

Stories Made to Matter: Power, Public Memory, and the Visual Rhetoric of Treaty 1 Representations at Lower Fort Garry

Georgia DeFehr

Inception

This paper was written in Dr. Tracy Whalen's class, "Rhetorics of Visual Representation," in the Department of Rhetoric, Writing, and Communications.

Abstract

In 1871, Indigenous and Crown representatives gathered at Lower Fort Garry in Manitoba to negotiate the first of the numbered treaties. Through the lens of visual and material rhetorics, a former historic interpreter considers how the historic site functions to ensure rather than challenge settler colonial misunderstanding of Treaty 1.

★ ★ ★

*"[P]laces of public memory are positioned perpetually as the sites of civic importance and their subject matters as **the** stories of society. The stories they tell are thus favored by being made, quite literally, to matter." —Dickinson et al. (Emphasis in original 28)*

Over nine days in August of 1871, representatives of the Anishinaabe, the Swampy Cree, and the Crown negotiated the foundation of the relationship between the government of Canada

and First Nations involved in the Numbered Treaties: Treaty No. 1. Treaty negotiations took place at “the Stone Fort,” officially known as the Hudson’s Bay Company post of Lower Fort Garry. Since making Treaty 1, Crown and Indigenous partners have had conflicting understandings of the treaty’s intent and obligations. Anishinaabe-Métis lawyer and scholar Aimée Craft explains that the Crown perspective treats Treaty 1 as a surrender of land, while an Anishinaabe understanding approaches Treaty 1 as a sacred agreement to share and equally benefit from the land, as well as to assist, respect, and care for one another as treaty partners (5). As time passed since the 1871 negotiations, Lower Fort Garry transformed from a fur trading post to a Parks Canada National Historic Site. Visitors and tour groups who pay an entry fee can wander through Lower Fort Garry’s historic stone buildings or visit its on-site museum on the land where nations gathered to negotiate Treaty 1 over a century ago.

Lower Fort Garry represents Treaty 1 in two locations: a display in the museum building (Figure 1) and a plaque outside the visitor reception centre (Figure 2). This essay will focus on the museum’s Treaty 1 display, considering how this representation of the treaty may appease settler visitors of their Treaty 1 responsibilities, uphold an androcentric and white-dominated social order, and promote a contained form of citizenship within the settler-colonial Canadian state. To do so, the paper will examine the museum’s Treaty 1 display from three broad approaches to visual rhetoric: visual rhetoric as public address, as everyday life, and as logic. Visual rhetoric itself, as communications scholars Brian Ott and Greg Dickinson define it, refers to non-linguistic symbols that are visible, meaningful, and human-produced (2). Such symbols are rhetorical, Ott and Dickinson suggest, because they “engage us in questions of belief, value, and action” (2).

By using three approaches to visual rhetoric to reflect on the attitudes that the museum’s Treaty 1 display may invoke, this essay

aims to contribute to critical scholarship on visual rhetoric, Treaty 1, and the museum. The common thread uniting many scholars in these areas is their contestation of dominant understandings of the past, regardless of whether they challenge taken-for-granted interpretations of the past as depicted in the museum or memorial (Bell and Val Napoleon; Dickinson et al.; Kidd et al.; Kreps), government and court records (Craft), or contemporary Canadian culture more broadly (Simpson). Another connection unites the work of these scholars, and this paper, as well: the imperative to critically examine dominant interpretations of the past for what they tell us about dominance in the present.

Visual rhetoric as public address

The public address perspective of visual rhetoric, as Ott and Dickinson describe it, treats the visual as a symbolic message created to address and persuade an audience. To understand how exactly the visual may address and persuade a particular audience, public address scholars of imagery examine the visual's structural elements, which are perceived as symbolizing the visual's message. Much public address scholarship on imagery considers how visuals contribute to civil, political, and public spheres of society. Images can teach viewers how to act as citizens, for instance, in addition to shaping viewers' attitudes towards public policies and issues (Ott and Dickinson 4-5).

Drawing from the public address approach to visual rhetoric, I argue that Lower Fort Garry's museum Treaty 1 display communicates a contained form of Canadian citizenship that serves to pacify any visitor discomfort concerning the Canadian government's general disregard for, and outright violations of, many of its treaty promises. By pacifying critical responses to the Canadian government's neglect of many treaty agreements, the display board reinforces the existing Western social order that is created by, and valorizing of, the white European man.

