

“NOT ALTOGETHER UNPICTURESQUE”: SAMUEL BOURNE AND THE LANDSCAPING OF THE VICTORIAN HIMALAYA

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Great things are done when Men & Mountains meet
This is not Done by Jostling in the Street
—William Blake

DURING HIS THIRD EXPEDITION into the higher Himalaya in 1866, the most ambitious of his three journeys into the mountains, Samuel Bourne trekked to the Gangotri glacier, the source of the Ganges. At that site he took “two or three negatives of this holy and not altogether unpicturesque object,” the first photographs ever made of the glacier and the ice cave called Gomukh, meaning the cow’s mouth, from which the river emerges (Bourne 96). These words of Victorian India’s pre-eminent landscape photographer, importantly, highlight the coming together of the picturesque mode and the landscape form through the medium of photography.¹ In this essay, I focus on Samuel Bourne’s images of the Himalaya, produced between 1863 and 1870, to query the ideological power of this triangulation to produce a specific image of the mountains in late nineteenth-century Victorian India. Situating Bourne’s images in relation to contemporaneous material practices of the British within the space of the Himalaya, namely, the establishment of hill stations as picturesque locales in the higher altitudes of the Indian subcontinent, I argue that the landscape form, the picturesque mode, and the photographic medium, inflect each other to tame the sublimity of the mountains by representing them as similar to the Alps.

Further, I contend that owing to their circulation across British India and in Europe as commodities, Bourne’s images articulate the Victorian Himalaya as a spatial fetish, and a “spectacular” landscape. Finally, I engage with Bourne’s anti-picturesque travel narratives on the Himalaya, serially published between 1864 and 1870 in the London-based *British Journal of Photography*, to delineate them as ideologically antithetical to his images and demonstrate that they posit the Himalaya as unlike its European counterpart.² Highlighting the tension between Bourne’s visual and textual representations of the Himalaya, I argue that while his images present the Himalaya as a spatial product, the travel narratives highlight the social relations that re/produce the mountainscape, and illuminate the process underlying the production of the Himalayan landscape.

Moreover, by focusing on the picturesque mode, this essay complicates Ann Colley's recent claim regarding the centrality of the "sublime" in Victorian attitudes towards the mountains, especially the Alps (1–5). Situating her work in relation to Marjorie Nicolson's insightful and pioneering study on the development a "mountain aesthetic," Colley has noted the "persistence of the sublime" in the case of Victorian mountaineers in the Himalaya (Nicolson 1–33; Colley 217–28). Citing the *Alpine Journal* and select travelogues, she contends that Victorian explorers and travelers in the Himalaya "were never really part of a 'Master-of-all-I-survey' scene" (Colley 222).³ While the idea of the sublime was indeed an important aspect in the human perception of mountains, especially the Himalaya, we must remind ourselves that humans have always interacted with them. They have climbed, trekked, mapped, surveyed, measured, drawn, painted, and photographed the mountains besides writing about them. They have also built houses and towns on the mountains in addition to cultivating on their slopes. Indeed, human interactions with mountains have always marked an attempt at scaling back the effect of the sublime in order to make them more describable and representable, to bring them within the ambit of ordinary human existence. This essay, then, aims to understand, not so much the persistence of the sublime but rather how it is tamed through the picturesque mode in Victorian representations of the Himalaya.

Visualizing the Victorian Himalaya: The Picturesque Landscapes of Samuel Bourne

LANDSCAPE, W. J. T. MITCHELL TELLS US, is not an "object to be seen or a text to be read, but . . . a process by which social and subjective identities are formed" ("Introduction" 1). Elsewhere, he argues that landscape is "a particular historical formation associated with European imperialism" that is a medium of cultural expression, and a representation of "something that is already a representation in its own right" ("Imperial" 5, 14). Underlying Mitchell's polemical claim is the belief that landscapes do not use inert natural objects as their subject matter. The subject of landscapes is "always already a symbolic form," because categories such as "the Ideal, the Heroic, the Pastoral, the Beautiful, the Sublime and the Picturesque . . . [have already determined] the kinds of objects and visual spaces that maybe represented" ("Imperial" 14). Mitchell's comments find critical resonance in the Indian photographs of Samuel Bourne, arguably the single-most important British photographer working in late-nineteenth century Victorian India.

Bourne came to India in January 1863 from Nottingham, and worked as a commercial photographer until 1870 when he returned to England. During these seven years, Bourne's output was prolific: he produced over two thousand images of Indian architecture, hill stations, cantonments, cities, memorials, and parks. However, despite the variety of his photographs, scholars agree that Bourne's reputation rests largely on his picturesque landscapes of India (Sampson, "Unmasking" 84–85; Pal and Dehejia 188). Bourne's natural and architectural landscapes of India were among the most widely disseminated images of the country in Europe as well as within British India, playing a crucial role in the visual construction of India in the late-nineteenth century.

