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Title: Framing the View: Picturesque Landscape in Contemporary Tourism Imagery

Author: Judith Bernanke

Affiliation: Lecturer, Communication  
Department of Communication and Journalism  
Massey University at Wellington

Address: Private Box 756  
Wellington  
NEW ZEALAND

E-mail: [j.bernanke@massey.ac.nz](mailto:j.bernanke@massey.ac.nz)

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**Abstract**

Landscape has been widely acknowledged in Western culture as a source of powerful aesthetic experiences. In the past, the emotional appreciation of nature was considered an aesthetic goal in tourism and has become increasingly popular for contemporary tourism as well. The marketing of tourism destinations with the promise of an experience of nature that is evocative, inspiring and emotionally overwhelming has become an important aspect of place branding, and landscape images are selected to appeal to those tourists who seek this emotional and spiritual relationship with nature. However, the images that have been used for this purpose have not been scrutinised critically for their historical and affective content. To this end, this paper will demonstrate that today's tourism imagery is implicated within the historical practice of the picturesque, an artistic movement of the eighteenth century concerned with the aesthetic appreciation of landscape that continues to influence how tourists construct and consume landscape.

Drawing on diverse areas of study including art history, eighteenth-century aesthetics, tourism studies, and contemporary environmental aesthetics and psychology, this paper explores the picturesque as a continuing historical practice operating within contemporary representations of landscape in promotional tourism imagery. This study presents a brief overview of eighteenth-century aesthetics and the impact of the picturesque on representations of landscape and then, applying cognitive and symbolic frameworks borrowed from theories of environmental aesthetics and landscape preference, analyses a tourism destination image to reveal characteristics consistent with the picturesque aesthetic.

## **Framing the View: Picturesque Landscape in Contemporary Tourism Imagery**

### **Introduction**

In letters written while journeying through Scandinavia in 1795, Mary Wollstonecraft described what she saw in this rarely-visited part of Europe. Her account emphasises the visual impact of her journey. At times her descriptions of the landscape present an experience that is both deeply personal and spiritually transforming. One passage demonstrates this response:

With what ineffable pleasure have I not gazed--and gazed again, losing my breath through my eyes--my very soul diffused itself in the scene--and seeming to become all senses, glided in the scarcely-agitated waves, melted in the freshening breeze, or, taking its flight with fairy wing, to the misty mountains which bounded the prospect . . . . (p. 74)

Wollstonecraft's prose demonstrates her knowledge of the aesthetic theories but also recreates an eighteenth-century traveller's subjective experience of a picturesque view. Simultaneously, this passage presents nature as both sublime in its breathtaking grandeur and picturesque in its intricate details contained within a well-composed frame. A "new kind of unity" (Price, 1965, p. 279) drawing on the aesthetic of the sublime and the beautiful, the picturesque was a hybrid encompassing "the variety and intricacy of microscopic detail united with breadth" (Labbe, 1998, p. 53).

More than just personal correspondence, Wollstonecraft published her letters as part of an already popular genre of travel literature that included descriptive travel books, guides, journals and poems. In the earliest days of organised tourism, tourists had to learn how to be tourists, and this literature, along with contemporary aesthetic philosophies, played a significant role in promoting both travel destinations and the practice of tourism (Watson, 1970; Towner, 1996). Besides telling tourists what they should look at, these works also contributed to a way of thinking about nature and landscape. In an age that was discovering the prospect and creating the landscaped garden, the theories of the sublime and beautiful and the related theory of the picturesque provided travellers with a much needed vocabulary for evaluating the qualities of a view.

