11 Narrating the “Great Outdoors”

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As befits a travel narrative, Margaret Fuller’s account of her journey in the Great Lakes region, *Summer on the Lakes, in 1843*, presents a wide array of geographical, biological, and socio-political observations.¹ Among other things, the travelogue conveys Fuller’s impressions of settler life on the frontier with a particular focus on the exigencies and repercussions for women, provides evocative descriptions of the region’s flora and fauna, and extensively discusses the plight of Native Americans. The book thus affords genre-typical explorations of a variety of spaces—physical, mental, and social—promising to be a particularly fruitful source for anyone interested in scrutinizing the relation between narrative and space and the concomitant narrative techniques and strategies employed in the representation and description of such spaces.

My interest in Fuller’s text, however, concerns not so much these representations and descriptions themselves but rather how Fuller employs them in order to evoke what French philosopher Quentin Meillassoux has ventured to call “the *great outdoors*” (*After* 7). As Meillassoux himself makes clear, the great outdoors is “the *absolute* outside of pre-critical thinkers” (7), that is, the notion of the absolute as sustained in the philosophical tradition before Kant.² Indeed, Fuller’s explorations of physical, mental, and social space are not self-sufficient. Rather, they serve to unearth what one might call metaphysical space. Note that Meillassoux introduces the absolute in spatial terms. This is quite fitting: not only does the concept’s Latin root (*absolvere*) mean “to loosen away,” which is a spatial expression, but the absolute is precisely that which eludes, exceeds, and goes beyond the particular, the concrete, and the relative, opening up another space beyond any and every given space, including the space of reason. It is not just outdoors, it is the *great outdoors*, absolutely outside and alien, no matter whether one conceives of the “indoors” as the domain of human thought or the whole realm of our lived experiences in the world at large. This is tantamount to saying that the absolute eschews experience and representation, that it is fundamentally inexperienceable and unrepresentable. At the same time, it cannot be a realm just unto itself as that would make it a realm relative to the human realm of experience

and representation: the absolute has to be both absolutely outside while at the same time permeating and saturating the human experiential and representational world, in which it registers as that alien force of the inexperienceable and unrepresentable. Even though it is all-pervasive, the metaphysical space of the absolute is thus categorically distinct from physical, mental, and social space, which are fundamentally representational and experiential. Meillassoux wants to recuperate the absolute without regressing to a pre-critical, that is, pre-Kantian metaphysics. The reason is that at least since Kant (though Meillassoux actually thinks since Berkeley)³, such a straightforward plunge into metaphysics has become indefensible,

because thought cannot get outside itself in order to compare the world as it is “in itself” to the world as it is “for us,” and thereby distinguish what is a function of our relation to the world from what belongs to the world alone. Such an enterprise is effectively self-contradictory, for at the moment when we think of a property as belonging to the world in itself, it is precisely the latter that we are thinking, and consequently this property is revealed to be essentially tied to our thinking about the world. We cannot represent the “in itself” without it becoming “for us.”

(After 3–4)

If by definition we can never get outside ourselves, can never attain “the world alone” as we invariably turn it into a mere thought, a mere representation, the very moment we think it, how can we ever hope to recuperate the great outdoors? And what has narrative to do with it?

In what follows, I suggest that we, in fact, do not get outside. But we can let the outside seep in. And narrative has a crucial role to play in this letting in.⁴ It is no coincidence that I chose a *romantic* travel narrative in order to showcase this capacity of narrative. Since the study of Romanticism is such a contested field, let me briefly qualify my use of the term. Against a widespread strain of scholarship going back to Arthur Lovejoy’s seminal essay that argues for the inherent plurality of Romanticism and even prefers to speak of Romanticisms in the plural (“Romanticisms”), I take it that there are several fundamental convictions that underwrite a shared romantic project. Roughly, they can be described as the philosophical marriage of Platonic idealism with Spinozist monism and expressionism and the priority of intuitive over discursive reason. Following Plato, the Romantics posited a realm of real Ideas. With Spinoza, they immanentized this realm so that Ideas became thisworldly expressive matrices rather than otherworldly blueprints.⁵ The most explicit statement of this view in Fuller’s travelogue comes in a short discussion of fourteenth-century “Flemish hero” Philip van Artevelde as depicted in Henry Taylor’s eponymous verse drama, when Fuller casts Taylor’s van Artevelde as a role model for America:

no thin Idealist, no coarse Realist, but a man whose eye reads the heavens while his feet step firmly on the ground, ... a man to whom this world is no mere spectacle, or fleeting shadow, but a great solemn game to be played with good heed, for its stakes are of eternal value.

(64)

In other words, against the otherworldliness of Platonic idealism (the world as "fleeting shadow" is an unmistakable reference to Plato's allegory of the cave) Fuller, in true romantic fashion, propagates the thisworldly synthesis of the ideal and the real such that the (transcendental) ideal inheres in (empirical) reality and the (empirical) real is governed by (transcendental) Ideas—otherwise it would not make sense to speak of the *eternal* value of *thisworldly* stakes.

