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The American Ideology of Space

LIKE ALL OTHER ASPECTS OF HUMAN EXPERIENCE, our distinctively American ideology of space has a history, and I propose to sketch something of its origin, its later development, and its presently visible consequences. I call my subject the ideology of "space" rather than "landscape" because space is an essential component of both architecture and landscape. Architecture and landscape architecture are two of the chief forms in which we shape and experience the spaces we inhabit. The term *space* also may remind us initially that a landscape is a physical entity whose meaning and value we construct and for which we have a variety of other names: land, topography, terrain, territory, environment, cityscape, countryside, scenery, place. One could go on, but all of these may be thought of as forms of space—geographical space. Indeed, the initial European conceptions of North America—the blank white areas often labeled *terra incognita* on early maps—had more in common with our shared idea of space (an empty three-dimensional field) than with the received idea of landscape (a pretty stretch of natural scenery).

The distinction points to another attraction of the word *space*: its relative neutrality. It does not carry the inescapably pictorial sense of place that the word *landscape* has carried since it first came into the English language in the early seventeenth century. (The word evidently was borrowed from the Dutch *landskip*, which closely associated it with the emergence of landscape painting as an independent genre.)¹ This pictorial idea of space was reinforced by eighteenth-century devotees of natural scenery, who developed elaborate theoretical distinctions among beautiful, sublime, and picturesque landscapes and representations thereof. By that time, *landscape* had become the essentially aesthetic concept it still is. *Space*, on the other hand, invites consideration of the actual state of the nation's terrain. The term may help to remind us of the differences among (1) ideas and images of topography, or its subjective existence; (2) the relatively small sector of the national terrain that might be called the designed landscape, consisting of deliberately planned gardens, parks, nature reserves, housing developments, and suburbs; and (3) the rest of the national terrain, most of which consists of a "built environment" shaped by the countless uncoordinated decisions of governmental bodies, firms, and individuals, and by the operation of various markets, especially that of real estate. I particularly want to emphasize the contrast between the small sector of the terrain shaped by the design professions—architecture, urban planning, and landscape architecture—and the rest of the nation-

al terrain, an immense unplanned area where the consequences of the prevailing American ideology of space are massively exhibited. This area is shaped by the decisions—in large measure market-driven—of countless real-estate investors, speculators, and developers.

My purpose, then, is first to consider the genesis of the ideology in the era of exploration and colonization, when Europeans began moving into the vast "deserts" of North America; second, to sketch the emergence, and relative importance, of three variants of that ideology—three more or less distinct ways of locating meaning, value, and social purpose in American space; and finally, to suggest where we are in America today, and where we seem to be heading, in our treatment of space.

THE MYTH OF AMERICAN ORIGINS

Anthropologists tell us that most self-conscious peoples possess a myth of national origins with a narrative core, and according to the American myth, our nation owes its being to the journey of Europeans from the Old to the New World. Among the features of our collective self-conception derived from that transatlantic migration is what the image geographers call a shared mental map. A nation's mental map, like the famous Bostonian's map of the United States (where that city fills a third of the national terrain and its western suburbs border on Chicago), is a shared, expressive, highly distorted representation of a people's actual geographic situation. It is a mental map, in other words, because the literal, objective geographic image has been reshaped by shared assumptions, beliefs, or ideology.²

The first principle of the American ideology of space derives from the initial European impression of the boundless immensity and seeming emptiness, or ahistorical character, of the New World. During the era of discovery, exploration, and settlement, the actual maps, with their conspicuous blank sectors and missing boundaries, comported with the European conception of North America as a vast, unbounded expanse of largely uninhabited, unclaimed, but potentially valuable space. The actual boundaries of the continent were, of course, unknown, and except for the land nearest the coast, so were the topographical details. The white interior space on the map reinforced the impression that this newly discovered place was nothing but raw nature, a cultural vacancy untouched by history and waiting to be filled by migrating Europeans. Of course, this view of the New World took little or no account of the Native Americans, but awareness of their presence did not conflict with the idea that North America consisted of little more than empty space: to most Europeans the "Indians," like other nonwhite peoples encountered by Europeans on other continents, were "savages" and hence not human, which is to say that they were a part of nature, not of civilization.

Another source of the emergent ideology of space, in addition to the perception of North America's immensity and cultural vacancy, was the sharp contrast between the built environment of the Old World and the unbuilt, or "natural," environment of the New World. For centuries most of Europe's habitable land had been preempted—owned or controlled—by privileged minorities. Thus the typical map of Europe revealed as much, perhaps more, about the alignment of human (political) power as

it did about topography. It depicted a continent that had long since been dominated by the process of reproducing social institutions, or "civilization," whereas the unlined, unbounded map of North America figured forth a world still under the control of nature.

This early version of the American mental map, with its graphic opposition between an old, established civilization to the east and raw, unimproved nature to the west, provided the symbolic setting for the myth of national origins whose narrative core was a journey from east to west. That we are dealing with a "myth," in Roland Barthes's semiotic sense of the word—as a second-order discourse, which distorts or deforms the significance that signs possess in the ordinary first-order semiological system—becomes evident if, for instance, we consider the density of meaning compressed into the three-word account of our national beginnings that young Americans learn in school: "Columbus discovered America." The myth imparts immense creative power to the westward movement of Europeans: indeed, other places and peoples acquire a meaningful existence only if and when they have been incorporated into the consciousness of Western civilization. It is striking, once we recognize the weight of implication borne by the seemingly innocent verb *discovered*, drenched as it is in the Eurocentric presumptions of white racial superiority and domination, to recall that this implication was seldom noticed, much less challenged, before the heightened awareness of racial bias that accompanied the civil-rights movement of the 1960s.⁴

The transatlantic voyage was an indispensable feature of the myth, but the voyage was susceptible to divergent interpretations. Its significance varied according to the sector of the mental map identified with the highest values and meanings. The dominant version of the myth, exemplified by the mini-history lesson "Columbus discovered America," depicts the voyage as a potentially triumphant advance of civilization. Here civilization is chiefly associated with its presumed positive qualities: organized religion; cities; literacy; knowledge of, and power over, nature, as represented by the latest advances in science and technology; social order; civility; literature; and art. The chief focus of value, accordingly, lies to the east, identified at the outset with Rome and the other great capitals of Europe and, later, after the establishment of the first colonies, with the built environment along the eastern seaboard of North America. In this utilitarian interpretation of the myth, nature (the white on the map, empty space, untapped resources, land uninhabited save for the savages) is a "howling wilderness." Its manifest destiny is to be discovered, subdued, and settled—made useful—by arriving Europeans.