The characteristics of the picturesque that attracted the eighteenth-century traveller are still found in contemporary promotional materials. Visitors to Costa Rica, for instance, are promised "a country of breathtakingly beautiful scenery, a wide variety of climates and a rich diversity of plants and animals" (Mexico, Cuba & Central America 2003). Another brochure describes the Amazon River as "a world of mystery, grandeur and romance" with "towering forest and rushing waters [that] harbour an incomparable diversity of life" (South America 2003). These brochures promise the traveller an experience of overwhelming beauty and variety, the same kind of experience sought by

romantic travellers of the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Romanticism encouraged the emotional appreciation of natural scenery and led to the development of scenic tourism, with the experience of nature as an aesthetic goal (Urry, 1990). Current trends indicate that this romantic pursuit is growing in popularity. Urry (1992) claims that increasing numbers of tourists seek "solitude, privacy and a personal, semi-spiritual relationship with their environment" by engaging in the visual consumption of nature as an object of the "romantic gaze" (p. 9). The marketing of tourism destinations by promising an experience that is evocative, inspiring and emotionally overwhelming has become an important aspect of place branding.

Tourists begin their journeys with already formed images in mind, shaped by cultural representations. The visual materials that are part of a complex tourist discourse designed to promote destinations and motivate tourists' choices are not merely contemporary constructions. The iconography of many of today's tourism advertisements featuring natural scenery derive from a tradition of the picturesque, an artistic movement of the eighteenth century concerned with the aesthetic appreciation of landscape. The cult of the picturesque and the rage for travel developed side by side, and today's tourism imagery is implicated within a historical practice that has played a significant part in shaping tourist construction and consumption of landscape. Tourism images and their designers operate within a complex historical discourse of meaning production that includes advertising, tour operators' information, the experiences of tourists, as well as images and concepts provided by popular media and fine art. Promotional imagery generates and reinforces ideas about tourist destinations as part of this culturally generated visual and conceptual material. This paper explores the picturesque as a historical practice still operating within contemporary representation of landscape in promotional tourism imagery.

### **Aesthetics and Tourism**

A brief overview of the aesthetic theories of the eighteenth-century serves as the starting point for this discussion. In one of the most influential works of the eighteenth century, Edmund Burke distinguished the sublime from the beautiful in his *Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* (1757). The two qualities, considered ideas or objective properties, are, according to Burke, "opposite and contradictory" (p. 125) and can be identified by their psychological effect on a perceiver. Personal experience, memory, imagination and physical sensation play a significant part in gauging what is beautiful or sublime. Applied to objects in nature, the pleasure of the beautiful is evoked by their smooth, clear, easily defined, polished, gracefully curved and comparatively small characteristics. In contrast, the qualities that characterise the sublime are ruggedness, immensity, obscurity, jaggedness, vacuity, solitude, silence. Burke argues that "terror is in all cases . . . the ruling

principle of the sublime" (p. 58) and something is terrible when it is "fitted in any sort to excite the ideas of pain, and danger" (p.39). Threatening and dangerous qualities seem to contradict the idea that the sublime is also pleasant, but Burke clarifies this contradiction: "When danger or pain press too nearly, they are incapable of giving any delight . . . but at certain distances, and with certain modifications, they may be, and they are, delightful . . ." (p. 40). An object in of itself is not "sublime" but in the right circumstances can provide the conditions for an observer to experience that quality. What is sublime and beautiful, then, lies not in the object, but arises as a subjective experience resulting from the relationship between the perceiver and the object (Ferguson, 1992).

The extreme emotional and psychological experiences evoked by the sublime make it the more powerful and impressive of the two aesthetic qualities. The attraction of the sublime derives from its ability to move us beyond ordinary experience. Dark and obscure ideas have a greater impact than those that are clear and obvious. Burke claims the sublime produces "the strongest emotion which the mind is capable of feeling" (p. 39). This emotion, which he called "astonishment", causes the mind to be "so entirely filled with its object, that it cannot entertain any other" (p. 57). According to Burke, the astonishment produced by the sublime overwhelms the viewer's mind, essentially preventing it from considering any other thought and often frustrating attempts at description, in effect, an experience that is "unframeable" visually and verbally (Andrews, 1999). For instance, in describing the magnificent scenery of Haford in North Wales, the travel guide writer George Cumberland (1796), claims that "no language can image out the sublimity of the scenes" (cited in Andrews, 1989, p. 147).

