

# Inspirational Landscapes and the role of hospitality

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## **Abstract:**

The keynote aims to come to terms with landscapes as inspirational, and how tourism, with emphasis on hospitality, can possibly deliver this inspiration. The point of departure is a recent marketing campaign launched by the Icelandic tourism authorities in response to the eruption in Eyjafjallajökull. The campaign is called Inspired by Iceland and features video commentaries and online chat forums where celebrities of varying degrees share their experience of Iceland. What is argued is that the landscape depicted and shown has no intrinsic value, it does not gain any level of authenticity through varying informed readings of it, it does not subject itself to the 'correct' managerial or planning schemes. Through presenting post-structural theorising the keynote argues that landscape is irreducible to its terms, it is within each of us, yet ours – a whole that is never the sum of its parts. It is through this capacity a landscape can be shared and can possibly be the substance of tourism marketing and promotion. Recognising the tourist as potentially inspired by landscape commands the attitude of respect that is argued as a necessary precondition to any ethical notions of hospitality.

**Dear conference participants and fellow scholars of tourism,**

First and foremost I would like to thank the organisers for inviting me here as a keynote speaker at this opening session of the conference. At the same time I have to offer my sincerest apologies as I will have to leave right after my presentation and carry on to Rovaniemi where the 20<sup>th</sup> Nordic Symposium of Tourism and Hospitality Research is starting this evening. I am simply obliged to be there, not least since I was the host of this event last year. So, as much as I would like to take part in the extremely interesting days ahead, talking about my favourite topic; landscapes, with the associated notions of spaces and places, I will have to leave, but thank the organisers again for having me, regardless of this.

So, I hope I can live up to the expectations we all have to opening keynotes! In order to situate myself with the themes of this conference I will focus on what we see here at the top of the opening slide: The landscape vista offered to us when we reach the rim of the inland highland plateaux of Iceland from the North. I will not talk about this view in terms of planning or sustainability, not in terms of generating economic value – or any other value for that matter. I will not talk about technical solutions, although the jeeps depicted have always fascinated me and I have written about these<sup>1</sup>. What I will talk about is advances in researching landscapes, and most particularly about what the landscape does in terms of providing an invitation. What I would like to do in the coming few minutes, is come to terms with landscapes as inspirational, and how tourism, with emphasis on hospitality, can possibly deliver this inspiration.

My point of departure is a recent marketing campaign launched by the Icelandic tourism authorities in response to the eruption in Eyjafjallajökull. The campaign is called Inspired by Iceland and features video commentaries and online chat forums where celebrities of varying degrees share their experience of Iceland, but the promo piece distributed world-wide was this one:

Without question the video represents a beautifully crafted piece of media, winning the International Congress and Convention Association's marketing prize in autumn 2010 and the Grand Prix of the European Association of Communications Agencies' *Euro Effie* in Brussels last week (14<sup>th</sup> September). However questions have been raised about the representativeness

of both the Icelandic landscape and culture depicted. Questions have also been raised on the rationale for the project launch in the first place, but evidently it was to convey the message that Iceland was a safe destination to visit in the wake of the infamous Eyjafjallajökull eruption in South Iceland<sup>ii</sup>. These concerns notwithstanding, they are not my focus here, but the marketing tactic of sharing through social media and naturally that which is being shared; the Icelandic landscape predominantly as could be seen from the video.

