Art as a Reflection of the Created Environment

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Abstract

Art provides a powerful mechanism through which a culture leaves its imprint on the physical environment. In doing this, an alternate, created universe is constructed which reinforces a people's sense of cultural cohesion. Art expresses this by actively referencing cosmological elements through aspects of the physical environment. Such was the case among the nineteenth-century Cheyenne and Kiowa peoples on the North American Great Plains. Moving out onto the Plains necessitated the formulation of a new cosmology based on an entirely new corpus of flora, fauna, landforms, and physical resources. (90) The imagery, color repertoires and materials used in men's art such as painted lodge covers, shield covers, war shirts, and ledgerbook drawings directly referenced supernatural forces that equipped the two peoples to forge new cultural identities and secure their place and destinies.

Keywords: Cheyenne; Kiowa; Native American art; cosmology.

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> A human population does not enter an environment as a blank slate to be written upon by raw natural forces. It possesses a specific technological, social, and ideological organization that is the product of history. This organization, although not immutable and certainly subject to adaptive modification, is a factor in the constitution of the niche because it defines the effective natural and social environment and materially alters that environment. (Biolsi, 1984, p. 162).

The definition and alteration of environments is directly attributable to human agency and the desire, need, and motivation to impose a specific imprint on the landscape. The impetus to make one's mark is not confined to individuals alone, but cultures as well. It has been said that the land makes a people. However, people carry with them ideas, values, and imperatives which they seek to impose on a landscape and in doing so they define their culture and create a wider environment. It is the context of this wider environment and the manner in which this created environment was expressed in nineteenth-century Cheyenne and Kiowa men's art that is the subject addressed in this paper.

Historically, art has proven to be a powerful mechanism in the formulation of culture, regardless of the physical landscape it occurs in, and art becomes a means of creating an environment intertwined with yet distinct from the physical environment. Through a process of agency individuals and cultures create a conceptual universe by fixing a center and establishing a presence according to a culturally based model, thereby shaping an environment to fit into a particular conception of reality. Mircea Eliade (1985, p. 119) comments that:

> To be situated in a landscape, to organize it, to inhabit it, are actions which presuppose an existential choice: *the choice of the "universe" that one is prepared to assume by "creating" it…*every human establishment includes the fixing of a center and the projection of horizons, that is to say the "cosmocization" of a territory, its transformation into a "universe", and a replica of the exemplary universe, created and inhabited by the gods.

This process of "cosmocization" was initiated by both the Cheyenne and Kiowa in defining and validating their respective territories as each people established themselves in the Plains. For the Cheyenne *Noaha Vose,* what we know as Devil's Tower in Wyoming, was the physical center of the universe, while for the Kiowa it was called *Tso'-saw.* (Boyd, 1983; Schlesier, 1987). A number of factors coalesce to contribute to a formulation of culture. Religious beliefs, shared identity by members of a society, perceptions of the larger world and one's place in it all play a role in creating culture.

A profound manner in which humans express their perceptions and conceptions of culture and the universe that culture occupies is through art. In many cases, art acts as a conduit for the dissemination of basic beliefs, and also serves to communicate abstract concepts. The role and function of art as a cultural modifier has changed little, if at all, throughout humankind's history, regardless of temporal and spatial boundaries. In a nineteenth-century context, men's art from the Cheyenne and Kiowa of the North American Plains served to shape a particular conception of the environment these peoples inhabited. The natural environment, while reflected in materials and pigments derived from animal, mineral, and vegetal sources representing powerful, regenerative forces, also encompassed a lived environment expressed through men's representational art. In essence the lived environment attained a magnitude that superseded the natural environment as the physical and conceptual intertwined.

In this lived environment the natural and supernatural overlapped and informed one another. Native cultures of the nineteenth century recognized no dichotomy between the seen and unseen. Everything that existed, whether animate or inanimate, was regarded as interrelated parts of an overarching whole. Brian M. Fagan (1995, p.60) has commented that "…humans never adjust to the physical world as it really is, but to this same world they perceive it through the conditioning given them by their own culture…the human ability to reason and adjust cultural perceptions played a vital role in the ways in which people interacted with one another and the environment". These factors worked together to create an environment that was not limited to the physical world an individual or community inhabited, but included human action on the environment as a determinant factor as well. Cultural tendencies and responses interact with physical settings to create a specific environment well beyond that encompassed by climate, land forms, flora, and fauna. Gregory Bateson points out that "The human individual is endlessly simplifying and generalizing his own view of his environment; he constantly imposes on his environment his own constructs and meanings; these…are characteristic of one culture as opposed to another." (Bateson, 1942, "Comments").

