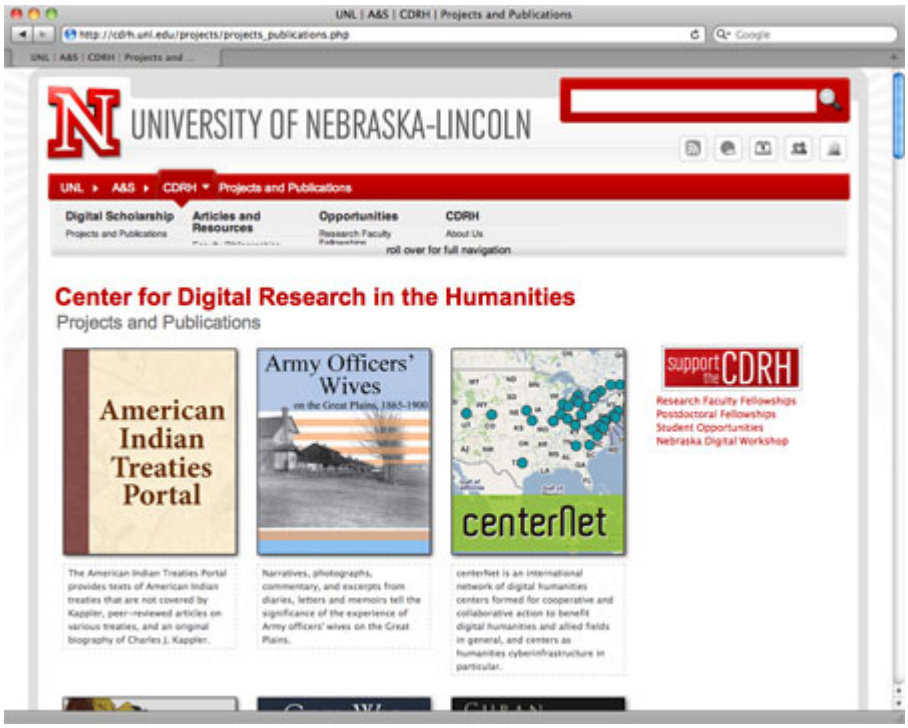
University of Nebraska’s Center for Digital Research in the Humanities Projects and Publications



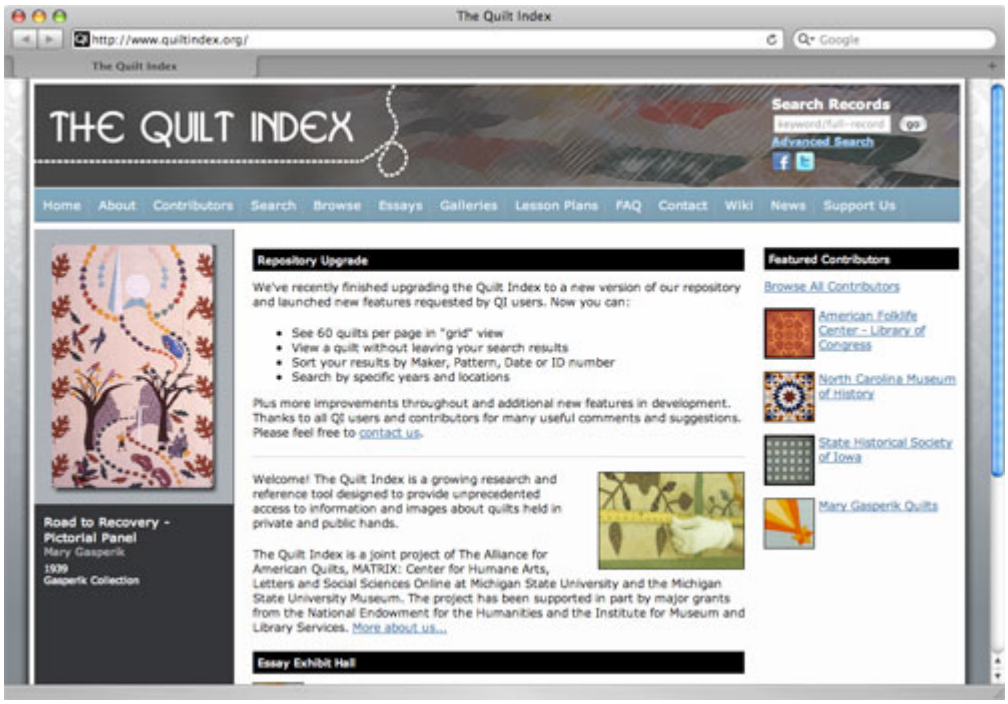
As with the Indian treaties portal, the intended audience for this site is not altogether clear. Perhaps the goal is simply to create a platform for further investigation by anyone who wants to learn more about the Omahas.

