

The “Imperial Self”¹in Nature: Emerson and the Invention of Ad Space

Overview.

Landscape, Emerson says, should effect a union between the “the Self of the nation and of nature.”² It should build character, in other words, and by so doing it will serve to unify the nation as well. The site at which this union is to occur is the post colonial “wilderness” landscape constructed in the frontier regions beyond the Appalachians. The wilderness of these regions is more “dear and connate than the streets or villages” of his native Concord, as Emerson records in “Nature” (1836),³ because here alone the authentic American will discover his true character and publish that discovery to the world.

Nevertheless, incident to this elevated purpose is the commercial role served by landscape among the members of a privileged, urban class.⁴ Emerson’s construction of an iconic wilderness site, soon to become the first national parks of Yellowstone and Yosemite, satisfied an acquired taste among these elites for a high quality, picturesque landscape packaged as cultural achievement. Visual consumption of nature at the sites of the national parks by wealthy railroad travelers exceeded the means and tastes of the urban working class. At the same time it distinguished American elites from their peers in European culture. The national parks, then, conferred a double benefit on their urban consumers. First, they bestowed instant celebrity vis a vis their peer group in Europe. Second, they marked out, through consumption of a commodity product, class distinctions between urban elites and the working class. Emerson, then, commodifies nature as a scenic product consumed by an urban industrial class. In so doing he moves from the colonization of America and the sale of its

agricultural products in distant markets⁵ to the colonization of the American mind and the mass marketing of its landscape.

Alas, for the Amerindians the change in venue from pre European colonial landscape to frontier wilderness and the national parks matters little. For the semiotics of national parks “wilderness” landscape like the colonial landscape before it requires that the native occupants be erased from view.⁶ The aboriginal perspective, therefore, is voided again but this time by national parks managers, railroad tycoons, the hotel industry, and not least, the new agents of erasure and occupation, landscape artists. In this function the 19th century artists Thomas Moran and Albert Bierstadt play an indispensable role. They produce an American landscape which melds the self, nature, and nation after the manner that Emerson, previsioned and dictated. It is also a landscape from which production and labor as well as Amerindians are conspicuously absent. The occupying tribal groups are physically ejected from their wilderness sites in the aftermath of national parks designation to agree with Bierstadt and Moran’s heavily edited representations of what the landscape should look like.

The verbal and visual narratives underlying Emerson’s construction of wilderness landscape link him, retrospectively, to the past and, prospectively, to the codes of modern advertising. Retrospectively, these practices include palimpsest landscape,⁷ a landscape scrubbed of native inhabitants and ecology awaiting occupation by an imperial self. Unhindered by the status hierarchies of European civilization, resource limitations, or by the aboriginal occupants, the imperial self is freed by palimpsest landscape to improvise self identity through commodities against a projected backdrop of “vacant” nature. Second, the narrative of the imperial self, an entity created, coevally, with vacant America, is perpetuated. We discover our identity, as occupier, possessor, of the

“vacant” lands of America at the same time that its “wilderness” landscape, as in a painting placed on an easel, is put on view.

Prospectively, Emerson’s use of wilderness as a site for enacting self transformation through commodified spectacle links him to the codes of modern advertising. Read carefully, Emerson’s wilderness is a stage constructed for the purposes of dramatizing self invention through commodified scenic backdrop. The drama works in good part because Emerson serves as self appointed inter-locutor within the visual frame by which wilderness is apprehended. Within the visual frame of wilderness Emerson addresses an urban capitalist who qualifies for moral consideration and personhood through consumption of scenic nature. The disembodied voice of the inter-locutor invites refashioning of identity through the galvanizing experience of encountering “wilderness” landscape. The beholding of wilderness, an expensive commodity whether as art object or tourist spectacle, dignifies and elevates the subject *at the behest of the inter-locutor*.⁸ Arriving at the scene as a crass mercenary in the service of capital, the beholding subject departs as an imperial self, an owner of a piece of national landscape, and a cultured gentleman equal to the best Europe has to offer. Hence self transformation through commodified spectacle becomes purchasable as a mass experience.

So described we begin to see Emerson’s wilderness landscape as the portal through which America becomes the tribal community of imperial selves spoken of by McLuhan and others.⁹ Each and every Marlboro Man and Virginia Slims woman, Joe Cool and Martha Stewart homemaker is engrossed in narcissistic self invention through commodities according to narratives best articulated in Emerson’s writings. To be sure the tribal nature of the community is obscured by commercial segmentation along the lines of ethnic-class-gender-generational affiliation and cultural iconology. There is Shirley Polykof, an account manager at Foote, Cone and Belding,

who sheds her Ukrainian Jewish past by means of hair dye. She became Clairol Woman, a Nordic, blond, stereotypical beauty, the account prospered, and the slogan “Does She or Doesn’t She?” was indelibly written on the American mind.¹⁰ There are the many young women wishing, vainly, to remain so. In ad space this wish is *granted* by modeling oneself after Joss Stone, the eighteen year old soul singer from Devon, England. The former Gap model, Jessica Parker, modeling the same jeans *but* age forty, is so over.¹¹ The Pepsi Generation of yesteryear defeated stodginess and decrepitude by drinking pop.¹² Marlboro Man offers an alternative to life as a suburban couch potato. You can acquire true dimension by dressing as *bwana*, a Banana Republic safari hunter and plantation owner. You will need a Ford Explorer and Pentax camera to accessorize these transformations. These modern fantasies of self invention achieve narrative unity and coherence solely by virtue of being posed against the backdrop of a common landscape. It is one invented by Emerson as a model for the nation.

Modern ad space is the successor to the bogus landscape of infinite nature and palimpsest representation staged by Emerson in his quest to break free of patriarchal Boston Brahminism. While Emerson’s role as “author” will be hedged¹³ and while the role of the technological sublime, complement to Emerson’s contemplative sublime, will need explanation, the main contention--that modern ad space derives from Emerson’s wilderness creation--will be upheld throughout. The other features of modern advertising--the imperial self, palimpsest landscape representation, self improvisation through commodities, and the hidden inter-locutor within the visual frame--are also presented as integral to Emerson’s model of empty nature in the farthest west. Williamson helps to make the connection between a discourse of commodification and a landscape of self invention when she notes that all advertising features a hidden inter-locutor within the visual frame of ad space. The consumer is

addressed from within a vacant, decontextualized space (void of ecology, production and labor, and of occupants making counter claims) about improvisation of identity through commodity purchase. The inter-locutor asserts a relation between “referent systems” (based on nature, celebrity, status, gender-ethnic-generational group) and commodities. An invitation is extended by the inter-locutor to “’freely’ create ourselves,” first, by affirming the relation asserted between referents and commodities and, second, by commodity purchase. Paradoxically, an affirmative response followed by commodity choice conforms us to “the way in which they have already created us.”¹⁴ The same formula applies to the urban capitalist inducted by Emerson into wilderness “nature” and into the “nation” which sanctions his/her quest for unity pursued through idiosyncrasy in commodity choice.

Although Emerson often stressed the novelty of his ideas, here the emphasis is on the considerable amount of old wine bottled in his “new” containers. This inheritance of ideas includes: (classical) liberalism, the Lockean idea that the right of the individual is prior and superior to the right of the state;¹⁵ laissez faire capitalism, the idea of the individual as the sole possessor of his talents and energies and whatever wealth, or instruments of wealth creation (human, physical, financial capital), may be acquired through their exercise;¹⁶ nationalism, the ghostly idea of a(n) (American) collective consciousness existing independently of any one of its members;¹⁷ and, not least, the biblical idea of nature as an artifact with no remainder of the natural world as an independent, self subsisting entity.¹⁸ These intellectual dependencies do much to upset claims of originality made in behalf of Emerson and to suggest that his gift rather lies in a vernacular expression of many commonly held beliefs. It is not, therefore, the originality of Emerson’s writing on any one of these ideas that makes him of interest to the students of American culture and the ad industry. It is his deployment of these

ideas in an invented space, the American wilderness landscape, where personal transformation is effected at a distinct site and through commodified spectacle alone. *This* socially invented space is a point of origin for the modern concept of ad space.

The Imperial Self in Nature.

The concept of “wilderness” Emerson advances has been criticized on the grounds that the values he allegedly finds in “nature” do not originate “out there” in an objective state of affairs but rather have their source within a projection of mind. W.J.T. Mitchell, for example, stresses that landscape involves a comprehensive shaping and molding of nature to serve broadly defined cultural ends. “It,” he says, (meaning landscape) “is already artifice in the moment of its beholding, long before it becomes the subject of pictorial representation.”¹⁹ Granted this assessment, Emerson does not observe unmediated wilderness landscape. Rather the wilderness landscape he observes is mediated by the classical liberal perspectives referred to above out of which the pre-European, colonial, American landscape is fashioned. Nevertheless, if the object of Emerson’s beholding of wilderness is not *observation* of the landscape but the *imposition* of preferred values, then he is better served by the idea of unmediated nature he advances. By representing the American frontier as “wilderness,” a blank tablet, all features of the relict landscape arising from culture, ethnic community, and ecology are removed from view. The task of writing the imperatives of the “Self of the nation and of nature” upon the landscape may then proceed unobstructed by conflicting evidence. Put differently, Emerson’s palimpsest representation of landscape frees him to impose values for the nation, the self, and nature on wilderness following the pretense that he is discovering them there.