Importantly, for the Romantics the realm of Ideas can only be accessed by means of intuitive rather than discursive reason (they were Kantians with respect to the limitations of discursive reason). This intuitive reason is commonly called intellectual intuition (e.g., Schelling, the Schlegel brothers, the Jena Romantics in general) or simply intuition (e.g., Emerson, Fuller, the transcendentalists). Crucially, for the Romantics intuitive reason is at work in acute aesthetic experiences proffered by the beauty and sublimity of nature. But it is most clearly on display in art; works of art are intuition materialized. They are "co-creations" ultimately stemming from the creative powers of nature itself (Deleuze and Guattari, *What Is* 173). In this way, art becomes the royal road to the realm of Ideas. This is why Schelling at one point even went so far as to claim that art is "at once the only true and eternal organ and document of philosophy" (231).⁶

The Romantics are precursors to Meillassoux in so far as they, too, hark back to the pre-critical notion of the absolute, and like Meillassoux, they do so in order to solve the riddle Kant bestowed on his successors and that we are still grappling with today: if we are caught in our thoughts, that is, for Kant, the world of representations and appearances, but know that there is an outside to this world—since appearances, after all, must be appearances of *something*, there must be *something* that appears—how can we mend this rift between thought and world, between appearances and that which appears, between the "for us" and the "in itself"? While Meillassoux opts for the route of mathematics to solve this problem, the Romantics turned to art.⁷ Where Meillassoux qua rationalist wants to show that rational thought, after all, *can* bridge this divide, the Romantics proposed to travel down the road of intuition. With my reading of Fuller's travelogue, I attempt to give an exemplary account of this kind of travel.⁸

Fuller's travel narrative about the Great Lakes region comes in handy for such an enterprise precisely because it does not content itself with merely describing the region and relating Fuller's impressions, experiences, and encounters. Rather, these descriptions and representations are but preliminaries in a series of narrative operations that serve to open up to that

wholly other realm of the great outdoors. For Fuller, the great outdoors is indeed to be found in nature, specifically American nature, which here means: the American West. She deliberately seeks experiences of beauty and sublimity in the West, which the travelogue is supposed to convey to and, crucially, induce in the reader. This explains why Fuller is less concerned with descriptive accuracy. Rather, her impetus is to render “the poetic impression of the country at large” (42), a country that is “still all new, boundless, limitless” (40). It is this limitlessness she tries to capture, as “what is limitless is alone divine” (40). Descriptive representations necessarily fall short of such divine limitlessness; only poetic evocation can hope to pierce the limits of representation in order to give us a glimpse of the unrepresentable absolute, the limitless great outdoors as intuited in the aesthetic experiences nature affords.⁹

Accordingly, Fuller’s narrative deliberately pushes against the limits of representation. It does so by means of performing displacements of experiential space, on at least three levels. First, the many digressions seemingly unrelated to Fuller’s actual travel itinerary included in the travelogue, most prominently those on Mariana, Fuller’s fictionalized alter ego, and Friederike Hauffe, the so-called Seeress of Prevorst, serve to interrupt and break up Fuller’s account of frontier life and the representation of the external space of the American West. Second, the focus on Mariana’s and Hauffe’s esoteric, spiritual powers and their somnambulism serves to unsettle the internal space of reason and thought, that is, representation *per se*. Third, these displacements are precisely enacted by means of breaking up the space of narration itself—the travelogue actively works against its own narrative progression. Conjointly, these strategies serve to pierce the limits of representation and to make tangible the otherwise intangible realm of the great outdoors. Such a feat should have repercussions for the narratological apparatus and terminology dealing with the relation of narrative and space. The essay accordingly introduces the notion of pseudo-paraleptic anamorphosis—a particular kind of cognitive distortion or displacement in and through narrative—to account for attempts to narrate the great outdoors.

The Limits of Representation

Summer on the Lakes, in 1843 presents a particularly disjointed, impressionistic, digressive, polyvocal, and fragmented narrative, even if one takes into account the genre’s amenability to such formal extravaganzas.¹⁰ Fuller’s travelogue is interwoven with illustrations, poems, dramatizations, numerous excerpts from other books, a fictionalized autobiographical sketch, and a retelling and part-translation of a German esoteric narrative that is itself the imaginatively embellished story of the life and death of the Seeress of Prevorst, Friederike Hauffe. These formal peculiarities go hand in hand with Fuller’s thematic interests. It is evident from the start that Fuller’s

goal is not a faithful and adequate approximation of empirical reality but the rendition and inducement of aesthetic experience facilitating the intuition of the absolute. *Summer on the Lakes* alludes to the importance of aesthetic experience already in the first of its two epigraphs, both penned by Fuller herself: "But, in fault of wizard spell, / Moderns their tale can only tell / In dull words, with a poor reed / Breaking at each time of need" (1). Lamenting the inadequacy of "dull words" to capture that which can only be adequately invoked by a "wizard spell" (1), the first epigraph wastes no time in setting intuitive over against conceptual reason. That the writing tools are of no use when they are most needed further emphasizes the limitations of representation. But Fuller immediately adds that "those to whom a hint suffices / Mottoes find for all devices" (1), making clear that despite its limitations, representation is at least capable to hint at that which it cannot grasp. This line of thought is continued in the second epigraph, in which Fuller first lists souvenirs such as "dried grass-tufts," a "mussel shell," "antlers," and an "eagle's feather" as poor evocations of the original experience (this holds true of both the words themselves—this is what Fuller actually gives us, after all—and the objects the words represent), only to conclude:

I give you what I can, not what I would, / If my small drinking-cup
would hold a flood, / As Scandinavia sung those must contain / With
which the giants gods may entertain; / In our dwarf day we drain few
drops, and soon must thirst again.

(2)

Humans are no giants, and the realm of gods is beyond their reach. Still, they partake in the divine, even if just by means of a few drops. The two epigraphs thus set up the primary challenge for the narrative: how to provide a few of these divine drops, how to forge a wizard spell out of the dull words the narrative needs to content itself with. In other words, how to pen a representational narrative that manages to pierce its representationality so that a glimpse, however small, of the beyond of representation becomes possible.

The narrative proper addresses this conundrum right away as it sets in with an account of the failure to achieve an experience of the sublime. Fuller very much expects such an experience on her visit to Niagara Falls, with which the travelogue begins. But already in the narrative's second sentence she makes clear that initially, she fails to have this experience: "Yet I, like others, have little to say where the spectacle is, for once, great enough to fill the whole life, and supersede thought, giving us only its own presence" (3). Fuller ascribes this failure to the powers of representation:

When I first came I felt nothing but a quiet satisfaction. I found that
drawings, the panorama, &c. had given me a clear notion of the

position and proportions of all objects here; I knew where to look for everything, and everything looked as I thought it would ... it looks really *well enough*, I felt, and was inclined, as you suggested, to give my approbation as to the one object in the world that would not disappoint.

