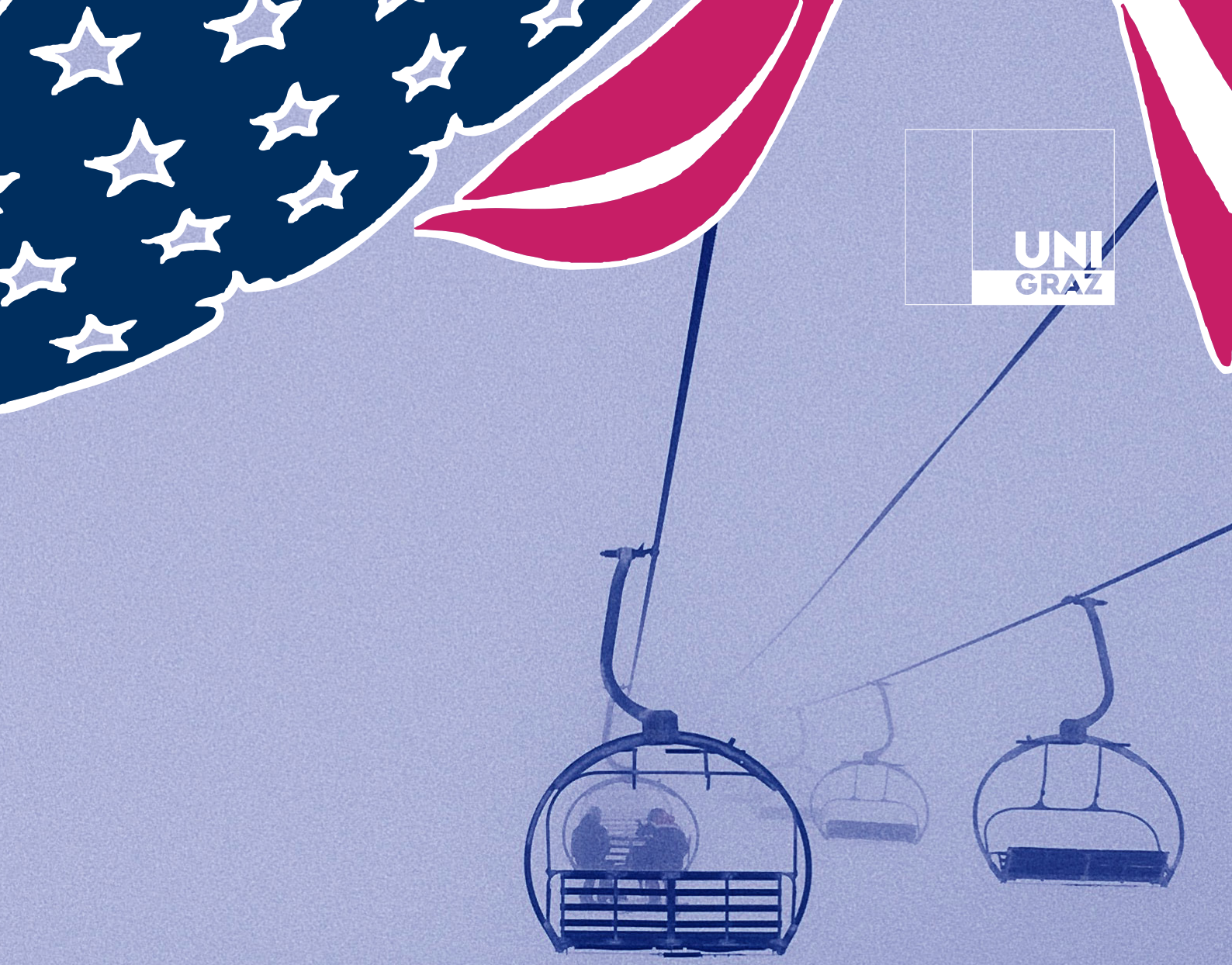

Vol. 2
№ 2
2021

JAAAS

Journal of the Austrian Association for American Studies

FWF Der Wissenschaftsfonds.

AAAS

Vol. 2, No. 2 | 2021

About

The *Journal of the Austrian Association for American Studies* (*JAAAS*) is a peer-reviewed gold open-access journal which provides an interdisciplinary space for discussions about all aspects of American studies. The journal functions as a forum for Americanists in Austria and the global academic community. Published twice a year, the journal welcomes submissions on a wide range of topics, aiming to broaden the multi- and interdisciplinary study of American cultures.

Aims

Interrogating the notion of "America" and looking at the U.S. within its transnational and (trans-)hemispheric interconnections, *JAAAS* seeks to challenge disciplinary boundaries by bringing together original and innovative work by scholars who focus on topics as diverse as literature, cultural studies, film and new media, visual arts, ethnic studies, indigenous studies, performance studies, queer studies, border studies, mobility studies, age studies, game studies, and animal studies. Apart from offering insights into trans- and international American literary and cultural studies and offering European perspectives on America, the journal also solicits scholarship that deals with history, music, politics, geography, ecocriticism, race, ethnicity, sexuality, gender, law, and any other aspect of American culture and society.

ISSN

2616-9533 (online)

Cover illustration:

Designed by Michael Fuchs. Based on Andrei Dan's "Alien," published on August 9, 2018, on Unsplash, under Unsplash's free-to-use license: https://unsplash.com/photos/9zGy3_yeewg.

Publisher

Austrian Association for American Studies
c/o University of Salzburg
Department of English & American Studies
Erzabt-Klotz-Straße 1
5020 Salzburg
contact@aaas.at

The publication of this special issue was supported by the Austrian Science Fund (FWF), grant number P 32994-G.

Special Issue
Mediating Mountains

Edited by **Eva-Maria Müller** and **Christian Quendler**

Introduction 105

Research Articles

Birgit Capelle
Mountains and Waters of No-Mind:
A Transcultural Approach to Moments of
Heightened Awareness and Non-Substantialist Ontology in
Henry David Thoreau, Jack Kerouac, and Gary Snyder 117

Heinz Tschachler
More Than a Feeling: Why the Lewis and Clark Expedition
Did not Experience "the Sublime" at the Great Divide
when Crossing the American Continent 143

Michael Wedekind
Mountain Grand Hotels at the Fin de Siècle:
Sites, Gazes, and Environments 163

Benita Lehmann
Jennifer Peedom's *Mountain* as a City Symphony 189

Sascha Pöhlmann
Thereness: Video Game Mountains as Limits of Interactivity 213

Mark Nunes
Becoming-Data–Becoming-Mountain:
Affordances, Assemblages, and the Transversal Interface 247

Reviews

Danielle Raad
Uplift: Visual Culture at the Banff School of Fine Arts
by PearlAnn Reichwein and Karen Wall 265

Eva-Maria Müller
Peak Pursuits: The Emergence of Mountaineering in the Nineteenth Century
by Caroline Schaumann 269

Peter Hansen
False Summit: Gender in Mountaineering Nonfiction
by Julie Rak 272

Mediating Mountains

Introduction to the Special Issue

Mountains confront us in many guises. They visualize space and provide geopolitical orientations that address questions of historical, cultural, social, national, and individual identities. Mountains are subjects of philosophical reflections, environmental meditations, and ecocritical ontologies. They serve as a means of spiritual invigoration, scientific experimentation, medical therapy, and recreation. They are sources and resources of technological and artistic innovations, human and nonhuman exploitations. Mountain spaces are often borderlands, contested zones of imperial expansion, war, and migration. They are sites of tourism and industrialization, deposits of waste, and repositories of cultural memory; their forms are shaped and reshaped through processes of cultural and geological erosion. This polymorphous and fluid nature turns mountains into a dynamic medium that both reflects and grounds subjectivities. Mountains may also be conceived of as what Timothy Morton calls "hyperobjects" that affect the very ways we come to think about existence, earth, and society.[1]

The contributions to this special issue on mediating mountains set out to examine the cultural and aesthetic malleability of mountains. The articles included in this issue originated in the forty-sixth international conference of the Austrian Association for American Studies, which was held at the University of Innsbruck in November 2019. It is easy to see how a city towered by the Alps could provide a setting conducive to reflecting on alpine mediations across the Atlantic. The Alps have shaped the perception of mountains worldwide. Imperialist gazes and migrant memories have left us with alpine denominations in New Zealand, South America, Canada, and Appalachia.[2] The Alps, much like the mass media, have globalized perceptions of mountains. Beginning in the sixteenth century, mountains in the Americas were subjected to detailed surveys, recording economic, political, and scientific facts about mountains, such as information about resources, infrastructure, geology, and climate. Later, they also included aesthetic qualities such as visual and sonic aspects of mountains.[3]

If the Alps are an influential cultural model of mountain perception, mountain aesthetics, in turn, help us gauge the virtues and affordances of old and new media. Mountains have been frequently invoked as photogenic objects that reveal the nature of cinema, and they continue to serve as a testing ground for computer-assisted symbolic navigation. Mountains are objects of mediations and mediating agents. When

mountains labor, Norman and Saxon genitives are simultaneously at work. Mediating Mountains addresses the making of mountains as well as the mountains' makings. Mountains shape the images that we have of ourselves and the images we generate of our environments.

Drawing on Martin Heidegger's reflections on technology, we can associate these sides or dimensions of mountains with two kinds of imagination: a poetic imagination that re-imagines mountains by means of symbolic inscriptions and a technological imagination that operates by extracting material resources.[4] Both kinds of imagination can be seen as strategies of domesticating mountains. If poetic imagination appropriates mountains by allocating them special places in our symbolic universe, technological imagination promises to unearth their symbolic currency by getting a hold of the very substance of mountains.

While Heidegger conceived of technics and poetics in antagonistic and hierarchical terms, Bruno Latour's *We Have Never Been Modern* (1991) has furthered our understanding of the dialogic and reciprocal relations among these kinds of imagination.[5] In particular the paradoxical and contradictory associations of poetics and technics allow us to appreciate fully the imaginary stakes of mountains. The popular custom of erecting crucifixes on mountain summits, which gained significance in Catholic Austria in the eighteenth century, exemplifies the symbolic investment in this practice.[6] Beginning in the 1820s, mountain crucifixes often included lightning rods that safeguarded the symbolic sanctification of nature in technical and prosaically pragmatic ways.[7] Accordingly, installing such crosses on mountaintops is a powerfully symbolic act that conveniently repurposes mountains into altars or even cathedrals and literally earths them with an emblematic device of Enlightened mechanical engineering. These mountain crucifixes are symptomatic of an overall trend toward a secular form of spirituality and a "new nature-based religiosity,"[8] which combines science and religion with a deeper appreciation of the material world. While these crosses seem to recall the animistic specter of paganism, paganism has become an important frame of reference in the modern technological imagination. Notions of cinematic animism persist throughout the history of film theory. From the early impressionist theories of Jean Epstein to Adrian Ivakhiv's ecological theory of the moving image,[9] film has been explored as a medium that reveals the soul or agency of things.

Richard T. Walker's pigment print *the plight of inconsequence #10* (2014; Illustration 1) draws attention to the duplicity of material resources and symbolic investments of mountain imaginaries. The iris-like visual indicates that the top of a mountain is a privileged part of symbolic investment. The eternal snow was a popular national and religious emblem throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and it continued to fascinate modernists like Georg Simmel and Ernest Hemingway.[10]

Illustration 1: Richard Walker, *the plight of inconsequence #10* (2014).
Reproduced by permission of the artist.

The inversion of scale and distance suggests that the features of mountains that receive the most attention in symbolic appraisals are only the tip of the iceberg. They are places sufficiently remote to serve as a virtual space of projection that both promises and undercuts the possibility of a supposedly immediate experience.

Arguably, *the plight of inconsequence* responds to Caspar David Friedrich's *Wanderer above the Sea of Fog* (c. 1818; Illustration 2). The outlines of a surrogate viewer are replaced by a disembodied gaze, outlined by the iris. In Friedrich's painting, the rocks serve as a pedestal for the wanderer and also provide a surrogate for the viewer's comfortable contemplative position. In *the plight of inconsequence*, the rock refers to the basic substrate of mountains.

If Friedrich's painting is paradigmatic of the poetic imagination of the sublime, we may associate Walker's image with the technological imagination of the machinic. The juxtaposition of iris and granite recalls a modern technological desire to overcome pathetic fallacies and find a non-anthropocentric reconciliation with nature through a technological apparatus. Photography, according to a popular account by one of its inventors, is "the pencil of nature."[11] Photography, in other words, is nature drawing itself. If it takes a mountain to understand a mountain, then perhaps the

Illustration 2: Caspar David Friedrich, *Wanderer above the Sea of Fog* (c. 1818).
Image uploaded to *Wikimedia Commons* by user Cybershot800i, from *Wikimedia Commons*, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Caspar_David_Friedrich_-_Wanderer_above_the_sea_of_fog.jpg (July 1, 2019).

new affordances of photographic, cinematic, and digital gazes may bring us closer to such an understanding.

Poetic and technological fantasies complement one another: frequently they are so enmeshed with one another that they present themselves in a monolithic form. An example from popular culture that merges past and future frontiers by juxtaposing nostalgia for the wilderness with a sense of futuristic humanism may help illustrate this point. The opening scene of the Star Trek film *The Final Frontier* (1989) stages an encounter between America's most famous monolith, El Capitan in Yosemite National Park, and one of America's most famous fictional captains, James Tiberius Kirk. In the film, Kirk evasively answers Spock's question of what motivates his ascent by citing George Mallory's famous reason for climbing Mount Everest: "Because it's there."[12] In an interview conducted during a location shooting at Yosemite National Park in 1988, William Shatner's explanation of the scene did not shy away from emotions:

> Free climbers challenge the rock, challenge themselves, they are at one with the rock, they become part of the rock. There is reason to believe that granite is alive, that crystal is growing. There's reason to think that if crystal can recreate itself that's one of the criteria of life and climbers believe that granite is alive and they get energy from the granite. Sun-warmed by eons of days in the sun, this rock can be thought of as alive and so they climbed this living body, seeking to be part of the living body, aspiring to climb to the top and challenging death and thereby gaining life. And that's what I thought Kirk would be doing and we treated it in a funny, in a comical fashion. . . . I think the climber wants to hug the mountain. He wants to envelop that mountain within his body, he wants to make love to the mountain. And on its highest and finest level, whether these tough young guys with their sinewy bodies in their one-meal-a-day routine will admit it, there is a passionate affair going on between the climber and the mountain. Why do I climb the mountain? I would say the climber would say "because I'm in love."[13]

Has Shatner just read Donna Haraway's "Cyborg Manifesto" (1985)? Is he anticipating the ecosexual movement by two decades? Most likely not. Rather, he seems merely amused by the sexualized trope of the body of nature, which in its orthodox imperialist form follows the way "no man has gone before." Even though he appears to be free-climbing, his techno-erotic touch remains unchanged. What has changed, however, are our ways of reading these tropes. Over thirty years ago, Shatner was confident in invoking El Capitan as a symbolic site of humanity's triumph. Unaware of the exclusionist implications of his desire, he imagined a national park where all languages are spoken by climbers from all over the world and where wilderness would remain unchanged for the next three hundred years. Around the same time, Félix Guattari published his ecosophic manifesto *Three Ecologies* (1989), in which he calls for an end to modern monolithic myths, advocating a poetics of science and

technology that engages in processes of heterogenesis and does justice to a holistic ecology of environment, society and mind. Technological and aesthetic spheres converge in pluralistic studies, and an ecosophical perspective on mountains reveals their oscillation between sites of monolithic and universal mythmaking and places of singular otherness and diversity. We also find this notion in the writings of the classic American mythmaker Herman Melville, who dedicated his novel *Pierre; Or, The Ambiguities* (1852) "to Greylock's Most Excellent Majesty," indicating that, in the U.S., mountains have replaced lords and kings.

The contributions to this special issue address mountains in their mightiness and multitude as they speak to the complex fabric of the material, social, perceptual, and technological ecology of alpine space. The essays engage with the multifaceted nature of mountains and media, examining the singular positions and unique localities of specific mountains, their distinctive forms, qualities, and socio-cultural networks. The authors reflect on a variety of processes that assign meanings to mountains and inform how mountains themselves act as meaning-makers in a wide array of cultural concerns that range from Chinese ontologies of Being to Manifest Destiny; they explore modern tourism and ecological justice, analyzing discourses of political and symbolic control as well as alternative models of digital agency and human and nonhuman entanglement.

The first two essays examine transnational negotiations of mountain cultures. They show how cross-cultural encounters shape not just alpine space but also philosophical, political, and literary landscapes in the U.S. Exploring the geological and aesthetic guises of mountains through an intricate web of intertextual and intermedial references, the articles document how disparate mountain perceptions inform a plurality of mountain models that, like mountains themselves, are bound in what Timothy Morton calls a "sticky mesh of viscosity."[14]

In "Mountains and Waters of No-Mind," Birgit Capelle develops her argument along the circular and open-ended structure of a Chinese handscroll in order to trace the aesthetic relational capacities at work between mountains and water as well as East Asian philosophical traditions and American mountain literature. Drawing on Gary Snyder's *Mountains and Rivers Without End* (1996), Henry David Thoreau's *A Week on the Concord and Merrimack Rivers* (1849), and Jack Kerouac's *The Dharma Bums* (1958), she demonstrates that the alpine streams of non-substantialist philosophy run within "a temporally and spatially unfolding web of interdependence and mutual conditioning that actualized itself moment by moment."

Heinz Tschachler's essay addresses the mediation of divergent cultural conceptions within the American continent. "More Than a Feeling" explores how the mountains of the American West upset European landscape models that had dominated

the perception of alpine spaces on the East coast during the Lewis and Clark expedition. He argues that geological and meteorological challenges, together with military and agricultural interests, defied the projection of a symmetrical geography and contested aesthetic imaginations of the sublime.

The second set of essays is concerned with places that mountains occupy in the broader technological, socio-cultural, and ecological fabric of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Their authors are interested in the bigger pictures of mountains that are made possible by the vast urban networks of modern tourism and the film industry.

Michael Wedekind's "Mountain Grand Hotels at the Fin de Siècle" traces the ways in which the metropolitan phenomenon of the palace hotel found its way into remote regions of the Alps and how these hotels were tied to industrial progress and the technological and cultural control of a social and natural environment. His essay considers mountain grand hotels as intermediary agents that facilitate the consumption of mountain space through cultural appropriation and a series of technological advancements that include photography, the construction of railway networks, and the switch to electricity, all of which contributed to the promotion of the tourist gaze and its infrastructure.

Benita Lehmann's essay "Jennifer Peedom's *Mountain* as a City Symphony" examines modern mountain networks and the urban alpine entanglements from an eco-cinematic perspective. Her analysis of the film "draws attention to the deep structural links between urban centers and mountains" and engages with the indeterminant orchestration of human action, mechanical invasion, and geological deep time. Mountains are seen as neuralgic network points that mountain films trace and connect in new and meaningful ways. Parsing the curious network of Peedom's mountain symphony, Lehmann acknowledges its ability to address environmental issues in revision but also critiques the cinematic romanticization of the mountain film, recognizing what Stephen Rust, Salma Monani, and Sean Cubitt call a "problematic inability to drive collective ecopolitical change."[15]

Together, the two essays in this section consider the ambivalence surrounding the organic quality of technological progression and the mechanical rhythm of mountain ecology. The contingent and multi-layered bundles of alpine connection, which collapse center–periphery binaries in a non-linear fashion, demonstrate not only the proliferation of meanings surrounding mountains but also the visceral and affective dimensions of their mediation.

The contributions in the third section expand on affective affordances of new media technologies in mediating human–mountain relations. In "Thereness," Sascha Pöhlmann theorizes the challenging presence of mountains that tests processes of

representation and cognition and equally invites and rejects human engagement in the virtual alpine playground. Analyzing *Celeste* (2018), *Getting Over It with Bennett Foddy* (2017), and *Mountain* (2014), the essay showcases the unique audiovisual, tactile, and ludic qualities of mountain presence as it questions the limits of interactivity and the infinite realness of simulation in video gaming. New media technologies, Pöhlmann demonstrates, invite us to interact with mountains in a new way and allow us to see not only "what we can do with the mountain" but also "what this doing does to us."

Mark Nunes's essay "Becoming-Data, Becoming-Mountain" engages with the interface between computer-based technologies and their potential for action, both human and nonhuman. Drawing on actor-network theory, assemblage theory, and interrelational ontology, he examines how trail-finding, GPS tracking, and peak-finding apps span the physical boundaries of alpine ecology, the human body, and mobile technologies to "mark a coupling between human agents and a material environment." This combination of human and nonhuman agencies affords an apprehension of the augmented space that emerges when humans and GPS-driven apps inscribe each other and, in the mutual exchange of data, become expressive of mountainous terrain.

Digital topologies at the transversal interface speak to the post-humanist view of mediation and mobilize what Mark Hansen terms "transindividuation"—an impersonal environmental sensibility at the intersection of ontogenesis and technogenesis.[16] Mediation, as Richard Grusin reminds us, operates beyond communication: it is a "fundamental process of human and nonhuman existence" and as such extends epistemologies of knowledge production to include affective and collective modulation.[17] If we cannot experience mountains immediately but are continually haunted by their mediation, as the essays in this special issue demonstrate, we may find comfort in knowing that all bodies—be they modeled by ice, fire, digital programming, writing, painting, or love-making—are fundamentally media. It is through our understanding of mediated mountains that we may overcome the seemingly impassable divide between technology and nature, resolve the tension arising from the presence of mountains and the human desires it provokes, and find fulfillment in being continually situated "in the middle" of a most radical mediation.[18] And what better location to explore these themes than "between heaven and earth" (in a final nod to Adorno and Hegel[19]) learning from the geologically, historically, culturally, socially, and technologically molded forms that have long mastered in-betweenness?

Eva-Maria Müller and Christian Quendler
DOI: 10.47060/jaaas.v2i2.145

Acknowledgments

This special issue was supported by the Austrian Science Fund (FWF): P 32994-G and the Faculty of Language, Literature and Culture at the University of Innsbruck. We would also like to thank Sonja Bahn, Katherine Dahlquist-Bauer, Camila Torres Carrillo, Anna Kofler, Nora Krause, Sandra Tausel, and Hilde Wolfmeyer for their editorial assistance.

Notes

1 Timothy Morton, *Hyperobjects: Philosophy and Ecology after the End of the World* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2013).

2 For Marina Frolova, the prevalence of the alpine model represents a real obstacle for understanding the diversity of the physical environments and social systems of different mountainous regions in the world in the second half of the twentieth century. Marina Frolova, "La représentation et la connaissance des montagnes du monde: Pyrénées et Caucase au filtre du modèle alpin," *Revue de géographie alpine* 89, no. 4 (2001): 160, DOI: 10.3406/rga.2001.3063.

3 Jon Mathieu, *The Third Dimension: A Comparative History of Mountains in the Modern Era* (Knapwell: White Horse Press, 2011), 16–20.

4 Martin Heidegger, "The Question Concerning Technology," in *The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays*, trans. William Lovitt (New York: Harper & Row, 1977), 5–36.

5 Bruno Latour, *We Have Never Been Modern*, trans. Catherine Porter (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993).

6 The practice of setting up crosses on mountain tops is much older and its uses are diverse. For instance, in colonial explorations, the ceremonial insertion of tokens of civilization was a symbolic act to bless pagan land in return for material resources. In the sixteenth, seventeenth, and eighteenth centuries, believers frequently congregated around crucifixes in the mountains for mass during pandemics. See Helga Ramsey-Kurz, "Tokens or Totems? Eccentric Props in Postcolonial Re-Enactments of Colonial Consecration," *Literature and Theology* 21, no. 3 (2007): 302, DOI: 10.1093/litthe/frm027.

7 Martin Scharfe, "Kruzifix mit Blitzableiter," *Österreichische Zeitschrift für Volkskunde* 53 (1999): 289–336, DOI: 10.7767/boehlau.9783205789833.45; Jon Mathieu, "The Sacralization of Mountains in Europe during the Modern Age," *Mountain Research and Development* 26, no. 4 (2006): 343–49, DOI: 10.1659/0276-4741(2006)26[343:TSOMIE]2.0.CO;2.

8 Mathieu, "Sacralization of Mountains," 346.

9 Jean Epstein, "Le Cinématographe Vu De L'Etna (1926)," in *Jean Epstein: Critical Essays and New Translations*, ed. Sarah Keller and Jason N. Paul (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2012), 287–310, DOI: 10.26530/oapen_413034; Adrian J. Ivakhiv, *Ecologies of the Moving Image: Cinema, Affect, Nature* (Waterloo, ON: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2013).

10 Georg Simmel, "Die Alpen," in *Philosophische Kultur: Über das Abenteuer, die Geschlechter und die Krise der Moderne* (Berlin: Verlag Klaus Wagenbach, 1986), 125–30.

11 William Henry Fox Talbot, "Some Account of the Art of Photogenic Drawing, or, the Process by which Natural Objects May Be Made to Delineate Themselves without the Aid of the Artist's Pencil," in *Photography: Essays and Images*, ed. Beaumont Newhall (New York:

Museum of Modern Art, 1980), 24.

12 *Star Trek V: The Final Frontier*, dir. William Shatner (Hollywood, CA: Paramount Pictures, 1989).

13 William Shatner, "Original Interview: William Shatner," in *Star Trek V: The Final Frontier* (Hollywood, CA: Paramount Pictures, 2003), DVD, disc two.

14 Morton, *Hyperobjects*, 30.

15 Stephen Rust, Salma Monani, and Sean Cubitt, *Ecomedia: Key Issues* (London: Routledge, 2016), 7.

16 Mark B. N. Hansen, "Engineering Pre-Individual Potentiality: Technics, Transindividuation, and 21st-Century Media," *SubStance* 41, no. 3 (2012): 32–59, DOI: 10.1353/sub.2012.0025.

17 Richard Grusin, "Radical Mediation," *Critical Inquiry* 42, no. 1 (2015): 125, DOI: 10.1086/682998.

18 Grusin, "Radical Mediation," 127.

19 Theodor W. Adorno, *Hegel: Three Studies*, trans. Shierry Weber Nicholson (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1999), 57.

Mountains and Waters of No-Mind

A Transcultural Approach to Moments of Heightened Awareness and Non-Substantialist Ontology in Henry David Thoreau, Jack Kerouac, and Gary Snyder

Birgit Capelle

Abstract

This article explores the epic poem *Mountains and Rivers Without End* (1996) by Gary Snyder and a Song/Chin dynasty Chinese landscape painting. I illustrate how the poem and the painting, together with Henry David Thoreau's autobiographical narrative *A Week on the Concord and Merrimack Rivers* (1849) and Jack Kerouac's *The Dharma Bums* (1958), form a complex web of intertextual and intermedial references. All four works, I argue, tell similar narratives of spiritual journey and paths through mountain and river landscapes; all four speak of moments of heightened awareness in the sense of Buddhist "no-mind" (Chinese: *wu-shin*; Japanese: *mushin*). I show how they converge in exhibiting ontologies of non-substantiality, emptiness, and becoming. Taking the philosophies of Zen Buddhism and Taoism as a theoretical frame, I argue that the American transcendentalist and Beat works poetically and narratively convey relational rather than substantialist views of Being and life. They depict the world as a dynamic and open field of tension between two non-oppositional forces from which we as subjects are not essentially separate in a dualistic way. I substantiate my argument by drawing on the French sinologist and philosopher François Jullien, who refers to the Chinese understanding of landscape ("mountains and waters") in his critical treatment of (European) philosophy's centuries-long subject-centered epistemology and substantialist "ontology of Being."

Suggested Citation: Capelle, Birgit. "Mountains and Waters of No-Mind: A Transcultural Approach to Moments of Heightened Awareness and Non-Substantialist Ontology in Henry David Thoreau, Jack Kerouac, and Gary Snyder." *JAAAS: Journal of the Austrian Association for American Studies* 2, no. 2 (2021): 117–140, DOI: 10.47060/jaaas.v2i2.93.

Keywords: American transcendentalism; Beat generation; emptiness; Jullien, François; Zen Buddhism

Peer Review: This article was reviewed by the issue's guest editors and an external reviewer.

Mountains and Waters of No-Mind

A Transcultural Approach to Moments of Heightened Awareness and Non-Substantialist Ontology in Henry David Thoreau, Jack Kerouac, and Gary Snyder

Birgit Capelle

Over the course of several decades beginning in the 1930s, D. T. Suzuki and Alan Watts published numerous texts with the aim of making East Asian modes of thinking accessible to the Anglo-American reader. Their texts have since inspired scholars from diverse fields to highlight and investigate in ever greater depth the analogies and parallels between U.S. American and East Asian ways of thinking.[1] This article explores, from a transcultural and comparative perspective, three American literary works from the nineteenth and twentieth centuries and one Song/Chin dynasty Chinese landscape painting titled *Streams and Mountains Without End* (Illustration 1). The guiding thought is that these works display astonishing isomorphic qualities on different levels and converge with regard to their ontologies of non-substantiality, emptiness, and becoming.[2] I will examine the texts' narrative structures, settings, stories, and themes while arguing that they form, together with the painting, a complex web of intertextual and intermedial references. They exhibit important similarities in structure and content. The three American works comprise three different literary genres: a book of poetry (Gary Snyder's *Mountains and Rivers Without End* [1996]), a personal narrative (Henry David Thoreau's *A Week on the Concord and Merrimack Rivers* [1849]), and a novel (Jack Kerouac's *The Dharma Bums* [1958]). All three are autobiographical in nature, and refer, in varying degrees, to East Asian religious and philosophical traditions. They speak of moments

of heightened awareness in the sense of Buddhist "no-mind" (Chinese: *wu-shin*; Japanese: *mushin*). The point of departure for my argument is the Chinese landscape painting, which, by depicting a journey through a landscape scene, conveys the traditional Chinese view of nature or existence (ontology) as a dynamic interplay of "mountains and waters."[3] My aim is to show how the three works of literature tell similar narratives of journeys and paths through metaphorical mountain and river landscapes in the form of spiritual quests. Most importantly, these works, like the Chinese landscape painting, convey non-substantialist ontologies in varying forms.

Before turning to my transcultural and intermedial comparison, I will give a short overview of the connections between the American transcendentalist and Beat movements and (East) Asian thought, and offer a brief introduction into the ways that Being has been conceived of in Europe, America, and Asia. This will serve as a basis for my subsequent analyses.

American Transcendentalism, the Beat Generation, and Asia

The writers who came to represent the revolutionary cultural and literary movements of American transcendentalism and the Beat generation each looked toward Asia for new ways of living, writing, and thinking that differed from the established paradigms of Western culture with its dualistic ontology and epistemology. In the religions and writings of Asia, they hoped to find support for their inner intuitions and unorthodox beliefs. Waltraud Mitgutsch speaks of "a long-standing tradition, going back to Thoreau, Emerson, and Whitman … This tradition tries to define Western, specifically American experience by Eastern analogies thus achieving a fusion of Western and Eastern thought."[4] In the same essay and in reference to the Beat generation, she expounds, "What was needed … was not only the rejection of Western civilization …, but models that could be turned to as viable alternatives."[5] After traders and missionaries had established first relations between the North Amer-

Illustration 1: *Streams and Mountains Without End.*
From the website of the Cleveland Museum of Art, https://www.clevelandart.org/art/1953.126, which provides the image under a CC0 1.0 license. Image cropped and color altered.

ican continent and Asia by the end of the eighteenth century,[6] the American transcendentalists, in particular Ralph Waldo Emerson and Henry David Thoreau, were pioneers in integrating Asian (primarily Hindu) thought into their own philosophies and writings and, to a limited extent, into their ways of life. Through Latin, French, and early English translations, they had access to Hindu texts, the mystic poetry of Persia, and—to a lesser extent—Buddhist and Confucian texts. About a century later, American Beat writers such as Jack Kerouac, Allen Ginsberg, and Gary Snyder took up and pursued this affinity for Asian views of reality. With numerous English translations at their disposal, this new generation was able to deepen enthusiasm for Asian (particularly Buddhist and Taoist) literature, philosophy, and religion, and, in contrast to the American transcendentalists, traveled extensively to the Asian continent. In particular, Gary Snyder spent several years in Japan pursuing spiritual training in Zen. Due to his fascination with ecology and the "East," he came to be known as a "modern Thoreau." Jack Kerouac, whose interest in Buddhism was inspired to a large extent by Snyder, focused on particular Buddhist insights and teachings, and his knowledge was based on private rather than academic studies.[7] All key figures of the Beat generation found intellectual and artistic inspiration in their nineteenth-century predecessors. This shows not least in their literary works with regard to the content and style. It also shows in their preoccupation with existential and ontological questions that engrossed Thoreau and, in particular, Emerson, the "endless seeker."[8] The following section will identify the central features of Western and Eastern traditions of thought on Being.[9] The aim is to prepare a theoretical framework for the later explorations of non-substantialist ontological thought in the literary works of these American writers and thinkers.

Thinking Being in Europe, America, and Asia

According to the traditional Western view that opposes the concept of "matter" to either "form" (Aristotle) or "mind" (Descartes), mountains or rocks are commonly conceived as solid blocks of matter that neither move nor essentially alter or disappear. Their underlying substance does not change. This idea that rocks are substantial and fundamentally unchanging goes hand in hand with belief in the existence of an ultimate substance, principle or primary matter (Greek: *arche*) from which mountains and the whole world of visible phenomena are made. The corresponding search for the tiniest (fundamental) particles has preoccupied philosophy since antiquity, starting most notably with the Pre-Socratics, including atomists such as Leucippus and Democritus. Despite Heraclitus's proclamation of the mutability of all existence,[10] interest in primary matter is a common thread throughout the Western history of ideas. Since antiquity, scientists and philosophers have been in pursuit of the most basic particles, whether it be atoms, quarks, or bosons.

But there has also been, especially in the past century, a handful of scientists and scholars advocating non-substantialist views of existence, in which reality is not composed of static substances but is instead inherently relational and processual. A noted advocate of a non-substantialist view is the German nuclear and quantum physicist Hans-Peter Dürr, who made the provocative claim around 2000 that "there is no matter."[11] In elucidating his view of non-substantial nature, Dürr refers to East Asian views of reality, primarily Buddhist teachings. Well-known modern philosophers who likewise advocate non-substantialist ontologies include Alfred North Whitehead and the American pragmatists William James and John Dewey. According to Dewey, "every existence is an event."[12]

In East Asian religious and philosophical traditions, particularly in Buddhism and Chinese Taoism, one does not find the dualism, or opposition, of mind (or form/idea) and matter, nor belief in the existence of indivisible material particles.[13] Instead, both philosophies view reality as void (Sanskrit: *śūnya*) or non-substantial (i.e., inherently relational and temporal). Buddhist views of reality—in accord with the teaching of *śūnyatā*—imply the rejection of finality in the cognitive search for truth and of the belief in metaphysical absolutes. This notion is succinctly captured by Michael G. Barnhart:

> In particular, the second-century [Buddhist] philosopher Nāgārjuna argued forcefully, especially in his *Mūlamadhyamaka kārikā* . . ., that all reality was *śūnya* or empty. No thing, including nothing itself, had *svabhāva* or substantial and individual being, self-identity, self-being, or self-existence. Rather, emptiness or *śūnyata* was dependence; that all things were empty meant that all things were mutually (and thoroughly) dependent—the doctrine of *pratītyasamutpāda*.

> Thus, no faith in a transcendent reality or principle could be sustained.[14]

In 1991, the biologist, neuroscientist, and philosopher Francisco J. Varela, together with Evan Thompson and Eleanor Rosch, published his pioneering work *The Embodied Mind: Cognitive Science and Human Experience*, in which he takes up the second-century Buddhist philosopher Nāgārjuna's systematic elucidation of the teaching of "emptiness" (Sanskrit: *śūnyatā*). He is critical of post-modern Western society's generally nihilistic treatment of what he calls "groundlessness," the "loss of foundations for the self and for the world." Varela takes up an optimist position and encourages scholars to consider the more affirmative Buddhist insight into emptiness, and to integrate this insight into their research and practice. Making reference to Gianni Vattimo, he argues, for example, that reading Nietzsche and Heidegger non-nihilistically means focusing on the possibilities and "positive opportunities for the very essence of man that are found in post-modern conditions of existence."[15]

In *From Being to Living* (2020), the French sinologist and comparative philosopher François Jullien compiles a "Euro-Chinese lexicon of thought" in which he considers transcultural philosophy (here: "between the thought-languages of China and Europe") as a "work in progress" that, with regard to Europe, should have as its aim the gradual "emergence from ontology . . ., a way out of the 'question of Being,' the *Seinsfrage*, that is *at the same time* an entry into the thought of *living*." He takes a critical look at European philosophy's centuries-long "ontology of Being" which, as he suggests, understands Being substantially, in terms of *presence* (rather than becoming or time), and which goes hand in hand with a subject-centered epistemology that conceives of human being and the world as dualistically split (rooted in the Cartesian *cogito*). Jullien takes up Martin Heidegger's, Hans-Georg Gadamer's, and Jacques Derrida's critique of a metaphysics of "presence."[16] As an alternative to the European ontology of Being and the subject, he suggests envisioning human being and the world (i.e., *living*) in terms of an integral, indivisible dynamic field or "situation" from which we cannot be dualistically separated or split.[17] In order to explain his unorthodox understanding of the term "situation," he refers to the Chinese term for *landscape*, which is "mountain(s)-water(s)."

> Subject *or* situation: this opposition is strangely illuminated quite differently in Chinese thought. Just think about what we call "landscape." . . . The Subject, in other words, is *in the presence* of the landscape, which is external to him and remains autonomous; he is not implicated in it. Yet China speaks not of landscape but of "mountain(s)-water(s)," *shān-shui* . . . At the same time, this is what extends towards the high (the mountain) and the low (water), towards what is motionless and remains unmovable (the mountain) and what never stops billowing or flowing (water) . . . The landscape is therefore not approached from the initiative of a subject, as the celebrated Cartesian beginning instituted it, but

> is conceived as an investment of capacities reciprocally at work, . . ., at whose heart "some" subject is implicated. *Situation* would thus designate, in a preliminary way, this web of unlimited implications . . . from which only by abstraction can one exempt oneself.

In fundamental accordance with the philosophy of Taoism, reality is seen as a dynamic web of interdependence, a continuous field of tension (situation) between the non-oppositional forces of yin/yang. We as individual selves (subjects) are thought to continually emerge from (and within) this web, situation, or field without ever separating from it: "I am at the heart of a continual relation of interaction which, as such constitutes 'myself' in response. The autonomy or independence of the subject is no longer an absolute predicate."[18] Traditional Chinese conceptions of Being and the subject are inherently relational and accordingly empty (*śūnya*) rather than substantial.

One finds strikingly similar ontological insights in the writings of Ralph Waldo Emerson, Henry David Thoreau, Jack Kerouac, and Gary Snyder. I believe that, in the spirit of Varela, their works reflect a life-affirming rather than nihilistic attitude toward Being as essentially groundless or non-substantial. By taking up the Chinese landscape painting *Streams and Mountains Without End* and its relevance for Gary Snyder (and Kerouac), my analysis will take a non-linear course. It will proceed in accord with the circular and open-ended structure of the Chinese painting (scroll) and its cyclical, periodic history of reception, analogous to the way Asian thought, which exhibits numerous structural similarities but also differences to American thought, has been adopted by American culture over the course of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

A Chinese Handscroll, Gary Snyder's *Mountains and Rivers Without End*, and East Asian Non-Substantialist Ontologies

Among the many outstanding works in the collection of the Cleveland Museum of Art is a Chinese landscape painting titled *Streams and Mountains Without End*, which was acquired by Sherman Lee in 1953 (Illustration 1 and Illustration 2).[19] It is unsigned and "painted on hand loomed single-cloth silk . . . in cold black ink of various tones" in a wide horizontal format (overall 13 13/16 by 434 9/16 in.)—a so-called handscroll (Chinese: *shou-chuan*).[20] The painting dates from the early to mid-twelfth century, the late Northern Song or early Chin dynasty.[21] On the museum's webpage, one reads that "this impressive work demonstrates the culmination of stylistic developments in Chinese monumental landscape painting following the Northern Song tradition."[22] Susan Bush points out that this particular handscroll "has been described intensively

Illustration 2: *Streams and Mountains Without End.*
From the website of the Cleveland Museum of Art, https://www.clevelandart.org/art/1953.126, which provides the image under a CC0 1.0 license.

as a key monument of early Chinese landscape painting in a well-known monograph of 1956 by Sherman Lee and Wen Fong."[23] In this work, Lee and Fong describe the age-old tradition in China of depicting "mountain and river" landscapes on horizontal scrolls: "the Chinese landscape handscroll is a paramount form in the history of Chinese painting from at least the *Wang-ch'uan* by Wang Wei in the eighth century until the present day."[24] The Beat poet, ecologist, and Zen Buddhist Gary Snyder, who studied East Asian religions and cultures for many years, "came upon a reference to a hand scroll (*shou-chuan*) called *Mountains and Rivers Without End*" when he was still a student.[25] In the seventies or eighties, he visited "most of the major collections of Chinese paintings in the United States," and "saw the Sung Dynasty *Streams and Mountains Without End*" in Cleveland.[26] He expounds upon the meaning of the handscroll in his essay "Blue Mountains Constantly Walking" (1990):

> In common usage the compound "mountains and waters"—*shan-shui* in Chinese—is the straightforward term for landscape. . . . There are several surviving large Chinese horizontal handscrolls from premodern eras titled something like "Mountains and Rivers without End." Some of them move through the four seasons and seem to picture the whole world.[27]

According to Snyder, the landscapes on the Chinese handscrolls can be read as microcosmic depictions of the earth as an altogether temporally unfolding, harmonious interplay of two complementary forces. Hunt speaks of "the interdependent dyad of mountains-rivers," claiming that "Chinese landscape painting . . . attempts to capture life in its essential complementarity."[28] In order to experience a Chinese landscape scroll, one has to—again following Snyder—"unroll the scroll to the left, a section at a time, as you let the right side roll back in. Place by place it unfurls."[29] Chinese landscape scrolls exhibit a sense of temporality through the gradual unrolling and viewing of the silk canvas. Rather than representing a static object, a Chinese landscape scroll is "an experience" in the sense of John Dewey's pragmatist aesthetics, an integral happening in time.[30] The temporal dimension is enhanced in the way the painting "represents a journey through a landscape."[31] It is a narrative that unfolds in time and that the observer, in accordance with Dewey's theory of art, engages with actively-passively (both physically and mentally) while unrolling and simultaneously rolling up the scroll.[32] In the case of the Cleveland handscroll *Streams and Mountains without End*, there is the added factor that the work itself evolved over centuries through the addition of "colophons that provide information about the work's early history" as well as forty-eight "seals of collectors."[33] Snyder states that "the East Asian landscape paintings invite commentary. In a way, the painting is not fully realized until several centuries of poems have been added."[34] In line with its title, this landscape scroll could in principle be creatively continued "without end" by adding further commentaries and seals—analogous to the seeming boundlessness of the

horizontally expanding landscape. Snyder composed an epic poem titled *Mountains and Rivers Without End* that serves as a commentary and poetic translation of the painting, and thus a continuation of it. Anthony Hunt, in his book *Genesis, Structure, and Meaning in Gary Snyder's* Mountains and Rivers Without End (2004), claims that Snyder's engagement with his "verbal landscape painting" was extensive. He reworked the poem from the mid-1950s until its final publication in 1996. Hunt suggests that "the horizontal dimension of the scroll may be seen as a symbol for Snyder's personal journey in time and space and for humanity's general historical and cultural journey." The very first of a total thirty-nine largely autobiographical poems, which are narrated by a "traveling persona," is titled "Endless Streams and Mountains"/"*Ch'i Shan Wu Chin*."[35] Snyder states that it "describe[s]" the Chinese handscroll.[36] Similar to the macrocosmic *Mountains and Rivers Without End*, it can be considered a microcosmic ekphrasis (a more direct translation) of the Cleveland handscroll. Hunt explains that Snyder used "the horizontal handscroll as a structural model for his long poem" so that "various sections of the poem can be read in and for themselves, as 'innumerable small pictures,' or the entire poem may be read from beginning to end as a singular long poem, a linear journey."[37]

> Clearing the mind and sliding in
> to that created space,
> a web of waters streaming over rocks,
> air misty but not raining,
> seeing this land from a boat on a lake
> or a broad slow river,
> coasting by.
>
> The path comes down along a lowland stream
> slips behind boulders and leafy hardwoods,
> reappears in a pine grove,
>
> no farms around, just tidy cottages and shelters,
> gateways, rest stops, roofed but unwalled work space,
> —a warm damp climate;[38]

The speaker in these first three segments of the poem describes the process of being drawn into a landscape painting ("sliding in") as "that created space." In accordance with the Buddhist teaching of "self-lessness" (Sanskrit: *anātman*), Snyder employs the progressive form ("clearing," "sliding," "seeing") and avoids personal pronouns and references to a subject.[39] From a boat, the speaker becomes aware of the landscape as a dynamic "web of waters streaming over rocks," reminiscent of the dyad of mountains-rivers, displaying what I would like to call a non- or pre-subjective state of "no-mind" (Chinese: *wu-shin*; Japanese: *mushin*). With a "cleared mind," the

speaker becomes aware of the passing landscape of mountains and rivers, flora and fauna, nature and civilization without evaluating it, spotting a "path" while becoming an integral part of the landscape itself, the "totality of the process of nature," as Snyder puts it elsewhere.[40] The "misty" air connects everything and dissolves boundaries, contributing to the atmosphere of quietude and emptiness. According to Alan Watts, "One of the most striking features of the Sung landscape . . . is the relative emptiness of the picture—an emptiness which appears, however, to be part of the painting and not just unpainted background."[41] This deliberately "painted" emptiness could be interpreted as a visualization of Buddhist groundlessness or non-substantiality (Sanskrit: *śūnyatā*). In Snyder's poem, this emptiness is evoked by the poem's language, the lyrical I that, from a Western, subject-centered perspective, is "missing" from the beginning of the opening section. And the typographical, rhythmic arrangement of the lines which, on a horizontal level, mirror the vertical elevations and valleys, the "felt rhythms of the Cleveland handscroll," together create the impression of empty space and empty mind.[42] "Snyder's concept of space," according to Hunt, "always includes the possibility of Buddhist 'enlightenment,' a moment when one 'awakens' to 'a nowness of emptiness (. . . *shūnyatā*)' wherein one comprehends 'the true nature of things' by knowing that 'the entire universe is emptiness,' including oneself."[43]

Years prior to the poem's publication, in his essay "Blue Mountains Constantly Walking," (1990), Snyder referred to the "Mountains and Waters Sutra" by the thirteenth-century Japanese Zen master Dōgen. In this essay, Snyder appeals to the sacredness of East Asian mountains and elaborates the traditional East Asian view of the world as an ultimately empty, dynamic interplay of mountains and rivers. Reminiscent also of Taoist philosophy, he refers to nature as an ongoing dynamic happening of two polar yet non-oppositional, complementary forces:

> There is the obvious fact of the water-cycle and the fact that mountains and rivers indeed form each other: . . . the Chinese feel for land has always incorporated this sense of a dialectic of rock and water, of downward flow and rocky uplift, and of the dynamism and "slow flowing" of earth-forms. . . . "Mountains and waters" is a way to refer to the totality of the process of nature. As such it goes well beyond dichotomies . . . . The whole, with its rivers and valleys, obviously includes farms, fields, villages, cities, and the (once comparatively small) dusty world of human affairs.[44]

According to Snyder's reading of Dōgen, experiencing reality as mountains and waters, yin/yang, the female and the male continuously interacting, is seeing reality *as is* (in an enlightened state of no-mind), in its "plain thusness" (Sanskrit: *tathatā*) of "passage" (Japanese: *kyōryaku*), temporality or non-substantiality ("selflessness"; Sanskrit: *anātman*). In his main work *Shōbōgenzō*, Dōgen makes the link between mountains

and water explicit. What they have in common is that both are temporal in nature: "The mountains are *time*, the oceans are *time* too." He expresses a non-substantialist ontology in which there is no dualistic split between being and time. Rather, "all being is time."[45] "Time is already existence and existence is necessarily time."[46] The term he uses is *uji*, "existence-time." Phenomena are constituted relationally and are ultimately empty. They are momentary manifestations within a dynamic web of interdependence and interpenetration (Sanskrit: *pratītya-samutpāda*), emerging only to dissolve again as spatiotemporal "particularities" (Japanese: *jiji*). Yet, because Dōgen views reality as a spatiotemporal network of dynamic interconnections, he believes in the simultaneity of all spaces and times in the immediate here and now,[47] which one experiences as a transient, enlightening moment of "Buddha nature" (Japanese: *busshō*) or "absolute now."[48]

According to D. T. Suzuki, this moment involves a new viewpoint, a return to one's original nature or "Self-nature," which sees through the rationally constructed interpretations of reality that characterize and limit our normal thought.[49] Enlightenment (Japanese: *satori*) refers to a pre-verbal and pre-conceptual state of Buddha-mind or no-mind. It is an "empty" state of awareness in which, similar to William James's "pure experience," the mind does not cling to a definite thought but instead lets thought evolve freely—similar to the speaker in the opening section of Snyder's poem. It precedes all conceptualizations and dualisms between subject and object, thinker and thought, knower and known. "The Zen masters speak of 'no-mind' (Jpn., *mushin*; Chin., *wu-hsin*), or synonymously of non-thinking (Jpn., *munen*; Chin., *wu-nien*) . . . The term [emptiness] denotes the non-clinging of the mind. The mind that does not adhere to anything is free and pure."[50] Non-clinging or non-attachment makes reality accessible in its ultimate groundlessness and non-substantiality.

