1803, two thirds of North America is taken up by Anglo-American territory (Brown, 1956, p.1). The War of 1812 against the British does not only pave the way for expansion, but it also gives the young nation a sense of pride and confidence (Hickey, 2012, p.3). Mainly a religious ideology in the Puritan days, Manifest Destiny now becomes political, too. This proves true in the annexation of Mexican territory in the Mexican-American War of 1848 (Meed, 2014). After the United States becomes united in the Civil War, the Spanish-American War in 1898 ends Spanish rule and boosts the self-confidence of the nation (Golay, 2009, p.vii).

The justification for the westward movement and the killing of Natives happens along religious, political and racial lines. But, the notion of patriotism and superiority seeps into the rhetoric and cultural works of 19th century America, too. In paintings, sophisticated Americans find a fusion of admiration of American landscapes and a pride in their national identity (Roque, 1987, 22). Over the course of the first half of the 19th century, the style of these painters becomes more and more distinct and moves away from European conventions. In more or less subtle ways, topics such as God, wilderness and the aforementioned increasing expansion are put onto canvas. Known for little more than his painting *American Progress*, John Gast is commissioned by George Crofutt to paint an angelic figure which is spreading technology, but also pushing back the Native population (Smith and Marx, 1994, p.9). Today, this painting is one of the most well-known paintings on westward expansionism.

Considering this fact, an in-depth analysis already makes sense because the image is instrumental in how we talk about 19th century expansionism today. It fits in with Hall's claim that power can produce new discourse or at least influence a given discourse (1997, p.190). One could argue that this power can be seen in the painting in the normalisation of hierarchies. Visual representations are believed to not only depict power, but also produce it (Rose, 2007, 12). This adds to Hall's aforementioned idea of power and its discursive effect. Also, if one is able to understand the symbols in the painting, one should have an insight into 19th century culture (Hall, 1997, p.194). In the best case, this study displays how 19th century discourse on westward expansion is negotiated within Gast's painting. This work is also relevant because it interprets Gast's painting with the help of Foucault, which appears to be a new approach. Since

a number of different ideas from Foucault's writing are applied to the analysis, new perspectives into the ideas behind the painting should become clear. Lastly, *American Progress* is not a traditional 19th century landscape painting. But, it contains a lot of elements which are integral to landscape painting from the time. By interpreting the symbols belonging to landscape painting, this paper takes an innovative stance in research. It unravels how peoples are ostracised along political, religious and cultural lines. The analysis lays bare how such an immoral, naturalised behaviour can be depicted in a picturesque way.

3 THEORY AND LITERATURE REVIEW

3.1 Representation

The main part of my research question is concerned with the display of power in Gast's painting. By looking at certain elements in the image, this paper aims to discern multiple layers of power relations. Basically, it means looking at how meaning is constructed. It leads me to believe that I am working in the theoretical field of representation. In his book *Work of Representation*, Stuart Hall claims that cultures use language in order to convey meaning (1997, p.194). This process of channelling meaning through symbols, for example, is what he calls *representation*. It is crucial to notice that the term language can be seen in a broad context. Even visual images convey meaning and consequently, belong to the category of language (Hall, 1997, p.173).

3.2 Representation in culture

If one accepts Hall's aforementioned definition of representation, paintings speak a form of language. On a surface level, one can often take in the general meaning and themes of the image. But, it takes knowledge of the given culture to dissect symbols and grasp their deeper meaning. Hall argues along similar lines in that he thinks that the understanding of language is dependent on cultures, but also on the time period (1997, p.195). I see another link to this research here. This paper compares the discourse on westward expansion in the painting to similar discourse in the 19th century. I would argue that it contextualises the painting and gives it another level of meaning. It is a depth of meaning that could not be understood from purely today's perspective. In order to understand cultures and their codes of meaning, one needs to gain access to their language. Once one knows the meaning behind the language and symbols of a group, one has a clearer insight into what is considered true during that period of time

within the group. A good example in *American Progress* is the locomotive. From today's perspective, it is outdated and most likely conjures up romantic feelings of nostalgia. In the 19th century, however, its depiction represents the height of civilisation and technological advancement. So, one needs to look at the painting from the eyes of a 19th century American. This idea aligns with Gillian Rose's concept of *visuality* in her book *Visual Methodologies*. Explaining the term *visuality*, she claims that both what the viewer of a painting sees and how he sees it, are culturally constructed (2007, p.2). In the case of *American Progress*, Gast encodes meaning in his painting within his cultural context. But, the viewer needs to share similar codes of interpretation to understand the deeper meaning behind the image (Hall, 1997, p.174).

3.3 Discourse

In the first paragraph of this section, I accepted Hall's definition of language and I insist that it is useful for the analysis. But there is an interesting point to be made about the insufficient depth in the term *language*. Depending on what one is trying to prove, the term *discourse* is more useful according to Foucault. For Foucault, language is merely theoretical, but discourse shapes practices and influences our behaviour (Hall, 1997, p.186). So, a discourse is made up of statements and is understood within a given culture. These statements carry meaning and through the dissemination within the culture, they influence people and eventually form practices. The distinction between language and discourse is important for the mere reason that this study is looking at the language within the painting. But, the second half of the research question is of course concerned with the practical implications of 19th century language, too. More concretely, it means that the interpretation of the painting is linked and compared to not only "what is said", but also to "what is done" in the 19th century.

3.4 Power

As Foucault is a guiding theory in this paper, one should first acknowledge that he thinks that the truths a given culture believes in are automatically infused with power and are then shown in many different forms of representation (Hall, 1997, p.191). I want to extract the power hierarchies in *American Progress* and compare them to what is considered true in the discourse of the time. Fyfe and Law raise an important point regarding images and power relations: They believe that images are great at presenting power structures (1988, p.1, cited in Rose, 2007, p.7). They explain that pictures decode differences and naturalise power hierarchies. By doing so, the viewer becomes aware of inclusion as well as exclusion of subjects or even objects.

Power is generally seen as a linear concept i.e. coming from a distinct source and pushing in a clear direction towards a given target individual or group. Foucault, however, moves away from this concept by saying that he believes that power does not only have one origin. It “is deployed and exercised through a net-like organization” (Foucault, 1980, p.98, cited in Hall, 1997, p.189). More concretely, Foucault says that power is infused in all areas of social life (1997, p.190). For Foucault, power is also a productive force. Similar to the way discourse manifests itself in the material world, power can produce knowledge and further discourse. Foucault’s idea of power is interesting in its focus. Instead of merely looking at the big, obvious factors of power, he examines the “micro-physics” thereof, too (1977, p.27, cited in Hall, 1997, p.190). This is crucial for Foucault because the smallest manifestations of power can be viewed as reflexive projections of larger, institutional forces.

3.5 Power/knowledge

For Foucault, power and knowledge are so closely intertwined that he saw the need to coin the term *power/knowledge*. On one level, this combination makes sense to him because a culture has the ability to shape knowledge through discourse and consequently, influence what people believe (Hall, 1997, p.188). In short, he claims that cultures have their own “truths” which may not be objective, but still seem true in that period of time or in a given space. A famous example he uses here is the topic of homosexuality. It goes without saying that the moral attitude regarding homosexuality has changed drastically over time and still varies greatly across geo-political spaces today. On another level, Foucault states that knowledge has the power to turn itself into the truth (Hall, 1997, p.189). This knowledge is then used to influence the conduct of others. In the case of *American Progress*, John Gast perpetuates power-infused truths of the time. That way, he takes up a position of power.

3.6 The American Frontier

Much has been written about the American Frontier, but *What is an American?* by De Crèvecoeur and *The Significance of the Frontier in American History* by Frederick Jackson Turner are not only canonical and contemporary texts on this issue, but they also give depth to the themes of *American Progress* in an innovative way.

Crèvecoeur explains that Americans are distinctly different from Europeans because while they do bring all the admirable European personality traits across the Atlantic, they leave the bad ones behind (1782, p.1). Linked to this claim, he believes that America is like a safe-haven of

refuge for Europeans fleeing from countries with political and religious oppression (p.2). Americans are thus bound together by their individuality and work ethic in a space which presents greater opportunities than Europe (p.1).

For Turner, the Frontier is the space where the European settler encounters the savage Native and by defeating the wilderness, he becomes an American (1893, p.3). For him, the West is a space of wilderness which needs to be civilised by the settlers (p.14). Referring to the way in which the ancient Greeks expanded, he views the westward movement as a natural and necessary process (p.38).

