CHAPTER IV

THE IMAGE OF THE WEST IN ART

Section -1

John Bartlett, chief commissioner to survey the Mexican boundary, sat in the crotch of a mesquite tree in 1852 and sketched the pueblo ruin before him. Dripping perspiration warped his sketch paper as he tried to capture the scene exactly as it was. The crinkled spots were nothing, however, compared with the changes that would come when the artist transformed his sketch to finished sepia drawing. The episode bespeaks much about art and the American West and most obviously the artist, when he was on the scene, faced immense where there was cold, wind, dust, glare, or rain. Second, Bartlett, like so many others, strove to achieve documentary accuracy. Third, psychological, social, and esthetic values screened artistic behavior and triumphed over photographic representation.

As if he were standing in a hall of mirrors or in whispering gallery, the artist creates images, impressions, and evocations. So Robert Penn Warren envisioned the mind of the painter John James Audubon, watching a great heron rise from the cypress swamp in the bright red down:

Thought: "On that sky it is black."
Thought: "In my mind it is white."...
Dawn: his heart shook in the tension of the world.
Utilitarian purposes long dominated American art, especially when artists first moved into the far stretches of the West. A good example was Samuel Seymour, who drew from Major Stephen Long's expeditions of 1819-1820. Seymour was the first official artist on a western exploring expeditions and initiated a series of artists who would be enlisted in the cause of science. He was specifically assigned to paint Indians, to choose landscapes for their "beauty or grandeur," and to ferret out any subjects "appropriate to his art." Through these instructions, Seymour was invited to apply his own artistic imagination and style to the documentary job at hand. The marriage of art and science was constant in western exploration from 1820 at least until 1880. John C. Fremont on his expeditions of 1845 and 1848 engaged Edward and Richard Kern, two brothers from Philadelphia, to interpret visually his journey. The Kerns were scientists, having worked with men like Henry Schoolcraft and Samuel Morton in institutions like the emerging Smithsonian. But they were no less artists. Having exhibited in distinguished salons such as the Academy of Fine Arts in Philadelphia. When Catlin said that the wilderness was the true school of the arts, the Kerns would have rejoined that it was also a good school of science. Richard, for example, in redoing his field sketches, repositioned and Indian pueblo in order to create an illusion of space and order missing in real life. He would change the eye level in an Indian Kiva to convey an impression of architectural strength quite different from the fact. Furthermore, their sketches in final from in the
printed reports had passed through the hands of eastern lithographers. When details were missing in a sketch, the lithographer would supply them. Though suppositions distorted the pictures, tens of thousands of Americans accepted them as scientifically accurate.

George Catlin has been acclaimed as an accurate portrayer of the plains Indians before they were contaminated by white influences. His drawings of tribes like, the Sioux and the Mandans were filled with details of bone necklaces, buffalo robes, and eagle feathers-delights for future anthropologists. But behind the artifacts are the Indians themselves, gazing with noble dignity. The portraits are rich in character, showing magnificent figures before the white degraded them with whisky and the reservation system.

As a young man Catlin had watched an Indian delegation walk through the stressed that he resolved, "Nothing short of the loss of my life, shall prevent me from visiting their country, and of becoming their historian," Catlin's aim, however, was more than recording; he hoped to spread a message about the vanishing Indian. He opened an Indian Gallery, a traveling exhibition including more than three hundred oil portraits and two hundred scenes, plus some live grizzly bears and pantomimes of Indians scalping. Catlin also wrote a good deal about his consuming interest, and his prose, pompous and labyrinthine, reveals his preconceptions: "Man in the simplicity and loftiness of his nature, unrestrained and unfettered by the disguises of arts, is surely the most beautiful model for the painter and the country from which he

324
hails is unquestionably the best study and school of the arts in the world.” At times the Indian for Catlin is a poet lost in grief for loved ones or philosopher deepen contemplation or a Greek god of lithe and agile lime. Catlin admits that he is bound to his Indian subject in a “mystic web of sympathy.” This natural man greeted white civilization with a Lockeian tabula rasa, and Catlin would have imprinted it with white civilization. Rather, Catlin believed, the Indian should embrace the goals of Chestnut Street in Philadelphia or Beacon Street in Boston. He found it a dreadful shame that the only civilized people the Indians normally met were the dregs of society known as frontiersmen.

The most appealing scene of native life Catlin could imagine was an Indian man “smoking his pipe, under his own humble roof, with his wife and children around him, and his faithful dogs and horses hanging about his hospitable tenement.” Catlin regretted that in the natural state the Indian did not know the efficacy and justice of civilized laws or “the light and the grace that flow from Christian faith.” It is clear that Catlin found the highest good not in Indian but in white society, particularly, in an agrarian society firmly rooted in private property, monogamy, and Christianity. Karl Bodmer was the first of many artists to translate the American West into a European image. Bodmer’s patron in the West was Maximilian, prince of the small southern German principality of Wide. Maximilian’s royal mind had been tuned to natural science. The prince had examined the jungles of Brazil in 1815 and when he tuned his attention to North America, he sought the best-trained artist. His
choice was Bodmer, a Swiss who prepared for his assignment by examining every western collection available, like the works of Samuel Seymour and George Catlin. Bodmer, a master craftsman, was far more skilled than Catlin. Yet into his portraits crept the trappings of Near Eastern exoticism, and his Indians sometimes appeared suspiciously fiendish.

Alfred Jacob Miller, with Catlin and Bodmer one of the earliest delineators of the plains and Rockies, as young man studies in Europe. The most memorable of Miller’s drawings, however, where not of scenes along the route but sketches of the fur trade in its palmist days. In his field drawings mountain men set traps, spun tales around camp fires, rested in the shade at noon, bartered for Indian brides, caroused at rendezvous. In general, Miller gave the mountain man as much detailed attention as Catlin had given the Indian. These first hand sketches were recopied, over and over, on large and small canvases in his studio. Each with additional subjective intrusions. In The Trapper’s Bride, the horse became a steed, the trapper an eager young husband, though he never returned to the west.

The 1840’s sharpened the European interest in the American West as an exotic whetstone for the imagination. Paul Kane had been intrigued by Indians as a boy in York, Canada, but his compelling desire to paint them was unsatisfied until 1843, when he first saw George Catlin’s Indian gallery in London. He had steeped himself in Rome and Florence, and the Swiss Alps had enraptured him, but
nothing hit him as hard as the image of Catlin’s Indians. Catlin convinced him that the Indians were fast losing their primeval state in the face of white cultural subversion. By 1845 Kane was heading for western Canada, traveling by canoe with the fur brigades of the Hudson’s Bay Company. Kane passed he next years of his life translating his sketches into finished oils, as sculptor fashions a figure from rough clay into polished marble. In the process he gave more dramatic stripes to medicine men, embroidered more handsomely chieftains, robes, and reassembled artifacts from various times and places for better an engraving of and Italian hunt scene. Kane often added neutral grays and dark browns to give the effect of works by old masters. Foreboding cloud bands were piled into some skies and day scenes were transformed tonight so the moon and campfire could throw weird shadows. These versions were bought by the Canadian government, hung in the Houses of Parliament, and later were prominently displayed in National Gallery.