Here, then, is the genesis of what was to be the dominant version of the American ideology of space. The utilitarian bias was buttressed by the strong Protestant sense of the natural world as lawless, unredeemed, or satanic. The seventeenth-century New England Puritans, who were bent on building a model Christian community, a city on a hill for all the world to see, took seriously the biblical injunction to subdue the earth and exercise dominion over all its creatures. (In their lexicon, *nature* and *natural* referred to that which existed in a fallen state: for example, the state of the soul before receiving grace.) Their viewpoint exemplifies the extreme anthropocentrism

that Lynn White, the distinguished historian of science, attributed to Judeo-Christian theology. In an influential essay, White argued that of all the great world religions, Christianity encourages least respect for the environment or, put differently, it lends most credibility to the idea that nature exists only to serve humanity.⁵ The dominance of this utilitarian bias is reflected in the many accounts of North America by arriving Europeans that, far from describing the appearance of the natural landscape, merely consist of unadorned lists or inventories of forests, flora, fauna, minerals, and other resources of potential use to Europeans.⁶

John Locke, the philosopher who probably had the greatest influence on the men who founded the American republic, added economic specificity to this utilitarian concept of space. His famous statement, "In the beginning, all the world was America," often has been quoted out of context by American historians (including myself), with the misleading implication that Locke was calling attention to the general resemblance between the uncolonized state of North America and the prehistoric state of the world.⁷ Locke's actual point in the chapter "Of Property" in his widely read *Second Treatise on Civil Government* (1690), however, is far more specific and revealing: namely, that incorporation into an economy, or commodity exchange, is a necessary precondition for imparting value to anything, including land:

Where there is not something both lasting and scarce, and so valuable to be hoarded up, there men will not be apt to enlarge their possessions of land, were it never so rich, never so free for them to take; for I ask, what would a man value ten thousand or a hundred thousand acres of excellent land, ready cultivated in the middle of the inland parts of America, where he had no hopes of commerce with other parts of the world, to draw money to him by the sale of the product? It would not be worth the enclosing, and we should see him give up again to the wild common of nature whatever was more than would supply the conveniences of life to be had there for him and his family.

Thus in the beginning all the world was America....⁸

Land in North America, according to Locke, is destined to remain worthless until it acquires the status of a commodity in a market or capitalist economy. With the image of America as boundless, scaleless space in mind, he was able to contemplate the possibility, unimaginable in Europe, that fertile, habitable land could be so abundant as to lack value. The importance of this commodity-exchange facet of the American ideology of space cannot be exaggerated. It is particularly revealing when we consider the state of the American landscape today, in the afterglow of the Reagan era. The principle of "letting the market decide" (with relatively few constraints) how we allocate and use the land was latent in the dominant American ideology of space from the beginning. We also are reminded that many of the delightful parks and landscape gardens we encounter in European cities survive from the era antedating the reign of the market and the commodification of land.

So much, then, for the first and most influential, or utilitarian, account of

lar construct is formed by contrasting the appealing aspects of civilization with the threatening aspects of nature, whereas the western (freedom of nature) pole is formed by reversing the terms and contrasting the negative aspects of civilization with the attractions of the natural.

10. For a useful summary of this view of pastoral origins, see David Halperin, *Before Pastoral: Theocritus and the Ancient Tradition of Bucolic Poetry* (New Haven, 1983), pp. 85–117; on the application of this view to American thought, see Leo Marx, "Pastoralism in America," in *Ideology and Classic American Literature*, ed. Sacvan Bercovitch and Myra Jehlen (Cambridge, 1986), pp. 36–69.

11. Thomas Jefferson, "Query XIX," in *Notes on the State of Virginia*, ed. William Peden (Chapel Hill, 1955); for a more detailed analysis of Jefferson's pastoralism, and of the widely held idea of America as a republic of the middle landscape, see Marx, *The Machine in the Garden*.

12. See Kenneth W. Maddox, "Asher B. Durand's Progress: The Advance of Civilization and the Vanishing American," in *The Railroad in American Art: Representations of Technological Change*, ed. Susan Danly and Leo Marx (Cambridge, Mass., 1988), pp. 51–69.

13. Thomas Cole, "Essay on American Scenery," in *The American Landscape: A Critical Anthology of Prose and Poetry*, ed. John Cannon (New York, 1973), pp. 568–78.

14. Actually, the railroad never did operate with a steam locomotive. For the details, see Kenneth W. Maddox *The Railroad in the American Landscape*, ed. Susan Danly and Leo Marx (Wellesley, Mass., 1981), pp. 17–33.

15. Novak, *Nature and Culture*, pp. 162–36.

16. For a fuller discussion of these paintings, see Leo Marx, "The Railroad-in-the-Landscape: An Iconological Reading of a Theme in American Art," in *The Railroad in American Art*, pp. 183–208.

17. Ralph Waldo Emerson, *The Complete Essays and Other Writings* (New York, 1956), p. 312.

18. Fredenck Law Olmsted, "Public Parks and the Enlargement of Towns," *American Social Science Association* (Cambridge, Mass., 1870), quoted by Robert Fishman, *Bourgeois Utopias: The Rise and Fall of Suburbia* (New York, 1987), pp. 127–28.

19. "Shakespeare's Judgement Equal to his Genius," in *The Selected Poetry and Prose of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, ed. Donald A. Stauffer (New York, 1951), pp. 423–33.

20. For a lucid explanation of Sullivan's theory, see Lewis Mumford, *The Brown Decades: A Study of the Arts in America 1865–1895* (New York, 1971), pp. 64–75; for a recent critique of Sullivan's theory, see David S. Andrew, *Louis Sullivan: The Present Against the Past, and the Polemics of Modern Architecture* (New York, 1985).

