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2. Making Sense of Smoke

Engraving and Ornament in de Bry's *America*

On any surface of metal, the object of the engraver is, or ought to be, to cover it with lovely *lines*, forming a lacework, and including a variety of spaces, delicious to the eye. . . . That [these lines] should mean something, and a good deal of something, is indeed desirable afterwards; but first we must be ornamental.

—John Ruskin, *Ariadne Florentina*:
Six Lectures on Wood and Metal Engraving

In the previous chapter I looked for traces of the scriptive techniques that produce the savage body; in this chapter, I turn my attention from the instruments of inscription to the engraved line itself. John Ruskin's remarks on the proper ends of engraving provide an appropriate starting point. Lecturing at Oxford in 1872 on the subject of wood and metal engraving, Ruskin declares that the art of the engraver is first and foremost a meaningless activity—it is, quite simply, the decorating or ornamenting of a metal plate with lines. In calling his audience's attention to the materiality of the engraver's mark, over and against its signifying function, Ruskin offers sound guidance for the viewer who is apt to make the leap too quickly from the ornamental lines of the print to a content one might suppose those lines to signify.

Consider de Bry's engraving for the *Report* titled *Their manner of prainge with Rattels about te fyer* (Figure 23). Nine Algonquian men and women, five of them shaking rattles, are seated in a circular pattern on the ground, while two additional figures (a man and a woman) stand to the left, apparently engaged in conversation. In the midst of the seated figures burns a large, smoking fire, which provides the focus for the depicted activities. The engraving is rich with potential meaning. There is, first of all, ethnographic content, as the image describes specific customs observed among the coastal Algonquians of Virginia. Harriot explains in the caption on the opposite page:

When they haue escaped any great danger by sea or lande, or be returned from the warr in token of Ioye they make a great fyer abowt which the men, and woemen sist

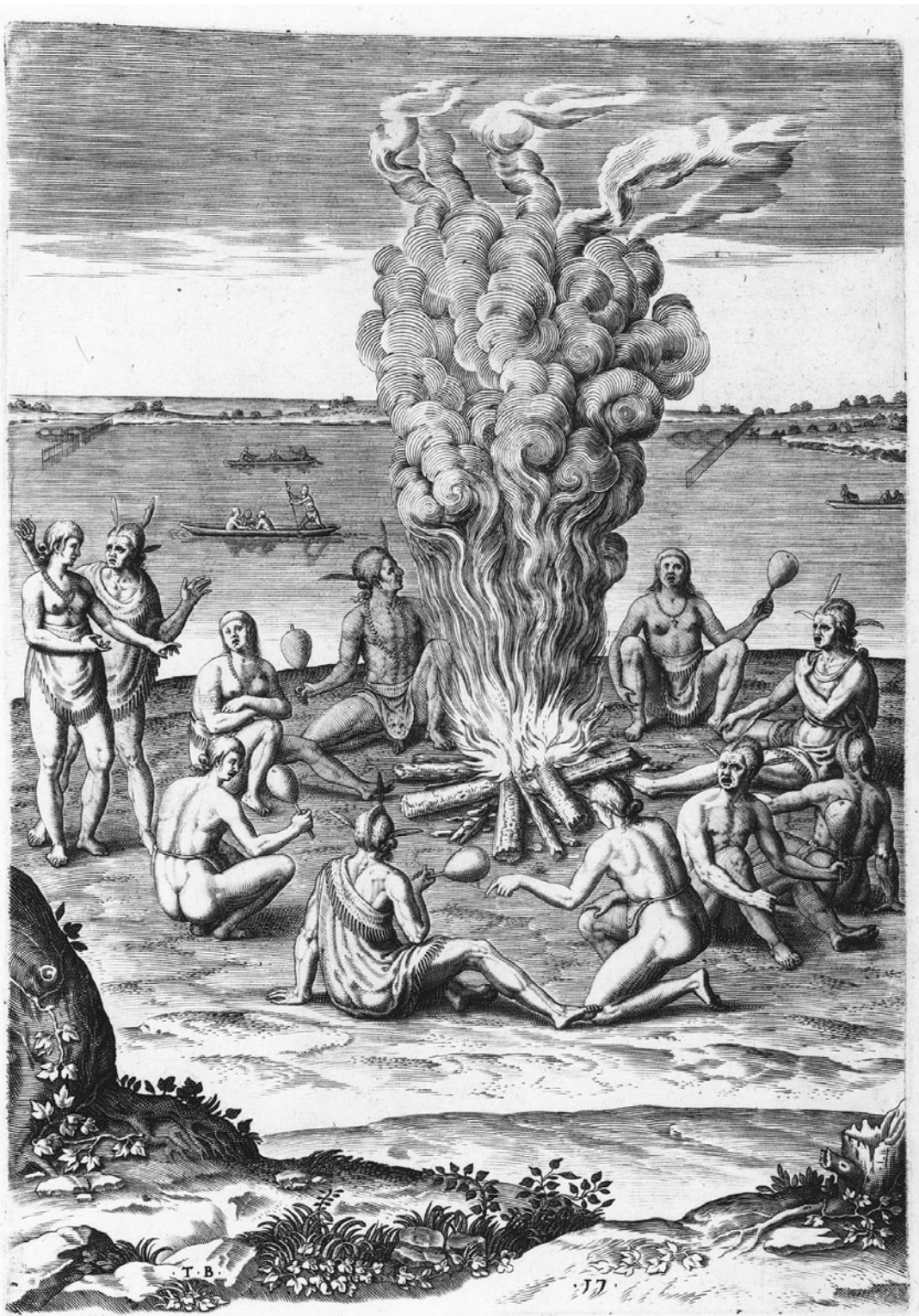


Figure 23. Theodor de Bry after John White, *Their manner of prainge with Rattels about te fyre*, from *A Briefe and True Report*. Courtesy and with permission of British Library G.6837.

[sic] together, holdinge a certaine fruite in their hands like vnto a rownde pompion or a gourde, which after they haue taken out the fruits, and the seedes, then fill with smal stons or certayne bigg kernellt to make the more noise, and fasten that vppon a sticke, and singinge after their manner, they make merrie: as myselfe obserued and noted downe at my beinge amonge them. For it is a strange custome, and worth the obseruation.¹

The caption, of course, includes more information than the engraving itself can offer: from the image alone, we cannot tell why the Virginians have gathered around the fire nor how their rattles were constructed. But because Harriot was there, because he “observed and noted downe,” his words carry the authority of the eyewitness and thus place him in a privileged position for explaining the meaning of the plate. As with the other plates for the *Report*, however, Harriot’s caption hardly exhausts the content of the image. Not only does the engraving contain a good deal of descriptive content not addressed by Harriot, it also has potential for connotational meanings that would contextualize it within de Bry’s and Harriot’s own cultural milieu. These New World savages, for example, as they sing and “make merrie,” are engaged (so the title informs us) in a form of prayer, and one can easily imagine de Bry’s Protestant audience associating this scene of New World religious ritual with various European contexts: with the “superstitious” rites of pagan antiquity, contemporary witchcraft, and Roman Catholicism, to name three. All these various meanings can and perhaps should be read into this image. Clearly the lines in this engraving *mean* something—indeed, “a good deal of something,” to borrow Ruskin’s phrase.

And yet before they mean something, they are simply lines. Would it, therefore, be worthwhile, would it tell us anything interesting about the conditions of representing



Figure 24. Theodor de Bry, *Grotisch fur alle Kunstler*, title page, late sixteenth century. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, The Elisha Whittelsey Collection, The Elisha Whittelsey Fund, 1951 [51.501.5793(1)]. Photograph from The Metropolitan Museum of Art; all rights reserved.

the New World in the late sixteenth century, to resist the impulse to find content in de Bry's engraving and instead—following Ruskin's cue—to consider this image first as ornament, as simply the decoration of a surface with lines? De Bry, after all, was himself an ornamental engraver and created several series of grotesque designs, such as the four plates of his *Grotisch fur alle Kunstler* (Figure 24). Clearly he was not unaccustomed to engaging in that intense visual concentration on the formal play of line and shape that characterizes ornamental work. And I would suggest that *Their manner of prainge* likewise lends itself to an “ornamental” analysis. Specifically, I would point out the ornamental quality of the roiling, spiraling smoke that occupies the upper portion of the image. The rich linear play of the smoke stands noticeably outside the spatial order that rules throughout the rest of the engraving, where clearly demarcated shapes (flowers, tree stumps, classicized bodies, etc.) occupy a recessional space divided neatly into foreground, middle ground, and background. Ascending from flames that consume a heap of logs positioned securely in the middle ground, the lines of the smoke rise not just toward the sky but also toward the surface of the page. These repeated linear swirls disengage themselves at least partially from representational space, and in doing so they serve as a check upon the historian's impulse immediately to move from inside to outside, from signifier to signified. Here and elsewhere an ornamental quality in de Bry's work plays a disruptive role within his project of New World representation. My concern in this chapter is to arrive at some understanding of this disruption.

The Engraver's Lines

Art historians who wish to take seriously an ornamental impulse within the graphic work of reproductive engravers such as de Bry are met by a certain disciplinary resistance, though it is a resistance that has begun to wane in recent years. Two factors in particular have contributed to this neglect of the reproductive engraver. One is art history's longstanding bias in favor of “originality” in artistic expression, a bias that at least since the publication of Adam von Bartsch's enormously influential catalog *Le Peintre-graveur* (1803–21) has privileged the inventions of painter-engravers such as Dürer over the work of professional engravers who devoted their careers to copying works by other artists. The second factor is the emergence of new photographic technologies in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. When William Ivens, writing in 1953, described the linear syntax of the early modern reproductive engraver as a “net of rationality,” he was indeed looking carefully at the work of professional engravers and offering a new language for critically engaging with their work; but it was also a largely disparaging language that privileged the nearly invisible syntax of twentieth-century photomechanical processes over the engraver's highly visible network of lines. In Ivens's view, the “net of rationality” constituted a “tyranny” that artificially limited the amount of visual information the reproductive engraver could convey.² When judged by photomechanical standards, the early modern engraver inevitably failed to

measure up. Alternatively, when judged by the standards of originality represented by the *peintre-graveur*, the reproductive engraver once again paled in comparison.

“What we have forgotten,” writes Caroline Karpinski, “is the critical, public and artistic confidence that earlier centuries expressed in reproductive prints.”³ Ivins’s net of rationality may indeed be a useful concept—as it was in the previous chapter—for coming to terms with a rationalizing impulse within de Bry’s graphic work. But it is also a phrase that downplays the extent to which reproductive engravers and their audiences, prior to the advent of photomechanical reproduction, acknowledged the line as a vital and manipulable rather than a “tyrannical” factor in creating meaning within this genre. Art historians have now begun to argue for the importance of attending to the ways in which reproductive engravers—particularly “specialist engravers” such as Hendrick Goltzius and Cornelis Cort, to name two of de Bry’s contemporaries—made deliberate and effective use of the tension between the contrived artifice of the engraved line and its power to produce three-dimensional illusion.⁴ These artists were not passive recorders of their models, nor did they seek to be; rather, they were skilled interpreters who sought to fix their viewer’s attention on lines that wavered provocatively and often spectacularly between representation and ornament.

As I have already argued, we must be careful to distinguish between the virtuosic line of an engraver such as Goltzius, who displayed his *ingenium* by copying the work of prominent artists of his day for the collector, and the lines of de Bry and his assistants, who primarily copied for a more general audience the work of unknown artists. De Bry’s lines are serviceable, not spectacular. Deployed within, but rarely against, the representational logic of the net of rationality, they seldom if ever seek the virtuosic effects achieved by the specialist engravers. This does not mean, however, that we should neglect the ornamental value of those lines simply because they do not measure up to Goltzius. De Bry was, after all, a skilled professional engraver, the founder of a printmaking and publishing firm that became known throughout Protestant Europe for the quality of its book illustrations.⁵ The *Report* constituted an important step in establishing that reputation, and one sign of its engravers’ command of the burin is the smoke that wafts in great, ornamental clouds through several of the book’s plates. Smoke, as depicted in engravings such as *Their manner of prainge*, *The manner of making their boates*, and *Their seetheynge of their meate in earthen pottes* (Figures 23, 25, 26), may be the one point in the illustrations for this New World text where the engraver’s lines do in fact withdraw, indeed quite dramatically, from their representational obligations and engage in something that approaches a freely ornamental play of line.