But all great expressions [sic] which, on a superficial survey, seems so easy as well as so simple, furnishes, after a while, to the faithful observer its own standard by which to appreciate it. Daily these proportions widened and towered more and more upon my sight, and I got, at last, a proper foreground for these sublime distances. Before coming away, I think I really saw the full wonder of the scene ... The perpetual trampling of the waters seized my senses.

(4)

The falls fail to convey their magic at first because they have been captured and represented too often in pictures and drawings; they have become an all-too-familiar, tamed place the perception of which is governed and guided by ready-made representations—representation, “clear notion,” cannot get at and even blocks access to the spectacle. Only once Fuller begins to attune herself to the falls, once she becomes a “faithful observer” letting the falls tower on and even seize her senses rather than employing them in the service of representation, does she achieve the kind of experience she was looking for. Faithful observation here indeed means the opposite of concentrated attention to detail, it means letting oneself be inundated, be overcome by the spectacle at hand: “[What] I liked best was to sit on Table Rock, close to the great fall. There all power of observing details, all separate consciousness, was quite lost” (5), Fuller writes. Only once one stops discerning details, that is, distinguishing things, is one able to perceive properly. Only then do “all the lineaments become fluent, and we mould the scene in congenial thought with its genius” (5). Only when we attune our thoughts to the genius of nature, can we expect to experience something like the sublime. In other words, sublimity does not just come by itself, it needs proper attunement, a willingness to forsake the world of representation.¹¹

Fuller’s account of the sublime as an experience overpowering the senses is in accordance with the Kantian and post-Kantian understanding of sublimity. For it is in the wake of Kant that the sublime has come to name precisely that which exceeds our sensory experience, which outdoes sensibility. But Kant holds that if we cannot process something by means of our senses, reason shows us that we can still *conceive* of it, we can *think* it, and *that* is what is sublime (5: 251–257, 5: 260–279). By contrast, for the Romantics, harking back to Baumgarten’s understanding of aesthetics as sensual cognition, reason is not limited to rational, conceptual thought but also encompasses sensual, intuitive thought. Reason in this latter sense is more akin to a *sensus divinitatis* that lets us in on the wonders and secrets of things, and *that* is what is sublime (Beiser, *Romantic* 60–63, Coleridge 555–60). For Kant, the feeling of the sublime is essentially an aesthetically

triggered awareness of our own rational powers. For the Romantics, it is the aesthetic vision or intuition of the absolute. As such, it exceeds the limits of representation. But representation proves hard to overcome.

Fuller emphasizes this latter aspect once more when she tells us that she ultimately managed to experience the sublime where she had not expected it at all precisely because no representation had prepared her for that, namely when she "saw a quarter of a mile of tumbling, rushing rapids" (8). Not the falls themselves, but the comparatively insignificant rapids manage to convey the sublime:

My emotions overpowered me, a choking sensation rose to my throat, a thrill rushed through my veins, 'my blood ran rippling to my finger's ends.' This was the climax of the effect which the falls produced on me—neither the American nor the British fall moved me as did these rapids.

(8)

This is the case because the rapids were not previously present in Fuller's thought, they were not yet governed by any representations:

For the magnificence, the sublimity of the latter [the British and American falls] I was prepared by descriptions and paintings. When I arrived in sight of them I merely felt, 'ah, yes, here is the fall, just as I have seen it in picture.' When I arrived at the terrapin bridge, I expected to be overwhelmed, to retire trembling from this giddy eminence, and gaze with unlimited wonder and awe upon the immense mass rolling on and on, but, somehow or other, I thought only of comparing the effect on my mind with what I had read and heard. I looked for a short time, and then with almost a feeling of disappointment, turned to go to the other points of view to see if I was not mistaken in not feeling any surpassing emotion at this sight.

(8)

Only once she is able to cast off the rule of representation with the help of the rapids Fuller is able to see "how here mutability and unchangeableness were united" and to feel a "genuine admiration, and a humble adoration of the Being who was the architect of this and of all" (9). The sublime does offer visions of the absolute, but we must work on our sensibility, tune and hone it so that such an experience becomes possible. We must be prepared to let go of representation.

In this way, the first chapter about her visit to the falls, the "prologue" to her travels in the West as Fuller herself calls it (3), introduces the pattern of and the key to the ensuing narrative: we live in a fully representational world; experiences of the sublime provide glimpses into a beyond of this world; but representation is all-encompassing and hard to shake off;

sublime experiences need to be actively sought out, fostered, and sustained; both nature and art are apt to provide such experiences (but they can and repeatedly do fail to do so); the narrative at hand aims both to represent and provide this kind of experience.

But daily life is not necessarily amenable to such heightened experiences. Quite on the contrary, despite the West's potential to instill experiences of the sublime and thus to provide a glimpse of the great outdoors, most settlers are less concerned with this kind of aesthetic experience that nature affords but much more with the mundane, every-day question of how to exploit its resources in order to secure a living. The settlers' approach to nature is predominantly instrumental and economic. Throughout her travelogue, Fuller decries "an age ... of *utility*," Americans' general lack of "tenderness of feeling" (25), the settlers' spirit of what she refers to as "calculation" and "accumulation" (12), and their "habit of imitating Europe" (40). These traits keep them from living up to the potential of what Fuller does not hesitate to call "Elysium" (29), "Eden" (75), and "the capital of nature's art" compared to which "Rome and Florence are" mere "suburbs" (33). For Fuller, only women and Native Americans seem to have the sensibility needed to reach beyond calculative thought and intuit the absolute. But the former are locked up in the domestic sphere and the latter are driven away or killed. Women and Native Americans are thus emblematic of this missed opportunity, this untapped potential.¹² This is why Fuller devotes long stretches of her narrative to the plight of Native Americans (especially chapter six) and inserts the two stories of women with particularly acute sensibilities, Mariana and Hauffe (chapters four and five).

