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**Mounting the Antelope**  
**How the Early American Wild Became a Document**  
**Monter l'antilope**  
**Comment l'Amérique sauvage est devenue un document**

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# Mounting the Antelope: How the Early American Wild Became a Document

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This paper troubles and historicizes the symbolic use of the antelope in the field of library and information science by examining correspondence during the Lewis and Clark expedition in the nineteenth century. It shows how taking the antelope from the wild, naming and classifying the animal, and mounting it for display in a museum were part of a national education program in the early United States. The "American antelope" was observed and killed during the expedition, and Thomas Jefferson, serving as both president of the United States and president of the American Philosophical Society, was intimately engaged in conversations about what to call the animal. Charles Willson Peale mounted an antelope that had been sent from the expedition and classified it according to a Linnean system. This moment is instructive for understanding the relationship between natural history and documentation in processes of settler colonialism, statecraft, and empire expansion.

**Keywords:** antelope, information-as-thing, settler colonialism, United States, museums, documentation

While Thomas Jefferson was serving his second term as president of the United States, he was also the president of the American Philosophical Society, a post that he held for eighteen years. During his first term in the office as the U.S. president he authorized Meriwether Lewis and William Clarks' famous expedition to gather information about the landscape, flora and fauna, and Indigenous peoples in western North America. Lewis and Clark sent Jefferson written communications about their journey, along with plants, animals (alive and dead), minerals, and cultural objects. Jefferson stored and studied some specimens at Monticello and sent other materials to Charles Willson Peale, fellow member of the American Philosophical Society and proprietor of the Philadelphia Museum.

Among the specimens sent by Lewis and Clark was what they believed to be an American antelope. Jefferson then had the animal forwarded to Peale. By the time the bones and skins arrived in Philadelphia in October of 1805, they were very much deteriorated, but Peale saw value in attempting to reassemble and preserve the animal for his exhibition. He wrote to Jefferson on 3 November 1805 to provide an update:

If I can mount one of the Antilopes to be decent, it will be a valuable addition to my Antilopes. I am very much obliged to Captn. Lewis for his endeavors to increase our knowledge of the

Animals of that new acquired Territory. . . . It is more important to have this Museum supplied with the American Animals than those of other Countries, yet for a comparative view it ought to possess those of every part of the Globe! (Peale, 1983, pp. 908-909)

Historians of documentation and print culture will recognize a resemblance between Peale's "Antilopes" and Suzanne Briet's use of an antelope in a zoo or museum (in contrast to the antelope in the wild) to define what a document is in the twentieth century. In this paper I expand upon and historicize the significance of the antelope in documentation theory to show how the documentation practices of museums (descriptions, advertisements, catalogues, correspondence, etc.) are tied to colonialist expansion, nationalism, and natural history. From letters exchanged between Thomas Jefferson and Charles Willson Peale, as well as the journals of the Lewis and Clark expedition, I will show how the process of an animal being rendered into a thing. I place this correspondence into dialogue with the literature on information as thing to consider how the antelope has been animated as a document and recurs as a signifier for the study of documentation. My aim here is to press Briet to think about what the antelope points to—not just as a specimen that proves the existence of a type, but its indexicality in relation to ideas about natural history and national identity in early America.

## What is a document?

Michael Buckland (2017) identifies four characteristics that are required for an object to be considered a document:

it must signify something; it exists within a system of cultural codes and shared understanding; it is a type of media or expression, e.g., image, text, diagrams, music, etc.; and it must have physicality (p. 26). Identifying writing, broadly defined, as a technique of recording speech and gesture, Buckland (2017) observes that "the effect is to establish a trace, evidence that can be perceived by others or serve as a reminder for oneself. . . the written record can endure and overcome the passage of time as long as the record is legible" (28). The coloniality of documentation derives at least in part from this privileging of durability. The case of the antelope shows how ephemeral and living beings are made durable by fixing them in or *as* a medium that communicates information. This paper is based in a conviction that by following the tracks of natural philosophers, we can understand the processes by which animal lives became evidentiary documents. As John Berger (1980) writes, animals "are the objects of our ever-extending knowledge. What we know about them is an index of our power, and thus an index of what separates us from them. The more we know, the further away they are" (p. 16). Indeed, treating animals as objects of inquiry is another way of saying that animals have become informational, which means that they are ontologically no longer beings in their own right, but documents that contain evidence for human use.

I am following the directive put forth by Littletree, Belarde-Lewis, and Duarte (2020) who suggest, "Before addressing the techniques and methods of trying to fix current [knowledge organization systems] for Indigenous communities, it is important to take the time and effort to understand both the history of coloniality in [knowledge organization], as well as the philosophical basis of Indigenous systems of knowledge" (p. 422). Settler colonial scientific practices rendered the antelope in the wild into a document, affecting relationships across human and non-human worlds. I ask readers to contemplate the ways in which privileging documents and regarding information as thing is rooted in settler colonial pasts that endure in the present. This is an attempt to investigate the consequences of coloniality, as well as the ways in which documentation was integral to settler colonial knowledge acquisition, with the goal toward thinking about how to recenter relationality, animals, water, land, and Indigenous knowledges. In dialogue with Patrick Wolfe (2006), who argues that "invasion is a structure not an event," I suggest that the documentary processes described in this paper were fundamentally structuring events that involved the removal of the structures that support Indigenous knowledge and life and formed new structures that contributed to a settler colonial imaginary and supported empire expansion (p. 388). How do documents and documentation practices participate in colonial violence? And what does this say about the set of disciplines that uses, catalogues, and privileges the "mark that endure" (Snaza 2019, p. 97)?

