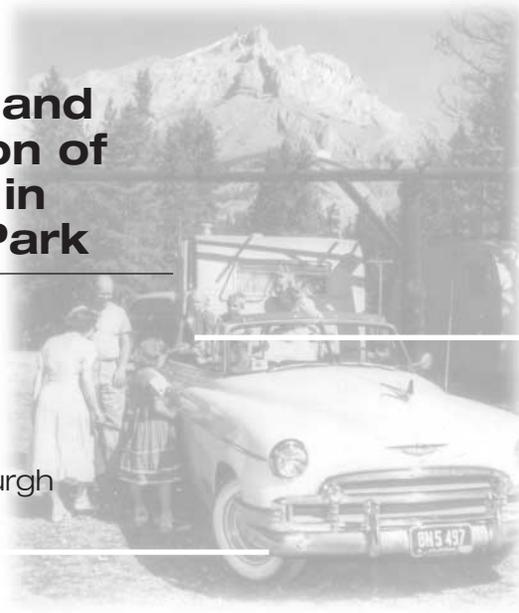


Production and Consumption of Wilderness in Algonquin Park

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This article investigates Algonquin Provincial Park, a 7,600 square kilometer “wilderness” park, located just north of Toronto, Ontario. The park markets itself as a place where one can experience nature in a more or less primordial state, but things—even natural things—are not always as they appear. Rather, it is the appearance of things, and the processes through which they are made to appear, that are subject to critical analysis. Not only a concrete, ecological space, Algonquin Park is also a discursive geography: The landscape is “read” by its visitors. This article emphasizes three distinct but interrelated productive and consumptive processes and practices: material (ecologies), discursive (text), and touristic (experience). Spatial production of wilderness is enmeshed in late capitalist economics and politics, whereas its consumption is structured to reproduce class distinction.

29 Access Points

This article investigates Algonquin Provincial Park, its 7,600 square kilometres of rocky forest and lake that lie between the urban megalopolis of Toronto just to the south and the vast, rugged Laurentian (or “Canadian”) Shield just to the north. Located on the horizon of Ontario’s population and industrial centres, Algonquin Park lies at the cultural heart of a particular Canadian imagination. The park occupies and negotiates the tension between two cultural archetypes that generate traditional, hegemonic Anglo-Canadian national consciousness: that of modern, industrial nation

Author’s Note: The author wishes to acknowledge the financial support of the Social Science and Humanities Research Council of Canada, the editorial assistance of Julie Thompson, and Lou Anne Meloche for paddling and theory in Algonquin.

space & culture vol. 5 no. 3, august 2002 198–210

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and that of wilderness. This analytical journey into Algonquin Park's cultural interior develops an understanding of the interrelated social practices that constitute it. This article engages the following questions: How does analysis encounter a "natural" space as cultural artifact? How are particular ideas of nature projected onto the landscape? How might a landscape be made to represent nature and the natural as well as express its contradictions? How do spatial relations between culture, economics, ecology, and everyday life make possible or encourage specific kinds of experiences? Everyday life, imagination and cultural ideals, material and ecological practice, economic and political relations all govern spatial production. This inquiry approaches the park through an examination of these interrelationships but places culture at the theoretical centre of a constellation of social forces. This commitment derives from recognition that it is through discursive, cultural forms, processes, and practices that people give meaning to themselves, their conditions, and the social and ecological relations into which they are structured. Cultural productions also provide conceptual tools for changing those conditions. Social and ecological conditions evolve through articulations among cultural, economic, and political practices. Hence, the cultural production of space and nature coincides with material transformation and exploitation.

Algonquin is undeniably a natural space; the park is usually described in terms that suggest it is, or at least approximates, a wilderness. The park markets itself as a place where one can experience nature in a more or less primordial state. Algonquin does indeed deliver on its promises: An extended canoe trip into the Interior along some of its 1,500 kilometres of canoe routes takes the camper through what appears to be an unending landscape of mature, almost primeval forest punctuated by crystal-clear lakes (from which one may drink freely), free-flowing rivers, and expansive marshes of biotic abundance. At night, the lakes resound with calls of the loon and owl, even the eerie howl of the wolf. In my experience, wilderness canoeing typically involves frequent encounters with wildlife: Moose and beaver are abundant; many species of waterfowl nest on park waters; otter families, deer, bears, gangs of raccoons, and an occasional startled porcupine can be met here and there throughout the park; fishing can be excellent; and the very fortunate may even glimpse a timber wolf. But things—even natural things—are not always as they appear. Or rather, it is the appearance of things, and the processes through which they are made to appear, that must be subject to critical analysis. An examination of Algonquin confirms Edward Soja's (1989) observations that "space can be made to hide consequences from us . . . relations of power and discipline are inscribed into the apparently innocent spatiality of social life" (p. 6). This article emphasizes three distinct but interrelated productive and consumptive processes and practices to reveal such relations: material (ecologies), discursive (text), and touristic (experience).