Missouri Digital Heritage



One impressive and very useful feature of the site lies in its function as a central clearinghouse for information about the state. In an effort to be comprehensive, the site's creators are engaged in "assisting institutions across the state in digitizing their records and placing them online for easy access."

The Quilt Index



One particularly intriguing new feature is the “signature quilt” search function, which features name and location data for about fifty quilts with multiple signatures.

Imperial Enlightenment

The Enlightenment of Cadwallader Colden

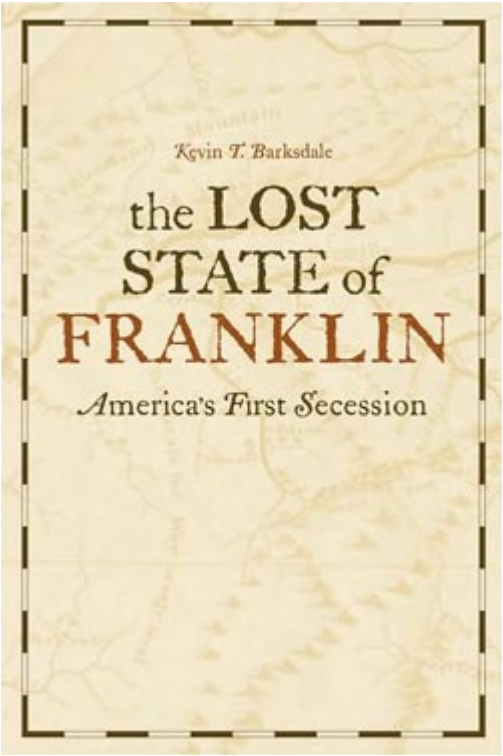


Empire, Science, and Intellectual Culture in British New York

John M. Dixon

John Dixon’s welcome study of Cadwallader Colden is the most comprehensive of the few biographies we have of this important North Briton colonial.

A Lost Cause



The sovereign vacuum created by the inability of any power to serve the needs of backcountry settlers politicized the early national West.

On the margins of the margin



In this wonderful snapshot of the relationship between economic systems and social hierarchies in eighteenth-century New York, Serena Zabin offers an exciting view of life on the margins in the imperial city. For starters, Zabin views New York not as a colonial frontier but rather as an imperial outpost, and she suggests that this vantage is key to understanding how New Yorkers understood themselves and their world at the time—on the margins of empire. Life on the margins of empire was filled with characters generally thought to be marginal to the real elites, politicians, and power brokers in England. But Zabin persuasively demonstrates that work done by poor and middling white women, slaves, servants, sailors, and dance masters was much more central to the imperial struggle for status and authority than previously thought.

Imperial New Yorkers were obsessed with appearance and representation, as traditional markers of class status were no longer reliable.

Central to women's economic authority were their relationships with others—mostly men who had the legal standing necessary to conduct business or access to wealth and markets, but also women in the form of family networks. Expanding efforts to understand the significance of marriage and family in women's lives, Zabin finds agency where most historians see only oppression: the law of coverture. Zabin writes, "Coverture reveals not the ways in which women's participation in the market was limited but the ways in which it was channeled" (35). Women navigated the market through their relationships. Though legally erased through the laws of coverture, married women used their marital status for social and economic leverage in order to acquire credit, information, respect, and access to markets, goods, and services. Such astute observations substantiate the book's arguments. Still, the bigger story is how women's work gets hidden in the archives. Historians well know that commonly

referenced “court records and city directories” only list occupations of men, but Zabin points out that even when women had the chance to testify about their work in court trials, they neglected to identify their occupations and rather “defined themselves by their husbands’ occupation” (39).