The degree to which de Bry’s smoke stands out from the other forms in his engravings and commands our visual attention is due in part to the fact that smoke presents the engraver with a special problem of representation: its nebulous immateriality is antithetical to an art whose degree zero is the line. The engraver’s solution to the problem of representing smoke is of necessity quite different from that of the watercolorist who provided the models for the engravings of the *Report*. In the prototype

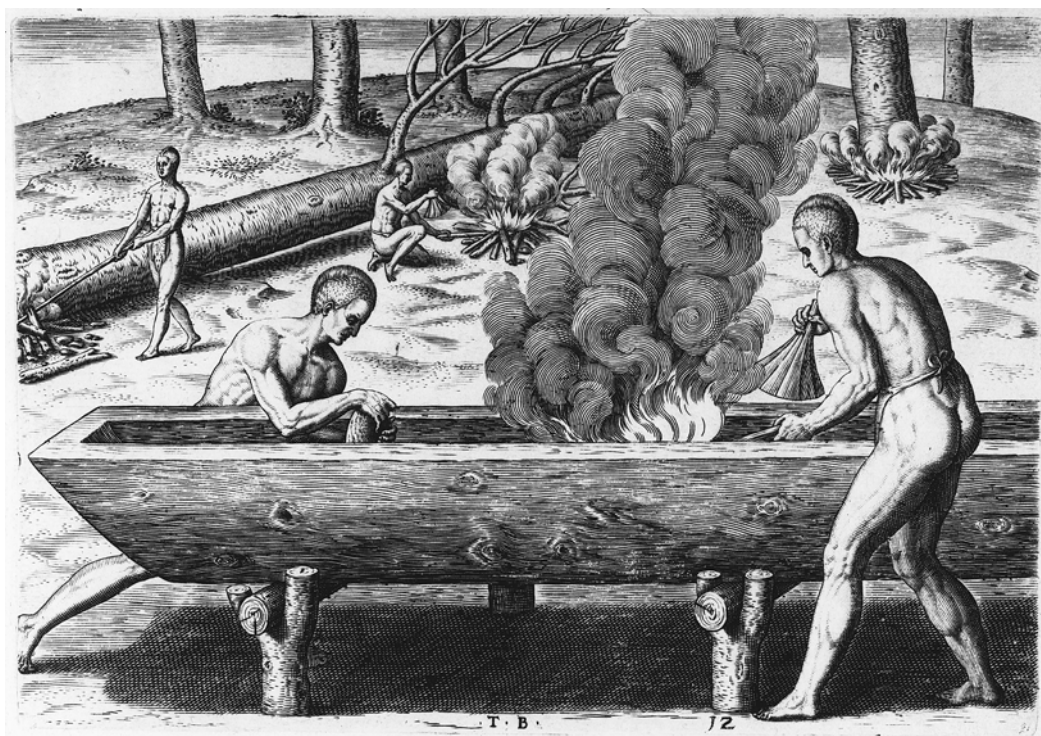


Figure 25. Theodor de Bry, *The manner of making their boates*, from *A Briefe and True Report*. Courtesy and with permission of British Library G.6837.

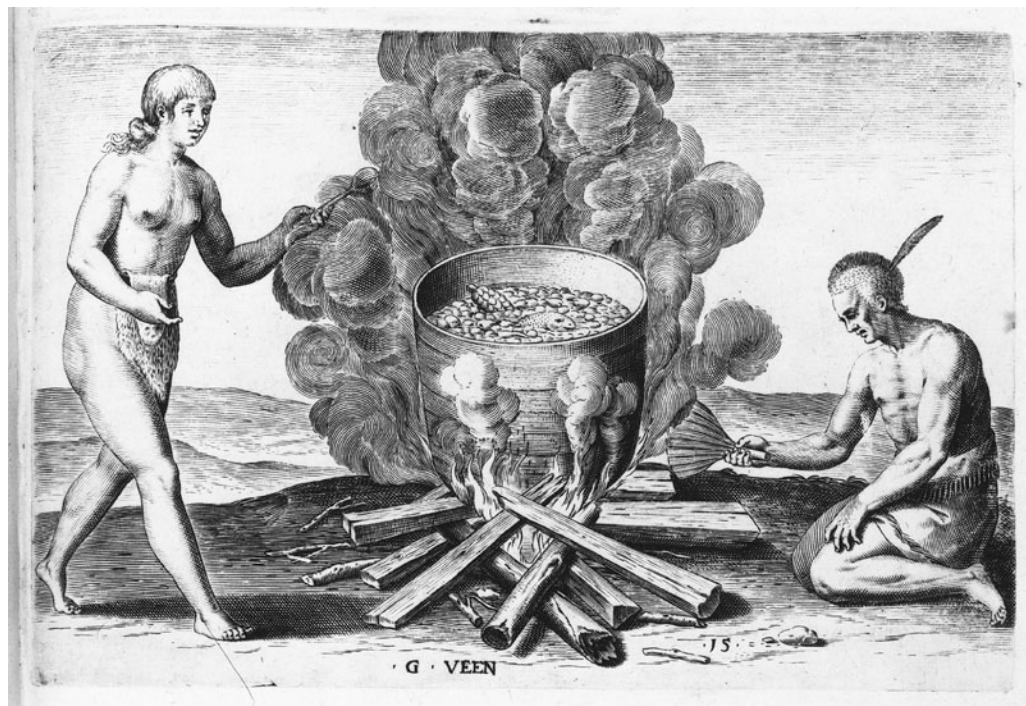


Figure 26. Gijsbert van Veen after John White, *Their seetheynge of their meate in earthen pottes*, from *A Briefe and True Report*. Courtesy and with permission of British Library G.6837.

for *Their manner of prainge*, for example, John White paints his smoke in light, transparent washes through which the ethnographic object—a chanting Indian—is easily discernible (Figure 27). Our visual attention rests not on a display of line or even on painterly virtuosity, but on the “facts”; no medium or projection of ego obstructs our gaze as we see through both the smoke and the artist’s technical presence into a new world. White is in fact notable in the history of watercolor painting for the extent to which he added the modern technique of transparent washes to a traditional dense and opaque use of color.⁶ But this transparency represents more than a simple technical innovation. It amounts to a strategic use of medium wherein the viewer is invited

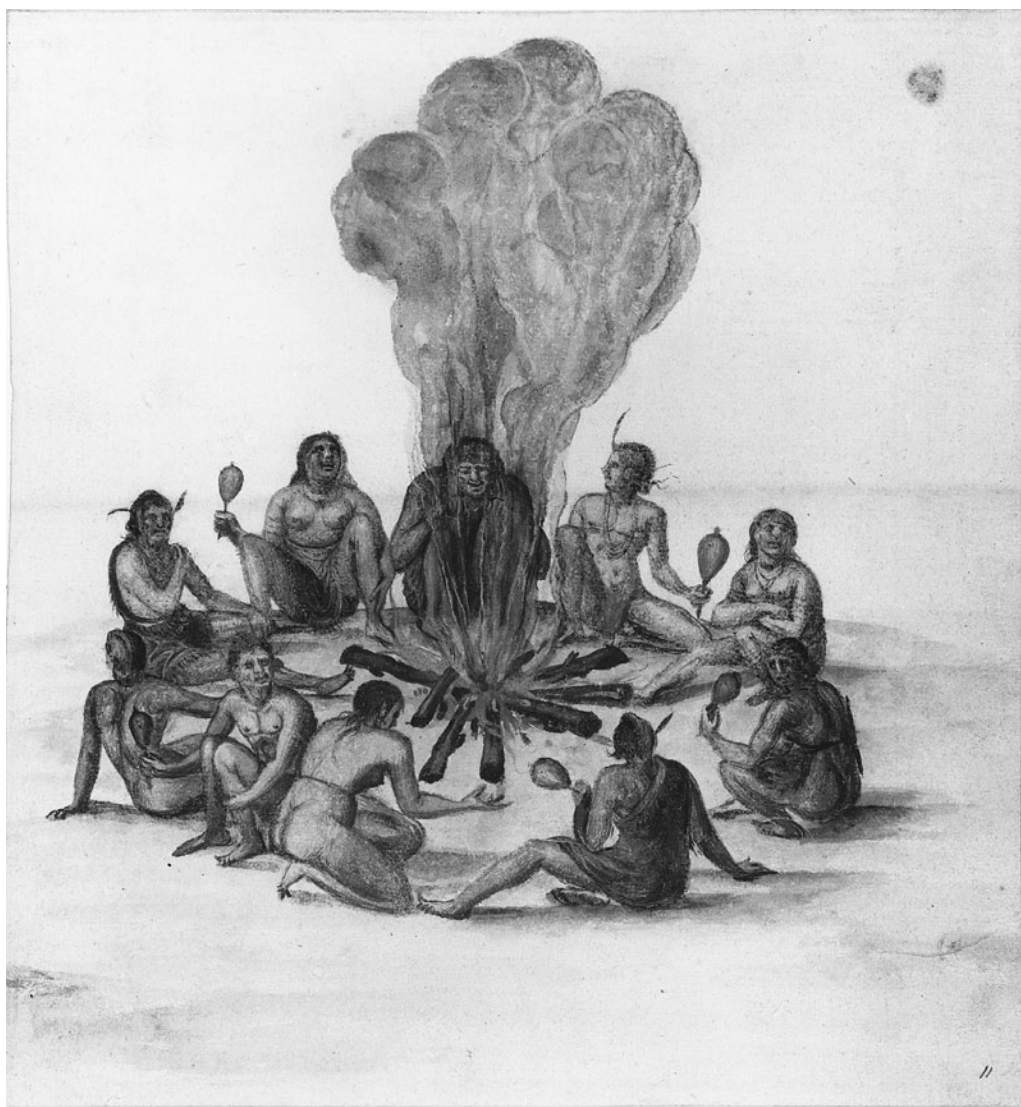


Figure 27. John White, *Algonquians around a fire*, watercolor on paper, c. 1585. Copyright Trustees of The British Museum.

to see through the intrusive hand of the artist by *literally* seeing through the medium itself. Nowhere is this technique more noticeable—or rather, unnoticeable—than in White’s manner of depicting smoke.

It is often noted that de Bry’s engravings translate White’s ethnographically perceptive studies into the classicized forms of European mannerism.⁷ But an equally if not more significant translation occurs at the level of the medium itself, where a visual rhetoric of transparency is exchanged for the opacity of the engraved line. This radical shift in visual language is particularly apparent in the artists’ respective approaches to the rendering of smoke. There is no seeing through the lines of de Bry’s smoke nor through those of Gijsbert van Veen, an engraver in de Bry’s workshop whose initials appear on *Their seetheynge of their meate*. The sinuous and sometimes intricate work of the burin in these smoky passages is mesmerizing. In van Veen’s and de Bry’s depictions of smoke, the engraver’s lines are released from their normal function of defining form: compare, for example, the perfectly parallel arcs that circumscribe the felled tree in *The manner of makinge their boates* with the perfectly parallel arcs in the overlapping smoke, which circumscribe nothing specific at all (Figure 28). So released, the lines of the smoke draw our eyes away from the ethnographic subject matter, away from the smoke itself, and into an ornamental display of graphic technique. To be fair, one must admit that there is indeed a compellingly smoky quality to these lines. They appear to mimic certain motions we are accustomed to watching in smoke. Groups of parallel hatchings—some forming serpentine curves, some simple arcs, others full spirals—build one upon the other; areas of cross-hatching suggest shadows and volume and indicate transitions as one smoky pocket bleeds into the next; and all this linear movement seems to defy gravity as it billows upward. However, in none of this



Figure 28. Theodor de Bry, *The manner of makinge their boates* (detail). Courtesy and with permission of British Library G.6837.

smoky play of line do we have the *illusion* of smoke in the way White produces the illusion of smoke's transparency, or in the way an engraver can produce the illusion of more architectural forms such as a tree, a canoe, or even a human body. But if the lines of de Bry's smoke do not give us illusion, they do give us, and to great effect, a display of the linear art involved in the engraver's effort to produce illusion.