The constructs and meanings applied by the Cheyenne and Kiowa as a way of knowing and understanding their environments were co-mingled with the physical and spiritual as a reflection of their origins and a template for their destinies. A great deal of the "simplifying and generalizing" directly impinges on social order and is often facilitated through art. "Art helps hold society together because it reflects and reinforces the relationships deemed proper in that society; art symbols are collective representations which by their form and content are shaped by and help shape the social order." (Hatcher, 1985, p. 113). This process of shaping social order is a salient feature of Native American art. Indigenous North American art encompasses facets of culture ranging from drama, such as dances and ceremonial reenactments, to systems of signs and symbols like those expressed in pictographic art on hides or in rock art. (Keyser and Classen, 2001). In addition to song and dance story telling can also be included in the rubric of art in a Native context.(Montejo, 1994).Yet, while art can and does include both the performing and plastic arts, the primary concern here is the visual expression of cultural bases.

Visual systems were utilized to espouse, express, and celebrate an individual's participation in the wider dimension of existence created by the interaction of supernatural agency with the physical realm. Art performed a number of functions for the individual and the larger culture. As a dynamic of culture, art relayed information about status and social relationships between and within groups.

Displays such as coup marks on a garment or a biographic robe were evidence of an individual's status as a warrior. Status was also denoted by the trappings of office that distinguished society leaders from the common rank and file warriors. Dog sashes, feathered bonnets, different lance types, and body paint patterns were all indicative of higher rank and status. (Greene, 2000). The deeds necessary to attain the right and responsibility of such status were a matter of public record, and known to everyone in the community.

An example is seen in war shirts. The imagery painted on these shirts depicted the wearer's accomplishments through a number of visual conventions such as coup marks, rake-like forms that touch and wrest weapons from enemies' hands, human forms indicating coup counting on live enemies, and horse captures. Such acts of valor were depicted under the auspices of eye witnesses who verified the performance of such deeds. In most cases these shirts were communal property owned by specific warrior societies, and great responsibility regarding expected behavior was required of the wearer. Exercising less than this resulted in losing the right to wear the shirt, a significant personal disgrace. Another item of note were feathered bonnets, which were bestowed as a recognition of service to the people. Eagle feathers used in bonnets were given as acknowledgments of valor.

Highly prized, feathers were often dyed red to show that the wearer was a combat veteran and had shed blood on behalf of the people. Bonnets with trailers of feathers were of special significance, and were worn only by the most accomplished individuals. Concepts underlying such practices of honor and recognition were reinforced through art. Much of Cheyenne and Kiowa men's art pointed directly to elements of cosmology, such as culture hero stories in which divine sanction for the warrior societies in each culture was given. An integral aspect of Cheyenne place and purpose was to dominate the grasslands which they believed had been given to them by *Maheo,* the Creator, for their exclusive use. World view and religious ideology revolved around this divine injunction. (Schlesier, 1987). Actions that accomplished this dominance were recounted in stories about the deeds of the culture heroes, and those elements from the physical universe which facilitated their actions. By extension, honoring the feats of individuals through special regalia, such as bonnets, war shirts, and other items served as visual reminders of the culture heroes' examples.

Drawings in ledgerbooks also routinely testify to the expression of supernatural agency. A number of examples exist which display what can be referred to as vision-based imagery, works celebrating supernatural agency on behalf of the people, whether in the form of a spirit being calling the buffalo from their underground cave or the giving of major ceremonies. The Cheyenne believe *Maheo* lives in the vault of the sky, the Blue Sky Space. The heavens were, and continue to be, of particular importance. Because of this, designs relating to celestial powers were prevalent in nineteenth-century art. Cheyenne shield designs often incorporated representations of stars and celestial bodies, as well as eagles, thunderbirds, and swallows, all of which were believed to be direct intermediaries between mortals and the Creator. Two examples of this are the Little Rock shield, captured at the Washita River in 1869, in the collections of the Detroit Institute of Art (Kan and Weirzbowski, 1982) and the Broadhead shield, in the Rochester Museum, collected at Camp Supply, Indian Territory in 1895. Both shields are two-dimensional maps of the Cheyenne universe expressed through compositional elements and color symbolism. In both shields the central motifs of thunderbirds, interpreted as emissaries of *Maheo,* are rendered in blue-green and reference the celestial realm where the Creator lives. Swallows are beings whose man function was to transport mortals' messages and prayers to *Maheo.*