Notable among Bourne's picturesque landscapes are those of the Indian Himalaya, taken during his three treks into the Himalayan hinterland between 1863 and 1866. Among his most striking images are those of the Gangotri glacier, the source of the Ganges. While they are among the first images of the glacier, and the source of the Ganges, they are remarkable in the way they underline the photographer's exemplary reliance on the picturesque mode.

The picturesque was introduced into the English cultural vocabulary by William Gilpin in the late eighteenth century as a mediating category between the categories of the “beautiful” and the “sublime.”⁴ The “beautiful” was traditionally understood as unthreatening; defined by gentle curves and soft contours, it was associated with the female form and male sexual desire. The “sublime” on the other hand addressed the “impulse towards self-preservation . . . [that afforded the viewer with] the *frisson* of contemplating terrifying things from a position of safety” (Buzzard 45). The “sublime,” then, was a category invested with the capacity of generating fear and awe in the viewer. Further, it was also characterized by a sense of ineffability and indeterminacy that could not be described or represented and owed its power to “its chaos . . . [and] its wildest and most irregular disorder and desolation” (Kant 92).

The “picturesque” could, therefore, be understood as not simply a mediating position between the beautiful and the sublime but, more crucially, as a mode that disciplines the sublime by evacuating it of its inherent capacity to generate fear and awe in the viewer. It draws the “sublime” into a normative affective region, in effect, pacifying it and making it describable. This aspect of the picturesque is of critical importance and, informs what several critics have noted as its tendency to depoliticize views of the natural world (See Leask 180–83; Sampson, “Unmasking” 84–91; Andrews 166–67). Further, the affective potential of the picturesque mode rests on three fundamental criteria. It incorporates within it an ordering impulse that harmonizes the elements within the frame of view. It also screens out the unseemly to structure its affect. Finally, the picturesque anchors its view through an act of familiarization that makes the foreign, familiar, and the unknown, knowable and known. I shall refer to these aspects of the picturesque as the ordering impulse, the screening effect and associationist aesthetic respectively, and demonstrate how they interact with each other to produce a “European” image of the Himalaya.

Bourne’s 1866 image of the Gangotri glacier (Figure 1) highlights the operations of the ordering impulse, the screening effect and the associationist aesthetics of the picturesque mode.⁵ It captures the tall mountain peak within its frame, and the neatly arranges the elements within it. The view is structured around the central image of Mount Shivaling, which exists as a visual counter-point to the ice cave.⁶ As Arthur Ollman has noted

The mountain itself is . . . a dramatic and imposing pyramid of rock isolated and framed by surrounding rises on both edges . . . that cause a bowl-shaped depression in the center of the image which perfectly cradles the massive triangular shape. . . . Huge boulders are strewn randomly in the foreground . . . a triangular shadow in the middle of the foreground predicts the pyramidal domination . . . in the rear (19).

This is the ordering impulse of the picturesque at work.

This image (Figure 1) also screens the unseemly from within the frame of view. This perfectly balanced image of precise order, for instance, evacuates any trace of the dangers and hardships of the trek that Bourne mentions in his narrative, a trek that remains as dangerous, if less difficult, in the twenty-first century as it did in 1866. Further, there are three human figures in the frame of the photograph (Figure 1) whose presence is not immediately obvious.⁷ Ollman notes that “the realization of their size is almost baffling” and claims that “the confrontation of the microscopic humans with an archetypal mountain, can be seen as the ultimate metaphor for Bourne” (19).



Figure 1. Samuel Bourne, *Mount Moira, and other Snows, from the Glacier*. Photograph, 1866. Courtesy of Arthur Ollman.

In fact, in most of Bourne's landscape photographs, the frame is vacated of human beings. In the instances they are present, their presence indeed appears "microscopic" and as visual anchors to the magnitude and the grander aspects of nature. By ordering them into visual pointers, the images evacuate the locals of any agency. For instance, in the photograph of the Manirung Pass (Figure 2), Bourne's coolies appear as little more than dots in the landscape to provide the visual anchor that highlights the vastness of the Himalayan peaks. However, the aesthetic appeal of the photograph obfuscates the rather crucial fact that the coolies would have stood on the glacial slopes, amidst the snow and freezing winds, for a considerable amount of time for the photograph to be composed and taken. This is because photographic technology in the late-nineteenth century had not developed enough to allow for "instantaneous" photography, that is, the freezing of motion.⁸ Moreover, by presenting the locals as coolies, that is, wage laborers for the photographer, the picturesque image disavows any sense of a lived relationship between the people and their land.