One way of coming to terms with these lines (lines that lead us both toward a meaning in the world and toward the art that produces this meaning) is through the semiotic notions first proposed by nineteenth-century American philosopher Charles Sanders Peirce of the iconic sign and the indexical sign. The real interest of de Bry's smoke is in the degree to which it behaves simultaneously as both. For Peirce, the icon is a sign that in some way partakes of the character of its object, even if that object is a purely hypothetical one.⁸ De Bry's smoke, as I have described it, functions as an icon insofar as it partakes of a quality, a certain vaporous movement, that any viewer who has ever seen smoke will associate with this ethereal substance. And indeed all other forms described in the plates for the *Report* can be classified as iconic signs as well. De Bry's illusionistic trees, for instance, unlike the word *tree* (which belongs to Peirce's category of the "symbol"), share with their object the qualities of roundness, of having branches, etc.

While the plates for the *Report* may be full of iconic signs, the individual lines that make up those icons function as indexes. An index is the physical trace that leads us directly to its source, and for this reason it bears a stronger connection to its object than does the icon: as Peirce defines it, the index is "really and in its individual existence connected with the individual object."⁹ The concept is in fact much older than Peirce, extending as far back as Augustine, who in the fourth century AD first distinguished between conventional signs and natural signs (*signa naturalia*), the latter being the equivalent of the index. For Augustine and others ever since, smoke as a sign of the fire to which it is physically linked has served as one of the chief examples of a natural sign.¹⁰ The lines that constitute de Bry's engraved smoke are also, I would suggest, noteworthy indexical signs—not as signs of fire, of course, but as visible traces of the engraver's hand and of the difficult process of pushing the burin into a resistant metal plate while at the same time turning that plate against the burin (a bespectacled engraver is engaged in this activity at the far right of the engraver's workshop in the final plate of van der Straet's *Nova reperta*; see Figure 3). Like the tracks of an animal (Augustine's other example of a natural sign), the engraved line bears an indexical relation to the activity that produced it.¹¹

While all the engraved lines of the *Report* necessarily include an indexical dimension, the lines of the smoke seem to be a special case, for unlike the other lines in the engravings, they advertise their indexicality. Since the lines of the smoke fall somewhat short of representing a discrete form and instead mimic through their movements and patterns the motions of smoke, we cannot read these lines *as smoke* without also reading them *as lines* and therefore as indexes of the engraver's labor. Thus, another way of understanding the tension between the representational aims and the ornamental

qualities of the engraved line is to view it as a tension between the iconicity of delineated form and the indexicality of the line itself. It is precisely this semiotic ambivalence that specialist engravers such as Goltzius, who knew how closely early modern audiences were attuned to the engraver's subtle manipulations of line, exploited in their reproductive engravings. In the case of the *Report*, this ambivalence, so apparent in de Bry's smoke, can offer valuable insight into the conditions of representing the New World around 1590.

Reading Smoke

How might we take this ambivalence seriously and yet at the same time read de Bry's smoke *as smoke*, thus situating it firmly within the horizon of possibilities of what the smoke of a New World campfire could signify for a European audience at the end of the sixteenth century? One such context for reading de Bry's smoke may be found in early modern prints and drawings treating the subjects of witchcraft and magic. The smoke in *Their manner of prainge* invites comparison, for example, with the turbulent, chaotic play of line in prints like Hans Baldung's chiaroscuro woodcut of the *Witches' Sabbath* (1510), perhaps the first single-leaf woodcut to treat this subject (Figure 29).¹² In Baldung's woodcut, smoke fumes into the sky from the pots of witches who are seated on the ground. The smoke suggests the transformative magic that makes possible such diabolical wonders as a witch who takes a backward flight on a goat, while it also calls to mind the commonly held belief that the demons summoned by witches were composed of condensed air.¹³ In the airy disturbances of Baldung's *Witches Sabbath* and in related drawings by the same artist, as well as in works by other sixteenth- and seventeenth-century artists who treat similar subject matter,¹⁴ the wild, undulating, and often elegant graphic line, tied to no specific representational duties, becomes an effective means for figuring precisely that which refuses figuration in witchcraft: the unseen forces within the air that are the source of the witch's power and the object of her conjurations.

There is good reason for considering de Bry's engraving alongside such images as Baldung's *Witches Sabbath*. The link between early modern attitudes toward witches and American Indians is well established.¹⁵ Distant as they were from the revealed word of scripture, natives of the New World were thought by Europeans to be particularly susceptible to demonic influences, while their figures of spiritual authority were often specifically singled out as witches and conjurors. Jean de Léry, for example, upon observing a religious rite in Brazil during which shamans shake *maracas* and blow tobacco smoke on the participants, had no hesitation in referring to the event as a "witches sabbath."¹⁶ The *Report* offers a similar assessment of an Algonquian medicine man who is the subject of a plate by Gijsbert van Veen titled *The Coniuerer* (Figure 30). According to the caption, "They haue comonlye coniurers or iuglers which vse strange gestures, and often contrarie to nature in their enchantments: For they be verie familiar with deuils, of whome they enquier what their enemys doe, or other suche

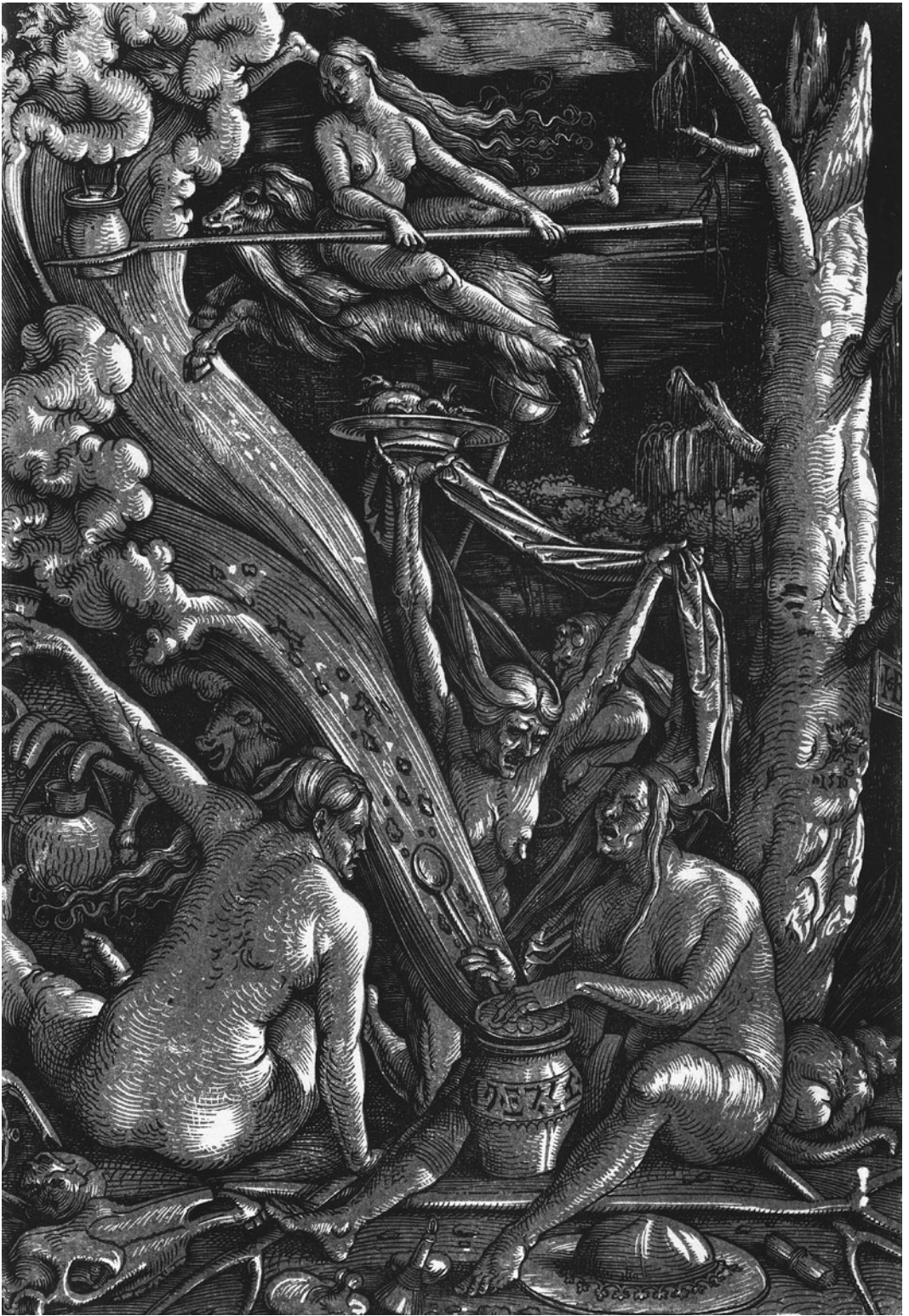


Figure 29. Hans Baldung, *Witches' Sabbath*, chiaroscuro woodcut, 1510. Copyright Trustees of The British Museum.

things.”¹⁷ In White’s original watercolor, this figure is actually labeled the “flyer,” a word that suggests the shaman’s capacity for flight between earthly and spiritual realms.¹⁸ The altered title that appears in the *Report*, however, with the aid of Harriot’s caption, would have been more immediately digestible to an audience steeped in popular reports of witchcraft and magic.

Around the time of the *Report*’s publication, an engraving by Crispijn de Passe titled *Saturn and His Children* explicitly makes a pictorial connection between the American Indian and the witch (Figure 31). The print, which belongs to a series of seven engravings of the planetary gods and their children based on drawings by Martin de Vos, shows Saturn riding in a chariot through his zodiacal house. Below him are those who fall under his influence, a motley crew that consists entirely of witches, magicians, and Indians, the latter engaging in a variety of activities, including mining and, in the right foreground, a cannibal feast. The smoke that rises from the savages’ barbecue is echoed on the left-hand side of the sheet in a scene of sorcery in which three witches are borne aloft by the smoke produced by their own black rites.¹⁹ For early modern viewers, such associations between the practices of witches and those of American Indians would carry over easily to de Bry’s scene of ritualistic incantation around a smoking fire.



Figure 30. Gijsbert van Veen after John White, *The Coniuerer*, from *A Briefe and True Report*. Courtesy and with permission of British Library G.6837.



Figure 31. Crispijn de Passe after Martin de Vos, *Saturn and His Children*, from *The Seven Planets*, late sixteenth century. Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam.

The smoke we see rising in the midst of this possibly demonic ritual would not, therefore, have been a neutral substance to the early modern viewer but a bearer, in a very literal sense, of meaning, since it is precisely in such smoky perturbations of the air that demonic spirits were thought to assume visible form through the invocations of witches. Indeed, de Bry's smoke suggests, within a static and silent pictorial art, the very sounds produced by these figures who sit upon the ground with mouths open and rattles shaking. As they strike the air with their wandlike rattles, the smoke serves to carry their prayers to the inhabitants of the spirit world.²⁰ Heinrich Cornelius Agrippa, the most influential writer on magic during the sixteenth century, has this to say of the mediating role of the air in the practice of magic:

[The air] immediately receives into itself the influences of all celestial bodies and then communicates them to the other Elements, as also to all mixed bodies. Also it receives into itself, as it were a divine looking-glass, the species of all things, as well natural as artificial, as also of all manner of speeches, and retains them; and carrying them with it, and entering into the bodies of men, and other animals, through their pores, makes an impression upon them, as well when they sleep as when they be awake, and affords matter for divers strange Dreams and Divinations.²¹

The work of the witch or the magician, then, was to manipulate the air in a manner that could call forth spirits. As Agrippa explains, "by certain vapors, exhaling from proper suffumigations, airy spirits are presently raised, as also thunderings and lightnings, and such like things."²² Echoes of Agrippa, who was something of a Faustian figure in early modern Europe, were heard on the English stage just a few years after the publication of the *Report*, in words penned by Harriot's friend, Christopher Marlowe.²³ In the final act of *Dr. Faustus*, the doomed magus makes a plea to the stars to effect his own bodily translation through the medium of mist, cloud, and smoke:

You stars that reigned at my nativity,
Whose influence hath allotted death and hell,
Now draw up Faustus like a foggy mist
Into the entrails of yon laboring cloud,
That when you vomit forth into the air,
My limbs may issue from your smoky mouths,
So that my soul may but ascend to heaven.²⁴

