

Earthly substances and narrative encounters: poetics of making a tourism destination

cultural geographies
2016, Vol. 23(4) 653–669
© The Author(s) 2016
Reprints and permissions:
sagepub.co.uk/journalsPermissions.nav
DOI: 10.1177/1474474016638041
cgj.sagepub.com


Katrín Anna Lund

University of Iceland, Iceland

Gunnar Thór Jóhannesson

University of Iceland, Iceland

Abstract

This article deals with the becoming of place in relation to tourism. The agency of non-human actors, such as earthly substances or matters underlying any given destination, has rarely been addressed empirically. Our argument is based on the view that a place is an entanglement of ever-moving substances. Hence, our objective is to trace how materialities of cultural landscape contribute to the continuous production of places through tourist encounters. By approaching destination development from the angle of relational materialism, the article aims at providing insights into the formation of tourism places, describing it as ‘poetics of making’. The article provides an account of the creation of the Strandir region, a sparsely populated coastal area in the north-west of Iceland, as a tourist destination. We will focus on the Museum of Icelandic Sorcery and Witchcraft, established in 2000, which has played a central role in framing the area as a tourism destination. The Museum brings together, and re-awakens, the period of witchcraft in the 17th century during which Strandir was one of the most notorious regions in Iceland for witch-hunts and burning. We will illustrate how magic, understood as a blank figure narrating human encounters with earthly substances, affects the ordering of Strandir both as a place and as a tourism destination. The power of the blank figure of magic rests in its ability to overturn stable orders or mobilise new or latent connections. Importantly, it also rests on personal narratives with the support of imagination, emotions and play. The Museum has been instrumental in creating and enhancing the image of the region as a place of magic, emphasising how culture and nature, as conventionally defined, mesh through human and non-human practices in the continuous forming of Strandir.

Keywords

blank figure, Iceland, magic, narratives, poetics of making, tourist encounters

Corresponding author:

Katrín Anna Lund, Department of Geography and Tourism, Institute of Life and Environmental Sciences, University of Iceland, Sturlugata 7, 101 Reykjavík, Iceland.

Email: kl@hi.is

Introduction

This article deals with the becoming of place in relation to tourism. It provides an account of how tourism place emerges based on connections that cut across the spheres of nature and culture as usually defined, as well as the past and present. Our objective is to trace how materialities of cultural landscape contribute to the ongoing production of places through tourist encounters. Often it seems that tourism destinations are the effect of human practice taking place on the 'passive' surface of the earth. They are depicted as cultural constructs that only relate to the natural environment and landscape as a passive resource. However, earthly substances and natural forces including wind, water and fire are increasingly recognised as potential actors in the ordering of place. While much has been written in theory about relational heterogeneity of places, less has been said about how places come about in practice through the entanglement of diverse elements, not least when it comes to tourism. This may seem odd as tourism is indeed a prime example of a practice that mixes things together and rests on such heterogeneous assemblage.¹ It is necessarily based on encounters between the tourist and the tourism product, however it may be composed. This encounter most often takes place at the 'production' site of the product, and thus, the tourist necessarily becomes a co-producer of the experience. This makes tourism extremely volatile, since all sorts of materials, emotions and natural forces can interfere in the process through which the place in question is created, both in the mind of the tourist and in its matter. In our view, these characteristics of tourism make it a fruitful field to explore the dynamics of place making and the entanglement of human and more-than-human elements in that process.

This article takes on the task of bringing together relational materialism and destination development, using a case study of a cultural tourism initiative in Iceland; it thus gauges some of the ways in which tourism contributes to the becoming of place. The area in question is the Strandir region, a sparsely populated coastal area in the north-west of Iceland. Its peripheral location provides it with an aura of remoteness, spatially and temporally; a sense of having been left behind but simultaneously protected from the hustle and bustle of any modern invasions. During the last decade, the area has experienced a slow but steady growth in tourism which has become an influential factor in shaping an image of the area, emphasising the cultural history of the region – a history which throws light on people who endured in a harsh environment, constantly dealing with the unpredictability of nature. In this a special focus has been created into the 17th century, a period during which the area became notorious for the practice of witchcraft. This era is presented in the Museum of Icelandic Sorcery and Witchcraft which was established in 2000 and will be at the forefront of this article. Focusing on the Museum allows us to reveal how agencies, human and non-human, should be approached 'as immanent in the "life process" itself, understood as the entire field of relations between humans and their environments'² in the process of place making, in this case a tourism destination.

Our intention is to follow some of these relations as narrative encounters, in order to get a glimpse into how Strandir materialises as a tourism destination. Following McLean,³ we want to examine the emergence of the area as a tourism destination as 'poetics of making', a concept put forward to grasp the creativity that encompasses the entanglement of the human and the non-human. As a concept, it provides the possibility of weaving together diverse substances bringing forth the tensions of presences and absences⁴ creating a space for what Hetherington and Lee⁵ have called the 'blank figure', an element of ordering which opens up new possibilities for connecting an assortment of elements and substances.

We will start with a discussion on the concept of destination and how destination development can be examined using the concepts of 'poetics of making' and the blank figure. Drawing on fieldwork we conducted in 2011 and 2012, we will then focus on the Museum of Icelandic Sorcery and

Witchcraft. The Museum is a primary attempt to strategically develop cultural tourism in the region and, as such, can be examined as a contact zone⁶ where complex gatherings of temporalities and spatialities materialise in its displays. Furthermore, it provides a space for blank figures to emerge, creating a sense of the destination as a place. The Museum and its collection of diverse artefacts create a narrative of magic from the region, encouraging a play with the visitor's imagination and affecting the image of the area as a tourist destination.