The picturesque emerged in the eighteenth century as a hybrid concept that mediated the beautiful and sublime by incorporating elements of both. As aesthetic categories, the sublime and beautiful were not adequate to describe certain visual experiences. For example, objects too small to be terrifying and too rough to be beautiful fit neither category, so the concept of the picturesque served to fill the gap. But the picturesque also identified aesthetic experiences worthy enough to be reproduced visually. Reverend William Gilpin defined the picturesque in *An Essay upon Prints* (1768), as "expressive of that peculiar kind of beauty, which is agreeable in a picture" (cited in Watson, 1970, p. 19). In the early and mid-eighteenth century, the picturesque was associated with the prospect views and panoramas exemplified by the gardens of Capability Brown and the paintings of Claude Lorrain. Claude was admired especially for his idealised rather than topographical representations of the natural world, and his works had become the model for English landscape artists. His paintings were noted, in particular, for their brownish tint, elevated prospects, and landscape details formally arranged along three planes: a background with undefined details; a darkened foreground; and a strongly lit middle ground, usually

with a framing device (*repoussoir*) of trees or mountain sides, designed to draw the viewer's attention to the highlighted middle distance (Andrews, 1989).

By the end of the eighteenth century, however, the picturesque came to refer to a representation of nature that was more detailed and less orderly and even included obscured, or partially hidden, views (Bermingham 1994). Martin Price (1965) describes the picturesque as "the rough or rugged, the crumbling form, the complex or difficult harmony" (p. 277). Instead of the idealised landscape seen from an elevated and detached position, the preferred viewpoint became lower. The viewer, surrounded and enveloped by the scenery, engaged more directly with the details of nature. Uvedale Price, author of *An Essay on the Picturesque* (1794) favoured the wildness and irregularity of this more rugged form of the picturesque and describes its effects on the imagination: "by its variety, its intricacy, its partial concealments, it excites that active curiosity which gives play to the mind, loosening those iron bonds, with which astonishment chains up its faculties" (cited in M. Price, 1965, p. 277). Astonishment, "the strongest emotion" of the sublime, is part of the picturesque experience as well, but its dominance is superseded by curiosity and the stimulation of the imagination through association of ideas and feelings (Hipple, 1957). Instead of being merely the passive receiver acted on by the overwhelming power of nature, viewers have taken on the role of participants imaginatively interacting with the landscape.

The aesthetic theories of the picturesque became an important part of tourists' travel experience, which for many involved not just looking at but also sketching the scenery. In the opening of his first tour description, *Observations on the River Wye* (1782), Gilpin announced a "new object of pursuit" for tourists. Instead of "barely examining the face of the country", he urged tourists to examine nature "by the rules of picturesque beauty: that of not merely describing; but of adapting the description of natural scenery to the principles of artificial landscape" (cited in Andrews, 1999, p. 167). Exploring the concept further in *Three Essays* published in 1792, Gilpin defined the picturesque as a "*happy union of simplicity and variety, to which the rough ideas essentially contribute*" (cited in Hipple, 1957, p. 196). More specifically, the picturesque described scenery characterised by variety and contrasting colour and detail; effects of light and shade; irregularity and ruggedness of form and roughness of texture. Generally, these varied and irregular characteristics were better suited for visual representations than were the potentially monotonous qualities of smoothness and delicacy associated with beauty. The picturesque functioned as "a sentimentalized sublimity", a moderate form of the sublime that provided all its "excitement . . . without its abandon" (Hipple, 1957, p. 191). As such, the idea of the picturesque was an important development in aesthetics and taste, a transition from the classical to the Romantic era and a guide for individuals to appreciate nature in a more personal and emotional way.

