"Second Nature": Advertising, Metaphor and the Production of Space

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> It is in the town and not in the country, that 'terra incognita' needs to be written on our social maps.
> — Charles Booth [1891] (Cited in Leys and Old 1988, 192)

> All the time and space of his world become foreign to him with the accumulation of his alienated products. The spectacle is the map of this new world.
> — Guy Debord [1967] (1983, § 31)

In the wake of the 'spatial turn' in the social sciences and humanities, considerable attention has been devoted to the role that culture and ideology play in the production of space. "Interpretations and constructed images of reality," writes one well-known urban political economist, "are now just as important as any 'real' material reality, because these interpretations and images are diffused and accepted and become the bases on which people act: they become real .... They are ... as real as machines, material and buildings" (Storper cited in Soja 2000, 178). Sentiments such as these have been accompanied by an explosion of research into the spatial epistemologies, and especially the representation of cities, that take shape in a wide variety of media from art and literature to film, television and new information technologies. Writing about the relationship between cinema and space in the world-system, for instance, Fredric Jameson (1992) argues that mass culture always involves a secret striving to represent the totality of social space, "an unconscious, collective effort at trying to figure out where we are and what landscapes and forces confront us ..." (3). In particular, he privileges the 'narrative figurations' of fiction for their supple capacity to register and accommodate the pervasive anxieties and fears, hopes and desires that both produce and are produced by different spatial formations: their "very structure encourages a soaking up of whatever ideas in the air are left and a fantasy-solution to all the anxieties that rush to fill up our current vacuum" (4). Surprisingly, though, advertising—the one form of culture that has elevated the 'soaking up' of ideas and the provision of 'fantasy solutions' to a fine art—has received very little attention in the scholarly literature on space. Easily the most ubiquitous cultural phenomenon in late capitalist society (and, arguably, the master-narrative for all texts produced by a culture industry that increasingly conceives of itself first and foremost as a marketing device), advertising expresses and influences our spatial consciousness and imagination in a variety of ways. In the pages that follow, I want to offer a few speculative thoughts on the spatial epistemologies embedded within contemporary North American television ads and, in particular, explore how ads use nature as a metaphor to constitute space as an object of knowledge and a field of action.

Advertising as Spatial Epistemology

Critical accounts of the broader cultural and ideological significance of advertising (as opposed to the study of its success or failure in marketing specific goods or services) usually begin with the question of representation. What are the underlying patterns and consistencies that govern how advertisers portray various dimensions of our social

and natural world? The classic case, of course, is gender: countless studies have exhaustively documented how we are bombarded with idealized images of men and women that valorize certain attributes, values and forms of behavior while disparaging, marginalizing or excluding others. Mass diffusion of these stereotypes (and their replication in other forms of culture) has a profound impact upon the process of identity formation insofar as they furnish a set of cultural blueprints through which to understand, imagine, construct and experience ourselves as gendered subjects. The impulse to consume rises out of the gap between idealized image and everyday reality. After four decades of feminist consciousness-raising, activism and critique, this has become a familiar and transparent (if no less visceral or avoidable) logic. Conversely, the normative spatial archetypes that appear in the landscapes of advertising pass by virtually unnoticed, perceived (if at all) as little more than an idealized 'backdrop' designed to complement the favourable depiction of commodity or brand. More than simply serving as an innocent frame for the 'real' action, however, such representations feed into and reinforce an interlocking network of 'common sense' assumptions and beliefs that mediate our interaction with space.

Advertising is but one component of ideologies of space that incorporate a jumbled, heterogeneous and often contradictory mix of philosophical fragments and cultural myths, images and symbols, ideas and beliefs, rituals, institutions and practices. Crudely speaking, such ideologies operate at two inter connected levels. First, they give structure and form to how we experience space, furnishing the categories and concepts through which perception becomes knowledge and thereby legitimating certain forms of awareness and experience while precluding others. Second, they also produce maps of affect which regulate our capacity and desire to make emotional investments in space, shaping how and why certain types of space (or features of particular spaces) come to 'matter' to us in both positive and negative terms, while others are largely ignored. [2] Advertisers actively intervene in the processes by which knowledge and emotions take shape around space in order to position their goods and services—and consumption more broadly—as a means for people to both expand and intensify their capacity to experience space in a productive and pleasurable manner, as well as to minimize or ameliorate their exposure to less hospitable environments. Insofar as these maps of meaning and pleasure articulate with maps generated by other forms of culture, within other institutions or through other practices, powerful 'structures of feeling' are generated that normalize, naturalize and valorize certain ways of thinking, experiencing and dreaming about space. Most importantly in my view, these structures establish the epistemological conditions under which space becomes known either as a social product, subject to human knowledge and political regulation, or a natural entity that seemingly lies beyond our capacity to understand, let alone control.

In Landscapes of Capital, an innovative, extensive and wide-ranging discussion of contemporary television commercials, Robert Goldman, Stephen Papson and Noah Kersey (2003, 2005) argue that a new species of corporate advertising has emerged over the last decade or so which offers an idealized yet complex and multidimensional portrait of how time and space have been transformed by the 'information capitalism' of the twenty-first century. In promoting themselves (or, rather , their brand identities), corporate giants such as Microsoft, AT&T and General Electric now generate images and narratives that speak less to the features of any particular good or service and more to the virtues of capitalism itself as a revolutionary economic force that brings radical social, political and technological change in its wake. "Though any single commercial may lack the representational breadth to be considered a map, taken as a totality corporate commercials do constitute symbolic mappings of new time-space relations." On the one hand, the world is presented as a space of growing complexity, chaos and velocity, transformed by the spread of markets and new technologies into fluid, transnational networks of power, money, information, people and goods that circulate in uneven and unpredictable flows throughout the globe. Such an environment creates formidable challenges and even dangers for individuals and institutions accustomed to the more stable climate of the past. On the other hand, such changes are also portrayed as opening up tremendous opportunities for profit and success to those willing and able to adapt themselves to the exigencies of this new world order. Not surprisingly, the corporation is positioned as the crucial interlocutor here, a repository of the knowledge, skills and technology necessary for success in the unforgiving, hyper-competitive marketplace of today. Modernist fantasies of exercising absolute control over social space give way to a post-modernist proxy which transcribes raw discourses of power into the more refined language of data and information, positioning knowledge of space as the key to its profitable exploitation. A recent ad for United Parcel Services nicely encapsulates these themes: flying brown squares are superimposed upon a succession of urban landscapes in grid-like patterns, connoting the company's precision in mapping and coordinating the movement of objects through time and space [3].