Fuller's "prologue" (3) thus has a double function: the visit to Niagara Falls is the starting point of Fuller's travels—this is the sense in which Fuller employs the term, but it is of course also the entry point to her narrative about her travels. In this vein, her musings on the limits of representation and the power of the sublime need to be understood as programmatic metanarrative comments. Just like Fuller initially only managed to experience the sublime where she did not expect it, we should not expect to have the sublime conveyed to us where we would anticipate it to be conveyed, namely in Fuller's descriptions of and musings on the natural expanse of the American West. Given her awareness of and warnings about the impediments of representation, we should not expect her to actually try to represent the sublime, especially since the sublime by definition exceeds representation. At the same time, since her account cannot but avail itself of "dull words" (1), that is, it cannot but represent, she must do with representation. In other words, in order to evoke the aesthetic vision of the great outdoors provided by the experience of the sublime that both nature and art are apt to offer, Fuller needs to undo representation from within. Fragmentation, disjointedness, digressiveness, polyvocality, the palimpsestic grafting of narrative upon narrative, and generic hybridity are all strategies she musters in the service of this undoing.

These strategies find their climax in the accounts of Mariana and Hauffe, the Seeress of Prevorst, in the book's two central chapters: not only are the chapters located in the middle of the book (in chapters four and five out of seven), more importantly, they capture what the entire narrative revolves around but cannot express with mere descriptions of nature and life on the frontier. Here, the narrative's form and content converge: as sustained digressions, the accounts of Mariana and the Seeress impede the representation of the travelogue's ostensible object, life in the American West, as they are not in any sense "about" the West. As discursive representations they represent the capacity for intuition as manifested in two young women. Placed at the heart of Fuller's narrative, they are representations that displace representation. Employing representation against representation in this way, the narrative opens up to the realm beyond the limits of representation. In its inherent mutability and malleability, its ability to take on and incorporate any form and genre, narrative is "the form that best captures the experience of colliding forms" (Levine 19) and is thus particularly well-suited to perform this work of displacement.

Displacement is of course a spatial expression, and I have chosen it with care. As is the case with Meillassoux's "great outdoors" and Kant's "in itself," Fuller, too, uses predominantly spatial terms to denote the beyond of representation (which, of course, is yet another spatial expression): to fill, to supersede, to widen, to tower, to surpass, to rise are some of the crucial terms employed in this respect in the excerpts quoted above. But what *kind* of expression, exactly, are they? If one follows Marie-Laure Ryan, these spatial expressions are mere metaphors, as they "fail to account for physical existence" (n.pag.), fail to index physical space in any way. Indeed, they do not as they quite emphatically wish to account for *metaphysical* existence. For example, when Fuller writes that the spectacle of the sublime "supersede[s] thought" (8), "supersedes" has no physical referent and does not describe a physical action. Ryan thinks that all uses of spatial expressions that do not refer to actual physical entities or actions are metaphorical uses. One wonders, however, what expressions like "supersedes thought," "beyond representation," and "the great outdoors" would be metaphors for. They seem to be categorically distinct from the metaphors Ryan has in mind such as, for example, the expression "mental spaces," which she paraphrases as a stand-in for "constellations of meanings held together in the mind" (though one cannot fail to note that Ryan's use of "in the mind" seems to be but yet another spatial metaphor—but one can see how this paraphrase might be extended such that it ends with reference to the brain, an actual physical object). Things seem to be different with expressions like superseding thought, the great outdoors, and the absolute: there is no paraphrase indexing physical entities or actions that would capture what these terms presumably stand in for. This is no wonder as they are coinages denoting non-physical existents. Here, one should not forget that in the Kantian and post-Kantian framework physics qua empirical science—like

all natural sciences—is a science of appearances. It operates well within representation. In fact, representationality is the guarantor of scientificity: only what is empirically observable and testable belongs to the purview of the sciences.

If the metaphoricality of spatial expressions is defined via their relation to physical existence, as Ryan insists, then I would suggest that neither the spatial expressions used to gesture towards the beyond of representation nor the narrative displacement of representation by means of the accounts of Mariana and the Seeress should be understood as mere metaphorical operations.¹³ Rather, they provide the double-vision of anamorphosis—they are the distortive, anamorphic element in the larger picture transforming it (*anamorphoein* translates as to transform) when viewed accordingly.

It is no wonder that the disjointedness and digressiveness of Fuller's narrative, particularly the inclusion of the seemingly irrelevant stories of Mariana and the Seeress, was immediately criticized upon publication, with later editions sometimes omitting these allegedly egregious and disturbing passages and chapters (Belasco Smith xiii). For if we take these digressions at face value, as further episodes in a series of observations and ruminations about the American West, they seem indeed misplaced. But once we view them differently, as attempts to break up the progression and coherence of the overall narrative in order to twist representation in such a way that it yields a view of the great outdoors, they are spot on.

But narrative anamorphosis does not yet constitute the whole picture. Since such anamorphic narratives profess to provide access to the cognitively inaccessible, they are also what I would propose to call pseudo-paraleptic: paraleptic, because they showcase figures that have direct knowledge about spaces they have no cognitive access to; pseudo, because these figures are not entirely cut-off from the spaces in question as they avail themselves of different, purely aesthetic channels to gain their knowledge.¹⁴ Let us now zoom in on the travelogue's most significant instance of anamorphosis, the two accounts of Mariana and the Seeress, in order to trace how this anamorphic element helps in yielding a view of the great outdoors and why this yielding warrants to be designated as pseudo-paralepsis.