Ordering destinations

The concept of place in tourism often appears within the conceptual framework of the destination, which is an organising principle of much of tourism development, widely used by professionals and academics alike.⁷ In recent years, destination has increasingly been conceptualised as an ordering effect. Studies emphasising tourist performances, mobilities, ordering and the materialities of place⁸ have framed places as unfinished and constantly “in play” in relation to multiple mobilities and varied performances stretching in, through, over and under any apparently distinct locality.⁹ Hence, place ‘is not something that stays in one location but moves about within networks of agents, human and non-human’;¹⁰ they are accomplished through heterogeneous assemblage and enacted through diverse spatial topologies.¹¹

The challenge that we are dealing with in this article is to account for such a heterogeneous assemblage and to describe its formation, as we are following the becoming of place through tourist encounters and thus the making of a tourism destination. If the reality is performed and enacted rather than observed from a distance,¹² it implies that the reality is an assemblage that is emergent through continually unfolding relations and orderings where some things are present and others necessarily absent or underdetermined.¹³ Place thus appears as an emerging configuration of material absences and presences. This understanding is in line with the ‘re-materialization of geography’,¹⁴ which highlights a shift away from the textual turn, language and social construction towards materialities. As Meier, Frers and Sigvardsson underline, however, while it is timely to attend to ‘the importance of things, matter and processes of embodiment’, it is equally important not to forget about ‘processes that involve more than mere matter’, elements of representations, feelings and the imaginative.¹⁵

This is what McLean¹⁶ seeks to do through the concept of ‘poetics of making’, which grasps creativity that encompasses the entanglement of the human and the non-human which is ‘neither focused on one’s own subjectivity nor on the objectivity of the world, but on what emerges in the space between’.¹⁷ While creativity has become a buzzword for economic development¹⁸ due to its connection to innovation and entrepreneurship, creativity can also be understood in relation to improvisation rather than innovation. This means that it is defined by its process or movement instead of any particular end product, that is, the novelty of an innovation.¹⁹ This view stresses that innovation is the result of work by collectives.²⁰ Apart from being generative, creativity in this sense is relational, working between heterogeneous actors, temporal as it is about ‘participating in ongoing material world-forming processes’²¹ and

... because it is the way we work, the creativity of our imaginative reflections is inseparable from our performative engagements with the material that surrounds us.²²

This underlines that as people experience life’s contingencies, they have to work out or improvise the ordering of social and cultural life – they have to engage in the poetics of making; improvising, because there is no script; ‘no system of codes, rules and norms can anticipate every possible circumstance’.²³ Hence, within every present order, some things are absent; every order thus has the capacity to change which is essential for its continuous formation or accomplishment.²⁴

One way to grasp the inherent potential of change or rupture of every order is the concept of the blank figure.²⁵ Blank figures are able to form links between heterogeneous parts of orders through their indifference towards the same heterogeneity. This allows blank figures to ‘provide the *conditions of possibility* of both stasis and change’,²⁶ which serves as a source of flexibility, necessary for the maintenance of social orders. According to Hetherington and Lee,

Blank elements allow us in certain instances to ignore or override difference. They are figures of the between space, communicators that pass between categories of difference as if they were not there; startling perhaps when made visible – who would not be startled by the apparition of an angel or some other ghostly presence – but facilitators of new possibilities in the connections that they make between spaces otherwise not connectable within the recognised order of things.²⁷

It is important to underline that blank elements or figures are not void or empty. As part of relational ordering, they rather embody absence and a ‘will-to-connect inasmuch as the blankness provokes or incites the effort to connect and order’.²⁸ They are underdetermined and full of potentiality, not necessarily as things in themselves but as elements of things. According to Ingold, drawing on Heidegger,

The thing . . . , is a ‘going on’, or better, a place where several goings on become entwined . . . [the] ‘thing has the character [. . .] of a knot whose constituent threads, far from being contained within it, trail beyond, only to become caught with other threads in other knots’.²⁹

The ‘constituent threads’ of relational ordering may or may not become entangled with other threads. Partly they are blank or become absent. From this view, absence is relational. It is not ‘as an existing “thing” in itself but as something that is made to exist through relations that give absence matter’.³⁰ Meier et al.³¹ argue that absence is made present through lived experiences. This is evident in the case of the Museum of Icelandic Sorcery and Witchcraft which allows people to experience the absent past through a display of various entities and narratives drawing both on the capacity of blank elements to incite play and imagination and on more determined historical resources and recounts. As such, through its assemblage, the Museum grasps shifting connections between material presence and absence, through which tourists and locals contribute to the ongoing emergence of the place.

Creating tourism: bringing out the blank figure of magic

When travelling through the Strandir region, the barren landscape and harsh climatic conditions in this seemingly peripheral part of Iceland cannot be easily avoided. Even while on the road, within the confinement of a car, the usual mode of transport for tourists visiting the area, there is hardly any escape from experiencing the rough surface of the narrow and windy gravel roads that demand a slower pace and alertness. One cannot help but feel a strong and quite earthly connection to the land due to the road conditions.³² Also, the materialities of the road arouse emotions of a long gone past, as such conditions are rarely found in today’s Iceland.

Strandir has probably never been a place where ‘ground connection’ has easily been missed.³³ Lowland is limited, and the extreme contrast between where the mountains and the sea, which stretches into the Arctic Ocean, meet is a recurring reminder of how nature is constantly in the making. Indeed, throughout history, life in Strandir has rested on natural resources and has thus been interwoven with at times the unpredictable rhythms and forces of nature. Sheep farming and fisheries have been the pillars of the local economy, and like most other rural regions in Iceland it has experienced almost constant outmigration during the second half of the 20th century. Other



Figure 1. Map of Strandir.

earthly substances such as driftwood and eiderdown have also played an important role. Consequently, life in Strandir has never been significantly wealthy or prosperous, except for isolated periods, most recently when the region experienced a rapid boom in the 1930s and 1940s, caused by the growth of Icelandic herring fisheries in the region.³⁴ The herring is notorious for its fickle nature, as throughout history it has brought prosperity to communities with its presence that turns into its opposite when it disappears. During the early decades of the 20th century, some of the best herring grounds in Iceland were in Húnaflói bay near the shoreline of the Strandir region. State-of-the-art processing factories were built providing much needed work for both locals and people from other areas of the country. However, in the 1950s, the herring fisheries collapsed, almost as suddenly as they had started, due to the herring moving to new grounds³⁵ (Figure 1).