The author of Emerson’s landscape is the imperial self, one who improvises identity against the backdrop of vacant, decontextualized, wilderness. The “imperial self” is conceived by

Emerson, necessarily, as an isolate. S/he is marked off from the customary norms of social intercourse and commitment by freezing disavowal. Using Emerson as a representative example, the self is "imaginatively de-socialized" from family, society, class, and ethnic background. When Emerson invokes nature, as he frequently does, it is always with a view to magnifying the powers of the solitary and depreciating the contributions of the social. The self is "spherical" Emerson asserts, and is complete within itself, needing nothing outside itself, no society, kindred, neighbors, or community of any kind, to complete itself.²⁰ Emerson announced that he, for one, was tendering his resignation from any elements of associative life to which he had not formally consented. His authentic, solitary, self, whose claims were prior and superior to those of society, demanded no less. Nor could the most intimate bonds of friendship and love restrain him because "nature" overruled such claims. "The great and crescive self, rooted in absolute nature, supplants all relative existence, and ruins the kingdom of mortal friendship and love."²¹

A contemporary of Emerson, Alexis de Toqueville, famously and appositely remarked that the distinguishing characteristic of the American was that he was "born equal" and did not have to "becom(e) so." Unlike his feudal ancestors in Europe, the American was not under the obligation of overthrowing feudal institutions; he was *already* consubstantially an imperial self with a scope of rights equal to all others in the political community.²² Emerson goes further when he says that beyond being "born equal" there is an impetus towards self reinvention among Americans, a desire to be, as it were, "born again," and not just once, but perpetually. Since society is certain to oppose this impetus, one wishing to fulfill one's potentialities as a man or woman must understand oneself as fated to be an oppositional figure. This is because the imperatives of self identity are perpetually being revised in a quest for completion or "sphericity." "Because," as Emerson says, "the soul is progressive, it

never quite repeats itself, but in every act attempts the production of a new and fairer whole.”²³

The prior and absolute rights of the imperial self over society and state focus attention on the person as the bearer of rights. But in some sense this view is misleading because it is not the person (an I) who bears these rights, but the eye, the all seeing, cosmic and spiritual eye of the poet. Emerson, the poet, identifies himself with this eye in a passage where he imagines himself a “transparent eyeball..a part or parcel of God.”²⁴ The eye is the “soul” of the person, Emerson says, the organ of spiritual insight and the means by which we obtain access to those transcendental, incorporeal realities by which the cosmos is ruled. The soul is opposed to the “Not Me,” he relates, which consists “of both nature and art, all other men, and my own body.”²⁵ We can imagine Emerson, then, as a contemporary wag and caricaturist once did, as a distended, disembodied, and bloodshot eyeball employed in surveying the cosmos from a position of utter and unconvincing detachment.²⁶ The eye is perched above a spindly, neglected, unused, body, a lifeless carcass solely useful as a prop to the head which in turn houses the eye. But though detached, this eyeball, owing to its superior powers of insight, commands an authority which the mere person can never equal.

Companion to the imperial self rooted in nature is a fictive landscape wherein this self can engage in a task of parthenogenesis, apart from the constraints of custom, family, social hierarchy, and class, apart from everything European and then some. Emerson’s writings are almost entirely focussed on carving out this “vacant” landscape i.e. vacant of counter claims against the American manhood he saw it as his duty to create and nurture. He attached unusual devotion to sites such as the western frontier regions, the wilderness, where the landscape supported the possibilities of self creation in terms of removal of constraints. Yosemite, a site to which

he traveled in 1871 in the company of Boston literati, qualified as ideal among western landscape possibilities in great part because of its properties as just such a palimpsest. To him it was a “wilderness” satisfying native, distinctively American, aspirations.

The irony of this appellation is that Yosemite was never wilderness within any acceptable sense of the term. The fiction of Yosemite as “wilderness” was created in the aftermath of the successful battle for its protected status only by ejection of the historic owners, the occupying Ahwahneechee (Big Mouth) Indians (1864-1868).²⁷ That is to say its status as wilderness never existed status quo ante and was only created retroactively by force. Muir, a resident of Yosemite at the time of the great man’s visit, was bemused by Emerson. He sought Emerson’s company for a walk through the valley hoping to discuss with him its geology and botany. These overtures were rejected as digressions. Muir recorded, “His party, full of indoor philosophy, failed to see the natural beauty and fullness of promise of my wild plan.”²⁸ Exactly. The nature which preoccupies Emerson is an infinitude which corresponds to the claims of the solitary, spherical self; one is oneself a cosmos and one seeks in nature, wild, inexhaustible nature, wilderness, an entity analogous to the limitlessness defining human personality.²⁹ Muir’s interest in the ecology and geological history of Yosemite speaks to a different set of concerns.

On occasion Emerson finds the ideal landscape virtually in his own back yard. In “Nature” he writes that the “poet” (Emerson, himself) “owns the landscape” comprised of some twenty or thirty farms surrounding Concord in a way that the separate farmers who possess title can never do. “Miller owns this field, Locke that, and Manning the woodland beyond. But none of them owns the landscape.” This is because, “there is a property in the horizon which no man has but he (the poet) whose eye can integrate all the parts.”³⁰ Unknown to Miller, Manning and Locke, the landscape

which they till and cultivate affords choice spirits a spectacle and a means of self reinvention. The landscape truly belongs to those who perceive the possibilities for self creation inherent in this spectacle and to this the warranty deeds of the farmers can give no title.

These poetic musings are not as innocent as they may appear. They prepare for the actual *physical* possession and despoliation of the western lands by the settler and immigrant armies and they sanction ejection of the Amerindians, as we saw in the fate of the Ahwahneechee, from those lands.

Inhering in this distinction between the landscape owned by the poet and that possessed by the farmers of Concord is a semiotic claim. The landscape owned by the poet embraces the all, cosmic nature, and thus, in comparison to the Concord farm land, possesses signifying power of vastly greater importance. The conventional landscape falls within the purview of a whole society of possessive individuals owning property in fee simple and is barren of real significance.³¹ In this distinction between cosmic and conventional landscape, sacred and profane nature, is born the redemptive importance and fungible role as signifier which the national parks and wilderness are later to possess. For the national parks dignify and elevate appropriation of nature (outside the parks) by the Concord farmers, immigrant armies, and settlers, under the condign aegis of the poet. He, alone, sanctions dispensation of the public domain on the basis of an authority derived from the nation and the Oversoul.³² Two-thirds of the public lands are transferred into private hands during the latter part of the 19th century but it matters not if they are restored at the level of spectacle and symbolism by the poet speaking for the aesthetic nation.³³

If wilderness landscape is the site where the claims of the imperial self are met, landscape art is critically important to their expression. By inspiring the soul's evolution landscape offers a means of rescuing American manhood from its failures. "Nothing

less than the *creation* of man and nature,” is the end of landscape art, Emerson affirms, and this means canvasses of this kind should represent nature after the pattern of a palimpsest, acknowledging no prior constraints originating in history or convention.³⁴ “Art should exhilarate, and throw down the walls of circumstance on every side, awakening in the beholder the same sense of universal relation and power which the work evinced in the artist.”³⁵ History is discarded because it is an “impertinence and an injury” when it is anything other than “a cheerful apologue or parable of my (the artist’s) being or becoming.”³⁶ Convention is also jettisoned because it leads to drab imitation. To be a landscape artist is to render a “fairer creation than we know” and for this the artist is required to consider the landscape a *tabula rasa*, a blank slate, on which the imperial self inscribes its own personal vision without constraint.³⁷ Paradoxically, the landscape inscribed by solitary, imperial genius will possess broad public appeal. For the artist “must employ the symbols in use in his own day and age to convey his enlarged sense to his fellow men.”³⁸

Wilderness.