Buckland's papers on information-as-thing (1991) and documentation (1997) have become canonical in the discipline of information studies. Perhaps the most memorable aspect of those papers is the citation to Suzanne Briet's (2006) treatise on documentation, in which she uses the example of an antelope to explain what a document is.<sup>1</sup> It is worth transcribing the entire passage here:

Let us admire the documentary fertility of a simple originary fact: for example, an antelope of a new kind has been encountered in Africa by an explorer who has succeeded in capturing an individual that is then brought back to Europe for our Botanical garden [*Jardin des Plantes*]. A press release makes the event known by newspaper, by radio, and by newsreels. The discovery becomes the topic of an announcement at the Academy of Sciences. A professor of the Museum discusses it in his courses. The living animal is placed in a cage and cataloged (zoological garden). Once it is dead, it will be stuffed and preserved (in the Museum). It is loaned to an Exposition. It is played on a soundtrack at the cinema. Its voice is recorded on a disk. The first monograph serves to establish part of a treatise with plates, then a special encyclopedia (zoological), then a general encyclopedia. The works are cataloged in a library, after having been announced at publication (publisher catalogues and Bibliography of France). The documents are recopied (drawings, watercolors, paintings, statues, photos, films, microfilms), then selected, analyzed, described, translated (documentary productions). The documents that relate to this event are the object of a scientific classifying (fauna) and of an ideologic [*idéologique*] classifying (classification) (p. 10).

Ron Day co-translated Briet's work after Buckland presented her theories in his papers on documentation and continues to engage with her ideas. For this paper, I will focus on the concept of indexicality, one of the essential qualities of a document. As Day (2019) explains, for Briet, "Entities are allegorized as signs of universal truth, emerging through processes of scientific revelation, led by ontological naming, whereby the entity gains its importance and value for truth by representing something other than its own particularity, a mode of generalized being that transcends particular entities and that appears through vigorous methods and techniques" (p. 64). Entities become evidence through primary and secondary documentary techniques. In the case of an antelope, the singular animal becomes representative of a type

<sup>1</sup>Briet was a librarian at the French Bibliothèque Nationale and is often regarded as a founder of French documentation.

through naming and classificatory techniques. Secondly, it is mounted in an exhibition hall, discussed and written about in academic publications, which are catalogued in a library and copied and revised and re-cited. Rendering an animal into a type is important because, that type enters into "a documentary ontology and beings are evidence of the existence of types and are proof of their factual existence" (Day, 2019, p. 62). But, as Day calls to notice, "such truths are products of cultural techniques, foremost, documentation techniques" (Ibid). Being evidentiary requires *becoming* a document.

Marc Koscielow has arrived at related conclusions in his study of documentation in Apartheid South Africa: "The point was to make people fit racial and ethnic categories that were forever bounded, implying that these categories were found objects, things that were not assigned but rather natural and innate" (p. 96). And Martin Nord (2020) has considered the implications of Briet's theory for "human documents" by examining the case of Ishi, a living Yahi man who was studied, documented, and displayed by anthropologists in the early twentieth century. Bernd Frohmann complicates Briet's assessment by inviting us to consider the antelope as something that "becomes a document by virtue of its arrangements with other things," rather than as "a privileged form of those arrangements, such as their evidentiary functions." In Frohmann's view, Briet's message is that, "in complex arrangements things exercise documentary agency, which is capable of being detected, understood, and engaged in many different ways, and by many different kinds of actors, both human, and nonhuman." Documentary agency, in Frohmann's view, does not require human contact, nor does its evidentiary status determine its existence. Below I show the ways that human contact resulted in the collection and use of animals for scientific study, as well as the way in which the animal asserted its agency.

### Peale's Museum

Charles Willson Peale was a portrait painter, engraver, and natural historian who organized North American expeditions and established one of the first museums in the United States. Founded in 1786, it was first called the Peale Museum and was renamed the American Museum in 1790.<sup>2</sup> Peale appointed a "Committee of Visitors" in 1792, which included Alexander Hamilton, James Madison, David Rittenhouse, Benjamin Smith Barton, William Barton, and others. Thomas Jefferson was the first president of the committee. The board's very first recommendation was for the museum to produce a full catalogue of the museum's contents (Dugatkin, 2019, p. 78; Schofield, 1989, p. 35).<sup>3</sup> The museum moved to the American Philosophical Society in 1794, and then was located in Independence Hall starting in 1802. By 1831, when Peale's son was at the helm, "the museum contained 250 quadrupeds, 1,310 birds, more than 4,000 insects, 8,000 minerals, 1,044 shells, several hundred fish, more than 200 snakes, lizards,