"At 7:42 A.M. critical samples arrived at this pharmaceutical lab. At 9:34 A.M. a trade proposal arrived at the

National Congress in Brazil .... Who made all of these things happen? A company that delivers more packages on time than anyone." [4] Panoptic dreams of surveillance tied to the mapping of complex flows of commodities and information subsume the prospect of understanding social space beneath corporate objectives of productivity and efficiency, conceiving the production of spatial knowledge as a narrowly economic and technical affair, rather than a broader political and cultural project.

Goldman, Papson and Kersey perform an exemplary job of charting how the latent desire to see the 'landscapes and forces that confront us' is routinely channelled into benign and affirmative portraits of capitalism. Yet, as they readily admit, their examples are primarily drawn from ads for a limited range of services—finance, insurance, transportation (shipping), resource extraction, data processing, communication and travel—targeted first and foremost to business and economic elites. What about the more amorphous representations of space one finds within ads for consumer products that are directed at a much broader audience and which appear with much greater frequency and volume in our mass media? Moreover, advertising does more than provide deeply ideological explanations of what space is and how it should be organized: it also implicitly offers normative models of how we might orient ourselves towards and engage with our spatial surroundings. Introducing his pathbreaking work The Production of Space, Henri Lefebvre (1991) explains that "instead of emphasizing the rigorously formal aspect of codes [of representation], I shall instead be putting the stress on their dialectical character. Codes will be seen as part of a practical relationship, as part of an interaction between 'subjects' and their space and surroundings" (17-18). Along these lines, I would argue that more often than not the epistemological significance of any given ad lies not so much in how it represents space per se as in the condensed and often metaphorical account it provides of how space feels or ought to feel. Indeed, as Louis Althusser (1971) once famously suggested, "what is represented in ideology is ... not the system of real relations which govern the existence of individuals, but the imaginary relation of these individuals to the real relations in which they live" (155). Notwithstanding the many faults of structural Marxism, this maxim remains the most compelling articulation of the ideological logic that animates the culture industry and it is especially useful in theorizing the social and cultural effects of advertising. The task of denouncing the spectacular distortions of advertising, then, must be supplemented with a more speculative reckoning of how these distortions perform what Jameson (1990) calls, after the Freudian logic of the dream, 'transformational work' upon the real needs, feelings and experiences of people in order to ensure their expression, accommodation, satisfaction and management within the existing social order. In short, my argument is that the main cultural significance of the portrayal of space within advertising may lie less with the systematic representation (or misrepresentation) of 'real' space in a specific manner and more with the provision of metaphors and pedagogic narratives that sponsor the living of space in mythic and imaginary ways.

The most persistent spatial logic within advertising taken as a discursive field is the conceptual and affective division of space into two different types: privatized, household or 'inside' space that is both infinitely malleable (and therefore expressive of personal taste and social status) and subject to microscopic levels of control; and a much broader, nebulous category of 'outside' space that encompasses both social and natural environments. As noted above, this latter form of space harbors great potential for stimulating, exciting and pleasurable experiences, but at the same time appears inherently resistant to the possibility of 'cognitive mapping', and thus fundamentally ungovernable in any democratic sense of the term. The implications of such a division for a politics of space are profound. On the one hand, embryonic impulses to participate in the creation, construction and regulation of social space are channelled into the endless project of perfecting domestic space and rigorously patrolling its borders to ensure the systematic exclusion of anything that does not belong. While this epistemological formation (and associated patterns of spatial desire) largely takes shape around the personal space of the home, it also cultivates a latent xenophobia and appetite for spatial 'purity' that is easily mobilized in support of a politics of surveillance, discipline and control (e.g. The Patriot Act, 'cleaning' up city streets through aggressive policing, etc). It installs and reinforces a spatial imaginary in which it becomes difficult to conceive of the 'perfection' of space without the liquidation of that which does not fit. This desire for stability and control, however, has in many ways become little more than a defensive, rearguard action in a world that appears to have become profoundly unknowable and uncontrollable. Accordingly, advertisers couple fantasies of domestic utopia with narratives that speak to the intellectual stimulation and aesthetic invigoration that can accrue when we seek extraordinary 'outside' spaces that seemingly enable novel forms of experience. In fact, our capacity to take pleasure from such spaces becomes—in important ways—dependent upon the extent to which it is 'alien' to us, filled with mysterious properties that can disrupt the routines and expectations that otherwise dominate our everyday interaction with space. Put simply, not

only do images of space in advertising compromise our capacity to understand space as socially and historically constituted, they teach us that our enjoyment of it is inversely proportional to its lucidity: spectacle—the 'time and space of [our] world become foreign to [us]'—becomes the preeminent signifier of the capacity of space to produce meaningful, enjoyable and memorable experience.

'Just Passing Through': Mobility, Vision and Space

Surveying any and all aspects of how this logic takes shape in television advertising would be a truly exhaustive (and probably futile) enterprise given the volume and diversity of commercials. Consequently, our primary focus will be ads for automobiles, [5] a useful area to examine for a couple of reasons. First, automotive advertising has been consistently understudied in the field of critical advertising scholarship despite the fact that promotional spending in this sector consistently dwarfs all other categories [6]. Second, and more important for this project, no other sector devotes as much time and energy to depicting the relationship between individuals and space, in large part because no other commodity or technology has exercised as great an influence over the (re)ordering of our built environments and spatial imaginaries during the twentieth century. It will come as little surprise that the most powerful, compelling and persistent narratives in auto advertising have little to do with either price or the functional qualities of particular vehicles or brands. Instead, they take shape in the constellation of mobility, space and freedom. The (con)fusion of technology and politics has always been among the most significant features of consumer society, a dynamic that mass 'automobility' and the promotional fields woven around it have played no small part in championing over the last eighty or so years. Movement through space is positioned as a concrete, material realization of freedom, a visceral and exhilarating experience that lends a physical, tangible quality to a political virtue that all too often remains disappointingly abstract or formal. "The private automobile represents freedom, opportunity and possibilities," writes Kevin Smith (2002), Editor in Chief of Car and Driver, the leading consumer oriented automotive magazine in North America. "It has had more impact on the human experience than any other invention of its time .... Being able to go somewhere, individually and independently, opens up the world" (17). An editorial in The Economist similarly champions the automobile as "the greatest mobile force for freedom in the rich democracies" (Cited in Freund and Martin 1993, 82). What are the implications of such sentiments—as they are channelled by and through the advertising industry—upon the epistemologies that mediate our understanding, perception and experience of space? How do they affect the (re)presentation of space in television commercials? Two themes strike me as especially significant in this regard.

