

Represented Landscapes: Picturesque and Cinematic Landscapes in Northern Ireland

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Abstract

The concept of the picturesque is, of course, one that is steeped in narratives, fictions and notions of representation. Throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries the picturesque or, 'painterly', lens became the prominent means of interpreting the natural Irish landscape (Slater, 2007). Following such picturesque readings of the landscape, the physical implementation of picturesque gardens emerges as common practice on the Irish estates of the planted landed gentry class. These constructed landscapes, imagined and implemented representations of natural Irish conditions were littered with ornamental follies symbolic of an idealised history, one that was disconnected from the ancestral land.

Cinematic traditions can be considered one of the most direct evolutions of picturesque aesthetic ideals. Picturesque and cinematic movements share similarities in both their composition and their construction, are both associated with movement and spatio-sequential experience and both have the potential to generate represented landscapes. Considering cinema as an evolution of the picturesque is particularly interesting in a contemporary Irish context. In recent years the country has emerged as a significant destination for location filming. The result is a wealth of filmic representations of Ireland; the country's 'real' and 'reel' landscapes have become intertwined.

This project will be concerned with relationship between the picturesque, cinematic landscapes and the cultural historic landscape of Northern Ireland, in order to interrogate Irish landscapes and their representations. It will understand the cinematic medium as an evolution of the picturesque, an aesthetic philosophy that has a long and complex history within Ireland. The first phase of the project will manifest in a study of the Northern Irish rural landscape as a spatial condition, considering landscapes within picturesque and cinematic traditions within this context. The project's second phase will use the findings of this study in order to question how architectural intervention can react to these overlapping landscapes. It will propose a series of follies functioning as both a prospect to, and an object within, such real and represented landscapes.

Slater. E., (2007) *Reconstructing 'nature' as a picturesque theme park: The colonial case of Ireland in Early Popular Visual Culture*. Vol. 5, No. 3, pp. 231-245.

Part I Landscape Exploration

The picturesque reconstruction of the Irish landscape

Between place and myth, between landscape and fiction, there is an extremely strong connection in Ireland. Irish landscapes are those of narrative. This connection emerged in the pre-Christian era during which time the country's *mythos*, an entity composed of sacred themes, plots and narratives, rather than a formal religion, structured spiritual beliefs (Smyth, 2020). The concepts of landscape and narrative have continued to be woven together and throughout Irish literary tradition the natural landscape has played a central role in the output of poets and playwrights such as W.B. Yeats, Seamus Heaney and Eavan Boland, to name but a few. In *A Lost Tradition*, Tyrone-raised poet John Montague wrote 'The whole landscape a manuscript / We had lost the skill to read / A part of our past disinherited' (1989) painting rural Ireland as historically steeped in narrative.

Having briefly established the long, complex and intertwining history of narrative and landscape in Ireland we are able to focus our attention on another facet of Ireland's material discourse, namely that of the physical manifestation of picturesque ideals. The concept of the picturesque is, of course, one that is steeped in narrative and fiction. Throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries the picturesque or, 'painterly', lens became the prominent means of interpreting the natural Irish landscape (Slater, 2007). In a response to this reading of the land the English informal garden emerged in Ireland. It was landscape devised as a series of views of seemingly natural scenery that could be experienced in both visually and bodily manners, thus incorporating both space and time. Acting as a physical manifestation of picturesque culture and ideology in rural Ireland, the landed gentry implemented the style within the bounds of estates under their control. This landed gentry however, consisted predominantly of British settlers on the island (both English and Scottish), positioned during the sixteenth and seventeenth century plantations of Ireland, confiscating and colonising Irish-owned land as a means of controlling and anglicising parts of the country. The result of this is constructed landscapes, imagined and implemented representations of natural Irish conditions. Eamonn Slater explains the product of this practice:

Montague, J., (1989) *A Lost Tradition* in *The Rough Field*. Ireland: The Gallery Press.

Smyth, D., (2020) *Earthing the Myths*. 1st ed. Dublin: Irish Academic Press.