For the analysis of *American Progress*, these two texts are appealing because they explain the Americanness and the way in which the power structure is established between the two peoples in the painting. Admittedly, Crèvecoeur's writing is slightly outside of the 19th century, but his ideas seem to carry over into the 19th century as one sees in the course of this paper.

3.7 Representation in landscape painting

In 19th century America, landscape painting takes up a crucial role in the identity shaping of the nation. Nation, nature and space are fused in images to represent and shape the newly born country (Christadler, 1989, p.93). Paintings about nature become screens for the display of power between settlers and Natives. Mirroring the westward movement, quite often, the settlers are placed on the right side of the painting and the Indians on the left side. Going in hand with their placement, there is a clear separation of culture and savagery (Miller, 1992, p.209). The concept of nature plays an especially important role here. With expansionism at its height, the West is constructed as a space of pure wilderness. Paintings are thus often commissioned to justify westward expansion on political, scientific and economic levels. The rationale behind the movement towards the West is also driven by religious symbolism. Harking back to biblical language, painters commonly imply that America is a New Jerusalem or some other paradise-like haven for the settlers. So, while nature is mostly displayed as hostile wilderness, painters often make conscious efforts to imply holiness in the space occupied by the settlers (Christadler, 1989, p.108). It becomes common godliness in landscape painting to imply holiness through bright colours or extreme brightness (p.109). For example, the sun is reflected in lakes or darkness and brightness are contrasted. In many 19th century paintings, spaces are left empty or objects seem absent. Martin Christadler explains that this absence can be as meaningful as presence (1989, p. 114). This reminds strongly of Foucault's belief that the marriage of absence and presence in images is worth interpreting (Carroll, 1994, p.159).

What is interesting about landscape paintings in the 19th century is that some viewers fail to understand what is real nature and what is only a representation (Miller, 1992, p.213). In fact, landscape paintings become a good measurement of the social gap in the 19th century. Those who simply enjoy the landscape without knowing what is real and what is represented, are looked down upon. In contrast, viewers who understand the hidden cultural codes are seen as erudite (p.215). This can be linked to Hall's claim that meaning is often dependent on a culture which speaks the same language (1997, p.195). The reason why poorly educated 19th century viewers do not necessarily understand the symbols is that most landscape painters attempt to create landscapes as authentic as possible. But, most of the time, they do not replicate real spaces of American nature. They seek to paint a spot of nature which carries symbolic meaning for the nation and which contains details representing a larger "truth" (Miller, 1992, p.208). In the time of rising nationalism in the 19th century, painters and sophisticated viewers form a bond over landscape paintings. Their communal ritual of producing and appreciating art becomes a form of love towards America and a strengthening of its exceptionalist myth (p.213). It is crucial to understand here that 19th century landscape paintings attempt to embody everything uniquely American about American landscape.

The painting *The Oxbow* by Thomas Cole is a good reminder of how this plays out. Portraying a simple bend in a river and contrasting two different types of landscape, this painting becomes an iconic 19th century American landscape painting. Its division of calm, open surfaces in the East and wild, stormy wilderness in the West is representative of the thought behind westward expansion. Furthermore, it combines a number of European aesthetic qualities which American painters love. According to Cole, it alludes to "the blue, unsearchable depths of the northern sky, the upheaped thunderclouds of the Torrid Zone, the silver haze of England [and] the golden atmosphere of Italy" (Roque, 1982, p.71). This view is contrasted by Cole who claims that one "see[s] no ruined tower to tell of outrage-no gorgeous temple to speak of ostentation; but (...) mighty deeds shall be done in the now pathless wilderness" (p.71). This juxtaposition is important in order to understand 19th century discourse on America and the expansionist thought. America is conceptualised as a new space which fuses all qualities seen in European nature, but at the same time omits everything detestable about Europe. For example, the John de Crèvecoeur describes America as a fresh start without political and religious oppression (1782, p.2). Cole refers to this idea when talking about the lack of ruined towers and the absence of temples. Instead, he sees the wilderness of the new nation as an opportunity to expand and do great things. As Roque explains, Europe in the 19th century is seen as a place of the past, whereas America is one of the future (1982, p.71).

3.8 Summary

In a broad sense, this study is concerned with representation. Hall's *The Work of Representation* presents a perfect framework, especially due to his multiple inclusions of Foucault's ideas. These two authors structure the thought behind representation and power. *Romantic Landscape Painting in American* by Martin Christadler puts these concepts into the context of paintings and establishes the steps for the analysis of *American Progress*. In addition, *Everywhere and Nowhere: The Making of the National Landscape* by Angela Miller addresses meaning and representation in 19th century American paintings. Lastly, *The Oxbow by Thomas Cole: Iconography of an American Landscape Painting* by Oswaldo Rodriguez Roque is a good text to grapple with the Americanness behind American paintings. *The Significance of the Frontier in American History* by Turner and *What is an American?* by De Crèvecoeur are crucial American texts to understand the Frontier as depicted in *American Progress*.

So, *power* and *representation* establish the theoretical framework, but since these ideas are an element in the writing of all the other authors mentioned, it is hard to separate the review of existing literature from the framing ideas of this study. This is especially so because the existing literature contains arguments which structure this work. The theoretical framework and existing literature may in fact play a greater role in this paper than usual because as I point out later on, a Foucauldian discourse analysis does not prescribe any real steps for an analysis.

This study is innovative in that it does use existing literature on 19th century landscape paintings, but applies it to only one painting and does so with the guiding methodological idea of Foucauldian *power*.

4 RESEARCH PARADIGM

This study takes a pragmatist approach with a leaning towards constructivism. The scholar David Morgan explains that knowledge is always gained within a social field (2016, p.1049). He elaborates that for him, a paradigm is concerned with shared belief structures in a research community. Within the community, it is decided which research questions are crucial and through which methodological approaches these problems should be approached. In other words, the social spaces of research committees are called paradigms and exert power on what a reader considers true. Even though this is inevitably manipulative of how the reader thinks about a given topic, it offers a framework in which the researcher can operate. Additionally, the access to knowledge is often linked to the researcher's view on the nature of reality.

Pragmatism as a research paradigm accepts the usefulness of various different research approaches (Morgan, 2016, p.1049). I believe its strength also lies in the fact that it does not rely on the aforementioned metaphysical truth claims other paradigms make. To cite Stuart Hall, pragmatism presents “an alternative epistemological paradigm” (2013, p.19, cited in Morgan, 2016, p.1049). Knowledge is thus a product of tested claims without metaphysical presuppositions. The issue lies in the fact that researches often cannot converge on the subject of reality. A pragmatist, on the other hand, circumvents the problem by viewing research as a social activity that is influenced by the researcher’s beliefs. Pragmatists accept that researchers are influenced by multiple fields such as political and social contexts (Creswell, 2013, p.11). That is why they believe the researcher should not limit himself to one method, but be flexible depending on the research question, the data sets and the methodological approach.

I find these ideas strikingly fitting in my case. Gough et al. explain that discourse analyses are a result of social theory such as social constructivism and post-structuralism (2013, p.278). If one becomes more specific by employing Foucauldian discourse analysis, one is concerned with the construction of discourse and its effect on knowledge and its creation of power hierarchies. But, concepts for Foucauldian discourse analysis can be drawn from multiple disciplines such as history, psychology or linguistics (Cataldi, 2004, p.20). Depending on the area of use, the paradigms vary. So, even concerning my method, it is hard to pinpoint the accurate paradigm. But, in general, Foucault is said to belong to the constructivists. The crucial distinction from the other constructivists being that he works with the establishment of meaning through discourse, not through language.

One should also narrow down the “display of power”-section of my research question. Under the previous heading, I argue that Hall’s concept of representation as encoding and decoding of symbols within a culture makes me believe that my framework belongs into the category of representation. At least here, I think I can state that the fitting paradigm is the constructivist approach. Despite the fact that constructivists do not claim that there is no material world, they do say that “things don’t mean: we construct meaning” (Hall, 1997, p.177). In short, social actors utilise a sound or depiction to represent an object in order to convey meaning. This meaning is then understood within the cultural context the social actor is operating in. If I apply this thought to *American Progress*, I find it quite reasonable. The symbols and implications placed in the painting are added by Gast with an intentional meaning. The viewer needs to understand the meaning by grasping the cultural context and depth of the elements placed within. This aligns with Hall’s belief in meaning being culturally dependent (Hall, 1997, p.195). Additionally, it fits in with the aforementioned claim that not everybody understands the hidden

symbol in American landscape painting due to the constructed meaning of certain elements (Miller, 1992, p.213).