21. "Lewis Mumford: Prophet of Organicism," in *Lewis Mumford: Public Intellectual*, ed. Agatha Hughes and Thomas Hughes (New York, 1990), pp. 164–80.

22. Quoted by Mumford, *The Brown Decades*, pp. 46–47.

23. Mumford, "The Case against Modern Architecture," reprinted in Donald L. Miller, *The Lewis Mumford Reader* (New York, 1986), pp. 74–75. My sense of Mumford's later career is that he became obsessed with what he saw as humanity's losing struggle with "mechanism," especially as manifested in the nuclear-arms race; his two-volume apocalyptic jeremiad, *The Myth of the Machine*, an admirable work in many ways, also is a testimonial to the difficulty of applying the organic principle to the operation of large institutions, and especially the state.

24. Joel Garreau, *The Emerging Cities of Washington*, Washington Post Reprint Series, March 8, 1987; June 14, 1987; Nov. 29–Dec. 1, 1987; and June 19–20, 1988.

25. John Herbers, *The New Heartland: America's Flight Beyond the Suburbs and How It Is Changing Our Future* (New York, 1986). See also William K. Stevens, "A Rural Landscape, But an Urban Boom," *New York Times*, August 8, 1988, p. 1. This is an account of more than five hundred rural counties in the United States whose population has grown, through the in-migration of largely affluent families from the suburbs, by almost fourteen percent in the 1980s in a process comparable to the gentrification of old urban neighborhoods.

26. A characteristic example of suburbia is to be found in Nash County, North Carolina, whose 589 square miles contain 120 industries and no cities. Kenneth T. Jackson, *Craigslist Frontier: The Suburbanization of the United States* (New York, 1985), p. 296.

27. *Ibid.*, p. 296.

CAROLINE CONSTANT

From the Virgilian Dream to Chandigarh: Le Corbusier and the Modern Landscape

LE CORBUSIER'S CONTRIBUTION TO THE MODERN landscape has drawn little critical attention, since the landscape was not a primary concern of either the modern movement or his particular theoretical position.¹ Nevertheless, his design for the capital complex at Chandigarh may be the modern era's most convincing testimony to the integration of architecture and landscape. There he recovered a spirit of inquiry that has been pursued only intermittently since the eighteenth century, when architecture and landscape emerged as separate disciplines. Le Corbusier did not explicitly seek to reintegrate the two domains; indeed, his polemical theories tended to disrupt the traditional connections between them. Rather, his persistent desire to reconcile man, nature, and cosmos through architecture ultimately led to his broader concern for the designed landscape. This important aspect of Le Corbusier's work exemplifies a current within modernism that falls outside its polemical boundaries yet evolves out of its utopian aims.

Le Corbusier rarely wrote about landscape. Moreover, his interest in assimilating traditional landscape principles in a manner appropriate to the new age, evident in his early Purist buildings, is often belied by the images he used to publicize them. Such discrepancies between his polemics and his built work, often pointed out in criticism, have obscured the role of landscape in Le Corbusier's work.²

He ultimately achieved this reconciliation of architecture and landscape through his designs rather than his polemical writings. His attitude toward the landscape developed in no single, consistent line. Rather than start from a set of rules that invert historical principles, as he claimed of his architecture, Le Corbusier often appropriated historical landscape techniques directly, questioning them only in later projects. If his architecture derived from *a priori* theoretical concerns, his attitude toward the landscape evolved *a posteriori* from practice. Though his treatment of the landscape was initially eclectic and schematic, it evolved to encompass a symbolic dimension. Only after his architecture transcended its seeming negation of history, and his landscape its diagrammatic relationship to history, could the two domains meet in conceptual unity.

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For migrants to such places, the chief attraction seems to be that of jobs in the new high-tech industries. Single-family houses on relatively large plots of land close to open spaces and outdoor recreation also satisfy the needs of prospective workers in the new industries, the self-employed (working in the new electronic cottage industries), and the retired. These areas also offer escape from the crime and racial conflict, and the other assorted discomforts (smog, noise, traffic congestion) of the city, as well as escape from the many constraints, such as high rents and high taxes, that now typify both the suburbs and the cities. For the management of the characteristically high-tech, small-scale firms specializing in customized production that locate along rural freeways, the chief attractions seem to be plentiful, inexpensive land; low taxes; a more skilled, homogeneous, nonunion labor force; and fewer governmental regulations and restrictions.

A striking feature of ruburbia is the highly dispersed, decentralized, noncommunal pattern of settlement itself. In the counties where ruburbia has emerged, it is not unusual to find that many new industries have been established in the last ten years and that the population has increased markedly (as much as 300 or 400 percent between 1978 and 1988), but that there has been little if any corresponding growth in the size of towns or cities. Some new growth counties in North Carolina and Arizona have populations as high as 200,000 yet have no single city or town with more than 3,000 inhabitants.²⁶ The result is a new kind of decentralized community (if that is not an oxymoron), whose built core may consist of nothing more than a "strip," or cluster of shopping malls, and a few services located near a freeway intersection. The regional school and church often are located, more or less randomly, along one of the nearby secondary roads.

The cultural, political, and environmental character of this new kind of settlement is not yet clear, but some of the preliminary findings are disconcerting. Life in ruburbia is even more dependent upon the automobile and the long-distance commute (often by both husband and wife) than life in suburbia. The prevailing mindset here is privatism, with its atomized anti-city cultural life centering upon "family values," a reliance upon the electronic media, chiefly television, for contact beyond the family, and unconcern for the welfare of the increasingly non-white urban majority. The prevailing political ethos seems to be antiliberal, anti-government "interference" or "regulation," or, in short, Reaganism. The absence of an organized community means reliance on private water supplies and waste-disposal systems. The result is environmental degradation and the careless, wasteful use of land and other resources.