Soon, looking for picturesque scenery became an important part of the tourist's routine. In 1789 Hannah More described her experience

sailing down the beautiful river Wye, looking at abbeys and castles, with Mr Gilpin in my hand to teach me to criticize, to talk of foregrounds, and distances, and perspectives, and prominences, with all the cant of connoisseurship, and then to *subdue* my imagination, which had been not a little disordered with this enchanting scenery. (cited in Andrews, 1989, p. 239)

The picturesque aesthetic not only helped tourists organise and understand the visual experience of their journey, but it also intervened in the experience by teaching them how to look, what to say and which landscapes were worthy of praise or study.

### **Nature Refined**

At times nature's art did not correspond to Gilpin's picturesque ideals. Generally, he considered nature "always great in design, but unequal in composition" (cited in Watson, p. 43), and admitted, "I am so attached to my picturesque rules that if nature gets wrong, I cannot help putting her right" (cited in Heffernan p. 8). Nature, it seems, occasionally falls short of picturesque perfection and requires the assistance of his refined and practiced eye. To help his readers visualise his descriptions and corrections, Gilpin illustrated his tours with aquatints of selected landscapes exemplifying the most picturesque scenic views and demonstrated improvements.

For the most part, Gilpin's critical assessments focus on the aesthetic appeal and visual impact of landscape's various elements. Although each of Gilpin's tours deals with a specific part of England, his images and discussion emphasise the general and idealised features of a scene rather than the unique local qualities of a place. For instance, he describes oaks as "the noblest ornament of a foreground", the branches of the beech as "disproportioned" and "twining awkwardly", and the best mountains as those with a "pyramidal shape and easy flow of an irregular line" (cited in Watson, 1970, p. 40). Also, the most picturesque rivers are those that exhibit pleasing qualities in all their features, which includes the composition of the area surrounding the river itself, the enclosing banks that mark the perspective leading into the distance, and the river's winding pathway in the foreground. Based on these criteria, Gilpin proclaims the river view at Perth unsuitable for the picturesque tourist's sketchbook because the Tay "runs in a direct line between parallel banks, from the town to the eye" (cited in Watson, 1970, p. 41).

Although Gilpin recommends that the picturesque traveller seek a nature "untamed by art, and bursting wildly into all its irregular forms", he continuously demonstrates that the most perfect form of nature is one that has been altered and reconstructed from the materials that are presented there: "What glorious

scenes might here be made, if these stubborn materials could yield to the judicious hand of art" (cited in Heffernan, 1985, p. 8). In the process of applying the rules of the picturesque and evaluating nature's shortcomings, Gilpin shows he actually prefers a nature improved and remade to follow picturesque principles of composition, but within reason. For instance, the artist, according to Gilpin, should not add new features to a landscape scene,

but he may certainly break an ill-formed hillock; and shovel the earth about him as he pleases, without offence. He may pull up a piece of awkward paling—he may throw down a cottage—he may even turn the course of a road, or a river, a few yards on this side or that. These trivial alterations may greatly add to the beauty of his composition. (cited in Barrell, 1972, pp. 11-12)

Nature's best is not always good enough, and Gilpin promoted the idea of omitting or correcting her less perfect characteristics to achieve a picturesque scene.

Contemporary depictions of the Lake District, the birthplace of the picturesque, demonstrate the persistence of this idealised view of a landscape designed to fit an idealised conception. Still a popular tourist destination, the Lake District retains the romantic and picturesque associations cultivated in the eighteenth century. In a study exploring the relationship between photographic practices and tourism, Cranshaw and Urry (1997) interviewed a number of professional photographers who lived and worked in the Lake District producing images of the area for postcards, calendars and other promotional materials. The photographers admitted adjusting the scenery so that it conformed to established ideas of the place by occasionally removing intrusive twigs or inappropriate signs of modernity or by adding well-placed daffodils and foxgloves. The study concluded that in producing images of what they believe visitors to the region want to see or imagine they would see, the photographers are perpetuating the dominant visual ideology of the Lakes, constructed in the eighteenth century and reproduced over time, but still retaining the original aesthetic qualities of the picturesque. The historical continuity of imagery authenticates a tourist attraction, reassuring tourists that they are in the "right" place, seeing what they are supposed to see. Such visual conceptions become powerful associations with place and are difficult to change.