The field of the Little Rock shield is blue-black, and the entire composition is circumscribed with a large, blue-green crescent. Vestiges of red pigment, symbolic of the sun and life force, are still evident at points along the shield's outer edge. The tail of the thunderbird creates the focal point of the composition, while the negative spaces created between the swallows' wingtips and the thunderbird's head on the Broadhead shield perform a similar visual function. In this way both shield designs focus attention on the universal center, while the four swallows in the Little Rock shield correspond to the four cardinal directions as do the four red discs on the Broadhead shield. Both compositions reference the source of all power, *Maheo* through color as well as visual symbols, with blue-green representing the blue-sky space. The four smaller elements in each composition denote the four corners of the universe under *Maheo's* dominion, represented by their respective colors. Other references included in each shield's design point to life, sustenance, and the sun. Buffalo tracks along the Broadhead shield's perimeter, the red discs and birds' tails, as well as the use of yellow allude to concepts of blood, vitality, ripeness, perfection, and wholeness.

The Kiowa also placed great emphasis on stars and celestial forms. (Bohtone, Hazel, 1997; Toppah, E. personal communication, 2003; Toyebo, Louis 1977). An example is seen in Magpie's Star Picture Tipi re-created for James Mooney in 1897 under the auspices of the Smithsonian Institution. (Ewers, 1978). The design is a bisected composition featuring a red-blue color pairing representing the idea of the *Psal' iday,* the twin boy culture heroes of the Kiowa, and the corporate entity of the Kiowa people themselves. Below each of the smoke flaps is a representation of the morning star in the form of a Maltese cross, and each field is filled with white stars. The entire composition communicates the interconnectedness the Kiowa felt with celestial bodies and the importance of these to the Kiowa. The Great Kiowa himself was believed to be depicted in the stars, as were other culture heroes. Star lore and celestial observation became a descriptive aspect of the oral tradition for the Kiowa. (Beck and Walters, 1977). Representations of these sacred phenomena evidenced sacred teachings and tribal histories.

Art also reflected political ideology. The Sweet Medicine stories of the Cheyenne's culture hero outline the political structure that the Cheyenne were to adopt, while stories from Kiowa oral tradition established a martial order for that people. The corpus of society paint patterns, shield designs, articles of regalia, and biographic art directly reference these traditions in both cultures.

Ethnic identity was also indicated through distinctive patterns and designs in the art. Time and again the Elders state that they can readily identify tribal affiliations simply on the basis of designs and predominant colors. (G. Dupont, personal communication, 2002; S. Hart, personal communication, 2002). The nineteenth-century Cheyenne were known to have favored particular compositional arrangements in shield designs, and this was a hallmark of their aesthetic. (Nagy, 1994). The Arapaho were known as the "Blue Sky People" because of their fondness for beads of a certain value of blue. (Morrow, 1966). Comanche hide work was distinctive for its overall yellow staining (Lowie, 1952), while Kiowa beadwork bore a number of distinctive traits, such as reversal of motifs and idiosynchretic color use to create a heraldic inversion between opposing halves of compositions. (Hail, 2000).

Art also satisfied the basic expressionistic needs of both artists and viewers. Men's art transmitted culture-specific values which were universally recognized by members of the larger cultures, and these value systems were rooted in the cosmologies of both peoples. Men's art performed an integrative function by representing world views common to members of the larger society, and in doing so exerted a profound influence. Because warfare was a primary theme that was expressed, men's art upheld cultural standards and expectations underlying a warrior ethos that was paramount for males in each culture.

Sometimes economic motives for warfare moved individuals and entire societies to disregard former ceremonial concerns that had previously held center stage. Yet in spite of this, world view nevertheless continued to be espoused through art. (Jablow, 1994). The Bowstring Society's beating of the Arrow Keeper in 1837 exemplifies such a shift. The stringent demands place on the Arrow Keeper elevated the individual holding that office in the eyes of the community. He was accorded high esteem because of his ritual knowledge. However, despite of the respect accorded the office itself, over time the individual filling that office came to be under the control of the warrior societies. The various societies were also bore responsibility for order during the major ceremonies, hunts, and moving camp. A pledger's society was responsible for defraying the expense of a ceremony, order in the camp circle for the duration of the ceremony, setting up the lodge, and selecting the priest for specific ceremonies. As a law making and administering force the Cheyenne and Kiowa warrior societies became increasingly more potent politically during the latter half of the nineteenth century. This assertion of authority was rooted in cultural injunctions proscribed through oral tradition and was routinely reinforced through art.