There is another crucial aspect about this photograph that Ollman either fails to notice or ignores: the image of Shivling (Figure 1) evokes the Alpine Matterhorn. Indeed, the Himalayan peak was called the "Gangotri Matterhorn [by the] German [and British] expeditions of the 1930s" (Pyatt 115). This is in evidence in the mountaineering literature of the 1930s, most notably in writings of the British mountaineer Marco Pallis. Writing in the *Himalayan Journal*, Pallis would call the Himalayan peak "a horrid-looking mountain with a striking resemblance to the Matterhorn, as it might appear in a nightmare" ("Gangotri"



Figure 2. Samuel Bourne, *Manirung Pass*. Photograph, 1866. Courtesy of Arthur Ollman.

n. pag.). He would go on to describe Shivling as “the huge pinnacle that *we called the Matterhorn*, half spire, half tower, red rock at the bottom, snow-powdered yellow at the top; beautifully alluring, hideously inaccessible” (Pallis, *Peaks and Lamas* 40, my italics). In re-presenting the Himalayan (Indian) peak in its Alpine (European) image through the deployment of the associationist aesthetic of the picturesque, Bourne, then, anticipates – and, in part, also contributes to – this later construction of spatial analogy by the European mountaineers.

Indeed, Bourne repeatedly displays his familiarity with the images of the Alps, and his awareness of the surge in interest for mountains, especially the Alps, among his contemporaries in Europe. In his serialized narratives, Bourne claims that “the world has resounded with the doings and exploits of the Alpine Club,” in addition to displaying a deeper acquaintance with that institution when he speaks about the appeal of “Peaks, Passes and Glaciers,” a probable allusion to the club’s publication (19). Moreover, he acknowledges his familiarity with Alpine photography, writing that he had not “seen Switzerland, except in some of M. Bisson’s and Mr. England’s photographs” (Bourne 35). Bourne here refers to the Alpine photography of William England, and more importantly to the work of the



Figure 3. Samuel Bourne, *The Source of the Ganges, Ice Cave at the Foot of the Glacier*. Photograph, 1866. Courtesy of Arthur Ollman.

Bisson brothers, Louis and Auguste. Significantly, the Bisson brothers photographed the Savoy Alps in 1860 as part of Napoleon III's climbing expedition to Chamonix. In 1861, Auguste Bisson climbed Mont Blanc and became the first person to photograph from its summit (Gernsheim 48). In fact, while recounting his experience of photographing Taree Pass in the Himalaya during his first trek of 1863, just two years after Auguste Bisson scaled Mont Blanc, Bourne's comment that he was at "an elevation of 15,282 feet, or about 200 feet higher than the summit of Mont Blanc" attempts to set up his achievement of high altitude photography with respect to Bisson (20). More importantly, it also appears to signal to his readers – potential customers of his images – the similarity between the Himalaya and the Alps (Bourne 20).

Bourne's reliance on the aesthetics of Alpine photography in his Himalayan images is further highlighted in another image that takes a closer look at the Gangotri glacier (Figure 3). For the European viewer, this image would recall the photographs of Alpine glaciers that were being produced and disseminated in Europe in the 1860s. It is, in terms of visual composition, remarkably similar to the photograph of the Bossons glacier taken by the Bisson brothers in 1860 (Figure 4). Both images highlight the roughness of the terrain, while the crooked lines and the interplay of light and shade in the composition stress the jagged features of the glaciers. In addition, the presence of humans is rendered insignificant in both images. In the image of the Bossons glacier, the train of "tiny" explorers provides a visual



Figure 4. Louis-Auguste Bisson and Auguste-Rosalie Bisson, *Glacier des Bossons, Savoie*. Photograph, circa 1860. Courtesy of Wm. B. Becker Collection/www.PhotographyMuseum.com.

contrast against which the vastness of the natural formations around them can be viewed. Similarly, the two people in the frame of Bourne’s image of the Gangotri glacier direct the viewer’s eye, allowing them to gauge the vastness of the source of the Ganges (Figure 3) just as the coolies provide the visual anchor for comprehending the immensity of the mountains in the photograph of Manirung Pass (Figure 2). Bourne’s photographs of the Himalaya, by reconstituting it in a picturesque mode, then, attempts to produce a space of sameness between the Alps and the Himalaya and – by extension – between Europe and India.

The deployment of the picturesque has several critical consequences in the colonial context of Victorian India. It presents an ordered view of space, constituted in its European image, where the indigenous people are absent or rendered microscopic. Such a representational strategy articulates the power of the colonizers to order – materially and rhetorically – the land. Further, by evacuating the locals or by rendering them, and their agency, insignificant, it obfuscates the social relations that re/produce the landscape, besides those between the colonizer and the colonized. In other words, it produces a fetishized image of Himalayan space. Moreover, by recreating the Himalaya in its European image, the picturesque landscapes indicate towards an epistemic colonization of the mountains, and by extension, the Indian subcontinent.

The Material Context of the Colonial Picturesque

MATERIALIST APPROACHES TO “SPACE” AND “LANDSCAPE” have repeatedly stressed the need to examine the built environment of the land, in addition to, and in conjunction with, its

representations, to reach a more holistic understanding of the social significance of the landscape concept.⁹ This critical imperative encourages the examination of Bourne's images of the mountains in relation to the "hill stations" that the British built in the Himalaya in the course of the nineteenth century.¹⁰ Such an investigation becomes more crucial since the ordering impulse, screening effect, and associationist aesthetics of the picturesque mode find their material expression in the Victorian hill stations of British India.