The author is a master storyteller whose clear prose and arresting plot lines never betray her thesis. The story of shopkeeper Elizabeth Anderson stands as a perfect example. This compelling, horrific account demonstrates in small part the antagonism that business women were subject to and the centrality of economics to every level of social interaction and authority. When Anderson pursued a group of men who had attempted to rape her daughter Mary, the accused took revenge by trying to destroy her business and reputation. While the case went to trial, it had the unseemly outcome of the public whipping of Elizabeth (you’ll have to read the book to find out why). Yet the trial itself is secondary to what the incident reveals about the importance of economics and status.

Zabin’s treatment of the alleged 1741 slave conspiracy further emphasizes the tight fit between social and economic forces. While many historians have embraced the evidence suggesting a planned slave insurrection, Zabin relegates most of the conspiracy story to a footnote and shows instead how economic roles shaped the hearings, ruling, and outcome of the trials. Most people involved, aside from Justice Daniel Horsmanden, distanced themselves from the event and moved on. Zabin concludes that “this failed attempt to violently re-inscribe social order through courtroom drama exemplifies the enduring power of New York’s economic culture over the simple ideology of white over black often associated with colonial America” (132).

The remainder of the book examines the use of credit, the role of consumer goods, and the treatment of prisoners of war. Here, Zabin offers us stories of social, cultural, and economic fluidity. Social hierarchies were weakened and appearance mattered. Zabin details the different forms of currency available in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries and the way that access to credit was linked to “cultural assumptions of trustworthiness”—assumptions increasingly threatened by con artists who “used commercial markers of gentlemanly status, such as fashionable clothes and letters of introduction, in order to exploit the modes of commercial exchange that depended on both personal interactions and long-distance exchange” (31).

Imperial New Yorkers were obsessed with appearance and representation, as traditional markers of class status were no longer reliable. How else could people determine their social betters and inferiors? To whom should credit be extended? Dancing masters were a crucial site of enactment of this drama concerning status, highlighting both the importance of appearance and the fluidity of social standing. It was no longer enough to simply be rich or successful. One had to be able to project this persona, as well. Ironically, those charged with training elites in the ways of refinement were far from elite themselves (103).

The unreliability of appearance also shaped race relations. White New Yorkers relied on race to determine slave status, but they found the visible markers of race increasingly unreliable. Spanish prisoners of war challenged the longstanding notion that dark skin constituted eligibility for enslavement. Spanish sailors captured by the British refused to accept being sold into slavery when their captors would not see beyond their dark skin and recognize their status as freemen and prisoners of war. For black sailors living on the margins of competing empires, war and commerce became vehicles for enslavement (113). These accounts provide important windows into the dynamic struggle to codify racial categories as well as the centrality of labor to such debates (117, 122).