The institution of warfare increasingly became a cultural focal point as groups vied for control of resources and prime hunting territories, and their continued existence as distinct and autonomous peoples in the face of Anglo-American expansion. Candace Greene states that "Warfare was the driving force behind…nineteenth-century Plains art. When that source of energy was abruptly interrupted by U. S. government intervention, the traditional genres of art faltered, attempted new directions, and ultimately died." (Greene, 1976). Not only did the art forms die, or at least pass into obscurity for a time, so too did the activities which defined a man's place in Cheyenne and Kiowa cultures. With individual avenues of male expression prevented by the restrictions of reservation life, there was no longer any reason for men to continue depicting scenes of warfare. Shields no longer served a purpose, and those that were created lacked any associations of power. Instead they were a means of satisfying academic investigations by ethnographers and providing a few dollars of income for their makers. Lodges were replaced by wooden frame structures. Painted robes, like shields, also ceased to perform a meaningful function, and these too passed into obscurity. The one men's art form that did survive was ledgerbook drawings, which became the foundation for a new form of artistic expression. This graphics tradition later developed into a Native painting style whose most celebrated adherents were known collectively as the "Kiowa Five". Removal of the impetuses for men's art, while eliminating certain forms of expression, did not erase the underlying spirit behind the art. Native artists continued to exhibit a belief in the intertwining of the spiritual and physical realms as a cohesive whole that defined the essence of existence. Even now this interplay of the physical and spiritual continues to find expression through art.

While there are no words for art in the Native languages of North America, there was and is a clear and unmistakable aesthetic that operated in both Cheyenne and Kiowa cultures. Joseph Epes Brown views Native arts traditions as the 'external projections of a people's inner vision of reality." (Brown, 1982). This is echoed by Emma Hansen, who states:

> Within both Native American and Euro-American cultures, art has served to order and interpret an individual's role within his or her environment and universe as a whole. Among Native cultures, religion, which is integral to all aspects of daily lives, helps to answer universal questions. The designs of many objects of traditional art represent a spirituality which acknowledges the power and authority of the Creator and symbolizes the relationship of the people to the earth and sky. (Hansen, 1998, p. 7).

As with Native American traditions, European traditions as well at one time made allowances for everyday life and incorporated this into artistic expressions. Prior to the Renaissance, the arts impacted a wider range of cultural aspects than they did after the Renaissance. The modern Western concept of art is a post-Renaissance phenomenon. Prior to this, artists routinely applied their talents to creating projections of their cultures' inner vision of reality, with art serving the purpose of expressing cultural value systems and an emphasis on process. A world view embodying a specific set of cultural beliefs and values was extolled through functional forms, such as illuminated manuscripts. (de la Croix and Tansey, 1980).

Before the Renaissance, European artists routinely operated under the guise of designers and engineers, carpenters and stonecutters, crafting such diverse items as suits of armor, family crests, tapestries, and statuary. (Hartt, 1994). Leonardo da Vinci's work is a case in point. Perhaps the earliest extant examples of the integration of art and life in Western culture are seen in Paleolithic rock art. Clearly art was a part of everyday life in pre-Renaissance Europe. It was only with a growing emphasis on specialization and an increased interest in creating faithful reproductions of the natural world that the plastic arts as we know them today came to be recognized as something wholly separate from other facets of life. The emphasis in Euro-American art traditions came to be the primacy of illusion, not art's integration with and expression of life. This artificial separation divided art into categories of "art" and "craft", with the latter bearing markedly inferior connotations in the Western mind. Reinforcing this sense of separateness is a focus on self-aggrandizement through the work produced. In marked contrast, Native American arts traditions were and are concerned with projecting a real and lived reality as primary, but the expression of connectedness with the wider reality.

Historically, Native arts traditions functioned as communal edification rather than glorification of the individual. While this may seem contradictory given the nature of art forms such as biographic art, the communal aspect behind the works was of the utmost importance. While individual warriors performed deeds of valor worthy of recounting, it was the set of cultural values expressed through the art that was of primary concern.

Individuals in the community were actively involved in creating art either as producers, viewers or both. An example of this is presented in George Bird Grinnell's accounting of how medicine lodge covers were dedicated by the community before their use.