Ruburbia and the low-density continental sprawl it portends exhibit traits that have been encouraged by the utilitarian ideology of space from the beginning. It exemplifies our continuing propensity to obey centrifugal impulses like those that first populated this nation; our willingness to allow the operation of the market to make crucial choices about land use; our individualistic tolerance for uncoordinated, haphazard development; and, above all, our irrational yoking together of a desire for access to the unspoiled countryside and a persistent disregard for its long-term well-being and survival. It would be wrong to imply that the ideology is itself the driving

force behind these new developments; rather, the ideology serves to validate the kind of behavior encouraged and rewarded by our economic system. "One need not be a Marxist to observe," writes Kenneth Jackson in summing up the influence of the economic system on suburbanization, "that outward residential growth in North America coincided with the rise of industrial capitalism and the separation of the population into extremes of wealth and poverty. The 'free enterprise' system provided incentives to land speculators, subdivision developers, building contractors, realtors, and lending institutions. When the economic system went into cyclical decline, as in the 1890s, 1930s, and 1970s, the construction of new housing and the movement of population into peripheral areas slowed."²⁷

With this new pattern of unplanned, random settlement (ruburbia) in view, finally, let me return to an issue raised at the outset. Can there be any doubt that the prevailing American ideology of space has done more to shape the national terrain than the ideas and practices of our most gifted architects, landscape architects, and planners? However much we may cherish the work accomplished by men like Olmsted, Sullivan, Schuyler, Wright, and Mumford, not to mention the achievements of all the responsible teachers, practitioners, and critics whom they inspired, the fact remains that so far as the scope of their influence on the transformation of the American terrain is concerned, all their efforts put together hardly begin to compare with the results of the countless uncoordinated individual, corporate, and governmental decisions made in accordance with the reigning ideology of space. And when, in addition, we consider the speed with which we now are degrading the global environment, the need to repudiate that anachronistic ideology becomes all the more urgent.

1. According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, the first recorded appearance of *landscape* in English, meaning "a picture representing natural inland scenery," was in 1603, just four years before the establishment of the first permanent English colony in Virginia. (That coincidence deserves careful examination.) The use of a corrupt form of the word, *landskip*, dates from 1598, and almost certainly is related to the vogue of landscape painting in Holland. See Henry V. S. Ogden and Margaret S. Ogden, *English Taste in Landscape in the Seventeenth Century* (Ann Arbor, 1955), pp. 5-6.

2. Peter Gould and Rodney White, *Mental Maps* (London, 1974).

3. "Just as for Freud the manifest meaning of behavior is distorted by its latent meaning, in myth the meaning is distorted by the concept." Roland Barthes, *Mythologies* (New York, 1972), p. 122.

4. I first heard this analysis of "Columbus discovered America" from Stokely Carmichael, a leader of the civil-rights movement, about 1965.

5. Lynn White, Jr., "The Historical Roots of our Ecology Crisis," *Science* 155 (1967): 1203-7.

6. Such highly utilitarian responses to North America are examined in *Views of American Landscapes*, ed. Mick Gidley and Robert Lawson-Peebles (Cambridge, 1989).

7. See, e.g., Leo Marx, *The Machine in the Garden: Technology and the Pastoral Ideal in America* (New York, 1964), p. 120; Barbara Novak, *Nature and Culture: American Landscape and Painting 1825-75* (New York, 1980), p. 3.

8. John Locke, "An Essay Concerning the True Original, Extent, and End of Civil Government," *The English Philosophers from Bacon to Mill* (New York, 1919), p. 422.

9. To put it in the simplest formulaic terms, the eastern (advance of civilization) pole of this bipo-

technological means to the achievement of a more harmonious relation with nature, or "the natural." In this context the natural is conceived, first, as inherent in the materials, and second, as a more inclusive, even holistic, sense of the object's function or purpose. The same principles are the bases of Mumford's historically precocious and telling critique, in his seminal 1962 essay, "The Case Against 'Modern Architecture,'" of the abstract, disconnected sterility of much modernist building. That antiseptic style owes its origin, he argues, to "certain preoccupations about the nature of modern civilization," and especially to "the belief in mechanical progress," with its "assumption that human improvement would come about more rapidly, indeed almost automatically, through devoting all our energies to the expansion of scientific knowledge and to technological inventions."²³ He rejects a large part of architectural modernism as embodying the spirit of the machine rather than that of organic nature.

The backlash against architectural modernism, as expressed by Mumford, replays a deeply rooted American conflict of ideas. It can be traced to the nineteenth-century opposition between the dominant culture (with its patriarchal view that natural beauty is a lesser, soft, "feminine" concern and its uncritical commitment to technological progress) and the adversary culture (with its belief in the need for greater harmony between the man-made and the natural, as exemplified by the Jeffersonian ideal of a society of the middle landscape). The persistence and recurrence of this tension suggest that it is indeed possible to speak of a single ideology of space in the United States—one that embraces the recurrent opposition in discourse and practice between progressivism and pastoralism. At times that tension has been resolved, or it has seemed to be on the verge of resolution, within this or that sphere of the culture. One thinks, for example, of Olmsted's urban parks or Sullivan's tall, ornamented, steel-framed buildings, but in fact those resolutions have been relatively rare, partial, and temporary.

The nation's overall direction in its treatment of space has been set by the dominant utilitarian ideology of progress and its associated tenets: the maximizing of economic growth, trust in the operation of the market, the commodification of land, and the individualist ideal of "success" marked by upward social mobility and the ownership of a detached single-family home. As a nation, therefore, we have zigzagged in that progressive direction, with the pastoral ideal responsible for many of the deflections from a straight course. Pastoralism has inspired alternative practices, both positive and negative: innovations like our great system of national parks, and constraints on the unchecked operation of market forces like the Environmental Protection Agency. Nevertheless, the fact is that the pastoral conception of American space has not issued in a genuine alternative to the dominant ideology, and probably never will, for it rests on too many of the same fundamental assumptions. Hence, concurrent with the dominance of the progressive ideology, we witness the repeated acting out of the pastoral motive—the urge, in the face of the growing power and complexity of organized society, to move away from established urban centers in the direction of "nature." In American experience this centrifugal impulse often has combined the desire to escape from complexity with the desire to conquer, dominate, and commodify the environment.