The contradiction that exists within the picturesque between the wild, irregular and rugged aspects of nature contained within a refined and perfected form must be understood within a historical context of economic and social change that literally altered the landscape of England. The picturesque movement arose during the time enclosures of the English countryside were accelerating at a dramatic rate, and large portions of the countryside were becoming unrecognisable. Approximately 20 per cent of England's total acreage was enclosed between 1760 and 1820, transforming the landscape into a commercial space of regular, hedgerowed fields (Bermingham, 1986; Short, 1991).

The cult of the picturesque grew in part as a response to this change and was expressed by the search for the untamed and wild landscapes of rural, natural England, far from the regular, manmade enclosures of the improved agrarian landscape or the planned vistas of the landscape gardener. For Gilpin, one of the ideal features of the Lakes was their remoteness from modern life: "At a distance from the refinements of the age, they are at a distance also from its vices" (cited in Brewer, 1997, p. 655). Nature had to be seen as remote and untouched so that, as Gilpin suggested, picturesque travellers could "suppose the country to have been unexplored" (cited in Glickman, 1998, p. 18). Instead, what travellers discovered was a landscape too vast and overwhelming for their comprehension, one that required correcting and control according to the formulaic rules of the picturesque. Untamed nature had to become more orderly and predictable in order to be consumed and appreciated in a comfortable and controlled way. In effect, by transforming nature into something more accessible, picturesque tourists were simply expressing, through their aesthetic preferences, the process of improvement and enclosure they were ostensibly trying to escape.

### **Contemporary Landscape Aesthetics**

Qualities typically associated with the picturesque such as roughness or irregularity of texture and form; obscured and partially concealed views; expansive and dramatic vistas; and varied details providing interest and contrast have also been identified by contemporary researchers in environmental aesthetics as the main criteria governing landscape preference. Some researchers (Orians, 1986; Appleton, 1996; Kaplan, 1987) have theorised that such preferences are the result of evolutionarily conditioned responses to behavioural adaptation, which could then account for the historical consistency of certain landscape preferences. However, the fact that the taste for particular forms of landscape arose only in the mid-eighteenth century calls that idea into question. Nonetheless, certain environmental aesthetic theories provide useful criteria for analysing and explaining the appeal of landscape imagery.

Combining ideas from environmental science, psychology, aesthetics and the visual arts, Appleton (1996) places landscape preference within a symbolic framework associated with the activity of seeking prospects and refuges. "Prospect" refers to a grand overview or maximum opportunity to see, while "refuge" refers to a safe place to hide, a place from which one can see without being seen. This theory explains landscape's appeal as based on a viewer's evaluation of an environment's physical features that would provide opportunities to see and to hide. Appleton argues that the pleasure we experience viewing landscape derives from observing and selecting favorable environments that satisfy fundamental biological needs of food-gathering, procreation and shelter-seeking.



Kaplan (1987, 1992) presents another theory of landscape preference also based on an evolutionary perspective of survival instincts, but focusing instead on viewers' cognitive experience. He argues that moving safely through an environment requires skill and knowledge, and our preference for landscapes is linked to how effectively we comprehend and engage with our surroundings. In effect, landscapes that aid and encourage exploration, navigation and information-processing are preferred over those that interfere with these activities. Kaplan's research has identified four predictors of landscape preference: complexity, coherence, legibility and mystery. The qualities of complexity, coherence and legibility tend to be moderate predictors of landscape preference. Mystery, however, "a remarkably reliable and effective predictor" of landscape preference (Kaplan et al., 1989, p. 517), is the most important of the four. In general, then, Kaplan's findings suggest that preferred landscapes are those that are easy to read and negotiate, but they should be engaging and intriguing as well.