Slater, E., (2007) *Reconstructing 'nature' as a picturesque theme park: The colonial case of Ireland in Early Popular Visual Culture*. Vol. 5, No. 3, pp. 231-245.

“These spatial enclaves on the landlord’s demesne, protected behind high walls, became a colonised space where the hegemonic picturesque held sway over the native sense of place.” (Slater, 2007)

Slater further argued these ‘spatial enclaves’ could be described as ‘theme parks’, citing recent discussions surrounding the theming of American landscapes and existence of ‘theme parks’ beyond simply the realm of entertainment resorts and amusement parks:

“It is at this point that the gardeners of the informal English style responded to the cultural forms of the picturesque, and crucially where the cultural forms of this ideological circulation process of the picturesque entered into a material production process resulting in the picturesque landscape becoming a theme park. A theme park that not only reflected the contradictory cultural forms of the picturesque, but also took on a spatial dimension where the design principles of the English informal garden attempted to transform the material structures of the Irish landscape by creating ‘little Englands’ in Ireland.” (Slater, 2007)

“This is the pivotal moment in the pictorialization of nature: what is designed (and owned) is composed to give the illusion of being natural, when in fact it is maintained as an enclave. To create the illusion, Brown’s garden used compositional conventions taken from painting. ... Increasingly it meant something visual: a forested landscape with serpentine clearings.” (Crandell, 1993, as in Slater, 2007)

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Crandell, G., (1993) *Nature Pictorialized: ‘The View’ in Landscape History*. John Hopkins University Press, London, pp. 129.

The significance of these practices for this project, which will focus on narrative, fictional and imagined landscapes, and, real landscapes, is two-fold; firstly the philosophy of picturesque aesthetics is inherently linked to concepts of fictional and constructed narrative views and imagined visual representation; secondly, the physical manifestations of the picturesque in Ireland resulted in ‘themed’ landscapes, ones that can be considered illusions of being naturally Irish. That is to say, both the concept of the picturesque and its execution within an Irish context bear importance here.



Figure 1. The Wonderful Barn, built in 1743 on the Castletown Estate.

Follies in Ireland

A folly is defined as a building constructed primarily for decoration, but suggesting through its appearance some other purpose, they often attempt to symbolise historic or cultural virtues. The practice of folly building in the Great Britain and Ireland became prevalent during the rise of the picturesque landscape tradition, follies became an integral feature of the English informal garden. Often built to mimic temples, medieval structures and ruins, injecting the landscape with a sense of fantasy. Within the picturesque context in Ireland they contributed incredibly to the understanding of English informal gardens as constructed imagined landscapes, representations of natural Irish conditions.

“In strict Brownian landscape, the structures of the landscape were not calculated to stimulate historical reflections, although later on ‘follies’ were constructed to give a general air of the historical past to the parkland. However, follies were only symbolic of an idealised past rather representing a real historical past or event and especially for the collective memory of the native Irish.” (Slater, 2007).

The tradition of folly building on the island of Ireland, however, extends beyond its roots in the picturesque. The construction of purposeless infrastructure was part of relief efforts during the famine of 1740 and the Great Famine of 1845-1849, as those suffering from starvation were employed to build roads to nowhere, estate walls, piers in the middle of bogs and as well as fantastical buildings on the grounds of the land owning class. Many examples still decorate the landscape today, for example, the R574 road on the Beara peninsula, Conolly’s Folly and The Wonderful barn on the grounds of the Castletown Estate (figure 1). These structures became collectively known as ‘famine follies’, a ‘landscape legacy of often well-intentioned, but hopelessly misguided, initiatives’. (Collins, 2013).

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Collins, R., (2013) Famine and Landscape in Jebb, M. and Crowley, C., (eds.) *Secrets of the Irish Landscape*. Atrium: Cork. pp. 210.



Figure 2. Thomas Gainsborough,
Man Holding a Claude Glass,
undated.

