

Icelandic Landscapes

Beauty and the Aesthetic in Environmental
Decision-Making

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Dissertation towards the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

University of Iceland
The School of Humanities
Faculty of history and philosophy
February 2015

Sagnfræði- og heimspekideild Háskóla Íslands
hefur metið ritgerð þessa hæfa til varnar
við doktorspróf í heimspeki

Reykjavík, 5. janúar 2015

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Faculty of history and philosophy
at the University of Iceland
has declared this dissertation eligible for a defense
leading to a PhD degree in philosophy

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Icelandic Landscapes: Beauty and the Aesthetic in Environmental Decision-Making

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Reykjavík 2015

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ISBN 978-9935-9189-9-4

Printed by: Háskólaprent ehf

Abstract

This thesis is a study of the aesthetics of Icelandic landscapes. The aim of the thesis is to gain a deeper understanding of the meaning of landscape and the values which are derived from the aesthetic experience of Icelandic landscapes, and to think of ways of integrating that meaning and value into environmental decision-making. Icelandic landscapes are often praised for their unique beauty; they are seen as Iceland's most important national symbol and as a core aspect of the Icelandic national identity. However, there has been a lack of a proper language to describe the aesthetic experience of Icelandic landscapes and the meanings and values associated with them. In order to find this language and its proper place in the political systems of planning and decision-making this thesis first explores the concepts of beauty, landscape, and the aesthetic from a phenomenological point of view. The phenomenological approach provides the possibility of getting beyond the narrow dualistic understanding of the concepts of beauty and landscape that has led to the exclusion of aesthetic values in decision-making on the grounds that they are too subjective and difficult to measure. Secondly, the thesis examines the actual aesthetic experiences of two Icelandic landscape types (glaciers and geothermal landscapes) through phenomenological and qualitative research methods, and reflects philosophically on the meaning and value derived from these experiences. The way we understand the meaning and value of landscape directly affects the methods and approaches we use to deal with it in decision-making, and hence the last part of the thesis consists in an elaboration of how the understanding of landscape, beauty and aesthetic value provided in this thesis can be made productive in our approach to these issues in decision-making.

Ágrip

Íslenskt landslag: Fegurð og fagurfræði í ákvarðanatöku um náttúruvernd og -nýtingu

Ritgerð þessi byggir á rannsókn á fagurfræði íslensks landslags. Markmið ritgerðarinnar er að öðlast dýpri skilning á merkingu landslags og þeirra gilda sem eru tengd við fagurfræðilega upplifun af íslensku landslagi; og að finna leiðir til þess að taka megi tillit til slíkrar merkingar og gilda í ákvarðanatöku um náttúruvernd og -nýtingu. Íslenskt landslag er þekkt fyrir einstaka fegurð sína; rannsóknir hafa sýnt að landslagið er eitt mikilvægasta þjóðartákn Íslendinga og á sterkan þátt í sjálfsmynd þjóðarinnar. Samt sem áður hefur skort tungumál til þess að lýsa fagurfræðilegum upplifunum af íslensku landslagi og þeirri merkingu og gildum sem tengd eru við þær. Til þess að leita leiða til að þróa tungumál sem nær utan um gildi og merkingu fagurfræðilegra upplifana varpar ritgerðin í fyrsta lagi ljósi á landslagshugtakið, fegurðarhugtakið og fagurfræði út frá sjónarhorni fyrirbærafræðinnar. Þessi fyrirbærafræðilega nálgun býður upp á möguleikann á því að komast handan þess þrönga skilnings er byggir á tvíhyggju sem hefur einkennt hefðbundnar túlkanir á þessum hugtökum. Það er þessi tvíhyggja sem hefur leitt til þess að fagurfræðileg gildi hafa verið hundsud í ákvarðanatöku á þeim forsendum að þau séu of huglæg og þess vegna illmælanleg. Í öðru lagi er í ritgerðinni leitast við að varpa ljósi á raunverulegar fagurfræðilegar upplifanir af tveimur íslenskum landslagsgerðum (jöklum og háhitasvæðum) með því að nota fyrirbærafræðilegar og eigindlegar rannsóknaraðferðir, og að greina heimspekilega þá merkingu og gildi sem leiða má af þessum upplifunum. Skilningur okkar á merkingu og gildi landslags hefur bein áhrif á þær aðferðir og nálganir sem notast er við til þess að meta landslag þegar kemur að ákvarðanatöku, og því fjallar síðasti hluti ritgerðarinnar um það hvernig sá skilningur á landslagi, fegurð og hinu fagurfræðilega sem ritgerðin byggir á getur komið að gagni í nálgunum er varða landslagsmál í ákvarðanatöku.

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Preface

While I was studying for an MA degree in environmental values in the UK, a fiery debate was ongoing in Iceland concerning the building of the Kárahnjúkar dam, whose reservoir would drown a large part of the Icelandic central highland. This was in 2005, at the highpoint of the debate that went on from 2003-2007.¹ This is one of the biggest environmental controversies that has come up in Iceland and has been described as the debate that split the nation in two (Karlsdóttir 2010, 157-201). Even though the Kárahnjúkar dam is already in use, the same core environmental debate continues to arise whenever plans are made or discussed to build new hydropower dams or geothermal power plants: the debate about whether natural² landscapes that are relatively untouched by human influence should be sacrificed for the financial profits gained by selling cheap energy to big industrial corporations.

As I was following this debate from a distance in 2005 and studying for a course on environmental aesthetics I realized that the issues that were at the core of the Kárahnjúkar debate concerned the *aesthetic values* of Icelandic nature. The problem with the debate was that these values were being ignored and dismissed as too subjective and relative to play any role in real world environmental planning and decision-making. Opponents of the dam-building (many of whom were artists) claimed that the building of the dam would destroy a site characterized by unique beauty and that this would therefore leave a great scar in the uninhabited central highland.³ The response to this claim was dismissal; claiming that a site should be protected because of its beauty was seen as the equivalent of mere personal opinion, and personal opinions and feelings should not have any effect on decision-making. Thus the aesthetic values of Icelandic

¹ In 2003 contracts were signed between Icelandic authorities and the aluminium company Alcoa to build a smelter in Reyðarfjörður and a huge hydropower plant to provide it with energy. The Kárahnjúkar dam's reservoir was filled in 2007.

² When I use the term *natural* landscape I am referring to what is perhaps most suitably described as *non-anthropogenic* landscape as opposed to *anthropogenic* or *cultural* landscape. I choose to hold on to the terms natural and cultural but bearing in mind the understanding that the notions of non-anthropogenic and anthropogenic are meant to capture; how even uninhabited environments are today affected by human activities (Glaciers are for example going through rapid changes due to the effects of global warming that is caused by human activities). I use the term environment when referring to the all-inclusive interdependent and connected whole of which nature, humans, organic and inorganic systems and objects are all part of (this notion will be discussed further later in the thesis), but I in some cases also use the terms natural and cultural environment when speaking of the different parts of this all-inclusive environment that are either non-anthropogenic or anthropogenic, but always inevitably affected by human activities, as humans are inevitably affected by the environments they dwell in.

³ Of course they also pointed out the ecological destruction that would result from the building of the dam, but since the Icelandic highlands are not very rich in bio-diversity, the value of the landscape as such played a central role (Karlsdóttir 2010).

nature were never discussed as such, they were not even referred to or considered as aesthetic values but rather as subjective emotions.

When I returned to Iceland after finishing my Master's degree I came into contact with Dr. Þorvarður Árnason who was at the time starting work on the Icelandic Landscape Project (ILP) along with Dr. Þóra Ellen Þórhallsdóttir. The ILP was a part of the Icelandic government's ongoing effort to create a Master Plan for Hydro and Geothermal Energy Resources, work which was initiated in 1999.⁴ The aim of the Master Plan is to evaluate and rank all significant sources of hydropower and geothermal energy in Iceland, with the aim of creating a clearer basis for environmental policy and decision-making and thus decreasing the chances of another controversy like the Kárahnjúkar case happening in the future. But after the initial work on the Master Plan's first phase it was clear that when it came to evaluating and ranking landscapes, there was a serious lack both of data and methodology to build on. According to a report from Working Group I that dealt with landscape evaluation in the Master Plan's first phase there was no empirical basis at all for making such evaluations: "The evaluation was especially difficult when it came to landscape and wilderness. There were few foreign examples to work from, the legal structure was badly defined and no existing tradition of taking such values into account" (Björnsson 2003, 10-11, my translation). The Master Plan's project management thus decided to conduct research on landscape evaluation and classification, and the Icelandic Landscape Project came into existence.

The directors of the ILP saw that the data that would be collected within the project would also hold great potential for further research so they encouraged me and other students at the University of Iceland to make use of the ILP's data and study Icelandic landscapes from different theoretical approaches. Since the ILP would primarily be focused on using the data for constructing a viable, applied methodology for the classification of natural landscapes in Iceland, it could benefit from sharing the

⁴ The Master Plan for the Use of Hydro and Geothermal Energy Resources was initiated by the Government of Iceland in 1999. In 2009 a new government formed by social democrats and the left-green party changed the title of the Master Plan into "Master Plan for the Protection and Use of Natural Areas with an Emphasis on Hydro and Geothermal Areas" allegedly with the aim of focusing not only on the use of energy resources but also on their protection. The aim of the Master Plan is to evaluate and categorize proposed power projects into three categories of use, protection and undecided, i.e. deeming further research: "on the basis of efficiency, economic profitability, and how they will benefit the economy as a whole. The implications for employment and regional development will also be considered. Furthermore, the impact on the environment, nature, and wildlife will be evaluated, as well as the impact on the landscape, cultural heritage and ancient monuments, grazing and other traditional land use, outdoor activities fishing, and hunting" (Rammaáætlun [Master Plan] 2013). The first phase was finished in 2003 with a preliminary ranking, but was unable to complete the final evaluation due to lack of scientific research. Work on the second phase started in 2007 and was finished in the beginning of 2010. Work on the third phase is now starting, in 2014.

data with other researchers whose contributions could enrich the ILP with their more theoretically oriented perspectives.

At the time, environmental aesthetics hardly existed as a subject of research or part of the curriculum in Icelandic academia, so there was not much knowledge of the theoretical language that existed and had been used to describe and analyze the values that people associate with their experiences of natural beauty. Thus there was no theoretical grounding for discussing these values that at the same time were proving to be very important to Icelanders. So when asked if I was interested in doing research on philosophical issues in relation to the landscape concept I soon came to the conclusion that examining the aesthetic experience and values of Icelandic landscapes might prove to be a fruitful and hopefully useful way forward, since it was evident that one of the core aspects of the landscape concept was its relation to aesthetic experience. I thus decided to start work on this PhD thesis on landscape and aesthetic value at the University of Iceland's School of Humanities, Faculty of History and Philosophy.

The ILP's work is based on certain conceptions of landscape where landscape value is understood as having both subjective and objective aspects. The project was thus meant to be divided into two parts that would then be combined in a comprehensive account of the intertwining of subjective and objective qualities. The first part dealt with classification based on the objective visual physical characteristics of the landscape, and the second, the evaluation part, was intended to deal with the more subjective aspect of landscape; people's perception of the landscape and the aesthetic values associated with it. The ILP's aim was thus to find ways of defining and categorizing Icelandic landscapes, based on their physical and visual characteristics, e.g. in order to determine their conservation value relative to one another. This raises questions about the relationship(s) between the physical/visual characteristics of these landscapes and their aesthetic values, for example: How – or to what extent – should aesthetic factors or elements be taken into account in the process of landscape definition and classification? On the basis of this approach I decided to focus my research on the “subjective” aesthetic side of landscape since this seemed to be the aspect of the concept that was more closely associated with the aesthetic valuing of nature I was interested in exploring from the viewpoint of environmental aesthetics.

In the summer of 2007, as I was starting to think about this thesis, I also started working for the ILP project on continuing the data collection for the classification part of the project that had been started the year before. This work (continuing in the summer of 2008) provided me with a bank of experiences of a variety of Icelandic landscapes and also with an insight into what is involved in trying to look at landscape through an objective lens – classifying and categorizing its physical qualities. Even though the data we were collecting was very important – providing basic information about the variety, diversity, qualities and categories of Icelandic landscapes – the

experience of narrowing landscape down to its physical features made me realize how all the other aspects of experiencing landscape were equally and even more important.⁵ It made me realize that this method *alone* could never capture what landscape really is and what its value might be.⁶ It could never capture the experience of being there: smelling the air, moving around in the landscape, hearing the sounds, touching and being on, with and around the rock, the water, the vegetation – all the elements that we so carefully listed and quantified on our check-lists. It could never capture the thoughts, the emotions, the feeling of being *me in this landscape* and how that feeling influences my whole being at that moment and from that moment. This feeling of me gave me a different sense of “me” given the strong sense for relation with the land as nature, often vulnerable and endangered, but also peaceful and thriving. It gave me a sense for interrelationality of all things (Skúlason 2005), and how our understanding of nature and culture are stuck in dichotomies. How natural environments are technologized in various ways, undermining a distinction of the natural and the cultural. It seemed to me that the land, in different forms, unspoilt or inhabited, became a philosophical text, a way of thinking about the self (“me”) as a relational entity, and how the subjective and the objective seemed to eschew any clear cut distinction. Being in the land felt being *of* the land and at the same time that the land was dependent on the human in important respects. I also felt strongly that this experience of landscape could not be reduced to a “mere” romantic sentiment, but that it was in a dire need of being understood as something profound and important. I had come to understand that the aesthetic encompasses something more than a subjective feeling and that the notion of beauty was something much more profound than an aesthetic, personal sentiment.

This was an aesthetic experience that led to a discovery of the forces that shape land and the different values we attribute to it. I saw how the “objective” approach to landscape alone could never capture this emotive, affective experience of landscape and how the distinction between the subjective and the objective is yet another false dichotomy that permeates environmental assessment thinking, discourses and policies. I realized that we need to get over this type of dualistic thinking to be able to take into account the value of “subjective” approaches, so often downplayed or dismissed, as well as the shortcomings of “objective” approaches that are in their very nature only able to capture part of the spectrum. All this became increasingly clear to me as I spent

⁵ The field work consisted in filling out a landscape check list of physical features such as color, forms, vegetation etc. (preferably in clear sky weather conditions), and taking photographs and videos of the landscape (taken 360° from a certain point) for further analysis and verification purposes.

⁶ The ILP project’s focus was on finding out what types of landscape exist in Iceland and how rare or diverse they are relative to one another. This part of the ILP was never meant to stand alone or to give a comprehensive account of the value and meaning of landscape, rather it was meant as a necessary starting point for any landscape assessment: knowing what types of landscapes there are and their basic physical characteristics.

more time thinking about these various landscape experiences and discussing them with my co-workers on our data collection expeditions. At this time I had also started examining my own experiences of the landscape types that I had decided to focus on in my research (that is natural landscapes characteristic of Iceland but rare elsewhere in the world, such as glaciers and geothermal areas) by spending time alone in such landscapes and writing up phenomenological descriptions of my own experiences there. It became clear to me in this work that these two methods of examining landscape; filling out forms and taking pictures to document the physical qualities with another person on the one hand, and spending time alone in a place, paying attention to all the details of my experience on the other hand, are fundamentally different ways of approaching the landscape. But I also saw how they could complement each other. So I became very excited to be able to compare my data from the phenomenological descriptions with the data that would be collected within the evaluation part of the ILP⁷ and then to see how the connection between the evaluation part and the classification part of the ILP would play out. But as time went by it became clear that there was opposition amongst key stakeholders in the Board of the Master Plan to the aims of the second part of the ILP, i.e. to develop and apply an empirical methodology for the evaluation of landscape values, aesthetic and otherwise, and thus in the end the funding of the evaluation part was redirected to further work on classification. Of course I was very disappointed that the great importance of getting a full account of landscape by combining the “objective” and “subjective” was not acknowledged. Both approaches offer partial perspectives that when added together offer a more comprehensive account.⁸ But since the data I had been hoping for was not going to be available I decided instead to do my own qualitative examination of people’s experiences of Icelandic landscapes.

I decided to focus on geothermal and glacial landscapes since these are among the landscape types that characterize Icelandic natural landscapes the most. Even though I couldn’t get information about these experiences nation wide, the experiences of around 50 Icelandic and foreign participants in my research have provided me with a rich account of common aspects of experiencing landscapes that are characteristic for Icelandic nature. Of course it would have been very useful to have a nation wide data collection, however, the opportunity to dive so deep into the experiences of fewer participants has given me rich data that is very different from what I would have gotten from the ILP’s bigger scale data collection.⁹ This experiment has also provided

⁷ The aims of this part of the project was to study public perception and evaluation of landscape.

⁸ As Haraway (1988) argues, all perspectives are always partial.

⁹ Both these approaches, a large scale quantitative study and a small scale qualitative study, have their pros and cons, and using both methods together (along with other methods as well) would in my view be the best way to get as full an account as possible, given circumstances and conditions. The issue of methodology for landscape assessment will be discussed in chapter four.

information about how one might possibly identify the “subjective” aspect of landscape and hopefully this will prove useful when the evaluation part of the ILP or other equivalent projects will be done in the future. The “subjective” element has in this research disclosed itself as much richer than a “mere” subjective viewpoint according to the common understanding of the term. The subject is embedded, the subject carries a set of values, and the relation to “nature” displays a relation to nature/culture insofar nature is part of embodied being in a contested political struggle about land and its meanings and uses. As I have been describing, these landscape experiences; my own and those of my co-workers and the participants in my qualitative study, played a central role in forming the content of this thesis. These experiences, as well as experiencing the problematic situation in environmental decision-making in Iceland where the values that seemed most important to the public were ignored, led me to search for philosophical routes that have been taken to move beyond this central subject-object dichotomy that was at the heart of environmental debates in Iceland. Discussions with colleagues at the University of Iceland were also influential at this point. During my first years of PhD studies I had the opportunity to take part in a reading group on the philosophy of nature/environmental philosophy with my colleagues at the department of philosophy, Sigríður Þorgeirsdóttir, Páll Skúlason, Björn Þorsteinsson, Gabriel Malenfant and Jón Á. Kalmansson.¹⁰ These philosophers are all working on philosophical issues concerning our relations to nature. The exchange of ideas and discussions we had in this reading group were very inspiring and played an important role in shaping my approach in this project. In our discussions we found that many of the basic distinctions that have characterized the field (for example anthropocentrism vs. non-anthropocentrism, and instrumental vs. intrinsic value) are becoming unstable and unnecessary. We also discussed how phenomenological approaches go deeper than this by showing how such sharp distinctions are dissolved when the intertwining of subject and object is acknowledged. Taking part in the conference “Nature in the Light of Phenomenology and Asian Philosophy” that was held at the University of Iceland in 2009, in relation to a research project with the same title, was inspiring as well.

This philosophical context is important to my approach, but so is interdisciplinarity. I benefitted greatly from also taking part in a reading group on landscape with an interdisciplinary group of researchers that are interested in the landscape concept. Two of the researchers in this group later edited the book *Conversations with Landscape* (Benediktsson & Lund 2010), which I and other Icelandic

¹⁰ Icelandic philosophers have paid considerable attention to philosophies of nature and environment. See for example: Skúlason (1998; 2005; 2008), Þorgeirsdóttir (2005; 2007; 2010), Árnason (2005); Árnason & Haraldson (eds.) (1994), Jónsson (2007), Jónsson & Sigurjónsdóttir (eds.) (2006). Also the theme of Vol. 23 of the Icelandic philosophy journal *Hugur* was nature, see: Henryson (2011).

and international researchers from a range of disciplines such as geography, archeology, anthropology, art, philosophy and literature studies contributed to. This academic context provided me with an environment in which to grow in as a researcher and for that I am grateful.¹¹ From all these experiences, discussions and exchange of ideas, it seemed to me that I had to examine the relationship between subject and object, and subjective and objective valuing, both to be able to shed new light on the environmental debates in Iceland, and also to be able to understand aesthetic experiences of landscapes and the values that are derived from them. Merleau-Ponty's work soon came to my attention as it offers a very different view of the subject-object relationship than the traditional view that I was trying to move beyond, and I saw that the phenomenological route beyond subject and object would be a fruitful way forward.¹²

However, it was not until the concept of beauty, that had only been lingering in the background so far, came into focus in my research that I felt that I had found the real source of the problem I wanted to deal with and thus a way to shed light on this issue. Up to this point, the concepts of the aesthetic and of landscape had been the central focus of my research, but as I started digging into these concepts and saw how the understanding of them had been stuck in the subject-object dichotomy, I realized that the concept of beauty and its history was the source of this problem. Beauty was until the 20th century the central focus of the field of aesthetics as "the beautiful" and "the aesthetic" were seen as synonyms, and it thus seemed obvious that the concept of beauty needed to be examined in order to shed light on the concept of the aesthetic. Edda R.H. Waage's work on the Icelandic landscape concept, *landslag*, and its use since the Icelandic sagas were written until today, finally confirmed to me that beauty was of key importance as her work shows that the concept of *landslag* has always been very

¹¹ During my studies I have also been inspired by attending international conferences organized by the Society for Phenomenology and Existential Philosophy, The International Association for Environmental Philosophy, The International Association of Applied Aesthetics, The Nordic Society for Aesthetics, The Nordic Society for Phenomenology, European Forum for the Study of Religion and the Environment, and The Nordic Network for Interdisciplinary Environmental Studies. These conferences have given me the opportunity to be inspired by thinkers like Arnold Berleant, Yuriko Saito, Yrjö Sepänmaa, Galen A. Johnson, Ted Toadvine, Konrad Ott, Thomas Heyd, Beth Carruthers, Kate Soper and many others. Very inspiring international conferences were also held at the University of Iceland during my studies. In June 2007 I participated in a small conference on landscape, where I got the chance to share my ideas with Emily Brady, Finn Arler, Gunnhild Setten and others, and in August 2010 I participated in the conference "Nature Within/Without in Eastern and Western Thought" where the focus was on phenomenological approaches to nature.

¹² Páll Skúlason's inspiring course on phenomenology which I participated in in the spring 2007 was influential here, as well as Sigríður Þorgeirsdóttir's seminar on the aesthetics of nature in the spring 2008. Another important inspiration at this point was my journey to Chicago in October 2008 to attend the 47th Annual Meeting of the Society for Phenomenology and Existential Philosophy (SPEP) as well as the 12th Annual Meeting of the International Association for Environmental Philosophy (IAEP), where I had the opportunity to get to know the ideas of thinkers such as Galen A. Johnson (who presented his work on Merleau-Ponty's aesthetics which was a work in progress at the time), Ted Toadvine and others.

closely associated with the concept of beauty in the Icelandic language (Waage 2010; 2012; 2013).

As I started examining the concept of beauty it became clear that its association with the feminine, the subjective and the emotional in the history of philosophy played a central role in the devaluation of the aesthetic value of landscape in Iceland, since discourse on this value was always framed in terms of the inherent subjectivity of the experience and judgment of beauty. When I came across more recent interpretations of beauty that attempt to re-think and revive the concept for example by examining it from the point of view of phenomenology, it also became clear to me that the concept of beauty is far richer and deeper than traditional interpretations of it as a simple experience of pleasure take into account. Thus the concept of beauty became one of the central focus points of this thesis as it holds the key to both understanding the landscape concept and the aesthetic valuing that is associated with people's experiences of landscape. The central aim of this work is to shed fresh light on the environmental debate in Iceland by providing a language that makes it possible to account for and discuss the value of aesthetic experiences of Icelandic landscapes. As Yrjö Sepänmaa notes: "When natural beauty is to be understood and protected [...] we must be able to talk about beauty, and to argue by referring to it" (Sepänmaa 2004, 5). Although the language that this thesis is based on is largely philosophical and phenomenological, my hope is to be able to speak these languages in a manner that both the general public and academics from other disciplines can relate to and understand.

The reason why I choose to center my discussion on the Icelandic context is threefold; firstly, I think it is important to bridge the gap between academia and policy making more often and one way to do that is to provide academic works that speak directly into the context of a specific policy issue.¹³ Secondly, in a phenomenological spirit, I think that the process of creating knowledge can benefit greatly from examining real experiences and situations, and thirdly I find it extremely important that my scholarly work has some practical benefits for the society I'm living in. The central aim of my work and my sincere hope is to make a difference and that is the main reason why I decided to try to contribute to finding solutions to a problem that the society I belong to has to deal with. This focus on the practical and applied is the result of my belief that the practice of environmental philosophy should not only involve theorizing about environmental values but more importantly, it should also involve finding practical solutions to real-life problems in co-operation with other disciplines.

¹³ Although doing so has been common in many academic disciplines I think it is fair to say that it has been less common within the humanities. As has been argued for example by the NIES network of environmental humanists, the role of the humanities as a contributor to good policy making in the environmental sphere should be emphasized more and therefore one of the network's aims is to find ways of bridging the gap between the humanities and policy making (Nye, Rugg, Fleming, & Emmett 2013).

A focus on practice can also be found within environmental pragmatism, where it is argued that environmental philosophy should reach out of the ivory tower and focus more on practicing their philosophy by taking a more active part in public discussions on environmental policy (Light 2003).¹⁴ I agree with the environmental pragmatist approach to emphasize the practice of finding ways to contribute more to the society in this manner, but I would like to add that environmental philosophers need not only open themselves more up towards a dialogue with the public, they also need to open themselves more up towards a dialogue with other disciplines. In recent years there has been increased emphasis on inter, trans- or multidisciplinary approaches within academia, and when it comes to environmental issues it is especially important to look at things from multiple perspectives. In my mind, disciplinary boundaries need to be crossed much more often and that is reflected in this work. This thesis is my attempt to practice environmental philosophy in a way that will hopefully contribute to opening up and furthering the debate on environmental values in the society I am living in.

Guðbjörg Rannveig Jóhannesdóttir
April 14th 2014

¹⁴ Andrew Light came to Iceland in september 2004 and presented his ideas about environmental ethics and environmental pragmatism at the University of Iceland's philosophy department. I attended the lecture as I was at the time starting my M.A. studies in philosophy, and Light's ideas were very inspirational to me.

Acknowledgements

I am grateful for the support I have received from *Háskólasjóður Eimskipafélags Íslands*, *RANNÍS* (The Icelandic Centre for Research), and *EDDA Center of Excellence*. Without the scholarships I received from these institutions this project would not have been made. I would also like to thank *EDDA* for providing me with a nurturing academic environment to work in, but within *EDDA* I had the opportunity to share ideas with a team of researchers who were all working within one of *EDDA*'s main research areas, “The Politics of Transition”, which was led by my supervisor, Dr. Sigríður Þorgeirsdóttir.

Umhverfis- og orkurannsóknasjóður Orkuveitu Reykjavíkur, *Náttúruverndarsjóður Pálma Jónssonar* and *Heimspækisjóður Brynjólfs Bjarnasonar* also funded parts of this research, and for that I am grateful. *Hagþenkir* has also supported the work I have already started on translating this thesis into Icelandic, and I am very grateful for their encouragement.

I am also grateful to *The Centre for Research in the Humanities* and the *Institute of Philosophy* at the University of Iceland for funding several trips to attend international conferences during my studies. Conferences held by the Society for Phenomenology and Existential Philosophy, The International Association for Environmental Philosophy, The International Association of Applied Aesthetics, The Nordic Society for Aesthetics, The Nordic Society for Phenomenology and The Nordic Network for Interdisciplinary Environmental Studies have been very inspirational and have given me invaluable opportunities for sharing ideas with others.

Thanks also to *Icelandic Mountainguides* and *Glacial Guides* for allowing me to do research on their organized tourist trips to *Vatnajökull* and *Sólheimajökull* glaciers.

My colleagues at the University of Iceland, from the Faculty of history and philosophy, and other departments, especially the Faculty of life and environmental sciences, have provided me with a lively and inspiring community to work within. I am especially grateful to the participants in the reading groups I took part in during my first years of study.

Special thanks to my co-supervisor and member of the PhD committee, Dr. Þorvarður Árnason for getting me started on this project, without his help and encouragement I

would not have started this work. I also want to thank him and Dr. Þóra Ellen Þórhallsdóttir for giving me the opportunity to engage with Icelandic landscapes during my work for the ILP project. Thanks also to Þorvarður for his amazing hospitality and inspiring conversations during my visits to the University Center in Höfn.

I am also very grateful to Dr. Emily Brady, also a member of the PhD committee, for her encouragement and the thought-provoking conversations we had during her visits to Iceland in the first years of my studies, and for her invaluable insights and comments in the last stages of writing this thesis.

Heartfelt thanks to my supervisor, Dr. Sigríður Þorgeirsdóttir for her endless support, patience, helpfulness and encouragement. Without our inspiring conversations about our relations to nature this project would not exist. Through her approach to life and philosophy she has also taught me invaluable lessons for the future for which I will always be grateful.

Special thanks to my sister Marta, and my dear friends Anna, Særún, Thelma, Tiara and Helga for always lending an understanding ear and sharing inspiring conversations.

Heartfelt thanks to my parents for always believing in me, and to my partner Sævar for his endless patience and support. I could not have done this without you.

Introduction

The concept of landscape has theoretically many layers, but one of its core philosophical aspects is captured in Joachim Ritter's definition of landscape as an environment perceived aesthetically (Ritter 1989). However, this philosophical concept of landscape has not received much attention in contemporary environmental debates, except in a limited way that reduces its full aesthetic aspect to a much more simple visual perception of scenic qualities. Thus there is a lack of attention to the core of the aesthetic aspect of landscape as an environment perceived aesthetically in a broader way, through all the senses, by embodied, relational beings.¹⁵ The reason for this neglect is the manner in which the landscape concept has been understood and framed in the context of landscape assessment in environmental decision-making. This is why the two central aims of the following thesis are to philosophically examine the landscape concept to figure out meanings and values associated with experiences of landscapes, with the purpose of finding possible ways of dealing with landscape in environmental decision-making.

In environmental discussions the concept of landscape is commonly understood and framed in terms of the subject-object dualism that has characterized Western thought for a long time.¹⁶ This way of framing the concept of landscape has led to its weak position when it comes to environmental decision-making in Iceland.¹⁷ My aim is

¹⁵ This type of landscape concept has also received very limited attention within Anglophone philosophical thought. This has even been the case within environmental aesthetics where the concept of landscape has been commonly associated with scenery and visual approaches to nature. This is evident in criticisms made by environmental aestheticians of the "landscape model" for aesthetic appreciation of nature which is described as a model that emphasizes scenic, visual qualities of nature but neglects other aspects of the environment and our aesthetic appreciation of it (Carlson 2000, 45-7). The notion of landscape as related first and foremost to scenic and visual qualities (Crawford 2004, 256-7) is thus taken for granted within environmental aesthetics, and attempts to expand the landscape concept to include more than the visual, or critically reflect on its meaning, are lacking.

¹⁶ Wylie (2007) describes the tension between subjective and objective approaches within geographical landscape studies thus: "The tension that [...] has [...] recurrently haunted landscape studies in cultural geography [...] is a tension between proximity and distance, body and mind, sensuous immersion and detached observation. Is landscape the world we are living *in*, or a scene we are looking *at*, from afar?" (Wylie 2007, 1).

¹⁷ This is also the case elsewhere, as is evident in Brady's comment about the UK and USA contexts: "When aesthetic value is given a formal place in conservation strategy and decision-making, there is a tendency to value scenic and formal qualities over other kinds of aesthetic features. Landscape conservation strategy in Britain is directed to a great extent by scenic criteria [...]. The scenic approach appears to be widespread in North America too" (Brady 2003, 225). This "scenic model" is based on the dualistic view of the distanced subject viewing the objective formal qualities of the landscape, and this approach is limited and superficial as it does not allow for a deeper, more inclusive understanding of the range of aesthetic values that are at stake in the aesthetic appreciation of landscape. See also Brady (2006).

to show that the meaning and value of landscape cannot be understood properly without eschewing such dualistic ways of thinking and examining deeper layers of our relation to landscape.

Different disciplines within the social and natural sciences have made efforts to move in this direction ever since Edmund Husserl founded the discipline of phenomenology as a philosophical study of the structures of human experience and consciousness that are prior to the distinctions between subject and object. Phenomena like landscape are subsequently understood in terms of the meaning they have in our experience; of how they appear in our experience. Later developments in phenomenology deepened this view with more extensive theories of embodiment, most prominently to be found in the works of Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1945/2002). Merleau-Ponty's idea of embodied perception is a point of departure of the phenomenological approach adopted here as it offers a way to understand perceptions and experiences of landscapes in a deeper way than empirical research within the social and natural sciences that is usually confined by traditional dualistic distinctions (Lothian 1999, Wylie 2007).

The framing of landscape in terms of the subject-object dualism is intricately related to the difficult status of beauty within landscape studies. The issue of beauty is obviously paramount in descriptions of perceptions of landscapes, yet beauty is for the most part deemed as merely subjective. This has resulted in its expulsion from landscape assessment. One of the main motives of this research is to take beauty seriously as it figures so prominently in what people say about landscapes.

The notion of beauty explored here in connection with my research into perceptions and experiences of natural landscapes in Iceland will be discussed from a phenomenological perspective on aesthetic experiences of landscape. This approach hence runs deeper than empirical research into different subjective preferences for landscape that are tied to time and place (Kaltenborn & Bjerke 2002, Dramstad, Tveit, Fjellstad & Fry 2006, Yang & Brown 1992, Kristinsdóttir 2004), or objective formal qualities of landscape (Arthur 1977, Daniel & Vining 1983, Bárðarson 2009, Pálsdóttir 2009). A phenomenological approach that has the relational subject as its point of departure, necessarily illuminates more general aspects of the self in an environment than empirical research into preferences for landscape. One of the results of such an approach is thus necessarily a more general understanding of landscape-beauty than "subjective" preferences and "objective" aspects disclosed in empirical research can yield. In my use of "subjectivity" and "subject" I focus on the relational and embodied aspect of these concepts. Rather than focusing on "subjective" experiences as experiences that emerge from the subject and become a basis for idiosyncratic preferences, my focus is on how "subjective" experiences emerge from the intertwining

of subject and object and how these experiences are shared and communicated between individuals.

The phenomenological concept of the aesthetically perceiving subject is a concept of the self as a relational entity that cannot be abstracted from its surroundings. The self is always already in relation with itself, reflecting on itself and its place in the world; it is always already in relation with the other, as it sees and is seen by the other; and it is always already in relation with its environment. This last notion of the self as an “environmental self” is crucial to an understanding of aesthetic perception of landscape.¹⁸ The phenomenological idea of the relational self reveals an understanding of the human being that acknowledges the central role of our embodied being in shaping the values and meaning that we find in the world. As embodied beings we are part of the environment. The environment affects us as we affect it prior to any distinction of the subject and object.

The duality of the subject and the object so common in landscape studies has also been the root of problematic distinctions in environmental aesthetics and environmental ethics. Sharp distinctions of anthropocentric and non-anthropocentric philosophies of nature (Routley 1973, Rolston 1975, Regan 1981) show themselves to be less distinct with a notion of the embodied environmental self. Sharp distinctions between nature and culture are also made redundant by an understanding of the environmental self as both affected by an environment and productive in creating an environment. Distinctions of intrinsic and instrumental value of nature are similarly rooted in the subject-object divide as they are often based on objective notions of instrumental or intrinsic qualities of natural environments. The idea of the relational self reveals how the values we associate with natural environments emerge from the intertwining of subject and object in the experience of nature and thus they should rather be framed in terms of the relations that are created in these experiences.

Theoretical Framework

The project is situated within environmental aesthetics, or more precisely, *applied* environmental aesthetics, but it adopts phenomenological approaches and intersects with landscape studies. Environmental aesthetics is an academic field that has re-emerged in the last decades (Berleant & Carlson 2004), reflecting philosophically on the aesthetic appreciation of environments. The field of applied environmental aesthetics has developed both within philosophical aesthetics (Eaton, 1989, 66-93; Sepänmaa

¹⁸ For a discussion of the environmental self, as one aspect of the multiple self, see Zahavi (2012).