A careful reading of Kane’s prose suggests that his artistic interpretations of the Indian should be viewed cautiously. He found “Indians are invariably dirty” and hence intolerable to the white man. Time after time he erroneously implies that a position that he might assign to princes of Britain. In Kane’s view the Indian medicine man was a charlatan, a necromancer, who humbly admitted that his powers would have little effect on the white man. He believed that Christian missionaries, particularly Methodists, calmed the Indian’s fierceness,
moderated his intemperance, and implanted true wisdom in his heathen mind. Yet for all Kane’s ethnocentrism, he is sympathetic to the Indian. He went out of his way to point out that Indians were not cannibals. He was willing to understand the women’s practice of leaving the tribe circle during menstruation, though he delicately referred to “certain stated periods” after which the woman returns to “health.” His view of the Indian was infused with ideas of romantic love. He shows Indian swains playing plaintive flute songs outside the wigwams of their beloved and tells long tales of young maidens waiting through the years for the return of lost warriors.

In the same decade Rudolph Friedrich Kurz was Paining the West “From my earliest Youth,” he had an indescribable charm for me.” He determined to devote his whole career to forests, wild animals, and Indians. His friends and countryman Karl Bodmer told him to better prepare himself for the American West, so he went to Paris. Kurz never transferred his sketches into finished paintings. When he returned to Switzerland, he fell into a prolonged illness. Kurz did, however, paint Indian ponies accurately, with their big bellies and their shagginess; ponies Bodmer and Miller had turned into Arabian steeds.

The romantic climate of opinion dominated art from late in the eighteenth century until the middle of the nineteenth century, the period in which the American Far West was being interpreted for the first time. Some assumptions about the frontier had been long evident the individualism of the pioneer, the nobility of the Indian, the glories
of the wilderness—but generally these themes waited until the romantic period for their fullest artistic expression.

Before the Renaissance no one had considered painting a mountain or a forest for its own sake worth a man's time. In the seventeenth century the projection of meaning into nature was forecast in the painting of tortured rocks with which the Dutchman Joachim Patinir framed an of tortured rocks with which the Dutchman Joachim Patinir framed an agonized St. Jerome. Patinir's contemporary Jacob Ruisdail delighted in the cool rush of water through a dank glade. In England in the eighteenth century, Philippe de Loutherburg began to paint moody skies charged with drama,. And he was followed by Young J.M.W. Turner, whose early canvases are electric with storms overpowering man. The works of the Frenchman Eugene Delacroix in the early nineteenth century may have marked the height of the Romantic Movement in painting. He was selected to illustrate a French scientific expedition into north Africa, but his resulting art bears little stamp of the mundane facts of exploration. Instead, he painted lions and tigers hope to study art until good fortune struck. His mother had been hospitable ot wayfarer, and the stranger on his death willed her enough money to send the boy to Europe. So Carl returned to his homeland, seeking his artistic grail in Dusseldorf, which had become a minor Mecca for American artists. There he trained with Emanuel Leutze, an American émigré and painter of Washington Crossing the Delaware. Wilmar discovered that, even six thousand miles from the
scene, he had not forgotten his absorption with the Indian, and Leutze encouraged him to paint western and Indian subjects, though he had to strain his memory for details. The titles suggest the subject of his work: *The Capture of Daniel Boone’s Daughter, Captive Charger, Indian Attacking an Immigrant Train.*

When he returned to St. Louis in 1857, he continued his work, penetrating the Far West aboard riverboats of the Fur Company, rather as Kurz had done earlier. But the tenor of his work continues, as it was Germany. In general his subjects remained dramatic, often chosen from historical events. Wimar perpetuated the view of the frontier as a region laden with moral impact for its inhabitants. Before Wimar left Dusseldorf, another St. Louis red in tooth and claw, horses leaping from the sea, and jungles shimmering in mystery.

The first full-fledged American romantics were members of the Judson River School-Asher Druand, Thomas Cole, and Fredrick Church, to name a few. Thomas Cole roamed through similar clefts in the Catskills, and his paintings bristle with jutting peaks that challenge the clouds for domination of the sky. As a matter of fact, Niagara came to symbolize the whole Hudson River School, for it was painted almost ritualistically. In most versions. An infinitesimal man stands on the brink of the falls facing the cataract, presumably feeling anew the strength of natural forces.

As the country moved west, a group of painters formed along the banks of the Mississippi. Among these artists was Carl Wilmer, who
had come to St. Louis from Germany as a lad of fifteen. A shy boy, much enamored of Indians, he was occasionally mistaken for one. Beginning to draw, he could not hope to study art until good for time stuck. Before Wilmar left Dusseldorf, one then St. Louis: Pinter, George Caleb Bingham, arrived there. Bingham quickly became part of the circle, writing home that his teacher Leutze treated him like a brother. As a result of their intimate contacts with the natural world, Boone and his friends symbolized immense courage and unconquerable faith in hard work and the cleansing of the same scene one of which would measure thirteen by eighteen feet, and to enter the giant picture in an American competition for the best work illustrating the history of the West. Bingham did not stay as long in Germany as Wimar had; and Leutze also returned to American after nearly twenty years in Dusseldorf. Nature still infused his scenes, and natural qualities were evident in the simplicity of the men he painted. River mists evoked the loneliness of trappers; quiet currents provided a backdrop of rough mem venting simple emotions by dancing and gambling; slowly moving waters defined the cast of character-transients loitering and drifting along the backwaters of the frontier.

Wimar, Bingham, and Leutze thus carried Hudson River concepts of nature of the banks of the Mississippi and the Missouri. One might expect that, in the transition, regard for the esthetic canon prevailing from their attachments to Europe would have changed, perhaps freeing artists from their attachments to European ideas. But this particular
road west involved a detour intellectually as well as physically to Dusseldorf. In Germany ideas of the West were affected by earlier expectations.

Another continental jump led to the zenith of western romantic interpretations—the Rocky Mountain School of painters. The Civil War was over, the nation had settled its sectional problem, or so it hoped, and artists took a long look at the nation’s dimensions. The most grandiose western features, the Yellowstone and the Grand Canyon of the Colorado, caught their view. Niagara, the Catskills, the Hudson, even the Mississippi, were dwarfed by the jugged peaks and blue rivers of the Far West.

No one captured the spirit of the grandiose as well as Albert Bierstadt. German by birth, he had been raised amid the bustle of sailing ships in New Bedford, Massachusetts. Only twenty-one when his first painting was exhibited in Boston, he studied in Europe and while they’re sketched castled on the Rhine and hiked among the Alps. His first change to see the American West came in 1858, when he accompanied General Frederick Landers on a survey party westward from St. Louis. Entranced with what he saw, he left the expedition to tramp and sketch through the Wind River Mountains and the Shoshone country. In 1860 his first Rocky Mountain pictures were immediately and overwhelming successful. In England his paintings soon brought higher prices than an American artists had ever received.

With his friend Fitz-Hugh Ludlow, wealthy opium smoker,
Bierstadt returned west, sketching the Colorado Rockies, the Great Salt Lake, Oregon, and California. Success enabled him to build a thirty five-room house overlooking the Hudson River at Irvington and to set up a second studio in San Francisco. From there, on excursions into the Yosemite and Hetch Hetchy valleys, he absorbed material for some of his most gloriously romantic canvases, enormous in square footage and grand with overreaching peaks and bands of water gleaming between dark forests. But all was not well in the relations between the American people as an art audience and the long-continued marriage of western painters with European romanticism. Europe had embarked in other directions, notably French impressions. Bierstdt fell out of favour, especially with art critics, and sold fewer and fewer paintings. Over twenty years after Bierstadt first saw the West, Thomas Moran was introduced to the Grand Tetons and the Yellowstone country. Moran was thirty-four years old and as well steeped in English romanticism as Bierstadt had been in its German form. He delighted in reading Robert Browning and Arthur Young. He was a friend and correspondent of John Ruskin, critical monarch of English romanticism, who overcame his antipathy to Americans long enough to implore Moran to move to England. In London, Moran was intrigued by the emotionally freighted early paintings of J.M.W. Turner. In the Yellowstone and the Grand Tetons, Moran’s excitement was boundless. Back in his studio, he flung his canvases over entire walls and, like Bierstadt, gate to western space its counterpart in footage. Hyden had also brought along a
photographer, William Henry Jackson, whose prints, along with the paintings of Moran, were instrumental in persuading Congress to create Yellowstone National Park.