The display's communication of a contained form of Canadian citizenship is apparent in the board's photographs (Figures 3-6). The majority are individual portraits, with one photograph depicting three figures. The subjects in all four photos are Indigenous men who, with one exception, have solemn and subdued expressions. While serious expressions are common in old photographs, the use of these photos may produce a different effect than if other photos—perhaps depicting groups of people or the landscape—were included. Robert Hariman and John Lucaites argue that a lack of emotional display is characteristic of public discourse in contemporary liberal-democratic societies. Citizens are taught to contain their emotionality in the public sphere, as public emotional display can dangerously digress into dissent against the liberal social order (Hariman and Lucaites 64). Hariman and Lucaites argue that photographs serve as one mode of public discourse through which citizens of liberal-democratic societies are taught to contain their emotions in public. The photographs of the display board may then serve to persuade viewers to suppress any potential dissent to the Canadian government's infractions of many of its Treaty 1 responsibilities. Resultantly, settler visitors in particular may feel more indifferent towards current treaty conflicts, such as pipeline expansions that Indigenous leaders across North America are challenging for their infringement upon treaty rights (Nicholson; Tasker).

The display reinforces white men's power in the current Western social order through a particular painting (Figure 6). The painting creates a hierarchy of figures in which European men stand at the top and First Nations people mainly sit at the bottom, privileging the European man. The First Nations people are also positioned on the side of the image, while the centre is punctuated by a historical symbol of European male power: The beaver felt top hat. The painting thus centralizes white European masculinity while marginalizing the First Nations figures.

Visual rhetoric as everyday life

The visual rhetoric as everyday life perspective considers the visuals which surround us in our daily lives, including architecture and street signs. Such everyday visuals are seen as conveying, but also limiting, cultural attitudes and practices as material forms of what Louis Althusser calls Ideological State Apparatuses (ISAs). As materializations of ISAs, everyday images hail individuals as subjects of ideology through a process Althusser terms “interpellation.” The images we encounter in our daily lives thus limit our cultural beliefs and practices, as well as our subjectivities—such as our feelings, memories, and imaginations—to the ideology of the state. The visual rhetoric as everyday life approach suggests that everyday visuals can also communicate a collective, oftentimes national, identity. The museum or memorial, for example, conveys a symbolic and embodied conception of nationhood to the subjects it hails (Ott and Dickinson 6-7).

From an everyday life approach to visual rhetoric, the everyday visuals of Lower Fort Garry may hail visitors as subjects of a state ideology in which the Canadian government can contain “the wild” and the social relations that take place within it. That is, the more banal visuals of Lower Fort Garry submit visitors to the rule of absent park experts in the government-ordered grounds of the national historic site.

Everyday visuals of the historic site include the path leading to the visitor reception centre, the boundary denying access to an alternative, unofficial entrance to the site, and parking lot signs informing where to park and exit. Ott and Dickinson suggest that the everyday visuals of the museum, such as signs and boundaries, signify the power and surveillance that museum experts exert over visitors (29). Sociologist Joe Hermer similarly argues that everyday visuals in federal and national parks produce what he calls an “emparkment gaze.” The emparkment gaze naturalizes power

relations between park visitors and officials by constructing a 'wild' space in which visitors must look to the "official graffiti" that absent park experts have constructed to navigate their way (Hermer 66). An emparkment gaze is arguably constructed at Lower Fort Garry through its commonplace paths, boundaries, and parking lot signs, as these everyday visuals communicate that the site is a chaotic space where visitors must subject themselves to the rule of Parks Canada officials for order to be secured. Everyday visuals of Lower Fort Garry may therefore instill a government-subject power relation that extends from the experience of visiting a national site to the everyday lives of citizens that are governed not by absent park experts, but by the Canadian state.