1995)¹⁹ and within other disciplines (Nasar 1992; Zube, Sell & Taylor 1982; Ulrich 1982; Kaplan & Kaplan 1989, Porteous 1996).²⁰

However, the two groups that have done most work on the practical side of aesthetics are firstly the researchers who approach the topic of environmental aesthetics from other perspectives than the philosophical, (Arthur 1977, Ulrich 1982, Kaplan & Kaplan 1989, Porteous 1996, Daniel 2001), and secondly the advisors, planners, politicians, educators and other groups who practice what Sepänmaa calls “hidden aesthetics” in their expression of aesthetic principles in and through their actions (Sepänmaa 2007, 60). The problem is that neither of these groups have referred much to or reflected on the works that have been developed within philosophical environmental aesthetics, and at the same time philosophical environmental aestheticians have not been effective in promoting the application of their theories. There has thus been a gap between the theory and practice of environmental aesthetics that people like Sepänmaa and Eaton have been trying to bridge. Sepänmaa for example organized a series of international environmental aesthetics conferences in the years 1994-2009 where the goal was to “create contacts and interaction between researchers and those involved in practical work” (Sepänmaa 2007, 55).²¹

It is extremely important to continue such efforts to bring the different disciplines that are dealing with landscape, environment and aesthetic values together. Therefore one of the aims of this thesis is to contribute to this type of co-operation and interdisciplinarity that has already started to grow within the field of applied environmental aesthetics by building bridges and connections between landscape studies (for example within geography and anthropology), environmental aesthetics, and phenomenology, as well as trying to bridge the gap between theories and practice.

¹⁹ Marcia Muelder-Eaton is a professor of philosophy at the University of Minnesota who has been a pioneer in seeking co-operation with landscape architects, planners and designers (Sepänmaa 2007, 54). Environmental aesthetics have gained a lot of prominence in Finnish aesthetics (Haapala 2011), where Yrjö Sepänmaa has been at the forefront (Sepänmaa 1993;1995;2004;2010). Sepänmaa is to my knowledge the only person in the world who bears the title “professor of environmental aesthetics” and in his work he has emphasized the importance of focusing on both theory and practice and creating a dialogue between the philosophical aestheticians who deal with theoretical issues within environmental aesthetics and the practitioners who deal with environmental aesthetics through for example planning and decision-making.

²⁰ As Jay Appleton (1998) describes it, there are two scientific worlds that have been dealing with environmental aesthetics: The world of classical philosophical aesthetics rooted in, for example, the works of Aristotle, Kant and Merleau-Ponty, and the world of other disciplines and institutions whose approaches are shaped by practical demands for dealing with the aesthetic values of environment.

²¹ See also Sepänmaa (2010, 401-3) for a further discussion of the conference series. Conferences have also been held in Finland by the International Institute for Applied Aesthetics (IIAA) which “promotes research, education and publishing in environmental aesthetics and other humanistic environmental studies”. IIAA has organized International summer schools of Applied Aesthetics since 1995, but these events are now known as the IIAA international summer conference that is held every other year in Lahti, Finland.

Sepänmaa describes the environmental aesthetician who bridges the gap between theory and practice as having two roles:

The first is to make the aesthetic practices of different areas of life visible by collecting them and writing about them, to demonstrate and correct errors in logic. The second is to act as an expert in beauty, to work as an active party, to co-operate with and to contact individuals and institutions from a base and foundation of knowledge of and experience in art and beauty and of speaking about them (Sepänmaa 2010, 404).

In my approach I aim at serving both of these roles as I strive firstly to make the aesthetic value of Icelandic landscapes and the practices surrounding them visible by examining and writing about them, and secondly by engaging in a dialogue with landscape researchers and practitioners from other disciplines, as I do in the focus group study that will be presented in chapter four (as well as in my reflections on the landscape concept in chapter one). However, I also expand these roles further by emphasizing the element of the empirical in my approach. This empirical approach is interdisciplinary as I utilize methods and approaches that have been developed within other disciplines (and not traditionally been used in philosophical works)²² to engage in a dialogue with both the public and professionals about the aesthetic values of landscapes.²³

Doing applied, practical environmental aesthetics is not only about applying aesthetic theory to practical issues but also about applying empirical methods and approaches to philosophical issues, using experiences and practice as a starting point. In this way, I am engaging in applied environmental aesthetics with a bottom-up approach rather than top-down, as my starting point is lived experiences which I use to elucidate my theoretical approach before I examine how theory can illuminate the experiences and values I am dealing with. This is why I have adopted phenomenological approaches that are characterized by having lived experiences as a point of departure, with the purpose of elaborating a theory of embodied experiences of landscapes.²⁴ Landscape studies have been developed within many disciplines, such as geography, anthropology, archaeology, landscape architecture and planning. The landscape concept has a key role in this project, and its relation to the concepts of beauty and the aesthetic is central in developing an understanding of landscape that goes beyond the traditional dualistic account that has led to the marginalization or exclusion of aesthetic values when it comes to the evaluation of Icelandic nature for planning and decision-making. So far,

²² The emerging field of “experimental philosophy” is an exception, as it makes use of empirical data to shed light on philosophical questions (Knobe & Nichols 2008).

²³ These are qualitative research methods such as interviewing, participant observation and focus groups.

²⁴ I will describe this methodology further later in this introduction.

landscape as a topic of debate has not played an important part in nature conservation in Iceland because incorporating the value of landscape into the decision-making process has been viewed as problematic. The determining factors when environmental decisions are made have rather been the biological and economical values of the natural environment.²⁵ The economic value of creating more jobs is thus weighed against potential harmful impacts on biological systems that are seldom considered to be serious enough to outweigh the economic benefits, unless an international agreement has been made that commits the authorities to conserve rather than utilize nature.²⁶ Increasing attention has however been paid to landscape in the last few years, especially after increasing discussion about Iceland signing the *European Landscape Convention (ELC)* (Council of Europe, 2000).²⁷

However, this is not an easy task. Taking landscape into account in environmental decision-making has been seen as problematic mainly on two accounts. Firstly, because the landscape concept was not defined in Icelandic laws until 2011,²⁸ and secondly,

²⁵ This is also the case elsewhere, as Brady points out: “Although aesthetic value (sometimes seen as overlapping with “landscape value”) is mentioned [in environmental planning and policy], it is given low priority, and more often scientific considerations on the one hand or economic ones on the other hold more sway” (Brady 2006, 278). Porteous describes the situation with stronger words ten years earlier: “[...] the very word “aesthetics” [has] been so lamentably neglected in twentieth-century industrial culture [...] Aesthetics, therefore, apparently concerned only with surface appearances, has clearly been deemed to be of little importance in comparison with the business of making a living [...]” (Porteous 1996, xvi).

²⁶ Iceland has for example signed the International Convention for the Protection of Birds, the Ramsar Convention (Convention on Wetlands of International Importance Especially as Waterfowl Habitat), the Convention on the Conservation of European Wildlife and Natural Habitats, the Convention on Biological Diversity, and the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) (Umhverfisstofnun 2013).

²⁷ This attention to landscape has for example resulted in the Icelandic Landscape Project. See: Þórhallsdóttir, Árnason, Bárðarson & Pálsdóttir (2010). The *ELC* was finally signed by Icelandic authorities on the 28th of June 2012. In the European context, the *ELC* can be seen as a response to a need for recognizing the important part that landscape plays in the quality of people’s lives. According to the convention, developments in industries and planning brought about by changes in the world economy have accelerated the transformation of landscapes. These fast changes in landscape have made people realize that it is “a key element of individual and social well-being” (Council of Europe 2000, 1). The *ELC* is a result of the acknowledgement that the “emotional and subjective” relationships that individuals and societies have to their surroundings are vital to our well-being. What is interesting about the *ELC* is that it includes both subjective and objective approaches in different evaluations and assessments of landscape, as can be seen in its core definition of landscape: “Landscape means an area, as perceived by people, whose character is the result of the action and interaction of natural and/or human factors (Council of Europe 2000, 3). Although this definition strongly emphasizes a subjective account of landscape, the convention also makes it clear that gaining knowledge of “the action and interaction of natural and/or human factors” is important “The identification, description and assessment of landscapes constitute the preliminary phase of any landscape policy. This involves an analysis of morphological, archeological, historical, cultural and natural characteristics and their interrelations, as well as an analysis of changes” (Council of Europe 2000, 2). The definition of the *ELC* thus acknowledges that the subjective and objective qualities of landscapes cannot be separated.

²⁸ When landscape was finally defined in the Law on Planning from 2010, the definition was based on the text of the *ELC*: “Landslag merkir svæði sem hefur ásýnd og einkenni vegna náttúrulegra og/eða manngerðra þátta og samspils þar á milli. Landslag tekur þannig til daglegs umhverfis, umhverfis með verndargildi og umhverfis sem hefur verið raskað. Undir landslag fellur m.a. þéttbýli, dreifbýli, ósnortni

because the visual and aesthetic values associated with landscapes are seen as being too subjective and relative (Björnsson 2003, Benediktsson & Waage 2009). In public discourse, aesthetic experiences and values are more often than not considered as personal, idiosyncratic feelings – or “mere subjective” emotional experiences as they are most commonly called – that, although widely experienced and acknowledged, cannot be measured objectively and therefore cannot be taken into account in the making of environmental policies.

This view has led to the fact that when natural environments are evaluated before decisions are made about their use or conservation, the values that have priority over aesthetic values of landscape are economic and biological values; the values that can be measured with presumably objective, scientific methods. This strikes me as odd, because Icelandic natural landscapes are such an important part of Icelandic identity. Landscapes are also perhaps the most important features of image making, as can be seen in promotional visual material, films, etc. Icelandic poetry, music and literature has likewise always paid tribute to landscapes and the dynamic, demanding nature.

Icelandic research on the landscape concept as a multi-layered concept (geological, historical, geographical, biological, etc.) that also includes dimensions of aesthetic experiences has only recently started to emerge,²⁹ and following international trends, this research is mainly developing within geography (Benediktsson 2007, Waage & Benediktsson 2009, Ólafsdóttir 2008), environmental sciences (Kristinsdóttir 2004, Óladóttir 2005, Bárðarson 2009, Pálsdóttir 2009, Þórhallsdóttir et al. 2010), anthropology (Lund 2005), landscape architecture (Sveinsdóttir & Stefánsdóttir 2005) and archaeology (Aldred 2005). Interdisciplinary approaches are also being elaborated (Benediktsson & Lund 2010).³⁰ What has been lacking, both in Icelandic and international contexts, is an understanding of the landscape concept that acknowledges

víðerni, ár, vötn og hafsvæði”; or “Landscape means an area, [notice that the words “as perceived by people” from the ELC version are missing] whose character is the result of the action and interaction of natural and/or human factors. Landscape thus includes everyday environment, environment with conservation value and environments that have been spoiled. Landscape includes urban, rural and wilderness areas, rivers, lakes and sea”. (Skipulagslög [Law on Planning] nr.13/2010, my translation based on the *ELC*). However, in the new Law on Nature Conservation from 2013, the definition has been shortened and adjusted again to the definition of the *ELC*: Landslag er svæði sem fólk skynjar að hafi ákveðin einkenni sem eru tilkomin vegna virkni eða samspils náttúrulegra og/eða mannglegra þátta” or Landscape [is an] area that people perceive as having a certain character that is the result of the action and interaction of natural and/or human factors. (Lög um náttúruvernd [Law on Nature Conservation] nr. 12/2013, my direct translation. The *ELC* text says “an area, as perceived by people, whose character is the result of...”).

²⁹ One of the first academic papers in Icelandic that deals specifically with aesthetics of natural beauty is Þorvarður Árnason’s “Náttúrufegurð” [Natural Beauty] from 1994. The concept of landscape is mentioned in Árnason’s paper, but without it being analysed specifically, since the main focus was on nature in terms of beauty (Árnason 1994b).

³⁰ Icelandic researchers have studied public attitudes towards and views of nature more generally (Árnason 2005, Loftson, Lohm & Skúlason 2006), but not focused much on the *aesthetic* valuing of nature as such. Studies have also been made on tourist attitudes of nature (Sæþórsdóttir 2009).

and examines thoroughly its central aesthetic aspect, and embraces the relation between landscape and beauty rather than avoiding it. In order to “rescue” beauty from being understood as a mere expression of subjective taste, we have to illuminate the deeper layers of experiences of landscapes that evoke experiences of beauty.

The relation between landscape and beauty is especially important in the Icelandic context as the meaning of the Icelandic word for landscape, *landslag*, is very closely tied to the concepts of beauty and the aesthetic: “According to a dictionary of the use of Icelandic, *landslag* is most often accompanied by qualifying adjectives such as: “beautiful, scenic, impressive, magnificent, effective, spectacular, majestic, expressive, grand, tremendous, unimpressive, monotonous, bland, insignificant” (Jónsson 1994 [...]). *Landslag* is thus most often associated with an aesthetic expression or experience” (Waage 2010, 51).³¹ According to Waage’s research into the use of the word *landslag* in the history of the Icelandic language, it has been associated with descriptions of perceived beauty in the land at least since the Icelandic Sagas were written in medieval times, and it still is in the everyday use of the word today.³² The dualistic way of thinking that has been determinative in landscape studies displays itself in the fact that landscape has been understood either in terms of objective, primarily visual qualities (Martin 1993, Nicholls & Schlater 1993) or in terms of subjective perceptions of the land (Dakin 2003, Schroeder 2007).

Theorists that have attempted to avoid this dualism have developed an understanding of landscape as the interaction between subject and object (Ingold 2000, Tilley 1997; 2004; 2008, Hirsch & O’Hanlon 1995, Wylie 2007). These authors encourage a new interpretation of the landscape concept that emphasizes how humans are interconnected with their surroundings through their bodies, and how the meaning of landscape emerges in the interaction between human bodies and the land. What is still lacking in these theories, however, is a thorough account and acknowledgement of the role of the aesthetic and the process of aesthetic evaluation in such embodied relations between humans and nature. If landscapes and the values most commonly attached to them are to serve as criteria for nature conservation, aesthetic values need to be included. While providing a sound, basic description of landscape as an interaction of the natural and the human/cultural, the above mentioned anthropological and geographical theories lack conceptual tools to analyze aesthetic aspects of this interaction and thus the meaning and values that are arguably at its core remain outside the scope of such theories.

³¹ Waage quotes Jónsson (1994: *landslag*).

³²The earliest example she finds is from a version of the “Saga of Erik the Red” that was written in the first decade of the fourteenth century and thus her analysis shows that “the visual morphological and aesthetic were already intertwined and embedded in the concept at the turn of the fourteenth century” (Waage 2010, 53). See also Waage (2012).

The history of philosophical aesthetics and especially the central role which the concept of beauty has played for the most part of that history are possibly the reason for the reluctance to connect the landscape concept with aesthetics in recent landscape studies within the social sciences. A major root of the dualistic debate on landscape lies namely in the history of aesthetics where the concept of beauty has either been categorized as subjective or objective. Of course there have been many attempts within modern philosophical aesthetics to explain “the inbetween”; how individual “subjective” judgments of beauty seem to have force beyond the individual, and thus how the subjective and objective are linked. Indeed, this was the central question of 18th century aesthetic thought with Hume, Kant and others providing comprehensive accounts of the judgment of taste with the aim of explaining how this “subjective” judgment can have universal validity (Hume 1757/1963, Kant 1790/2000). However, the nuances of philosophical thought do not always reach into common discourse, or discourses within other disciplines, and in this case the ideas of beauty and the aesthetic that have been filtered down from philosophical discourse into common discourses are very narrow compared to the variety and complexity of ideas within the history of philosophical aesthetics.

The ideas that have shaped very common and influential views of beauty in common discourses are firstly, the Platonic, formalist idea of beauty as being found in certain objective qualities such as harmony, order and balance, and secondly, the idea of beauty as being found in the subject’s individual (and emotional) response. Beauty has thus been located either predominantly in the subjective eye of the beholder or in the objective qualities of things, and the nuances that can be found inbetween are not reflected in other discourses than the philosophical. In this context, the tendency to exclude beauty and aesthetics is understandable when the aim is to provide an understanding of landscape that is not confined to the objective-subjective divide.

From the point of view of landscape aesthetics that is not firmly grounded in philosophical aesthetics, but rather in common notions of aesthetics and beauty that are restricted to the visual and the subjective, the concept of beauty has been understood too narrowly. Subsequently, the concept of beauty has become more or less useless and powerless. The concept of beauty has on the one hand traditionally been too restricted to objective qualities and the visual. On the other hand, philosophical aesthetics that focus on the subjective aspect of the aesthetic do not seem to be able to offer a basis for an objective evaluation as the subjective approach is commonly understood to imply that judgments of aesthetic value are, in Hume’s famous words, “in the eye of the beholder”. Even though Hume’s account of taste is intended to show how an objective standard of taste can be established in spite of the subjectivity of the judgment of taste, the most famous and influential idea from his theory is indeed the idea that beauty is a

feeling rather than an objective quality; the idea that “beauty lies in the eye of the beholder”.

Other efforts, such as those of Kant, to secure an intersubjective ground for aesthetic judgments³³ remain largely unacknowledged in common discourses, and in landscape studies within the social sciences. The thread that lies through both Kant’s and Hume’s theories, emphasizing the role of community and communication (Arendt 1982, Brady 2003, Jones 1993, Guyer 2005) in making valid aesthetic judgments, has not received much attention in common discourse. Instead, the most influential thread that has been picked up from 18th century aesthetics is that there is a strong subjective element to the judgment of beauty, and this idea is then contrasted with the Platonic idea of the objective qualities of beauty. This is in line with the polarization of Western thought through the ages, our focus on the differences between the poles on each end, prevents us from seeing the “in-between”.

This state of affairs has influenced debates on environmental controversies surrounding land and land-use in Iceland. The word “beauty” seems too simple and superficial to describe the deep aesthetic experiences (not limited to the visual) that people have of the dramatic landscapes of the Icelandic highland; and in the public debate and environmental decision-making, beauty has been judged as too linked to individual taste to form a basis for any meaningful evaluation. In order to reclaim beauty to extend assessment of the value of landscape, we need to understand the concept of beauty differently. We need a concept of beauty that covers more than primarily visual qualities and we need accounts of subjective perspectives that are relative but yet have general features. The phenomenological concept of the embodied, environmental self is a basis for discussing such general features through the analysis of aesthetic experiences of landscape introduced in this thesis.

Recent developments in aesthetics and in the understanding of the concept of beauty also provide an opportunity to understand the deeper layers of aesthetic aspects of landscape. Just like the landscape theorists mentioned above who have been developing non-dualistic accounts of landscape, philosophers who have been rethinking beauty and aesthetics have been inspired by Merleau-Ponty’s phenomenology of the embodied self. One of the most remarkable attempts in this vain is to be found in Galen A. Johnson’s recent phenomenological rethinking and redefinition of the concept of beauty (Johnson 2009). Johnson gets straight to the point by claiming that the concept of beauty provides an opportunity to think and also to live beyond the subject-object dichotomy, since the experience of beauty cannot be understood as either completely objective nor completely subjective (Johnson 2009, 5-6).

³³ Emily Brady (2003) has for example argued that Kant’s idea of *sensus communis* holds a key to understanding the inter-subjectivity of aesthetic judgments of environment. This idea of *sensus communis* will be discussed further in chapter two, section 2.3.6.

While Johnson focuses mainly on beauty in art, my aim is to reflect on his re-thinking of the concept with reference to aesthetic experiences of landscape. There has been a long tradition of philosophical reflections on the difference of the beauty of art, a human construct, and the beauty of nature, even to the point that these two forms of beauty are viewed as incomparable (Janaway 1993). I will not get into such discussions as my claim is that there is indeed a common ground for experiences of beauty, be it in nature, in art or in human life in general. The concept of the embodied, environmental self gives in my view a reason to reflect on this common ground by analysing what is sensed and grasped in aesthetic perceptions that make us say that something is beautiful (be it a waterfall, be it a painting, be it an artefact, be it a person).

Reflecting the concepts of beauty, landscape and aesthetics through the lens of Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology provides an opportunity to sidestep the dualistic understanding of these concepts that has resulted in the neglect of the aesthetic values of landscape in environmental planning and decision-making. If the aesthetic values of landscape are to become a part of the environmental evaluation process, it must be acknowledged that those values are neither completely objective, nor completely subjective. So even though aesthetic values cannot be measured in the same "objective" way as for example biological values, it is possible to understand and appreciate the experiences that create these values, and use them as a starting point for finding a basis for evaluation.³⁴

This type of approach that acknowledges the "subjective" aspect of aesthetic value would be complementary to a more "objective" approach that involves categorizing the objective visual qualities of a landscape;³⁵ it would moreover confirm how the objective qualities and subjective experience are intertwined. The concept of beauty that will be examined here is situated on a different level of perception and experience than provided by approaches that are determined by the subjective-objective divide. It is not a concept that generates some kind of "standards" of beauty for assessment such as depicted with terms from aesthetics of the work of art like equilibrium, balance, proportion, etc.. And it is not a concept that is limited to describing in line with aesthetics of perception, feelings of pleasure, objective qualities or standards of taste that are determined by time and place. Rather, the concept elaborated on the basis of aesthetic experiences of landscape generates an understanding of what we mean when we describe something as beautiful. The sense of beauty evoked by natural landscapes

³⁴ Aesthetic values are not the only environmental values that cannot be measured in a quantitative manner; historical and cultural values are examples of values that are measured qualitatively, and these values are often closely intertwined with the aesthetic values since historical and cultural factors can greatly influence the aesthetic experience of landscape.

³⁵ An example of this approach is the Icelandic Landscape Project (Þórhallsdóttir, Árnason, Bárðarson & Pálsdóttir 2010).

has in a profound way something to do with general features of our understanding of our relation to nature.

The phenomenological concept of beauty that this work elaborates discloses a sense of relation felt by an environmental self, as it provides a possibility of experiencing a basic feature of our condition as embodied beings. The sensory immersion that is involved in the experience of beauty is a source of “sensory knowledge”. This is an experience that stirs our emotions and allows us to perceive the world in a manner that reveals to us our relations with the environment that are in a certain ontological way deeply ingrained and at the same time conditioned by actual circumstances. In modern philosophical aesthetics, such experiences have rather been associated with the concept of the sublime than with beauty. However, the relational understanding of beauty that will be elaborated here challenges sharp distinctions between the beautiful and the sublime.

The history of the concept of the sublime is long and complex. It has been understood and interpreted from many different perspectives of philosophy, psychology, art theory, literature and architecture and used to reflect on various topics ranging from experiences of nature to moral character and artistic expressions (Brady 2013). The different notions and aspects of the sublime that have characterized its history are not the background to the concept of the sublime discussed here. Rather, its background is the tradition of the sublime that relates the concept to aesthetic experiences of nature that began in 18th century thought and culminated with Kant’s articulation of the aesthetic experience of the sublime as a response to great size and power in nature. His reflections on the sublime led to a clarification of the distinction between beauty and the sublime that has ever since determined discourses on aesthetic experiences of nature.

The phenomenological elucidation of aesthetic experiences of natural landscapes shows that there is a common core to experiences of the sublime and the beautiful, undermining a sharp Kantian distinction between the two. The Icelandic language gives us a clue here, but one of the Icelandic terms for the sublime is *ægjefegurð*. *Ægjefegurð* is combined of the two words *ægi*, which can mean grandness or awesomeness (inspiring awe and even wonder), but also has an element of fear or threat in it,³⁶ and *feegurð*, which means beauty. This term therefore points to the idea that beauty and the sublime are inherently connected.³⁷ Especially in Kant’s early works, the sublime and the beautiful

³⁶ The saying “mér ægir við þessu” can mean “I am threatened by this” or “I am fearful of this”.

³⁷ One might argue that *ægjefegurð* is equivalent to grandeur, which is often interpreted as beauty on a greater scale, or to terrible beauty which is used to describe tragic, uncomfortable forms of beauty. But in my view *ægjefegurð* is neither limited to describing experiences of something “grand and beautiful” or “terribly beautiful”, but rather it captures both of these elements, grandness and a kind of terror or negative emotions, just as the concept of the sublime does. The concept of *ægjefegurð* and its relation to beauty and the sublime will be discussed further in section 1.3.5, as well as in chapter three, but I emphasize here that

are thought of along the lines of a contrast between the sublime as masculine and beauty as feminine (Kant 1764/1960). Even though this view is not prevalent in his later works (Kant 1790/2000), this train of thought has had an enormous impact on common views of beauty and the sublime, as I will discuss further later in this thesis.

The Kantian association of beauty with objects that are pleasing and the sublime with awe and admiration is correct up to a certain extent. We may find the magnificent Dettifoss a sublime waterfall as well as perceiving a midsummer sunset in my home coastal village Garður as beautiful. Yet, according to my analysis of aesthetic experiences of glacial and geothermal landscapes there is a deeper level to both beauty and the sublime that is common to them. Both beauty and the sublime express a becoming aware of the relations that exist between the perceiver and the perceived, it is an experience of opening up to the landscape. This experience puts the human perceiver into a different kind of relation with reality as it evokes a metaphysical insight into our relation with nature.

By analysing deep relational levels of aesthetic experiences I do not intend to discard the notions of the sublime and the beautiful. On the contrary, I want to give these terms a “thicker” meaning in order to “rehabilitate” them as useful terms for discourses on aesthetic experiences of landscape. In landscape studies there is an apparent reluctance to refer to landscapes as beautiful or as sublime. In my view, this has to do with a too narrow understanding of these concepts, and a too sharp distinction between beauty and the sublime that we have inherited through Kantian aesthetics. In this regard it is nevertheless necessary to make a distinction between the different forms of aesthetic experiences of natural landscapes.

Firstly, it is the deep aesthetic and metaphysical experience of nature as beautiful and sublime that was described above as an experience that reveals deep levels of our relation with our surroundings. Secondly, aesthetic experiences of landscape reveal values that are tied to time and place. An example of this is how people’s attitude towards the high mountains of the Alps changed with time from being seen as frightening and threatening obstacles to being seen as majestic and sublime (Nicolson 1997). These values are related to history and culture and are connected to recreational values, heritage and historical/archeological values, geo-historical values and so on.³⁸ Thirdly, aesthetic experiences can be determined by the interests of the perceiver, and in this case it matters whether she enters the situation as an hydro power engineer,

my understanding of the word *agjefgurð* is not based on a thorough etymological investigation. Rather it is based on how the combination of the words *agi* and *segurð* seems to call for an interpretation that fits very well with the experiences that I describe in my research. *Agjefgurð* allows me to capture how the boundaries between beauty and the sublime are blurred. The word *agi* adds to the notion of beauty elements that are traditionally associated with the sublime as contrasted with a much narrower idea of beauty than the idea I will propose.

³⁸ For a discussion of these different environmental values see Malenfant (2011, 54-89).

CEO of an energy production company, politician, environmentalist, pagan believer, tourist, artist, etc. An example of that is the aesthetic claim made by the former Minister of Industry Valgerður Sverrisdóttir, who claimed in 2006 that she saw “no special natural beauty” in the landscape that would go under water with the building of the Kárahnjúkar dam (Engin sérstök náttúrufegurð í landinu sem sekkur! [No special natural beauty in the land that sinks!] 2006, May 17) while many environmentalists praised the pristine beauty of the same landscape.

According to this distinction between the three types of aesthetic experiences, such aesthetic claims are either situated on the level of the beautiful and the sublime shaped by time and place or driven by actual interests. While environmental aestheticians have focused most on the first level (Hepburn 2004, Carroll 2004, Berleant 1992) and landscape theorists on the second and third (Massey 2006, Tuan 1974, Yang & Brown 1992), the focus in this thesis is on the first two levels. The aesthetic experiences of glacial and geothermal areas that will be examined here, are an example of deep aesthetic experiences of beauty and the sublime in nature that are indeed affected by the time and situation they take place in. These experiences reveal the possibility of a relationship with nature that goes beyond narrow interests. Thus the relation to landscapes in these kind of experience displays how the individual self is an embodied self that is a part of the larger whole of nature, and yet tied to time and place.

On the basis of a phenomenological analysis of experiences of landscape, the second part of the thesis consists in an examination of meanings and values of glacial and geothermal landscapes on the basis of the actual aesthetic experiences that people have of these natural landscapes. In both the central academic discourses that have considered the aesthetic value of nature; environmental aesthetics and landscape studies, there is inadequate attention paid to the *actual aesthetic experiences* of nature. Environmental aestheticians have approached the topic from a more general point of view, circumscribing the scope of aesthetic experiences of nature.³⁹ Landscape theorists that reflect on public perceptions and experiences of natural landscape tend, on the other hand, to ignore the strong aesthetic aspect of these experiences (Dakin 2003, Schroeder 2007). I argue that an empirical grounding is needed within these fields; an empirical grounding that involves focusing on a particular landscape and the particular experiences of that landscape in order to provide an account of the aesthetic meaning and values that are associated with it.

³⁹ When environmental aestheticians describe aesthetic experiences, it is either in the form of general examples of experiences (Rolston 2004) or in describing their own experiences (Berleant 1992: 40-56). Little attention has thus been paid to experiences of larger groups of the public. This is largely due to their approach, which is philosophical method – a method that has traditionally not involved collecting empirical data.

Methodological Framework

The aesthetics of nature is a field that investigates human perceptions and experiences of natural environments. As a discipline that has an experiential premise it is strengthened by an empirical grounding. Aestheticians that have applied environmental aesthetics to concrete phenomena have done so mostly in the form of criticisms of different empirical approaches. Environmental aestheticians have thus criticized landscape architects, environmental planners and landscape assessors for limiting their focus to visual properties of scenery and for neglecting other aspects of the aesthetic appreciation of landscapes (Carlson 1977; 1979; Berleant & Carlson 2004, 27; Saito 2004, 143; Sepänmaa 2010).

As mentioned before, the field of applied environmental aesthetics has focused on applying theory to practice and building bridges between researchers from different disciplines and those who deal with the aesthetic value of environments in practice through planning, design and decision-making. However, less attention has been paid to examining actual aesthetic experiences. In their introduction to *The Aesthetics of Natural Environments*, Allen Carlson and Arnold Berleant thus point out that future research in the aesthetics of nature

...requires more than philosophical analysis and theoretical elaboration. We must address questions such as: How can we characterize the actual appreciative experiences that we have? [...] What features of natural environments do we actually value? What sorts of paths, views, and approaches are experienced as attractive and satisfying? What kinds of bodily involvement and movement are found most rewarding? What kinds of sensory and other perceptual qualities and what kinds of spaces, volumes, and textures appear to possess aesthetic appeal? (Berleant & Carlson 2004, 26-27).

Research into these above mentioned dimensions of experiences that people have of environments and landscapes can in my view also inform about the values we associate with these experiences. These views of Berleant and Carlson confirmed my experience from within the Icelandic Landscape Project (ILP) that it is necessary to examine actual aesthetic experiences of landscapes in order to get an insight into their possible meaning and value.

When I started working for the ILP I had not traveled very much around Iceland, and the central highland was unknown territory to me. All the experiences I and my co-workers had during our fieldwork became endless food for thought about what it was that characterized our responses to the landscapes we visited, and I realized that this is where I should look for answers: in the actual experiences people have of landscapes. I therefore decided to base my research on phenomenological and qualitative research on

the aesthetic experiences of two landscape types that are characteristic of Iceland; glacial and geothermal landscapes.

The choice of doing research into experiences of extreme landscapes like these is not the central issue. Other landscape types would also have been illuminative as an empirical resource for theoretical reflection in environmental aesthetics. These extreme glacial and geothermal landscapes are more over not in any way representative of natural landscapes in general because they are rare. I nevertheless argue that experiences of such landscapes can shed light on experiences of less extreme forms of landscapes. The extreme can serve as a kind of a magnifying glass for the less extreme. Glaciers and geothermal areas are not exceptional landscapes, but rather landscapes that offer the possibility of an intense experience of a dynamic natural environment that is still in the making.

By bringing attention to experience of landscape it was appropriate to base the methodology of the analysis on the phenomenological approach because of its emphasis on describing, interpreting and analyzing the structures of experience. According to the tenets of phenomenology, the starting point of phenomenological knowledge is conscious experience. The qualitative methods I implemented have been developed on the basis of the phenomenological approach. The qualitative studies consisted in participant observations and in-depth semi-structured interviews with participants in group trips to geothermal and glacial landscapes. The phenomenological methodology discloses various aspects of aesthetic experience of glaciers and geothermal areas with the purpose of examining the more general relationship between humans and nature that these experiences evoke.

Such an approach gives increased weight to empirical research into views towards natural landscapes among different groups and different stakeholders for it enables extending the scope from group-specific interests to more general interests of human beings as embodied living beings. It also extends the scope of framing environmental values which has been limited to intrinsically or instrumentally valuable objects to focus more on relations between humans and nature. Therefore aesthetic experiences of natural landscapes evidenced through these methodologies offer highly relevant knowledge to environmental decision-making.

By using an empirical approach I am not assuming that an examination of actual aesthetic experiences tells the full story about the aesthetic meaning and value of landscape. I am not using the empirical data I collected to provide evidence about how Icelandic landscapes are generally perceived and experienced aesthetically, but rather to shed light on an aspect of experiencing landscape that I think is important to reflect on. My approach can thus be seen as a combination of the empirical methods of the social sciences and the philosophical method, at the same time as it differs from both of these approaches in important ways.

While social scientists use empirical methods to find evidence of their claims about how things are (and often put great effort into showing that their methods are no less “objective” than those of the natural sciences), I am using these methods to find a starting point for philosophical reflections on an important aspect of human experience. Philosophers using the philosophical method on the other hand, traditionally do not collect empirical data to support their views (although this might be changing, see Knobe and Nichols (2008) on the emerging field of experimental philosophy). Rather the philosophical method consists in reflecting on philosophical questions more generally, providing either imagined examples or general examples from one’s own experience or public discourses to support philosophical arguments, without supporting these examples with carefully documented and analysed empirical studies.

My approach shares the use of qualitative research methods to get an insight into people’s actual experiences with the social science approach, but it differs from the social sciences in that my aim is not to use the data to provide sociological evidence about what the most common experiences of or preferences for landscape are, but rather to use it as a source of inspiration and a starting point for philosophical reflection on an experience that undeniably exists, whether it is common or not. It is enough for me to show that this experience exists and that it is important, rather than showing that it is a common experience. My approach is thus in important aspects much more related to the philosophical method, only differing from it in expanding the area of where to start searching for answers.

When philosophers find a philosophical question worth pursuing, they often start looking for answers in the works of other philosophers, or they use examples from general experiences as they are reflected in art, everyday life and social situations. My suggestion is that it is useful to expand this search for answers to include looking at more particular experiences through the lens of qualitative research methods. In much the same way as Páll Skúlason’s personal experience of the volcanic crater Askja provided a starting point for him to think philosophically about the human-nature relationship, the experiences of the 50 participants in my qualitative study provided a starting point for me to think about the aesthetic experience of landscape. Thus both Skúlason and I start from a phenomenological approach; using experience as a starting point for reflection that depends on using the philosophical method. The only difference is that I choose to look more thoroughly at other people’s experiences as well as my own, through the lens of phenomenological approaches within the social sciences.