Faust's description of a vaporous path to the heavens recalls de Passe's engraving, in which the abject progeny of the earth god—the bodies that occupy the fallen, saturnaline world below—are tied to the stars through the medium of air. In its most exalted form, this medium is seen as the supportive cloud on which Saturn drives his chariot. This celestial cloud then merges with "laboring clouds" that spew rain over the gloomy terrain, and these storm clouds in turn, and almost imperceptibly, transform into the

smoke produced by human sorcery. Like de Passe's smoke and clouds, de Bry's own surging smoke may be read as the visualization of the airy medium through which magicians and witches work their magic, the medium that unites the celestial with the earthly, that carries speech, that translates bodies and images (Agrippa's "species") and impresses them upon our senses. Through his smoke, de Bry lends to the suspect prayer of the savage, with its potentially demonic invocations, a kind of formless visibility.²⁵

But even as de Bry's smoke leads us outward into the larger context of witchcraft and magic during the sixteenth century, this same context returns us to the engraver's lines, for the preoccupation with medium in the early modern literature on magic, witchcraft, and demonology can provide us, as it provided certain writers and artists, with a means of understanding the nature of the artist's involvement with his own materials.²⁶ The notion of a demonic manipulation of the air, for example, finds echoes both in the theory and practice of picture-making in the Renaissance, as in Leonardo's technique of *sfumato* (smokiness), which created an enhanced sense of illusion in his paintings by causing forms literally to merge with their surrounding atmosphere.²⁷ Understood in these terms, Leonardo's famous technique demonstrates the artist's "magical" ability to manipulate his medium. Similarly, one might well argue that Baldung's frenzied smoke offers a pictorial meditation on the idea of artistic creation as demonic possession. To be sure, one would be hard-pressed to argue that de Bry, in his ethnographic engravings for the *Report*, is chiefly concerned with the notion of the artist-as-magician. Nevertheless, as the charges of atheism, conjuring, and juggling made against the Raleigh circle (and Harriot, in particular) during the 1590s demonstrate, the ability to conjure the elements and the ability to conjure new worlds were not unrelated skills in the late sixteenth century.²⁸ And as we have just seen, Harriot and de Bry both belonged to a culture in which the witch, the magician, the demon, and the artist could all be conceived as manipulators of the same airy matter. It thus makes a good deal of sense that an engraver would choose to represent this medium—especially when it was stirred up by the prayers of New World savages—through a smoky display of his own art.

While the art and literature surrounding early modern magic and witchcraft can help us read de Bry's smoke, it is nevertheless important to recognize that de Bry does not *definitively* present this New World gathering as a scene of witchcraft: the burden is on the viewer to come to his or her own conclusion as to the specific nature of what Harriot in his caption identifies simply as a "strange custom." Again, Baldung's *Witches' Sabbath* provides a useful point of comparison. As Joseph Koerner points out, Baldung does not represent a Sabbath in which all of the deeds and implements of the witches have been named and accounted for. Instead the artist presents the viewer with the very problem of *knowing* witches and how they work their magic. The role of the audience is to make sense, as if we were ourselves inquisitors, out of ambiguous visual signs such as the sausage-like forms hanging over a pitchfork on the far left-hand side of the print, forms that might simply be sausages but could also be interpreted as signs of the symbolic castration that witches were thought to carry out on

their male victims.²⁹ In this regard, the smoke functions critically in Baldung's print, for its formlessness suggests a meaning that has yet to materialize. De Bry's viewers are presented with a similar ambiguity (see Figure 23). For example, we do not and cannot know the precise nature of the prayers being spoken in *Their manner of prainge*. Other visual elements are similarly elusive. What, for example, might be the topic of conversation between the man and woman standing on the left, a pair that does not appear in White's original watercolor? The man gestures urgently but ambiguously at his companion, while she, just as ambiguously, points toward the fire. Perhaps the man is a figure of religious authority who attempts to use his influence to lure the woman into pagan worship. It is equally possible, however, that the man tries to dissuade the woman from participation in a rite toward which she seems to be drawn. After all, as de Bry makes clear at the beginning of the illustrated section of the *Report* with his engraving of the Fall (see Figure 11), it is a woman's natural weakness to surrender herself to diabolical temptations.

Perhaps one thing that can be said unambiguously about the meaning of *Their manner of prainge* is that it is a print about superstition, about prayer to false gods and irrational beliefs in the spiritual efficacy of mere ceremonial trappings (such as the rattles so carefully described by Harriot). It is therefore difficult to imagine that associations with witchcraft, on some level, would not have passed through the mind of any Protestant viewer who took a serious look at de Bry's image—even if this occurred only through association with “superstitious” Catholic ceremony, which was itself commonly linked to witchcraft.³⁰ But the connection with witchcraft must remain precisely at this level, the level of association. Whatever meanings are carried on the plumes of de Bry's smoke, they remain unresolved. We would do best to approach this smoke in the way Gaston Bachelard asks us to approach the poetic imagery of wind, clouds, flight, and the like: not as fully formed poetic images, but as means of figuring the mobility of the imagination.³¹ De Bry's smoke may be understood, in similar terms, as a strategy for pictorializing the interpretive process.

This leads to yet a third possibility for reading that curious pair standing to the left, a reading that would trump both interpretations presented above. For before these figures occupy any specific roles within an imagined narrative, they are simply *interpreters* of the event to which they bear witness. As such, they thematize the central problematic of the print: the translation of vision into knowledge. As the woman points and looks toward the fire, she carries out the work of vision, and more specifically a carnal vision, as this female figure is, like many of the women depicted in de Bry's engravings for the *Report*, displayed as an object of male desire, her seminude body turned toward the viewer and thus presented for *his* visual consumption. The rhetorical gesture of the man, on the other hand, is turned away from the primary object of vision (the scene of prayer) as he seeks to engage his companion with his words, to translate her seeing into his knowing. Such is the (gendered) interpretive process rehearsed inside the picture by these figures and outside the picture by de Bry's

viewer. What is crucial to recognize about this process is how it hinges on that viewer, a viewer who is hailed by the image as a subject capable of producing meaning out of so much visual matter, a subject who can translate the materiality of the engraver's medium—a materiality that reaches its most raw state in the formlessness of the smoke—into something meaningful. Into a scene of witchcraft, perhaps; and perhaps into other meanings.

The Beholder's Share

My own reading of de Bry's smoke, which has attempted to tie *Their manner of prainge* into a specific cultural and historical moment's concerns with magic, witchcraft, and medium, in the end turns out to be inconclusive, for in a sense we are back where we started: with the individual viewer before the work, and the problem of determining the meaning of engraved lines that seem to resist all attempts to do so. So let us turn for the moment from the smoke itself to the viewer whose task is to make sense of it. What conclusions might we draw about this interpretive subject? As I have just suggested, we can certainly say it is a male subject. We can further say it is an *acquisitive* male subject, one who is invited to take an *interest* in the "virgin" land represented in the images and text of the *Report*. As Harriot writes in his initial address to the reader, this book has been published so that "you may generally know & learne what the countrey is, & thervpon consider how your dealing therein if it proceede, may returne you profit and gaine; bee it either by inhabitting & planting or otherwise in furthering thereof."³²

Indeed, de Bry presents himself as a model for this subject, for he too is an investor in the Virginia enterprise, a businessman who declares no less than three times in the *Report* that this book and its illustrations have been engraved, printed, and published at his "owne chardges."³³ As indexes of the artist—pictorial equivalents to the alphabetical letters (de Bry's *TB*) at the bottom of the plate—the lines of de Bry's smoke serve as a declaration of this investment. Following them back to their producer, we arrive at a subject who is not so much a demonically inspired artist as an astute engraver-publisher whose authority resides in his financial and artisanal investment in copper plates and the printing press. But even as it foregrounds the engraver as the chief interested subject of the *Report*, de Bry's smoke also produces the viewer as an acquisitive subject, one who could potentially become a de Bry. The very purpose of the *Report*, after all, was to attract investors in the Virginia colony, investors who just might (like de Bry) make their own fortunes in the "marchantable commodity" of copper: "A hundred and fiftie miles into the maine," writes Harriot, "in two townes wee founde with the inhabitunts diuerse small plates of copper, that had beene made as wee vnderstood, by the inhabitantes that dwell farther into the countrey."³⁴ One such copper plate hangs around the neck of de Bry's *A cheiff Lorde of Roanoac*, as visual evidence of Virginia's riches (see Figure 4).

In contrast to the state-sponsored colonialism of Catholic Spain, the English effort to establish a colony in Virginia was to a large extent a commercial enterprise, one that depended for its success on generating financial interest among prospective investors and settlers—as Harriot attempts to do in the passage just quoted and as de Bry attempts to do in the engraving of *A cheiff Lorde of Roanoac*. And just as the Virginia colony can be seen as an early experiment in commercial colonialism, so too can de Bry's *America* (indeed a far more successful one). As Tom Cummins has argued, the nascent capitalism of Protestant Europe during the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries provides a critical context for our understanding of de Bry's *America* and of the role that visual images play in its thirteen volumes. De Bry's plates appealed to the viewer as particularized fragments of the New World, fragments detached from and indeed subversive of higher authorities (that of the crown, for example) that would supersede the authority of the individual viewer.³⁵ The illustrated plates for the *Report* served, like the plate around the neck of the cheiff Lord, as lures for investment in de Bry's New World enterprise; they "delighted the eye as they served the interests of capital."³⁶ The interpretation of de Bry's images, therefore, is not something that can be accomplished *for* the viewer. Belief in the image as an intercessor for a higher authority, after all, had been shattered by the Reformation's attack against religious images.³⁷ The work of interpretation now belonged to the anonymous individual in the marketplace, the potential investor.

As so much visual matter that has yet to be made meaningful, de Bry's smoke thus invites our interest as it hails us as the interpretive subjects who can discover the new world, invest in its opportunities, engrave our own names upon it—just as de Bry has done. This invitation becomes particularly apparent when we consider the smoke depicted in *Their seetheynge of their meate* and *The manner of makinge their boates*, plates that explicitly address the colonial possibilities of the New World by focusing on the productive activities of the Virginians (see Figures 25, 26). These images provide the viewer with evidence of the promising ingenuity for which both de Bry and Harriot praise the Virginians.³⁸ In the caption to *The manner of makinge their boates*, for example, Harriot writes: "The manner of makinge their boates in Virginia is verye wonderfull. For wheras they want Instruments of yron, or other like vnto ours, yet they knowe howe to make them as handsomelye."³⁹ The roiling smoke rising from between the two laborers in this image does not simply return us to the productive labor of the engraver; clearly it is a sign of the Indians' labor as well, a sign of the transformation they are working upon the world. This smoke suggests both the productivity of these Algonquians and their promise as a productive people. Thus the sign of de Bry's own investment in Virginia (the indexical lines of his smoke) is simultaneously the site of Virginia's potential *as* an investment. The outcome of this investment, however—like the smoke itself and like the response of the viewer—cannot be determined. The significance of the image is not the message it delivers but the kind of subject it constructs precisely through its deferral of a message. De Bry's smoke is the image of this deferral.

Smoke and /Cloud/

I have addressed some of the ways in which a contemporary audience might have received de Bry's smoke. While I have tried not to leap too quickly to particular meanings, while I have argued that the engraver's smoke may indeed be understood as a deferral of meaning, I have nevertheless focused my investigation on the viewer's impulse to find a content, a depth, within this surface play of lines. I have suggested that somewhere behind or within this smoke we might catch a glimpse of the airy prayers of the Virginians, of invisible demonic forms, of the artist's and perhaps most importantly the viewer's subjectivities. But at this point it is worth recalling Ruskin's caution that although meaning is certainly desirable, "first we must be ornamental." In the following paragraphs I will try to be more ornamental, by which I mean that I will keep my attention more closely focused on the surface qualities of de Bry's engravings. My interest in the ornamental quality of the engraved line, however, is not an interest in the line as decoration, but in its status as a material signifier on the page, a signifier whose relation to other such marks is governed by a more or less formal set of rules. At stake in de Bry's smoke, as we will see, is not only the subject it addresses, but the very logic of a structure of representation, one that in this case purports to hold the New World within its grasp. It is a structure that depends on the amorphousness of smoke for its very possibility.