A product of specific material relations and practices within a larger context of historical, social processes, Algonquin's ecological features, despite their natural appearance, are the result of many years of human occupation, intervention, policy, and administration.¹ This wilderness has a history, which is to assert that nature in all its forms, even its most primitive and essential (especially its most essential), is a consequence of social production.² As such, wilderness spaces are imbricated in various histories of economic activity, ecological exploitation, and systems of representation. People make geographies and ecologies as they make history. Analysis can compel those geographies and ecologies to speak their histories.

Although it is a concrete space composed of material relations, Algonquin Park is also a discursive geography. If the park is understood as geography and ecology, it is

textual as well: The landscape is “read” by its visitors. The ideological work of the park-as-text is to provide a means of ideological displacement. Algonquin represents the values and ideals attached to the Canadian Shield and stands in for “Ontario,” “the North,” and “Canada.” Historically, Algonquin plays an important role in the cultural apparatus of nation building. The wilderness that Algonquin and other parks reproduce is a central component in the historically dominant national imaginary. A special, ideal space like Algonquin Park engenders contradictions between those values it strives to represent and the (obscured and displaced) social practices that constitute it. To reveal social relations, to pry open contradiction, and relocate the displaced are the tasks at hand.

Algonquin’s design—of ecology and landscape with their textual capacity—offers settings for touristic experiences. Park regulations require all visitors to enter the Interior from one of 29 designated and regulated access points. Strict control of access and movement within the park structures experiences in physical and discursive ways. If one stays on designated canoe and hiking routes and within their greenbelts, one will not encounter the park’s clear-cuts, logging roads, railways, and so forth. A park pamphlet instructs us that “the essence of Algonquin is its vast Interior of maple hills, rocky ridges, spruce bogs, and thousands of lakes, ponds and streams. The only way to explore this rugged beauty is by canoe or on foot” (Ontario, 1994). There is no mention of the vast and largely secret network of more than 2,000 kilometres of permanent logging roads (Ontario, 1968, p. 10) that would provide access to a remarkably different outdoor experience. This careful organization and management of experience serves cultural and ideological functions in addition to those more obvious administrative ones. As there are specific sets of meanings encoded in the landscape, there must also be a means to organize practices of “reading” as one moves through the landscape on a drive, day hike, or extended interior camping trip. Inevitably, as we shall see, any experience of wilderness is structured by practices of consumption and coded to reproduce class distinction.

Discursive Landscapes: Textual Production and Cultural Management

For Algonquin Park to produce specific touristic experiences, ecological production must coincide with textual production. Cultural practices that constitute the park overlay geographic space “making symbolic use of its objects,” as Henri Lefebvre put it (1991, p. 39). Although concrete spatial practices constitute the park, the sociocultural production of wilderness also depends on a series of representations; Algonquin is experienced through its associated images and symbols. In 1893, James Dickson, the first park surveyor, suggested publishing a guidebook with illustrations and drawings to advertise the attractions of the park (Saunders, 1947, p. 80). Today, hundreds of pamphlets, tracts, and books offer interpretations of park landscape and ecology and the experiences they offer. A contemporary pamphlet published by the Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources (Ontario, 1994), for instance, begins as follows:

Pursue unexcelled opportunities for outdoor adventure and education in Algonquin Provincial Park . . . a canoeist’s and camper’s paradise as far as the eye can see. Hear the call of the loon echoing from rocky lakeshores, gaze at the sunset silhouetting a solitary pine, and watch a beaver forging a rippling wedge across a glassy pond. A fish splashes, a

moose raises its massive head to stare at passing paddlers, and high above a windy cliff, a croaking raven surveys a landscape of lakes, forests, streams and bogs from horizon to horizon. At nightfall, two canoeists look up from their flickering campfire and drink in the wild music of wolves wafting over the ancient hills. This is Algonquin Provincial Park.