American Transcendentalism, Moments of Heightened Awareness, and Non-Substantiality

Intimations of an absolute now can also be found in the writings of the American transcendentalist Ralph Waldo Emerson.[51] More than a century before Snyder began to compose his poem *Mountains and Rivers Without End* in the 1950s, Emerson, in the famous "transparent eyeball" passage of his essay "Nature" (1836), describes a moment in which the narrator's subjective perspective seems to dissolve: "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 eye-ball; I am nothing. I see all. The currents of the Universal Being circulate through me; I am part or particle of God."[52] This is a moment of mystic fusion during which the narrator's ego ("I") or self

becomes one with an underlying, all-encompassing monistic power, "Being," divine energy or "God." While Emerson's description is more in line with the Hindu belief in the identity of *Atman* (individual self/soul) and *Brahman* (universal soul/underlying power of the universe) than the Mahayana or Zen Buddhist teaching of *śūnyatā*, the passage is nonetheless an early expression of Emerson's gradual move away from a dualistic and substantialist conception of Being.

But perhaps Emerson's most explicit declaration of intellectual independence from Europe, including the abandonment of a metaphysics of presence and substantialist thought, can be found in his essay "The American Scholar" (1837). In this essay, Emerson presents a post-metaphysical vision of Being as "circular power returning into itself."[53] He refers to Being as a beginning and endless dynamic continuity or, as Herwig Friedl puts it, a "self-constituting circularity of both nature and mind" whose transient manifestations form a multi-dimensionally expanding divine *textura* or "web" that eludes verbalization,[54] which Emerson refers to as "the inexplicable continuity of this web of God."[55] With this ground-breaking ontological vision, Emerson abandons the traditional Western notion of Being as essentially substantial and the Western belief in metaphysical absolutes. Instead he advocates an open-ended revisionism, referring to himself as an "endless seeker" and "experimenter" and anticipating later, twentieth-century anti-foundationalist positions (such as pragmatism).[56] At the end of his essay "Circles," he describes a process of letting go ("abandonment") that, to a certain extent, is reminiscent of Buddhist non-attachment. He celebrates the process of emptying one's mind and assuming an egoless, pre-conceptual perspective that allows the unexpected and unprecedented, the *new* to come forth (emergence).

> The one thing which we seek with insatiable desire, is to forget ourselves, to be surprised out of our propriety, to lose our sempiternal memory, and to do something without knowing how or why; in short, to draw a new circle. Nothing great was ever achieved without enthusiasm. The way of life is wonderful: it is by abandonment.[57]

At first sight, Emerson contradicts the Buddhist teaching of non-attachment and no-mind in describing "abandonment" as being accompanied by an extreme feeling of "enthusiasm" and the wish to re-construct or build anew. Yet this proto-pragmatist notion of looking forward that focuses on the importance of human creation is, after all, very close to the life-affirming way of Zen described by D. T. Suzuki in his *An Introduction to Zen Buddhism* (1934):

> Do not imagine, however, that Zen is nihilism. All nihilism is self-destructive, it ends nowhere. Negativism is sound as method, but the highest truth is an affir-

> mation . . . we must not forget that Zen is holding up in this very act of negation something quite positive and eternally affirmative.[58]

In *A Week on the Concord and Merrimack Rivers*, Henry David Thoreau, similar to Emerson in "The American Scholar," narratively depicts life as a temporally unfolding continual circular happening. It is symbolically represented by the one-week boat trip of the narrator and his brother John along the rivers and mountains of New England, which begins and ends in the town of Concord, Massachusetts, and unfolds between Saturday and Friday (and could essentially start again, one might claim). During this journey, the narrator's thoughts follow the stream of the river and wander across the surrounding landscape, freely associating topics, experiences, memories, and ideas. James R. Guthrie speaks of the book's "discursive and [at the same time] meditative" character.[59] Transcending the pre-given, linear frame of the river, the narrator's thoughts "weave" a multi-dimensional texture, a verbal painting, or what Judith Broome Mesa-Pelly calls a "web of time and space, memory and history" that is reminiscent of the Chinese landscape scroll.[60] In his book *Literary Transcendentalism: Style and Vision in the American Renaissance* (1973), Lawrence Buell states with regard to *A Week* that "Thoreau's excursion does not have the kind of formal cohesiveness which modern readers have been trained to expect, but it does have a sinuous continuity, reminiscent of those lengthy Chinese scroll paintings entitled 'Mountains and Rivers without End.'"[61]

At the end of the first chapter, the narrator, like the speaker in Snyder's poem "Endless Streams and Mountains," abandons his observing (external) perspective and steps into a boat and into the flowing river. He and his brother immerse themselves in the dynamically unfolding happening of the journey with an open, receptive mind, going *with* its current or flow. One could argue that the change of perspective comes down to the adoption of a state of no-mind, a state of immediate awareness that is prior to verbalization: "we, . . . who behold but speak not, silently glided past the firm lands of Concord . . . Our reflections had already acquired an historical remoteness from the scenes we had left."[62]

In the "Tuesday" chapter, after experiencing the Sunday in nature as an archetypical, purely "natural Sabbath" and praising the myths, scriptures, and (alleged) contemplative attitude of the "Asiatics," Thoreau retells the story of a climactic mountain ascent that he made during another journey. He inserts the story in the narrative of *A Week*, which was an attempt to come to terms with the death of his brother John. The narrator retells in the form of a memory how he climbed up "Saddle-back Mountain in Massachusetts" (Mt. Greylock) and after a while rose into a "new world . . ., the new terra-firma perchance of my future life." His entering a "new world" could be read as a newly gained perspective on life beyond the illusory, unenlightened view.

As the morning light gradually grows brighter, he becomes surrounded by "an ocean of mist" reminiscent of the Chinese landscape paintings, which hides from him the world of parts and particularities. He experiences reality as a dreamlike mystical unity and undifferentiated whole, beyond language and discrimination:

> As the light increased I discovered around me an ocean of mist, which . . . shut out every vestige of the earth . . . All around beneath me was spread for a hundred miles on every side, as far as the eye could reach, an undulating country of clouds . . . It was such a country as we might see in dreams, with all the delights of paradise . . . There was wanting the symbol, so there was not the substance of impurity, no spot nor stain. It was a favor for which to be forever silent to be shown this vision. The earth beneath . . . was not merely veiled to me, but it had passed away like the phantom of a shadow, . . . and this new platform was gained.

From his "new platform," from his superterrestrial perspective, the narrator sees the world below and around as a bright, paradisiac place beyond Platonic shadow, contamination, language, and differentiation. He envisions a future entering of the "region of eternal day."[63] We can read his reaching a new platform as a metaphor for attaining a state of heightened awareness or no-mind. The narrator no longer clings to visual particularities, which he calls "symbols," but instead gradually awakens to a "pure world" that, ironically, is not marked by clarity and translucence or eternal ideas, but by the opaque, undifferentiated simultaneity of *all* existence, reminiscent of Dōgen's ontology.

The final chapter of *A Week*, titled "Friday," is marked by quietude, silence, and contemplation. According to my reading, it complements and balances the passage on ascent with an atmosphere of exhilaration. Reminiscent of luminist paintings, the scenery is described as crystalline, illuminated, and divine. After having experienced overnight "the turning point in the season," the passing of summer into autumn, which could be read as a metaphor for the brothers' inner conversion, they quietly float down the stream towards their final destination. Interestingly, the narrator describes their experience of nature from the perspective of the boat as if he were reading a Chinese landscape painting, "map," or Chinese scroll that gradually unrolls before his eyes. Just like the speaker in Snyder's poem, he becomes aware of the objects—mountains and rivers—mentioning them moment by moment *anew* without evaluating them, as if he had assumed a new perspective of no-mind: "Sitting with our faces now up stream, we studied the landscape by degrees, as one unrolls a map, rock, tree, house, hill, and meadow . . . Viewed from this side the scenery appeared new to us." Most importantly, at the very end of *A Week*, the brothers abandon their subjective perspective and individuality, fusing with the surrounding silence, portrayed as the never-absent "back ground" to the temporally unfolding painting of life:

> Silence is the universal refuge, the sequel to all dull discourses and all foolish acts, a balm to our every chagrin, as welcome after satiety as after disappointment; that back ground which the painter may not daub, . . . and which, however awkward a figure we may have made in the foreground, remains ever our inviolable asylum.[64]

One cannot avoid the impression that Thoreau was familiar with Song dynasty landscape scrolls when he wrote this passage. While the "back ground" generally depicted in transcendentalism is a monistic divine power and not Buddhist emptiness, the narrator's meditation on silence hints at a different view, evoking Zen Buddhist and Taoist ways of intuiting reality as ultimately nameless and empty. The (paradoxically "audible"[65]) silent background mentioned by Thoreau also brings back to mind Alan Watts's remark on the "relative emptiness" of the Chinese landscape paintings.[66]

Non-Substantialist Ontology and Intertextuality in Jack Kerouac's *The Dharma Bums*

Roughly a century after Thoreau's *A Week*, the Beat writer Jack Kerouac published *The Dharma Bums*—a semi-autobiographical narrative of a journey across the United States. This story recounts the spiritual search of a whole generation for the alleged essence, substance or, as Thoreau put it in *Walden* (1854), the "marrow of life."[67] The book vividly illustrates how this generational search (represented by the protagonist's personal quest and transformation) was fueled by the intense study and practice of Asian philosophy and religion. It culminates in the narrator's momentary enlightening return to a pre-verbal and pre-conceptual state of emptiness and silence (no-mind).

Notably, Jack Kerouac dedicates *The Dharma Bums* to the Chinese Tang dynasty poet Han Shan. A "Zen lunatic," sage, and mountain hermit, Han Shan was admired by Gary Snyder, who translated Shan's "Cold Mountain Poems" into English in the 1950s.[68] Han Shan literally means "Cold Mountain." Like Thoreau's *A Week*, Kerouac's semi-autobiographical novel narrates a spiritual quest that unfolds like a Chinese landscape painting. It contains two climactic mountain ascents, time spent on hills and trips through the U.S. and Mexico at ground level by train, bus, and car.[69] *The Dharma Bums* conveys the Beat generation's "vision of a great rucksack revolution" based on the transformation of mind into no-mind. The friendship of the two main characters, "Dharma Bums" or "Zen lunatics" Ray Smith and Japhy Ryder—Kerouac's fictional names for himself and Gary Snyder—lies at the center of the story. The "religious wanderer" Ray looks up to Japhy as "a great new hero of American culture" who translates poems of Han Shan into English and who is versed in the art of mountain climbing and Zen practice. He encourages Ray to climb a mountain and explains to him how the art of climbing mountains is akin to Zen. Both entail cultivating a state

of awareness marked by playfulness and flexibility, the ability to immediately adapt to each presently given situation: "'The secret of this kind of climbing,' says Japhy, 'is like Zen. Don't think. Just dance along." Japhy associates mountains with the Buddha, an enlightened attitude of no-mind, marked by mental and verbal silence and the immediate awareness of the world's ultimate "emptiness." This is also an awareness of its simultaneous beginning and end, which are always directly present:

> Now the mountains were getting that pink tinge . . . "They're so silent!" I said. "Yeah man, you know to me a mountain is a Buddha. Think of the patience, hundreds of thousands of years just sittin there bein perfectly silent . . . This is the beginning and the end of the world right here. Look at all those patient Buddhas lookin at us saying nothing."[70]

In this same spirit, the philosopher Masao Abe states that, according to Buddhist teachings, "time dies and is reborn at each and every moment."[71] The world, accordingly, emerges and dissolves in and *as* each and every single transient (empty) moment of "existence-time" (Japanese: *uji*).

The first climactic mountain-top experience is when Ray and Japhy and their friend Henry Morley attempt to climb Matterhorn Peak in California. Guided by Japhy, Ray learns how to both ascend and descend a mountain with a playful and enlightened attitude of no-mind or *wu wei* (Chinese: "action without action," "no action against the course of nature"). They run down Matterhorn, lightheartedly dancing from boulder to boulder, following the course of nature without any effort or deliberate thought. "Then suddenly everything was just like jazz: it happened in one insane second or so: I looked up and saw Japhy *running down the mountain* . . . and began running down the mountain after him." Ray concludes with regard to his new state of heightened awareness: "'Ah Japhy you taught me the final lesson of them all, you can't fall off a mountain.' . . . But when I looked up and saw you running down that mountain I suddenly understood everything.' 'Ah a little satori for Smith today,' says Morley."[72] Ray's friend Morley is described here in a way similar to a Japanese Zen master who attests to his disciple the attainment of enlightenment.

Later in the narrative, Ray experiences another moment of satori away from mountain tops. In the passage, the correspondence between the Mahayana Buddhist teaching of *śūnyatā* and the growing tendency of Western science to view existence as ultimately empty, groundless, or void of substance is addressed directly. While visiting his mother and family for Christmas in North Carolina, Ray resumes his spiritual quest by meditating every day quietly under a "baby pine" in a forest close to his mother's house. In one moment, he gains the enlightening insight into the non-substantiality of all existence:

> But then suddenly under the tree at night, I had the astonishing idea: "Everything is empty but awake! Things are empty in time and space and mind." I figured it all out and . . . I felt the time had come to explain everything to my family. They laughed more than anything else. "But listen! No! Look! . . . It's empty, everythin's empty, things come but to go, . . . you see them, but they're made up of atoms that can't be measured or weighed or taken hold of, even the dumb scientists know that now, there *isn't* any finding of the farthest atom so-called, things are just empty arrangements of something that seems solid . . . they're ghosts pure and simple."[73]

Ray takes up an insight that the historical Buddha had uttered in the fifth or sixth century BCE and that has become increasingly relevant over the past century to nuclear scientists such as Hans-Peter Dürr: that there is no ultimate tiniest particle or primary substance, but rather only existence as a temporal and relational, continuous *event*.[74] In another passage of *The Dharma Bums*, Japhy expresses to Ray a similar insight into the ultimate identity of "matter" and "spirit:" "The closer you get to real matter, rock air fire and wood, boy, the more spiritual the world is. All these people thinking they're hardheaded materialistic practical types, they don't know shit about matter, their heads are full of dreamy ideas and notions." Here "spirit" is not to be understood in terms of a substantial reality or ghost-like substance or power. The character of Japhy represents the Zen Buddhist insight that matter and spirit (or mind) are not essentially different because both are ultimately manifestations of emptiness. Ray's attempt to explain his enlightening insight into the non-substantiality of existence to his family necessarily fails because it is an intuitive insight that must be experienced directly. It is beyond rational comprehension and cannot be fully grasped in language. Frustrated, Ray leaves his family and returns to California, where Japhy procures for him a job as a mountain lookout on Desolation Peak. In the mountainous landscape, Ray's final enlightenment experience happens one morning upon looking down at the world below:

> Lo, in the morning I woke up and it was beautiful blue sun-shine sky and I went out in my alpine yard and there it was, everything Japhy said it was, hundreds of miles of pure snow-covered rocks and virgin lakes and high timber, and below, instead of the world, I saw a sea of marshmallow clouds flat as a roof and extending miles and miles in every direction, . . . I had a tremendous sensation of the dreamlikeness . . ., especially when I stood on my head to circulate my blood, . . . and then the mountains looked like little bubbles hanging in the void upside down. In fact I realized they were upsidedown and I was upsidedown! . . . I realized, "there is no answer." I didn't know anything any more. I didn't care, and it didn't matter, and suddenly I felt really free.[75]

What eventually brings Ray peace of mind is his turn to an empty state of no-mind, symbolized by the headstand, in which he no longer dissects reality into pieces, into

knowledge or particular thoughts. He simply becomes aware of reality in its "suchness" (Sanskrit: *tathatā*) and ultimate emptiness, realizing that the empty present is all there is.

It is relevant to my argument that in *The Dharma Bums* Japhy talks about his future plan to compose a poem titled "Rivers and Mountains Without End." With an intertextual reference, Kerouac addresses Gary Snyder's poetic project with which I started—the project that was inspired by his encounter with the Chinese landscape painting.

> Know what I'm gonna do? I'll do a new long poem called "Rivers and Mountains Without End" and just write it on and on on a scroll and unfold on and on with new surprises and always what went before forgotten, see, like a river, or like one of them real long Chinese silk paintings that show two little men hiking in an endless landscape of gnarled old trees and mountains so high they merge with the fog in the upper silk void. I'll spend three thousand years writing it, it'll be packed full of information on soil conservation, the Tennessee Valley Authority, astronomy, geology, Hsuan Tsung's travels, Chinese painting theory, reforestation, Oceanic ecology and food chains.[76]

It is not difficult to imagine that the "two little men" on the canvas who merge with the fog in the void are Japhy and Ray, who, moment by moment, reach the enlightened state of no-mind. Anticipating the creation of his ekphrastic poem, Japhy imagines what could be called a poem-painting of the world as a temporally and spatially unfolding web of interdependence and mutual conditioning (Sanskrit: *pratītya-samutpāda*) that, in line with the Buddhist doctrine of "momentariness" (Sanskrit: *ksasikavāda*), actualizes itself (i.e., is unrolled, lived, painted, and poetically created) moment by moment (reminiscent of the "Net of Indra" mentioned in the *Avatamsaka-Sūtra* of Mahayana Buddhism). The poet-painter (Japhy) says it will take him "three thousand years" to create his poem, which is a time span that clearly transcends that of an individual human life and thus, one could argue, connotes a view of reality (the poem-painting) as a self-creative happening that transcends temporal and spatial boundaries and emerges, ever anew, out of nothingness ("void") through poetic imagination (Greek: *poiesis*).

Conclusion

One may say that both *A Week* and *The Dharma Bums* reflect the Emersonian and central Buddhist insight that life, in its very essence, is a dynamic continuity, a relational happening or "web of events."[77] The narrative structure of both works is similar to Snyder's poem and the Chinese scrolls. They, too, give expression to ontological insights that can be found in the centuries-old elucidations by Nāgārjuna, the Zen

ontology of Dōgen, specifically his notion of "existence-time," and Buddha's insight into "impermanence" (Sanskrit: *anitya*). Both Thoreau and Kerouac crafted their semi-autobiographical narratives in the form of journeys that unfold through meandering geographical and spiritual landscapes, reaching points of climax on mountain tops and quietly flowing rivers (as well as in the woods), where the narrators experience epiphanies or moments of heightened awareness. The journeys are similar to the dynamically interacting mountains and rivers of Dōgen and Snyder and may be read as narrative descriptions of Being (ontologies) as an essentially temporal, rhythmical happening that continually emerges from the creative interplay of two complementary forces. Most importantly, they generate and *comprise* occasional moments of spiritual insight (no-mind) during which the narrators instantaneously become aware—in Dōgen's sense—of the simultaneity, interconnectedness, and ultimate "emptiness" of all existence in an essentially life-affirming way.

Viewed from a broader analytical perspective, all four works with their various intertextual and intermedial references and interconnections as well as their numerous analogies of structure and content, together form a distinct web, a manifestation (phenomenon) of reality as an altogether multi-dimensionally expanding non-substantial relational happening. Elucidating this web (or "situation" in the sense of Jullien) from a transcultural perspective has been the aim of this article and will hopefully serve as a minor yet fruitful contribution to the ongoing project of (East/West) comparative philosophy, literary and cultural studies. It is intended to support what Jullien envisions as the "work in progress" of European-shaped cultures. By closely studying the philosophies or "thought-languages" of Asia (and the United States, as I would like to add) and setting them in critical relation to European thought, one moves away "from [a focus on] the question of Being to the thought [and attainment] of *living*."[78]

Notes

1 See, for example: Van Meter Ames, *Zen and American Thought* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1978); Kenneth K. Inada and Nolan P. Jacobson, eds., *Buddhism and American Thinkers* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1984); Robert S. Ellwood, ed., *Zen in American Life and Letters; Interplay 6: Proceedings of Colloquia in Comparative Literature and the Arts* (Malibu, CA: Undena Publications, 1987). For a more recent publication, written from the transcultural perspective of a Japanese scholar, see Yoshio Takanashi, *Emerson and Neo-Confucianism* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014).

2 I have explored a similar matter with regard to the topic of time in my book *TIME in American and East Asian Thinking*. See this work also for a more comprehensive comparative study of East Asian thought (Zen and Hua-yen Buddhism) and works of the American transcendentalists Emerson and Thoreau. Birgit Capelle, *TIME in American and East Asian Thinking: A Comparative Study of Temporality in American Transcenden-*

talism, Pragmatism, and (Zen) Buddhist Thought (Heidelberg: Universitätsverlag Winter, 2011).

3 Gary Snyder, "Blue Mountains Constantly Walking," in *The Gary Snyder Reader: Prose, Poetry, and Translations 1952–1998* (New York: Counterpoint, 1999), 203.

4 Waltraud Mitgutsch, "Gary Snyder's Poetry: A Fusion of East and West," in *Essays in Honour of Erwin Stürzl on His Sixtieth Birthday*, ed. James Hogg (Salzburg: Institut für Englische Sprache und Literatur, Universität Salzburg, 1980), 430.

5 Mitgutsch, "Gary Snyder's Poetry," 425.

6 Arthur Christy, *The Orient in American Transcendentalism: A Study of Emerson, Thoreau, and Alcott* (New York: Octagon Books, 1978), vii.

7 David Need, "Kerouac's Buddhism," *Talisman: A Journal of Contemporary Poetry and Poetics*, nos. 32–33 (2006): 83–90. See also: Birgit Capelle, "Generating Newness in the Flow of Immediacy: Stein, Kerouac, and the Tao of Modernist Writing," in *Modernities and Modernization in North America*, ed. Ilka Brasch and Ruth Mayer (Heidelberg: Universitätsverlag Winter, 2018), 46–48.

8 Ralph Waldo Emerson, "Circles," in *The Collected Works of Ralph Waldo Emerson*, vol. 2, ed. Joseph Slater et al. (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 1979), 188.

9 "Western" is to be understood as "European and North American traditions/histories of ideas"; "Eastern" as "Chinese and Japanese, Taoist and Buddhist traditions."

10 Heraclitus's proclamation implies, however, the hypothesis of an unchanging principle of "change." In *Experience and Nature* (1925), John Dewey asserts: "The argument is not forgetful that there are, from Heracleitus to Bergson, philosophies, metaphysics, of change . . . But the philosophies of flux also indicate the intensity of the craving for the sure and fixed. They have deified change by making it universal, regular, sure." Dewey, John. "Existence as Precarious and as Stable," in *The Later Works, 1925–1953*, vol. 1, ed. Jo Ann Boydston (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1981), 49.

11 Hans-Peter Dürr, *Es gibt keine Materie! Revolutionäre Gedanken über Physik und Mystik* (Amerang: Crotona, 2018).

12 Dewey, "Existence as Precarious and as Stable," 63. In the field of neuroscience, Wolf Singer and the molecular biologist and Buddhist monk Matthieu Ricard postulate that the human ego or self does not exist in a substantial way but is rather a delusional mental construct. Wolf Singer and Matthieu Ricard, *Hirnforschung und Meditation: Ein Dialog* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 2008), 51.

13 In Buddhism, there is, however, the belief in elementary *skandhas*, which are considered to be ultimately empty.

14 Michael G. Barnhart, "Śūnyatā, Textualism, and Incommensurability," *Philosophy East and West: A Quarterly of Asian and Comparative Thought* 44, no. 4 (1994): 649, DOI: 10.2307/1399756.

15 Francisco J. Varela, Evan Thompson, and Eleanor Rosch, *The Embodied Mind: Cognitive Science and Human Experience* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1993), 230, 253, 229. Varela points out that "the majority of the world's Buddhists do not speak of their deepest concerns in negative terms; these negatives are preliminaries—that are pointing toward the realization of a positively conceived state" (248). He also finds reason for his optimist position in the structural analogies and convergences of Western science and

philosophy as well as Buddhist practice and thought: "We do find remarkable, however, the extent to which the Western tradition, based on the reasoning of philosophy and scientific practices, and the Buddhist tradition and thought, based on experiencing the world with mindfulness/awareness, have converged" (230).

16 François Jullien, *From Being to Living (De l'Être au Vivre): A Euro-Chinese Lexicon of Thought*, trans. Michael Richardson and Krysztof Fijalkowski (London: Sage, 2020), 202, 204, 7, 12, 203, 203. Jullien asserts: "Just as the ontology of Being that serves as a basis of knowledge needs to be taken apart, so we will have to try to undo the ontology of the Subject" (12).

17 It is important to note that William James overcomes, in a sense, the European approach when in the "Stream of Thought" chapter of his *The Principles of Psychology* (1890), he presents a phenomenological approach to his psychological philosophy. He suggests that philosophy and psychology should start with consciousness or thinking, which has, in its pure, original state, a pre-subjective quality. It "*tends* to be [but not necessarily *is*] part of personal consciousness" (220; emphasis mine). This is why, instead of the Cartesian *cogito*, James uses the subject-less phrases "it thinks" and "thought goes on" when he speaks of "the first fact for us … as psychologists" (219). William James, *The Principles of Psychology Vol. 1*, in *The Works of William James*, vol. 8 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1981).

18 Jullien, *From Being to Living*, 8–9, 11. Please note that "*shān-shui*" in the block quotation should be written with an i-breve; unfortunately, the font *JAAAS* uses does not support this character.

19 "Streams and Mountains without End," *Cleveland Museum of Art*, accessed October 25, 2020, https://clevelandart.org/art/1953.126.

20 Sherman E. Lee and Wen Fong, *Streams and Mountains Without End: A Northern Sung Handscroll and Its Significance in the History of Early Chinese Painting*, 2nd ed. (Ascona: Artibus Asiae, 1967), 2–3.

21 See also Susan Bush, "Yet Again 'Streams and Mountains without End,'" *Artibus Asiae* 48, nos. 3/4 (1987): 197, DOI: 10.2307/3249871; Anthony Hunt, *Genesis, Structure, and Meaning in Gary Snyder's* Mountains and Rivers Without End (Reno: University of Nevada Press, 2004), 30.

22 "Streams and Mountains without End."

23 Bush, "Yet Again," 197.

24 Lee and Fong, *Streams and Mountains*, 1.

25 Gary Snyder, *Mountains and Rivers Without End* (Berkeley, CA: Counterpoint, 1996), 155.

26 Snyder, *Mountains and Rivers*, 158.

27 Snyder, "Blue Mountains," 203.

28 Hunt, *Genesis, Structure, and Meaning*, 65, 29.

29 Snyder, *Mountains and Rivers*, 9.

30 John Dewey, *Art as Experience*, in *The Later Works, 1925–1953*, vol. 10, ed. Jo Ann Boydston (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1987). In the chapter titled "Having an Experience," John Dewey presents his view of art as "an [integral unified] experience" that dynamically unfolds in a non-dualistic way (35). Art, according to Dewey, is a temporally stretching process of dynamic interaction between an artist and her/his work (=

"an experience") during which both are not dualistically split. In a way, the artist creating is in a pre-subjective, immediately present state of no-mind that no longer differentiates between subject (herself/himself) and object (her/his work of art).

31 "Streams and Mountains without End." See also Lee and Fong, *Streams and Mountains*, 6–7.

32 See also Dewey: "For to perceive, a beholder must create his own experience… Without an act of recreation the object is not perceived as a work of art.… There is work done on the part of the percipient as there is on the part of the artist." Dewey, *Art as Experience*, 60. According to Dewey's aesthetics, neither the artist nor the perceiver is dualistically separated from the work but, rather, forms an integral part of the temporally unfolding work of art itself.

33 Bush, "Yet Again," 197.

34 Snyder, *Mountains and Rivers*, 161.

35 Hunt, *Genesis, Structure, and Meaning*, 27, 35, 61.

36 Snyder, *Mountains and Rivers*, 158.

37 Hunt, *Genesis, Structure, and Meaning*, 31.

38 Snyder, *Mountains and Rivers*, 5.

39 See also Hunt, *Genesis, Structure, and Meaning*, 65.

40 Snyder, "Blue Mountains," 203–204.

41 Alan Watts, *The Way of Zen* (New York: Vintage Books, 2019), 179.

42 Hunt, *Genesis, Structure, and Meaning*, 32.

43 Hunt, *Genesis, Structure, and Meaning*, 36.

44 Snyder, "Blue Mountains," 203–204.

45 Thomas Cleary, "Shōbōgenzō: Zen Essays by Dōgen," in *Classics of Buddhism and Zen: The Collected Translations of Thomas Cleary*, vol. 2 (Boston, MA: Shambhala Publications, 2001), 348, 344.

46 Hee-Jin Kim, *Dōgen Kigen: Mystical Realist* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1987), 143.

47 Steven Heine, "Temporality of Hermeneutics in Dōgen's *Shōbōgenzō*," *Philosophy East and West: A Quarterly of Asian and Comparative Thought* 33, no. 2 (1983): 144, DOI: 10.2307/1399098.

48 Kim, *Dōgen Kigen*, 147.

49 Daisetz Teitaro Suzuki, *Manual of Zen Buddhism* (New York: Grove Press, 1994), 85–86. According to D. T. Suzuki, Zen "looks backwards to a point before the world with all its dichotomies has yet made its début." Daisetz Teitaro Suzuki, *Living by Zen*, ed. Christmas Humphreys (London: Rider & Company, 1972), 70.

50 Heinrich Dumoulin, *Zen Buddhism: A History*, vol. 1, trans. James W. Heisig and Paul Knitter (New York: Macmillan Publishing, 1988), 142–43.

51 In his "Works and Days," Emerson applies the term "everlasting now" (with a slightly different meaning). He was inspired by Thomas Carlyle's *Sartor Resartus* (1834). Ralph Waldo Emerson, "Works and Days," in *The Complete Works of Ralph Waldo Emerson*, vol. 7 (Cambridge, MA: Riverside Press, 1904). 174.

52 Ralph Waldo Emerson, "Nature," in *The Collected Works of Ralph Waldo Emerson*, vol. 1, ed. Robert E. Spiller and Alfred R. Ferguson (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 1971), 10.

53 Ralph Waldo Emerson, "The American Scholar," in *The Collected Works of Ralph Waldo Emerson*, vol. 1, ed. Robert E. Spiller and Alfred R. Ferguson (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 1971), 54.

54 Herwig Friedl, "Fate, Power, and History in Emerson and Nietzsche," *ESQ: A Journal of the American Renaissance*, no. 43 (1996): 280.

55 Emerson, "The American Scholar," 54.

56 Emerson, "Circles," 188.

57 Emerson, "Circles," 190.

58 Daisetz Teitaro Suzuki, *An Introduction to Zen Buddhism* (New York: Grove Press, 1964), 9.

59 James R. Guthrie, *Above TIME: Emerson's and Thoreau's Temporal Revolutions* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2001), 49.

60 Judith Broome Mesa-Pelly, "Thoreau's 'Basket of a Delicate Texture': Weaving History in A Week," *The Concord Saunterer*, no. 4 (1996): 176.

61 Lawrence Buell, *Literary Transcendentalism: Style and Vision in the American Renaissance* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1973), 236.

62 Henry David Thoreau, *The Writings of Henry David Thoreau: A Week on the Concord and Merrimack Rivers*, ed. Carl F. Hovde et al. (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1980), 16–17.

63 Thoreau, *A Week*, 46, 126, 180, 188–89.

64 Thoreau, *A Week*, 334, 349, 392.

65 Thoreau, *A Week*, 391.

66 Watts, *The Way of Zen*, 179.

67 Henry David Thoreau, *Walden, Civil Disobedience, and Other Writings: Authoritative Texts, Journal Reviews and Posthumous Assessments, Criticism*, 3rd ed., ed William Rossi (New York: Norton & Company, 2008), 65. In *On the Road* (1957), this search turns into the pursuit of an ultimately nameless "IT."

68 Jack Kerouac, *The Dharma Bums*, in *Road Novels 1957–1960*, ed. Douglas Brinkley (New York: Library of America, 2007), 290.

69 See also Keith N. Hull, "A Dharma Bum Goes West to Meet the East," *Western American Literature* 11, no. 4 (1977): 321–29, DOI: 10.1353/wal.1977.0014.

70 Kerouac, *The Dharma Bums*, 351, 356, 282, 302, 326, 328–29.

71 Masao Abe, "Time in Buddhism," in *Zen and Comparative Studies: Zen and Western Thought*, vol. 2, ed. Steven Heine (Basingstoke: Macmillan Press, 1997), 168.

72 Kerouac, *Dharma Bums*, 341–42.

73 Kerouac, *Dharma Bums*, 378, 385–86.

74 See also Dewey, "Existence as Precarious and as Stable," 63.

75 Kerouac, *Dharma Bums*, 432, 453–58.

76 Kerouac, *Dharma Bums*, 427.

77 Ralph Waldo Emerson, "The Over-Soul," in The Collected Works of Ralph Waldo Emerson,

vol. 2, ed. Joseph Slater et al. (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 1979), 163.

78 Jullien, *From Being to Living*, 202–205; my emphasis.

About the Author

Birgit Capelle is a postdoc researcher and lecturer in the North American Studies program at the University of Bonn. She has taught at the University of Düsseldorf, where she graduated with a dissertation titled "TIME and Temporality in American and East Asian Thinking," in which she analyzes structural parallels between American Transcendentalist, Pragmatist, and (Zen) Buddhist ways of conceptualizing temporality and existence. Her dissertation received the "Best Dissertation in The Faculty of Arts and Humanities 2009" award and was published by Universiätsverlag Winter in 2011. Capelle's primary research interest concerns the convergences and intersections of U.S. American, European, and Asian thought. She is currently working on a global study of spiritual crises in autobiographical writing (from the seventeenth to the twentieth century). In September 2018, she made a short research trip to Concord, MA, supported by the Ralph Waldo Emerson Society.

Contact: Birgit Capelle; University of Bonn; North American Studies Program; Department of English, American, and Celtic Studies; bcapell1@uni-bonn.de.

More than a Feeling

Why the Lewis and Clark Expedition Did not Experience "the Sublime" at the Great Divide when Crossing the American Continent

Heinz Tschachler

Abstract

When in the early summer of 1805 Meriwether Lewis for the first time sights the great mountains of the American West, he merely reports "an august spectacle." The word "august" was not then an aesthetic category, nor did it usually describe visual contact with landscape. Categories used for these purposes were the picturesque and the sublime. Whereas there are numerous examples of the picturesque in the journals of the Lewis and Clark expedition, the sublime draws a blank. In my contribution, I will be offering several reasons for the absence of description in the sublime mode: (1) Like their contemporaries, Lewis and Clark held nature up to the yardstick of utility, calculating the agricultural potential of the land or the navigability of a river. (2) The Lewis and Clark expedition was a military expedition, sent out by President Jefferson not to stand in awe at sublime grandeur but to document a useful landscape. (3) Seeing mountains as sublime was essentially a matter of an individual imagination. The Corps of Discovery was a group, whose success depended on cooperation. Hence, the individual imagination must take a back seat. (4) The actual experience of hardship and adversity during the crossing of the Rockies would have obviated any description in the "grand style." (5) Finally, the Corps of Discovery was not even prepared to encounter the great mountains of the West, expecting instead gentle rolling hills that would enable an easy portage to the Columbia River and, if anything, call for picturesque description.

Suggested Citation: Tschachler, Heinz. "More than a Feeling: Why the Lewis and Clark Expedition Did not Experience 'the Sublime' at the Great Divide when Crossing the American Continent." *JAAAS: Journal of the Austrian Association for American Studies* 2, no. 2 (2021): 143–160, DOI: 10.47060/jaaas.v2i2.85.

Keywords: Clark, William; Lewis, Meriwether; Lewis and Clark Expedition; Rocky Mountains; the sublime

Peer Review: This article was reviewed by the issue's guest editors and an external reviewer.

More than a Feeling

Why the Lewis and Clark Expedition Did not Experience "the Sublime" at the Great Divide when Crossing the American Continent

Heinz Tschachler

At the turn of the twenty-first century, the United States geared up for the bicentennial of the Lewis and Clark expedition. American filmmaker Ken Burns launched his riveting television documentary *Lewis & Clark: The Journey of the Corps of Discovery* (1997) and even President George W. Bush paid tribute to the achievement that "changed the face of our country forever. It opened up the American West for future development." Bush further claimed that the Lewis and Clark expedition "increased our knowledge of our natural resources," helped "gain a better understanding of America's native cultures," and that the expedition "will stand forever as a monument to the American spirit, a spirit of optimism and courage and persistence in the face of adversity."[1] Mountains figure prominently in nineteenth-century explorations and they have held a prime position in travel since. Today, high mountains are among the prime tourist attractions and are often regarded as the most beautiful and spiritually uplifting places on earth, and as the cause of pleasurable, even ecstatic feelings by a large majority of writers and artists. Their attraction is frequently associated with the state of the sublime and Percy Bysshe Shelley's poem "Mont Blanc" (1817), perhaps the most famous literary celebration of mountain sublimity.

This article argues that despite the high currency of the sublime, the Lewis and Clark expedition did not habitually resort to this category in their reports. It investigates the reasons for this absence and asks how the members of the expedition responded to the high mountains of the American West. Altogether in the *Journals*, the word "sublime" occurs a mere four times, and only in Meriwether Lewis's writings, as only Lewis had the refined sensibility to associate the landscape with European art, literature, and thought. But even Lewis used the category of the sublime only in

describing the Great Falls and the White Cliffs of the Missouri, scenes that somehow fit the aesthetic sensibility that he had acquired in the East. That sensibility proved to be inadequate at the Great Divide. If sublimity was not the main defining category to make sense of the mountains encountered in the American West, what were the qualities chosen for representation?

Lewis's record of "a most beatifull and picturesk view of the Rocky mountains" is truly enthusiastic, yet what he described is a static tableau.[2] This was the trademark of picturesque description, that is, of "the habit of viewing and criticizing nature as if it were an infinite series of more or less well composed subjects for painting."[3] Derived from landscape painting, the term "picturesque" references an ideal form of nature and may be described as "feeling through the eye."[4] By contrast, beautiful landscapes were light, pastoral, and pleasing. Flattering a sense of our own power, they evoke cheerful and harmonious reactions. Though aesthetic categories were not part of the expedition's "surveying catalog," on occasion such categories did enter their observations. We find examples for as long as the actual landscape somehow corresponded to what they had been told to encounter— truly pastoral stretches or gentle rolling hills that would enable an easy portage to the Columbia River. As we will see, in the actual crossing of the Rocky Mountains, the view is neither beautiful nor picturesque. By contrast, the sublime might have qualified as a representational category. Literally, sublime means "(on) high, lofty, elevated." Used as "a term of aesthetic approbation," its effect is "simultaneously to make one conscious of one's own comparative weakness in the face of natural might and to produce a sense of the strength of one's own faculties."[5]

Originally, "sublime" denoted a writing style that was calculated to prompt the strongest emotions. By the eighteenth century, it had gone well beyond that, to a theory of emotional experience that shaped not only literary representation but also the arts as well as the experience of landscape, in particular of features of overwhelming grandeur such as the high Alps. Edmund Burke elaborated as early as 1757 that the sublime, especially the sublime in nature, causes a specific "passion," that is, "Astonishment." This is a mingled passion, comprising both enjoyment of beauty, which evokes feelings of "joy and pleasure," and "some degree of horror." Most importantly, in sublime moments, "the mind is so entirely filled with its [sublime] object, that it cannot … reason."[6] In this way, and always from a safe distance, sublime encounters transform landscape into a baffling wilderness, bringing the observer face to face with a lack, or rather inadequacy, of human comprehension and agency, producing a sense of powerlessness and insignificance vis-á-vis the infinite. In other words, the sublime "bespeaks pleasure in an object that is without bounds not merely in appearing infinite but in having no form."[7]

In the remainder of this essay, I will probe the following three reasons for the absence of the sublime mode in the Rocky Mountains section of the journals: (1) The Lewis and Clark expedition was a military expedition by order of President Jefferson. Their mission was to find a practicable water communication and not to stand in awe at sublime grandeur. (2) Mountain tops have been valuable viewpoints in colonial exploration and were used to assess the agricultural and navigational potential of an area from a bird's-eye view. Holding nature up to the yardstick of utility did not necessarily lend itself to aesthetic appreciation. (3) When the Corps of Discovery, as Thomas Jefferson had called the group, encountered the great mountains of the West, there was an awareness of the mountains' grandeur, but nothing that would qualify as a powerful aesthetic experience. The actual experience of hardship and adversity constituted what Michel Foucault called the "limits and forms of the sayable."[8] Hardship and adversity thus ruled out description in the grand style.

The Lewis and Clark Expedition as a Military Expedition

On January 18, 1803, President Thomas Jefferson sent a confidential message to Congress:

> The river Missouri, & the Indians inhabiting it, are not as well known as is rendered desirable. . . . It is however understood that the country on that river is inhabited by numerous tribes, who furnish great supplies of furs. . . . An intelligent officer with ten or twelve chosen men . . . might explore the whole line, even to the Western ocean. . . . The appropriation of two thousand five hundred dollars . . . would cover the undertaking.[9]

The phrase "an intelligent officer with ten or twelve chosen men" leaves no doubt that from the beginning, the Lewis and Clark expedition was a military expedition, though its purpose was not military conquest so much as exploration framed by commercial interests. Jefferson made plain the expedition's purpose in his instructions to Meriwether Lewis: "The object of your mission is to explore the Missouri river, & such principal streams of it, as, by its course and communication with the waters of the Pacific ocean . . . may offer the most direct & practicable water communication across this continent, for the purposes of commerce."[10] Jefferson also insisted that simply making the journey and finding a practicable water communication was not enough. In order for the expedition to be utilized for military purposes, acquired knowledge had to be recorded through writing, drawing, and map making. Jefferson directed Lewis accordingly: "Your observations are to be taken with great pains & accuracy" and "to be entered distinctly, & intelligibly for others as well as for yourself."[11] As a measure of precaution, the president urged Lewis to produce one copy of his notes on birch bark, as that material was "less liable to injury from damp than

common paper."[12] In his lengthy directions, Jefferson overlooked nothing. The Corps of Discovery was tasked to draw maps, make detailed observations of soils, minerals, crops, animals, topography, and weather. In addition, they were to meet the Indigenous population and record their languages, customs, religions, food, clothing, and, their willingness to trade with the Americans. Thus, a great many of the expedition's journals contain notes that reveal the expedition's interest in knowing the land and the people sought to conquer.

Military interests required a thorough knowledge of topography. Faithfully following the instructions that he had received, Lewis made use of a valuable viewpoint for assessing navigational potential of the land stretching below him. On May 26, 1805, for instance, he noted that he had sighted

> a few of the most elivated points above the horizon, the most remarkable of which by my pocket compass I found bore N. 65° W. being a little to the N. of the N. W. extremity of the range of broken mountains seen this morning by Capt. C. these points of the Rocky Mountains were covered with snow and the sun shone on it in such manner as to give me the most plain and satisfactory view.

In other instances, scientific notes contain climatological observations, as in Lewis's journal entry of June 14, 1805—

> that sudden and immence torrants would issue at certain seasons of the year; but the reverse is absolutely the case. I am therefore compelled to beleive that the snowey mountains yeald their warters slowly, being partially effected every day by the influence of the sun only, and never suddonly melted down by haisty showers of rain.

Notes of this kind make for rather dull reading. Yet the original journals were never meant for public scrutiny but as records of military men writing under orders; they were intended for the eyes of the President, the intelligentsia who were stirring with national fervor at the time, and politicians in favor of westward expansion. But president, intelligentsia, and politicians for all their Enlightenment rationalism were all guided by a set of misconceptions, chief among them the theory of the Northwest Passage (a theory stretching back to Christopher Columbus).

Supporting the Northwest Passage theory were two geographical concepts: the "pyramidal height of land" and "symmetrical geography."[13] The pyramidal height of land was a mythical spot in the West where all the major rivers of the continent had their sources. From this commanding height, armchair explorers imagined the possibility to travel in all directions by river. Symmetrical geography projected onto the West what was known of the East. Reasoning from known to the unknown, geographers assumed all kinds of resemblances—between the Missouri and the Ohio, the Rocky Mountains and the Appalachians, the Columbia and the Potomac. In their minds,

the West became a rough mirror image of the East, often even better. Symmetrical geography—one of the guiding principles of neoclassical aesthetics—must have had a special appeal to Thomas Jefferson, whose Monticello also faithfully reflected symmetry. If the beauty of symmetry reflected God's mind, it was only reasonable to assume that the North American continent would obey the same rules.[14] An 1803 map of western North America by the government cartographer Nicholas King bears out the era's misconceptions. Although it reflects the most accurate geographical information available (it has the continent's width absolutely correct because the coasts' longitudes had been precisely measured by the British Royal Navy), the map is also saturated with wishful thinking. Instead of showing the Rocky Mountains as an unbroken north-south chain, it shows intermittent hills that end a little south of the 49th parallel, complying with Jefferson's description of them as "highlands" rather than mountains. A tributary of the Columbia River even interlocks with a southern branch of the Missouri, illustrating the President's claim that the Missouri offered "continued navigation from it's source, and, possibly with a single portage, from the Western Ocean."[15]

Safety and survival are of paramount importance for military expeditions. The Lewis and Clark expedition was no exception in this regard. After more than two years and with nearly 8,000 miles behind them, the Corps of Discovery returned to Saint Louis safely, having lost only one man on the way. As Lewis wrote in his report to Jefferson, dated September 23, 1806:

> It is with pleasure that I announce to you the safe arrival of myself and party at 12 OClk. today at this place with our papers and baggage. in obedience to your orders we have penitrated the Continent of North America to the Pacific Ocean, and sufficiently explored the interior of the country to affirm with confidence that we have discovered the most practicable rout which dose exist across the continent by means of the navigable branches of the Missouri and Columbia Rivers. . . . Meriwether Lewis, Capt. 1st U'S. Regt. Infty.[16]

The report must have delighted Jefferson, not just because of the safe return of the expedition's members but also because of the safe arrival of their "papers and baggage." Jefferson could look forward to a huge amount of useful knowledge, recorded through writing, drawing, and map making, and, following his directions, taken "with great pains & accuracy."[17] Jefferson, who envisioned the western United States as an agrarian paradise, would especially relish knowledge of the usability of the land.[18]

Mountains and their Utility

Reconnoitering the land around the Great Falls of the Missouri on June 14, 1805, Lewis, after climbing a hill, enjoyed "a fine prospect of the adjacent country." He wrote, "from

hence I overlooked *a most beatifull and extensive plain* reaching from the river to the base of the *Snowclad mountains to the S. and S. West*." Overwhelmed by the human scale and clearly perceived limits, Lewis found beauty in the pastoral plain extending beyond him, which left him in a cheerful and harmonious mood. Lewis had experienced a similar reaction along the Maria's River, which, he noted on June 8, 1805,

> passes through a rich fertile and one of the most beatifully picteresque countries that I ever beheld, through the wide expance of which, innumerable herds of living anamals are seen, it's borders garished with one continued garden of roses, while it's lofty and open forrests, are the habitation of miriads of the feathered tribes who salute the ear of the passing traveler with their wild and simple, yet s[w]eet and cheerfull melody.[19]

More specifically, the passage reveals that "beautiful" did not exclusively mean aesthetically pleasing in the sense that the French painter Claude Lorrain saw it or that modern tourists might see a landscape today. There is a clear implication of use, and use was inevitably connected to commercial agriculture. In a letter Lewis sent his mother from the expedition's winter quarters at Fort Mandan, he not only pronounced the region "one of the fairest portions of the globe," but also declared that nowhere else was there "a similar extent of country, equally fertile, well watered, and intersected by such a number of navigable streams."[20] And just before the expedition arrived at Maria's River, Lewis once again managed to conjure an agrarian paradise out of the land: "the whole country," he wrote on June 4, 1805, "in fact appears to be one continued plain to the foot of the mountains or as far as the eye can reach; the soil appears dark rich and fertile yet the grass is by no means as high nor dose it look so luxurient as I should have expected, it is short just sufficient to conceal the ground."