First, notwithstanding the intense fetishizing of domestic space I noted above, the 'outside' spaces that have the potential to interest, excite and stimulate us are those to which we must travel, rather than those in which we spend our everyday lives. While it is doubtful that many believe in the literal reality of the mythic dreamscapes constructed by advertisers, such images inaugurate and sustain forms of spatial desire for spectacular locations that can overwhelm the senses and fire the imagination. Dreaming about space takes the form of going somewhere else rather than (re)imagining the relatively mundane spaces of the familiar. "Tell better stories," tempts an ad for Nissan Pathfinder, showing a middle aged couple regaling their dinner guests with a tale about how they came to possess a hawk feather framed upon their wall.

> Our trip, we load up our new Nissan Pathfinder and head out. Make camp. Unmake camp. Get a better idea. Get lost. Get found. Jump in a lake. Jump out of the lake. We keep driving. Watch four movies. Come across this family and give them a ride. Well the father turns out to be this Navajo healing man and soon we're around this fire and they give us this hawk feather. We drive home without touching a freeway and get back just as we run out of CDs ... Broccoli? [7]

A visual montage with twenty-four distinct edits in less than twenty seconds accompanies the story. As trivial or ridiculous as ads like this might be, they nevertheless shape our expectations about the potential of different types of space to provide physical, intellectual and emotional gratification; more to the point, they invite us to conceptualize privatized mobility as the best (and only) strategy for changing the role of space in our lives from a banal, unremarkable and even constraining force into a resource for excitement, stimulation and empowerment.

Countless variations of this basic message romanticize a nomadic sensibility, counseling that if we want to experience places that will awaken our curiousity and intellect, invigorate our senses, improve our social and spiritual well-being and create new opportunities for friendship, intimacy and personal growth, then travel to new,

exotic and unfamiliar spaces is obviously the best strategy. The relationship between agency, autonomy and space is reconfigured around narratives of mobility, speed and escape as compared to thicker, deeper or more grounded forms of spatial agency based in the democratic construction and governance of existing social and public spaces. Measured against the dreamworlds of promotional culture and exciting experiences they appear to make possible, the spaces of our neighborhoods and communities appear diminished and unremarkable, unlikely sites for the investment of utopian energies needed to energize a truly radical and transformative spatial politics. Utopia—the good place—thus also remains 'no place', that which we might dream about finding elsewhere, but never something that we might collectively design or build ourselves. Automakers commonly depict automobiles passing through fantastic, otherworldly landscapes filled with remarkable sights and sounds. In an ad for Mitsubishi, for instance, a young woman drives through an imaginary underwater environment populated by exotic sea creatures and a futuristic submarine, her eyes filled with wonder. "Where will the Colt take you?" [8] A more dystopian vision from Acura sets the automobile's passage through an ominous—almost apocalyptic—landscape of storms, tidal waves and urban desolation to a gothic electronic beat.

The specific characteristics of such fantastic environments matter less than the shared orientation to space modeled again and again by the human subjects in these ads: space becomes noteworthy insofar as it offers a collection of visual delights designed to enchant and entertain. The familiarity of the environments we know best, precisely because they breed a certain level of comfort and predictability, become an index of their quotidian status as differentiated from the novel, monumental and spectacular features of space dramatized by advertisers, features that ultimately become a pre-requisite for space to attract our attention and desire.

The second theme that clusters around the promotional discourse of automobility is a phenomenology of perception that privileges the visual characteristics of space. As Wolfgang Schivelbusch notes in his oft-cited study of railway travel in the nineteenth century, the preeminence of vision is intimately related to speed. Travel through landscapes at increasing velocities in self-contained vehicles generates a fundamental disjuncture between travellers and the world outside, elevating the visual faculty as the preeminent and architectonic sense through which one experiences space. "Panoramic perception, in contrast to traditional perception, no longer belonged to the same space as the perceived objects: the traveller saw the objects, landscapes, through the apparatus that moved him through the world" (Cited in Goldman, Papson and Kersey 2003). Television ads, especially those for automobiles, consistently replicate this form of perception, positioning the visual characteristics of space as the principle features through which it becomes intelligible, meaningful and emotionally significant. Special effects, for example, are more prevalent in advertising than in virtually all other media (with the possible exception of videogames) and are primarily used to convey ideas, meanings, values and emotions in a condensed, shorthand fashion through visual means. In an ad for Jaguar, for instance, lingering close-ups that lovingly trace the smooth curves and polished chrome of the vehicle not only define it as an object of sexual desire—the commercial is entitled 'Lust' after one of the seven deadly sins—but, more importantly, invite us to privilege the literal fetishization of commodities as a source of erotic pleasure [9].

Techniques of graphic reproduction take on epistemological significance in terms of how they code certain landscapes, features of space or modes of spatial engagement as meaningful or emotionally significant in particular ways.

Among the battery of tactics regularly used by advertisers, the quick-cut is probably the most common (though rarely noticed) effect one finds in television commercials. Most thirty second ads, for instance, will have ten to fifteen distinct edits, each involving either a shift in visual perspective or the portrayal of an entirely different location. At one level, such fragmentation is little more than a crude device for securing the attention of the viewer. But it also has deeper implications in terms of privileging a particular mode of interaction between space and subject. A brisk montage of images suggests that the car, and by extension, rapid movement is the key that can literally translate space into a phenomena that is visually interesting, aesthetically complex and even physically exhilarating. The volume, scale and dynamism of visual stimuli that any given place can supply are surreptitiously positioned as the features most likely to motivate and attract our interest, attention and enthusiasm. At a more abstract level, though, the intense visual fragmentation of most auto ads convey both an expression of spatial disorientation—a sense that the complexity and velocity of our environment makes it virtually impossible to understand and locate ourselves within time and space— and the simultaneous enchantment or aestheticization of such disorientation as an opportunity for spectacular forms of consumption that proceed via the emancipation of the visual fragment from its placement within a meaningful structure or totality. Visual stimulation thereby serves as a form of ocular compensation for cognitive disorientation. Radical shifts in perspective and location as the camera effortlessly dives

around the commodity, zooming in for a close-up in one moment, pulling back for a wide panning shot in the next, offer an experience of space in multiple dimensions. Yet the utopian power of the camera to penetrate deeply into the tissue of space stands in inverse proportion to the advertisement's willingness to offer up any secrets of the commodity or the landscape in which it is embedded: instead, their history, the social, political and economic conditions under which they were produced remain unacknowledged.

Spectacle displaces intelligible totality. The quantity and quality of visual stimuli that advertising injects into representations of space, the meticulously crafted 'perfection' such simulations embody and the perpetual excitement, happiness and awe they generate in the actors who inhabit them creates a compelling web of associations between space, spectacle and human gratification. What kinds of spaces do we need, want or dream about? The power of advertising lies not in the provision of any definitive answer, but rather in tilting the scale clearly in favor of those that can satisfy (and stimulate) a thirst for scopic pleasure. Given the limits imposed by the thirty second spot, advertising has grown reliant upon highly stylized and iconic representations of space that are instantly recognizable, eliciting certain ideas, values or feelings, as well as making an immediate and strong impression upon the viewer, creating a highly charged cultural space in which to embed the product, brand or message. Irrespective of the content of those spaces, the television commercial demands, and therefore normalizes, strategies of perception in which our capacity to classify, comprehend and enjoy space (or its representation) depends upon the extent to which it furnishes visual cues that are, on the one hand, relatively straightforward to recognize and identify but, on the other hand, sufficiently spectacular and 'eye-catching' in terms of scale, intensity and dynamism to merit our interest and attention.