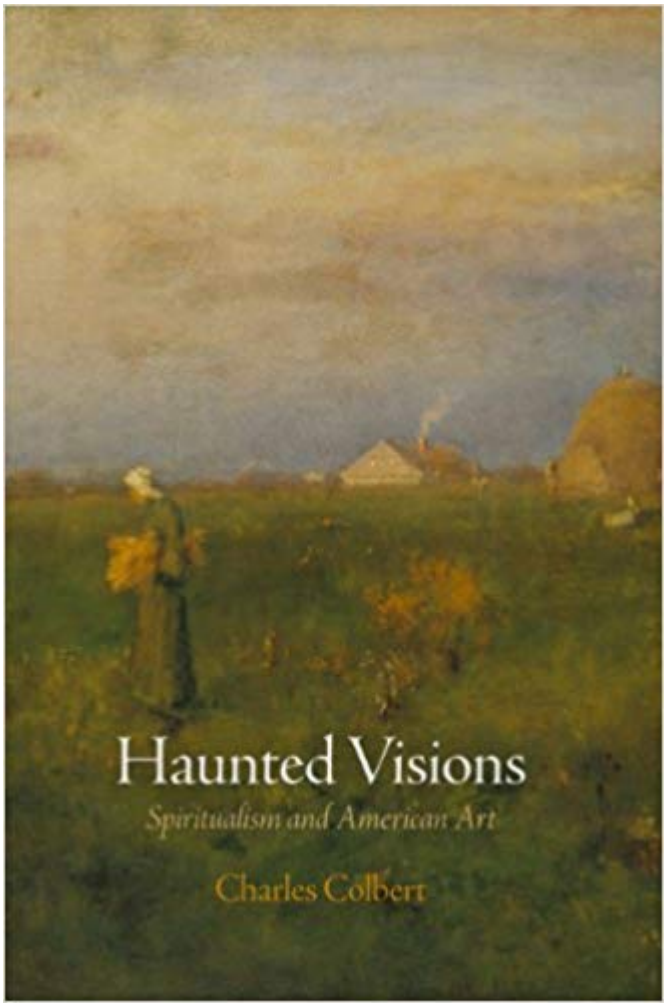
Zabin mentions the importance of ballroom heterosociability as well as the significance of "mixed sex" sociability in defining proper social interactions for elites (97). This reader was left wanting to know more about how the concept of heterosociability shaped other economic interactions between men and women. Did a failure to successfully demonstrate heterosociability affect one's ability to navigate the gendered world of the market? While several scholars of early America have documented the relationship between economic and gendered identities (failures at the market have led to crises of masculinity in more than one study) few have extended this analysis to monetary relationships *between men and women.*

As a scholar of women's crime, I was most taken by the detailed descriptions in Zabin's chapter on the underground, extralegal, and (in her terms) "informal" economies run predominantly by poor white women and black men. The market in used and often stolen goods threatened elites for two distinct reasons: the informal economy undermined the value and "status implications" of luxury goods, and it encouraged interracial economic partnerships between black men and white women (8). While married middle- and upper-class white women were encouraged in their financial transactions, poor women were ridiculed and frequently charged, convicted, and imprisoned. Stealing, receiving, or selling stolen goods were the most common crimes women were charged with during the period, and yet participation in this economy was liberating for slaves and poor white women (80). Historians have long argued that petty theft, particularly of cloth and clothing, was motivated by necessity. Zabin notes that there was an overall increase in the value and significance of consumer goods throughout the period, and argues that we should see slaves, servants, and other poor people involved in the informal economy as consumers who were also aware of the increasing value of luxury goods on the market (66).

Social order is dynamic, unstable, and largely defined by economic rather than political forces. This take on imperial New York is refreshing—not only for its disassociation from the (not yet) pending revolution, but also for its skillful weaving of racial and gendered analysis within a larger, compelling narrative. Zabin sums up her argument, "The primacy of commerce in the British Empire, particularly within the context of a diverse and competitive Atlantic world, worked against any stiff adherence to an abstract social order" (158). The

author’s writing style and deft turns of phrase make this an excellent choice for the general public and undergraduates. Its substantial archive and careful analysis make it essential for Early Americanists and feminist historians alike.

White light (goin’ messin’ up my mind)



Imagine yourself seated around the table at a séance. Imagine having already committed to an ethereal mechanics of sympathy and spirit communication. Imagine the promise of darkness and the desire to sense something beyond the shadow play of candlelight. Imagine an artist like James McNeil Whistler breathing in the scene in which silence, concentration, and spirit-seeing were requisite for success, a scene he sought to recreate in the experience of his own portraits, most strikingly in his *Arrangement in Black* series. In the shimmering spaces between light and dark there is, for a lack of a better phrase, a profound depth.

Artistic creation as a form of mediumship.