We find a similar rhetoric of agricultural potential in William Clark's description of the prairie world. In his entry of July 4, 1804, he duly acknowledged "one of the most butifull Plains," in which "nature appears to have exerted herself to butify the scenery by the variety of flours <raiseing> Delicately and highly flavered raised above the Grass, which Strikes & profumes the Sensation and amuses the mind." The cheerful and harmonious reaction that the landscape evokes in Clark no doubt references the beautiful as defined by Burke. Yet Clark quickly went on to note that the grassland stretching to the horizon was "well calculated for the sweetest and most norushing hay." Moreover, he ends with a regret that "So magnificent a Senerey" can "be enjoyed by nothing but the Buffalo Elk Deer & Bear . . . & Savage Indians." For Clark, aesthetic appreciation is inseparable from use, that is, use in terms of European-style commercial agriculture. Only when grass would be hay and trees timber might the land's beauty be appreciated by the "Sivilised world." Lewis and Clark, like many of their contemporaries, Thomas Jefferson included, were faithful disciples of the British

agriculturalist Arthur Young, who considered agriculture to be "beyond all doubt the foundation of every other art, business, or profession."[21] In his wake, the American West was envisioned as a garden or, more precisely, an agrarian paradise. And that was what Jefferson promised. The West, he claimed, would "yield an abundance of all the necessities of life, and almost spontaneously; very little labor being required in the cultivation of the earth."[22] There are good reasons, then, to refer to the rhetorical mode employed for the journal entries quoted here as "pastoral."[23]

There were exceptions to the newfound Garden of Eden on the western plains. Shortly after leaving the expedition's winter quarters at Fort Mandan, the Corps of Discovery came through a badland of high buttes and eroded gullies. "Soar eyes is a common complaint among the party," Lewis noted on April 24, 1805. "I believe it originates from the immence quantities of sand which is driven by the wind from the sandbars … so penitrating is this sand that we cannot keep any article free from it; in short, we are compelled to eat, drink, and breath it very freely." A month later, the expedition reached the Missouri River Breaks, a rugged and broken terrain with endless mazes of bluffs and coulees, which Clark on May 26, 1805, called "the Deserts of America, as I do not Conceive any part can ever be Settled." Not every part of the West was, then, a Garden of Eden for its agricultural potential. If there had been a few isolated stretches of "useless" land along the Missouri River, in the high mountains of the far West even looking for an agrarian paradise was utterly pointless.

Hardship and Adversity at the Great Divide

Already Lewis's first sighting of the Rocky Mountains on the far western horizon reveals that hardships encountered via impassable terrain, bad weather, and starvation marked the crossing of these rugged mountains. It was Sunday, May 26, 1805, when the captain climbed out of the valley of the Missouri River and for the first time saw what he thought were the Rocky Mountains. Gazing at the distant peaks gave him a "secret pleasure," but already it was tempered by the prospect of "the sufferings and hardships of myself and party in thim." Still, optimism prevails: "As I have always held it a crime to anticipate evils I will believe it a good and comfortable road untill I am compelled to believe differently." In the following weeks, a sense of danger builds up, though Lewis's optimism prevails. "We all beleive that we are now about to enter on the most perilous and difficult part of our voyage," he recorded on July 4, 1805, "yet I see no one repining; all appear ready to met those difficulties which wait us with resolution and becoming fortitude" and "all appear perfectly to have made up their minds to suceed in the expedition or purish in the attempt." Two weeks later, the first range of the Rocky Mountains loomed ahead. The river cut through them in an awesome gorge that the men called Gates of the Rocky Mountains. The cliffs, Lewis wrote on July 19, "rise from the waters edge on either side perpendicularly to

the hight of [*NB: about*] 1200 feet. every object here wears a dark and gloomy aspect. the tow[er]ing and projecting rocks in many places seem ready to tumble on us."

The crossing over the Great Divide, which Stephen Ambrose calls "one of the great forced marches in American history,"[24] became a grueling 165-mile, eleven-day ordeal in which the Corps of Discovery teetered on the brink of starvation and came its closest to complete failure. Conditions got so bad that the men ate their last colt, the rest of their portable soup, about twenty pounds of candles, and a little bear's oil, and Clark named a stream "Hungery Creek." "This morning was very cold," Lewis scribbled in his journal on August 21, 1805, "the ink feizes in my pen." And Joseph Whitehouse noted on September 10, "Though the day is warm, the Snow does not melt on the mountains a short distance from us . . .. The Snow makes them look like the middle of winter." Nothing in their experience of mountains had prepared the explorers for the Bitterroot Range of the Rockies. Led by an elderly Shoshone, whom the captains called Old Toby, the men found their path blocked by deep snow, twisted undergrowth, and steep hillsides. And there was that awful weather. "I have been wet and as cold in every part as I ever was in my life," Clark wrote on September 16. Two days earlier he had written, "The Mountains which we passed to day much worst than yesterday, the last excessively bad." The day before, Clark had recorded a dismaying sight from a vantage point—"high ruged [rugged] mountains in every direction as far as I could See." When "we awoke this morning," Whitehouse noted on September 16,

> to our great Surprise we were covred with Snow which had fallen about 2 Inches the latter part of last night, and continues a verry cold Snow Storm. . . . Some of the men without Socks raped rags on their feet . . .. Set out without any thing to eat, and proceeded on.

John Ordway, too, was dismayed. "The mountains continue as fer as our eyes could extend," he wrote on September 18, "they extend much further than we expeted."

Crossing over the Great Divide pushed the Corps of Discovery to the breaking point, not only physically but also mentally and intellectually. Confronted with hitherto unknown physical hardships, the men also confronted an epistemological void, a pictorial vacuum, a blank. With the basis of the journals gone in dashed hopes for a Northwest Passage, the failed expectations drowned out any familiar aesthetic templates. It was Lewis, with his refined sensibility, who suffered the most from the erosion in his categories of description, and all but vanishes as a narrator. (More of the narrative crisis anon.) As the dream of a "practicable water communication" faded, so did Lewis's account—stopping in mid-sentence on August 26. A long and pessimistic entry ends with an incomplete thought and an empty stomach: "I had nothing but a little parched corn to eat this evening. This morning Capt. C. and party—." Then, there is nothing at all until the explorers are way over the Bitterroots. Finally, on Sep-

tember 21, Lewis admitted in his journal, "I find myself growing weak for the want of food and most of the men complain of a similar deficiency and have fallen off very much." On September 22, the expedition staggered out of the Bitterroot mountains, more dead than alive. The men had already ascended the Missouri in a keelboat, had spent a bitter cold winter at Fort Mandan, had labored hard at the Great Falls, had gotten their canoes up the Jefferson River, and every time they had such an experience behind them, they agreed that it had to be the worst, and that they could not possibly endure anything worse. Only to have it get worse. Understandably, Lewis wrote on September 22, "the pleasure I now felt in having tryumphed over the rocky Mountains and decending once more to a level and fertile country where there was every rational hope of finding a comfortable subsistence for myself and party can be more readily conceived than expressed."

Altogether, the record that those "writingest explorers of their time," as Donald Jackson exuberantly calls the Corps of Discovery's members,[25] left behind from this most arduous part of their journey amounts to a case study in perseverance against continual adversity. It is no exaggeration to say that the explorers speak to us as "men . . . with the will and the hardihood to endure and the humility and skill to survive."[26] Nor does it come as a surprise that on the return leg, the rigors of those mountains were constantly on the captains' minds. "That wretched portion of our journy," Lewis noted in his journal entry of June 2, 1806, "where hungar and cold in their most rigorous forms assail the waried traveller; not any of us have yet forgotten our sufferings, in those mountains in September last, and I think it probable we never shall." And on June 14, Clark "shudder[ed] with the expectation of great difficulties in passing those Mountains [one more time], from the depth of snow and the want of grass sufficient [for] our horses." Lewis, observing, on May 17, the increasing run-off from the snowmelt, was more hopeful that "that icy barier which separates me from my friends and Country" will soon be behind them. Yet looking at snowbanks twelve feet deep, he marveled on June 17, "Here was winter in all it's rigors." It was not until June 30 that the Corps of Discovery finally descended "these tremendious mountanes . . . in passing of which," Clark noted, "we have experiensed cold and hunger of which I shall ever remember." What Clark as well as the other men will remember from the crossing over the Great Divide is being pushed to the breaking point, not standing in awe at the mountains' sublime grandeur. Aesthetic appreciation was a matter of less threatening landscapes, most notably of landscapes that somehow corresponded to what the men had been told to encounter—truly pastoral stretches or gentle rolling hills that would enable an easy portage to the Columbia River.

Aesthetic Eccentricities and Discontinuities

There is a striking contrast between the rhetoric of hardship and adversity that marks the crossing over the Great Divide and Meriwether Lewis's enraptured listening, on the plains off the Maria's River, to the song of "a small bird which in action resembles the lark," characterizing it as both "sweet" and "plaintive." "The larks," he remarked on June 4, 1805, "add much to the gayety and cheerfullness of the scene." Even more remarkable for its sense of wonder and awe at the marvels of nature is Lewis's observation of the Great Falls of the Missouri. "I hurryed down the hill which was about 200 feet high and difficult of access," Lewis noted in his journal on June 13, 1805, "to gaze on this *sublimely grand specticle*," which he then calls "the grandest sight I ever beheld." He instantly took out his notebook and recorded what he was seeing. Painfully aware that he lacked artistic skills, he wished "for the pencil of Salvator Rosa or the pen of [James] Thompson, that I might be enabled to give to the enlightened world some just idea of *this truly magnifficent and sublimely grand object*, which has from the commencement of time been concealed from the view of civilized man." When Lewis, who has verbally positioned himself as a typical landscape painter, mentions Salvator Rosa, he likely recalled the Italian painter's dark landscapes art (of which he may have seen reproductions). He also may have remembered reading (or hearing about) James Thomson's cycle of poems, *The Seasons* (1730). Perhaps he even remembered what he himself had seen, such as "the celibrated falls of Potomac or Soolkiln &c.," which, however, are not up to par with the Great Falls. "This falls," he recorded for June 14, 1805, "is incomparably a geater cataract and a more noble interesting object." Rosa's paintings of sublime landscapes, Thomson's descriptions of dark winter landscapes, as well as personal recollections condense into a template providing a vocabulary that came to bear on Lewis's response to what is now partly submerged under the lake behind Ryan Dam.

For Lewis, the Great Falls provided a preeminent locale for the picturesque, the beautiful and, with some reservations, for the sublime in nature. So did, to a lesser degree, the White Cliffs of the Missouri. In his entry for May 31, 1805, Lewis marvels at the "most romantic appearance" of the White Cliffs, those "seens of visionary inchantment." The sight left him full of cheer and harmony, yet once again he recalled an image from back East, this time of "some of those large stone buildings in the U. States." What Lewis discovered is made meaningful by placing it in the context of European intellectual traditions. This is also true of William Clark, who saw the White Cliffs in terms of "antient ruins some like elegant buildings at a distance," a phrase that John Ordway repeated almost verbatim, while to Patrick Gass, one of the Sergeants, the cliffs seemed "as if built by the hand of man, and are so numerous that they appear like the ruins of an antient city." In each instance, the scene is seen through a lens formed by images from European art, literature, and thought. More-

over, what is being described are landscapes that are non-threatening, landscapes that somehow corresponded to what the men had been told to encounter—which the great mountains of the West did not.

Failed Expectations and Narrative Crisis

The lens formed by images from European art, literature, and thought would take the Corps of Discovery only so far. In August 1805, the expedition had reached a point on the Missouri that was as far as their canoes could go. Lewis was amazed about the gentle ascent to so high an elevation. "If the Columbia furnishes us such another example," he wrote on August 10, "a communication across the continent by water will be practicable and safe." Yet Lewis had had some forebodings about that prospect ever since the Corps of Discovery had arrived at the Three Forks. His main concern was to find horses and trade for provisions to cross a section of the country where subsistence would be "precarious." The expedition had reached the edge of the geographical information they had gleaned from the Hidatsa people the previous winter and, as Lewis noted on July 27, was now "without any information with rispect to the country not knowing how far these mountains continue, or wher to direct our course to pass them to advantage or intersept a navigable branch of the Columbia," or whether they would find enough suitable timber to build canoes. Still, Lewis remained hopeful, taking "consolation" from the fact "that from our present position it is impossible that the S. W. fork [the Jefferson] can head with the waters of any other river but the Columbia."

None of the men had had any firsthand experience of high, rugged mountains, nor any mental images thereof. Their landscape vision had been shaped by eastern experiences and a decidedly Atlantic sensibility. Forests and meadows, farmsteads and villages, navigable rivers, clearly defined seasons, and a paramount green color were the dominant features of their landscape world. Images derived from the men's Atlantic sensibility lost their representational force once the Corps of Discovery reached the Continental Divide, on August 12, 1805. After a moment of elation and exuberance for having accomplished "one of those great objects on which my mind has been unalterably fixed for many years," that is, for having discovered the headwaters of the mighty Missouri, Lewis "proceeds" to the top of the ridge. However, beyond Lemhi Pass lay not the Columbia River, nor the green slopes leading down to a western ocean, as Jefferson's instructions had led him to expect, but an immense jumble of daunting, snow-capped mountains where mountains were not supposed to exist, "immence ranges of high mountains still to the West of us with their tops partially covered with snow." Lewis never wrote about what he felt as he first saw the Bitterroot Range of the Rocky Mountains, though in those mountains, the myth of a Northwest Passage finally died. In his summary report to President Jefferson,

drafted in late September 1806, Lewis was, then, quite straightforward about the portage from the Missouri to the Columbia: it was a passage of 340 miles, 200 along a good road, the other 140 over "tremendious mountains which for 60 mls. are covered with eternal snow." With those words, "Lewis put an end to the search for the Northwest Passage."[27] There simply was no "practicable waterway" across the North American continent as Thomas Jefferson had expected and as the British cartographer Aaron Arrowsmith's 1802 map (which the explorers had with them) promised.[28] Instead, there was a snowy barrier to the west of the explorers, "the most terrible mountains I ever beheld," in the words of Sergeant Patrick Gass of September 16, 1805.

These mountains not only made the duration of the expedition much longer than anticipated; they also completely lacked what the explorers would have seen as usefulness—agricultural potential of the land or navigability of rivers. In fact, the explorers were not even expecting the height and breadth of the Rocky Mountains but rather a single line of low ridges promising an easy half-day portage from the Missouri to the Columbia. The notion of a half-day portage had received additional fuel by what Hidatsa people told Lewis at Fort Mandan in the winter of 1804–1805. As Lewis wrote in his report to Jefferson, the northern of the three rivers at Three Forks

> is navigable to foot of chain of high mountains, being the ridge which divides the waters of the Atlantic from those of the Pacific ocean. the Indians assert that they can pass in half a day from the foot of this mountain on it's East side to a larger river which washes it's Western base.

What the Hidatsas said they saw from the top of the mountain was exactly what Lewis and Jefferson hoped for and expected: "The Indians inform us that that the country on the Western side of this river consists of open & level plains like those they themselves inhabit."[29] Understandably, Lewis wrote to Jefferson on April 7, 1805: "I can foresee no material or probable obstruction to our progress, and entertain therefore the most sanguine hopes of complete success … You may therefore expect me to meet you at Monachello in September 1806."[30]

Arrowsmith's map of 1802 was not the only faulty marvel that misguided the Corps of Discovery and led to their failed expectations. In 1802, Thomas Jefferson also received a copy of Alexander Mackenzie's account of his voyage to the Pacific Ocean in 1793. Published in 1801, the account reports of an easy one-day portage over a low mountain pass to a westward-flowing river. What remained below Jefferson's radar was that the river was not navigable, and that Mackenzie had reached the Pacific a full five degrees north of the Columbia. Nevertheless, Jefferson reasoned that if the mountains four hundred miles south were similar to those Mackenzie had crossed, the portage would also be similar. A year later, in 1803 and just in time for the

explorers' departure, Albert Gallatin, Secretary of the Treasury, supervised the creation of a map of western North America by the government cartographer Nicholas King. Although the map summarized current knowledge of the West, it too showed a blank filled with a major misconception—that the Rocky Mountains were not in the way of, as Jefferson had written in his instructions to Meriwether Lewis, a "direct & practicable water communication across this continent, for the purpose of commerce."[31]

Explorers, as "they go out into the unknown, are 'programmed' by the knowledge, values, and objectives of the civilized centers from which they depart."[32] Lewis and Clark were no different. They had fully internalized the implications of a "geography of hope."[33] In crossing the Great Divide, the Corps of Discovery, hapless victims of fanciful geography that they were, confronted an epistemological void, a pictorial vacuum, a blank. With the basis of the journals gone in dashed hopes for a Northwest Passage, "the gap between ideological and geographical landscapes would become too wide to mend through description. A narrative crisis resulted."[34] Lewis, who habitually cast himself in the persona of an enlightened explorer, full of a refined sensibility, established back East, had reached a limit to the range of his writing. With the premise behind the narrative exhausted, he was no longer able to incorporate physical terrain and categories of description. As we have seen, he stopped writing altogether, disappearing as narrator during the most difficult leg of the journey and never completing the blank pages of the expedition log. Thus, what the explorers left behind from the crossing are climatological and other scientific observations, records of their encounters with Indigenous people, words of appraisal to Thomas Jefferson and other representatives of U.S. officialdom, as well as ample records of, as President George W. Bush put it, "adversity."[35] They also left behind a map, begun by William Clark in 1804 and completed by him at Fort Clatsop in February 1806. At more than four feet wide, this masterwork, which Clark kept updating in his office in St. Louis, not only is a historically relevant summary of the geographic knowledge of the West at the time, but, as a marvel of accuracy, also retains evidence of the discontinuities and terminations that were part of the expansion into the West of enlightened America.[36]

Failed expectations explain why the Corpse of Discovery did not experience the sublime at the Great Divide. The great mountains of the West were anything but gentle rolling hills; they had no agricultural potential, the rivers were not navigable, and what passed for a road often was, as Lewis noted on September 19, 1805, "excessively dangerous . . . a narrow rockey path generally on the side of steep precipice, from which in many places if ether man or horse were precipitated they would inevitably be dashed in pieces." The explorers, like mountaineers in earlier times, took to the Rocky Mountains fearfully, grimly, resenting the necessity, and only on rare occa-

sions, if at all, suggesting the slightest aesthetic gratification. Overall, there was too much danger to give the explorers time to reflect upon the mountains' beauties, to recollect the encounter in tranquility, that is, from a safe distance. Accordingly, there is nothing in the journals that would qualify as a powerful aesthetic experience, least of all one that elevates the great mountains to symbols of, in Marjorie Hope Nicolson's words, "that 'more beyond' to which imagination persistently aspires, of the eternity and infinity that are the unattainable goals of the imagination."[37] We find all of this in Shelley's poem on the glory of Mont Blanc:

> . . . how hideously
> Its shapes are heap'd around! rude, bare, and high,
> Ghastly, and scarr'd, and riven.—Is this the scene
> Where the old Earthquake-daemon taught her young
> Ruin? Were these their toys? or did a sea
> Of fire envelop once this silent snow?
> None can reply—all seems eternal now.[38]

The poem is subtitled "Lines Written in the Vale of Chamouni," which marks it as the product of the safety and comfort of a chalet, the ideal setting for emotions to be recollected in tranquility. In the journals of the Corps of Discovery, the great mountains of the West are confronted directly, as a potentially life-threatening phenomenon. They are represented as adversaries, as foes to humankind, monsters to be conquered, vanquished, or engaged in pitched battle—like the grizzly bears that the members of the Corps of Discovery killed by the dozen.[39] This is how Lewis put it in his report to President Jefferson: "We suffered everything Cold, Hunger & Fatigue could impart [as well as] the Keenest Anxiety excited for the fate of [our] Expedition."[40] Vision and emotion, direct and personal confrontation with the natural world, later to be recollected in tranquility and turned into symbols of eternity and infinity—these became the trademark of the tradition of the Romantic west, of explorers *after* Lewis and Clark.[41]

If the Lewis and Clark journals do not exhibit multiple references to the sublime, they also do not frame the expedition in relation to America. As regards references to the sublime, accompanying the Yellowstone expedition of Captain Stephen Long in 1820 were two painters, Titian Peale (the youngest son of the great Charles Wilson Peale) and Samuel Seymour, who created landscapes and character studies that were cast through a haze of romantic interpretation.[42] Ten years later, romantic landscapes and portraits by Alfred Jacob Miller, George Catlin, and Karl Bodmer appeared, as well as, landscape artists from the late 1850s like Albert Bierstadt. They all drew on the evocative power of America's wild spaces to create a visual myth of mountain sublimity that celebrated national expansion and dazzled—both with the size of their canvases and their subject matter—domestic and international audiences. In the writings of Lewis and Clark's successors the travel narratives too came more and more from individuals recognizing themselves in a landscape they have already

identified as American. The most powerful assertion of authority in these later writings—in Zebulon Pike's journals as well as in John Charles Fremont's narrative—is the trope of aesthetic appreciation articulated in the rhetoric of the sublime. For these explorers, the sublime became a dominant cultural investment, in which the grandeur of the mountains spelled, not so much knowledge of the external world as the grandeur of the American nation, yet to be built.[43]

In the journals of the Lewis and Clark expedition, there is little or no identification of "American" self and the land. Already Jefferson's instructions were specifically meant for "after your departure from the United States."[44] And once the Corps of Discovery had crossed the Divide, leaving the territory of the United States behind, the men were invariably referring to things "back in the States." For them as well as for the president, manifest destiny was not yet a familiar concept. Knowledge, useful knowledge, that is, was the order of the day. Hence the journals are chockful of detailed scientific observations, which the men compiled per Jefferson's instructions. But the journals are also punctuated by discontinuities that were clearly outside the expedition's "surveying catalog." Such discontinuities appear, for instance, in the form of enthusiastic descriptions of "seens of visionary inchantment" (Lewis, May 31, 1805), as well as, importantly, of representations of the great mountains of the West as a purely present landscape, what Willa Cather later called "the great fact…a vast hardness."[45] Hardness and adversity came to structure what the members of the Lewis and Clark expedition could see and think and say about the Rocky Mountain experience. Unsurprisingly, the prevailing mood in the journals from this section is one of mountain gloom rather than of mountain glory.

Notes

1 George W. Bush, "Remarks by the President at the Bicentennial of Lewis and Clark's Voyage of Discovery, The East Room," *The White House Archives*, July 3, 2002, https://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/news/releases/2002/07/20020703-9.html.

2 Meriwether Lewis in *The Journals of the Lewis and Clark Expedition*, ed. Gray E. Moulton, June 12, 1805, https://lewisandclarkjournals.unl.edu. There are many editions of the journals. Moulton's edition, published in eight volumes by the University of Nebraska Press between 1987 and 1993, is by far the best and also available online. My quotations throughout the article are taken from the online edition, cited in the original spelling, and with all emphases added. I have not annotated quotations from the journals because it is just as easy to look up the original by searching for the date of entry as by following URLs like https://lewisandclarkjournals.unl.edu/item/lc.jrn.1805-05-26#lc.jrn.1805-05-26.01. Also, relying on the date will allow those who wish to see the full entry to do so in the Reuben Gold Thwaites eight-volume edition, or the Biddle paraphrase, or any of the various other editions.

3 Christopher Hussey, *The Picturesque: Studies in a Point of View* (New York: Putnam, 1927; repr. Hamden, CT: Archon Books, 1967), 1.

4 Marjorie Hope Nicolson, *Mountain Gloom and Mountain Glory: The Development of the Aesthetics of the Infinite* (1959; Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1997), 25.

5 Alex Preminger and T. V. F. Brogan, eds., *The New Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1993), 1230.

6 Edmund Burke, *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* (London: R. and J. Dodsley, 1757), 19, 42, capitalization in original. Elsewhere, Burke describes beauty as "that quality or those qualities in bodies by which they cause love, or some passion similar to it" (73–74).

7 Preminger and Brogan, *Princeton Encyclopedia*, 1231.

8 Michel Foucault, "Politics and the Study of Discourse," in *The Foucault Effect: Studies in Governmentality*, ed. Graham Burchell, Colin Gordon, and Peter Miller (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), 59.

9 Thomas Jefferson, message to Congress, January 18, 1803, quoted in Dayton Duncan and Ken Burns, *Lewis and Clark: The Journey of the Corps of Discovery* (New York: Knopf, 1997), 8.

10 Thomas Jefferson, "Jefferson's Instructions to Lewis," in *Letters of the Lewis and Clark Expedition, with Related Documents, 1783–1854*, ed. Donald Jackson, 2nd ed., vol. 1 (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1978), 61.

11 Jefferson, "Instructions to Lewis," 69.

12 Jefferson, "Instructions to Lewis," 69.

13 Carolyn Gilman, *Lewis and Clark: Across the Divide* (Washington: Smithsonian Books, 2003), 56–57.

14 Stephen E. Ambrose records the things that Jefferson believed in in *Undaunted Courage: Meriwether Lewis, Thomas Jefferson, and the Opening of the American West* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1996), 54–55.

15 Donald Jackson, ed., *Letters of the Lewis and Clark Expedition, with Related Documents, 1783–1854*, 2nd ed., vol. 1 (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1978), 12.

16 Meriwether Lewis to Thomas Jefferson, September 23, 1806, transcribed and ed. Gerard W. Gawalt, *Library of Congress*, accessed April 15, 2020, http://www.loc.gov/resource/mtj1.036_0912_0917.

17 Jackson, *Letters of the Lewis and Clark Expedition*, 12.

18 See Jon Meacham, *Thomas Jefferson: The Art of Power* (New York: Random House, 2012), esp. 360–71 and 383–93.

19 Lewis, "A Summary view of the Rivers and Creeks," undated, winter of 1804–1805, in *The Journals of the Lewis and Clark Expedition*, ed. Gray E. Moulton, https://lewisandclarkjournals.unl.edu/item/lc.jrn.1804-1805.winter.part1.

20 Lewis to Lucy Marks, March 31, 1805, in *Letters of the Lewis and Clark Expedition, with Related Documents, 1783–1854*, ed. Donald Jackson, 2nd ed., vol. 1 (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1978), 223–24.

21 Arthur Young, quoted in Gilman, *Lewis and Clark*, 39.

22 Thomas Jefferson, quoted in John Logan Allen, *Passage through the Garden: Lewis and Clark and the Image of the American Northwest* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1975), 114.

23 Bruce Greenfield, "The Problem of the Discoverer's Authority in Lewis and Clark's History [by Biddle]," in *Macropolitics of Nineteenth-Century Literature: Nationalism, Exoti-*

cism, Imperialism, ed. Jonathan Arac and Harriet Ritvo (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1991), 24–25, DOI: 10.9783/9781512800371-002.

24 Ambrose, *Undaunted Courage*, 298. For a detailed map of the route across the Bitterroots, see 296–97.

25 Jackson, *Letters of the Lewis and Clark Expedition*, vii.

26 William Faulkner, "The Bear" (1941), in *Go Down, Moses* (New York: Vintage, 1973), 191.

27 Ambrose, *Undaunted Courage*, 407.

28 For "practicable waterway," see Jefferson, "Instructions to Lewis," 61. For the Arrowsmith map, see Gilman, *Lewis and Clark*, 55.

29 Lewis, "A Summary view of the Rivers and Creeks."

30 Jackson, *Letters of the Lewis and Clark Expedition*, 196.

31 Jefferson, "Instructions to Lewis," 61–62. On Mackenzie's account and the hope that it raised for the Lewis and Clark expedition, see Ambrose, *Undaunted Courage*, 74–75.

32 William H. Goetzmann, *Exploration and Empire: The Explorer and the Scientist in the Winning of the American West* (New York: Knopf, 1966), 199, quoted in Gilman, *Lewis and Clark*, 52.

33 John Logan Allen, Interview, in *Lewis and Clark: The Archive*, PBS, 1997, https://www.pbs.org/lewisandclark/archive/allen.html.

34 Thomas Hallock, "Literary Recipes from the Lewis and Clark Journals: The Epic Design and Wilderness Tastes of Early National Nature Writing," *American Studies* 38, no. 3 (1997): 61.

35 George W. Bush, "Remarks by the President."

36 Clark's updated map is in the Library of Congress, map division.

37 Nicolson, *Mountain Gloom and Mountain Glory*, 393.

38 Percy Bysshe Shelley, "Mont Blanc: Lines Written in the Vale of Chamouni," in *The Works of Percy Bysshe Shelley in Verse and Prose*, ed. Harry Buxton Foreman, vol. 6 (London: Reeves and Turner, 1880), 203.

39 See Duncan, *Lewis and Clark*, 90–94; Gilman, *Lewis and Clark*, 179–83.

40 Jackson, *Letters of the Lewis and Clark Expedition*, 339.

41 See William H. Goetzmann, *The West as Romantic Horizon* (Omaha: University of Nebraska Press, 1981); John L. Allen, "Horizons of the Sublime: The Invention of the Romantic West," *Journal of Historical Geography* 18, no. 1 (1992): 27–40, DOI: 10.1016/0305-7488(92)90274-d.

42 Patricia Trenton and Peter H. Hassrick, *The Rocky Mountains: A Vision for Artists in the Nineteenth Century* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1983), 20–30.

43 Allen, "Horizons of the Sublime," 28–38.

44 Jackson, *Letters of the Lewis and Clark Expedition*, 61.

45 Willa Cather, *O Pioneers!* (1913; Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1950), 11.

About the Author

Heinz Tschachler is a former Associate Professor of English and American Studies at the

University of Klagenfurt. His academic interests are relations between representation, ideology, and material conditions, including the discursive constructions of national identity, for instance through the Lewis and Clark expedition, as well as the cultural dimensions of coins and currency in the U.S. He has published on the literature of Ursula K. Le Guin, Margaret Atwood, James Dickey, on the writings of Lewis Mumford, has worked on science fiction, and published several books, including *The Greenback* (McFarland, 2010), *The Monetary Imagination of Edgar Allan Poe* (McFarland, 2013), *Americans for George* (Winkler Verlag, 2015), *George Washington and Political Fatherhood* (McFarland, 2020), and *George Washington on Coins and Currency* (McFarland, 2020). His most recent book, *Washington Irving and the Fantasy of Masculinity*, will be published in early 2022 by McFarland.

Contact: Heinz Tschachler; heinz.tschachler@aau.at.

Mountain Grand Hotels at the Fin de Siècle

Sites, Gazes, and Environments

Michael Wedekind

Abstract

Grand hotels had been a metropolitan phenomenon before they emerged in remote regions of the Alps between the 1880s and the 1930s. This essay explores how these semi-public spaces and early places of modernity engaged with alpine scenery and shaped the very industry of mountain tourism. It analyzes the relationship between elite tourism and the natural and social environment of the Alps.

The success of mountain grand hotels was tied to increasing industrialization and a new understanding of travel. Their thoughtful detachment from space, time, and society was an expression of a business as much as of social philosophy. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, mountains served as a backdrop for the narrative of the period's scientific and technical progress and became subject to rational interpretation and economic exploitation. Mountain grand hotels were not only a key component of tourism infrastructure but also the bold expression of a presumptuous occupation of spaces set away for tourism. Natural space had widely been turned into social space for visual and leisurely consumption, raising questions of authority, priority, appropriation, and imposition.

By mapping the perception of mountains along the history of mountain grand hotels, this essay studies the sites, gazes, and environments of mountain tourism at the fin de siècle. It examines how the history of the mountain grand hotel conflates with the forces of nationalism, colonialism, and capitalism and showcases how these spaces reflect the socio-economic transformations that ultimately paved the way for mountain mass tourism.

Suggested Citation: Wedekind, Michael. "Mountain Grand Hotels at the Fin de Siècle: Sites, Gazes, and Environments." *JAAAS: Journal of the Austrian Association for American Studies* 2, no. 2 (2021): 163–187, DOI: 10.47060/jaaas.v2i2.118.

Keywords: Alps; mountains; nature; Switzerland; tourism

Peer Review: This article was reviewed by the issue's guest editors and an external reviewer.

Mountain Grand Hotels at the Fin de Siècle

Sites, Gazes, and Environments

Michael Wedekind

A fairy-tale glitter still surrounds the legendary grand hotels of the fin de siècle. Nineteenth-century contemporaries were amazed by their feudal luxury, exclusivity, and elegance, by their comfort, refinement, and impeccable service. The audacity of their architecture and the extravagance of their interiors and furnishings caused a sensation. The towering establishments that emerged in the remote regions of the Alps and the Rocky Mountains between the 1880s and the 1930s were even more spectacular than the metropolitan grand hotels. Their appearance would not have been conceivable without the epoch's enthusiasm for the Alps, which transformed Europe's highest mountain range into an outstanding landscape of leisure and recreation between the Enlightenment and the turn of the twentieth century.

Grand hotels (also referred to as "palace hotels") were established in scenically privileged locations of the Alps and along numerous European coastlines, serving as luxury destinations for international aristocratic and upper-class elites. They were considered the highest hotel category, although no precise classification system existed at that time. The term "grand hotel" alluded to the size and grandeur of the buildings. Similar to the transatlantic liners that entered service at around the same time, they were celebrated as an expression of innovation, progress, and human mastery over nature.

Grand hotels and their dream worlds became a literary topos and a subject of harsh criticism, which focused on the internal organization of these parallel universes and their social hierarchies.[1] Historiography has concentrated primarily on the social interactions within grand hotels, which were considered semi-public spaces and early "places of modernity."[2] However, this article is interested in how grand hotels engaged with alpine scenery and shaped the very industry of mountain tourism by analyzing the relationship between elite tourism and the natural and social environment into which grand hotels were brusquely and carelessly placed. After all, the Alps were not

empty spaces when they first underwent emotionalization and aestheticization.[3] However, Europe's mountain ranges were inland peripheries and, like its coastlines, became sites of tourism, commercialization, and exploitation.

Exploring human attitudes toward nature, this article sketches how the perception of mountains changed from the second half of the eighteenth century to the decades around the turn of the twentieth, from early aristocratic and upper-bourgeois alpine experiences to the advent of mountain mass tourism. It studies the sites, gazes, and environments of mountain grand hotels to examine how these spaces informed the role of nature and landscape in upper-class tourism.

Longing for the Alps

Early enthusiasm for mountains, partially fueled by Enlightenment philosopher Jean-Jacques Rousseau, had its primary origins in a Romanticist devotion to nature. The epoch's cultural representations, largely produced in urban centers, framed the alpine landscape and charged it with new meanings. As the Alps became increasingly aestheticized and emotionally occupied, early mountaineers pilgrimaged there in search of primeval wilderness and sacred summits. They frequently cast their experience as a spectacle of uplifting emotions and a desire for contemplation and mystical immersion in nature. These experiences touched on basic questions of human creation and existence. They held the fleeting illusion of rapture from earth to heaven and awakened foreboding feelings and transcendental sensations of connectedness with all beings. In short, they conveyed a sense of fusion with the universe.

However, perceptions of nature and landscape are primarily conditioned by culture and are therefore subject to changing patterns of evaluation. By the late nineteenth century, bourgeois enthusiasm for the natural world was little more than a reaction to the crisis of modern civilization. The relationship was an ambivalent one: love *for* nature was very much an escape *to* nature from a life of rationality, mechanization, and urbanization. Therefore, one might argue that the widespread longing for mountains resulted from the epoch's civilizational fatigue, its nervousness and anxiety, and the discontent with modern urban life. By contrast, reconnecting with nature was considered archaic and maternal, and was felt to have regenerating, purifying, and ennobling effects on humans, elevating them morally and intellectually. Mountaintops became an "emotionally highly charged reserve of 'healing' through aesthetic [experience] and of 'sanctifying' nature."[4] Here, humans seemed to be liberated from positivist isolation, modern fragmentation, and alienation from nature.

During the four decades preceding the First World War, the Alps became an increasingly important bourgeois outdoor leisure space. Europe's leading mountain climbing associations were founded, and winter sports emerged. Like the World Fairs,

mountain museums (established in Italy in 1874, in Switzerland in 1905, and in Germany in 1911) brought the mountains to the city, long before "Swiss chalets" began to appear in parks in Britain, France, and Germany. German-speaking countries also saw the advent of "Alpenfeste" (alpine festivals) and widespread enthusiasm for alpine traditional costumes, which were particularly favored in upper-class social circles.[5] Simultaneously, higher-class Berlin tenants would decorate their courtyards with murals based on alpine postcard motifs.[6] The writings of Ludwig Ganghofer and Richard Strauss's *Alpensinfonie* (Alpine Symphony op. 64; 1911–15) owed much of their success to this longing for the Alps. In December 1897, the magazine *Die Kunst für Alle* (Art for Everyone) referred to the "longing of our time for peace and harmony, born out of extremely hard-fought social struggles." Rather than "the human hustle and bustle," the "unspent, constantly rejuvenating stirring of the plant world [and] the earth with its seemingly unchanging mountains and rocks" would be able to offer fulfilment.[7]

Measurable evidence of mountain enthusiasm as a mobilizing force is provided by figures on the members of mountaineering societies. Apart from minor differences due to the varying socio-economic and political frameworks at both regional and national levels, continental European clubs mainly appealed to the educated middle classes, such as professional workers and higher civil servants.[8] Fin-de-siècle grand hotels, whose guests would often stay for weeks or even months, were, by contrast, populated by distinctly different social classes. They were the places to see and be seen for those who had always enjoyed the privilege of travel and for the new upper-middle-class elites. The guests were members of the highest aristocracy and Europe's ruling houses, top administration officials, high-ranking military figures, members of the financial oligarchy, industrial magnates, members of parliament, writers and artists, celebrities, fashionable persons, and all those striving to rise in social status. Intellectual elites only appeared in mountain grand hotels in later years. Meanwhile, the North American grand hotels tended to be less exclusive, hosting a more socially mixed clientele.

Hotelscapes

Switzerland was the first tourist destination in the Alps, and it catered primarily to elite travelers. Grand hotels proliferated around Lake Geneva, in central Switzerland, and the Bernese Oberland (Illustration 1), in the canton of Valais and the Upper Engadin. In Austria, they were mainly located in Tyrol (including Italian-speaking Trentino), in Bad Gastein and the Salzkammergut, around Lake Wörth, and on the Semmering Pass. In the Italian Alps, they predominantly bordered the lakes of Lombardy and Piedmont, but they also rose in the Graian Alps northwest of Turin, in the Dolomites, and Cadore. In the French Alps, they could be found in the Department of Upper

Illustration 1: The Grand Hôtel des Alpes in Mürren (Canton of Berne, Switzerland). Postcard, c. 1905. Kilchberg: Verlag Gebr. Wehrli.

Savoy, especially in the Mont Blanc region (Chamonix) and on Lake Geneva. In southern Bavaria, where King Ludwig II had Neuschwanstein Castle built in 1869, large hotel complexes were constructed on lakeshores and in valley locations (Bad Schachen, Bad Reichenhall, Bad Tölz, Partenkirchen, and Garmisch) during the final years before the First World War. Only from 1914 did they begin to be built in the mountains: on the Wendelstein in 1914, on the Predigtstuhl near Bad Reichenhall in 1928, and on the Zugspitze in 1931 (Schneefernerhaus). However, they were far from comparable to the Swiss alpine grand hotels. In the rarely visited alpine region of today's Slovenia, the only such hotel opened its doors in 1931, on Lake Bled.

Switzerland remained the alpine hotelscape par excellence. There, travelers could find "probably the best hotels in the world" with the greatest facilities.[9] Run by highly competent management, they were established much earlier than in neighboring countries and located in the most spectacular sites. More than any others, Swiss hotels became a major draw for international tourists and were the most outstanding from an architectural perspective.[10] The 1875 Baedeker Travel Guide to Switzerland regarded the "new large hotels . . . to be in themselves worth seeing."[11] By 1909, the country had more than 800 grand hotels, "some of the grandest consider[ing] themselves too grand to be in [the official guide of the Swiss Society of Hotel Keepers]."[12] British author Arnold Bennett, who was a grand hotel habitué, frequently dining at London's Savoy, jibed:

> You may put Snowdon on the top of Ben Nevis and climb up the height of the total by the aid of railways, funiculars, racks and pinions, diligences and sledges; and when nothing but your own feet will take you any farther, you will see, in Switzerland, a grand hotel, magically and incredibly raised aloft in the mountains; solitary—no town, no houses, nothing but this hotel hemmed in on all sides by snowy crags, and made impregnable by precipices and treacherous snow and ice.[13]

As a rule, Swiss accommodation prices rose in proportion to the geographical altitude of the establishments.[14] In 1880, about fifteen percent of Switzerland's 1,000 hotels (and of its 58,140 hotel beds) were situated in high mountain regions above 1,500 meters (about 5,000 feet).[15]

In the nineteenth century, whether in Switzerland or elsewhere, the success of grand hotels was tied to scientific and technical progress and increasing industrialization. The growing railroad network provided significant impetus. From the end of the 1830s, sizeable private railway companies started erecting luxury hotels close to their stations for the convenience of long-distance travelers. Constructed to guarantee well-heeled guests maximum ease and comfort, these hotels also allowed railway companies to compensate for possible financial losses in their core business.

This concept was further developed in the years to come when extravagant railway-run hotels opened in remote scenic sites along the train routes and in secluded mountain locations. Staying at such exclusive destinations was often the primary motivation for travel.

Railway hotels opened first in Britain, then in the USA and Canada, where the coast-to-coast Canadian Pacific Railway operated several, such as the Banff Springs Hotel (1888) and Chateau Lake Louise (1890) in the Rocky Mountains.[16] On the European mainland, the Austrian Kaiserlich-Königlich Privilegierte Südbahn-Gesellschaft (Imperial and Royal Southern Railway Company) constructed lavish hotels in Dobbiaco/Toblach in South Tyrol (the Grand Hôtel Toblach, in 1878), on the Semmering Pass (the Semmering, in 1881, around 100 kilometers, 60 miles, southwest of Vienna), and in Opatija/Abbazia (the Quarnero, in 1884, in the vicinity of Rijeka/Fiume).[17] Although other railway-run hotels were to open along Austria's transalpine lines, none would equal the luxury establishments of the Southern Railway Company.[18] The rail network development also gave a significant boost to tourism on the lakes of northern Italy, especially Lake Maggiore. There, the first grand hotels catering to affluent guests were built in Stresa and Verbania, in parallel with the erection of numerous stately villas.[19] In Switzerland, remote mountain regions were opened up for elite tourism after the extension of the railroads, the newly installed cable cars, the introduction of steamships (which started to ply their trade along Swiss lakes in 1823), and the construction of high mountain roads, which were often built for military purposes.

The railways were pioneers in the hotel industry and helped create further demand for tourist accommodation. They contributed to the embourgeoisement of the upper middle classes, enabling them to travel and share what until then had been the privilege of the nobility: stays in spas, health, air, and seaside resorts. Upper-bourgeois visitors had begun to appear in such places, which often resembled aristocratic summer residences, at the beginning of the nineteenth century, bringing about a significant change in the social composition of vacationers.[20] In particular, the fashion for spas, which had become particularly popular from the 1830s onward as a result of scientific advances in balneology, was another contributing factor to the building of luxury hotels. In 1885, however, Ludwig Rohden, a renowned German balneologist and spa physician practicing in Gardone on Lake Garda, asserted that he could not, and would not, "believe, for the honor of mankind, that the hustle and bustle of large, crowded health resorts and 'grand hotels,' which cater most promptly to any whim and stupidity of the wealthy, is a suitable environment for sick people and for those needing rest."[21]

Celebrating Modernity

Grand hotels owed much of their popularity to a new understanding of travel that had developed in the second half of the eighteenth century. Travel was increasingly understood as a process of education and experience. Railroads greatly increased the comfort and speed of travel and changed the voyagers' perception of time and space. Soon, trains not only connected cities but also extended into smaller towns and rural areas. Curiously, this did not mean that the new mountain grand hotels were within easy reach. Here we are confronted with a paradox: while trains cut down on travel time, much of it was then lost when guests, heading to luxury out-of-the-way hotels, had to face astonishing obstacles on the final miles toward their destination.

The Grand Hotel Giessbach in the Bernese Oberland, established in 1875, was one such hard-to-reach place. Guests had to walk or hire a porter for the short steep climb leading up to where the hotel was nestled, one hundred meters (300 feet) above Lake Brienz. Access to this isolated cosmos was eased only in 1879 when a funicular railway was built, the lower station of which was located at the landing stage of the local steamship company. It could only be reached by boats departing from Brienz and Interlaken. Yet, when travelers had finally arrived at their destination, they could enjoy contemplating the might of nature from the hotel's terrace—a nature whose forces most likely awed and thrilled them when they finally made their way up to the hotel. Guests reminisced about "the plummeting waters [of the Giessbach Falls], their deafening noise, the rugged landscape."[22] Above all, the "view on Lakes Brienz and Thun was so magnificent that one could not take one's eyes off it."[23] Equally superb was a journey to the Grand Hôtel des Rochers-de-Naye (Illustration 2), which opened its doors in 1893, and offered a spectacular view of "the whole of Lake Geneva, its charming shores, the splendid chain of the Savoy Alps, majestically overlooked by the silvery peak of Mont Blanc, [and] the green belt of the Jura Mountains."[24] Travelers who wanted to join the hotel's exclusive belle assemblée at 2,054 meters (about 6,700 feet) above Montreux between May and October had to be patient, because getting there entailed a rack-railway journey of almost one-and-a-half hours.[25] The Schweizerische Nordostbahn (Swiss Northeast Railway) brought its passengers from Zurich to Romanshorn on Lake Constance some seventy kilometers (about 45 miles) away in roughly the same time.

As they made their way uphill on long, winding tracks, the guests of mountain grand hotels were offered sublime spectacles that could be observed from ever newer and often confusing perspectives:

> The tree-shaded road to the hotel [Giessbach] on an elevated plateau, lead up by a series of zigzags that seemed interminable . . . The light from the hotel looked always so near and yet so far, and there was always another bend when

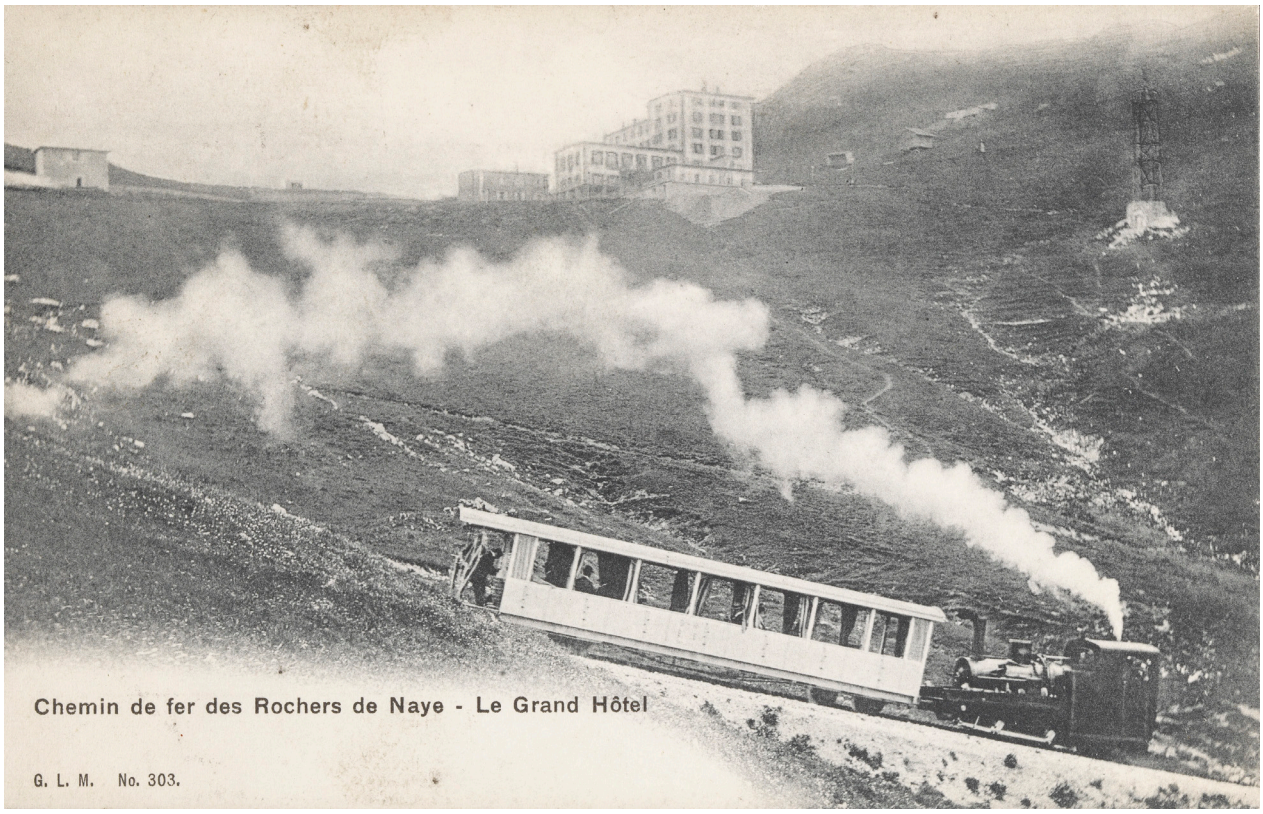

Illustration 2: The railway to the Grand Hôtel des Rochers-de-Naye (Canton of Vaud, Switzerland). Postcard, before 1908.
Montreux: Gaspard Lips Éditeur. Eidgenössische Technische Hochschule, Zurich, image archive, PK_010551.