'It's a Jungle Out There': From Society to Nature and Back Again [10]

Since the emergence of the automobile as a mass commodity in the early twentieth century, natural themes and imagery have been used to flesh out and concretize these two principles of spatial epistemology—the pursuit of spatial novelty and a spatial phenomenology that privileges spectacle—by attaching a utopian flavor to movement through space. "We shall solve the city problem," Henry Ford once quipped, "by leaving the city" (Cited in Flink 1988, 139). From the 1920s onward, car advertising has invoked the fantasy of leaving behind the constraints of a crowded, mundane and polluted urban environment for the wide open spaces offered by nature. Charting the evolution of automotive promotional discourse, Andrew Wernick (1991) argues that the reliance upon natural imagery intensified in the 1970s and 1980s as people grew disenchanted with technology (and its militaristic overtones) and expressed concerns over growing traffic congestion, energy consumption and road construction (77-79). Among the easiest tactics for advertisers wishing to deflect the negative associations invoked by the car was, and remains, an image-based rearticulation of cars with nature. For both producers and consumers, the association of automobiles with (travel to) pristine natural environments helps to forget the vast resources and infrastructure required to support car-based societies as well as the enormous ecological consequences that accompany their mass production. In an American context, the use of natural imagery also taps deeply into core national myths. Thomas Jefferson, for example, famously idealized the authenticity and moral supremacy of life in the country, an idea that has been replayed in countless texts and venues over the past two centuries in which a redemptive arc is traced from the corruption of the city to the honesty, virtue and community of the small town. Frederick Jackson Turner's 'frontier thesis', which has become deeply embedded in popular culture (if somewhat discredited in academic scholarship) traces a similar trajectory in defining the essential strength and vigour of U.S. moral character and democracy as a product of the struggle to carve a new life out of the wilderness and, conversely, suggesting the likely atrophy of such virtues in an urban environment. The recent popularity of sentimental and often melancholy tributes to the declining role that nature plays in everyday life, best expressed perhaps in Bill McKibben's bestsellers The End of Nature (1989) and The Age of Missing Information (1992), confirm the ongoing purchase that this dream of escaping the city for the sensual bliss of nature continues to hold on the popular imagination.

The flight from urban to natural space looms large in automobile ads of today, ranging from the carefully crafted stories of big budget national campaigns to generic footage of vehicles racing through natural landscapes that populate spots for local dealers. Cities or, more accurately, the monotonous routines that often seem to dominate urban and suburban existence are regularly targeted by advertisers. A typical ad for Saab, for instance, paints an Orwellian portrait of social life as characterized by endless sameness: row upon row of identical suburban homes, identical suitcases on an airport trolley, identical office cubicles, identical dresses in a clothing store and, lastly,

identical black sedans in a parking garage. Puzzled, confused and disoriented, the commercial's protagonists shuffle about aimlessly in a bland, urban dystopia of complete homogeneity. Finally, salvation arrives in the form of a silver Saab convertible that offers its young driver the opportunity to stand out from the crowd. As the growl of its engine mixes with the chorus 'I'm free' sung by The Who, the vehicle slowly pulls out of a parking garage, leaving a stunned onlooker speechless with wonder. "In a world of sameness, you can still maintain your identity." [11] It is a familiar refrain, duplicated ad nauseam since marketers discovered the counterculture in the 1960s, yet still a popular formula in marketing discourse.

The flip side of this denigration of urban life is the idealization of nature (and the technology to get us 'there') as the antidote to the mind-numbing boredom of daily life. Invoking nature as the endpoint of vehicular travel confirms the belief that spatial mobility can offer access to places, experiences and events that are fundamentally different. Escape to someplace else is both possible and desirable, offering an emancipation from the tyranny of the everyday. A Honda ad begins with the archetype of a normal, ordinary, even generic man rising from his bed, brushing his teeth, kissing his wife goodbye and working in an office. A deep imprint in his mattress, worn footprints in front of the sink, the outline of his lips on his wife's cheek and the deep grooves his office chair has worn into the carpet reveal that each action has been performed in precisely the same way, countless times before. The accompanying piano melody is slow and banal to the point of being tedious. Then, as he leaves work, our latter-day Sisyphus stops, looks up, and sees a black Honda Pilot with a powerboat in tow. Entranced, he steps off a path worn deep into the ground, the spell of the commodity shattering his imprisonment within the spaces of the everyday. Drums pounding, a rock soundtrack cranks up as images of our hero and his excited family driving through the great outdoors pass across the screen. The spiritual death of comfortable life in city and suburb give way to the adventurous exploration of a wilderness environment [12]. A pair of ads for Jeep and Acura follow the same pattern in terms of contrasting the virtues of nature as compared to the ills of the city. Both begin with images of peaceful travel through spectacular wilderness terrain, the scenery accompanied by soothing, peaceful melodies. Abruptly, nature vanishes and we find the vehicles are actually mired in traffic gridlock, the wilderness imagery but a dream. "The Jeep Liberty makes you feel like you're in the middle of nowhere ... even when you're not" while Acura informs us that, with respect to its SUV, "its heart is in the right place ... even when you're not." [13]

The virtuous character and restorative powers of natural landscapes are invariably linked to their awe-inspiring visual features, the second epistemological principle discussed earlier. Nature's value and significance grows in proportion to the extent that it can be perceived and consumed in a spectacular fashion: indeed, the ease with which such wilderness locales can be sharply and quickly differentiated from more prosaic locations is precisely what makes them so attractive to advertisers. Nissan, for instance, lifts the energetic chorus from British rock band Stereophonics's hit 'High as a Ceiling'—'find my way, free my soul, eyes wide open'—and layers it over images of kayakers, cross-country runners and alpine snowboarders hurtling through isolated wilderness terrain, symbolizing the Xterra's capacity to partner with nature in the invigoration of human bodies. [14] One might reasonably object that depictions of intense physical activity, in fact, challenge the hegemony of vision by promoting the pleasures of a visceral, embodied and 'direct' engagement with the environment, valorising a 'pure', 'raw' and sensual experience of natural space that both relies upon and stimulates each and every human sense (as compared to the sensory deprivation that, it is implied, characterizes life in the city). Yet the key that unlocks such an experience is almost always the visual splendour of the natural landscape. It is not the activity per se, but the prospect of doing it amidst such breathtaking scenery that constitutes the underlying logic of these types of ads. Signifiers of nature become emblematic of the pursuit of spectacular visual experience that dominates our perceptions and expectations of space.