### Figure 1

*This is a map of the territory in which Lewis and Clark first captured their antelopes. In a later map drawn by the German prince, Maximilian, of Wied, the area was labeled "Killed the first Antelope." See Moulton (1983), Map 29. Meriwether Lewis, 1774-1809. Evans's Map 2 (the Expedition's route about September 10-23, 1804). Box 1, Folder 5. [1804?]. <https://collections.library.yale.edu/catalog/2002446>.*



turtles and tortoises and the major U.S. Collection of fossil bones; it had become the primary resource for American natural history" (Schofield, 1989, p. 21). Peale taught himself the methods for taxidermy, preservation of specimens, and mounting for display mostly by reading books and exchanging letters with European scientists. His vision for the museum was for it to inform and entertain a broad American public about natural history. He shared the view with his contemporaries that science education would "promote useful knowledge," which was important for educating Americans:

I have long contemplated that by industry such a variety of interesting subjects of Nature might be collected in one view as would enlighten the minds of my countrymen, and, demonstrate the importance of diffusing a knowledge of the wonderful and various beauties of Nature, more powerful to *humanize the mind*, promote harmony, and aid virtue, than any other School yet imagined (Peale to Jefferson, January 12, 1802, emphasis added).

<sup>2</sup>The first museum in Philadelphia opened in 1782 by the Swiss collector Pierre Eugène Du Simitière, but it closed withing a few years. Peale's is remarkable for its size and influence.

<sup>3</sup>For an account of the perfection of Linnaeus's system for Peale's museum, as well as the printed volumes consulted for identification, taxidermy, and natural history see Schofield (1989); other members of the board included (Dugatkin, 78).



Peale's hope was that the museum would be established someday as a national museum of natural history, with support and status as a U.S. cultural and educational institution. That dream was not realized, and most of the materials that he collected were lost due to fire or were dispersed in auction.

Jefferson, Peale, and many of their colleagues understood education to be essential to the growth of the early American republic, and Peale's museum was a nationalist project in educating Americans in natural history. Of interest here is the role of documentation in natural history expeditions that brought information back for scientific study, the formation of nationalism, and Peale's museum. The journals of Meriwether Lewis and William Clark are full of accounts of sightings and killings of animals, close encounters, and data gathering. William Clark first wrote about his encounter with antelopes in an entry labeled "Missouri River, Vermilion to Teton" on September 14, 1804. He refers to the animal as a "Buck Goat" because he does not yet know what it is. His offers a detailed description:

in my walk I Killed a Buck Goat of this Country, about the hight of the Grown Deer, its body Shorter the Horns which is not hard and forks 2/3 up one prong Sort the other round & Shapr arched, and is imediately above its Eyes the Colour is a light gray with black behind its ears down its neck, and its face white round its neck, its Sides and its rum rount its tal which is Short & white: Verry actively made, has only a pair of hoofs to each foot, his brains on the back of his head, his Norstrals large, his eyes like a Sheep he is more like the Antilope or Gazella of **Africa** than any other Species of Goat (p. 147, emphasis in original).

Within a few days, Lewis was referring to this animal as an antelope in his own journal. He observes a great number of wolves, bison, elk, deer, and beavers, as well as the expansiveness of the landscape in this journal: "I do not think I exagurate when I estimate the number of Buffaloe which could be comprehended at one view to amount to 3000" (p. 153). But his description of the antelope is particularly telling, as it begins, "my object was if possible to kill a female Antelope having already procured a male" (p. 153). Already, Lewis is setting out to kill an animal so that it can be studied. The details in this passage show in several instances just how elusive the animal is, and how difficult it is to capture:

we had now after various windings in pursuit of several herds of antelopes which we had seen on our way made the distance of about eight miles from our camp. we found the Antelope extreemly shy and watchfull insomuch that we had been unable to get a shot at them. . . I had this

day an opportunity of witnessing the agility and the superior fleetness of this anamal which was to me really astonishing.... I got within about 200 paces of them when they smelt me and fled. . . . I beheld the rapidity of their flight along the ridge before me it appeared rather the rappid flight of birds than the motion of quadrupeds (pp. 153-154).

Although some earlier European explorers had encountered this animal, the Lewis and Clark expedition afforded the first scientific investigation (Peale, 1983, p. 954n). The sent antelope skins and skeletons to the President's house in Washington, and on 6 October 1805, Jefferson sent two "skins of the male & female antelope with their skeletons," along with several other specimens and a living magpie and a living "burrowing squirrel" to Peale. In the letter accompanying the specimens, Jefferson described the confusion about the antelope:

I have some doubts whether Capt Lewis has not mistaken the Roe for the Antelope, because I have recieved from him a pair of horns which I am confident are of the Roe (tho' I never before supposed that animal to be in America) and no Antelope horns came. these you know are hollow, annulated, & single. those of the Roe are bony, solid, & branching. I hope you will have the skeletons well examined to settle this point. you will recieve them in great disorder as they came here, having been unpacked in several places on the road, & unpacked again here before I returned, so that they have probably got mixed (Peale, 1983, pp. 894-895).