THE OLD IDEOLOGY AND THE NEW AMERICAN TERRAIN

What sort of terrain is the American ideology of space now helping to create? If it can be said to embody our future goals, where is it leading us? If I had raised this question thirty years ago, when I published *The Machine in the Garden*, I doubtless would have pointed to suburbia, which I then regarded as a modern, if somewhat debased, effort to realize the pastoral ideal. The suburbs, on this view, reflect a widespread desire not uncharacteristic of pastoralism, to have it both ways: to enjoy the economic benefits of urban complexity while avoiding many of its disadvantages. This situation is made possible by modern transportation, especially the automobile and the daily commute; by the characteristic suburban pattern of class and racial segregation; and by such additional attractions of suburbia, not readily available in the urban core, as the single-family dwelling, a more complete separation of work and domesticity, and a simulacrum of genteel rusticity. Although the growth of suburbia has been an integral feature of the massive urbanization of the last two centuries, it simultaneously represents a negative reaction to the complexity and disorder of life in the central city; in that sense it may be described as another act of pastoral disengagement from social complexity by millions of Americans.

Until recently, I say, suburbia might have seemed the obvious terminus of the American treatment of space, but that is no longer so obvious. To be sure, the suburbs have continued to grow rapidly. Between 1950 and 1970, while the population of the central cities grew by ten million, that of the suburbs grew by eighty-five million. Nevertheless, in the last ten or fifteen years it has come to seem more likely that the characteristic future landscape of America is to be found elsewhere, beyond the suburbs, in one or more of the new kinds of settlement that are variously being called exurbia; technoburb; slurb; edge city; ruburbia; the citified or gentrified countryside; or the countrified city.

As this cacophonous inventory suggests, the settlements to which these names refer have appeared so recently that their essential character is a subject of extensive debate. My impression is that they fall into two categories. First, there are the new urban centers that have arisen along the suburban perimeter of, for example, Washington, D.C., Baltimore, Los Angeles, and Atlanta. These are citified cores with at least five million square feet of office space, more jobs than housing, and more people commuting in than out daily. According to one student of the subject, as many as fourteen such new high-rise cities are emerging in the Washington area alone.²⁴

Second, there is a new kind of low-density-population growth that has appeared even more recently in the countryside at some distance from metropolitan areas. After a century and a half of decline, the population of rural America grew by eleven percent in the 1970s. This form of rural settlement, which I will call "ruburbia," does not fit any of our traditional categories of settlement: urban, suburban, town, rural. Ruburbia is being formed by the dispersal of industry, homes, and other buildings across two kinds of hitherto-underdeveloped terrain: the agriculturally least productive rural areas beyond the suburbs, and remote areas of sparsely settled states like Arkansas, New Hampshire, North Carolina, and North Dakota.²⁵

like the building of a railroad to the West, as an example of improvement or progress and, at the same time, as a means of carrying Americans closer to the heart of unspoiled nature. Much the same dubious blend of the two ideals is still used nowadays as a rationale for, say, building superhighways into the northern New England ski country. The fact is that logical incoherence is not difficult to hide in the presence of collective fantasy and myth. This is especially true when the illogic is reinforced by material desires and rewards.

A more important reason for positing a single American ideology of space, however, is that the utilitarian outlook, as subsequently reformulated in the idiom of progress, has dominated our thinking in this realm from the beginning. To be sure, dissidents who were unmoved by the pieties of utility, commodification, possessive individualism, and progress often have adopted the pastoral conception of space as a hypothetical alternative. But in the event, pastoralism has not provided a serious, feasible alternative to the dominant mode of thought and behavior nurtured by the original European conception of American space. That conception, to repeat, included a sense of space in the New World as virtually limitless; as having no reason for being except utility to humanity; and as possessing worth only when incorporated into a market economy, which is to say, only when invested with exchange value. The result is that we always have treated land, and the resources upon and beneath the land, as if they were privately owned goods largely indistinguishable from cotton cloth, pork bellies, or any other marketable commodity.

According to this dominant ideology, the chief means of investing North American space with value was the European population's centrifugal, often warlike movement—a "conquest" or "annihilation" of space—from an eastern, established, built environment westward in the direction of nature. This seemingly preordained movement was, as the popular mid-century slogan had it, America's "manifest destiny." Today we continue to enact that centrifugal process. True, it no longer takes the form of a westward movement of population across the continent, but in the modern era Americans have participated in a massive movement out of central cities into the quasipastoral environment of suburbia. A certain continuity with the old myth of national origins is suggested by the distinct social character that process has had in England and America as compared with, say, Europe and South America. Whereas the more privileged members of the London and New York middle class have tended to move to the suburbs themselves, abandoning the urban core to relatively poor, powerless, and non-white groups, their counterparts in Paris, Vienna, or Rio de Janeiro have done just the opposite. Whether the ideology I have been describing chiefly accounts for this difference is not clear, but it surely has been a contributing factor.

The tendency to fuse pastoral and progressive values makes itself felt in the more explicit theories of American space formulated by certain of our most innovative planners and architects. One of their chief assumptions, in designing parks, parkways, and suburbs, has been that access to the natural—to open space, sunlight, lakes and ponds, vegetation, birds and animals—provides an effective remedy for the sensory and other deprivations and constraints of life in the industrial city. Frederick

Law Olmsted regarded both the urban park and suburbia as "strongly counteractive to the special enervating conditions of the town."¹⁸ Olmsted's conviction that the successful park or suburb represents a "marriage" of town and country, a community in closer "harmony with nature," also makes itself felt in the thought and practice of, among others, Andrew Jackson Downing and Catherine Beecher.

A similar, if indirect or metaphoric, affinity with pastoralism is discernible in American architectural theory. I am thinking especially of the organicism that is traceable to Coleridge and German Romantic philosophy. The key to this theory is the distinction between "mechanic" and "organic" form; the form is mechanic when a predetermined pattern is imposed on the materials from without; the form is organic when it is innate, that is, when the form arises from within, as part of the object's development.¹⁹ This organic principle of form, which rests on the likeness between the design process of art objects and the growth of organisms, was first Americanized by Horatio Greenough and Ralph Waldo Emerson; then applied with stunning originality to literary form by Henry Thoreau (in *Walden*) and Walt Whitman (in "Song of Myself"); and most effectively translated into the language of architecture by Louis Sullivan, Montgomery Schuyler, Frank Lloyd Wright, and Lewis Mumford. Here again, adherents of the doctrine conceived of buildings—and the process of designing buildings—according to the metaphor of organic growth. Thus the potential user's character and purpose, the building's intended function, are seen as the germinating entity, like the seed or DNA of the tree, from which the structure's ideal form should develop. As Sullivan famously put it, "Form follows function," or "What the people are within, the buildings express without."²⁰