Hill stations emerged in the Indian subcontinent during the early decades of the nineteenth century after British victory in the Anglo-Nepalese war of 1815. The British began building settlements in the Himalayan territories gained from Nepal. In the next two decades, Shimla, Mussoorie, and Almora (all located in the west of Nepal) and Darjeeling (located in the east of Nepal) developed into distinct British settlements. In the course of the nineteenth century, these evolved into sites that served to "maintain the social structure and social behavior of the British colonial community in India" (King 196).

In his study on British hill stations in colonial India, Dane Kennedy has noted a three-fold progression in the evolution of the hill stations in British India. He comments that these places went from being sanitarium to places of high refuge; from high refuge to hill station; and finally, from hill station to town (Kennedy 11–12). Indeed this model of tripartite development is particularly true of Shimla. It began as a high-altitude sanitarium for convalescing Europeans, especially European troops, before developing into the summer capital of British India in 1864. Moreover, Kennedy observes that though these towns were located at elevations of six to eight thousand feet, the appellation "hill station" indicates "an etymological effort to minimize the disturbing implications of the sublime. . . . To speak of hill stations rather than mountain stations rhetorically scaled back the overwhelming force of the landscape" (46–47). Indeed, the British intervened materially into the physical spaces of the Himalaya to set up these hill stations. As the mountains were "brought within bounds, subdued and domesticated," the Victorian Himalaya was physically transformed, and the locales were recreated in the picturesque image of English towns and countryside (Kennedy 46).

Further, the British set up gardens and orchards, created lakes, and planted trees brought in from locations as diverse as England, Australia, and Japan. They also developed the water bodies and wooded areas around these hill stations for recreational activities such as fishing and hunting, providing the British with a very tangible sense of home away from home within India. Such was the transformation of these Indian locales that Viceroy Lytton, visiting the hill station of Ootacamund (Ooty) in the 1870s would gush about it as "a paradise . . . [with] such beautiful *English* rain, [and] such delicious *English* mud" (qtd. in Kennedy 51).

Most crucially, the hill stations served to underline British identity in colonial India. They were typically described as racially "pure" zones that were peopled by colonial administrators and military officers as well as planters and retired European civil servants. The hill stations also attracted European women and children for lengthy stays. Colonial officials often sent their wives to these locales to give birth in their salubrious climes, while their children went to boarding schools that came up in these places, both instances underlying the status of Victorian hill stations as a home away from home. Further, the construction of grand colonial edifices dramatically transformed these townships in the final decades of the nineteenth century: the Lieutenant Governor's mansion was built in Darjeeling in 1879, and the Viceregal Lodge and other administrative buildings were constructed in Shimla in the 1880s.

These hill stations articulated not only the spatial distinction between the Indian hills and the plains, but also the racial difference between the colonizer and the colonized. As Kennedy comments

From the increasingly accessible vantage point of the hills, the plains seemed a stark, heat-shimmering, monotonously unvarying landscape, teeming with millions of idol-worshipping, disease-ridden people. . . . These lofty lands appeared unsullied by lowland hordes, untouched by their contaminating influence . . . [and] offered an environment so pristine, so free of human admixture, so empty of history that it seemed to invite the British to engrave their own dreams and desires on its unmarked surface. (61)

Despite attempting to project the Himalaya as a *terra nullius* for setting up the picturesque hill stations as zones of racial purity, the British ironically ended up attracting more Indians than they intended. As the hill stations expanded during the latter half of the nineteenth century, they became attractive as places of employment for Indians, most of them from the same plains from which the British were seeking to escape. Moreover, a retinue of porters, servants, and cooks invariably accompanied the British who came to these hill stations for the summer months.¹¹ This resulted in a substantial population of natives in these pristine locales, and the setting up of markets for this population with its local vendors.

This contradiction between the idea of the hill station as a “pure” British space of imperial grandeur, and the reality of it being a place with a significant native population is succinctly recorded by George Curzon in his personal diary during his visit to Shimla. Traveling through the hill station during 1894–95, a few years before assuming the office of Viceroy of India, Curzon notes:

Simla was pretty much what I expected with two exceptions. I had no idea that there was so large a native and shop town and I had always imagined the station on the northern instead of the southern slope of the mountains and fronting the snowy peaks. As a matter of fact the Viceregal Lodge – which surprised me with its palatial proportions – is one of the few buildings that face both ways and the majority of the houses get no snow view at all. . . . As I entered the Viceregal Lodge I could not help wondering if I should ever do so as its master. I should like to succeed Elgin in 5 years time . . . (n. pag.)