In an award-winning spot for Volkswagen, for instance, a young couple—smiling beatifically at one another—are shown scaling mountain trails in their SUV in order to take a snapshot of the panoramic vista at the summit for a senior citizen who eagerly awaits their return in the parking lot [15].

Two recent ads for the new Jeep Commander showcase a similar sensibility. In the first one, we hear children react with awe and amazement as a school of sharks swims overhead: slowly, the camera pulls back to reveal the 'Command View' skylights as the SUV emerges from its underwater sight-seeing excursion. "That was cool," concludes a boy in the backseat. [16] The second opens with footage of a nature documentary running on the jeep's DVD player: "Virtually inaccessible, the remote northern territory is a fortress of alpine peaks, the terrain so brutal, its beauty has seldom been seen by human eyes. Only the most adventuresome have ever set foot in this desolate yet picturesque landscape." Again, a slow camera pan shows that the vehicle is actually parked on a mountain peak in

the very same territory described in the documentary. Seven friends admire the awe-inspiring views of snowcapped mountains and densely forested valleys as one nonchalantly suggests "this is much better than the movie".

Both commercials conclude with the tagline: "It's your world. Take command." [17] This martial injunction plainly refers not to physical or proprietary control over space nor to the simple mastery of nature for our own ends but instead models a form of spatial agency based on the pursuit of visual stimulation, the art of cleverly positioning oneself in the right place at the right time, thereby maximizing one's 'subjection' to an array of spectacular environments and events.

At one level, explaining the appeal of natural imagery as a marketing device (and the ideological implications that flow from such rhetorical strategies) is not especially difficult. As Kate Soper (1995) explains, "the societies that have most abused nature have also perennially applauded its ways over those of 'artifice', have long valued its health and integrity over the decadence of human contrivance, and today employ pastoral imagery as the most successful of conventions to enhance the profits on everything from margarine to motor cars" (150). The semiotic economy that governs promotional culture ensures that the most highly prized marketing slogans and signifiers are those that enable people to symbolically distance and differentiate themselves from conventional, 'mainstream' forms of social life. Scarcity breeds value, and the more difficult it becomes to 'experience' nature (or places that are culturally sanctified as relatively untouched by human activity), the more appealing natural signifiers become as a means of distinction. "In virtually all its manifestations," notes William Cronon (1995), "wilderness represents a flight from history" (79). As city streets and suburban neighbourhoods give way to the rugged, epic and timeless beauty of landscapes seemingly untouched by humanity, one can fantasize about escaping the collected ills and burdens of history, society and civilization. Such narratives reduce the complexities and interdependence of nature and history to mutually exclusive spatial archetypes, inviting us to believe that they are entirely separate and distinct from each other and, most importantly, that the automobile can effortlessly spirit one between them. When nature and history face off in the Manichean narratives favoured by promotional culture, the former always wins; not because its signifiers are inherently more attractive or appealing, but because such contests fix and freeze space into an assortment of essentialist configurations, the attributes of any given space predetermined by how it fits into a simplistic framework of primitive archetypes. Not only is urban space demonized in a host of predictable ways, but, more dangerously, urban ills that have an eminently social and historical origin—congestion, smog, suburban sprawl, urban poverty, crime and so on—are naturalized as inevitable features of urban life, reinforcing personalized flight as the only viable and realistic solution to, as Ford put it, the 'problem' of the city.

But are the ideological effects of nature in automobile advertising exhausted by its capacity to serve as a utopian foil to life in the city? A sanctuary from the monotony, boredom and sameness of the everyday? A privileged site for the (re)awakening of body and soul to primordial forms of experience? An escapist distraction and retreat from a more substantive and rational engagement with both the potential and the problems of urban space? It is, without question, all of these things some of the time. But I would argue it is also something more. Writing about the fantasies of Hollywood in the 1930s and 1940s, Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno (1993) warned that "the escape from everyday drudgery which the whole culture industry promises may be compared to the daughter's abduction in the cartoon: the father is holding the ladder in the dark" (142). A similar logic is at play in the stories and images of advertising. On the one hand, natural signifiers facilitate the clustering of utopian desires for difference, escape and the renovation of experience around the promotional narratives of automobility. On the other, those signifiers also serve as highly potent metaphors for the transcription of existing forms of spatial experience into a mythic form. Just as the distortions of the dream help to accommodate the expression and 'management' of wishes and anxieties that would otherwise be repressed, images of nature can similarly solicit the (distorted) expression of popular hopes and fears about social space.

"The alienated city," notes Jameson, "is above all a space in which people are unable to map (in their minds) either their own position or the urban totality" (Cited in Freund and Martin, 107). Given the exponential rate at which time and space have been compressed over the last three decades, it is tempting to explain this collective disorientation as a phenomena of recent origin, symptomatic of the growing complexity and interdependence of virtually all aspects of social life. Certainly the expansion and intensification of capitalist social relations, euphemistically described as globalization, have drawn all parts of the world—in one way or another—into hyper-dynamic networks of production, exchange and consumption that have become virtually impossible to map or even conceptualize from moment to moment. The penetration of the commodity form into all aspects of daily life brings even the smallest and most trivial activities, objects and spaces under the sway of vast social, economic and political forces that literally

escape representation (except, perhaps, in the most caricatured of forms). Yet our detachment and isolation, at both a conceptual and practical level, from the processes, relations and institutions that govern our world is not merely a formulaic correlate of their increasing scale, fluidity and scope. Instead, it is compounded by the social logic of alienation Karl Marx (1978) discerned in the commodification of labour over a century and a half ago. "The alienation of the worker in his product means not only that his labour becomes an object, an external existence, but that it exists outside him, independently, as something alien to him, and that it becomes a power of its own confronting him; it means that the life he has conferred on the object confronts him as something hostile and alien" (72). As the commodity form spreads beyond the labour process, subsuming more and more use-values under the principle of exchange, this experience of alienation becomes generalized throughout capitalist society. Integrating Weber's sobering and largely pessimistic account of instrumental rationality's 'iron cage' with Marx's analysis of alienation, Georg Lukacs (1990) argues that reification—the petrification of social relations and historical processes into things—robs people of the capacity (and the will) to understand and engage with their world as the product of collective human activity. Instead, seemingly helpless in the face of forces that defy comprehension and control, passive forms of knowledge and activity become normalized.