In order to approach the topic of my talk some groundwork needs to be done, or landscaping if you like. Etymological evidence suggests that landscape (“land”) is a (marked) portion of the earth’s surface. Similarly, and interestingly, the “scape” is a phetic form of escape. I emphasise these prepositions, or lack thereof, as they lead us in advance, in a sense indifferent to theories and conceptualisations of landscape. In theory, when asking what is landscape, a range of definitions can be drawn upon. Landscapes can be read as texts and thus symbolic or in some way expressed through literature or art, they can have a range of meanings, values and experiences attached to them or lived through them, they can provoke sensory reactions, be perceived as something authentic or simply reside in one’s mind - in the sense that the landscape is truly in the eye of the beholder. But what seems to dominate our approach to landscapes; “is that they are irredeemably centred on the sense of sight” quoting from the introduction of a recent book edited by colleagues at the University of Iceland<sup>iii</sup>. As a reaction to this some scholars of phenomenological bent have gone as far as wholly uprooting the scenic aspect of landscapes, focusing merely on people’s sensory immersion in the landscape and how we possibly embody them<sup>iv</sup>. This seems to me both extreme and counter-productive, especially in terms of tourism.

Tourism for me by necessity needs to hold on to the scenic and the visual aspect of landscape. Katrín Lund and Karl Benediktsson, my Icelandic book editing colleagues, make an effort to hold on to the scenic, arguing that landscapes are to be understood through the metaphor of conversations. Quoting them, they argue: “the metaphor of conversation can assist in finding a variety of new directions in the complex terrain of landscape studies by bringing attention to the mutuality of human-landscape encounters. Landscape is not comprehended as a predetermined, culturally contrived and passive “text”, but as a conversational partner that is certainly more than human” ... Drawing on Hans-Georg Gadamer they also introduce the concept of the horizon, and again I quote; “with its implication of movement and constantly shifting positions, takes landscape away from the often romantic and rather static association

with place. It brings forth the importance of the visual as a part of a more encompassing sensuous engagement of humans with landscape”.

So holding on to the visual, yet allowing for other sensory appreciations of landscapes provokes a fusing of the horizons for Lund and Benediktsson. Indeed an appreciation of the scenic is important. The visual experience of landscape is thus meaningful even going so far as to state that the mere glancing at it as the tourist body is moved through the landscape involves a sensuous experience as Jonas Larsen at Roskilde in Denmark would argue<sup>v</sup>.

But to many this scenic appreciation of the landscape is passive, a distanced practice rehearsing the age old mind/body dichotomy haunting humankind all-through the period of Enlightenment. The main issue people tend to raise with the visual is that it somehow is based on an understanding of our existence as being outside the realm of the natural. Nature and the natural world, according to this understanding, form a substrate of existence whilst the human spirit, soul or understanding can easily soar beyond all bounds of the physical. Often cited as the founder of this fundamental dichotomy, ushering in modernity, is the philosopher Descartes, who proved our existence with reference to our capacity to think; or more profoundly to doubt. Emerging from this understanding is people’s role as mastering the landscape, sculpting nature to man’s needs and designing it for the inhabitation of ‘man’ as Clarence Glacken meticulously documents<sup>vi</sup>.

But what Lund and Benediktsson along with Larsen and other argue is that although seemingly passive, the visual appreciation of landscapes entails an interaction. Kenneth Olwig and Michael Jones argue in a similar way for fusing the diametrical opposites of mind and body gleaned from the landscape literature, but they do so in an explicit attempt to politicise the landscape<sup>vii</sup>. They argue:

The political landscape focuses on the action of people as political beings who neither stand alone as individual spectators of a spatially distant scene nor, alternatively, submerge themselves as individual existential insiders in a world of unreflected concrete experience of the authentic phenomena of the lived world ... (p. xiii)

In this sense the dualistic relationship cited in the conference theme’s subtitle builds on an understanding of spaces and places as produced through dialectical oscillations, informed by their ideas practiced *in situ*. In the geographical literature the Frenchman Henri Lefebvre is