By *structure of representation* I mean the structure of representation itself; more specifically, I mean the structure of *illusionistic* representation, which early modern artists found in the rules of linear perspective. Through the regular application of these rules, artists established a system for making forms depicted on a two-dimensional surface appear very much like our optical experience of the world. What is critical to recognize about this system is precisely that it *is* a system, a set of representational rules for artificially constructing an illusion of the world; in no sense can perspective be reduced to a natural reflection of things as they are.⁴⁰ In his *Optics* of 1637, René Descartes argued along these lines when he claimed that our optical perceptions of objects do not in any strong sense of the word *resemble* those objects. Interestingly, he chose to make his point through the example of engraving:

we must at least observe that there are no images that must resemble in every respect the objects they represent—for otherwise there would be no distinction between the object and its image—but that it is sufficient for them to resemble the objects in but a few ways, and even that their perfection frequently depends on their not resembling them as much as they might. For example, you can see that engravings, being made of nothing but a little ink placed here and there on the paper, represent to us forests, towns, men, and even battles and storms, even though, among an infinity of diverse qualities which they make us conceive in these objects, only in shape is there actually any resemblance. And even this resemblance is a very imperfect one, seeing that, on a completely flat surface, they represent to us bodies which are of different heights and distances, and even that following the rules of perspective, circles

are often better represented by ovals rather than by other circles; and squares by diamonds rather than by other squares; and so for all other shapes. So that often, in order to be more perfect as images and to represent an object better, they must not resemble it.⁴¹

It is important to note that for Descartes representation is premised on a certain distance between a picture and its depicted object. Historically speaking this is the distance that opens up with the decline of the medieval cult image and its bond of identity between the picture and the figure depicted. With the loss of that bond emerges a new kind of relationship, one based on likeness across a field of difference. It now becomes the artist's task to convince the viewer that even though the picture is fundamentally distinct from that which it portrays, this difference can nevertheless be concealed through the artist's powers of illusion.⁴² However, as Descartes argues, securing this bond of likeness is not, or at best is only in part, a matter of making the image physically resemble its object; and in fact a good deal of distortion is necessary to effect a convincing likeness. As I noted earlier, De Bry's tree in *The manner of making their boates* is an iconic sign that shares a certain quality of roundness with a real tree; but its two-dimensional, pictorial roundness—two parallel contours bridged by a series of many shorter, curved hatches that are more or less perpendicular to the primary contours—is worlds apart from the tactile roundness of a tree we might encounter in the forest. Descartes wants us to understand that perception is not finally a question of knowing how images resemble their objects; rather, it is a question of knowing the rules by which images communicate to the mind "all the diverse qualities of the objects to which they refer."⁴³ And the chief rule or regulatory structure through which images communicate, the rule that prevents an engraving from becoming a distorted, haphazard jumble of meaningless marks, is the rule of perspective.

The scholarly literature on linear perspective is, to say the least, vast, and many aspects of perspective—particularly the question of how it might be made into the object of historical inquiry—have hardly been resolved.⁴⁴ On a practical and relatively uncontroversial level, however, we can define perspective as a technique for depicting objects and the intervals between them on a two-dimensional surface so that these objects appear to recede from view in a manner similar to our direct perceptual experience of the world. The degree to which perspective might or might not accurately reflect that experience is not my concern; I am interested in perspective only as a set of rules for the artist's practice. De Bry's employment of these rules in the *Report* is not rigorous—even at his most stridently perspectival, we will not find all orthogonals meeting at a single vanishing point on the horizon. But this is not to say that the rules of perspective, when not followed strictly, cease to regulate illusionistic representation. When all is said and done, it is still the perspective system, understood in the broadest sense, that secures the possibility of reference in de Bry's engravings. Perspective is the foundational visual paradigm of the *Report*—one so dominant, so naturalized, that we

tend to forget its artificiality and feel it superfluous even to point out its presence in pictures such as de Bry's Algonquian village (Figure 32). Represented from a bird's-eye perspective, the architecture, crops, and human activities that make up *The Towne of Secota* are all carefully arranged and brought within the beholder's visual command through the logic of the perspectival grid. In another case, to be considered in more depth in the following chapter, an Algonquian tomb housing the corpses of dead chiefs is placed within a perspectival structure that subjects to the most rational scrutiny an idolatrous practice that would have been seen by its Protestant audience as the height of pagan irrationality (see Figure 45). In both instances it is the binary structure of the perspective system—its function as the rule of measurement that mediates between an individual viewing subject on the one hand, and the world as referent on the other—that constructs and maintains the ideological divide between a host of binaries crucial to the *Report's* coloniological project: self versus world, Europe versus America, rational versus irrational, civil versus savage.

These binary oppositions are not simply constructed by perspective, they are *delineated* by it. Perspective is a rule of *lines*, lines that measure space (orthogonals and transversals) and lines that trace borders separating bodies from the measurable space that surrounds them (contours). "Perspective," writes Giovanni Paolo Lomazzo in a 1598 English translation of the *Trattato dell'arte della pittura*, "(being subordinate to Geometry & as it were the daughter thereof) is a science of visible lines: So that the subject therof is a visible line."⁴⁵ As a science of the line, linear perspective in effect codifies a standard myth of painting's origins. Recorded in Pliny and Quintilian, and retold frequently (in words and later in pictures) from Alberti through the Romantics, this story locates the origins of painting in an act of tracing an outline around a shadow.⁴⁶ Pliny's version, for example, tells the story of a Corinthian maid who traces the shadow of her lover on a wall. The story does not, to be sure, describe the origins of perspective per se, and indeed the simple tracing of a shadow betrays either ignorance or rejection of perspective's illusion of spatial recession. But we should remember that this classical story served as an account of origins, and for the early modern artist the tracing of a shadow constituted the essential first step toward the more elaborate linear system of perspective.⁴⁷

During the eighteenth century, Pliny's version of the story became a popular subject for pictorial works. An important early example appears as the frontispiece for the second English edition of Charles-Alphonse Dufresnoy's *The Art of Painting* (1716) (Figure 33).⁴⁸ The designer and engraver of this work, Simon Gribelin—an artist who earlier had copied de Bry's engravings from the *Report* for an eighteenth-century account of Virginia⁴⁹—pictures Cupid guiding the hand of the maid as she traces the outline of her lover's shadow. The frontispiece offers us an image of painting's primitive foundations through a medium particularly well suited to displaying those foundations; for the engraver, like the Corinthian maid, practices an art of the line. Engravings such as Gribelin's anticipate John Ruskin's notion that the most primitive of all the visual arts is engraving precisely because it is a *linear* art.⁵⁰ To a certain

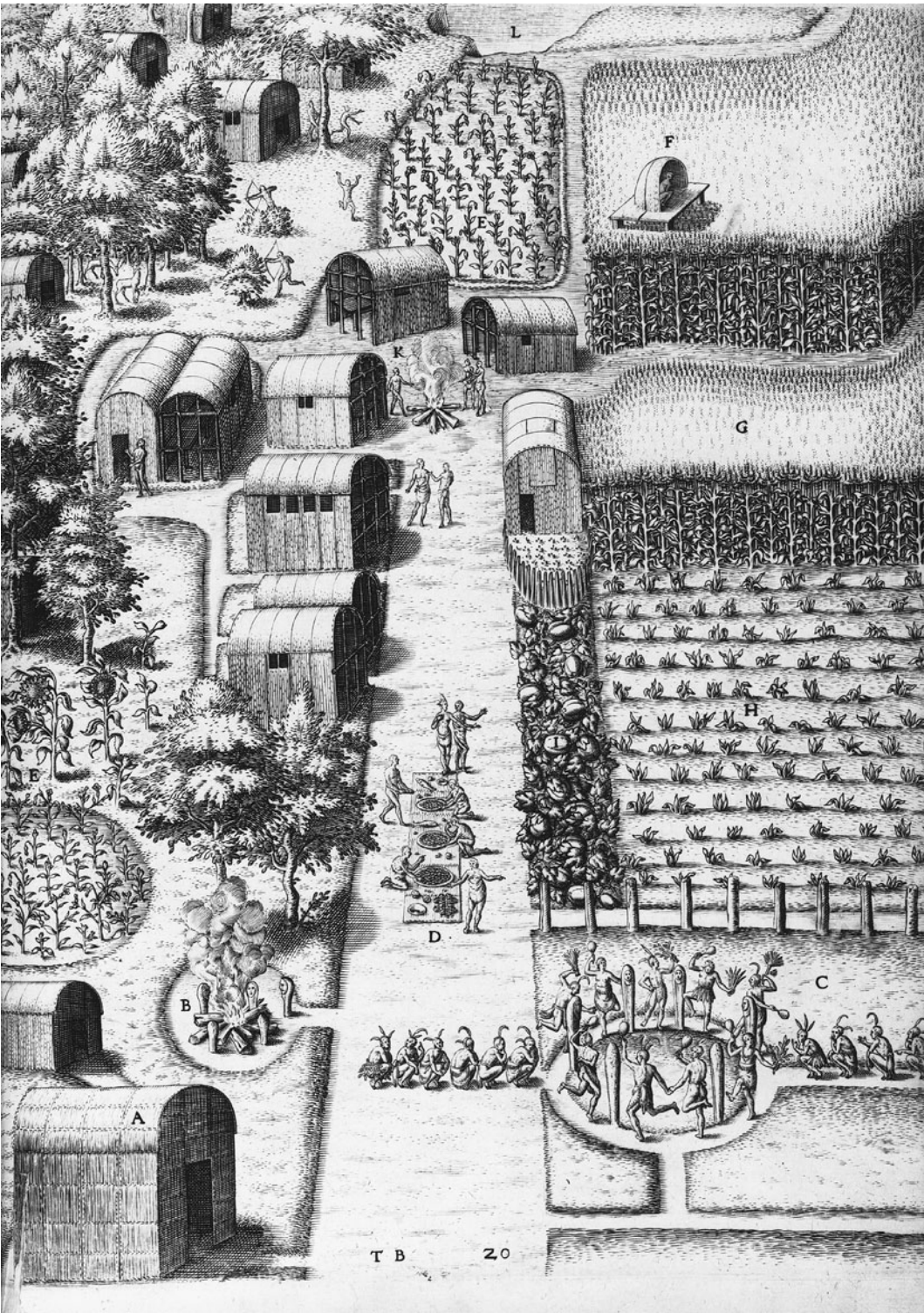


Figure 32. Theodor de Bry after John White, *The Towne of Secota*, from *A Briefe and True Report*. Courtesy and with permission of British Library G.6837.



Figure 33. Simon Gribelin, frontispiece to Charles-Alphonse Dufresnoy, *The Art of Painting* (London, 1716). From the Collections of the University Libraries, University of Minnesota, Minneapolis.

extent this idea is implicit in the engraving of the tattooed Algonquian warrior discussed in the previous chapter, an image that should be read as a New World version of Gribelin's origin myth (see Figures 5, 16). As his stylus-like arrows meet the edge of his shoulder, this Virginian enacts a fantasy of self-origination through the tracing of his own contour; representation is born in an act of self-delineation by a tattooed savage who engraves his own flesh.⁵¹ As both de Bry's and Gribelin's myths suggest, the effort to produce an illusion of the New World through engraving is a foundational exercise in circumscription.

But what of those more intangible aspects of the New World—the inscrutability of Native American religious practices, for instance, or the uncertain future of the Virginia colony as an object for investment? What of this deferred content that eluded the engraver's net of rationality, that could not be captured by an outline and set into measurable space, that could not, in short, be made to signify within the rules of the perspective system? I do not raise these questions to ask where in the engraving we might locate these unknowns: I have already suggested that the formlessness of de Bry's smoke provides a space for such projections and thus for the constitution of the viewer's own subjectivity. I ask these questions, rather, in order to begin considering the structural role that de Bry's smoke might play vis-à-vis the perspective system, for the kinds of ambiguous readings this smoke provokes—readings grounded in uncertainty, doubt, speculation—are precisely the kinds of meaning perspective will not admit. The formlessness of smoke serves as a negation of the perspective system: smoke is not any particular meaning but instead signifies all that cannot be contained by contours and orthogonals. By approaching de Bry's smoke in this way we can begin to grasp its semiotic function as the indefinable remainder of the perspective system (a function that must be understood as being prior to any attempt to *read* smoke). Smoke is the exception that defines the rule, the excluded term that makes it possible for perspective to cohere *as* a system. The concept that can help us account for de Bry's smoke, so conceived, is */cloud/*.