A famous painting, “The Grand Canyon of the Yellowstone,” executed by Thomas Moran in 1872, a year after Emerson’s tour of Yosemite, illustrates Emerson’s ideal of wilderness landscape. It depicts a site, the precursor of modern ad space, wherein an imperial self comes to presence as witness to the natural sublime. Historic accounts of the layout of the national parks and wilderness areas emphasize the prior construction of such sites, then called prospects, certifying access to the experience of the sublime according to the Emersonian canon. The rim of the Grand Canyon, the face of Half Dome in Yosemite, the view of Niagara Falls from Goat Island join the Yellowstone Gorge as examples of such iconic vistas.³⁹ Photographers and landscape artists were often on hand at these sites to provide confirmation that the witness was indeed

there and the appropriate experience, even though ineffable, experienced. The emphasis is thus upon private access to a spectacle for which words are inadequate, the spectacle is fabricated in advance, the indescribable is recorded, and the private is actually intended for publication.⁴⁰ An explanation for these contradictions is that we are in the presence of a business established to serve a private need for a mass experienced product—self transformation by the natural sublime packaged as spectacle and sold as a product.

The Moran painting has as its apparent focal object the gorge of the Yellowstone canyon. A shaft of yellow light penetrates the gorge on the right throwing into relief a stand of spruce clinging to a rocky scree and disappearing into the canyon bottom. The scene is witnessed by two men who are shown perched atop a rock in the foreground of the painting from which they overlook the gorge. The waters of the Yellowstone river rush towards them, some distance below, from a falls shown at the extreme end of the gorge. Their enchantment with the scene appears to liberate them from fear even though the drop beneath their feet is precipitous.

This is patriotic, triumphal landscape at its zenith. The natural landscape of the new nation--its falls, gorges, and mountains--are pitted against the artifacts of European culture--its cathedrals, palaces, parks, and heroic monument--to the disadvantage of the latter. America is set apart from Europe, its peer and rival, because of the rich endowment of its resources and unmatched beauty. Yet it is not only, or even primarily, the spectacle of the canyon that the painting emphasizes but the *beholder(s)* of the canyon, Emerson's subjects beholding "unmediated" nature precisely, and *owning* it because gifted with superior powers of appreciative insight. It is as if, absent the beholding subject, the producer and consumer of this spectacle, the vast canyon would recede and disappear from view.

This is an eerie moment. Nature, itself, Moran suggests as Emerson did before, is held in suspense by ourselves, an imperial,

beholding subject who summons it into existence and for whose benefit, exclusively, it displays its powers and its charms. These beholders of the canyon, comfortably dressed in top coats, are obviously tourists. A further surmise is that they have been transported close to the site they occupy by the only means available, a spur of the Northern Pacific railroad (nowhere visible in the painting), and they are undoubtedly housed at the only hotel, the Mammoth, on the premises.⁴¹

The painting, then, brings to view what is only implied in other frontier canvases, the imperial subject whose gift of a transparent eyeball provides the means of beholding and constructing nature. Put differently, the nature beheld, the gorge of the Yellowstone canyon, is an incident within a painting which is really about ourselves as imperial creators of nature. This reflection becomes a reflection in turn upon the towering human capacities, those exerted by the railroads, the media, the military, and the hotel industry, who are laboring night and day to make this spectacle of nature possible, record it in imperishable paintings and photography, and, of course, to make a profit for themselves. Unwittingly, Moran's foregrounding of privileged, tourist spectatorship calls attention to those who collaborate behind the scenes in the production of spectacle. But if the production of vacant, imperial space is actually a collective endeavor, then to credit the imperial self with its creation must be false. The production of a social space wherein the imperial self comes to presence, while represented as private by Moran (and Emerson), is actually public. It is driven by and satisfies the acquired taste of a cultivated mass audience.

Suspecting that the powers of the transparent eyeball do not really extend to nature production after all, we wonder how the effect of unmediated nature is achieved. Editing nature to remove evidence of exclusion, territorial aggression, and ecological impact,

all key attributes of palimpsest representation, is the chief means. The spectacle is void of native inhabitants. The Bannock, Shoshone, and Crow were expelled from Yellowstone as formerly the Ahwahneechee were driven from Yosemite in order to achieve the effect of an unmediated wilderness nature beheld by white men. Among the early appointees to parks management at Yellowstone, unsurprisingly, were former members of the military necessary to effect this purpose.⁴² Second, the apparatus and disfiguring effects of hydraulic mining carried on within the near vicinity of the parks and the Yellowstone gorge are removed from view.⁴³ These unfortunate reminders of production and labor trouble the transcendental imagination and distress enjoyment of spectacle. The hotel industry and the railroad spur which took visitors from the main trunk line of the Northern Pacific to the park is edited out. Once editing is completed, the basic elements of a palimpsest landscape are presented to view. Now we are ready for occupation and inscription by well dressed tourists visually liberated to enjoy the spectacle of the gorge.

Paradoxically, therefore, “wilderness” nature in Emerson is the sign of its opposite--a world of commodities and their consumption. It is through “nature” commodified as spectacle that we become imperial selves entitled to further commodify nature without remainder. Alan Trachtenburg biting captures the paradox of wilderness as the portal to shop windows, tourism, and ad space when he says,

The buried contradiction here between the appeal of wild grandeur and the comfort of mechanized access to the site where such an appeal can be satisfied is not merely comic in its blithe leap over wagon track and rotting carcasses that marked a mode of access only a few years past; it indicates a special kind of denial of social fact that afflicted sections of American culture in these years. Thus the railroad, the prime

instrument of large-scale industrialization which re-created American nature into “natural resources” for commodity production, appears as a chariot winging Americans on an aesthetic journey through the new empire. Tourism, already implicit in the landscape conventions, becomes yet another form of acting upon the land.⁴⁴

This paradox may be difficult to accept. Emerson is a self-declared nature-poet, one of the darlings of the environmental movement.⁴⁵ Fairness requires engaging this opposing viewpoint as well as providing added support for Emerson’s role in the genesis of commercial advertising. Of help in getting this discussion underway is a removal of the screens from behind which he speaks and attention to the scope of his exclusions from wilderness landscape. The ensuing discussion shows that location of the imperial self in nature deflects attention from the class origins of Emerson’s ideas. The tourist imagination may be liberated by Emerson’s natural sublime but the unprivileged and the aboriginal other are not among its beneficiaries. More importantly, removal of the multiple screens concealing Emerson’s real position discloses a hidden alliance between the natural sublime and the purposes of commodity capital. Emerson’s contemplative, natural sublime is dependent on the technological sublime of the railroad industry, the national parks managers, and hotel industry for its expression and existence. Moreover the natural sublime harbors the biblical idea of nature as an artifact, the foundational idea inspiring capitalism’s transformation of nature into commodity artifacts.

Workers, Amerindians, and, fantastically, the political community are excluded from the landscape intuited by poetic genius. Workers are an early, unregretted casualty following upon the keen pleasure taken by the poet in the landscape. The poet’s delight lifts him out of the body into that altered state of being earlier termed a “transparent eyeball.” Here the self consumed by

visual pleasure is relieved of the cumbersome and obnoxious features of embodiment and becomes one with the cosmic nature. “I am nothing. I see all; the currents of the Universal Being circulate through me.”⁴⁶ The pleasure of the poet in the landscape is spoiled, however, if industry is in progress at the same site. “(Y)ou cannot freely admire a noble landscape if laborers are digging in the field hard by. The poet finds something ridiculous in his delight until he is out of the sight of men.”⁴⁷ Left unstated but reasonably evident is that the occasion of the poet’s discomfort is the sight of the discomfort of labor. Labor recalls the poetic genius to the life of embodied pain and contradicts the illusion that we are disembodied eyeballs. It interrupts the illusion, so friendly to the suburban and tourist imagination, that visual delight in nature is always or even often “free.” More often than not the apparent transparency of nature is purchased by the activity of labor, one’s own or more likely others, as well as technical advances such as the camera in lifting away the features of embodiment from the visual imagination. Remarkably, Emerson laments the distracting effect of labor on the imagination of the poet but not the greater limitations imposed on the “laborers” themselves. Ignoring the class origins of his construction of the landscape, he perpetually invokes the uplifting effects of vacant nature on “man,” perhaps a cosseted, figuratively, his “godship.”

Amerindians have already been mentioned as among the groups excluded from the community of imperial selves delighted by poetic landscape. Certainly, Emerson’s emphasis on the poet’s *imaginative* possession of a space only provisionally owned by others turns the attention to an “objective correlative,” an actual landscape which will fulfill the poetic requirements.⁴⁸ Since the “vacant” pre European, colonial landscape fantasized by Locke and European settlers is no longer available to supply this correlative,

the poet's imagination naturally turns to the aborigine owned, western regions to supply the deficiency.