Just three days later, Jefferson realized he'd made an error and hurriedly sent a follow-up to Peale. He corrected himself, based on more carefully examining the skins and skeletons (the documentary evidence), and stated "these sufficiently prove that the animal is of the Antilope family."<sup>4</sup> Upon the arrival of the specimens, Peale responded to Jefferson with both curiosity and frustration about the poor condition of the specimen. The antelope was itself perplexing in terms of type, and he wondered if it was a "singular Animal" in a class of its own, but they were in such "bad condition owing to the Moth & Dermest having made great havock" (Peale 1983, p. 908). Peale describes this mess in detail, but remains hopeful:

The conversation about the antelopes continued as Peale did manage to mount the antelope in April 1806. It was not perfect, but "being so interesting an Animal," he thought it better to display an imperfect specimen than no specimen at

<sup>4</sup>Thomas Jefferson to Charles Willson Peale, 9 October 1805, *Founders Online*, National Archives, <https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Jefferson/99-01-02-2448>.

all (Peale, 1983, p. 951). He made a drawing of the animal and sent it to Jefferson. The drawing remains unlocated, but his son Titian Peale painted a watercolour from the mounting (Fig. 2) At the same time, he continued to be confounded by this animal and how it fits within the order of the animal kingdom. He compares all of its features to those of the common deer and elk. He examines and dissects, measures and calculates, and assesses the animal's scent, teeth, bones, hair, horns, skin, and so on: "I wish I could know more of this Animal, it may be a small Elk, as the rump is white—or a small species of Deer, having no Scar we cannot determine what the horns might have been, whether hollow or solid—Linneus gives to Deer and also to Antilopes the character of 8 front under teeth, but no mention of a difference in the size of them" (Peale, 1983, p. 952).

## Figure 2

Titian Ramsey Peale. American Antelope. *Antilocapra americana*. American Philosophical Society. Titian Ramsay Peale Sketches, Mss.B.P31.15d



On August 4, 1806, Peale told Jefferson that he had presented the antelope drawing to the American Philosophical Society the year before. At that meeting, "A member demanded of me, what name I gave it? to which, after a few moments reflection, I replied *The forked Horned Antelope*. but Sir that is not a scientific name. It is not a Latin Name but one most descriptive of the Animal, since we knew of no Antelope besides having forked Horns."<sup>5</sup> He invited Jefferson to offer a name, hoping that an Indigenous name for the animal might be applied. Peale seems to find his colleagues pretentious for their insistence on a Latin name, and suggests that an Indigenous name would be more appropriate: "I most humbly request of you my dear Sir, to give me a Name for this American Antelope, perhaps the Indian Name, if it could be had would be a proper one. however I leave it to your superior

judgement, and shall only say that whatever you think proper to give it, will be placed in print on the Animal in the Museum, and given to the Society, as of your choice or not as you may please to direct."<sup>6</sup> The name matters, and it seems that this confirms the idea that naming is entirely instrumental to the specimen entering into scientific society.<sup>7</sup> Peale expresses unease about naming, and although one can only speculate about his motivations in this case. Jefferson seems not to have provided a name, and it was not until a decade later that it was given the name *Antilocapra americana*, which translates to "American antelope goat," by George Ord. Clearly, this creature continued to confound, as the name reflects the fact that natural scientists could not determine whether it was a goat or an antelope.

And with good reason.

This antelope, as it turns out, is not an antelope at all. This is in fact the Pronghorn.

Still, the animal continues to be referred to as the "American antelope." It is the only horned animal that sheds its horns. It is also one of the few animals that is North American in origin and habitat.

## From Antelope to Pronghorn (and back again)

Zoologists came closer to understanding how to position this animal in the following decades but continued to cling to the idea of the antelope. In 1866 the family name *Antilocapridae* ("goat-like antelopes") was established, and as it turns out, the Pronghorn is the only species that belongs to that family. Scientists believe that there was a time when as many as a dozen species belonged to this family, an all except for the Pronghorn have been extinct for thousands of years. It is not closely related to the African antelopes, as believed in Jefferson, Lewis, Clark, and Peale's day, and, in fact, it has no close relatives anywhere on earth.

The Pronghorn is a prime example of the way that naming as a classificatory practice gets embedded in culture. To this day, the scientific name for the species is *Antilocapra americana*, and in common language it is often referred to as the pronghorn antelope. Some people continue to use "pronghorn" and "antelope" interchangeably. The Pronghorn is the fastest animal in North America, and without guns, they are extraordinarily challenging to hunt. Long ago they were pursued by cheetahs, other big cats, and wolves, and are capable of running sixty miles per hour, "in bounds exceeding 20

<sup>5</sup>Charles Willson Peale to Thomas Jefferson, 4 August 1806, *Founders Online*, National Archives, <https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Jefferson/99-01-02-4127>.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid.

<sup>7</sup>Peale withdrew the paper for publication on 17 June 1807 because he found out that Lewis planned to publish a description of the pronghorn in his book about the expedition. The drawing and article are both unlocated. There is no evidence that Jefferson responded with a name (Peale, 1983, p. 974n).

feet" (McCabe, xv). They are remarkable creatures, standing three feet high, weighing 90-140 pounds, with astounding musculature. They have a large windpipe and lungs, and their heart is twice as large as other animals of the same size. Their eyes protrude so that they have nearly 360-degree field of vision, and their eyesight is equal to a human's looking through 8x binoculars. But they did have habits and migration patterns that communities were attuned to. Pronghorn congregated in large herds and could very often be ambushed near water sources along migration routes. Another of their vulnerabilities is what people have described as their curiosity. Several stories describe the Pronghorn as appearing to willingly come near people, as surprisingly tame, and even capable of domestication.