Moran and Bierstadt together carried the remanti concepts of nature to their ultimate in size and grandeur. For them the western landscape was sublime and awe inspiring. Man stood in the presence of nature as in a Gothic cathedral, tuning his muted senses to the infinite beauty. Moran’s Grand *Canyon of the Yellowstone* might be interpreted as a stained-glass window, each small piece of color transmitting an aura of mystical reverence. Like the glass, these painting are not photographically real; Moran once said that literal transcripts from nature are worthless. Nature was glorified and worshiped at a time when western landscape from man’s depredation. The small man in the foreground of the painting who so much needed nature was at the same time building railroads and hotels.

Later in the century, in contrast with the Rocky mountain School, painters like Frederic Remington de-emphsized the elemental grandeur of nature and stressed instead the human qualities called forth by the grimness of the wilderness. In paintings like *Night Wolf* the animal, threatened by the dark surroundings, stands forth like a courageous man in self-reliant independence. Remington was the chief exponent in art of the rugged western individualist.

Sight unseen he purchased 320 acres in Kansas for a boy, he joined in pranks, throwing spitballs at bald men and going on larks as
far south as Mexico. Concurrently, public opinion in the East was focused on the army’s campaign against Geronimo, the Apache militant. Because Remington the Sonoran and Chihuahuan rather than any other artist, he was asked to illustrate articles about Geronimo and the campaign for outing magazine. One pictorial success followed another, and before long he was New York’s resident expert on the West, drawing for *Harper’s and Century* as well as for outing. Another claimant for the title of honorary westerner, Theodore Roosevelt, his forthcoming *Ranch Life and the Hunting Trail*.

Bierstadt had entered the rarefied beau monde of art: Remington remained outside that realm, reflecting far more of the popular imagination. Between 1888 and 1890 paintings and bronzes poured from his studio. His paintings brought tens of thousands of dollars, and he never in the histrionics of burning piles of his canvases, as a robber baron might light cigars with ten-dollar bills.

Remington rivaled his friend Roosevelt in living up to the cult of masculinity. His apparent distaste for women was reflected in his paintings, where among hundreds of male subjects no more than four women ever appeared. He believed masculine strength came from conflicts with nature, the individual against drought and wind. In *Friend or Foe*, a lone rider strains his eyes to identify a barely visibly speck on the bleak horizon.

Remington treated the Indian as if he were a part of hostile nature, an abrasion against which the Anglo-Saxon could prove his
mettle, in the summer of 1890 the artist marched with General Nelson Miles when the army massacred a remanant of Sioux at Wounded knee. In his view, as a race Indians were no better than foreigners.

Remington, with his distaste of eastern industrial society, lumped the Indian together with the immigrants when pouring into factories of the East. In his paintings of lonely cowboys looking out over a rough-cast nature and of cavalrymen riding to the attack, bugles shrill, pennants proud, Remington proclaimed man triumphant over nature and the Anglo-Saxon male dominating "lesser" peoples.

Remington had a counterpart in Charles M. Russell, who like to be introduced as a Montana cowboy rather than as an artist and who would have loved Remington's designation of "man with the bark on. "Like Remington, Russell was raised in wealthy family from which he escaped to the outdoors. He ardently read western dime naves and was filled with notions about the West. Russell never lost his love for that country. For eleven years he worked as horse wrangler, but during this time he also began to drew and paint. After he married, his wife so successfully managed the sale of his work that he could settle down comfortably in Great Falls.

Sometimes Russell tried, almost humorously, to capture Indian viewpoints, as his painting *Indian Discover Lewis and Clark* suggests. Russell projected a simple, boyish West, and his popularity as an artist shows the extent to which most people were in tune with the chord he struck.
If one moves only short step from Russell to the world of prints by Currier and Ives, that sympathetic chord for the free, individualistic, simplistic West is even more dramatically sounded. Take, for example, the currier and Ives print *Rocky Mountains: Emigrants Crossing the Plains*. Lithographed in 1866 from a painting by Fanny Palmer, this print was widely sold and seen in barber shops, saloons, hotel rooms, and in the parlors of rich and poor alike. The Rocky Mountains transcend all human experience, surpassing Bierstadt. Blue glaciers mirror a storm less sky over meadows as green as Elysium. Amid lush foliage only one dead tree remains to feed any lingering romantic’s melancholy. Full-bellied oxen pull wagons containing men and women, properly paired. They seem not to notice the Indians whose wigwams stand a scant hundred yard away, and the Indians look on in idle curiosity, is what we would now call factual, yet Currier and Ives, like scientific draftsmen earlier in the century, were consistently extolled for their “meticulous accuracy”. Nature was charged with meaning and gave men moral purpose. The fury of nature instructed mem to fight back; the raw energy of a storm provided the requisite power. Softer moods exposed the values of peace and tranquility; the moist warmth of a meadow in Indian summer imparted contentment and acquiescence. Mountains taught humility; rivers, existence and determination; spring leaves, joy; autumn foliage, gratitude and fruitfulness. Nature at the vary least aroused in men elevated thoughts and inspired the pleased of contemplation.
Natures' moods are so varied and so extreme that awesome tensions result. The soft summer sky is at another time gloweringly black; the smooth river breaks into the churning rapids; level paints are ridged with sharp peaks. The tensions in these opposites are like electric charges that can be wired to man. The tensions then can also illuminate in some mystical way men own dichotomies-his limitless dreams magnitude of the universe, his evanescent life versus eternity, ultimately, starkly, life against death. The Indian closeness to nature. In the same way, the white man might become strong from nature as "rubbish." In the situation, the white man who had become the natural man might righteously destroy the Indian. Self-righteousness thus reinforced the conscious ness of power so dominant in western art.

Violence is a product of the political system of all dynamic societies, especially if it is defined to include threats, intimidation, compulsion, and coercion, as well as more overt forms of physical force. It is unusually evident in a proudly competitive environment like the same frontier and may be associated with the growth of group identity and awareness among the disadvantaged of their potential power. Against such challenges, the established order reacts coercively, violently. To consider violence senseless, criminal, juvenile, factional, fanatic, or un-America and go no further, is to miss deeper understanding. 66 If ever the free

Institutions of America are destroyed, that event may be attributed to the omnipotence of the majority, which may at some future time urge the minorities to desperation and oblige

338
them to have recourse to physical force."\textsuperscript{12}

If we assume that Americans have an inclination toward violent action, to what extent has the frontier contributed to that propensity the natural setting was wild and placed a premium on physical toughness. Life on farms, on ranges, and in mines made muscular energy an asset, Action was enthroned over intellect.