Still another group excluded from wilderness landscape is the political community. If vacant nature and the imperial, beholding subject are inscribed within the narratives of the American wilderness sublime, the state is written out. It as if the imperial self had opted out of the contractual agreements creating the state and reclaimed immunity for the pre-political, solitary, imperial self in "nature." A self governing unit of these isolates was then to be relocated from Washington to some indeterminate point out west with Emerson, an American Moses, leading the way.⁴⁹ As with the abolition of aboriginal perspective this is a startling development. The government was vital at every turn to the development of the western lands which Emerson and Thoreau prized though they do not mention it. The state provided land grants to the railroads, mapped the location of valuable minerals, undertook expensive land reclamation and irrigation projects, administered the sale of public lands, and provided the military force which enabled settlers to occupy tribal "wilderness" lands.⁵⁰ Taken one by one, the crescive selves of Emerson's essays, would have been incapable of carrying out any of these projects.⁵¹

Given the scope of these exclusions we must ask with Jonathan Bordo, what occasions the conceit that the subject beholding nature is served by a condition of "wilderness"?⁵² Emerson answers that wilderness is the sign of cosmic nature and as such a revelation to the poet of the divine mind.

In the woods, we return to reason and faith..Standing on the bare ground—my head bathed by the blithe air and uplifted into infinite space—all mean egotism vanishes. I become a transparent eyeball; I am nothing; I see all; the currents of Universal Being circulate through me. I am part or parcel of God.⁵³

A different answer involves removal of the screens from behind which Emerson speaks. There is first the screen of the imperial, distended eye tenuously housed in the carcass of the poet. It is plain that Emerson, the son of a Congregational minister and the recipient of an inheritance and Harvard education, speaks from an established position of considerable privilege for this curious view. The speculation arises that this conceit is nourished by the numerous offices performed in his behalf by the female members of his household as well as by the privileges of the class for whom he speaks. These conferred on him a favored condition, so much so that he could enjoy the ease and delicious conceit of imagining himself as disembodied.

Emerson supposed disembodiment as the universal condition rather than his peculiar good fortune because of a penchant for universalizing, beyond the class of privileged, disaffected Whigs, a life of beneficent circumstance. Nevertheless, the shortcomings of this perspective is evident. The class which manipulates capital, its apologists such as Emerson included, directs its use to artifacts lifting away from themselves the features of aversive embodiment, while exposing the laboring class to conditions of embodied pain.⁵⁴ At its most extreme, this inequity takes the form of supposing that the ocular imagination, characterized by extension of the senses outward into the world, frees us from the limitations of embodiment. This emancipated condition is not acknowledged as class bound but represented instead as universally accessible. The social imagination so described defines Emerson.

A second screen is the imperial isolate achieving self actualization in the wilderness. Wilderness, if it be such, is an unpicturable condition. Picturing, as Bordo points out, implies a human presence on the landscape bringing with it alteration in the circumstances of unmediated nature. Therefore, wilderness cannot be pictured free of an ulterior motive. In Emerson's case this is the

inscription of preferred Euro-centric and capitalist values on wilderness landscape without acknowledging their origin in human agency. Wilderness, as discussed above, is in fact a cultural artifact whose peculiarity is that it is unrecognized as such. The values imported by Emerson into the projection of wilderness are reassigned to nature, an entity ordinarily considered to stand outside the realm of human agency and of history.

Understood this way, the wilderness landscape witnessed (allegedly) by Emerson, his contemporaries, and successors, has an obscurantist function. It enables an Euro-centric and capitalist civilization to impose its values, more specifically a class and gendered outlook, on a credulous public located back east without calling attention to their social origin.⁵⁵ The class origin of Emerson's ideas, once we begin to pay attention, directs us to the increasing separation of the functions between management and labor occurring in the urban centers of the east. Speculatively, this bifurcation creates a preference among the urban elite for a wilderness landscape that will recognize these differences, compliment their good taste in choosing wilderness landscape as the product of learning and cultivation, and enhance pleasure in their choice by means of landscape representation.

Emerson's hidden alliance with commodity capital is further underscored by attending to the biblical origin of his concept of nature. Emerson pretends that the observational position from which he speaks is located in wilderness nature. If, however, wilderness is an objective correlative as previously suggested, its meaning is to be sought in the landscape from which the projection originates not in the landscape onto which the projection is made. Emerson's "vacant" wilderness is a fiction located in class differences and patriarchal issues within the Whig, commercial Protestant, eastern seaboard, culture. The idea of nature harbored by this class culture is far from unmediated.

It cleaves, as does Emerson, to the biblical idea of a created nature,⁵⁶ nature as an artifact, the creation of a determinate artificer, God or man, and therefore a nature whose latent purpose is fulfilled when transformed into artifacts serving human utilities. Nature, so understood, is friendly to capitalist enterprise, “the men of mine, telegraph, mill, map, and survey”⁵⁷ whom Emerson admired then transforming the face of America. Additionally, this idea unites disparate elements, straddling the accustomed division of morals and groups into material and spiritual values, religion and capitalist enterprise. For if by “materialism,” a slippery word, we mean the transformation of the world into artifact, the Bible, especially the Old Testament, is allied with this purpose and not in opposition to it. Emerson’s “vacant nature,” on its face a travesty of ecological values, is not directed to preservation of a pastoral idyll as some have written but rather to its exploitation in the service of human needs and material benefits.⁵⁸

From this counter position we can begin to see that the poet and the capitalist, while looking at the landscape from a different vantage, are joined at the back. Emerson’s role as poet is created for him by his role as son of a Congregational minister applying received biblical ideas. In this capacity he effects a synthesis, call it populist-evangelical-capitalism, out of the biblical idea of nature as inert, passive, and awaiting transformation into artifacts *narrowly construed as commodity artifacts*. “Nature,” Emerson writes, “is thoroughly mediate. It is made to serve. It receives the dominion of man as meekly as the ass on which the Saviour rode. It offers all its kingdoms to man as the raw material which he may mould into what is *useful*.”⁵⁹ Thus, the poet may “own” the physical and cultural landscape, as Emerson says,⁶⁰ in the sense that he has better insight than the capitalist into the biblical mythology lurking behind the activities of the latter. But, conversely, capital transforms the landscape the poet occupies (and claims to perceive) into an artifact

which transparent eyeballs may regard with complacency. Indeed, the transparent eyeball is a cultural and technological construction, not an independent soul stuff sprung from the beyond.

The interwoven positions of poet and capitalist grow out of their common roots in the biblical idea of created nature. This idea of nature, hinted at by Emerson in the emphasis on a new world *created* by the landscape artist, is taken up in numerous passages of the Essays. Since the “world..the double of the man,” is nothing but the “realized will” of a pantocrator⁶¹ it is up to each man who wishes to realize his potentialities to “alter, mould, and make” the world into something resembling the “heaven” that he desires.⁶² “Build therefore your own world,” Emerson commands, in short, achieve apotheosis through artifice of like scope and magnitude to the Genesis epic and to the works of the biblical creator. Human powers, truly understood, are equivalent to the great maker of the world in the beginning; nature, an infinitely plastic, passive, inexhaustible material, awaits the procreative, poietic activity of the male spirit. *This* nature is the product of a creative will, God’s or man, but always and only an artifact produced by a determinate artificer. Its ideal condition is achieved when transformed by human imagination and industry into artifacts. Such artifacts may be classified broadly, the landscape which joins the self, nature and nation, the poet’s work. Alternatively, artifacts may be categorized more narrowly as that subset intended for market relations, commodities, the work of the capitalist. Both artificers, poet and capitalist, are joined within a landscape which calls upon them, indeed commands them, to continue the work of the creation epic.

The poet’s creation, national, iconic landscape is superior to the products of capitalism in the sense that national, wilderness landscape provides the sign by which the achievements of the latter are publicly dignified. This is an intangible function which possesses, at the same moment, *immense*, fungible value. For the

object sought by the tourist travelers to the national parks and wilderness landscape cannot be explained otherwise than as a pilgrimage to a holy site where, assisted by Emerson, they encounter and then seek to emulate the Maker whose Art is revealed in nature.⁶³ Pretending to represent that which is in fact unrepresentable, cosmic nature,⁶⁴ Emerson challenges these supplicants to rededicate themselves to the world altering task of commodity production. Only by such works is proof offered of their worth as artificers comparable to the God of the Genesis epic. Absolution granted, the supplicants are then released to return to the lands outside park and wilderness boundaries, outside the true church so to speak, with a license to resume the practices which brought them there.

Emerson's claim to enjoy a disembodied, intimate relation with wilderness landscape fails to acknowledge a dependence on the function of artifice and artifacts in lifting away the aversive features of embodiment from the beholding subject. *By subsuming "body" but not the spiritual, ocular imagination within "nature" he denies what is in fact the case, that there is a connection between perception and embodiment.* Once this dependence is brought to light the claim of the transparent eyeball to behold wholly spiritual, cosmic nature falls away and the commodity driven, capitalist culture out of which the claims of the imperial eye (I) are born becomes apparent. Missing from Emerson's account of sublime landscape is an acknowledgment of the role of labor and capital in effecting a change from raw, unaccommodating nature to one fit for aesthetic contemplation. He often seems not to be aware that the transparency and beauty he perceives in nature is, in fact, a collective achievement won at great cost *over* nature by society at large, a capitalistic society.