So, the framework Foucault and Hall offer and the way in which paintings are constructed, pave the way to a constructivist approach. But, as Creswell argues, I, as a researcher, may not be aware of how I am influenced by various approaches, fields of study and personal beliefs (2013, p.11). I also want to maintain the flexibility of moving between approaches and not worrying about metaphysical questions. That is why this study is conducted under the light of pragmatism with a constructivist focus.

5 METHODOLOGY

This paper applies Foucauldian discourse analysis to Gast's painting *American Progress*. At first sight, it seems odd to apply discourse analysis to an image. Of course, discourse is mostly used for oral and written texts. But, Foucault, for example, believes in a broader definition of discourse, even encompassing images (Meyer and Wodak, 2009, p.6). Foucault is also advantageous because the concept of power is the driving force behind my research question and of great importance in Foucault's writing. Arribas-Ayllon and Walkerdine point out that Foucault places power at the very centre of his analysis (2007, p.91). The focus on power relations in paintings, specifically, calls for Foucauldian discourse analysis on some level. Meaning and thus also power relations, are decoded in paintings and can be revealed within the historical discourse of the time, for example (Meyer and Wodak, 2009, p.60). This analysis does not only examine how power is constructed, but it also puts this power hierarchy into the context of the time. For Foucault, this step plays an important role because it allows for a better understanding of the discourse and its power display (1980, p.131, cited in Hall, 1997, p.189). While the painting itself contains truths about the discourse of the time, the power relations within become more evident when compared to the discourse outside of the image.

In paintings, one can often focus on what is omitted rather than just analysing the elements present. Especially in the context of paintings, Foucault thinks the interplay of presence and absence can be a helpful angle of analysis (Carroll, 1994, p.159). It seems natural to examine what is intentionally placed in an image. But, it can also be fruitful to wonder why certain things are missing when the viewer would usually expect them. In *American Progress*, this theory sounds even more reasonable due to the dualistic way in which it is constructed. For many symbols and themes portrayed in the right half of the painting, there is either a complete

opposite on the other side, or an absence thereof. A good example is the theme of Christianity on the right side and a lack of religious presence in the left half.

In addition, I want to point out that Foucauldian discourse analysis stressing *power* works well with Gast's painting for another reason. Angela Miller writes that 19th century painters often invent spaces and landscapes in order for them to be symbolic of national truths (1992, p.207). The title of her essay goes *Everywhere and Nowhere: The Making of a National Landscape*. "Nowhere" stands for the construction of a non-existing space, while "everywhere" is meant to emphasise the universal, national truths one can obtain from it. Similarly, Gast's image is made up, but the display of power mimics a larger, national discourse. Foucault argues that one should pay attention to details as they can be indicative of a larger discourse (1977, p.27, cited in Hall, 1997, p.190). Connected to this idea, a Foucauldian analysis could be advantageous because of Foucault's new idea of power. Without having to focus on oppressive forces, one can also look at microscopic symbols of power (Foucault, 1980, p.98, cited in Hall, 1997, p.189).

Foucauldian discourse analysis has been looked down upon in the past for not offering a real means of methodology. This is probably mainly so because there is no step-by-step way to conduct this form of research. Instead, a researcher employing Foucauldian discourse analysis is supposed to pick ideas from Foucault's body of writing and assemble them (Given, 2008, p.357). Foucault himself writes: "I would like my books to be a kind of tool-box which others can rummage through to find a tool which they can use however they wish in their own area" (Foucault, 1974, pp. 523, 524, cited in Motion and Leich, 2007, p.2). Contrary to a step-by-step manual for a discourse analysis, Foucault states that a Foucauldian discourse analysis deals with the broad ideas of construction of meaning and the various aspects of power (1978, cited in Motion and Leich, 2007, p.3). The previous chapter explains exactly which texts are concerned with the production of meaning through representation and the consequent creation of power. Placed into the framework of the research question, it appears sensible to employ Foucauldian discourse analysis. Naturally, the steps of the analysis still need to be established.

Since Foucault himself claims that he has only created a toolbox and not a manual, I want to elaborate on the steps myself.

5.1 Structure

As mentioned before, one of the most striking characteristic of *American Progress* appears to be the dualistic nature of the painting. This analysis thus concentrates on the following opposites:

- Civilisation and Nature
- Godliness and Godlessness
- Brightness and Darkness

It is not just the mere convenience of having three dichotomies which is driving the analysis. In fact, these opposites are informed by Martin Christadler and Angela Miller and their arguments as displayed in the previous chapter. In a broader sense, these ideas are elements of *power*, which can be looked at from Foucault's perspective. In another sense, each dichotomy is an example of Foucault's *presence* and *absence* since each half of a dichotomy implies the absence of its content in the other half. For example, the absence of brightness is darkness.

In 19th century landscape paintings, one of the most common theme of power between settlers and Indians is the separation of civilisation from wilderness (Miller, 1992, p.209). Representing common 19th century discourse on westward expansion, writer Frederick Jackson Turner reflects this notion in *The Significance of the Frontier*. Here, he claims that the Frontier is the meeting point of wilderness and culture (Turner, 1893, p.3).

Likewise, the division of godliness and godlessness is a driving theme in both paintings and 19th century discourse. While American wilderness in paintings is mostly construed as godless, the space taken over by settlers is almost always infused by divine symbols (Christadler, 1989, p.108). One of the most influential forces behind the movement towards the West, Manifest Destiny, is motivated by religion from the Puritan days up to the end of the 19th century (Parker, 2014, p.3).

Lastly, the juxtaposition of brightness and darkness makes sense because it is a common stylistic means to elevate the superiority of the East over the West in 19th century paintings. Here, light is seen in religious terms or as a "spiritual metaphor for divinity in nature" (Christadler, 1989, p.111). In 19th century discourse on westward expansion, this stylistic tool is mostly embedded in the topics of civilisation and Christianity. But, it is not hard to see how brightness is a strong rhetorical tool in general to justify expansionism.

Now that I have argued why these divisions of power make sense, I want to elaborate on how the analysis is conducted.

5.2 Steps

I believe the creation of power in terms of civilisation and nature is best explored in the following steps:

First, this paper explains why the viewer is made to believe that the right side of the painting is the civilised half. Likewise, it then proceeds to unfold how Gast depicts the Natives in the West as uncivilised. Here, Foucault's theory of *absence* plays a guiding role. Having undertaken these two steps, I move on to argue how this hierarchy in power naturalises westward expansion.

In a similar way, as with nature and civilisation, *American Progress* manages to separate godliness from godlessness. First, I attempt to show how the East is shown in a divine manner and then I try to prove that the opposite is true for the West. Once again, I mostly do this with Foucault's tool of *absence*. Lastly, this chapter shows the justification behind westward expansion through the lens of Manifest Destiny.

The painting establishes a clear division of light. Here again, I conduct a brief superficial reading of why the settlers are shown in bright light, whereas the *absence* thereof is true for the Natives. Then, I look at Manifest Destiny through the lens of the phrase "the empire on which the sun never sets" and lastly, from the angle of the Sublime.

5.3 Sample

The focus on only one painting in this study is intentional and more than sufficient. *American Progress* is a seminal piece of 19th century art and a strong visualisation of the discourse at the time. Even though a superficial glance at the painting is enough to understand the key topics within the painting, a more focused analysis using multiple sources of literature proves its great depth. Its structure of dichotomies goes especially well with Foucault's concept of *absence*. In addition, its obvious and more subtle display of power allows for an interpretation with the help of Foucault's writing on *power*. The amount of literature in the analytical chapter is based on Willig's approach of "the selection of suitable texts for analysis is informed by the research question" (2013, p.131). Applied to this study, this means that the bulk of sources needs to be sufficient to explain the power structures within *American Progress* and supportive enough to allow for a comparison with 19th century discourse on westward expansion. Naturally, sources belonging to the framework and the methodology need to enrich this structure. Willig's approach sounds reasonable and natural in that it does not confine the researcher to a given number of sources.

This painting should provide good insight into the discourse on westward expansion at the time. As argued before, visualisations can bring forth inclusions and exclusions in society (1988, p.1, cited in Rose, 2007, p.7). Connected to my research question, the power structures in Gast's painting should reveal societal issues in the discourse on the westward movement.