Curzon’s surprise at seeing the “large . . . native and shop town” in Shimla, as well as at the absence of a view of the “snowy peaks” is significant. It underlines the ideological power of the picturesque landscape photographs of hill stations produced by the British photographers among whom Bourne was the foremost. Indeed, much of Bourne’s landscape photographs depicted Indian hill stations such as Simla, Mussoorie, Nainital, and Darjeeling as well as Srinagar, the capital of the princely state of Kashmir. For a photographer in search of the picturesque, these locations were already physically ordered along those lines, waiting for the invocation of associationist aesthetics. It would simply require the deployment of the screening effect of the picturesque to evacuate the unseemly natives from the frame and recreate the landscape in the image of Britain (See Figure 5). The picturesque mode, then, would enable the production of a Victorian space in India, mediated through a Victorian way of seeing that could be looked at, when seen by viewers in metropolitan Britain, from another Victorian space. In other words, it allows for the visual translation of the Himalaya



Figure 5. Samuel Bourne, *Simla in Winter, View from the Bowlee near "Glenarm."* Photograph, 1868. Courtesy of Arthur Ollman.

into a Victorian landscape, thereby articulating a cultural and epistemic colonization of the land.

Elective Affinities: The Landscape Form and the Photographic Medium

THIS PROCESS OF VISUAL TRANSLATION of Indian space into a Victorian landscape was of course substantially aided by the affinity between the landscape form and the medium of photography. Their kinship, in fact, centers on the perspectival ordering of space that is fundamental to both the landscape form and photography. Moreover, the social sanction of photography's truth-claims further validates, and naturalizes, the relations of power immanent in the landscape form.

Raymond Williams reminds us that the "idea of landscape implies separation and observation" (*Country and the City* 120). Denis Cosgrove echoes Williams when he defines landscape as "a way of seeing, a composition to be appropriated by a detached, individual spectator to whom an illusion of order and control is offered through the composition of space

according to the certainties of geometry” (“Prospect” 55). Crucially, both these statements underline the importance of perspective for the landscape form. Like the landscape form, photography too is a “way of seeing” and a mode of representation; it is a perspectival ordering of space that provides the viewer with the illusion of control while simultaneously separating him from the view. Further, like the landscape form, the photographic image draws its power from its ability to circulate across physical spaces and cultures. Both the landscape form and photography can then be understood as visual ideologies that seek to control and dominate space.

At the time of its advent, photography was seen as essentially a mechanical and technological representational practice with no claims as a medium of artistic potential. This enabled photography to be seen as “passive *recordings* of preexisting sights” (Snyder 176). This assumption of photography as “passive” is particularly important, as it allowed for the cultural belief that “photographs stand in a special relationship to vision, but vision detached from any particular viewer” (Snyder 183). Unlike painting and other graphic arts that were seen as depicting the realm of the “imaginative, cognitive and the ideal,” photography came to belong to the realm of “the factual, material, the physically real” (Snyder 181). Consequently, this idea of a detached, and disinterested, way of seeing informed the indexical claims of the photographic image. It invested the photographic image with a cultural sanction that allowed it to masquerade as truth. Photography, Snyder notes, played “the role of the mechanical and non-artistic outsider to established and evolving landscape practices that seem[ed] internal to painting” (185). By establishing it as the normative way of looking at nature, photography naturalized the landscape form. Riding the truth-claims of the photographic image, what was “a way of painting landscapes and viewing . . . became . . . *the way of looking at nature*” (Snyder 185).

Photography came to India a few years after its invention in Europe. By the decade of the 1850s, photography was an established practice among India’s European residents and the local elite. The 1857 Rebellion and its aftermath, when the British crown assumed direct control of its Indian empire, heralded the mobilization of “all the mechanisms of the colonial apparatus, from repressive to ideological . . . [and the deployment of] revitalized programs for greater hegemonic control – economic, political, cultural, and epistemic – over the Indian population” (Chaudhary, “Phantasmagoric” 67). At this time photography was appropriated by the colonial state and emerged as an apparatus of imperial control.¹² In effect, it became a means of

mastering space . . . [and formed] part of a practico-symbolic management of the vast subcontinent which demanded the classifying, recording, census-taking, mapping, displaying and licensing of everything . . . rendering it knowable, imaginable and controllable by means of European systems and on British terms. (Osborne 39–40)

Photography, then, became a tool in the imperial project of documenting India and its people and fundamental to the construction of the imperial archive. Importantly, the colonizers harnessed the truth-claims of the photographic image to validate imperial representations of India and its people as truthful. Consequently, photography not only naturalized the landscape form and made it *the way of seeing nature*; it also established the landscape form as the visual ideology of empire (Mitchell, “Imperial”).

Bourne's images of the Indian Himalaya demonstrate a coming together of photography, the landscape form, and the picturesque mode. In Bourne's case, the ideological power of such a triangulation is further accentuated owing to the wide circulation of his images. This was assisted to a great degree by the establishment of his own commercial photography studio in Shimla, which, after several mutations, came to be known as *Bourne and Shepherd* from 1865. Bourne and his partner Charles Shepherd

adopted various strategies for the dissemination of an ever-increasing stock of landscape, architectural, and ethnographic views and group portraits of colonial officers, at once developing and stimulating a demand for such pictures by making certain that they could be obtained relatively cheaply and without difficulty. (Sampson, "Success" 336)

Photographs could be ordered by negative number from the studio in Shimla and by 1866, Bourne's images could be obtained in Calcutta through the bookseller and supplier W. Newman and Company. By that year his photographs could also be purchased at all the major cities and hill stations of British India such as Bombay, Madras, Lucknow, Agra, Allahabad, Mussoorie, and Muree, a hill station now in Pakistan. A Calcutta branch of the studio opened in 1867 and, incidentally, continues to remain in business to this day by that name, although under an Indian owner. By 1870, Bourne's photographs of India were also being "distributed in London and Paris by the French publishers A. Marion and Company" (Sampson, "Success" 338).