> we thought we were just there. At the same time there was quite a picturesque effect produced by the rays of light falling through the green branches upon the dripping groups toiling up the ascent.[26]

These highly emotional preludes also provided guidance on how to decode the relationship between nature and technology. Travelers frequently marveled at the wonders of the former while sharing their admiration for the latter:

> After slowly ascending from the level of the lake [of Geneva] a glorious panorama gradually unfolds itself . . . Finally, on reaching Mont Caux, the tourist, who has imagined himself to be in a country as wild as in the days of Bonnivard, suddenly finds himself transported to our ultra-modern civilization, as the train stops at the artistic station adjoining a palatial hotel [i.e., the Grand Hôtel des Rochers-de-Naye].[27]

Supposedly pristine, non-anthropized mountain landscapes served as a backdrop to the narrative of progress. The cable car ride celebrated the taming of wilderness, human triumph over nature, and the epoch and its technical achievements, which made such journeys (and the subsequent marketing and touristic consumption of landscapes) possible in the first place. Romantic ideas of dramatic and unspoiled

mountain scenery may still have accompanied the pleasantly shuddering voyagers as they set off on their safe trips to the summit. However, these concepts, which had survived from pre-industrial times, had lost any real foundation. Nature had long since been tamed, emptied of enchantment, and explored. Contact with this now controlled environment required little but to "repeat, without any risk, proven patterns of perception, behavior and experience."[28] Furthermore, the thoughtful detachment from space, time, and society was a constituent of impression management and part of the hotels' self-representation, as well as an expression of a business and a social philosophy.

Mountain grand hotels capitalized on a landscape that aesthetic discourses had idealized over the previous one-hundred-and-fifty years. This landscape, however, was meanwhile subject to rational interpretation and economic exploitation. Natural space had widely been turned into social space.[29] Scenic landscapes became marketable products. The commercialization of idealized values and intangible capital was as novel and modern as the guests' motivations and modes of travel. Avantgarde (not to say, downright bold) architecture, innovative construction techniques, building equipment, and utility supplies such as sanitary, communication, heating, and air conditioning systems cast mountain grand hotels in a shining light of progress and modernity, and the elevator became a symbol of this. Their fashionable sports facilities and lavish electrical interior and exterior lighting assumed a legendary reputation. Switzerland's first electric lights were turned on in the dining room of the Kulm Hotel in St. Moritz on Christmas eve in 1879. With grand hotels conquering the mountains, technical modernity found its way into the Alps. The faith in technology, widespread at that time, led guests of the Grand Hôtel Karersee in the Dolomites to believe that even the reddish light of alpenglow, observed after sunset, was the result of electrical lighting and fireworks arranged by the hotel management.[30]

The staging of nature was always combined with the staging of technology. Artful arrangements of promenades, scenic vista points, and resting benches directed the gaze of the stroller back to the massive hotel complex.[31] Tellingly, Fräulein Else soliloquized in Arthur Schnitzler's eponymous novelette:

> How immensely broad the meadows are, and how huge and black the mountains. There are hardly any stars. Yes, there are, three, four—there'll soon be more. And the wood behind me. It's pleasant to sit here on the seat at the edge of the wood. The hotel is so far, far away, and the lights are like the lights of fairyland. And what brutes live in it![32]

The establishment that the heroine refers to was the Hotel Fratazza, which opened in 1908 just below San Martino di Castrozza in the Trentino Dolomites.[33] Swiss writer Konrad Falke, on the other hand, voiced the perspective of the host society: "In the

evening, however, the mountain people, who sneak up to the hotel windows in amazement, would see such glittering splendor in the ballrooms that it seemed as if King Laurin's fairy-tale magic had become reality."[34]

Lost in Reverie

Scenic attractions became a key element in choosing sites for the construction of mountain grand hotels and their related marketing strategies. The more grandiose the landscape, the more intense their fascination. Remote elitist microcosms expressed the spirit of the time and corresponded to the glamorous lifestyle of a social elite that, "at such an altitude, enjoyed the luxury and impeccable comforts of a modern hotel, the spicy alpine air (unpolluted by the dust and coal smoke of the cities), morning walks to important peaks . . . and, at midday, sumptuous, pleasurable upscale wining and dining."[35] Yet, the transparent superficiality with which nature was perceived is revealing: only in the imagination of the clueless may "important peaks" be reached during simple "morning walks." The hotels owed their success not so much to picturesque, fairy-tale-like nature as to the projection of bourgeois culture and urban lifestyle onto the mountains.

Perched high among the mountains on commanding elevations, the monumental hotel buildings, many of which were hillside constructions, allowed for vast panoramas because of their longitudinal development orientated toward the landscape. Architectural features such as light-flooded verandas, glass-enclosed terraces, and winter gardens established a symbiosis between the alpine landscape and human-made objects. In this setting, guests must have felt as if they were floating between heaven and earth in an enchanted world disconnected from reality, in whose enjoyable lightness "the air . . . is like champagne."[36] As spaces between the inside and outside, verandas—often conceived as extensions of the entrance hall and equipped with rattan seating in keeping with their filigree iron and glass construction—became a place of encounter and conversation.[37] From here, hotel guests could enjoy expansive, captivating mountain vistas and trace bold climbs through their binoculars. Nevertheless, nature was primarily observed from the distant perspective of a remote and isolated position that placed the ego at the center. The viewer gazed at the world from a position of superiority over nature (and society) in a way that linked ideas of authority, priority, appropriation, and of imposing order on the natural (and societal) environment.[38] Gazing at, rather than experiencing, nature gave rise to the widespread application of hotel names such as Bellevue, Grande Vue, Belvoir, Beauregard, Bellavista, and Belvedere.

High-end tourists were visual consumers. They hardly interacted with their temporary environment away from the urban centers, not with its space, nature, or the

host society. During their week- or month-long stays, they did not withdraw from their urban bourgeois lifestyle, but maintained their usual social and spatial ties. The telephone became a symbol of permanent availability and of constantly keeping in contact with the world of business, finance, politics, and culture. Mail delivery became a major event in the day—not least because in the "overcrowded palace hotels . . . boredom yawns from every corner,"[39] thus inducing the management thoughtfully to protect guests from their ennui by a variety of amusements.[40] Grand hotels, which were seen as a sort of springboard for social advancement and a platform to increase social capital, provided an ideal setting for self-staging and social interaction. People watching appeared far more meaningful and more entertaining a pastime than contemplating the spectacle of nature, as contemporaries noted of fellow tourists staying at the famous Catskill Mountain House in Upstate New York.[41]

Prefigured and acculturated imaginations of landscapes, which artists and writers, travelogues, and guidebooks had produced and perpetuated since travelers became fascinated with Switzerland in the late eighteenth century, were another feature that kept many tourists from enjoying nature.[42] Through thoroughly canonized points of interest, the spectator's visual consumption of landscapes became predictable. An accumulated stock of images overlaid the individual's own sensory perceptions and reduced their willingness to open up to and deal with their emotional responses to natural environments; encounters with the visual reality then became disappointing. Landscapes were little more than a backdrop for the above-mentioned self-staging and social interaction. No wonder that nature and alpine scenery soon became part of hotel interiors (Illustration 3)—as mountain-themed tableaux, stained glass paintings, murals, tapestries, sculptures, hunting trophies, and large rows of windows facing out to the adjacent natural environment. Alpine nature was turned into furniture and reconfigured as an appendage to the world of the bourgeoisie.[43]

In addition to hotel interiors, the mountain environment was turned into an illusion. Marvelous parks and extensive gardens—calculated, mannered, and artistically laid out—were established as counter-landscapes. They provided opportunities for promenading, becoming spaces of social intercourse for a bourgeoisie that transferred its habits (and its architectural and urbanistic requirements) from the city to the high mountains. These counter-landscapes were specifically designed for people watching, displaying the centered self, and approaching the opposite sex for encounters and conversation. Guests at the Caux Palace above Montreux on Lake Geneva, for example, enjoyed an 800-meter (about 2,600-feet) promenade-terrace from which they could take in views of the Bernese, Valais, and Savoy Alps. In Ticino and on the lakes of northern Italy, the search for alterities of nature gave rise to alternative, artificial environments. The extensive planting of exotic species in the gardens and parks of villas and hotels transformed the natural character of much of the region.

Illustration 3: The vestibule of the Waldhaus Vulpera in Tarasp (Canton of Grisons, Switzerland). Photo, 1899.
Eidgenössische Technische Hochschule, Zurich, image archive, Ans_06984.

This new environment, skillfully positioned as a touristic product, found its place in idealizing landscape representations and marketing strategies.[44]

The consumed landscape was increasingly reduced to stereotyped images with interchangeable elements. Little, charming, deep blue lakes, enclosed on both sides by densely vegetated rocky ridges and guarded at their upper end by an imposing massif, were the natural settings chosen for more than a few mountain grand hotels (Illustration 4). Serially produced images made these sceneries predictable places. The widely popular Bremen travel writer Johann Georg Kohl provided a romanticist analysis of the meaning and soul of mountain landscapes in his *Naturansichten aus den Alpen* (Views of Alpine Nature). He wondered:

> What . . . is it, then, that fills us with such joy, with such delight, with such affection and longing, with such enchantment, and such nostalgia when it comes to lakes? In answering this question . . ., it seems to me at first remarkable that the mobile and restless element, which accumulates in lakes, is the representative of the most graceful peace. . . . The enormous mass of water in the oceans is too vast and dreary to allow individualization. The small, closed lakes, however, have far more individual life and are easier to grasp as persons. Therefore, their relationship to our soul, which is itself enclosed in the shell of our body like a moving body of water, is closer, and this is precisely why the poetic impression of lakes is stronger. A small lake, which lies still and smooth in the deep lap of a wild mountain, appears to us like a soul at peace with itself.[45]

Travelers to the large lakes in the southern Alps, however, needed to be wary of aesthetic overstimulation, which was believed to cause an imbalance of the soul, as the Swiss writer and literary critic Joseph Victor Widmann pointed out:

> I believe that a stay on Lake Lugano is more appropriate for particularly irritable natures . . . because its more tranquil beauty does not excite the mind as much as the dazzling charms of Lake Como. After all, here, too [on Lake Lugano], Armida's magic gardens have splendor enough to completely enchant an eye which is accustomed to Nordic landscapes. I confess that I was . . . in raptures of delight at the glory of this blessed corner of the earth.[46]

Disconnections

According to Karlheinz Wöhler, touristification is a process of evolving and developing tourist sites that bears a strong resemblance to colonial patterns.[47] It occupies space by giving new meaning and by attributing economic value to it via symbolic appropriation and the development of exploitative infrastructure. It is a process by which ready-made concepts and ideas, as well as established systems of knowledge, are transferred from their socio-cultural and spatial context of origin into spaces of

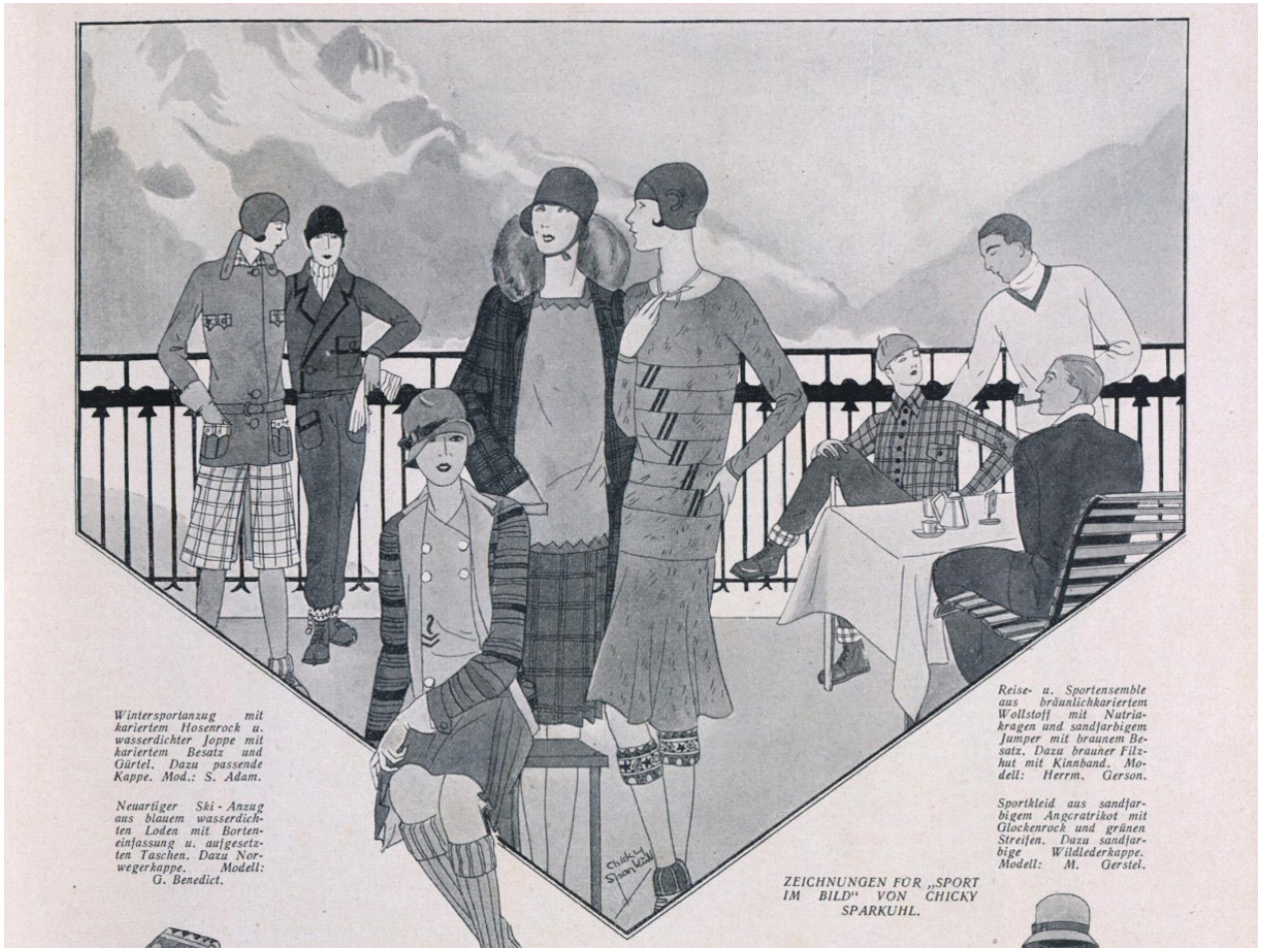

Illustration 4: Grand hotel scenery as a backdrop for the emancipated woman of the 1920s. Illustration by fashion designer Grete ("Chicky") Sparkuhl-Fichelscher for the German sports magazine *Sport im Bild* (1927).
From Elsa Herzog, "'Neue Sachlichkeit' beim Wintersport," *Sport im Bild* 33, no. 24 (1927): 1469.

tourism that dominate social exchanges.

Grand hotels were not only a key component of tourism infrastructure but also the bold expression of a presumptuous occupation of the space to be touristified. This was underlined by the places that were chosen for many of the hotels, which sat impressively enthroned on commanding, fortress-like mountains ("oppressing" the alpine environment in all their "glory of modernity"[48]). They seemed to rule majestically over the world that lay at their feet. Their high-rise, monumental architecture of power, drawing on feudal buildings (such as castles, châteaux, residential tower-houses, manors, villas, and palaces), made them appear as intimidating strongholds of the hosted wealthy elites and as an isolated cosmos, removed from the people in geographical, cultural, and socio-economic terms.[49] It is no coincidence that along many Swiss and Italian mountain lakes, grand hotels frequently nestled down in advantageous waterside positions, occupying land formerly dominated by the edifices of power of petty dominions (castles, châteaux, residences, prefectures,

town halls, and official buildings).[50]

As the opportunities to participate in tourism increased for the middle classes, luxury travelers demanded "ever-more exclusive hotels in ever more secluded locations." Keeping an "elegant distance" from populated areas was crucial when it came to choosing suitable sites for the hotels.[51] Their insouciant unrelatedness to space and society, their de-contextualized, decoupling, and hermetic separation from reality were well-conceived: long sinuous uphill driveways, expansive parks, entrance gates, walls and enclosures, ever-revolving doors, halls, and receptions facilitated the necessary distance and functioned as a means of social selection, access restriction, separation, and exclusion. The apparent contradiction between the challenging accessibility to carefully secluded hotel destinations, on the one hand, and nineteenth-century concepts of rationality and time economy, on the other, found a rational resolution.

Grand hotels ensured that guests were isolated from any "undesirable phenomena," sparing them unpleasant exposure to the commonality. The host society, noticed only incidentally, was at best perceived in terms of the picturesque. Often captured in popular costume and featured on retouched postcards in the form of tourist advertising and visual evidence of tradition-steeped immutability, local society functioned as a counter-image to innovation, charged with romanticized perceptions of peasant life. Yet what threatened to outdistance rural society in so many regards was precisely the modernization whose achievements nineteenth-century tourists would enjoy and admire in their palatial hotels.

Erected amidst a world of peasant privation, poverty, and emigration, these were islands of exuberant luxury in an ocean of suffering. The 1884 Kursaal Maloja on Lake Sils, for example, the largest hotel in Switzerland at the time, was a vast neo-Renaissance five-storied edifice built in close proximity to a "little village of poor huts."[52]

> Up here [on Maloja] and down there, on Lake Sils, where it was once so quiet, things became pretty lively after 1884. Before then, there was nothing up here except a mass of granite debris surrounded by flourishing alpine roses, along with a simple osteria and the great view of the enchantingly beautiful valley of Bregaglia or Bergell and the Upper Engadine, with the blue lake at your feet. Meanwhile, on its green shore stands a huge hotel palace, a splendid building, together with numerous other edifices situated in the grounds. The area is dominated by the unfinished "Château Belvedere," which looks like a feudal castle. And above, up here, rises "Hotel Kulm"! All this is so magnificent, so luxurious, that it is said that there is no hotel palace and no hotel interior in all Switzerland that rivals hotel "Maloja"—not even the 1888 grand hotel in Territet-Montreux.[53]

Grand mountain hotels contributed to the penetration of international tourism

into remote agricultural areas. With technical, cultural, and political modernization pushing into the periphery, these areas' physical and social structures underwent considerable change.[54] As was the case with the Austrian Semmering Pass, grand hotels constituted the starting point for the touristification of the surrounding environment, which typically led to spatial and socio-environmental transformation. Villa complexes, avenues, and promenades were frequently erected in the neighborhood of the hotels, just as majestic sea-front and processional architecture rapidly developed at British and continental seaside resorts from the 1820s. Due to growing infrastructure and the metropolitan bourgeoisie "bringing the city with them" when on vacation, these new settlements quickly assumed an urban appearance.[55] This held particularly true for the Semmering Pass, which, around 1900, could be reached by train from Vienna in just a little over two hours. Although different in terms of the level and peculiarities of touristification, the area showed significant similarities with the Catskill Mountains, which at the time, could be reached by train in around four hours from New York. Nowhere could Vienna or New York urbanites "get so high so quickly, and yet remain so attached to the city" as on the Semmering and in the Catskills, which became "remarkably urbanized landscape[s]."[56]

We can safely define European belle époque grand hotels as worlds of escape from social tension and fear of upheaval. It is no coincidence that they peaked at a time of widespread social conflict. We can also safely call these tourist enclaves a laboratory of technical modernity. It might be too far-fetched, though, to imagine those self-sufficient grand bourgeois establishments in terms of a social laboratory; that is, of an experimental microcosm of a society characterized by strong hierarchies where subordinates were excluded from political and socio-economic participation. Nevertheless, the hotels' managerial structures and work organization—the strict (albeit not hermetic) separation between guests and staff along with the hierarchization and control of the personnel (often locally recruited)—may well have corresponded to the vision of a social order on the part of many guests. In short, we may argue that grand hotels were fortresses of the existing order, defenses against social disruption, and also bastions of ruthless hedonism—a world eloquently sketched by Austrian writer Stefan Zweig in his essay "Bei den Sorglosen" (Visiting the Careless),[57] written against the background of the First World War, in which he provides a description of Suvretta House near St. Moritz (Illustration 5).

During the First World War, high society in neutral Switzerland did not need to worry about its safety. Nevertheless, in the middle of the summer season of 1914, many left hastily. Those who stayed in the hotels often became impoverished together with the owners. These former places of ease, unexpectedly depopulated, were plunged into existential despair. Summering in the hotels had previously been more than a fashion and much more than a question of social prestige. As a matter of fact, they

Illustration 5: The Suvretta-Haus in St. Moritz (Canton of Grisons, Switzerland). Postcard, c. 1910.
Kilchberg: Verlag Gebr. Wehrli. Eidgenössische Technische Hochschule, Zurich, image archive, PK_004968.

were places of social and business life, where personal contacts were established and continued year after year. For regular guests and frequent staff members, "nothing short of a death-certificate is accepted as a more or less adequate excuse for [their] nonappearance" during the season.[58]

The grand hotels, which at first had often been perceived as a bourgeois substitute for noble country estates, became places for pre-war social elites to reassure themselves of their common social status and identity. They also enabled guests to achieve an (albeit illusory) elevation of their social status. A number of hotels and tourist resorts owed their fame to the sojourns of royalty and the highest nobility. Regular stays by members from the Habsburg family, for example, brought Madonna di Campiglio in the Brenta Dolomites to international prominence, guaranteeing "a constantly increasing influx of tourists, despite the fact that the prices are all but insignificant."[59] Hence, the local 1886 Grand Hôtel des Alpes "was usually filled to overflowing" in July and August.[60] Here, where the international grand bourgeoisie basked in the glow of aristocracy, unabashedly imitating its habitus, symbols, and way of life, the contradictory aristocratization of the upper bourgeoisie became apparent.[61] It was a fundamental break with its own values and norms, along with an understanding of its societal role.

Objections

The construction of grand hotels and the associated infrastructural and landscaping interventions resulted in the conversion of the natural landscape into a cultural landscape. The building of railroads caused an irreversible transformation of the environment and alpine geography. So, what could be saved and preserved from intensive intrusion; what could be protected; and what should be protected? After all, elite travel marked only the beginning of more extensive processes of touristification, which were about to evolve into mass tourism. Long before the turn of the century, it had been evident that the tourist industry would have to "adapt even more than before to the ordinary middle class," and that "people other than Jewish bankers and English nabobs would also love to travel in Switzerland," as was stated in 1885.[62] That same year, French writer Alphonse Daudet became a prominent critic of mountain tourism.[63]

However, even before the 1880s, the touristification, technification, and artificialisation of the Alps, along with the unchecked commercialization of nature, had already been regarded with high levels of disapproval. The Schweizer Heimatschutz (Swiss Society for Nature and Cultural Heritage Protection) was a particularly strong force in voicing aesthetic objection to the defacement of nature and townscapes.[64] Soon after the beginning of the twentieth century, its criticisms turned into a declaration of war against "any willful destruction of landscape beauty, [and against] any insensate obliteration of cultural distinctiveness."[65] The association, founded in Bern in 1905, idealized vernacular architecture along with traditional forms of economy and living. It was opposed to modern urbanization and industrialization, and to the advance of urban culture and extravagant lifestyles into the countryside.

Others regarded pre-1900 grand hotels as an expression of the exploitation and banalization of the landscape, as symbols of a heteronomously determined building epoch, if not as architectural aberrations.[66] The Grand Hôtel St. Moritz (Illustration 6), a fifty-six-meter (about 185 feet) high-rise edifice with a one-hundred-meter-long (about 330 feet) façade, was considered an unparalleled architectural "monstrosity," erected in St Moritz-Dorf in the immediate vicinity of Badrutt's Palace Hotel (1896).[67] When it opened for business in December 1905, the monumental building and the impact of landscape interventions met with harsh criticism from Heimatschutz members, architects, and guests alike. Two years later, Hotel La Margna, was opened only 300 meters (about 1,000 feet) away. Its "servile reverence to vernacular architecture" was perceived as "a petrified manifesto against grand hotels."[68] After the Second World War, when their fortunes had since long declined and their clientele had thinned out, clean-up efforts led to the demolition of various hotel buildings, especially on Mount Rigi. Many, however, found posthumous recognition from both

Illustration 6: The Grand Hôtel St. Moritz (Canton of Grisons, Switzerland). Photo, 1905.
Kulturarchiv Oberengadin, Samedan: ID-4200577.

an architectural and environmental viewpoint.[69]

Echoes

So then: what remained of the late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century nature ideals at the fin de siècle? What remained of the aestheticization of nature and high mountain landscapes and those "great temples of nature," which had provided the basis for early alpine tourism and (to some degree) for the later success of grand mountain hotels?[70] A pale glimmer of those ideals. They gave rise to an awareness that tourism, through the commodification and commercialization of inherited landscapes, had profoundly transformed those landscapes and their aesthetic values, thus diminishing their attractiveness for tourism itself. While promoting regional economic growth and technological progress, turn-of-the-century elite tourism, centered on grand hotels, furthered capitalist expansion into Europe's coastal and mountainous inland peripheries, into residual areas of non-capitalist environments and supposed economic wastelands. Mountain grand hotels, destinations of capital-intensive luxury tourism, were an expression of "an arrogant colonialization

through tourism."[71] They made nature available to an aristocratic and upper-middle-class clientele for casual consumption and as a stereotyped backdrop for self-staging. The touristification of European inland peripheries was a process of land seizure, internal colonization, and socio-economic transformation—a process that was concurrent with the climax of the colonial and imperial expansion of Europe's nation states and their access to natural and human resources overseas.

According to Munich mountaineer and writer Heinrich Steinitzer, the gradual opening-up of the Alps by scientists, sportsmen, and early travelers was nothing less "than a specific manifestation of global research and expansion efforts which, once the internal structure of the societal edifice had been consolidated, strove to extend their reach beyond the [own] political, economic and social realm."[72]

Human disposal *over* nature paired with alienation *from* nature; both phenomena were equally symptomatic of an epoch characterized by increasing industrialization and urbanization. While a specific perception of nature initially helped mountain travel destinations gain lasting popularity, turn-of-the-century elite tourists followed values and norms that were different from those of early-day mountain tourists, let alone from the particular back-to-nature concept of the *Jugendbewegung* (the German Youth Movement) that emerged shortly before 1900. High-society vacationers tended to experience landscape and nature from distanced and isolated positions. The grand hotels' large viewing verandas, providing vast panoramas through picture windows, reinforced the upper class's sense of otherness, and may be regarded as having symbolized their loss of contact with both the natural and broader social environment.

Notes

1 For an overview, see Cordula Seger and Reinhard Wittmann, eds., *Grand Hotel: Bühne der Literatur* (Munich: Dölling & Galitz, 2007).

2 See Habbo Knoch, *Grandhotels: Luxusräume und Gesellschaftswandel in New York, London und Berlin um 1900* (Göttingen: Wallstein, 2016); see also Habbo Knoch, "Das Grandhotel," in *Orte der Moderne: Erfahrungswelten des 19. und 20. Jahrhunderts*, ed. Alexa Geisthövel and Habbo Knoch (Frankfurt: Campus, 2005), 129–40. Unless stated otherwise, all translations by the author.

3 Alain Corbin, *Meereslust: Das Abendland und die Entdeckung der Küste* (Berlin: Wagenbach, 1990), 319.

4 Götz Großklaus, "Naturtraum des Kulturbürgers," in *Natur als Gegenwelt: Beiträge zur Kulturgeschichte der Natur*, ed. Götz Großklaus and Ernst Oldemeyer (Karlsruhe: von Loeper, 1983), 190.

5 See Ulrike Kammerhofer-Aggermann, "Von der Trachtenmode zur heiligen vererbten Vätertracht: 'Volk in Tracht ist Macht!,'" in *Ein ewiges dennoch: 125 Jahre Juden in Salzburg*, ed. Marko M. Feingold (Vienna: Böhlau, 1993), 177–90; Reinhard Johler, "Nachwort,"

in *Die unsichtbare Grenze: Ethnizität und Ökologie in einem Alpental*, ed. John W. Cole and Eric R. Wolf (Vienna: Folio, 1995), 427–28.

6 Werner Brunner, *Verblichene Idyllen: Wandbilder im Berliner Mietshaus der Jahrhundertwende: Beispiele internationalen Zeitgeschmacks der Belle Epoque* (Berlin: Mann, 1996), 116–30.

7 "Ausstellungen und Sammlungen: Hannover," *Die Kunst für alle* 13, no. 6 (1897): 111.

8 Alfred M. Müller, "Geschichte des Deutschen und Österreichischen Alpenvereins: Ein Beitrag zur Sozialgeschichte des Vereinswesens," PhD diss. (University of Münster, 1980), 242; Michael Wedekind, "La politicizzazione della montagna: borghesia, alpinismo e nazionalismo tra Otto e Novecento," in *L'invenzione di un cosmo borghese: valori sociali e simboli culturali dell'alpinismo nei secoli XIX e XX*, ed. Claudio Ambrosi and Michael Wedekind (Trento: Museo Storico, 2000), 35; Michael Wedekind, "Alpes et Carpates: Conflictualités ethniques et culturelles dans l'alpinisme de la fin du XIXe siècle," in *La montagne pour tous: la genèse d'une ambition dans l'Europe du XXe siècle*, ed. Olivier Hoibian (Toulouse: Le Pas d'Oiseau, 2020), 114–15.

9 Karl Baedeker, *Die Schweiz, nebst den angrenzenden Theilen von Oberitalien, Savoyen und Tirol: Handbuch für Reisende* (Leipzig: Baedeker, 1875), XXIII.

10 Nikolaus Pevsner, *Hugh Honour, and John Fleming, Lexikon der Weltarchitektur* (Munich: Prestel, 1992), 569.

11 Baedeker, *Schweiz*, XXIII.

12 Arnold Bennett, "The Hotel on the Landscape," *The Living Age* 7, no. 44 (1909): 541.

13 Bennett, "Hotel", 541–42.

14 Gustav Peyer, *Geschichte des Reisens in der Schweiz: Eine culturgeschichtliche Studie* (Basel: Detloff, 1885), 193.

15 Eduard Guyer, *Der Fremdenverkehr und die allgemeinen Verhältnisse des Wirthschaftswesens in der Schweiz (Schweizerische Landesausstellung Zürich 1883. Bericht über Gruppe 41: Das Hotelwesen)* (Zurich: Füssli, 1884), 10.

16 See Christopher Monkhouse, "Railway Hotels," in *Railway Architecture*, ed. Marcus Binney and David Pearce (London: Orbis, 1979), 121.

17 See August Prokop, *Über österreichische Alpen-Hotels, mit besonderer Berücksichtigung Tirol's* (Vienna: self-published, 1897); Désirée Vasko-Juhász, *Die Südbahn: Ihre Kurorte und Hotels* (Vienna: Böhlau, 2018). The Südbahn also established hotels in Baden near Vienna, Dobrna, Gorizia, and Merano; the company probably owned further hotels in Graz, Ljubljana, Pivka, Rijeka, and Trieste; see Vasko-Juhász, *Südbahn*, 37–38.

18 See Vasko-Juhász, *Südbahn*, 78–81.

19 Antonio De Rossi, *La costruzione delle Alpi: immagini e scenari del pittoresco alpino, 1773–1914* (Rome: Donzelli, 2014), 295–305.

20 Maria Wenzel, *Palasthotels in Deutschland: Untersuchungen zu einer Bauaufgabe im 19. und frühen 20. Jahrhundert* (Hildesheim: Olms, 1991), 81, 101.

21 Ludwig Rohden, "Gardone-Riviera am Gardasee: Ein Beitrag zur Klimatotherapie," *Deutsche Medicinische Wochenschrift* 11, no. 41 (1885): 706.

22 Silke Behl and Eva Gerberding, eds., *Literarische Grandhotels der Schweiz* (Zurich: Arche, 2008), 88.

23 Konrad Meyer-Ahrens, *Die Heilquellen und Kurorte der Schweiz und einiger der Schweiz zunächst angrenzenden Gegenden der Nachbarstaaten* (Zurich: Orell, Füssli & Comp., 1867), 252.

24 Alexandre Martin, *La Suisse pittoresque et ses environs: tableau général, descriptif, historique et statistique des 22 cantons, de la Savoie, d'une partie du Piémont et du pays de Bade* (Paris: Souverain, 1835), 306.

25 Eugène de La Harpe, *La Suisse balnéaire et climatique: ses eaux minérales, bains, stations climatiques d'été et d'hiver, établissements hydrothérapiques, etc.* (Zurich: Schmidt, 1897), 71. Before it was opened up to tourists, the Rochers-de-Naye could only be reached by a four-and-a-half-hour climb along steep and arduous footpaths. See Martin, *Suisse pittoresque*, 305; John Murray, *A Handbook for Travellers in Switzerland, the Alps of Savoy and Piedmont, the Italian Lakes, and Part of Dauphiné* (London: Murray, 1879), 185.

26 "Among the Switzers," *The Evening Star* (Washington, D.C.), September 12, 1878: 1.

27 "More Alpine Railroads: How Swiss Peaks Are Made Accessible to Tourists," *New-York Tribune*, illustrated supplement to *New-York Tribune* 64, no. 21189 (November 20, 1904), 10.

28 Großklaus, "Naturtraum", 195.

29 Henri Lefebvre, The Production of Space (Oxford: Blackwell, 1994), 30–31.

30 Elisabeth Baumgartner, "Elektrisches Alpenglühen," *Distel: Kulturelemente*, nos. 42–43 (1990): 63.

31 Evelyne Polt-Heinzl, "Ein Fräulein und sein Autor zu Gast im Grand Hotel," in *Grand Hotel: Bühne der Literatur*, ed. Cordula Seger and Reinhard Wittmann (Munich: Dölling & Galitz, 2007), 49.

32 Arthur Schnitzler, *Fräulein Else: A Novelette*, trans. F.H. Lyon (London: Philpot, [1925]), 77.

33 Karl Baedeker, *Südbayern, Tirol und Salzburg, Ober- und Nieder-Österreich, Steiermark, Kärnten und Krain: Handbuch für Reisende* (Leipzig: Baedeker, 1906), 446.

34 Konrad Falke, *Wengen: Ein Landschaftsbild* (Zurich: Rascher, 1913), 78.

35 Arthur Achleitner and Emil Ubl, *Tirol und Vorarlberg: Neue Schilderung von Land und Leuten* (Leipzig: Payne, [c. 1900]), 354.

36 Schnitzler, *Fräulein Else*, 15.

37 See Eduard Osenbrüggen, *Wanderstudien aus der Schweiz*, vol. 5 (Schaffhausen: Baader, 1876), 290–91.

38 See Mary Louise Pratt, *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* (New York: Routledge, 1992), 7.

39 Woldemar Kaden, *Das Schweizerland: Eine Sommerfahrt durch Gebirg und Thal* (Stuttgart: Engelhorn, [1880]), 177.

40 Ornella Selvafolta, "I Grand Hotel e la tradizione dell'accoglienza sul lago di Como tra Otto e Novecento," in *I Grand Hotel come generatori di cambiamento tra 1870 e 1930: indagini nei contesti alpini e subalpini tra laghi e monti*, ed. Monica Aresi (Riva del Garda: Museo Alto Garda, 2016), 102.

41 See David Stradling, *Making Mountains: New York City and the Catskills* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2007), 82.

42 See Uwe Hentschel, *Mythos Schweiz: zum deutschen literarischen Philhelvetismus*

zwischen 1700 und 1850 (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 2002).

43 Wolfgang Kos, "Die Verkleinerung der Alpen, am Beispiel der touristischen Eroberung des Semmeringgebietes im 19. Jahrhundert," *Distel: Kulturelemente*, nos. 42–43 (1990): 47.

44 See Claudio Ferrata, *La fabbricazione del paesaggio dei laghi: giardini, panorami e cittadine per turisti tra Ceresio, Lario e Verbano* (Bellinzona: Casagrande, 2008); Claudio Ferrata, "Dall'importazione di piante alle trasformazioni del paesaggio: il caso della Regione dei laghi," in *I Grand Hotel come generatori di cambiamento tra 1870 e 1930: indagini nei contesti alpini e subalpini tra laghi e monti*, ed. Monica Aresi (Riva del Garda: Museo Alto Garda, 2016), 193–202.

45 Johann Georg Kohl, *Naturansichten aus den Alpen* (Leipzig: Arnoldische Buchhandlung, 1851), 116, 120; see also Kaden, *Das Schweizerland*, 84–85.

46 Joseph Victor Widmann, *Spaziergänge in den Alpen: Wanderstudien und Plaudereien* (Frauenfeld: Huber, 1885), 89.

47 See Karlheinz Wöhler, *Touristifizierung von Räumen: Kulturwissenschaftliche und soziologische Studien zur Konstruktion von Räumen* (Wiesbaden: VS-Verlag, 2011).

48 Jakob Hardmeyer, *Locarno und seine Thäler* (Zurich: Orell Füssli, [1890]), 10.

49 For the architecture of grand hotels, see Isabelle Rucki, "Grand Hotels in den Alpen: Zur Entstehung und Entwicklung eines Bautyps," *Itinera*, no. 12 (1992), 199–215; Roland Flückiger-Seiler, *Hotelträume zwischen Gletschern und Palmen: Schweizer Tourismus und Hotelbau, 1830–1920* (Baden: Hier und Jetzt, 2001); Roland Flückiger-Seiler, *Hotelpaläste zwischen Traum und Wirklichkeit: Schweizer Tourismus und Hotelbau, 1830–1920* (Baden: Hier und Jetzt, 2003); Wenzel, *Palasthotels*. See also Wolfgang Richter and Jürgen Zänker, *Der Bürgertraum vom Adelsschloß: Aristokratische Bauformen im 19. und 20. Jahrhundert* (Reinbek: Rowohlt, 1988). In Austria, quite a few grand hotels initially adopted regionally based architectural elements, followed the Swiss Chalet style, or still strove for a fusion of architecture with nature.

50 Kohl, *Naturansichten*, 137.

51 Roland Flückiger-Seiler, "Hotelpaläste des Historismus in der Schweiz," in *Baukultur im Wandel: Historismus in Südtirol*, ed. Arbeitskreis Hausforschung Südtirol (Bolzano: Athesia, 2014), 188.

52 Caspar Ulrich Huber, *Album von St. Moritz in Oberengadin, Canton Graubünden* (Zurich: no publisher, [c. 1858]), 15.

53 Woldemar Kaden, *Durchs Schweizerland: Sommerfahrten in Gebirg und Thal* (Zurich: Meier-Merhart, 1895), 388.

54 In this context, see Karl Baedeker, *Die Schweiz, nebst den angrenzenden Theilen von Oberitalien, Savoyen und Tirol: Handbuch für Reisende* (Koblenz: Baedeker, 1869), 100; Peyer, *Geschichte*, 2. See also Cédric Humair et al., *Système touristique et culture technique dans l'Arc lémanique: analyse d'une success story et de ses effets sur l'économie régionale, 1852–1914* (Neuchâtel: Alphil, 2014); Andrea Leonardi, "I Grand Hotel come motore dello sviluppo turistico in area alpina," in *I Grand Hotel come generatori di cambiamento tra 1870 e 1930: indagini nei contesti alpini e subalpini tra laghi e monti*, ed. Monica Aresi (Riva del Garda: Museo Alto Garda, 2016), 26–28; Andrea Zanini, "Grandi alberghi e organizzazione turistica in Italia tra Otto e Novecento: il ruolo pionieristico dell'esperienza

lariana," in *I Grand Hotel come generatori di cambiamento tra 1870 e 1930: indagini nei contesti alpini e subalpini tra laghi e monti*, ed. Monica Aresi (Riva del Garda: Museo Alto Garda, 2016), 37–49.

55 In this context, see Jon Sterngass, *First Resorts: Pursuing Pleasure at Saratoga Springs, Newport, and Coney Island* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001), 6–39.

56 Stradling, *Making Mountains*, 90, 79.

57 Stefan Zweig, "Bei den Sorglosen," in *Die schlaflose Welt: Aufsätze und Vorträge aus den Jahren 1909–1941*, ed. Knut Beck (Frankfurt: Fischer, 2012), 104–111.

58 Erich Kästner, *Three Men in the Snow: A Story*, trans. Cyrus Brooks (London: Cape, 1935), 53.

59 Achleitner and Ubl, *Tirol*, 354.

60 Karl Baedeker, *Südbayern, Tirol und Salzburg, Ober- und Nieder-Österreich, Steiermark, Kärnten und Krain: Handbuch für Reisende* (Leipzig: Baedeker, 1910), 411.

61 See also Hans Heiss, "Das 'Österreichische Engadin': Das Hochpustertal—Pionierlandschaft des Tiroler Fremdenverkehrs," *Distel: Kulturelemente*, nos. 42–43 (1990): 42; Wenzel, *Palasthotels*, 293.

62 Peyer, *Geschichte*, 239.

63 Alphonse Daudet, *Tartarin sur les Alpes: nouveaux exploits du héros tarasconnais* (Paris: Flammarion, [c. 1905]), 117–18.

64 See e.g. Kaden, *Durchs Schweizerland*, 388; Hermann Wollschlaeger, *Sommerferien in Tirol: Reise-Erinnerungen* (Berlin: Janke, 1901), 46; Édouard Rod, *Là-haut* (Paris: Perrin, 1897); Édouard Rod, "Der Alpinismus, Teil I: Die Schweizer Alpen," in *Die Schweiz im neunzehnten Jahrhundert*, vol. 3, ed. Paul Seippel (Bern: Schmid & Francke, 1900), 409.

65 Albert Burckhardt-Finsler, "Was wir wollen," *Heimatschutz: Zeitschrift der "Schweizer[ischen] Vereinigung für Heimatschutz" = Ligue pour la beauté: Bulletin de la "Ligue pour la conservation de la Suisse pittoresque"* (1905/06): 1; "Projekt für ein Kurhaus," *Heimatschutz: Zeitschrift der "Schweizer[ischen] Vereinigung für Heimatschutz" = Ligue pour la beauté. Bulletin de la "Ligue pour la conservation de la Suisse pittoresque"* 1, no. 2 (1906): 9.

66 Roland Flückiger-Seiler, "'Architektur nach dem Sündenfall': Der Umgang mit Hotelbauten aus der Belle Époque," in *Erhalten und Gestalten: 100 Jahre Schweizer Heimatschutz*, ed. Madlaina Bundi (Baden: Hier und Jetzt, 2005), 81. For a lucid criticism of the *Heimatschutz* and for the confutation of some of the its positions, see Samuel Guyer, "Das 'Suvrettahaus' bei St. Moritz: Ein Beitrag zum Hotelbau-Problem der Gegenwart," *Schweizerische Bauzeitung: Wochenschrift für Bau-, Verkehrs- und Maschinentechnik = Revue polytechnique* 69, no. 7 (1917): 71–74; no. 8 (1917): 85–87; no. 9 (1917): 94–98.

67 Michael Schmitt, *Palast-Hotels: Architektur und Anspruch eines Bautyps, 1870–1920* (Berlin: Mann, 1982), 70.

68 Guyer, "Suvrettahaus," 97; Cordula Seger, "'Ihr werdet arm im Glück, im Reichtum elend bleiben!': Bauen für den Tourismus im Spannungsfeld zwischen Tradition und Spekulation," in *Alpenland: Terrain der Moderne*, ed. Marius Risi (Münster, New York, Munich, and Berlin: Waxmann, 2011), 108. On the hotel La Margna, see "Das Hotel 'La Margna' in St. Moritz," *Schweizerische Bauzeitung: Wochenschrift für Bau-, Verkehrs- und Maschinentechnik = Revue polytechnique* 53, no. 22 (1909): 277–79.

69 See Jürg Ragettli, "Berglandschaft, Hotelarchitektur und Heimatschutz," *Turrisbabel:*

Trimestrales Mitteilungsblatt der Stiftung der Kammer der Architekten, Raumplaner, Landschaftsplaner, Denkmalpfleger der Autonomen Provinz Bozen = Notiziario trimestrale della Fondazione dell'Ordine degli architetti, pianificatori, paesaggisti, conservatori della Provincia autonoma di Bolzano, no. 84 (2010): 26–29.

70 Kaden, *Das Schweizerland*, 104.

71 Carlo Calderan, "La costruzione del paesaggio turistico," *Turrisbabel: Trimestrales Mitteilungsblatt der Stiftung der Kammer der Architekten, Raumplaner, Landschaftsplaner, Denkmalpfleger der Autonomen Provinz Bozen = Notiziario trimestrale della Fondazione dell'Ordine degli architetti, pianificatori, paesaggisti, conservatori della Provincia autonoma di Bolzano*, no. 84 (2010): 7.

72 Heinrich Steinitzer, "Die Psychologie des Alpinismus," in *Saggi sulla psicologia dell'alpinista: raccolta di autobiografie psicologiche di alpinisti viventi*, ed. Adolfo Hess (Turin: Lattes, 1914), 67.

About the Author

Michael Wedekind has been a senior researcher with the Munich-based Zentralinstitut für Kunstgeschichte since 2016. He studied history and Romance languages at Münster, Perugia, Bologna, and Bucharest, obtaining his PhD on Nazi occupation policy in Northern Italy from the University of Münster, where he also served as a postdoctoral researcher and published an award-winning study on the history of European mountaineering. After visiting professorships at the University of Trento and the University of Bucharest, he was a senior researcher at the University of Münster and the University of Vienna, where he also taught contemporary history. His research focuses on nineteenth- and twentieth-century history of the Alpine-Adriatic region, Italy, and South-East Europe. His latest monograph, *Die Besetzung der Vergangenheit: Archäologie, Frühgeschichte und NS-Herrschaftslegitimation im Alpen-Adria-Raum (1939–1945)* (StudienVerlag, 2019) analyzes the role of German and Austrian archaeologists in legitimating Nazi expansion to Slovenia and Northern Italy. He is currently co-editing two publications that discuss twentieth-century demography and population policies in South Tyrol and Trentino and forced transfers of cultural objects in the Alpine-Adriatic region between the 1900s and 1970s.

Contact: Michael Wedekind; michael.wedekind@outlook.de.

Jennifer Peedom's *Mountain* as a City Symphony

Benita Lehmann

Abstract

This article explores Jennifer Peedom's film *Mountain* (2017) through the lens of the city symphony in view of structural, aesthetic, and thematic parallels between mountain and city symphony films. Analyzing *Mountain* in the generic context of the city symphony film draws attention to the deep structural links between urban centers and mountains, and their shared technological and urban infrastructures. This appraoch also harnesses the potential of film studies to revise dominant perceptions of mountains and can help viewers understand mountains as places of density and as dense networks that are developed by technological infrastructure and informed by dense technological, social, and cultural networks. By drawing on media ecology, actor-network theory, and media archeology, I will show that, similar to city symphonies, *Mountain* explores collective networks beyond the human realm to shed light on mountains as cultural spaces, geological manifestations, and eco-social realities. In so doing, *Mountain* tries to help humans to come to terms with the deep temporalities of alpine spaces and their technological mediations.

Suggested Citation: Lehmann, Benita. "Jennifer Peedom's *Mountain* as a City Symphony." *JAAAS: Journal of the Austrian Association for American Studies* 2, no. 2 (2021): 189–210, DOI: 10.47060/jaaas.v2i2.100.