More importantly, frontier society was permeated with fear and doubt. Primitive conditions threatened established social values. Frustration grew from cultural deprivation. Frequently, though not as often as we like to think, the forms of law and were missing; lack of authority feeds fear. Furthermore, on the frontier nearly all civilians were armed. Few societies have allowed such unrestricted ownership of firearms. The gin on the cabin wall within easy reach, whatever its value as a hunting tool, meant that any meeting could quickly become an armed mob. When Parkman moved West across the Missouri and bid adieu to the principles of Blackstone's Commentaries. He recognized that the foreigner, Mr. Blackstone, had been supplanted by the very American Mr. Colt. Even so, the pervasiveness of weapons in the West was probably less a cause that a symptom of conflict.

It makes a difference whether violence is in defense of established norms or in quest of new values, whether it is to defend an elite or to champion an outcast minority Brown distinguishes between positive and negative violence, depending on whether the participants hold long-range, socially constructive, and widely.
Just as Americans have often talked peace while encouraging violence, so they have at the same time praised the law while extolling vigilantism. In San Francisco during the gold rush, Sam Brannan, a displaced Mormon elder and imperious boomer, rise to wealth and power as a printer, journalist, and storekeeper. Australians were logical suspects; as immigrants they congregated in an urban ghetto and their name, “Sydney Ducks,” automatically came to denote criminals. Brannan and the other good people made preparations for hanging. William Coleman, another well-placed young man in the community, prevailed on the gathering to set up a court and thus give at least the impression of legality. The two men were later proved innocent.

In May a series of fires terrified the city and rumors blamed criminals. Brannan assembled a few businessmen in his office, and they adopted a constitution for a committee of vigilance to clean up San Francisco. The next night, one John Jenkins action. More than six thousand citizens, mostly middle and upper-class businessmen, volunteered for service. These vigilantes had already proved irresponsible in failing to vote and to volunteer under established law. A smaller law and order action, mostly lawyers and intellectuals, protested the formation of the vigilance committee but were little heeded. The committee proceeded first to the jail, where Casey and another murderer were taken into custody with no resistance form 150 of the sheriff’s men. White most of the opposition attended hanged
from a makeshift platform before a small crowd. During the trial the vigilantes had refused to honor grounds of popular sovereignty. The voice of the people, they reason, overlooked the other crowd, walking silently behind Casey’s coffin.

The governor declared San Francisco in a state of insurrection. Cynics claimed that Sherman’s real reason, however, was related to his extensive by the committee before they were through, making it, according to Richard Brown, vigilante action could be engaged in and justified by citizens as a reasonable as a reasonable response.

Merchants in the early years were not sufficiently settled to land their profits with stability. But it did not take long, perhaps five or ten years, in San Francisco and 1883 in Montana, lawyers, doctors, entrepreneurs of goods and services such as saloon keepers, workers, and new immigrants. Cleavages had grown between groups like the Masons, representing the merchants, lawyers, doctors, entrepreneurs of goods and services such as saloon keepers, workers, and new immigrants. Cleavages had grown between groups like the Masons, representing the merchants, and the Catholics, representing newer immigrant arrivals. To the Masons, the Catholics, through their political parties and tax programs, threatened distribution of the community’s wealth. Vigilante activity in such new situations assumed additional colors. Seen in this Democrats and against urban proletarians in general; the Montana vigilantes of the 1880’s become businessmen intent on preserving a society in which they held the paramount

341
positions.

If vigilantism was a reflection of economic interest, so also was the violence of the range wars. Recall, for example, the conflict between antagonism between sheepmen and cattlemen, "the longest and the bloodiest war" in the West. Here we might think again of the violence of large cattle raisers toward the owners of small herds.

Not infrequently, ridding the range of rustlers also meant ridding the area of irksome economic competitors. Because the big owners were rapidly consolidating into associations that could control price and supply, the issue could become highly Illinois, in 1894, had violent counterparts in the West. In 1892, only three months after the murder of Nat Champion, miners at Coeur d'Alene, Idaho, struck for union recognition. They, like the men along the Powder River, were overpowered by troops, and seven miners died in the confrontation. Out of such conflicts grew greater organization, initially in the form of the western Federation of Miners, which between 1893 and 1903 expanded to fifty thousand member. One of its planks called for a prohibition of armed force against labor, reflecting the wounds of Coeur d’Alene. The WFM leader, Bill Haywood, was instrumental in forming a larger union in 1905’s the Industrial Workers of the World, or “Wobblies,” of which the Western Federation became a part. In 1913 at a tent camp for workers in Ludlow, Colorado, women and children were shot by strike breakers. Before the Colorado fight was over, seventy-four people lay dead.
The social bandit, like Jesse James and Joaquin Murieta, appears in myth and legend. He was the West’s Robin Hood or primitive rebel, as Eric Hobsbawm calls him. He was strictly rural and precapitalist, autonomous, highly romantic, even millennial. Because presumably he robbed the rich and gave to the poor, his crimes were crimes only in the eyes of the wealthy or the state; no genuine democrat would consider him quality. Honorable, young; unattached, ephemeral, he represented the weak against the powerful. Often, reports of his death were considered false, for how could a man who was the spirit of the people die?

Adding history to legend, we find that this bandit arose out of social turmoil. Joaquin Muriesnt terror into the hearts of the prosperous Anglo farmers of the San Joaquin Valley in the 1850’s. In that period, Mexicans were suffering the first consequences of their newly reduced social position, and their future seemed bleak. For them, Murieta’s violence was sweet revenge.

Jesse James translated in a roughly analogous way the hates and frustrations of thousands of people who had suffered in the Civil War at the hands of the Union army. He fought the dragon of the railroad, which symbolized not only the North but corporate wealth and industrial power as well. The bandit’s act may seem futile, but, Hobsbwm warns, such violence may become epidemic against a prevailing society that finds itself “in a condition of abnormal tension and disruption.”13
The excessive brutality of the Civil War is generally recognized, but that of the Mexican War is less so. The Mexican War could account for some of the attitudes of veterans toward Mexicans. In the nation at large there was a marked increase of prison commitments following both the Mexican and the Civil wars. In the year after the Civil war, violent crimes increased fifty percent. Facts were equally disturbing in New York, Massachusetts, Kansas, and Pennsylvania. Philip D. Jordan calls violence on the frontier after both the Mexican and Civil war "epidemic." In the west a war against Indians was fought throughout the frontier period, undoubtedly having a continuing effect on individual crime.

Crime among minority groups often resulted from confusion and misunderstanding about what the law actually was. Indians hardly accepted white law. Former Mexican nationals likewise faced a new set of statutes based on unfamiliar principals. For example, under Mexican law a salt lick in the Guadalupe Mountains near the border in Texas was communal property; all men could lead their herds to it without cost of interference. When Anglo law was imposed on the area, the salt lick fell into private hands and charges were immediately levied on use. Mexicans were understandably furious, and violence.

The most familiar scenes of individual violence were the cattle towns of the 1870's and 1880's presumably the most brawling, hard-fisted Mecca of brutality and unshirted aggressiveness the West ever knew. The idea persists, as suggested by a recent headline designating
Washington, D.C., "dodge city on the Potomac." However, Robert R. Dykstra, in a detailed study of five cattle towns (Ablene, Dodge city, Ellsworth, Wichita, and Caldwell) found that excessive violence was limited to the earliest years of each community’s life. City councils may have enacted laws against prostitution and gambling, but officials usually considered these ordinances more as a source of revenue than as extensions of morality. On rare occasions when a police officer acted with too heavy a hand, the city council decisively removed him. Because only twenty percent of the population jail and hunted criminals, but their functions varied considerably and sometimes included swiping out the courtroom, cleaning the streets, and, most importantly, collecting taxes. The federal marshal’s duties embraced army deserting, mail theft, and crimes committed on Indian reservations. There was plenty of room for chicanery, particularly when communities deliberately hired criminals for their criminals for their lawmen, assuming that it takes a killer to catch one.

