Reading Landscape
We began with the claim that reading landscape is more complex than it first appears – It is problematic – It requires a critical examination
First, a Landscape

• A slideshow of faces on posters on Toronto’s College St, March 2011

• How do we “read” it?
McKay Reading

• Ian McKay’s 1993 paper on Historical Nova Scotia and the Tourist Gaze
• What is McKay saying about the landscape of Nova Scotia?
McKay

- The ‘heritage’ landscapes of Nova Scotia were created/shaped for tourism
- Heritage was
  - Often invented, often suppressed
- Nova Scotia re-invents itself as a theme-park of sanitised history for tourists
  - White middle-class ones with money
Landscape of Nova Scotia is reshaped to suit a tourist audience

- But we pretend that the new landscape is ‘authentic’.
Ideology

• What is ideology?
• A made-up bunch of ideas that you can live by
  – Which we pretend aren’t really made up
• Nova Scotia ‘heritage’ landscapes are full of ‘ideology’
  – Made-up but we pretend they are ‘authentic’.
Landscape as Culture

• Landscape is shaped by culture
  – The landscapes themselves
  – The ways of looking at them
Early 18th Century Europe

- Elite culture believed that mountains and wild places were frightening and unaesthetic
  - Delicate ladies advised to look at them through mirrors
The Picturesque

- C. 1780s elite culture persuaded to view landscape as a carefully-composed painting
  - Often through a picture frame
  - Aided by guides, guide books
  - The picturesque
DOCTOR SYNTAX SKETCHING THE LAKE.
The Picturesque

- Rich landowners sometimes remodelled their estates to make them more "picturesque"
  - Adding tasteful ruins
  - Removing unsightly villages, hills etc.,
The Picturesque

- Eventually becomes deeply absorbed into the culture of landscape
Mediation

• In these examples people’s encounters with landscape are mediated
  – Perhaps through a physical device (the picture frame)
  – But mainly through a culture of looking
Present-day tourism

• Obsessed with mediated visual consumption of landscape
  – You go ‘sightseeing’
  – You visit ‘landmarks’
  – You stop at ‘viewpoints’
  – You read guidebooks, go on guided tours
  – You take photographs
  – All of it mediated
DESIGNATED PICNIC AREA
This is not a photo opportunity
The Gaze

• Mediation is crucial to the ways people read landscape
  – You tend not to see what is really there
  – But what your culture tells you is there

• The Gaze: a culturally-mediated way of looking
What’s in a Gaze?

• Michel Foucault:
  – Gaze embodies dominance, power, control
What’s in a Gaze?

• Jacques Lacan
  – The Gaze is part of the symbolic order from which you form your identity
  – Power influences it, but the Gaze is about identity, not dominance
The Tourist Gaze
Tourist Gaze

- Tourist as the western Self
- Gazes at the “exotic” Other
  - sight seeing
  - taking photos
  - buying postcards
tourist lol!
Golden Week 2012
The Tourist Gaze

- A mediated reading of landscape
- As in the picturesque, tourist landscapes get re-organized around the tourist Gaze
Tourist Shot User Manual

1. Touch
2. Support
3. Hold
4. Kiss
5. Smoke
6. Drink
7. Hug
8. Hang
9. POINT
The Double Hermeneutic

• Readers cannot read *exactly* the message the author intended

• To convey a message both author and reader much each interpret
  – The author interprets a message into writing
  – The reader interprets writing into a message

• Creators of landscape culture cannot control how people react to it
  – Although they try
Hong Kong 2003

- Advertised for tourists under the slogan “Hong Kong will take your breath away”
But the 2003 SARS epidemic made that embarrassing.
The Bulls of Wall St NYC
Sliding Signs & Signifiers

• The relationship between a symbol and what it symbolises is unstable
  – Proud Victorian statues become objects of fun in a later age

• Monuments are documents
  – Read, re-read and reinterpreted

• Ordinary people don’t necessarily react to landscape as the elite intends
Positivism

• Basically, the scientific method
• The observer sees things
  – Makes organized observations
  – Builds these into interpretations, theories, scientific laws
Reality

• It is problematic to make observations
  – To privilege observation is to accept a culture dominated by the visual

• Observing is mediated
  – By technologies
  – By the senses
  – By culture
The Power of Interpretation

• Academic and public culture is big on interpretation
  – Bodies of theory, cultures of interpretation
  – People’s careers depend upon it

• In academic culture things tend to get politicised
  – Political theory dominates
TAYLORS of HARROGATE

YORKSHIRE TEA

TREAT YOURSELF TO A RICH, REFRESHING CUP OF TEA WITH OUR COMPLIMENTS
Drinking Tea

- Seems a symbol of British culture
- But academic culture senses politics
  - Colonialism
  - Globalization
  - Racism
- This may be true
- But academic culture is also a mediated culture, a Gaze.
Cultural Geography

• For the past 20 years or so has been obsessed with power and politics
• The only important thing shaping landscape is power
• Culture becomes reduced to power relations
Michael De Certeau

- Noticed that there is a huge gap between the self-appointed interpreters of culture and the ordinary people they theorise about.
- Academic culture tends to marginalise the ordinary person.
  - Ordinary people drink tea without realizing the politics involved.
The Issue of Time

• We are reading landscapes through time
• Landscapes exist, vary, change over time
  – And the interpretation of time is also culturally mediated, a Gaze
One Landscape, Two Times of Day

- Salsa on St Clair 2012:
  - Saturday Afternoon
  - Saturday Evening
Palimpsest

- concept
- examples
Colchester, England
Toronto’s Distillery District
Toronto’s Little India

- 1910s Anglo-Canadian buildings
- 21st Century Indo-Canadian businesses
- A palimpsest
Merry Christmas
Palimpsest

- Need to look at what is there
- ... and also what is missing
New St, Newark NJ 1970s
Conclusion

• Reading landscape is more complex than it seems at first
  – Landscape and its culture shaped by politics and other factors which can be hard to notice
  – The complexity unfolds over time.
  – And time can be ‘political’ too.