5.4 Ethical considerations

When applying Foucauldian discourse analysis, there are a couple of moral implications a researcher needs to be aware of. For Foucault, an analysis of a given discourse perpetuates social structures (Wrbouschek, 2009, p.36). The utterance of knowledge may even restructure the discourse the researcher is examining. A critical analyst of social issues is thus not only entangled within the structures, but also takes up a position of power. This seems inevitable because Foucault thinks that power runs through all social and public entities and actions (Hall, 1997, p.190). The inescapable danger for him lies in the idea that a researcher may be criticising a discourse with good intention, however, by doing so he is generating new power structures (Wrbouschek, 2009, p.38). I find this notion slightly too relativistic. If one is criticising a deplorable social practice, is the position of power one is taking up as a researcher really that bad? One must remember that Foucault also believes that discourses can be productive in their nature (Carabine, 2001, p.268). So, by examining an immoral practice, a researcher is publishing positive counterarguments. I will concede that I cannot produce knowledge in a vacuum. This caveat is mentioned in chapter on the research paradigm. By taking a pragmatist approach, I acknowledge the issue of being influenced by my experiences and social surroundings (Creswell, 2013, p.11).

Ramírez says that one problem with Foucauldian discourse analyses usually is their focus on large institutions and their obvious exercise of power (2013). On some level, the scope of this paper is concerned with a self-evident power display, namely westward expansion. But, the analysis of the most minute details in *American Progress* could mitigate this issue. This strategy goes in hand with Foucault's focus on the "micro-physics" of power (1977, p.27, cited in Hall, 1997, p.190). Of course, Ramírez is probably still right in the case of this paper as even the smallest manifestations of power are an element of the self-evident display of westward expansion.

Ramírez raises another interesting point when he says that discourse analyses usually examine those in power and by doing so, neglect the perspective of those who suffer (2013). Partially, I avoid this problem by dividing each dichotomy of analysis up into the perspective of the settler and that of the Natives. But, for the analysis of the Indians, I frequently utilise Foucault's concept of *absence*. Consequently, I look at the Native as a counterimage of the settlers and treat them as "the other". I am not sure to what degree this is problematic in this study. The Natives are "the other" in the discourse I am looking at. And since I am clearly condemning of "othering" by John Gast, I think it weakens the issue Ramírez puts forth.

Lastly, Ramírez highlights that it is possible to generate positive, social change through one's research (2013). As mentioned before, a researcher is in a position of power and should, in consequence, internalise that a criticism of a social issue is at the same time an implication that there is a more moral position. I have no doubt that a criticism of westward expansion or a criticism of glorifying depictions thereof is correct.

As mentioned before, a Foucauldian discourse analysis does not have any fixed steps one can follow in the analysis. One can imagine that this is liberating, but it also puts a lot of work and trust in the hands of the researcher. The researcher needs to have an overview of Foucault's body of writing in order to pick concepts for the analysis. While he does want researchers to treat his works like a "tool-box" (Foucault, 1974, pp. 523, 524, cited in Motion and Leich, 2007, p.2), the danger is that one picks his concepts out of context. If one is not aware of his range of literature, one may, for example, be writing about his concept of *knowledge* while being oblivious of the fact that this idea is closely tied to *power*. This can easily lead to a misinterpretation of terms.

5.5 Limitations and weaknesses

There some clear limitations to this study. The first lies in the fact that this paper is framed around discourse. Foucauldian discourse analysis is built on the idea that discourse plays a dominant role in the creation of meaning and on the presupposition that our subjective experience revolves around language (Willig, 2013, p.139). But since the social construction of the world changes across cultures and time, Foucauldian discourse analysis can hardly make claims about the unchanging nature of our world. In this case, the paper informs about the different forms of discourse on the westward movement in the 19th century. I hardly draw conclusions about objective realities outside of this framework. The issue of subjectivity is mirrored in the constructivist leaning of this paper, too.

Put into a broader perspective, the problem of subjectivity leads even further. For Foucault, knowledge and truth is dependent on a given culture. For him, societies use power to make things true or at least have an influence on their truth. In consequence, his ideas are sometimes labelled relativistic (Hall, 1997, p.191). This weakness may be mitigated by my voice as a researcher and my rejection of relativism.

Despite enabling a broad definition of the *text*, discourse analyses focus on the meaning of language, but neglect other areas where meaning can be produced e.g. thought and awareness (Willig, 2013, p.124). On the other hand, some argue that the relationship between mental states and language is irrelevant (Potter and Wetherell, 1987, p.180, cited in Willig, 2013, p.124). To

some degree Willig's concern makes sense. Quite often, thought patterns are the only measurement of what a subject intends to do or believes to be true. Thoughts are not always manifested in the real world. Applied to *American Progress*, the viewer obviously cannot know what Gast's intentions behind every detail of the painting are. This raises some questions: How could one even seek to find out his true intentions? Should the burden of meaning-production not lay on the viewer instead of the painter? In other words, does it matter which intended meaning Gast encodes in the painting? The point is that this paper claims an interpretation of the painting without knowing Gast's full intention.

One could criticise that the very use of discourse analysis is limiting because of its focus on discourse and omission of other factors. Hall, for example, points out that critics of Foucault's works think that the material and structural elements that influence *power/knowledge* are neglected e.g. economic factors (1997, p.191). Since this paper is concerned only with discourse, this can be seen as a weakness.

There is an obvious limitation in the chosen sample of this paper. The analysis of only one painting does not give an insight into the full range of 19th century representations on westward expansion. Further, the conclusions about the 19th century westward movement are dependent on the findings concerning *American Progress*. So, it is possible that some crucial information on 19th century discourse is left out because it is not mirrored in the painting. Lastly, the analysis of *American Progress* with literature concerned with landscape paintings is limiting in its perspective because it omits other iconographic approaches.

If one follows the methodological steps, I believe this study could be replicated independent from this research. The interpretation within the steps could vary, but to some degree the results should remain the same as they are bound to literature. However, the section on brightness and darkness would probably vary quite a bit because it relies more on a subjective interpretation. Within its limited scope, this paper should be valid. If one was to replicate the study with different methodological steps, but still under the guidance of Foucauldian discourse analysis, one could end up with different findings due to the lack of prescribed steps by Foucault. Generally speaking, this study should stand the test of time because the chosen sample, literature and methodological steps will not change in the future.

6 ANALYSIS

6.1 Civilisation and nature

6.1.1 Civilisation

Gast clearly makes a conscious effort of showing the right side of the painting in the most civilised manner possible. The boats in the top right hand corner are the first hint. Obviously, the size and complexity of their build implies some degree of civil advancement. But, on a deeper level, the open waters behind the boats underline the fact that the settlers are originally from Europe. This is important because Europe is seen as the centre of arts, science and culture at the time. John de Crèvecoeur, for example, shares this notion. He claims that settlers bring the best of European qualities to this new continent and leave the worst behind. So, on the one hand, they carry with them “the embryos of all the arts, sciences, and ingenuity which flourish in Europe” (Crèvecoeur, 1782, p. 1). On the other hand, however, they drop unwanted qualities such as religious and political oppression and a huge divide between the rich and the poor. He goes on to describe America as a place of refuge for poverty-stricken Europeans who are now accepted as real citizens (Crèvecoeur, 1782, p.2). As claimed before, it is a common theme in America landscape painting to highlight either the Americanness of a landscape or the idea that the America is a combination of the best European qualities, while taking pride in the fact that America has dropped unwanted qualities such as political and religious oppression (Roque, 1982, p.71).

The second mode of transportation in the painting is the locomotive. The railroads connect to the water in the East, which once again implies European roots. Invented in the first quarter of the 19th century and brought to America shortly after, steam engines reshape the way time and space are seen in a dramatic manner (Usselman, 2002, p.1). It not only enhances trade and travel, but it also gives way to new forms of cultural expansion. Usselman says that railroad systems increase in number dramatically over the years and locomotives undergo drastic improvements in terms of power, size and weight (2002, p.2). One can now grasp how the locomotives in *American Progress* are a symbol of civilisation. This depiction is a prime example of what Hall is emphasising in his claim that language is highly dependent on time and cultures (1997, p.195). One really needs to become aware of the implications behind a symbol like the locomotive in the 19th century. Looked at from today’s perspective, one easily fails to do so. It should go without saying that the telegraph lines running through the image are also an element of 19th cultural advancement.