mostly accredited for giving us the conceptual tools to grapple with this<sup>viii</sup>. His notion of the production of space was the culmination of his previous engagement with the transition of human population from the rural to the urban. He saw the urban, as conceived in modern times, as the epitome of calculated rationality through geometric patterning and rationalised planning, what he termed “abstractions of space”. His example was that of a new town in France called Mourenx, a town deliberately built and designed only to house the workers of a nearby sulphur mine. Here the urban landscape was being created from abstracted logic and calculated rationality, certainly a production of space, but for Lefebvre the matter was not so simple as to conceive of this landscape as merely a kind of material production of abstracted ideals. For him there were more spaces that got created, all informed by a host of different conceptions and ideals, implicit or explicit, of what a space could or should be. Hence production needs to be grasped as both material process and a mental process as well, as the move to abstraction and conceiving space as mental constructs is always grounded in the concrete social relations latent in space and reproduces these. What is of relevance when we aim to politicise the landscape is that for Lefebvre, space itself is born out of the contradictions within the relations of production at the same time it profoundly shapes the apparatus of production. By accentuating the differences that the abstraction attempts to usurp and negate, Lefebvre tells us that “space is at once *work* and *product* – a materialisation of ‘social being’”. Stuart Elden, an avid reader of Lefebvre explains<sup>ix</sup>;

There is not the material production of objects and the mental production of ideas. Instead, our mental interaction with the world, our ordering, generalizing, abstracting, and so on produces the world that we encounter, as much as the physical objects we create. This does not simply mean that we produce reality, but that we produce how we perceive reality (p. 44).

Making space part and parcel of multiple social and material relations, Lefebvre made his conceptual break with the tradition of his era. His emphasis was on how space is produced by and through the production and reproduction of social and material relations, thus avoiding fetishizing space through masking it as an objective ‘thing’ in itself, an inert container, or to be considered in isolation. For Lefebvre, space is and I quote “always now and formerly, a present space, given as an immediate whole, complete with its associations and connections in their actuality”.

Note the words here, ‘given as an immediate whole’. How could we see then the landscape as an immediate whole? The Icelandic philosopher Páll Skúlason describes this when he experienced at well-known destination in the Icelandic highland interior<sup>x</sup>.

When I came to Askja I entered an independent world, Askja world, one clearly demarcated whole spanning all and filling the mind to the extent one feels like having sensed all that is real in both past, present and future. Beyond the horizon is the unknown eternal, the great, silent void. When you know such a world one has reached the end of the road. Having touched reality itself. The mind opens to perfect beauty and one sees finally what life is about. - Sometimes I play with a rock I received from the lake at Askja. It reminds me of this connection with reality, this touch, this whole that is Askja itself, spanning all that is, was, and can be. Or almost.

This is a birds-eye view of Askja, Páll was on the ground in the caldera itself, surrounded by the jagged edges that represent the rim of the caldera. Looking the other way and focusing on the sky Woodford describes her experience of nature, watching the aurora borealis whilst travelling in N. Norway<sup>xi</sup>;

Breathtaking and beautiful the vivid tongues of blue-green light traversed the night sky, their numinous presence a manifestation of the mysterious and mystical. In those icebound places I felt the absolute essence of nature laid bare.

Experiencing ‘all that is real in both past, present and future’, ‘laying bare the essence of nature’ for me goes to show how the experience of landscapes molds human ideas which in turn molds landscapes as the classic dialectical framing would argue. But there is more here. The phenomenologist would go as far as immersing our subjectivity in the landscape, I however would like to hold on to the subject, but at the same time not, through making sense of seeing. This leads me to a reiteration of the Enlightenment project and as a consequence the theme of this conference.

Concurrent the emerging themes of the Enlightenment with its mind/body dualisms and dialectical attempts to grapple with this, was a different take on what the Enlightenment project entailed and thus human relations with nature and the landscape.

In the early 18<sup>th</sup> Century the German philosopher Leibniz demonstrates a fundamentally different outlook on the world and our involvement in it. Making sense of seeing, building on Leibniz, represents what John Law calls a baroque sensibility<sup>xii</sup>, whilst the Enlightenment project can be roughly sketched as a romantic holism. This baroque sensibility is described by Clarence Glacken, with reference to Leibniz stating that to him;

... the world of senses is alive. The plenitude of nature entrances him. He desires to do more than to contemplate God's work; he wishes to use them, to transform them for human welfare.