In his *Theory of/Cloud/*, Hubert Damisch proposes a structuralist theory of visual representation in which the depiction of clouds in works of two-dimensional art has since the Renaissance played a constitutive role in the perspective system. By placing the word *cloud* between forward slashes, Damisch means to designate it as a signifier only, a pictorial graph isolated from any content a viewer might attach to it. Understood at this level, */cloud/* becomes a crucial term that establishes both the limits and the possibilities of generating meaning within perspectival representation. Damisch's theory is based on the basic semiological insight that meaning is produced through a system of exclusions. Perspective, in other words, can make meaning out of certain things—those that lend themselves to shape and contour, such as the architectural forms of canoes and tree trunks or the architectural form of the human body—but it can only define such elements because it excludes other things within the realm of visual experience that resist such codification, such as nebulous clouds and smoke. As Damisch writes, perspective can only know things

that occupy a place and the contour of which can be defined by lines. But the sky does not occupy a place, and cannot be measured; and as for clouds, nor can their outlines be fixed or their shapes analyzed in terms of surfaces. A cloud belongs to the class of “bodies without surfaces,” as Leonardo da Vinci was to put it, bodies that have no precise form or extremities and whose limits interpenetrate with those of other clouds.⁵²

In the full passage cited by Damisch, Leonardo also notes that smoke belongs to this class of “bodies without surfaces.”⁵³ Now clouds and smoke may not have definable surfaces, but the fact remains that they do appear quite frequently in Western art—and after all I am arguing that smoke takes up an inordinate portion of de Bry’s plates in the *Report*. But the very regularity with which the motif occurs should alert us to the fact that more is at stake with clouds and smoke than their descriptive value. They carry out an essential semiotic function, establishing the limits on which representation is founded.

Precisely because of their critical role in marking the limits of signification, clouds became an important means for artists to point toward, while still refusing to depict, all that the new representational system of the Renaissance could not acknowledge. Dürer, for example, put them to work in the fifteen woodcuts of his *Apocalypse* (1498), an illustrated book de Bry would certainly have known and a work that in its introduction of /cloud/ into the new print medium stands as an important antecedent to de Bry’s smoke. Based on the mystical imagery of the Book of Revelation, the *Apocalypse* addresses an impossible subject for the naturalistic artist: the unveiling of God’s kingdom on earth. The novelty of Dürer’s approach was to confront this challenge by “representing” God’s invisible kingdom as the end of representation itself, as may be seen, for instance, in the way the artist depicts clouds in the *Vision of the Seven Candlesticks* (Figure 34). As Panofsky notes, the highly naturalistic candlesticks appear in perspective, supported by weight-bearing clouds. These same clouds, however, confound the logic of this very space as they “develop into what resembles vertical columns of smoke, weightless and unrestrained by the rules of perspective.”⁵⁴ Dürer’s smoky clouds thus affirm and at the same time deny rationalized space. Located at the cusp of the representational system, both defining that system’s domain and resisting incorporation into its linear order, /cloud/ serves as a powerful means for Dürer to provide viewers access to the unrepresentable. For the first time in the history of Christian art, writes Damisch, the “the eruption of heaven on earth was conveyed, at the level of the system, by a rent in the very order of depiction, or representation.”⁵⁵

By the late sixteenth century the strategy introduced into the printed image by Dürer had become a common one. De Bry himself employs smoke as a means of opening a space of scriptural revelation within the representational image. In his depiction of Noah’s sacrifice that serves as the frontispiece to the second book of *America* (1591), Noah kneels before his burnt offerings as plumes of smoke rise into the air and finally unfold into the tetragrammaton, the unpronounceable four letters of God’s

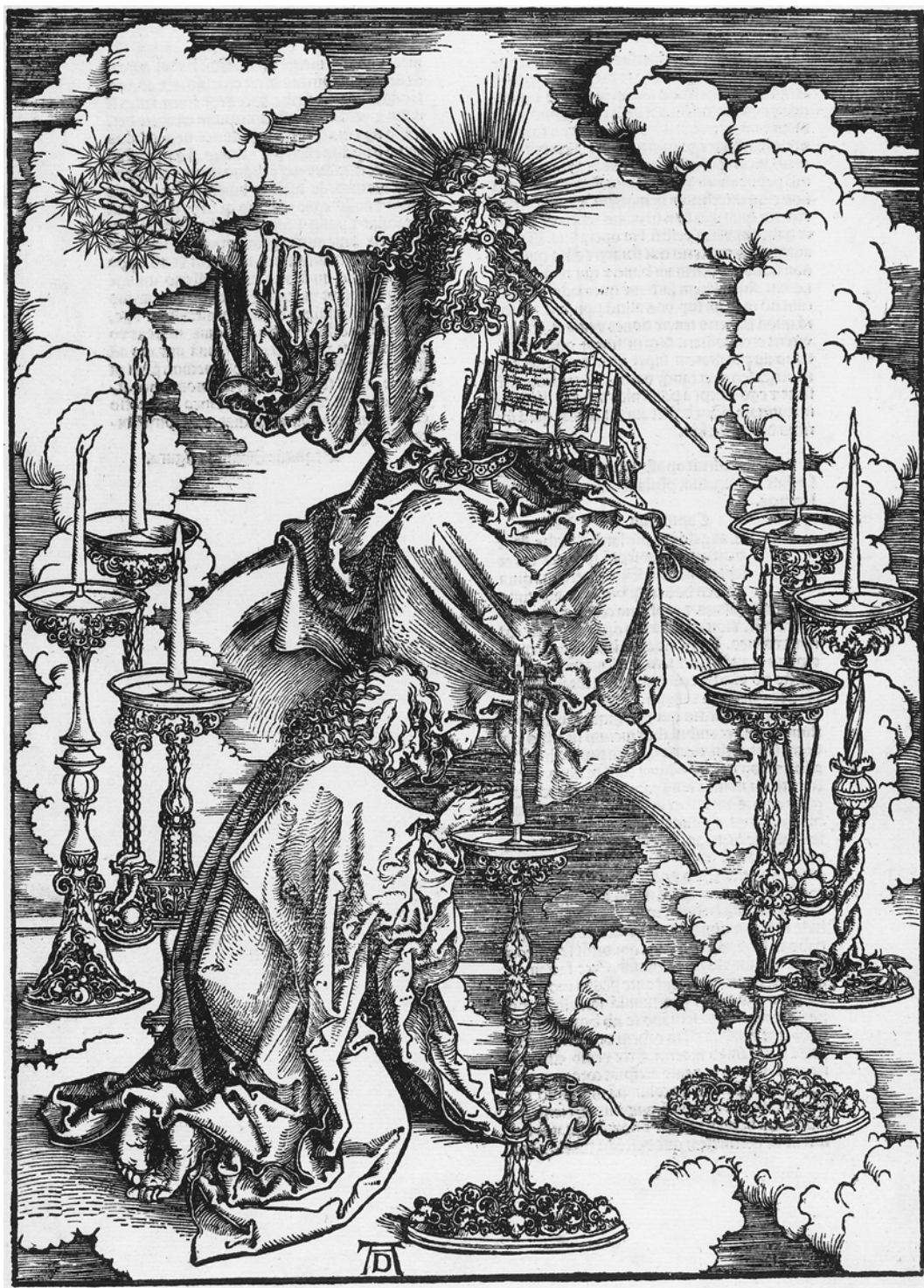


Figure 34. Albrecht Dürer, *Vision of the Seven Candlesticks*, from *The Apocalypse*, 1497–98. The Minneapolis Institute of Arts.

name (Figure 35). The spatial ambiguity of this column of smoke and its attendant rainbow (the sign of God's new covenant with Noah) designates an order of knowing that stands in stark contrast to the trail of naturalistically rendered animals that makes an orderly, two-by-two procession through perspectival space on the left-hand side of the print and to the architectural structures being built by Noah's sons on the right-hand side, structures that are critical in defining the perspectival space of the picture. More so than with Dürer, however, it is the materiality of the indexical lines of de Bry's smoke—tightly bunched, perfectly parallel, fastening our eyes on the linear patterns on the surface of the engraving even as the landscape recedes from view—that announces this disruption of perspective by the Word.

Coming on the heels of the Virginia plates, the engraving of Noah's sacrifice directly recalls the smoking fires of the Algonquians. The typical Protestant viewer would not, of course, have been likely to imagine the name of God rising from the Virginians' fires; but it is precisely the flexibility of /cloud/, its role as a structural element independent of any fixed iconography, that allows its significance to shift from context to context, from the heavenly to the demonic. In any case, I have not introduced Damisch's notion of /cloud/ for the sake of clarifying *what* de Bry's smoke might



Figure 35. Theodor de Bry, *Noah's sacrifice*, frontispiece to *America*, part 2 (Frankfurt am Main, 1591). From the Collections of the University Libraries, University of Minnesota, Minneapolis.

signify but rather *how* it might signify. /Cloud/ allows us to situate the plates of the *Report* within a historical framework that operates, to use Damisch's phrase, "at the level of the system." What is at stake in de Bry's smoke, in other words, is the history of representation itself and its role in the work of New World discovery. Understood on a semiotic level, the billowing residue of the savage's fire is the residue of the representational system through which early modern Europe attempted to lay claim to an unknown land. It is therefore important in writing the history of Europe's pictorial response to the New World that we give this smoke its due, that we acknowledge the critical disruption in meaning that it marks. To do so is to understand that the cultural work of engraving the New World—the work of assimilating it line by line to the system of representation—was not only a matter of rendering that world visible, but also of marking the limits of its visibility.

Grotesques

Smoke is not the only visual element in the *Report* that marks these limits. In the margins of the text we come across another kind of linear ornament that recalls de Bry's smoke but belongs to a distinct ornamental tradition, one that emerged in fifteenth- and sixteenth-century Italy alongside Renaissance naturalism, and that indeed relies on that naturalism as the reference point for its subversive play. The tradition is that of grotesque ornament, and in the *Report* it takes the form of the printer's ornaments placed before and after sections of printed text (see Figures 37, 41, 42). Composed of hybrid beasts, disembodied faces, and a variety of vegetal and abstract patterns, these woodcut ornaments, a common feature of early modern books, are the sort of decorative, peripheral matter that readers are accustomed to passing over in printed books. We tend to look on such ornaments, if we choose to look on them at all, with an antiquarian's interest—as admirable, perhaps, for lending a certain aesthetic appeal to the text, and possibly as a means for attributing a book to a particular printer's workshop, but finally as a form of surface decoration that has nothing to tell us about the content of the book itself. But if we approach these grotesques with eyes conditioned by de Bry's smoke, they begin to take on a critical, defining role within the *Report's* representational project. And because grotesques, unlike smoke, draw upon a sophisticated ornamental language tied to classical, medieval, and Renaissance visual traditions, they can lead us to a fuller understanding of how the ornamental remainder of the *Report* served a specifically *civilizing* function. By providing a locus for certain types of grotesque imagery that de Bry's audience identified with the savage, imagery that was opposed in fundamental ways to the carefully circumscribed world of illusionistic representation, de Bry's printer's ornaments confined "primitive" ways of seeing to the margins where, precisely as ornament, they could be emptied of significance.

To understand this civilizing work, it is necessary to understand something of the peculiar history and visual language of Renaissance grotesques. This form of ornament first became popular in the early sixteenth century, not long after the rediscovery

around 1480 of Nero's Golden Palace and its decorative frescoes.⁵⁶ Dubbed *groteschi* because they were found in the cave-like rooms, or grottos, of the partially buried palace, these ancient Roman frescoes were characterized by graceful symmetrical designs incorporating a wide variety of motifs—vegetable, animal, human, mythological, etc.—often combined into striking hybrids. While sixteenth-century Italian artists explored the possibilities of this new ornamental grammar in the form of wall and ceiling decoration, grotesques were quickly popularized across Europe through the printed image, first in works by Italian engravers and later by Northern European engravers like de Bry.⁵⁷ The first sheet of de Bry's *Grotisch fur alle Kunstler* displays features typical of Renaissance grotesques: a two-dimensional armature of festoons, vases, and rinceaux, the latter appearing here in the form of scrolling cornucopias; the employment of animal motifs, in this case, birds, monkeys, squirrels, and insects; the inclusion of masks or faces; and the incorporation of other ornamental traditions such as the strapwork designs that frame the three cartouches (see Figure 24).