From a visual rhetoric as everyday life approach, one could also consider how the objects of Lower Fort Garry's Treaty 1 display case (Figure 7) may interpellate settler viewers. Positioned close to the glass, the Treaty 1 document reproductions, sealing wax, stamp, ribbon, and inkwell almost invite the viewer to reach out and use the objects, possibly calling on settler visitors to assert their colonial power by officiating Treaty 1 through the written English word. According to Craft, written records of Treaty 1 are favored by the Canadian government and courts over Anishinaabe means of remembering the treaty, such as oral transmission and objects like the wampum belt, birch bark scroll, pictograph, and petroform (14). Indigenous Studies scholar Winona Wheeler similarly argues that "the federal government of Canada is steadfastly wedded to the written texts of the treaties [...] and has made little to no movement toward reaching a common understanding with Treaty First Nations that reflects First Nations oral accounts" (xi). By hailing settler viewers to imagine signing Treaty 1, the display potentially acts on the viewers' subjective imaginations to convey colonial cultural beliefs in an embodied way. That is, the display may incite viewers to viscerally experience the colonial state ideology in which the written English word is privileged over First Nations means of remembering Treaty 1.

Visual rhetoric as logic

Visual rhetoric as logic scholars argue that how we see an image is shaped by the unique logic by which the image operates. Seeing is a creative, selective, contextual, and spatial process, according to these scholars. Seeing is creative because we process, organize, and construct what we see based on aesthetic elements like color and shape. Seeing is selective because we filter out what we consider less important. Seeing is contextual because what we see is shaped by the social, cultural, historical, and material milieu in which we see the image. And seeing is spatial because, unlike the linear and sequential way in which we process words, we process images spatially and simultaneously. Scholars from this approach argue that the logic of images influences not only these four broad aspects of seeing, but our emotions, movements, and actions, as well (Ott and Dickinson 8-10).

From a visual rhetoric as logic perspective, Lower Fort Garry's display may soothe settler viewers of their treaty responsibilities by portraying Treaty 1 as a First Nations "issue" of the past that European men handled and contained. The sepia coloring of the display board's photographs, painting, and background may compel viewers to feel that Treaty 1 is a past event instead of an agreement that holds—as many treaties have written—for "as long as the sun shines, the grass grows and the water flows." The worn, handwritten pages pictured on the display board reinforce that Treaty 1 is an agreement of the past which, by implication, bears less weight in the present. Additionally, the colors of the display board which arguably stand out most are red, white, and blue—the colors of the British flag. These colors potentially communicate British power over the contemporary representation of Treaty 1. The board's British and sepia colors and pictures of worn pages may therefore lead us to see that Treaty 1 was a past event which Europeans can safely portray in a museum today.

The display board's use of photographs may contribute to the viewer seeing Treaty 1 as a First Nations agreement that Europeans have contained. The lack of photographs of Europeans who were part of treaty negotiations, for instance, suggests that Treaty 1 involved First Nations people, but not settlers. Philosopher Susan Sontag examines photography beyond the content it depicts, however, by considering the meanings and effects of photography as a practice. According to Sontag, photographing serves to contain. We often say that a photograph "captures" something, for instance, reducing the experience or person captured to an object one can possess (Sontag 49). The people who become objectified through the snap of the camera can then be catalogued and controlled, evidenced in the police institution and aligned with the bureaucratic ordering of Western societies since the nineteenth century (52). While the photographs could have been included to provide what rhetoric and visual communication scholar Jens E. Kjeldsen calls "thick representation" (23), rendering some of the initial members and thereby the making of Treaty 1 more present and immediate, the photographs' depictions of only First Nations men may also lead us to see the figures as objectified, controlled, and contained by the European camera lens.

The numbers and corresponding legend on the display board may suggest that the pictured men were not only contained by Europeans when the photograph was initially taken but are still contained through Western museum methods of tracking, sorting, and labelling. Numbers connect each photograph to a "Photo Legend" which displays the photographed subject's name, the date the photograph was taken, and the location where the photograph is stored. According to museum scholar Nicole Robert, the exhibit legend can "reflect cultural assumptions about what is valuable" (28). Robert explains that what the legend often portrays as valuable is when the object was collected and how that object is tracked through the museum's numbering system (29). The legend and numbers for the Treaty 1 photographs may then result in visitors

seeing the First Nations men as contained by Western practices of museum archiving and photography, soothing settler viewers of the treaty responsibilities that bind them to these figures rendered lifeless as photographed and cataloged subjects.