Another reason why this empirical approach is chosen is that Icelandic natural landscapes are radically different from most of the environments that characterize Europe and N-America and which have been the focus of environmental aesthetics (since this is where most of the theorizing has occurred). Even though environmental

aestheticians have focused to some extent on particular types of environment,⁴⁰ none of them has written about the aesthetic experience of the glacial and geothermal landscapes that characterize Iceland. When first approaching the issue of the aesthetics of Icelandic natural landscapes, it thus seemed evident that it would be difficult to make use of the existing aesthetic theories that focus on European or N-American landscapes, which in many cases furthermore fall into the category of cultural (anthropogenic) landscapes. In this situation it seemed appropriate to make the actual experiences of Icelandic natural landscapes, rather than aesthetic theory, the starting point of my investigations.

On the basis of the bottom-up approach of this research, the results of the qualitative research have guided my assessment and critical analysis of theories of environmental aesthetics that are of relevance to my research into aesthetic experiences and values of Icelandic landscapes. My emphasis on relational features of aesthetic experiences in this research was largely determined by the first results of my studies of aesthetic experiences of geothermal and glacial landscapes. What surprised me the most was that the participants described similar experiences and responses that were triggered by particular physical features of the landscape. For example, all the participants in the glacial studies responded in similar ways to the size of the glacier. This suggests that these aesthetic experiences are not as subjective as often assumed but more general or even inter-subjective in character. That encouraged me to examine theories of aesthetic experiences and values that pay attention to the “in-betweenness” of aesthetic experiences.

Such theories support the idea that aesthetic meaning and value cannot be found either predominantly in the subject’s perception or predominantly in the object’s qualities. These values emerge when the interviewees reflect and articulate the experience that takes place in the intertwining of subject and object. Examining aesthetic experiences of glacial and geothermal landscapes discloses the in-between; here we can see what it is in the object’s physical qualities that triggers similar responses in subjects, and how these responses in turn affect subjects’ attitudes towards the environment that they perceive.

⁴⁰ Holmes Rolston III has for example written about the aesthetic experience of forests (Rolston 2004). In fact he claims that forests serve as an archetype of the foundations of the world and that they represent the elemental forces of nature; and that such experiences serve well as an instance and prototype of the aesthetic appreciation of nature. I think the same can definitely be said about glaciers and geothermal areas, but they are stronger representatives of nature’s active, powerful, frightening and sublime forces. Yi-Fu Tuan has also written about experiences of polar explorers in the 18th and 19th century (Tuan 1993), but these are very different from the experience tourists have in modern times in Iceland. Barbara Sandrisser has reflected on the aesthetic experience of volcanoes in Hawaii (Sandrisser 2007), but again, the context is very different from the Icelandic one.

Outline and Structure

Landscape studies, phenomenology and environmental aesthetics form the theoretical background of this research project which connects these three disciplines. Although these disciplines share their core topic - the relationship between humans and land that emerges from our perception of environment - the novelty of this research project consists in combining methods and approaches of these disciplines to grasp common features of aesthetic experiences of extreme landscapes. My goal and aspiration is that this thesis will demonstrate the potential of this type of conceptual and methodological interconnection as a basis for effective collaboration.

Despite the interdisciplinarity of the approach, this thesis is first and foremost philosophical in so far conceptual analysis is the basis of the argument of the thesis. The first chapter will thus consist in a clarification of the concepts of beauty, the aesthetic and landscape. There has been an increasing interest in using the landscape concept in Icelandic conservation in the last years, but transforming this interest into actual practice has proven difficult, e.g. due to the lack of a clear and encompassing definition of the concept. As mentioned above, landscape has been associated with beauty or the aesthetic in the Icelandic language at least since settlement times and it still is in everyday language (Waage 2010; 2012). The most common exclamation of my interviewees, the “Wow!”, is always an expression of experiencing either wonder or beauty, or both. My aim is to bring out this relationship between the concepts of landscape and beauty and contribute in that way to the discussion about how to define and implement the landscape concept, as well as to circumscribe the concept of beauty with reference to aesthetic experiences of natural landscapes.

The history of the concepts of beauty and the aesthetic is important for my conceptual analysis because of how a widespread, narrow interpretation of beauty as visual and distant has directed the development of landscape aesthetics in relation to environmental assessment into a quest for objectivity. In response to this problem that has caused the weak status of landscape in decision-making processes, where the value of landscape is reduced to covering only the visual, I turn to an analysis of the concept of beauty from contemporary feminist and phenomenological viewpoints. These interpretations of beauty emphasize the relational and non-dualistic character of the experience of beauty. The idea of the relational self that is at the core of these interpretations of beauty and the aesthetic is different from the traditional idea of the self as distanced and separated from its environment. The relational self is always already in relation with itself, the other and the environment. The self-environment relation is a relation that is created through our aesthetic perception of environment, but this relation converges with the self's relation to itself and to the other as it also involves a type of self-understanding. This self-understanding is created through

reflecting on oneself and one's place in the natural world in relation to the human and non-human other.

After defining in more detail the relational understanding of beauty and the aesthetic, I turn to the landscape concept to show how this interpretation of beauty and the aesthetic can alter prevalent understanding of the landscape concept in landscape studies. This includes an analysis of the different approaches to landscape to be found in different disciplines with a special focus on dualistic tendencies in these discourses on landscape quality. As mentioned above, the objectivity vs. subjectivity debate on landscape has its roots in aesthetics, so through this analysis the chapter will flesh out the missing (or at least underestimated) links between landscape and aesthetics in landscape studies. Within contemporary geography and anthropology of landscape there are attempts to be found that avoid succumbing to either a onesidedly subject-centered or onesidedly object-centered account of landscape. These approaches are often inspired by Merleau-Ponty's philosophy of the embodied and relational subject and hence make strides in the same direction I do with my relational definition of the concept of landscape (Ingold 2000, Tilley 1997; 2004; 2008, Wylie 2007, Hirsch & O'Hanlon 1995).

Within this phenomenological turn there is however a widespread tendency to ignore the aesthetic aspect of landscape. With their emphasis on how we interact with the landscape as bodies, phenomenological theorists attempt to avoid the perspective on landscape that is confined to the visual, and this may result in an overall phobia of the aesthetic (Benediktsson 2007). However, as mentioned above, attempts to re-think and re-define the concept of beauty from feminist and phenomenological perspectives (Mann 2006, Johnson 2009, Böhme 2010) provide a resource to rethink beauty based on experiences of landscape. According to the prevalent account of beauty that has been most influential in common discourses, the concept refers to the form and appearance of objects and/or the pleasure these evoke in the subject that makes the judgment of beauty from a disinterested and distanced⁴¹ viewpoint. Johnson's phenomenological account of beauty is radically different from this view. Beauty does not only refer to a distanced judgment of form and appearance, rather it refers to a certain relation between subject and object that is characterized by openness. Beauty

⁴¹ As mentioned before, the nuances that can be found in the various views within philosophical aesthetics, seem not to have reached very far into other discourses than the philosophical. I already discussed how the contrasting views of beauty as objective or subjective have been most influential in common views on beauty while the nuances that describe the inbetween have been neglected. Other ideas that have had considerable influence are the ideas of distance and disinterestedness as being necessary conditions for making universally valid aesthetic judgments. These ideas have been interpreted in terms of a requirement that one should erase everything personal from aesthetic experience in order to be able to make a valid aesthetic judgment about the form of the object. Although this formalist interpretation has been challenged in philosophical aesthetics (as will be discussed further in section 1.3.3), it has remained influential in other discourses, where the nuances that emphasize a very different aspect of disinterestedness are neglected.

thus involves opening up towards the other as it appears in direct perception, when all the attention is drawn to the senses and preconceived ideas and interests are left in brackets.

Another important attempt to avoid the subject-object dichotomy is to be found in Gernot Böhme's philosophy where he introduces "atmosphere" as a central concept of his ecological aesthetics. With the concept of atmosphere Böhme describes how aesthetic perception (and perception in general) is the commonly generated reality of the perceiver and the perceived. According to Böhme, atmospheres emerge between subjects and objects: "[...]one can describe them as object-like emotions, which are randomly cast into a space. But one must at the same time describe them as subjective, insofar as they are nothing without a discerning subject. But their great value lies exactly in this in-betweenness" (Böhme 2000, 15). On the basis of his notion of atmosphere, Böhme articulates beauty as an atmosphere that is characterized by a felt presence of a landscape that attracts us and that enhances our sense for life (*Lebensgefühl*) (Böhme 1992a, 197).

Böhme makes an important stride by making beauty of nature a topic for phenomenologically inspired aesthetics, but his concept of atmospheric beauty accentuates a different aspect of the aesthetic experience of nature than I do. On the basis of my research, I want to concentrate on the relational aspect of the inbetweenness, i.e. how an aesthetic experience evokes a sense of beauty as a relation to nature that is also a relation to oneself as part of the larger whole of nature. I will pursue this relational concept of beauty with reference to recent trends in phenomenological and feminist work in aesthetics that in my view have enabled re-linking landscape and beauty (Embree & Rainer Sepp 2010, Toadvine 2010, Lintott 2010, Mann 2006, Jantzen 2004). The key to the relational aspect of beauty is the fact of embodiment, as I will explicate in this chapter.

On the basis of my interpretation of the concepts of beauty, landscape and the aesthetic provided in the first chapter, the second chapter will begin with an examination of the values associated with experiences of glacial and geothermal landscapes. The qualitative research offers an opportunity to test the viability of the theoretical concepts and frameworks that are discussed in chapter one. If the relational character of the concepts of landscape and beauty is acknowledged, one must examine thoroughly the relation that emerges in the aesthetic experience of landscape. The main goal of the qualitative research is not to suggest a method to assess or evaluate particular landscapes, but rather to get a general idea about the aesthetic meaning and value of the landscape types that characterize Iceland (which also shed light on the aesthetic experiences of extreme landscapes in general).

The second chapter is strictly speaking the "least philosophical" one since it is based on methods commonly used by the social sciences. That depends however on

how one defines what philosophy is, and how one imagines the borders between disciplines to lie. As I have already discussed, my approach combines the empirical methods of the social sciences with the philosophical method. However, one could also see the boundaries between these methods as being fluid, as the qualitative methods that this chapter is based on do have their origins in phenomenological philosophy, i.e. in phenomenological analysis of life-world experiences. The form of this chapter is hence interdisciplinary, or phenomenological in a wider, non-disciplinary sense. The analysis discloses the main characteristics of the aesthetic experience of geothermal and glacial landscapes, as well as the relation between the perceiver and the perceived that is generated in these experiences. The main part of this chapter will thus include a discussion of the results of the qualitative studies, also with reference to environmental aesthetic theories that have dealt with the aesthetic qualities which make up the basic elements of the experience of these landscapes. The features that characterize the aesthetic experiences of the participants the most are: Wonder, the sublime, imagination, attention to sensory perception and the importance of sharing and communicating the experience.

In the third chapter the aesthetic experiences that are described in chapter two are examined further, delving deeper into the meaning and value of these types of experiences and reflecting on the role they play in the quality of our individual and communal life, how they affect our understanding of ourselves in relation to our surroundings and how they affect our moral attitudes towards nature. In other words, one of the main focus of this chapter will be the transformative aspect of aesthetic experiences of extreme landscapes. Something literally “happens” to us in these kinds of aesthetic experiences. They transform us, and transformative values are values derived from such experiences that are capable of transforming our preferences (Norton 1984).⁴² I will also reflect on how environmental values are framed in general when they are discussed within environmental ethics and decision-making. Instead of focusing on the intrinsic or instrumental values of some objective properties, authors like Norton, Holland, O’Neill, Light and others suggest that environmental values should rather be thought of in terms of transformative values that are created through experiences that generate “meaningful relations” (Holland & Rawles 1994, Holland, Light & O’Neill 2008, Brady & Phemister 2012). This relational way of thinking about values makes it possible to blur the traditional boundaries between self and the

⁴² This type of value is central to Bryan Norton’s account of “weak anthropocentrism”: “[W]eak anthropocentrism as here defined also places value on human experiences that provide the basis for value formation. Because weak anthropocentrism places value not only on felt preferences, but also on the process of value formation embodied in the criticism and replacement of felt values with more rational ones, it makes possible appeals to the value of experiences of natural objects and undisturbed places in human value formation. To the extent that environmentalists can show that values are formed and informed by contact with nature, nature takes on value as a teacher of human values” (Norton, 1984, 135).

environment, and is thus more in line with the understanding of aesthetic value, landscape and beauty provided in the previous chapters.

The discussion of the fourth and last chapter returns to the original problem that this thesis responds to: the neglect of aesthetic values of landscape in environmental decision-making in Iceland. In the first three chapters the main goal is to gain an understanding of what landscape is and shed light on its aesthetic meaning and value, but in this last chapter I will turn to the other goal of this thesis which is to think of ways of integrating that meaning and value into environmental decision-making.

The way we understand the meaning and value of landscape directly affects the methods and approaches we use to deal with it in decision-making, and hence this chapter will consist in an elaboration of how the understanding of landscape, beauty and aesthetic value provided in this thesis can be made productive in our approach to these issues in decision-making. For this purpose, I again make use of the methods of social sciences by conducting a focus group study where I got a group of “landscape professionals” to reflect with me on how the aesthetic value of landscape could best be incorporated into the decision-making process. After reflecting on the results of the focus group study, different methods and approaches that can be used in order to broaden the scope of landscape assessment in environmental decision-making will be presented and critically reflected upon.

This thesis does not provide any easy solutions or one simple method that can be used as an assessment tool for evaluating landscapes; this is not the goal. Rather the goal is to elaborate conceptual tools provided by philosophical reflection that allow us to discuss an issue that has been neglected and left unsolved due to the shadow cast by the Western frame of dualistic thought. This shadow will continue to decrease in size as more and more disciplines collaborate in overcoming the subject-object dualism that continues to haunt scientific, theoretical and everyday ways of thinking. This thesis is thus a part of the larger project of re-thinking the human subject by giving special attention to the dimension of an environmental self, and applying this re-thinking to the value and assessment systems that we use to frame our reality.

1. Landscape, Beauty and the Aesthetic

In order to examine the aspects of landscape that are associated with aesthetic valuing it is necessary to first be clear about what is meant by the term aesthetic. To shed light on the aesthetic I will begin by looking at the history of this concept and suggest how it leads to the specific meaning of it which I will propose on the basis of my research in relation to landscape. The aim of this chapter is both to work out a notion of the aesthetic and of beauty to lay a methodological and conceptual foundation for aesthetics as a component of landscape assessment. This will be done by first looking into the closely connected philosophical roots of a very widespread, narrow understanding of the concepts of beauty and the aesthetic. I will argue that our understanding of the aesthetic depends largely on our understanding of the concept of beauty and thus exploring the meaning of the aesthetic in relation to landscape must include an examination of the concept of beauty. I will thus treat the concept of the beautiful as a key to unlock the specific meanings of the aesthetic and of landscape that I will propose.

As discussed in the introduction, there has been a tendency amongst landscape theorists to neglect the aesthetic aspect of landscape when they attempt to eschew the subject-object divide in their understanding of the landscape concept. This is because the traditional Western interpretations of beauty that have influenced our understanding of the aesthetic do not seem to have managed to make enough room for moving beyond the subject-object divide since the nuances of these interpretations have not reached into common discourses that are still based either on the narrow idea of the disinterested judgment of visual beauty made by a distant subjective viewer or on the idea of objective properties. I argue on the other hand that rather than giving up the aesthetic aspect of the landscape concept to move beyond the subject-object divide in the prevailing understanding of landscape, one should take one step back. I propose one should begin by leaving aside the interpretations of beauty and the aesthetic that depend on holding on to this dualistic thinking, and re-examine these rich concepts that do indeed offer the possibility of guiding our understanding of landscape away from the subject-object divide. I will begin by examining the philosophical roots of the concept of beauty by discussing exemplary stages in its historical development and argue how certain dimensions of traditional notions of beauty have led to a devaluation and often neglect of beauty in modern and enlightenment philosophy. I will then turn to a re-examination of the concept of beauty in order to reveal a certain hidden thread that

displays a very different idea of beauty and the aesthetic that emphasizes the intertwining rather than separation of subject and object in the experience of beauty (Jantzen 2004, Johnson 2009). Finally I will discuss how this re-thinking of beauty and the aesthetic informs the way we understand the landscape concept and the values associated with it.

1.1. The Intertwining of the Beautiful and the Aesthetic

The establishment of contemporary philosophical aesthetics in the 18th century is of importance for this study insofar as it reveals how the concepts of beauty and the aesthetic became closely intertwined and how the focus on a specific understanding of beauty influenced prevalent ideas about the aesthetic. When Baumgarten first used the term –“aesthetic” in 1735 his purpose was to delineate the philosophical study of art and natural beauty. His choice of a word is certainly telling about his idea of what is at the heart of experiencing art and beauty, and his choice of a definition tells the same story. The Greek origin of the term, *aisthesis*, refers to *sense perception* and Baumgarten’s definition was that the field of “[a]esthetics (the theory of the liberal arts, lower gnosology, the art of beautiful thinking, the art of the analogue of reason) is the science of sensitive cognition” (Guyer 2005, 3).⁴³ Thus he made clear that examining sense perception and the knowledge gained from it, was central to theorizing about art and beauty.

Although the importance of sense perception is again acknowledged in contemporary aesthetics (Berleant 2010a, Chaplin 2005, Diaconu 2006), this aspect of the aesthetic has not been given the attention it requires. This can be explained by the fact that even though Baumgarten emphasized sense perception in his definition of aesthetics as “the science of sensitive cognition”, the concept of beauty has become more central to the development of Western aesthetics. Indeed, until the mid-nineteenth century aesthetics was the theory of beauty, the words *aesthetic* and *beautiful* were often seen as synonyms. This focus on beauty at the cost of aesthetic sense perception has had many consequences, but the most serious one is the metaphysical structure that accompanied the concept of beauty.

1.1.1. The Metaphysical Structure of Beauty: The Visual and the Aural

The metaphysical structure of the concept of beauty is embedded in the very foundation of the ancient idea that beauty should have more to do with the soul rather than the body. The idea that sight and hearing are the aesthetic senses (the senses central to perceiving beauty) was promoted in Greek philosophy because these senses were seen as more closely related to reason; since they are the distant

⁴³ Guyer quotes Baumgarten’s *Metaphysica*, (1739/1983, §533) and *Aesthetica* (1750-58/1961, §1).

receptors they do not destroy the isolation of the contemplative mind like the contact senses, touch, taste and smell, that call attention to the body. In ancient Greek, especially Platonic thought, beauty was understood in relation to the good and the true – the good, the true and the beautiful were known by the contemplative mind or reason.

Even though Baumgarten's aim was to relate the beautiful to our sensuous, non-conceptual understanding and disassociate it from this too restricted ancient notion of beauty that was tied to the good and the true, the emphasis on the visual and the aural continued to permeate reflections on the aesthetic. The distant receptors of sight and hearing were seen as the ideal of the aesthetic sensibility because they were more closely related to reason, to the contemplative mind through which beauty should be experienced. Inherent in this thought is the assumption that the contemplative mind, which is thus associated with sight and hearing, is something different from the body that is associated with smell and touch. Thus the metaphysical structure of mind-body and subject-object dualism is built into the core idea of beauty as experienced by the distant, contemplative mind.

One form that this structuring of the concept of beauty takes is the concept of *disinterestedness*, which Kant claimed to be one of the main characteristics of a true judgment of beauty. After Kant, the concept of disinterestedness became one of the core ideas of philosophical aesthetics. The traditional interpretation of the concept of disinterestedness has helped keep alive the emphasis on the visual and the aural; the distant receptors allow the subject's distant and disinterested contemplation of the object's formal qualities. According to Arnold Berleant, one of the major pitfalls of the concept of disinterestedness is its "tendency to fragment the aesthetic situation into separate elements, typically the beholder on the one side and the art object on the other, elements that then need to be related and reconciled" (Berleant & Hepburn 2003, 2) This pitfall has created many problems in aesthetics and one of them is the problem of objectivity that has been at the heart of the development of Western aesthetics.⁴⁴ The problem of objectivity has led to the tendency to ignore the types of values that cannot be accurately quantified in a clearly objective manner.

As discussed earlier, the problem of objectivity has a great influence on how we conceive of and deal with nature when it comes to environmental decision-making. From the perspective of the quest for objectivity it seems so much easier and less controversial to count species or money in order to determine conservation values than to take into account the allegedly subjective aesthetic values that people associate with their experiences of natural landscape, and so these values are comfortably put to the side and neglected.

⁴⁴ The concept of disinterestedness will be discussed further later in this chapter.

1.1.2. *How to Measure the Immeasurable?*

This angle of the problem is the same one Husserl addressed in his writings on the crisis of the European sciences, where he criticized the European or Western scientific frame of mind for changing the world of perceived nature into a mathematical world, where everything that cannot be submitted under a scientific, objective calculation and is therefore “merely” subjective, must be eliminated and declared as worthless, inexact and insufficient (Husserl 1979/1936). The fact is that we have come to rely so much on numbers, mathematics and calculation in order to represent our knowledge of the world and the values we associate with it that we have come to believe that things that are not quantifiable are not worth identifying. Or perhaps we don’t even believe that they are not worth identifying, but rather we simply don’t know how to deal with the immeasurable aspects of human existence and therefore we get confused when we are confronted with them.

To exemplify this, let me tell a little story from a meeting where landscape professionals came together to discuss ways of dealing with the value of landscape in decision-making, methods of finding out what landscape is and what it is worth. At the meeting there were many landscape architects, planners and professionals who all had very good technological methods to deal with landscape. Everything that could be quantified was quantified and made visual through maps and graphs and numbers. But one of these professionals had a big complaint: “we all have very good methods of quantifying and visualizing the landscape’s objective qualities – and this is an important part of landscape evaluation - but we don’t know how to deal with what landscape really is: what is in here” - he said as he pointed to his head. And the others agreed with him. Thus the problem was not that they didn’t acknowledge the existence of the aspect of landscape that cannot be quantified, they just didn’t know how to deal with it.⁴⁵ How do you measure the immeasurable?

This confusion or crisis that arises when we are confronted with the qualitative dimensions of existence has its roots in the divide that we have been taught to see between the subjective and objective. The reason why these professionals have not found a way to deal with the “subjective” aspect of the landscape concept is that this aspect is (and has been for a long time in the Icelandic language)⁴⁶ connected in their minds to the concept of beauty. Landscape is understood in terms of experiencing beauty in nature, and beauty is understood as being purely subjective and thus also relative, and this leads to the idea that there is no way of taking these

⁴⁵ This confusion and conflicts about the use of the landscape concept are also discussed in Edda R.H. Waage’s research. See Waage & Benediktsson (2010).

⁴⁶ Waage’s research into the origin and everyday use of the word *landslag* in Icelandic confirms this. See Waage (2010, 2102).

experiences of beauty into account because there is no way of coming to an objective conclusion about something that is inherently subjective.⁴⁷

From this we can see that this particular qualitative dimension of human existence we choose to call the aesthetic value of landscape has been seen as very difficult to deal with and the result is that the values associated with this dimension have been ignored in decision-making. But what can we do to change this? How can we deal with the qualitative dimensions of human existence? In searching for answers to these questions it is useful to take a closer look at how the ideological structures of the European sciences that Husserl criticized influence the way we approach the world, and more specifically how they influence the way we think about aesthetic values and landscape.

Husserl's criticism is aimed at the fundamental assumptions of the sciences: the division between subject and object and the resulting quest for objectivity that is inherent in the scientific method. These assumptions lead to the neglect of the dimensions of existence that cannot be objectified. It is hard to find strong objectivity in these dimensions that are characterized by blurring the distinction between subject and object. So rather than dealing with this difficulty, these dimensions are simply ignored. It is a long time since Husserl made this criticism and even longer since Goethe made similar suggestions and argued that the qualitative aspect of existence could not be captured by measurement and calculation (Simms 2005). But in many aspects we have still not taken their criticisms seriously and the quest for objectivity continues to shape philosophy's many branches in different ways. Aesthetic thought is not excluded, as Berleant has pointed out, Western aesthetics has been based on the same fundamental assumptions as Western science (Berleant 2010b).

1.1.4. The Quest for Objectivity in Aesthetics

In his paper "Reconsidering Scenic Beauty" Berleant questions the quest for objectivity that has characterized aesthetic thought at least since Baumgarten (Berleant 2010b). The assumption that in order to understand judgments of taste one has to start by explaining the apparent objectivity of aesthetic values and how universality is necessary for making valid aesthetic judgments, is based on a dualistic understanding of the subject/object relationship.

⁴⁷ This view can be seen in a report on The Nature Conservation Strategy 2004-2008 from the Environment Agency of Iceland (Harðardóttir 2003, 34), as well as in the above mentioned qualitative case study of the preparation for the Icelandic Nature Conservation Strategy 2004-2008, where contributors to the strategy were interviewed (Waage & Benediktsson 2010, 18). This will be further discussed in the section on landscape.

Thus Kant, Hume and other 18th century thinkers aimed to explain how an aesthetic judgment that seems to be subjective, also seems to have some degree of objectivity, and this was perceived as a problem because of the disparity between the subjective experience of beauty and the independence of the object toward which the judgment is directed (Berleant 2010b, 339). Their goal was to understand *why* we feel that we can expect universality; an agreement from everyone else, when we say that something is beautiful, while we can normally only expect agreement on objective matters. The starting point thus becomes to explain how aesthetic judgments are *different* from other judgments because they seem to belong to *both* the subjective and objective, whereas other judgments are seen as being *either* subjective *or* objective. The philosophical baggage of Platonic and Cartesian mind/body, rationality/emotions, object/subject dualisms has arguably influenced the development of this starting point considerably, as it has influenced most Western philosophical thinking.

Even though these authors discovered many interesting nuances where the borders between the subjective and objective are blurred, their starting point has cast a shadow on these nuances. Starting the quest for understanding aesthetic judgments from the point of view that the subjective is something inherently different from the objective, already influences where the quest finds answers before it has started. As Berleant points out, the division between subject and object structures the whole issue of aesthetic judgment, and “[t]he fact that this [division] imposes a template on experience is overlooked” (Berleant 2010b, 340).

Instead of structuring the issue of aesthetic judgment around the division between subject and object, it should be structured around the relation between subject and object that emerges through the aesthetic experience. Berleant thus suggests we should change the starting point of aesthetic thought:

When we make perceptual continuity central in aesthetic appreciation, we transform the problem of aesthetic judgment. In place of a dualism of viewer and landscape, perceiver and object, each of the pair reciprocates the other, and we have a situation in the form of an aesthetic field characterised by an actively perceiving human participant within and part of a sensory environment. Every perceiver contributes to the situation, not only through perceptual activity, but with the invisible dimensions of past experience, memory, knowledge and conditioning – the whole range of personal and cultural factors that colour our active sensory experience, whether or not we are aware of it (Berleant 2010b, 344).

By starting from the relation between the subjective and objective rather than the difference between them, and acknowledging and embracing the variability of

aesthetic judgments as well as their communicability, rather than focusing on objectivity and universality, we might find some new and useful threads to base our thinking about aesthetics on.⁴⁸

When the starting point of aesthetics becomes perceptual experience rather than “the requirement to conform to an a priori logical or epistemic criterion of universality” (Berleant 2010b, 346), we can start picking up threads that allow us to focus on and discuss the content of our perceptual aesthetic experiences and reflect empirically on where we are in agreement and why: “The extent of agreement is thus an empirical matter. It is no surprise that its scope is considerable, even though far from universal, considering the biological and cultural commonalities that bind people together” (Berleant 201b, 346). Perhaps this will allow us to find better ways of dealing with aesthetic value in practice by opening up a space for acknowledging and reflecting on actual appreciative experiences and the values found in them, rather than focusing only on objective qualities. As discussed above, the tradition of striving for objectivity in all matters of evaluation can lead to a neglect of the aspects of the aesthetic value of landscape that cannot be framed in a strictly objective manner. The aesthetic value of landscape is created in an intertwining of objective and subjective aspects and if the evaluation of such value is restricted to objectivity, the most important aspects of it are lost.

Even though discussions of the relation between the subjective and objective are commonplace in philosophical aesthetics from Kant and Hume to current debates, the knowledge gained through these discussions has not managed to undermine the striving for objectivity in assessment of landscape that is driven by technocratic demands for scientific accuracy. If there was awareness of the untenability of strict objectivity, it would be accepted that the aesthetic value of landscape should be framed in terms of the relation between the physical qualities of the land and the aesthetic experience of it, rather than only in terms of its physical qualities, as has often been the case. Since the aesthetic experience of landscape is assumed to be too subjective and relative to be taken into account in evaluations and decision-making, this aspect of the value of landscape has simply been left out. Thus dealing with the value of natural landscapes has been reduced to dealing with objective physical features of the land that can be shown to be rare, diverse or unique.

These kinds of standards and especially the “objective” methods derived from them are at a closer look arguably not even as objective as they are presented to be.

⁴⁸ By starting from this relation we might also come to understand better how the presumably “objective” judgments of the sciences also have their subjective aspects; in other words, how the boundaries between the objective and subjective are blurred not only in aesthetic judgments but in other types of judgments as well. For further discussion see Harding (1991).

Landscape is not a stable object; it changes with the weather, climatic, zoological, botanical and geopolitical conditions. The experience of landscape changes with the mood of the weather and the perceiver as well. Landscape is not only visual; sometimes all the visual features are hidden by fog, snow or rain and clouds – but the landscape is still there to be experienced. Confronting this situation, it is simply decided subjectively that simplification is necessary and the weather needs to be stabilized when the landscape check-list is filled out. We also decide subjectively that the most diverse and rare landscapes are the most valuable ones. My point here is a phenomenological one, that we are dealing with meanings that are given based on certain experiences as well as diverse interests when discussing landscape values. Thus there is always a “subjective” decision made somewhere on the way to an “objective” evaluation.⁴⁹

Why is it so hard to admit that our “objective” standards are not strictly objective after all, and that neither are our allegedly subjective standards completely subjective? Do we necessarily have to rely on the idea that there exists some kind of strict objectivity or subjectivity? According to Berleant, this is “not the first time that philosophy has tied itself up in knots of its own making, and this is nowhere more evident than in attempts to objectify the world” (Berleant 2010b, 340). The remnants of dualistic schemes that have permeated Western philosophy have tied philosophical aesthetics among other disciplines up in knots that need to be untied. Berleant suggests that in order to do so it is good to take a look at some theoretical developments in philosophy and other disciplines that have aimed at overcoming the subject-object dichotomy. He mentions developments in psychology; that the sociology of knowledge has shown how cultural factors underlie our conceptual structures; and that in philosophy Merleau-Ponty and others have developed theories where the subject-object dichotomy is overcome. These conceptual changes also have their counterparts in the sciences, for example in relativity theory and quantum mechanics. But as Berleant points out: “general understanding usually lags generations behind major scientific developments, and philosophic theory is no exception” (Berleant 2010b, 343).

So even though all these developments that suggest that the subject-object dichotomy should not be taken for granted, aesthetic thought still hasn’t taken this wisdom to heart: “conventional views of aesthetic experience cannot accommodate such a change” (Berleant 2010b, 343). This imbalance between the subject and the object is evident in philosophical aesthetics despite longstanding efforts to the contrary. Analytic aesthetics focuses too much on the art object, while what could

⁴⁹ This was confirmed by my interviewees in a focus group study which will be discussed in chapter four.

be called the continental tradition in aesthetics focuses too much on subjectivity and thus “both suffer from partiality and incompleteness” (Berleant 2010b, 344).

I agree with Berleant that we need to look to all the theories and insights that have already started to move beyond the subject-object dichotomy in the last century, and for my purposes, Merleau-Ponty’s thought is a very useful source to look for guidance. In the next sections I will therefore explore how an approach to aesthetics that is inspired by Merleau-Ponty’s philosophy looks like and how it changes the way we think about and frame the aesthetic value of landscape. As discussed above, our understanding of the concept of beauty directs our understanding of the aesthetic, so if we are to get beyond the dualistic understanding of the aesthetic and the value of landscape, we need to rethink the concept of beauty. There is however a tendency to avoid the concept of beauty, precisely because it is assumed that it leads to subjectivism about aesthetic value. With the aim of getting beyond the subject-object divide in the understanding of landscape, the tendency within landscape studies has been to emphasize the role of perceptual experience in creating the meaning of landscape without referring to the concept of beauty or even the aesthetic aspect of this perceptual experience (Ingold 1993, Casey 2001, Massey 2006, Wiley 2007, Dewsbury & Cloke 2009).

I argue firstly, that the perceptual, emotional and bodily experience of landscape *is* the aesthetic experience of landscape and secondly that the concept of beauty should play a key role in understanding the aesthetic experience of landscape. The understanding of beauty that I will propose does indeed provide a basis for shedding light on the intertwining of subject and object that characterizes the perceptual, emotional, bodily or simply: aesthetic, experience of landscape. As will be explained later in this chapter, one of the main characteristics of beauty is the rapt attentiveness that is given to sensuous perception in the experience of beauty and thus understanding this aspect of beauty should be the starting point for understanding the aesthetic (perceptual, emotional) experience of landscape.

Within environmental aesthetics, the tendency has also been to neglect the concept of beauty as such. Even though natural beauty is of course the main topic of environmental aesthetics or more specifically; the aesthetics of nature, the concept of beauty itself has not been central. Rather terms such as aesthetic appreciation, aesthetic perception or aesthetic experience have been in the leading role in theories within environmental aesthetics. Perhaps many authors find it unnecessary to discuss beauty specifically as they see it as being an inherent part of discussing aesthetic experience or appreciation; perhaps they are using aesthetic experience as a synonym for beauty. Whatever the reason is, this is usually not something that is considered to need any specific explanation. But I in contrast think that it does need to be explained and that there is an important reason behind

the low profile of the concept of beauty within both environmental aesthetics and landscape studies.

As will be discussed in the following section, the concept of beauty has come to be seen, largely, as uninteresting and trivial both in art and philosophy in the last century or so. It has been devalued and neglected and this history of the concept is arguably an important part of the reason why beauty has not been treated as central in environmental aesthetics, landscape studies and other fields that deal with perception and the aesthetic. However, the main reason behind this devaluing and neglect of beauty has to do with the narrowing of the concept of beauty that especially modern art contributed to. But instead of giving up on the concept for this reason, I argue that one should rather just leave this narrow understanding behind and revisit the concept of beauty from the perspective of experiences of landscape. This section will thus begin with exploring attempts at rethinking the concept of beauty from phenomenological and feminist perspectives. On the basis of such perspectives I will throw new light on the concept of the aesthetic. I will argue that it is possible to flesh out meanings of experiences of beauty of landscapes without falling back into the subject-object divide.

1.2. Phenomenological and Feminist Reclamations of the Concept of Beauty

As discussed above, the concept of beauty has been central to our philosophical understanding of what the aesthetic is. In everyday language the words *beauty* and *beautiful* are more or less unaffected by philosophical critique of these terms, but yet they are clearly quite elusive and hard to define. The word *beauty* is so commonly used that every person probably claims to know what it means, until she is asked to define it. Why is this concept so complicated in its simplicity? Is it because the experience of beauty which seems so simple – to be fascinated by the red color and sweet smell of a rose, or the golden rays of sunset by a glacier – affects our consciousness in a complex and deep manner? Is the experience of beauty one of the most important pillars of human life? If so, perhaps it should not be so surprising that defining the concept of beauty has proved to be so difficult. We have here a similar situation as when dealing with god and the divine; beauty and the aesthetic are names that we have given to certain distinctly human experiences that play an important part in creating the core of what it means to be human, but at the same time these are experiences that are difficult to express in clear and concise terms.