Keywords: mountain symphony films; media ecology; media archeology; archive; agency; mountain film

Peer Review: This article was reviewed by the issue's guest editors and an external reviewer.

Jennifer Peedom's *Mountain* as a City Symphony

Benita Lehmann

A mountain stands snow-covered and solitary in the distance. It is guarded by several snowy conifers and situated in a landscape filled with movement: light and shadow, day and night, clouds and stars move around the peak and its surrounding scenery. Instead of a starred sky moving above a single peak, the next scene shows a mountain range. Snowcats move up and down one of the mountains preparing the slopes for the next day, their movement visible only by the shine of their headlights. The scene evokes associations with cars driving on busy night streets. Then, the attention shifts to actual streets, as various infrastructural approaches to mountains are presented: first, through the windshield of a car that follows tracks on a snow-covered highway; second, through a serpentine road, heavily trafficked, winding up the mountain flank. Third, via a parking lot that fills up and clears out between dawn and dusk. A delicately frosted deciduous tree mediates the transition between the streets leading to mountains and the streets that are modelled onto them. Freshly groomed slopes are gradually tracked by numerous skiers who descend like a ballet ensemble and carve turns whose traces in the snow evoke waves. Only identifiable as colorful dots of ski jackets, the skiers move across the slopes. They are joined, in the next scene, by skiers on a chairlift. Finally, the camera's attention moves to the infrastructure on the mountains. Gondolas span slopes, skiers flock to queue at ski lift stations and the lifts themselves turn like Ferris wheels, gradually transporting skier after skier. Cable car poles, pipes, rollers, and anchor points become visible. A flock of birds flies away as trees are cut down to create the space where technology allows people to meet mountains. These scenes, some accelerated, are dramatized by symphonic music and stylized by poetic narration.

This sequence from the film *Mountain* (2017), directed by Jennifer Peedom, evokes aesthetic associations with the city symphony film, which was popular in the 1920s. City symphonies are considered a hybrid between a documentary and avant-garde film: they are avant-garde films that assume "a documentary *attitude* towards film-making" and capture urban life.[1] City symphonies stress the organic nature of the city and the effects of and connections between industrialization, mechanization,

and a pre-industrial society,[2] dealing "with the energy, the patterning, the complexities, and the subtleties of a city."[3] With a tendency to rhythmize human actions versus those of machines and invest in the depiction of masses rather than individuals,[4] they are also characterized by associative and rhythmic montages that forge new meaningful connections through visual and temporal forms.[5]

Early city symphony films frequently express a certain admiration for modern technology, "capturing motion by showing busy street life and powerful machines at work."[6] In celebrating modernity, they play a key role in visualizing collective, technological, and non-human agencies. Time-lapses and accelerated images (which also characterize Peedom's documentary *Mountain*) are often used as part of a visual rhetoric that highlights industrial processes of mechanization typically encountered in urban settings. In this respect, *Mountain* resonates with city symphonies such as *Rien Que Les Heures* (1926) and *Berlin: Die Sinfonie der Großstadt* (1927), as it brings out the industrial apparatus which informs mountains in the same way that Cavalcanti and Ruttmann highlight the urban machinery that vitalized Paris and Berlin.

Although *Mountain* shares a number of these core features with the city symphony and focuses on "both a defined time frame (most often from morning until evening) as well as a carefully articulated geographic space,"[7] its geographic interest is not confined to city walls. Instead, it explores the relationship between the urban and the natural as they connect in alpine spaces. The generic relationship to the symphony film is further intensified on the narrative level: like city symphonies, which, although mostly non-narrative, are often divided into thematically organized segments, and sometimes even follow the structure of a poem (e.g. *Manhatta* [1921]),[8] *Mountain* is structured by a narrative voice that guides the viewer through a series of chapters.

Mountain mediates the alpine rhythm of nature, just like the city symphonies of the 1920s use "the pulse of the city and quite literally translate it into the rhythm of cinema."[9] In the context of the Anthropocene and the exploitation of nature, accelerated in the wake of the past century's industrial and technological developments, the mountain symphony responds to the current ecocrisis.[10] While city symphonies often mirror the effects of World War I, industrialization, and mass mobility and "can be seen as responses to the startling changes that came with this,"[11] *Mountain* belongs to a more recent cinematic trend of films employing aesthetic ecological strategies, such as long shots, slow orchestration, and symphonic music to express non-human agencies. The film also draws attention to the media-archeological dimension of the structural similarities with city symphonies: while the latter mediate "the metropolis as a site of social contrasts, drawing the viewers' attention to overlooked spaces and neglected communities,"[12] mountain symphonies critically

engage with the networks involved in and produced from alpine space.

Loosely based on Robert Mcfarlane's book *Mountains of the Mind* (2003), narrated by Hollywood actor Willem Dafoe, and with a backing soundtrack by the Australian Chamber Orchestra, *Mountain* was compiled from the 2,000-plus-hour archive of film by cinematographer Renan Ozturk and production companies such as Sherpas Cinema. The film takes the viewer through five historic and symphonic chapters and topics of mountain culture: from the beginnings of imperialist mountain cartography, to emerging tourism and first ascents, commercialization of the mountains and mass tourism, and ultimately back to mountains as ecological entities. Peedom combines footage from many existing outdoor films and reframes these in ways that shift the agency from mountaineers to the mountains themselves. In this sense, Peedom's documentary allows the mountain to take the lead, in the same way that cities were the stars of the symphony film. *Mountain* transfers the aesthetics associated with urban spaces to the mountains and renders nature as intimately connected to urbanity. Mountains, Peedom's film demonstrates, are mediated as extensions of the urban sphere, developed by various forms of infrastructure, and expressed through the visual language of the city symphony. Blending expository and poetic modes of documentary film,[13] *Mountain* showcases human–alpine encounters by employing the visual language of the city symphony.

This article explores *Mountain* through the lens of the city symphony and tests the generic potential of a mountain symphony film regarding these parallels due to their numerous structural, aesthetic, and thematic similarities. Analyzing *Mountain* in the generic context of the city symphony film draws attention to the deep structural links between urban centers and mountains, and their shared technological and urban infrastructures. This approach also provides opportunities to utilize the potential of film studies in revisioning dominant perceptions of mountains, helping viewers to understand mountains as places of density and as dense networks that are developed by technological infrastructure and informed by dense technological, social, and cultural networks. Like city symphonies, *Mountain* explores collective networks beyond the human realm and sheds light on mountains as cultural spaces, geological manifestations, and eco-social realities. It helps humans to come to terms with the deep temporalities of alpine spaces and their technological mediations.

The approach of this article is framed by concepts and ideas of media ecology, media archeology and its notion of deep time, landscape studies as well as network aesthetics. Borrowing from network aesthetics, my analysis adopts the notion that humans and non-human entities interact equally in networks, and nature and society are organized as equals. It builds on media ecology's conception of humans, society, and media as agents as much as it rests on the premise that media are ecologically

entangled with nature, and human society and our environment are by no means separate. With regard to media archeology, my analysis considers media history from a geological perspective of deep time that addresses contingent and non-linear developments of history, such as those that emerge through the repurposing of the footage in *Mountain*.

My discussion of *Mountain* explores the large-scale technological permeation of mountains to ask both what can be gained and what is brought to the forefront if we read mountains in the context of the city symphony. I argue that this specific generic reading highlights the film's production of density as it pertains to time, space, and footage. By tracing these various forms of densities and analyzing the filmic strategies used to convey them, this article demonstrates how *Mountain* expresses a very specific alpine agency. One way in which questions of agency interrelate with those of density is in the repurposing of footage from outdoor films that compose Peedom's film. Culled from an immense archive of mountain and outdoor films, *Mountain* may be considered a mountain film about mountain films. The film critically engages with the genre of outdoor films and their mediation of nature while also replaying some of the genre's most contested characteristics and forms of Romanticization. The final section of this paper addresses how this combination of critique and idealization is not a contradiction, but, rather, a core feature of a cinematic revision that ultimately shifts critical and cinematic attention to environmental concerns.

Alpine Technological Conquest

In order to come to terms with the technological permeation of mountains, the first section of this paper explores the historical and technological conquest of mountains, its cinematic mediation in *Mountain*, and how the film contributes to our understanding of imperial and technological invasion in alpine space. How are city symphonies and mountain symphonies similar, not only on the level of their content but also in their aesthetic form? What can be gained for the study of mountain films on a more general level? By bringing together footage that spans across a century of mountaineering, *Mountain* emphasizes how humans have inscribed themselves into the alpine landscape via a vast infrastructural network that includes roads and passes, as well as treks and transportation systems. Peedom's film is a reminder that the utilization of these networks, whether powered by humans, animals, or machines, has gradually moved from the lowlands to the highlands, connecting human settlements with alpine regions. This is highlighted in scenes of a horse track on a wide plain, presumably located in North America that is followed by black-and-white footage horses crossing a riverbed in a more alpine setting, as well as heavy-laden mules who climb up a wintery, snow-covered mountain pass.

The film establishes connections between modern alpinist interventions and early religious mountain hikes: the image of a mountaineer turning his oxygen flask cap is rhythmically followed by a monk turning the prayer wheels. The scene juxtaposes religious and archaic forms of mountain life with industrial and technological approaches to mountains. Consequently, the history of alpine exploration is condensed even further: masses of people gather at Mount Everest basecamp while the mountain itself rests solitary and majestic in the background. Mountaineers and sherpas pose for images and track toward the icy flanks of its peak. These scenes, connected via Chopin's *Notturno, Op. 27: No. 2 in D-flat major*—a slow piano piece—all demonstrate that "the great peaks of the world" had begun "to exert a force upon the imagination . . . that was easy to hear, hard to resist and sometimes fatal."[14] The black-and-white scenes condense the historical development of alpine space and the footage culminates in a tableau showing the date of George Mallory and Andrew Irvine's third failed attempt at Mount Everest.

To keep this network of alpinist interventions active in viewers' minds, footage in color shows how mountaineers use strap-on crampons to cross a glacial bridge, modern versions of those seen in the black-and-white footage. In order to bring this sequence of images to a close and thus connect the historic dimension of alpine conquest with that of historic milestones, the film presents Tensing Norgay's iconic photo of the first successful ascent of Mount Everest in 1953. The narrator frames these images' crucial impact at the emergence of mountaineering as a popular mass sport: "This was the moment that mountaineering as an adventure entered the popular imagination."[15] The entire passage is accompanied by energetic and triumphal string music. The strings of the orchestra support the strings of the alpine network mediated in the images of these scenes. The allegro vivace of the *Holberg Suite* by the Australian Chamber Orchestra and the images themselves remain largely natural in terms of their pace and rhythm, which draws parallels to slide shows. In this way, Peedom's film brings together the various exploratory and imperialist interventions that have shaped mountains from the mid-eighteenth century onwards and eventually paved the way for alpinist ambitions among the general public.[16] Peedom's film makes clear that, regardless of whether conquests were leisurely or imperial (or both), they were fostered by the infrastructural development of the alpine region.

Mountain addresses the history of the mountaineering infrastructure in relation to the history of alpine aesthetics. This is particularly apparent in images which stylize mountains as objects of art. In a scene from the film's second chapter, a lone mountain in the distance looks picturesque: the mountain is flanked by clouded sky and veil and seems to be floating weightlessly. As this montage draws to mind associations with the Romantic tradition, the search for the sublime is specifically picked up in another scene: a line of mountaineers traverses an alpine flank, and the frame

is so close that it mediates the immense height and exposure. The section is closed by the shot of a solitary man smoking a pipe on the edge of a rock, again only partially situated within the alpine landscape. The narrative voice contextualizes the interplay between urbanization and the emergence of the sublime as one that is deeply interconnected: "As cities grew and we insulated ourselves away from nature: The mountains called us back . . . We went in search of places that were intimidating and uncontrollable. That inspired in us the heady blend of pleasure and terror. Which we came to call the sublime."[17] These black-and-white scenes connect the history of mountaineering with that of aesthetic alpinism and demonstrate how early urban spaces and nature are organized in networks. *Mountain* is replete with such images in which lone climbers are juxtaposed with a magnitude of spiky peaks.

Still in black-and-white, the film highlights the technical and technological development of alpine skiing alongside the political developments of the twentieth century. Footage follows of skiers walking up a hill using the herringbone technique and collectively descending using the snow plough technique. Through these images, the film establishes associative links that echo the military history of World War I. The war triggered the development of skiing and became part of national culture, as illustrated by the fact that, at the end of WWI, every soldier in alpine regions was given a pair of skis.[18] With the war, the infrastructural development of the Alps became strongly pushed by and linked to military concerns and fostered infrastructural interventions like the building of mountain combat stations to secure the alpine borders.[19]

The film condenses the technological advancements in aviation and the technological development of cameras and links these to the empire building of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Images shot from a plane display diverse alpine scenery und images of rural settlements. While these scenes are related to airspace, other images show maps of various mountain ranges and territories. These images highlight the link between cartography and imperialist interventions like "the stabilization of territorial states" and the visual control of mountains by colonizers.[20] Images of white soldiers in a village with Mount Kilimanjaro in the background follow. These scenes highlight alpine networks as they spread from skiing in the European Alps to the subjugation of entire countries beyond the European realm. All these techniques and technologies are united by the goal to master and control, as the narrator suggests: "The imperial aim was to bring it and its peoples within the realm of the known and the owned. To replace mystery—with mastery."[21] The following scene highlights how colonial imperial expansion was superseded by neocolonial empire-building based on mountains as symbols as mastery—an idea that is literally carried to the mountains: a rope team with heavy cables hikes up a steep, icy mountain flank. The team mounts a cable roller that directs the cable back into the val-

ley. Cable car poles, steel ropes, and gondolas—arranged to an energetic and uplifting piece for string instruments—are embedded into nature. Technology at its height has now reached the summit as a gondola, crammed with laughing tourists, reaches the summit station.

In "The Nation's First Playground" (2006), Jennifer Lynn Peterson thematizes North American alpine development, characterized by the construction and development of national parks in the American West. She stresses that the transition from allegedly empty landscapes to touristic playgrounds in the American West was crucial for the creation of tourism-fostering infrastructural development. At the beginning of the twentieth century, travelogues, the early forerunners of nature films, were produced. These were supported by the technological development of film as well as the infrastructural and technological development of nature. Peterson's research on the relation between transportation systems and early travelogues of the American West highlights the importance of infrastructure for the mediation of mountains in travelogues, as they were "equally invested in the representing of the process of getting to that scenery—the railroads, cars, horse paths, and walking trails the traveler must use to reach the scenery—and the experience of viewing the scenery once one has reached it."[22] *Mountain* illustrates these early human-mountain encounters and the technological advancements where people serve as "mediating tourist figures within the landscape, essentially holding the audience's hand while leading it into the spectacular places on-screen."[23] In the scenes that highlight this connection, masses spread to line up on a mountain crest and gaze at the surrounding alpine scenery. Representing the density produced by infrastructural development in alpine spaces, the lift cables of the first ascent's rope team become a line of tourist mountain pilgrims that are carried to the top.

This dense geographical and historical network is inscribed into the present as the footage changes to color. The film again reflects the history of alpine technology as a tremendous one but at the same time as one of violence in the mountains. As Stephen Slemon notes: "Everest's paradigmatic inaccessibility, its figuration of otherness without cultural others, becomes violently translated—by commodification, by commerce, by the staging of postmodern nationalist arrival—into exactly its opposite: Everest becomes a main street, a traffic jam, a ship-of-fools party on the rooftop of the world."[24] In this sense, Slemon and the film suggest that technological development also frequently accompanies a sort of violence and demystification, which, as I will argue later, is not necessarily always the case. Summiting Mount Everest is mediated as if it were a strategic military operation. A computer-animated map of the trek from Kathmandu to Mount Everest is framed by the narrator's voice: "And the greatest mystery of them all: Everest. And so began the campaign to vanquish it."[25] Images that summarize the technological advancement of modern alpin-

ism show pressure chambers for training the mountaineer's lung capacity and overalls with artificial oxygen tanks that are needed to reach Mount Everest's top. The martial framing of summiting the epitome of alpine space—Mount Everest—forms a contrast to the celebration of technological development. Further, this scene foreshadows the film's critical engagement with human intrusion and its consequences for alpine space. To intensify the connections between terror and magnificence, the narrator closes the sequence as if the images were part of a war landscape: "Everest was placed under siege. Until at last it succumbed."[26]

The commodification of mountaineering on Mount Everest in the mass-oriented outdoor industry becomes clear when the film transfers the previous juxtaposition of pre-industrial and industrial society to the present, where "mountain mania culminates on Mount Everest."[27] In scenes of Sherpas trekking with mules, an infinite number of colorful religious flags towers above the base camp. Instead of a rural assembly of tents, the base camp has become more of a tent city. These images are accelerated, rhythmically edited, and accompanied by a piece in a minor key by the Australian Chamber Orchestra, highlighting the industrial character of modern alpinism, which "isn't climbing anymore. It's queuing. This isn't exploration. It's crowd control. This is the modern industry of ascent. In which the risks are often taken most by those who have least."[28] Ultimately, the film re-mediates Tensing Norgay's iconic ascent photo, but with a different outcome: a mountaineer on the summit holds a camera and pans it around himself. What initially appears to be a heroic singular achievement is turned into a mass experience. Mount Everest's peak is crowded, people are waiting in line to replicate the photo at "the top of the world." The film not only comments critically on the effects of technologization but also the fact that mountaineering has become a lucrative business. These scenes stress the connection between technology and society in such a way that "societies are made of the media that bind us together and media exist only where there are societies to bind them."[29]

Mountain, in these images, relates to the genre of the city symphony as it condenses a hundred years of alpine history, accompanied by the orchestra's music, into a few minutes. Here, the time frame is not a single day, but decades. The geographical space switches from a global level to the realm of Mount Everest as the embodiment of what mountains signify for humans. *Mountain* simultaneously celebrates and criticizes the technological development of alpine space: it creates a critical focal point through the montage and revision of footage, which itself only becomes possible through its montage. This effect is reinforced by the film's juxtaposition of sound and words: while the music remains energetic, the images showcase masses making pilgrimages to the mountains and the narrator's closing comment that "our fascination became an obsession" sets a critical tone for the following segments of film.[30]

In this change between black-and-white and color images, the film reveals the diversity of different forms of alpine networks: sometimes, these are immediate connections—the rope between two humans or the rope between human and mountain, while in other cases, these are larger, less immediate links such as those between a metropolis and a distanced alpine playground. However, these different connections showcase what Adrian Ivakhiv refers to as ecological thinking in terms of network narratives that "consist of lines of individual narratives that converge and diverge in ways that highlight both the casual links and the indeterminacies of the connections that make events possible."[31]

These connections between urban and alpine spaces were intensified through national, military, and commercial interests throughout the first half of the twentieth century—a period that also figures as a dense moment in mountain film history, marking the apogee of the German mountain film.[32] Like the *Bergfilm*, *Mountain* engages discourses of modernity. However, instead of highlighting the contrast between urban spaces and alpine nature that the *Bergfilm* is known to celebrate, *Mountain* resonates with recent research on mountain films, demonstrating that urban and alpine spaces are not polar opposites that cannot be imagined without each other, but have always been connected and circulated in networks into which modern landscapes are embedded.[33] In this sense, Peedom's blending of mountains with the avant-garde and city symphony do not merely challenge the contrast between the urban and the alpine but, in certain ways, also upsets the generic dominance of the German mountain film. The mountain symphony, then, in the way it emerges from Peedom's film, highlights the density and multi-layered nature of mountain-urban relationships. It contributes to a broadening of the genre as it showcases the collective human and nonhuman networks, exploring their organicity and fluidity "as circulating objects undergoing trials."[34]

Dense Mountain Time

One of the mountain symphony's strengths lies in its ability to render the relationship between humans and nature tangible as a closely entangled network. Montage and assemblage highlight the collective networks beyond the human realm. In order to better understand mountains as places of accumulated density, one must resort to actor-network-theory, which assumes that humans and nonhuman entities interact equally in networks that "share the same shape-changing destiny."[35] Networks, in that sense, are "never *bigger* than another one" but "simply *longer* or more intensely connected."[36] What makes actor-network-theory so valuable for viewing mountains as dense network points here is its assumption that "a given element becomes strategic through the number of connections it commands."[37] In this, it supports the idea that mountains serve as neuralgic points that bundle, re-direct and emanate

various connections.

I will trace how *Mountain* produces density as it concerns the entities of time, space and footage. My first argument about density pertains to temporal density, as the mountain symphony probes the relationship between human experience and measured time. City symphonies follow the clock, and their rhythm is a mechanical one. The mountain symphony, by contrast, follows a different rhythm. City symphonies re-embody the mechanical, industrial time referred to as "objective time" by Ori Levin.[38] *Mountain*, instead, approaches a different kind of objective time, namely, a "hyperobjective" or geological deep time,[39] where temporalities "are understood in this alternative account as concretely linked to the nonhuman earth times of decay and renewal but also to the current Anthropocene of the obscenities of the ecocrisis."[40] Accordingly, the mountain symphony addresses layered and non-linear developments of history. While Dziga Vertov's *Man with a Movie Camera* (1927), filmed over a period of three years and in three different cities, cinematically condenses footage "into a single 24-hour day,"[41] the mountain symphony condenses footage filmed over several years all over the world into one large timeframe and into a deeper temporal structure. The mountains in *Mountain* are contrasted with the ephemerality of human time through mountain time, as a sort of deep time. Mountains in Peedom's film, similar to the hyperobjects in Timothy Morton's elaborations, become "so massively distributed in time that they seem to taper off."[42] Through scenes that make human presence in high alpine environments seem particularly short-lived, such as when the narrator claims that "mountains humble the human instinct and reveal our insignificance,"[43] the camera dramatizes the mountain in aerial and panoramic shots from various angles. While humans might briefly inhabit high altitudes, as scenes of snow-covered tents on the mountain flank indicate, the presence of an individual mountain is suggested to outlive that of the alpinist individual. The tents in these scenes are symbolic of the status of alpinists as eternal guests: despite how well-trodden mountain paths have become, the individual mountaineer is only a fleeting presence on the mountain. Furthermore, the tents can be read as points of interconnection between the human and nonhuman and as objects through which human and mountain time meet and make the different scales of the alpinist and mountain timeline strikingly apparent.

The idea that mountains exist in a timeframe different from human existence is stressed by the narrator, who adds, "They live in deep time. In a way that we do not."[44] Through this statement, Peedom's cinematic archive reveals the geological age of the mountains and the layers of horizontally stratified flanks of a mountain range stand as witness to their geological age. Mountains have been compressed over millions of years and yet, through geological movements, have been transported to the surface. The idea that mountains live in a time that is different from human expe-

rience is reflected in scenes where time becomes condensed through the visual language of the symphony film with its time lapses and slow-motion images. In these scenes, Peedom's film portrays mountains as what Morton calls "nonhuman entities . . . that are incomparably more vast and powerful than we are."[45] Not only are mountains temporally vaster and therefore more powerful, but their temporal longevity also results in the fact "that our reality is caught in them."[46] While most of the original films from which Peedom draws her footage show explorers scanning, or mountaineers exploring, the surface of mountains, her quick and rich assemblage of clips has the human individual appear against the mountain and deeply embedded in its time. This kind of deep time afforded in *Mountain* also invites a consideration of reversed roles, in which the mountain rather than the mountaineer assumes the position of the observer: "Behind and beyond the mountains stretch eons too fast for us to comprehend. They were here long before we were even dreamed of. They watched us arrive. They will watch us leave."[47] The film itself, then, opens a third perspective that transcends the binary of visual mastery, as these meditative shots are released into an even bigger frame: a shot of the earth as seen from space. The film in these images becomes a space that transcends time and illustrates the dense relational network between mountains and humans.

Dense Alpine Space

My second point regarding density explores how *Mountain* produces and reveals geosocial densities, highlighting what Bruno Latour describes as the absence of distance in actor-network-theory: "there is no distant place anymore."[48] My argument follows Marc Boumeester in relating the mapping of space to questions of agency. He notes that "cartography is a useful instrument . . . which reveals much more of density than focusing on density itself: the mapping of agencies."[49] The dense compilation of the mountain symphony introduces the viewer to the different agents responsible for "the modification of mountains," disclosing, first, the cartography of technological intervention that shapes alpine space.[50] Technological force becomes visible through the agent of the machine that removes large stretches of forest on a mountain flank or through the snowcat that prepares a half pipe and models the mountain for the utilization of freestyle skiers. Accelerated and rhythmically choreographed to the music, the machines repeatedly move up and down the mountain. In this way, the mountain symphony highlights the agency of technology in choreographing alpine space. Likewise, these images present this space as one where network points, such as slopes and gondolas, create dense spaces for encounters between humans and nature. As in cartography, where the density of a certain area is determined by the "points or lines [that] may be concentrated in a given area,"[51] the mountain symphony is composed of moments and spaces of heightened contact

between the human and non-human. Understanding mountains' space and surfaces as a network helps "us to lift the tyranny of geographers in defining space and offers us a notion which is neither social nor "real" space, but simply associations."[52] The repeated punctual interventions into mountain space, which evidently has an enormous effect on nature, is further stressed in the arrangement of these images to a staccato piece for strings. When the camera slowly zooms out into a long shot of the mountain, it unites the fragmentary earlier scenes and visualizes the mountain in a way that resembles a map. The mountain's surface is carved with slopes resembling snowy highways, transportation systems like gondolas and lifts; restaurants dominate the landscape.

In its mediation of alpine spatial density, the film turns to the top layer of this network: humans who simply use the surface structure of the mountains. Symphonically accompanied, visually accelerated images of ski boots on icy terrain are followed by ski depots crammed with skis which empty, fill, and finally closed slowly with masses of unskilled skiers who descend a flat slope. The next images demonstrate how this space is created: two hands prepare explosives to be thrown out of a helicopter onto an untouched mountain flank, uncovering an even more violent and destructive network. These hands signify how alpine interventions are by no means anonymous but that the machinery used in alpine space is always controlled by human beings. They also demonstrate that interventions into the surface of mountains have far reaching consequences: the explosives, touching the snow in a singular spot that sets off an avalanche that affects an entire mountain flank, evoke associations with points of a neuralgic network that activate other regions through stimulation. Footage of freeride skiers ploughing through deep powder shows how their movements cause eruptions of white snow, resembling the images of explosives used to trigger avalanches. In that sense, the film draws parallels between the beauty of freeride skiing and the terrors of the destruction of nature. The film demonstrates how all agents of a network depend on and react to each other, requiring one "to think in terms of nodes that have as many dimensions as they have connections."[53] Arranged like points of a networks, skiers move down the mountain, their skis draw lines in the snow that have "a fibrous, thread-like, wiry, stringy, ropy, capillary character."[54] These connective fibers shape alpine space just like hands and boots do. The alpine landscape in these images resembles the blueprint of busy urban infrastructure. These images visually portray alpine space as one of amplified technological inscription, technical progress, and human interventions. Mountains in these images are mediated as extensions of urban structures and extensions of the urban sphere which makes them dense, developed spaces.

Revisioning Mountain Film Footage

Mountain's production of density is also linked to its large scope of footage, as the film ploughs through the archives of the outdoor films industry. It produces a density that is linked to the re-arrangement of footage, which is my third argument about density. Building on the large media archive footage of cinematographer Renan Ozturk and his connections to various North American and European production companies, *Mountain* is the condensed result of 2,000 hours of archival footage that contains images from various mountain sport activities filmed all over the world.

The film's density of footage results from scenes that are taken from various outdoor films: footage from mountain documentaries such as *Epic of Everest* (1924), *Conquest of Everest* (1953), and BBC's *Planet Earth* episode "Mountains" (2006) focus on the conquest of nature but not so much on individuals. Scenes from freeride skiing and snowboarding films such as Candide Thovex's *Few Words* (2015), Sherpas Cinema's *All.I.Can* (2011) and *Into the Mind* (2013), Travis Rice's *The Art of Flight* (2011) and *That's It That's All* (2008), as well as films from the film company MSP productions, and the mountain bike film *Ashes to Agassiz* (2015) show how mountains serve as a playground and a backdrop. Other more alpinist-oriented films such as *Sherpa* (2015), *Sherpas: The True Heroes of Mount Everest* (2009), *Ice Revolution* (2012), Danny Macaskill's bike descent of Cuillin Ridgeline on Scotland's Isle of Skye in *The Ridge* (2014), *Meru* (2015) about the first ascent of the "Shark's Fin" route on Meru Peak in the Himalayan mountains, and Alex Honnold's attempt to free-climb El Capitan in *Free Solo* (2018) highlight the individual athlete as a hero who conquers nature. Footage from clips such as Red Bull's *Base Jumping and Slacklining on the World's Biggest Hammock* (2016) highlight how nature is instrumentalized as a marketing tool. Most of these mediations of mountains are united by the fact that their realization depends on sponsorship by major outdoor retailers/producers like outdoor equipment and clothing companies as well as brand imperia like Red Bull.

The film's use of this large archive produces density by adding layers of meaning to the films it incorporates; however, it also adds network extensions. *Mountain* reproduces iconic scenes from various outdoor films, and it ultimately criticizes its very origins. The images are released from their original frames of the action-loaded outdoor industry and relocated into a less human-centered and slower frame of reference: *Mountain* decenters humans in favor of mountains and critically comments on the interchangeability of the performances. In *Mountain*, the iconic scenes featuring individual athletes become interchangeable figures that repeat mechanical movements in the alpine setting, while their former context focused on individual athletes, brands, a mostly sensationalist narrative voice, and hammering music. Through the rearrangement and condensed presentation in *Mountain*, these revised scenes por-

tray the human-mountain relationship from a different angle; their re-purposing and altered orchestration cater to a different audience and, at the same time, also train a more mindful and ecologically aware audience.

The film activates a new network of reference that does not see mountains as a stage prop or background by replaying iconic footage of skiers who descend through deep powder into pine woods. Artistically, they drift through the snow. Critically framing the origin of these images, the narrator notes, "What odd devotions we undertake. What curious performances we put on."[55] The mountain symphony then showcases its capacity and power to remediate outdoor film images to a different purpose and within a symphonic structure: in a sequence of ski and snowboard freeriding scenes from various outdoor films, a slow-motion close-up of falling snowflakes mediates the transition to a freestyle skier who performs a backflip over a natural feature. These slow and meditative scenes are followed by faster sequences of freestyle skiing, which demonstrate how the skier mechanically transports the human–mountain relationship. Compiled into a sequence, a freestyle ski park on top of a mountain flank is used for various ski tricks. These images from various outdoor films show how one athlete after the other performs rotations and flips over artificial features. The power of the mountain symphony in these images lies within its orchestration of the mechanical repetition of tricks and movements by various skiers. The mountain symphony alters the machinery of this relationship: against the celebration of the alpinist hero on which the traditional *Bergfilm* is built, *Mountain* decentralizes the athlete as an individual by the visual string of performances and stresses the arbitrariness and repetitiveness of the modern outdoor film industry.

The film also mediates a madness that attacks the modern machinery of mountain commodification: mountains can strike out of the blue, as unpredictable forces that punish humans' exuberant approaches. These "strikes" become visible in the form of crashes and injuries, as mountains gain more agency in the film. The narrator frames the encounter between humans and mountains as one that is governed by addiction and unpredictability: "Adventurers sometimes liken fear to a rat. When you take risks, you feed the rat with fear. But each time you feed that fear it grows fatter. So, then you must feed it more fear to sate it. And yet more again and then still more. Until a madness bites."[56] Images of professional snowboarders who descend a steep mountain face are abruptly interrupted by snow masses that literally flush the athletes down the mountain massif. In other scenes, a singular skier gets caught in an avalanche and the snow forces are less gentle: out of the blue, he tumbles heavily and ultimately crashes into a crevasse. The film shows the result of the human–mountain encounter: a blood-smeared face with likely fractures.

From snowy peaks, the footage then changes to the red rock of the Grand Can-

yon: footage of Graham Agassiz's famous and near-fatal downhill crash featured in *Ashes to Agassiz* (2015) shows him on a mountain bike racing down a straight trail on a mountain flank. Suddenly, his bike snaps and he tumbles and crashes. The Red Bull film traces Agassiz's injury and recuperation in terms of a supernatural being: "A man at the top of his professional prowess, his mountain bike a natural extension of him … But like all great heroes, adversity comes a knocking. For Graham Agassiz, a relatively benign descent … reached out with its wicked limb and smacked him down."[57] By contrast, in *Mountain*, Agassiz becomes one of the many humans who approach mountains with too much exuberance. The symphonic arrangement no longer sits well with the stylization of Agassiz as the superhuman biker but turns him into a fallen hero. In these scenes, *Mountain* mediates alpine agency as one that counters human pretentiousness and thereby reckons not only with the outdoor industry but also with the athletes.

That the sensationalist and violent mediation of mountains is not necessary becomes apparent in other images where the film visually stresses how humans and mountains coexist in networks instead of nature simply being a background for action-loaded mediations. The film does so by remediating scenes from a Red Bull production that include a helicopter circling around a party scene at Grand Canyon. The footage is accompanied by party music and fast-paced editing. *Mountain*, in a striking sequence of images, takes the viewer to the cinematic landscape of the characteristic red, rocky landscape of the Grand Canyon, where slacklines across the canyon's abyss are arranged like the strings of a network. The mountain symphony, through slow and classical string music, connects to the strings of ropes stretched above the canyon the idea of a possible mindful coexistence between humans and nature. The red and yellow ropes of the net reveal an open hole in the middle, an empty point in the network, which, when a person jumps off into the depths, turns into a pregnant moment: the film highlights only the sound of shoe soles released from the construction. The slower, meditative visual language, which omits the marketing strategies and concentrates on the experience of human-nature encounters, creates the illusion of mindfulness. At the same time, as it does not engage with the infrastructural and technical necessities of the endeavor, the film is somewhat complicit in the human intrusion into nature.

From Symphony to Organicity

While the mediation of mountain-human encounters remains a symbolic one in the previous scenes, the mountain symphony also mediates mountains as living organisms that are embedded in their own life cycle. *Mountain* aligns with elements in the work of the French philosopher François Jullien, who contrasts conceptions of Western landscapes with Asian understandings of landscapes. He highlights the notion of

chi, a key concept for rethinking landscapes. Jullien notes that "the most glorious sites will consequently be those where it is most densely accumulated, where the circulation of this breath is most intense, its transformations most profound."[58] He stresses the Chinese understanding of nature as a compositum of "mountain(s)-water(s)," which highlights mountains as composite agents.[59] Like Jullien's proposal to stop thinking of nature in terms of absolute opposites, the film forces us to think of it, rather, as a fluid state that flows through everything and as an entity that surrounds everything. In a sequence of scenes, *Mountain* mediates this organic mountain cycle: the birth and coming-into-existence of mountains is mediated by images of erupting lava. Their maturation phase is exemplified by footage of solidifying lava that turns from bright red to black. Stratified mountain layers visualize the mature phase of mountains. Ultimately, as human remains are returned to the earth, mountains return to the ocean as sedimented particles that accumulate to rise again.

Like the city symphony *Organism* (1975), an experimental film on the organicity of New York City, *Mountain*, in these images, draws clear parallels between the organic structure of the earth with the human body. *Organism* "combined time-lapse photography of New York City with microphotography of the internal systems of the human body to provide a visual essay on the idea that the organization of the metropolis is a macrocosmic version of the internal systems that keep us alive."[60] *Mountain*, likewise, uses physical processes and elements to illustrate the earth's organicity and to remind us that the spaces sought after for ski trips are governed by the same principles as our own bodies. One scene in which this becomes particularly palpable is when bright red lava flows down from an active volcano onto its black ashy surroundings, followed by a shot that shows how the fiery liquid spreads into tinier branches. Not just in terms of their color, these scenes evoke associations with the network of human blood vessels. In images that describe this life cycle, lava erupts at the intersection of rocky coast and the ocean. Here, new soil is created at the very intersection of two elements. These images are followed by lava that is fluid enough to move but solid enough to reveal its texture. It again evokes associations of human nervous tissue, entangled like a network. The idea that solid mountains are eroding and return into a fluid state is stressed when the narrator comments, "A rhythm of uplift and erosion that makes not waves of water but waves of stone."[61] These waves are visually transferred to images of a stratified mountain range, which resonate with the Chinese word *mo* for "the lines of force that traverse the relief and hold it in tension" and "the pulse-transmitting arteries of the body."[62]

Moreover, through the very nature of mountains, they engage with humans as providers and nourishers. The narrator's comment "from these waves of stone flows life" is underscored by images of glaciers and mountains.[63] These are followed by images that show an ice cave that has been hollowed out by a torrential river that

resembles a giant vein. The last branch of this river flows into a river delta where, arranged like a nervous system, numerous smaller branches spread throughout the landscape. Finally, various animals that find nourishment from rivers, trees and meadows conclude this section and highlight the far-reaching impact of mountains on these creatures.

The film also suggests that the earth and its diverse environments are animate, breathing and possessing a heartbeat. Through time lapses, in a striking sequence adapted from the iconic film *All.I.Can* (2011), the film mediates the changing seasons of an alpine landscape in which leaves turn red and yellow until snow covers the trees again. Images of snow-covered fir trees, which evoke associations with human bodies, are fast-forwarded and rewound to create the impression that they are lifting and lowering their arms. The film expands the environmental network from the forest to the ocean: Images of water covered with a thick layer of ice rises and lowers through the tide. Through the rhythmical editing, these images create the impression of the earth as a being that breathes, the motions of the ice alluding to the movements of breathing. Lastly, the mountain symphony suggests that the mountains are animate beings not only entangled in an environmental network, but moreover connected with humans in a relation that is characterized by exchange. In this relation, mountains do not need humans, but humans need mountains: "They want nothing from us … And yet, they shift the way we see ourselves," the narrator adds, concluding, "More than ever, we need their wildness."[64] In these slow and panoramic images of various alpine landscapes, the mountain symphony reveals its essence, namely, the alpine environment beyond its status as a backdrop or an imaginative place which possesses the ability to impact humans.

Mountain draws analogies between the life of humans and that of mountains in different scales of space and time and, thereby, earlier sensationalist mountain films are endowed with an ecocritical undercurrent. Addressing the importance of environmental concerns, the mountain symphony emphasizes the critical role of mountains for the wellbeing of this planet. Mountains cover over a quarter of the world's land surface, directly support twelve per cent of the planet's population, and provide almost half of the globe's freshwater.[65] The mountain collective is a condensed symbol not just for the relationship between humans and non-humans, but for the overall condition of this planet. Thus, the film supports Jussi Parikka's idea that "the Anthropocene is a way to demonstrate that geology does not refer exclusively to the ground under our feet. It is constitutive of social and technological relations as well as environmental and ecological realities."[66]

Through its slow and mindful orchestration, the film resonates with a more recent trend in nature films that beckons the audience to become more ecologically aware.

Like *March of the Penguins* (2005) and the television series *Planet Earth* (2006), the mountain symphony addresses "a new, more patient kind of audience, willing to see the experience of cinema less as a source of information than as a way of learning to be more fully present during gradual revelations of the particulars of the natural environment and human engagement with it."[67] The mountain symphony celebrates mountains as dense points of this connection between the environment and the human in a careful orchestration of relational strings. It also relates to the urgency to begin listening to nature if the very planet that provides for our basic existence is to be preserved. Accordingly, *Mountain* exemplifies Ivakhiv's suggestion that moving images affect our perception of ourselves, the world and all entities, as "these images move us, and we move with them. And as we do, we may realize that we too are moving images, seen and heard and perceived by others who are seen and heard and perceived by us."[68] The images of the mountain symphony urge its audience to realize that environmental concerns mediated in film open a path to reconsider mountains as dense places whose well-being is strongly linked to that of our existence. They are composite active agents, dense neuralgic network points that mediate between ideas of mountains as remote places of freedom, as sites of technological advancements and developments, as testing grounds, places of longing, and economic interests. Lastly and most importantly, they are places that co-exist and equally shape our reality. When *Mountain* ultimately reveals the very nature of mountains, it connects the mountain symphony with that of the physical reality of mountains as a major point of the ecological network: "Born of fire. Born of force. Mountains move. Over epochs they rise and fall. This is the symphony of the earth."[69]

What, in the end, emerges from Peedom's *Mountain* is a planetary orchestration that showcases mountains as focal points in the expansive network of a complex economic, social, technological, and cinematic ecology. By casting into relief mountains' densities of time, space, and footage, this article, like Peedom's film, exposes the fault lines of seeing alpine space as empty, remote, and far removed from human life. Rather, it invites viewers and readers to consider mountains as points of immense density. The film's activation and layering of various neuralgic networks creates new points of alpine media networks that draw attention to the cinematic and physical presence of mountains and their connections with us. By approaching mountains in symphony, *Mountain* ultimately provides an opportunity to come to terms with our current ecocrisis: it allows us to perceive humans and mountains as bound up together in space and time and perhaps finally helps us change our pace of action to harmonize our lives with the larger human and other-than-human network.

Notes

1 Scott MacDonald, "Avant-Doc: Eight Intersections," *Film Quarterly* 64, no. 2 (2010): 50–57,

DOI: 10.1525/fq.2010.64.2.50; A. L. Rees, *A History of Experimental Film and Video*, 2nd ed. (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011); Alexander Graf, "Paris, Berlin, Moscow: On the Montage Aesthetic in the City Symphony Films of the 1920s," in *Avantgarde Film*, ed. Alexander Graf and Dietrich Scheunemann (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 89, DOI: 10.1163/9789401200035_004.

2 Scott MacDonald, "The City as the Country: The New York City Symphony from Rudy Burckhardt to Spike Lee," *Film Quarterly* 51, no. 2 (1997–1998): 2–20, DOI: 10.2307/3697136.

3 Steve Jacobs, Anthony Kind, and Eva Hielscher, *The City Symphony Phenomenon: Cinema, Art, and Urban Modernity between the Wars* (New York: Routledge, 2019), 10, DOI: 10.4324/9781315619989.

4 Ori Levin, "The Cinematic Time of the City Symphony Films: Time Management, Experiental Duration and Bodily Pulsation," *Studies in Documentary Film* 12, no. 3 (2018): 225–38, DOI: 10.1080/17503280.2018.1504370.

5 Graf, 80–82.

6 Jon Gartenberg, "NY, NY: A Century of City Symphony Films," *Framework: The Journal of Cinema and Media* 55, no. 2 (2014): 248–76, DOI: 10.13110/framework.55.2.0248.

7 Gartenberg, "NY, NY," 248.

8 Scott McDonald, *The Garden in the Machine: A Field Guide to Independent Films about Place* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2010), 4.

9 Jacobs, Kind, and Hielscher, *City Symphony*, 29.

10 In 1992, during the UN Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro, Agenda 21 was adopted, making mountains an official topic of global politics.

11 Jacobs, Kind, and Hielscher, *City Symphony*, 31.

12 Jacobs, Kind, and Hielscher, *City Symphony*, 30.

13 Bill Nichols, *Introduction to Documentary* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2001); Bill Nichols, *Representing Reality: Issues and Concepts in Documentary* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991).

14 *Mountain*, dir. Jennifer Peedom (Melbourne: Madman Entertainment, 2017).

15 *Mountain*.

16 Jon Mathieu, *The Third Dimension: a Comparative History of Mountains in the Modern Era* (Knapwell: White Horse Press, 2011); Jon Mathieu, "The Alpine Region," *EGO*, last modified March 9, 2017, http://ieg-ego.eu/en/threads/crossroads/border-regions/jon-mathieu-the-alpine-region; Jon Mathieu, *The Alps: An Environmental History* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2019); Peter Grupp, *Faszination Berg: Die Geschichte des Alpinismus* (Cologne: Böhlau Verlag, 2008); Peter Hansen, *The Summits of Modern Man: Mountaineering after the Enlightenment* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2013), DOI: 10.4159/harvard.9780674074521; Stephen Slemon, "Climbing Mount Everest: Postcolonialism in the Culture of Ascent," *Canadian Literature*, no. 158 (1998): 15–35; Bernhard Tschofen, "Tourismus als Modernisierungsagentur und Identitätsressource: das Fallbeispiel des Skilaufs in den österreichischen Alpen," *Histoire des Alpes*, no. 9 (2004): 265–82.

17 *Mountain*.

18 Tschofen, "Tourismus als Modernisierungsagentur."

19 Mathieu, *The Third Dimension*; Tschofen, "Tourismus als Modernisierungsagentur."

20 Mathieu, *The Alps*, 89. On the visual regime implemented by colonialism, see, for exam-

ple, Mary Louise Pratt, *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* (London: Routledge, 2008).

21 *Mountain*.

22 Jennifer Lynn Peterson, "The Nation's First Playground," in *Virtual Voyages: Cinema and Travel*, ed. Jeffrey Ruoff (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2006), 87, DOI: 10.1215/9780822387947-007.

23 Peterson, "First Playground," 87.

24 Slemon, "Climbing Mount Everest," 25.

25 *Mountain*.

26 *Mountain*.

27 *Mountain*.

28 *Mountain*.

29 Stephen Rust, Salma Monani, and Sean Cubitt, *Ecomedia: Key Issues* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2016), 2.

30 *Mountain*.

31 Adrian Ivakhiv, *Ecologies of the Moving Image: Cinema, Affect, Nature* (Waterloo, ON: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2013), 189.

32 On the *Bergfilm*, see, for example: Siegfried Kracauer, *Von Caligari bis Hitler: Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte des deutschen Films* (Leipzig: Rowohlt, 1958); Seth Peabody, "Environmental Fantasies: Mountains, Cities, and Heimat in Weimar Cinema," PhD diss. (Harvard University, 2015); Christian Rapp, *Höhenrauch: Der deutsche Bergfilm* (Vienna: Sonderzahl Verlagsgesellschaft m.b.H., 1997); Eric Rentschler, "Mountains and Modernity: Relocating the Bergfilm," *New German Critique*, no. 51 (1990): 137–61, DOI: 10.2307/488175; Eric Rentschler, "Hochgebirge und Moderne: Eine Standortbestimmung des Bergfilms," in *Berge, Licht und Traum: Dr. Arnold Fanck und der deutsche Bergfilm*, ed. Jan-Christopher Horak (Munich: Bruckmann, 1997), 85–104.

33 Ben Anderson, "Alpine Agency: Locals, Mountaineers and Tourism in the Eastern Alps, c. 1860–1914," *Rural History* 27, no. 1 (2016): 61–78, DOI: 10.1017/S0956793315000163; Peterson, "First Playground"; Jennifer Lynn Peterson, *Education in the School of Dreams* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2013), DOI: 10.1515/9780822378914; Rentschler, "Mountains and Modernity"; Peabody, "Environmental Fantasies."

34 Bruno Latour, "Agency at the Time of the Anthropocene," *New Literary History* 45, no. 1 (2014): 8, DOI: 10.1353/nlh.2014.0003.

35 Latour, "Agency," 17.

36 Bruno Latour, "On Actor-Network Theory," *Soziale Welt*, no. 47 (1996): 372.

37 Latour, "On Actor-Network Theory," 373.

38 Levin, "Cinematic Time."

39 Timothy Morton, *Hyperobjects: Philosophy and Ecology after the End of the World* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2013), 55.

40 Jussi Parikka, *A Geology of Media* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2015), 30, DOI: 10.5749/minnesota/9780816695515.001.0001.

41 Levin, "Cinematic Time," 231.

42 Morton, *Hyperobjects*, 55.
43 *Mountain*.
44 *Mountain*.
45 Morton, *Hyperobjects*, 130.
46 Morton, *Hyperobjects*, 130.
47 *Mountain*.
48 Latour, "Agency," 2.
49 Marc Boumeester, "Unframing Urban Density: The Somaesthetic Cartography of Intensities," in *Rethinking Density: Art, Culture, and Urban Practices*, ed. Anamarija Batista, Szilvia Kovács, and Carina Lesky (Vienna: Sternberg Press, 2016), 38–49.
50 *Mountain*.
51 Marc Altaweel, "Density Mapping with GIS," *GIS Lounge*, October 27, 2017, https://www.gislounge.com/density-mapping.
52 Latour, "On Network-Actor Theory," 372.
53 Latour, "On Network-Actor Theory," 370.
54 Latour, "On Network-Actor Theroy," 370.
55 *Mountain*.
56 *Mountain*.
57 *Ashes to Agassiz*, dir. Leo Hoorn and Eric Crosland (Whistler, BC: Sherpas Cinema, 2015).
58 François Jullien, *The Prosperity of Things: Towards a History of Efficacy in China* (Princeton, NJ: Zone Books, 1995), 92.
59 François Jullien, *Living Off Landscape; Or, The Unthought-of in Reason* (Lanham, MC: Rowman & Littlefield, 2018), 15.
60 MacDonald, "The City as the Country," 9.
61 *Mountain*.
62 Jullien, *Living Off Landscape*, 30.
63 *Mountain*.
64 *Mountain*.
65 Martin F. Price et al., ed., *Mountain Geography: Physical and Human Dimensions* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2013).
66 Jussi Parikka, *The Anthrobscene* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2014), 3.
67 MacDonald, "Avant-Doc," 57.
68 Ivakhiv, *Ecologies*, vii.
69 *Mountain*.