Here, it is interesting to note that this new form of technology is being put up by a great angelic figure flying from East to West. Holding a school book in her arm, she is also a carrier of education. The divine implication of Manifest Destiny is hard to miss. When looking at the settlers, one notices that even the farmers are well-dressed. Further, the carriages imply some degree of wealth and the horses and cattle can be viewed as a symbol of domestication and thus a taming of wilderness. The settlers are characterised by individual freedom and as Crèvecoeur describes Americans in general, a “spirit of industry” (1782, p.1).

6.1.2 Nature

Foucault’s concept of *absence* comes in handy when looking at the left half of the painting. The reason is that everything mentioned in the previous paragraph which represents civilisation in the form of technological, communicational or cultural advancement is absent on the left. Previously, I mention how well-dressed the settlers are and how they have tamed wild animals. In contrast, the Natives are partially naked and are surrounded by wild animals. Granted, they have tamed horses, but their placement within seeming wilderness mirrors common conceptions of Natives at the time. Rather than just seeing Indians as living in nature, they are construed as an element of nature and wilderness (Ross et al., 2016, n.p.). Consequently, they appear to be merely animals. It is interesting that the Natives in the painting are fleeing and looking back at the settlers in a similar way as the wild animals are. Further, one can see that the Natives seem to have not even reached the stage of agriculture yet. In contrast to the tilled soil on the right-hand side, their land remains untouched. The placement of Native Americans on the left side of the painting within untamed spaces fits in the common procedure among 19th century painters (Miller, 1992, p.209).

In the background, one can see a group of Natives who appear to be dancing. This stereotypical primitive and animalistic movements are described by Mihesuah as “spasmodic” (2013, n.p.). This adds to the notion of Indians being uncivilised, animalistic, of low intelligence or even possessed by the devil. If one focuses on the landscape, one is struck by the hostility of the West. The background is filled with high and pointy mountains, which lie beneath heavy thunderclouds. This stands in stark contrast with the nearly smooth and endless landscape in the East. Similarly, the water in the top-left hand corner does not appear as calm as the water in the East does. In 19th century landscape paintings, the contrast of smooth waters or landscapes with sharp mountains covered by storms becomes a common stylistic device to imply a dichotomy of controlled space in the East and fierce wilderness in the West (Christadler, 1989, p.111). The element of death is implied on the left through dead animal corpses which are

devoured by other wild animals. Wild animals and death are not found on the other side of the painting. Also, one could mention that the Native weaponry is fairly primitive and the resources are easily attained from nature. In contrast, one of the settlers is holding a rifle which requires greater craftsmanship. It is even possible to read a form of mockery into the fact that the settlers have already built a house shortly after their arrival, whereas the Indians are dancing around their tents despite having always lived there.

6.1.3 Westward expansion

Now that I have established how one can interpret the construction of nature and civilisation in the painting, I attempt to show what to make of this information. The question now is, how this is a display of power and how it mirrors discourse on westward expansion from the time. To gain some first insights, a surface reading is enough. By painting the East as civilised and the West as savage, Gast is claiming superiority of the settlers. This can be seen on a moral, technological, cultural and human level. The clash of opposites is what Christadler calls a “rhetorical and legitimizing concept in political discourse” (1989, p.93). By dehumanising the Natives, the westward movement becomes less brutal.

The aforementioned permanence of living as shown by the settlers and the restless lifestyle as depicted by the tipis is a good starting point for a closer reading. It is common practice in the late 19th century to argue that Indian territory is far too wild and hostile for survival (Ross et al., 2016, n.p.). The claim is that Indians may have travelled through the wilderness, but they did not like these spaces due to their hostility. Even if they had lived there, it is argued that they do not deserve this living space because they fail to cultivate the lands as it was instructed to Adam by God. This notion is underlined by the agriculture on the right-hand side of the painting, the wilderness of the West and the degree of movement by the Natives. This conceptualisation of Native behaviour is a good example of Foucault’s term *power/knowledge*. He believes that knowledge is shaped through discourse and influences people’s beliefs. In consequence, a culture may have its own truths (Hall, 1997, p.188). This knowledge can even be self-perpetuating and powerful without a clearly discernible agent (p.189). So, after a while the aforementioned claims about Natives are questioned less and less and become common knowledge.

I have also pointed out that *American Progress* is not only successful at portraying the Indians as human beings within nature, but rather as a part of nature. By doing so, it dehumanises the Indians and desensitises the viewer to the sad realities of westward expansion. It places the Native within wilderness and represents him as a savage. This way of thinking is present

especially before the construction of the aforementioned invisible, vagabond Indian (Ross et al, 2016, n.p.). It is interesting to notice that it does not really matter if one labels Indians savages or invisible vagabonds. The result is a power hierarchy and a consequent justification for exploitation. But, it does show Foucault's *power/knowledge* in two different manifestations. Both construct the Native in a disparaging way, which eventually leads 19th century Americans to have a new image of the Indians.

It is helpful to look at the painting from the angle of the Frontier, too. In his famous essay *The Significance of the Frontier in American History*, Turner describes the Frontier as “the meeting point between savagery and civilization” (1893, p.3). He states that this line transforms the settler from a European to an American (Turner, 1893, p.4). It is the pure immersion in the wilderness which Americanises the settler. As I have pointed out before, the painting clearly signals the European roots of the settlers. This is obviously contrasted with the American traits portrayed in the image. Examples thereof could be the settlers' strive for freedom, individualism, their hard work ethic, the move towards the West and their rapid technological establishment. So, Turner's idea of Euro-American transformation can be applied here. The cruelties of expansionism are rationalised by the claim that the Frontier is necessary to transform Europeans into Americans. Turner later goes on to cite a man named Grund who states that the “universal disposition of Americans (...) to enlarge their dominion over inanimate nature, is the actual result of an expansive power which is inherent in them” (n.d., p.8, cited in Turner, 1893, p.7). This quote is so fascinating and a great example of 19th century discourse on westward expansion for two reasons. On the one hand, it claims that Americans are born with a want to expand their outreach of power. On the other hand, it does not only dehumanise Natives, but even reduces them down to objects. The Natives in *American Progress* clearly have not lost their animate nature, but I believe I have shown that the painting offers a similar apologetic tone on why westward expansion is morally acceptable. The supposed inherent expansionist nature is a radical version of what Miller calls “national self-affirmation” (1992, p.213).

At this point, I would like to draw the attention to the group of buffalos on the left side of the painting. Turner elaborates that the path the buffalos tread, becomes a path for the Indians. These trails then widen into roads and eventually become railroads (1893, p.14). He sees it as a metaphor for the evolution of civilisation. Not only does the painting display buffalos, but the steps of evolution go in hand with westward expansion. The buffalos seem to be further to the left than the Natives and these in turn are placed to the left of the settlers. Turner appears to believe that Americans are driven by an inherent need to expand. By focusing on a detail such

as the buffalos in *American Progress*, one finds an example of Foucault's concept of the "micro-physics" of power (1977, p.27, cited in Hall, 1997, p.190). For him, power is not a line, but a net. In this case, the detail is a representation of a larger discourse. The buffalo becomes an element of westward expansionism.

The second but last sentence of Turner's essay reveals an even larger thought that just the self-evidence of American expansion. He says that the Mediterranean Ocean was to the Greeks what the Frontier is to the Americans (Turner, 1893, p.38).

This idea reminds strongly of the concept of *translatio imperii*. The core belief here is that the centre of civilisation has always thought to be moving towards the West (Frese, 1999, p.31). Frese extends his thought by saying that it is analogous to the way the sun rises throughout the day. One is instantly reminded of the rising sun in *American Progress*. Since the sun here is possibly representative of the East and in consequence, Europe, Gast may be implying that the centre of culture and science needs to move on to America and push back the wilderness. Frese elaborates that the ideas of *translatio imperii* have changed over time. One crucial shift is the movement from a belief in a paradise-like island to the idea of a refuge for oppressed people (Frese, 1991, p.31). This can be linked to Crèvecoeur's notion of America as a place of refuge for oppressed Europeans (Crèvecoeur, 1782, p.2).

Even though I want to address religion in the next section, I cannot omit the religious element of *translatio imperii* in the context of America. Frese claims that European Christians are mobilised by a desire to missionize the heathen Indians (1991, p.34). A mixture of ideas lead the settlers to believe that the Natives need either be converted or killed for the Second Coming of Christ or that America is a sort of New Jerusalem. The religious element of *translatio imperii* is mainly depicted by the westward moving, angelic women in the centre of *American Progress*. In 19th century paintings, the link between America and a possible New Jerusalem is commonly implied (Christadler, 1989, p.108).