Identical or similar versions of this paragraph appear on several pamphlets and canoe route maps. This description of park experience provides not so much an interpretation but a reading strategy—coded as “adventure.” The role of such texts is by no means ancillary to the park proper. To create representative space requires production of representations of space (Lefebvre, 1991). The dissemination of images and texts ensures that natural spaces produce intended readings, that visitors decode those spaces as they were encoded—*education* is the apt term used above. The park itself, its associated government departments and agencies, as well as nongovernmental organizations (Friends of Algonquin Park being chief among them) produce a series of representations in policy papers, on maps and pamphlets, interpretative walks and their associated brochures, books, and in photographs. More than 1,800 scientific papers have been generated from research conducted in the park (Winters, 1998, p. 1). Algonquin also figures in many films and television shows, paintings and poetry, a symphony, and New Age ambient recordings of its lakes, streams, loons, and wolves. The constant textual output of the park is a crucial component for the production of nature within the park. Just as regulatory restrictions limit physical movement and guide experiences, textual productions restrict possible meanings. This discursive flow from the park is as significant as timber flow and, ironically, pulpwood used for paper production.

Peter Thomson, the first chief ranger of Algonquin Park, was responsible for establishing park boundaries, constructing buildings, and posting notices to warn hunters and trappers against trespass. He liaised with timber operators, oversaw the removal of settlers and their homes, and notified local Algonquin natives that they could no longer hunt or trap in the area. Ranger Thomson facilitated industrialized logging in the forest as he presided over the expulsion of hunting-gathering and agrarian semi-subsistence custom and economy. He also envisioned systems of production that would only come to maturity long after him. Wrapped in 19th-century idiom of the picturesque, his first report beckoned toward the 20th century to imagine an economy of signs, consumption of spectacle, and “cultivation” of cultural capital:

To the tourists the continual change from lake to river, from river to portage, and from portage to river and lake again, make a delightful panorama which captivates the eye and the senses, and provides abundant opportunity for the cultivation of the tastes in the study of all the varying phases of the landscape, and impels a seeking after more perfect knowledge of the many varieties of animal and vegetable life which have their habitat in the territory. (Thomson, 1894, pp. 15-16)

One can imagine Thomson paddling through his new park, monitoring logging operations, blazing boundaries, and seeking out poachers, all the while envisioning the park as a system for production of touristic wilderness experiences. At the moment of creation, then, Thomson’s park represents, simultaneously, an aristocratic sensibility of possession and propriety, the industrialization of North American countryside and hinterland, and the emergence of a late modern economy where cultural production takes its place alongside older industries.³

Such consumptive, recreational systems and spaces are well in place by now and are patchworked with those of continued industrial timber extraction. The coexistence of timber production and wilderness consumption has always been an uneasy one, and park administration ensures “resource utilization will take place in a discreet manner to ensure the visitor’s perception of the natural qualities of the Algonquin landscape” (Ontario, 1973, p. 4). The implications are clear: The park is a means to bring landscape and forest ecologies into the late-capitalist epoch of spectacular consumption while preserving conditions for heavy industry in and around the park. Even if on the surface of things the tourist expects spontaneous recreational leisure in an unproductive expenditure of wealth, all this “unproductive” activity is, as Lefebvre (1991) pointed out, “planned with the greatest care: centralized, organized, hierarchized, symbolized and programmed to the *n*th degree” (p. 59). Lefebvre left little room for the variety of experiences and active readings that are obtained in a complex and contradictory place like Algonquin; the point, however, is that a wild place need not be exploited for its organic and mineral resources to be incorporated into late-capitalist economies. The 20th-century shift to a leisure-based consumer economy dependent on production of spectacle and cultural experiences creates the conditions for a renewed phase of exploitation in the forest. Raw materials like trees and wildlife are “harvested” as commodity signs for the tourist industry.

Hierarchies of Experience

Zoning is an integral part of park administration. The ostensible reason for zoning is to “ensure the effective management and orderly development of park lands” (Ontario, 1968, p. 19). Thus, Algonquin is divided and subdivided into zones according to ecological and recreational categories: historic, recreation/utilization, nature reserve, wilderness, and development zones. Although these zones refer to environmental conditions and land use, they also facilitate what management literature calls “cultural operations,” that is, “public education and recreation” as a means to “promote in park visitors an appreciation of park features and the inspirational enjoyment of nature” (Ontario, 1968, p. 30). These divisions are as concerned with cultural production as they are with natural environments. Furthermore, because parks are sites of cultural production, they represent or reproduce social relations within their boundaries. These ecological and cultural structures of production and consumption are, in fact, based on a hierarchy of class distinction.