As is common with elusive concepts the concept of beauty has been understood and misunderstood in many different ways through history. After

having almost disappeared from 20th century aesthetics,⁵⁰ many scholars have tried to revive the concept of beauty and bring it back into focus in the last decades (Mothersill 1984, Kirwan 1999, Scarry 2001, Johnson 2009, Brand 2000; 2013, McMahan 2011, Heller 2012) Most of them have in common that they start their revival of beauty by tracing the traditional ideas of beauty that have led to its displacement in 20th century art discourses rendering it a notion that is not any longer seen as the hallmark of the aesthetic. What happened in the history of ideas of beauty and in our culture that made beauty appear as uninteresting and trivial both in art and philosophy? The connection between beauty and ideas of embodiment and femininity in traditional and modern aesthetics play an important role in this development. These ideas have led to the situation that beauty has been devalued because of its relation to the body and the feminine in a philosophical era that has been permeated by a dualistic divide between body and soul, emotion and reason, beauty and the sublime. Now when aestheticians and philosophers started moving beyond this dualistic way of thinking and undermining these traditional distinctions, new possibilities opened up for reconceptualizing beauty and the beautiful.

The deconstruction of the dualisms of body and soul, and beauty and the sublime, makes it possible to get past some of the difficulties with dealing with beauty. In art the difficulty has been centered around the view that beauty is trivial and light-weight, and in philosophy around the view that beauty is little more than what we mean when we find something to be pleasurable. There are further features to traditional accounts of the concept of beauty that have contributed to its devaluation. Distinctions between “subjective” and “objective” notions of beauty have remained sharp despite efforts within modern aesthetics to problematize them. This has resulted in onesided notions of subjective and objective dimensions of works of art and phenomena of beauty. According to the “subjective” notion, beauty infamously is in the eye of the beholder and the “objective” notion holds the opposite view – beauty is in the physical form and quality of the object. Both of these accounts remain flawed if the “in-between” of beauty, i.e. the interplay of the subjective and the objective is ignored. One notion is thought to exclude the other and so this interplay is not accounted for.

⁵⁰ As Kirwan points out: “When the word beauty is used in aesthetics – as it sometimes is, in the forewords, conclusions, and even titles and subtitles of books on the philosophy of art – it is used as a mere rhetorical flourish: a word either without any meaning whatsoever, or given a meaning (for example, as a blanket term for the merits that art may possess) that is quite at odds with that normal usage which constitutes its meaning in the world beyond.[...]“Beauty“ quietly slips away from the serious business of philosophizing about art – as, indeed, it should” (Kirwan 1999, viii).

1.2.1 Gendered Beauty

Distinctions of objective and subjective dimensions of beauty and the aesthetic have corresponded to dualistic ideas about gender differences. The subjective has within aesthetics traditionally been associated with the feminine as the emotional and affective. An objective approach has been associated with masculine connoted rational assessment. This has had repercussions on the concept of beauty leading to its downgrading as merely “cute” and hence insignificant. Ever since Burke and Kant established the division between the beautiful and the sublime the concept of beauty has increasingly been devalued. According to this division, beauty was associated with the small and feminine and the sublime with the grand and masculine.

This association of beauty with the small, delicate and feminine, restricts our use of the word, it is this association that brings on the thought that calling something beautiful is trivializing it, beauty becomes a synonym for “cute” or “kitch”. According to this notion, beauty is a rather insignificant “extra”; a decoration on the surface that causes vague, shallow pleasure; beauty is something that women should concern themselves with, but a real man should not care about something so trivial. This narrow idea of beauty is very much being questioned in recent feminist philosophy of beauty (Brand 2000; 2013, Jantzen 2004, Korsmeyer 2005). Grace Jantzen has in her book *Death and the Displacement of Beauty* argued that a much more provocative idea of beauty can be found within the philosophical tradition (Jantzen 2004, 88), and that this tradition was thoroughly forgotten in the modern devaluations of beauty.

The idea of beauty that has been repressed in the history of Western philosophy is nonetheless there - an idea of beauty that is also connected to femininity, but a different and more dangerous kind of femininity than the one confined to the mere pleasurable. Jantzen points out that a certain dilemma has characterized the concept of beauty in the history of philosophy. Both Augustine and Plato did their best to remove beauty from the realm of the body and transfer it to the realm of the soul. The connection between beauty and the body was poison in their eyes. Why? According to Jantzen, the true source of this fear lies in their fear of gender, sexuality and otherness. In Plato’s account beauty is among other things related to desire for the young boy’s body, but is transferred to the female body in Augustine’s Christian philosophy. Beauty thus becomes the tempting, seducing and dangerous beauty of the female body. This type of beauty can bring on such burning desire that it causes obsession with getting one’s hands on the object of beauty and owning it. Augustine assumed that this would cause men to worship beauty instead of God (Jantzen 2004, 141). Augustine and Plato realized that one of the main

characteristics of beauty is that we are drawn towards it – it has a power of attraction that creates desire within us. And in their minds, according to Jantzen’s interpretation, desire was Eros, sexual and bodily desire. According to this understanding beauty is what causes sexual desire.

With this reasoning in mind, it is perhaps understandable that Plato and Augustine wanted to separate beauty from the body; they cared very much about beauty and wanted to hold on to it, and in order for that to be possible they found it necessary to ignore the body and the strong desire that came with it. The conclusion thus became that yes, beauty has its roots in sensory perception (and thus the body), but it is only sight and hearing that bring us beauty, not smell and touch. We don’t perceive beauty with the whole body, rather we perceive it from a distance, through the senses that do not call for closeness and bodily contact. This view can for example be seen in the *Symposium* where it is claimed that only the eye of the soul can see true beauty, untainted by human flesh (Plato 1989, 563[211e]).

This fear of beauty that characterized religious and philosophical views in the middle ages can also be seen in the thoughts of 14th century poet and philosopher Petrarca on natural beauty. In his writings on the *Ascent of Mont Ventoux*, which is probably one of the first philosophical writings on landscape and beauty, Petrarca describes the guilt he feels as he loses himself in enjoying the beauty of the landscape. He feels guilt because Augustine’s works had taught him that earthly beauty should not be enjoyed since this would distract one from thinking of God (Petrarca 2006). This separation of beauty from the body is then maintained in the history of philosophy, and the result is that beauty has gradually lost its power, until it had almost disappeared from any serious discourses and become a cheap advertising trick or surface decoration.⁵¹

The contemporary philosophers who have attempted to restore a deeper and richer concept of beauty criticize the traditional notions of beauty and how they appear in the modern consumerist media culture. They also have in common to suggest an alternative approach towards the “problem” with objectivity vs. subjectivity of beauty. Instead of viewing beauty as *either* subjective *or* objective, the boundary between subjectivity and objectivity is removed and attention paid to how

⁵¹ Cultural views of beauty have played their role, women have long been oppressed in the name of beauty as can be seen in the foot-binding of Chinese women and the tight corselets of European women in the past. In *The Beauty Myth*, Naomi Wolf (1991) has shown how ideals of beauty have been used to suppress women. Surely women have used beautiful appearances, clothing and ornaments as tools to get ahead, but these are tools that are examples of the weapon of the powerless. It is interesting that as women have gained more power and influence in public life in the 20th century the demand for the right appearance has grown louder. Plastic surgeries and demands for being thin can thus be seen as the “corselet” of modern times.

beauty is in fact the type of human experience where it becomes impossible to distinguish between mind and body, object and subject, human and environment.

Another alternative approach is a response to the idea of beauty as being merely pretty, cute and feminine. Here beauty is seen as something much deeper and more comprehensive than is accounted for in ideas of surface decorations and standards of beauty that boost the sales. According to this approach, perceiving beauty is a deep, even spiritual, experience that has a deep impact on the one who experiences it and her relation to the world (Jantzen 2004, Johnson 2009, Böhme 2010).⁵²

Related to this approach is the response to the idea of beauty as a seductive and dangerous erotic beauty that was transferred with Christianity from the ancient Greek philosopher's love of young boys to women, and thus became a dangerous desire, even demonic in comparison with the spiritual desire for the divine. In this response, it is acknowledged that beauty is a powerful attraction that creates desire, but this desire is very different from the negative bodily desire that Augustine and Plato feared – the desire that is grounded in sexual attraction, and longing for getting one's hands on, owning and even controlling the object of beauty. Very early on there can be found different accounts of beauty that do not dismiss the body, quite the contrary. The ancient Greek poet Sappho wanted to allow the acknowledgement of the beauty of earthly bodies and the beauty of her loved one's body (Jantzen 2004, 195). But these accounts did not gain hold in the history of ideas.

Simone Weil takes up this hidden thread when she writes that the love for beauty in the world is a love for everything precious that bad fortune can destroy (Weil 1951, 115). Thus beauty can be connected to caring about and relating to something. This is one reason why contemporary philosophers are now digging up this hidden thread – because the desire for beauty has to do with a certain relation between subject and object – a relation that is characterized by something else than controlling and owning the object. As mentioned above, feminist and phenomenological thinkers are amongst those who have emphasized these alternative approaches to understanding beauty and now it is time to take a closer look at the ideas of those thinkers.

Before beginning to reconstruct the concept of beauty following the aforementioned hidden thread, let me say a few things about the specific theoretical context of beauty *in nature* that I am working within. One of the central questions that environmental aestheticians have dealt with is the question whether the aesthetic appreciation of art and nature can be explained by one theory or if we need

⁵² This approach will be further discussed later in this chapter.

separate accounts for the aesthetic appreciation of art and of nature since they are inherently different from one another (Hepburn 1966, Berleant 2004, Carlson 2004).

Although artworks and natural landscapes call for different assessment, there are good reasons to argue that beauty in art and beauty in nature are in important respects different sides to the same coin. Both involve a sensory immersion that can stimulate pleasure, thought and reflection – they are a source of “sensory knowledge” as Baumgarten would put it. Looking at a painting, dwelling in a natural landscape, listening to music, reading a book – all of these activities can stimulate our emotions and our perception of the world in various ways, and our emotions and our perception of the world are an extremely important part of how we *know* the world. In both cases of art and nature we have learned to appreciate with time that not only calm, peaceful, symmetrically perfect forms and sounds can be sources of beauty, but also caotic, irregular, disturbing features can be appreciated as aesthetically interesting. A famous example is the change in people’s attitude towards the Alps in the 18th century. The mountains that were once considered to be a horrible and threatening obstacle were now appreciated as magestical and *sublime* (Nicolson 1997).

The concept of the sublime, originally more connected to nature, increasingly also became preferred in aesthetic thought on art in the 20th century (Kirwan 2005). Beauty was, as mentioned above, subsequently devalued as it was considered to refer to the weak and feminine in opposition to the masculine sublime. Beauty was thus thought to be unuseful and irrelevant for understanding the complex experiences of modern and avant garde art. So beauty was marginalized in theories of art for a long time. But what happened with beauty in relation to appreciation of nature?

Even though early modern theories in aesthetics usually discuss both art and nature, the central questions of 20th century aesthetics were primarily focused on art. The four questions that are often thought to be at the center of the field of aesthetics since Plato are “what is the nature and value of beauty? what is the connection between art and knowledge? what is the connection between aesthetics and morality? and what is genius, the source of artistic inspiration?” (Guyer 2005, x). The last three questions have centered more around art; the artist, the genius and the art object’s qualities. The first and most basic question of aesthetics, “what is the nature and value of beauty?” became less significant as philosophical aesthetics focused more and more on art alone. Both nature and beauty were put aside in aesthetic thought as the field of aesthetics became defined as the philosophy of art.

Beauty and nature have however both been surfacing again in the later half of the 20th century. What is the reason why these concepts vanish and resurface in aesthetic thought at similar points in modern philosophical aesthetics and theories of art? The concept of beauty was not only devalued in theories on art, but also in

aesthetics in general because at the same time as beauty was ignored in theories of art, the appreciation of nature was hardly a subject of theories on aesthetics. Hence an important venue left for beauty to matter in aesthetics became peripheral. According to my findings on experiences of landscape, beauty and nature are concepts that go hand in hand. In order to be able to properly answer the question “what is the nature and value of beauty?” one needs to reflect on experiences of beauty in nature. Like Böhme (2010) has argued, such experiences of beauty in nature call for a rethinking of the concept of beauty for the notion of beauty as the pretty and the agreeable is too narrow to capture diverse experiences of beauty in nature. One of the goals of this study is precisely to flesh out such a richer concept of beauty in light of experiences of natural landscapes. So in my mind, one way for bringing beauty back into the philosophical aesthetic discourse is through the aesthetics of nature and natural landscape. Beauty and nature have been led hand in hand out of philosophical aesthetics, and their return can also be made hand in hand.

My aim with examining the concept of beauty in the next sections - what we mean when we describe a landscape as beautiful - will be to shed light on the experience of certain Icelandic landscape types that can be characterized as extreme landscapes. It is these landscapes that have led me in the direction of exploring the concepts of beauty, landscape and the aesthetic from perspectives of Merleau-Pontian and other phenomenological insights. The results of the qualitative studies that will be discussed in chapter two reveal an experience that is characterized by perceiving “sublime beauty” or *aggifegurð*⁵³ - an aesthetic quality that puts the human perceiver into a different kind of relation with reality – a metaphysical relation. *Ægífegurð* can bring out a metaphysical insight into our relation with non-human nature as it brings to light our own vulnerability and dependence on the natural systems of which we are such a tiny part.

This experience also reveals how the distinction between the perceiver and the perceived becomes blurred in a manner that is best explained by looking into the hidden thread of the beautiful that can be found in Merleau-Ponty’s aesthetic thought. For this purpose Galen A. Johnson’s reflections on the concept of beauty from the perspective of Maurice Merleau-Ponty’s philosophy prove to be very useful in illuminating the idea and concept of natural beauty that I encounter in descriptions of my interviewees (Johnson 2009). In that way Johnson’s reflections help shed light on the aesthetic experiences of the extreme natural landscapes that

⁵³ As mentioned in the Introduction, *aggifegurð* is a term that has often been used to translate the sublime and is a combination of the word *aggi*, which means grandness or awesomeness, but can also describe fear or being threatened by something, and *fegurð*, which means beauty. I will discuss this term further later in this chapter.

characterize Iceland and that are the focus of this project on landscape aesthetics. While Johnson is mainly dealing with the experience of beauty in light of experiencing art, my focus will be on nature, and my aim is to utilize Johnson's insights amongst others to understand the experience of beauty and *agifegurð* that appears in my qualitative data.

1.2.2. New Perspectives on Beauty

One of the basic premises of my approach is how the subjective and the objective merge in experiences of landscape. Johnson is driven by the same insight when he claims at the beginning of his study that it would be a great loss if the concept of beauty disappears totally from philosophical discourse because beauty is one of few concepts that offers the possibility of thinking beyond subject and object. Beauty occupies a "strange and different" place that is neither completely subjective or completely objective, and according to Johnson it is important to pay more attention to this strange place:

The disappearance in our times of the concept of the beautiful from philosophical reflection is a profound loss. It has abandoned us to the dangers of bifurcated thinking and living: thinking in which the separation of subject from object dominates philosophy and science, and living in which humans are separated from nature and from one another. The philosophical dualism of subject and object underlies divisions in Western civilization between spirit and matter, self and world, mind and body, humans and animals, nature and technology, landscape and property, domination and dominated. By contrast, the experience of the beautiful transcends the subject-object dichotomy, and in it both union and difference are philosophically integrated (Johnson 2009, 5).

From these words we can see that to Johnson the concept of beauty is far from being useless; it is an important part of a much needed rethinking of the basic ontology and understanding of the human being that Western thought is rooted in.⁵⁴ According to the common account of beauty that I am dealing with here, beauty refers chiefly to the form and appearance of an object, and the experience of beauty should be distanced and disinterested. A phenomenological account of beauty is very different. For Johnson, the concept of beauty does not only refer to form and other sensuous qualities (color, sound, smell), but it also refers to a certain relation between subject and object; in this relation there is not distance, but rather a certain

⁵⁴ Here Johnson is in agreement with Berleant who in his account places the aesthetic at the heart of human experience and thus rethinks the ontology behind the Western understanding of the human being. This will be discussed further in the next section, 1.3.

closeness and openness between subject and object (Johnson 2009, 6). When we experience beauty we open ourselves up to the object in a unique way. Phenomenology of the aesthetic is thus necessarily based on an aesthetic desire for the beautiful. Johnson describes this *aesthetic desire* as *not* involving the desire to possess, control, and objectify the object. The aesthetic desire is rather based on care and openness to perceive the object “for what it is”, not for something else that the subject wants it to be.⁵⁵

This idea of desire when it comes to experiencing beauty can also be found in Grace Jantzen’s (2004) and Elaine Scarry’s (2001) accounts of beauty which I will refer to later. Even though none of the accounts of Johnson, Jantzen or Scarry is specifically aimed at shedding light on the experience of beauty in nature they are of importance for environmental aesthetics. As a matter of fact none of these accounts excludes or ignores beauty in nature all together. They all acknowledge experiences of nature as important aspects in the examination of the concept of beauty (Scarry 2001, 122; Jantzen 2004, 130; Johnson 2009, 41). Beauty and nature do indeed go hand in hand in some such way that referring to experiences of nature seems to come quite automatically when a certain hidden thread in the understanding of beauty is unpacked.

Such reflections on beauty outside “proper” environmental aesthetics (which deal specifically with nature and natural environments) also contribute to an undermining of the traditional distinction between the beautiful and the sublime. Johnson rejects the dualism that has prevailed in the discourse on beauty and the sublime. Bonnie Mann claims that beauty and the sublime become one in those moments where the experience of beauty becomes powerful, majestic or mysterious (Johnson 2009, 218; Mann 2006, 163). As mentioned above, the traditional account of this pair of aesthetic concepts holds that beauty is connected to the feminine, while the sublime is connected to the masculine as a powerful experience of the distant subject which gains understanding of his own power over the object through the experience. This is in line with the adherence to dualistic ideas and clichés about gender difference that appear for example in Kant’s early works on beauty and the

⁵⁵ One might argue that this type of desire, even though it does not involve possession and control, does involve a self-interested desire for having a pleasureable experience, and thus it turns beauty into consumption, confusing aesthetic value with amenity value. But I argue that even though we often desire to engage with beautiful objects, places or circumstances, and seek this engagement by for example hiking in nature or visiting art museums, this desire that one feels before the aesthetic experience, is something quite different from the aesthetic desire that is at the center of the aesthetic moment of beauty. As will be discussed further later, when beauty captures one’s senses (whether we went out of our way to seek being captured or not) a de-centering of the self occurs which allows us to enter into a relation that just like the relation of love or friendship, has nothing to do with consumption.

sublime (1764/1960)⁵⁶ and have been prevalent in Western philosophy throughout the ages.

In her book, *Women's Liberation and the Sublime: Feminism, Postmodernism, Environment*, Mann (2006) deconstructs such a dualistic differentiation and proposes an understanding of the sublime according to which the sublime experience, like the experience of beauty in Johnson's account, creates a strong relation, an aesthetic desire between subject and object. The sublime experience "throws" one into relation with *the other*, whether it is another person, nature or earth. Instead of the sublime experience tearing the subject away from the object and placing it above and at a safe distance (as in the common account of the sublime based on essentialism about sexual difference), both Johnson and Mann emphasize that the experiences of beauty and the sublime are experiences that make it possible for people to see themselves as beings that are always in relation to each other and the world around us.

This type of relationality is far more ambiguous than one of safe distance and the sense or illusion of control it yields. One of my interviewees claimed that the most memorable experience of being in a glacier is standing with one foot on each side of a crevasse, facing the abyss. Sure enough, this position did not endanger this person, but yet she was reminded of how volatile such a position is, thus reminding her of the fragility of the human condition as dependent on a natural environment. Such experiences of extreme natural landscapes in Iceland call for a phenomenological perspective. After the first participant observations that were conducted in Seltún geothermal area, it was evident that the experiences were represented as an intertwining of physical "objective" features and the heightened perceptual attentiveness of the perceivers. Furthermore, the same physical features seemed to awaken similar responses in different people at different times.

These aspects required furthermore an examination of phenomenological ideas about the intertwining of subject and object to understand better the possible inter-subjective dimensions of these experiences and the values derived from them. So in order to understand the experience of geothermal and glacial landscapes it is necessary to view them in light of reflections on ontology. Extreme landscapes such as these triggered thoughts about the relationship between the human being and the reality that surrounds her. For this reason, let us now turn to Merleau-Ponty's

⁵⁶ Even though this gendered view of beauty as feminine and the sublime as masculine only appears in Kant's early work *Observations on the Feeling of the Beautiful and the Sublime*, which was interestingly "intended as a popular piece and containing little by way of aesthetic theory" (Brady 2013, 52), unfortunately this view seems to have had a more lasting influence on common views of beauty and the sublime than his later works have had. The nuances that can be found in Kant's later theory of the sublime and beauty (Brady 2013) have not been taken into account in the common views of these concepts that have influenced the practice of aesthetic valuing.

ontology of the intertwining of the subjective and the objective in experience. This analysis is a necessary premise for understanding the type of experiences of beauty described by my interviewees. That in turn is the first step in capturing a notion of beauty freed from the dualities that have been discussed here.

1.3. Merleau-Ponty's Phenomenology and Aesthetics of Nature

Even though Merleau-Ponty never wrote an explicit account of beauty or aesthetics, Merleau-Ponty's ontology has an underlying aesthetic theory built into it, like Johnson argues. That is not surprising since Merleau-Ponty's last ontological reflections on our relation to the world were largely based on his reflections on artists and their creative work.⁵⁷ The artistic perception and rendering of experiences of the world were for him paradigmatic for how the subjective and the objective merge (Merleau-Ponty 1961/1993). For Johnson Merleau-Ponty is on grounds of this the philosopher that has been most successful in creating an ontology that goes beneath the subject and object divide resulting in a theory of aesthetic perception. Since the experience of beauty is thought to occupy this "strange" place that precedes the subject-object divide like Johnson argues in his interpretation, Merleau-Ponty's ontology can provide means to shed light on the concept of beauty and the place it occupies (Johnson 2009).

In Merleau-Ponty's view there were some unique parallels in the ideas and attitudes found in modern art and phenomenological thinking (Merleau-Ponty 1961/1993). In both disciplines he saw the same kind of longing for paying more attention to the sensory and bodily experience that comes before conceptual knowledge and can be termed as pre-discursive. Our pre-discursive knowledge of reality is the bodily, affective, pre-symbolic experience that comes before words and that is routed through the logics of the body. Just like Cézanne tried to put on canvas his direct lived perception of the world phenomenologists tried to describe this direct perception by "bracketing" the natural attitude that occupies itself with categorizing reality into separate parts.

Merleau-Ponty thus thought that art is better equipped than other disciplines to describe directly how we live in the world, how we experience the world and relate to it through our perception. In his paper "Eye and Mind" (Merleau-Ponty 1961/1993) he claimed that art is in some way more capable than philosophy to perform the phenomenological reduction; to bracket pre-conceived conceptual knowledge and focus on direct perception. The painter mediates her experience of reality directly through her body, in the painting there are no words or concepts that get in the way. Instead of perceiving reality first through the body and then putting

⁵⁷ For an overview of Merleau-Ponty's writings on art see Johnson (1993).

those perceptions into words and concepts, the artist mediates her perception directly through her eyes, hands and senses. It was this artistic process that Merleau-Ponty thought could enable him to understand deeper levels of perception by disclosing the intentional structures in relations to objects and others in the world.

Such a phenomenological approach is not the least of importance for environmental aesthetics for it has its point of departure in lived experiences of embodied subjects that are more over also constituted in their subjectivity by intersubjective relations. Embodiment is of paramount importance for any discipline dealing with the natural environment for it is the body that makes us part of nature. The body is thus the link that undermines the traditional distinction between the cultural and the natural.⁵⁸ The notion of embodiment destabilizes a clear cut distinction between human and non-human nature since both are nature. The interrelationality of body and nature (as for example apparent in that bodies come to be, grow and decay) is for Merleau-Ponty a naturalistic basis for his undermining of the traditional epistemological distinction between the subject and the object. In his later writings where he directs his attention to the natural/cultural world and aesthetic perception of it, he introduces the concept of *chair* or *flesh* (Merleau-Ponty 1968).

1.3.1. *Flesh of the World*

Merleau-Ponty introduced the concept of the *flesh* in his posthumous work, *The Visible and the Invisible* (Merleau-Ponty 1968). This term that he was sadly destined to leave incomplete has been explicated and extended by a growing number of thinkers and disciplines, as Evans and Lawlor point out: “phenomenologists, poststructuralists, feminists, and ecologists use it to clarify the bond between self, others and world, and to affirm the positive status of difference and alterity in relation to this bond” (Evans & Lawlor 2000, 1). With *flesh* Merleau-Ponty offers a concept that is meant to overcome a certain limitation of his approach towards our

⁵⁸ It is extremely important not to adhere to a strict division of art and the artefact on the one hand and nature and the natural on the other. Nature and culture are intertwined making it impossible to categorize something as pure nature or pure culture. Culture would not exist without its home; the earth, but how we make it our home is affecting the earth on a greater and greater scale. Even the air we breath and the climate we live in are not pure occurrences of nature but rather affected by how human beings live on this earth. For that reason, the term “Anthropocene” is used to describe how humans have become a geological force on earth. On the basis of this, traditional distinctions between the natural and cultural, the organic and the inorganic are not tenable any longer. Experience of the beauty of a melting glacier is at once an experience of ice and snow and the colors and textures of it, but at the same time imbued with awareness of how human forces cause the glacier to melt more rapidly with every year. The sight of a polarbear breastfeeding its cub in Greenland is likewise not a sight of pure natural beauty. We know that the milk of the mother is saturated with chemical substances that are sedimented in this vulnerable ecosystem. This is beauty, but there is a sadness to it, sadness because of the fragility of the condition of nature (Neimanis 2012, Braidotti 2013, Latour 1991/2012).

relation to the world in the *Phenomenology of Perception* (Merleau-Ponty 1945/2002). The fault he saw with his approach in this earlier work was that there he starts from the consciousness-object distinction (Merleau-Ponty 1968, 200). This causes him to miss the openness to the world that characterizes our embodied subjectivity and is revealed in our perceptual experiences.

His response to this problem is to aim for nothing less than a new terminology that can allow us to speak of our relationship with the world without relying on the distinction between subject and object. The central term of this new vocabulary is *flesh*, a new philosophical term that hitherto had “no name in any philosophy” (Merleau-Ponty 1968, 147). For Merleau-Ponty *flesh* is the word that captures the in-between or the interaction between body and the world:

The flesh is not matter [...] it is not a fact or a sum of facts “material” or “spiritual.” Nor is it a representation for a mind [...] The flesh is not matter, it is not mind, is not substance. To designate it, we should need the old term “element”, in the sense it was used to speak of water, air, earth, and fire, that is, in the sense of a general thing, midway between the spatio-temporal individual and the idea, a sort of incarnate principle that brings a style of being wherever there is a fragment of being. The flesh is in this sense an “element” of Being (Merleau-Ponty 1968, 139).

The perceiver and the perceived are both active in the event of perception, they both affect the *flesh*. The body is both perceiver and what is perceived, both object and subject, and this in the end should eradicate the division:

We say therefore that our body is a being of two leaves, from one side a thing among things and otherwise what sees them and touches them; we say, because it is evident, that it unites these two properties within itself, and its double belongingness to the order of the “object” and to the order of the “subject” reveals to us quite unexpected relations between the two orders. It cannot be by incomprehensible accident that the body has this double reference; it teaches us that each calls for the other (Merleau-Ponty 1968, 137).

In the intertwining of body and world, reality somehow affects our senses. The senses cannot independently work out some subjective and individual picture of reality, rather reality projects itself on to our senses and carves out the vision they perceive.

The subject looks at the world, but at the same time the world looks at her and it is when their eyes meet that meaning emerges. Merleau-Ponty uses painting as an

example of this. Many painters have said that the world looks at them just as they look at the world:

As André Marchand says, after Klee: “In a forest, I have felt many times over that it was not I who looked at the forest. Some days I felt that the trees were looking at me, were speaking to me... I was there, listening... I think the painter must be penetrated by the universe and not want to penetrate it... I expect to be inwardly submerged, buried. Perhaps I paint to break out.”

We speak of inspiration, and the word should be taken literally. There really is inspiration and expiration of Being [...] it becomes impossible to distinguish between what sees and what is seen, what paints and what is painted (Merleau-Ponty. 1961/1993, 167).

When the painter creates art, she perceives the world around her and changes it into a painting; she changes it into a representation of her perception of reality. If we take the word “inspiration” literally, like Merleau-Ponty recommends, we could say that reality projects itself onto the painter’s perception; reality has its role in the outcome, and so does the painter’s perception, through her perception she draws up a certain picture of reality which sheds light on one possible side of it. The same occurs when the scientist, philosopher or writer try to explain reality to us, they draw up certain pictures and perspectives that can help us understand and deal with the world around us.

As mentioned above, the notion of flesh has been explicated and extended by a number of philosophers who have seen it as offering a way out of the mind/body, subject/object dualism. Feminist philosophers and environmental philosophers are amongst those who have found Merleau-Ponty’s ontology of flesh especially useful for their projects of figuring ways out of gender denoted, dualistic schemes of Western thinking. Merleau-Ponty’s thought has more over been considered to be important for feminists because of his perspective on the human situation that emphasizes embodiment and intersubjectivity (Olkowski & Weiss 2006, Alcoff 2000, Chanter 2000, Grosz 1993). As Linda Martín Alcoff points out, Merleau-Ponty’s perspective can be useful to feminist thought in the important project of “reconfigure[ing] the role of bodily experience in the development of knowledge” (Alcoff 2000, 251). Within environmental philosophy, the focus has mainly been on how Merleau-Ponty’s thought can help redefine the human-nature relationship (Cataldi & Hamrick 2007, Toadvine 2009, Abram 1996).

Within the scope of this project, the notion of flesh is brought in with the aim of shedding light on perceptions of beauty and the aesthetic values derived from them. However, the concept of flesh is also important for this project for the same reasons it is important for feminist and environmental thought. The feminist project

of reconfiguring the role of experience in the creation of knowledge is central in this project as I aim to show how acknowledging the importance of diverse experiences in the creation of the meaning and value of landscape should extend and inform the way we think about the practice of assessing the value of nature in environmental debates.

The environmentalist project of rethinking the human-nature relationship is also central to this project as I argue that our understanding of our relations to nature can be informed by the specific aesthetic experience of natural landscapes that I am dealing with. This experience can be characterized as a certain kind of love of nature that arises from the experience of beauty and has been held by thinkers such as Aldo Leopold to be the basis of an ethical relationship with nature (Leopold 1949).⁵⁹ I am thus working within the scope of both environmentalist and feminist interpretations of Merleau-Ponty's thought but extending such approaches to also include an examination of the aesthetic experiences of natural landscapes.

In order to be able to grasp the profound sense of beauty as experienced in such landscapes it is necessary to analyze it as an experience of the intertwining that is characteristic of the flesh. From a phenomenological point of view, beauty is not a quality of the object but rather an experience that takes place in the intertwining of the object and the subject who perceives it. Beauty is thus one of the elements of flesh; beauty *is*, like flesh, this strange place *between* the self and the artwork, the self and nature (Johnson, 2009). According to the widespread, narrow idea of beauty, the experience of beauty is distant and disinterested; the subject is separated from the object and judges its form and content and the pleasure they evoke. But from the point of view of the ontology of flesh this division between subject and object is not realistic. The meaning that the subject finds in the object, whether it is an aesthetic meaning or not, is always created *between* the subject and the object, in the flesh that is an intertwining of the self with the artwork or nature.

One of the things that directed Merleau-Ponty's attention towards artists and their work was their above-mentioned idea that the world looks at them, that they listen to and receive some meaning that the mountain or the forest express to them. According to Johnson this is precisely what characterizes the experience of beauty. It is no coincidence that we often speak of the love of art, the love of nature and the love of another human being in a similar manner; all these types of love are

⁵⁹ In Leopold's words: "It is inconceivable to me that an ethical relation to land can exist without love, respect, and admiration for land, and a high regard for its value. By value, I of course mean something far broader than mere economic value; I mean value in the philosophical sense" (Leopold 1949, 223). In my interpretation, "value in the philosophical sense" is a value that has its roots in our aesthetic relation to land; a relation that is the foundation of our love, respect and admiration for land.

somehow related to the love of beauty, and they encourage us to care for and protect those precious treasures that fill our lives with meaning (Johnson 2009, 158). But why do we care about an artwork, nature, or a human being? The root of our care lies in the fact that we see the artwork, nature, or human being as an independent existence that brings meaning to us, looks at us and speaks to us in some manner or the other.

This is the core of the phenomenological account of beauty: the experience of beauty involves opening oneself up to *the other*⁶⁰ and listen, see and feel who the other really is instead of throwing our own concepts and ideas on the object of beauty and thereby striving towards controlling and owning it. This becomes evident in depictions of the landscape experiences I will discuss later, where an important part of the experience was the rapt attentiveness and opening of the senses that resulted in a different kind of relation with nature and understanding of our place within it.

1.3.2. *The Desire for Beauty: Opening up to the Other*

In order to understand the opening up to the other that occurs in the aesthetic experience of beauty in landscape it is useful to examine how Johnson uses Merleau-Ponty's idea of an *aesthetic desire*. For all of Merleau-Ponty's artists, the relation between beauty and desire was very strong, and for Merleau-Ponty himself desire played an important part in all expression, whether it is artistic or not. But in Western thought from Plato to Sartre a certain idea of desire has been advocated that holds that desire is negative because it involves an aim to own, control and use its object (Jantzen 2004, 157). This idea has led to the exclusion of the relation between beauty and desire: since beauty should be disinterested and distant there is no room for this negative desire that involves the interest of owning the object, and the closeness the subject desires to have with the object (Johnson 2009, 145-50).

Merleau-Ponty's understanding of desire is completely different from this approach that has been prevalent in Western philosophy, and is derived from the negative pole in the ambiguous conception of desire. Instead of the idea that aesthetic desire involves a desire to objectify and own the object, Merleau-Ponty's idea of aesthetic desire connects with the positive notion of desire that entails

⁶⁰ The concept of *the other* has been a key concept in Continental philosophy and is often used to describe how our definition of the "other" is a part of what constitutes the self, and to understand how societies and groups exclude "others" whom they want to subordinate. In my use of this concept I focus on how it describes the inherent relationality of the human subject that is always already in relation with the other, and how aesthetic experiences can provide the possibility of opening up to the other in a unique way.

opening oneself up towards the object as it is; it involves an openness towards the other to receive the meaning that the other expresses.⁶¹

In this context Johnson refers to Heidegger's ideas of the experience of beauty, but Heidegger claimed that with the idea of disinterestedness Kant did not mean that the experience of beauty should be absolutely distant and free from longing but rather that such experience involves a certain attempt to let things be as they are. This "letting-be" (g. *sein lassen*) involves being open towards the object and relating to it, and this is the core of beauty: "for the first time the object comes to the fore as pure object and that such coming forward into appearance is the beautiful. The word "beautiful" means appearing in the radiance of such coming to the fore." (Johnson 2009, 160).⁶²

The aesthetic desire that has been neglected in modern philosophy of beauty is a positive desire that is not based on lack or a longing for owning and controlling: "Desire is not always a question of need or lack; neither is the fulfilment of desire necessarily possession" (Jantzen 2004, 157). The positive desire that Jantzen connects to beauty is based on a longing, not to own, but rather to dwell on the object's beauty.

Beauty attracts us, it draws our consciousness towards itself and creates a desire for repetition and for sustaining and sharing beauty with others. Who hasn't had the experience of finding something beautiful and feeling the need to point it out to the next person? Or feeling the need to take a photo, draw a picture, make music, write a poem or simply to take it in for a long time; a need to capture the moment of beauty and create new beauty, continue it in some manner? Beauty nourishes the one who experiences it and this nourishment encourages her to reciprocate: to protect and nourish this beauty so it may continue to nourish others. If our understanding of the concept of beauty is built on this type of desire instead of the negative desire described above, a different picture appears of the experience of beauty and how it affects human life and awareness. This type of experience gives an opportunity to contemplate and dwell on the object.