The outmigration that ensued was probably inevitable. Together with increasing mechanisation, farms grew larger and there was less demand for labour, although the fisheries continued to be the backbone of the economy for those that remained in the region. During the 1980s, the fishery sector went through drastic organisational change with the implementation of the individual transferable quota (ITQ), which was meant to increase efficiency and improve the management of the fishing stocks. These changes had major socio/cultural impacts on many coastal communities around the country, and the villages in the Strandir region were no exception, as direct access to resources was now based on corporate capital.³⁶

In the mid-1990s, tourism was increasingly promoted as a development option for rural areas.³⁷ At the time, a report was written for the county council of the Strandir region titled *Tourism and National Culture*,³⁸ whose author, Jón Jónsson, was an ethnologist, born and bred in the region. In the report, Jón stressed the potential role of small-scale tourism in the region detailing many ideas of possible projects, such as exhibitions on the history of the region both recent and in the more distant past. When we interviewed Jón, he stressed that the ideas were not his. Rather his role, as an author, had been to collect ideas from the people of the region, organising and framing them. At

the end of the listed ideas, a brief mention is included of a possible exhibition about the history of sorcery and witchcraft in the area. This short paragraph refers back to the region's 17th century history, a period which was not only signified by witchcraft and witch-hunting but also extreme poverty and humiliation. This era had largely been absent in the public memory of Icelanders, and many, not least the inhabitants of Strandir, would have preferred to keep it that way. Nevertheless, this Dark History became the inspiration for the establishment of the Museum of Icelandic Sorcery and Witchcraft. Although many worried about the repercussions, most of the inhabitants were content about the display, recognising that it had been tastefully presented. Thus, it was with a general acceptance that the absent past was given a presence in a new ordering of the cultural landscape of the Strandir region.

The Museum does not mark a starting point for tourism in Strandir; indeed, the remote and rugged landscape had been attracting visitors for several decades and approximately three hotels have offered accommodation since the 1970s. The Museum is, however, the first concrete attempt to attract tourists to the region on the basis of its cultural history, directly allowing an aspect of cultural history to materialise in the landscape.³⁹ Since its establishment, the Museum has strengthened the image of Strandir as a magical region not least as it is often featured as the region's main attraction in marketing material; indeed different tourist firms in the region often use runes and carvings associated with the period of witchcraft as external or, even, interior decorations. In many ways, the report by Jón can be seen to mark a break in the emergence of Strandir as a tourism destination, and it is in one sense an example of how tourism as an ordering device is able to reinvent places. Such ordering is, however, materially heterogeneous. We, therefore, need to consider tourism destinations as relational effects emerging through more-than-representational practices of tourists and locals. The account of Jón's work and the role of the Museum of Icelandic Sorcery and Witchcraft for tourism development take on another figure and bring about alternative connotations that may enhance our understanding of the becoming of place through tourist encounters, emphasising the material enactments through which Strandir is emergent as a tourist place.

In the case of Strandir, we have noticed the role of sheep farming and fishing, most notably herding, in the shaping of the region in recent history. In the face of significant strain on the local economy, the report by Jónsson established an alternative connection to an existing order of tourism mobilities.⁴⁰ This did not come from nowhere. Tourism, and not least cultural tourism, was promoted as a tool for regional development in Iceland at the time. The report by Jón creates links between the potential realities of tourism development and the present order of primary industries. The report facilitated the establishment of the Museum through its collection of narratives, which revealed the presence of the blank figure of magic in the region. As such, it rearranged the relationship between the absence and presence of magic in the region. What was absent was made present by carefully creating and locating a narrative of magic and witchcraft in the Museum.

The above account verges on describing Jón in traditional terms of the visionary entrepreneur, carrying out his ideas through his or her skills, perception of opportunities and willingness to take risk.⁴¹ However, as Callon⁴² underlines, '[i]t is collectives that invent, design, develop and use innovations'. Moreover, these collectives are materially heterogeneous. This is not to say that Jón's work and the material presence of the Museum of Icelandic Sorcery and Witchcraft together with its collection of cultural representations are not important for the making of Strandir as a tourism destination. What we would like to highlight is that by focusing only on human affairs taking place on a passive surface in a clearly defined location, we might miss a substantial part of the energies underlying the emergence of any place and thus any given tourism destination in the form of the agential capacity of nature and earthly substances/matters. To create a narrative or tell a history at a museum is, thereby, not simply an exercise in socially constructing an image of the Strandir region as magical. In order to make the absent past present, the narrative necessarily rests on

earthly and material agency which visitors are invited to engage with. We shall now introduce the narrative foundations of the Museum of Icelandic Sorcery and Witchcraft before coming to its display.

Poetics of making Strandir

Narrative foundations

As Evans-Pritchard noticed in the last chapter of his account of Witchcraft and Sorcery among the Azande people in Southern Sudan, '[m]agical rites do not form an interrelated system, and there is no nexus between one rite or another'.⁴³ Narratives of magic bring together sporadic accounts of individual acts which mix together different substances, materials and ideas in an attempt to affect their circumstances – to bring some kind of order to reality. The period of witch-hunts during which the Museum of Icelandic Sorcery and Witchcraft was built commenced rather late in Iceland compared with the rest of Europe. The first three confessions resulting in witch-burning at Strandir confirm Evans-Pritchard's observation. In 1654, the peasant Þórður Guðbrandsson admitted to the county magistrates committee to have met the devil, disguised as a fox, which had followed him to Trékyllisvík. For this, he was sentenced to death by fire. The following day, another peasant, Egill Bjarnason, confessed that he had killed a sheep using witchcraft and made a connection with the devil through inscriptions, carvings and blood vessels. The third confessor, Grímur Jónsson, revealed that he had also killed a sheep using witchcraft and in addition enthused the devil to 'make evil'. He admitted that he had driven away a farmer in Reykjafjörður using damaging rune inscriptions, verses and summons. They were all burnt to death on 25 September 1654 at Kistuvogur in Trékyllisvík.⁴⁴