On not a few occasions the confusion led law officers to oppose and fight one another. In the nearly legendary shoot-out at the O.K. Corral in Tombstone, Arizona, on October 26, 1881, Virgil Earp, serving as both town marshal and deputy United States marshal, had enlisted as deputies his brothers Wyatt and Morgan and Johan “Doc” Holliday. John Behan, appointed by Territorial Governor Johan C. Fermount and allied with the rival Calnton faction, acted as country sheriff. Seeking to arrest army may only have implemented legitimate power, the violence
exercised against the Cherokees in the removal from Georgia to Oklahoma, to cite case, must nevertheless be fount unjust. The Cherokees were educated, spoke English, read newspapers, elected intelligent spokesman, had settled down to agricultural pursuits, and successfully raised cotton on plantations with black slaves. They were what Richard E. Rubenstein calls 'a domestic group denied the privilege of citizenship.' Such groups have been admitted to the political system, but only when the prevailing structure was sufficiently racked with doubts and factionalism to open the way to reorganization. Alas, the Indian was never faced with such a possibility or presented with such a wedge. Laborers and some immigrant groups succeeded; the black man and the Indian did not.

The Texas Rangers, a local example of official violence, was first formed by Anglo settlers in Mexican Texas in the 1820's. The force became.

One reason westerners supported such rangers was fear of anarchy. Curiously enough, government policy, of lack of it, was largely to blame for theist alarm. In the heyday of laissez-faire and the minimal state, the nation never saw fit to institute a territorial police force comparable to the Royal Canadian Mounted Police. Such a body might have impartially executed the law and the least occasionally protected the Indian as well as the white. Instead, central force was exerted only if absolutely necessary, when situations had grown out of hand; witness the national guard shooting at already enraged miners. The vacuum of
order was an excuse and symptom, and it resulted in upheavals that undermined justice.

Once again, we see how hard it is to separate the West from a larger context. The nineteenth century, especially after the Civil War, was a discordant period for the nation. That fact underscores the tendencies erupting in all segments long Indian racial war, class battles were fought large stock growers against small cattlemen, organized labor against management in the mines. Almost constant warfare brutalized men and encouraged crime. Individual violence or one man against another cannot be divorced from social dislocation and tensions. The nation at large chose to extol most western violence as the actions of free men ridding society of insane of vicious misfits; it seldom saw these spasms as extensions of social and economic problems. Thus misunderstood, vigilante outbursts against the Irish and army massacres of the Indians could be used as models for national actions in other times and places.

***

347
REFERENCES

2. Quoted in John Ewers, Artist of the Old West (NY, 1965) p. 26
4. Ibid. , p. 53.
5. Ibid. , p. 10.
6. Ibid. , p. 270.
8. Ibid. , p.53.
13. Eric Hobsbawn, Primitive Rebel (N.Y. 1963)
TRANSFARMING IMAGES OF THE WEST
Section –II

The West, of course, from the point of view of the transforming image has not become: it is no one thing or image. As “always,” it is continually becoming. Transformations of sense are never static; they both produce and accompany the major cultural shifts. Transformations of power, on the power, on the other hand, are the pride of stasis: the image of an arrested and frozen status quo, sold and consumed not for the sake of the culture, but for the gratification of the conscious manipulators. No doubt, the West is disputed ground in a struggle for power, in a quest to establish it as a permanent refuge for, say, political conservatism and economic entrenchment, but it is also much more as it continues in the endless process of cultural becoming.

In many important ways, the entire West in these times (and therefore the folklore of the West) reflects a posture of the status quo, of the West as last refuge of freedom and right living. Proposals associated with industry and national defense have united westerners across a broad socioeconomic-religious spectrum against the federal government. Older (but persistent) forms of folklore used for millennia to deal with and thus transform the landscape are now being used in different ways. Let me illustrate with a single example:

A traditional phenomenon many would associate with the West and westerners is the hanging of slain predatory wildlife (coyotes, hawks, bobcats on barbed wire fences. However, such practice is
archaic. Ancient peoples hung the skins of certain animals on trees that marked the boundaries of their sacred groves, places of worship.¹ One trespassing on ground made sacred by these markers committed a sacrilege "analogous to a profane person's entrance into a sacred forest or temple."²

Greeks of the classical period were deeply concerned with means of protection for gardens, mainly herb gardens, and this concern moved eventually to medieval England, where elaborate precautions against the elements and their dangers were taken by the English. Very often, these protective measures involved hanging predatory wildlife, in part or whole, from fences surrounding the garden.³

This practice (in form at least) probably moved from England to America and thence to the West. While there is a latent belief that dead coyotes on western fences (usually hung head-down and some-times badly mutilated) will protect what the fence encloses (sheep perhaps) by warning other coyotes away, the import of this act, I believe, has accrued meanings other than it had archaically. In the past the act was preestablishment, highly spiritual, protective of the norms of culture. While a different community is being protected today, the predators are hung in open defiance of the establishment - against laws that limit or forbid the killing of such animals. And on one level, at least the act is devoid of spiritual significance. This is, the purpose of such display assumes another focus. Archaically, it affirmed the cultural verities for the sake of the culture itself: the validation was internalized and
consumed by the culture exclusively for its own sake. This exclusive sense of community was visible within the circle of cultural validation—evidently, it did not move outward to either engulf or negate transforming images of other peoples. Today, however, the act is a portrayal of a violent defiance, a defiance that certainly affirms the group and keeps it encircled by an aura of its own belief. The variant here a (as all “variants” experience) been transformed into an image of the culture. But the home-place is the place of vengeance; and as this vengeance is directed toward alien and therefore threatening institution, it both affirmed the culture and destroys the chaos of alien institutions. This is not problem of paradox, of affirming and denying simultaneously, but a problem of prostate, through which a tenet of folk belief, an image of transformation, through its portrayal of violence, affirms the community in its own sense, in its own ardor.

Nonetheless, the practice is a persistent form of folklore and does embody certain assumptions about the landscape (much of which owned by the federal government): that the land belongs to those who live by and use it and that the federal government had better not tamper with private affairs. The god of the western landscape today, on the mainstream cultural level, is one of political conservatism and backlash against the federal government; this, however, is also a way of perceiving the landscape through folk belief.

Westerners assume the land as possession because that the meaning the chaos of wilderness must now assume in order to be
comprehended. The West remains enigmatic. Its spaces can never be taken for granted. Desert, mountain, the lack or abundance of rainfall—all continue to demand a transformation by culture. The terror of these enigmatic spaces is alleviated only as the spaces are converted to a cultural metaphor, to a precise image of the culture, to a transformation of sense; and the essence of folk belief is the vehicle cultures use to remake a landscape into a pleasant image of themselves. We have been slow to understand folk belief because we have been slow to understand transformations, slow to move away from the ordered illusion of index and archive to the vibrant belief in living context. Slow to substitute “collection” and “field trip” with a careful scrutiny, of why cultures do what they do, assume what they seem to assume.