Beyond the Limits of Representation

The first of the two stories portrays the very short life of Mariana, introduced as Fuller's former schoolmate, a "provoking nonconformist" (53), "most rich in energy" with "power of excitement" (51), and a "very intellectual being" (59), but who, confined to the domestic sphere, ultimately withers away and dies. The "slight sketch" (51), as Fuller herself calls it, is introduced unceremoniously, with Fuller metaleptically recounting a chance meeting in Chicago with her former schoolmate's aunt, who breaks the news of Mariana's death to her. Like the Seeress, Mariana, too, is a "sleep-walker," her "restlessness" and "excitement" ever "increased by the restraints and

narrow routine of the boarding school" she attends (52). Due to her unusual nature and comportment, Mariana is soon alienated from everyone else at the school and after several incidents, in which she is alternatively victim and perpetrator resulting in moral self-castigation and affective isolation, her "heart of stone [is] quite broken in her. The fiery life fallen from flame to coal" (57). It is only downhill from there: Mariana returns home and soon marries into a dull, unfulfilling life of domesticity, characterized by "the desolation of solitude" and the "repression of her finer powers" (59) by a husband "with little delicacy of sentiment" (59) and only interested in "business and the world" (59), expecting her to fit in with the superficial and "careless shining dames of society" (60). Living the life of a "solitary and wretched wife" (60), she falls ill and dies.

Fuller thus paints a grim picture of how the resources needed to tap the great outdoors, namely the very aesthetic and intellectual sensibilities displayed by Mariana, the very sensibilities her husband lacks, fully immersed in the world of economy (business) and appearances (shining dames) as he is, are recklessly wasted. By the same token, she emphasizes not only that but also how these resources could be kindled, fostered, and capitalized on: precisely by means of an adequate education focused on training and exercising these sensibilities. Fuller here emphatically employs the romantic discourse of aesthetic education (Beiser, *Romantic* 88–105), to which her own narrative is designed to contribute. The stories of Mariana and Hauffe constitute both discourses on and, qua instances of narrative anamorphosis, opportunities for the exercise of sensibility or intuitive reason.

Like Mariana, Hauffe, the Seeress of Prevorst, is a figure with acute, heightened sensibility. Wielding prophetic powers, she has direct access to the world of spirits: the "spirit of things, about which we have no perception, was sensible to her," Fuller writes (90). Her account of the Seeress draws on and indeed constitutes part-translation of a voluminous narrative by Justinus Kerner, a German physician specializing in mesmerism with a track record in the successful treatment of somnambulism.¹⁵ In his report on the case, he tells us how he was called on to cure Hauffe from her bouts of somnambulism and what was then known as mesmeric trance and how he ultimately failed to do so, unable to prevent her premature and gruesome death.¹⁶ This might all sound rather curious by today's standards, but one should not forget that Kerner was an accomplished and reputed physician and that spiritism and spiritualism were the vogue of the day, so much so that Kerner and Hauffe were visited by a number of famous people hoping to gain insight into the world of spirit, Schleiermacher and Schelling among them.¹⁷ Fuller inserts the story of the Seeress after having conveyed her impressions of Wisconsin frontier life for several pages, deliberately casting Kerner's "vision of an exalted and sensitive existence" as being "in strong contrast with the [frontier] life around" her (77), which she had just criticized for its excessive instrumentalism and economism.

To make this point even more emphatically and in order to put her own thoughts on the issue into relief, she prefaces the translated extracts from Kerner's account with an allegorical dialogue between Good Sense, Old Church, Self-Poise (recognizably Emerson), and her alter ego—Fuller is explicit about this fact (78)—Free Hope. In Good Sense's impatience with Free Hope's interest in somnambulism, mesmeric trance, and the spirit world with which the dialogue begins—the injunction to "be completely natural, before we trouble ourselves with the supernatural" (78)—we can easily recognize the "life around her" (77) with its focus on the empirical here and now and its instrumental and economic attitude that Fuller decries time and again in her narrative. Unsurprisingly, Free Hope's response stresses that being completely natural precisely results in the revelation of the supernatural, something the instrumental empiricist necessarily misses out on: "The meaning of the flower uprooted in the ploughed field" completely eludes "the ploughman who does not look beyond [the field's] boundaries" and can only ever be apprehended by the "poet" and "dreamer" who "looks oftener to the sky than on the ground" (79).

Fuller's commonplace romantic equation of poet and dreamer in this passage helps her to emphasize both the visionary qualities of the poet and the creative aspects of dreaming. More importantly, it establishes a parallel between the figure of the poet and both Mariana and the Seeress, aligning the work of poetry with the two women's somnambulant visionary powers. This is very much in line with Kerner's essentially romantic understanding that "somnambles ... know from direct experience that behind the brutal realities of social and material existence there is a much larger, all-encompassing, and deeply meaningful life," which is expressed "through profound symbols and poetic language" (Hanegraaff, *Esotericism* 263). Such an understanding is part and parcel of what one could call the Romantics' fundamental existential aestheticism as outlined above and which Hanegraaff, with reference to the esoteric discourse that many of the Romantics including Fuller availed themselves of, describes in the following manner:

When our bodily senses shut down temporarily, and we descend into dream or somnambulant trance, our soul "wakes up" to the larger world whence it has come and where it really belongs. The rationalist, in contrast, is spiritually asleep. He lives in a state of artificial isolation from his own soul and its powers of perception, incapable of understanding the language of symbols and poetry. He naively believes that his brain and his senses show him all there is, never realizing that they are obstacles rather than reliable instruments for discovering the deeper "secrets of nature." Blind as he is to her spiritual dimensions, he can only dismiss belief in occult powers and supra-normal abilities as "superstition." Such abilities are, however, neither miraculous nor supernatural: they are *natural* human faculties, potentially available to

us all. Hence, the remarkable feats of somnambules reveal the powers that are latent in humanity.