Lewis Mumford, a devoted heir and reinterpreter of this native aesthetic tradition, regarded organicism as a primary conceptual resource in controlling the forces of technological and economic progress. If properly understood and applied, Mumford argued, the organic principle will enable us to adapt technological power to those humane purposes he associates with the natural. For Mumford, as for Sullivan and Wright, organic form is an antitechnocratic principle of order, a principle that can and should guide the architect in subordinating the new architectural components (steel, glass, elevators, and so on) to the most inclusive sense of the building's or city's function. The principle thus would require the harmonious accommodation of each building to the site, each site to the city, each city to the region. As I have argued elsewhere,²¹ the central idea in Mumford's view of the world is the control of the mechanic by the organic, as is implicit in his approving citation of Montgomery Schuyler's praise for the Brooklyn Bridge: "It is an organism of nature. There was no question in the mind of the designer of 'good taste' or of appearance. He learned the law that struck its curves, the law that fixed the strength of the relation of its parts, and he applied the law. His work is beautiful, as the work of a ship-builder is unfailingly beautiful in the forms and outlines in which he is only studying 'what the water likes' without a thought of beauty."²²

Schuyler's statement exemplifies the most inspiring and useful expression of organicism. His organic principle is a native version of pastoral in the sense that its manifest aim, in the design of artifacts, buildings, and landscapes, is to subordinate



90. Thomas Cole. *View on the Catskill, Early Autumn*. 1837. Oil on canvas, 39 x 61". The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Gift in memory of Jonathan Sturges by his children, 1895

91. Claude Lorrain. *Landscape with Merchants*. c. 1630. Canvas, 38 1/4 x 56 1/2". National Gallery of Art, Washington, Samuel H. Kress Collection

The earlier landscape, with its lovely images of running, wild (rather than iron) horses and of a woman in the foreground offering wildflowers to a child, has a distinctly elegiac touch. Of the two, it surely is closer in its compositional features to a typical painting by Claude like *Landscape with Merchants* (c. 1630) (Fig. 91). I am thinking especially of the repoussoir trees and the resulting sense of a framelike balance of vertical and horizontal lines. (Claude also represents the reconciliation of bourgeois society—the merchants—with the aesthetic order of nature.) As Barbara Novak has noted, Cole's 1843 painting betrays several possible signs of his altered feelings about the presence of the railroad: a greater horizontality (the absence of the usual tall trees); and the stumps, the fallen branches, and the man with the axe (all received icons of the beneficial transformation of nature in the progressive ideology of space) in the left foreground.¹⁵

Nevertheless, the fact remains that Cole's partly concealed, diminutive railroad hardly disturbs the rustic serenity of this scene. Nor does it effectively undercut the prevailing sense of confidence in the essential harmony between industry and landscape. Actually Cole's painting is one of many American landscapes of this period in which a minuscule but conspicuous, often centrally located railroad is made to blend seamlessly into a pastoral prospect.¹⁶ Why did so many mid-century American painters produce work that ignored or denied the conflict—of which they, like Cole, surely were aware—between the new industrial technologies and the beauty of the landscape?

There are several possible answers. One has to do with the depth of their commitment to the form itself, which is to say, to the very concept of a landscape painting as an affirmation of pastoral harmony between society and nature; another has to do with the intimidating social power, the virtual hegemony, exercised by the national faith in progress. The wealthy patrons of landscape painting, including the railroad magnates who sponsored special journeys for artists, tended to be adherents of the progressive ideology. There also is reason to believe that Cole and several others more or less consciously adopted the strategy that Ralph Waldo Emerson had recommended in his 1842 essay "The Poet":

For as it is dislocation and detachment from the life of God that makes things ugly, the poet [or painter] who re-attaches things to nature and the Whole—re-attaching even artificial things and violation of nature, to nature, by a deeper insight—disposes very easily of the most disagreeable facts. Readers of poetry see the factory-village and the railway, and fancy that the poetry of the landscape is broken up by these; for these works of art are not yet consecrated in their reading; but the poet sees them fall within the great Order not less than the beehive or the spider's geometric web. Nature adopts them very fast into her vital circles and the gliding train of cars she loves like her own.¹⁷

Cole, like Emerson, seems to have believed that art could provide, by means of

a symbolic reconstruction of reality, an exemplary guide to social purpose. What poets or artists were able to represent of the subordination of power to purpose in words or in paint, society might emulate in fact—in the "real" world. If new technologies like the railroad threatened to destroy the beauty of American scenery, landscapes of pastoral reconciliation like Cole's 1843 landscape envisioned the possibility of quite another outcome.

The pastoral conception of American space, as exemplified by Jefferson, Emerson, and Cole, was in some measure a reaction to the dominance of the progressive view and to the fact of accelerating industrialization. In their effort to rescue American space from the harsher, more brutally utilitarian consequences of scientific and technological progress, a minority of disaffected or critical Americans endorsed the pastoral ideal of a middle landscape. Although this conception of space never replaced the dominant utilitarian conception, it was to provide a rationale for some of the most constructive thinking about and practice of architecture and landscape architecture, including the design of many parks and suburbs, and some of our most effective urban and regional planning.

THE FUSION OF THE PROGRESSIVE AND PASTORAL IDEALS

So far, then, I have distinguished three variants of the mid-nineteenth-century American ideology of space—the progressive, the primitivist, and the pastoral. Each version comports with a distinctive interpretation of the myth of national origins. It may be asked whether it makes sense, given the existence of these three variants, to speak of *the* ideology of American space, as if there were only one. I believe it does, although admittedly, the difference between the concept of a single ideology, embracing potentially conflicting modes of thought and behavior, and the concept of rival ideologies may prove to be a matter of emphasis more than of substance.