Speaking of the cultural transformation, Canetti affirms that what we learn from considering the essence of transformations is what it means for the Bushman “to think of a creature other than himself”⁴ As this study has shown, what he thinks of, culturally, is the image of his own people: their institutions of becoming. What he feels is a sensation in his head when he is going to cut off the springbok’s horns. What he seems to fell is a cultural image, a transformation, imposed upon the animal so that the animal, in all of its uses and movements, speaks a cultural dialect. What the Bushman thinks of when he thinks of a creature other than himself is himself, is the image his culture has provided of the meaning and place of natural things. Such natural things assume a culturally dictated meaning reflecting the hierarchical
values of the system. What the Bushman as individual, as existential essence, feels and know we may scarcely discover, But we know what his culture feels and knows by experiencing the images of transformation: chaos becomes an ordered image of the culture that transforms it.

In the language of folklore, from earliest times until now, the landscape has been endowed with a human, a cultural, meaning-has been personified in myriad ways simply because the land itself has no human meaning. Cultures can deal with the West only when it assumes a meaning the culture dictates. That is how life is lived and made meaningful: through and within a cultural transformation. Edward Abbey’s thoughtful, probing, “undressing” the West of its cultural mores and attitudes (if that is every possible) has led to the realization that the desert says nothings, that it is completely passive, is acted upon but never acts, invites not love but contemplation, and finally, therefore, has no heart, presents a riddle with no answer-the riddle itself being merely an illusion. The tough stance seems remarkably sound and existentially honest, yet it eludes (and perhaps ignores) the stolid, pervasive practices of folk belief, the dusty philosophy of western cultures that says the landscape has meaning only when it looks like me, like the pure transformation of sense. I live and die by, like the precious image of my face reflected in every crevice and rises of a landscape called western.

As one probes beyond superficial layers of human existence,
through layers of pretense, of modes and institutions of convenience, one finally is shocked by the immeasurability of essential human problems. Figurations of power that have strewn societal chaff in the faces of eager researchers waver, then disappear, and what looms in place of these institutions we cannot rightly describe—but we can fee. We do know that something always escapes the intellectual micrometer. We are uncomfortable that the final decimal point (which we have been taught dismiss as inconsequential) does not equal zero, that things have not come to rest, that there is an unaccountable presence looming just beyond the scope of our most astute tools of measurement. We are assured about what we feel, confused about what we have measured. Our world has done a double take. Can we now see things, not through new eyes, but through old—through those we have been taught to close? Not through the grand symphony of mimesis, but through the quiet act of recognition.

It is in such a context of simultaneous denial-recognition that this book hopes to lose itself. Those who, perhaps, have told us least. And those who have ranged into moments of feeling, not levels of measurement, are those, perhaps, who have told us most—who have not rested within the confines of a paradigm, but who, instead, have drifted into the abyss, whose limit is a reflection not of the devil and his minions. But the placid face of humanity. So on the one hand, “no mode of writing was more artificial than that which set out to give the most accurate description of Nature.”7 while on the other, nature becomes

354
most vibrant, most felt, when it realized through an unselfconscious image. Not that the core itself can be entered or understood. The core has no mining. The desert has no heart. "One thinks that one merely tracing round the frame through which we look." But there are various levels of transformation. And there are those transformations that seem to move beyond a figuration of power, despite Elias Canetti's probing claim that "the talent for transformation which has given man so much power over all other creatures has as yet scarcely been considered or begun to be understood." Transforms of nature seem to lead naturally to vestments of power, to the overt and vicious exploitation of the other. But transformations of being do not; that is, they may be created as antidote for certain fear-index rather than a quest for power. Fear of what? Of the nothingness and immutability of core. And so, if we have not begun to consider or understand the transformations of power how innocent we are with reference to the transformations of being. The transformation of being is transformation of sense, of felling. And Wallace Stevens asserts. "So sense exceeds all metaphor" If metaphor is repression and if repression is culturally taught, then metaphor is power. Transformations of power are invariably expressed metaphorically - transformations of sense (being) are not. Metaphors of repression seem measurable because they are culturally produce; they speak a language of power, since power invariably leads to repression. But a transformation of sense is immeasurable because it is powerless.

A series of metaphors, then, is a series of illusions culturally
dictated. But as the transformations become more sensual, they become more opaque. It may well be that the transformation of sense, of being, is also an illusion – an illusion insofar as it casts man (or the self) outside the biological, that is, outside the commonality of life, as it sees man apart from the movements of the germ cell, But if we were able to peel away the transformations of power and approach the transformations of sense (immeasurable, and therefore unpredictable), we could see the individual, as well as that individual’s culture, from a new point of view, We could for example, ask an old question – What is the American West? _ and have hope of a new answer, a new perspective, a point of view not thoroughly institutionalized.

For transformations of sense precede the culturally dictated question what. Such transformations are primordial, ancient, beyond obfuscation, but not impervious to disguise. They persist because they are essentially human, and therefore unavoidable. Within transformations of power, answers exist only because of questions; but with transformations of sense, the answer to the question (asked later) is at least unselfconscious. It is unselfconscious because such transformations are autonomous-do not rely on an outer institution for formulation.

When Johann Kepler “reasoned” that if the sun is the analogue of God the Father, then the sphere of the fixed stars is the sensible. Counterpart of the Son, the intermediate regions of the planet being assigned to the *Holy Ghost*,¹⁴ he used a familiar, culturally dictated
metaphor in producing his particular transformation of meaning, a metaphor infused with power from on high and therefore sanctioned by the gods, a metaphor whose answer was thoroughly (and culturally) a product of worn but pleasing question. A similar astronomical transformation was wrought by B.L.B. de Fontenelle, who argued for the presence of inhabitants in other parts of the solar system (an argument, by the way, that has not been outmoded by advances in Western science - we still search longingly for the face of God in waste places.) This, says Fontenelle, is “the way of reasoning I have made use of. The moon, say I, is inhabited because she like the earth; and the other plants are inhabited because they are like the moon”\textsuperscript{15} Once again, such a metaphor, such a transformation, mirrors a cultural probability, an answer dictated solely by its question. “Only that which we ourselves construct” writes Ludwig Witgen Stein can we foresee”\textsuperscript{16} Prophecy, then, is a metaphor, a particular cultural transformation that molds the unknown into the image of the culture, There are no false prophets; there are only prophets. A prophet is an adept maker of culture metaphors. Both Fontenelle and Kepler were prophets. The possibility that “everything we se could be otherwise” \textsuperscript{17} is absolutely beyond the realm of prophecy, of the possibility for over cultural transformation, because the answer is always dictated by the question. The answer exists only because of the question. Nothing we se can be otherwise, because both answer and the question would disintegrate, the prophecy would fail, the culture would disappear, Prophets are not

357
revolutionaries – they are harlots. And it is the thinking and the voice of harlots that we yearn to see and hear. For answer and question are provided for minimal expense – a barter of flesh, of cultural legacy, the self – perpetuation of question dictated by answer.

