



An entry on invasion

Michael Eddy (2019)

The Western was hunched over an encyclopedia, raptly scanning a timeline.

The etymology of the word invasion mostly suggests stability across thousands of years. It is a corridor of belligerence slicing through chaotic time. Going back, far back, origins seem to simplify into chunky basics. All of the overtones and connotations of experience are rolled back to the uncomplicated balls of dirt we used to toss around, as words. Go in. Early Europeans were plain-faced, earnest, bare-action monads just trying to get the point across; homely, god-fearing word scrooges who would stand barking single nouns into caves listening to the echoes ping-ponging in a toilet spiral down toward the silent, preverbal subterranean world, hoping to root out predators. If, now, you can imagine Lidl-encrusted Europe, the 3D-scanned, appellation-d'origine-controllée new Europe, the single sliding noodle bowl techno-continent, as instead completely forested, frozen and crawling with all sorts of non-poisonous Northern flesh rippers and nauseating evil spirits—that is to say if you can imagine the total accommodation dream as a total threat nightmare—then you can understand the mind frame of the caveman emulsified in struggle with his environment.

Such pitched conflict, constantly testing the individual, was the crèche of this hard-working and clever guy (and gal), the Western. That's me, he said, looking up. Gradually settling into the feudal 9-to-5, he stretched out and battered the land into domestic obedience. Pragmatic and frugal as he was, the Western found himself strapped for goods, and yet more abundant than ever in words: Burdock root, Maultaschen, Ribena, waffles, saltlakrids, mead, garlic, laver balls, truffles, venison, stinking bishop cheese, extra virgin, schnapps, béchamel. New words stimulated the Western's desire, his appetite for truck and his lust for territory. The market gave him an uncountable number of legs, and scripture was doctored into license for subjugation. Wade right in there.

The entry made it patently clear: Territorial invasions are ignoble and they mark the shift both to industrial labour conditions and to the anthropocene, via the colonial plantation's disciplinary regime, and the slaughter and sickening of millions of the original inhabitants of the Americas,

respectively. The act of invading obviously neither began nor halted with these bloody imperial projects and the invasions of other sovereign territories but especially the former and also the two World Wars. Of course the bad ones are those who invade, not the ones who liberate or civilize or settle. Or at least the word can give cause to equivocate. See the illustration at left, depicting the "Agriculture" diorama in the Felix M. Warburg Hall of the New York State Environment at the American Museum of Natural History, where it states: "When the Algonquin Indian invaded this forest, he did little to alter the conditions of nature. He lived off the natural plant and animal life without disturbing its basic character. He made small clearings where he built his villages and staked out his garden, only to abandon them again to the growth of the forest as he pursued his nomadic life." The word invasion is a projection of the settler perspective on the landscape, and is used to liken indigenous ways of life, inaccurately described on the plaque, to the European encounter with land that progressively unfolded in the following diorama sections, up to the monoculture of the 1950s.

But how can we start the entry after Alexander the Great, after Hannibal, after Genghis Khan? The Western felt a distasteful surge of anti-pc stomach acid in his throat; look, these guys weren't Europeans. Why is everybody always dissing the crusaders? But then he slouched. To be honest I can't think of a single validating interpretation of military invasion, sighed the Western. To take a trendy example, think of the wildly famous "Michel Foucault on steroids" Shimon Naveh, who used the theories of Deleuze like piping on the slices of horror he passed around to the rhizomatic, "swarming" Israeli Defence Forces, while they autopoetically walked through walls in the West Bank: "Several of the concepts in A Thousand Plateaus became instrumental for us [...] allowing us to explain contemporary situations in a way that we could not have otherwise explained. It problematized our own paradigms. [...] Most important was the distinction they have pointed out between the concepts of 'smooth' and 'striated' space [...] [which accordingly reflect] the organizational concepts of the 'war machine' and the 'state apparatus.' [...] In the IDF we now often use the term 'to smooth out space' when we want to refer to operation in a space as if it had no borders. We try to produce the operational space in such a manner that borders do not affect us." Even cool ideas like those of Gilles Deleuze are ruined by this topic. How old was this encyclopedia, wondered the Western.