Scientists estimate that there were perhaps 20-40 million pronghorns in western North America in 1800, before the arrival of Lewis and Clark. But the first European encounter with the species occurred in 1542, when, according to Russel Tanner (2000), Juan de Torquemada described a hunt in western Hidalgo, Mexico. The proliferation of firearms during the Civil War, along with increased settlement of the western U.S., led to the rampant slaughter not only of bison, but of smaller animals like the pronghorn (Tanner, 2000, p. 136). By 1920 they were on the brink of extinction, with fewer than 15,000 pronghorns in the wild. The good news is that, due to conservation efforts of the twentieth century, the pronghorn population reached about a million by the 1980s.

Still, the increase in population, measured in numbers, does not account for the ecological loss or the loss of long-standing Indigenous relationships with the pronghorn. We have archaeological, ethnographic, documentary, and oral history evidence of the significance of the pronghorn to Indigenous life and culture. Archaeological sites in the north-central Great Basin, for example, contain hundreds of projectile points, which suggests that Indigenous communities have had elaborate communal pronghorn hunting practices for at least 4,000 to 5,000 years (Hockett and Murphy, 2009, p. 708). In the Northern Plains pronghorns were integral to the Blackfoot, Mandan, Crow, Arapaho, Arikara, Cheyenne, and Lakota communities. They used pronghorn hides for dresses, shirts, moccasin tops, and cover, hair for pillows, bones for pipes, and horns for headdresses. A Cheyenne creation story tells of a Great Race between the two-legged animals and the four-legged animals. According to Linea Sundstrom (2000), this event established a relationship in which people could hunt and consume the four-legged animals. In most versions of this story, the place of the Great Race is Buffalo Gap—which matches gap in the sandstone rim that served as the entrance to the enclosure described in the story.

Further south, pronghorns/antelopes were essential to Pueblo communities in what is now called New Mexico, and as Leslie Marmon Silko (1996) explains, their creation story is also intimately connected with the landscape. There was

an eight-mile path from the natural springs to the sandstone hilltop at Laguna, which was marked with boulders, mesas, springs, and river crossings. Silko describes it as a ritual circuit that the Laguna people made, as part of a way to both differentiate themselves from the other beings around them, and to honour the relationality of all beings. Silko gracefully describes how respect and appreciation for the antelope that gave its life was central to the ceremonial hunt:

The ANTELOPE MERELY consents to return with the hunter. All phases of the hunt are conducted with love: the love the hunter and the people have for the Antelope People, and the love of the antelope who agree to give up their meat and blood so that human beings will not starve. Waste of meat or even the thoughtless handling of bones cooked bare will offend the antelope spirits. Next year the hunters will vainly search the dry plains for antelope. Thus, it is necessary to return carefully the bones and hair and the stalks and leaves to the earth, who first created them. The spirits remain close by. They do not leave us (p. 26).

For the spirit to endure, the remains of the animal must be returned to the earth. This is a very different relationship to the body of an animal in comparison with the processes of taking, mounting, and documenting.

### Taxonomic resistance

The exchange of and correspondence about animal specimens between Jefferson and Peale is significant because they were both important players in the scientific community who believed in the efficacy of the Linnean classification system. Jefferson believed that one universal system was preferable to multiple systems, anticipating standardization. For instance, while he found value in the classifications of Blumenbach and Cuvier, he advocated for the Linnean system "because it is sufficient as a groundwork; admits of supplementary insertions, as new productions are discovered, and mainly because it has got into so general use that it will not be easy to displace it, and still less to find another which shall have the same singular fortune of obtaining the general consent" (Looney, 2010, p. 210). Jefferson was convinced of the efficacy of universal classifications, but he understood that they could be modified according to context. He was leaning toward standardization, favouring Linnaeus because it had become so widely used that it afforded what we refer to today as interoperability. The Linnean system could be somewhat flexible, but it was uniform enough that it could be applied in different disciplines in many locations.

Greta LaFleur (2018) suggests that the Linnean system is particularly relevant for historians of race and science because he included "humans in his taxonomy of the animal

world and because he was one of the first naturalists to divide humans into regional taxa." Indeed, he organized humans according to four regions—Europaeus, Asiaticus, Americanus, and Afer, which explained and determined "'types' of humans according to phenotypic, cultural, and even characterological qualities." (p. 2). Linnaeus revised his system over time, and eventually provided details regarding types of humans. One quickly notices the differences between his description of Indigenous (*Americanus*) and European humans:

AMERICANUS a. reddish, choleric, erect. *Hair* black, straight, thick; Nostrils: wide; Face: harsh, *Beard* scanty. *Obstinate*, merry, free. *Paints* himself with fine red lines. *Regulated* by customs.

EUROPAEUS b. white, sanguine, muscular. *Hair* flowing, long. Eyes blue. *Gentle*, acute, inventive. *Covered* with close vestments. *Governed* by laws.