Weighed against such a problem, a question is asked by Michel Foucault, a question that begs its answer. Speaking about the birth of the clinic, the discourse of the sanitarium, Foucault conspicuously asks, “How can we be sure that eighteenth-century doctor did not see what he saw, but that it needed several decades before the fantastic figures were dissipated to reveal, in the space they vacated, the shapes of things as they really are? And the answer: We can be sure the doctor saw what he saw, because the doctor was engaged in the perpetuation of cultural metaphor. What he saw was pathology, a space for and disease. What he saw was the face of the culture in the malady of his patient. He saw precisely what we see, and what we continue to see (although the spaces may be slightly displaced, which displacement we call modernity). And what we seem, and continue to see, is the question with its answer, the face of the culture clearly impressed on a fabric we call existence. These transformations are so omnipresent and ubiquitous that no single work could do them justice– at least not comprehensively. Perhaps the reason, as Canetti suggests, that cultural transformations have scarcely been considered or understood is that not only are they everywhere within the cultural fabric, they are the fabric itself. They are the culture. They display deep structures of ambition and longing.
withheld by other cultural morphologies, other cultural dynamics. Shot through with such transformation, cultures move in, of, by and for them.

Anything so astoundingly omnipresent is bound to be invisible—even when the transformations are manifestations of power. Even (or most especially) our most revered cultural icons are seldom praised, consciously, for their real cultural worth. Literature, for example, provides the varied cultural transformations in a context we call art. Roland Barthes writes:

In this way, Literature begins to know society as a Nature, the phenomena of which it might perhaps be able to reproduce. During such moments when the writer follows languages, which are really spoken, no longer for the sake of picturesque ness, but as essential objects which fully account for the whole content of society, writing takes as the locus of its reflexes the real speech of men. Literature no longer implies pride or escape, it begins to become a lucid act of giving information; as if it had first to learn the particulars of social differences by reproducing them. It takes if upon itself to give an immediate account, as preliminary to any other message, of the situation of men immured by the language of their class, their region, their profession, their heredity or their history.19

Labeling such disturbing implications of the word as art allows us to sidestep the demands these implications make on the life of a culture. We hang them, gift framed, in a museum of our own making.20
Basically, the answer with accompanying question is what the literature, the universal, is quite generally damned, at least until it is enclosed within and adapted by a cultural transformation. It is damned because it fails to place proper answer and proper question in corresponding (and therefore predictable) positions. It fails, in short, to provide a proper, cultural transformation, a transformation of power, comfortable literature – and cultural literature manifests the prime transformations of power. So these in all of the cultural corners. Virtually every act conscious man performs is the result of an expectation, a taught mode of being. These expectations are acted out event in the most pressing, the most vicious, and the most pleasant of circumstances. Pleasures imply a manifestation of transformations. Human wants are encased by cultural expectation, the green husk of propriety. And what is more propitious than power, than the fear of offense, the buffing discontinuity between denial and expectation? So that one can say: man, cultural man in particular, is the transforming animal. Nietzsche describes life as constant transformation of all the we are into light and flame – “also everything that wounds us” 21. Impositions of cultural transformation of course imply loss of choice. Loss of that thing, says Sartre, man was damned (compelled) to exist within. Cultural transformations are mufflers of the individual essences. They must be in order to preserve a status quo. We seen, then, to lack choices because the status quo is a hard master. Man is bound to be the animal that transforms, the being that is caught in the transformations
of pore authored by the conscious affirmations of culture and simultaneously liberated by the unselfconscious models of being: the transforming image beyond (but also within) modes and institution of power. Nietzsche comments, “How should explanations be at all possible when we first turn everything into an image our image! 22 And this, of course is the point: the only image a man finds satisfying is his own. He impresses in into the visible spaces of the universe. He find we find our transforming image. “The Christian resolve to find the world ugly and bad has made the world ugly and bad” 24 and such resolve is in overt manifestation of transformations of power, The world speaks a language of its particular transformation. These transformations are complete and far-reaching.

One of the dearest institutions of Western society, that which we call love, is also a matter of transformation. We seldom love the things we love for what they are. 25 We love them for what we have been taught they tough to be for a man to love a woman is to love n image, a cultural image of expectation. Deep within other core of being, we can scarcely describe (spiritually) the deference between man and woman, but in the outer layers differences are profuse. We know, from our transformations, exactly what man is and ought to be. And we also know exactly what woman is and ought to be. With this set of cultural images, we construct a likeness of love, prescription of action for men and women. But what we can neither account for nor ultimately repress are the biological verities. They can scarcely be mad to fit the image.
Pornography of the Western world, for example, is not only an attempt to stratify woman and love, to politicize that which we cannot understand, it is also one of our most vibrant cultural images. Most of all, humanity politicizes itself. Human life, in most of its forms, is a metaphor of repression, and therefore of transformation. Every cultural institution is a manifestation of transformation. As subjects, pornography and astronomy may appear as diverse as ornithology and linguistics – but they are both part of the morphology of cultural transformation. Morphologically, they are scarcely to be distinguished as cultural manifestations.  

And we have not only performed these transformations on the astronomical world, and upon our own species - we apply them everywhere. In his search to find human form in the lower orders of creation, the French philosopher. J.B. Robinet "was unhappily let to find similitude's of faces, as well as of arms and legs, in the radish and other plants, and to publish drawings of these vegetable anthropoids. The humanization of nature is an old and detailed story. Man has, through various institutions and explanations. Perfomed his transformations, searched for his image, in all forms of life and existence that his culture / cultures find recognizable: a part of the human world of cause / effect want satisfaction, movement / stasis. The process of symbolization is also a process of transformation, insofar as it projects a human meaning onto the natural world. Of course symbols are dear, are a pure experience of order, but they are so largely because of the
transformations they perform. "Before, there were branches there; now there is a human shape,\textsuperscript{30}" writes Wittgenstein. The branch becomes a symbol only when it is endowed with a humanly comprehensible form, a transformed image. When we look long enough at the branch, it becomes human. The transformation, of course is a matte of perspective. It is perspective Stevens approached when he wrote: the world lives as you live Speaks as you speak, a creature that Repeats its vital words, yet balances The syllable of a syllable.\textsuperscript{31}

So, we return to an old question asked a new time: What is a landscape (land-skin to Irish Lann, Welsh, 'church' + 'scape'- Old English scape, akin to German schaft, 'relationship' or 'creation': thus landscape= 'a church relationship,' a sacralization of the land by endowing it with a transforming image; quite literally, 'of land) What is the American west? Of course, the question here, and perhaps especially here implies a transformation. At the outer levels, the levels of power, the answer precedes the questing. Thus the West becomes something we take for granted (as we do all landscapes) through its cultural transformation. But the American West seems a place especially transformed, a metaphor that has attained a world image.

Compared with images of the American West, the vastness of the Russian wilderness, as image, is simply inconsequential. And this omnipresent image begs several questions: what do we know, what can we know, about the American West? If we can understand it what is it we
assume an understanding of? Perhaps the reason the American West has attained a world image is due largely to its transformations of power, especially those that are most visible and that seem therefore culturally most dear. Perhaps the core has been politicized beyond reach. Perhaps the outer layers display a toughness that we love with one eye but that we cannot see with the other. Perhaps we have been about the business of selling in image for so long that the image has become its means and end, its answer and question. “We can destroy,” writes Nietzsche, “only as creators”.

The creation of an enduring political image may disfigure the core so thoroughly that it can never be seen again by the culture that created the dominant image. Not that the core was ever untransformed, but that some transformations seem relatively powerless, not simply that they are without power, but that they lie beyond the affects of a world in which power is the most sanctioned and therefore the most understood of all languages. And attached to such language, we create a landscape thoroughly capable of enacting our cultural probabilities. Thus, says Nietzsche: “Jesus Christ was possible only in a Jewish landscape.”

