# Charting Scottish Tourism and the Early Scenic Film

## Access, Identity and Landscape

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*For my mother and father, who taught me to love the Scottish landscape,*
*even before I had the chance to set foot in it.*

# Acknowledgments

This book exists at the intersection of two very different projects. The first was my doctoral thesis tracing the role of the natural sublime in environmental aesthetics and visual culture and the second a postdoctoral research project interrogating the historical links between the sites and circulation of scenic films and the spatial identities of Scottish communities at the turn of the century. For this reason there are several individuals and groups to thank for their commitment and contribution to this final piece of work.

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# Contents

# Introduction

**Abstract**  This introductory chapter explores how the interplay between material forces and aesthetic and cultural discourses paved the way for nature appreciation to be embedded within the tourism industry in Scotland between the late eighteenth and early twentieth centuries. Several representational technologies played a role in this process including photography and film. The latter, in the guise of the scenic film, renegotiated one of the central debates surrounding first-hand contact with nature and its aesthetic parameters—that is how to frame the embodied gaze. This question was particularly important within the Scottish context because of the impact of transborder tourism and the circulation of landscape imagery during the period. Both regional and international leisure patterns transformed not only how individual communities moved and looked at the spaces they called home but also how they conceptualised their relationship with the natural world.

**Keywords**  Nature appreciation · Scenic filmmaking · Aesthetic philosophy · Travel and tourism · Scotland

Jean Adamson spent her childhood holidays outside of the Highland village of Ardentinny. In her private memoirs she described that period of her life with reverent detail. It was there in the forest that she created her own magical world detached from the cultural and economic pressures that surrounded her family back home in the mining town of High

Blantyre. When revisiting these memories Jean describes herself as being completely "absorbed" by the natural world around her, where "Life itself seemed to proliferate faster than at home".[1] With a heavy sense of nostalgia, these periods of leisure became a "timeless world" with "some atavistic power that made us think and behave like our ancestors… extracting the savour of life from the rhythm of nature and getting myths from the lips of the story tellers".[2] The experiences she retells and the rhetoric she uses to do so are, of course, not entirely unique. They reflect a complex set of discourses and performed behaviour embedded in the foundations of the cultural identity of her home country of Scotland, discourses which would have a profound effect on the spatial patterns and expectations which would drive the domestic tourism industry for the next several decades.

Over a period of a few hundred years, looking at and moving through natural spaces became central features of what particular socio-economic groups did while away from home on holiday. In fact, the emergence and valorisation of nature appreciation as a performed set of first-hand experiences went hand in hand with the development of a range of technological, economic and political changes which made increasing amounts of leisure travel possible for a larger and larger percentage of the British population. Individuals and groups chose to spend their often-precious time outside of work in natural landscapes because, in the words of John Urry and Jonas Larsen, they "anticipate[d]" those experiences would provide a kind of pleasure or benefit that was unlike anything they could acquire in their regular day to day lives.[3] Those benefits, whether physical, psychological, aesthetic or intellectual were constructed by a series of overlapping discourses which circulated through a number of texts and devices such as topographical literature, guidebooks, photography, and by the turn of the twentieth century, cinema. Each of these representational technologies contributed to "formalizing" particular "patterns of appreciation and mobility" extending the reach of the initial philosophical debates to the middle and working classes.[4] In *Tourist Gaze 3.0*, Urry and Larsen argue that this combination of the "means of collective travel", "the desire for travel" and the rise of representational technologies set the foundation for the emergence of the "tourist gaze" which became "a core component of western modernity".[5]

*Charting Scottish Tourism and the Early Scenic Film* interrogates how one of these technologies, the moving image, not only reconstructed the Scottish tourist map but renegotiated the already complex relationship

Scottish communities had with looking at and moving through natural spaces. The book uses one genre in particular, the scenic film, as a way of tracing the rise of domestic nature appreciation by the Scottish middle and working classes. While the scenic genre remains largely underrepresented in the field of early cinema, it is an unrivalled source of material detailing the expansion of both regional travel and national tourism. Scottish scenics not only documented the manner in which different socio-economic groups explored and reclaimed natural spaces but also played a central role in actual leisure performances, with the embodied gaze remaining a central motif throughout the rise and fall of the genre. The scenic did not solely display one single model of spectatorship, rather throughout its lifespan it portrayed competing models while also juxtaposing complex and historically wide-reaching debates about the role natural spaces play in defining personal and cultural identity structures. The early scenic was in fact defined by its own precariousness and remains a potent cultural symbol of the gaze's contentious relationship to the dichotomies which often define leisure travel.