(*Esotericism* 263)

I think Hanegraaff draws too stark a contrast between rationalism and romantic aestheticism in this passage—the Romantics did not see themselves as rejecting rationalism but as complementing and completing it (see Beiser, *Romantic* 43–55).¹⁸ But it serves us well in pinpointing Fuller's romantic program and in further determining the thematic and structural importance of Mariana's and the Seeress's stories for Fuller's narrative.

That Kerner makes note of Hauffe's inclination to compose little poems in her states of somnambulism, something she is otherwise not prone to do, is an interesting detail in this context (Kerner, *Die Seherin* 76–78; 58–59),¹⁹ a fact that Fuller does not fail to mention in her text, even though she is keen to distinguish the Seeress's simple rhymes from true poetry (Fuller 92, 96). The Seeress is not a poet, after all—her creative and visionary powers are expressed in her prophetic states of somnambulant clairvoyance. Fuller's insistence on the much greater force of true poetry compared to "the simplest character" (96) of Hauffe's verse only serves to reinforce the parallel between the powers of poetry and those of prophetic somnambulism. Fuller runs together the creative principles of nature and poetry into one great principle of *poiesis*. Nature and poetry are presented as expressions of one and the same principle. This is why poetry—and by extension literature and art—is apt to disclose this very principle and why Fuller can hope to evoke the aesthetic vision of this principle *in and through her own account*.

Ultimately, Fuller casts literature as just as somnambulant as Mariana and the Seeress. In a sense, for Fuller literature *is* somnambulism, of which her own travelogue is but another instantiation: the inclusion of the stories of Mariana and the Seeress amounts to the travelogue's own somnambulant vision—its anamorphosis—by means of which Fuller wishes to open up her narrative to the realm of the great outdoors or absolute.

Having established her own affirmative stance vis-à-vis Kerner's and the Seeress's spiritualism by means of the brief allegorical exchange with the exemplary positions of empiricism (Good Sense) and dogmatism (Old Church),²⁰ Fuller finally gives us a summary of and several pages of translated excerpts from Kerner's book. As with Mariana, Fuller stresses Hauffe's "intellectual nature" and "greater liveliness" compared to her peers in the time before her illness (84). Hauffe suffers severely, plagued by bouts of fever, spasms, prophetic dreams, and an almost continual state of mesmeric trance lasting for several years. Once it becomes clear that Hauffe cannot be cured, Kerner decides "to record ... the mental phenomena of such an almost disembodied life" (Fuller 89; Kerner, *Die Seherin* 73; 55), among which he lists a "sense of the spirit of metals, plants, animals, and men" (Fuller 90; Kerner, *Die Seherin* 75; 57), frequent out of body experiences (Fuller 91; Kerner, *Die Seherin* 76; 58), and "the powers of seeing, healing,

and poesy” developed in states of somnambulism (Fuller 93; Kerner, *Die Seherin* 78; 59).

For Fuller, the most important lesson to draw from Kerner’s account of the Seeress is encapsulated in the subtitle of his book, which she translates as “Revelations concerning the inward life of man, and the projection of a world of spirits into ours” (78). Hauffe’s peculiar illness serves as a testimony to “spiritual facts of high beauty, ... which cast light on the state of the soul after its separation from the body” (95) and to how the “floating belief of nations, always no doubt shadowing forth in its imperfect fashion the poetic facts with their scientific exposition, is found to grow up anew in a simple, but high-wrought nature” (98).²¹ Fuller thus emphasizes not only the fundamental spiritual nature of nature, but also that this spirituality is often expressed in and through simple minds—all it needs is a certain exalted and appropriately attuned sensibility. Indeed, Kerner wastes no time in formulating this program, directly addressing his readers when he begins his book on the Seeress with the following words:

As must every man who, isolating himself from the hurry and bustle of external life, to contemplate his inner self, you will feel, dear reader, that our inner and outer life are not only different, but often in flat contradiction of each other. What the outer life finds decorous, the inner frequently condemns; and in the midst of the world we are often disquieted by a still small voice that whispers us from within. If you examine further, you will feel that this external life is the dominion of the brain—the intellect which belongs to the world—whilst the inner life dwells in the region of the heart, within the sphere of sensitive life, in the sympathetic and ganglionic system. You will further feel, that by virtue of this inner life, mankind is bound up in an eternal connexion with nature, from which his imperfect external existence can only apparently release him.

(*Seeress*, 5)²²

By placing the stories of Mariana and the Seeress at the heart of the book Fuller manages both to convey what is wrong with settlement on the frontier as it shuts out rather than opens up to the great outdoors (the violent legacy of settler colonialism is a corollary to this shutting out) and what it would actually take to open up, namely the kind of acute sensibility evidenced by Mariana and the Seeress.

Crucially, this opening up is performed by the very narrative at hand as it *makes space* for the realm of the great outdoors at its very center. Interrupting her descriptions of and musings on the West, Fuller provides textual space for what she thinks is lacking on the frontier. In alignment with her rendition of Kerner’s subtitle and program, she lets the spirit world project itself into the world of the narrative. In doing so, *Summer on the Lakes* emphasizes once more that this spirit world, that the great outdoors

cannot be accessed rationally—rational thought in its calculations is precisely what impedes the access. Rather, one has to proceed aesthetically, by means of veritable visions. Fuller's travelogue most fully lives up to its professed aim to render "the poetic impression" of the West with the two accounts of Mariana and the Seeress as they provide an apposite rendering of the West's untapped potential even though—or rather, precisely because—they are not in any sense representations of the West.