Nietzsche writes not only of figurations, but of actualities, for a Jesus seems rudely our of place, even in the midst of the gospel of wealth and Americanism, in the “badlands” of Nevada, The transformed landscape of Nevada may not allow for parables; its pools may be land equate for the baptism of deity, its wilderness too brazen even for one who lived on locusts and hone. “Nature is always valueless, but has been given value at some time, as present - and it was we who gave and bestowed it.”

But
nature, of course, can be cast in different roles; it can be transformed accordingly. And in order to wear a new face, the landscape must in some way be divested of culture that the created its role. The world becomes chemical machine, a sacramental wilderness, a property, a proving ground, according to the dominant image a culture wished to portray. And likely such images change only through cultural catastrophe. The transformation is that tenacious. The transformation is not only responsible for the world as it is that world. It is the face of faces, the only possible configuration in the cultural world. However, transformations of being, unlike transformations of power, are not exclusive. They form a single view, but that view calculates its place in time and space by incorporating not only the unaccounted for, but the alien. Transformations of power are exclusive; they negate surrounding space; they live in stasis until their own inevitable death makes way for other system of exclusion.

Images, then, of American West may be either inclusive or exclusive. When the West assumes a face endowed by institutions of power (politics, history, nationalism, desacralized religion), the landscape becomes immovable and unbending. But the image of being moves with time, incorporating moments of change rather than rejecting them.

How and just when these transformations take place we may never know. The certainly have seldom been historicized, either because of the inability of historicism to capture the moment of transformation or from the overwhelming power of the transformation
itself. “Everything in the state, once it became a stat, or the unmapped regions west of the Missouri, had a beginning as clearly defined as the heavens and the earth in scripture. One day it wasn’t there at all: the next day it was ‘discovered’. But we still have not been able to say just when adjust why. Even the most superficial of transformation seems to elude both fixation and enlarging – perhaps because we have yet to deal meaningfully with genuine cultural moments.

The West has to multiplicity of meanings – each depending on the particular transformations a culture has wrought on the landscape. The landscape then speaks a cultural dialect.

One such cultural dialect is that of folk belief. Its particular transforming images are interesting and important because its dialect is at lest partly unselfconscious. That is, folklore, as the later chapters of this work will show, is in many ways an invisible dialect that reacts against the machinations of the status quo. And while at the same time it, paradoxically, does not deny the culture at its core, it does fight against they very visible transformations of power. And this is why I say, here and late, that folklore is not only not history, it is history’s very antithesis, since history is one of the highly visible faces a culture has been taught to wear. Folk belief itself, however, can be transformed by institutions of power when and if they become aware of its existence, when they make the unselfconscious conscious. It can, for example, be made to appear as a historical moment. But this is always done for purposes of the visible transformations conscious. It can, for example, be made to appear as
historical moment. But his is always done for purpose of the visible transformations. And it is not simply that at the moment we cannot distinguish between the conscious and unselfconscious - it is that we are not allowed to distinguish between them for the visible transformation invariably strives to make the unselfconscious appear as a visible and integral segment of the conscious. But I maintain that at their core, the transformations of folk belief do not have as their major purpose the display of power, Their questions are not visibly determined by answers, if only because the unselfconscious is concerned not with the solving of riddles, but with expression, an expression whose meaning we have still not adequately interpreted.

These are difficult problem. And they have been made to appear by collectors and preservers (the caretakers of certain transformations of power) as easy and simpleminded. The unselfconscious has rather alarming originality, even when expressed through so-called clichés and what have become rather "standard" narrative forms (standard to scholars, at least, but not to folk) forms such as myth, legend, folktale, joke. Thinking of the essence of originality, Nietzsche writes: "What is originality? To see something that has no name as yet and hence cannot be mentioned although it stares us all in the face."39 Naming takes place on several level. When scholars and scientists name, they categorize and make predictable; they impose a transformation of order. The folk also transform by naming, but the transformation occurs at a different level, that of the unselfconscious, because naming at this level is an image of
cultural legacy, not an artificially adapted language from the conscious world, whose purpose is to codify and freeze, thus making possible proper scientific study. Within a culture the names may help establish an order, a way of seeing the world; but they needn’t necessarily lead to the establishment of visible power. Naming occurred for millennia before what we call science was born. The power of naming among the folk leads, essentially, not only to the becoming of the thing or person named, but to the revivification, perpetuation, of the culture not culture that exists through codes and labels, but one that moves through the change of incorporation. A title, *Felish Concolor*, simply signifies species: provides the exclusion of labels. But human, cultural naming creates a world of possibility, in which the thing person names expands beyond far beyond, any boundaries imposed by labels. The power of unselfconscious naming lies within the possibilities of expansion, not the world of explicitly scientific order but an order whose limits perpetually change. Contemplation of such crucial problems led Stevens in his poem of the ordinary to write:

> The serious reflection is composed  
> Neither of comic nor tragic but commonplace.⁴⁰

And the commonplace is the essentially unselfconscious. Thus to speak of a folklore of the senses is to speak of the inner core, the place where the transformation is not thoroughly predetermined by its question. The transformations of the inner rings of being are and will remain partly ambiguous, if only because we do not understand the unselfconscious.
Attempts to classify the expressions of the inner rings have led. Hugely to an obfuscation of humanity, a quest for a grand hierarch, where none exists. Transformations of being are ambiguous because of their calculation to incorporate change. And, "above all, one should not wish to divest existence of its rich ambiguity."41 Once the ambiguity is divested, the unselfconscious is transformed into the conscious, into a component of a visible, predictable system, a place where a sense of the world lies totally outside itself for the sake of an institution, a belief, a classification.

I am not suggesting that in the transformation of folk belief we find a pristine expression of the essentially - human. But I am suggesting that these transformation have been accomplished for purposes other than the figuration of power. And I do believe that the quest for power has not only blurred man’s perception of nature but also of himself.42 That, in fact, it is the quest for power that has caused man to see himself apart from nature - to see nature as a commodity and as an adversary. While, on contrary, the transformations of folk belief search for a common ground between man and nature, an affinity at one felt and remembered. I am talking neither of primitivism or romanticism (both of these terms are expressions of power), but simply of humanity’s ability to transform. And I am not suggesting that in the transforming images of folk belief, the living tissues of the culture for the culture, we see humanity at peace, at one with nature. But I do believe that the word terror; for example has profoundly different connotation when used in the visible systems than it does on the level of
folk belief. One is concerned with the exploitation, with marketing of fear, while the other is concerned with the establishment of an image for the sake of the individual and his or her culture. The fearsome images we see in popular visions of werewolves, for example, exist for an overt and explicit purpose: the marketing of fear, the shock, the terror in the transformation of human to animal and back. But images of such transformation in folk belief, whether fearsome or not, are not calculated to produce terror. They are on the contrary, reasoning images of essential transformations in which movements of human to animal, the fluctuations of morphology, establish a relationship between two worlds – an extrapolation of being. Culturally, such extrapolation is indispensable – because the unseen world (or the unseen world in its fleeting, tangible manifestations) must be death with immediately and meaningfully. But popularly, such images of frothing, malevolent beasts are merely manifestations of pornography of fear.

In the contrary, images of folk belief are only salable when they are politicized, when they are knowingly exploited. Likewise, a landscape is only salable when it has become politicized.

This, then, is a book about landscape and several of its images. It is a book about the unselfconscious transformations, a book about human beings doing human things- whether good or reprehensible – a book about sowing things in human ways for human reasons.

•••

370