Whilst for the proponents of Enlightenment, man became separate from nature, those adhering to the 'monadology' of Leibniz, nature was very much part and parcel of man, able to influence human being and welfare. Thus the Cartesian dichotomy never ruled supreme as Bruno Latour later explains when he argues we have never really been modern<sup>xiii</sup>.

The plenitude of nature is entrancing, and the world of senses is alive. This indeed opens the door to the immersive phenomenological speculations I have already ruled counter-productive for tourism. But if we want to make sense of seeing - further probing along this way is necessary. Landscapes could thus be termed hybrids drawing on Sarah Whatmore<sup>xiv</sup> in an effort to "...confront these volatile exteriorizations [of landscapes] as places of our own making, configured in relation to the interiorized sites of knowledge, imagination and desire".

This confrontation is not about landscapes as social constructions but deals with it more in terms of being where social construction might occur. What myself and Martin Gren have called e.g. earthly tourism<sup>xv</sup> when coming to terms with Bruno Latour's possibility to allow for people to become the "Earthlings"<sup>xvi</sup>:

Who are you really, Earthlings, to believe that you are the ones adding relations by the sheer symbolic order of your mind, by the projective power of your brain, by the sheer intensity of your social schemes, to a world entirely devoid of meaning, of relations, of connections?! Where have you lived until now? Oh I know, you have lived on this strange modernist utterly archaic globe; and suddenly (under crisis) you realize that all along you have been inhabiting the Earth (p. 8).

Becoming one with the Earth is for Latour allowed for under the terms of crisis which for him entail the environmental issues of global warming and climate change. But the above quotations hint at a more fundamental conception of human's being with the landscape. They can roughly be framed as post-positivist humanistic thought drawing on phenomenology.

When experiencing nature through what at first might seem as passive gazing might therefore entail a realisation of nature's plenitude; its infinite multiplicity but yet wholeness. But the 'almost' in the end of the quote from the philosopher Páll Skúlason quote hints to me at the ways in which we relate to our surroundings, not from the birds-eye view of the aerial

photograph, nor pure sensory immersion of that which was, is and will come to pass. Being there then is what matters, most profoundly to those who visit. As Gilles Deleuze argues when explaining how we perceive the sea<sup>xvii</sup>:

... our perception of the noise of the sea, which confusedly includes the whole and clearly expresses only certain relations or certain points by virtue of our bodies and a threshold of consciousness which they determine (p. 315).

We must think of nature through the principle of the diverse and its production. Indeed Sarah Whatmore already proposed we confront landscapes as configured in relation to ourselves but not to arrive at an end state or defined way of being. For Deleuze in his book the *Logic of Sense*, this means that each term becomes the means of going all the way to the end of another, by following the entire distance. As a consequence and quoting from Deleuze, “divergence is no longer a principle of exclusion and disjunction no longer a means of separation. Impossibility is now a means of communication.” Simply not being consistent is how landscapes relate to us.

Nature, and for our intents and purposes here landscapes as well, are for Deleuze to be understood in the conjunctive rather than attributive expressing itself through ‘and’ not ‘is’<sup>xviii</sup>:

... she is made of plenitude and void, beings and nonbeings, with each one of the two posing itself as unlimited while limiting the other... Nature is indeed a sum, but not a whole... Nature to be precise, is power (p. 304).

People clearly experience scenic landscapes in vastly different terms and thus it is necessary to consider a person’s interaction with that landscape at each time and place. Indeed this is not that new. E.g. environmental psychology has for some time recognised the healing powers of being in a natural setting or extensive views<sup>xix</sup>. Thus with nature emerging as power in the conjunctive, landscapes seem to have the capacity to reach out to us.