Now imagine standing in front of Jackson Pollack's *White Light* (1954). Standing *in*rather than *at* attention. Longing to see beyond the buoyed splats and hardened rivulets of paint, into the dense measures of Pollack's being and the very rhythm of his mid-century milieu.

The work of art as mystic portal.

Colbert seeks to illuminate an invisible depth for his readers.

There is a relationship between these experiences, argues Charles Colbert in *Haunted Visions*—between a century of American art, between artistic creation, spectatorship, and a tradition of appreciation in which the critic becomes a kind of psychic interpreter, expert in discerning the hidden lines of influence.

In asking how spiritualism influences a visual romanticism in nineteenth-century America, Colbert explores the precursors to a distinctly American modernism. Colbert's understanding of spiritualism is sufficiently broad to include a host of other metaphysical schemes that inflected how a wide range of Americans assumed their position at a trance lecture or séance table—mesmerism, psychometry, phrenology, psychical research, and the radical empiricism of William James that would seek to explain such schemes or situations. There is, of course, a transcendentalist hue to all of this, but Colbert succeeds in distinguishing a tradition of nineteenth-century aesthetics from an Emersonian orbit and its afterglow.

Colbert offers a compelling catalogue of odd American artists who "advocate[d] the virtues of enchantment" (61). With an emphasis on the ideological impact of Andrew Jackson Davis and Emanuel Swedenborg, *Haunted Visions* offers a breezy yet fine-grained portrait of the myriad artists and critics swept up in the metaphysical flowerings of the nineteenth century. Colbert is at his best when he writes of the way in which orientations to psychic energies and magnetic powers make their way into stone, marble, and canvas.

The narrative is roughly chronological. It begins with a consideration of the "spiritualist theme" in the work of four sculptors (Hiram Powers, William Wetmore Story, Henry Dexter, and Harriet Hosmer, the latter drawing upon the principles of perpetual spirit motion for the design of a Ferris wheel that would expose riders to the possibilities of interplanetary travel). After looking into how painters William Sidney Mount and Fitz Henry Lane strove to paint the metaphysics of light in the antebellum era, Colbert moves onto postbellum tonalism and the tendency among its practitioners (James McNeil Whistler and George Inness among others) to aggressively paint the auratic energies that pervaded the natural world. The book concludes with discussions of the critic and collector James Jackson Jarves and the early twentieth-century artist Robert Henri, whose interest in clairvoyance, Colbert argues, was part of a long nineteenth-century run-up to the revolution that was

American Modernism.

The gist of Colbert's argument is that this limned tradition was integral in setting the stage for the emergence of modernist art and spectatorship. Modernist works were self-consciously dependent upon and invested in promoting higher levels of consciousness. The surfaces of these works were intended as portals to somewhere else precisely because they had captured the depth that clings to all surfaces—a macrocosmic economy of forces that was ever present but visible only to the properly initiated. "The psychic content of late nineteenth-century art," writes Colbert, "resides beneath the surface and implies an existence that usually operates beyond the threshold of the senses. An observer attuned to the possibility enters a meditative state at the behest of these intimations and resonates sympathetically with them" (19).

Interestingly, Colbert adopts such a critical gaze when explicating the spiritualist content that underlies the works he surveys. In other words, Colbert seeks to illuminate an invisible depth for his readers, which is tantamount to his argument that spiritualism mattered, intensely mattered, for artists and audience alike.

In Colbert's telling, spiritualism comes across as primarily about beliefs, principles, what might be called doctrine-effects. Questions of artistic practice are engaged pointedly at times and there is much to be admired in such a line of inquiry, for it reveals the presence of spiritualist proclivities in arenas not often seen as wrapped up in occult sympathies. Yet in Colbert's rendering of spiritualism as largely a reaction against the anti-intellectualism and sensational excess of evangelical revivalism, the non-ideological life-world of spiritualism (i.e., the bat-shit crazy wonder of it all) does not often come to the fore.