Evolutions of the picturesque

The picturesque acts as a universal concept and its aesthetic philosophy has applications across the spectrum of visual arts, however it is the evolution of picturesque ideals within cinematic traditions that is perhaps one of its most direct manifestations. As Steven Jacobs asserts in his essay *Screening Landscape: between the Picturesque and the Painterly*:

“Inherently connected to movement and to a sequential spatial experience in time, the picturesque has been considered as a precursor of the cinematic.” (Jacobs, 2021)

This thought is based on the parallels between nineteenth century landscape paintings and cinematic representations, of which lenses, frames, compositions, montages and lighting effects are used to characterise both mediums. Jacobs connects the constituents of both the picturesque, and thus its landscape form, and of cinema, making a reading of cinematic traditions as an evolution of the picturesque a convincing one. The notion of the picturesque is firmly connected to implications of movement as well as the idea of a series of successive framed views (intentions that can be observed in English informal gardens). These practices are so closely related to cinematic mediums that at times the hierarchical relationship between the two has even be reversed with the picturesque being described as “pre-cinematic” (MacArthur, 2007 as in Jacobs, 2021).

Indeed, between the historic means of imaging picturesque views from the landscape and of producing film there is an even more literal similarity- the use of lenses. Within the picturesque landscape tradition ‘Claude glasses’, small convex mirrors with a tinted surface, were used to reflect, distort and recolour the landscape in order to experience a visual effect similar to that of Claude’s painting. The lens produced a manipulated image of the real landscape in order for appropriately picturesque viewing. Of course, lenses are fundamental apparatus in the production of photography and film, which too, depending on focal length and aperture, create a manipulated image of the real world.

In the same vein, applications of picturesque ideals in the landscape can be understood to a degree as physical representations of imagined

Jacobs, S., (2021) *Screening Landscapes: Film between the Picturesque and the Painterly*. Acta Universitatis Sapientiae, Film and Media Studies, Vol.19, Issue 1, pp. 1-16.

landscapes. As explained in the previous section of this programme, this practice was prolific in eighteenth and nineteenth century Ireland. Cinematic traditions too are concerned with representations of landscape. Andrew Horton asserted that “All landscapes in cinema are ‘reel’.”, as opposed to those we understand as ‘real’, further justifying this claim in *Reel landscapes: cinematic environments documented and created*:

“That is to say, both landscapes that look like we could touch them, walk through them and smell them, as well as those that look entirely fanciful or theatrical, are presented to us through the medium of film. And film traditionally has been a piece of plastic running through a machine with a strong light that throws a two-dimensional image on a screen. Modern digital technology has somewhat altered this formula, but the fact remains: to speak of landscapes and cinema is to speak of the representation of landscapes through another medium.” (Horton, 2003)

Within the field several models have emerged to describe the relationship between reality and representation in film. These frameworks, when applied to filmic landscapes, categorise space as those that exist within reality, those that are constructed within the film; and those which are constructed in the imagination. Further to these frameworks for interpreting levels of spatial reality generated by cinema, academic discourse within the field has also included explanations of the role such representations of landscape perform. Chris Lukinbael, a cultural geographer, has explored extensively the concept of mediated geographies. He summaries represented landscapes within film as functioning in four ways, either as space; as place; as spectacle; or as metaphor (Lukinbael, 2005).

Horton, A., (2003) in *Reel landscapes: cinematic environments documented and created* in Robertson, I. and Richards, P. (eds.), *Studying Cultural Landscapes*. London: Oxford University Press.

Lukinbael, C., (2005) *Cinematic Landscapes* in *The Journal of Cultural Geography*. Vol. 23, no. 1, pp. 3-22.



Figure 3. Castle Coole estate, Co. Fermanagh, as seen in *Miss Julie* (2014).

Figure 4. Magheramore Quarry, Co. Antrim as seen in television show *Game of Thrones* (2017).

Figure 5. A view north from Galboly, Co. Antrim as seen in television show *Game of Thrones* (2015).

Real and reel landscapes in Ireland

We can now draw together the aforementioned contextual background to the modern day Northern Ireland, which acts as the broad site of the project.. Whilst Northern Ireland has not possessed a significant film industry for most of its history, most probably a result of lacking infrastructure, isolated geographical location and relatively small population, the industry has, in recent years, become a thriving industry. This growth can be attributed to a number of economic benefits, funding and the formation of the Northern Ireland Screen (previously the Northern Ireland Film Council). In addition, the natural landscape has been realised as ideally suited for on location filming.