1.3.3. Dwelling on Beauty

The experience of beauty begins in sensuous perception, the object of beauty, whether it is a form, color, texture, sound, movement, words or actions, draws the senses towards itself, captures one's attention. Often this happens in a quite unsuspected way: beauty captures one's attention and pulls one's consciousness out of the everyday for a moment. Caught up in everyday thoughts I look out the

⁶¹ This idea resonates with my interviewees' experiences of relations characterized by a certain kind of decentering of oneself that leads to respect for nature that will be the topic of the next two chapters.

⁶² Johnson quotes Heidegger (1991, 110)

window and see four swans fly by in the pink morning light – for a few moments my thoughts stop and the only thing that fills my mind are the slow movements of the beautiful white wings.

But often the experience of beauty is something that we seek out on purpose: at the art museum or in the theatre, in a natural landscape, or at home with a book in hand or music in ears. At these moments we put ourselves in a special frame of mind and expect our attention to be captured (and we even get disappointed if we don't succeed in leaving daily life behind and don't get a good enough chance to enjoy). When one's attention has been captured the desire for repetition comes along. I watch the swans until they go out of sight and feel the need to capture the moment and find a way of sharing it somehow.

This desire for repetition can also be seen as a desire for dwelling in the moment, a longing to continue to watch and letting the object influence your being. Philosophers have often described beauty as something that greets you, as Elaine Scarry has pointed out:

Not Homer alone, but Plato, Aquinas, Plotinus, Pseudo-Dionysus, Dante and many others repeatedly describe beauty as a “greeting”. At the moment one comes into the presence of something beautiful, it greets you. It lifts away from the neutral background as though coming forward to welcome you – as though the object were designed to “fit” your perception (Scarry 2001, 25).

It is however necessary to add to this description, which is a bit too dualistic, i.e. separating the perceiver and the perceived, that what greets one is dependent on some kind of disposition within the perceiving subject towards the object of beauty. So a certain kind of rapport is necessary: Beauty is a call, it calls for my attention and when my attention heeds the call beauty welcomes me and gives me access to its object. Beauty resonates with something in me that is open to letting it overtake me in a sense, as if I was momentarily off guard.

1.3.4. Aesthetic Experience of Landscape as Decentering of the Self

In his essay on walking up the mountain, Petrarca has to remind himself not to revel too much in the beauty of the landscape because it may, according to the Christian mores of medieval times, distract him from thinking of God (Petrarca 2006). What is implied here among other things is an acknowledgement of the fact that a sublime or beautiful landscape can make one forget not only the creator, but also forget oneself in a certain way. One of my interviewees described this in terms of her mind being so busy experiencing the landscape that everything else became secondary and

she “became calm”. This is an important reason for seeking such experiences, they give us a sense of relief from mundane thoughts and everyday worries.

An essential part of this experience of opening oneself up for and dwelling in the moment of beauty is a “radical decentering” of the experiencing subject. Scarry illustrates this with a description taken from Simone Weil:

At the moment we see something beautiful, we undergo a radical decentering. Beauty, according to [Simone] Weil, requires us to “give up our imaginary position at the center” [...] When we come upon beautiful things [...] they act like small tears in the surface of the world that pulls us through to some vaster space [...] or they lift us (as though by the air currents of someone else’s sweeping), letting the ground rotate beneath us several inches, so that when we land, we find we are standing in a different relation to the world than we were a moment before. It is not that we cease to stand at the center of the world, for we never stood there. It is that we cease to stand even at the center of our own world. We willingly cede our ground to the thing that stands before us (Scarry 2001, 111-112).

Scarry also refers to Iris Murdoch’s thoughts on beauty, but she called this decentering that beauty occasions “un-selfing”. According to Murdoch beauty is the most “obvious thing in our surroundings which is an occasion for “un-selfing” (Scarry 2001, 112-113). Murdoch gives a familiar example:

[Murdoch] describes suddenly seeing a kestrel hovering: it brings about an “unselfing”. It causes a cluster of feelings that normally promote the self (for she had been “anxious...resentful...brooding perhaps on some damage done to [her] prestige”) now to fall away. It is not just that she becomes “self-forgetful” but that some more capacious mental act is possible: all the space formerly in the service of protecting, guarding, advancing the self (or its “prestige”) is now free to be in the service of something else (Scarry 2001, 113).

When this radical decentering or un-selfing takes place we gain a different kind of access to the world; to what we perceive. Instead of “the I” being in the center, the being of what is perceived, independent of all my interests and longings, becomes the center of attention.

This is in my view the real core of the idea of disinterestedness that has been one of the core concepts of modern aesthetics since Kant. Disinterestedness has often been seen as the requirement that in aesthetic experience, one should erase everything personal from the experience. Aesthetic experience is thus an experience where the distant and detached subject looks at the object and judges its form; no thoughts or knowledge are allowed, only the pure (often visual) perception of the

form. Such formalist interpretations have been criticized for describing aesthetic experience as a sort of “blank cow-like stare” which is not an accurate description of an experience that is characterized by more participation (Brady 2003, 130). It is indeed reductive to interpret the concept of disinterestedness in such a narrow manner, especially when discussing aesthetic experiences of landscapes.

As mentioned above, Heidegger pointed out that the disinterested attitude does not necessarily have to be distant and free from all desire, rather disinterestedness involves a different kind of desire than the negative desire to own and control the object; it involves the positive desire of letting-be. According to this interpretation being disinterested does not mean erasing everything except visual distant perception. As Emily Brady puts it: “Aesthetic appreciation does not require that we set aside who we are, it requires only that we set aside *what we want*” (Brady 2003, 132).

Understanding aesthetic disinterestedness as a certain attitude of indifference that one brings to the experience of beauty in order for an aesthetic judgment to be true or of value is one of the forms that the quest for objectivity discussed earlier can take. According to such a view, what we judge beautiful isn’t truly so unless the judgment is made with a disinterested attitude. In this way disinterestedness becomes a kind of key to objectivity: if we are separated from the object of beauty and judge beauty from a distance, then the judgment is valid. But this understanding cannot offer a correct picture of the role of disinterestedness in the experience of beauty. Instead of being an attitude that one *brings to* the experience, it is rather an attitude that is the *result of* the experience; when beauty captures one’s attention, all interests fall to the side and one gets an opportunity to experience the object of beauty as it is in itself: not in light of something else. I am not referring here to some diffuse sense of merging of man and world as the poets of the romantic period described. Rather I am referring to an experience of beauty that makes one capable of overcoming, at least for a moment, the tendency to perceive things from the viewpoint of one’s narrow self-centered interests.

There is a sense of unrestraint in such an experience that gives space for disclosure to happen. The result of this is that something is opened up for us so that we have no better way of describing it than to say “oh, how beautiful!” This allows us to understand more clearly Heidegger’s account of disinterestedness as “letting-be” as openness of the subject towards the world. Heidegger’s account was intended to show how Schopenhauer misinterprets Kant’s idea of the beautiful as the object of disinterested delight as an “indifference toward a thing or person” (Carbone 2000, 124).⁶³

⁶³ Carbone quotes Heidegger (1991, 108).

In Schopenhauer's and Heidegger's accounts we have then two interpretations of the notion of disinterestedness that depend on very different ideas of the subject's relation to the object as Mauro Carbone points out:

While in Schopenhauer's misinterpretation, the "unconstrained favoring" should mean indifference and suspension of will, thereby preventing every "essential relation to the object", in contrast Heidegger maintains that this very behavior – "letting the beautiful be what it is" – would favor the essential relation to the object (Carbone 2000, 124).

These different approaches can also be juxtaposed as renouncing worldly engagement in the case of Schopenhauer's philosophy, and engagement even though it is in the sense of letting-be in the case of Heidegger's philosophy. Interpretations of disinterestedness that are based on the same "misinterpretation" as Schopenhauer's (Bullough 1912, Kemp 1999, Hanfling 2000) have been criticized firstly for creating a separation and distance between subject and object, and secondly for objectifying the object of beauty (Battersby 1991, Bourdieu 1984). When we judge beauty from a distance we see it as an object that can be used and controlled.

But this criticism doesn't apply if we follow Heidegger's interpretation where disinterestedness does not refer to intentional, controlling distance but rather to an un-intentional moment of grace where the experience of beauty allows the self to let go and step to the side to be able to see, hear and sense the other's being. However, it is not so that the self disappears totally even though it leaves the center: I am still here even though my interests and longings are less self-centered. Disinterestedness so understood is a notion that helps explain the openness towards the world that occurs in the aesthetic experience of beauty. What happens here is a certain event allowing "the beautiful to be what it is" leaving it free to appear as it is (Carbone 2000, 124).⁶⁴

What I refer to here as beauty begins in simple perception but when everything is counted, it is much more than that (and perhaps "simple perception" is also something much more than we normally think it is). The experience of beauty gives us an important lesson in putting our own self to the side. Such an experience

⁶⁴ In contemporary aesthetics the idea of "sympathetic attention" involves a similar focus on perceiving the object of beauty "as it is". According to this view "the aesthetic response is correctly characterized as involving sympathetic attention to the qualities of the object for their own sake" (Brady 2011, 97; Carroll 1999). In the aesthetic response we are thus not perceiving for example nature as if it were art, or in the context of some other interests than just perceiving. In my view, this approach is correct as far as it goes, but it is necessary to provide a deeper and richer account of what is involved in the aesthetic response which I think the account of beauty as involving a de-centering of the self provides.

entails transcending our narrow interests, altering our pre-conceived ideas and perceiving things in some new way, and most likely not as we expect them to be. There is hence a transformative moment to the experience of beauty. One's own ideas are modified or enriched when seeing something new or something we already know in a different light. And the important thing is that this radical decentering that takes place in the experience of beauty⁶⁵ leads to pleasure, so an individual that has once been captured by beauty is likely to look for opportunities to repeat this experience. Thus the longing for beauty becomes a capability that is cultivated and inspired by each individual's experience.

Kant once said that the one who has love for beauty in nature was more likely to be a good person (Kant 1790/2000 5:301). Friedrich Schiller claimed that the aesthetic up-bringing of citizens was very important for creating a better society (Schiller 2005). Dostoyevsky even went so far as to claim that beauty could save the world (Dostoyevsky 1868-9/2004). Needless to say, these authors are aware of the fact that the ability to appreciate beauty is a necessary but not sufficient precondition for being a good person and a good citizen. A sense for beauty in such a context also needs to be coupled with a sense for justice and the good, as has been the case since the ancient philosophers pointed this out. Especially Schiller thus argues for the importance of aesthetic education as part of general education.

Aesthetic appreciation of beauty cultivates among other things our ability to put one's own self to the side and to pay full attention to the other as an independent being or existence. These ethical aspects of the experience of beauty will be discussed further in chapter three in light of the results of the qualitative research of landscape experiences but now it is time to reflect on how the relationship between the concepts of beauty and the sublime changes with the phenomenological account of beauty that has been discussed here.

1.3.5. Sublime Beauty

My research into experiences of beauty in landscape as well as the research of Johnson, Jantzen and Scarry yield a totally different idea of beauty and its relation to aesthetic desire and feelings from the common account of a disinterested appraisal of beauty that is free of desire. Instead of aesthetic desire involving the separation of subject and object, it rather involves experiencing an opening and relation between

⁶⁵ Not all aesthetic experiences of beauty are equally powerful in the way that they provide a possibility of this type of de-centering of the self. However, they all do hold the potential to draw the perceiver's attention to her immediate sensuous perception in a manner that allows her to open up to the other in this unique way. In cases of extreme and sublime beauty, for example when standing up against a glacier, the self is "thrown" into a relation with the other in a dramatic manner, while in cases of simpler beauty, for example of a flower, this relation is revealed in subtler ways.

subject and object; the subject lets go and opens up to the object; and meaning is created in the resulting intertwining of subject and object.

With this richer understanding of the concept of beauty then comes a different idea of the sublime, and of the relation between these two concepts. The widespread account that has its roots in Kantian aesthetics holds that the difference between the experience of beauty and the experience of the sublime lies first and foremost in the fact that beauty lies in the form of the object and the pleasure it evokes in the subject, and therefore it has its roots in the physical qualities of the object, but the sublime on the other hand has its roots in the inner state of the subject. According to a common interpretation of Kant this is why we can use the word beauty about nature; we can say that nature is beautiful, but we cannot use the word sublime in the same way. The word sublime is used to describe the feeling of the subject, not the object that creates the feeling; it is not nature that is sublime, but the feeling evoked by it.⁶⁶

This difference between these two concepts is undermined by a richer understanding of beauty and disinterestedness that acknowledges the role of feelings and emotions in the experience of beauty; and by a richer understanding of the sublime that acknowledges that the sublime feeling does not only have its roots in the subject, but is also a response to certain physical qualities of the phenomena that evoke the feeling.⁶⁷ So it seems evident that the gap between beauty and the sublime starts to close when the threads that tie them together are examined. So let us now turn to some of the threads that both Johnson and Mann have traced between the two concepts. These accounts are of importance for interpreting my findings, i.e. understanding the experiences of natural landscapes as both “beautiful” and “sublime”, and they are also of importance for shedding light on the specific meaning of beauty and the aesthetic that I propose.

As will be discussed further in chapter three, the results of the qualitative research of experiences of glacial and geothermal landscapes show that one of the main characteristics of these experiences is a feeling of awe and respect that can be described by the term sublime. However, the sublime moment has often been understood in philosophical aesthetics as a moment where the subject is separated from the object, she watches it from safe distance and conquers it with her

⁶⁶ See for example Kant (1790/2000, 5:246): “But from this one immediately sees that we express ourselves on the whole incorrectly if we call some object of nature sublime, although we can quite correctly call very many of them beautiful” and Kant (2000, 5: 264): “Thus sublimity is not contained in anything in nature, but only in our mind, insofar as we can become conscious of being superior to nature within us and thus also to nature outside us (insofar as it influences us).”

⁶⁷ Brady emphasizes this aspect in her account of the Kantian sublime as she argues that in Kant “the causes of the sublime can be brought back to natural objects and phenomena, and these thus have a central role alongside that played by reason” (Brady 2013, 62).

rationality.⁶⁸ This account of the sublime experience does not describe the experiences of my interviewees very well as they are characterized more by feeling oneself to be small and dependent on the forces of nature rather than feeling oneself to be superior to these forces.

Mann's account of the sublime is useful as it overcomes the traditional version of the sublime which she refers to as a masculinist version and suggests a more feminine account of the sublime experience where the relational aspect of the sublime is emphasized. Both beauty and the sublime can thus be understood as concepts that describe how certain experiences can "throw" one into relations with the other, and how realizing these relations and the ambiguities they may involve can influence our ethical attitude towards the world.

The strict division between beauty and the sublime becomes untenable as the common aspects of these experiences are unveiled. This does not mean that the division should be abandoned all together. It is useful to hold on to the distinction but to realize that these experiences are not in sharp contrast with each other but rather they lie on different points of the same aesthetic scale. This will be further discussed in chapter three but for now it is important to trace the origins of the divide between beauty and the sublime that lies in relating beauty with the feminine and the sublime with the masculine as this duality makes evident how constructed and constrained the distinction between the beautiful and the sublime in fact is.

As discussed above, according to a widespread view of beauty and the sublime the former is connected to ideas about femininity while the latter is connected to ideas about masculinity. This gendered idea of the concepts can be seen in Kant's early work from 1764, *Observations on the Feeling of the Beautiful and Sublime* (Kant 1764/1960), where he writes that the role of women is to be beautiful and think beautiful thoughts while the role of men is to think sublime thoughts of society and

⁶⁸ Kant's influential idea of the sublime has often been interpreted in this way. However, Brady has shown that there is a complexity and subtlety in Kant's ideas which undermines the view that his theory sees only the human subject to be sublime but not nature and is thus merely self-regarding: "I have argued that the sublime response is a form of aesthetic appreciation for Kant, and that the natural objects of that appreciation are themselves significant, rather than being mere triggers on the way to finding sublimity in our moral vocation. Together, these arguments bring nature back into the Kantian sublime and support the view that his theory is not merely self-regarding (Brady 2013, 84). Brady rather argues that the Kantian sublime can be shown to be other-regarding: "Through an aesthetic experience, Kant believes, we are able to develop a sense of how we are situated, as human selves, in relation to internal and external nature. That is, in relation to both our natural inclinations, as part of human nature, and external natural phenomena, we come to see how they might threaten and humiliate, determine, and confront us. And yet we also find a way to establish some independence from their power over us" (Brady 2013, 87). I agree with Brady, that there seems to be room for an other-regarding aspect of the sublime in Kant's account. However, these subtleties of Kant's theory have not reached through into common discourses which are more influenced by interpretations of Kantian aesthetics that emphasize the self-regarding and masculine aspects of the sublime.

morality.⁶⁹ Mann points out that women are often objectified in philosophical works, but it is never as explicit as in works on beauty. Western thought has made beauty the life-project of the white European female; as Kant claimed it is not appropriate for women to think of more serious matters than beauty (Mann 2006, 26), and this claim has had a lasting effect on our culture. In Mann's view these old ideas of beauty and the sublime have had serious consequences for the Western frame of mind:

The turn toward what we now recognize to be a masculinist version of sublime experience in postmodernity is a symptom of the way we, in the so-called developed world, live now – of a fragmented, technologized existence, carried out at a dizzying pace across impossible distances (Mann 2006, 153).

Mann argues in other words that concepts are a shaping factor in the way we understand the world. Concepts have a force that can be repressive for nature or non-repressive.

According to the masculinist understanding of the sublime the subject is separated from the object, she watches it from safe distance and conquers it with her rationality. For Kant, and many other 18th century thinkers, the feeling of the sublime arises mainly in the experience of great natural forces. The object is a frightening, forceful nature that creates fear in the subject because of its powerful forces that can in an instant take the life of the tiny human being. This type of experience can make the human being realize her own powerlessness against this force, how she depends on its mercy. But it seems as if for Kant, this is not the case, and perhaps it can be expected from ideas that were born at a time when humans had for the first time managed to “conquer” and control nature with the help of science and technology. The sublime experience in this influential interpretation of Kant, does make the human being understand that she is connected to nature and its power, but in this view it also makes her understand that she has the power to cut this connection and gain control over nature; both the nature within herself and the nature outside.⁷⁰ According to this idea the sublime experience shows how man

⁶⁹ Even though this gendered view of the sublime and the beautiful does not appear in his later works, it seems to have had lingering effects on how these concepts are commonly understood. As mentioned before, it is interesting that this book was intended as a popular piece rather than strict aesthetic theory (Brady 2013, 52), perhaps it became a very popular piece indeed, and thus influential.

⁷⁰ As already pointed out, Brady has criticized this interpretation of Kant and argued for a more nuanced account of his theory that acknowledges the complexity and subtlety of his ideas regarding this issue. In her interpretation Kant is “not arguing for a dominion of humans over nature, and his view of nature is not one of a hostile environment to be conquered, even if it does threaten our well-being. Instead, he values nature for the challenges it presents to us, as something that is difficult for us to face, and against which morality provides the resources needed to cope (Brady 2013, 83).

is superior to nature and that his destiny is to become “free” from nature. The concept of nature employed here is one of wild and powerful nature to be controlled.

The concept of nature employed within a contemporary context is very different. Nature and technologized culture are very much intertwined yielding a notion of the sublimity of nature that accounts for how embodied nature and the environments constructed by humans are all products and part of the nature we live in. Such an understanding of the sublime undermines the common idea of the sublime that is based on tearing apart the relation between man and nature, and between men and women as well; where each individual is a separate subject who gains control of the objects around her. The Western viewpoint that is framed by the masculine sublime creates distance and separation:

[...]Each object in our “object” world is teeming with relationships with other people in other places around the globe[...] We are sealed within our own view by the moment-to-moment patterns and habits, movements and practices, that make up daily life (For a feminist academic in the North, for example, I turn on the computer, I check my email, I pick up the cell phone, I board the plane to the conference where others who turn on their computers, check their email, and pick up their cell phones will also arrive by plane and take taxis driven by undocumented drivers from El Salvador; we will eat Thai food together between sessions and order coffee from Nicaragua.) [...]Others are functionalized in this commonsense world (the ones who made the gadgets, who prepared the food); they don’t enter into my world as persons, but as functions (Mann 2006, 154-55).

Mann suggests that it is necessary to rediscover and reconceptualize the sublime by interpreting it in a contemporary context and distancing it from the widespread masculinist understanding of the concept. The concept is thus both a shaping factor as well as shaped by conditions that influence the way it is defined, as is the case with Kant’s idea of it.

Mann distinguishes two aspects of the sublime experience, what she calls *the liberatory sublime* and *the natural sublime*, in order to explicate the descriptive and critical force of the concept of the sublime. The experience of the hurricane Katrina is her example of the natural sublime: those who watched the hurricane from a safe distance were thrown into an acute and frightening awareness of how dependant we are on nature and on each other. This is a powerful experience that unveils the relation between man and nature (Mann 2006, 161). The liberatory sublime is another side to the same coin; here we have an experience that tears down walls between people. This is an experience that makes us aware of all *the others* that we are

connected to and we rely on, but we forget that they exist in our daily lives; this is the moment where we become aware of who made the computer in front of us, the clothes that we wear, the coffee that we drink. At the same time we realize how we are undeniably connected to other individuals that live on this earth; my consumption of coffee influences the lives of many other real persons out there, and so with all my daily activities and choices comes a serious responsibility (Mann 2006, 157-8). The core of Mann's understanding of the sublime lies in these relations that the sublime experience throws us into, but the understanding of the sublime that is based on traditional ideas about the masculine seems to lie mainly in attempting to make these relations invisible.

But what is the role of the concept of beauty in this richer understanding of the sublime? It should be clear by now that there are many common aspects to the accounts of beauty discussed above, and Mann's understanding of the sublime. Beauty is an experience that involves opening up towards the other, whether it is nature or another human being. In the sublime experience we are also confronted with the other, and one of the things that is revealed to us in this experience are the relations that exist between the self and the other.⁷¹ Both these experiences thus involve an inner state of feeling that reveals an experience of relationality that affects our understanding of self and world. Beauty is not merely pleasure, and the sublime is not merely an inner state but also has its root in the form(lessness) of the object.

According to Johnson the same applies to the experiences of the sublime and beauty; in both cases the experience takes place *between* us and the world: "The experience [of beauty] is two-sided, fully relational between perceiver and world. Just as perceiving Grand Canyon or the Milky Way as sublime is fully relational: awe, wonder, and fear are about magnitude and might in the natural order" (Johnson 2009, 223). The feelings of beauty and sublime do not occur in a distant and separated subject, rather they are feelings that have their roots in certain qualities of the object and are created *between* subject and object.

In my findings it is evident that the experiences of beauty and the sublime often go together. An experience that starts in a moment of beauty becomes sublime as some features are added to the experience. The Icelandic term *agjefgurð* (*extreme/awesome beauty*) can describe this well, as an experience where the boundaries between beauty and the sublime become blurred. One might argue that *agjefgurð* is equivalent to the English term "grandeur", which is often interpreted as beauty on a

⁷¹ Brady also emphasizes this relational aspect, that she finds in Kant's ideas: "Aesthetic experience of the beautiful and the sublime comes out of a relation between subject and object, while the sublime brings out the role of the subject in ways that the beautiful does not. In this way, Kant extends earlier notions of the concept and paves the way for reflecting on how the sublime creates a relationship between the self and the world" (Brady 2013, 66).

greater scale, or to the term “terrible beauty” which is used to describe tragic, uncomfortable forms of beauty (Korsmeyer 2006, Brady 2013). But in my view *ægjefegurð* is neither limited to describing experiences of “grand beauty” or “terrible beauty”, rather it captures both the elements of grandness and a kind of terror or negative emotions, just as the concept of the sublime does. The word *ægi* has both of these connotations as it refers to something grand, awe-inspiring, immense or extreme, or to something that threatens or frightens one, so in the combination *ægjefegurð* we have beauty linked with both fear and grandness. These are qualities that are commonly understood to be qualities of the sublime – as contrasted with beauty that rather involves the qualities of calmness and smallness/delicateness.

The term *ægjefegurð*, and my findings from the qualitative studies suggest that beauty and the sublime are not always in sharp contrast with each other, but rather there are moments when the boundaries between them are blurred.⁷² Both Mann and Johnson also point out how beauty and the sublime blend into each other when the experience of beauty becomes powerful, majestic, or mysterious. Mann gives an example of an experience of running into a wild animal in nature; the beauty of the animal is majestic but with the experience comes a certain sorrow and fear because today “[e]very experience of nature is plagued by the terror of non-existence, the fear that natural beauty will be forever stamped out, that our own existence, as a species, will end” (Mann 2006, 163). But at the same time as we feel this sorrow, we also feel excitement and joy that this beauty still exists and that we are here to enjoy it.⁷³

This experience of beauty is very different from the common account of distinterested beauty that is free from personal feelings, and it is very different from the masculinist account of the sublime. This experience of beauty further more plays an important role in the experience of the natural sublime. Even though the experience begins as an experience of beauty, it quickly changes and becomes an experience of the sublime because natural beauty reminds us today of the fact that nature is threatened by destructive forces and so are we as natural beings. Mann’s conclusion is therefore that the gap between beauty and the sublime is

⁷² My aim in this section is to emphasize that the common view of beauty and the sublime as contrasts should not be taken for granted, and that the widespread association of beauty with the feminine and the sublime with the masculine has played an important role in causing the differences between these concepts to be exaggerated. I will turn back to a further discussion of these concepts and how the boundaries between them blur in an experience of what I call *ægjefegurð* in chapter two and three, where this will be discussed in light of the findings of my qualitative studies.

⁷³ Carolyn Korsmeyer has written about “terrible beauties” where she argues that beauty is more complex than notions of its relation to pleasure allow for. Terrible beauty for her is “bound up with the arousal of discomfoting emotions” (Korsmeyer 2006, 52), and examining this aspect of beauty reveals that “[t]he complexity of aversive emotions bound up with artistic beauty creates a zone where terror and horror, beauty and sublimity and ugliness, can be difficult to distinguish” (Korsmeyer 2006, 63).

dissappearing; new circumstances and the experiences they generate call for a richer understanding of these concepts.

Johnson reaches a similar conclusion, the aesthetic desire and the feelings that come with it create multifaceted experiences of beauty:

Some feelings awakened by beauty are very close to perception itself and seem almost purified of desire as Kant prescribed, as we enjoy the experience free of any longings or demands other than the simple “again” as we experience the serene pleasure of repetition and variation. Much less serene, much more intense feelings extend to joy and rapture [...] Other experiences of the beautiful – these have to do with suffering and brokenness – arouse in us feelings of turbulence and sorrow (Johnson 2009, 216-17).

As in Mann’s account the experience of beauty can in some cases blend into the sublime experience when beauty creates the feeling of sorrow and fear. The sharp distinction between the two concepts thus is blurred when beauty is given a more comprehensive meaning, allowing it to be “sublime beauty”.

1.4. Phenomenological Aesthetics of Landscapes

If the core of our understanding of beauty and the sublime becomes relational, how does our understanding of the aesthetic change? In the context of environmental aesthetics the concept of relationality indicates how the subject stands in relation to her environment, man-made surroundings as well as uninhabited natural environments. Such a focus “decenters” the subject in many ways. As an embodied being, the subject is part of a species, and at the same time that species is a part of complex ecological systems. The decentering also ontologically deindividualizes human subjects in the sense that they are dependent on human and non-human others as well as the natural and technological foundations of human life. The experiences of the sublime and the beautiful reveal these relationalities.

According to the phenomenological and feminist interpretations of beauty and the sublime that have been discussed here, the concepts of the sublime and the beautiful do not refer either to physical objective qualities or to subjective experiences of a detached mind. They refer to the most immediate and direct relations we have with the world, and to ourselves via the world. If we apply this relational thought to the aesthetic, we reach a point where the original meaning of the greek word *aisthesis* becomes central again in our understanding of the aesthetic. The sphere of *aisthesis*, or the field of the sensuous “marks the realm in which aesthetics as a traditional discipline meets phenomenology – a meeting in which aesthetics has changed and phenomenology has expanded its framework” (Embrece,

and Rainer Sepp 2010, xvi). The connection between aesthetics and phenomenology has often been pointed out. As we already noted, this is what Merleau-Ponty referred to in his writings about Cézanne and other artists: Cézanne's aesthetic approach, perceiving just to perceive, and trying to capture on canvas some sort of direct perception of the world, is a case in point for the phenomenological approach. Embree and Sepp furthermore point out that "phenomenology has long and deeply dealt with aesthetics" (Embree & Rainer Sepp 2010, xvi). This is perhaps unavoidable since these disciplines share two of their central ideas: the emphasis on "bracketing" all pre-conceived ideas and opinions, and the emphasis on perception.

As was argued in the beginning of this chapter, the meaning of the term aesthetic has been narrowed firstly by its close relation to the narrow idea of beauty as experienced by the distant observer, and secondly it has been narrowed by the strong emphasis on art in philosophical aesthetics. It is perhaps with the connection between the aesthetic and this traditional narrow idea of beauty in mind that Berleant says that: "In speaking of aesthetics, we must go beyond beauty, we must go beyond objects that are pleasing, and focus on our experience of such *objects*, since only through *experience* can we grasp them" (Berleant 2010a, 29). Berleant is right in claiming that a focus on experience is needed in aesthetics and his phenomenological account of aesthetic engagement is one of the most important contributions that have been made within environmental aesthetics; a field to which not many phenomenologists have paid attention.

Berleant has furthermore contributed to the field of phenomenological aesthetics; a field in which more attention has been paid to art than nature,⁷⁴ and he has also contributed indirectly to feminist aesthetics, as Sheila Lintott points out:

The most promising example of a philosophical aesthetician who takes a consciously feminist perspective on natural beauty in his work is found in the work of Arnold Berleant. Berleant's philosophical work takes experience and context seriously and his views of nature appreciators as participants in constructing the object of appreciation accords with much feminist thinking (Lintott 2010, 328).

While feminist and phenomenological aesthetics have not paid sufficient attention to nature, environmental aesthetics have not been open to phenomenological or feminist perspectives. The first nascent steps of such rapprochement can indeed be

⁷⁴ Phenomenological aesthetics, like philosophical aesthetics in the 20th century in general, have focused mainly on art and not paid much attention to nature, as Toadvine points out: "Explicitly phenomenological work in ecological aesthetics is still in its infancy, but the insights of many of the major figures in the tradition are applicable to this new field of study" (Toadvine 2010, 85)

detected in Berleant's reflections on aesthetic engagement, perception and experience.

However, what Berleant fails to account for in this context of environmental aesthetics is the concept of beauty. From the quote above it seems that he sees beauty as a concept that is standing in the way of a more phenomenological perspective on the aesthetic where aesthetic experience is central. Therefore he wants to move "beyond beauty" and "beyond objects that are pleasing". The concept of beauty that Berleant seems to be referring to here is the widespread, narrow concept that I have been trying to move beyond in this chapter. So we are in agreement that this narrow idea of beauty is a hindrance to a broader phenomenological account of the aesthetic, but in my view Berleant is too quick in putting the concept of beauty on the shelf and replacing it with the terms aesthetic experience, aesthetic perception or aesthetic engagement. Of course Berleant mentions beauty often in his works, but he does not elaborate on it specifically and thus I think he misses some of the light that the concept of beauty - understood differently than the narrow idea of it accounts for - can shed on our understanding of the aesthetic.

However, even though Berleant does not focus specifically on the concept of beauty he is open to the possibility of rethinking beauty, as he says in *The Aesthetics of Environment*, he "[...]suspect(s) that both beauty and the sublime require radical redefinition once one no longer associates the first with objects and the second with transcendence" (Berleant 1992, 173-4). The rethinking of beauty and the sublime that I have been discussing here is in line with this thought as it presents an attempt to move beyond the association of beauty with objects and the sublime with transcendence. In my view the understanding of beauty presented here is indeed very compatible with Berleant's phenomenological aesthetics as I will describe in this section, and adds a necessary component to it.

1.4.1. A Place for Beauty in the Aesthetics of Engagement

Berleant puts the aesthetic at the center of his philosophy because an aesthetic approach to reality involves perception that is direct and immediate. Of course he acknowledges that perception is never completely pure, it is always filtered through many layers of culture and meaning; but aesthetic perception is as direct as perception can be because in the aesthetic moment our senses are open to perceiving things as they are without any reference to our interests or preconceived ideas about them. This is in line with the idea of *aesthetic desire* as the core aspect of the concept of beauty; this is a desire that does not involve the separation of subject and object where the subject aims to own and control the object, rather it is a desire

that involves the intertwining of subject and object where the subject lets go and lets the object's influence in.

The connection between phenomenology and aesthetics unveils how an aesthetic approach to reality can be seen as a form of the phenomenological reduction. In the moment we experience beauty, all our senses are so engaged with the object that all our preconceived opinions and ideas fall into the background; our direct perception becomes the only focus and thus we can see, hear, feel who/what the other is instead of throwing our own ideas, interests and concepts over it. In Berleant's view, aesthetic perception is a perceptual experience that needs to be recognized as "the clearest measure by which to assess the values that emerge. Aesthetic perception may indeed stand as the touchstone of human values" (Berleant 2010a, 30). For him "the aesthetic" refers to perception in its most immediate form, and through this perception we gain our access to the world; it is the starting point for all our knowledge and our valuing of the world. According to his account, the aesthetic experience described above where one opens up to the other, provides us with a pre-discursive knowledge of what has its counterpart in the scientific, ecological idea of environment. At the same time this level of experience is also part and parcel of the more advanced levels of scientific approaches. In turn the scientific approach would do well in reflecting on the basic premises of its take on the natural environment.⁷⁵

The ecological idea of environment tells us that the environment is all-inclusive: nature, humans, organic and inorganic systems and objects are all part of an interdependent and connected whole. This does not only apply to natural environments but also to urban environments; the ecological idea of environment has spread into the social, for example in the form of cultural ecology which explores how social and cultural conditions affect human well-being and influences survival.⁷⁶

⁷⁵ This is in line with Sandra Harding's thoughts on "strong objectivity" in which she suggests that ideas of objectivity need to be expanded to include the context in which "objective" judgments are made: "In an important sense, our cultures have agendas and make assumptions that we as individuals cannot easily detect. Theoretically unmediated experience, that aspect of a group's or an individual's experience in which cultural influences cannot be detected, functions as part of the evidence for scientific claims. Cultural agendas and assumptions are part of the background assumptions and auxiliary hypotheses that philosophers have identified. If the goal is to make available for critical scrutiny all the evidence marshaled for or against a scientific hypothesis, then this evidence too requires critical examination within scientific research processes. In other words, we can think of strong objectivity as extending the notion of scientific research to include systematic examination of such powerful background beliefs. It must do so in order to be competent at maximizing objectivity" (Harding 1991, 149).

⁷⁶ "Cultural ecology thus denotes an all-embracing environmental context in which each of its elements, whether organic, inorganic, or social is interdependent as well as interrelated with the others, and which, by a pervasive reciprocity, contributes to an ongoing balance that promotes the well-being of the participating organisms" (Berleant 2007, 2).

So the meaning of the term environment has changed dramatically: it is no longer seen only as an object out there, surrounding us, but rather as a system that we are a part of. This is the ecological, scientific idea of environment, but according to Berleant, this idea or concept that we use to categorize the world has an experiential analogue in aesthetic experience of environment. This means that this type of human experience gives us access to perceive the world and ourselves as part of an interdependent system. It is one thing to know things scientifically through scientific ideas and concepts, but another thing is to perceive, to know through the senses as embodied beings.