Given the discursive reach of spiritualism, it would have been helpful if Colbert attended to questions of desire, affect, and how individual historical figures theorized their interiority. This would have allowed him to broach how people live *out* and *through* a metaphysics of correspondence in addition to living *by* it. For example, what else is going on with George Inness's "desire to impress himself unequivocally into his compositions" other than his "belief" in the occult? What to make of how his paintings actively deny the inevitability of urbanization? How does the occult revival relate to other kinds of revival and other political registers beyond questions of religious freedom, belief, and cognition (166)?

Colbert argues that the significance of spiritualism, in general, and of spiritualist art in particular, is that both call into question theses of secularization. The persistence of spiritualism in the nineteenth century and beyond, then, demonstrates that religion, and by extension, enchantment, did not recede within the frame of modernity but existed alongside all manner of profanations. Colbert maintains that the presence of religion he unearths should surprise theorists of secularization, challenge the "secularizing bias

of historians” (15), and upend Max Weber’s lament over iron-clad disenchantment.

On its face, this argument is convincing enough. Indeed, within histories of American religion, spiritualism has often been figured as a formation of rebellion—against religio-political orthodoxies, against gender hierarchies, against death itself. And while traffic in ghost-stories may always signal epistemic eccentricity, I am still left wondering what, exactly, is surprising about the cultivation of a reasoned attention that trades in concepts of creativity and genius and eternal value? What is necessarily surprising about Jarves’s notion of the “special gift” of art-seeing (rather than spirit-seeing) in which the “mysterious test of feeling . . . takes cognizance of the sentiment of the artist, his absolute individuality, by which he is himself, and none other; that which cannot be exchanged or imitated” (217)?

Colbert emphasizes the creative individualism of spiritualist practice rather than viewing it in light of cultural consolidations and incorporation. He does not ignore themes of industrialization and urbanization. Nor does he overlook artistic responses to demographic forces. But the reader yearns for a fuller discussion of how and why the artists Colbert surveys were generative of and complicit in the culture at-large. Might the kind of authentic self that Jarves celebrates become less authentic, or better yet, something else entirely, when considered in light of market directives, technological incentives, conceptual conflations of religion and freedom, and other forces that exceed the frames of cognition and intentionality? How might the language of magnetism, for example, be bound up in an encounter with an increasingly capitalized and networked society—one that allows for a robust recognition of self precisely by occluding its powers of ontological diffusion? How does one come to picture (literally and figuratively) a vibrant aura or diagnose the process of re-enchantment? What categories feed into such activities? What are the mechanics? Is enchantment merely a cognitive matter?

In my reading of *Haunted Visions* there is a lament coursing between the lines of Colbert’s narrative—the decline of what he calls the “tempular museum.” This lament is precipitated by the golden-age-quality of the era Colbert considers and culminates in the “awed reverence” demanded by the auratics of Mark Rothko’s *No. 14* (1960) or Pollack’s *White Light*. There is an implicit figuration of decline in Colbert’s narrative—the spiritualist flowering of the long nineteenth century followed by an increasing numbness to spiritual depth. After Pollack and Rothko the deluge of pop art. Andy Warhol as the cynical embrace of the secular surface of things.

But I am not entirely convinced that enchantments lie only behind the screens of history and/or canvas. Indeed, surface and depth may be entirely inadequate for understanding enchantment or anything at all for that matter (the depth ever there to domesticate the unruliness above, to give some semblance of order). For in facing *White Light* one may hear the sounds of Ornette Coleman’s *Free Jazz* (1961), its gatefold album cover so perfectly capturing the