One result of this industry expansion, in particular location filming, is the new prominence of the Irish landscape represented on screen. In some cases the Irish landscape plays itself, for instance *Miss Julie* (2014) set and filmed in County Fermanagh (figure 3), *Brooklyn* (2015), using Curracloe beach, County Wexford, for Irish coastal scenes, and *The Quiet Man* (1952), shot on location in County Mayo and County Galway (however, Irish landscape representation in *The Quiet Man* is particularly complex as it uses a picturesque 'theme park' to depict the native landscape) (Slater, 2009). Increasingly the landscapes of Ireland have been used to play the role of fantasy-scapes, most recently in *Star Wars Episode VIII "The Last Jedi"* (2017) with scenes of *Planet Ahch-to* filmed at Malin Head and the Skellig Islands, and the television series *Game of Thrones*, the majority of which is filmed in rural Northern Ireland (figures 4 and 5). With representations of Irish landscapes used as place, space, spectacle and metaphor, and of course existing on all levels of spatial reality, the country's 'real' and the 'reel' landscapes have become intertwined. The following map identifies a number of these landscapes (figure 6).

This project will be concerned with relationship between the picturesque, cinematic landscapes and the cultural historic landscape of Northern Ireland. It will understand the cinematic medium as an evolution of the picturesque landscape, an aesthetic philosophy that has a long history within Ireland.

Slater, E., (2009) *The Postcolonial Landscape Aesthetic of the 'Quiet Man' in NIRSA Working Paper Series, No. 45.*



1	Gosford Castle		
2	Lietrim Lodge	15	Carnlough Harbour
3	Tollymore Forest	16	Galboly
4	Inch Abbey	17	Cushendun Caves
5	Quoile River	18	Murlough Bay
6	Castle Ward	19	Fairhead Cliffs
7	Broken Tower	20	Larrybane Quarry
8	Audley's Castle	21	Ballintoy Harbour
9	Quentin Bay and Castle	22	Dunluce Castle
10	Lough Neagh	23	Portstewart Strand
11	Toome Canal	24	Downhill Beach
12	Sallagh Braes	25	Binevenagh
13	Cairn Castle	26	The Dark Hedges
14	Shillanavogy	27	Pollnagollum Cave

Figure 6. Filming locations, real landscapes in Northern Ireland.

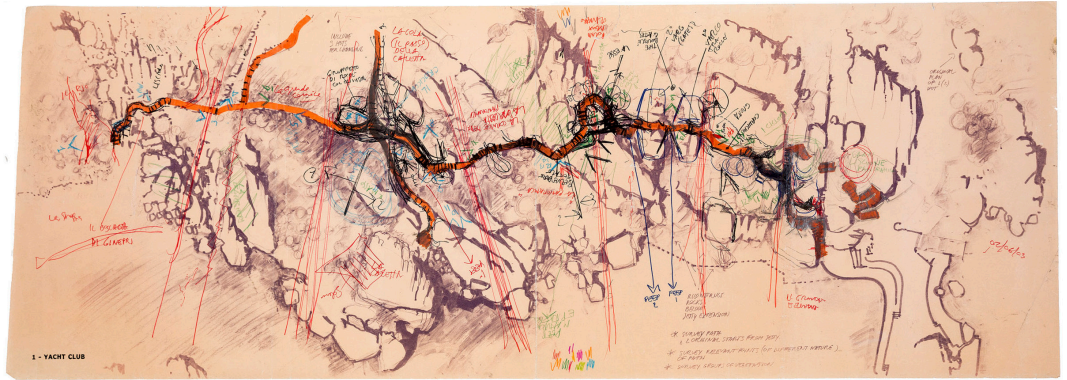


Figure 7. Alberto Ponis, *Yacht Club Path*, 1965. Exhibited in *Cartographies of the Imagination*, 2021.