The reliance on the perspectival ordering of space by both the photographic medium and the landscape form produces a sense of alienation that diminishes the presence of locals substantially. This is further underscored by the screening effect of the picturesque mode that evacuates the locals from view. In effect, the picturesque landscape photographs of Bourne obfuscate the lived, and living, landscape from view. For instance, Bourne's images of the Gangotri glacier while tapping into the nineteenth-century fascination for images of mountains and glaciers in Europe, refuses to acknowledge the local and affective status of that place within the realm of Hinduism. His photographs are clearly not informed by the ideas of purity and sacredness Hindus associate with the glacier, which for them is a site of pilgrimage. More importantly, through the act of photographing the glacier, and transforming it into an aesthetic commodity, Bourne turns it into an object of display and consumption and dislocates it from its position within the conceptual universe of Hindu sacred geography. In other words, Bourne's picturesque images of the Victorian Himalaya mystify the social relations that produce and re-produce the mountainscape.

Importantly, Bourne's images of the Indian Himalaya circulated as commodities, and, as such, display what Karl Marx described as the "fetishism" of the commodity form (163–69). Marx reminds us that under the spell of the commodity fetish "the definite social relation between [humans] . . . assumes . . . the fantastic form of the relation between things" (165). Guy Debord develops this notion further to speak of the "spectacle," that is, commodities that are not simply "a collection of images . . . [but] a social relationship between people that is mediated by images" (12). Debord comments that spectacles are better viewed as a "world view transformed into an objective force" and Bourne's images are no exception (13). As commodified images of alienated space (and spatial alienation), Bourne's photographs present the Himalaya as a double spatial fetish: the images themselves are fetishized representation of space, which also re-present another fetishized space, such

as the British Indian hill stations or the Himalayan landscape. His “spectacular” Himalayan landscapes in the picturesque mode, then, not only “epitomize . . . the prevailing model of social life . . . [but also serve] as a total justification for the conditions and aims of the existing system” (Debord 13).

To put this in another way, Bourne’s images are, on one hand, the function of colonization that serves as their condition of possibility; on the other hand, these images articulate and reaffirm the ideology of alienation that forms the bedrock of colonialism. These photographs, then, allow their buyers what one critic calls the “picturesque possession” of the Himalaya, albeit vicariously. (See de Almeida and Gilpin 189–94.) More crucially, viewed from Britain (a Victorian space), they would appear as images of another “spectacular” Victorian space (British Indian hill stations) that completely mystify the labor and historical conditions of their making. Indeed, Bourne’s images articulate and reaffirm colonial alienation, the real conditions of which are immanent in the colonial landscaping of the mountains that transform them into “spectacular” spaces: through the construction of hill stations and the setting up of plantations and the attendant commodification of land; through processes that physically evict locals from these “spectacular” spaces or turn them into wage laborers within them.

Articulating an “Other” Himalaya: Samuel Bourne’s Anti-Picturesque Travel Narratives

IF BOURNE’S PHOTOGRAPHS present his viewers with images of a formed “spectacular” Himalayan landscape, his travel accounts demonstrate the process behind their forming. His anti-picturesque travel narratives present the reader with a reversal of the ordering impulse, the associationist aesthetics and the screening effect, that form the basis of Bourne’s landscape photography. Such a move allows him to depict the Indian Himalaya as different from the Alps, and thereby produce the Indian Himalaya as a space of difference.

If the Himalayan peaks appear in Bourne’s photographs as perfectly balanced and neatly arranged representations, in his narrative he speaks of their vastness and his own difficulty in deploying the ordering impulse of the picturesque. He writes that the Himalayan scenery is “very difficult to deal with [through] the camera; it is altogether too gigantic and stupendous to be brought within the limits imposed on photography” (Bourne 17). Further, Bourne’s disavows the associationist aesthetics in his travel accounts. The Himalayan scenery for him is “in general not picturesque . . . [the Himalaya are] greater, higher, and altogether more vast and impressive; but they are not so naked in their outline, not so detached, do not contain so much variety, have no such beautiful fertile valleys [as the Alps]” (Bourne 35–36). Bourne’s travel narratives are also devoid of the screening effect of the picturesque. This enables him to indulge in a form of anti-aesthetic realism, and describe Hindu rituals, quaint kings, his experience of crossing Himalayan rivers on inflated buffalo skins and report the “loathsome sight [of] several natives afflicted with leprosy” (Bourne 26). Further, such a narrative strategy enables the articulation of danger, and the threat of violence and death. During his Kashmir trek, Bourne narrates his brush with death while swimming in a mountain stream. He writes:

I . . . found myself carried away by a strong undercurrent, which defied . . . all my powers of resistance. The more I struggled the worse I got, when, finding it hopeless I had just strength left to call out to one of my native servants on the bank who happened to be a good swimmer. . . . He plunged in and laid hold of my arm, just in time to prevent me being carried under the rock, and either dashed to pieces or drowned. (Bourne 26)

Not only does this extract highlight the entry of danger and the threat of death – a threat that comes from the land itself – the locals are not evacuated from the landscape; instead, they are given a degree of agency. In other words, the anti-picturesque travel narratives depict the social relations between the colonizer and the colonized.