Ad Space

For Emerson, a modern,⁶⁵ nature is the sign of God's art as well as pointing to the art of man whose works imitate, by means of commodity production, God's art. He is further the inventor of a space, the precursor of ad space, wherein an imperial self comes to presence through a commodified "wilderness" landscape. Any ad featuring self invention through commodified landscape, therefore, owes a debt to Emerson. The Marlboro Country ads, obviously, are so indebted but so are the Yukon, Denali, and Tahoe ads, all of whom trade upon the signs and symbols of infinite nature as a means of conjuring into existence an imperial self deserving of one of these powerful machines. A distinction exists among ads adhering to the "modern" outlook like those above and ads showing the influence of a "postmodern" framework.⁶⁶ In the postmodern instance--an Absolut bottle super-imposed over Central Park, Manhattan offers an example--nature is no longer the *sign* of the commodity artifact, nature *is* a commodity artifact. The foregoing discussion of Emerson's contribution to advertising concludes by focussing on ads which use nature as the sign of the artifact, moves to ad space as a *landscape* derived from wilderness representation, and then speculates on the connection between modern and postmodern frameworks of advertising.

In Kate Soper's excellent book, What is Nature? she notes the frequent use of "nature" as "referent system" in commercial advertising.

Margarine comes to us from dew-bedecked pastures, cider from the age old orchards of country hamlets, whiskey out of Scottish burns (or Irish mists), mineral water direct from the Samuel Palmer landscape. The plough is still sometimes to be seen coming over the brow of the cereal packet, and the motor-car is always somewhere on the way back to nature. The rural provenance of commodities is now one of their most vital merchandizing features...(T)hat commerce can trade on

'nature' in this way bears witness to a widespread interest in not confronting the truth of its actual exploitation.⁶⁷

These examples, drawn from life in the English country side, have a charming innocence compared to the use of nature as signifier in the ad space of American culture. True to the Emersonian origins of American advertising the industry showcases artifacts corresponding to the outsize dimensions of the imperial self and its Siamese counterpart, imperial nature. Ford demonstrates the truth of its “No Boundaries” slogan by showing an Explorer en route across fragile, denuded, crypto-biotic terrain in the mountain desert climes of the southwest. General Motors names its high-powered Sport Utility Vehicle (SUV’s), a class escaping the restrictions on miles per gallon standards applying to the automobile fleet, Sequoia, Yukon, Denali, and Tahoe, all symbols of infinite nature. A Tahoe ad, a vista shot, zeros in on a minuscule fisherman on the edge of a stream, a mountain range cupping the horizon. Nature speaks in a caption below the ad and it argues that since “You are a microscopic speck in the universe, you might as well be a microscopic speck with more power.” Marlboro Man is projected against the expanse of nature out west for no other apparent reason than that the presence of unfenced nature means an absence of secondary smoke protocols.

In these examples the sign of nature is used as a means of concealment and obscurantism. Nature is improbably used to endorse its own demise and the introduction of toxic substances. But lurking within critiques of this sort, which can be turned against the Sierra Club as well as the neighborhood refinery,⁶⁸ is a more radical argument. It is possible that the use of nature as a referent system in ad space, while important, deflects attention from a still more important phenomenon: the production of a space wherein identity improvisation through commodities against the backdrop of infinite nature is naturalized. The production of this space serves the

interest of commodity capital in a more subtle way because the space that is projected is not an external datum like referent systems. It is rather a social and cultural creation arising out of distant, buried ideologies. This space transcends the many, often clashing, reference systems deployed in ad space by linking a national community of imperial selves within a common landscape of visual and verbal narratives. Nature as referent system has many authors but the production of a space which is the precursor to ad space is chiefly Emerson's master work.

Henri Lefebvre records that space is not a "thing but rather a set of relations between things."⁶⁹ It must be understood as the product of an accredited cultural perspective, then, one which arises out of historical and social relations such as the palimpsest wilderness landscape of Emerson. The presence of labor, competing groups, and resource limitations is edited out of this space in order to make it a fit object for scenic consumption by an urban managerial class, in essence a social class fronted by a collection of imperial selves. If we imagine the Marlboro cowboy as driver of the mega SUV's just mentioned, it does not seem very difficult to see this space and its companion persona, the imperial self, as ideal for exfoliating the purposes of commodity capital over space and time. The Marlboro cowboy *is* a descendant of the imperial self embedded in nature that Emerson talked about. Projected against an identical, passive, merely specular, vacant background, the cowboy rouses the suburban couch potato from his slumbers to effect a union of self, nature, and nation, in a way that was anticipated long ago by Emerson writing on the west. You are a "microscopic speck in the universe," the cowboy tells the couch potato, "you might as well be a microscopic speck with more power." Ergo, the Tahoe, a significant current form of imperial self extension through commodities is naturalized by a landscape taken straight from the stage props of Emerson.

Like Emerson's wilderness, ad space affords a passive, roving eyeball surveying opportunities for commodified self transformation a range of opportunities as immense as nature itself. This landscape interrogates us, as Emerson once did, concerning our fitness to be an imperial self, to "Break Through," as an ad for Cadillac Escalade exhorts, to the self constructed as an unopposed will. In an ad the Escalade is pictured passing a chartered Tour Bus on a sun bleached stretch of "blue" highway (state owned) threading western prairie lands. A rock and roll band inside the Tour bus gawks as the glossy black 345 horsepower, V8 SUV pulls around the side and passes. To the visual narrative of the Escalade pulling out and passing the bus is added the exhortation "Break Through." Who breaks through what? To what purpose?

Significantly, the Escalade breaks through the limitations of speed and power customarily defining automotive travel. This break through, as opposed to the one wrought by rock and roll culture, is in line with the infinite, always receding landscape of the west and with the prerogatives of the imperial self. Western, triumphal landscape is a visual analogue to the disembodied, imperial eye (I) restlessly scanning the horizon in search of opportunities for predation and precession. Thus the landscape complements the driver, the Escalade, and the culturally driven necessity of preceding all others. Summing up, "Break(ing) Through" is about getting in touch with your inner, imperial self by means of an uncommonly powerful SUV and a landscape comporting with your and its peculiar needs. This is the landscape that Emerson invents, that the landscape artists of the 19th century transmit, and that the modern ad industry perpetuates.

The merits of the interpretation above may be tested by comparing it with an alternative view which, in some respects, it resembles. T. Jackson Lears has argued that the ancestral source of advertising lies in the pseudo-therapeutic approaches adopted by

commercial Protestantism under siege from urban change, status anxieties and the challenges of “modernity,” a catch all for technological advance, labor unrest, and changes in economies of scale in merchandising, production, and distribution, Within this set of challenges, Bruce Barton created modern advertising by reformulating Protestant belief to emphasize the blessings of material wealth in this world. His Congregationalist father’s message of reward in the hereafter was not so much discarded as superseded and ultimately made irrelevant.⁷⁰ Since both Barton and Emerson, were sons of Protestant ministers under similar pressures and since both view the connection between ministry and material advancement in positive terms, their influence upon 19th century culture is comparable. But Barton actually had a role as an advertising executive and founder of Batton, Barton, Durstine, and Osborne, one of the nation’s first and still among the most prominent agencies. The palm should go to him, therefore, as father of advertising.

Missing from Lears’ account, however, is a sufficient appreciation of the social space required for acts of narcissistic self transformation through commodities. Concomitant to Emerson’s privileging of wilderness vistas is the project of voiding social space of resistance to self extension through commodities while, conversely, enlarging the sphere of private action. Recall that the political community is edited out of Emerson’s wilderness fantasy even though the state made western expansion possible. In this enterprise, as sociologist’s now regularly report, he succeeded brilliantly.⁷¹ It should come as no surprise then that the state is edited out of the Cadillac Escalade ad even though that is where the brunt of its ecological and social impacts will be felt. The Escalade requires a gallon of gas to propel it for twelve miles and it rates 0 on a scale of 1 to 10 in emission standards administered by the Environmental Protection Agency.⁷² It is engineered with a total

disregard for global warming, pollutant emissions, and resource consumption, and it is implicated in the trajectory of American oil imperialism in Central Asia and the Middle East.⁷³ The Escalade does not, in and of itself, engender these phenomena but as a metonym it perfectly captures the Emerson inspired cultural enthusiasms that lie behind them.