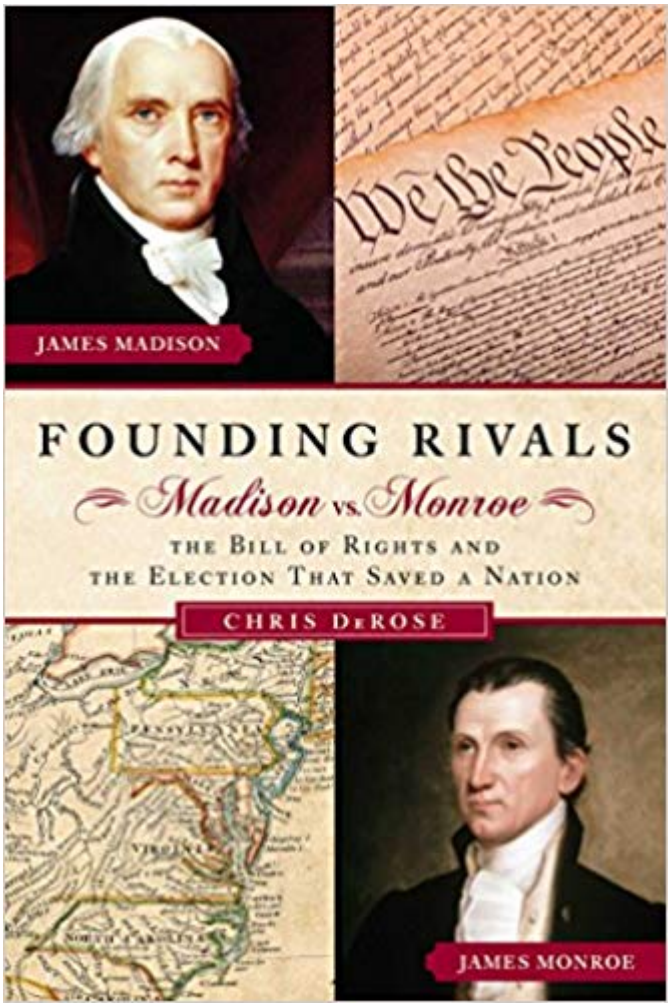
synaesthetic promise of *White Light* and Pollock's method of spontaneous composition. Harmonies converge ever so intensely as Pollack's world bleeds into the Warhol world of irony and so-called detachment and, of course, into the sonic space of the Velvet Underground's *White Light/White Heat* (1968), inspired, in part, by Coleman's extended riffs and asymmetrical phrasing in *Free Jazz*. There is a density and compulsion to all this signal static. The surface becoming the depth and vice versa in a continuous shimmering implosion—the audience at home, longing to clarify, to collect, to own a copy (paintings being long out of reach, original vinyl pressings now do the trick).

It is this contemporary experience of vibrant matter that Colbert addresses through his pre-history of an American art. As Colbert writes of the spiritualist will to domesticate—"By taking possession of paintings, one raised the prospect of being possessed by those same paintings" (227). Indeed, this central claim is spot-on. The shadow play of spiritualism persists in our contemporary moment, suffusing our desire for objects that are really real, things anchored, forever, in a world that goes beyond, so far beyond, those flat schemes of representation. Such schemes must, to their detriment, still the circulation and distinguish art from experience, life from death. The end result, one surmises, is the contemporary art market with its blend of bourgeois frivolity, Victorian fetishism, and bewilderment in the face of such a dense cultural ecology. So that when you walk into a room in which *White Light* hangs, you may be peppered with a palpable spirit of the age—burnt metal circulations of money and sex, feedback, and all manner of spectral splatter.