In spatial terms, reification has deep implications for the epistemologies that mediate how we conceptualize and experience our social and material environments. In particular, as the logic of commodification spreads, so too does the collective amnesia spawned by the separation of people from the conditions and practices through which social space is produced. We literally 'forget' that the spaces in which we dwell are the product of social and historical forces and thereby subject to some measure of democratic regulation. Instead, as Lukacs (1990) observes, human beings "erect around themselves in the reality they have created and 'made', a kind of second nature which evolves with exactly the same inexorable necessity as was the case earlier on with irrational forces of nature ..." (128, emphasis added). In recent years, the concept of second nature has proven remarkably fertile in deconstructing how what we tend to think of as purely 'natural' has, in fact, been socially produced. [18] What is less often explored, however, is the appeal and use of nature as a metaphor to express the affective dimensions of capitalist experience. Indeed, it is precisely this expressive relationship between economy and culture that fascinated Walter Benjamin (1999) in his famous study of the Parisian Arcades: "the economic conditions under which society exists are expressed in the superstructure—precisely as, with the sleeper, an overfull stomach finds not its reflection but its expression in the contents of dreams ..." (392, emphasis added). Much of his work involved a meticulous investigation into how experiences of alienation in a city being reshaped by the logic of capital were expressed in the popular culture of the day. Among the most interesting literary fragments collected in The Arcades Project are those that press natural motifs into metaphorical service in the articulation of such alienation. "Cities, like forests," writes Victor Hugo, "have their dens in which all their vilest and most terrible monsters hide" (415). Or Honore Balzac: "The poetry of terror which the stratagems of enemy tribes at war create in the heart of the forests of America, and of which Cooper has made such good use, was attached to the smallest details of Parisian life" (442). Lastly, from Charles Baudelaire, "Man ... is always ... in a state of savagery. What are the perils of the jungle and prairie compared to the daily shocks and conflicts of civilization? Whether a man embraces his dupe on the boulevard, or spears his prey in unknown forests, is he not ... the most highly perfected beast of prey?" (443). Fascinated with Benjamin's remapping of nineteenth century Paris as a primeval, phantasmagoric landscape in which humanity once again slumbered under the spell of myth and nature, Horkheimer and Adorno (1993) developed this constellation of ideas as one of the principle organizing motifs of Dialectic of Enlightenment: "It is as if," they write, "the final result of civilization were a return to the terrors of nature" (113).

It is an idea that the copywriters and creative directors of Madison Avenue have taken as their own. Television commercials that present natural forces as unpredictable and dangerous have become increasingly common in the field of auto advertising. Among the most memorable variant on this theme appears in a recent spot for Acura. Accompanied by an ominous cinematic soundtrack, a silver SUV slowly makes its way through a dense forest shrouded in mist. Suddenly, in Tolkienesque fashion, the trees and shrubs come alive, attacking the vehicle with root, branch and hurled boulders. Dodging and weaving the relentless assault, the SUV finally races into the safety of an open field just ahead of the grasping claws of the predatory forest. "Because you never know what nature might throw at you," explains the narrator. [19]

An equally magical sequence for Lexus depicts an angry wind god vainly trying to blow the luxury car off the road. [20] Volvo depicts a diver protected from an aggressive great white shark by a distinctive, car-shaped cage. [21] While Toyota regularly deploys blissful images of a peaceful nature in order to promote its line of hybrids, it offers a

very different vision of nature in its ads for trucks. One commercial, for instance, cycles through images of natural disaster—floods, mud slides, tornadoes, earthquakes, forest fires and so on—noting that "whatever gets thrown at them, people all over the world rely on Toyota trucks to make it through". [22]

In a somewhat lighter vein, a second uses faux home movie footage that shows a pick-up survive a direct hit from a meteor, its occupants howling with delight after the impact. [23] A Jeep driver on an ocean causeway rolls to a stop as a massive tree suddenly falls out of a blue sky, blocking the road. After a moment or two, he calmly drives over the trunk and continues on his way: the Wrangler Rubicon is "engineered for the unexpected". [24] Images of a ferocious and unpredictable nature are, of course, ideal for dramatizing an automobile's capacity to protect its occupants from inclement driving conditions as well as master the roughest terrain. However, I would argue such narratives have broader (if unintended) effects upon how we conceptualize and understand the world that lies outside. Among the many attractions of nature—in all of its many guises from terrifying to serene—to advertisers is its seemingly boundless capacity to accommodate the felicitous projection, expression and aestheticization of our thoughts and feelings about social space, from utopian dreams about environments that can delight, inspire and amaze to dystopian nightmares of frightening and dangerous spaces that threaten our safety, security and well-being.

Aestheticizing Reification: Epistemologies of the Sublime

Fear, incomprehension, spectacle, metaphor and nature bring us to the conceptual terrain of the sublime. While the diversity of phenomena that have attracted the label 'sublime' have multiplied in recent years, [25] it is fair to say that natural environments remain the dominant archetype when it comes to thinking through experiences of the sublime. For Edmund Burke, such experiences come "upon us in the gloomy forest, in the howling wilderness, in the form of the lion, the tiger, the panther or rhinocerous" (Cited in Hitt 1999, 605). In The Critique of Judgement, Immanuel Kant divides sublime experience into two variants: the mathematical, generated by natural landscapes of vast magnitude and unfathomable scale; and the dynamic, in which one confronts the power and ferocity of uncontrollable natural forces. Of the latter, for instance, he writes:

> At the moment of the sublime, we measure ourselves against the apparent almightiness of nature …. Bold, overhanging, and, as it were, threatening rocks, thunder-clouds piled up the vault of heaven, borne along with flashes and peals, volcanoes in all their violence of destruction, hurricanes leaving desolation in their track, the boundless ocean rising with rebellious force, the high waterfall of some mighty river, and the like, make our power of resistance a trifling moment in comparison with their might (ibid).

The sublime, then, is generated by environments of terrifying power and immensity over which human beings exercise neither control nor understanding; facing them, we grapple with a visceral experience of ourselves as inconsequential and insignificant when set against the totality of the overwhelming and unpredictable forces of nature. In the Romantic cultural sensibilities of the nineteenth century, echoes of which resound in contemporary environmental consciousness as well as the commodified 'New Age' spiritualism of late capitalism, nature marks the boundaries and outer limits of human reason and control. In its most progressive guise, sublime experience marks a humbling revolt of the senses against imperialist Enlightenment and capitalist narratives that define nature as little more than raw material to be studied, transformed and exploited in the satisfaction of (narrowly conceived) human needs and interests.