To be sure some critics of the ad industry view the relentless commodification of self and nature by the ad industry as a positive achievement. Herbert Gans, for example, argues that the ad industry liberates its audience, each potentially an imperial self, from the social pressures exerted by community, family, and neighborhood.⁷⁴ Daniel Boorstin, former head of the Library of Congress, makes a similar evaluation of the role of advertising. On returning from Russia in 1986, he reported that he lit a taper every time a commercial came on TV in his hotel room because “the commercial was an icon of freedom...a sign that we had the opportunity to choose.”⁷⁵ But we should ask Gans and Boorstin if it is liberation we are speaking of or a tightening of the cultural noose? The discipline of resource economics, for example, informs us that nature is not, contra Emerson, infinite but progressively in short supply as both resource and waste sink.⁷⁶ Appositely, the discipline of conservation biology remarks that nature is adversely affected by commodification at thresholds below resource availability in terms of the impacts exerted upon species life and ecosystems.⁷⁷ It is worth stressing that Emerson’s idea of nature as artifact and the landscape narrative conveying this idea is arrayed, *in principle*, against *both* of these opposing views.

Within the frame of ad space nature commonly serves as the sign of the commodity artifact. This is true whether nature is represented as the pastoral, wilderness, or western panorama (Marlboro country, Escalade, Pentax, Ford Explorer), or whether the referents of contemporary culture (generational change, colonial

adventure, Anglo-Saxon beauty, phallogocentric masculinity, the realized woman) are employed to “naturalize” the product (Pepsi-Cola, Banana Republic, Lady Clairol, Joe Cool, Virginia Slims). On occasion, the camouflage is removed and nature is transmuted into a postmodern phenomenon. It is *identical* to the commodity artifact (Coca-Cola is the “real thing,” Buick is “something to believe in,” Sherwin Williams paint “covers the world”). Central Park in the Absolut ad mentioned above metamorphoses into an Absolut bottle. Its new title is not Central Park, Manhattan but Absolut, Manhattan!

In these postmodern ads nature as a foil to the artefactual is eliminated and Jameson’s epitaph, “Postmodernism is what you have when the modernization process is complete and nature is gone for good,” is fulfilled. This appears to represent a break from modernity even though the postmodern condition is actually an extension of it. For the ads above remain indebted to Emerson as the progenitor of the key ideas on which its brand of advertising depends. This debt arises from Emerson’s invention of a space in which the imperial self comes to presence and his emphasis upon nature as latently an artifact. Given these premises, the latent artifact of nature (an imperfect condition) is remedied *after* modernity has run its course and nature, under duress from technology, industrialization and the ad industry, is manifestly revealed as the artifact it always was. And where is the imperial self in this ad? You, the viewer of an ad which positions you as a transcendental eyeball above Manhattan Island and which confers, by inference, the title of pro-consul of Absolut Manhattan, are that imperial self.

Discussion of a connection between Emerson and the modern ad industry may seem counter-intuitive. Much has changed since Emerson’s day. The space in which transformation is enacted, ad space rather than the space of the public lectern where Emerson conjured western landscape into existence, is changed. The

technologies by which the imperial self achieves extension in the world, the magnitude of ecological footprint imposed from commodity production, and the pace of life has changed. The camera, invented in Emerson's lifetime (1839), immeasurably extends the powers and reach of the transcendental eyeball. But the question remains whether technological change has altered, in substance, the cultural reading of the landscape. Putting aside matters of scale and technique all the underlying enthusiasms remain the same: the prior and absolutely superior rights of the imperial subject, a limitless self improvisation against a backdrop of inexhaustible, vacant, decontextualized nature (an "ass" Emerson says), a palimpsest landscape scrubbed of ecology and occupants on which to inscribe a message of self aggrandizement, the contempt for the restraints of society, custom, and resource limitations while at the same time remaining in step with the fundamentals of the American consensus.

Close

The landscape Emerson originates and that ad space perpetuates has ecocide as its end point. Wilderness landscape for Emerson is merely a sign referring back to the claims of the imperial self. So represented, visual pleasure in nature derives from its role as narcissistic complement to the infinitude of the spherical self. It sanctions physical possession of natural resources and augments claims, already, in principle, infinite in behalf of nature's transformation into human artifact. Capital and technology are hidden agents in the production of the disembodied visual imagination behind the imperial self so described. They contribute to the illusion of a self apart from nature and further accentuate the claims of the imperial self over nature. Emerson turns away from the recommendation made by his contemporary, John Stuart Mill, of a "steady state economy" held in check by sustainable development of resources towards a "progressive state economy" underwritten by

inexhaustible nature.⁷⁸ Rather than Mill's recommendation for a public debate over resource limitations, Emerson supplies a politics of landscape representation camouflaging resource exploitation (and conquest) by use of the sign of nature, nationalism, and manly independence. The relevance of these choices to the forces driving contemporary U.S. imperialism and environmental degradation seem sufficiently evident.

¹The idea of an “imperial self” governs Quentin Anderson’s book, an exploration of American cultural foundations, by the same name, The Imperial Self (N.Y.: Knopf, 1971). Sacvan Bercovitch’s “separate cosmic selves” The Rites of Assent (N.Y. Routledge, 1983) pp. 311, 319, and T.Jackson Lears, “stoic isolato” Fables of Abundance (N.Y.: Basic Books, 1994) pp. 363-64 are terms bearing close comparison. These terms should be used with caution because they deflect attention from Emerson’s role as spokesperson for a social and economic class. David Leverenz makes this criticism in Manhood and the American Renaissance (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1989) pp. 73-88.

² Ralph Waldo Emerson, The Complete Essays, with an intro. by Brooks Atkinson (N.Y.: Modern Library, 1950) p. 81. Hereafter, The Essays.

³ The Essays, pp. 6-7.

⁴ See Roderick P. Neumann, Imposing Wilderness (Berkeley, Ca.: University of California, 1998) p. 25, and Ramachandra Gaa, “Radical Environmental Criticism: A Third World Critique,” Environmental Ethics (Spring 1989) pp. 71-83.

⁵ William Cronon, Changes in the Land (N.Y.: Hill and Wang, 1983) pp. 167-170.

⁶ W.J.T. Mitchell, “Holy Landscape: Israel, Palestine, and the American Wilderness,” Critical Inquiry (Winter 2000) pp. 218-19. Efforts to repair the injury done to aboriginals and to save the credibility of “wilderness landscape” are discussed by M. Kat Anderson and Michael G. Barbour, “Simulated Indigenous Management: A New Model for Restoration in National Parks,” Ecological Restoration,” (December 2003) pp. 251-277. Also see Rebecca Solnit, As Eve Said to the Serpent (Athens, Ga: University of Georgia, 2001). Vine Deloria, an aboriginal, supplies a treatment of these same events from an aboriginal perspective in Custer Died for Your Sins (London: The Macmillan Company, 1969).

⁷ The idea of a palimpsest landscape is adapted from medieval manuscript preparation. It was a common practice in ecclesiastical circles, to rub out an earlier piece of writing by means of washing or scraping the manuscript, in order to prepare it for a new text. By the same token, John Locke famously and erroneously declares America to be “vacant” in the Second Treatise as prelude to colonial occupation. His misrepresentation is inspired by an interest in purging “nature” of feudal and resource limitations which might otherwise interfere with introduction of a classical-liberal, political economy. See John Locke, Second Treatise of Government (Indianapolis, Ind.: Hackett, 1980) section 36 and the discussion by C.B. Macpherson, The Political Theory of Possessive Individualism, (N.Y.: Oxford University Press, 1962), Peter Coates, Nature (Berkeley: University of California, 1998) pp. 110-124. Here Emerson’s “wilderness” landscape is viewed as successor to the palimpsest American landscape envisioned by Locke.

⁸ See the discussion of an inter-locutory voice positioned in wilderness landscape by Nathan Stormer, “Addressing the Sublime,” Critical Studies in Media Communication, (September, 2004) vol. 21, # 3, pp. 219-223. More precisely, Stormer suggests that the spectator of the natural sublime is first addressed by an inter-locutor who then turns to a third party, “Nature,” invoking its presence as in apostrophe.

⁹ McLuhan says, “the photo and TV seduce us from the literate and private ‘point of view’ to the complex and inclusive world of the group icon. That is certainly what advertising does. Instead of presenting a private argument or vista it offers a way of life that is for every body or nobody.” See Marshall McLuhan, Understanding Media (N.Y.: Signet, 1964) p. 205 and, The Mechanical Bride, (Boston: Beacon Press, 1951). Among current interpretations of advertising McLuhan’s, as is the case for my own view, is most nearly linked to “repressive liberalism” because it notes that while ads address us as “free” to improvise an identity through commodity purchases, on inspection we are only free to choose

the identity created for us in advance. We are liberated, then, but only repressively because the symbolic systems used to lure us into commodity purchases mask a de-sublimating, circular intent. See Judith Williamson, Decoding Advertisements, (London: Marion Boyars, 1986) pp. 17, 40-44, 50; Thomas Frank, The Conquest of Cool (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1997); Mark Crispin Miller, Boxed In (Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University 1988); Herbert Marcuse, One Dimensional Man (Boston: Beacon Press, 1969). For other interpretations of the advertising industry see footnote 70 below.

¹⁰ Malcom Gladwell, "True Colors," *New Yorker* (March 22, 1999) pp. 70-81.