Peale was invested in scientific classification for his museum of natural history and his museum was the first major museum to adopt the Linnean classification (Dugatkin, 2019, p. 75). Of course, the antelope was just one of many types of animals that were preserved, mounted and displayed at Peale's museum. It belonged to the Quadrupeds. Peale did produce a *Scientific and Descriptive Catalogue* in 1796, at the Board of Visitors' behest. He classified it according to Linnaeus's system, thereby placing primates as the First Order of quadrupeds, which included Man, monkeys, lemurs, and bats. Based on existing criticisms of Linnaeus, he seems to anticipate resistance among his visitors and provides an explanation for how Man could be regarded as a relative of the bat: "Candid and enlightened men, however, who know that Linnaeus did not attempt to form a natural system, but an artificial one, only in order to facilitate the study of this science, will perceive the injustice of their criticisms" (p. 2). Here he leans on Linnaeus's famous invocation of Socrates, seeming to suggest that the way that Man knows himself is by observing and measuring the animals:

We have in this followed his example; but deeming it unnecessary to enter upon a particular description here, shall only subjoin with that celebrated naturalist, "MAN 'KNOW THYSELF'" (p. 2).

Peale included Indigenous remains in his museum, and classed them under "Quadrupeds, American Indian, *Homo Sapiens Americanus*, Lin. He put three Indigenous materials on display: "Skeletons of an Indian man and woman of the Wabash Nation," "Skin of the thigh, and part of the leg of an Indian," and "A piece of human skin, tanned with bark, in the common way," are in fact the first three entries in the catalogue

(Peale 1796, 3–4). Peale spent hours upon hours learning and applying the classification. Importantly, Dugatkin (2019) observes that, "Linnaeus's system appealed to Peale not only because of its power to organize, but because it was so in line with the Enlightenment ethos that things made sense—that complex totalities, be they political systems, cities (such as gridded Philadelphia), or the world of natural things, were interpretable and amenable to order and systematization" (76). This is key to our understanding of why such careful attention and deliberation was paid to the antelope. It was partly about the animal itself for its exceptional characteristics, but more than that, it confounded the system and challenged Peale and his colleagues in their efforts to place this animal in the order of the great chain of beings. Its refusal to be captured—both in the wild and in the totality of the system, are what made this animal such an "evocative object" (Turkle, 2011).

Hannah Turner's observations are relevant here. Turner's research focuses on this Smithsonian, a later period in the history of American natural history museums, taking note of the body scholarship that has demonstrated the ways that scientific methods, including the use of documented evidence, were used to justify European dominance. "Throughout the history of settler colonialism," writes Turner (2020), "administrative and bureaucratic structures would enable and solidify these interpretations, creating part of an infrastructure of oppression. Like the early catalogues and atlases from scientific pursuits, many museum catalogues resemble or grew out of attempts to categorize the natural world" (p. 29). Arguably, Peale and his colleagues set the stage for using scientific methods for studying animals and Indigenous humans. Whereas the antelope and other life forms were intimately connected to many Indigenous communities in stories, hunting, and everyday life, the colonial universalizing classifications and their categories necessarily eliminate knowledge associated with animals, plants, and minerals in various contexts.

Peale's attempts to put them back into context is remarkable for the way that it seems to signal the loss inflicted on the animal, but one sees that his approach is meant to entertain while it educates.<sup>8</sup> Rembrandt Peale, one of Peale's sons, recorded an elaborate description of the exhibit, which shows the extent to which Peale tried to recreate the natural environment. He made mounds of earth that were "covered with green turf" and trees. On that mound of earth, he exhibited birds that walk on the ground and "different kinds of wild animals,—bear, deer, leopard, tiger, wild-cat, fox, raccoon, rabbit, squirrel, etc." There were snakes in a thicket, birds

<sup>8</sup>Visitors to the Smithsonian's National Museum of Natural History today will see very similar displays, with animals mounted in ways that animate them in live-action scenes – sometimes as the hunter, sometimes the hunted. Painted scenery, artificial turf and trees, and video footage of the wild are placed across the animal exhibits there. See Hannah Turner's *Cataloguing Culture* (2020) for a history of the museum's documentation practices.



in the trees, and fish in an artificial pond. On a beach surrounding the pond, he mounted "an assortment of shells of different kinds, turtles, frogs, toads, lizards, water snakes, etc. In the pond was a collection of fish with their skins stuffed, water fowls, such as the different species of geese, ducks, cranes, herons, etc.; all having appearance of life, for their skins were admirably preserved" (See Rogers, Shreckengast, and Dorfman, 2000 for the entire passage, pp 27–28).

We have enough details about Peale's museum from the period in which it was located on the second floor of Independence Hall beginning in 1802 to envision its magnitude. The painting "A in shows in detail how the exhibition was arranged. The long room was one hundred feet long and twelve feet high and featured over a thousand birds. Above them were portraits of scientists, explorers, and revolutionary figures – people such as Washington, Franklin, Rittenhouse, Lafayette, and so on. What we notice by looking at the painting of the long room (Figure 3) is that these portraits are meant to convey order according the Linnean system, with Man at the top. As Dugatkin explains, "Though initially the art had stood alone, separate from the other parts of the museum, soon Peale erased the physical boundary between the portraits and the natural history specimens, hanging the portraits over exhibits of the latter to capture 'the great chain of being, from the lowly to the grand, with man atop it all'" (p. 67).