Conclusion

This paper has utilized three approaches to visual rhetoric to consider attitudes that Lower Fort Garry's Treaty 1 display and its everyday matter as a national historic site may induce. From a visual rhetoric as public address approach, the display's photographs and painting of the Treaty 1 signing may communicate a contained and non-dissenting form of Canadian citizenship, supporting the Western social order that positions European men at the top. From a visual rhetoric as everyday life approach, Lower Fort Garry's everyday visuals such as its paths, physical boundaries, and parking lot signs perhaps convey that the historic site is a wild space in which visitors must look to a park expert's "official graffiti" to navigate their way, interpellating visitors to an ideology in which only the state can order "the wilderness" and the daily lives of citizens. Also, from this approach, the pages and writing tools of the Treaty 1 display case may interpellate settler viewers by hailing them to officiate the treaty agreement through the written English word. This process of interpellation reinforces the Canadian government's ideology which privileges written documents over Indigenous means of remembering the treaty. Lastly, from a visual rhetoric as logic approach, the colors, labels, legend, and photographs of the display potentially suggest that Treaty 1 was a past issue primarily concerning First Nations people, whom Europeans have captured, contained, and catalogued in their historical photographs and current museum display.

In his discussion of "countermonuments," media and rhetoric scholar Joshua Reeves emphasizes the potential of subversive, seemingly out-of-place works of public memory to "displace individual

observers from their everyday habits of life, challenging them to interrogate the past/present conjuncture within a potentially transformative rhetorical space” (321). Arguably, Lower Fort Garry could do more to create such a provocative and engaging space in its Treaty 1 display. At the very least, the display could meet the calls of law professors Catherine Bell and Val Napoleon, who ask that heritage sites provide Indigenous communities with control over how their cultural heritage is protected, used, and disseminated (3). Without a significant overturn of museum governance from settlers to Indigenous peoples, heritage site representations may continue to produce what Reeves calls a “touristic, consumptive response” (310). An examination of the visual rhetoric of Lower Fort Garry’s Treaty 1 display demonstrates that such a detached response may take the form of diminished settler sensitivity to treaty obligations and reinforcement of an unjust social order. Power, public memory, and the matter we use to represent the past are therefore inextricably bound.

Appendix (Images by Georgia DeFehr)