> In olden times, at the making of some specially painted lodges, the lodge covering, after having been painted, was spread out where everybody in the camp might walk over it. This was believed to drive away sickness from the camp. On such occasions women took their little children by the hand and walked over the lodge covering. If the ornamented pieces of hide representing stars were to be sewn on such a lodge, they were put on as soon as the painting was finished…The day after this was done…the paint thus being allowed to dry…the lodge [cover] was spread out in a narrow placed between two hills, where people were likely to pass, and an old man rode about the village and shouted that it was desired that everyone should walk over that lodge. (Grinnel, 1923, pp. 230-231).

Lee Irwin comments on this element of collective involvement, pointing out the effect that exposure to art had on children, particularly in the context of rituals in which art held a prominent place.

> The power of this imagery would have been particularly strong for children, whose early learning experience is primarily imagistic and eidetic. In a context of ritual enactment…the child would be highly susceptible to the power of imagery as well as to its evocative emotional contents. All the rich imagery on tipis, horses, and clothing would constantly be communicating its contents nonverbally to a receptive child. Those special times of collective ceremony and enactment would strongly reinforce the importance and primacy of the imagery. (Irwin, 1944, pp. 235-236).

Regarding imagery on lodge covers, Gordon Yellowman states that "The tipi is connected to you. The tipi reflects the Cheyenne Universe, and art also expresses a way of life, a life style. This is who we are." (G.Yellowman, personal communication, 2002). It should also be noted that there is a direct relationship between the colors used on Cheyenne lodge covers and the region they were located in. Painted lodge covers in the regions of Wyoming and Montana typically utilized a predominant blue-green color repertoire, while those in Oklahoma and Kansas featured a predominant use of red, yellow and white. The reasons for these color choices was the manner in which light in both the north and south reacts on color perception. In the north, closer to the mountains, blues and greens are more readily apparent, while in the south the sun reflects the red of the earth and the yellow and white of the grass during the summer months. (G. Yellowman, personal communication, 2002). This being the case, the people that inhabited a particular environment visualized, depicted, and expressed their connection with the physical environment in symbolic and esoteric terms. Art encompasses a wide range of pursuits and end products, not the least of which is community cohesion, as expressed in Grinnell's account of dedicating lodge covers. This was also extended to honoring ceremonies and other public displays.

The divergence between Native American and Euro-American expressions is based in the aesthetic bases of each cultural tradition. The definition of art in a Western sense is, in the overall scheme of things, a fairly recent development. In Native American traditions the aesthetic system governs decisions regarding what is and is not art. Categories of "high" and "low" art forms as an accepted aspect of aesthetics, is a Western invention. This construct has been the defining paradigm for Euro-American visual traditions, as well as assessments of non-Western arts traditions throughout the world for most of the past six hundred years. The result has typically been a set of culturally laden value judgments designed to make exotic objects more palatable to Western tastes while discounting the aesthetic frameworks of non-Western cultures. The constraints of this are, when applied cross-culturally, the consequence of objects being reduced to categories such as craft, or worse, artifact. The only true universal aesthetic is the intrinsic human need to create beauty, and in each case the sense of beauty exercised is culturally determined. Because of this an understanding of what art is and does in a given culture necessitates an understanding of the culture producing the art.

The aesthetic systems of the nineteenth-century Cheyenne and Kiowa peoples included beauty as a prerequisite for what was deemed to be acceptable as "Art". An individual's expertise and facility for creating visually pleasing items was highly valued. The individual sought out to paint designs on shield covers was solicited because of his technical skill. Excellence was a criterion, but, all facility aside, the overriding requisite for art being "good' was in how effectively it communicated basic cultural values and beliefs. An article's worth was not based solely in its beauty of form or exactness of execution. While pleasing color, design and form worked together to elicit viewer appreciation, it was the spiritual efficacy of an article that was most important. The way an article was to be used and its impact toward desired ends was a concern greater than its visual appearance. Hansen (1998, p. 5) states:

> Rather than being products of an artistic process, the objects serve as reflections of cultural ideals, beliefs, and knowledge. They may manifest the spirituality of a people or support community and individual achievements, aspirations and the proper roles of men and women, children and elders. For the artist, the creative process, with its attendant preparations, songs and prayers may have as much value as the completed work.

The creation of shields, medicine lodge covers, war shirts, and ledger drawings demonstrate the importance placed on the expression of elemental forces' agency in life. Each of these formats was conceived and created as collaborative pieces, and involved specific ritual actions in their creation. The full meaning of visionary images was often known only to the recipient of the vision and his spiritual advisor. These were executed by someone noted for their expertise in artistic endeavors. It was not only an individual's artistic facility that was important, but the materials they employed in the production of such imagery.