As noted earlier, in any case, the primitivist viewpoint surely did not provide a conceptual basis for a distinct ideology of space. Despite its imaginative appeal to artists, writers, and devotees of wilderness, only a tiny minority of Americans ever adopted primitivism as a guide to behavior. Even Henry Thoreau, who often has been mistaken for an advocate of a total hermetic withdrawal from organized society, was far from being a true primitivist. True, he insisted upon the indispensability of access to wilderness, but the chief locus of meaning and value in the world of *Walden* is the characteristic middle landscape of native pastoralism. The same can be said about most American thought and expression that withhold assent from the dominant progressive ideology. Although primitivist ideas have helped to shape our collective imaging of space—our shared mental map and our arts of representation—their direct influence on behavior, save for the creation of nature reserves and other measures for the preservation of wilderness, has been negligible.

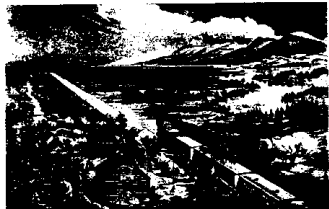
What makes the notion of a single American ideology of space truly problematic, however, is the apparent contradiction between the progressive and pastoral ideals. In theory and in principle the two are ultimately irreconcilable, but in practice that logical contradiction has been relatively easy to disguise and ignore. Thus, a stock rhetorical strategy of the Jacksonian era was to valorize a technological innovation,

and the oncoming march of civilization. At the center of the eastern horizon, from which the new power apparently emanates, the distant mountains and clouds are aglow in a kind of supernal light. On a peninsula in the middle distance on the right shore, Durand envisions a busy, thriving city of commerce and industry, with several plumes of smoke or steam rising from ships, locomotives, and factories. Closer to us, on the right side of the canvas, we see a train, its locomotive smoking, moving across a viaduct, a busy canal, and a wagon heading west along a dirt road—all serving to convey a sense of the inexorable, expansionary energy of progressive white European civilization.

The only possible note of discord in this optimistic prospect is introduced by the two Native Americans who stand on a promontory in the left foreground, gazing down on what must have been for them a dismaying exhibit of the white man's organized power and industry. The two "savages" stand amid unsightly vegetation: rotting stumps, twisted roots, jagged and tangled branches, and the skeletons of dead trees. This disorderly patch represents raw, unmodified, recalcitrant, death-dealing nature, or, to use a favorite New England Puritan epithet, the "hideous wilderness." Wild, hostile nature is the appropriate setting for these unfortunate "red men," often referred to at the time as "vanishing Americans" or an "extinct race" because progress foretold the inevitable "conquest" of the wilderness and its imminent transformation into a garden. In contrast to the display of the white man's power down in the valley, with its barely concealed genocidal implications, the Indians standing amid unmodified, unruly nature seem pathetically small, helpless, forlorn, bemused; they obviously are in retreat, and about to be pushed further back by the forces of progress—back, one imagines, all the way to the Pacific or, as it were, right out of the picture frame. Their presence evokes a pathos familiar to readers of Cooper, Bryant, or Whittier: a poignant sense of doom that is unfortunate but unavoidable, a doom that may, on reflection, be a consolingly small price to pay for the incalculable benefits humanity will derive from the future glory of civilization.

Fanny Palmer made an even more obvious, almost diagrammatic statement of this progressive ideology of space in her popular 1868 lithograph, *Across the Continent: "Westward the Course of Empire Takes Its Way."* Here we look forward, across the plains toward the western mountains, and the straight diagonal formed by the right-of-way of the transcontinental railroad slices the entire scene in two. This boundary line serves the distorting purpose of myth; instead of dividing the terrain into southern and northern sectors, as the transcontinental railroad actually did, the diagonal enables Palmer to invest the picture with the ideological overtones of the east-west contrast. On the near, more easterly side of the tracks, there-

fore, is a frontier settlement, populated by energetic, civic-minded white adults, who are busy chopping down trees and dispatching wagon trains off to the West while their children file into a public school. The only people on the other, more westerly, side of the tracks, in the great expanse of unimproved land stretching towards the mountains, are "savages." The natives nearest to the settlement, in the



87. Currier & Ives. *Across the Continent—Westward the Course of Empire Takes Its Way*. 1868. Lithograph, 20 1/4 x 27 1/4". The Harry T. Peters Collection, Museum of the City of New York

foreground, are armed, but they are about to be enveloped by a plume of thick, dark smoke; it comes from a locomotive pulling a train of cars that also is headed toward the Pacific. The message hardly could be more explicit: progress, as represented by the powerful new technology, will overwhelm the natives and help to establish a new white European empire in North America.

At the other end of the spectrum of attitudes toward American space, Albert Bierstadt, a leading western landscapist, paints a primitivist vision of unimproved nature in *The Rocky Mountains: Lander's Peak* (1863) (Fig. 88). Here, in one of the most popular paintings of the day, Bierstadt strives to evoke a sense of wonder in the presence of nature's elevating grandeur, infinitude, or, in a word, sublimity. Although the compositional structure is Claudian, the locus of value is not, as it would be in a typical Claudian pastoral landscape, a harmonious blend of nature and civilization. The only evidence of a human presence is the obscurely rendered, technologically primitive encampment of the Native Americans in the shadowed foreground. Bierstadt saves the preternaturally intense light of the sun, which dominates the picture, for an almost garish celebration of the forms of untouched nature: the serene lake, the cataract, and the towering, awe-inducing mountains in the distance. This image of natural beauty, with its suggestion of infinite space, evokes feelings of reverent awe and fear that an earlier generation would have reserved for a more orthodox, supernatural divinity.

In his response to industrialization, Thomas Cole, known as the founder of the Hudson River school of landscape painting, exemplifies a quite different, pastoral, conception of American space. In his 1836 "Essay on American Scenery," he celebrated the beauty of the national terrain, but he also took the occasion to deplore the negligent way it was being transformed at a time when "a meager utilitarianism seems ready to absorb every feeling and sentiment, and what is sometimes called improvement in its march makes us fear that the bright and tender flowers of the imagination shall be crushed beneath its iron tramp."¹¹ The iron tramp Cole heard was of course, that of the iron horse, the nation's favorite exemplar of progress and a particular threat to one of his favorite scenes. In 1830 a railroad had bought a right-of-way on land overlooked by his Catskill retreat. By 1839 some twenty-six miles of track had been laid, and four years later Cole painted the scene, including an imagined smoking locomotive, in his *River in the Catskills* (Fig. 89).¹²

In view of Cole's expressed hostility to such alterations of the landscape, his depiction of the minuscule, inoffensive railroad is surprising. The "ravages of the axe are daily increasing," he had said in the 1836 essay. "The most noble scenes are made desolate, and oftentimes with a wantonness and barbarism scarcely credible in a civilized nation." Yet here the train seems to blend harmoniously with the rural scenery. To be sure, when historians have compared this work with Cole's 1837 painting of essentially the same vista, *View on the Catskill, Early Autumn* (Fig. 90), they have noted some differences that may be attributable to the artist's forebodings.