Berleant's concept of aesthetic engagement, which he has developed in his former writings, sheds light on this idea (Berleant 1991; 1992; 1997). Aesthetic engagement is a concept that developed out of Berleant's criticism of the traditional subject-object dichotomy that has characterized aesthetic theory. Instead he proposes another understanding of aesthetic appreciation not being distant but rather engaged. Aesthetic perception, according to this idea, is when we do not stand outside of experience, objectifying and conceptualizing it, but rather sense ourselves as a part of the environment. So aesthetic engagement means experiencing environment not as separate surroundings but "more as a fluid medium, a kind of four-dimensional global fluid of varying densities and forms in which humans swim along with everything else" (Berleant 2007, 2). And thus aesthetic engagement becomes an experiential analogue of the ecological concept of environment – experiencing aesthetic engagement helps us grasp more fully the experience and idea of environment – as Berleant puts it: "environmental perception is originally aesthetic" (Berleant 2007, 3).

Understanding beauty and the aesthetic from these phenomenological perspectives, we can see that there is much more involved than a distant appreciation of physical "objective" qualities such as form and color. If beauty is about relation and opening up to the other, the aesthetic realm can be found when we open up to experience objects or environments "in a manner that is fully aware of [their] perceptual richness and in which immediate, qualitative perception dominates" (Berleant 2007, 3). The aesthetic experience of beauty thus can become a deep experience that not only gives us pleasure but also helps us better understand our place in the world and our relations to the environments we dwell in.

But how do these phenomenological interpretations of beauty and the aesthetic change the way we understand the landscape concept? In the next section I will explore the landscape concept and show how the philosophical developments I have been discussing can help solve the dilemmas that have characterized landscape research.

1.4.2. *Landscape and Aesthetic Values: Not Only in the Eye of the Beholder*

One of the things that happens when studying the experience of landscape is that one begins to seriously doubt the widespread idea that this experience is foremost a visual experience. At least it becomes obvious that this experience is far richer and encompasses more senses. More often than not, this is not reflected in research done on aesthetic qualities of landscape. In fact, both the everyday understanding that people have of the word landscape, and its usage in academia, often emphasizes its scenic and visual aspects (Benediktsson 2007, Lothian 1999, Gobster *et al.* 2007, Brady 2003, Eaton 2007). As we have seen, this has also been the case in philosophical aesthetics, where the visual has been seen as the most important aesthetic sense and the role of the other senses has been downplayed. Thus, there is a strong conceptual and historical link between the landscape concept and aesthetics.⁷⁷ As Andrew Lothian points out, philosophers have dealt with aesthetics for a long time and thus “[t]heir findings can inform contemporary landscape research” (Lothian 1999, 177). The aim of this section is to examine some ways in which I think that the philosophical developments within aesthetics and phenomenology that have been discussed in the previous sections, can indeed inform landscape research within the social and human sciences.

Landscape is and has been a very contested concept. For example, landscape assessment has been approached in two different ways: in an objective way, where landscape quality is seen as inherent in the physical features of the landscape (Martin 1993, Nicholls & Schlater 1993); and in a subjective way, where the quality of landscape is seen as a product of people’s perception (Dakin 2003, Schroeder 2007). This dualism in approaches to landscape within landscape studies has a historical root in the developments in philosophical aesthetics from Plato to Kant and beyond (Lothian 1999). However, philosophical thought can also provide a different path that eschews this dualistic approach.

But why is there a need to get beyond a dualistic way of thinking about landscape? One of the reasons is that this dualistic approach has, among other things, contributed to the weak status of landscape in environmental decision-

⁷⁷ As has been discussed earlier, the meaning of the Icelandic term *landslag* is closely related to beauty and the aesthetic and so is the traditional meaning of the English word landscape which first appeared in relation to landscape painting in the 16th Century (Cosgrove 1984; 1985). However, other interpretations of the landscape concept emphasize aspects of its meaning that are traced to the germanic/scandinavian word *landskab* which has nothing to do with the aesthetic but rather with the social order of the land. These interpretations are based on a cultural understanding of landscape as lived/worked/practiced, quite different from the visual understanding associated with the English landscape concept (Setten 2006, Olwig 1996; 2002, Mels & Setten 2007). Although these accounts give an important insight into one of the many aspects of landscape, the association of landscape with the aesthetic is predominant in the context of the Icelandic concept of *landslag* and its counterpart in English which has been at the heart of landscape studies.

making. How can such a contested concept ever become a solid grounding for decision-making? Both approaches to landscape, the objective and the subjective, have flaws that make it difficult to get people to agree on their usage. The objective approach is lacking because it doesn't take into account the side to landscape that is the main reason why people see it as important to protect landscapes: the relationship between humans and the land. The subjective approach is problematic because the values that emerge from people's perception of landscape are seen as being too subjective and relative and thus not able to provide solid criteria for landscape protection.

How can philosophy, or more precisely the approach of phenomenological aesthetics of nature adopted here, help with this dilemma? First, the rethinking of subject and object that has occurred in the field of phenomenology can help deconstruct the idea that landscape quality has to be categorized *either* as subjective *or* objective. Second, the phenomenological interpretation of the concept of beauty provides a possibility for eschewing the subject-object divide and an opportunity to bring out the connection between the concepts of landscape and beauty that has been lost in the efforts made by landscape theorists to escape from an over-emphasis on the visual in definitions of landscape. Third, the field of environmental aesthetics has encouraged new developments in thinking about aesthetic valuing that suggest, as Kant did, that at least some degree of objectivity can be found in the allegedly subjective, aesthetic judgments of nature.

In the first part of this present section, I will examine the relation between landscape and aesthetics, go through the objective and subjective approaches to landscape and show through an Icelandic example how these approaches can lead to a weak status of landscape in decision-making. In the second part I will discuss how Merleau-Ponty's rethinking of subject and object through the notion of *flesh* can provide a context for understanding landscape, beauty and aesthetic value, which suggests that the meaning and value of landscape is determined by the relationship or conversation that takes place between landscape and the people who dwell in it through their experience of beauty. This phenomenological approach leads into an examination of the subjectivity or objectivity of aesthetic values, since the concept of *flesh* also suggests that the traditional separation between subject and object – and hence, subjective and objective valuing – is not as clear-cut as once was held. The meaning and value of landscape cannot be found through categorizing its objective features, nor can it be found only in our social construction of it, i.e. in the meanings we are understood to impose on it.

1.4.3. *Landscape: Objective or Subjective?*

The landscape concept can surely be seen as a very contested and elusive concept, having been interpreted in quite contrasting ways. The point where the concept becomes contested and interpreted in contrasting ways does not primarily involve the understanding of landscape in aesthetic terms, but rather it involves contrasting ideas of how to understand or define aesthetic qualities and values. The debate is not about whether landscapes should be defined as having aesthetic qualities but rather about *what is the source* of these aesthetic qualities: is it the object's physical features or the subject's experience?

The different definitions of landscape lead to different methods of doing landscape assessment; on the basis of the objective definition, landscape is treated in a similar way as soils, landforms or vegetation, as a feature that can and should be mapped and classified by specialists. A landscape assessment based on this definition would involve documenting landscape features, such as colors, lines, forms, water coverage, vegetation coverage and so on, and as in other sciences, the aim would be not to involve much personal evaluation.

This method of landscape assessment can be criticized from two directions. On the one hand, it can be criticized for being based on subjective values after all (Harding 1991). As Lothian points out, when landscape is classified and mapped in this way, certain assumptions are established beforehand, "e.g. that mountains and rivers have high landscape quality" (Lothian 1999, 177), or that rare and diverse landscapes have high landscape quality, and then the landscape is evaluated according to these assumptions. So despite sharing a method with the "objective" empirical sciences, this approach to landscape assessment has a subjectively determined basis. On the other hand this approach can be criticized for not taking the subjective aspect of landscape into account and thereby ignoring what is in fact important about landscapes: the human relationship to the land, and the differing experiences they have of the land.

The subjective definition of landscape leads to a very different way of landscape assessment, using qualitative and/or quantitative research methods to examine individual and community preferences for landscape (Kaltenborn & Bjerke 2002, Dramstad et al. 2006, Yang & Brown 1992, Kristinsdóttir 2004). The assumption here is that landscape quality is determined by people's perceptions and interests, and so what needs to be mapped and classified are not the physical features of the landscape but rather people's experiences and preferences (Massey, 2005). This method has been criticized for being based on something that is too relative and subjective to be measured in any meaningful way (Porteous 1996, Westland 1967).

Different individuals have different preferences in different times and there can thus never be a static consensus about what counts as a valuable landscape.

This dualistic way of defining landscape and approaching landscape assessment can contribute to the weak status of landscape and aesthetic value in environmental decision-making, policy and planning (Brady 2006, 278). In Iceland, this has certainly been the case; landscape has had a weak status in decision-making and it is seen as very difficult to deal with because of the subjective valuing associated with it. According to a report from Working Group I of the Master Plan for Hydro and Geothermal Energy Resources (1st phase), that dealt with landscape evaluation, there was no basis for making such evaluation as there were not many foreign examples that would be appropriate to work with and the legal structure was badly defined (Björnsson 2003, 10-11). From this time on, the need for taking the value of landscape into account in decision-making in Iceland has become more and more evident, with many controversies about changes in landscape created by the construction of new dams, roads or power-lines. The fact is that when new construction projects are being prepared, the most controversial part of the environmental impact assessment has been the visual and aesthetic value of the landscape (Benediktsson 2007, Þorgeirsdóttir 2007). Landscape thus seems to be very important to the Icelandic public and its value largely based on the aesthetic value of the experience of landscape.

But taking the value of landscape into account is not an easy task. There are two basic problems that need to be solved; first, reaching an agreement on how the landscape concept should be defined, and second, finding a way to evaluate landscape in spite of the fact that landscape values are seen by experts and laypersons alike as being subjective and thus also relative, offering no possibility of adjudication between differing viewpoints. In a chapter on landscape conservation in a report on The Nature Conservation Strategy 2004-2008 from the Environment Agency of Iceland, this is mentioned as one of the reasons for the weak status of landscape conservation: “The value of landscape is mostly visual and aesthetic, and such subjective values are more relative than the measuring sticks that can be used to evaluate other natural factors. Therefore it is much more difficult to describe and categorize landscape than other natural factors” (Harðardóttir et al. 2003, 33, my translation). A qualitative case study of the preparation for the Icelandic Nature Conservation Strategy 2004-2008, where contributors to the strategy were interviewed, confirms this:

The subjective aspect of landscape was always linked to aesthetic values. This became the experts’ recurring, niggling problem. The dilemma [...] is that the aesthetic values of landscape resist being

measured and evaluated by means of the presumably objective methods of the natural sciences (Waage & Benediktsson 2010, 18).

It can be seen from the above how the dualistic thinking about landscape contributes to its weak status in conservation. In the debate on landscape it is thus more common to assume that the objective and subjective definitions of landscape are mutually exclusive. Lothian is one of those whose view is colored by this:

The paradox in [the subjective and the objective] approaches derives from their contrasting underlying premises. They cannot both be correct. The first approach assumes that landscape quality is inherent in the landscape while the second assumes that landscape quality is in the eyes of the beholder. The paradox is that in common usage, the landscape is taken to be beautiful but in actuality this beauty is literally a figment of the imagination, a product of the viewer's own cultural, social and psychological constitution (Lothian 1999, 178).

The paradox should be taken as a sign of the fact that both approaches are insufficient accounts of the roots of aesthetic qualities of landscape, but it is understandable that the sign goes unnoticed in a culture that has for centuries assumed that the gap between so-called objective and subjective values is unavoidable.

This gap has a deep root in the Western mind-set which is based on the dualisms between subjective/objective, emotions/reason, nature/culture, female/male, body/mind, non-cognitive/cognitive and beauty/sublime. The Western worldview has been characterized by a tendency to divide everything into such dualistic pairs, where one part of the pair is seen as having greater importance than the other. Considering this history of ideas it is not surprising that in debates on nature conservation aesthetic values are often associated with subjectivity and emotions and therefore pushed to the side for scientific or economic values that can be measured objectively (Þorgeirsdóttir 2007, Benediktsson 2007).

One result of this tendency towards dualism in the history of ideas is the displacement of the concept of beauty as simple, easy pleasure in the history of aesthetics.⁷⁸ As has been discussed in the previous sections, this widespread understanding of beauty has played an important part in the association of aesthetic values with subjective emotions. The subjective-objective divide in aesthetics that has influenced common discourses and discourses on landscape, is based on the understanding of the concept of beauty as being either solely in the eye of the beholder or in the objective qualities of things. This division between so-called

⁷⁸ As discussed earlier, there are many nuances in the history of aesthetics that have not reached into common discourses as strongly as this interpretation of beauty.

objective and subjective values and the value hierarchy inherent in it is based on an interpretation of the relationship between subject and object that has been challenged, as has been discussed in the previous sections. “Subjective” values are much more than just what lies in the eye of the beholder. The meaning and value of our experiences and perceptions of reality are always the result of an intertwining of subject and object, and this counts for both the meaning and value that result from our scientific viewpoint, and from our aesthetic viewpoint.

Recent developments in landscape studies do suggest that there is a growing interest in trying to somehow combine the two approaches and the different methods (Dakin 2003, Schroeder 2007). It could be said that with the increasing acknowledgement of the need to take the subjective aspect of landscape into account, more attempts have been made to try to implement a combination of the two approaches in landscape assessment. Thus, a strong acknowledgement of the interrelationship of objective and subjective landscape qualities is evident in the *European Landscape Convention (ELC)* (Council of Europe 2000), which emphasizes both identifying and describing people’s perception of the land *and* the other more physical aspects of landscape in landscape evaluation.⁷⁹ The definition of the *ELC* acknowledges that the subjective and objective qualities of landscapes cannot be separated; the distinction between culture and nature does not hold.

The landscape concept makes it possible to look at nature and culture together and see how these two concepts can dissolve into one. As already mentioned, landscape is a multi-layered concept: it includes nature in the meaning of earth, water, plant- and animal life, biological and geological diversity; it includes human-made objects, buildings, roads, sculptures, the products of culture; it also includes movements and action. But on top of all these visible phenomena, landscape includes the invisible. The invisible relationships which emerge in people’s actions, movements, speech, thoughts, imaginations and narratives that are intertwined with the visual; they emerge in an interaction with the visual (Ingold 2000). The visible landscape has certain potentials, it calls for ideas and imaginations, stories and events. If landscape is viewed from this perspective, we can see how it adds to our usage of the concepts of nature and culture. Landscape involves a comprehensive way of looking at the reality of places and spaces. Instead of dividing reality into different boxes and viewing nature in one box and culture in another, the landscape concept invites us to look at the whole picture: how the meaning of landscape

⁷⁹ This can be seen in the *ELC*’s definitions that were quoted in the Introduction: “Landscape means an area, as perceived by people, whose character is the result of the action and interaction of natural and/or human factors” (Council of Europe 2003, 3), and: “The identification, description and assessment of landscapes constitute the preliminary phase of any landscape policy. This involves an analysis of morphological, archeological, historical, cultural and natural characteristics and their interrelations, as well as an analysis of changes” (Council of Europe 2000, 2).

emerges in the relation between subject and object, between the human and the land.

Geographers and anthropologists that have emphasized this understanding of landscape are often inspired by Merleau-Ponty and other phenomenologists (Ingold 2000, Tilley 1997; 2004; 2008, Wylie 2007, Hirsch & O’Hanlon 1995). These authors encourage a new interpretation of the landscape concept which acknowledges the intertwining of humans and the land and how the meaning of landscape emerges from these relations. However, the role of the aesthetic and aesthetic valuing is reduced in these theories and thus they fail to provide a language that helps us deal with the values most commonly associated with landscapes: aesthetic values.

The interviewees from the Icelandic case study mentioned above can give a clue to what is needed. According to Waage and Benediktsson many of the interviewees seemed to view landscape in both subjective and objective terms:

[W]hat is of particular interest here is how “beauty” and “landscape” are equated throughout the interviews and how landscape is therefore seen as a subjective phenomenon. Yet, there is the idea of universal beauty or landscapes that everyone finds beautiful. This represents an attempt to objectify a phenomenon, which nevertheless is considered as being essentially subjective (Waage & Benediktsson 2010, 17).

This might suggest that there is a need for understanding how the presumably subjective landscape can be, and is often objectified. But to understand this it is necessary to let go of the objective-subjective dualism that directs the debate on beauty and landscape. As we have seen, the association of beauty and landscape with subjectivity can be challenged by looking at these concepts through the perspective of Merleau-Ponty’s ontology.

Authors from different disciplines have been inspired by Merleau-Ponty’s ideas and used them as tools to provide a new understanding of both the human-nature relationship and of the landscape concept. Philosophers David Abram and Ted Toadvine have examined Merleau-Ponty’s ideas in order to rethink the human-nature relationship and to find a basis for a new philosophy of nature and the place of humans within it (Abram 1996, Toadvine 2009). Anthropologist Tim Ingold and archeologist Christopher Tilley have used Merleau-Ponty’s ideas to provide a new understanding of the landscape concept (Ingold 2000, Tilley 1997; 2004; 2008). All of these authors provide good insights into how Merleau-Ponty’s ideas can change the way we think about humans and nature or other environments that surround us. To simplify a bit: Instead of seeing ourselves only as subjects trapped inside our minds and the environment as separate objects that are outside of us, Merleau-Ponty shows us how perception is inherently an ongoing interchange between the body

and the entities that surround it, and thus the barrier between the inside and outside is blurred. Abram describes this interchange as “a sort of silent conversation that I carry on with things, a continuous dialogue that unfolds far below my verbal awareness”(Abram 1996, 52). This description hints at how Merleau-Ponty’s ideas can provide a language to talk about the *conversation* between humans and the land. But what is lacking in Abram’s approach is an examination of how Merleau-Ponty’s ideas can influence the way we understand the roots of the meaning and values that emerge from our conversation with the land.

Abram does talk about values, but in a very different context. His main conclusion is that if we acknowledge that we are having an ongoing conversation with our surroundings which are “experienced as sensate, attentive and watchful” then this will lead to a more ethical behavior towards nature, and we will value it differently: “then I must take care that my actions are mindful and respectful, even when I am far from other humans, less I offend the watchful land itself” (Abram 1996, 69). Here, Abram uses Merleau-Ponty’s thought to attempt to change the way we value nature, but what I want to suggest is that his thought should also be used to gain a new understanding of how values emerge in the first place. Basically, Abram advocates a spiritual relation with natural environments. My approach would determine spiritual values as one set of values among others generated in the human-landscape encounter. His approach is about “connecting” with the non-human and the more than human world. The approach developed here consists in establishing aesthetic values as legitimate in assessment of landscapes, as important for human well being, and as reflective of what it means to be human as intertwined with the non-human.

Reflection on how Merleau-Ponty’s ideas can influence the way we understand the emergence of landscape value is also missing from the accounts by the other authors I mentioned above. Ingold and Tilley use Merleau-Ponty’s thought to gain understanding of the landscape concept as an interchange that constantly goes on between the human body and the land, but in their approaches to landscape, the aesthetic aspect does not play an important role. This may be due to the relation these authors see between an aesthetic aspect of landscape and a strictly visual understanding of beauty and landscape. With their emphasis on how we interact with the landscape as bodies they are attempting to get away from the perspective that is confined to the visual, and this may result in an overall phobia of the aesthetic (Benediktsson 2007).

As we have seen, Merleau-Ponty’s phenomenological understanding of human perception of reality provides a new way of thinking about beauty, aesthetic qualities and aesthetic value that should affect how we understand the landscape concept. Just like the boundaries between the sea and the land are flowing and elusive, the

border between the body and the world is not as clear as the traditional account of subject and object describes. Thus Merleau-Ponty makes an attempt to get beyond the two alternatives that have been directing the way we think about subject and object: strict scientific determinism on the one hand and idealism (as displayed in forms of social constructionism) on the other. According to Merleau-Ponty, perception is neither caused entirely by the object nor caused solely by myself: “Neither perceiver nor the perceived [...] is wholly passive in the event of perception” (Abram 1996, 53). In order to take a closer look at how Merleau-Ponty’s ontology can influence our understanding of the landscape concept, I will now turn again to his notion of *flesh*.

1.4.4. Landscape - Flesh - Atmosphere

As we have seen in the previous section, Merleau-Ponty’s idea of *flesh* suggests that both perceiver and the perceived are active in the event of perception. What does this tell us about aesthetic qualities and the emergence of aesthetic values? It tells us that neither of the accounts of aesthetic qualities that have shaped the debate on landscape can be accurate. What we perceive is neither created solely by me as a subject, nor solely by the physical features of the object. Böhme builds his aesthetic theory of nature on this assumption, making *atmosphere* its central concept (Böhme 1992; 1993; 1995; 2000).⁸⁰ One of the reasons why he chooses this concept is that it has the advantage of being able to draw on our common daily experiences:

One talks of a pleasant valley, of the depressive mood before a storm, or the tense atmosphere in a meeting, and it is easy to agree on what these phrases mean. If atmospheres are moods, which one feels in the air, then we are describing a phenomenon which is familiar to everyone (Böhme 2000, 15).

Atmosphere is a very suitable term to describe the way that perception is the common reality of the perceiver and the perceived. According to Böhme, atmospheres stand between subjects and objects: “one can describe them as object-like emotions, which are randomly cast into a space. But one must at the same time describe them as subjective, insofar as they are nothing without a discerning subject. But their great value lies exactly in this in-betweenness” (Böhme 2000, 15). This description of atmosphere corresponds in my view to Merleau-Ponty’s understanding of *flesh*. Atmosphere, as *flesh*, is a concept that captures the

⁸⁰ See also Jane Howarth’s (1995) paper on “Nature’s Moods” where she discusses what we mean when we “speak of angry skies, melancholy seasons or joyful brooks”. Like Böhme, she focuses on the relational aspect of the aesthetic encounter through exploring the atmospheric “mood” we perceive in nature.

“inbetweenness” of subject and object, it is what Merleau-Ponty thought of as being “midway between the spatio-temporal individual and the idea” (Merleau-Ponty 1968, 139), or the meaning generated in the encounter. What Böhme’s concept of *atmosphere* and Merleau-Ponty’s notion of *flesh* suggest to our understanding of the aesthetic qualities of landscapes is that these qualities can be seen as being both subjective and objective. They are objective in the sense that they are qualities “via which the object projects itself into space” and “modifies the sphere of its surroundings” (Böhme 2000, 15). And they are subjective in the sense that they are perceived by the subject whose mood or feeling is affected by the atmosphere that the object creates. According to Böhme, atmospheres are experienced as suggestive instances, that is, as a tendency or urge toward a particular mood” (Böhme 2000, 15).

We cannot understand the meaning and value of landscape by focusing only on its objective side or its subjective side. Rather, we have to acknowledge both, and realize how these two sides really are one; a clear-cut distinction between subject and object cannot be made, and so we cannot say that the meaning of landscape is *only* a social construction, or *only* a matter of describing its objective features. The *ELC*’s definition emphasizes the need to *both* identify and describe the more objective features of landscape, and examine people’s perception of these features. Identifying the objective features of landscape is important because it allows us to document the changes that occur and also to explore how these changes affect people’s perception of the landscape, and what the relationship is between different objective features and people’s perception. If landscape assessment would only focus on the former, it could not truly capture what landscape is; it would be like claiming to understand the value of a glass of wine by describing only its ingredients and the visual features of it without saying anything about the taste: the perception of it.

Both in the case of a glass of wine and in the case of landscape, its value cannot be understood only by looking at it from a distance and classifying its objective features; the meaning and value emerge when these objective features are perceived by the subject. They emerge in the intertwining of subject and object, and included in this intertwining are time and history, different social and cultural developments that shape both the subjects and objects. Embodied being is the very foundation for situatedness in place, time and other determining factors that influence the way we experience landscape. Interpreting the landscape concept from the perspective of Merleau-Ponty’s and Böhme’s ideas, shows that its role is first and foremost to capture the atmosphere: the invisible depth of the visible that emerges in our relationship to environment, and changes and develops as history and time shape that relationship.

In order to get beyond the dualistic approach to landscape and aesthetic values, we need to acknowledge how the meaning of landscape (which largely depends on aesthetic experience) is created in the conversation between humans and the land.⁸¹ This will allow us to account for our aesthetic experience of landscape, and how it is not unreasonable to expect at least some degree of general agreement; and to think that certain landscape features do indeed have a tendency or urge to affect the mood of the landscape and the people who perceive it in specific ways.

⁸¹ It is important to note that the concept of conversation is used here in a metaphorical way since there can be no real conversation between humans and landscapes. There can however be an internal conversation that is triggered by the encounter of the human subject and the landscape (Árnason 1994b, 278-9). Landscape is active in this sense, but the meanings generated in the perception of it are experiential as well as conditioned by the time and place of the encounter.

2. Qualitative Studies: Aesthetic Experiences of Glacial and Geothermal Landscapes

We have now seen, on the basis of a phenomenological understanding of beauty and the aesthetic, that the meaning and value of landscape is found in the intertwining of subject and object. It is this intertwining, that takes place in the aesthetic *experience* of landscape that needs to be explored in order to shed light on the aesthetic *value* of landscape. Thus the next step in the examination of the aesthetic value of Icelandic landscapes lies in studying actual experiences of the two landscape types that characterize Icelandic nature the most; glacial and geothermal landscapes. This study has been conducted in four steps.

The first step was to examine my own experiences of these landscape types with the method of phenomenological descriptions. In 2008 I went alone on several trips to four different geothermal areas in the south-west of Iceland, where I spent a few hours each time and wrote down descriptions of my experiences and the natural features that captured my attention the most. These areas were *Austurengjar* and *Seltún* in *Krýsuvík*, and *Fremstidalur* and *Innstidalur* in *Hengill*. I also travelled to many different geothermal areas in the highlands with my co-worker in the ILP project; for example *Kerlingarfjöll* mountains, the *Torfajökull* area and *Kverkfjöll* mountains. The experiences we had there also provided me with plenty of food for thought. In 2008-2009 I travelled on *Vatnajökull*, *Hoffellsjökull* and *Snafellsjökull* glaciers and did the same. Before this time, I had only been a few times to geothermal areas and I had never been on a glacier before, so I did not have many pre-conceived ideas about the experience of these landscape types.

The next step was to read and examine as many descriptions of these geothermal areas and glaciers that I could find in travel books and other material such as hiking-route guides. The third step was to do qualitative studies of people's experiences of geothermal and glacial landscapes. In 2008 I took three different groups to the *Seltún* geothermal area, did participant observations and took interviews with one to three participants after each trip. In 2009 I did the same in group trips to *Svínafellsjökull*, *Sólheimajökull* and *Falljökull* glaciers. The final step was then to examine theories within environmental and phenomenological aesthetics insofar as they can help shed light on the basic characteristics of the experiences that appear in the data. In this chapter, the results of this study will be discussed. I will begin by discussing descriptions found in travel books and other literature, and then I will discuss the results of the qualitative studies and examine them in light of theories within environmental aesthetics.

2.1. Glacial and Geothermal Landscapes: Descriptions in Travel Books

How have the geothermal areas and glaciers I visited been described before? Which characteristics have captured people's attention the most? In order to find answers to these questions I examined descriptions I could find, mainly in travel books, but also in hiking route guides and other comparable literature. What these texts have in common is that their main purpose is to describe the "lay of the land": the perceivable features of the travel/hiking area are described so that others can recognize them when there. In other words, what they are describing is the landscape. Of course what has been written in these books does not give a full account of the image of these landscapes in the past, however, they can provide us with some ideas about people's attitudes to these landscapes and what has been thought to characterize them aesthetically the most.⁸²

2.1.1. Descriptions of Geothermal Areas

In descriptions of the geothermal areas historical and geological knowledge is emphasized the most. Information is provided about which kind of geological phenomena can be found in each place and which historical events have happened

⁸² An examination of descriptions in poetry, literature and visual material (photography, art, film) of these landscape types would also be useful in this context. But such a project is beyond the scope of this thesis, although it would be an interesting next step. As described by Halldór Björn Runólfsson, director of the National Gallery of Iceland and curator of the exhibition *From Another Shore; Recent Icelandic Art (Frá annarri ströndu; nýleg íslensk list)* that was opened in the Scandinavian house in New York in may 2008, nature and landscape are central themes in contemporary Icelandic art: "[Runólfsson] says that it marks a difference between the artists how different their views of nature are, although it is the foundation of their art, whether they are conscious of it or not: "Contemporary Icelandic art stands firmly in the landscape, but has little in common with European landscape traditions" (Náttúran í forgrunni [Nature in the Foreground], 2008, my translation). The centrality of nature can also be seen in 19th and early 20th century Icelandic poetry when poets "spoke with veneration of the sublimity of their country, of its massive glaciers and mighty waterfalls" (Yngvason 2008, 6), and in early 20th century landscape painting (Eysteinnsson & Jóhannsdóttir 2008, Árnason 1994a). Although the topic of nature and Icelandic art has been discussed in Icelandic academia recently (Sigurjónsdóttir 2008, Jónsson & Sigurjónsdóttir 2006, Eysteinnsson & Jóhannsdóttir 2008), it would be interesting to carry this theme further in light of the landscape concept developed here, and examine how landscapes are interpreted and mediated in Icelandic art and how art expresses people's relations to landscape, as well as affecting these relations. As will be discussed in chapter three and four, I do believe that art can play an important role in creating knowledge of landscapes, but at this point I will focus on the descriptions of landscape that were written with the aim and focus of describing the observable features of the landscape as they appear, but not with the aim of expressing the landscape artistically. One of the reasons for this is that in the context of landscape assessment in Iceland, these are the types of texts that would possibly be taken seriously as data revealing information about the features of the landscape, whereas artistic expressions of the landscape would never even be considered to be of relevance since artistic expressions are perceived as personal opinions that should not have any role in assessment. So my aim here is to examine the place of aesthetic values in relation to landscape in other discourses than the artistic one, which obviously focuses most on aesthetic qualities and is best suited to capture and describe them.

there in the past. Perhaps this emphasis is due to the fact that signs of geological and historical events are very visible in the Icelandic landscape – both the geological and cultural histories of Iceland are histories that began quite recently compared to other parts of the world and so the evidence of these histories are still there and not yet covered with layers and layers of landmass.⁸³

Discussion of the geothermal areas is colored by this, often there is only a short mention of the fact that there are some geothermal areas in the place that is being described, sometimes it is mentioned that the geothermal areas are constantly changing and that they can be dangerous, but what is most characteristic of the little mention of the geothermal areas are descriptions of how people have attempted to utilize the geothermal heat. In the following description from the yearbook of the Icelandic Travel Society we can see in a nutshell how the geothermal areas are discussed:

Krýsuvík was once a manor with many crofts. The manor farm was east of Bæjarfell and there you can see quite big ruins and the road up to the farm can still be seen, as well as the church, which is very close to ruin.

Otherwise Krýsuvík is mostly known for its vast geothermal area and the sulfur mines that were there for some time. Kongens Mine used to be there at the bottom of the mountain, a short way from the drilling hole that most people stop to take a look at and was mentioned before. In the prairie that is a short distance more to the north, and south under Bleikhóll hill we find a special human construction, which is now mostly covered by sand. It is a small swimming pool with clear water, but there is not much water like that found in this area. Swimming was taught there for some time.

Up on the shoulder above Seltún is the hot spring Pínir and sometimes the steam from it can be seen all the way from Reykjavík. It is quite often changing like many other hot springs in this area and is quite common generally with hot springs in geothermal areas. East of the highway is a hotspot called Svunta. There a new mud spring has appeared and it boils hard and erupts with mud (Brynjólfsson et al. 1984, 89-90, my translation).

As we can see, the first thing that is discussed is the history of *Krýsuvík*, and when the geothermal area is mentioned it is immediately connected with people's attempts to utilize the sulfur for mining and the hot water for swimming. So the discussion is mainly limited to describing the utility and harnessing of the geothermal heat.

⁸³ The island started to form 44-26 million years ago. The oldest rock in Iceland, in the Westfjords, is 16 million years old. The first human settlers arrived around the year 870.

Other things that are mentioned are raw facts about the hot springs, for example where they are, what type they are, and that they are constantly changing. In another description of a hiking route the utility is also what is mentioned first:

It is very interesting to walk through the geothermal areas in Krýsuvík, but one must be careful, as in all geothermal areas. The drilling hole in Seltún always draws people's attention, but now there are 40 years since it was opened (Guðjohnsen 1989, 60, my translation).

In descriptions of *Hengill*, human use of the hot springs is the main topic:

From there one can continue to the south-west and down the hill west of Hveragil [Hotspring-gorge] and down into Innstidalur. From Hveragil flows a hot stream, colored by mud, but that doesn't stop many hikers from taking a bath in it. Many people have used this stream for bathing and have made little pools there to sit in (Guðjohnsen 1988, 61, my translation).

It is fun to go into Hveragil in the south of Hengill to take a bath (Kristinsson & Sæmundsson 1996, 48, my translation).

However, there is one description of hiking routes in *Hengill* that is different. Here the geothermal area in *Innstidalur* valley is discussed with an emphasis on describing the characteristics of the area and the atmosphere that can be experienced there:

Up Sleggjubeinaskarð gorge the hiking route lies from the Vikingshed, when the great steamy hot spring of Innstidalur is visited. He blows all the time so powerfully in his gorge, that he is thought to be the most powerful steam spring in Iceland, even though he has many competitors, not the least his neighbor in Reykjadalur [...] To the right there is a magnificent display of colors around the springs in the west slope of Skarðsmýrarfjall mountain. What draws one's attention the most is the bright yellow color of the sulfur [...] there are such glorious colors to be seen in Innstidalur, that it is hard to find words to describe it [...] A short distance east of the shed you can see where the hot spring blows steam in the narrow gorge. It is easy to walk up to it, but one must be very careful not to step down into the mud and sulfur where the hot water boils and the steam wheezes [...] a short way up from the shed, the hot spring erupts with such force that the thundering sound from it can be heard from far away. It is not easy to get close to this thundering beast, because the hot water splashes up and it is very narrow in there, in the presence of the mountain dweller. It is best to stay on the east side of the hot spring, and be careful not

to fall over by going to close to it (Jóhannsson 1992, 52, my translation).

Here the geothermal area is described as “the great steamy hot spring” that blows powerfully; one has to be careful where “the hot water boils and steam wheezes”; and it is not easy to get close to “the thundering beast”. These descriptions indicate an attitude towards the geothermal areas that is characterized by seeing them as a powerful and dangerous force that wheezes and makes loud noises, and the atmosphere seems mysterious. This can be seen as a description of the aesthetic quality of the sublime as it has the elements that have traditionally been associated with it; an experience of a grand and powerful natural force that poses a danger to the human, who perceives it from a safe distance as mysterious and magnificent, and experiences pleasure mixed with fear.

In another description of the geothermal areas in Krýsuvík, the author emphasizes describing the characteristics of geothermal areas and special attention is paid to how they are always changing and how curious they are:

The big mud spring in Seltún is mostly cold, but once it boiled quite hard. Hot springs are constantly disappearing and others appear instead. A big and powerful hot spring is now just by the road to Seltún, where there was none before. A bit further to the east one can see the steam from Austurengjahver, which was formed in an earthquake in 1934 and grows gradually towards south. Around it are some beautiful fumaroles and they are also constantly changing. Also the gorges in Seltún and Krýsuvík are curious, and in some spots one can find clear sulfur and gypsum (Guðjohnsen 1988, 60).