Yet as many commentators have observed, sublime experience ends with neither terror nor abjection, but more ambiguously with a mixture of fear, joy and delight, and its end result is often an invigorated and even empowered subject. In The Romantic Sublime, Thomas Weiskel (1976) argues that the sublime unfolds over three successive stages or moments. First, that which we perceive is fundamentally in accord with our intellectual faculties: there is an underlying harmony or congruence between the impressions of our senses and our capacity to give them meaning. In the second, this "habitual relation of mind and object" comes to a sudden end before an image, idea, sensation or experience that exceeds our understanding: we are confronted with a space or phenomena that is literally incomprehensible. The final moment involves a restoration of meaning through an intellectual sleight of hand: our lack of knowledge itself assumes deeper significance as expressive of a privileged communion with a transcendent and otherwise unimaginable other (22-25). Via the semiotic alchemy performed by the sublime, absence of meaning (or, more properly, experience of an object that overflows and disturbs the process of making sense)

becomes the foundation for deeper forms of meaning laden with affect. For Kant, the ultimate victor in this process is reason itself and, by association, the subject which passes through and beyond fear and self-doubt to invoke its faculties of aesthetic judgement in the extraction of meaning from the experience. Nature's overwhelming sensual, material presence becomes grist for the conceptual and aesthetic mill that is the transcendental ego. Momentary loss or displacement of that ego in initial moments of fear and disorientation ensure that its eventual return, and accompanying sentiments of mastery, will be all the more pleasurable and enduring.

Experiencing natural space as sublime depends upon the preeminence of the visual faculty and the associated transformation of nature into spectacle. At one level, the attributes of sublime landscapes—scale and/or power— are most effectively triggered through visual cues. The vast emptiness and unfathomable depths of the open ocean, for instance, or the destructive power of an earthquake or volcanic eruption are simply inconceivable without a strong visual presence. More importantly, though, faced by a transcendent, unknowable and often threatening 'otherness', onlookers can train themselves to (re)experience such spaces in spectacular form by cultivating a posture of contemplative detachment from both natural phenomena and the visceral reaction of terror and fear they might otherwise generate. Accenting the visual features of space, then, becomes simultaneously constitutive and reflective of a posture of self-mastery in the face of that which one cannot control or understand. This is no mere intellectual process or act of individual willpower. The sublime is not merely an aesthetic logic, but a social and historical one insofar as it is predicated upon increasing isolation, detachment and protection from environments that threaten human safety and security. Prior to the eighteenth century, for instance, natural spaces attracted little veneration in the European West: wild forests, swamps and mountains were, for the most part, viewed as inhospitable and dangerous, to be avoided wherever possible (Macnaghten and Urry 1998, 114). The transformation of nature into an object of aesthetic judgement—in which disinterested contemplation replaces more immediate (and instrumental) attention to how it might both sustain and threaten human life—was a luxury reserved for a select few who could afford such 'independence' from their environment. Excavating the historic and social origins of this logic in the 'Grand Tour' of European elites (a voyage involving passage through the Alps en route to the cultural treasures of the Italian peninsula), Gene Ray (2004) argues that the capacity to experience the sublime was heavily dependent upon social class:

> To be able to find pleasure in avalanches and fissured glacier fields sets English nobles and bourgeois travelers on the Grand Tour apart from Swiss peasants for whom such natural features are a despised daily danger. The rich on vacation can be moved to a pleasurable awe by the sight of a storm at sea; the fisherman and sailor know otherwise .... In a revealing moment of the Critique of Judgment, Kant would acknowledge that the sublime presupposes the possession of a certain "culture," that it indeed requires more culture than the beautiful: the sublime is thus a more exclusive taste—a more expensive distinction (7).

The sublime, in other words, evolves as a privileged cultural and intellectual strategy for not only managing anxiety when confronted with powerful and dangerous forces beyond one's control, but also as a means of transforming experiences of fear and helplessness into opportunities for aesthetic gratification and the accumulation of cultural capital.

In a fascinating study of American naturalist fiction from the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Christophe Den Tandt (1998) argues that the rhetoric of the sublime was gradually appropriated by authors who sought to express the perceptual disorientation that frequently characterized people's encounter with urban space. Fiction of this period featured two distinct spatial epistemologies and corresponding descriptive styles: on the one hand, realist discourse strove for a transparent accounting and explanation of social and material conditions; on the other, an emerging natural idiom relied upon a fertile mixture of metaphor, allegory and romantic fantasy to give expression to human experiences that (seemingly) lay beyond more traditional forms of narrative description (3-51). Note, for example, the "gothic and oceanic tropes" that dominate Theodor Dreiser's account of metropolitan experience in the turn-of-the-century novel Sister Carrie:

> She was again the victim of the city's hypnotic influence, the subject of the mesmeric operations of super-intelligible forces. We have heard of the strange power of Niagara, the contemplation of whose rushing flood leads to thoughts of dissolution. We have heard of the influence of the hypnotic ball, a scientific fact. Man is too intimate with the drag of unexplainable, invisible forces to doubt longer that the human mind is colored, moved, swept on by things which neither resound nor speak. The waters of the sea are not the only things which the moon sways (Cited in Den Tandt, 40).

Refusing typical accounts of these two discursive forms as distinct genres, he theorizes their uneasy coexistence

within tests of this period as symptomatic of an emerging cultural and intellectual sensibility that the scale and pace of urbanization was rendering cities increasingly unintelligible as a form of social space. The documentary style of realism was well-suited to the exploration of the 'knowable communities' and 'familiar worlds' of family, neighbourhood, workplace and small town. However, attempts to describe the metropolis itself as a coherent totality and, above all, to register how such a complex, multi-faceted and 'monumental' environment was experienced by individuals defied conventional, realist modes of description and explanation.

In this latter case, romantic metaphors and allegories were used to construct the 'urban sublime', a series of interlocking rhetorical tropes that both signify the impossibility of grasping the totality of metropolitan existence and turn such recognition into an occasion for wonder and delight at the marvellous spectacle in which (some) city dwellers find themselves.

> The function of the rhetoric of sublimity is, first, to give utterance to the writer's doubts about the very possibility of portraying the city as a totality comprehensible in human terms; simultaneously, in an act of rhetorical substitution, the sublime fills the epistemological and existential void of the city's fragmentation by producing its pseudo-synthesis of the urban field ... the totalizing representation thus created is a metaphorical token for the unrepresentable object—in this case, the whole of city life (39).