The cases appear as random individual acts; however, what they do share is the play with earthly substances. Magic spells reveal how carvings and inscriptions were often made in blood, manure or other bodily substances on wood, stone or skin. Additionally, they are undertaken in the dark, secret corners of an individual's life using various improvised methods. With a reference to Lévi-Strauss, Michael Jackson points out that all magic is akin to play in how its tendency is to 'miniaturize, simplify, and rearrange . . . to make the real object less formidable, and so to bring it under control' and simultaneously to reduce 'the scale of the world to the scale of the self'.⁴⁵ Magic, like play, is about reordering and bringing together substances that are not normally associated with each other, bringing forth the trickster or what Hetherington and Lee⁴⁶ refer to as the blank figure, an element capable of making unexpected connections or protecting against unwanted events. However, that is not where the game ends because other people enter the play but with other purposes and with their own strategies for ordering, and in Strandir, as was the case throughout Iceland, changing power structures as a result of strong European influences.

The origins of performing magic in Iceland can be traced as far back as ancient Germanic mythology. In the Edda poems, runic spells are frequently mentioned and magical acts were seen as entwined in the cosmos.⁴⁷ Thus, it may be assumed that knowledge of runes was common and the practice of magic a part of everyday life. Christianity, in the form of Catholicism from about AD1000, did not affect people's daily practices in any great way, not least since those in power played with diplomacy which provided space for heathen practices and thoughts in combination with Christianity. During the middle of the 16th century, the influence of the Lutheran Church was, however, soon to become dominant in Iceland, establishing the orthodox emphasis on suffering and salvation. This allowed the development of conflicts regarding ordering strategies; instead of trying to affect one's circumstances, one should pray to the Lord as a humble sinner and be grateful for suffering.⁴⁸ The opposition between sacred and evil was clearly defined.

During the 17th century, the power of the Lutheran Church had implemented a new order through which the practice of magic became defined as witchcraft and sorcery, a criminal act. To be accused of witchcraft and sorcery was to be doomed; one became an outcast of society and life became unbearable, which may explain why in some cases people confessed rather than living as suspects. As Jackson⁴⁹ has pointed out, admitting to crime, however impossible it is to verify it, is to take the control of one's destiny or to leave circumstances too unbearable to live with. In other words, to bring the game to a personal end and leave it for other people to continue.

In a region like Strandir, it can easily be imagined how peasants suffering poverty in an often harsh, unforgiving and unpredictable natural environment desperately tried to control their circumstances by establishing order through magic as the only available instrument. This is not only imaginable in the contemporary world, but it also seems to have been a widespread assumption that people in Strandir practised communing with supernatural powers more than people in other areas of Iceland. Cases of witchcraft accusation during the 17th century were not isolated simply to Strandir. Nevertheless, in people's minds there had always been some association between witchcraft, sorcery and the people of Strandir, probably due to its peripheral location.⁵⁰ This association is brought to light with the establishment of the Museum of Icelandic Sorcery and Witchcraft, which uses the idea of magic in an attempt to re-order a place as a tourism destination. As 17th century peasants used magic to connect to supernatural powers, the Museum plays with it to connect to tourism mobilities. The play continues in how the Museum orders and performs its materiality and in how it brings into presence the underdetermined blank figure of magic by determining its existence to a greater or lesser extent.

Materialities of presence and absence

The challenge of the Museum is to bring together sporadic accounts of acts, spells and summons or the substances used for magical acts in the past, and shape their materiality in order for the display to be both informative and entertaining. The majority of the objects on display are reproductions of tools, carvings and other items used for magical performances, however the substances are, as much as possible, drawn from the surrounding landscape or made to resemble the surroundings, such as skin of animals, driftwood and stones – earthly substances. Still, the Museum curators have chosen to continue the play of magic rather than to form it into a coherent display by creating a single narrative. Every object on display contains narratives in how it is combined with other objects to reflect a particular magic performance, leaving a space for the audience to improvise the narratives in their own way. It may thus be argued that the display's order allows for the poetics of making through how it performs 'a potential mapping of disparate and incommensurate qualities that do not simply "add up" but instead are intricately linked',⁵¹ not providing closure but rather further possibilities for continuing narration. The exhibition, which is housed in a small renovated warehouse by the seashore, is on two floors (Figure 2).

The house itself is painted black with red doors and a grass roof which makes it clearly distinct from other similar buildings in the vicinity. The first item on display features the Helm of Awe, a magical rune for protection against the abuse of power; the second is a map of Iceland, which is completely blank except for outlines of the largest glaciers and dots that mark the places where accusations of witchcraft and burnings took place during the 17th century (Figure 3).

The first object that meets the eye is an 'empty' glass cabinet which stands in the middle of the floor in front of the audience, featuring the 'Invisible Boy'. On it, the rune and the spell for the 'Invisibility Cloak' are marked. Behind it, or actually through it, one can see the back of a zombie crawling up from underneath the floor (Figure 4).



Figure 2. The Museum of Icelandic Sorcery and Witchcraft.
Photo: Gunnar Thór Jóhannesson.



Figure 3. Map of places where witchcraft accusations and burnings took place.
Photo: Gunnar Thór Jóhannesson.



Figure 4. The Invisible Boy.
Photo: Katrin Anna Lund.