Kaplan and Appleton's preference theories are useful for a number of reasons. First of all, they provide a systematic approach to analysing the properties of landscape in terms of its potential to satisfy viewers cognitively and emotionally. Analysis of tourism imagery that considers a landscape image's overall composition as well as its potential effect on a viewer demonstrates the dynamic relationship that exists between viewer and environment, a relationship that cannot be demonstrated just through analysis of individual landscape features. Also, together, these approaches reflect the feeling/reason dichotomy operating in romantic aesthetic theories and explain aesthetic experience as a relationship between viewer and object. Appleton's focus is on the viewer's psychology, or feelings, in relation to the symbolic values of landscape features, while Kaplan emphasises the cognitive, or rational, experience of the viewer. Commenting on the eighteenth-century aestheticians of the picturesque, Appleton claims that "the ideas which they introduced or developed contained the germ of what we may well regard as a modern view" (1996, p. 35).

### **The Appeal of Landscape**

Analysis of one image, the 'View from Mt. Alfred' produced as part of Tourism New Zealand's '100% Pure New Zealand' campaign, demonstrates the application of contemporary environmental aesthetic theories of Kaplan and Appleton. For the purposes of this discussion, this analysis will focus on only two of Kaplan's four preference criteria, coherency and mystery, and will look at how Appleton's symbolic system provides insight into the subjective and affective experience of landscape. This approach shows how considering the formal aspects of this image reveals its compositional logic and also explains its aesthetic appeal. Also, comparison with earlier aesthetic theories demonstrates how the picturesque has been retained in the construction of contemporary tourism imagery.

This particular image, used continuously in overseas print and television advertisements since the launch of the '100% Pure' campaign in 1999, has played a significant part in the marketing of New Zealand as a tourism destination to Western European and North American markets. This landscape scene depicts a man and a woman turned away from the viewer, standing on a hilltop in the foreground and looking towards a craggy mountain range that encloses the background and stretches into the distance. A meandering river extends from the right-hand side of the image, winds between the hills and disappears among the mountain ranges. Dark, rugged hills and outcroppings lie to the left and right of the river and contrast with smooth green valleys. Sunlight, originating from the direction of the mountain range and indicated by the long shadows extending from the two figures in the foreground, highlights the reflective water surfaces, the valleys, the tops of the mountain ranges and the hilltop in the foreground.

First of all, coherency is a significant feature of this image. Kaplan (1992) explains coherency as a patterned repetition of identifiable features of a landscape that organises the image and suggests an underlying logic in the arrangement of a scene. Appleton (1996) claims the compositional balance of a landscape image is determined by the relative proportion of the number of prospect and refuge symbols present which then projects a particular tendency or 'feel'. In this image some opportunities for seclusion are suggested by the darker, bush-covered hills, but it is primarily dominated by prospect symbols, such as concave, elevated surfaces and brightly-lit, smooth, open areas with low ground cover offering unimpeded views. Repetition and duplication of features emphasise the prospect-dominant feel of this image and create a sense of order. Repetition in the 'View from Mt. Alfred', for instance, can be seen in the rhythm of the jagged mountaintops extending in a horizontal line across the background and in the pattern of the dark mounds of the irregular hills. Also, the silhouette of the figures' heads and shoulders are echoed in the shapes of the mountains in the background. Balance, order and strong interrelationships construct a visually interesting and formally coherent landscape, one that can be construed as harmonious, an especially significant quality of picturesque landscapes. Uvedale Price, for instance, describes a good landscape as

that in which all the parts are free and unconstrained, but in which, though some are prominent and highly illuminated, and others in shade and retirement; some rough, and others more smooth and polished, yet they are all necessary to the beauty, energy, effect, and harmony of the whole. (cited in Andrews, 1989, p. 65-66)