The advent of colonial capitalist modernity in the Indian subcontinent under British rule saw the emergence of the category of wage relationship that mediated the social relations between the colonizer and the colonized. Bourne's depiction of his interaction between himself and his coolies in the travel narratives, demonstrates the establishment of wage relations. More crucially, it underlines the attendant violence deployed for its successful enforcement. The most striking instance of this in Bourne's narrative is when he details his procurement of supplies before setting out to cross the Manirung pass. Bourne tells his readers

I had considerable difficulty in some of these small villages . . . and other places where the country was barren, to obtain food for all my coolies. The small patch of cultivated land attached to each village barely produced sufficient grain of all sorts to meet the requirements of the villagers, and I have sometimes had the whole village on their knees before me, begging that I would not take their flour or rice from them. It was a difficult case, but there was no alternative; my men must have food, and *all I could do was pay them well for everything they supplied.* (82, my italics)

The extract highlights unequivocally the vehemence with which the social relations of production were altered in the Himalaya owing to the advent of colonization. Not only does Bourne's comment exhibit his sense of entitlement over the produce of the land, he also treats them as commodities that can be, and is, purchased. In his interaction with the villagers regarding the procurement of flour and rice, he introduces the logic of exchange forcibly and relies on his colonial status to trump the locals' argument for the logic of use. Further, Bourne's act of forcibly purchasing the locals' flour and rice, meant for their own consumption, transforms their produce into commodities, and the locals into suppliers. In effect, it binds the locals into a wage relationship with him, thereby aligning Bourne firmly within the colonial logic of extracting the surplus of the colonized.

Moreover, Bourne tells us that he sought to employ the local inhabitants of the Himalaya as coolies, that is, load-bearers during his Kashmir trek. However, midway through the trek, he discovered that his coolies had deserted him, almost jeopardizing his journey. Bourne tells his readers that he "vowed vengeance against the rascals . . . [and taking] a stout stick . . . set out in search of them" (31). On finding them at a neighboring village hiding inside huts, Bourne dragged them out and "made them feel the quality of . . . [his] stick" (31). In his subsequent journey, he speaks about a "mutiny amongst . . . [his] coolies" (Bourne 71). At first he tries to reason with these "resolute and stubborn" natives but when they declare they would simply not follow his orders, Bourne says that he "took a handy stick and layed [sic] it smartly about the shoulders of several of them till they lay whining on the ground" (71). He goes on to add that

This bit of seasonable sovereignty had a good effect, as I never afterwards had the least trouble with these men, they stuck to me through heat and cold, climbing the highest and most difficult passes, and carrying their loads bravely over glaciers and places so difficult and dangerous that I, empty handed, only passed with fear and trembling. (Bourne 71)

Subsequently in the narrative, as he and his entourage climb higher into the Himalaya, Bourne describes it as not “fewer than eighty people, all told, wending their way up the mountains” carrying the white man’s burden (83).

It is, of course, instructive to situate Bourne’s comments about his own “hard work” in relation to the labor of his coolies. Bourne writes that he gets “*riled when . . . people speak of landscape photography as mere holiday work [for he had worked] like a horse, and done things and suffered things that few people would submit to*” (75). Indeed, it bears stressing that the labor of the local inhabitants of the Himalaya – as suppliers of his food, as his load bearers, and as his “models” in his photographs against which the picturesque Himalayan landscape is viewed – form the essential condition of possibility for Bourne’s “work” as a landscape photographer. More crucially, this underlines the singular importance of the labor of the colonized, as in the case of Bourne’s coolies, as the enabling feature for what is usually remarked upon as colonial forays into the Himalaya for their survey, mapping, exploration or photography.

Bourne’s images and narratives of the mountains, then, provide two perspectives on the Himalaya that are in tension with, and complement, each other, reminding us that the meaning of photographic imagery is “frequently framed by linguistic messages in the forms of titles, captions and accompanying texts” (Ryan 19). Moreover, the photographs and the travel narratives illuminate an inter-textual articulation of the Victorian Himalaya that simultaneously draws sustenance from, and in turn animates, the physical landscape. Further, in addition to underlining the material and cultural processes that transform the mountains into a specifically Victorian space, Bourne’s picturesque landscape photographs and anti-picturesque travel narrative provide a renewed understanding of the categories of “space” and “landscape,” as both a social product and a social process.