To sum up, *American Progress* portrays nature and civilisation in an obvious contrasting manner. But, with Foucault's focus on *power* and *absence*, one becomes aware of the depth of his depiction. With an additional understanding of the symbolism within the painting and the socio-historical context of the 19th century, one can grasp its take on westward expansion even more.

6.2 Godliness and Godlessness

6.2.1 Godliness

Gast strongly indicates that the right side of the painting is divinely inspired. The most obvious symbol is the woman in the centre of the painting. She is characterised by pale skin, long, blonde hair and a flowing white dress. Her juvenile appearance and the manner in which she is flying through the image instantly make one think of an angel. Her head is tilted upwards which gives her a sense of pride and conviction. Additionally, one can interpret the sun again in the context of religion. Sill writes that the sun is often used as a symbol of Jesus (2011, n.p.). It is symbolically life-giving and through its illuminating force it is a source of energy and glory. Referring to the book of Revelations, she elaborates that the sun is an attribute belonging to the Virgin Mary. It is thus not hard to argue that the angelic figure in Gast's iconography is a depiction of the Virgin Mary, while the rising sun is symbolic of the Resurrection of Jesus. Here, the sun as a guiding light does not only provide spiritual assurance, but in a literal sense, it truly is illuminating the path for the settlers. It may seem exaggerated to read meaning into something so banal as the sun. But, one must be aware of the fact that *American Progress* clearly is not a depiction of a real scenario or landscape. As the title of Miller's essay *Everywhere and Nowhere: The Making of the National Landscape* can be interpreted, 19th century paintings are invented. But due to their artificiality, their construction is meant to contain national symbols. I am tempted to think that there is a lot of intention behind every element in a constructed scenario.

One could state that the two farmers driving the ox and cultivating the fields in the bottom right-hand corner imply a sort of godliness, too. First of all, it is telling that the settlers are all male. According to Genesis, it is men who need to work hard because of Adam and Eve's transgression in the Garden of Eden. More concretely, tilling fields is exactly what God asked Adam to do (Ross et al., 2016, n.p.). Further, the settlers in *American Progress* seem to be driven by a strong sense of conviction and individualism. Similarly, the expulsion from the Garden of Eden offered free will to mankind, which allows for conviction and individual freedom. Apart from these parallels, one can extract implications of Protestant work ethic. For example, believers in predestination believe that it is not possible to influence whether one is saved or not after death. So, they see work ethic as a good indication of future salvation. Rodgers explains that European visitors are awestruck by the industry and lack of leisure time in 19th century America (2014, p.5). This can partially be explained by the Puritan influence of hard work, but possibly also by the general Protestant idea of work as a privilege (Rodgers,

2014, p.6). The immaculate appearance and behaviour displayed by the settlers is similar to the way the famous 19th century painter Thomas Cole views the settlers. He views the West as uncultivated and as an opportunity where “mighty deeds shall be done (...) and poets yet unborn shall sanctify the soil” (Roque, 1982, p. 71).

6.2.2 Godlessness

Even more than in the previous section, I believe the concept of godlessness can best be approached through the very *absence* of godliness in the West. On one level, it is interesting to see that the element of labour and agriculture is absent on the left side of the painting. Not only does it support the idea that Natives are unable to cultivate their land, which makes them part of nature rather than masters thereof. In the religious context, it also proves their failure to till the land as God instructed Adam (Ross et al., 2016, n.p.). The Indians also appear to be straying from God’s path once one accepts that hard work is a Protestant value. The dancing Natives in the background stress this notion even more. The dance could be viewed as a heretic practice, which would obviously make them godless. But, it could also be seen as a pass time activity, which would be the antithesis of 19th century Protestant work ethic.

I believe the absence of full clothing on some of the Indians can be interpreted as a lack of godliness, too. Settlers associate Indian nakedness with sin and Satanism far before the 19th century. In the early 18th century, the famous Puritan Cotton Mather, for example, claims that the Indians were naked, stupid, driven by lust and sin and miserable before they were introduced to Christianity (b, 2003, p.26). It is interesting how the simple lack of clothing fits in with Fyfe and Law’s claim that power normalises the exclusion of individuals (1988, p.1, cited in Rose, 2007, p.7). The viewer contrasts himself to the naked Native and consequently, distances himself while judging the Indians negatively. One could point out that the sun is a symbol of God and more concretely, the rising sun is symbolic of the Resurrection of Jesus (Sill, 2011, n.p). If one carries on this thought, the sun should eventually set on the left-hand side of the painting. One could see that as the opposite of the Resurrection of Jesus and thus possibly a godless place. The absence of God as displayed by the sun can be seen in a literal sense by the darkness covering the left side of the painting.

6.2.3 Westward expansion

I think I have laid a decent foundation of how Gast contrasts the two opposing sides along religious lines. Obviously, these two sides have a contrasting power display and I now

attempt to connect it to the concept of westward expansion. The most basic reading here is easy. The settlers have God on their side, are guided by God and even have a divine justification for their movement into space inhabited by the Natives. The Indians, on the other hand, appear to be failing at God's plan of tilling the earth, even display Satanic traits and are forced to recede in the light of settler expansion.

I believe I can analyse the power relations in greater depth by looking at Manifest Destiny. I discuss this theme in the section on God because the Puritan roots of Manifest Destiny are religious and even with the political aspect mixing in over the years, I would say that being "destined" is inevitably religious. The central symbol of Manifest Destiny in the painting clearly is the woman dressed in white. Primarily, I wonder why this concept is represented by a female figure in such a male-dominated image. Greenberg guesses that the femininity of the figure has a soothing effect on the gruesome reality of westward expansion (2005, p.2). She believes there might be an idealisation of the transformation of wilderness into culture through the image one has of the benign and domestic 19th century woman. She elaborates that the "progress" of Manifest Destiny is connected to the progress made through female domesticity introduced into the world outside her house. Indeed, I do agree that the woman in *American Progress* stands out in the masculine crowd. I believe, however, that one should not be oblivious to the fact that Gast did include the violent aspect of westward expansion e.g. the gun-carrying settler. But, I do not think that this necessarily nullifies Amy Greenberg's argument. The tone of the painting clearly glorifies the westward movement. The gun is simply a tool to push the wilderness away and this apologetic tenor is strengthened with a female version of Manifest Destiny. The interpretation of the meaning behind the angelic woman is another good example of how the language of a painting needs to be analysed within its socio-historical field (Hall, 1997, p.195). There is another fascinating, but dangerous aspect connected to Manifest Destiny that I would like to discuss. The very definition of the word implies that the settlers are destined to expand. So, as Turner argues, too, it is an unalterable trait Americans are born with. Since this infusion of destiny happens before birth, it also hints at the divine force behind this belief. In Christianity, God is thought of as benevolent, omniscient, omnipresent and omnipotent. Further, his will does not change over time. The danger behind Manifest Destiny presents itself in the divine justification. If one thinks that the creator of the universe claims something morally true and worth fighting for, no other opinion counts and his will should be obeyed. As a matter of fact, it gives the settlers the view that they are sent by God to expand and fulfil his wish. Supporting arguments such as demonic depictions of Natives, false tales about Indians and a general belief in racial and cultural superiority fortify the narrative of Manifest Destiny. I want to emphasise

that religious certainty about something can be the most dangerous form of conviction due to its divine roots. In *American Progress* one can see this certainty and pure confidence in the behaviour of the settlers. There seems to be no doubt about their moral standpoint. They are all facing the West and especially the vehicles are portrayed in a way which makes them seem in a great hurry. As mentioned before, the angelic figure appears proud and confident in her upright gaze and the relaxed manner in which she is spreading the telegraph lines makes it seem like there is nothing wrong with expanding. The underlying discourse here could be the thought that Europe in the 19th century is commonly conceptualised as a place of the past, while America one the future (Roque, 1982, p.71).