In fact, the majority of the exhibition space on the lower floor contains various ‘cabinets of curiosities’⁵² placed along the surrounding walls, each of them combining item(s) related to a particular magic, marked on the side by the relevant rune and spell used. No one is told whether these have really been used or by whom or where; nevertheless, the combination is real and thus the magic exists. It is left to the audience’s imagination to continue the narratives by placing themselves in the make-believe world of the people performing the magic act. Thus, one might suspect the curators of consciously playing with the poetic relations between the objects and the viewing subjects which is, as Hetherington⁵³ points out, akin to the conventional in the history of the Museum. He writes,

The history of the museum, . . . , has always been in some way defined by the relationship between subjects and objects. It constructs, at different moments, a ‘point of view’ through the constitution and arrangement of material ‘heterogeneity’ and in relation to it the viewing subject. But this material heterogeneity is not something fixed. What counts as a subject and an object and the relationship between them is the effect of the field of possibilities and type of time-space that they occupy.⁵⁴

As Hetherington convincingly argues, in order to get insights into the working of the Museum as a time–space offering a multiplicity of possible narrative encounters, one needs to examine the subject/object relationship (Figure 5).

When the arrangements and performances of different magical acts have been examined on the lower floor, one moves up a narrow staircase for the second part of the exhibition, which may appear as more conventional in its design. Along the walls on each side, long cabinets with glass tops have been placed, and one in the middle of the floor, containing various types of written documents. On the right-hand side, it is possible to examine replicas of skin sheets with different combinations of runes and inscriptions, some wood carvings as well as earthly items, such as bones and hair from animals and various types of stones and earth materials. One example of many is a combination of lignite and magnetic rock which is regarded as a powerful natural recipe for preventing insomnia and bad dreams (Figure 6).



Figure 5. Visitors at the Museum.
Photo: Gunnar Thór Jóhannesson.



Figure 6. Lignite and magnetic rock.
Photo: Katrín Anna Lund.

Thus, magical acts are still at the forefront, although more in miniature than the lower floor, and accompanied by pieces of written documents. At the end of the room, a replica of Jón Guðmundsson (1574–1658), usually called the ‘Learned’, a respected author, carver and natural scientist, is featured sitting by a desk, writing on a piece of skin and wearing a worn out leather cloak (Figure 7).

Jón, who was born in Strandir to an ordinary family, was renowned for his supernatural powers, not the least being the poetry he composed in order to quell ghosts, an act he carried out on at least two occasions. His knowledge about the medical powers of plants and stones, which he thoroughly



Figure 7. Jón the Learned.
Photo: Katrín Anna Lund.

documented, provided him with the status of a natural scientist. He also confronted the authorities, and as a result he spent much of his life in hiding from those in power who accused him of bonding with the devil through his practices of sorcery.⁵⁵ The snippets of written document and the figure of Jón the Learned are important in the act of ordering, as they provide the means to make narrative connections between things that come from different directions and do not obviously fit in contemporary settings. In her writing about salvage memory, DeSilvey⁵⁶ refers to Hetherington who argues that writing ‘does not involve a bold statement about fact, but an unfolding of understanding through an unexpected gap – an absence made presence’.⁵⁷ Thus, the document snippets may be seen as ‘supplementary fragments’⁵⁸ that help to bring the audience into the cosmos in which magic was an everyday practice. The documents do not provide a linear story but rather bring about the blank figure that connects ‘between spaces otherwise not connectable within the recognised order of things’.⁵⁹ They offer a glimpse into a cosmos that is more-than-human, in which people live in, and with nature, through their earthly practices and by putting magical acts into context. What disrupts the cosmology is the enforced Christianity that was introduced with the Lutheran conversion in Iceland, which in its ordering attempts defines nature as a creation of God, thus removing it from everyday and ordinary practices.

The new ordering and how it clashes with the old are represented in various legal documents on display that list witchcraft accusations and court cases. The cabinet on the left-hand side of the Museum further reveals the complex power relationships through graphic representations of the families involved in court cases (Figure 8).

What is apparent in these lineages is the complex interconnection of families and also how people, especially men of power, gained wealth and authority by ownership of valuable land, and thus nature, through marriage practices, meaning that wealth accumulated into a few hands. Moreover, the charts also reveal the importance of a European education underlining the complex mobility of Strandir as a region and how it has always been caught up in mobile flows and practices. Before, the Middle Ages men went abroad to study magical practices, contributing further to wisdom about earthly practices. This changed during the Middle Ages as the practices of law and

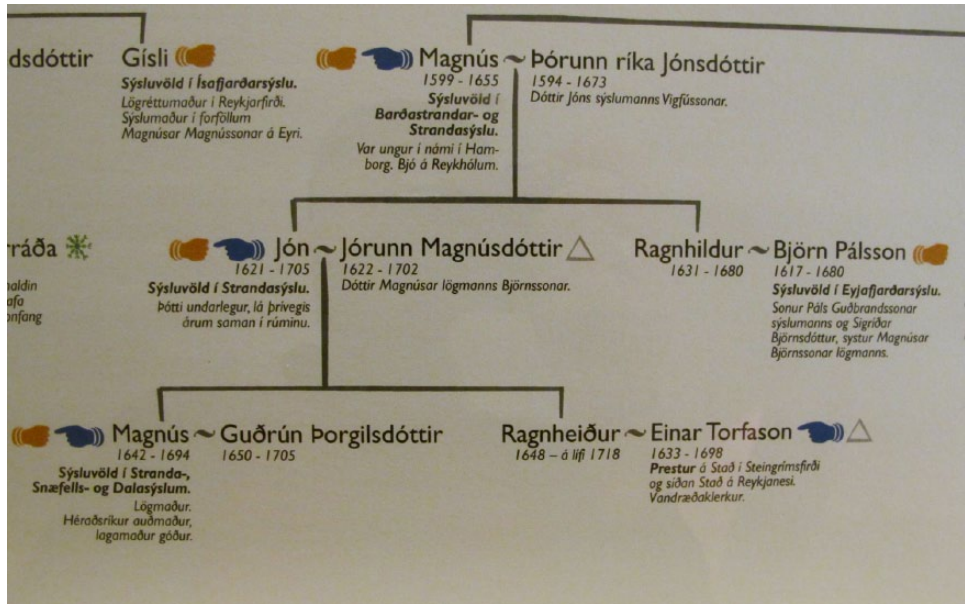


Figure 8. An example of family relationships.