About the Author

Benita Lehmann holds a bachelor's degree in Literary, Cultural and Media Studies from the University of Siegen and spent a semester abroad at University College Dublin. In 2013, she graduated from the University of Innsbruck with a master's degree in Media Studies. Affiliated with the FWF-funded research project "Delocating Mountains: Cinematic Landscapes

and the Alpine Model" at the University of Innsbruck, she is currently writing her dissertation about alpine media networks in and of mountain cinema during the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Drawing on media ecology and archeology as well as network aesthetics, she examines the density of mountains in film culture and explores the intersections, divergences, and hidden networks which inform our encounters with mountains. She is a recipient the University of Innsbruck's junior researcher scholarship and a member of the doctoral program "Borders, Border Displacements, and Border Transgressions in Language, Literature, and Media" at the University of Innsbruck.

Contact: Benita Lehmann; benita.lehmann@gmx.net.

Thereness

Video Game Mountains as Limits of Interactivity

Sascha Pöhlmann

Abstract

This article theorizes the abstract quality of "thereness," or a challenging presence that both invites and resists being engaged by humans, which is central to the ludic and symbolic function of a number of related video games in recent years. I will discuss games that deliberately resist the mimetic approach of an ever-increasing "realism" in this popular medium but rather explore the allegorical aspects of mountains, notably without turning them into "mere" metaphors but insisting on their own distinct existence as something beyond ourselves. As virtual mountains that are not really to be played with, they invite a philosophical, cultural, and aesthetic interpretation as human mediations of what resists both mediation and the human, as something always just beyond our full cognitive and epistemological grasp, a limit rather than an object of our consciousness. I will discuss how games such as *Celeste* (2018), *Getting Over It with Bennett Foddy* (2017), and *Mountain* (2014) use their unique audiovisual, tactile, and ludic qualities to convey this elusive "thereness" of the mountain as something that both challenges and rejects human interaction. Instead of offering their players the fantasy of power and control that so often underlies contemporary video games, these games evoke the otherness of mountains to take their players to the limits of interactivity within a medium that is fundamentally defined by this very interactivity.

Suggested Citation: Pöhlmann, Sascha. "Thereness: Video Game Mountains as Limits of Interactivity." *JAAAS: Journal of the Austrian Association for American Studies* 2, no. 2 (2021): 213–245, DOI: 10.47060/jaaas.v2i2.101.

Keywords: video games; *Celeste* (2018 video game); *Getting Over It with Bennett Foddy* (2017 video game); *Mountain* (2014 video game)

Peer Review: This article was reviewed by the issue's guest editors and two external reviewers.

Thereness

Video Game Mountains as Limits of Interactivity

Sascha Pöhlmann

My approach to the mediation of mountains in video games is based on two different conceptual reference points, one from the field of poetry, the other from mountaineering. The first is Basil Bunting's poem "On the Fly-Leaf of Pound's *Cantos*" (1949). In this poem, he draws on what by then had been firmly established for roughly two centuries as the Western cultural imaginary of associating mountains with the ineffable and the sublime. While he does so to predict what timeless cultural importance Ezra Pound's *Cantos* (1917–70) will have in the future, he also neatly summarizes a few crucial characteristics of mountains themselves:

> There are the Alps. What is there to say about them?
> They don't make sense. Fatal glaciers, crags cranks climb,
> jumbled boulder and weed, pasture and boulder, scree,
> et l'on entend, maybe, le refrain joyeux et leger.
> Who knows what the ice will have scraped on the rock it is smoothing?
>
> There they are, you will have to go a long way round
> if you want to avoid them.
> It takes some getting used to. There are the Alps,
> fools! Sit down and wait for them to crumble![1]

This ties in with the second reference I am using as the starting point for my theorization, perhaps the most widely known quip in mountaineering. It is George Mallory's response to the question "Why did you want to climb Mount Everest?" in 1923, after the first two unsuccessful attempts and before the third one that would kill him: "Because it's there."[2] This last word is precisely the one I am interested in and want to fill with meaning for the project at hand beyond both Bunting's and Mallory's intentions and contexts. Both use the term to describe a peculiar quality of mountains and/or a peculiar perception or thought by those who contemplate them: they are *there*. This thereness is not just presence but a *challenging* presence, something

whose existence cannot be met with indifference but is a provocation in one way or another, specifically the provocation to climb that mountain, but more generally also to cognitively grasp it. At the same time, this thereness also entails a challenge that cannot be met by default, a presence that cannot easily and fully be incorporated into epistemological and ontological systems, and a phenomenon that seems irreducibly inaccessible to humans while demanding their engagement nevertheless.

Michael Marder, in a phenomenological consideration of mountains, argues that this "distance from a mountain, even when we stand at its foot, is not only ontic, or empirically measurable, but above all, ontological. . . . Faced with the mountains, an uncanny sensation persists: one cannot help but feel 'out of place,' unable to rely on the familiar routines, lived interpretations, and practical orientations of our world."[3] The mountain is always *there* but never *here*. Its physical form "delimits our ideally unbound freedom of the gaze by imposing itself upon our senses that cannot avoid it in the manner of the eighteenth-century travelers in the Alps [who blindfolded themselves in fear of their visual effect],"[4] and it thereby imposes itself on our perception and cognition while at the same time exposing their limits and our inability to grasp it in any reasonable totality. Marder's phenomenological approach indicates that what "we call a mountain is . . . in fact a collaboration of the physical forms of the world with the imagination of humans—a mountain of the mind," as Robert Macfarlane has it in his rich cultural history *Mountains of the Mind* (2003).[5] It is these mental mountains that interest me as I discuss their particular virtual manifestations and what players do with them. I want to argue, in brief, that video games are uniquely suited to mediating mountains because their simulated thereness is as real as what it simulates, and because this thereness potentially subverts the very interactivity that makes this simulation possible.[6]

Macfarlane elaborates on the duality that forms the mountain of the mind, stating that mountains

> are simply there, and there they remain, their physical structures rearranged gradually over time by the forces of geology and weather, but continuing to exist over and beyond human perceptions of them. But they are also the products of human perception; they have been *imagined* into existence down the centuries.[7]

These words already indicate that the relation between these physical structures and their human imagination is not at all straightforward, and Macfarlane adds that a "disjunction between the imagined and the real is a characteristic of all human activities, but it finds one of its sharpest expressions in the mountains." This means that "the mountains one gazes at, reads about, dreams of and desires are not the mountains one climbs."[8] It also means that this disjunction continually haunts the

mediated mountains of the minds as a problem of representation. If mountains are, as Marder has it, "irreducible to straightforward objects of thought" and thus "concrete resistances to the routines of idealization," then they also resist the representational repertoire we have available as part of these routines.[9]

Thereness describes a cognitive and a representational challenge as much as a physical one, and it implies that constructing and mediating these mountains of the mind is an ongoing struggle against our limits of making sense. In *The Living Mountain* (1977), her excellent prose work on the Cairngorms in Scotland, Nan Shepherd accordingly insists that "one never quite knows the mountain, nor oneself in relation to it," and being made aware of this epistemological limit is no small part of thereness and its challenge.[10] What Shepherd calls the "total mountain" exceeds, as Macfarlane explains in his introduction to *The Living Mountain*, "the possibility of our capacity ever to know it entirely."[11] However, this is not a limit we can easily accept. Bunting's second stanza suggests that not engaging this dialectic between the ineffable sublime and a desire for representation is no real option: "There they are, you will have to go a long way round / if you want to avoid them." Thereness means that the Alps are unavoidable, like in Mount Everest's challenge to Mallory; it simply will not do to pretend they are *not* there, or one will have to go to great lengths to do so, demanding a considerable amount of self-delusion in the process. At the same time, thereness is never something to be at ease with: Bunting states with ironic modesty that "it takes some getting used to," while Shepherd insists with regard to her Cairngorms that "there is no getting accustomed to them."[12] The productive provocation of the mountains is constant and beyond resolution. Thereness can perhaps be managed but not controlled, and it *must* be engaged: if you sit and wait for thereness to go away, like a fool, you will crumble before the mountains do. Yet thereness can only be confronted in the knowledge that such engagement cannot be goal-oriented but is rather, at best, an end in itself. This distinguishes thereness from mere temptation: we may be provoked by bubble wrap or wet paint to act upon it, but giving in to such desires usually satisfies them. By contrast, thereness, like the sublime, involves a difference in scale that determines how we position ourselves toward the object in question. While mountains are not the only things that evoke thereness, there are certainly not too many others, either (deserts, oceans, perhaps skyscrapers…).

Thereness thus demands its own definition of success and failure, of hope and futility, of process and result. Mallory's explanation of his quip indicates as much after he dismissed a rational and scientific motivation for his endeavor as secondary: "Everest is the highest mountain in the world, and no man has reached its summit. Its existence is a challenge. The answer is instinctive, a part, I suppose, of man's desire to conquer the universe."[13] The author of the article rightly claims that "this is pure romance," and Mallory made the statement in full recognition of its irrational-

ity. Mallory's thereness fuses a material and an imaginary element in a challenge to human enterprise, which certainly bespeaks an ideology in which the existence of the mountain is a challenge to humans rather than, say, the mountain is a sacred place that *must not* be climbed by mere mortals. It also bespeaks the ideology of British imperialism and colonial desire for geographical, political, and symbolic control.[14] Yet his comment also seems to self-consciously address such aspirations as much as their limits. Mallory acknowledges "man's desire to conquer the universe" but does not presuppose their ability to do so. The grandiose scope of his words alludes to the ultimate futility of such hubris, and they thus include a sense of *doing it anyway*, meeting the challenge for its own sake rather than in a belief in its teleology. This is Mallory's philosophical shrug at thereness, needing no further motivation than "the inverted gravity of mountain-going—the attractive force that pulls you ever upwards," while also understanding that none of his actions will ever make it go away or truly overcome it.[15]

Being the first to reach the summit is only part of the challenge posed by Everest. This is a challenge Mallory could meet, a game at which he could win, since he would be playing it against other players. Yet this is not the genuine thereness of Everest itself, as it will *continually* provide a challenge even once the first person has climbed it. In Shepherd's terms, such thereness lies in pitting "oneself against the mountain," whereas "to pit oneself merely against other players, and make a race of it, is to reduce to the level of a game what is essentially an experience."[16] Especially in his contemporary imperialist setting, Mallory may have been aware that the language of victory and domination is entirely inappropriate in dealing with "the greatest of all mountains of the mind" and its thereness that is independent of other humans and their attempts to overcome it.[17] Humans do not "conquer" the mountain, and they never "win" against it: mountaineering is a game where only loss and failure are clearly and often tragically defined, but there is no such thing as a conclusive victory. The mountain is "not a crossword to be cracked," and "to aim for the highest point is not the only way to climb the mountain, nor is a narrative of siege and assault the only way to write about one."[18] Instead, the thereness of the mountain is utterly untouched by an ascent to its summit and a descent to tell the tale. "There are the Alps," and their thereness is characterized by an indifference toward human interaction with them (even though they certainly suffer from the human impact on the environment as a whole). If mountain climbing is a game of player versus environment, as video game terminology has it, then the environment is literally not playing along. The player encounters not an opponent but rather the utter indifference of something that is part of the game but remains unchanged by it in an ontological sense (though certainly not in an environmentalist sense). The real mountain, in this sense, is a limit of interactivity: while place "and a mind may interpenetrate till the

nature of both is altered," the mountain does not react to us climbing it.[19] "Determining and overwhelming our senses, they are not things of this world, if by 'world' we understand, in a phenomenological vein, the realm of habitual experience where everything is at our fingertips. Even to an experienced mountaineer, the mountain is not quite 'ready-to-hand,'"[20] and this quality of a distinct and palpable lack of Heideggerian *Zuhandenheit* is one crucial aspect of the thereness of mountains. They are there, but not for us, and not for us to use; if there is something we can do with them, then their being is not defined by our doing something with them. The mountain is "neither noumenal nor phenomenal,"[21] and its thereness is a reminder that not everything is about us or for us.

With this ludic terminology, the introductory discussion of thereness has taken us from the abstract to the concrete issue at hand, the mediation of mountains in video games, and my discussion in the following will occur in the framework just outlined. I will discuss games that deliberately resist the mimetic approach of an ever-increasing "realism" in this popular medium to instead explore the symbolic aspects of mountains in their thereness, notably without turning them into metaphors for some human concern but insisting on their own distinct existence as something beyond ourselves (while still acknowledging that humans construct their mountains). As virtual mountains that are not really to be played with, they invite a philosophical, cultural, and aesthetic interpretation as human mediations of what resists both mediation and the human, as something always just beyond our full cognitive and epistemological grasp, a limit rather than an object of our consciousness. I will discuss how the games *Celeste* (Maddy Thorson und Noel Berry, 2018), *Getting Over It with Bennett Foddy* (Bennett Foddy, 2017), and *Mountain* (David OReilly, 2014) use their unique audiovisual, tactile, and ludic qualities to convey this elusive thereness of the mountain as something that both challenges and rejects human interaction. I will argue that instead of offering their players the fantasy of control that so often underlies contemporary video games, these games draw on the cultural imagination of the thereness of mountains to take their players to the limits of interactivity within a medium that is fundamentally defined by it.

Mountains and Games: Theory and a Bit of History

The mountains mediated in and by video games are undoubtedly part of the Western cultural history Macfarlane outlines in his book, and their representation is as much informed by this tradition as that in other media. At the same time, since the distinguishing feature of this particular medium is interactivity, mountains are mediated differently with regard to that aspect. This difference may also help answer the broader question of what video games may add to or how they change the imagination of mountains that has so far largely occurred in the non-interactive media of

text, image, film, etc. For example, video games force us to amend Macfarlane's point that "the mountains one gazes at, reads about, dreams of and desires are not the mountains one climbs,"[22] since these virtual mediated mountains are *precisely* those one climbs, and even if this act of virtual climbing is very different from the one that can really kill you if you are careless, it is still a *physical act* that adds the element of simulation to the imaginary engagement with the mountain in representational media.

Beyond this fundamental difference, there are surely numerous points of intersection between video games and other media, but instead of tracing these affinities, I will rather begin with a theoretical connection that points toward a close affiliation between mountains and video games in a philosophical sense. It is striking just how often mountains and games are linked in texts that try to understand either of them. Perhaps the most celebrated essay on climbing, Lito Tejada-Flores's "Games Climbers Play" (1967), does just that in order to develop an ethics of climbing based on discrete sets of rules in different frameworks.[23] And perhaps one of the most ingenious texts on games in philosophy, Bernard Suits's *The Grasshopper: Games, Life, and Utopia* (1978), uses mountain climbing as a crucial test of its definition of games.[24]

In chapter eight of this work, Skepticus challenges the Grasshopper's definition by suggesting that mountain climbing is a game without constitutive rules in which the player, in this case Sir Edmund Hillary setting out to climb Mount Everest, "employs *all* the most efficient means available to him." The Grasshopper counters this by imagining an escalator to the summit and a helicopter up the fictional Mount Invincible, arguing that such most efficient means of ascending are irrelevant to the prelusory goal, which is "to *climb* mountains rather than the prelusory goal of simply being at their summits, which would not have required him to climb mountains."[25] Notably, the mountain here does not offer a clear and fixed set of rules to the player but is nevertheless necessary to the game itself and how the player creates it. The mountain is not just a playing field but rather a constitutive environment for a specific game that, in this particular instance, could not be played anywhere else (unlike, say, football, which can be played in a stadium as much as with any old can in the streets). Tejada-Flores's essay shows that the rules of climbing are both determined by what is being climbed and by those who climb, so that there are ways of climbing that are not climbing, and the framework of what constitutes the "well-played game"—to use Bernard De Koven's influential term[26]—is negotiable and subject to a variety of parameters.[27]

Thereness, then, is a way of describing the ludic aspect of mountains, not as a property of the physical objects themselves that invite us to play, but as a way of engaging them playfully. Yet this is not something we entirely project onto the moun-

tain: we create thereness in our perception of the mountain, but this construction depends on what is perceived as much as on the perceiver. This is not to ascribe sentience or a particularly privileged form of existence to the mountain; on the contrary, thereness really depends on the absence of such mystical thinking and, perhaps, on the absolute indifference of the object toward the subject. The ludic quality of mountains described by their thereness is most evident in the aspect it shares with gameplay: "the utter uselessness of it all,"[28] or, to put it more positively, an "activity which is intrinsically valuable."[29] Mallory's thereness describes a challenge that the mountain is not actually posing to humans. Despite all the practical and symbolic consequences his efforts may have had, his quip emphasizes most of all that there is really no *need* to climb Everest, and that asking for a reason or justification is as misguided as asking why one plays a game. There is no point to it beyond the activity itself, and it speaks volumes of what Western society has come to recognize as useful that it apparently cannot accept the pleasure of an activity as reason enough to do it.[30] It comes as no surprise that Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi's psychological theory of "flow," "the state in which people are so involved in an activity that nothing else seems to matter,"[31] also substantially draws on the experience of mountain climbing and has found widespread application in video game studies to describe a particular experience of immersion.

This ludic affinity is precisely why games, and more particularly video games,[32] are uniquely suited for a particular way of mediating mountains: because the video game can *simulate* thereness as a quality that cannot be *represented*. Like non-interactive media, the video game can show us mountains or tell us about them: it can have us listen to their soundscape and give us sequential or static impressions of their visual aspects, but it can also invite us to interact with them in a physical way, to engage them and see if they engage us back (or not); it can ask us to see what we can *do* with the mountain and what this doing then does to us. In this way, video games do precisely the opposite of what Nan Shepherd claimed about racing other players to the mountain summit: they do not "reduce to the level of a game what is essentially an experience" but in fact offer an experience through the game.[33] This experience is fundamentally different from the experience of other media in whose reception we may be very active but never *inter*active. Video games can simulate the thereness of mountains so well because they are, in Jesper Juul's memorable phrase, "*the art of failure*, the singular art form that sets us up for failure and allows us to experience and experiment with failure." They allow the player to truly fail instead of showing them someone else's failure or telling them about it: "when you fail in a game, it really means that *you* were in some way inadequate."[34] Thus, our engagement with the medium may be framed in terms of success or failure, winning or losing, playing well or badly, which are categorically different from when we attribute them to, say,

a good reader or a bad listener. Despite their obvious ontological differences, both a virtual mountain and a real one share a similar thereness, in that both posit a challenge to the subject and allow us to experience that challenge ourselves. In other words, the mountain is mediated in video games, but its thereness *is not*. The challenge of climbing the virtual mountain is as real as that of climbing a real mountain (even though the activities themselves clearly differ). Simulated thereness is as real as what it simulates.

Given this structural parallel, one would assume that video games and mountains are such a perfect match that the history of the medium is full of climbing games that make the most of the straightforward verticality of the premise, especially given the symbolic significance invested in attempts to engage the thereness of the mountain in Western cultures:

> Most recently, the mountain summit has become a secular symbol of effort and reward … Undoubtedly, the sense of accomplishment which comes from reaching a mountain-top has historically been a key element of the desire for height. This is unsurprising—what simpler allegory of success could there be than the ascent of a mountain? The summit provides the visible goal, the slopes leading up to it the challenge. When we walk or climb up a mountain we traverse not only the actual terrain of the hillside but also the metaphysical territories of struggle and achievement. To reach a summit is very palpably to have triumphed over adversity: to have conquered something, albeit something utterly useless.[35]

Such simple allegories seem ready-made for the narrative and symbolic simplicity of a medium that usually values its interactivity above all else: there is a mountain, you know what to do. Thereness needs no premise, it is the premise, and this should be perfect for a medium that still often quite happily settles for flimsy narrative pretexts to motivate gameplay. And yet, this is not the case at all, and there are not as many video game mountains as one might expect. Of course, there are various mountains in games that may or may not serve all kinds of narrative, symbolic, and ludic functions, from visual backdrops that delimit the game world and strategic obstacles that determine possible player actions to prominent, quasi-mystical places that demarcate a particular plot point.[36] Yet these various mountains have barely any thereness, and if they do, it is often quickly and conclusively exhausted, since it turns out that climbing the highest mountain in an open-world game such as *Just Cause 3* (Avalanche Studios, 2015) or *Skyrim* (Bethesda, 2011) is not challenging at all. Thus, what seemed like thereness in these games turns out to be just presence.

These are not the games I am concerned with here, although a more complete history of video game mountains and their function would surely be desirable. The beginning of thereness in video games may be marked by a game that finds it not in a mountain but a skyscraper, perhaps the most fitting urban equivalent to the natural

object: *Crazy Climber* (Nichibutsu, 1980). Nintendo's *Ice Climber* (1984) explicitly frames its gameplay in terms of mountain climbing, and since then a number of other games have at least incorporated elements of climbing in their gameplay. The most popular recent example of such a game is probably the rebooted *Tomb Raider* trilogy (Crystal Dynamics and Eidos Montreal, 2013; Crystal Dynamics, 2015; Eidos Montreal, 2018), which includes numerous passages that range from scaling craggy walls to a particularly memorable ascent to a summit amongst an ever-worsening snowstorm in the endgame of the first part. While the series successfully conveys the suspense of moving vertically in dizzying heights and enabling a state of flow, it exemplifies the larger trend in representations of climbing as it does not simulate thereness. Even this particularly climactic climb, however dramatic in its audiovisual representation with quick time events and the like, is no more difficult for the player than the other movements of Lara Croft, so that the required skill is no different from, say, jumping from one ledge to another in a less vertical environment in the game. The series dramatizes climbing in a representational sense, but it has little interest in *simulating* for the player the drama of actually engaging thereness. In fact, *Tomb Raider* opens with a climb to the summit as a *tutorial* to the controls as a whole. Two VR games, *The Climb* (Crytek, 2016) and *Climbey* (Brian Lindenhof, 2016), take a comparable approach in a different mode of interaction, but like *Tomb Raider* they arguably offer a rather pure pleasure of control, to use Torben Grodal's phrase, instead of a challenge to control. Grodal argues that "games are constructed to make it possible for players to gain control over the elicited arousal by means of the learning processes" and that this control is often "not absolute, but relative to his skills," depending on the genre and the context of play (say, single-player versus multiplayer).[37] Yet precisely this element of skill has been reduced instead of heightened as an aspect of player control in video games in recent years, so that games are indeed fantasies of control rather than *tests* of it. Climbing in most video games is such a fantasy of control: the player delights in making Lara Croft ascend a summit with the superhuman strength she has. Their gratification does not derive from having mastered the skill necessary to get her there but from experiencing the audiovisual and narrative framing of the gameplay and the flow it creates, since the actual interaction is usually rather trivial. *The Climb VR* offers a similar fantasy without an avatar but from a first-person perspective, where the player sees their hands as they move them but are offered the control without the strain or the punishment.

This should not imply that such games would offer a less "authentic" climbing experience than others, simply because such a naïve understanding of "realism" misconstrues what an interactive simulation is and what aesthetic effects it may produce. I offer the distinction with regard to simulating thereness not as a value judgment but as a critical insight, as I believe this to be the distinguishing feature of a particu-

lar set of games that I will describe in the following. Though very different from each other, these games all use mountains of the mind to take the player to the *limit* of control and interactivity rather than use the mountain as the setting for a fantasy of control that allows the player to overcome it as an obstacle. Here, the mountain is not just a learning curve, but the learning curve is the mountain, and this is what makes them thereness simulators. They are all representative of the unique way in which video games mediate mountains, and yet each is unique in its own right.

Celeste

The first game I want to analyze in more detail is *Celeste*. It is relevant to my discussion not only for how it consistently invests a simulation of thereness with a particular allegorical meaning, but also for how variable it is in terms of player control on the metalevel of gameplay. At first glance, *Celeste* draws on the Western imagination of mountains of the mind and their thereness, as it initially dramatizes the mountain as a challenging, mysterious, inevitable object that must be overcome or mastered by the player. The title screen depicts a stylized snow-capped mountain that introduces the cartoonish aesthetics of the game, accompanied by sounds of strong winds that are mixed with a sparse piano melody. The player starts the game by selecting the option "CLIMB" underneath an icon of said mountain (Illustration 1), which demonstrates how effective the cultural trope of mountain thereness is as a simple premise for the gameplay to come.

The scene is set through sound—a car stops, the motor is turned off—and text, telling players: "This is it, Madeline. Just breathe. Why are you so nervous?" Switching to the pixelated graphics of the interactive sections, the first screen has Madeline on the bottom left and invites players to traverse the screen to the right, according to the genre conventions of jump-and-run platform games. The snow blowing from right to left indicates that Madeline may face some resistance when trying to progress. At the foot of the mountain, lampposts, electrical wires, and weathered signs indicate that this mountain is not only a natural object but likewise a cultural one, a first impression that will be reaffirmed much more intensely by other such elements in the game that leave no doubt that this is a mountain of the mind—a magic mountain at that. These elements, together with the pixelated graphics, clearly forego any aspirations to "realism," instead setting the stage for the mountain as an allegory (Illustration 2). Its thereness, however, is retained in this anti-realist framing, and it is, in fact, central to the symbolism of the mountain in the game. Learning the few controls in the game allows the player to traverse the first brief stage, taking them to an old lady in front of a cabin who warns Madeline about the challenge ahead: "If my 'driveway' almost did you in, the Mountain might be a bit much for you." In this way, the mountain—the word capitalized and in color like the names of characters

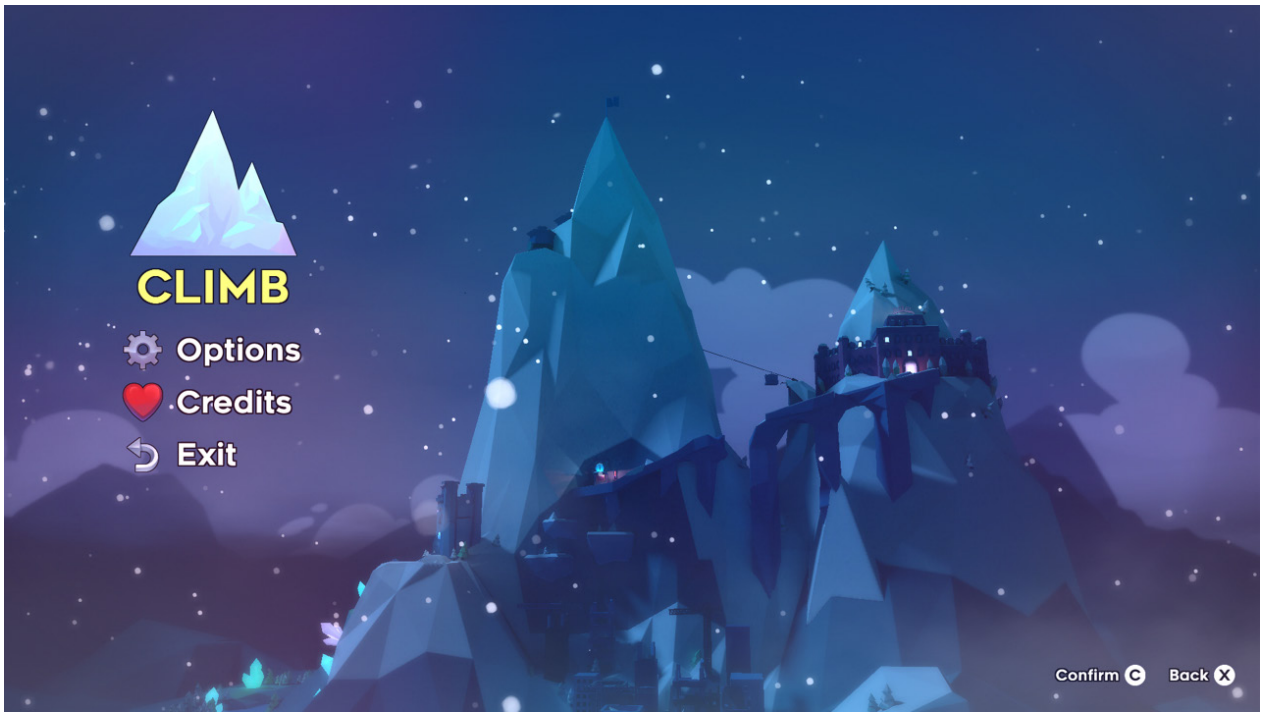

Illustration 1: The title screen of *Celeste* (2018).

Screenshot from *Celeste*, developed by Maddy Thorson and Noel Berry, published by Matt Makes Games, Windows version. *Celeste* © Matt Makes Games, 2018. Image used in accordance with Austrian copyright law pertaining to the use of images for critical commentary.

in the game—is continually constructed as a sentient entity that is both dangerous and challenging. "Celeste Mountain is a strange place," the old lady continues. "You might see things. Things you ain't ready to see." Madeline enters this mystical place by crossing a bridge that collapses underneath her, marking the point of no return. Madeline only makes it to the other side because time is stopped in yet another anti-realist, metaludic instance, and a bird tells her about the dash move she can perform just in time to save her. "You can do this," a line of text tells the player, and this concludes the prologue.[38]

All this is constructing thereness for the player: the mountain is set up from the start as something to be climbed without any justification other than its being there; it is a "strange place" that eludes and challenges our cognitive and epistemological repertoire of sense-making; it can only be traversed by non-trivial effort; and it poses a challenge that may be too much for those who seek to rise to it, so that failure is clearly a very real option. At the same time, the game keeps cheering the player on, and the thereness of the mountain is consistently complemented by supportive symbolic gestures in various forms. Notably, these never make the challenge any lesser,[39] but they support the player in meeting it. Even more than the textual examples mentioned above, the game's thoroughly uplifting music urges players on, especially in its faster movements which are designed to generate an immersive rather than impeding it.

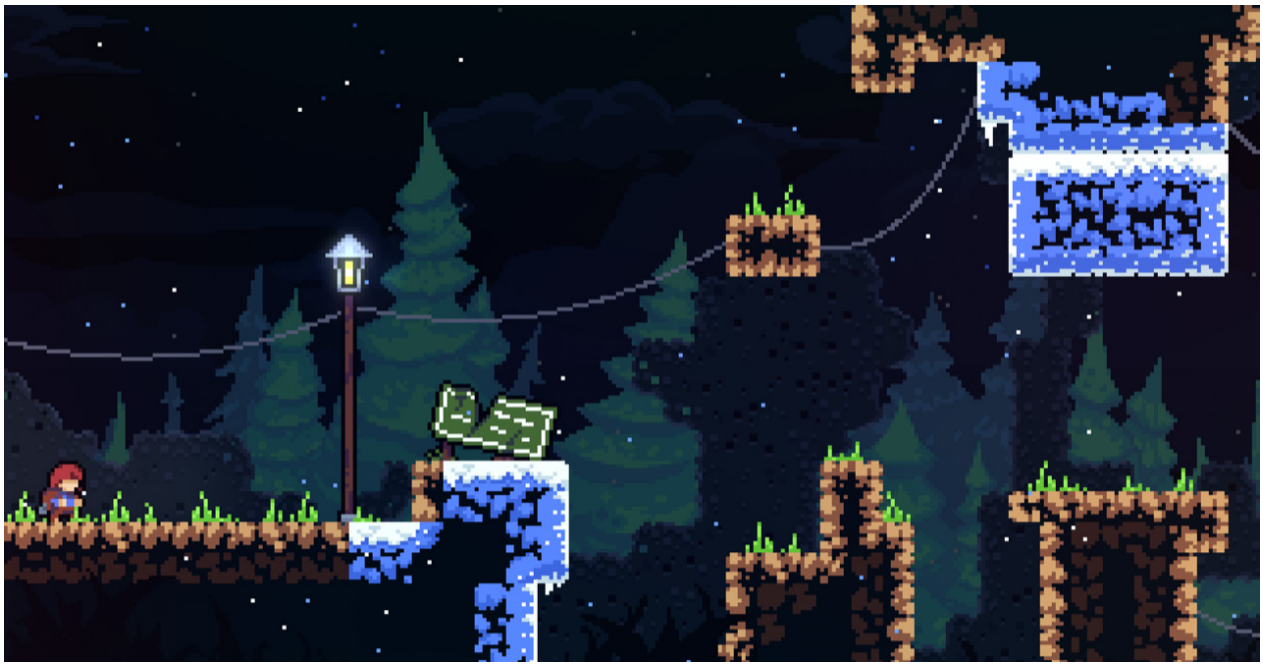

Illustration 2: The beginning of *Celeste* (2018).

Screenshot from *Celeste*, developed by Maddy Thorson and Noel Berry, published by Matt Makes Games, Windows version. *Celeste* © Matt Makes Games, 2018. Image used in accordance with Austrian copyright law pertaining to the use of images for critical commentary.

This dichotomy between thereness and the encouragement to tackle it is crucial for the allegorical meaning invested in Celeste Mountain: climbing is associated with dealing with depression and anxiety,[40] and the challenge of getting on top of the mountain parallels that of getting on top of one's "inner demons," as the game's description puts it.[41] Notably, though, it is not Celeste Mountain itself that becomes a symbol of depression and anxiety. While it is mostly a dangerous, creepy, and challenging place, it is also not the problem to be solved. Rather, its thereness becomes the catalyst through which Madeline may deal with herself and her own troubles, "a place of healing," after all (in the words of the Old Lady). Madeline's real antagonist is "Part of Me," a manifestation of her dark side that questions her ability to climb the mountain and even actively tries to dissuade her from it:

> "I know it sounds crazy, but I need to climb this Mountain."
> "You are many things, darling, but you are not a mountain climber."
> "Who says I can't be?"
> "I know it's not your strong suit, but be reasonable for once. You have no idea what you're getting into. You can't handle this."
> "That is exactly why I need to do this."[42]

This exchange frames climbing Celeste Mountain in terms of personal improvement, of testing and pushing one's limits, but it also indicates that there is more at stake, and that the symbolism is not as straightforward as the initial premise of the game may have suggested. In fact, it turns out that the mountain allegory is com-

mendably subtle: the challenging presence of Celeste Mountain does not imply that this is a "mountain of depression" that Madeline must climb to overcome it once and for all, which would problematically and erroneously suggest that depression is something that can be tackled by sheer force of individual will, resulting in a conclusive moment of healing (one might call this the "pull yourself together" approach). Such a simple allegorical reading is prohibited precisely by the game's simulation of thereness: the mountain always remains there along with its challenge to our skill and persistence, and climbing it only changes the climber, not the mountain itself. As Theo, a fellow climber Madeline meets early in the game, puts it: "I'm freezing my toes off, but I can't imagine a better place to be for some quiet reflection." This mountain does not make sense in itself but allows players to make sense of themselves in relation to it. The mountain is not the symbolic key to unlocking the mystery of depression but rather the allegorical place to understand it better. Thereness allows Celeste to frame anxiety in ludic terms, not as something to defeat once and for all, but as an opponent in a serious game that one can learn to play well against—a game one can at least learn not to lose.

Failure is an integral part of the gameplay experience, and the game is exceptionally well-balanced in terms of its learning curve and the control it both grants to and demands of the player. Since it is a puzzle platformer, players will not be able to get through different levels on either skill or wits alone, and finding the right combination of both will take practice.[43] Practice means dying often, but the game represents this is not so much as genuine failure but more of a temporary setback: Madeline dissolves in a ring of glowing spheres and after a fast wipe almost instantly respawns in the initial position on the screen, so that the penalty for dying is minimal. One of the many ways of encouraging the player is a postcard sent to Madeline between levels: "Be proud of your Death Count! The more you die, the more you're learning. Keep going!" Dying accordingly does not interrupt the ludic flow but becomes an integral part of it, and this revalues failure as progress both symbolically and in terms of gameplay. The visual representation of Celeste Mountain supports this further: the game map that marks the players' progress includes objects that clearly indicate that this mountain has been climbed before, and that it has, in fact, been so thoroughly cultivated that climbing it can only be understood as a *personal* achievement but not as a victory over other players. An abandoned city, a castle, a hotel, a funicular, and a temple suggest that Madeline is not the first to climb the mountain, and that she may find encouragement in others having made it before her. This frames the challenge as manageable rather than impossible (although there is also a monument "to those who perished on the climb").[44]

All this encouragement is meaningful only because *Celeste* is fiendishly difficult, and this is what makes it a thereness simulator rather than just a climbing game: it

is easy to learn and hard to master, posing a significant challenge to the player that cannot be met by trivial effort. While one can easily make Lara Croft climb just by playing, one has to play *well* to make Madeline do the same. Celeste Mountain is not just a playground but an indifferent antagonist, a challenge that remains challenging even if a player has mastered the game (which has a built-in speedrun timer to allow for such different ways of playing, as well as even more difficult optional goals that are framed in such a way that missing them does not put the player at fault).

Above all, the game is *fair*. The mountain does not cheat: it is an adversary only in its indifference but not in an antagonistic way that would be impossible to engage or frustrate any attempt by default. Furthermore, the mountain cannot be cheated: you have to adapt to it and its rule set, not vice versa. Its thereness means that its challenge can be met only on its own terms, and in a genuine relation to those who perceive it as a challenge. The game does not maintain its challenge by making the player's effort seem insignificant, and it does not create the challenge in the first place by disconnecting player effort from its result. The controls in *Celeste* are as precise as they get, but this does not result in a fantasy of control, which corresponds to the framework of mountain thereness. Instead, the game provides an experience of control that could be described as "learning what you can do," not because the player gains new abilities that make earlier challenges seem trivial, but rather because they get better at using the abilities they have. (Though they *are* granted new abilities, notably by reintegrating Part of Me into Madeline rather than by defeating or rejecting her.) *Celeste*'s puzzles are designed to provide players with a sense of success at overcoming obstacles that seem impossible to overcome initially. Many screens or stages will have players move from "this one cannot be solved" to "I actually did it," and this sense of accomplishment is only possible because of the genuine challenge posed in the first place. Thereness means you have to earn it, but it also means you have truly earned it when you do.

This semantics of achievement and skill leads us on a slippery slope, though, one that leads toward a normative, exclusive privileging of ability over other ways of playing. Video games and video gamer culture valorize skill, just like sports and sports culture tend to valorize excellence.[45] The downside to this valorization is that a particular way of playing becomes the standard of playing *well*, which is tied to certain normative assumptions about ability that often go without saying. Video game studies has come to address such ideological assumptions about ability in recent years, drawing on the field of disability studies to the mutual benefit of both discourses. *Celeste* is doubly relevant in this regard because its ludic approach to depression draws on an allegory of mountain thereness, and it thus contains two symbolic discourses in which the notion of dis/ability is crucial and contested. Thereness may be construed to suggest a challenge to human endeavor that presupposes a particular level of

skill that needs to be acquired, whether it is to understand Pound's *Cantos* or climb Mount Everest, and this also presupposes a certain normative framework of ability whose rules determine who can and who cannot achieve success by these standards. In parallel, a difficult puzzle platformer such as *Celeste* may not be played by anyone because even its basic controls presuppose a level of control and skill that will exclude some would-be players from the start. Both these normative frameworks apply to *Celeste*, and both could potentially counteract its ludic/symbolic approach to depression as something that can be engaged. This would mean that the game claims to be about inclusivity but is actually exclusive in itself; in this case, the gamer meme of "git gud" as a piece of very useful advice on how to play a difficult game better would parallel the equally useful advice to a depressed person to "cheer up."[47] *Celeste*, however, deliberately eschews this normativity by including an "assist mode," which offers "both assists and control over gameplay variables, with an unpatronisingly worded introductory screen."[48] This assist mode allows the player

> to modify the game's rules to fit your specific needs. This includes options such as slowing the game speed, granting yourself invincibility or infinite stamina, and skipping chapters entirely. *Celeste* is intended to be a challenging and rewarding experience. If the default game proves inaccessible to you, we hope that you can still find that experience with Assist Mode.[49]

This assist mode is noteworthy for many reasons, and it is also relevant to *Celeste*'s simulation of thereness since one must consider the argument that such a set of options turns the game into a fantasy of control, after all, and eradicates thereness in mediating the mountain. However, the game's expansion of interactivity in the sense of enabling the widest possible group of people to play the game still finds its concrete and symbolic limit in the mountain itself, as the mountain remains the one element that ensures that the game always remains a game and does not turn into sufficiently less rule-bound play. Assist Mode or not, or in any combination of the different ways of changing the gameplay on a metalevel, *Celeste* only lets you master climbing but not the mountain. I claimed above that the mountain cannot be cheated and that you have to adapt to it and its rule set, and this still holds true even in the Assist Mode that seems to contradict this assertion, as the ground rules set by the mountain remain unaffected by even the most extreme changes to the gameplay. If anything, Assist Mode proves that the mountain remains there beyond our actions, a limit to interactivity in that it enables player agency and provides the friction it needs to exist but at the same time does not *react* and is also not only *acted upon*. The mountain is no active antagonist, but it never becomes merely a passive playground either, since it provides our interaction with a set of rules that is neither entirely fixed nor entirely flexible. This duality makes for a peculiar kind of interaction regardless of how the player exerts control over the game. If "to aim for the highest

point is not the only way to climb the mountain,"[50] then why should *Celeste* without Assist Mode be the only way to climb Celeste Mountain, and what does it say about our assumptions about thereness that we consider our engagement with it primarily in a singular way? Regardless of how players approach it, Celeste Mountain is always *there*, and the game never takes it out of the equation even as it allows for a massive variability in terms of how they interact with it.

Getting Over It with Bennett Foddy

If *Celeste* is metaphorically holding your hand for moral support while you make the difficult climb, *Getting Over It* is giving you the finger almost all the way. Both games are quite similar in their simulation of mountain thereness, but they frame it very differently for players, and the fitting tagline for *Getting Over It* is: "A game I made / For a certain kind of person / To hurt them."[51] Like *Celeste*, *Getting Over It* is an extremely hard game, but instead of encouragement it offers only the cold honesty of telling you to just get over it, mixing ridicule and self-reflexive cultural critique. The game uses a simple control scheme that only requires the movement of the mouse and not a single button or key. This simplicity is part of how the game simulates thereness: all you can and need to do is swing a hammer to climb the mountain in front of you and rise to its challenging presence, though it quickly turns out that this is akin to saying you only need to put one foot in front of the other to walk up the Matterhorn. This is truly a *Fallstudie*: a case study of falling, again and again.

Getting Over It draws on the trope of mountains as a symbol of challenge and reward before the game even starts, misleading potential buyers into believing that the game offers a mountain that can actually be conquered in a naïve sense of the term. The description advertises it as "a punishing climbing game" but claims that "great mysteries and a wonderful reward await the master hikers who reach the top of the mountain." The text announces "between 2 and ∞ hours of agonizing gameplay, depending," and promises that, as a player, you will "lose all your progress, over and over" and "feel new types of frustration you didn't know you were capable of."[52] This challenge of climbing is expanded further when the game is loaded: the menu screen comes up with a piece of rock in its left half as a hammer slams into its surface, showing the player that this is what they are supposed to do. Upon starting a new game, they see a black metal cauldron on the rocky ground next to a tree, an oversized Yosemite hammer leaning against it. In the background, a slope rising to the right suggests the direction the player's movement will take. From the cauldron, the avatar Diogenes, whose name players only learn toward the end of their ascent, emerges. He clasps the hammer, which is the only tool at his disposal, although he does not use it to nail his route but rather to swing, pull himself up, or jump (Illustration 3). The challenge for the player is evident as soon as they circle the hammer and

Illustration 3: The beginning of *Getting Over It* (2017).
Screenshot from *Getting Over It with Bennett Foddy*, developed by Bennett Foddy. *Getting Over It with Bennett Foddy* © Bennett Foddy, 2017. Image used in accordance with Austrian copyright law pertaining to the use of images for critical commentary.

move the avatar to the right, first over a tree and then up a rocky slope littered with seaside debris.[53]

This is where the game starts simulating thereness in earnest. The player encounters the mountain at its base, at sea level, and they have no sense of it as a whole. Instead of diminishing the provocation of thereness, though, this rather increases it, as the mountain is presented continuously but never completely. It eludes our cognitive grasp, as it is not divided into distinct screens that split up its challenge into more manageable chunks but rather is rendered in a smoothly scrolling camera movement centered on Diogenes. This is especially effective on the first playthrough as the player gets to know the mountain, but it is at least somewhat retained in repeated climbs, as the deliberate withholding of visual information at times makes the ascent harder than it would be from a better perspective. The mountain, then, is mysterious, as the player perceives in fragments what is clearly a whole, only that this totality is never available to them as such. At the same time, they mostly get a sense of its wholeness when they fall down, the continuity of the mountain evident only in the painfully quick descent, knowing that there are neither save nor safe points to avoid this continuity in failure. *Celeste* lets the player forget about the last challenge as soon as they engage the next, but *Getting Over It* maintains the possibility of having to start at the foot of the mountain again at all times, only giving the player temporary respite before taking them to very risky places again. One of

the most profoundly sublime moments of delightful horror in the game is when the player realizes that this mysterious mountain is *curved*, and that the route up bends back to the left so that when Diogenes falls at a certain point, he will not just lose some but potentially all progress.

This risk is the most crucial aspect of how this mountain presents itself to the player, and it increasingly takes center stage as the mountain changes in appearance. The "realistic" aesthetics of the rocks at its foot are disturbed early on by oddly placed objects, most notably a paper coffee cup that seems to provocatively indicate that someone has casually strolled up here. At the latest, the stairs and door next to the Devil's Chimney ensure that the player understands they are climbing an allegorical mountain of the mind that has been *designed* for their particular experience but is still not secondary to it. This mountain is still not just a tool to be used, not an object for humans, and certainly no place to make oneself at home beyond an occasional breather. Instead, it is a risky place throughout, as is highlighted again after the first clues as to the mountain's curved topography, for example when the player encounters the maddeningly difficult Orange Hell section or, shortly before the end, the terrifying threat of "the snake" that will send them all the way down.

The way in which the player interacts with this object is straightforward and both extremely limited and open at the same time: they can only move Diogenes using the hammer, and yet this movement allows for such variability that climbing the mountain in this way becomes utterly challenging. Similar to *Celeste*, the controls are as precise as they can be, and this makes every failure in the face of thereness all the more immediate, as the player really only have themselves to blame for their own inadequacies. *Getting Over It* uses the mountain to take the player to the limit of interactivity not because of how it limits their means of interaction but, rather, in its emphasis on how there really is no genuine interaction taking place. The mountain is just there, designed to provide a challenge but never antagonizing the player in response to their input (a well-placed jump scare and a hat that is not as fixed as it seems to be are the only exceptions). In other words, the game creates an awareness of the limits of interactivity by making the only way act in the game both effective and ineffective at the same time: the hammer is all you have, and climbing with it is possible but hard, so that the way to the top is both clearly laid out and utterly uncertain. The game forces the player to reflect on their interaction with it through sheer difficulty and design instead of making the controls more unreliable. It openly eschews a fantasy of control for what one could describe as a realism of control: it allows you to do exactly what it allows you to do, nothing more and nothing less, and it throws the player back entirely on their skill by depriving them of alternative ways of playing.

The mountain is central to the construction of this brutal simplicity, and its thereness is the perfect semantic catalyst to intensify the effect of the challenge for the player. In contrast, this is a symbolic element that is absent from the game that inspired *Getting Over It*, *Sexy Hiking* (Jazzuo, 2002), so that it lacks the conceptual focus necessary to make it meaningful beyond its difficulty. *Getting Over It*, however, draws on the cultural meanings ascribed to mountains and thus uses the trope of thereness as a premise for the game and, just as importantly, for its philosophical undercurrent. Form and content only become one because thereness fuses them for the player, and without it the game would be either merely didactic or no different from any other game in being only "intrinsically valuable."[54] With this symbolic underpinning, however, the climb opens itself up to further meaning-making. While the mountain does not make sense for the player, they are invited to make sense of their ascent and their struggles, failures, and successes in attempting it. The game includes Bennett Foddy's commentary on player progress as well as a set of reactions to their failures; the former is a basically a linear text that players are presented with as they clear certain milestones while the latter is randomly generated whenever they lose their progress.[55] The comments on the player's failures oscillate between comfort and taunting, between deep philosophical insight and the tragicomic emptiness of motivational posters (Illustration 4). Irrespective of how each player receives these comments, they will at least provide them with an opportunity for some quiet introspection, even though these do not make any difference in a strictly systemic gameplay sense. Ranging from Emily Dickinson and Friedrich Nietzsche to Jennifer Aniston and Ice-T as well as songs such as "Going Down the Road Feelin' Bad," these snippets all reflect on challenges, success, failure, pain, and pleasure in various ways. What they have in common is that they do not make the mountain's thereness go away but rather provide ways of considering and engaging it philosophically (just when the player's physical engagement has failed). All this is part of how the mountain of the mind is constructed both in its material and imaginary qualities, but this aspect only comes into play *during play*, only when the player engages the mountain.