Appar'tly, the entry went on, the British invasion was one of the more successful re-brandings of the term. The Western had been reborn as a baby boomer whose teenage libido was stimulated by sunny, coquettish songs featuring atomic bombs as signifiers of great orgasms. Pop culture was processing the trauma conceptions of their parents. If the invasions had led to their generation being born, then it didn't matter that the West was being invaded by the British, because invasions were great. Not everyone stateside was so enthusiastic. The teeny boppers had dropped their surf wax and Brylcreem to the chagrin of the homegrown teen idols who sulked by the shore like spurned lovers. Hormones once containable to hamburger-related events were spilling out into the counterculture, enraging the betrayed parents who beseeched "Beatles go home." Why had they liberated Normandy, only to invite in communists? The Western adjusted with the times, grew out his hair, threw away his shoes. They were talking about nuclear weapons that could vaporize you anytime, anywhere. As lite as this consumer society revolution seemed—see entry on Pop Art—it effectively signalled that the world was coming together without the archaic inconveniences of borders and moneychangers.

Globalization has been described as a system in which there is no illusion of state monopoly on invasion (see entry on Empire). Economic invasion is truly a tricky term because state violence and its promise have never really been the safeguards against brutality for economic gains. Politics lends a whiff of deep identity and higher rationales à la Leo Strauss circa Noble Lies, but the crucible of modern democracy was a mint. Neoliberal economic invasion has been a multi prong process; at once organized, through transnational organizations that arbitrate and privilege corporate rights over national sovereignty, but also chaotic, where foreign companies, usually from the North, exploit historically produced inequalities in order to enforce their bottom lines or grab raw resources in very galleon-and-morion fashion. While intriguing pockets here and there have been cultivated in the armpits of hegemonies, this version of invasion is no model for agency. Artists would be well to not fall in love with Nike. The Western, however, did love them, the mesh, the strong morality of sport, the soles resembling cartoon teeth chomping the asphalt.

The Western began to suspect his Westfalia had become occupied by bedbugs. The world had gotten colder, had conspired against the Western, he thought. He searched online for home remedies, and later got unbidden text messages advertising hydrocortisone creams. Nowhere was safe, even your friends charged you to crash on their couch through an app. The freewheeling neoliberals were being replaced by the reactionary neofascists. They inverted the concept of invasion to make it seem like they were the ones being invaded. And they even called themselves Westerns. The Western was disgusted and ambivalent as he read this.

Industrial civilization itself was psychotic and overbearing like a stupid, myopic old man. One whose sour binarism had been mediated into abstraction and detached from the earth. The conceits of progress and conquest had ferried domineering species in bilge water and in half-baked introductions to unsuspecting ecosystems. Each solution the Western came up with caught a hanging thread from somewhere else, and the whole tangle multiplied with each overly engineered attempt. The grey-backed cane beetle became the cane toad became the werewolf. One could object that the concept of an ecosystem was an idealized nostalgia for holism that easily slid into fascism, but the reader had to weigh that against the increasingly homogenous fact of the world as a crawling infested jambalaya of disequibrated pain. The reader was asked to note the dynamic of responsibility in this mess. The blame was not on the “other”; through invasions the “other” was created.

The Western had been studying tirelessly all the while. Even though he no longer knew who he was, he wanted to become a doctor when he graduated because of the high pay. Medicine was a highly valued science, and drove forward all other sciences with its promise of infinite youth and of someone to pay for it. (And military applications, noted a sidebar, have been the catalyst in turn for medical techniques, but that is beyond this entry.) The defences were high and constantly building higher and more solid, like the defences in science fiction movies.

But in the end, everyone had to go, especially in the real world, where ultimate preservation was only in the sphere of dreams for the elite and the very wealthy. When the world invaded you back, you were finally a part of everything. You expanded as a habitat for various and ever larger orders of flora and fauna. You became only fuel. Was it that thought that had urged on the practise of cremation, the Western wondered. Get rid of the body (see vamoose). Defending the human habitat was defending the human from the habitat.

This is a natural metaphor. It is ambiguous if invasion ever really meant simply “go in” or wade in,

like an interaction between two elementary states, like maggots "entering in a hostile manner," (late 15th century). It is almost a misnomer to call decomposition an invasion, which risks normalizing the monstrous proportions that invasion has taken on since the advent of capitalism. We have been looking for the originary ape who rented her labour for the surplus value reaped by another, but we have not found her yet. We haven't found ants who have installed their factories overseas.

And yet materially, invasion is what happens. We don't evaporate into rainbows or angels and we don't freeze into stone monuments. Our bodies turn into kombucha sacs, for lack of a better image, and if we do possess souls, you could say that our souls are the "mothers." This was perhaps the only really acceptable celebration possible for the word "invasion," thought the Western.

And the Western shook his head, wise after all, seeing his own rational logic laid out before him, as geometric as a jewel.