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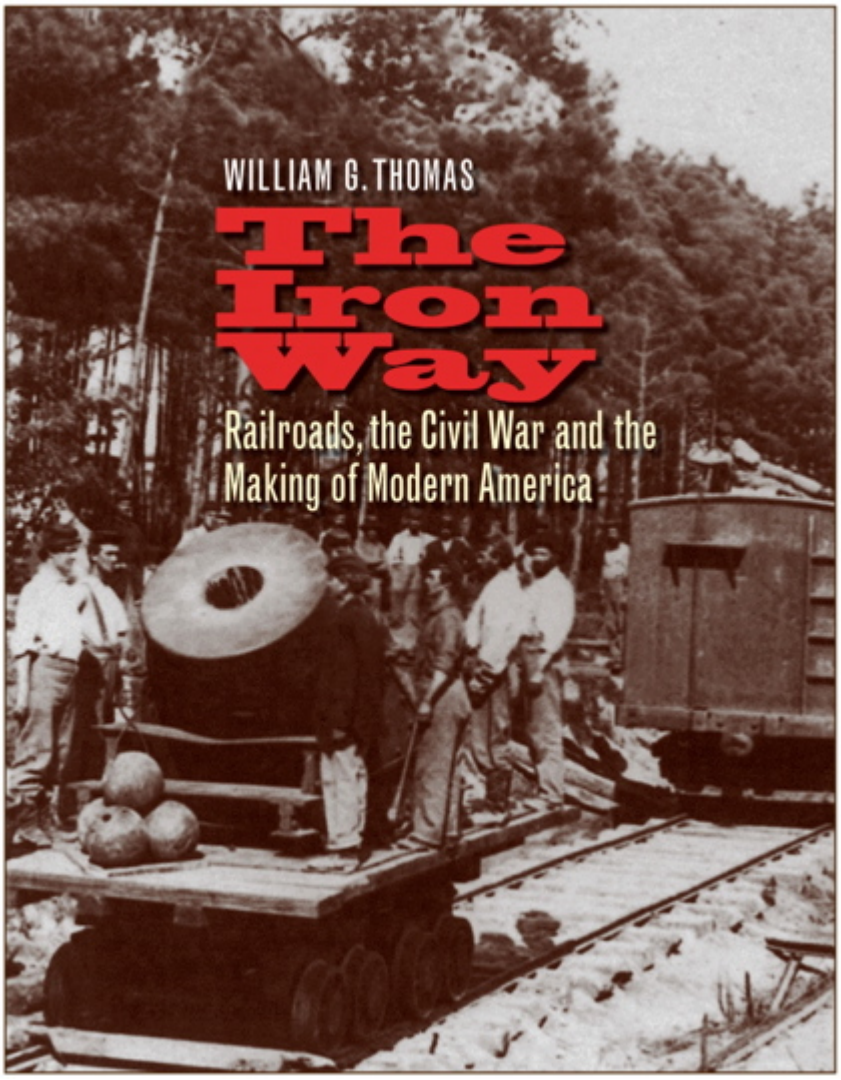
John Lardas Modern teaches in the Religious Studies Department at Franklin & Marshall College. He is the author of *Secularism in Antebellum America* (2011), *The Bop Apocalypse: The Religious Visions of Kerouac, Ginsberg, and Burroughs* (2001), and co-curator of *Frequencies: A Collaborative Genealogy of Spirituality.*

Outsourced History



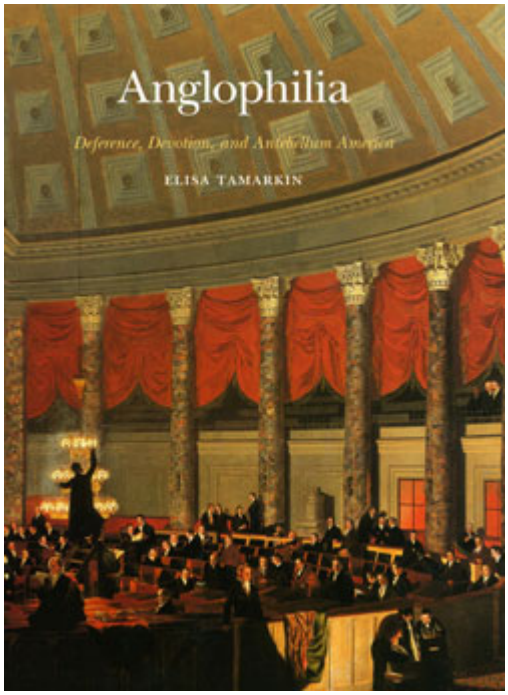
It is fair to say that had the election in Virginia's Fifth District gone the other way, the nation's early political history would have been considerably altered.

Like an Arrow from Jupiter's Bow: Railroads and the Civil War



The presence of railroads in the North and South did not determine social relationships in either region. Instead, both sections of the country used the same technology for their own ends.

Victoria Complex



Americans expressed remorse for their lost place in the British empire and their dissatisfaction with the new political order of an independent democracy wrought by economic and moral conflict.