The prospect dominance of this image is further enhanced by its primary and secondary vantage points. A primary vantage point, according to Appleton, is a position of observation that offers a direct and unobstructed view. In this image, a primary prospect is suggested by the placement of the figures in the foreground. However, landscapes can present secondary viewing positions such as hilltops, mountains

and rocky outcroppings that symbolically suggest alternative, and perhaps more extended, viewing opportunities. One of the most important secondary prospects in this image, the horizon extending along the mountain range stretching across the background, operates as an especially effective symbolic vantage point; it suggests an opportunity to see further and directs the viewer to speculate about what lies on the other side (Appleton, 1996). The horizon is further enhanced by a phenomenon Appleton refers to as a "false sky dado", identified by a bright, white layer contrasting with the deep blue of the sky above and created by diffused light in the lower atmosphere (1996, p. 104). This effect adds to the prospect symbolism of the image by drawing the viewer's attention toward the distance and to an imagined potential view beyond.

Mystery, conveyed by landscape features that indicate additional interesting information could be discovered with further exploration or change of vantage point, is a key element in Kaplan's information model of environmental preference and is also a particularly compelling characteristic of this image. The many landscape features that present intriguing opportunities for new prospects also suggest that an observer could acquire more information merely by moving deeper into the scene. For instance, the horizon, as noted earlier, provides a stimulus for the imagination and a potential vantage-point for seeing further. The hills and mountains overlook concealed views that offer opportunities for refuge as well as exploration. Even the winding river creates a "deflected vista" as it bends out of sight that suggests possible opportunities for further exploration.

The physical characteristics of this image, its formal arrangements, including the pyramidal mountains and hills with their flowing irregular lines and the meandering river receding into the distance, define it as picturesque according to Gilpin's criteria. More significantly, however, the effect of this image on the viewer also makes it picturesque. The quality of landscape defined by Kaplan (1987) as "mystery" is similar to the characteristic of "curiosity", identified by Uvedale Price as the primary effect of the picturesque and a stimulus that maintains and directs the viewer's attention. The potential of the extended view was considered by Burke to be an especially appealing aspect of the sublime as well. In contemplating infinity, Burke claims, "the imagination is entertained with the promise of something more, and does not acquiesce in the present object of the sense" (p. 77). One consistent quality that underlies the aesthetics of the past and the present, then, is that viewers prefer images that present opportunities for them to participate imaginatively in the scene.

### **Taking in the View**

Imaginative participation means that viewers need to critically engage with the image by being able to identify the components of the image and interpret their symbolic significance. To appreciate a

landscape, viewers imagine themselves interacting with the depicted space to determine the possibilities that an environment may present. Overall, while such assessments are largely automatic and unconscious being derived from conditioned responses, Kaplan (1987) argues that they result from "a complex relationship that exists between the observer and the environment [and] cannot be detected directly in terms of feature analysis" (p. 22). In other words, the overall impact of an image derives from how the features work together as a whole and, more importantly, how effectively the scene encourages viewer identification and participation.

Historically, paintings of landscapes have often included figures, not as the painting's focus but as devices to convey ideas about the landscape. The Rückenfigur, a figure in a painting that is turned away from the viewer, has been used by painters since the early Renaissance as a surrogate or guide for the viewer. The viewer looks at the depicted figure looking at the scene in order to understand the experience, but the Rückenfigur with its back to the viewer seems unaware of the viewer's presence. This lack of awareness, however, is part of the image's appeal and actually compels viewer identification with the figures in the scene.