88. Albert Bierstadt. *The Rocky Mountains, Lander's Peak*. 1863. Oil on canvas, 73 1/4 x 126 1/4". The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Rogers Fund, 1907. (07.123)

89. Thomas Cole. *River in the Catskills*. 1843. Oil on canvas, 28 1/4 x 41 1/4". M. and M. Karolik Collection. Courtesy, Museum of Fine Arts, Boston

American origins as a stage in the triumph of civilization over nature. As we will see, by the late eighteenth century this interpretation, identified with the highest values of European culture, was to be reformulated in the language of "progress." In the opposed, primitivist version of the myth—a second interpretation—the chief locus of value was the most distant, western edge of the mental map. Here the essential meaning and purpose of life in the New World is located as far away as possible, in space or time or both, from the great centers of European civilization. (In the primitivist version the most attractive aspects of nature are set in opposition to the negative attributes of civilization—political tyranny, economic oppression, war, injustice, constraint.) The desired destination of the transatlantic voyage thus is the pristine, unmodified state of nature associated with the "noble savages" of the frontier. Nature, in this view, is identified with freedom, spontaneity, authenticity; to recover the natural is to escape from the unhappy consequences of monarchical, aristocratic, and ecclesiastical oppression that constitute the dark underside of civilization.⁹

Unlike the utilitarian version of the myth, however, this primitivist version rarely has been taken seriously as a guide to life. To be sure, primitivism has inspired many works of art and expression, and in those aesthetic forms it has provided an imaginative basis for a telling, if often indirect, critique of organized society in general, and in particular of industrial capitalism and the heedless destruction of the countryside. No doubt the most tangible consequence of primitivism has been the motivation it provided for the conservation and preservation movements, the defense of public lands, and the establishment of national forests and parks. As we shall see, it also has helped to clarify the meaning of the third, intermediate or pastoral, version of the myth. The primitivist idea of America provides no basis for the life of a large population, however, and therefore has never been adopted by a significant social group. To most people, except for a minority of artists, writers, intellectuals, hermits, and wilderness preservationists, it has seemed a mere poetical vision or fantasy, not a live option or a feasible way of life.

The third, or pastoral, version of the myth has been favored by a much larger, if nonetheless somewhat dissident, minority of Americans. According to this viewpoint, the New World provided the first actual large-scale opportunity to realize the ancient dream of achieving genuine harmony between humankind and nature. Here the ideal locus of value and meaning is neither the overcivilization of Rome, Paris, or London, nor the savagery of the western frontier, but a "middle landscape" or "semiprimitivism," a *via media* neither urban nor wild, that combines the best features of each. This pastoral interpretation of the mental map is traceable to the idealization of the ancient Middle Eastern herdsman and to his role as a mediating, or what the anthropologist Victor Turner called a liminal (from the Latin *limin*, or "threshold"), figure, one whose calling required him to work in the borderland between civilization and nature.¹⁰

Thomas Jefferson consciously affirmed the applicability of this ancient pastoral ideal to American circumstances just before the Republic was founded. At that time, as I have argued elsewhere, he answered the question "Shall the new American

republic develop manufacturers?" with an emphatic No! "Let our work-shops remain in Europe," he wrote in the 1780s. "It is better to carry provisions and materials to workmen there, than bring them to the provisions and materials, and with them their manners and principles."¹¹ Here Jefferson was specifically repudiating the primacy of economic criteria in choosing social policies. His characteristically pastoral goal for the material condition of the new republic was economic sufficiency, not the maximization of production or consumption. "The loss by the transportation of commodities across the Atlantic," he explained, "will be made up in happiness and permanence of government." Here he prefigured the deep conflict that has become ubiquitous since World War II: that between, on the one hand, those who give the highest priority to economic growth and economic criteria in shaping social policies, and, on the other, those committed to less tangible political, aesthetic, moral, environmental, or "quality of life" criteria in shaping social policies. Although Jefferson later changed his mind on the specific issue of manufactures, he did not abandon his vision of an ideal republic of the middle landscape.

THE VISUAL REPRESENTATION OF THE IDEOLOGY

By the 1830s, with the advent of the railroad and the marked acceleration in the rate of industrialization, a new set of images—and a new vocabulary—became available for representing the dominant ideology of American space. In the Jacksonian era its proponents began to depict the advance of European civilization in the New World as confirming evidence for the idea that history is in essence a narrative of human progress. *Progress*, in fact, became the code word for an all-encompassing view of life, one that extended and refigured the primary, or utilitarian, version of the myth of American origins; it thereby provided ideological support for a rapidly expanding capitalist economy. Now the transatlantic migration of Europeans was regarded as a particularly revealing chapter of modern history, and history was conceived as a record of the continuous, steady, cumulative, virtually preordained expansion of human knowledge about, and power over, nature. The many new improvements (a key word of the period, as in "internal improvements") made possible by advances in science and technology explained why most people were better off (had a "higher" standard of living) than their parents and why their children could expect a comparable improvement in their lot. The special circumstances of American life, the very idea of building a new nation in a virgin land, made the landscape a visible register of history and of progress.

A telling pictorial inscription of this belief system is Asher Durand's 1853 painting *Progress* (Fig. 86). At first sight this picture, with the framing trees at the left and the large body of placid water in the center, might be another conventional Claudian landscape. Unlike most landscapes of the period, however, this one depicts the industrial transformation of nature. (Durand himself had asserted that the greatness of landscape paintings depended on their success in celebrating the superiority of the works of God to the works of man.)¹² Durand situates the viewer to the west of this terrain, facing the rising sun



86. Asher B. Durand. *Progress*. 1853. Oil on canvas, 48 x 72". The Warner Collection of Gulf States Paper Corporation