The framework for the Park’s *cultural* hierarchical structure is a *geographical* binarism; Algonquin provides two distinct geographic and ecological environments corresponding to two modes of consumptive experience. As a park brochure puts it, there are “two Algonquins to choose from,” the Parkway Corridor and the Interior (Ontario, 1994). The Parkway Corridor is the area that surrounds Highway 60, which runs through the southwest corner of the park, the only paved road within the park and its only through road. The corridor contains numerous picnic areas, campgrounds, beaches, lookouts, education and interpretation centres, an historic logging museum, hiking trails of various lengths, and the only private lodges within park boundaries—Arowhon Pines, Bartlett, and Killarney. There are also eight “organized campgrounds” for tents and trailers along the Parkway Corridor that offer a “road-based holiday filled with the pleasures of camping, picnicking and other outdoor adventures” (Ontario, 1994). This mode of recreation and consumption offers an aesthetic pursuit of fulfill-

ment through democratic consumption that constitutes the middle-class “good life.” A booklet from the late 1950s or early 1960s titled *Welcome to the Provincial Parks of Ontario* claimed that

soil, trees and water can be measured, but not so the intangible values found in Provincial Parks. These values are those that stir the emotions, that influence our happiness and contentment; are concerned with the good life. It is the policy of the Parks Division to make these values available to as many people as possible. (Ontario, n.d., p. 4)

Such experiences—coded as middle-class tourism—represent a large portion of park use: One third of park visitors come only for the day (Ontario, 1994). The “road-based” or touristic mode of sightseeing, picnicking, and camping depends on the automobile both as a means of transportation and as a technology of spectacle and spectacular consumption. In the early part of the century, railroads (already established by the timber industry) were the only means of access to the park, its lakes, canoe routes, and lodges. Highway 60 was paved in 1947 and 1948, and rail travel into the park was discontinued in 1959⁴ (Ontario, 1968, pp. 8-9). This shift from rail to auto initiated a period of rapid development of camping facilities between 1956 and 1961 (Ontario, 1968, p. 12). This coincided with the consolidation of suburbanization and consumer culture, with a concomitant expansion of leisure and its associated industries.

Designed around the automobile and ease of access, the corridor offers the pleasures of the holiday rather than the challenge and adventure of a wilderness trek:

For a vacation that is less demanding than a trip in the park Interior, there is a second, distinctly different Algonquin. Enjoy camping, swimming, museums, hiking, learning and picnicking with the comfort of modern amenities along the 56 kilometer stretch of Highway 60 running through the southwest corner of the Park. (Ontario, 1994)

As this contemporary brochure alluded, not all modes of consumption and appropriation are equal; there is, as Pierre Bourdieu (1984) would phrase it, a social hierarchy of consumption in the forest, which in turn legitimates social difference. Hence, the camper may obtain another set of values as she moves away from the corridor:

Even experienced Algonquin visitors are often unaware that the Park has four intimate campgrounds nowhere near the Highway 60 Corridor. Set at the ends of sometimes dusty roads leading into Algonquin’s west, north and east sides, these campgrounds feature no modern conveniences but they have a slow-paced, old-fashioned charm that many people wouldn’t trade. (Ontario, 1994)

These campgrounds appear to offer a more authentic, natural, and traditional set of meanings and values. The two campgrounds I have visited, Achray in the east and Rainy Lake in the west, seem carefully constructed and maintained to produce a rustic effect. The landscape aesthetic is minimalist with quiet, cozy, closely forested sites and pathways. Their geographic distance from modern social space and their difficulty of access legitimates and authenticates the camping experiences available at “the end of sometimes dusty roads.” Allusions to geography here serve only as metaphor to disguise *social* restrictions to access. These campgrounds and their old-fashioned authenticity are available not to all but only the many people who can appreciate their charms. It is cultural capital, not driving skills or prior camping experience, that restricts access to such authenticated experience.