Part I Framing a Project

Thesis statement

This project will be concerned with the relationship between the picturesque, cinematic landscapes and the cultural historic landscape of Northern Ireland. It will understand the cinematic medium as an evolution of the picturesque landscape, an aesthetic philosophy that has a long history within Ireland.

The first phase of this project will manifest in a study of the Northern Irish rural landscape as a spatial condition, considering picturesque and cinematic traditions within this context. The purpose of this study is to gain insight into how concepts of narrative and represented landscapes intertwine with real and existing ones and to interrogate how these relationships can be expressed in both two-dimensional and three-dimensional mediums.

The project's second phase will use the findings of this landscape study in order to question how architectural intervention can react to these overlapping landscapes. It will manifest in the design of a series of small-scale 'follies' functioning as both as a place from which to view such landscapes and as an object within the landscapes. The precise sites of these follies within Northern Ireland will be determined by the initial exploration of the landscape.



Figure 8. Jeffrey's House model, Tom O'Brien and Emily Mannion, 2014.

Defining a working method

The first phase of this project will manifest in a study of rural landscape, producing drawn and modelled expressions of Northern Irish landscapes. Inspiration for these expressions will come from historic methods of documenting and mapping landscapes as well as contemporary abstract and artistic methods of landscape expression. In order to maintain structure for this phase I have set the following parameters as a guide for a working method:

1. The landscape study will begin with documenting the real, existing landscape to provide a concrete basis for visual expression, before combining with documenting explorations of narrative and represented landscapes.
2. The form of documentation of landscape might include the following forms:
 - Plan drawing
 - Sectional drawing
 - Perspectival representations
 - Physical modelling
3. Each expression of landscape will take a minimalist approach, that is to say only information that is relevant to communicate the intended idea will be expressed. This approach will discourage a reliance on any visual tools that could dilute meaning. In most cases, drawings will be reduced to a palette of lines, with colour and hatch only used unless necessary to communicate an idea.



Figure 9. Jeffrey's House, Tom O'Brien and Emily Mannion, 2014.

Part II Responding to Landscapes

Requirements for a viewing folly

The proposed architectural intervention will take form as a series of follies set within the Northern Irish landscape functioning as places from which to view the landscape, in other words as 'prospects'. It is intended that these follies should be experienced in sequence, continuing the spatio-sequential traditions of the picturesque and the cinematic. The number and situations of these follies is as yet unknown, these factors will be determined by the preceding landscape exploration. However, there are a number of suggested requirements for such infrastructure:

- Space for 1-2 people

- Situated on publicly accessible land

- Frame a prospect of the surrounding landscape

- Positioned relative to one another for a sequential experience

- Enhance the surrounding landscape

It should be noted that here the term 'landscape' refers to all forms of landscape explored in this project.



Figure 10. Jeffrey's House sketch, Tom O'Brien and Emily Mannion, 2014.



Figure 11. Jeffrey's House sketch, Tom O'Brien and Emily Mannion, 2014.



Figure 12. Jeffrey's House, Tom O'Brien and Emily Mannion, 2014.



Figure 13. Bus Stop, built as part of the Koshirakura Landscape Workshop, Japan, 1997.



Figure 14. Bus Stop in the snow, built as part of the Koshirakura Landscape Workshop, Japan, 1997.



Figure 15. *Ore-Bodies and Topography of Mine-Hill, New Almaden.* U.S. Geological Survey, Monograph XIII, Atlas Sheet VIII.

Submission

Deliverables

The following list is a suggestion of deliverables, this list is of course subject to change as the landscape exploration unfolds and the architectural response evolves. The landscape exploration phase will take shape as an atlas of kinds.