Photo: Gunnar Thór Jóhannesson.

order became prominent. Young students returned to Iceland, usually gaining positions of importance through family relations, and regarded it as their duty to enlighten the poor peasants still living in their muddy cosmos.

The complex mobile entanglements bring forth the role of the Museum as a contact zone.⁶⁰ It is a place where conflicts of past histories and power relations are made explicit in an attempt to negotiate with the present Strandir as a tourism destination. As stated by Clifford,⁶¹ museums as contact zones are marginal through how they bring together a multiplicity of spatial and temporal relations and encounter between figures and voices that otherwise would not assemble. Still, the Museum throws a light on the centrality of Strandir as place continuously entangled in the flow of global and local networks. Feldman,⁶² on the other hand, puts an emphasis on the Museum object itself as a contact zone. The object is a point of bodily encounter between the audience and a past invisible. Importantly, the object here is much like the Ingoldian-thing, a knot with some loose threads or blank elements. Through this encounter, the absent past 'attains a presence'.⁶³ In relation to Strandir as a place, the absence is continuously present in narratives and material accounts of magic, made explicit in the Museum itself. As such, magic as a blank figure does not only make its presence felt in the Museum in the form of a present absence, but also the establishment of the Museum itself reaffirms its presence in the area by determining it up to a point. Furthermore, the Museum subsists because of the continuous presence of the absent encounters with the devil and practices of witchcraft. The Museum as such is a contact zone and simultaneously marginal as it gathers together heterogeneous spatio-temporal threads. At the same time, it also creates a focal point for cultural tourism in Strandir, and for many it represents the centre of the place as a tourism destination. The sense of its centrality stems from how it brings out and mobilises selected narratives continuously lurking around and makes them explicit through giving them the power to affect. The affect stems 'from the external encounter with other modes of existence'⁶⁴ creating an atmosphere radiating from one being to another in

different spheres in which the human and the non-human enmesh.⁶⁵ Thus, the magical quality of Strandir as a destination is not experienced as something otherworldly or supernatural but rather as affects that are ordinary. This supports Stewart's⁶⁶ illustration of contact zones as goings-on 'where the overdeterminations of circulations, events, conditions, technologies, and flows of power literally take place'.

Continuing the journey

This article has offered an exploratory account of the becoming of place in relation to tourism and thus the emergence of a tourist destination. The making of a tourism destination has often been described as a human affair taking place on a passive ground within a clearly defined space or location. Rarely has the agency of non-human actors, such as earthly substances and materialities of a destination, been addressed. Our argument is that a place is an entanglement of ever-moving substances in which human beings are, inevitably, also entwined. Furthermore, the importance of time-space entanglements for place making is especially apparent when the making of a tourism destination is followed. We have suggested a pathway through a place created through heterogeneous entanglements that bypass a common dichotomy between nature and culture. Thus, we have approached the ordering of Strandir as a tourism destination as 'poetics of making', a process that allows for arranging human and non-human images and entities 'that do not conventionally or logically belong together'.⁶⁷ This argument contributes to an ongoing discussion on relational and materially heterogeneous composition of places. Tourism, we believe, affords fruitful engagement with place making, as it underscores how places are continuously co-created through tourist encounters and often seemingly mundane practices, such as visiting a museum. Crucially, we think, the entanglement of human and more-than-human needs to be accommodated in studies of place making, allowing space for material agency when following the becoming of cultural landscape.

In our specific case, we have emphasised the heterogeneous narrative the Museum offers and argued that magic, understood as a blank figure narrating human encounters with earthly substances, affects the emergence and ordering of Strandir as a place. Magic, as performed in the past and narrated at the Museum of Icelandic Sorcery and Witchcraft in the present, involves the improvised ordering and re-arranging of earthly substances, such as blood, earth and water. Importantly, it also rests on personal narratives with the support of imagination, emotions and play. The power of the blank figure of magic rests in its ability to overturn stable orders or mobilise new or latent connections. The Museum has been instrumental in creating and enhancing the image of the region as a place of magic, emphasising how culture and nature, as conventionally defined, mesh through human and non-human practises and flows in time and space and cannot be separated. The Museum can thus be treated as a contact zone from which the blank figure emerges, as it has successfully connected Strandir to an alternative order of tourism mobilities in the face of struggling primary industries. We have, therefore, stressed the role of magic itself, both as a narrative from the past and as an ordinary affect, a blank figure drawing attention to the ways in which the human and the more-than-human are entangled in the continuous accomplishment of Strandir as a destination.

Acknowledgements

We would like to thank all those that took part in the research and assisted us in any way, especially Guðrún Þóra Gunnarsdóttir who assisted us with the data collection, Sigurður Atlason, the director of the Museum of Icelandic Sorcery and Witchcraft and Friðþór Sófus Sigurmundsson for his assistance with map making. We will thank the editors as well as the three anonymous reviewers for their insightful comments.