Function and visual appeal were interrelated and integrated just as art and life were. The one simply did not exist without the other. For something to be visually pleasing yet fail in expressing cultural ideals and values rendered it of no real consequence. W. Richard West, Jr. states "Unlike most of Western art, the objects created by those we now call native artists and artisans were not valued by their makers primarily as representations of individual creative and artistic expression. The material, instead, was appreciated by native maker and community principally for its communal, ritualistic, or ceremonial significance." (West, 1994, p. ix).

Emphasis was placed on articles that effectively embodied cultural values. Figures of men and horses rendered in ledgerbook drawings adhered to a set of specific rules of convention that do not coincide with Euro-American artistic standards of proportion and realism. Proper proportion of riders to horses was not a concern. The animals were drawn with small heads atop elegantly elongated necks, while their sinuous bodies featured splayed legs to denote the idea of speed. Figures exist on picture planes without details of foreground or background and appear to float across the page. The emphasis in the makers' minds was the idea of the event, with no concern for extraneous details that would have impeded the art's intended purpose. Peterson comments that:

> Plains drawings usually employed shorthand versions of recognizable objects rather than abstractions with "symbolic" meanings known only to the initiated. This was a matter of expediency, for, just as the sign language was the lingua franca among the diverse tongues of the Plains, picture writing was the inscribed equivalent thereof. (Peterson, 1971, p. X).

Joyce Zsabo adds to this, stating:

> Clarity of understanding was the primary purpose which dictated the stylistic approaches that continued into ledger art. The most readily identifiable aspect of a figure or an *object* was portrayed to avoid confusion…Costume elements were eliminated because paraphernalia or clothing carried complex social messages…and often the actual identity of the figures illustrated. Such messages were less likely to be misinterpreted than attempts at physical portraiture. (Zsabo, 1994, p.5).

An expressive grace of forms and pattern was exercised. Above all else, ready interpretation of images and actions was the intended goal. An example is the manner in which horses were treated. It mattered less that a horse's head was disproportionately small in relation to its body, or that the legs were drawn in splayed fashion. What did matter was the idea represented in the maker's and viewer's minds, that being a vehicle of grace and speed.

Visual works acted as "synthesizing symbols", embodying a paradigm in which the universe was perceived to be ordered, and knowledge of how that order was to be expressed. (Hatcher, 1985). Men's art accomplished the transmission of cultural values and knowledge by designs received through visionary experiences and traditional depictions. Beck and Walters state that "Knowledge was passed on by word of mouth and through story telling. More elaborately, knowledge was passed on through ceremonials, symbols, and songs…Knowledge was confirmed over the years by specialists in sacred ways." (1977, p. 71).

Visionary themes, often displayed in the art, focused on the supernatural powers that inhabited the unseen universe. These powers frequently chose to manifest themselves in animal and or human form, and were routinely expressed visually. As a mechanism for value transmission, art performed a synthesizing function by expressing universally recognized cosmological concepts represented by such beings. Not only were the images and designs recognized by the larger community, but they were given credence through the auspices of spiritual specialists who interpreted visions within their cultural context.

Biographical formats such as painted robes, lodge covers, rock art, and ledger drawings worked hand in hand with visionary designs, each serving to affirm the other. A design received through vision was more than a simple representation of a symbol for a specific entity or concept. It was the embodiment of that entity or concept. Brown states:

> The generally understood meaning of the symbol as a form that stands for or points to something other than the particular form or expression is incomprehensible to the Indian. To the Indian's cognitive orientation, meanings are intuitively sensed and not secondarily interpreted through analysis; there tends to be a unity between form and idea or content. Here, the 'symbol' is, in a sense, that to which it refers. The tree at the center of Sun Dance lodge does not just represent the axis of the world, but is that axis and center of the world. The eagle is not just a symbol of the sun but is the sun in a certain sense; and similarly, the sun is not a symbol of the Creative Principle, but is that principle as manifested in the sun. (Brown, 1982, p. 72).

Irwin refers to art as being holonomic, that is the expression of a specific totality or wholeness perceived to exist in the universe. (Irwin, 1944). The designs and objects used to express this totality point to the implicit totality rather than operating explicitly in and of themselves.