Fried (1980) has discussed this paradoxical relationship between painting and viewer as a tendency of mid- and late-eighteenth-century art. Paintings that include figures turned away or completely absorbed in some activity deny the viewers' presence but simultaneously encourage viewer identification with the depicted characters and their activities. Fried (1981) explains that "the effect of the figure portrayed from the rear is . . . to remove all sense of confrontation between painting and beholder and thereby to facilitate the virtual merging" of the two (p. 111). Images of tourists engaged in the activities of their vacation destination function in a similar way. The backs of the figures in the 'View of Mt. Alfred' enclose the scene, essentially walling off the image, but the representation of their focused attention invites viewer identification, especially because the figures' faces are obscured. According to Cohen (1993) when locals are represented in tourism imagery, they function as part of the environment and ambience of the destination, but travellers shown with their backs to the viewer "vicariously substitute for the observer of the image—the prospective tourist" (Cohen, 1993, p. 49). They direct the viewers' gaze and show what they would be seeing if they were standing in that place. In effect, the visual convention of the Rückenfigur functions in contemporary tourism imagery in the same way that it did in romantic painting of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, as a device to initiate viewer identification with the figures in the image and participation in the scene itself.

Not only does the 'View from Mt Alfred' use a formal device derived from romantic painting, but it also borrows a theme from romantic landscape paintings, especially those of Caspar David Friedrich. The

motif of the Rückenfigur recurs throughout Friedrich's works and represent travellers who have stopped on their journey to contemplate a sublime, natural scene. Koerner (1985) suggests that Friedrich's paintings are "not so much a picture of a landscape, as a picture of a unique and private experience of landscape" (p. 160). The same can be said of the 'View from Mt Alfred'. Like Friedrich's painting, the '100% Pure New Zealand' ad dramatises the contemplation of nature and the astonishment that is felt when confronting a breathtaking view. What is depicted here is not just the beauty of untouched and unspoiled nature far removed from the modern world, but a personal and emotional experience of an awe-inspiring landscape conveyed in the image by the simple gesture of the man's arm resting on the shoulder of the woman. The moment is one that is so moving that it can only be shared in silence and through touch. Words cannot express the emotional experience; the view, as the ad promises, takes the breath away as well as the voice ("You catch your breath") and guarantees a spiritual experience, one that is often missing in modern society. This emotional and subjective experience plays a significant part of the picturesque experience as well, since, according to Gilpin, "we are most delighted when some grand scene . . . strikes us beyond the power of thought . . . every mental operation is suspended . . . We rather feel than survey it" (cited in Andrews, 1989, p. 44).

What we see, then, is not an image of a sublime landscape but a depiction of a subjective experience of a sublime landscape set within a picturesque frame that defers the experience of the sublime. Andrews (1999) argues that the sublime is "pictorially unframeable, and it cannot be framed in words. The sublime is that which we cannot appropriate, if only because we cannot discern any boundaries" (p. 142). The picturesque, however, contains the sublime, constrain the excesses of nature and suggest the possibility of more to be experienced if we step into the frame. Instead of being overwhelmed, we are imaginatively engaged; rather than being fearful, we are emotionally captivated. "The picturesque . . . renders the terrors of nature sublimely acceptable. They are subsumed into cultural forms that we find nicely awesome, something to be wondered at, but not terrified by" (Taylor, 1999, p. 74). The picturesque aesthetic persists in landscape imagery and maintains the symbolic myth of the sublime within comfort-producing restraints, making nature comprehensible and accessible, and therefore easy to consume.

## **Conclusion**

The overall goal of this paper was to understand the picturesque aesthetic as a historical practice within the discourse of tourism that still shapes the way landscape images are constructed and consumed. This brief study points to further research that should be conducted, including the cognitive and symbolic analysis of many more examples of images of landscape promoting tourism destinations. To position these images within a historical practice their iconographic content should be considered as well. Also,

it is suggested that qualitative research be conducted examining the potential tourists themselves in order to identify their subjective and emotional responses to these landscape images. Such research would hopefully add to our understanding of the appeal of landscape and would be a valuable contribution to the body of knowledge comprising the history of tourism.

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