Still deeper into the park lies the Interior, which is not accessible by automobile. Publicized as the “essence of Algonquin,” the Interior has special significance and grants the experiences it provides a higher status. Such a dichotomy implies, in Kerwin Klein’s (1993) words, “a certain elitism, a subtle transcendence of mere tourism and denigration of the popular (and classist) image of hurried sightseeing in which the traveller acquired a superficial, inauthentic understanding of place and past” (p. 56). The Interior experience is structured by a set of complex, yet fairly rigid codifications and manners forming a subtle class system of camping culture. The grandeur of hill, cliff, lake, and forest imbues the Interior with the same solemnity and consecration as the more traditional (meta)symbols of class power: the cathedral, great museum, or magnificent opera house. Yet only those who have the skill, equipment, and leisure time to pursue an Interior vacation are able to gain access to such grandeur.

The Practice of Objects

Here are all the ingredients for a perfect Ontario holiday. A car, a tent, a boat and, obviously, a delightful spot to camp at for as long as time permits. (Ontario, n.d., p. 2)

Here are all the ingredients for the understanding of how class operates in the production of wilderness and its concomitant consumptive experiences: commodities, an aesthetically structured landscape, and leisure time. The production of nature as wilderness not only shapes the landscape of Algonquin, it also structures visitors’ encampments (or habitations) of its space. Space and nature are coded, and these codes structure practical, experiential relationships to that space and its contents. Thus, far from being a natural, essential ur-experience, wilderness camping is a highly structured procedure mediated by, and contained within, complex matrices of cultural practices and meanings. In the wilderness, perhaps more than anywhere else, a hierarchy of authenticity is reproduced: from the travel home tourist to the minimalist hiker or canoeist. With its maps, high- and low-tech equipment, codes of dress, and so forth, the cultural production of wilderness and its consumption requires an elaborate array of commodity signs. “Paradoxically,” Margaret Cerullo and Phyllis Ewen (1984) argued in their ethnographic research into family camping, “pre-industrial fantasies tie people more tightly into the market . . . the experience of nature is mediated by commodities” (p. 35). But commodities need a structured space through which their movements can be regulated; they also need a series of sites through which their significations can circulate. Algonquin is just such a space.

As a leisure activity, the wilderness experiences we enjoy while camping are produced in the consumption of commodities, that is, the use of canoes, clothing, and gear, or the consumption of specialized food. Such material consumption goes hand in hand with symbolic consumption. The objects of camping function in a complex system of meaning production. As such, camping is a cultural practice that incorporates systems of objects specific to particular periods, regions, classes, and cultures. Contemporary, middle-class, Canadian—or more specifically Ontarian—camping culture reproduces its symbolic system of objects in a body of how-to or camping-lore literature such as the work of Bill Mason in the information and practical guides of the provincial park system, in the marketing of equipment and accouterments at stores like Mountain Equipment Co-op or Trail Head, by outfitters, and, finally, in

everyday practices of campers. Within this specific cultural system, there seems to be two paradigmatic trajectories or sets of values in which specific objects take their place and their significations: that of *tradition* and *naturalness* on one hand and *efficiency* and *finesse* on the other—or what one might distinguish as low tech and high tech. High-tech and low-tech camping can be discerned not so much from the slight differences in objects but rather from the systems of value they represent. Although these trajectories of meaning appear to be oppositional, they are not entirely so—class affiliations remain. Each system reproduces, although in different ways, social rank. Each system grounds itself in the material, empirical, and simple obviousness of its objects.

As canoes go, the Swift brand kevlar canoe perhaps best epitomizes the high tech. The high-tech kevlar material combines strength and light weight. The minimal gunwales and seats as well as the subdued colours of these expensive canoes express an efficiency of production and minimization of weight. Swift designs tend toward sleek, clean forms suggesting speed, efficiency, and purpose (in canoe design, speed always comes at the expense of stability, so a fast boat does not permit the paddler much pause or play in the water). Many of these modern canoes have straight keel and bowlines with none of the curves of traditional, native designs. Such boats declare the values of rationality, productivity, and efficiency. Many kevlar models weigh less than 50 pounds, so if a pair of campers can pack light with freeze-dried food, lightweight stoves, tents, clothing, and sleeping bags, the portage can be executed in a single trip or trip and a half. Combined with bent-shaft paddles, such canoes can move through the water at considerable speed with a minimum of effort. The precise 30-degree angle of a bent shaft paddle provides maximum output of human energy at the most effective angle of stroke. It also shortens each stroke, allowing more strokes per minute for a maximum output of energy. These values may appear intrinsic to the properties of the objects, but they are, rather, embodied in class formations through which those objects circulate. The values these objects represent are constituted in their social usage, not their apparent usefulness. Efficiency, ease, finesse, and technique: These are the ideological components of a professional managerial class. In the swift execution of passage, either across the lake surface or over the portage, the quality and finesse of high-tech equipment offers testimony to its utility, concealing sign exchange and codes of class hierarchy. Grounded in this way to use value, utility obscures the objects' sign function; signification slides off the smooth, high-tech surfaces as they glide across the lake surface. However, efficient passage has less to do with destination than it does with social destiny.