Vision imagery also "…represents the visible portion of the enfolded order and serves as a constant reminder of those powers that remain yet concealed in the world strata and in every object that could potentially transform itself into a visionary appearance." (Irwin, 1944, p. 215). As such, objects and images of those objects operated metaphorically. Greene has aptly demonstrated the use of metaphor as an underlying impetus behind ledgerbook drawings. In her analysis she presents scenes of courtship and hunting as metaphorical statements of dominance related to warfare.(Greene, 1976). For example, killing a bull buffalo for use in the Kiowa *K'ado* ceremony was equated with killing an enemy. After the animal was dispatched an eighteen inch wide strip of hide including the horns and tail was taken from its back for use on the center pole of the ceremonial lodge, while the remainder of the carcass was left to rot in the sun as an enemy would be left. (Kracht, 1989). The metaphors expressed in Plains arts traditions referenced the holy powers which ordered the universe and made sense of the world.

The power referenced through vision imagery ensured assistance for success and victory. When an individual entered a lodge painted with vision imagery he was, in his own mind, literally stepping inside the power that was represented. As noted earlier, Yellowman pointed out that painted lodges reflected the Cheyenne universe. The specific power referenced in each tipi design was no less than the Creative Principle, or what could be referred in a Western sense as "God". Dr. Jerry Bread adds to this by stating that "an individual would want to put something positive on his lodge. The persons possessing the rights to display such imagery would have been the recipients of very potent medicine. Placing these images on their lodges was a positive affirmation of protection as well as communicating to others the ferocity of the owner. A person would not want to put something negative on his lodge, but something positive because the lodge housed his family." (J. Bread, personal communication, 2002). This applies to shield designs as well, which were essentially two dimensional maps of the three dimensional universe. Imry Nagy (1994, p. 45) states:

> Cheyenne religious concepts were expressed artistically. The figures and designs on Cheyenne heraldic objects (shields, painted tipis and figurative parfleches) are arranged holistically, as models of the universe. Circular shield designs can be seen as overhead maps of sacred space, while other Cheyenne heraldic objects are equally intended as reflections of the cosmos.

The same holds true for animal and bird body parts that were routinely incorporated into designs. The use of bones, teeth, feathers on a shield, lance shaft, or in a headdress brought into being those qualities that made specific animals and birds of prey attractive to the warrior such as speed, predation, and associations with the sun. (Moore, 1996). Bears' claws or a bear paw motif invoked in the warrior's person the power and ferocity of that animal. In this respect it was not so much an acquisition of supernatural powers that was effected by the use of such designs and/or forms, as it was a statement of their active involvement in mortals' lives. Brown comments that "…there is no separation between the created form of whatever medium, and the message or power this form bears and transmits…the power is always latently present in the created design or object." (Brown, 1982, p. 74).

The stories contained in biographic renderings, whether on rock, hide, or the pages of a ledgerbook, went beyond the simple act of recording events and deeds. The accuracy of visual expressions as a recording device and as an ethnographic tool has been aptly demonstrated by a number of scholars. (Afton, J., 1997; Berlo, K., 1997; Greene, C., 1976; Zsabo, J., 1994). Biographic compositions were mimetic devices used to recount the efficacy of supernatural powers on behalf of a story's protagonist and were expository in nature. The care taken in depicting items involved more than a keen eye and love for detail, or the simple need to denote an individual's identity. While such information was important, a deeper function was being addressed. Each detail of regalia, paint patterns, and visionary design directly referenced supernatural agency and accorded mythic relevance to everyday life. While shield designs, clothing, regalia, and paint patterns were carefully delineated, these drawings were embodiments of the power an individual had received, not simply recording devices. (G. Yellowman, personal communication, 2002).

The relationship between vision-based and biographical art was very much one of cause and effect. Without supernatural empowerment a man was naked and defenseless before his enemies. In securing assistance from the supernatural the warrior was able to fulfill his role in society and gain the respect and admiration of his peers. Viewing items of power reminded him that those powers were present and ready as a means of attaining success. Brown refers to this as giving the mythical an "immediacy of present tense." (Brown, 1982, pp. 49-50). The supernatural powers were not fettered by spatial-temporal constraints that would hold them in the mythic past.

Instead, these forces were able to transcend barriers of space and time to inhabit the present, to inform it, and form it. Consequently, concepts relayed through drawn and painted media were not representations of events that occurred in a hazy past beyond living memory, but became part of an on-going process of creation. At the very moment the warrior donned his headdress, applied his paint, sang his songs, and took up his shield he became fully capable of wielding the powers embodied in those designs, articles, words, and ritual actions in the same way the culture heroes had done. Creation does not occur out of nothingness, but instead is an on-going cyclical process by making "manifest the power or quality…of that which is named." (Beck and Walters, 1977, p. 77). This process of on-going creation was based in a conception of circularity in which time wraps back onto itself. (Brown, 1982). This contrasts with Western paradigms of a linear temporal progression which continually moves away from past events.