This philosophy of failure is connected to the mountain but not elementary to it; the game reflects on all this, but not the mountain itself, and it is never reduced to a purely didactic or metaphorical object. Instead, it retains its thereness as something *other* than the player. The mountain becomes an object of their thought but resists being reduced to such objectivity in the service of human subjectivity. It offers an irreducible provocation that elicits responses but is not predicated on serving such a purpose.

Foddy's commentary builds on and enhances this thereness and uses it to place the player's experience in a variety of other contexts, suggesting ways of making

Illustration 4: *Getting Over It* "encourages" players in a variety of ways.
Screenshot from *Getting Over It with Bennett Foddy*, developed by Bennett Foddy. *Getting Over It with Bennett Foddy* © Bennett Foddy, 2017. Image used in accordance with Austrian copyright law pertaining to the use of images for critical commentary.

sense of climbing the mountain that do not make sense to us. One way to do so is to once more connect playing a game and climbing on a conceptual level. While introducing the player to the game as a homage to *Sexy Hiking*, Foddy states that "the act of climbing, in the digital world or in real life, has certain essential properties that give the game its flavor. No amount of forward progress is guaranteed. Some cliffs are too sheer or too slippery, and the player is constantly, unremittingly in danger of falling and losing everything." This reference to "essential properties" resonates with my earlier claim that simulated thereness is as real as what it simulates, as it suggests that challenge and risk are common to any climbing experience regardless of its mediated status. To create "a sense of truth in that lack of compromise," though, climbing must be a genuine challenge, and most video games no longer offer such a challenge: "Most obstacles in videogame worlds are fake—you can be completely confident in your ability to get through them, once you have the correct method or the correct equipment, or just by spending enough time," whereas "frustration is … essential to the act of climbing and it's authentic to the process of building a game about climbing."[56] This distinguishes a climbing game from a game about climbing, control from a fantasy of control. It also differentiates a genuine digital mountain of the mind from a mere representation of a mountain since only genuine risk will add the real element to the imaginary one to complete the duality: "Imaginary mountains build themselves from our efforts to climb them, and it's our repeated attempts to reach the summit that turns those mountains into something real."[57]

Yet Foddy does not leave it at that reflection on how to simulate mountains of the mind through thereness, instead proceeding to use it as a form of cultural critique. Somewhat reminiscent of modernist rejections of mass culture, Foddy states that most contemporary video games are

> trash in the way that food becomes trash as soon as you put it in the sink. Things are made to be consumed in a certain context, and once the moment is gone they transform into garbage. In the context of technology those moments pass by in seconds. Over time we've poured more and more refuse into this vast digital landfill we call the Internet. It now vastly outnumbers and outweighs the things that are fresh and untainted and unused. When everything around us is cultural trash, trash becomes the new medium, the lingua franca of the digital age. . . . Maybe this is what this digital culture is. A monstrous mountain of trash, the ash-heap of creativity's fountain.[58]

Yet this is not only cultural pessimism, and Foddy's own description of this dire situation indicates that the critique itself can become an aesthetic countermodel, as his words now move from the diagnostic to the poetic and become more formalized themselves, aestheticized by rhythm and rhyme and worth quoting at length:

> Everything's fresh for about six seconds
> Until some newer thing beckons
> And we hit refresh
> And there's years of persevering
> Disappearing into the pile
> Out of style
> In this context it's tempting to make friendly content
> That's gentle, that lets you churn through it but not earn it.
> Why make something demanding, if
> It just gets piled up in the landfill.
> Filled with bland things?
> When games were new, they wanted a lot from you.
> Daunting you, taunting you, resetting and delaying you.
> Players played stoically. Now everyone's turned off by that.
> They want to burn through it quickly, a quick fix for the fickle
> Some tricks for the clicks of the feckless.
> But that's not you, you're an acrobat
> You could swallow a baseball bat.
> Now I know most likely you're watching this on Youtube or Twitch
> While some dude with 10 million views does it for you
> Like a baby bird being fed chewed up food.
> That's culture too.
> But on the off-chance you're playing this, what I'm saying is
> Trash is disposable but maybe it doesn't have to be approachable

> What's the feeling like? Are you stressed?
> I guess you don't hate it if you got this far
> Feeling frustrated it's underrated.[59]

This elaborate rejection of consumability as an aesthetic norm of the digital age finds its objective correlative—to playfully draw on a key modernist concept—in the mountain and its thereness, the ultimate symbol in Western culture of something that cannot easily be obtained; it is an unfriendly object whose challenge cannot be overcome once and for all even by overcoming the mountain once or twice. This mountain requires the stoicism referenced above, and it must be engaged directly and personally since the simulation of its thereness requires it. Its permanence relates to the ambiguity of the title: the game is not so much about getting over the mountain but about getting over failure, over challenge, over the game—and also over oneself as subjected to thereness. The Steam achievements indicate as much on the level of the metagame: "Got over it" is awarded for reaching the top of the mountain, "Got Over It, For Real This Time" for reaching it twice, and "So over it" for reaching it fifty times, a progress also marked by a gradual transformation of the black pot into a golden one. There is no magical reward for hikers who reach the top (except for maybe wisdom), as the game description claims, since such conclusive success would put an end to thereness. Instead of such closure, climbers find community, as the game takes them to a chat room where "only those who have climbed are welcome," and then the player exits through the "souvenir shop" and may start again. The game is thus truly a thereness simulator rather than a mere climbing game, as the challenge of the mountain does not go away after having climbed it, and the mountain is never overcome or conquered. The mountain remains there, waiting for the second and the fiftieth ascent without even waiting. If these climbs become easier, then it is only because the climber has changed, not the mountain.

Mountain

If there is a progression in how *Celeste* and *Getting Over It* deploy mountain thereness to take users from fantasies of control to the limits of interactivity, then this process finds its culmination in David OReilly's *Mountain*. Upon starting the game in version 2.0, the player is first presented with three subsequent white squares, each headed by a word such as "love" or "forgiveness." Once they have drawn something in each square, they may proceed to the next screen. Next, they are shown a screen with a spinning, glowing sphere in front of a galactic backdrop. Zooming in on the sphere, they see a mountain evidently undergoing a rapid geological formation process that builds various layers until the finished mountain is covered in green grass and trees. Four lines of text follow: "WELCOME TO MOUNTAIN. YOU ARE MOUNTAIN. YOU ARE GOD. PLEASE ENJOY YOUR TIME HERE" (Illustration 5). The next line of text appears

Illustration 5: The beginning of *Mountain* (2014).
Screenshot from *Mountain*, developed by David OReilly, published by Double Fine Productions. *Mountain* © Double Fine Productions, 2014. Image used in accordance with Austrian copyright law pertaining to the use of images for critical commentary.

on top of the screen, "I AM ALIVE," which is the first of the mountain's thoughts the player reads.[60] The mountain remains firmly in the center of the screen, while the user can turn it and zoom in or out to see the mountain in its bubble or take a better look at its near-symmetrical underside, but there is little else they can do. As time passes, the user watches the weather change, sees trees grow on or vanish from the mountain, and reads the mountain's random thoughts. At some point, the first random object will come flying at the mountain from outer space, hit it, and get stuck in its side, which is also the moment where the user will once again realize that this is an allegorical, fantastic mountain of the mind rather than a "nature simulator" with any aspirations to "realism." The mountain is peppered with stuff, ranging from cars to arrows and plastic ducks. The player may click on these objects to trigger an appropriate noise or a small animation and to grab and rearrange them on the mountain. Finally, the player can press keys and play music, upon which the mountain will spin faster as time speeds up, or they can evoke a new thought by pressing a particular key (none of which is really explained but left to the user to figure out).

This is all the "gameplay" afforded to players, though, and user interaction is so minimal that the status of *Mountain* as a game has been questioned by many commentators.[61] This challenge to what makes a game a game is part of *Mountain*'s appeal and integral to its mediation of mountains through thereness. *Mountain* comes to us *as* a game, and its context and aesthetics lead us to expect it to be a game: it has

graphics, sound, music, it is available in online game stores such as Steam and Humble, and it is reviewed and discussed mostly in publications that focus on gaming. At the same time, the game playfully prides itself on not being interactive: the website lists the game features as "no controls / time moves forward / things grow and things die / nature expresses itself / [about] 50 hours of gameplay."[62] Version 1.0 of the game even spelled out "Controls: none" in an option menu in which players would usually expect to customize their input method.

This dichotomy makes *Mountain* a unique example of mediating mountains and their thereness: it aesthetically raises the expectation of interactivity while practically frustrating it on a very fundamental level. This is not the frustration integral to the experience of *Getting Over It*, but it is even more basic, since it is not the frustration of failure but that of not being able to interact in the first place. If *Celeste* and *Getting Over It* simulate thereness by creating for players the experience of a challenging presence of an object that invites but frustrates interaction, then *Mountain* takes this simulation to its logical conclusion by undermining even that aspect of simulation. *Mountain* simulates thereness by excluding the subject from the object even more radically and not granting players a performative way of making sense of a thing that does not make sense in and of itself. Notably, this lack of interactivity in a medium defined by its interactive qualities does not reduce *Mountain* to mere representation, or if it does, it is a *return* to representation *through* simulation: the aesthetics of *Mountain* enforce a ludic perspective on it that lends it just enough of a simulational quality to be more than a representation. At the same time, its representational nature that eschews simulation is an integral part of how it conveys thereness. In simpler terms, thereness in *Mountain* is first created through the *expectation* of simulation and then maintained through the refusal to simulate and involve the player *as* a player. This results in a different relation between player and game than a purely representational logic would allow. Without the promise of interactivity, *Mountain* would be just a screensaver; without the subversion of interactivity, it would be just a Tamagotchi.

Mountain thus challenges its users to engage the mountain at all. It plays with interactivity itself as it lets the user find out how to play, or rather if they can play. The first invitation to draw, for example, seems like a setup process that may determine the parameters for the mountain whose construction users will witness afterwards, but there is no evident causal relation between the drawings and the shape of the mountain. Instead, these three steps may well be the first introduction to how interactivity is subverted rather than instituted in *Mountain*. Every player action may then be understood as a way of interacting with the game but not with the mountain, even more than in *Celeste* and *Getting Over It*. Tim Barker and Conor McKeown offer a convincing reading of player control on the level of code in *Mountain*, noting

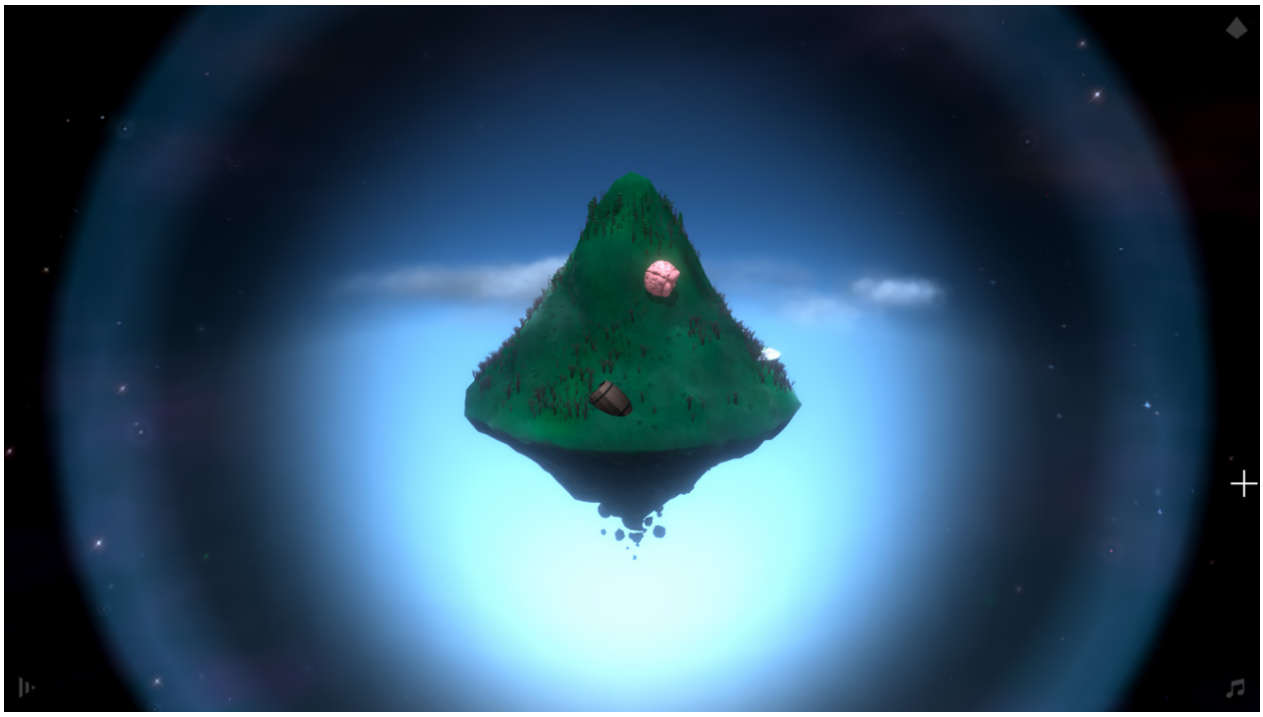

Illustration 6: The total mountain in its sphere.
Screenshot from *Mountain*, developed by David OReilly, published by Double Fine Productions. *Mountain* © Double Fine Productions, 2014. Image used in accordance with Austrian copyright law pertaining to the use of images for critical commentary.

how apparent surface effects such as rotating the camera indicate how "human input is not a matter of 'controlling' or 'using' the game. Rather, human input is a small contribution to the vast code ecosystem."[63] Users may look at the mountain from every angle, but looking is all they do, and the game does not evoke a constructivist or quasi-Berkeleyan position that would make the mountain exist just by watching it. This is one implication of the only textual communication that directly addresses players, the initial words that tell them "YOU ARE MOUNTAIN. YOU ARE GOD."[64] The game teases users by promising them infinite power and instead turns them at best into a non-interventionist higher being removed from the reality that they observe. The user's gaze is shown to be inconsequential to the mountain, and this sense is heightened by the literal centrality of the mountain, for it is always placed at the center of the sphere on and in which the camera may move. We cannot look away, we cannot look elsewhere; this game is not about us, it is about the mountain at its center, and we are incidental to its existence. The mountain's thereness is conveyed through its central presence to which we have no access and whose totality necessarily escapes us in our particular perspective (Illustration 6). We can only look closer but are left entirely to partial observation rather than true interaction. This is Nan Shepherd's "total mountain," but we are not part of it.[65] Clicking on a tree will stir up a flock of birds, and clicking on an object will make it wobble or play a sound, but these minor responses to our actions rather prove our lack of agency, as they are evidently superficial and leave the mountain itself unaffected. The closest we get

to interaction is playing music, and we may be forgiven for thinking that the mountain responds by dancing. However, these tones only speed up time, as a result of which the mountain rotates faster, too. Similar to the drawings in the beginning, our actions do not receive the necessary feedback to give us a sense of *inter*activity as opposed to a sense of acting without palpable consequence. To put it bluntly, we can play music to this virtual mountain as much as we can play music to any real mountain, but we would hardly call either interacting with the mountain. What the music can do is introduce particular effects to the game: certain melodies will cause a rain of frogs, fish, or blood, but again these affect the environment of the mountain but leave the mountain itself utterly unchanged.[66]

Even the mountain's thoughts are not responses to anything users do; they can trigger a thought to be displayed, but the text is not in response to their action. Just like there is no interaction, there is also no communication, or at best the one-sided communication of the monologue or message in a bottle without a particular addressee. The mountain is thinking, but this is not "thinking like a mountain" in Aldo Leopold's sense, which refers to environmental connectedness rather than nonhuman cognition.[67] Instead, these thoughts highlight that whatever the mountain is thinking, it is surely not thinking about *us*, and it operates independently of our subjectivity. These are thoughts, not messages, and users are not needed as receivers but only granted access to them, which is as close as they get to that object. Ian Bogost highlights this duality as the core aspect of the game as he discusses it in terms of his object-oriented "alien phenomenology":

> *Mountain* breaks the mold of video games not by subverting its conventions through inactivity, but by offering an entirely different kind of roleplay action as its subject. It presents neither the role of the mountain, nor the role of you the player-as-master, nor the absence of either role. In their place, *Mountain* invites you to experience the chasm between your own subjectivity and the unfathomable experience of something else, something whose "experience" is so unfamiliar as to be unimaginable.[68]

Bogost's notion resonates with the thereness of the mountain as something that is "irreducible to straightforward objects of thought."[69] Marder's phenomenological take on mountains is as indebted to Heidegger as Bogost's, and both their approaches as well as the game's find in the mountain and its thereness the appropriate conceptual thing for their interrogations of subjectivity and objectivity. The task of the player in *Mountain*, then, is not to observe, control, or receive, but rather to *contemplate*. This task is unlike those video game mechanics typically demand—to the point where it is not even set as a task. The virtual mountain is just *there*, it makes no sense, but the way it is presented to us challenges us to make sense of the mountain, the game, and our part in it, without a clear teleological process that will lead play-

ers anywhere in their contemplation. The thereness of the mountain ensures that players will not think they think like a mountain but come to understand that they *cannot do that*. The initial claim that "YOU ARE MOUNTAIN. YOU ARE GOD" suggests an identity between the playing subject and the central object of the game, and yet there is not even identification, much less identity. The thereness of the mountain, its irreducible, provocative otherness, its presence that neither depends on us nor makes sense for us, prohibits any banal resolution that would dissolve the boundary between self and non-self too easily.

One final aspect of quasi-interactivity is crucial in this regard: the only way to truly do something with the mountain in the game is to destroy it. The player may trigger the apocalypse by playing the famous five musical notes from *Close Encounters of the Third Kind* (1977), a reference that suggests communication across epistemological, cultural, and even ontological barriers. As the player overcomes this boundary and finally at least does something to the mountain and interacts with the game (if not the mountain itself), their action results in the annihilation of the mountain and, surprisingly, themselves. The apocalypse comes in the form of an object whose approach is staged differently—cinematically—from the other objects that hit the mountain before, with suspenseful music and a camera perspective that finally decenters the mountain to show the constellation of the two things about to collide. Upon impact, the screen flashes red and turns completely white, and the game informs the player via text that, for example, "YOU HAVE BEEN GRANTED DEATH BY THE SUN OF INFINITE DARKNESS"—*you*, not the mountain, as if the identity between player and mountain would only be possible in this moment of annihilation but never in the game itself. The final button, "RETRY," once again is a mockery of interactivity rather than its manifestation, as there has been nothing to try in the first place. The player may save the mountain from annihilation by playing music and thus building up a protective shield that will destroy the incoming object, and yet such preservation is not "the goal" of the game either. Most importantly, even the player's destructive action is no final proof of their control over the game after all, simply because the apocalypse will happen anyway even if they do not play the *Close Encounters* melody. In other words, *Mountain* is a game that can play itself as much as any human player can (a concept that OReilly takes one step further in the "sequel" to *Mountain*, his 2017 game *Everything*, which includes an autoplay mode that kicks in whenever a player has stopped playing for a few seconds[70]). If players still needed to be convinced of their irrelevance to the game despite how their interactivity has been undermined or revealed to be illusory from the start, it is surely this automatic gameplay.

In conclusion, this is the point all three games discussed here have in common, although to different degrees and to different ends: *Celeste*, *Getting Over It*, and *Mountain* all stage the absence of *Zuhandenheit* by confronting users with an object

that cannot be understood in relation to how we might use it, so that they are not users at all. The mountain in *Celeste* can neither be used as a remedy for depression nor a metaphor for it, and it retains an otherness that cannot be reduced to a function it has for the characters or the players. The mountain in *Getting Over It* can be climbed but not overcome: the progressive form of the verb in the title suggests that the process of getting over it will never end. The mountain's challenge remains even as players walk away from the game, a provocative object beyond purpose whose existence in code is as independent of humans as the existence of an actual mountain. Finally, the mountain in *Mountain* takes the aforementioned approaches to their extreme conclusion, as it turns players into "players" by giving them a mountain that is not to be played with, try as they might. They may just as well sit down and wait for it to crumble.

Notes

1 Basil Bunting, "On the Fly-Leaf of Pound's Cantos," in *The Complete Poems*, ed. Richard Caddel (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), 114.

2 "Climbing Mount Everest is Work for Supermen," *New York Times*, March 18, 1923, X11.

3 Michael Marder, "On the Mountains, or the Aristocracies of Space," *Environment, Space, Place* 4, no. 2 (2012): 65, DOI: 10.7761/esp.4.2.63.

4 Marder, "On the Mountains," 68.

5 Robert Macfarlane, *Mountains of the Mind: A History of a Fascination* (London: Granta, 2003), 19.

6 In this essay, I use the term "simulation" not in the mimetic sense but in Gonzalo Frasca's sense that highlights interactivity and not "realism": "to simulate is to model a (source) system through a different system which maintains (for somebody) some of the behaviors of the original system." Gonzalo Frasca, "Simulation versus Narrative: Introduction to Ludology," in *The Video Game Theory Reader*, ed. Mark J. P. Wolf and Bernard Perron (London: Routledge, 2003), 223.

7 Macfarlane, *Mountains*, 19.

8 Macfarlane, *Mountains*, 19.

9 Marder, "On the Mountains," 70, 68.

10 Nan Shepherd, *The Living Mountain* (1977; Edinburgh: Canongate, 2014), 1.

11 Shepherd, *The Living Mountain*, 105; Robert Macfarlane, introduction to *The Living Mountain*, by Nan Shepherd (Edinburgh: Canongate, 2014), xxiv.

12 Shepherd, *The Living Mountain*, 1.

13 "Climbing Mount Everest."

14 In a commendable Deleuzian essay, Ian Buchanan explores the shifting symbolic values attributed to Mallory's endeavor, arguing that "Everest wasn't, and of course still isn't, a self-evident symbol of anything," so that its "meaning had to be manufactured." Ian Buchanan, "Becoming Mountain," *Revista de Filosofia Aurora* 29, no. 46 (2017): 222–23, DOI: 10.7213/1980-5934.29.046.DS12. Robert Macfarlane also addresses these issues in

chapter 8 of *Mountains of the Mind*.

15 Macfarlane, *Mountains*, 167.

16 Shepherd, *The Living Mountain*, 4.

17 Macfarlane, *Mountains*, 225.

18 Macfarlane, introduction, xiv, xxiv.

19 Shepherd, *The Living Mountain*, 8.

20 Marder, "On the Mountains," 69.

21 Marder, "On the Mountains," 73.

22 Macfarlane, *Mountains*, 19.

23 Lito Tejada-Flores, "Games Climbers Play," *Ascent* 1, no.1 (1967): 23–25.

24 Bernard Suits, *The Grasshopper: Games, Life, and Utopia* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1978; Peterborough: Broadview Press, 2014), DOI: 10.3138/9781487574338. *The Grasshopper* is formally unique, combining dramatic dialogue, fable, prose narrative, and various other styles to answer Ludwig Wittgenstein's famous challenge in *Philosophical Investigations* to define what a game is. Instead of accepting Wittgenstein's proposal that games cannot be defined but only be described by a shifting set of family resemblances, Suits playfully arrives at the serious conclusion that to "play a game is to attempt to achieve a specific state of affairs [prelusory goal], using only the means permitted by rules [lusory means], where the rules prohibit use of more efficient in favor of less efficient means [constitutive rules], and where the rules are accepted just because they make possible such an activity [lusory attitude]." Or, the shortest version of this: "playing a game is the voluntary attempt to overcome unnecessary obstacles." Suits, *Grasshopper*, 43. While this proposition is useful in itself as a debatable (and debated) foundation for video game analyses that seek a clear grasp of their object of study, it is not as important to the project at hand as its reference to mountain climbing. Like Tejada-Flores's "Games Climbers Play," this helps explore further the *ludic* implications of mountain thereness and its manifold challenges to humans.

25 Suits, *Grasshopper*, 90, 92. Jonathan Simon describes this difference by distinguishing "summiteers" from "mountaineers." Jonathan Sim, "Taking Risks: Extreme Sports and the Embrace of Risk in Advanced Liberal Societies," in *Embracing Risk: The Changing Culture of Insurance and Responsibility*, ed. Tom Baker and Jonathan Simon (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002), 177–208, DOI: 10.7208/chicago/9780226035178.003.0008. Pam R. Sailors usefully expands on this distinction to dismiss the self-affirmative rhetoric of victory over the mountain in climbing in favor of a self-transcendent perspective. Pam R. Sailors, "More than Meets the I: Values of Dangerous Sport," in *Climbing. Philosophy for Everyone: Because It's There*, ed. Stephen E. Schmid (Hoboken: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), 81–92, DOI: 10.1002/9781444327717.ch6.

26 Bernard De Koven, *The Well-Played Game: A Player's Philosophy* (Garden City, NY: Anchor Books, 1978; Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2013), DOI: 10.7551/mitpress/9722.001.0001.

27 Just consider Reinhold Messner's dictum, voiced in his manifesto in 1968, that the use of technology in climbing results in the "murder of the impossible" and thus the central node that keeps the game of mountaineering from falling apart *as* a game. Reinhold Messner, "Direttissima—oder Mord am Unmöglichen," *Alpinismus*, no. 8 (August 1968): 17–18.

28 Macfarlane, *Mountains*, 6.

29 Suits, *Grasshopper*, 176.

30 This is why the Grasshopper claims that "game playing is what makes Utopia intelligible." Suits, *Grasshopper*, 188.

31 Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, *Flow: The Psychology of Optimal Experience* (New York: Harper Perennial, 1990), 4.

32 Some board games draw on mountain thereness in their own way, most notably *Mountaineers*, which includes a massive three-dimensional game board whose verticality provides a material corollary to the imaginary component of the gameplay. See "*Mountaineers*: A 3D Board Game," *Massif Games*, accessed November 17, 2020, http://www.massifgames.com/mountaineers/.

33 Shepherd, *The Living Mountain*, 4.

34 Jesper Juul, *The Art of Failure: An Essay on the Pain of Playing Video Games* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2013), 30, 7.

35 Macfarlane, *Mountains*, 142.

36 Mitchell F. Wolfe's "Mountains in Gaming" (2018) offers a selective and rather rough catalogue of video game mountains and their various functions, though he acknowledges that the choice of theme is "mostly arbitrary" and not based on a coherent theoretical foundation. Mitchell F. Wolfe, "Mountains in Gaming," *Medium*, February 5, 2018, https://medium.com/super-jump/mountains-in-gaming-2cb888786b0c.

37 Torben Grodal, "Video Games and the Pleasures of Control," in *Media Entertainment: The Psychology of its Appeal*, ed. Dolf Zillmann and Peter Vorderer (Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates Publishers, 2000), 209, 203. A child of its time, Grodal's essay is far too focused on psychology, violence, and film from today's perspective, and yet the text remains continually relevant for having systematically addressed the pleasures of interactivity and control in the first place, and for raising questions that require a different set of answers as the medium develops, as for instance provided by Jesper Juul's *The Art of Failure*.

38 *Celeste*, dev. Maddy Thorson and Noel Berry (Vancouver, BC: Matt Makes Games, 2018), multi-platform.

39 Other games take a different approach and offer more than symbolic encouragement: for example, losing too many lives in *New Super Mario Bros. Wii* (Nintendo, 2009) triggers the optional Super Guide mode that restarts the level in an autopilot mode the player can stop any time.

40 While most reviews pick up on this aspect of the game, especially two texts usefully explore *Celeste*'s ludic take on depression further: Nathan Grayson, "*Celeste* Taught Fans and Its Own Creator to Take Better Care of Themselves," *Kotaku*, April 16, 2018, https://kotaku.com/celeste-taught-fans-and-its-own-creator-to-take-better-1825305692/; Wyatt Donigan, "That Time *Celeste* Made Me Realize I Had Depression," *Medium*, June 29, 2018, https://medium.com/@wyattdonigan/how-celeste-made-me-realize-i-had-depression-66570faa9067/.

41 "Celeste," *Steam*, accessed November 17, 2020, https://store.steampowered.com/app/504230/Celeste/.

42 *Celeste*.

43 In a notable video review of the game, Brian David Gilbert argues that the skills required to advance in the game parallel actual rock climbing in combining beta and crux, or a conceptual understanding of the best possible route and the ability to actually take it beyond a point of particular difficulty after a relatively easy introduction. Brian David Gilbert, "*Celeste* Will Make You Better at Every Video Game," *Polygon*, December 16, 2018, video review, https://youtu.be/e07FaVLET3k.

44 *Celeste*.

45 On this particular point, see Christopher A. Paul, *The Toxic Meritocracy of Video Games: Why Gaming Culture is the Worst* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2018).

46 For example, the following texts explore this intersection very productively, as do an increasing number of scholarly contributions to what is undoubtedly a crucial issue: Diane Carr, "Ability, Disability and *Dead Space*," *Game Studies* 14, no. 2 (2014), http://gamestudies.org/1402/articles/carr/; Joyram Chakraborty, "How Does Inaccessible Gaming Lead to Social Exclusion?" in *Disability, Human Rights, and Information Technology*, ed. Jonathan Lazar and Michael Ashley Stein (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2017), 212–24, https://doi.org/10.9783/9780812294095-015; Sarah Gibbons, "Disability, Neurological Diversity, and Inclusive Play: An Examination of the Social and Political Aspects of the Relationship between Disability and Games," *Loading ...: Journal of the Canadian Game Studies Association* 9, no. 14 (2015): 25–39, http://journals.sfu.ca/loading/index.php/loading/article/view/150; Kara Stone, "Time and Reparative Game Design: Queerness, Disability, and Affect," *Game Studies* 18, no. 3 (2018), http://gamestudies.org/1803/articles/stone/; David Wästerfors and Kristofer Hansson, "Taking Ownership of Gaming and Disability," *Journal of Youth Studies* 20, no. 9 (2017): 1143–60, https://doi.org/10.1080/13676261.2017.1313969.

47 Many games espouse such normative positions on ability by framing their difficulty levels accordingly, so that, for example, the easiest mode of *Wolfenstein: The New Order* (Machine Games, 2014)—"Can I play, Daddy?"—is illustrated by dressing up the otherwise badass protagonist with a bonnet and a pacifier, "for the spineless gamer." Even though players do have a choice, then, they may either be shamed or patronized for making what seems like a wrong choice based on the value system of the game, or they may be told more neutrally (but no less normatively) that one of these options is how the game "is meant to be played." *Wolfenstein: The New Order*, dev. Machine Games (Bethesda, MD: Bethesda Softworks, 2014), multi-platform.

48 "*Celeste* Assist Mode," *Game Accessibility Guidelines*, accessed November 19, 2020, http://gameaccessibilityguidelines.com/celeste-assist-mode/. This website is an excellent resource for inclusive game design, including abstract criteria as well as best-practice examples.

49 The wording of this introduction to Assist Mode has changed during the development process. These changes attest to how semantics and ideology intertwine with regard to how ability, skill, difficulty, and other aspects are represented and taken for granted by a particular game and in gamer culture as a whole. See the following article for a discussion of some of these changes (though not the most recent ones in version 1.3.1.2, which I consider here): Patrick Klepek, "The Small But Important Change *Celeste* Made to Its Celebrated Assist Mode," *Vice*, September 16, 2019, https://www.vice.com/en_us/article/43kadm/celeste-assist-mode-change-and-accessibility.

50 Macfarlane, introduction, xxiv.

51 "Getting Over It with Bennett Foddy," *Steam*, accessed on November 19, 2020, https://store.steampowered.com/app/240720/Getting_Over_It_with_Bennett_Foddy/.

52 "Getting Over It."

53 *Getting Over It with Bennett Foddy*, dev. Bennett Foddy (self-published, 2018), multi-platform.

54 Suits, *Grasshopper*, 176.

55 Ekfir, reply to "Quotes," *Steam Forum*, December 14, 2017, https://steamcommunity.com/app/240720/discussions/0/2425614539593135151. In this post, Steam user Erkfir has usefully transcribed this commentary. The thread contains most of the in-game quotations as well.

56 *Getting Over It*. Bennett Foddy gives examples to distinguish "Eleven Flavors of Frustration" on his website, arguing that a "[a] game that is completely devoid of frustration is likely to be a game without friction, without disobedience. Games that are perfectly obedient are mere software." Bennett Foddy, "Eleven Flavors of Frustration," *Foddy.net*, January 15, 2017. http://www.foddy.net/2017/01/eleven-flavors-of-frustration/.

57 *Getting Over It*.

58 *Getting Over It*.

59 *Getting Over It*.

60 *Mountain*, dev. David OReilly (San Francisco, CA: Double Fine Productions, 2014), multi-platform.

61 Braydon Beaulieu has deftly overviewed critical responses to Mountain and offered an original analysis of the game in relation to "the Conceptual movement in art and writing" in his essay "Conceptualizing Mountain," *First Person Scholar*, March 2, 2016, http://www.firstpersonscholar.com/conceptualizing-mountain/.

62 David OReilly, "Mountain," *Mountain Game*, last updated in December 2018, http://mountain-game.com/.

63 Tim Barker and Conor McKeown, "Unearthing Techno-Ecology: On the Possibility of a Technical Media Philosophy of Ecology," *Digital Culture & Society* 1, no. 1 (2015): 34, https://doi.org/10.25969/mediarep/636.

64 *Mountain*.

65 Shepherd, *The Living Mountain*, 105.

66 Steam user Gargoonka has compiled a short list of the ways of interacting with the game, including all musical codes: Gargoonka, "Notes, Unlocks & Tips," *Steam Forum*, August 19, 2020, https://steamcommunity.com/app/313340/discussions/0/3522103184718549 9/.

67 Aldo Leopold, *A Sand County Almanac* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1949), 129–33.

68 Ian Bogost, "You Are Mountain," *The Atlantic*, July 17, 2014, https://www.theatlantic.com/entertainment/archive/2014/07/you-are-mountain/374543/.

69 Marder, "On the Mountains," 70.

70 I discuss the autoplay mode in *Everything* in relation to its larger philosophical deconstruction of the distinctions between self and non-self and between player and game in my essay "Whitman and Everything." Sascha Pöhlmann, "Whitman and Everything: Playing with the Poetics of Scale," in *Revisiting Walt Whitman: On the Occasion of his*

200th Birthday, ed. Winfried Herget (Bern: Peter Lang, 2019), 55–80.

Acknowledgments

I would like to thank the two anonymous reviewers of this essay for their very helpful suggestions. Gewidmet meinem Opa Fritz Burger, der die Berge kennt.

About the Author

Sascha Pöhlmann is a professor of North American Literature and Culture at the University of Innsbruck. He is the author of the monographs *Pynchon's Postnational Imagination* (Universitätsverlag Winter, 2010), *Future-Founding Poetry: Topographies of Beginnings from Whitman to the Twenty-First Century* (Camden House, 2015), *Stadt und Straße: Anfangsorte in der amerikanischen Literatur* (transcript Verlag, 2018), and *Vote with a Bullet: Assassination in American Fiction* (Camden House, 2021). He has edited and co-edited essay collections on Thomas Pynchon, Mark Z. Danielewski, foundational places in/of Modernity, electoral cultures, American music, unpopular culture, and most recently *Playing the Field: Video Games and American Studies* (de Gruyter, 2019). His video game-related essays deal with Pynchon's use of games, David OReilly's *Everything* and Whitman's poetics of scale, ludic populism and its subversion, and the representation of homelessness in *CHANGE*. He is a co-editor of the book series Video Games and the Humanities (de Gruyter).

Contact: Sascha Pöhlmann; University of Innsbruck; Department of American Studies; sascha.poehlmann@uibk.ac.at.

Becoming-Data, Becoming-Mountain

Affordances, Assemblages, and the Transversal Interface

Mark Nunes

Abstract

This article explores our ecological relation to both information and information technologies as we "mediate mountains." Starting with a Gibsonian approach to affordances, and considering how an agent-specific account of action limits human access to "the digital," I suggest that the interface between human and device marks a double-coupling of two agents—one digital the other embodied—each of which draws out the other to alter potential action. The essay explores the affordances of agents and the environments in which they act, and how action seemingly occurs across the boundaries marked by the human-device interface. Drawing on actor network theory, assemblage theory, and Don Ihde's "inter-relational ontology," I examine how, within an ecology of humans and mobile devices, "agency" and "action" operate within a Deleuzean transversal, cutting across body-machine boundaries. As an application of this analysis, I examine the relationship between embodied and digital agents "in the wild" of the mountains, through AR and GPS-enabled smartphone apps, and how each agent, acting upon its own environment, gives rise to transversal events that alter the affordances offered to agents across a seemingly uncrossable divide.

Suggested Citation: Nunes, Mark. "Becoming-Data, Becoming-Mountain: Affordances, Assemblages, and the Transversal Interface." *JAAAS: Journal of the Austrian Association for American Studies* 2, no. 2 (2021): 247–262, DOI: 10.47060/jaaas.v2i2.98.

Keywords: affordances; becoming; mobile devices; transversal

Peer Review: This article was reviewed by the issue's guest editors and an external reviewer.

Becoming-Data, Becoming-Mountain

Affordances, Assemblages, and the Transveral Interface

Mark Nunes

Of course, we should all know better, but how often do we still encounter that persistent, romantic illusion: that technology *removes us* from nature, or that we should experience nature as directly and in as unmediated a manner as possible? In the United States, at least, this admonition declares itself, without any apparent irony, on websites and in social media campaigns, encouraging youth and adults alike to put down their screens and enjoy the natural world around them. Retreat centers like Digital Detox call upon us to "disconnect to reconnect," offering "unplugged, immersive experiences" to remove us from our networked lives and (re)turn us to nature.[1] A growing number of businesses have sprung up, such as Nature Unplugged, offering retreats, coaching sessions, and consulting services to facilitate "nature immersion [and] a chance to unplug from your devices and let go of your daily to-do list."[2] Over and again, we encounter this rhetorical opposition between technology and nature—in the words of Nature Canada's public health initiative to improve the health and welfare of children: it's a matter of "Screen Time vs. Green Time."[3] Writing for *Blue Ridge Outdoors* in a hiking piece titled "Unplugging from Technology, Plugging into Nature," "College Ambassador" Sarah Puckett notes:

> Life is amazing when you actually look up from your phone and notice the world around you. You have more time to explore the mountains and explore your mind. You have more time to acknowledge and really enjoy the beauty of a snowcapped mountain or the soothing sound of rain in the wilderness. Try it! You'll be surprised at what you might find.[4]

The dichotomy set up here assumes that when we are on our devices, we are out of our embodied environment. The less mediated our lived experience, such an opposition suggests, the more directly we will experience the natural world. But, of course, our experience of the world is always already mediated, and thank goodness for that.

As a case in point: in the fall of 2019, I went on a three-day solo backpacking trip, which involved a leg up and over Grandfather Mountain, the highest peak in my little corner of the Blue Ridge Mountains of North Carolina. I am quite happy that my experience of the mountain was mediated by way of the hiking shoes on my feet, my jacket and my hat, my tent and my water filter, and so on.[5] Grandfather Mountain is a low altitude summit by Austrian standards, to be sure—just over 600 meters of elevation gain to a peak of about 1800 meters. There is no technical climbing involved to reach the summit, but there are several stretches at the ridge line with ladders and fixed cables to aid hikers: a form of mediated ascent, to be sure. While hikers depend upon these technological mediations, this same dichotomy between "direct" and "mediated" experience follows us up the mountain: thus, the privileging of high-altitude ascents, for example, completed without the aid of supplemental oxygen. In rock climbing (perhaps especially in the United States), we encounter a similar hierarchy of "pure" ascent, which places free climbing above aid. And yet when I free climb, my "unaided" ascent is still, and quite happily, mediated by way of the climbing shoes on my feet and the chalk on my hands. Even Alex Honnold, in his mind-boggling free *solo* climbs, embraces these two forms of mediation in his pursuit of pure climbing. But of course, there are those who seek the purest of free solo ascents: climbing shoeless, without chalk bag, or any clothing at all.

But if we are to set aside this admonition that warns us off of a technological corruption of an otherwise pure experience of nature and accept in its place an understanding that our experience of the natural world is always technologically mediated, we might then begin to explore more critically the environment for potential action offered by this mediated relation, and how this relation conditions and shapes our experience of the world. And what goes for boots and hats and gloves applies equally well for screens and networks and mobile devices.

To some extent, I am embracing an ecological understanding of mediation, which suggests that the devices we use, and the environment in which we use them, has a strong impact on our experience of being human and being in the world. "Environment," in this context, is both natural and technological, in that it provides a frame for social, cultural, and embodied action. While we could—as Marshall McLuhan does—explore a broad range of technologies as "extensions" of human sense and action, mobile devices provide a particularly compelling context for a discussion of our ecological relation to both information and information technologies that, at the same time, problematize this "extension" metaphor by challenging us to think carefully about who (or what) is "extended," into which environment, and across which borders and boundaries.[6] By focusing on the ecology of our media interactions, we can begin to understand our embodied and informatic engagement with our devices and the environment in which we act. But by no means is this relationship unidirectional. As

I will suggest later, the ecological perspective that I am applying to mediated action is very much interactive, providing a way of understanding how technology *engages us*, and how we in turn engage technology in a co-active system. To think about how mobile devices "mediate mountains" for human users is, in effect, only half of the story. We will also want to consider how the human user likewise mediates embodiment and embodied action for a digital device.

To frame this discussion a bit more specifically, I will turn now to J. J. Gibson's theory of affordances, which defines "action" in relational, organism-specific terms. Gibson developed the concept of affordance to help explain an organism's embeddedness within its environment, arguing that what an animal perceives depends upon a kind of mapping of an organism's potential for action onto a particular environment. This ecological approach to perception offers an understanding of how agents make use of their environments, and the sorts of interactions that give rise to ways of not only using the environment, but also embodying space through use. What an environment affords, then, is contingent upon a relation between an embodied actor and the environment in which it acts. When an organism acts, it likewise *makes actual* specific potentials for action that otherwise remain virtual. Thus, affordances articulate a set of relations between actor and world such that, in Gibson's words, "to perceive the world is to coperceive oneself."[7]

Gibson's work has had far-reaching impact, to be sure, most notably through a lineage that includes Don Norman's appropriation and expansion of the term into the realm of applied design.[8] Norman's work has provided the basis for a great deal of application in user-centered design and interaction design, but to some degree, the term "media affordances" has been used so widely in these fields that it has lost considerable specificity. For this reason, I would argue that when we deploy the term "affordances" in a discussion of mediated relations between actors and environment, it is important to keep intact Gibson's concept of an *organism-specific frame of action*. Doing so forces us to acknowledge not only how our mediated interactions give rise to potentials for action but also the boundaries that mark this structural coupling and the processes that mediate action across these apparent boundaries. This issue becomes critically important when we begin to speak of "digital affordances." How can we claim that an embodied organism acts upon a digital environment when embodied interaction with digital devices occurs at a level that is fundamentally distinct from the level at which algorithmic and computational actions occur? Rather than suggesting that a mobile phone offers digital affordances to users, it strikes me as more accurate to claim that the phone-user interface marks a coupling between a human agent and a material environment that includes this digital device. I would also claim, however, that, at this point of interface, this digital agent is likewise engaged in a structural coupling within a data environment, which

just so happens to include a human user, functioning as an embodied "socket."[9]

This more limited embrace of the term "affordances" somewhat paradoxically allows for a more expansive understanding of both actor and environment that would include the device itself as actor, with its own potential for action within an environment in which those potential actions can be articulated. In other words, while smartphones, as objects within a material environment, have properties that afford human users for whom they were designed a range of potential actions,[10] they likewise possess their own potential for *digital* action as agents within a digital environment (such as database queries and data processing). From a user-centric perspective, this digital "substratum," to use Ian Hutchby's term, certainly impacts how a human actor can engage a device, yet the data-device coupling that gives rise to algorithmic and computational action does not afford human users the capacity to act directly upon a digital environment.[11] As the device acts upon and within a digital environment, however, it materializes and actualizes opportunities for users to coperceive themselves within an inhabitable space of information.

Similar to Bruno Latour's actor-network theory, this actor-centric framework for affordances allows us to explore what we might mean by an agency of devices, digital or otherwise.[12] Furthermore, this approach allows for a more complex understanding of how media ecologies operate, to the extent that we will need to consider not only how digital devices serve as an extension of the human, but also how the human user likewise functions as a material extension for the digital device. It also calls attention to how this "extension" in some fashion marks a border or boundary for each actor. In an attempt to answer the similar question of how this interaction occurs at and across borders between human and nonhuman agents, Kirsty Best suggests that we think in terms of "relational affordances," in which device and human alike "inscribe" each other as agents within a system of interactive dispositions.[13] As digital agents, these devices are acting upon a data environment, but these data sets are likewise coupled, through embodied engagement of a human user, to a material environment. What I am suggesting is not entirely in conflict with Jane Bennett's new materialist "agency *of* the assemblage," which expresses itself as process, at the point of assemblage, and which is irreducible to the individual agencies of the actors collected into that assemblage.[14] Like Bennett, I would affirm that "bodies enhance their power *in* or *as a heterogeneous assemblage*."[15] By focusing on affordances, however, I am attempting to maintain an actor-centric perspective on potential action while at the same time noting that, at this point of interface, that potential is caught up in a crossing marked by a data-body assemblage.

"Location," then, would offer a particularly salient mapping of affordance as actor-environment coupling by *situating* this data-body assemblage within a mate-

rially articulated sense of place. What my environment affords, when I engage my smartphone, depends upon two acts of structural coupling—one digital and the other embodied—that *involve* distinct actors and distinct action-oriented relations to data-as-location, as well as location-as-data.[16] Human agency gains access to an augmented sense of place by way of the information overlay materialized by these devices, as placeness is likewise mediated for a digital actor by way of an embodied human interface. At this point of double coupling and double articulation, material and digital agents alike embed their actions within this scene of material-informatic translation. In this regard, the device operates as an extension of the human, but, likewise, the human serves as an extension of computational action into a world of flesh and movement.

Which brings me back to mediating mountains.

I am the sort of person who will lose my car pretty much every time I leave it in a parking lot. My wife says that I am "spatially challenged." I am not sure if this is a real condition, but perhaps it explains why I have been so interested in how individuals experience space and place, and why it has been a consistent theme in my scholarship for the past twenty-five years. Another consistent theme in my personal life, for the past fifteen years at least, has been a commitment to spending a good portion of my time in the mountains. I live in Western North Carolina, on the eastern escarpment of the Blue Ridge Mountains in southern Appalachia. I enjoy technical climbing when I can, and, when I can't, I often spend one day a week in the woods, on a trail, ascending some peak. And when I am in the woods, my smartphone comes along with me.

I have quite a number of apps on my phone that enrich my experience of the mountains. I use trail-finding apps, GPS apps, rock climbing apps, peak-finding apps, and so on. While it has become commonplace to refer to these sorts of apps that provide information overlays as offering "augmented reality," I would argue instead that it is more accurate to speak in terms of "augmented affordances." As I have already admitted, I am indeed spatially challenged. But with a GPS tracking app at my disposal, my action-oriented relation to outdoor space changes radically. As I follow a trail, both under my feet and on my smartphone's screen, my device is quite literally materializing relations for potential action that are not available to me without the actions of this device within a digital environment. The mountain trail remains unchanged, yet in profound ways, my engagement with the material environment in which I find myself has changed considerably. I can now bushwhack confidently, explore cliff lines and summits where little trace of a trail exists. I act "within" a space of information that is likewise articulated within an embodied field of potential action.