¹¹ Ruth La Ferla, "Next!," *The New York Times* (May 19, 2005) E1.

¹² Frank, The Conquest of Cool, pp. 169-176.

¹³ In affirming that Emerson is the "author" of a landscape exfoliating the practices of commodity capital I do not wish to affirm that he sought this role, nor deny his association with other, more lofty, discourses, nor maintain that he intended this discourse to be his most important legacy. Nor do I deny that others have contributed significantly to this same discourse (see the discussion of Bruce Barton below). "Authorship," is retroactively conferred, Foucault justly argues, because the discursive community which an author seeks to bring about is prospective. See Michel Foucault, "What is an Author?" in Daniel Preziosi (ed.) The Art of Art History (N.Y.: Oxford University Press, 1998) pp. 299-314. Nevertheless, I do claim that his references to wilderness America as a site where an imperial self is reborn through commodified landscape hold clear relevance for the interpretation of contemporary advertising.

¹⁴ Williamson, Decoding Advertisements, pp. 40-44. See also Michael Schudson who describes consumer goods advertising as "relatively placeless and timeless" appealing to a set of idealized circumstances wherein, "the pleasures and freedoms of consumer choice" are exalted and where commodities serve as the markers of personhood, Michael Schudson, Advertising, The Uneasy Persuasion (N.Y.: Basic Books, 1984) p. 218

¹⁵ The prior influence of classical liberal ideology on American culture is posited in this essay rather than argued. For an introduction to this literature see Myra Jehlen, American Incarnation (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1986), Louis Hartz, The Liberal Tradition in America, (N.Y.: Harper Collins, 1957), John Opie, Nature's Nation (N.Y.: Harcourt, Brace, 1998), Jack Greene, The Intellectual Construction of America (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 1993), Philip Abbott, "Still Louis Hartz after All These Years," *Perspectives on Politics*, vol. 3, #1, (March, 2005) pp. 93-109.

¹⁶ Macpherson, The Political Theory of Possessive Individualism.

¹⁷ Benedict Anderson, Imagined Communities (London: Verso, 1991) pp. 22-24.

¹⁸ See Sacvan Bercovitch, "The Biblical Basis of the American Myth," in The Bible and American Arts and Letters, ed. by Giles Gunn (Phila., Pa.: Fortress Press, 1983); Elaine Scarry, The Body in Pain (N.Y.: Oxford 1986). See also Gordon D. Kaufman. A Problem for Theology: The Concept of Nature," Harvard Theological Review 65 (1972) pp. 337-366.

¹⁹ W.J.T. Mitchell, Landscape and Power, (Chicago: University of Chicago, 2001) p. 14. See also Raymond Williams, Problems in Materialism and Culture (London: Verso, 1980) p. 27.

²⁰ The Essays, 218. The phrase "imaginative de-socialization" is employed by Quentin Anderson, The Imperial Self, p. 4.

²¹ The Essays pp. 37, 218

²² Alexis de Toqueville, Democracy in America ed. by Philips Bradley, vol ii (N.Y.: Vintage, 1945) 108. Jehlen, American Incarnation, p. 8, makes a similar point when she suggests that the idea of liberal individualism is "incarnated" in America rather than deliberately adopted. It is "a description of things not only as they are but as they manifestly need to be."

²³ The Essays p. 169.

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- ²⁴ The Essays, p. 6.
- ²⁵ The Essays, p. 4.
- ²⁶ Cited in Lawrence Buell, Emerson (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003) p. 93.
- ²⁷ Rebecca Solnit, As Eve Said to the Serpent, (Ga.: University of Georgia, 2001).
- ²⁸ Quoted in Stephen Fox, John Muir and His Legacy (Boston: Little Brown, 1981) p.5. Fox says of Emerson, “The Concord philosopher, it seemed, could only accept nature in human terms, measured by human scales” p. 6-7.
- ²⁹ Myra Jehlen states that Emerson’s vision of man coming into his own through the beholding of vacant wilderness landscape is deeply imitative of then familiar apologies for westward territorial expansion. See Buell, Emerson, op. cit., p. 69. Niall Ferguson, Colossus, (N.Y.: Penguin Press, 2004) pp. 40-41 documents the significant, territorial expansion which occurred in America within Emerson’s lifetime.
- ³⁰ The Essays, p. 5
- ³¹ See Denis Cosgrove, Social Formation and Symbolic Landscape, (Madison, Wisc.: University of Wisconsin, 1984) ch. 6 for a discussion of American political community as organized, solely, on the basis of fee simple ownership.
- ³² On the fungibility of national, sublime landscape see Mitchell, Landscape and Power, p. 14. He says, “As a medium for expressing power, it (national landscape) has a semiotic structure rather like that of money, functioning as a special sort of commodity that plays a unique symbolic role in the system of exchange value. Like money, landscape is good for nothing as a use value, while serving as a theoretically limitless symbol of value at some other level.” Contrast Immanuel Kant, “Critique of Judgement,” in The Philosophy of Kant, ed by Carl J. Friedrich, (N.Y. Modern Library, 1949) pp. 284-324; Edmund Burke, A Philosophical Enquiry into the Sublime and the Beautiful, ed. by David Womersley, (N.Y.: Penguin 1998) pp. 86-127. For further discussion see Cosgrove, Social Functions and Symbolic Landscapes, pp. 223-253, Kate Soper, What is Nature?, (N.Y.: Blackwell, 1995) pp. 229-232.
- ³³ See Elizabeth Helsinger’s brilliant discussion of the “visual possession of England” in “Turner and the Representation of England,” W.J.T. Mitchell, Landscape and Power, p. 105
- ³⁴ The Essays pp. 305, 312.
- ³⁵ The Essays p. 312.
- ³⁶ The Essays, p. 157. Contrast Walter Benjamin, “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction,” Illuminations (N.Y.: Schocken Books, 1968). The artistic image, he says, loses its aura absent the historical context in which it originated. Consequent to this is a loss of representational authority.
- ³⁷ The Essays, p. 305.
- ³⁸ The Essays, p. 306.
- ³⁹ See David Nye, Narratives and Spaces, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997) pp. 16-21; Anne Whiston Spirn, “Constructing Nature: The Legacy of Frederick Law Olmsted,” in Cronon, Uncommon Ground, pp. 91-113.
- ⁴⁰ See especially Stormer, “Addressing the Sublime,” pp. 223-231.
- ⁴¹ Chris J. Magoc, Yellowstone: The Creation and Selling of an American Landscape (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico, 1999), p. 73.
- ⁴² Ibid. p. 63.
- ⁴³ Ibid. pp. 177-78.
- ⁴⁴ Alan Trachtenberg, The Incorporation of America (N.Y.: Hill and Wang, 1982) p. 19.
- ⁴⁵ Buell, Emerson, op. cit; Donald Worster, Nature’s Economy, (Cambridge, Mass.: Cambridge University Press, 1995), pp. 103-107.
- ⁴⁶ The Essays, p. 6.

⁴⁷ The Essays, compare p. 5 and 36. Leverenz interjects that Emerson's disparagement of labor is hard to see because he directs attention to defending American manhood against a decadent, patriarchal culture. We see his attack, then, on patriarchy and not his disguised attack on labor. The attack on patriarchy is motivated, Leverenz claims, by a desire to throw off the humiliation inflicted by his own father during his childhood years. As an adult Emerson revenged buried humiliations by a war of retribution, waged in the wilderness, in behalf of the imperial self against the fathers. See David Leverenz, Manhood and the American Renaissance (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1989).

⁴⁸ The concept is T.S. Eliot's. Its use in ad space is discussed by Williamson, Decoding Advertisements, p. 30. See also Mark Spence Dispossessing Wilderness (N.Y.: Oxford University Press, 1997). In "Imagining Nature and Erasing Class and Race: Carleton Watkins, John Muir, and the Construction of Wilderness," Environmental History, vol.6, #4 (October 2001) pp. 541-60 Kevin DeLuca and Anna Demo bring a racist charge against wilderness advocates.

⁴⁹ The Essays, 433. Emerson's hopes for regeneration of American manhood on the frontier are discussed by Leo Marx, The Machine in the Garden, (N.Y.: Oxford 2000) 238. The recovery by isolates in nature (such as Emerson) of pre political rights surrendered by social contract is one of the enduring tropes of American politics. See Louis Hartz treatment of this phenomenon, The Liberal Tradition in America, pp. 59-62.

⁵⁰ Patricia Nelson Limerick, The Legacy of Conquest (N.Y.:W.W. Norton, 1987).

⁵¹ The Essays, p. 705.

⁵² Jonathan Bordo, "Picture and Witness at the Site of Wilderness" in W.J.T. Mitchell, ed. Landscape and Power (Chicago: University of Chicago, 2001) p. 292.

⁵³ Essays, p. 6.