This twisting and displacement of representation by means of representation is what I suggested to call the narrative's work of anamorphosis. In contrast to metaphor's representational dualism—something standing in for something else—anamorphosis goes hand in hand with expressive monism: one and the same thing is twisted and distorted such that it takes on a new shape. This reshaping, this perspectival distortion of representation, facilitates a new vision, the intuition of the great outdoors. Since in such expressive monism the space of the metaphysical subtends and inheres in the space of the physical, that is, it does not constitute a realm unto its own, expressive monism provides us with an ontologically continuous but epistemologically discontinuous world. Human knowledge is simply restricted to the limitations of the human cognitive apparatus. But this does not mean that the world at large can be reduced and made to shrink to fit these very limitations. On the contrary, the transexperiential great outdoors beyond representation is just as real as and infinitely larger than the space of human experience. If this is indeed the case, then narratives like Fuller's present us with a fourth option besides the "three types of spatial organization within narrative worlds" (552) that Sabine Buchholz and Manfred Jahn distinguish. Next to "texts that contain contiguous subspaces, where characters move freely from one space to the next, ... texts with discontinuous, ontologically distinct spaces that allow communication in exceptional circumstances only," and "texts with ontologically distinct spaces that do not allow communication, except through metalepsis" (552), we need to list texts with ontologically continuous but epistemologically discontinuous spaces that do not allow communication but where access from one space to the other can nevertheless be established by purely aesthetic means.

I take it that in *Summer on the Lakes*, Mariana and the Seeress personify precisely this kind of relation. They are both the narrative's most salient distortive element of anamorphosis and, by dint of their access to the cognitively inaccessible, its most explicit performance of pseudo-paralepsis. In a further twist, Fuller's travelogue portends to facilitate precisely such a performance for its readers. This, then, is how narratives of the absolute narrate the great outdoors: by means of pseudo-paraleptic anamorphosis.

Coda

Whatever one thinks about the metaphysical import of narratives such as Fuller's, whether one believes that they achieve what they set out to do

or whether one thinks that the entire elaborate metaphysical architecture they offer is but esoteric hocus-pocus, one cannot deny that they profess to perform the kind of work I have outlined throughout this essay, particularly when they contain figures like Mariana and the Seeress who exemplify this kind of performance. While one might very well reject the thought that these narratives themselves constitute cases of intuition by means of what I have called pseudo-paraleptic anamorphosis, that they *actually succeed* in narrating the great outdoors, it nevertheless remains the case that we need adequate vocabulary to describe such an enterprise. Minimally, this is what I hope to have contributed to.

Notes

- 1 I would like to thank Philipp Schweighauser and the editors for their helpful comments on earlier versions of this article.
- 2 For a resourceful and erudite discussion and renewal of the notion of the absolute, see Gunnar Hindrich's *Das Absolute und das Subjekt*.
- 3 While *After Finitude* might well be read as primarily an attack on transcendental philosophy, Meillassoux has since expanded his initial analysis ("Iteration" 122–23, 132–33).
- 4 Much of what I say in this essay builds on and continues the work begun in my *Narrative and Becoming*.
- 5 Spinoza's famous distinction between *natura naturans* and *natura naturata*, where the latter is the expression of the former without constituting a realm unto its own is a particularly salient example of his expressionist immanentism: nature expresses itself. For a sustained discussion of Spinoza's expressionism, see Gilles Deleuze's *Expressionism in Philosophy: Spinoza*.
- 6 I do not have the space here to defend this view of Romanticism in any detail. But much of what I say on Romanticism's Platonism cum Spinozism, its prioritization of intuitive over discursive reason, and its efforts to synthesize idealism with realism is indebted to Frederick Beiser's invaluable work in his seminal monographs *German Idealism* and *The Romantic Imperative*. In a similar vein, see also Dalia Nassar's *The Romantic Absolute*. For discussions of the transcendentalists' transatlantic connections—they were all avid readers of English, German, and French romantic literature and philosophy, and Fuller was a pivotal figure in the dissemination of these ideas, whether as translator or the editor of the most important transcendentalist journal, *The Dial*—see, for example, the works by David Greenham, Samantha Harvey, and Charles Capper.
- 7 In the last two chapters of *After Finitude*, Meillassoux suggests that Cantorian transfinities provide the solution to this problem (see particularly 101–111). For a detailed discussion of Meillassoux's argument see Sergey Sistiaga's *Das Prinzip vom Grund bei Kant und Meillassoux*.
- 8 The reading of *Summer on the Lakes* presented here expands and elaborates on my brief discussion of Fuller's text in an essay for *The Cambridge Companion to Literature and the Posthuman* (Askin, "Objects").
- 9 Stephen Adams was one of the first to point out that Fuller's travelogue is deliberately designed to elude "conventional objective description." However, unlike Adams, I do not think that Fuller's strategy serves to recalibrate the focus "on the perceiver more than the objects perceived" (249). Fuller is not more interested in the subjective over the objective side of perception. Rather, her

travelogue aims at the great outdoors beyond the representational subject-object dyad.

- 10 Adams (248), Susan Belasco Smith (xii), Casey Blanton (1), Michael Meyer (239), and Carl Thompson (11–12) all emphasize travel literature's essential looseness and malleability and what one might call its generic hybridity. Meyer also gives a short and informative overview of the genre's history (239–42).
- 11 Such at times laborious attunement to the powers of *poiesis* or creation—laborious precisely because it demands an unconditional letting-go—is a precondition of aesthetic experience in general, as Fuller makes clear in another passage:

But it was not so soon that I learned to appreciate the lake scenery; it was only after a daily and careless familiarity that I entered into its beauty, for nature always refuses to be seen by being stared at. Like Bonaparte, she discharges her face of all expression when she catches the eye of impertinent curiosity fixed on her. But he who has gone to sleep in childish ease on her lap, or leaned an aching brow upon her breast, seeking there comfort with full trust as from a mother, will see all a mother's beauty in the look she bends upon him.