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NOTES

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1. Instead of using simply “landscape” or “landscape idea,” terms preferred by some art historians and human geographers, I use the term “landscape form.” This allows me to follow materialist approaches to the concept of “landscape” and suggest that it encompasses the categories of *built environment* and *representation*, as well as their *social significance*. For a detailed exposition of the landscape concept from a materialist perspective, see Mitchell, “Landscape” 49–56 and Mitchell, *Lie of the Land* 3–35.
2. Samuel Bourne’s travel narratives in the *British Journal of Photography* were titled “Ten Weeks with the Camera in the Himalayas” (1864), “Narrative of a Photographic Trip to Kashmir and Adjacent Districts” (1866), and “A Photographic Journey through the Higher Himalayas” (1869–70). In addition, he had also published an article titled “Photography in the East” (1863) in that journal. These texts have been edited and published together as *Photographic Journeys in the Himalayas* by Rayner in 2004. All references to Bourne’s narratives are from the Rayner edition.
3. For an exposition of the “monarch-of-all-I-survey” trope, see Pratt 201–08. Also see Spurr 28–42.

4. For eighteenth-century expositions on the “picturesque” see Gilpin, *Three Essays* and Price, *An Essay on the Picturesque*. For a contemporaneous delineation of the categories of the “beautiful and the “sublime” see Burke, *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful*.
5. In the case of Samuel Bourne, much of the earlier scholarship has restricted itself to descriptive accounts of the photographer’s use of the picturesque mode or has largely stressed his artistic genius without situating his photography within a historical context (See Williams, *Samuel Bourne* 7–13; Ollman 5–22). Notable exceptions to this trend are Sampson’s essay titled “Unmasking the Colonial Picturesque” and Rao’s “Imperial Imaginary: Photography and the Invention of the British Raj in India.” Sampson investigates Bourne’s deployment of the picturesque in the context of British India after the 1857 Rebellion. He, however, restricts the full scope of his enquiry by limiting himself to a discussion of Bourne’s photographs of a colonial park in Barrackpore, outside Calcutta. Rao’s discussion of Bourne’s images and narratives locates the images and texts squarely British imperialism in late-nineteenth-century India. However, she curiously posits a separation between the realms of aesthetics and politics by claiming that Bourne vacillated between “a desire to represent India and the Himalayas and his political position” (10).
6. Bourne calls the peak behind the Gangotri glacier Mount Moira, the name used by nineteenth-century European explorers. I refer to it by its contemporary name of Shivling in this essay.
7. I noted three figures in that photograph (see Figure 1) while Ollman notes two. This confusion further highlights my claim that Bourne reduces human presence in his photographs to near insignificance.
8. A lot of effort went into getting the camera to “freeze” motion since the early days of photography, and gained momentum and intensity from the 1860s. The first instance of the freezing of motion was achieved in 1851, when William Fox Talbot photographed a page of *The Times* fastened to a rapidly revolving wheel illuminated by a sudden electric flash. This was, however, an exception and until the 1870s motion was recorded only in stereoscopic views of cities that showed minute pedestrians. In 1869 – the same year as Bourne was trekking in the Himalaya – E. J. Muybridge invented one of the first shutters for a camera, which he finally perfected between 1883 and 1885. Moreover, the camera’s ability to freeze action was further enhanced with the development of the lighter gelatin dry plates. The gelatin process was refined through the 1860s until a workable version that froze motion was developed in 1879. It gradually replaced the cumbersome wet collodion process – used by Bourne – that needed the photographer to be his own plate-maker, and have immediate access to a darkroom. The development of shutter and the gelatin process also resulted in the development of smaller hand-held cameras, the most notable of which was the Kodak, manufactured by George Eastman, a dry-plate maker in Rochester, New York. For further details, see Gernsheim 83–96.
9. The classic study on space as a social process and a social product remains Lefebvre’s *The Production of Space*. One of the earliest materialist interpretations of landscape in the field of literary and cultural studies is Williams’s *The Country and the City*. Williams’s insights have influenced materialist conceptualizations of “landscape” in human geography, especially the work of Don Mitchell. For various materialist perspectives on “landscape” see Mitchell, *The Lie of the Land*; Cosgrove, *Social Formation and Symbolic Landscape*; Olwig, *Landscape, Nature, and the Body Politic*; and David Harvey, *The Limits to Capital*.
10. There exists a small body of scholarship on British hill stations in colonial India. Among these, only King and Kennedy engage with hill stations as a spatial category while other scholars focus on specific sites. For instance, Nora Mitchell’s book discusses the hill station of Kodaikanal in South India; Kanwar and Chatterji examine Shimla and Darjeeling, respectively, in their works; Kenny’s doctoral dissertation focuses on another South Indian hill station Ootacamund (Ooty).
11. Kennedy notes that “to sustain their comfortable existence . . . an average of ten or more Indians were employed directly or indirectly in the service of each Briton” in the hill stations (8).
12. For a detailed discussion on colonial photography in British India, see Chaudhary, *Afterimage of Empire* and Ryan. Also see Pinney 17–71.

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