Another reason why Manifest Destiny is such a powerful thought, is its fusion with multiple disciplines in the 19th century into a national myth. As mentioned before, the origin of Manifest Destiny is nearly entirely religious in the early settler years. Even though the term Manifest Destiny does not exist yet, early settlers such as John Winthrop are clearly driven by a belief in a divine mission (Parker, 2014, p.3). But, during the height of westward expansion, in the 19th century, the religious thought behind Manifest Destiny fuses with political ideals, social concepts and cultural imperialism. As a result, it becomes a powerful national myth. One can see this amalgamation of ideas in the takeover of civilisation over nature, for example. While the expansion into Native territory and the consequent establishment of “civilisation” is mainly a social and political movement, as I have the shown before, the justification is often connected to the Bible. This myth can easily be seen in Turner’s rhetoric. This comes out especially when he talks about the process of “Americanization” (1893, p.4) by means of the Frontier. Naturally, this process is of course mostly about pushing savagery back and establishing a cultured society. But, it is phrases like “perennial rebirth” (Turner, 1893, p.3) or “virgin soil” (p.19) that infuse religious elements into a mainly political and social endeavour. The result is an ideal of American exceptionalism or even “a romance with America” (Fluck, 2009, p.87). Even referring to Turner’s concept of “rebirth”, Fluck explains the romance of the Frontier by stating that the process of self-transformation into a hero in unknown wilderness is a crucial American myth (Fluck, 2009, p.90). *American Progress* portrays this national myth in multiple ways. One can see the raw masculinity attached to the Frontier, the degree of individualism and determination in the settlers, the way the expansion into Native territory is romanticised and the personification of Manifest Destiny. All of these forces are political, cultural or religious or a combination thereof. But, the result is a concept of Manifest Destiny which goes beyond these terms. It really is a sort of national, romanticised myth which is deemed truly American and the very process by which a European settler is “Americanized” (Turner, 1893, p.4). For me, this

is the reason why Manifest Destiny is such an incredibly powerful justification for gruesome actions in the 19th century. The mixture of ideas behind this American myth reminds me strongly of Foucault's idea of *power/knowledge* (Hall, 1997, p.188). The myth becomes a form of national "truth" and is questioned less and less.

6.3 Brightness and darkness

6.3.1 Brightness

With the sun placed in the top right-hand corner, the brightness decreases the further one looks towards the West. The light on the right side of the painting goes in hand with everything I have argued so far. The technological inventions, the advancement of communication technology, the cultivation of soil and general movement towards the West seem to be illuminated by the sun as well as the angelic figure. Despite the lack of secular thinking in the painting, I am still reminded of the age of enlightenment. This is probably so because the name of the age goes in hand with the scientific advancements of moving out of the "dark ages". This notion is mirrored in the image. As claimed before, I maintain that the brightness in *American Progress* is closely linked to God's will of expansion and spiritual guidance.

6.3.2 Darkness

Again, Foucault's idea of *absence* comes in handy in this paragraph. On one level, the absence of light is darkness. But, on another level, the dark side of the painting is also characterised by a lack of elements portrayed on the right side. Means of communication, technology, Western culture and religion are absent and instead replaced by a primitive and barbaric depiction of the Natives.

6.3.3 Westward expansion

Given that I have already established how civilisation and religion play a crucial role in *American Progress* in the establishment of Manifest Destiny, it would be too repetitive to continue with a long superficial reading on brightness and darkness. I should stress again that it becomes evident that the superiority of the settlers in terms of civilisation, technology, religion and agriculture is emphasised through the lighting. Of course, this contributes to the justification of Manifest Destiny.

In the context of lighting, I would like to draw attention to the sun again. I have already briefly explained the idea of *translatio imperii* and how it can be linked to the sun. Now, I shortly connect the symbolism of the sun to the phrase “the sun never sets on the empire”. Even though it is mostly used in the British empire, it is also mentioned referring to America. Naturally, even by the time the Frontier reaches the Pacific Ocean, this phrase cannot be uttered in a literal sense by Americans. More, this idea refers to the way in which the international greatness of the United States never ceases (Kayer, 2005, p.17). Especially in the end of the 19th century, the strong sense of patriotism extends the concept of Americanisation from a national to an international level. So, it is no longer just the westward movement, but also a belief that the States could possibly be the greatest country in the world. Events like the Spanish-American War are significant in the shaping of this thought (Kayer, 2005, p.17). A war is inevitably an exercise of power. If one accepts Kayer’s aforementioned claim that the Spanish-American War leads to a heightened patriotic discourse, this ties in with Foucault’s belief that power is productive. It can, for example, produce discourse (Hall, 1997, p.190). It is the heightened confidence of America gained through wars and the concept of *translatio imperii*, which helps justify the westward movement in the 19th century.

I would also like to examine the brightness from the perspective of the Sublime. In *Luminism and the American Sublime*, Earl A. Powell explains that the philosophical idea of the Sublime becomes a visual concept in 19th century paintings in America (1989, p.69). He elaborates that the Sublime is used by European philosophers in the previous century to label the intense emotions one feels when standing in the vastness of nature, in front of high mountains, in dangerous storms or in sharp contrasts of light and shadow. In the 19th century, the feeling of internal calm felt when one is present in vast, seemingly endless spaces becomes an element of the Sublime, too. It is also important to note that the Sublime is generally seen as a religious emotion. A main thinker behind the Sublime, Edmund Burke, links it to the power of God and calls it “the strongest emotion which the mind is capable of feeling” (Powell, 1989, p.70). Traditionally, mountains are seen as ugly, but by the 19th century, painters use mountains to imply the anger of a fair God. In *American Progress*, the high mountain chain extends across the Native territory and smoothens out in the territory of the settlers. The mountains are covered by dark clouds and are present only in the dark half of the painting. It is not hard to connect this depiction to Burke’s theory of God’s wrath in mountains. One could interpret the mountains as a symbol of God’s discontent with the Indians. But, the viewer also gets the feeling of fear when looking at the mountains. For Burke, fear is the highest form of the sublime and can once again be connected to God’s power (1989, p.70). The feeling of fear and despair is clearly stressed

by the presence of darkness in the West. Here, one could understand fear as a reaction to the savagery settlers are trying to push back. The unknown and the wilderness are unpredictable and a concern to settlers. The thunder clouds play a crucial element in the creation of darkness on the left side of the image. A thunderstorm is overwhelming and can evoke a number of negative emotions (Brady, 2013, p.43). However, it also a great source of the Sublime and thus not completely undesirable. Kant, for example, writes that someone with a lack of moral strength might run away from a thunderstorm even if he is in a safe space (p.58). He seems to argue that it requires a cultured mind to appreciate a powerful force like a thunderstorm. It would be too far-fetched to argue that the Natives are fleeing from the thunderstorm. Their main fear obviously is simply the advancement of the Frontier. But, maybe one could claim that the settlers in the background are not afraid of riding through the thunderstorm. So, one could state that they are depicted in a cultured way, as Kant writes. The underlying tenor behind the Sublime appears to be the desire to have a “heroic landscape” with “national associations” (Miller, 1992, p.207). As mentioned in previous sections, this nationalism in American landscapes is shown in *American Progress* in Thomas Cole’s quote on American nature: He views American landscapes as a mixture of the best European traits, namely: “the blue, unsearchable depths of the northern sky, the upheaped thunderclouds of the Torrid Zone, the silver haze of England [and] the golden atmosphere of Italy” (Roque, 1982, p.71). This greatness is supported by the lack of towers and castles in America, signalling an absence of oppression.

The brightness on the right half of *American Progress* is also stressed by the concepts of seeming infinity and calm. Some painters in the 19th century attempt to imply godliness and tranquillity through bright light and infinite, calm surfaces. This is achieved by still bodies of water, for example (Powell, 1989, p.72). The idea behind painting calm water is that it instils the viewer with a sense of calm sublimity. I believe one can find this detail in Gast’s painting. I have already argued that the body of water on the right-hand side appears to be the Atlantic Ocean. If one takes the size of the boats into account, it is hard to say that it is merely a lake. Considering this, the water appears strangely calm. Together with the sunlight, it has a relaxing effect on the viewer and adds to the notion of sophistication and control by the settlers. Referring to the biblical phrase “sea of glass”, Powell even compares bright, calm waters to heavenly emotions (1989, p.93). Likewise, Christadler highlights that 19th century painters often suggest holy power in light-filled waters (1989, p.109). In contrast, the body of water in the West is overshadowed by dark clouds and appears uncanny in its grey colour. The effect is the opposite and the viewer feels uncomfortable due to the lack of order on the surface.

Similarly, the landscape in the East is smooth and appears endless. Highlighted by the brightness, I once again have the impression that the viewer feels relaxed because of the ordered composition of landscape. 19th century American painters use order and minimalism to signal that the depicted landscape is part of God's intention (Andrus, 1989, p.31). This plays into the divine narrative behind westward expansion. Interestingly, the West is shown in a cluttered manner. Also, the mountain chain and the water on the left are narrowing down the space. Given that the painting is from the 1870s, one could state that Gast wants to remind the viewer that the closing Frontier is about to end the time of wilderness. The settlers bring order into the Western space and are pushing back the darkness in the Indian territory.