The on-going process initiated through painting visionary and biographical imagery is the same as Eliade's concept of the "cosmocization of territory". In each culture the designs, regalia, colors, and kinetic elements referenced the supernatural. Men's art continually called the vital forces of the universe into active being, much like a play composed of a series of never ending acts with no scripted ending. Each element of Cheyenne and Kiowa cosmology was in turn a manifestation of the ultimate Creative Principle. The representations may have been figurative, but each element depicted had a place within the cosmocized territory of each people. This was true whether the image represented a stylized landscape, bear, horse, buffalo, or steer. This "mapping" of realms was "congruent with a Plains ecological setting and the recognition of the relatively stable features of that landscape, particularly in terms of how a specific place relates to its social and mythic history." (Irwin, 1944).

A bear motif on a shield could evoke associations with places pertinent to the people's historical/mythic experience, while the stylized landscape painted in a design might represent the sacred mountain and caves the spiritual forces dwelt in. In either case, the sites referenced actually existed in the physical territories of both the Cheyenne and Kiowa. The vitality of visual elements resided in their role as direct conduits to and from the Creative Principle itself. Because of this, it was not the physical item represented that was of primary importance, but the power underlying that representation. The entire corpus of visual symbols, images, songs, dances, and objects associated with a particular source of empowerment became transmitters and communicators of power. As such, discovering the "living quality of the natural world often leads to a conscious shaping of objects that are intended to communicate power to others." (Irwin, 1944, p. 31).

The retention of the rawhide shield in Plains cultures provides a case in point. The use of firearms eventually rendered the shield obsolete as a means of physical protection against an enemy's missiles. While shields provided adequate protection against musket balls and arrows in earlier times, advances in firearms technology during the nineteenth century rendered their practicality as physical protection inconsequential. (Hamalainen, 2002). In spite of the obvious shortcomings, shields continued to be carried into battle as standard equipage. The reasons for the endurance of rawhide shields as regalia were the painted designs on their covers, the materials used, and the powers believed to reside in these. (Brown, 1982). In this respect, art's agency in life's activities, especially warfare, was cosmologically centered. Through such centering, an individual became the focal point upon which the supernatural forces converged through an implicit transfer of power, and this was communicated visually.

The individual character of a design was subject to strict rules of ownership. When an individual received a design he also received the right to reproduce it a certain number of times before its efficacy was reduced and/or lost. This duplication of spiritual images was a prevalent feature in both Cheyenne and Kiowa cultures. Certain shield designs proved to be so effective in the minds of the creators and owners that as many as ten variants of some designs are known to have been produced. (Mooney, 1896). These designs were often purchased by others within the family, but could also be transferred to people outside the family. (Mooney, 1896).This tradition of intangible property rights was practiced by virtually every Native American group on the North American continent. Families and individuals within families held specific rights to the use of designs, and it was considered to be blatant thievery for anyone else to copy these without proper permission or purchase. Cheyenne elder Sam Hart affirms this in stating that he would recognize his mother's designs as hers and hers alone anywhere. (Hart, 203). Marriott as well points this out in relation to medicine bundles containing designs owned by members of the Southern Cheyenne Women's Trade Guild and other similar confraternal organizations. (Mariott, 1982). Art was a pervasive influence in the everyday lives of the nineteenth-century Cheyenne and Kiowa. The synthesis of each people's world views and associated perceptions of place and purpose in the universe was expressed visually.

As such art determined culture, and in turn culture determined art. Each article of regalia, every painted scene, every robe, ledgerbook drawing, and shield design reaffirmed the cosmological order, and the warrior's place within that order. Art was produced to reaffirm cultural constructs of the universal order as defined in the cosmogony of both the Cheyenne and Kiowa peoples. Formats encompassing visionary and biographic modes of expression played a part in the on-going creative process as expository statements of perceived purpose.

Art is life, and life is art. Everything from quills, feathers, teeth, claws, and bones to the minerals and plants used for pigments embodied associations with a wider reality in the minds of the nineteenth-century Cheyenne and Kiowa. The very elements that composed physical works espoused the supernatural. Visual works which highlighted and reaffirmed supernatural agency's place in everyday life became a formative element in Cheyenne and Kiowa cultural consciousness, inextricably linking them with the very forces that created, dictated, and ordered life on the nineteenth-century Great Plains.

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