⁵⁴ An important discussion of embodiment and class conflict is supplied by Scarry, The Body in Pain, Part 2, sections 3 and 4. Also note Drew Leder, The Absent Body (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1990), Mark Johnson, The Body in the Mind (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1987).

⁵⁵ William Truettner The West as America (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution 1991) shows that "western" landscape is an invention of eastern capital backed by eastern seaboard wealth. To a lesser extent Chicago mercantile capital was also heavily invested in western landscape representation. For treatment of "western" cultural products consumed by the Chicago metropolis see William Cronon, Nature's Metropolis (N.Y.: William Norton, 1991), and Richard White, "Fredrick Jackson Turner and Buffalo Bill," in Richard White and Patricia Nelson Limerick (eds.) The Frontier in American Culture (Berkeley: University of California, 1994).

⁵⁶ The transmission of biblical ideas into western culture is addressed in Bronislaw Szerszynski, Nature Technology, and the Sacred (Oxford: Blackwell, 2005) and Frank M. Coleman, "Thomas Hobbes and the Hebraic Bible" *History of Political Thought*, (Winter, 2004) pp. 642-669 and "The Origins of Advertising Discourse: Locke, Landscape, and America," *Ethics, Place, and the Environment* (March, 2006) pp. 101-124.

⁵⁷ The Essays, p. 698.

⁵⁸ The literature dealing with the "materialist" thrust of the Old Testament is sparked by an essay of LynnWhite Jr. "The Historic Roots of Our Ecologic Crisis," Science 155 (March 10, 1967). A much better exposition of the biblical idea of *created* nature is provided by Elaine Scarry, The Body in Pain (N.Y.: Oxford 1986). See also Gordon D. Kaufman. A Problem for Theology: The Concept of Nature," Harvard Theological Review 65 (1972) 337-366 and Kenneth Olwig, "Reinventing Common Nature" in Uncommon Ground, 384-85. If it is granted that Emerson's idea of nature has its sources in biblical texts as interpreted above, then the pastoralist interpretation of his writings is misconceived. For an exposition of the pastoral account of Emerson see Perry Miller, "Nature and the

National Ego,” Errand into the Wilderness, and Marx, The Machine in the Garden, 229-239. For a reply to the White thesis entailing a discussion of the “J” contribution to the Genesis epic and the thought of John Muir see J. Baird Callicott, “Genesis and John Muir,” in Beyond the Land Ethic (Albany, N.Y.: State University of New York, pp. 187-219. See also Donald Worster, The Wealth of Nature, (N.Y.: Oxford University Press, 1993) pp. 207-212.

⁵⁹ The Essays, p. 22 (italics mine).

⁶⁰ The Essays, pp. 5, 6.

⁶¹ The Essays, p. 22.

⁶² The Essays, p. 42.

⁶³ Floyd Dominy, director of the Bureau of Reclamation, once defended flooding the Grand Canyon for the purposes of hydro electric generation on the grounds that it would make the Canyon rim more visible to tourism. David Brower, high druid of the Sierra Club, replied that by the same token the “Sistine Chapel” should be flooded so that visitors could get nearer the ceiling. That is the nub of it--the Grand Canyon is, figuratively, the Sistine chapel of “nature’s nation.” The sins of commodity capitalism upstream in Las Vegas are absolved by God’s tabernacle resident in the Grand Canyon downstream. See the account in Mark Reisner, Cadillac Desert (N.Y.: Penguin 1993) 242-43, 282-85.

⁶⁴ Particular instances of cosmic nature are representable--van Allen’s radiation belt, the Milky Way, the moons of Uranus, the double helix—but the idea of cosmic nature is an abstraction and is not. See Stormer, “Addressing the Sublime: Space, Mass Representation, and the Unrepresentable,” pp. 212-240.

⁶⁵ Here modernity is linked to the project announced by Thomas Hobbes in the introduction to Leviathan, “Nature,” Hobbes says in the famous introduction, “(the Art whereby God hath made and governes the World) is by the Art of Man, as in many other things, so in this also imitated,” that man can make government through pacts and covenants resembling “that *Fiat*, or the *Let us Make Man*” pronounced by God in the Creation,” and he can make “Automata” or, as we would say today, machines. This statement heralds the modern world where sages like Emerson follow Hobbes’s lead in hinting that the works of man improve upon and upstage the achievements of Israel’s Maker. See Thomas Hobbes, Leviathan, ed. by Richard Tuck, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991) pp. 9-10.

⁶⁶ Frederic Jameson’s now classic work is the basis for defining postmodernism as a condition where nature, formerly a foil to the artefactual, is reduced to an artifact, merely. See Frederic Jameson, Postmodernism, (Durham: Duke University Press, 1992) p. ix.

⁶⁷ Soper, What is Nature?, p. 194.

⁶⁸ See Timothy W. Luke, “Nature Protection or Nature Projection,” Capitalism, Nature, and Socialism (March, 1997) pp. 37-63 for a penetrating analysis of the use of nature symbolism by the Sierra Club.

⁶⁹ Quoted from Stormer, “Addressing the Sublime,” *op. cit.* p. 214.

⁷⁰ See Lears and Fox whose outlook contrasts with the “repressive liberalism” approach presented here. They argue that advertising is “pseudo-therapy.” They say that it fell to advertising elites to mitigate the social effects--instabilities in the family, labor force, and the community--of economies of scale in production, merchandising, and distribution of goods occurring in the latter part of the 19th century. Advertising duped the public into believing that the goods and services produced by new technologies and management systems could be adopted without disturbing cherished values of family and community. Thus advertising finessed, pseudo-therapeutically, the discontents of modernity See Roland Marchand, Advertising the American Dream (Berkeley: University of California, 1985) p. 359, T. Jackson Lears and Richard Fox, eds. The Culture of Consumption (N.Y.: Pantheon 1987) pp. 27,37. Also see the “class persuasion” interpretation of advertising. This interpretation theorizes that capitalist

“idealism” is upheld by advertising not so much through propagandistic assertion as by repeatedly affirming that its merits need not be questioned. See especially Michael Schudson, Advertising: The Uneasy Persuasion (N.Y.: Basic Books 1986) pp. 215-18. An important effect is that class antagonisms are depoliticized. They are deflected downward and away from their actual sources in wealth distribution and conditions of work and into comparatively trivial matters of taste and style. See Stuart Ewen and Elizabeth Ewen, Channels of Desire (N.Y.: McGraw Hill 1982) p. 265, Stuart Ewen, Captains of Consciouness (N.Y.: McGraw Hill 1976) pp. 19, 25, Stuart Ewen, All Consuming Images (N.Y.: Basic Books 1988) p. 79. Another view “social discourse” trades upon anthropological discourse in holding that advertising is simply “social communication through and about objects.” See William Leiss, Stephen Kline, Sut Jhally, Social Communication in Advertising (London: Routledge 1990) pp. 1,311. A “gift” culture such as the Kwakiutl, for example, confers status on the basis of generosity; hence lavish potlatches are a preferred means of social communication. By contrast in a commodity culture such as our own status distinction is achieved by acquisition not by giving goods away Leiss et. al. pp. 310-11.

⁷¹ Robert D. Putnam, Bowling Alone (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2000). See also Robert N. Bellah et. al, Habits of the Heart.

⁷² Gregg Easterbrook “Axle of Evil,” *New Republic* (1/20/03) 27-35.

⁷³ Amory Lovins writes that “Transportation consumes 70% of U.S. oil and generates a third of the nation’s carbon emissions.” Of that 70% approximately one to two million barrels a day is consumed by the SUV and light truck fleet alone. Thus it is fair to present the automotive industry as a significant driver of American oil imperialism. Amory Lovins, “More Profit with Less Carbon,” *Scientific American*, (September, 2005) p.78.

⁷⁴ Herbert Gans, Popular Culture and High Culture (N.Y.: Basic Books, 1974).

⁷⁵ Quoted in Miller, Boxed-In, p. 24.

⁷⁶ H.E. Daily, “Operationalizing Sustainable Development by Investing in Natural Capital,” in Jansson et. al. Investing in Natural Capital, (Washington, D.C.: Island Press, 1994); Paul Hawken, Amory Lovins, Natural Capitalism (Boston: Little, Brown, 1999).

⁷⁷ Edward O. Wilson, The Diversity of Life, (N.Y.: W.W. Norton, 1992); Stephen Meyer, “The End of the Wild,” *Boston Review* (April/May, 2004); David Quammen, “Planet of Weeds,” *Harper’s Magazine*, (October, 1998) pp. 57-69; Stuart L. Pimm, “Sustaining the Variety of Life,” *Scientific American* (September, 2005) pp. 66-73.

⁷⁸ John Stuart Mill, Principles of Political Economy, intro. by Donald Winch, (Baltimore, Md.: Pelican Books, 1970), pp. 111-117.