Of course, one needs to remain realistic and accept that the general 19th century discourse on westward expansion is not concerned with details like the Sublime. But, in the analysis of this small detail, one can find bigger concepts of Manifest Destiny. As I have pointed out on multiple levels, these ideas are of course dominant 19th century beliefs concerning the westward movement. And, as mentioned before, Foucault believes it is important to focus on the most minute details, too. They can be representative of a larger force (Foucault, 1977, p.27, cited in Hall, 1997, p.190).

7 DISCUSSION

On the most basic level, this study exemplifies how cultures utilise symbols in language in order to convey meaning (Hall, 1997, p.173). Additionally, it shows how these pieces of language need to be understood within the cultural context of the time (Hall, 1997, p.195). For example, as argued before, the significance of the locomotive in *American Progress* only becomes apparent when one contextualises it within the 19th century. Despite the usefulness of *language*, Foucault's concept of *discourse* plays a larger role in this paper as it encompasses the actions behind "what is thought" at the time, too (Hall, 1997, p.186). This is crucial because most of the rhetoric on westward expansion in the 19th century manifests itself in real expansion. Fyfe and Law play an important role with their claim that images display power structures well and can naturalise power hierarchies (1988, p.1, cited in Rose, 2007, p.7). As said before, this becomes most apparent in Gast's image in his construction of the Native being a part of nature rather than a human within nature. This construction could also be seen as an example of Foucault's *power/knowledge* (Hall, 1997, p.188). Not only does Gast take up a position of power by naturalising a power structure, he also might influence what a 19th century viewer considers "true" about Native Americans. Foucault's concept of the "micro-physics" of power

(1977, p.27, cited in Hall, 1997, p.190) proves useful in the analysis of the buffalos and their symbolic meaning, for example.

Despite initial hesitations, the lack of fixed methodological steps in a Foucauldian discourse analysis is useful in this study because the flexibility allows for a more customised, individual analysis. The methodology and theoretical framework of this study fit together well because Hall writes about *representation*, but also cites Foucault on exactly this topic. In addition, Hall's concept of *representation* contextualises Foucault's broad topic of *power* culturally. This is important because Foucault's *discourse* is very much dependent on culture. These two ideas are not only present in the existing literature on the Frontier, but also guiding ideas in the two scholarly texts by Miller and Christadler. To some extent, this paper shows how *representation*, *power* and visualisations fit together. One could say that visualisations can represent power structures in a clear way. This seems especially helpful when one is talking about a discourse that is very power-laden. Even though *American Progress* is not a typical 19th century landscape painting, the two texts on landscape painting by Miller and Christadler provide a strong theoretical framework for the analytical steps of civilisation/nature, godliness/godlessness and brightness/darkness. Together with Roque, even details such as the possible meaning behind the sun become clearer.

One of the most shocking realities behind the findings of this paper is the casualness and naturalness with which the Natives are separated from the settlers and dehumanised in this process. The justification for the killing of Indians is shown in religious, political and cultural terms in *American Progress*. The right side of the painting is elevated in every detail, while the inferiority of the Native side is implied ad nauseam. This becomes even more horrifying if one accepts that these results align with 19th century discourse on expansionism. This means that the arguments made in *American Progress* have some grounding in the rhetoric and actions of the people in 19th century America. The representation of power in the painting does in fact lay bare the social fabric of the time. As Rose says, visualisations can be great tools to view social work (2007, p.7). The interpretation of the image shows how banal the act of territorial expansion and killing of Natives becomes. It depicts the process of how a Native American becomes an animalistic savage, how the West is construed as a place of wilderness and how settlers are carrying out God's will. Of course, one can argue that actual policies like the Indian Removal Act and other political actions lead to the genocide of the Native American population. But, it is images like *American Progress* that show how intricate the net of arguments is which justifies these actions in the first place. It proves Foucault's point that knowledge is power, especially when this knowledge is defined as a form of subjective, culturally-dependent truth.

It reveals how a society can be programmed to believe the most absurd things about another group and as a consequence, commit horrendous acts of violence. I hope this paper exemplifies how one should not underestimate those in power to influence a discourse. Distributors of information like news agencies, the media and in this case, commissioners of paintings have the ability to latch on to an existing discourse and deepen it or even create a new one. It also goes to show how vulnerable our brains are to incoming information and cultural norms. The real force behind a brutal state seems to lie in the manipulative thought behind it. It makes me wonder to which degree individuals can lose their ability to think rationally about immoral practices when this practice is carried out by a large group i.e. when this practice is engrained in the individual's culture.

7.1 Future research

To extend this research, one could interpret *American Progress* from a different iconographic approach. In other words, one could move away from the 19th century perspective on landscape paintings and try finding other artistic conventions. The findings on the angelic figure in the painting, for example, seem sufficient in this paper. One could, however, say more about her appearance and the implications thereof if one was to consult literature on the Classical period, for example.

Gillian Rose states that the composition of a painting is best looked at from the angle of content, colour and the spatial organisation of elements (2007, p.13). Content and spatial organisation are covered extensively in this study. This paper also analyses the contrast of brightness and darkness, but it would also be worth examining the colour display in general. Additionally, one could pay closer attention to the size of the elements within the painting and the possible meaning thereof. One could ask oneself, for instance, why the size of the ships in the right half is so unrealistically disproportionate to the rest of the painting.

Given that *American Progress* is painted less than a decade after the end of the American Civil War, one could look for a change in style in the painting. Miller points out that the style and intended meaning behind American paintings changes after the war (1992, p.220). If one can detect a change in style, one could possibly also find new meaning in the image.

One could make a bold attempt and lift the painting out of its historical context of the 19th century. On the one hand, one could examine the stereotypisation of the Native in *American Progress* and compare it to today's image of Native Americans. On the other hand, it might be interesting to examine the characteristics of the settlers and analyse whether they have carried over to modern Americans.

8 CONCLUSION

American Progress is easily one of the most well-known paintings on the westward movement. Partially, this can probably be attributed to the fact that it is not hard to deconstruct its meaning on a surface-level. But, it is surprising how the dichotomies of civilisation and wilderness and faith and disbelief can be found in just about every element of the painting. Foucault's concept of *absence* is especially helpful here because it often gives meaning to the second half of the painting and simultaneously, the second dichotomy. The decoding of the individual symbols in the painting reveals truths about 19th century thought on the topic of the Frontier and often shows remarkable similarities with literature on this topic.

Gast's image is so powerful because it creates a bond between civilisation and godliness. The Natives are dehumanised through their placement in nature, appear demonic and lack any form of civilisation. This depiction fits in with the 19th century image of the invisible, vagabond Native (Ross et al, 2016, n.p.) or the Native savage who is closer to an animal than to a human. The settlers appear highly civilised due to their pristine appearance, work ethic, individualism and their use of modern 19th century technology. While Gast does seem to imply that the settlers are influenced by European culture as seen in the ships, for example, one can see that they make a conscious effort to construct the right side of the painting as distinctly American, too. One of many examples thereof are the will to expand and the emersion of the settlers in the Frontier. It is this mixture of good European and new American traits which is mirrored in 19th century thought and claimed to make the American so great. Naturally, this difference in the portrayal of civilisation between the two halves of the painting, elevates the settlers and justifies their expansion towards the West.

The angelic figure in *American Progress* embodies Manifest Destiny and implies that the settlers are sent by God to expand into Native territory in order to establish a Christian, cultured society. Godliness is also symbolised by their Protestant work ethic, their free will and the rising sun. The Native Americans are fleeing from the God-ordained expansion, but also lack the aforementioned Protestant values. Their nakedness and wild dancing makes them fit in with the 19th century image of the satanic savage. This powerful representation of godliness and godlessness naturalises westward expansion along religious lines.

Finally, the opposites of brightness and darkness strengthen the opposites of civilisation/nature and godliness/godlessness. On a deeper level, one can interpret the rising sun as a metaphor for *translatio imperii*, which would mean that America is the next empire to expand. If one adds

the Sublime to the analysis, one can read a sense of calm and control into the right side of the painting, while the opposite becomes apparent on the left side.

In *American Progress*, westward expansion is justified with religious, political and cultural arguments. These claims are similar to the way the movement to the West is justified in the 19th century.

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