In this description the emphasis is on the constant changes of the geothermal areas; at some point a hot spring boiled hard but is now cold; now there is a spring where there was nothing before; and another hot spring was formed in an earthquake. These changes are thought to be very interesting, and to see them happen is very curious. The using of the word “curious” suggests that the area awakens some form of wonder, perhaps wonder arises because of the visibility of the earth movements. It is also interesting that the word “beautiful” is used here, this is the only description of geothermal areas where this term is used. The constant changes are also noted in a description of *Hengill*:

The hot springs have often changed in earthquakes. History books tell us that in 1339 a big hot spring appeared where there was nothing before (Kristinsson & Sæmundsson 1996, 29).

Again it is found interesting and curious that a big hot spring can suddenly appear where there was nothing before. In these descriptions one might say that a certain aesthetic quality is being described. The feeling of wonder has often been described as one of the main characteristics of aesthetic experience, and this feeling involves experiencing something surprising that awakens one's curiosity.

What can be learned from this examination of writings about geothermal areas in travel books and hiking-route guides, is that not much attention has been paid in this type of literature to the aesthetic aspect of the geothermal areas. Stories of the actions of humans utilizing the geothermal heat seem to be what is found most interesting. However, in two examples one could say that the aesthetic qualities of wonder and the sublime are being described. Also, the emphasis on geological and historical information could indicate that, as has been argued by some environmental aestheticians, aesthetic appreciation and valuing can be based on scientific knowledge of the phenomena (Carlsson 2000, Shapshay 2013), or the stories that we tell about it (Heyd 2004).

2.1.2. *Descriptions of Glaciers*

Quite a lot has been written about glaciers in Iceland, certainly much more than has been written on geothermal areas. Many books have been published on glaciers from a natural sciences perspective, but also many travel stories can be found, both from modern times and from the first expeditions to *Vatnajökull* glacier in the late 19th century and early 20th century. The element that stands out in people's descriptions of glaciers is mixed emotions, where the glacier is perceived as both attractive and repelling at the same time. In the book *Vatnajökull: Frost og funi* [Vatnajökull: Frost and Fire], by Ari Trausti Guðmundsson and Ragnar Th. Sigurðsson, this attitude is emphasized: "Vatnajökull is a big world, separated from anything else, cold and charming in the eyes of the perceiver; a sort of ice palace or desert of ice, even both at the same time" (Guðmundsson & Sigurðsson 1996, 5, my translation).

The cold repelling atmosphere of the glacier is often discussed in stories of travelling on the glacier, especially in stories of early expeditions where the conditions were not the best. In the book *Í ríki Vatnajökuls* [In the kingdom of Vatnajökull], Hans W. Ahlmann describes his participation in the Swedish-Icelandic *Vatnajökull* expedition of 1936: "'Are you going to Vatnajökull?' said the captain of the ship[...]well, then you won't come back alive, for Vatnajökull is *hell on earth*". Einar Einarsson was not far from the truth and his words were not too exaggerated, this we would learn in the next few weeks" (Ahlmann 1936/1979, 19, my translation). Ahlmann's descriptions from the expedition suggest that he indeed found the place to be "hell on earth": "[The landscape] was not as magnified as in

the Alps or in Norway, not more vast than on Svalbard and not more colorful than in North-Africa, but it was more *immensely cruel to human life in its terrible devastation* than any other landscape I have ever laid my eyes on” (Ahlmann 1936/1979, 68, my translation). But at the same time this “hell” awakens his imagination to imagine the enormous powers of the earth that creates this landscape: “It was *barren and rough*, one could see no traces of life. The lava fields were only there as witnesses to the *primal forces of the earth’s core*, that had spat them out up on the surface, layer upon layer; the glacier and the vegetation-free sand in front of us was a true ice-age vision” (Ahlmann 1936/1979, 18, my translation). The fascination that comes with this imagination is the other side of the mixed emotions that appear in people’s writings on glaciers.

The following description of *Vatnajökull* shows very well how the glacier can be both fascinating and repelling at the same time: “[...] Vatnajökull is majestic to look at [...] the glacier puts a rather cold and even aloof appearance on the south-east coast. Still many find it wonderfully beautiful [...] Some people find that the glacier must be its own kingdom within the kingdom.” (Guðmundsson & Sigurðsson 1996, 5, my translation). Here, the glacier brings out the image of the forces that create the landscape and that image leads to fascination, the other side of the coin that the experience of the glacier brings forth.

Another aspect that characterizes people’s writings on the experience of glaciers is the feeling of wonder and mystery: “Often the glacier traveller becomes filled with wonder over the diversity of Vatnajökull.” (Guðmundsson & Sigurðsson 1996, 7, my translation). In his description of summer days on Vatnajökull Sigurður Þórarinnsson writes: “In the shadowed surface of the lagoon the bluegreen glacial cliffs are mirrored, but white icebergs of extraordinary forms float here and there on the water. This vision is so unreal, that one hardly believes his own eyes” (Þórarinnsson 1954, 141, my translation). In the travel story of Jón Trausti of his trip to *Eyjafjallajökull* the same response is described: “We walked slowly up there and made a stop from time to time, to watch those wonders, that appeared in front of us” (Hjálmarsson 1968, 30, my translation). Ahlmann also describes the feeling of wonder in the kingdom of *Vatnajökull*: “It grew bigger and taller, soon the majestic dome of Öräfajökull appeared in front of us. Its white crown was glowing for a moment in the sunshine, but was then covered in clouds again. After that we did not see more of Vatnajökull. In our curiosity and wonder we tried without success to break through the mist” (Ahlmann 1936/1979, 28, my translation). This experience of wonder is related to the fascination that was described above, and it leads to a deep respect or admiration for the glacier, it is a “kingdom within the kingdom”.

Even though most of what has been written about glaciers are scientific (biological, geological) information and descriptions of the glacier's objective qualities, in many places descriptions of the researcher's perceptual experience are hidden in between, and these experiences can be seen as aesthetic experiences. So we could say that the aesthetic aspect of the glacier has received some attention even though most attention has been paid to the scientific aspects. This is different from what seems to be the case with writings on and descriptions of geothermal areas, where human action and utilizing of the geothermal heat seem to receive most attention, but not their aesthetic qualities. The examples that have been discussed show that at least two aesthetic qualities are very prominent in people's experiences of glaciers: the feelings of wonder and the sublime. These qualities will be discussed further as I turn next to the results of the participant observations and interviews to see if the aspects that appeared to be most characteristic of the participants' experiences have something in common with the descriptions that have been discussed above.

2.2. Qualitative Studies of the Experience of Geothermal and Glacial Landscapes: Methodology

In order to gain more insight into the aesthetic experiences of glacial and geothermal landscapes I decided to conduct participant-observations and semi-structured interviews. A participant observation involves the researcher going into the situation that is to be examined (for example a home, workplace, meeting or any other situation where people react to each other and their environment), looking closely at and registering the chain of events, the actions and responses of the participants, and then writing a thorough report based on this that can then be further analyzed. A semi-structured interview is conducted so that the researcher comes to the interview with a few main questions in mind, but does not lead the interview through a closed, specific list of questions. The aim is rather to let the interviewee lead the conversation by asking very open questions and letting the responses the interviewee gives inform what questions are asked next (Taylor & Bogdan, 1998).

From February to April 2008 I took three different groups to the geothermal area *Seltún* in *Krýsuvík* and in the summer of 2009 I went on group trips to three glacial outlets called *Svínafellsjökull*, *Sólheimajökull* and *Falljökull*. I did participant-observations during the trips where I registered thoroughly all the responses, words and actions of the participants in the trips, and then after each trip I interviewed one to three participants to gain a deeper understanding of what characterizes the aesthetic experiences of these areas.

2.2.1. *Seltún - Participants*

The three groups that went to *Seltún* were very different. The first group (*Seltún 1*) was created around friends, a couple (Helga, age 37 and Einar, 31) with one child (age 6). I asked them to join me in *Seltún* and then they invited other people to come along: two American guests (Leslie, age 49 and Bob, 58), another Icelandic couple, (Svavar and Laufey, age 38 and 32) with two children (age 6 and 9), and a young Icelandic woman (Jóna, age 19). The second group (*Seltún 2*) was small and intimate, it consisted of two female friends (Katrín, age 31 and Lára, 27) and Katrín's son (Baldur, age 10). The last group (*Seltún 3*) consisted of seventeen foreigners who have moved to Iceland and were studying Icelandic for foreigners together, and a friend of mine who was their teacher. Two of them were Hungarian women in their twenties (Victoria and Eva) and the others were from Poland, all people in their twenties and thirties.

Even though some of the participants knew the researcher personally, this did not interfere with the outcome because they had not received any information about the ideas behind the research. It was rather a positive thing than negative that there existed some relations between the participants; in all the cases either some of the participants knew the researcher or they knew each other and this fact made them more relaxed and open to express their responses. If they would have been surrounded by strangers they would probably have hesitated more and been more reserved in their responses.

2.2.2. *Seltún - Collection of Data*

One of the reasons why *Seltún* in *Krýsuvík* was chosen as a research area was that it is a very accessible geothermal area. It is situated 40-50 minutes from Reykjavik and Keflavik Airport and there is no need to hike to get there as it is accessible to all traffic for most part of the year. *Seltún* is also a quite diverse geothermal area. I was always the one initiating the trip and leading the group there, but as soon as we were there I tried to let the group lead itself. This was successful, I was not in the role of the guide, rather people would move around the area as they wanted and I was able to observe their responses. I was careful to stay in the background, I avoided sharing my own responses to the environment and kept my focus on observing the other's responses.

When I arrived at home I sat down by the computer and wrote down the chain of events as I remembered it. This turned out to be quite easy, both because only 45 minutes had passed since I was in the chain of events and because of the shape of the area and the fact that we walked around it in a circle – this makes it easy to visualize the events in a circular time frame. I then took semi-structured interviews

with one participant from each trip. The interview was always taken one or two days after the trip, which worked well – the experience was still fresh in their memory. The questions I had in mind were very open, so that the responses that the interviewees themselves thought were most characteristic for the experience would emerge. The first question was always the same, I asked how the person experienced being in *Seltún*. I had a few other questions in mind during the interview but most of them were created in the process of the interview.

2.2.3. *Sólheimajökull, Svínafellsjökull, Falljökull - Participants*

In the case of glaciers it was not so easy to access and organize trips on my own so I decided to join guided tours with two travel companies – *Icelandic Mountainguides* and *Glacier Guides*. So in these cases I could not have any influence on who was participating. The majority of the customers of these companies are foreign tourists so it was not surprising that all of the participants and interviewees were foreign. The first group in *Sólheimajökull* was a Belgian family of four; a middle-aged couple and their two children, a boy and a girl, 14-15 years of age. I interviewed the couple but the woman did most of the answering.

The second observation was on *Svínafellsjökull* and this time the group was bigger, it consisted of seven people, all in their thirties: two couples from France and Germany, two young women from Canada and a young man from Germany. The last three were all interviewed afterwards. In the third observation on *Falljökull* the group consisted of four Americans in their thirties/forties and with them was one Danish man in the same age, one French couple and another couple from Austria, also all in their thirties/forties. I interviewed the Austrian couple afterwards. In order to get an Icelandic comparison I added one interview with an Icelandic woman in her thirties who I came into contact with through a mutual friend. This woman has traveled on several glaciers in Iceland, including the ones that we visited in the group trips.

2.2.4. *Sólheimajökull, Svínafellsjökull, Falljökull - Collection of Data*

All in all I conducted three participant observations and five semi-structured interviews for this part of the study. As mentioned above I was able to join organized trips to the glaciers and this made it easier for me to stay in the back. I was just a part of the group and was able to observe the participants and even take notes without the others paying much attention to it, whereas in the geothermal area the participants always knew that I had initiated the trip. If people asked me what I was doing I answered that I was studying experiences of glaciers, otherwise I only explained shortly to the people I interviewed what I was doing (I told them I was examining the aesthetics of glaciers). When we came down from the glacier I tried

to write down the chain of events as soon as I could, but before that could happen I had to do the interview, so the notes I jotted down on the trip became very useful.

The first interview was taken on a bench by the parking lot where the trip ended, so the experience was very fresh in the interviewee's memory. The same counts for the other interviews – they were always taken very soon after coming down from the glacier. The second and third interviews were taken in a camping kitchen facility in *Skaftafell* after a short bus trip from *Svínafellsjökull* and the fourth interview was taken at the *Jökulsárlón* coffee house after a short drive from *Falljökull*. As before, I started with one open question: “can you describe your experience of the glacier?”, and then let the questions develop with the process and flow of the interview.

2.2.5. Data Analysis

The participant observations were written up straight after each trip. The interviews were recorded on a computer and then written up. After that I worked through the interviews and participant observations in the same manner: reading through the texts and adding my observations, and then reading through the whole text with my observations, and identifying some main themes from each interview/participant observation. So the data analysis was conducted along the way during the data collection, with each interview/participant observation I wrote down my analysis of the main themes that came up and these became the material of the analysis of the main themes that came up through the whole study. Thus the coding was double; first I read through each interview/participant observation and then identified and analyzed the main themes. When all the data had been collected I read through all the analyses and saw that some themes came up more than once. Then I read through all the data again and coded them with reference to these themes. What came out of the coding was then added to the material of the main analysis. This made it possible to focus more efficiently on the themes that stood out in the data.

2.3. Qualitative Studies of the Experience of Geothermal and Glacial Landscapes: Results

As mentioned above many of the themes that appeared in the results came up more than once in the interviews and participant observations. Some themes also appeared in the examination of my own experiences in the phenomenological descriptions, and in the travel literature. The main themes that came up in both glacial and geothermal landscapes were: wonder, attention to sensory perception (of forms, colors, smells, touch, sounds), imagination, and the sublime – or feeling oneself small. Other themes that came up were different responses to different

forms and qualities of the landscape, communication, photographic approach, focus, art/nature and restorative effects. The theme that stood out though was the theme of wonder and therefore more attention will be paid to this theme than the others.

2.3.1. *Wonder*

The exclamation “Wow!” and wondering about how different forms and phenomena can be created or how they are possible was a very common response in the study. This feeling of wonder was what characterized the experiences of the participants the most. Pierre Hadot and Ronald W. Hepburn have both pointed out that wonder is closely tied to aesthetic perception (Hadot 2004, 213; Hepburn 1984, 131). According to Hadot wonder is one of the most important aspects of approaching the world aesthetically. Wonder involves seeing the world as if for the first time, and increasing focus on sensuous perception. This feeling, to see things as if for the first time, also leads to curiosity about this exotic or unusual phenomenon that one does not experience every day. Wonder is thus characterized by experiencing something new that one is surprised by and does not fully understand, and is filled with curiosity and the need to know in response to it.

The feeling of wonder often begins in the rapt attentiveness to the senses that is characteristic of the aesthetic response, but it also extends this rapt attentiveness as curiosity urges one to use all the senses to explore what is perceived, and ignites the imagination to start envisioning the forces that created the perceived qualities.⁸⁴ The reason why I refer to the participants’ experiences as experiences of wonder and not some other type of positive experience is that this is the term that seemed most fitting to describe the body language, facial and verbal expressions of the participants. In hindsight, it would have been useful to have a camera to capture some of the moments where their faces lit up like they were small children actually discovering something truly wondrous for the first time. The smiles on people’s faces in the moment of wonder were not calm or contemplative smiles filled with veneration, majesty or grandeur, but rather excited, joyful and childlike smiles filled with fascination and surprise.

Another reason for using this term is that this experience of wonder led the participants to start *wondering* about the phenomenon that they were perceiving, how they were created and how they had developed. This form of the word suggests to me a relation to the imagination, as wondering about something can be understood as imagining possible answers to questions that arise, which the participants frequently did. The data shows that the feeling of wonder appeared in different

⁸⁴ The relation between wonder, imagination and beauty will be further discussed in chapter three.

ways. Firstly, in words, exclamations or lack of words (being struck silent). Secondly, in the emphasis put on sensuous perception, and thirdly, in surprise and curiosity about exotic or unusual phenomena encountered.

The first hint that suggested that the feeling of wonder was an important part of the experience were the facial expressions of the participants and the words they used. In the *Seltún 1* observation the foreign guests were the first ones to shout out “*wow!...remarkable!...amazing!*” Throughout the *Seltún 1* and *Seltún 2* observations the participants used sentences like: “*wow, this is great, this is amazing!*” or “*wow, look at this!*”, “*wow, see this over here!*”, “*wow, see how beautiful this is!*”, “*wow, this is magnificent!*”. When these sentences were used there was always a certain tone in the voice, as if the person was very excited and surprised by something. The exclamation wow! can of course also be connected to expressions of majesty or grandeur, but in these cases the tone of the voice and the body language would be more calm and filled with veneration rather than being characterised by the excitement and joyful curiosity that appeared in the facial and verbal expressions of my participants.

In the *Seltún 3* observation I did not understand the languages that the participants spoke, but in that case I found that wonder appeared in the lack of words – or silence, and also in people’s activities and facial expressions. The Polish women that were sitting in the back of my car when we were on the way to *Seltún* had been chatting away and laughing the whole journey and did not seem to be paying much attention to the landscape outside the car window. But when we were getting closer to *Seltún*, driving past lake *Kleifarvatn*, it was as if the landscape captured their attention as they suddenly went totally silent and looked out the window, with facial expressions of fascination and surprise. In the study of my own experiences, the same responses came up: “*wow!*” was an exclamation that often went through my mind and I even said it out loud to myself (as I was alone). The lack of words was also often characterizing my experience: “*Inside my head I just hear wow! wow! wow! when I see all the details and glorious colors that I can’t find words to describe*”.

The same “*wow*” response came up in the study of glaciers, but in this case the facial expressions were even more strongly expressing wonder and surprise. In the *Sólheimajökull* observation one could see joy, excitement and wonder in the facial expressions of the Belgian family. Every time we stopped to look at big crevasses or moulins, great curiosity and wonder appeared in the participants’ facial expressions. They were standing in front of a phenomenon they had never seen before, and as Hadot points out, seeing things as if for the first time is a key factor in approaching the world aesthetically through wonder (Hadot 2004, 213). Here we thus have what we might call a genuine wonder; the participants were *actually* seeing things for the first time, not only *as if* for the first time, as Hadot recommends we do to gain access to the feeling of wonder.

Rachel Carson also recommends that we imagine that we have never seen what we are perceiving before, or that we knew that we would never see it again (Carson 1998, 67). In this way we can sustain or develop our sense of wonder, but Carson worries that the sense of wonder given to children disappears too often when we grow older: “It is our misfortune that for most of us that clear-eyed vision, that true instinct for what is beautiful and awe-inspiring is dimmed and even lost before we reach adulthood” (Carson 1998, 54). Perhaps this is why the Belgian family was so exhilarated as they were filled with wonder at all the things they were experiencing and they had never experienced before; this was a refreshing change from daily life where all is known – everything has been seen before.

When we were standing by a black glacial moraine and listening to the guide explain this phenomenon to us, the Belgian woman looked at me with her eyes wide open and I could see the great excitement, surprise and wonder in her facial expression. When we came up to a big crevasse surrounded by big ice sculptures the woman shouted “*Wow!*” and pointed to the forms she saw, and her husband did the same while shouting: “*a hole in the ice!*”. In the interview she described this response: “*you see amazing things!*”, and when I asked her what kind of feelings she had she said: “*amazed...wonderful...that nature is very unpredictable!*”. These words suggest that wonder was the feeling she thought characterized her experience the most.

In the *Svínafellsjökull* observation, the same thing occurred. As we stopped by the first moulin, immediately I could see many curious eyes wide opened and wondering smiles on people’s faces. They looked over the glacier with this facial expression of wonder and as the phenomena we looked at grew bigger and perhaps more dramatic, this facial expression also became more dramatic. In the interviews after this trip the Canadian women used the words “*awesome*” and “*spectacular*”, when I initially asked them to describe their experience on the glacier. In the *Falljökull* observation there was no less wonder in people’s faces: “*their jaws were dropping from interest and they listened with great attention*” when we made the first stop close to the glacier. When we were on the glacier and stopped to look at moulins and crevasses, the wonder in their facial expressions grew as the crevasses and moulins grew bigger:

Now we are stopping by a very big moulin. The Austrian woman looks down into it and makes a grimaced “wow!” face. One of the Americans says “wow!” and so do I when I look into it. Everyone is smiling with a facial expression of wonder when they have looked down.

In this trip the guide also described to us his own feeling of wonder when he had gone into a moulin in another trip and got a closer look at the light-blue and see-through ice: “*it was a strange feeling...very impressive!*”. These responses in words,

exclamations or lack of words, were the first symptoms of wonder but to analyze these responses better I will next look at what it was that evoked this response.

2.3.2. *Wonder and the Senses*

The most obvious reason for the wonder felt by the participants was their direct sensory perception of colors, forms, textures, sounds. The *Sólbeimajökull* interviewees said that what captured their attention the most were the forms and phenomena, moraines, moulins, small holes in the ice filled with clear-blue water; this was what they described as “*amazing*”. They also said that the sounds of the water streaming under the glacier caught their attention and that all the senses had been very active. It is interesting how they described this: “*I became calm...the stress is going...floating away...because you must be...you are busy with nature...so many surprises you see and nice things...you see so many...and you don't think of other things...your mind is busy experiencing*”. Because the senses were so active they experienced peacefulness in their mind.

This is one of the main characteristics of wonder: that the mind takes a break while all the focus and attention is in the senses.⁸⁵ When we see something for the first time, or as if for the first time, the starting and focus point is in the senses – the senses are so overwhelmed by a color, form, movement, texture or sound that there is no room for “other things”. The “mind is busy experiencing” and so the channels of sensory impression are opened up while any knowledge about the things perceived falls into the background and is not able to break the feeling of wonder by capturing the object in one thought and categorizing it as “known” and thus not worthy of wonder. This will be discussed further later in this chapter in the context of the relation between wonder and knowledge.

The focus on the senses also appeared in the urge many participants had to touch the glacier and even taste it, the curiosity that the unusual sensory experiences caused made people want to explore the phenomena through more senses than just the visual (examining the texture of the ice with the ice-axe, taking up and touching chunks of ice, and tasting the clear-blue water). The sounds of the water streaming under the glacier and down the moulins also affected many participants. The Austrian man said: “*and there's a noise of the water...there was this special place where we didn't see the water but it was...I think the most impressive sensation for me*”. The Canadian women also spoke about the sounds: “*mainly the sounds...I wasn't expecting to hear so much water, like underneath the glacier and throughout the glacier*”. The sense of taste was also explored, both in *Sólbeimajökull* and *Falljökull* the guide encouraged the

⁸⁵ This is also a key feature of the aesthetic response, and as I further discuss in section 3.1., beauty and wonder do share some important features, such as the rapt attentiveness to the senses that characterizes both.

participants to taste the thousands of years old water in the clear-blue water holes and streams, and when the people tried this one could see great wonder and joy in their facial expressions. In *Svínafellsjökull* the Canadian women admired the clear water and one of them said: “*I just want to take a straw and drink it!*” Some interviewees also talked about the sense of smell – they found it strange to smell the cold air on the glacier.

The same occurred in *Seltún*, the qualities that fascinated the participants the most were all the unusual and unique sensuous qualities of the geothermal landscape: the smell was unusual, the colors, the sounds and the details in the patterns; all these things were found very unusual, unique, and very fascinating. Victoria, the interviewee from *Seltún 3*, felt wonder in the face of these phenomena because she is not used to seeing, hearing, or smelling them – she is experiencing these things for the first time and the response is wonder. This was also the case with the other participants, the reasons for the sentences mentioned above, like “*wow, look at this!*”, were the colors or some of the delicate forms and patterns in the rocks and clay.

Rachel Carson’s advice to those who want to explore the sense of wonder is that they need to learn how to open up their senses: “It is learning again to use your eyes, ears, nostrils and finger tips, opening up the disused channels of sensory impression” (Carson 1998, 67). In all the studies, both in glacial and geothermal landscapes, this heightened attention to sensuous perception was prominent. However, since the perceptual stimulants of the geothermal landscape are so much more various and diverse, much more and closer attention is required of the senses and so the role that the senses play in the experience of these two landscape types is quite different in that way.

In the glacier, the senses are indeed stimulated in many different manners, as described above - the sounds of water running, melting and dripping, and of icebergs braking and cracking, the smell of cold air, the taste of ancient water, the touch of different textures of ice, and seeing various forms of white and blue for as long as the eye can reach – these sensory stimulants all played an important role in capturing the aesthetic attention of the participants as well as their imagination and curiosity. There were so many senses captivated by the glacier that “the mind became calm” as the Belgian woman put it.

But the geothermal area has many more different kinds of sounds; loud sounds and soft sounds, all playing at the same time. And it has white and blue like the glacier, but also red, pink, orange, yellow, green, blue, purple, grey, black, and all the different variants of these colors one could imagine. The geothermal landscape has dozens of different smells of hot air, smells that one cannot escape when they rush up the nose with the wind, and that even follow one home. The geothermal

landscape also has different wet and dry, hot and cold and variously patterned textures of different earth materials – stones, mud, clay, sand. We might say that the geothermal landscape is able to overwhelm the senses in a different manner than the glacier does because of the enormous variety of sensory qualities found there. So it is no surprise that in my studies there was a much stronger emphasis on the attention paid to the senses in the study of geothermal landscapes than in the study of glacial landscapes. In what follows I will thus discuss in more detail how the geothermal landscapes were explored through all the senses by my participants and how their responses were characterized by wonder.

Smell

In the *Seltún 1* observation the role of smell in the experience was one of the first things that came up, and that was even before we arrived in *Seltún*. When we were still in the car, approaching *Seltún*, Leslie said with surprise: “*I can smell the sulfur*”. Another participant, Helga, spoke again and again how she liked the smell, and that part of the reason for that was that the smell reminded her of good memories from the steam bath in *Laugarvatn*, which was built on top of a hot spring. The foreign visitors also talked about how the smell was an important part of the experience, a part that you could not capture on camera. After the first few minutes in *Seltún*, Bob, who had immediately taken up his camera when we arrived, said: “*It doesn’t make sense to take photos*” and Leslie replied: “*no, you have to take in the smell*”. With these words they implied that experiencing the geothermal landscape involves more than just the visual.

This was also apparent when we stopped by *Fúli pollur* (*stinky pond*). For many, the strong smell of sulfur that characterizes this geothermal mud pool is unpleasant, even disgusting and nauseating. But in the *Seltún 1* observation this smell was something that the participants thought was very interesting and exciting. The group went searching for the smell (they expected it from the name) and then they found it. People were even able to discuss the smell and this hints at the fact that “subjective” experiences like smelling are perhaps not so completely subjective as is normally thought. Even if we cannot smell with other people’s noses, that doesn’t prevent us from discussing its aesthetic characteristics and coming to a conclusion about it.⁸⁶ In the *Seltún 2* observation, the smell was not as prominent, and that was partly because of the direction of the wind. Victoria, the participant I interviewed after the *Seltún 3* observation, said that the first thing that captured her attention was the unusual smell. She did not think that it was a bad smell, but it was very unusual

⁸⁶ This will be discussed further in relation to the theme of communication and sharing.

and exotic to her. So the smell played an important part in her experience of the place being unusual and exotic.

This emphasis on the smell can also be found in my phenomenological descriptions. The smell affected me in a similar manner, it is often the first thing that captures one's attention and causes wonder and curiosity even before one arrives at the place visually, and this is a central part of the experience. The smell also often came with me after I had been in the geothermal landscapes and when I could smell it on my clothes later when I was somewhere else, I connected the smell to my experience of the hot springs – it brought up memories very easily and I found the smell to be good and somehow even charming or fascinating. A similar response came up in Helga's interview where she said that the smell immediately brought up memories from another experience of a hot spring. In her discussion on the aesthetics of smell, Brady (2005) refers to research that has shown that smell connects people to memories more efficiently than vision does, and she emphasizes that an important role that smell has in our aesthetic experiences is this – that smell easily brings back memories (Brady 2005, 188).

Sounds

A variety of different sounds characterizes most geothermal areas – boiling mud and water is the core of the soundscape found there and the boiling sounds are very different according to how thick or thin the fluid is that is boiling and how high the temperature is. These sounds are on the scale from being a lively and fast rhythm of surface water boiling, to a very heavy and slow rhythm of boiling mud under the surface. Another core aspect of the soundscape are the wheezing sounds of the steam that breaks through the surface. Again, the sounds can vary according to how big the fumarole that the steam is coming from is, and how hot the steam is and thus with how much power it breaks through. Small streams and ponds are often a part of geothermal landscapes and these bring the sounds of water streaming, small waves and even the sound of small waterfalls. It is hard to ignore this strong soundscape.

The participants in the *Seltún 1* and *Seltún 2* observations all paid a lot of attention to the sounds and so did the interviewees. In the *Seltún 3* observation it was more difficult to tell whether the participants were discussing the sounds with each other since I did not understand the language they were speaking. The main roles that the sounds played were that sound is an important part in creating the feeling of wonder, sound and vision are very connected, sounds play an important role in creating the atmosphere of a place, and sounds can be a source for artistic inspiration.

In the *Seltún 2* observation there were moments where a lot of attention was paid to the sounds, and this attention was characterized by the feeling of wonder. One of the participants, Katrín, pointed out to the others a lively sound coming from small water holes that boiled very hard. She obviously found the sound very interesting and there was a sense of surprise and wonder in her voice when she repeated again and again: *“do you hear these sounds?”* Her voice was excited and joyful and the smile on her face and her wide opened eyes, as well as her emphasis on showing the others what she was perceiving, expressed a childlike feeling of wonder. In the interview with her she said that she was surprised by these sounds because they were so unusual and exotic – she found it difficult to describe them and she did not understand where they were coming from. In the *Seltún 1* observation the responses of Helga and Einar were characterized by the same kind of wonder, they were very excited and talked about how *“magnificent”* these sounds were. In the *Seltún 3* interview, Victoria also talked about the sounds being one of the things that caused the feeling of wonder, as was discussed above, it was sensuous perception, and especially the sounds, that created the feeling of wonder.

One of the things that characterized this feeling of wonder was that this response called for an interaction between hearing and seeing. When Katrín wondered at the sounds and called to the others to hear them, she both said *“hear the sounds”* and *“look”* and thus it seems as if she is seeing the sounds. The same thing happened with Helga in the first participant observation when she pointed the sounds out to me: *“these sounds are magnificent, can you hear over there? [and she pointed with her finger] and the sound that comes from there [pointed again] and then there is one over there that is just like a tiny little boiling kettle [pointed to a small stroke of steam]”*. Helga and Katrín’s responses to the sounds are very similar to my responses from the phenomenological descriptions where I noticed that often the sounds guided my visual perception of the area. I would hear one sound distinct from all the others and start looking for the origin of that sound and find that this wheezing sound of steam was coming from that little fumarole.

Helga also discussed this further in her interview where she described how she had the need to investigate with her eyes where the sounds were coming from and see what was the difference between the phenomena that were creating different sounds; where was that heavy bubbling sound coming from and where did the lively boiling sound come from? She said that the reason for her searching for the origin of the sound with her eyes and the need to “investigate” where the sounds were coming from was that she had not been to this place often, she was there for the first time and therefore she had the need to investigate the place with her eyes. But then she said that once she had gotten to know the place with her eyes, she was able to pay more attention to the sounds alone, then she did not feel the need to “see”

the sounds, but rather she could focus on just listening and investigating the soundscape. These are interesting ideas about how the different senses work together – it seems that often the visual takes over, perhaps especially when people are getting to know the environment and curiosity is playing the main role. The sounds seem to awaken the curiosity and then the need comes up to examine them closer by seeing where they come from, what the origin of them looks like, how it smells, how it feels.

Seltún is divided into two different spaces, front space and inner space. The front space is open and often windy and it consists of a large dark-grey mud spring. The appearance of this space is quite dark and eerie, the sounds from the mud spring are slow and deep, the smell of sulfur is very strong and the colors are dark. The inner space is very colorful and consists of boiling water springs and mud springs at the bottom of a gorge in the mountain slope that creates shelter from all sides, the steam is thick and surrounds one's face and body, and many different sounds of boiling and steam create a steady and lively soundscape. The responses to these areas were very different; most of the participants hurried through the front space and the responses were characterized by fear and a tense atmosphere, but in the inner space the responses were more jolly and many people talked about how cozy and warm the atmosphere was there.

In the interview after the first participant observation Helga pointed out that the sounds play a big role in creating these different atmospheres. She described how she thought that the front space was “rather callous”, but as soon as she came into the inner space she felt “somehow really nice when I was there, also because there you can hear...much more sounds...all the bubbling...different sizes and kinds of it”. Here Helga connects the good feeling she had in the inner space with the fact that there you can hear more sounds, a certain kind of wall of sound is created there by all the various boiling, bubbling and steaming sounds. Helga also talked about that the sounds are more likely to bring back memories, that one connects the sounds to a certain type of atmosphere while photos do not do the same. In her opinion the sounds in an environment play an important role in creating the atmosphere in each place.

Helga also discussed how the sounds can be inspiring for creating music. The sounds were an important part of her and Einar's experiences, they admired the sounds and their beauty and started thinking about if they could somehow record these sounds and use them as material for creating music (they are both musicians). This hints at the relationship between art and nature, as Helga describes it, a natural phenomenon can become material for creating something. It is interesting that she does not talk about imitating nature, but rather to take some natural element, like the sounds, and creating something new from it.

Vision

In all the Seltún observations, the use of a camera was very popular and people paid a lot of attention to the small details, the “micro-worlds” as I chose to call them. People were bending down a lot to look and touch and take close-up pictures of these small details of colorful patterns in the clay and other earth materials. I think they would have paid attention to these details without the camera as well, but the camera did play an important role in this examining of the details.

This was certainly the case with Katrín, who saw the photos of the details as works of art that she would hang on her wall after she would enlarge the photos. This is a very interesting connection; she looks at nature as she would look at art, looking for forms and colors to hang on her wall. Perhaps this photographic vision led to her not paying as much attention to the other senses – at one point she paid attention to the sounds and touch, but otherwise it was always the details, the colors and the forms that captured her attention the most. It is very interesting what Katrín said in her interview, that she used the camera to be able to look at the details more closely. In this way she was able to take the details with her home and “*continue the feeling of fascination*”, as she put it.

This examining of the details was also very characteristic of my own experience. I would examine one “micro-world” after another; I could stare at them endlessly and imagine how they would look like enlarged, though I never had a camera. I would often compare these details, the forms and colors, with works of art in my mind, and I remember thinking that no artist could ever create as beautiful and unique forms and blend as beautiful vibrant colors.

Victoria also said that she used the camera in this way, to look at the details more closely, but she also said that she used it to be able to share her experience with others that were not there with her. This is similar to what Helga described, she spoke of the camera being a form of communication, especially when you are alone, instead of pointing things out to the person standing next to you, you point with the camera lens and then you can show the pictures to people who were not there and thus share the experience.

Vision is a very important part of the experience of geothermal areas because there one can find so many tiny details. More focus is needed in looking at a geothermal area than other landscapes that are more characterized by big forms that are experienced from a distance. The variety of colors is also unusually high and participants always paid a lot of attention to that.

Touch

In all the Seltún observations the need for touching was characteristic of the experiences - touch was a key element in creating the feeling of wonder. When

Helga and Einar dipped their fingers into the dark-grey mud and looked at it closely their feeling of wonder increased - this response was not there until they had the mud on their finger. The same happened with Katrín and Baldur – even if they knew that the water was warm, it was not until they had touched it that the response “*wow!*” came up. In the *Seltún 3* observation this need for touching was also characteristic – people would touch the mud and even take up big chunks of clay and play with it. The touch of the steam also affected Helga and Jóna in the *Seltún 1* observation when they enjoyed feeling the steam on their faces. This was also characteristic of my own experiences – I had a strong need for touching, feeling the temperature, the texture of the mud or sulfur – and these aspects played an important role in the experience.