Funding

This article is written within the research project Chair in Arctic Tourism. Destination Development in the Arctic (2010–2012), hosted by Finnmark University College, Alta, Norway, and financed by the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

Notes

1. R. Van der Duim, C. Ren and G.T. Jóhannesson (eds), *Actor-Network Theory and Tourism: Ordering, Materiality and Multiplicity* (London and New York: Routledge, 2012).
2. S. McLean, 'Stories and Cosmogonies: Imagining Creativity Beyond "Nature" and Culture"', *Cultural Anthropology*, 24, 2009, pp. 213–45.
3. McLean, 'Stories and Cosmogonies'.
4. M. Rose and J. Wylie, 'Guest Editorial: Animating Landscape', *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space*, 24, 2006, pp. 475–79; A. Maddrell, 'Living with the Deceased: Absence, Presence and Absence-Presence', *cultural geographies*, 20, 2013, pp. 501–52; T. Edensor, 'Waste Matter – The Debris of Industrial Ruins and the Disordering of the Material World', *Journal of Material Culture*, 10, 2005, pp. 311–32; L. Frers, 'The Matter of Absence', *cultural geographies*, 20, 2013, pp. 431–45.
5. K. Hetherington and N. Lee, 'Social Order and the Blank Figure', *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space*, 18, 2000, pp. 169–84.
6. J. Clifford, *Routes: Travel and Translations in the Late Twentieth Century* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997).
7. J.O. Bærenholdt, 'Enacting Destinations: The Politics of Absence and Presence', in R. Van der Duim, C. Ren and G.T. Jóhannesson (eds), *Actor-Network Theory and Tourism: Ordering, Materiality and Multiplicity* (London and New York: Routledge, 2012), pp. 111–27.
8. K. Benediktsson, K.A. Lund and E. Huijbens, 'Inspired by Eruptions? Eyjafjallajökull and Icelandic Tourism', *Mobilities*, 6, 2011, pp. 77–84; J.O. Bærenholdt, M. Haldrup, J. Larsen and J. Urry, *Performing Tourist Places* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2004); A. Franklin, 'Tourism as an Ordering: Towards a New Ontology of Tourism', *Tourist Studies*, 4, 2004, pp. 277–301; G.T. Jóhannesson and J.O. Bærenholdt, 'Enacting Places through Connections of Tourism', in B. Granås and J.O. Bærenholdt (eds), *Mobility and Place: Enacting European Peripheries* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2008), pp. 155–66; K.A. Lund, 'Slipping into Landscape', in K. Benediktsson and K.A. Lund (eds), *Conversations with Landscape* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2010), pp. 97–108; K.A. Lund and K. Benediktsson, 'Inhabiting a Risky Earth: The Eyjafjallajökull Eruption in 2010 and Its Impacts', *Anthropology Today*, 27, 2011, pp. 6–9; K.A. Lund, 'Just Like Magic: Activating Landscape of Witchcraft and Sorcery in Rural Tourism, Iceland', in S. Brunn (ed.), *Changing World Religion Map: Sacred Places, Identities, Practices and Politics* (New York: Springer, 2015), pp. 767–82; C. Ren, 'Assembling the Socio-Material Destination: An Actor-Network Approach to Cultural Tourism Studies', in G. Richards and W. Munsters (eds), *Cultural Tourism Research Methods* (Wallingford: CABI, 2010), pp. 199–208; M. Sheller, 'The New Mobilities Paradigm', *Environment and Planning A*, 38, 2006, pp. 207–26; M. Sheller and J. Urry (eds), *Tourism Mobilities: Places to Play, Places in Play* (London and New York: Routledge, 2004); Van der Duim et al., *Actor-Network Theory and Tourism*.
9. Bærenholdt et al., *Performing Tourist Places*, p. 145.
10. K. Hetherington, 'In Place of Geometry: The Materiality of Place', in K. Hetherington and R. Munro (eds), *Ideas of Difference: Social Spaces and the Labour of Division* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1997), pp. 183–99.
11. Jóhannesson and Bærenholdt, 'Enacting Places through Connections of Tourism'; Ren, 'Assembling the Socio-Material Destination'.
12. C. Gad and C.B. Jensen, 'On the Consequences of Post-Ant', *Science, Technology & Human Values*, 35, 2010, pp. 55–80; A. Mol, 'Ontological Politics. A Word and Some Questions', in J. Law and J. Hassard (eds), *Actor Network Theory and After* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1999), pp. 74–89.
13. T. Edensor, 'Entangled Agencies, Material Networks and Repair in a Building Assemblage: The Mutable Stone of St Ann's Church, Manchester', *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*, 36, 2011, pp. 238–52; P. Harrison, "'How Shall I Say It. . .?'" Relating the Nonrelational', *Environment and*