## Framing the Gaze

How to look and move through a space lies at the heart of environmental aesthetics. When appreciating and making judgements about any space or object, a spectator draws on a particular framing mechanism to derive significance and meaning. These framing mechanisms construct the parameters of the view which typically involves the isolation of a series of elements from the rest of the visual field and their union into "a consistent whole".[6] The frame becomes, as Michael Snow describes, an epistemological tool: "That's to say that out of the universal field, knowledge isolates, selects and points out unities or differences which were not previously evident. Identification, definition is a matter of limits, of recognition of limitations, bounds, boundaries".[7] For example, landscape painting depends on a frame in order to distinguish between the world of the painting and the world of the observer, reinforcing what belongs in the view and what does not. Natural spaces often exceed the parameters of these rules or guides, they demand something from the spectator which is by its very nature subversive, testing the foundations of aesthetic experience and knowledge formation.

This resistance to being easily attained and controlled by a framework lies at the forefront of contemporary environmental aesthetics. The field's

problematic nature has been defined by the role of immersion, especially at the time of its revival in the late 1960s. In "Contemporary Aesthetics and the Neglect of Natural Beauty",[8] published in 1966, R. W. Hepburn analyses the differences between the form of embodied experience which is central to environmental appreciation and the main aesthetic models of the day which attempted to construct a unified system for aesthetic judgements. He states that,

> Some writers have been impressed by the fact that certain crucial features of aesthetic experience are quite unobtainable in nature – a landscape does not minutely control the spectator's response to it as does a successful work of art; it is an unframed ordinary object, in contrast to the framed, "esoteric", "illusory," or "virtual" character of the art object. And so the artifact is taken as the aesthetic object *par excellence*, and the proper focus of study.[9]

In this account objects which can be appreciated aesthetically are necessarily framed and bounded. By contrast, a person experiencing a natural space remains within that space and is forced to integrate a large variety of visual detail and sensation into the overall experience. Here the detachment which is necessary in order to reach a state of contemplation is almost impossible to achieve if both it and immersion remain defined in their conventional manner. For Hepburn, one of the most important aspects of these differences is the participatory nature of the latter. This participation allows for a reflexive internal free play where we engage in a transformative dialectic between performing the role of actor and spectator, allowing our creativity to be "challenged, set a task; and when things go well with us, we experience a sudden expansion of imagination that can be remarkable in its own right".[10] Here the very thing which is valued about the frame, specifically its stability and determinateness, is challenged by the accompanying possibilities provided by the unpredictable and interactional perceptual nature of environmental appreciation.

Space is a central example. Its potential as an object of aesthetic relevance is constantly being negotiated through its relationship to the embodied observer and its larger conceptual and cultural associations. Hepburn writes,

> Space is neither a substance nor a quality of substances… To add to the complexity, we ourselves are spatial beings: the arm I stretch out to point

to a star is itself a portion of space, the same space (even if subject to different gravitational influences). Unlike the situation with most aesthetic objects, we cannot get right outside space so as to focus on it.[11]

This interconnectedness makes it necessary to construct a theoretical framework which can account for the excesses and nuances caught outside the bounds of the artistic frame,[12] forcing a variety of epistemological and phenomenological issues to the surface. Are judgements possible when we are deeply implicated in the experiences and spaces that we are trying to make sense of?

This debate about the place of environmental appreciation within aesthetic philosophy signals a return to a set of questions which have their roots at the very outset. While the field in analytic philosophy has only been around for just over five decades, its antecedents date back to the eighteenth century, the same century which developed the initial conceptual parameters of aesthetic philosophy and subjectivity.[13] Nature and the manner of its appreciation was the primary object of concern for British philosophers debating those parameters.[14] First-hand experiences of natural spaces, made possible by increased access to domestic and international travel, constructed the possibility for new forms of pleasure that fell outside the confines of the rules of taste dictating artwork at the time. These new sensations and ancillary ideas brought the problem of cause and effect and subject and object to the fore, posing a series of new questions: What is the primary cause of these internal states? Are they elicited by natural phenomena or the observer's original disposition? Which internal faculties should be relied upon to make judgements about them? Increasingly diverse forms of contact with natural spaces became fundamental to responding to these issues, as well as establishing the bounds of taste and, eventually, if you were a member of the gentry, acquiring a well-rounded aesthetic education.