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Having made sense of the landscape in terms of its power to relate to us when we visit and see a certain place there and then, I would like to move to the other half of the landscape relation, that which is the visiting guest. What intrigues me and prompts me to probe further into the dualistic relationship is how landscape in the conjunctive unfolds in terms of hospitality.

In order to do so I would like to return to the very anthropocentric notion of conversations, i.e. allowing more for the articulation of people's desires and wishes and how these might structure landscape encounters. Allowing for this articulation requires me to delve into the notion of hospitality. Here I would like to draw on how Emmanuel Levinas<sup>xx</sup> and Jacques Derrida<sup>xxi</sup> articulate a hospitality that unconditionally opens the door of the home. Quoting from a recent article by Siby K. George<sup>xxii</sup>, this unconditional welcoming of the other means that;

The other person, the stranger is inassimilable, irreducible to any concept or possession; he/she is infinitely other than the same, the self, and this 'difference' calls into question the self's egoistic spontaneity in the primal ethical encounter with the other. It is in communication, language and conversation that the 'I' coexists with the other without infringing her alterity, and this cohabitation and sharing of the world is ethical in the sense that it 'puts the spontaneous freedom within us into question' (p. 34)

So much like the landscape, the unconditionally welcomed guest is inassimilable and irreducible or 'impossible' as Deleuze has informed us before. Using then the landscape as an invitation to be inspired and subsequently visit a country or a place - as the promotion video we just saw does, necessitates an understanding of people's relations to landscape under the terms of hospitality 'that puts the spontaneous freedom within us into question'.

Being hospitable?

Jacques Derrida is quoted in his conversation with Anne Dufourmantelle entitled *Of Hospitality*, requesting a further analysis of ethics based on narratives that problematise binaries such as citizen/foreigner, master/stranger, and friend/enemy. His ruminations draw on an engagement with the work of Emmanuel Levinas who is quoted saying in his book *Totality and Infinity* that "subjectivity is formed in a radically passive relation of hospitality towards the Other". According to Clive Barnett, a geographer at the Open University in Milton Keynes, Levinas develops an account of subjectivity as always already responsible to and for the Other, prior to any calculation or reflection by a self conscious subject<sup>xxiii</sup>. The subject is, as he puts it, always One-for-the-Other. In this way hospitality is not about having certain ends in mind, but about generating beginnings.

The question Clive however raises is:

... how the ethics of hospitality (the scene for the unconditional obligation to welcome the Other without question) is related to the politics of hospitality (the realm in which hospitality is conditionally extended as a right to certain categories of person, implying an apparatus of laws, states, and borders) (p. 11).

It would thus seem that,

The problem is not that we can never live up to absolute, unconditional hospitality because we can never welcome everyone, because we must set limits to our hospitality. Obeying the law of conditions is not simply a concession to our finitude, to our limited capacities and resources, or else simply a concession to political expediency. It is recognition that hospitality, 'real' hospitality, consists in welcoming particular guests and not just anybody, particular guests and, as a result, not others (p. 13)

These politics of hospitality unfold through the assessments we make, analysis and decision based on our aspirations, hopes, dreams, faith, longings in every moment, every encounter. So making sense of seeing the landscape in this way is attentive to and through the relations that are constituted during a visit. Sarah Whatmore, whom I have already quoted on seeing landscapes as hybrid, would see hospitality thus as an;

... ethical praxis [that] likewise emerges in the performance of multiple lived worlds, weaving threads of meaning and matter through the assemblage of mutually constituting subjects and patterns of association that compromise the distinction between the 'human' and the 'non-human.' (p. 159)

Weaving threads of subjectivity, conceived as about generating beginnings, through landscapes conceived of as power in the conjunctive, heeds in many ways the call made by David Fennell, in a recent publication edited by John Tribe on the *Philosophical Issues in Tourism*<sup>xxiv</sup>. He concludes his chapter by stating;

... that if we continue to place ourselves as tourists and service providers as the only locus of concern in tourism interactions, then we can do little to actualise an ethic of responsibility in tourism for the larger whole (p. 224).