- Planning A*, 39, 2007, pp. 590–608; Hetherington and Lee, 'Social Order'; J.Law, *After Method: Mess in Social Science Research* (London and New York: Routledge, 2004).
14. L.Meier, L.Frers and E.Sigvardsson, 'The Importance of Absence in the Present: Practices of Remembrance and the Contestation of Absences', *cultural geographies*, 20, 2013, pp. 423–30.
 15. Meier et al., 'The Importance of Absence in the Present', p. 3.
 16. McLean, 'Stories and Cosmogonies'.
 17. M.Jackson, *Excursions* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007), p. xii.
 18. G.Richards, 'Creativity and Tourism: The State of the Art', *Annals of Tourism Research*, 38, 2011, pp. 1225–53.
 19. T.Ingold and E.Hallam, 'Creativity and Cultural Improvisation: An Introduction', in T.Ingold and E.Hallam (eds), *Creativity and Cultural Improvisation* (Oxford: Berg, 2007), pp. 1–24.
 20. M.Callon, 'The Role of Hybrid Communities and Socio-Technical Arrangements in the Participatory Design', *Journal of the Center for Information Studies*, 5, 2004, pp. 3–10.
 21. McLean, 'Stories and Cosmogonies', p. 214.
 22. Ingold and Hallam 'Creativity and Cultural Improvisation', p. 3.
 23. Ingold and Hallam 'Creativity and Cultural Improvisation', p. 2.
 24. Law, *After Method*.
 25. Hetherington and Lee, 'Social Order'.
 26. Hetherington and Lee, 'Social Order', p. 169.
 27. Hetherington and Lee, 'Social Order', p. 171.
 28. S.D.Brown and R.Capdevila, '*Perpetuum Mobile*: Substance, Force and the Sociology of Translation', in J.Law and J.Hassard (eds), *Actor Network Theory and After* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1999), pp. 26–50.
 29. T.Ingold, 'Bringing Things to Life: Creative Entanglements in a World of Materials', 2008, p. 6, <<http://citeseerx.ist.psu.edu/viewdoc/download?doi=10.1.1.584.793&rep=rep1&type=pdf>> (05 March 2016).
 30. M.Meyer, 'Placing and Tracing Absence: A Material Culture of the Immaterial', *Journal of Material Culture*, 17, 2012, pp. 103–10.
 31. Meier et al., 'The Importance of Absence in the Present'.
 32. K.A.Lund and G.T.Jóhannesson, 'Moving Places: Multiple Temporalities of a Peripheral Tourism Destination', *Scandinavian Journal of Hospitality and Tourism*, 14, 2014, pp. 441–59.
 33. About 672 people live in the region of 0.22 per km² (Landmælingar Íslands, 2012, 'Sveitarfélög LMÍ'), <<http://atlas.lmi.is/sveitarfelog/>> (10 October 2012).
 34. B.Sigurðsson, B.Sigurðsson, G.Th.Jóhannesson, H.Gíslason, H.Ragnarsson, J.Jakobsson, J.Þ.Þór and S.J.Lúðvíksson, *Silfur Hafsins – Gull Íslands: Sildarsaga Íslendinga*, vol. 2 (Reykjavík: Nesútgáfan, 2007).
 35. Lund and Jóhannesson, 'Moving Places'.
 36. A.Karlsdóttir, 'Not Sure about the Shore! Transformation Effects of Individual Transferable Quotas on Iceland's Fishing Economy and Communities', *American Fisheries Society Symposium*, 68, 2008, pp. 99–117.
 37. G.T.Jóhannesson, 'Tími Til Að Tengja? Af Stefnunótun Í Ferðajónustu Á Íslandi', *Stjórnmal og Stjórnsýsla*, 8, 2012, pp. 173–93.
 38. J.Jónsson, *Ferðajónusta Og Þjóðmenning* (Hólmavík: Héraðsnefnd Strandasýslu, 1996).
 39. G.Þ.Gunnarsdóttir and G.T.Jóhannesson, 'Weaving with Witchcraft: Tourism and Entrepreneurship in Strandir, Iceland', in A.Viken and B.Granås (eds), *Destination Development in Tourism: Turns and Tactics* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2014), pp. 95–112.
 40. Sheller and Urry, *Tourism Mobilities*.
 41. M.de Laet, 'Patents, Travel, Space: Ethnographic Encounters with Objects in Transit', *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space*, 18, 2000, pp. 149–68; G.T.Jóhannesson, "'To Get Things Done": A Relational Approach to Entrepreneurship', *Scandinavian Journal of Hospitality and Tourism*, 12, 2012, pp. 181–96.
 42. Callon, 'The Role of Hybrid Communities'.
 43. E.E.Evans-Pritchard, *Witchcraft, Oracles and Magic among the Azande* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1976), p. 221.

44. Galdrasýning á Ströndum, 'Galdrabrennur', 2011, <http://www.galdrasyning.is/index.php?option=com_content&view=category&id=27&Itemid=67&lang=is> (31 October 2011).
45. M.Jackson, *Minima Ethnographical: Intersubjectivity and the Anthropological Project* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), p. 31.
46. Hetherington and Lee, 'Social Order'.
47. M.Rafnsson, *Angurapi: Um Galdramál Á Íslandi* (Hólmavík: Strandagaldur, 2003), p. 9.
48. Rafnsson, 'Angurapi'.
49. M.Jackson, *Paths toward a Clearing: Radical Empiricism and Ethnographic Inquiry* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1989).
50. For example, Rafnsson, 'Angurapi'.
51. K.Stewart, *Ordinary Affects* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007), p. 30.
52. For example, S.Alpers, *The Art of Describing: Dutch Art in the Seventeenth Century* (Hammondsworth: Penguin, 1983); K.Hetherington, 'From Blindness to Blindness: Museums, Heterogeneity and the Subject', in J.Law and J.Hassard (eds), *Actor Network Theory and After: Sociological Review Monographs* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1999), pp. 51–73.
53. Hetherington, 'From Blindness to Blindness'.
54. Hetherington, 'From Blindness to Blindness', p. 53.
55. Rafnsson, 'Angurapi'.
56. C.DeSilvey, 'Salvage Memory: Constellating Material Histories on a Hardscrabble Homestead', *cultural geographies*, 14, 2007, pp. 401–24.
57. Hetherington, 2001 in DeSilvey, 'Salvage Memory', p. 404.
58. DeSilvey, 'Salvage Memory', p. 404.
59. Hetherington and Lee, 'Social Order', p. 171.
60. Clifford, 'Routes'.
61. Clifford, 'Routes'.
62. J.D.Feldman, 'Contact Points: Museums and the Lost Body Problem', in E.Edwards, C.Gosden and R.B.Philips (eds), *Sensible Objects: Colonialism, Museums and Material Culture* (Oxford: Berg, 2006), pp. 245–68.
63. Hetherington and Lee, 'Social Order', p. 173.
64. G.Deleuze, *Spinoza: Practical Philosophy* (San Francisco: City Lights Books, 1988), p. 50.
65. For example, B.Anderson, 'Affective Atmospheres', *Emotion, Space and Society*, 2, 2009, pp. 77–81.
66. Stewart, *Ordinary Affects*, p. 3.
67. Jackson, *Excursions*, p. xii.

Author biographies

Katrín Anna Lund is an anthropologist and Associate Professor in the Department of Geography and Tourism at the University of Iceland. Her research is on landscape, place, narratives, and modes of travelling in southern Spain, Scotland, and Iceland. She is a co-editor of the volume *Conversations with Landscape*, published with Ashgate 2010.

Gunnar Thór Jóhannesson is Associate Professor at the Department of Geography and Tourism, University of Iceland. His research interests are in the areas of entrepreneurship in tourism, tourism policy and destination development as well as research methodologies. He is a co-editor of *Tourism Encounters and Controversies: Ontological Politics of Tourism Development*, published with Ashgate in 2015.