As Bourdieu (1984) pointed out, the structured and codified values of aesthetics produce the work of art; cultural investment creates the aesthetic object (p. 29). At the apex of canoe tradition is the wood and canvas canoe (the lack of large birch trees has made its predecessor, the birch bark canoe, rare and essentially unavailable). Wood and canvas canoes are expensive, the cost going toward craft labour and aesthetics rather than durability or efficiency. They characterize natural grace, simplicity, and, above all, authenticity. The wood and canvas canoe is often spoken about in terms of beauty and harmony with nature; it is precisely this aesthetic component that gives the wood and canvas canoe its status as a luxury object. Unlike kevlar, wood and canvas boats are relatively slow in the water and heavy on the portage. An average-sized wood canvas canoe can weigh more than 70 pounds and can require two carriers over portages. This ponderousness only adds to the object's status, however, as it becomes a sign of leisure, a waste of time, a rejection of the dictates of modern notions of efficiency and rationality. Embodied in its weight is a sense of gentry that can afford

to move leisurely through the forest as if they had all the vacation time in the world at their disposal. "Economic power is first and foremost a power to keep economic necessity at arm's length," according to Bourdieu (p. 55).

The cedar strip or "stripper" canoe combines both systems: Its smooth clear surface reveals a wood core beneath the fiberglass and epoxy outer shell that brings out the colours and grain of the cedar. The combination of wood and fiberglass creates the lightest, strongest, and yet the most aesthetically pleasing of all canoes. Like fiberglass, cedar strip and epoxy can be fairly easy to construct and shape in subtle ways, permitting the application of contemporary, ever-evolving, high-tech canoe designs to maximize efficiency and utility. These distinctions based on "natural" qualities (aesthetic appreciation of vista, of wood canoes, or the fine grain and elegance of a solid cherry wood paddle as well as the call of the loon or the sight of the majestic moose) are difficult to unravel, their social and class character hard to identify. Taste becomes self-evident, based as it is on an apparent authenticity of simplicity and naturalness. An appreciation of the natural world is taken as obvious and universal rather than cultivated and attached to specific class formations. And in the past few decades, appreciation of nature is buttressed by an incontrovertible ecological ethic. The objects that travel through the park play a crucial role in the education of taste and distinction vis-à-vis nature or the wilderness. These seemingly simple objects, along with ecological and spectacular management techniques—or what park management literature called "visitor experience design" (Ontario, 1973)—allow visitors to "ascend to a higher plane of leisure experience" (Klein, 1993, p. 57). The park offers something more than mere tourism; it provides a geographic and social space for the reproduction of cultural capital and a reinforcement of class distinctions.

Woods Lore and Cultural Capital

Thus, the consumption of nature becomes a cultural practice for acquiring cultural capital. However, cultural capital takes on specific forms in parks like Algonquin. Bourdieu's (1984) conceptual model is useful and appropriate although somewhat misleading in this case. In the wilderness, a strange inversion occurs: Cultural capital is expressed precisely by an absence of culture. What counts at the campsite, on the portage, traversing the lake by canoe, is a kind of nature capital, or what turn-of-the-century campers called "woods lore." Woods lore actively denies all affiliation with cultural or social practice. That is why it is always necessary to complain about frequent encounters with other campers and why one is obliged to lament bitterly at overcrowded conditions in the park: "When we first started coming here, . . ." the mantra begins, "we had this lake to ourselves." The camper can increase her status by pushing deeper into the forest to escape any traces of the social: "The three kilometer portage was worth it because we had the lake to ourselves for two days," is the kind of refrain heard often. Having a lake to oneself is the highest achievement of camping, the pre-eminent display of cultural and practical competence. To escape (how often this word is used to describe the camping experience!) the social in this way is also a guarantee of authenticity; a genuine camping experience can be represented to oneself and to others as unmediated by the trappings of civilized life. An authentic experience derives from a seemingly direct connection with nature, a connection approached from the social world only with a certain degree of minimalism, difficulty, and respect. Elite interior camping becomes a pilgrimage as much as a leisure activity.