Most mechanically reproduced grotesques, including de Bry's *Grotisch fur alle Kunstler*, were not conceived as prints for the collector but rather as source material for other artisans (de Bry calls them grotesques for "all artists" [*alle Kunstler*]), who incorporated the engraved designs into a variety of media: three of the most popular destinations for printed grotesques were metalwork, architectural decoration, and embroidery. De Bry's own designs were most likely intended for metalwork, although there is one documented case of his grotesques having served as models for seventeenth-century plasterwork decoration in a Scottish castle.⁵⁸ Another important application of printed grotesques was, of course, the printer's ornament. Whether it was de Bry or another artist who actually designed the ornaments for the *Report* is uncertain.⁵⁹ What we do know is that over the course of his career the engraver and publisher of this book put a good deal of effort into the design, engraving, and publication of grotesques. De Bry clearly took grotesque ornaments seriously, and perhaps therefore, as readers of de Bry's book, we should do the same.

Grotesques, as Randle Cotgrave defines them in his *Dictionarie of the French and English Tongues* (1611), are "Pictures wherein (as please the Painter) all kind of odde things are represented without anie peculiar sence, or meaning, but onely to feed the eye."⁶⁰ Taking grotesques seriously means taking seriously this senselessness.⁶¹ Like de Bry's smoke, grotesques require us first to be ornamental, not simply for the sake of "feeding the eye" on their senseless play, but so that we might grasp the important cultural work grotesques performed precisely through this play. It was a work that involved incorporating elements from the wider culture, and in the process emptying them of "anie peculiar sence, or meaning." A strapwork grotesque designed by Marcus Gheeraerts and published in Antwerp by Philips Galle sometime in the last quarter of the sixteenth century can serve as a case in point (Figure 36). Titled *America*, the engraving puts on display exotic human and animal figures culled from a variety of sources, including two Inuits at the lower corners, based on watercolors by John White.⁶² At the center of the design stands an allegorical figure of America, her

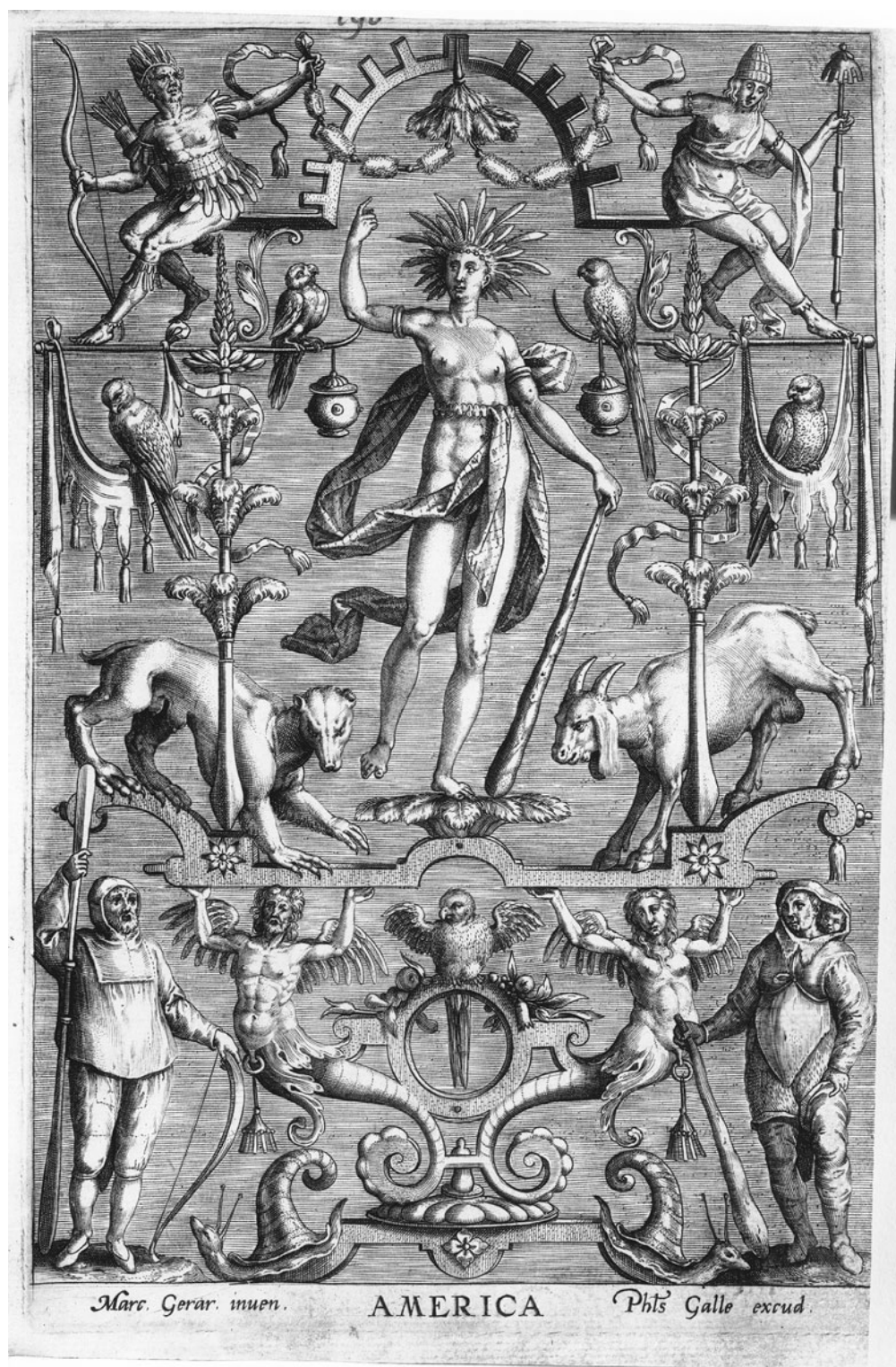


Figure 36. Philips Galle after Marcus Gheeraerts, *America*, late sixteenth century. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Gift of the Estate of James Hazen Hyde, 1959 (59.654.55). Photograph from The Metropolitan Museum of Art; all rights reserved.

right hand and index finger raised as if she were about to instruct the viewer in the meaning of the New World. Although the print is often labeled an allegory of America, it would be a mistake, as well as a futile interpretive exercise, to attempt to decipher a coherent allegorical message here. The irony (perhaps even the intentional joke) of America's tutorial gesture is that precisely because she is reduced to an element in an ornamental grotesque, she is unable to deliver on her promise. Within the ornamental world of grotesques—and this is why they proved to be particularly well suited to absorbing exotic elements—there is no pressure to name.⁶³ The domain of grotesques is an extralinguistic domain; as one scholar has recently put it, the grotesque “accommodates the things left over when the categories of language are exhausted; it is a defense against silence when other words have failed.”⁶⁴ The failure of language before the wonder of the New World was a note regularly sounded in the sixteenth century, and grotesques offered an aesthetic mode uniquely adapted to preserving this experience; it was a mode for holding meaning—just as grotesques hold their gravity-defying figures—in suspension. In this sense, grotesques share a basic logic with the Renaissance collection, a logic wherein curious objects are accumulated not in order to classify the world according to familiar categories, but, to the contrary, in order to maintain its strangeness.⁶⁵

One of grotesques' chief formal means for subverting the impulse to name and classify, and one of their most enduring features, is the hybrid. Grotesques are filled with chimeric forms such as the winged figures whose lower bodies fuse with scrolling strapwork at the base of Gheeraerts's design; the freedom to invent fantastical figures such as these made the practice of grotesques irresistible to many artists, while for others, from Vitruvius and Horace through counter-Reformation critics, it represented an unforgivable breach of decorum.⁶⁶ At any rate, whether it was seen in terms of the liberated imagination or as aesthetic violation, the grotesque hybrid insinuated itself throughout the ornamental margins of Renaissance culture. One hybrid element that appears regularly in grotesques, and that we find in a headpiece used on several pages of the *Report*, is the motif of the dolphin (Figure 37). As their tongues and tails merge into leafy tendrils and strapwork, these dolphins demonstrate the essential ambivalence of grotesques—the quality of being both one thing and another at the



Figure 37. Headpiece, from *A Briefe and True Report*. Courtesy and with permission of British Library G.6837.

same time. Upon the back of one of the dolphins rides a young satyr (already a hybrid), holding a trident and apparently ready to take aim at the snail beneath him; but his wisps of hair, his trident, and his cloven hoof fuse with the surrounding vines—he is pure decoration. So while it is true that this ornament includes a hint of narrative content and while it is true that these dolphins, satyrs, and snails are on some level representational, the ambivalence of grotesques lies precisely in the way they raise the possibility of meaning, the possibility of figures in space carrying out actions, only to pull back and transform what we thought was a dolphin into acanthus scrolls, what looked like a snail hunt into linear decoration. All elements of grotesques are in this sense hybrids as they waver, like the lines of de Bry's smoke, in between ornamental and representational duties. Delighting in the confusion of categories, the printer's ornaments of the *Report* respond to a subversive impulse entirely foreign to the ethnographic function of de Bry's illustrated plates, in which the clear distinction among types is precisely the point.

However opposed in their essential visual logic, the grotesque ornaments and the representational plates of the *Report* are at the same time, by virtue of their opposition, inextricably linked. While grotesques often appear independently, they nevertheless must be understood—like their medieval counterparts, the drolleries of Gothic manuscripts—as a form of marginal art, an art that takes its meaning from its relation to a norm that, in its turn, is only conceivable in relation to its cast-off margins.⁶⁷ The norms that serve as the unavoidable points of reference for Renaissance grotesques are the conventions of naturalistic representation. According to André Chastel, grotesques depend on two laws: “the negation of space and the fusion of species.” The “domain of grotesques,” he writes, is “the antithesis of that of representation, whose rules are defined by the ‘perspectival’ vision of space and the distinction and characterization of types.”⁶⁸ Chastel is here essentially repeating, in a more pictorial language and without a tone of condemnation, the classical Vitruvian position that grotesques are against nature: “Such things,” writes Vitruvius, “neither are, nor can be, nor have been.”⁶⁹ The pleasure of viewing grotesques is the pleasure of seeing the rules of naturalistic representation invoked, only to be flaunted: we take delight—safely within the confines of the margins—in watching a contour leave its appointed task of circumscribing a three-dimensional body and meander off to take up a new and purely decorative life in a scroll of foliage. Grotesques offer us a surreal world, a world of constant flux. It is not surprising therefore that sixteenth-century writers, when they undertook the difficult task of finding a language that could account for grotesques, chose to compare them to clouds.⁷⁰ Like clouds, grotesques are the airy, ethereal stuff of dreams, the leftovers of naturalism. In their own way, then, grotesques constitute a species of /cloud/: a nothing in themselves, they give birth to meaning elsewhere, in the spatial and taxonomical coherence of the perspective system.

Unlike clouds, however, grotesques incorporate a wide range of visual imagery, and in doing so they provide a fascinating commentary on just what it is that perspectival representation leaves behind in the ornamental margins. In these margins

we find a world inhabited by primitive forms, irrational hybrids that remind us of a time when a more superstitious people invested visual images with supernatural force. Early modern commentators suggested as much when they drew connections between grotesques and indigenous art forms of the Americas, from the Franciscan Motolinía's assessment in the sixteenth century that "before [the Conquest], they [Mexican painters] knew how to paint only flowers, birds, and all kinds of grotesques, and if they painted a man or a horse, it was so ugly that it resembled a monster," to the Jesuit Lafitau writing in the early eighteenth century about the grotesque habits of the Iroquois. In one of the plates from *Customs of the American Indians* Lafitau places the figure of an American Indian, derived from one of de Bry's plates and ornamented with a false tail and horned headgear, alongside two satyrs derived from ancient monuments. In his text Lafitau compares Iroquois customs of bodily ornamentation to these antique hybrids with horns and tails who "have no reality and owe their existence only to the poets' imagination, to the hieroglyphic writing of the first times [i.e., grotesques], and the ignorance of later centuries."⁷¹

It was thus not only the antinaturalism of grotesques that provoked disapproval, but their proximity to the pagan/primitive. During the nineteenth century, this tendency to identify the marginal art of grotesques with a barbarous state of existence developed into a tendency to link ornamental forms *in general* with the most primitive art forms. Such evolutionary interpretations of ornament reached their apogee at the end of the century when Austrian architect Adolph Loos baldly stated that "The lower the cultural level of a people, the more extravagant it is with its ornament, its decoration. . . . To see decoration as a sign of superiority means to stand at the level of the Indians."⁷² No one would have made the connection between savagery and ornament quite this explicitly and emphatically in early modern Europe, and Loos's views cannot, of course, be separated from the impact of evolutionary theory during the nineteenth century or from turn-of-the-century debates surrounding the decorative arts. Nevertheless, his comments do point us to a critical aspect of the ornamental grotesque: we must take seriously the possibility that in the grotesques decorating the margins of the *Report* de Bry's Protestant viewers would have found traces of a primitive visual vocabulary, remnants—now absorbed into the most sophisticated of ornamental styles—of a pagan past from which these viewers felt themselves increasingly distant. The *Report*, after all, is a book that seeks to create this distance, going so far as to draw a direct link between the savages of Virginia and those of a British past.