(17)

- 12 Fuller deliberately contrasts Native Americans' aesthetic sensibility in attunement with the powers of nature with the settlers' destructive coarseness:

Seeing the traces of the Indians, who chose the most beautiful sites for their dwellings, and whose habits do not break in on that aspect of nature under which they were born, we feel as if they were the rightful lords of a beauty they forbore to deform. But most of these settlers do not see it at all; it breathes, it speaks in vain to those who are rushing into its sphere. Their progress is Gothic, not Roman, and their mode of cultivation will, in the course of twenty, perhaps ten, years, obliterate the natural expression of the country.

(29)

- 13 Of course, metaphors are also intrinsically representational: in a metaphor, something stands in for something else, at least if one follows traditional theories of metaphor, what Max Black in his seminal essay referred to as the "substitution view" (279). But cognitive and interactionist theories (like Black's) are equally based on relations of similarity and analogy and thus do not do away with representationalism. Seen this way, metaphors are not the best means to test the limits of representation anyway. In this context, it is also worth remembering that Jacques Lacan famously equated displacement—the term I have been using to designate the work performed by the narrative strategies in question—with metonymy, precisely in contradistinction to the condensation of metaphor (Lacan, "The Instance"). As will become clear later on, the contiguity inherent in metonymy is indeed crucial for the kind of narrative performance I am delineating here.
- 14 In his typology of paraleptic narrators, Rüdiger Heinze glosses *paralepsis* as narrators' display of knowledge that "is temporally, spatially, or cognitively undisclosed to them" (279). Unsurprisingly, the term *paralepsis* ultimately derives from discussions of narratorial omniscience (280–82).
- 15 When he was asked to treat Hauffe in late 1826, Kerner was already well-known and an established expert on somnambulism, having published his widely read *Geschichte zweyer Somnambülen: Nebst einigen andern Denkwürdigkeiten aus dem Gebiete der magischen Heilkunde und der Psychologie* two years earlier.

- 16 Kerner's account of Hauffe's somnambule and magnetic states and visions and his attempts to cure her—Hauffe even moved in with the Kerner household—firmly established her as the spiritist *du jour*, creating the myth of and turning Hauffe into the infamous Seeress of Prevorst. Wouter Hanegraaff discusses this mythographic aspect of Kerner's narrative extensively in an essay on the topic ("A Woman Alone")—I would like to thank Susannah Crockford for alerting me to Hanegraaff's work.
- 17 A brief portrait of Kerner in the *Deutsches Ärzteblatt*, the official organ of the German Medical Association (Bundesärztekammer) and the National Association of Statutory Health Insurance Physicians (Kassenärztliche Bundesvereinigung), stresses his professional merits and conduct (Schott), something that Hanegraaff also emphasizes in his essay.
- 18 When in Fuller's travelogue *Old Church* decries "wild speculation and intemperate curiosity" (80) because it violates the limits of human finitude as imposed by God, Free Hope refutes this charge by replying that nothing violates this supposed imposition more than the dogmatic, unexamined, and ultimately rationally unfounded doctrines of the church, thus testifying to Fuller's adherence to the principles of rational thought. Like all Romantics, Fuller is not interested in doing away with rational, conceptual thought. Rather, she thinks it needs to be complemented by aesthetic, intuitive thought.
- 19 Here and throughout, references to Kerner's book are first to the German original, then to Catherine Crowe's abridged translation published in 1845 (in this passage, for example, Hauffe's poems are not reproduced in the English version)—in *Summer on the Lakes*, Fuller still thinks that Kerner's book "has not, probably, and may not be translated into other languages" (78), underestimating its appeal. Crowe is an interesting figure herself, best-known for her 1848 bestseller *The Night Side of Nature Or, Ghosts and Ghost Seers*.
- 20 Self-Poise's injunction to seek spirit in one's own soul rather than in the world at large only serves as an occasion to distinguish her own, more expansive brand of transcendentalism from Emerson's, which Fuller thinks is too imposing and stifling in its unrelenting insistence on self-reliance (80–83).
- 21 While these passages might sound like they advocate a dualist world view, one should not forget that the Romantics immanentized the realm of spirit such that it inheres in matter. The Romantics' Spinozist monism holds that while there are different aspects to the world, there is just one world. Analytic philosophers accordingly call such a Spinoza-derived ontology dual-aspect monism (Atmanspacher 4.6, Stubenberg 5.4, 8.3).
- 22 In the original German, the passage reads as follows:

Wie jeder Mensch, der entfernt vom Treiben des äußern Lebens nur etwas in seinem Innern einkehrt, wirst auch du, lieber Leser, fühlen, daß in diesem ein ganz andres, dem Äußern meist widersprechendes Leben ist. Was das äußere Leben für geziemend findet, tadelt oft das innere, und oft geht bei Thaten des äußern ein stilles, beunruhigendes Gefühl, das nur aus dem innern Leben kommt, auf das äußere über. Fühlst du dann weiter nach, so fühlst du, daß dieses äußere Leben besonders mit den mechanischen Einrichtungen des Gehirnes, dem für die Welt berechnenden Verstande, zu thun hat, das innere Leben aber, in der Region des Herzens, dem sympathetischen und Gangliensysteme, in den Kreisen des Gefühllebens, seinen Sitz fand.

Noch weiter fühlst du, daß vermöge dieses innern Lebens der Mensch in einer alten ewigen Verbindung mit der Natur steht, von der ihn die einseitige Ausbildung des Gehirnlebens nur scheinbar freistellen kann.

(Kerner, *Die Seherin* 27)

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