Arduousness ensures authenticity in wilderness travel just as it does in the appreciation of “difficult” works of art. Hauling a canoe over rugged terrain and through mosquito-infested swamps to gain access to solitude, rare wildlife, or unique ecological features provides a cultural experience similar to the appreciation of atonal music, abstract art, or formalist cinema. Aesthetic experiences, whether based on pleasure or its denial, must be merited to “produce” cultural capital. Apprehension and appreciation are always a display of cultural competence, and in this case class privilege—even if they take on, as are their tendency, an appearance of innate rather than learned comprehension. An “enchanted” experience of culture or nature is one “which implies forgetting” the acquisition of education and training, as Bourdieu (1984) reminded us. Thus, the camper finds sublime transcendence in the park as if it emanated from the natural content of experience rather than the trained senses, cultural competence, and aesthetic perception—in other words, those “product[s] of history reproduced by education” (pp. 3-4).

As consumption “underlies all practice relative to objects,” natural objects like landscapes take on what Jean Baudrillard (1981) termed “sign exchange value” (p. 29). Consumption is for Bourdieu (1984) “an act of deciphering, decoding, which presupposes practical or explicit mastery of a cipher or code.” Just as in the art gallery or museum, elaborate codifications, rituals, and “programme[s] for perception” (p. 2) influence cultural consumption in the park and at the same time legitimate social difference and a class hierarchy. Such discursive and practical programmes are necessary before natural objects in the park can “enact their role of social discriminants” (Baudrillard, 1981, p. 33). Nature and natural objects can play an exceptional role in the accumulation and circulation of cultural capital because, as Bourdieu has shown, “nothing is more distinctive, more distinguished, than the capacity to confer aesthetic status on objects that are banal or even ‘common’ ” (p. 5). Aesthetic and experiential consumption of landscape requires a “labour of appropriation” based on affective investments distributed unequally among the classes (Bourdieu, 1984, p. 100). Yet appreciation of landscape, forest, and wildlife has the capacity—perhaps like nothing else—to naturalize taste and the class distinctions it reproduces. Wilderness embodies taste and its classist spirit yet elaborately and extravagantly displaces them onto the natural surfaces of the park environment. Taste appears as spontaneous and natural as landscape itself; the beauty of the trees cloaks its “social and economic determinance” (Bourdieu, 1984, p. 101). The common phrase “to be enjoyed by all Ontarians” evokes a democracy of consumption that is not as straightforward as it may seem in Algonquin Park, across its lakes and over its portages. It is a space structured to some extent along class lines, determined by the production and exchange of commodities and the circulation of capital. By extension, then, we need to be reminded that larger struggles around wilderness preservation are, in whole or in part, class struggles. The middle-class flight into the forest primeval offers no escape from the production/consumption process or from the social relations they embody and engender. Thus, what the camper often experiences are the pleasures of ideological displacement.

Spatial relations and textual productions may very well provide a structure in which the camper or day visitor experiences the park and then produces meaning from those experiences. On the other hand, to structure movement, vision and the process of interpretation does not necessarily determine how people negotiate, integrate, and make relevant what they see, hear, and feel as they encounter the social and ecological features of Algonquin. Actual experiences and their meanings for people who visit the park cannot be read from the landscape any more than they can be read

from pamphlets and maps. The basic requirement of travel and movement, along with the number of choices as to whether to go here or there, to paddle, hike, or drive, suggests very active readings of park landscapes. More than that, encounters with special natural spaces like Algonquin often evoke and blend both shared cultural values and deeply personal feelings of self-renewal and affirmation. These social and personal imaginings can smooth over the contradictions of social life or just as easily pry open others. Nature, like any powerful mythic formation, is deeply contradictory; one can celebrate a nationalist myth of wilderness while expressing personal dissatisfaction with modern Canadian society. Ethnographic research is beyond the scope of this study but would be the next step in understanding the park and its place and function in Canadian culture. Mark Neumann's (2000) recent book on the Grand Canyon is exemplary in its fusion of cultural analysis with ethnographic work drawn from formal interviews with canyon visitors, apparently random discussions, chance encounters, and overheard conversations. Neumann's critical encounter with the canyon, spanning several years of on-site research, has produced a book that is at once a historical account, cultural interpretation, ethnographic study, personal narrative, and photographic portrait. His work demonstrated that what people do in natural/cultural spaces, how they negotiate the rich and complex meanings they find there, and what they have to say about their experiences are of vital importance to the spatial and cultural analysis of spaces like Algonquin Park.