Certainly, I could engage in a paper-based form of wayfinding, by way of a printed map, and make use of a magnetic compass to augment my sense of orientation. Or perhaps, if I were attempting to perpetuate that romantic illusion of an unmediated experience of nature, I might turn to those wayfinding cues embedded in the natural world itself and draw out my sense of location in nature more "directly." But setting aside such fantasies for a moment, and with an attempt to identify what differentiates a paper map and compass experience of wayfinding from one that is digitally mediated, I would note that, unlike the passive medium of a printed map, my digital device is engaged in a whole series of actions that are quite literally beyond my (embodied) reach.[17] While it may seem obvious to note that a paper map does not change with my movement through the space it represents, this simple observation highlights the different set of relations that exist between a smartphone engaged in digital action and a human user engaged in embodied action. Thus, while there may be important distinctions to be made regarding the type of digital device one uses for wayfinding, be that a mobile phone or GPS tracker, the distinction between *digital and embodied actors*, and the interface between these two distinct actors acting within distinct environments, provides a more salient frame for analysis. Likewise, while "mundane technologies" such as socks and boots and crampons engage and act upon each other in what Mike Michael describes as a "*cascade* of affordances" that alters the range of potential actions for human, embodied experience,[18] these affordances all map within the same *material* environment. In contrast, the augmenting of affordances that ensues for human and digital actor alike occurs at and across a boundary between two *distinct* environments—one digital and the other material. In effect, two agents act within and upon the environment in which those actions are embedded, yet each "extends" the potential for action across an apparently uncrossable boundary.

To help elaborate on this point, I would call attention to the ways in which my body interacts with my smartphone when using an app like *Gaia GPS*, and how this account differs considerably from most discussions of user interaction and "digital affordances."[19] The touchscreen provides an important locus of human-device interaction, and by engaging this interface, I can alter much of what my screen presents to me—loading different map overlays, changing orientations, expanding or shrinking the map image, and so on. However, if I want to change the location of my indicated presence on the map—in this instance, an orange arrow—I can only do so by moving my body in the space in which I am materially embedded. As I hike, occasionally consulting my GPS-driven app, I leave traces on a map that mark my ascent. At the same time, the device calculates changes in GPS coordinates, articulated by my bodily movements, and translates that displacement as output on the screen. Each agent, in effect, inscribes and enlists the other, at and across this boundary. My wayfinding

is dictated by my body's interaction with the world and the corresponding translation of these actions as data input for my device, which is then acted upon by the device to produce a representation of position on my screen's dynamically changing map. Each actor performs according to a set of possible actions defined through agent-specific affordances, mapped onto each environment in which they act. As an embodied actor, I experience an augmented sense of place by way of data queries and other digital actions that materialize as images on a screen. At the same time, however, my movement through space augments a digital environment for a digital agent, translated in and by the interface. But how do we make sense of what occurs *across and between* this apparent divide between two sets of environmental relations—one material, the other digital? How is it that I do, in fact, experience an augmented sense of place by way of this data translation? And can we likewise acknowledge that this digital device, left at home or in my car, would have an impoverished sense of *its* digital environment, were I not to take it with me on a mountain ascent?

As I have argued elsewhere,[20] we can extend Taina Bucher's discussion of "programmed sociality" to describe a *programmed spatiality*, in which the production of a lived space for human actors involves both human and nonhuman actors alike.[21] As Wendy Hui Kyong Chun notes, in our daily engagement with information technologies, we are inhabiting a set of relational practices that position us "within" socio-technological environments: habit as *habitus*.[22] If we accept, as Chun argues, that "habit is ideology in action,"[23] then it is my habitual engagement with a programmed spatiality—mediating mountains in this instance—that "hails" me into a set of relations as both an embodied actor *in* a material environment and as a constellation of data *within* a digital environment *for* a digital actor.[24] My experience of "the mountains" is very much impacted by my own actions within this natural space, but, to the extent that I am engaging in the augmented affordances offered up through this double coupling of human and digital agent, that environment is likewise altered for me by way of the programmed actions of a digital actor within a data space. "Trailblazing," for example, defines two distinct sets of engagements with "location" to the extent that my movements through space are constantly tracked and recorded and displayed on a screen for me. My own sense of how I move through an unmarked natural space, in other words, alters to the extent that *it has been marked* in a materially present way on my screen. Tracing back my own steps becomes a matter of aligning my physical movements in space with my marked location on a dynamically changing map rendered on a screen. Clearly there are boundary matters at play here but boundaries that are crossed as well through this point of interface between location-as-data and data-as-location: derivatives of the digital action of digital agents that are dependent upon a materially embodied human agent, acting upon an embodied environment in ways that are equally dependent upon digital agents.

While the account I am giving of human and nonhuman agencies as well as their associated environments resonates somewhat with Latour's actor-network theory,[25] my ecological account of augmented affordances, I would argue, aligns more closely with Don Ihde's "inter-relational ontology," in which humans and their technologies are caught up in a "mutual co-constitutional process."[26] Like Ihde, I am interested in this point of co-constitution—an "interface" (in Ihde's sense) of an embodied agent that gives rise to a "symbiosis of humans plus their artifacts in actional situations."[27] While a boundary exists at this point of interface, a crossing still occurs. Hyo Yoon Kang describes this symbiosis between embodied action and computational environment as a "hybrid agency," marked critically by a "continuous, co-constitutive relation" between information and the conditions of embodiment.[28] Questioning how this co-constitution occurs at and across the interface calls attention to mediation as an *ecological* crossing, giving rise to a materiality of the digital as well as an informatics of the body, much in keeping with Eugene Thacker's discussion of biomedia.[29] As José van Dijck notes, drawing on Thacker, "both body and machines are considered platforms through which activities are mediated, yet the materiality of that platform profoundly *matters*: information is embodied as much as flesh is computed."[30] An inter-relational ontology of affordances, like Thacker's biomedia, "take[s] us beyond the familiar tropes of technology-as-tool or the human-machine interface."[31] Thacker's emphasis on the body as medium and body as remediated through bioinformatic engagement translates here into another way of understanding how the body maintains its engagement with an embodied environment while at the same time acknowledging how the digital actors engaged in a digital environment transform the lived experience of an embodied potential for action. In effect, "the body you get back is not the body with which you began, but you can still touch it."[32] Thacker frames this body-technology relation as neither tool-oriented nor extension-oriented but, rather, "generative" within the biological; the body remains body, with technology "creat[ing] novel contexts, and establish[ing] novel conditions for biological components and processes."[33] I would argue as well for a reciprocal relation: the digital remains digital and, in its generative coupling with an embodied materiality, new modes of engagement emerge for data-driven action. The interface, then, marks a scene of co-constitution, a generative moment in two directions around this point of assemblage: what we might tentatively—if not hesitantly—call a becoming-data of the human, and a becoming-human of data.

I say "hesitantly" here in part to acknowledge that "affordances" and "becomings" to some extent map orthogonal relations. Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari discuss "becoming" as an "unnatural participation" that occurs along an axis distinct from what creates delimited subject positions.[34] Affordances, in contrast, orient action within that axis that *defines and determines* subject, actor, and agency (thus "to per-

ceive the world is to coperceive oneself"). By bringing these two concepts into dialogue with one another (an assemblage of sorts, to be sure), I am striving to account for both the boundary of action and the crossing of that boundary that occurs when I engage in this body-data assemblage. The boundary that is both marked and crossed between these two interacting agents, acting at the same time within distinct environmental mappings of potential action, would serve as a locus of what Deleuze and Guattari call "transversal communications between heterogeneous populations."[35] This locus likewise serves as a scene of assemblage: "multiplicities with heterogeneous terms, cofunctioning by contagion."[36] I would argue that "data" offers a site of unnatural participation for embodied actors that, in assemblages of co-functioning agents (human, digital) gives rise to a becoming-data of the human, much as "the pack" does in Deleuze and Guattari's becoming-animal.[37] If the interface (what Deleuze and Guattari would refer to as borderline or threshold) marks a becoming and a site of multiplicity, it does so "not by the elements that compose it in extension, not by the characteristics that compose it in comprehension, but by the lines and dimensions it encompasses in 'intension.'"[38] It is in this "plane of consistency or composition," marked by "subjectless individuations," that contagions and crossings can occur, to the extent that an agency of the interface expresses itself distinct from its co-constitutive, co-functioning agents.[39] In this moment of threshold crossing, Deleuze and Guattari argue, "the plane itself is perceived at the same time as it allows us to perceive the imperceptible (the microplane, the molecular plane)."[40] Might we include as well the plane of the digital—the data plane of computation and calculation? Can we add to the list of "becomings of bacteria, viruses, molecules and things imperceptible" the becomings of data and the digital?[41]

To move once again from theory to practice, and back to the mountains, let us consider a location-aware app such as *PeakFinder*, which positions users within a topographic map showing the names of mountain peaks, along with other orientation cues such as the path of the sun on that particular day, the user's current longitude and latitude, and their compass heading.[42] *PeakFinder* hails me to look "through" my screen, pointing my mobile device in the direction of a peak. Within this assemblage, one might ask, where is the interface—is it the screen I am looking at, the lens of my camera as I point it toward a peak, or is it my body positioned in relation to my environment? As a co-constituting symbiosis, I would argue, it is marked in this plane of composition as a crossing and contagion of data-driven action and embodied action. I experience this interface as an altered, embodied relation to the land in which I find myself. Ihde describes this process as a "material hermeneutics," whereby elements otherwise beyond human perception are made visible.[43] This translation across the interface—from technological sensors to a human sensorium—alters a human experience of the observable world.[44] Database queries materialize as output

on my screen, and I find myself surrounded not only by mountains but by imperceptible geographic, cartographic, and orientational information now made visible—and more importantly, perhaps, now virtually *incorporated* in my environment through a transformation of my potential for embodied action. But at this point of interface, my embodied actions are likewise part of a co-constituting process, a becoming-data of movement and position that is altering the digital environment for a digital actor. I am a socket for this app, positioned between datasets and embodied experience, as the device queries and logs my experience of these mountains into sets of data that position me—embodied and as a constellation of data—into the landscape. What I experience, as I peer at mountain ranges on my *PeakFinder* app, is a kind of a data overlay; at the same time, however, my body and its embodied actions provide a co-constituting material overlay for the data-driven potential for action of a digital agent in a digital environment.

Guattari describes these assemblages as "strange contraptions" and "machines of virtuality," a relationship that is "half-object" and "half-subject," to the extent that "subjectivity" is both marked and transgressed in these relations.[45] These strange contraptions of co-functioning and co-constituting agents are the basis, I would argue, of a becoming-other, a becoming-data. To the extent that digital media impact our potential to act, they alter as well the virtual in which we find ourselves, and in which we are located. This human-technology assemblage is never without impact in both directions, at and across the interface. As Michael notes, even the "mundane technology" of hiking boots "are not simple intermediaries, going about their business as innocent conduits, pristine channels. They too contribute to this process of communication—this exchange of meanings—by introducing their own heterogeneous messages."[46] In this "heterogeneous dialogue between humans and the environment," we mark a boundary at the same time that it is crossed.[47] The "interface," then, is not the surface it appears to be; rather, it allows for the sort of transversal communication that not only places actors within potential fields of action but also suggests other modes of being, other modes of action, and other virtual becomings.[48] This transversal interface allows for articulations of potential action, much as transversality stands in relation to the virtual: "a space in which becomings are truly creative—radically open and simply not what is now actual," as Gary Genosko notes.[49]

In this "unnatural participation," Deleuze and Guattari argue, in the process of a human "becoming-dog" (for example), the dog likewise becomes "something else."[50] If we speak of a becoming-data of the human, then, can we reciprocate and likewise suggest a becoming-human of data? Or is it more accurate to speak, in this instance, of a becoming-mountain? After all, "The street is as much a part of the omnibus-horse assemblage as the Hans assemblage the becoming-horse of which it initiates."[51] In this assemblage of human and device ascending a mountain, might

we likewise suggest that the mountain itself is as much a part of that assemblage? If the digital is involved in a becoming-other, perhaps it is not the human actor, which serves merely as an embodied socket, but the material environment in which that body is situated that draws the digital device toward becoming. In the multiplicity of data, the mountain itself opens its terrain to novel mappings—a movement of territorialization and deterritorialization—as actors digital and human alike find themselves in an altered environment of movements and flows.[52] We cannot apprehend how a becoming-other (or a becoming-mountain) of a digital agent might be experienced, but, from the perspective of the human agent engaged at and across this interface, experiencing an environment that is altered and augmented, my sense of potential action—my virtual ecology, to use Guattari's term—is indeed transformed: "I am no longer as I was before. I am swept away by a becoming other, carried beyond my familiar existential Territories."[53]

And perhaps it is the becoming-other of data that *matters* the most, be it on a mountain or a desert or the open sea. But does not the specificity of territory signify in this assemblage of hiker-device-mountain? Of course. Yet, it is precisely the *otherness* of the mountain that is most relevant in beginning to understand the interface as transversal. The mountain, mediated by way of this interface, provides an augmented environment of "embodied awareness" that is both tactile and dynamic,[54] expressive of a terrain that has been mythologized and symbolized as "extreme"—a *limit* in the mathematical sense of embodied human experience. Framed as a relation that is at once a becoming-data of embodied actor and a becoming-mountain of a data environment, this limit is not "conquered" as so many accounts of mountain approaches and ascents would have it; rather, it is a limit expressed as an irreducible, indeterminate form. The mountain matters, for certain, but the territorialization of data as mountain and the deterritorialization of the climber in becoming-data provide a terrain of inquiry that is both specific to what it means to "mediate mountains" and, likewise, a mapping that applies more broadly to "all" terrains of otherness.[55]

How, though, do we avoid that old and tired story of technology as a tool of domination? For if we are thinking of augmented affordances as a matter of expressing one's dominion over earth and nature, we have, in effect, left standing that stable, romantic subject: our mountaineer hero, conquering new heights, aided and abetted by his technological extensions. But I would suggest instead a more "minoritarian" perspective (in Deleuze and Guattari's sense) of what it means to cross this "transversalist bridge" between embodied experience and digital action.[56] If we translate Guattari's "coefficient of transversality" as a measure of displacement between a verticality of relations (human-tool hierarchy) and a horizontality of non-distinction between digital actors and embodied actors,[57] we might attempt to identify what Genosko refers to as a "transitional phenomen[on]" between these two agents

and agencies, a transversality that operates upon the potentialities of both fields of action.[58] Genosko, in reading Guattari's earliest discussion of transversality in an institutional setting, suggests that the "Master" position of the analyst is displaced from hierarchical/vertical power structures, allowing for an opening that shifts group relations toward more horizontal, deterritorializing interrelations.[59] This same displacement of the masterful mountaineer might likewise open a space in which we can shift two sets of power relations: one in which the tool in the hands of the human user falls entirely under human purview as a willful extension of human power; and the other, a relation between Man and mountain that creates a structure of dominance, writ large in American and other Western mountaineering traditions, that inscribes climbing as conquest, dominance, and an expression of masculinized power.[60] Rather, in a becoming-data of the human user through this transversal relation, the production of subjectivity is opened and altered in unforeseen ways, assuming one allows for such a coefficient of transversality, such that in mediating mountains, I am likewise becoming-other. This sort of group relation between agents and environments, and the becoming-other of each agent at the point of interface, suggests the sorts of "breaks and ruptures" from pre-defined subject positions that produce the "initiatic" assemblage.[61] Such a movement suggests a shift in virtual ecology, a shift in potential to act that ultimately destabilizes both the embodied subject ascending a mountain and the apparently stable and indifferent ground "under" the subject's feet. And might we also imagine the altered virtuality of a digital agent—a becoming-solid in the form of the ground itself materialized, which we might call (still somewhat hesitantly—but why not?) a becoming-mountain of the digital? Our virtual ecology alters through these "strange contraptions": a transversal shift in our relationship to both ourselves and the environment in which we act. At this moment of crossing, I become other than the subject that I was.

A becoming-data of the human, and a becoming-mountain of the digital, suggests both a shift in potential action within this assemblage as well as an acknowledgement of how actors engage within specific environments. As Genosko notes, "transversality may be best appreciated in terms of its praxic opening and the virtual potential it holds for subjectification."[62] A transversal understanding of affordances would, in effect, mark this same sort of praxic opening, marking the interface not as an extension of a predetermined subjective agency but, rather, establishing a virtual potential for new modes of being and acting. This relational coupling between user and device and between agent and environment is critical to ecological understandings of the role and place of media in everyday life, be that in the mountains or amid urban spaces. At the same time, this approach calls attention to the border itself between two environments and two agents, one digital and the other embodied. As Ihde notes, we are "embodied outward" in and through the environment in which

we act—and in and through the relations in which we find ourselves embedded.[63] We find ourselves in mountains, mediated. At the same time, we mediate the digital for actions that are performed only in the digital. What and how the mountains become depends largely upon our own becomings, our own interfaces, and the multiplication of potential actions within an embodied landscape.

Notes

1 "Experiences," *Digital Detox*, accessed August 24, 2020, https://www.digitaldetox.com/experiences.

2 "Our Services," *Nature Unplugged*, accessed August 24, 2020, https://www.natureunplugged.com/services.

3 "Screen Time vs. Green Time," *Nature Canada*, accessed August 24, 2020, https://naturecanada.ca/enjoy-nature/your-naturehood/screen-time-vs-green-time/.

4 Sarah Puckett, "Unplugging from Technology, Plugging into Nature," *Blue Ridge Outdoors*, last modified March 19, 2015, https://www.blueridgeoutdoors.com/hiking/unplugging-technology-plugging-nature/.

5 For further discussion of boots as technological mediation between embodied experience and environment, see Mike Michael, "These Boots are Made for Walking: Mundane Technology, the Body, and Human-Environment Relations," *Body and Society* 6, nos. 3–4 (2000): 107–26, DOI: 10.4135/9781446221266.n6.

6 Marshall McLuhan, *Understanding Media* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1994).

7 J. J. Gibson, *The Ecological Approach to Visual Perception* (Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum, 1979), 141.

8 Don Norman, *The Design of Everyday Things*, rev. and exp. ed. (New York: Basic Books, 2013), DOI: 10.15358/9783800648108.

9 For a more complete discussion, see Mark Nunes, "The Affordances of Place: Digital Agency and the Lived Spaces of Information," *Media Theory* 3, no. 1 (2019): 216–20.

10 I will set aside, for this paper at least, a discussion of the normative forces at work in those design decisions, the conditions of embodiment they assume, and how they determine both the "intended user" and the potential for use.

11 Ian Hutchby, "Technologies, Texts and Affordances," *Sociology* 35, no. 2 (2001): 450, DOI: 10.1177/s0038038501000219.

12 Bruno Latour, *Reassembling the Social: An Introduction to Actor-Network Theory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005).

13 Kirsty Best, "When Mobiles Go Media: Relational Affordances and Present-to-Hand Digital Devices," *Canadian Journal of Communication*, no. 34 (2009): 402, DOI: 10.22230/cjc.2009v34n3a2205.

14 Jane Bennett, *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010), 24.

15 Bennett, *Vibrant Matter*, 23.

16 This "involving" certainly holds parallel with Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari's discussion of "involution" and its relation to processes of contagion, coupling, and becoming, to

which we will return later in this essay. See Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism & Schizophrenia*, trans. Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987), 238–40.

17 The magnetic compass provides a more complicated point of comparison, I will admit, if we attempt to tease out whether it is the Earth that is acting upon the compass, or the compass that is acting upon the Earth's magnetic fields. While this point of speculation is worth further consideration, for the sake of this essay, I will bracket off this quandary for future discussion.

18 Michael, "These Boots," 112.

19 *Gaia GPS*, dev. TrailBehind (Berkeley, CA: Trailbehind, since 2014), iOS and Android.

20 See Nunes, "Affordances of Place," 223–24.

21 Taina Bucher, "The Friendship Assemblage: Investigating Programmed Sociality on Facebook," *Television & New Media* 14, no. 6 (2012): 479–93, DOI: 10.1177/1527476412452800.

22 Wendy Hui Kyong Chun, *Updating to Remain the Same* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2016), 7, DOI: 10.7551/mitpress/10483.001.0001.

23 Chun, *Updating*, 9.

24 Chun, *Updating*, 120–22.

25 It is appropriate to note—in a footnote—that Latour signals this connection in a footnoted reference to J. J. Gibson. See Latour, *Reassembling the Social*, 72. See also Taina Bucher and Anne Helmond, "The Affordances of Social Media Platforms," in *The SAGE Handbook of Social Media*, ed. Jean Burgess, Alice Marwick, and Thomas Poell (New York: Sage Publications, 2018), 242, DOI: 10.4135/9781473984066.n14.

26 Don Ihde, "Smart? Amsterdam Urinals and Autonomic Computing," in *Law, Agency, and Autonomic Computing*, ed. Mireille Hildebrandt and Antoinette Rouvroy (New York: Routledge, 2011), 18, DOI: 10.4324/9780203828342.

27 Don Ihde, *Bodies in Technology* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002), 92–93.

28 Hyo Yoon Kang, "Autonomic Computing, Genomic Data, and Human Agency: The Case for Embodiment," in *Law, Agency, and Autonomic Computing*, ed. Mireille Hildebrandt and Antoinette Rouvroy (New York: Routledge, 2011), 112, DOI: 10.4324/9780203828342.

29 Eugene Thacker, *Biomedia* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2004).

30 José van Dijck, *Mediated Memories in the Digital Age* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2007), 45.

31 Thacker, *Biomedia*, 6.

32 Thacker, *Biomedia*, 6.

33 Thacker, *Biomedia*, 14–15.

34 Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 240.

35 Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 239.

36 Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 242.

37 Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 239–43.

38 Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 245.

39 Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 266.

40 Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 267.

41 Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 248.

42 *PeakFinder*, dev. Fabio Soldati (Zurich: PeakFinder, since 2010), iOS and Android.

43 Don Ihde, *Postphenomenology and Technoscience: The Peking University* Lectures (Albany: SUNY Press, 2009), 56.

44 Ihde, *Postphenomenology*, 61.

45 Félix Guattari, *Chaosmosis*, trans. Paul Bains and Julian Pefanis (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995), 92.

46 Michael, "These Boots," 114.

47 Michael, "These Boots," 114.

48 To return to mountains and climbing, a brief non-digital example: I experience a parallel phenomenon when I free climb, engaged as I am in a becoming expressed in a human-technological assemblage of body, harness, rope, and gear. While I climb without "pulling" on the aid of any device to ascend, my field of potential action alters to the extent that I climb "differently" knowing I have protection against a fall. This example may seem far removed from what I am attempting to describe as a transversal interface, but it is, once again, an instance of an altered virtual ecology, expressed at and across a point of co-constitution that forms the human-technology assemblage.

49 Gary Genosko, *Félix Guattari: An Aberrant Introduction* (New York: Continuum, 2002), 75, DOI: 10.5040/9781472546449.

50 Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 258.

51 Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 263.

52 For a discussion of "mapping" vs. "tracing," see Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 12–15.

53 Guattari, *Chaosmosis*, 93.

54 Neil Lewis, "The Climbing Body, Nature and the Experience of Modernity," *Body and Society* 6, nos. 3–4 (2000): 58–80, DOI: 10.1177/1357034x00006003004.

55 We might likewise ask: Which mountains? Does it matter, after all, if we participate in this transversal interface on the Blue Ridge Mountains of North Carolina or on the North Chain of Tyrol? Again, I would answer: of course—but only to the extent that we are focusing our attention on experiencing the specificity of that particular co-constituting assemblage and that particular becoming. In this regard, and risking a descent into a vortex of singularity, we might just as well ask: Which moment? And: Which climber? Much as the "we" in this note—and employed throughout this article—can be taken not as an uncritical overgeneralization but, rather, as a provocation of sorts to enter into a (rhetorical) assemblage with the author, so too would I suggest that "the mountains"—to the extent that this generalized term evokes a terrain of otherness to both digital and embodied action—offer the same sort of provocation and calling-forward of becomings for embodied and digital actors alike, at and across a transversal interface.

56 Guattari, *Chaosmosis*, 124.

57 See Félix Guattari, "Transversality," in *Psychoanalysis and Transversality: Texts and Interviews 1955–1971*, trans. Ames Hodges (Cambridge, MA: Semiotext(e), 2015), 102–120.

58 Genosko, *Félix Guattari*, 71.

59 Genosko, *Félix Guattari*, 77–79.

60 For one account of this tradition of masculinity, "purity," and ascent in American climbing in particular, see Joseph E. Taylor, *Pilgrims of the Vertical: Yosemite Rock Climbers and Nature at Risk* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2011), DOI: 10.2307/j.ctvjnrvb3.

61 Genosko, *Félix Guattari*, 97.

62 Genosko, *Félix Guattari*, 108.

63 Ihde, *Postphenomenology*, 42.

Acknowledgments

Portions and fragments of this essay have appeared in earlier form in Mark Nunes, "The Affordances of Place: Digital Agency and the Lived Spaces of Information," *Media Theory* 3, no. 1 (2019): 215–238.

About the Author

Mark Nunes is Professor of Interdisciplinary Studies and Chair for the Department of Interdisciplinary Studies at Appalachian State University in North Carolina, in the United States. His ongoing research focuses on the impact of new media on culture, society, and embodied experience. He is the author of *Cyberspaces of Everyday Life* (University of Minnesota Press, 2006), which explores how the internet restructures our everyday experience of the public and the private, and the local and the global. He is also editor of and contributing author for a collection of essays titled *Error: Glitch, Noise, and Jam in New Media Cultures* (Continuum, 2011), which examines how the concepts of "noise" and "error" structure modes of cultural resistance in a network society.

Contact: Mark Nunes; Appalachian State University; Department of Interdisciplinary Studies; nunesm@appstate.edu.

Reviews

edited by
Eva-Maria Müller and Christian Quendler

Abstract

Danielle Raad reviews PearlAnn Reichwein and Karen Wall's book *Uplift: Visual Culture and the Banff School of Fine Arts* (University of Chicago Press, 2020); Eva-Maria Müller reviews Caroline Schaumann's monograph *Peak Pursuits: The Emergence of Mountaineering in the Nineteenth Century* (Yale University Press, 2020); and Peter H. Hansen reviews Julie Rak's monograph *False Summit: Gender in Mountaineering Fiction* (McGill-Queen's University Press, 2021).

Published in: *JAAAS: Journal of the Austrian Association for American Studies* 2, no. 2 (2021).

Reviews

edited by
Eva-Maria Müller and Christian Quendler

Uplift: Visual Culture at the Banff School of Fine Arts. By PearlAnn Reichwein and Karen Wall (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2020), 352pp.

Danielle Raad, Yale University Art Gallery
DOI: 10.47060/jaaas.v2.i2.127

The Banff School of Fine Arts was envisioned in the 1930s by its founder as the "Salzburg of America." Salzburg is home to an annual festival of music and drama where visitors flock to the Alps in the summertime to listen to Mozart and participate in the production of Austrian national culture. The Banff School was conceived as a metaphorical Salzburg, a locus of art and culture in the Rocky Mountains linked to notions of cosmopolitan Canadian nationalism. Located within Banff National Park in Alberta, Canada, the Banff School was established by Donald Cameron in 1933 as the Banff School of Drama. The institution has undergone several name changes: in 1936, it was renamed to the Banff School of Fine Arts and today, it is known as the Banff Centre for Arts and Creativity. *Uplift: Visual Culture at the Banff School of Fine Arts*, by PearlAnn Reichwein and Karen Wall, is a history of the Banff School during the first four decades of its existence. The book traces the school's inception and development between the years 1933 and 1974. It considers how, as an institution of arts extension education, the Banff School is intertwined in a web of cultural production, tourism, and conceptions of the mountain landscape in Canada's first national park. The authors investigate the ways in which the Banff School, a cultural outpost in western Canada, influenced the development of visual culture, public art, adult extension education, and the meaning of citizenship in twentieth-century Canada.

Both authors of this book are professors at public research universities in Alberta. PearlAnn Reichwein is Professor of Kinesiology, Sport, and Recreation at the University of Alberta and studies Canada's social and environmental history, specifically focusing on the mountains in western Canada. Her research spans environmental history, tourism, recreation, sport, leisure, and public policy. In Reichwein's previous

book, *Climber's Paradise: Making Canada's Mountain Parks, 1906 to 1974* (2014),[1] she considered the role of the sport of alpinism in the cultural production of national parks and mountain landscapes. *Uplift* is a logical continuation of this scholarship, treating the role of visual art in producing Canada's parks and landscapes. A mountaineering guide and interpreter in Banff National Park, Reichwein possesses intimate, bodily knowledge of the Canadian Rockies. Karen Wall is a Professor of Communication Studies at Athabasca University. Her work centers around the production of community arts and heritage, First Nations culture and reconciliation, and cultural and public arts policy. Wall investigates the ways in which cultural production shapes heritage, space, and power relations. She has studied artist-in-residencies, written about the links between the oil industry, visual art, and democratic cultural development, and published the first comprehensive social history of sports in Alberta. The authors co-wrote earlier iterations of components of their study of the Banff School of Fine Arts, and it is clear that well over a decade of research and writing has gone into producing this book.

Uplift is the first history of the Banff School of Fine Arts. The historical narrative presented therein is comprehensive and investigative. It is a critical history driven by clearly outlined research questions aimed at understanding how the Banff School facilitated interactions between art, tourism, and extension education to inform understandings of modern Canadian citizenship. The book is made up of seven core chapters between the introduction and conclusion. Rather than a chronological structuring, each chapter looks through a different lens at the major questions and themes across the decades under purview. The individual chapters can stand on their own for researchers looking to target their reading. Still, they come together to form a cohesive whole comprised of several different facets to the history of the Banff School.

Chapter 1, "Uplifting the People: Extension Education and the Arts," provides an overview of adult art extension education in twentieth-century Alberta, describing the broader social context within which the Banff School emerged. Community arts education and populist participation in cultural production were considered integral to the development of the economy and a modern democratic society. In Chapter 2, "Branding Banff: Arts Education, Tourism, and Nation Building," an analysis of the print and film media used to market Banff to the postwar middle class is used to show how both the school and park participated in the development of Canadian tourism and national identity within a symbolic mountain landscape. The Banff School was "an educational setting that worked to produce spatial imaginaries of place and tourism" (49). The concept of the spatial imaginary is further explored in Chapter 3, "Building a 'Campus in the Clouds': Space, Design, Modernity." This chapter considers the modernist campus architecture and the ways in which the built environment

urbanized the park and reinforced specific ways of seeing the landscape.

The subsequent two chapters include in-depth treatments of two subjects of visual arts production at the Banff School of Fine Arts: landscape painting and portraiture. Chapter 4, "'Wholesome Understandable Pictures': Practices of Landscape Painting and Production of Landscapes," explores how artistic representations of the Canadian mountain landscape, driven by economic and political imperatives, were codified and linked to a nationalist iconography. Like the mountain landscape, Indigenous people were subjects for the artists at the Banff School, who acted as "cultural intermediaries in the process of shaping notions of Indigenous identity" (170). Chapter 5, "Presence and Portrait: Indigeneity in the Park," treats the Euro-Canadian exclusion and erasure of Indigenous people from Banff and their subsequent reinsertion through performances and portrait staging for the benefit of artists and tourists. The final two core chapters of *Uplift* are about the teachers and students of the Banff School. Chapter 6, "'Leading Artists of the World': Teachers as Tourist Attractions and Pedagogues," explores the role of the teachers, while Chapter 7, "'Some Paint, Some Tan': Students Coming to the Mountains," considers the students. Artist-teachers are imported to Banff as temporary residents: their movement and instruction contributed to expanding mainstream art networks. The students, both professional and amateur, are also vacationers and cultural producers.

Uplift is richly narrated with quotes from primary source documents including student and teacher correspondence, administrative records, photographs and posters, newspaper and magazine clippings, and instructor curricula. Each chapter includes several grayscale scans of archival photographs and advertisements as well as extensive endnotes. The endnotes and comprehensive bibliography of secondary sources are appropriate for researchers looking to delve further into these topics.

The authors engage deeply with the circuit of culture concept, conceiving of the Banff School as a locus around which was fostered a regional circuit of cultural products, producers, consumers, and attitudes. This circuit was "a social reproduction of aesthetics, practices, and products that flowed from producers to consumers and back, with implications beyond the fine arts" (16). While the school did not produce a unique style of art, it reinforced certain ways of seeing Canadian mountains and nature and produced people who engaged in the circuit on different levels. The characters in the story include administrators, teachers, students, artists, tourists, and residents. These categories are blurry; one major theme throughout the book is the overlapping roles and complex identities of the people who participated in the Banff School in the twentieth century. Teachers and students produce and consume the mountain landscape and, especially the female students, were both tourist-artists and tourist attractions and publicity props themselves. As these themes are revis-

ited and exemplified throughout the book, the reader gains an understanding of the complexity of identity as well as the nodes and interactions at play in the circuit of culture.

Uplift is a history of art that is not art historical. It is a story of art production that does not prioritize style and individual works, nor does it foreground famous artists. It is rather a story about the impact of art education and the contributions of amateurs, women, and Indigenous people. The links between extension education in Alberta, the development of tourism, and post-war Canadian nation-building are deftly teased out from the historical records. The authors, too, successfully convey the argument that the selective production of visual culture at Banff reinforced the construction of the tourist gaze and a dominant, collective way of viewing the Canadian landscape.

In the conclusion, the authors are hopeful about the impact this book can have on discussions about the role of the fine arts and adult education in society. But how can we reconcile this use of the Banff School as a case study for ways to incorporate art and the humanities in public life with its role in developing dominant ways of seeing Canadian nature and identity? One outcome of this is the exclusion of coal mining and environmental exploitation, which tacitly allows these activities to continue by denying their existence in visual representations of the landscape. Omitted, too, is a discussion of the alternative service camps in Banff during the Second World War. Were the administrators, teachers, or students at the Banff School unaware of the forced laborers in the park? Further attention could also be paid to environmental policy in the twentieth century. What role did Canada's first conservation movement play in promoting art production or enrollment at the Banff School? These are some of the questions I was left wondering after reading.

Uplift is appropriate for both scholarly and popular audiences. It is a detailed yet readable case study for anyone interested in learning about the history of the Banff School of Fine Arts in particular, or the impact arts education can have on a nation's politics and ideology. PearlAnn Reichwein and Karen Wall adroitly weave together a wealth of primary source information to show how the Banff School was embedded in a complex network of interactions between national park tourism, art, adult extension education, and cultural policy.

Note

1 PearlAnn Reichwein, *Climber's Paradise: Making Canada's Mountain Parks, 1906 to 1974* (Edmonton: University of Alberta Press, 2014).

Peak Pursuits: The Emergence of Mountaineering in the Nineteenth Century. By Caroline Schaumann (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2020), 365pp.

Eva-Maria Müller, University of Innsbruck

DOI: 10.47060/jaaas.v2i2.141

Caroline Schaumann's monograph on the pursuit of peaks in the nineteenth century changes preconceived notions about mountains and mountaineering. Although *Peak Pursuits* highlights tropes familiar to mountain studies and does so via a range of prominent alpinists representative of the era, the book is a deliberate move away from a reading of mountaineering in the widely studied contexts of empire, Romanticism, and scientism. Instead, Schaumann, an avid climber herself, proposes looking at nineteenth-century alpinism through "the embodied experience of the mountaineer" (4). This corporeal awareness allows her to emphasize the ambivalences, incongruities, and paradoxes of the sport. Mountain studies has long established that mountaineering emerged at the nexus of conflicting discourses, but not since David Robbins exposed the sport's inherent contradictions has anyone shown quite such a profound interest in them.[1] *Peak Pursuits* approaches the semantic and affective powers of physical experience with the dedication previously reserved for analyzing scientific, aesthetic, and imperial alpine motivations. Schaumann attempts for the recognition of physical experiences in mountain studies what scholars such as Marjorie Hope Nicolson, Philipp Felsch, and Peter Hansen have done for understanding the aesthetic, scientific, and imperial forces exercised against mountains. She is less interested in solving the discursive mysteries behind the "many inconsistencies and controversies" (154–55) in mountaineering than in describing the materiality of climbs and showing how these physical sensations complicate dominant frameworks.

The book is structured into three parts and moves effortlessly between leading figures and prime sites of European and American mountaineering in the long nineteenth century. Part One follows Alexander von Humboldt's American journeys, traces his departure from "paradigms such as the European sublime and scientific enlightenment," and portrays a language of mountaineering that "oscillates between superlatives and negation, amazement and protest, exaggeration and humility, detailed measurement and silence" (16). Having set the stage for the book's "Humboldtian history" (4), which mediates between discursive contradictions, bodily sen-

sations, and narrative representations, Part Two offers a thorough examination of how Humboldtian ideals, molded by South American mountains, "shaped perceptions and representations of European forays to Alpine summits" (16) and consolidated mountaineering in Europe between 1787 and 1867. Sketching the sport's developments from Horace Bénédict de Saussure's quest for Mont Blanc to Leslie Stephen's making of modern mountaineering and all the heroic moments and mishaps in-between, this part elucidates the embodied dimension of climbing for scientific curiosity, commercial success, sublime reflections, and the celebration of the self. In Part Three, Schaumann assesses the North American bend to European mountaineering in a final transatlantic maneuver that demonstrates how "traditions of European Romanticism informed notions of nature and wilderness" and were subsequently conflated with the myth of the American West (234).

Each of the three parts and each of the ten chapters of this impressively detailed book showcases the life and works of one (or two) historical mountaineer(s), with an eye to how their varied experiences on the most attractive mountains of their time culminate in conflicting reflections. Navigating elegantly between the Americas and Europe, *Peak Pursuits* does more than trace the routes of nineteenth-century alpinists Alexander von Humboldt, Horace Bénédict de Saussure, James David Forbes, Louis Agassiz, Albert Smith, Alfred Wills, John Tyndall, Edward Whymper, Leslie Stephen, Clarence King, and John Muir; it is a comprehensive mountaineering history that contributes to an important transfer of knowledge between schools of mountain studies on either side of the Atlantic. Schaumann's broad perspective on material discussions of mountaineering confirms an understanding of the sport's emergence in international as well as interdisciplinary settings. For example, her unpacking of Agassiz's repeated references to Romantic poetry as an attempt to increase the popularity of his research results, or the way in which she honors Johann Wolfgang von Goethe's impact on nineteenth-century glaciology. In these moments, *Peak Pursuits*, an otherwise unconventional work for a literature scholar, strongly supports the paradigm that mountaineering is roped to the written word.[2] By reading physical experience through narrative expression, Schaumann exposes the global character of nineteenth-century mountaineering. She spans an incredibly dense literary network that reveals the high degree of internationalization in nineteenth-century mountaineering and demonstrates just how strong the ties really are between mountain writing, science, and athleticism.

Yet, the most stimulating contribution to current scholarship in mountain studies lies in this book's exposure of the dimly illuminated spots in the great show that is nineteenth-century mountaineering. *Peak Pursuits* takes interest in the fallen alpinists, the tragedies, the futile climbs, and their social struggles, weakened bodies, and failed marriages. The author also reads the ambivalent success stories of these his-

toric alpinists within a larger social network that is sustained by women and mountain Others who might not always be documented in the writings of celebrated alpinists but are written back into mountaineering history in *Peak Pursuits*. Schaumann dares to venture, also, into the uncharted terrain of same-sex friendships in the history of alpinism when she analyzes how the quality and intimacy of relationships between men intensified at great heights. By drawing attention to ambiguous moments on and off the mountain, Schaumann engenders a more comprehensive reading of what it meant and, perhaps more interestingly, what it felt like to climb mountains in the nineteenth century.

In large part, the value of reading for an embodied experience lies in teasing out the ambiguities and the genuine commitment to foregrounding material perception over theoretical frameworks. Except for a few minor signposts to Stacy Alaimo, Onno Oerleman, Alan McNee, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, and Richard White in the introduction and ecocritical echoes at the end of each chapter, *Peak Pursuits* develops its case from close rather than critical reading. This commitment helps us look beyond established theorems but also leaves unanswered the question of how these conflicting notions are discursively constructed and what these inconsistencies might reveal about human engagement with the alpine Other. Whymper's parallel praise and critique of mountain guides, for instance, might imply a socio-cultural landscape that shapes these assertions in addition to the physical experiences of the mountaineers and the physicality of the mountain. Morever, despite Schaumann's conscious decision not to employ postcolonial theory (293), the discipline's long tradition of unpacking ambivalence and representation might have supported—rather than obscured—the book's interest in the ambiguities of alpinism. A discursive inquiry into the emerging sport's contradictions might provide a sustainable investment for (mountain) scholarship and advance knowledge on the relationship between body, place, and literature for the study of other times and texts.

What this book's rigorous focus on the paradoxes of mountaineering achieves, in any case, is providing an impetus to translate nineteenth-century incongruities to contemporary alpinist endeavors. As disparate discourses continue to dominate the sport, Schaumann's detailed portrait of mountaineering in the long nineteenth century also offers valuable insights for the current moment. With its transcorporeal, transatlantic, and transdisciplinary perspectives on the emergence of mountaineering, *Peak Pursuits* entertains the possibility that the experiences of human bodies on mountains—of "seeing, smelling, and sensing different natures" (297)—remain crucial today. While the mountaineers in Schaumann's book are hardly models of embodied sustainable action, they find imaginative ways to rationalize quests caught in the tension between scientific curiosity, exploration, and awe. In this sense, Schaumann's scholarly ascent of nineteenth-century mountaineering history has us

wonder about contemporary conflicts in alpinist action and invites reflection on how we might be able to justify our own conflicting pursuits in the Anthropocene.

Notes

1 David Robbins, "Sport, Hegemony and the Middle Class: The Victorian Mountaineers," *Theory, Culture & Society* 4, no. 4 (1987), DOI: 10.1177/026327687004004001.

2 See, for example, Bruce Barcott, "Cliffhangers: The Fatal Descent of the Mountain-Climbing Memoir," *Harper's Magazine* (August 1996); Stephen Slemon, "The Brotherhood of the Rope: Commodification and Contradiction in the 'Mountaineering Community,'" in *Renegotiating Community: Interdisciplinary Perspectives, Global Contexts*, ed. Diana Bryon and William D. Coleman (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2008); Zac Robinson, "Early Alpine Club Culture and Mountaineering Literature," in *Mountaineering Tourism*, ed. Ghazali Musa, James Higham, and Anna Thompson-Carr (London: Routledge, 2015), DOI: 10.4324/9781315769202-18.

False Summit: Gender in Mountaineering Nonfiction. By Julie Rak (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2021), 268pp.

Peter H. Hansen, Worcester Polytechnic Institute

DOI: 10.47060/jaaas.v2i2.144

Julie Rak's *False Summit* is the most important work on gender and mountaineering in many years. The gender politics of climbing Annapurna, K2, and Mount Everest were recorded in nonfiction writing over the last century. For even longer, images of mountaintop figures standing above a sea of clouds (à la Caspar David Friedrich) have invited viewers to imagine themselves in the summit position of the sovereign individual. Rak notes that to substitute someone else into this position requires an equivalence, a form of physical embodiment, that often excludes those who are not white, male, and Euro-American. These challenges make it difficult for others to occupy this position which creates the "false summit" of the book's title.

Rak critiques these familiar images of modern man at the edge of a cliff by placing different bodies in the foreground. First are Bolivia's cholita climbers—women who have climbed Aconcagua and Andean peaks in skirts and hope to climb Everest—a story that bookends the text and provides its opening illustration. Rak later includes a photograph of Junko Tabei, Pan Duo, and Wanda Rutkiewicz, the first women to climb Mount Everest, to spotlight an intersectional feminism that contests the effects of nationalism, sexism, and racism that would view female climbers as inauthentic, ascents by a person in the wrong body.

The author demonstrates the importance of "mastery, of the body, the environment, and of others" (33) as a central theme in mountaineering, no matter the gender of the climber. This reading of climbing nonfiction amplifies influential accounts

by Sherry Ortner and Judith Butler of gender as a serious game or performative.[1] Rak notes that bodily politics in Himalayan mountaineering marks the bodies of climbers indirectly. Debates over styles of leadership or styles of climbing (siege or alpine) articulated a gender politics on Annapurna, K2, and Everest.

Annapurna, the first 8000-meter peak to be climbed, demonstrates the gender politics of climbing leadership in a French team in 1950, a British team in 1970, and an American, all-women climbing team in 1978. Maurice Herzog's siege-style expedition resembled war by expecting loyalty and obedience and resulting in the amputation of frostbitten limbs. Chris Bonington and Arlene Blum led teams that redeployed masculinity through counter-cultural discourses rather than break with earlier styles of siege ascents. Blum's *Annapurna: A Woman's Place* (1980) is a lesson in American liberal feminism's belief in gender equality as well as its blind spots.[2] Efforts to recruit female Sherpas to join the expedition assumed a universality of oppression and took little account of Sherpa culture. Ascents of Annapurna by American women with (male) Sherpas, followed by the deaths of two other Americans in a women-only attempt without Sherpas, led to a misogynist backlash in the American climbing press that highlights a longstanding double-standard.

K2 entangled gender politics in the "brotherhood of the rope," an ideal that emerged in a 1953 American expedition on K2 and symbolized a community of men tied together by masculine heroism and selflessness. The rope saves lives in an accident, but the brotherhood excluded and marginalized others who were said to be not "real" climbers. The cohesion of the 1953 American team stemmed from its social uniformity, Boy Scouts-like masculinity, and affective bonds between men that had an emotional intensity superseding language. In the 1970s and 1980s on K2, women experienced sexism and were viewed as sexual objects that threatened the brotherhood of the rope. Rak also offers a fascinating reading of Kurt Diemberger's *The Endless Knot* (1991), an account of his climbing partnership with Julie Tullis written after her death on K2 in 1986, which respects differences and recasts the rope as a metaphysical connection between climbing partners and the mountain.[3] For the predominant climbing culture on K2, though, the rope served as a proxy for a relationship between men that could not speak its name: "Rope operates as this sign of vernacular gender: it becomes a thing which stands in for what cannot be said about male love or desire" (139–40).

"Who belongs on Everest?" has been asked repeatedly over the last century. Following George Mallory's disappearance in 1924 and rediscovery in 1999, his body represented the "apex of modernist white British masculinity and its ideals" (154). Mallory became the archetypal figure who belongs on Everest. Close identification with Mallory's masculinity by later generations is deployed by more recent climbers as

evidence of their own right to be on the mountain. Working-class men, women, Sherpas, and others reworked earlier masculine discourses to assert that they belonged, resulting in narratives that Everest was in decline. Commercial climbing was criticized in gendered and racist terms that expressed nostalgia for the time when women and brown men were not on the mountain. Sherpas resisted paternalist and orientalist attitudes and Junko Tabei's memoir, *Honouring High Places* (2017), includes stories of other women that dispel sexist and racist narratives about Everest.[4]

Rak provides an extended discussion of the gender politics of the 1996 Everest disaster recounted in best-selling books and Hollywood films. By reevaluating competing accounts, Rak persuasively challenges Jon Krakauer's version that "places Everest firmly within a narrative of white male heroism acting beyond market forces" (195). Written shortly after the 1996 tragedy, Krakauer's trauma narrative about his experience contrasted authentic climbers and guides with rich but unqualified clients and dished out harsh criticism of women on the mountain. Rak finds correctives in documentaries, expedition transcripts, and other books like *Climbing High* (1999), by Lene Gammelgaard, a Danish climber.[5] These counter-narratives make possible new ways of understanding the politics of gender on Everest "not as a sign of decline, but of change" (225).

A coda strikes more personal and hopeful notes. After reading *Into Thin Air* (1997), Rak took climbing lessons in the Canadian Rockies and witnessed male instructors discounting suggestions from a female guide who could easily outclimb them.[6] Rak thought about the stories she had read and wondered why sexism is so integral to climbing. "That is when and why I decided to write about mountaineering nonfiction and gender one day" (228). This book fulfills that promise, which bodes well for Rak's concluding hope that by seeing how gender has done its work in mountaineering stories, "other stories of what it means to live and move in the mountains can emerge" (230). *False Summit* should be widely read and will have an impact in many fields and in areas well beyond the mountains.

Notes

1 Sherry B. Ortner, *Life and Death on Mt. Everest: Sherpas and Himalayan Mountaineering* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1999); Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1990).

2 Arlene Blum, *Annapurna, A Woman's Place* (San Francisco, CA: Sierra Club Books, 1998).

3 Kurt Diemberger, *The Endless Knot: K2, Mountain of Dreams and Destiny* (Seattle, WA: The Mountaineers, 1991).

4 Junko Tabei and Helen Y. Rolfe, *Honouring High Places: The Mountain Life of Junko Tabei* (Victoria, BC: Rocky Mountain Books, 2017).

5 Lene Gammelgaard, *Climbing High: A Woman's Account of Surviving the Everest Tragedy*

(Seattle, WA: Seal Press, 1999).

6 Jon Krakauer, *Into Thin Air* (New York: Villard Books, 1997).