Atlas of cartographic references

Plans

- 1:25000 physical landscape
- 1:25000 represented landscape
- 1:5000 physical landscape
- 1:5000 represented landscape
- 1:500 selected landscape
- 1:50 landscape and folly

Sections

- 1:500 selected landscape
- 1:10 selected landscape
- 1:50 landscape and folly
- 1:10 detail

Elevations

- 1:50 landscape and folly

Perspectival representations

Models

- 1:500 represented landscape
- 1:50 represented landscape
- 1:500 landscape and folly
- 1:50 folly

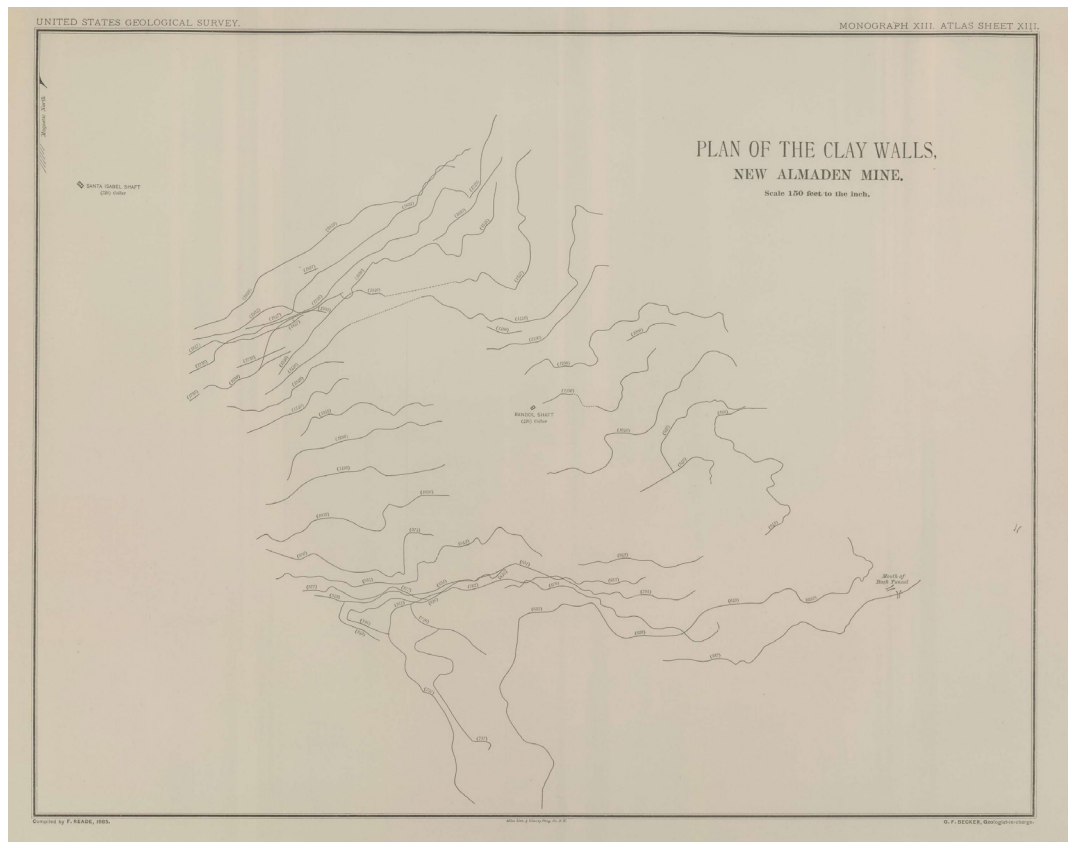


Figure 16. *Plan of the Clay Walls, New Almaden Mine.* U.S. Geological Survey, Monograph XIII, Atlas Sheet XIII.

Submission Schedule

Week 13

Part I Landscape Exploration

Atlas of cartographic references

Plans

- 1:25000 physical landscape
- 1:25000 represented landscape
- 1:5000 physical landscape
- 1:5000 represented landscape
- 1:500 selected landscape

Sections

- 1:500 selected landscape
- 1:10 selected landscape

Perspectival representations

Models

- 1:500 represented landscape
- 1:50 represented landscape

Week 19

Part II Responding to Landscapes

Plans

1.50 landscape and folly

Sections

- 1.50 landscape and folly
- 1.10 detail

Elevations

1.50 landscape and folly

Perspectival representations

Models

- 1.500 landscape and folly
- 1.50 folly

Bibliography

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