There is a need to be vigilant in our critical attention to contradictions and ideological snares that lie in the forest and in assumed, taken-for-granted distinctions between wilderness and civilization, leisure and labour, the woods and the city. We should be wary of any reified apolitical and ahistorical understandings of the park and the experiences it produces. We also need to acknowledge at some point that there are genuine pleasures sought in the wilderness as there are powerful affective investments in what it represents. Embedded in these investments is poignant dissatisfaction with industrial life. Let us also not forget, however, that those classes that have the leisure time and financial and cultural capital to gain the most from an Algonquin experience suffer least from urban life and the stresses of an industrialized society.

Conclusions

Space, Lefebvre (1991) argued, is not empty, waiting to be filled with objects and social relations; rather, a system of space is constituted and reproduced as a set of social relations—it is also lived and experienced. Lefebvre also reminded us, however, that “spaces sometimes lie just as things lie” (p. 92), and any lived experience of the park is a product of culture, ideology, and the same social structures that produce urban and industrial spaces. Cultural and material practices reshape the land and intervene in local eco-systemic patterns and rhythms of its human and nonhuman inhabitants. The internal colonization of Algonquin and its subsequent industrialization in the 19th century generated a radically changed set of social relations and practices on the landscape. The establishment of the park introduced yet another set of relations grounded in larger historical and economic changes. Algonquin Park is a geographical realization, implementation, and expression of state-sponsored rationalization of resource exploitation and tourism. It is not so much that nature disappears—or “recedes,” as Lefebvre (p. 120) suggested; rather, new levels of geographical and ecological forms, practices, and texts overlay previous forms and relations as palimpsest.

Long-standing ecological and geographic spatial structures and relations are never subsumed entirely by their social reorganization in the park—nor are preexisting social systems. Although there is a “diversion and reappropriation of space” (Lefebvre, 1991, p. 167), traces of residual structures and social practices remain. Such residual spaces and activities can exist secretly, as in clandestine trapping; in relative harmony, as in fishing; or in conflict, as in contemporary struggles of environmentalist and wilderness advocates who challenge First Nation moose hunting and trapping.

There is much to learn from a place like Algonquin Park. First, we must realize that space is not two dimensional (as in maps) but rather multidimensional: This territory is much more than forest, lake, and stream, much more than landscape. Human and nonhuman inhabitants and their interrelationships; laws, regulations, and management techniques; resources, both material and cultural; as well as texts and experiences must all be considered. Space is historical, too. It is, therefore, never static: A First Nation is excluded from its traditional territories; resources flow in and out of the park; an army of labourers arrives to build railroads then leave again, then another arrives to extract a vast quantity of timber; a settler’s fire rages through a thousand acres of slash left by a lumbering operation; a native trapper steals across the boundary to take a few beaver pelts before the rangers can catch him; trains and then automobiles travel through, stopping here and there; rail lines and roads are constructed and then melt back into the forest; the park continuously expands its boundaries. Produced and reproduced over time, the park must be understood in relation to other forces: human displacement and settlement, economic structure and activity, changing political structures and struggles, cultural developments, ecological contingencies. Thus, we must embed this place in larger fields of geography, material production, and culture: histories of industrial and consumer capitalism, of state intervention and public administration, of ecological destruction and construction, class dynamics, of ideas of nature and wilderness.

Notes

1. Gerald Killan (1993) offered a comprehensive history of park administration in Ontario.
2. Two important Canadian books on the social production of nature are Neil Evernden (1992) and Alexander Wilson (1991). A recent American contribution is Mark Neumann’s (2000) breathtaking study of the Grand Canyon. Raymond Williams’s essay (1980) *Ideas of Nature* remains a classic and an important starting point for this article.
3. For a thorough historical and cultural account of nature tourism in 18th-century Ontario, see Patricia Jasen (1995). Her discussion of tourism in the Thousand Islands region in chapter 3 has particular relevance to my arguments here.
4. The last railway in the park, a Canadian National Railways line that passed through the northwest corner of the park, was phased out in 1995 after many years of hard lobbying by conservation groups and park advocates. This struggle was motivated in part by frequent moose deaths on the line.

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