### Figure 3

*Charles Willson Peale; Titian Ramsay Peale, The Long Room, Interior of Front Room in Peale's Museum, 1822, watercolor over graphite pencil on paper. Detroit Institute of Arts, Founders Society Purchase, Director's Discretionary Fund, 57.261*



The quadrupeds were featured in another room, which was 40 feet long. Peale mounted his specimens to make them look alive and in action. The larger specimens were situated in natural-appearing settings, and the smaller ones were placed in glass cases, animated with painted landscape

backgrounds. Very often, these paintings were of specific locations, sometimes depicting the precise spot from which the specimen was collected. According to Rogers, Rogers, Shreckengast, and Dorfman (2000) these cases that featured realistic paintings of the animal's natural environment were "by all accounts, the first habitat dioramas in the United States as well as the entire world" (p. 13). Each room, according to Robert Schofield (1989), "contained a framed Linnaean catalogue of the genus and species of every object in it, keyed by number to the cases, and over each case, the Latin, English and French names of the objects when known" (p. 31). Across the yard in Philosophical Hall were the mastodon, an antique room that featured archaeological and ethnological item, and a room with models of recent technological inventions.

### The Thingification of the Antelope

Let's return to Briet (2006) and the notion that "A document is a proof in support of a fact" (p. 7). As Day writes, the professional culture of documentation has to be understood in the context in which Briet was working. The formulation of the definition of documentation, which would later be incorporated into American information science to explain the concept of "information-as-thing" was figured into "the cultural destiny of documentation as science, which for Briet rides on the rails of earlier European colonialism, through the dominance of three European languages across the world" (Day, 2020, p. 63). Indeed, the culture of documentation takes hold within "the metaphysical and political destiny of 'the West' as a culture, which in the postwar years is characterized as world development and progress" (Day, 2020, p. 63). It is particularly interesting that she chose an African antelope to exemplify a primary document and the processes of secondary documentation. French colonialism in Africa, while perhaps not explicitly evident in Briet's account, aligns with the documentary practices over a hundred years earlier in the United States. In his analysis of John Wesley Powell's policy-making at the helm of the late 19<sup>th</sup> century Bureau of American Ethnology, Montoya (2022) suggests that "the collection of knowledge was less about the epistemic expansion of knowledge and more about the collection of knowledge-as-resource that was quickly dissipating because of the damaging US policies that were to eventually (nearly) eradicate the widespread existence of native knowledge" (p. 200). Briet's discussion of removing an antelope from the African wild and placing it in a zoo or a museum is akin to the removal of animals from the American wild. In both cases, the antelope simultaneously advances knowledge of the colonial power and participates in genocide.

Rather, a thing's documentary agency, power, or force—what Frohmann refers to as "documentality"—is enacted by virtue of its situatedness the world of other things. This perspective recognizes a thing, or a thingified being as having a capacity to "produce, afford, allow, encourage,

permit, influence, render possible, block, or forbid the generation of marks, traces or inscriptions" in relation to others (Frohmann, 2012, p. 175). When we are talking about the lives that have been thingified through processes of datafication and documentation in different points in history, it is not enough to suggest that they are rendered docile subjects. They can resist or refuse, block or deceive, or strategically submit to documentary processes of sorting, naming, counting, and diagramming. The collection, study, and display of animals is connected to broader problems with regard to museums and other cultural institutions relationships to the theft of Indigenous life, objects, and land, as well as what Aimé Césaire (1972) refers to as the *thingification* of life, particularly in the context of slavery. The conversations about the antelope tell us a lot about the history of information and documentation in the formation of the young republic. The stories of the mammoth and Jefferson's moose have taken on mythical proportions, and we know that they were important for several reasons, including the refutation of Buffon's claims that the American climate and landscape were inferior and would only support degenerate life. These stories are important because they engaged in conversations about climate and extinction and scientific classification.

These stories are important in documentation theory because of the ways in which documents carry the quality of indexicality. They contain evidence. They are meant to be used. And, as Buckland (1991) writes, "'information-as-thing,' by whatever name, is of especial interest in relation to information systems" because ultimately information systems, including 'expert systems' and information retrieval systems, can deal directly with information *only* in this sense (p. 352). Without things, there isn't material to process. And even without information systems and computers, when humans regard animals or texts as informational, they become things. Buckland continues, "One learns from the examination of various sorts of things. In order to learn, texts are read, numbers are tallied, objects and images are inspected, touched, or otherwise perceived" (p. 353).

This is where the use of the antelope as an example gets particularly interesting. Buckland (1991) points to the term "evidence," which "implies passiveness." He writes, "Evidence, like information-as-thing, does not do anything actively. Human beings do things with it or to it. They examine it, describe it, and categorize it" (p. 353). Once something becomes informational, it becomes passive. This runs counter to the notion that objects have agency, and whether or not it is an accurate characterization, Buckland's assessment requires attention. He points out that "document" is derived from the Latin *docere*, which means "to teach." And he talks about evidence as being passive. But we can take this connection even farther, noting that *docere* is also the root of "docile." Even Foucault (as far as I know), does not seem to notice this Latin root common to *le document* and *docile* in the connec-

tions he draws between docile subjects, documentation, and discipline.