Basing hospitality on ethics sensible to the emergent relationality of the visit and the scenic experience in practice invokes "vitalist" notions, in the sense of being a-signifying and non-textual, sympathetic to the unconditional welcoming of others. Thus, Whatmore tells us that

agency is not reduced “to the impartial and universal enactment of instrumental reason, or “enlightened self-interest”” but is difference-in-relation constituted in the context of the practical and lived.

Doreen Massey explains how this type of ethical concern emerging from difference in relation demands an attitude of ‘respect.’<sup>xxv</sup> This notion of respect drawing on difference-in-relation, is a politicisation of landscapes that to me departs considerably from the reduction of the landscape to ‘a spatially distant scene or, alternatively, to submerge oneself as individual existential insiders in a world of unreflected concrete experience of the authentic phenomena of the lived world’ as Kenneth Olwig and Michael Jones argued before. Their stance seems to me one-sided, narrow and instrumental. It does not allow for the power of landscape nor the ways in which we can relate to it. Moreover, conceiving of hospitality as difference-in-relation constituted in the context of the practical and lived implies that subjectivity is not always and everywhere organised through modalities of exclusion, hostility, or anxiety. The idea of respect and thus acknowledgement takes us beyond choosing between a false universalism of the unconditional welcome or an indifferent relativism of regressive delimitations of uncountable others. It does so by placing the emphasis upon the constitutive receptivity of selves or communities to otherness.

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Sharing landscapes,

What we see now on the whole is a person, a visiting tourist who comes to Iceland, inspired by the landscapes depicted in the promotion video. What I have strived to offer is an understanding of this person through notions of hospitality conditioned upon respect for alterity and an understanding of landscape as a scene which has the power to relate to us and affect us. Seeing both us and the landscape as open relational entities which in each moment of reckoning are weaved together leads me to postulate that our inspirations by landscapes stem from the relating itself. Quoting colleagues at Durham University in England, Ben Anderson and Paul Harrison from the introduction of their recently published book<sup>xxvi</sup>;

Relations are in the middle, and exist as such. This exteriority of relations is not a principle, it is a vital protest against principles ... If one takes this exteriority of relations as a conducting wire or as a line, one sees a very strange world unfold, fragment by fragment: a Harlequin's jacket or patchwork, made up of solid parts and voids, blocs and ruptures, attractions and divisions, nuances and bluntnesses, conjunctions and separations, alternations and interweavings, additions which never reach a total and subtractions whose remainder is never fixed ... (p. 15).

So to sum up where we have reached and what I have hopefully managed to contribute to this conference:

The landscape to me is never a conceivable whole that can be read through the lens of semiotics nor a purely embodied experience. The landscape is indeed a scene, which has the power to attract people far and wide as is doubtless the intention of the video I showed in the beginning. The particular method of disseminating the landscape, through sharing via social media, is, as any other landscape experience, allowing for certain 'attractions and divisions, nuances and bluntnesses, conjunctions and separations, alternations and interweavings', which undoubtedly make the landscape malleable to any and all political agendas, marketing usage and/or immersive experiences.

Creating a sense of place and telling a story is a slogan accredited to a Tom Buncle invariably cited by the promoter of the Inspired campaign at Promote Iceland. To me this sense of place entails a landscape that has no intrinsic value, it does not gain any level of authenticity through varyingly informed readings of it, it does not subject itself to the 'correct' managerial or planning schemes. Due to the irreducibility of the landscape to its terms, it is within each of us, yet ours – a whole that is never the sum of its parts. It is through this capacity a landscape can be shared and can possibly be the substance of tourism marketing and promotion as we saw in the video. Recognising the tourist on the other hand as potentially inspired by this landscape commands the attitude of respect that I argue is a necessary precondition to any ethical notions of hospitality.

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