One of the crucial markers of this primitive condition beyond which the viewer has presumably progressed, a marker found in both the printer's ornaments of the *Report* and on the bodies of de Bry's British savages, is the apotropaic face. In the final section of the *Report*, de Bry presents us with his collection of ancient Picts and Britons who "haue bin in times past as sauage as those of Virginia." The first of these savages, and the most fearsome of the group, is a Pict whose body is painted from shoulders to ankles with monstrous hybrids of all sorts (Figure 38). Located on his



Figure 38. Theodor de Bry after John White, *The true picture of one Pict*, from *A Briefe and True Report*. Courtesy and with permission of British Library G.6837.

chest, belly, shoulders, and knees are grotesque faces whose purpose must have been recognized by early modern viewers as a means of magical protection against enemies. Harriot describes the Pict's bodily ornamentation in the caption:

In tymes past the Pictes, habitans of one part of great Brittainne, which is nowe nammed England, wear sauuages, and did paint all their bodye after the maner followinge. . . . vppon their breast wear painted the head of som birde, ant about the pappes as yet waere beames of the sune, vppon the bellye sum feerefull and monstreus face, speedinge the beames verye fare vppon the thighes. Vppon the tow knees som faces of lion, and vppon their leggs as yt hath been shelles of fish. Vppon their Shoulders griffones heades, and then they hath serpents abowt their armes.⁷³

The description reads like a formula for designers of grotesques. In de Bry's engraving, which is based on an even more striking watercolor by White (Figure 39), the savage body itself becomes a grotesque, as its limbs and appendages merge with and emerge from the fantastical creatures painted on its surface. The two heads on the Pict's torso, which include an owl (traditionally a creature of ill omen) and a diabolical lion's head, fulfill the function of the protective gorgon heads commonly found on both ancient and Renaissance armor.⁷⁴ Indeed the Pict's grotesque bodily ornament seems to be derived from fifteenth- and sixteenth-century designs for fanciful, theatrically inspired armor, like that which protects the body of Carlo Crivelli's *St. George* (1472; Figure 40); and it is entirely possible that White based the design of his own figure on theatrical armor from the Elizabethan theater.⁷⁵ For the Pict, however, the absence of actual armor suggests that painted flesh has itself become a defensive shield, a form of protection, through the efficacy of the image alone, against the Pict's enemies.

But it is also essential to recognize that in leaving the printer's ornament and entering the realm of representation the grotesque takes on an entirely new significance. The tail, for instance, that hangs from the backside of de Bry's tattooed warrior, its point of attachment just hidden from view by the quiver, may exhibit some of the playfulness of the ornamental grotesque hybrid but its most basic function in the illustration is to identify this figure with a primitive state that plays loosely with distinctions between the human and nonhuman (see Figure 5). In this "true picture" of a Virginian, where we must have meaning, the subversiveness of grotesque ornament is contained—its potential threat to the perspective system is defeated—by means of its objectification. In this case and in the case of the decorated Pict, the grotesque is primitivized as a quality of the savage for the simple reason that the savage mind is itself supposed to be grotesque, that is to say, irrational and invested in the magical rather than in the representational power of the image. And so the savage paints his body with terrible faces, imagining that they help him in battle and protect him from his enemies. "When they go to battel," Harriot writes of the Virginians, with whom we are expected to compare the grotesque Pict, "they peynt their bodyes in the most terrible manner that thei can deuise."⁷⁶



Figure 39. John White, *Pictish Man*, watercolor on paper, c. 1585. Copyright Trustees of The British Museum.



Figure 40. Carlo Crivelli, *St. George*,
tempera on wood, 1472. The
Metropolitan Museum of Art,
Rogers Fund, 1905 (05.41.2).



Figure 41. Tailpiece, from *A Briefe and True Report*. Courtesy and with permission of British Library G.6837.



Figure 42. Tailpiece, from *A Briefe and True Report*. Courtesy and with permission of British Library G.6837.

On the page opposite de Bry's Pict, a grotesque printer's ornament—a tailpiece consisting of a tiny, scowling gargoyle surrounded by delightful arabesques—stares us in the face (Figure 41). Through the Middle Ages, gargoyles quite openly served, like the faces on the Pict, as protective images. The juxtaposition of this ornamental gargoyle and the Pict's bodily grotesques is therefore of some interest as an implicit commentary on the meaning (or meaninglessness) of grotesques, and it would seem to confirm Ernst Gombrich's argument that medieval drolleries and Renaissance grotesques display the vestiges of the apotropaic image.⁷⁷ We encounter a similar situation with another tailpiece, one that along with the gargoyle tailpiece is employed numerous times throughout the Report (Figure 42). At the center of this slightly larger ornament is a head surmounted by a crown of stylized palmettes, a common motif in Renaissance grotesques (de Bry often includes such heads in his grotesque designs) and one that was originally inspired by the apotropaic antefixes placed along the roofs of Etruscan temples.⁷⁸ Incorporated into grotesques, such motifs preserve the memory of the image whose function is, in Gombrich's phrase, one of "protective animation"; but of course there is little possibility of the gargoyle's face being taken seriously by the viewer in the way the Pict seems to take his own grotesques seriously. Within the pictorial arts of a civilized and Protestant society, products of human fancy are not, or at least are not supposed to be, animated by supernatural forces. Grotesques thus migrate from their central role among savages and pagans into the domain of pure ornament, where they cannot by definition have "anie peculiar sence, or meaning."

Still, the juxtaposition of these two pictorial instances of the grotesque, even if they occupy antithetical pictorial orders, should give us cause to wonder: How distant is the grotesque face that decorates the page from the grotesque face that protects the body? What would constitute the line between the *containment* of the magical image within the margins and the *survival* of pagan magic within the pages of a printed, Protestant text? This is an impossible line to draw because containment and survival are two sides of the same coin: the printer's ornaments banish magic to the peripheries while at the same time serving as the living trace of that same magic. And so even as it is being civilized this grotesque remainder continues to mark the possibility of an alternative relation to the image. Indeed one can imagine without too much difficulty how protective animation might operate just below the surface of the *Report*. De Bry's tailpiece, after all, performs a function not unlike the grotesques of the Pict, insofar as de Bry finds himself in a publishing situation where he is in need of his own protective devices. As we saw in the previous chapter, de Bry attempts to shield himself from counterfeiters with the apotropaic claim that "dyuers secret marks lye hiddin in my pictures, which wil breede Confusion vnless they bee well obserued."⁷⁹ The statement grows out of a publisher's anxiety about protecting his investment after it is released to a public over which he has no control. The condition I mentioned earlier—that of publishing for an open market in which meaning itself was largely a production of the reader—raised fundamental difficulties for printers, publishers, and authors who wished to maintain authority over their texts and images. It is not, therefore, entirely

unreasonable to think of a printer's ornament, a mark of identity and even ownership,⁸⁰ as an image carrying the memory of a magical function, a function that a publisher could not and perhaps would not want to make so fully *other* that its apotropaic power was no longer accessible.

The *Report's* grotesque printer's ornaments return us, finally, to de Bry's smoke, which can itself be understood as an irruption of the grotesque within the book's representational plates. The pictorial logic of grotesques is by no means limited to imagery that explicitly adopts a conventional ornamental vocabulary. Ruskin, for instance, found it in the monumental works of Michelangelo, in which the grotesque "is stealing forth continually in a strange and spectral way, lurking in folds of raiment and knots of wild hair, and mountainous confusions of crabby limb and cloudy drapey" (one thinks of the complex twists and coils of beard and fabric in the *Moses*).⁸¹ Perhaps it is even possible, as it was in the case of the printer's ornaments, to observe a vestigial magic in de Bry's clouds of grotesque smoke. As I have already argued, an early modern viewer would have been predisposed to see the convoluted lines of de Bry's smoky burin work through the lens of magic and witchcraft, but we should not be too quick simply to displace this magic onto the superstitious practices of Europe's others. As recent scholarship on the anthropology of art has suggested, ornamental complexity functions across cultures as a "technology of enchantment."⁸² Alfred Gell in particular has demonstrated how decorative patterns can serve as a means of producing confusion in viewers who find themselves unable to bring logical organization to their visual field, as in Gell's example of the ornate linear designs carved on Trobriand canoe prow-boards. Used for Kula trading (a system of ceremonial exchange of valuables), these prow-boards are intended to bewilder the trading partners and thus make them willing to part with their most prized items. For Gell, however, the most important aspect of the viewers' response is not their actual psychological confusion (which is mild) but the fact that this confusion then leads the viewer to imagine a magical power emanating from the ornamented object itself. As Gell writes, "the canoe-board is not dazzling as a physical object, but as a display of artistry explicable only in magical terms, something which has been produced by magical means."⁸³

While it is commonplace within the language of art history to speak of the magical skill of the virtuosic artist, Gell's anthropology shows us how we might take such metaphorical language literally. Through their power to index the hand of the artist, the ornamental lines of de Bry's smoke are, no less than the linear designs on Trobriand prow-boards, capable of holding us under their spell.⁸⁴ Linear confusion, moreover, both historically within Europe and across diverse cultures, has performed an apotropaic function. The multiplication of twisting and turning lines in ancient ornament, for example, could serve as a means of confounding demons and malevolent spirits. In general, practices of multiplication, ornamental and otherwise, that emphasize indeterminability and confusion have been shown to be a surprisingly durable means of guarding against evil.⁸⁵ The goal in such practices is to multiply individual elements

and patterns in order to “breede Confusion” (to borrow de Bry’s own phrase for his engraved marks) in one’s enemies. Perhaps a good candidate for de Bry’s protective secret marks, then, is his smoke, with its confusing lines. These indexical markers of the engraver’s own labor and authority bear a trace of a type of image we tend not to link to the practice of early modern engraving but that perhaps deserves more attention than it receives: the magical image that stares back, that refuses admittance by warding off potentially evil or envious eyes.

I do not wish, however, to press the point too hard. At the beginning of this chapter, I set the goal of arriving at an understanding of the kind of disruption presented by de Bry’s smoke. This disruption, as we have seen, is the making visible of representation’s remainder; it does not, however, involve the *naming* of that remainder, which should itself be understood as a kind of void, a space in which we are invited to imagine that which cannot be circumscribed by the engraver’s lines, that which cannot be “said” within the order of representation. And so, while I have ended with an apotropaic reading of de Bry’s smoke, it is by no means intended to be a definitive reading of a grotesque imagery fundamentally opposed to definition. Indeed, the apotraism of de Bry’s smoke is precisely *not* named as such; it is instead the *savage’s* ornamental marks that are seen as magical and superstitious within the emergent ethnology of the *Report*. In contrast, the magic of de Bry’s ornamental smoke can only exist below the surface as a nameless element, the savage leftover of a representational system that dreams of its own civility. Rather than attempting to name de Bry’s smoke, I have therefore offered certain concepts that foreground ambivalence and indeterminability and thus prove useful for talking around the unnamable—magic and witchcraft, /cloud/, the grotesque. If we choose to see this smoke for what it is—which is, finally, nothing but pure line, a spiraling and shapeless materiality—then we can begin to understand the fundamental importance of a nameless pictorial element in the early visual representation of the New World. De Bry’s project needed this element, indeed *produced* it as representation’s formless by-product; produced it, in other words, as smoke.

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