Figure-1



Figure-2



Figure-3

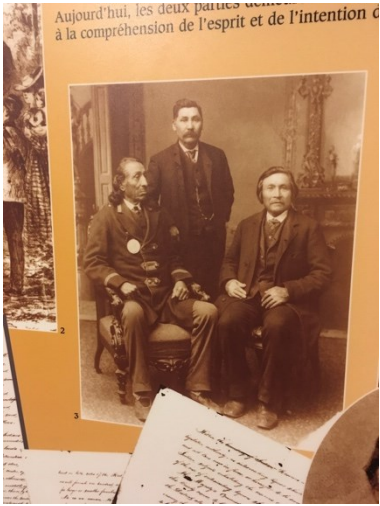


Figure-4



Figure-5



Figure-6

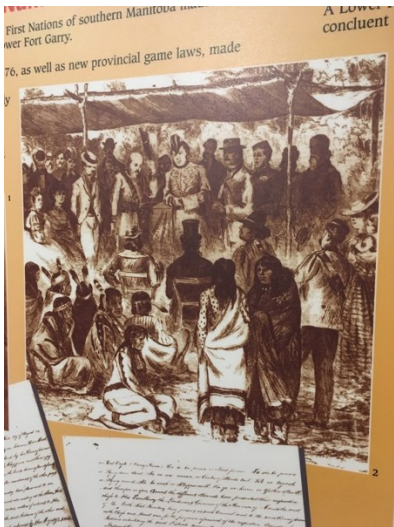


Figure-7

Works Cited

- Bell, Catherine and Val Napoleon, editors. *First Nations Cultural Heritage and Law: Case Studies, Voices, and Perspectives*. UBC Press, 2008. ProQuest Ebook Central, <https://ebookcentral-proquest-com.uwinnipeg.idm.oclc.org/lib/uwinnipeg/detail.action?docID=3412620>.
- Craft, Aimée. "Living Treaties, Breathing Research." *Canadian Journal of Women and the Law/ revue Femmes Et Droit*, vol. 26, no. 1, 2014, pp. 1–22. Project MUSE, muse.jhu.edu/article/543906. Accessed 6 Apr. 2018.
- Dickinson, Greg, Carole Blair, Brian L. Ott, and John Louis Lucaites, editors. *Places of Public Memory: The Rhetoric of Museums and Memorials*. University of Alberta Press, 2010. ProQuest Ebook Central, <https://ebookcentral-proquest-com.uwinnipeg.idm.oclc.org/lib/uwinnipeg/detail.action?docID=565716>.
- Hariman, Robert and John Louis Lucaites. "Dissent and Emotional Management in a Liberal-Democratic Society: The Kent State Iconic Photograph." *Rhetoric Society Quarterly*, vol. 31, no. 3, 2001, pp. 5–31, doi:10.1080/02773940109391204.
- Hermer, Joe. *Regulating Eden: The Nature of Order in North American Parks*. University of Toronto Press, 2002. ProQuest Ebook Central, <https://ebookcentral-proquest-com.uwinnipeg.idm.oclc.org/lib/uwinnipeg/detail.action?docID=4671892>.
- Kidd, Jenny, Sam Cairns, Alex Drago, Amy Ryall, and Miranda Stearn, editors. *Challenging History in the Museum: International Perspectives*. Taylor and Francis, 2016. ProQuest Ebook Central, <https://ebookcentral-proquest-com.uwinnipeg.idm.oclc.org/lib/uwinnipeg/detail.action?docID=1580892>.
- Kjeldson, Jens E. "The Rhetoric of Thick Representation: How Pictures Render the Importance and Strength of an Argument Salient." *Argumentation*, vol. 29, no. 2, 2015, pp. 197–215, doi:10.1007/s10503-014-9342-2.
- Kreps, Christina. *Liberating Culture: Cross-Cultural Perspectives on Museums, Curation and Heritage Preservation*. Routledge, 2003. ProQuest Ebook Central, [https://ebookcentral-proquest-](https://ebookcentral-proquest-com.uwinnipeg.idm.oclc.org/lib/uwinnipeg/detail.action?docID=1580892)

- com.uwinnipeg.idm.oclc.org/lib/uwinnipeg/detail.action?docID=1433563.
- Nicholson, Blake. "Keystone XL pipeline faces opposition from 'historic union' of Canada, U.S. Indigenous tribes." CBC News, CBC/Radio Canada, 16 May 2017, <http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/calgary/keystone-xl-pipeline-indigenous-opposition-1.4117445>. Accessed 6 Apr. 2018.
- Ott, Brian L. and Greg Dickinson. "Visual Rhetoric and/as Critical Pedagogy." *SAGE Handbook of Rhetorical Studies*, edited by Andrea A. Lundsford, Kirt H. Wilson, and Rosa A. Eberly, SAGE, 2009, pp. 391–405.
- Reeves, Joshua. "Suspended Identification: Atopos and the Work of Public Memory." *Philosophy & Rhetoric*, vol. 46, no. 3, 2013, pp. 306–327. Project MUSE muse.jhu.edu/article/519913.
- Robert, Nicole. "Getting Intersectional in Museums." *Museums & Social Issues*, vol. 9, no. 1, 2014, pp. 24–33. doi:10.1179/1559689314Z.00000000017. Accessed 6 Apr. 2018.
- Simpson, Leanne. "Looking after Gdoo-naaganinaa: Precolonial Nishnaabeg Diplomatic and Treaty Relationships." *Wicazo Sa Review*, vol. 23, no. 2, 2008, pp. 29–42. Project MUSE, doi:10.1353/wic.0.0001. Accessed 6 Apr. 2018.
- Sontag, Susan. "In Plato's Cave." *On Photography*. 1977. Picador, 2001, pp. 1–24.
- Tasker, John Paul. "Trudeau Welcomes Trump's Keystone XL Decision." CBC News, CBC/Radio Canada, 24 Jan. 2017, www.cbc.ca/news/politics/trudeau-cabinet-keystone-xl-1.3949754. Accessed 6 Apr. 2018.
- Wheeler, Winona. Forward. *No Surrender: The Land Remains Indigenous*, by Sheldon Krasowski, 2019, University of Regina Press, pp. xi-xiv.