Drawing upon Weiskel's semiotic reformulation of the sublime, Den Tandt locates the origin of sublime experience in a state of perceptual confusion motivated by a sudden surplus of signifiers, as when immersed in an environment with a surplus of sensory stimulation: the semiotic flood simply overflows our capacity to give it meaning. Resolution of this crisis is achieved through the use of metaphor by which the experience of confusion and disorientation is given meaning as expressive of transcendent forces beyond human ken. Metaphor, then, constitutes the "ideological fulcrum of the sublime ... it provides the subject with a pseudo-totalizing view of his or her universe that is epistemologically more manageable than the supposedly unrepresentable object of terror and fascination first evoked by sublime discourse" (40). Not surprisingly, among the favored metaphorical tokens adopted to restore meaning to urban spaces, however mythic in form, were those drawn from the vitalist discourses of social Darwinism, conceiving the city as a vast, mysterious and spectacular reservoir of instinctual energies and pseudo-natural forces (33-43). Images of nature become, then, not the cause of sublime experience, but rather a metaphorical response to it, the origins of which lie in an urban environment that simultaneously overwhelms the senses and seemingly defies comprehension. In the face of a reified world that appears to lie beyond human understanding and control, spatial agency retreats to the fortification of domestic enclaves on the one hand, and the episodic pursuit of mystical rejuvenation through different forms of spectacular experience on the other.

"There will always be limits to our knowledge, and nature will always be, finally, impenetrable," writes Christopher Hitt (1999).

> An ecological sublime would remind us of this lesson by restoring the wonder, the inaccessibility of wild nature. In an age of exploitation, commodification and domination we need awe, envelopment, and transcendence. We need, at least occasionally, to be confronted with the wild otherness of nature and to be astonished, enchanted, humbled by it. Perhaps it is time—while there is still some wild nature left—that we discover an ecological sublime (620).

Recent writing on the sublime has similarly emphasized the emancipatory effects that can emerge from an encounter with phenomena that defy subsumption beneath dominant forms of reason, forcing us into a productive engagement with the limits of human understanding and installing a posture of openness and acceptance toward otherness of all kinds. [26] As praiseworthy as such sentiments clearly are, we must also recognize the ease with which the sublime, or, rather the images and spaces that both generate and express it, can serve as an aesthetic veneer for reified forms of experience in which our world—and the social, political and economic forces that govern it—are perceived and felt to exist beyond our control. As Manuell Castells observes, "flows of power generate the power of flows, whose material reality imposes itself as a natural phenomenon that cannot be controlled or predicted, only accepted and managed. This is the real significance of the global restructuring process" (Cited in Soja 2000, 214). Irrespective of whether such hyperbole is actually true, images of nature as sublime offer a compelling metaphor through which to recognize (and misrecognize) what it feels like to live within the petrified urban and suburban landscapes of postmodern capital. Yet the ideological significance of these images does not only lie in a literal naturalization of social space, but, more importantly, in how they invite us to actively embrace and even celebrate this fate. The real secret of fascism, Benjamin once argued, was the transformation of alienation into a cultural spectacle, an aesthetic pleasure of the first order. Nature in advertising, I would suggest, performs a nearly identical function

today. For if as one critic has argued "the sublime is about aestheticizing conditions of impossibility for discourse" (Stormer 2004, 213), then nature offers an ideal metaphor through which the 'impossibility' of understanding, mapping and controlling social space can become the grounds for spectacular forms of pleasure and agency.

Endnotes

1. This paper was originally prepared for delivery to Ecology, Imperialism and the Contradictions of Capitalism, a conference at York University commemorating the 25th anniversary of the journal Capitalism, Nature, Socialism. My thanks to the conference organizers and participants for a stimulating venue in which to discuss these ideas. I'd also like to acknowledge the support of the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council which helped fund this research.

2. My understanding of the relationship between affective and ideological processes has been shaped by Lawrence Grossberg's (1992) pathbreaking work in cultural studies. "Affect," he writes, "has a real power over difference, a power to invest difference and to make certain differences matter in different ways. If ideology and even pleasure constitute structures of difference, these structures are unrealized without their inflection through an affective economy" (105). I discuss the significance of this conceptualization at greater length in Gunster (2004a).

3. The ads that I analyzed for this project are drawn primarily from two samples. The first is a set of 1,800 original ads (i.e. no duplicates) extracted from a survey of 150 hours of United States and Canadian television in October and November 2004. The second is an additional sample of roughly 560 ads that were reviewed from a commercial database managed by Adforum, a company that provides information and creative services to the advertising industry, including a systematic collection of work from major global advertisers and agencies. Ads that I discuss from the first sample have, for the most part, been reproduced in this article under the Fair Use commentary and critique provisions of U.S. copyright law. Given that access to ads from the second example is strictly regulated—including the requirement that the ads not be duplicated in any form—I have been unable to provide access to them in this format.

4. UPS—squares, personal ad capture.

5. Analysis of ads for this project was conducted in two stages. First, I reviewed a random sub-sample of 800 ads from a set of 1,800 original commercials extracted from a survey of 150 hours of cable and broadcast television from October and November 2004. In particular, I investigated the presence of recurring spatial themes as well as to determine which product categories were more likely than others to draw upon images or stories that foregrounded representations of space. Based upon these results, I subsequently gathered an additional sample of ads from the Adforum archive. Specifically, I reviewed an additional 350 automotive ads, 150 ads for the banking and financial services sector, and 60 ads for business services. In total, then, a sample of 1,360 television commercials, or approximately 11 ½ hours of material were analyzed for this project. Although only a small fraction of this material is explicitly discussed below, the images and themes chosen for discussion are broadly reflective of dominant patterns found in the whole sample.

6. The 2005 Advertising Age survey of the leading 100 advertisers in North America reports that roughly $10.2 billion were spent on media buys in network and cable television by the automotive sector, compared to just over half that amount for the next leading sectors of retail and pharmaceutical. For a preliminary attempt to sketch out the significance of automobile advertising for popular conceptions of utopia, see Gunster (2007).

7. Nissan pathfinder—tell better stories, www.adfolio.com.

8. Mitsubishi—passing lanes, www.adfolio.com.

9. Jaguar—lust, personal ad capture.

10. The following section draws upon an analytic framework I first developed in Gunster (2004b) and also see my discussion of the concept of 'second nature' in critical theory in Gunster (2004a, 71-80).

11. Saab—sameness, www.adfolio.com.

12. Honda Pilot—nothing routine, www.adfolio.com.

13. Jeep—nowhere, personal ad capture; and Acura—wilderness, www.adfolio.com.

14. Nissan—x, www.adfolio.com.

15. Vwtouareg—camera, personal ad capture.

16. Jeep commander—sharks, personal ad capture.

17. Jeep Commander—view, personal ad capture.

18. See, for example, the strong collection of essays in Braun and Castree (1998).

19. Acura—angry forest, personal ad capture.

20. Lexus—wind god, www.adfolio.com.

21. Volvo—shark, personal ad capture.

22. Toyota—disaster, personal ad capture.

23. Toyota tacoma—meteor, www.adfolio.com.

23. Jeep—unexpected, www.adfolio.com.

24. See, for example, the discussion in Holmqvist and Pluciennik (2002).

25. For recent examples, see Stormer (2004) and Pence (2004).

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