The Oxford English Dictionary's definition of docile is relevant here for the way that it indicates teaching and teachability, submission, and that this can be "*transferred* of things."

1. (a) apt to be taught; ready and willing to receive instruction; teachable  
(b) Submissive to training; tractable, manageable
2. *transferred* of things: Yielding readily to treatment; easily managed or dealt with; tractable (emphasis in source)

The antelope – or rather, the pronghorn – strikes me as anything but docile. Indeed, the documentary evidence surrounding the pronghorn shows the extent to which natural historians struggled to name this animal, and tried to force it into categories, until it becomes clear that it occupies its own. It evades description, confounds taxonomy, exceeds its own name, just as it so often escaped capture in the wild. The antelope in the wild is not a document, as Briet tells us. In the case of the antelope, we see how it being forced into submission, killed, mounted, and named are processes associated with the objectification of animals for the sake of science. And we see that epistemic violence is not just a metaphor, but that there is a series of violent acts that produce the docile subject and render it into a document. The message that I want to drive home is two-fold: genocide and colonial expansion depend on epistemological and ontological control and violence; and the recurrence of the antelope as a document signals the ways that the trope of "information as thing" was borne out of a cartesian dichotomy that severs human/other-than-human relations.

The classification and documentation of the antelope is directly connected to the dispossession and removal of Indigenous communities from their land, knowledge, and essential sustenance. I am suggesting that we take seriously the legacy of taking animals from the wild for the purposes of acquiring settler colonial knowledge, which included the cruelty and morbidity of removing animals and plants from their habitat and transporting them to a museum space in which their original habitat is re-created and the preserved remains of the dead animals are set up for display. As Danielle Taschereau Marners (2019), writes, "To move from this multispecies site of colonization to multispecies practices of decolonization requires the withdrawal of those forms of epistemological violence that animate policies of dispossession and elimination. Specifically, such a withdrawal requires ceasing material violence: unfencing land, releasing animal-bodies from the biopolitical thrall of classification and enumeration" (p. 32). Leanne Betasamosake Simpson (2014) insists that that rather than extracting from life worlds to gain certain forms of knowledge that support settler colonial goals, we stay close to

the land and find meaning there: "Meaning then is derived not through content or data, or even theory in a western context, which by nature is decontextualized knowledge, but through a compassionate web of interdependent relationships that are different and valuable because of that difference" (p. 11). Removing the animal from its habitat and from the Indigenous communities that have had long standing relationships with the pronghorn and so many other species, results in ecological, communal, and cultural loss, not to mention the loss of pronghorns' lives and the lives that depended on these animals for sustenance.

Bernd Frohmann (2012) sees documentation as an event or a happening, and asks how "writing, traces, and documentation emerge from the interactions between a thing—this antelope—and other elements of its specific arrangements" (p. 173). How is the actualization of a being's documentality—its agency—manifested in relationships to other things and the political, historical, and cultural time and space in which that thing exists? Frohmann invites us to consider Briet's antelope as something that "becomes a document by virtue of its arrangements with other things," rather than as "a privileged form of those arrangements, such as their evidentiary functions." Briet's message, according to Frohmann, is that "things exercise documentary agency, which is capable of being detected, understood, and engaged in many different ways, and by many different kinds of actors, both human, and nonhuman" (p. 173). He refers to a thing's documentary agency, power or force as "documentality," which "is exercised by virtue of those arrangements" (p. 173). This perspective recognizes a thing, or a thingified being as having a capacity to "produce, afford, allow, encourage, permit, influence, render possible, block, or forbid the generation of marks, traces or inscriptions" in relation to others (Frohmann, 2012, p. 175). When we are talking about the lives that have been thingified through processes of datafication and documentation in different points in history, it is not enough to suggest that they are rendered docile subjects. They can resist or refuse, block or deceive, or strategically submit to documentary processes of sorting, naming, counting, and diagramming. One of the ways that information's own history of itself has been obscured is by naturalizing processes of abstraction so that we see numbers, projections, and aliases in place of life and experience. How is the actualization of a being's documentality—its agency—manifested in relationships to other things and the political, historical, and cultural time and space in which that thing exists? How do the terms of agency become institutionalized and universalized in assemblages of documentary power?

We can't simply return the antelope to the wild, but perhaps we can think with wildness—not as an *other* to prove our humanness—but as a point of connection. If we take *wildness* to stand for anyone that resists categorization, for "unrestrained forms of embodiment, the refusal to submit to

social regulation, loss of control, the unpredictable," (Halberstam, 2020, p. 3) then we may also begin to challenge the role of documentary techniques as scientific practices, as well as the institutions that preserve and organize those documents. We can use wildness as a concept to think about ontologies of refusal, to think about the potential for the undocumented and the unclassifiable, and the resistance to capture. The antelope is not an antelope at all, and even in death, as the animal arrived at the doors of the museum in pieces, the antelope not only demonstrated the "resistance of the object" (Moten, 2003), but a resistance to becoming an object in the first place.

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