During the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries a number of new aesthetic frameworks emerged in an attempt to make sense of these experiences and address these concerns. The most prominent and revolutionary of these affective states became known as the sublime. The idea was first introduced into the British philosophical lexicon in the domain of rhetoric by Nicolas Boileau and his translation of Longinus, and then in relation to judgements of taste in reference to specific experiences of nature. The concept formalised and explained certain pleasurable experiences which could not be accounted for within the neoclassical system of beauty, a

theory constructed out of a reasoned set of objective criteria.[15] Moving away from this model, theories of the sublime began by emphasising the properties housed within natural objects, and then the interplay of internal faculties.[16] The concept was defined by a radical dichotomy of immersive and contemplative models of spectatorship. The sublime could not be found through traditional models of framing that demanded detachment and distance alone; the experience was described as immediately dissipating when a subject was able to isolate and perceive a phenomenon's boundaries.[17] The sublime seemed in fact completely counter-intuitive to previous view aesthetics, and yet this precariousness and instability only enhanced its cultural and conceptual value.

The sublime was not alone in trying to articulate and formalise particular forms of contact with natural spaces. Other aesthetic frameworks, like the picturesque, began to emerge in critical and philosophical writing, creating a complex terrain of competing prescriptive aesthetic models. But while each of these models may have centred around a different set of experiences and landscapes, they were all symptomatic of a palpable anxiety that existed at the core of much of the British discourse surrounding the natural environment and its appreciation. This anxiety quickly spread from the philosophical sphere to the popular one as access to travel began to incorporate a wider and wider group of people.

## THE RISE OF LEISURE TRAVEL

The cultural discourse surrounding nature appreciation rose in parallel to the philosophical one. Both were by-products of large sweeping technological, economic and political changes occurring across Great Britain during the same period which not only allowed, but eventually encouraged middle, and then working class communities to not just travel but to travel for pleasure. In the eighteenth to early nineteenth centuries Great Britain faced a series of upheavals which directly altered the nature of domestic travel and the makeup of urban and rural landscapes, including the expansion of rail networks. While these changes were necessary to construct the material requirements for increased travel, the circulation of place-imagery encouraged a shift in perception with regard to the value of said travel, making it more and more indispensable to the lifestyles of particular social groups. By the mid-nineteenth century this proliferation of visual messaging was not only reorganising the physical environment but the virtual one as well, transforming and reconstructing the way middle and working class people imagined that world. In Jean-Louis Comolli's

"Machines of the Visible" he describes a pattern in Europe that is equally applicable to Great Britain, "The second half of the 19th century lives in a sort of frenzy of the visible. It is, of course, the effect of the social multiplication of images: even wider distribution of illustrated papers, waves of prints, caricatures, etc. The effect also, however, of something of a geographical extension of the field of the visible and representable by journeys, explorations, colonisations, the whole world becomes visible at the same that it becomes appropriatable".[18] For the first time in history the world became accessible to larger and larger subsets of the population via static and then moving images. This "geographical extension" not only made virtual travel possible but transformed how first-hand experience was negotiated. The "inversion of priority of object over image"[19] dramatically changed the parameters of our relationship with not only natural spaces but how those spaces solidified personal and national identity structures.

Leisure travel, whether on Grand Tour to the Continent, or for a week of sun and water in Rothesay, developed an ever-expanding industry, taking advantage of this shift in emphasis towards physical and virtual travel. The industry promoted the importance of first-hand experience as well as embedding those experiences in an ever more complex set of cultural expectations and values. An array of texts and technologies participated in this expansion providing "physical" and "discursive" access to the public.[20] Most were produced to prepare or accompany a would-be traveller, including guidebooks, painted panoramas, magic lantern shows, photography and scenic filmmaking. Each object prescribed itineraries, viewpoints and models of spectatorship, providing the popular imagination with the tools and frameworks they needed to feel like they had the required "cultural and material equipment to experience the countryside"[21] and participate in the wider popular discourse.

These texts largely existed as mediating devices between the natural world and spectator, constructing the semblance of a guarantee for the tourist that they too could experience the variety of pleasures and novelties that had been reserved for the likes of the gentry. Urry and Larsen argue that it was this "double helix" of photography and leisure travel which occurred around the mid 1800s which laid the foundation for the "tourist gaze".[22] Borrowing the concept of the gaze from Foucault, they describe several different "kinds of gaze authorised by various discourses" at work during the period, including those dictated by health, education and heritage.[23] They contend that each type of gaze was informed in