All senses

One of the results of this study is thus how the “other” senses (than the visual) play an important role in the experience of geothermal and glacial landscapes, and also how the senses intertwine and work together. The eyes start searching for something that you hear or smell, and sound and steam together can create a certain response. Sometimes one hears a mysterious and deep sound but cannot see its origin because of the thick steam – or one hears water running inside the glacier without being able to see it and this creates a feeling of mystery and excitement. Other times one hears a low but steady steaming or boiling sound while the steam plays with your face and this creates a nice, cozy feeling. This is what I noticed in my own experiences – how all the senses are important and play a role in creating the experience.

Helga also spoke of this. Discussion of sounds, smell and touch of the steam was very prominent in her interview and she also talked about how all these factors come together to form some kind of whole or equilibrium. She feels that this equilibrium then influences the way she feels after spending time in the area. The equilibrium she senses in the environment reaches her own inner being and thus the experience can be said to have some kind of restorative effects. In the phenomenological descriptions this kind of sensuous perception was the main cause of wonder. My attention was drawn towards all the colors, delicate forms and patterns, sounds and smells, and this caused the feeling of wonder. This full attention to the senses led me to wonder how such colors, forms and sounds could come into existence: “*the delicate patterns are indescribable. Here beside me is an orange base color with all imaginable varieties to that color, then it changes into wine-red and pink and then there are dark-blue, gray and white parts on the top*”. All this shows that the focus on the senses plays an important role in people’s experience of wonder, the feeling of

wonder increases with the sensory experience and also the feeling of wonder urges people to explore the phenomena through all the senses.

2.3.3. *Wonder and Curiosity*

We have seen how increased attention to the sensuous surface is characteristic of the experience of wonder. Another main characteristic of wonder is experiencing something as if for the first time, to experience something surprising, exotic or unusual. In the *Seltún 2* observation the feeling of wonder appeared in the words spoken by Katrín and Lára as we drove past lake *Kleifarvatn* and arrived at *Seltún*: “*wow, this is so beautiful!*” Later it came up in their responses that they were actually surprised that this beauty and this nature was there, so close to where they live, and yet they had either never been there before or not since they were little girls. The same response came from Helga in the *Seltún 1* observation, she was surprised that this beauty was so close to her home and yet she did not know about the place. So their responses are characterized by the fact that they are surprised by the experience, they see something that they did not expect.

Katrín also talked about in the interview that she thought that the surprising element was one of the main characteristics of geothermal areas generally: “[*the geothermal areas*] *are always so surprising somehow ... they are just all so different somehow ... one is always just like wow, this! Wow, that!*”. This thought also came up in the interviews with Helga and Victoria. Helga spoke of “*mixed emotions*” she had towards the hot springs, and explained these emotions by saying that “*this is quite rare...like...you haven't seen a million mud springs*”. These mixed emotions were characterized by the fact that she thought that the hot spring was attractive and repelling at the same time, and what was attractive about it was that it is rare and “*amazingly interesting*”. Thus the hot spring is something that surprises her, something that she is always seeing as if for the first time because it is always more exotic than familiar, it is not as familiar to her as the waterfall, the mountain or the rainbow and therefore it is always surprising.

In the phenomenological descriptions it was also very common that what caused the feeling of wonder were unusual and exotic phenomena; the bright yellow color of sulfur and rocks that had been colored by the sulfur awakened this feeling as well as boiling water or mud that boiled so hard that the fluids were splashing tens of centimeters up in the air. Both of these phenomena are things that are not very common; they are unusual in comparison to gray rocks and cold water. Victoria also spoke of the experience of the geothermal landscape as an experience of something rare and unique - exotic nature that surprises her. She emphasized in the interview that this was something that she was seeing for the first time and that the experience was totally unique. She said that this was exactly what she found most

appealing about experiencing Icelandic nature: “*In Iceland you can see so many things like this...that you can never see anywhere else*”. When she was asked if she thought it was important to experience something that was rare she replied: “*that’s why I came here to be honest*”.

Presumably none or few of the participants in my studies on glacial landscapes had been on a glacier before and thus it is normal that their responses were characterized by wonder – they actually were experiencing a glacier for the first time, and the forms and phenomena on the glacier are very unusual and exotic. This experience brings with it a certain curiosity which appears in a nutshell in the response of one of the participants when he saw a small glacial moraine and shouted with a surprise: “*what the hell is that?*” Here the sensory experience of an unusual phenomena calls for curiosity and wonder and he wants to know what this is and how a strange phenomena like that comes to exist. The curiosity and wonder make him want to know. This was also the response of the Belgian woman in the *Sólheimajökull* observation – she talked about her experience of the unpredictability of nature. In the interview she said that when she was standing there and watching the glacier from a distance she thought, “*wow! what is this?*” - the phenomena made her curious and surprised and then when she was on the glacier she was surprised again and again and this made her feel that nature is unpredictable. The Icelandic interviewee also spoke about this, that the first time she was on a glacier the most exciting thing was to experience something new for the first time, to do something you do not do every day.

Wonder is a result of experiencing something new that one does not fully understand, then one feels the need to know it and understand. The first step towards that knowledge is to touch, smell, look and listen. The surprising element, the attention paid to the senses and the curiosity are all aspects of wonder. Wonder has something in common with scientific thinking, and many times it has been claimed that wonder is the starting point of all science⁸⁷ – we find something surprising and unusual that we do not understand and therefore we start seeking out ways to identify and understand these phenomena. Some of the *Seltún* participants expressed some sort of scientific curiosity. In the *Seltún 1* observation Bob said: “*I wish I had paid more attention in science class*”. Katrín also said that she always started thinking about the processes and forces that lie behind the natural environments she is experiencing, even though she does not know the scientific explanations. Victoria expressed the same thought: “*I like to know...what is it...actually that happens*”. This is one of the main characteristics of wonder – having to ask yourself “how did this happen?” Curiosity was also very common in my phenomenological descriptions,

⁸⁷ This will be discussed further in chapter three.

the sensuous qualities awakened my curiosity and then made it grow; often there was a sound or stroke of steam that caused curiosity and then led me to find the source of the sound or the steam, and then the curiosity grew about what was under the surface and how these phenomena came into existence. When people see something new and surprising they become curious about how these strange things came into existence and how they work. So next I will talk about the connection between wonder and knowledge.

2.3.4. Wonder, Knowledge and the Imagination

Since the glacier participant observations took place in guided tours it of course followed that the guides explained the basics of glaciology to the participants; how the glacier develops, how it creates the surrounding landscapes, how the moulins, crevasses and moraines are created, and so on. All the participants showed a great interest in this knowledge and asked lots of questions, which shows that they were very curious. This is interesting because wonder has often been defined as the opposite to knowledge, as the state of mind that is created when we lack knowledge and that as soon as the knowledge is gained, the wonder disappears.

One of Ronald Hepburn's aims in his essay "Wonder" is to examine if wonder and knowledge must exclude each other as has often been argued (Hepburn 1984). He points out the opposing ideas of wonder where it has on the one hand been explained as the starting point for knowledge; we feel wonder or puzzlement over something that we do not fully understand and therefore we start seeking knowledge or understanding. On the other hand wonder has been explained in terms of itself being the end, not as being a means to some other end. According to this view wonder does not have to be the starting point of something else to be a valuable aspect of human experience, it has value in and of itself: "wonder can also be highly valued as a form of human experience, overlapping with both the aesthetic and the religious; and we may wish it did possess stability and were invulnerable to undermining" (Hepburn 1984, 132).

Proponents of this view have seen the increase of scientific knowledge as a threat to the continued existence of the feeling of wonder; that gradually wonder will disappear or be displaced as we manage to know and categorize everything. The rationalization of human reality is thus seen as leading to a disenchantment that makes wondering redundant. Those who hold the former view have likewise seen wonder as a threat to the advancement of knowledge:

...allowing that some people come to love wonder for its own sake, such people have been seen as hostile to the pursuit of naturalistic explanation, preferring to marvel rather than to understand. The

pursuit of scientific knowledge – it is argued – would in fact provide them with objects enough for wonder (Hepburn 1984, 132).

Hepburn's aim is to solve this dilemma by showing that wonder does not necessarily have to disappear when knowledge is gained. The first step he takes to do this is to draw a distinction between different types of wonder by referring to Kant's ideas of the difference between astonishment and wonderment:

Kant's usage is striking and suggestive. He certainly distinguishes between astonishment (*Verwunderung*) which fades as a sense of novelty diminishes, and wonderment that is steady and unthreatened (*Bewunderung*). We apply the expressions "sublime" and "noble" to certain objects, "provided they do not so much excite astonishment (*Verwunderung*)" which is directed at "novelty exceeding expectation" as admiration (or wonder, *Bewunderung*) – "an astonishment which does not cease when the novelty wears off" (Hepburn 1984, 133).

The distinction is thus drawn between a kind of curiosity or need for novelty on the one hand, and "true" wonder or wonderment, on the other. Wonderment does not disappear, its object continues to cause wonder after it has been identified or fully understood. But astonishment on the other hand, does disappear when one's curiosity has been answered: now we know what was once new and unexplored and therefore it does not cause wonder anymore. Hepburn points out that such an approach indicates a need for "owning" the object by gaining knowledge of it: "a tick on the tourist's place-list". True wonder on the other hand is characterized by the fact that this need for knowing the object and thus controlling or owning it is not there:

Wonder does not see its objects possessively: they remain "other" and unmastered. Wonder does dwell in its objects with rapt attentiveness. There seems, too, a variable relation between the element of curiosity or interrogation in wonder and a contemplative-appreciative aspect ("dwelling"), in which it is furthest from mere curiosity (Hepburn 1984, 134-135).

In this "contemplative appreciative aspect" we find the continuous character of wonder that does not disappear with knowledge.

Hepburn continues to explore Kant's distinction between astonishment and wonderment and uses it to explain how some forms of knowledge can indeed co-exist with the "true" wonderment that does not fade even though knowledge is gained. Wonderment can for example co-exist with causal explanations when we see some phenomena that goes against what we are used to perceiving. Even though we

can explain the phenomena, the causal explanation is so complex and extensive that we are not able to comprehend in one thought how this strange phenomena could come into existence. Even if we understand the causal explanation, the perception of the phenomena is so unusual that the explanation has no effect on us (Hepburn 1984, 137-138).

This applies to the qualities of the glacial and geothermal landscapes. Even if we know the geological explanation of how the ice becomes light-blue or how the bright-yellow sulfur is created people still feel wonder over these extraordinary colors. A complex causal explanation does not make one respond with “oh, yes of course” and the wonder to disappear. In the same manner knowledge about how some qualities evolve does not influence the feeling of wonder if the explanation of this evolution is so complicated and the perception of it so unusual that the explanation has no influence: “The most dramatic example is the wonder at the evolutionary emergence of living structures from the less ordered and less differentiated” (Hepburn 1984, 139). Here we wonder at how these sensuous qualities could change into completely different sensuous qualities; how could the visual qualities of the caterpillar change into the visual qualities of the butterfly? This also applies to the constant changes that go on in the geothermal and glacial landscapes; how can a new hot spring emerge where there was once cold earth? How can a crevasse change into a moraine?

Another example of knowledge not influencing the feeling of wonder is when we wonder at sensuous qualities without the cause of these qualities being part of the feeling of wonder:

The wonder is not vulnerable to the Baconian “going behind the curtains”. For it is not the genesis of the phenomenon that elicits the wonder, but the phenomenon itself, color, sound, or combination of impressions. There is no “going behind” it (Hepburn 1984, 139).

Even if we know the explanation of the phenomena, this is not what causes the wonder, rather it is the extraordinary color, texture, sound or other qualities that cause the wonder.

These types of wonder are all characterized by the fact that sensuous perception plays the primary role in creating the feeling of wonder, but knowledge is secondary. Even if the knowledge is there, it does not cause the wonder to disappear. This is how wonder and the aesthetic merge; both are characterized by the fact that all the focus is on the sensuous while knowledge goes into the background. However, Hepburn does not hold that wonder and the aesthetic are one and the same thing. The feeling of wonder is not always a part of an aesthetic experience; it can also be a part of a religious or metaphysical experience.

Furthermore, aesthetic experience is not always “wondering” (Hepburn 1984, 147). But wonder and an aesthetic experience do share some important features:

...both are concerned with unusually concentrated, rapt experience: there are aesthetic theories whose concepts are “heightened” or “expanded” consciousness, or the “privileged moment”. These all stress aspects of aesthetic experience that come closest to wonderment” (Hepburn 1984, 147).

As discussed above, the wonder felt by the participants started with this type of heightened awareness of and attention to sensory qualities. The feeling of wonder increased as more attention was paid to the senses, but wonder also urged people to explore what they perceived through all the senses. A strange sound would capture their attention and then they would start searching with their eyes for the origin of the sound. When the origin was found they would have the urge to touch it and with every new sense coming into the experience, the feeling of wonder would increase. But wonder did not only urge people to focus more on the senses, it also caused a great deal of curiosity. Being curious entails wanting to know, and thus the above mentioned idea that wonder is the starting point of knowledge seems to ring true. However, when the knowledge came into play, for example when the guide explained the glacial phenomena to the participants, the wonder did not disappear. As Hepburn argues, knowledge is not always destructive to the feeling of wonder and in the cases of glaciers and geothermal landscapes knowledge is certainly not able to destroy the feeling of wonder.

The responses of the participants in the studies of glaciers fall under the cases Hepburn speaks of; they were very curious, asked questions and wanted to know everything about these strange phenomena they were experiencing, but despite all the knowledge that the guides shared with them their wonder seemed to remain untouched. In fact, the feeling of wonder seemed to increase the more they heard about the glacier. In the *Sólheimajökull* observation the participants were very curious and wanted to know everything about the nature of these strange phenomena they were experiencing. The whole group (family of four) showed a lot of interest and listened with attention and wonder to everything the guide said. But in spite of all the knowledge he shared with them their wonder seemed to remain untouched, and even increase. When the guide explained to them that the volcanic ash that had covered the ice came from the volcano Katla, they were very surprised and this information seemed to awaken even more wonder and curiosity in their minds:

They asked curiously if the fire was able to go through the ice or if the lava would flow over the ice...their imagination is obviously awakened when the guide starts talking about Katla, they envisage the volcanic eruption and wonder how the ice and

fire mix together. The explanation doesn't seem to satisfy them, how can the fire go through so much ice; what happens when so much ice and so much fire come together, which of them gives way? This moment was characterized by great wonder, a moment where one's understanding can't get around the phenomena.

This is exactly what Hepburn talks about; when we experience a complicated phenomenon like the glacier, the knowledge does not affect the wonder because it is too vast and complicated for the mind to be able to grasp it as a whole. The same occurred in the other glaciers, the wonder did not decrease but rather increase as the guides provided more information about the nature of the glacier.

In the interviews it was apparent that knowledge was an important part of the experience. The German interviewee talked about how the knowledge directed his attention to the forms in the surrounding landscape: *"it's a nicer view on it...small things become bigger...like the small scratches on the wall...if you know how they came up that small thing becomes big if you know there was a big glacier doing that"*. The two Canadian women had studied geography so they had some knowledge of glaciers and glacial landscapes beforehand, but the feeling of wonder was still there. They talked about how the knowledge they had, added to the experience: *"just because of my interest in geography, my interest in the landscape...like I love understanding how something is made, like I don't...just...obviously just seeing a mountain is beautiful but knowing what happened to create that mountain adds so much more to the experience"*. The Icelandic interviewee told the same story, but she has also studied geography:

there were these lines of moraines, big moraines where there have been...crevasses are filled with mud and rocks and sand you know, and then the glacier melts around it and then the sand remains because it makes sure that there isn't as much perspiration, so it insulates the ice. So its so funny to see these lines...you know that one knows that...I knew that they had once been crevasses, I thought that was so much fun, just to see how this changes so fast...this is a very surreal environment...

Here she explains in detail how the moraines are formed and in the next sentence she describes how these moraines created a feeling of wonder in her; how she got all excited and thought the phenomenon was surreal.

It is interesting that even the people who have studied the phenomena seem to have the same intensity of wonder as the others that were learning about the glacier for the first time. In his paper "Sheltered by the Glacier: Thoughts on Stone-pebbles" the geographer Edward H. Huijbens describes this; how the scientist becomes "fascinated" by the field he is working in:

When the author had mastered the technique involved in reading in what direction the glacier had been moving in [...] what remained was

a fascination at being able to read into other times by looking at where a stone-pebble was lying on the ground. Through this stone-pebble I could see that a glacier, that was now quite far away, had been there and created this place that I was now standing on [...] What was the fascination about? What caused this perception and the emotional experience I describe as fascination? (Huijbens 2006, 71, my translation).

Here we can see that even when the scientist should be “busy” with his scientific knowledge, this knowledge can direct his mind towards an aesthetic experience; the wonder and the fascination at the amazing processes that are perceived through this knowledge remain. These examples prove Hepburn right; in the experience of some phenomena - like glaciers and geothermal areas – the feeling of wonder remains untouched by knowledge because it is too vast and complicated for the mind to be able to grasp it as a whole. Thus the role of knowledge in these cases seems to go into the background while the sensuous takes the lead.

However, knowledge is an important part of the experience because often knowledge is what directs people’s attention towards the sensuous qualities that then take the lead and remain the focus of aesthetic appreciation. Thomas Heyd (2004) has criticized Allen Carlson (2000) for narrowing the scope of aesthetic experience with his emphasis on the importance of scientific knowledge instead of using different types of knowledge to broaden the scope of aesthetic experience. While arguing that it is doubtful that knowledge of the origin of a work of art or a natural phenomenon is a sufficient or necessary condition for aesthetic experience and that in some cases scientific knowledge can be “neutral, or even harmful, for our aesthetic appreciation of nature” (Heyd 2004, 270), he acknowledges that in other cases scientific knowledge can indeed guide our attention towards aesthetic qualities: “While walking to the bottom of the Grand Canyon from its rim, knowledge of geology *may* be helpful to our aesthetic appreciation if it makes us focus with attention on the various visible strata uncovered by the river’s action throughout the ages” (Heyd 2004, 271-2).

Heyd emphasizes that different types of stories or knowledge can help guide our attention towards aesthetic qualities but what remains the central focus of the aesthetic moment, is the perception of sensuous qualities. Categorizing or naming what we are experiencing is never the primary focus of aesthetic experience: “To worry about how they came about is like reading the label of origin on a bottle of wine, or the biographical note on the wall next to a painting in an art museum: it puts things in context, but surely is secondary to properly experiencing the thing (the wine or the painting)” (Heyd 2004, 271). When we sip the wine it is its taste qualities that we are focusing on – the affect that the aesthetic qualities of the wine

have on our senses. When we see the artwork we are focusing on the colors, forms and perhaps the thoughts it awakens in our minds; we are focusing on what our senses perceive. And the same happens when we appreciate nature aesthetically: we focus on the colors, forms, sounds, movements – on the aesthetic qualities we are perceiving.

Even though scientific knowledge can sometimes guide our attention towards aesthetic qualities as in the Grand Canyon example, it is not a necessary condition for aesthetic appreciation as Carlson argues. In his view, non-scientifically grounded appreciation is superficial, but as we will see in the results of my study, the appreciation and aesthetic imagination of the participants was not superficial at all, despite a lack of knowledge. Even if they did not know all the scientific explanations of the geothermal activities (these trips were not guided), they wondered about how the qualities they were perceiving had come into being. Not having the answers did not stop them from reflecting deeply and richly on the aesthetic qualities of what they perceived, even if this was only reflecting on how *much* power and force was at stake in creating the landscape without being able to reflect on the details of how exactly this power was unleashed.

This is evident in the results of the study, since the participant observations on the two different landscape types had a different form. On the glacier, the participants were led by a guide who shared knowledge of the glacier with them, while in the geothermal area, there was no guide and limited knowledge. In both cases, sensuous qualities were the main focus and the cause of great wonder; the difference was that in some cases on the glacier the participants were filled with even more wonder and noticed more aesthetic qualities as the guide shared more knowledge with them, but in the geothermal area the strong feeling of wonder and attention to sensuous qualities came about without any reference to new knowledge. So we can assume that if there had been no guide on the glacier this would not have affected the aesthetic experience to a great extent – it would have had the same basic characteristics. But it is likely that the knowledge helped deepen the experience and perhaps having more knowledge of the geothermal area would have helped the participants to imagine the processes that had brought about the phenomena they were perceiving, which had stimulated their curiosity.

The role of scientific knowledge may be especially relevant in the context of glacial and geothermal landscapes because these landscapes are characterized by geological features that are easily observable, and as Yuriko Saito has pointed out, geological information is

based upon observations, particularly of secondary qualities, and deal with objects and phenomena in their spatial and temporal context. For

example, the geological origin of a mountain [...] is embodied or manifested in the observable feature of the object, and we appreciate the way in which each object is telling about its origin, structure and function (Saito 2004, 148).

Saito's point is that while some scientific information, for example physics or chemistry, that can tell us about "the molecular structure of a rock or the medicinal value of a spring" can "lead us away from the actual experience of nature", the natural history sciences (such as geology and biology) are more likely to enhance our perceptual experience of nature (Saito 2004, 148). The important thing here is that some forms of knowledge can certainly co-exist with wonder and they can co-exist with a strong focus on the sensuous. Thus it does not make sense to draw a strict distinction between the cognitive and the non-cognitive⁸⁸ – both play an important role and are intertwined in the aesthetic experience of glacial and geothermal landscapes.

What stands out when examining the role of wonder in these experiences is that wonder leads to curiosity and this both encourages people to explore what is perceived through all the senses and to explore and imagine the processes that are going on behind what is perceived. Thus wonder and curiosity awaken the imagination which in turn can lead to the feeling of the sublime. I will thus next turn to discussing the role of the imagination and the sublime in the experience of glacial and geothermal landscapes and then we can see how the feeling of wonder connects together sensory perception, imagination and the sublime.

2.3.5. The Sublime and the Imagination

In her paper "The Sublime and Contemporary Aesthetics" Brady takes Icelandic nature as an example of landscapes that the concept of the sublime suits well to describe: "vast lava fields, glaciers, barren, treeless mountains, stunning calderas and so on provide cases of the contemporary sublime [...]" (Brady 2008, 54). The main reason why Icelandic nature creates the feeling of the sublime according to Brady is that this nature is very young geologically, it is always moving and being re-created and this fact sparks up the imagination very easily. Iceland is geologically a young land and as an active volcanic area it is a land that is very much still in the becoming (Þorgeirsdóttir 2005).

⁸⁸ As has so often been done within the discipline of environmental aesthetics (Berleant & Carlson 2004, 16-17, Brady 2003, 89-116). I am not claiming that these authors agree that such a distinction is necessary, but they discuss this distinction in their overviews of the field because it has been one of the key issues in environmental aesthetics, and like other environmental aestheticians they situate their own and other's approaches on the scale of the cognitive – non-cognitive.

The glaciers and geothermal areas are a very strong example of the movement and creation that characterizes Icelandic nature, and as has been described here, the scientific knowledge of the forces at hand in these landscapes easily sparks up the imagination: the sight of small scratches on a wall call up the image of the glacier's movement, a row of moraines calls up the image of the crevasses that formed the moraines, and small geothermal fumaroles bring up the image of a new hot spring being formed.

The imagination appeared in different ways in the studies. In *Seltún 1* and *Seltún 3*, Victoria and Bob showed interest in the geology of geothermal areas, their experience awakened their imagination and curiosity about how these areas come into existence and how they work. After *Seltún 2*, Katrín talked about this in the interview – how she started to imagine the geological processes beneath the surface: “one is often wondering how fast these things change? ...does it happen in some months? Is it a slow change? ...or does it just pop up on the surface somewhere? ...what is the geological process like?” She thinks about how fast or slow the changes happen in the area, imagines how far down it is to the earth's core that creates this heat on the surface, and imagines that tiny little fumaroles are perhaps the beginning of a new development within the area. These responses were also characteristic of my own experiences, my imagination was awakened very easily, I imagined how and when the geothermal areas came into existence, whether it had happened gradually or if a hole was torn in the earth in one moment.

This imagination sometimes caused what could be called the feeling of the dynamical sublime.⁸⁹ In these cases, the sublime response does not arise only from the imagined qualities but rather the imagination plays the role of expanding the qualities that the senses are already taking in – imagining the creative forces that lie behind what is sensed. To imagine the earth just tearing up in one moment made one realize the power and the danger, for at any moment the earth could just tear up right under your feet. In the phenomenological descriptions of my experiences there were many moments that could be interpreted as the feeling of the dynamical sublime. These responses were not as characteristic of the participant observations in *Seltún*, but this can partly be explained by the fact that *Seltún* is a very “safe” geothermal area, there are fences and wooden paths that people walk on so the feeling that the earth could tear under your feet is not so prominent.

The phenomenological descriptions were made in a few different areas, and *Seltún* was the only one of those that had a built access to it. In *Austurengjar*, *Innstidalur* and *Fremstidalur* the feeling of the sublime often came up, but it never

⁸⁹ Kant made the useful distinction between the mathematical sublime in response to great size and the dynamical sublime in response to great power (Kant 1790/2000, §25, 5:248 and §28, 5:260).

came up in *Seltún*, except when I went to another part of the area, outside of the framed access:

I was sitting there on a stone at the edge of the hot spring area, with warm colorful earth all around me and watching the hot spring and listening to it boil and bubble. Then I looked at this circle (the hot spring) and imagined how it had emerged (it just came up in my imagination). The earth so loose and fragile and then just all of a sudden, crack, boom, a hole in the earth. And in that hole the water boils and the steam blows up in the air. I also heard the water and the steam boiling underneath the surface right next to me and then all of a sudden I was gripped by fear. My heart skipped a beat and I envisaged how the earth could all of a sudden break beneath me and I would fall into the boiling hot spring. That's when I hurried over here to this beautiful and peaceful moss with its purple flowers. Here I am safe.

This description shows how the imagination can help create the feeling of the sublime, where one realizes the force and the magnitude of the phenomena that one is confronted with and feels a certain kind of fear mixed with pleasurable excitement. Similar experiences were even stronger in the bigger and “wilder” areas that I experienced in my trips to the highland geothermal areas in *Kerlingarfjöll* and *Torfajökull* areas. If the participants in my study had not been walking through the geothermal area on a safe wooden path, their imagination about the geological processes would have made their heart skip a beat in some cases.

The imagination that creates the feeling of the sublime was indeed found in the geothermal areas, but this was much more prominent in the studies of the glaciers, where the role of the imagination was even bigger and it appeared in different ways. For example the Austrian woman said she had imagined the age and history of the glacier: “*that this is there since so many years, so many centuries, and I thought...ok, who has been there? What the ice has seen? I mean...the history...that the ice was there so much time...its really impressive*”. Here her imagination is sparked up, she is aware of the long time the glacier has been there and is curious about all the changes that have occurred in this vast time.

A similar imagination came to my mind the first time I was up close with *Vatnajökull* glacier:

When I was on the glacial outlet [Hoffellsjökull] and I suddenly looked up and saw it in front of me and towering over me my heart skipped a beat and some emotions were stirred in me. I felt like I was confronted by this ancient being that was so mighty and strong, but so slow and stable at the same time. Just some amazing power that was so much bigger than me and had such endlessly big and slow energy. Like an old wise person.

Human life appears such a short span of time compared to the vastness of geological time. This is a temporal experience that is specific to such landscapes as the glacier. Under your feet is the accumulated snow of hundreds and even thousands of years. The geological dimensions of time also render the time of the human species as relative, making us aware of the fact that our species has come to be and will come to an end one day. Finitude of human life is an important realization in this kind of an environment.

The Icelandic interviewee also described how the imagination is awakened by the size of the glacier:

I just realize...how there is this enormously thick mass you know and it is so unbelievable to be walking on some ice which is many many many many meters you know...hundreds of meters...you start imagining what is beneath you.

In all these cases the imagination is expanded to be able to perceive the endless size and age of the glacier. In all the interviews we can see that the participants were very much affected by the size of the glacier; the image of the enormous size made them feel small. When the German interviewee was asked to describe the feelings he had on the glacier he said: *“feeling a bit small in that surrounding”*; the Austrian put it thus: *“feeling myself small...you are a little point on this big ice!”*; and the Canadian women said that what enchanted them the most was: *“just the enormity of it...just how small it made you feel”*.

From these examples we can see that a big part of the experience is that we can never perceive the whole glacier at the same moment. We know it stretches out endlessly in all directions, but the senses can only perceive what is in front of us at each moment. This experience is what Kant described as the mathematical sublime. The mathematical sublime occurs when we experience a natural phenomenon which is so enormous that when we try to imagine the whole size of it we expand the senses and the imagination to their limits. This feeling also came up in the geothermal areas in the highlands. These areas are much larger than *Seltún*, and the senses were often overwhelmed by the enormity of the *Kerlingarfjöll* and *Torfajökull* areas that one knew that stretched down into the earth's core and many square kilometers in all directions from where one was standing.

The imagination was also awakened by the great power of the glacier, and this imagination lead to the feeling of the Kantian dynamical sublime. When experiencing the glacier we see powerful forces that can hurt us, every step taken on the glacier could end with a disaster. This knowledge can cause fear, but if we are in safe distance we experience pleasure mixed with fear rather than pure fear. An example of this happened in the participant observation at *Falljökull* when the group heard loud cracking sounds when we were standing beneath a big icefall. Everyone

was startled, went silent and listened closely. The image of the huge icefall came to the mind. The Icelandic interviewee described a very similar experience in the surroundings of *Morsárjökull* glacier:

If you go into Bajarstaðaskógur forrest you can...then you hear the icefall in Morsárglacier and...it is unbelievable, just hearing the thundering sound you know...because this is a glacier that falls down from a cliff...I didn't go all the way up to it but I just remember hearing the sounds... that was powerful.

This image then leads to the feeling of the sublime, continuing the story the interviewee said:

I think it's very much about this...wow! this is so huge and enormous and scary and you know, so powerful in some way...you feel yourself small...and wow! how you couldn't do anything up against this...you are so powerless really.

Here we can see that the images of the power of the glacier and its size are connected, and together they bring out this feeling of being small when confronted by this huge and powerful phenomena.

The study showed that the participants were very much aware of the enormous force of the glacier and the danger it creates. The Austrian woman said that she felt afraid when the group was exploring the biggest crevasse we came across and the guide was helping her standing with one leg on each side of the crevasse to look down into it: “*when I was approaching the huge crevasse I was afraid...indeed...because I felt ok wow! this is really deep and...I mean, you can fall...I wasn't afraid like...deathly...but it was a kind of respect...but more than respect...between respect and being afraid*”. In my notes we can see that people were also afraid when we looked down a huge moulin:

Next there is another huge moulin and one of the Americans responds with the words “oh shit!” when he looks down into it. The French woman looks worried and afraid and the Austrian woman's facial expression is stiff. I get a weird feeling in my stomach over the size of this moulin. Overwhelming.

The experience of the mathematical and dynamical sublime become one here: it is at the sight of the biggest moulins and the biggest crevasses that the participants feel afraid and realize how dangerous the glacier's forces are. The Icelandic interviewee describes this well: “*This imagination that can make you go just o my god if you would fall down a crevasse...you can just imagine the dark depth...and you can start imagining a moulin that goes down maybe 500 metres...or something that you can have no control over*”.

The participants' awareness of how dangerous the glacier is was evident in that everyone became very serious and attentive when the guides explained the security issues to us. They showed us how to put on climbing belts around the waist, fasten

crampons to our shoes, how to walk with them and how we could use ice-axes to keep our balance. The guides also emphasized that the participants should take the danger seriously, for example by asking people regularly to check if their crampons were fastened tightly enough, telling us that they brought a 60 m long rope along in case they had to rescue someone from a moulin as we were standing by one of them, and by telling us stories of people who had gone missing on the glacier and have never been found. Sometimes it is also emphasized to walk in silence and in a single row on a glacier – in order to keep people alert.

The interviewees also described how this awareness about the dangers of the glaciers forces led to a deep respect for the glacier. As mentioned above, the Austrian woman connected the fear she had to respect: *“between respect and being afraid”*. Her partner also described this feeling of respect, when I asked them what kind of feelings they had on the glacier this was his answer: *“respect...and responsibility...and feeling myself small”* and he also said that he felt most respect by the biggest crevasse: *“I had most respect in this glacier when this...crevasse...where we put both legs on each side”*. The Icelandic interviewee described the same feeling, after having described how the imagination made her see in her mind the great depth of the moulin. As mentioned before, she talked about how this experience led to respect:

You naturally have...respect for this phenomena, you know...this is an unbelievable phenomena...this is just some huge mass which is alive and it moves and it somehow seems to have...what they can do...you know...this is of course an unbelievable...such an amazing force...you think it's so weird to imagine that he [the glacier] can just dig into mountains and, you know, just crush everything into pieces underneath it, and you know it's such a great weight and it...it is somehow alive.

From this we can see that the experience of the mathematical and dynamical sublime played a very big role in the participants' experiences of the glaciers especially, but also to a certain extent in the geothermal areas. This experience leads to a certain attitude towards these natural environments; feeling oneself small up against a great force leads to respect for this force.⁹⁰ Such experience is characterized by what Hepburn refers to as the metaphysical imagination, where the imagination allows one to see things from a bigger perspective. According to Hepburn the metaphysical imagination is a part of aesthetic experience that involves perceiving how things “really are”. This occurs when we experience beauty or some other qualities that seem to point towards some bigger force that we lack the words

⁹⁰ Kant refers to respect in his account of the sublime; even if respect cannot in his view be properly attributed to natural objects, “[they] are, at the very least admired, and their impact places us into a position where we do not ascribe to them but rather project onto them a respect normally reserved for rational ideas” (Brady 2013, 81).

or concepts to describe. The metaphysical imagination helps us to interpret or make sense of the whole landscape experience; to “interpret[t] as...” or “se[e] as...” (Hepburn 2004, 128). In that way we could *see* one particular moulin *as* the slow movement of the glacier through the ages, or one particular hot spring *as* the volcanic activity of the earth; these forces can even be seen as the creative force of the earth as a whole. The feeling of wonder and curiosity push this imagination into action and this can create the feeling of the sublime described above.

The transformative effects of these experiences of glacial and geothermal landscapes will be discussed and explored further in the next chapter. But before we take a closer look at these core aspects of the experiences and how they can influence or transform our attitude towards nature I will first describe shortly other themes that came up in both the glacial and geothermal studies.

2.3.6. *Communication and Sharing*

In all the interviews and participant observations it was obvious that communication and sharing was an important aspect of the experience. When we experience nature we feel the need to share our perceptions with others: “*look at this!*”, “*bear this!*” and “*feel this!*” were very common responses. This makes the experience deeper, people don’t always notice the same things, and when one person points something out to the next one, her experience becomes deeper as she gets to experience something that she would otherwise not have noticed.

An example of this was when Helga told me and Jóna, as we were standing in the inner space of *Seltún*, how good she thought it was to feel the steam blow on her face. Helga’s comment made us pay attention to something we had not noticed and thus this feeling became a part of our experience as well. It was also interesting how the participants could discuss and share the experience of smelling the hot spring called *Fúli pollur* or “*Stinky pond*” – they were able to discuss and come to a conclusion about what characterized the smell. This indicates that even if experiencing nature is personal – I can never be sure that my sense of smell is the same as the next person’s – it is possible to share the experience, discuss it and come to a common conclusion about its aesthetic qualities.

The way Helga talked about communication also hints to the idea that experiencing landscape is not necessarily completely subjective, but is rather something that we share. She described how she always had the need to share her experiences of beautiful places either by telling someone about it (she took an example of seeing a beautiful waterfall while she was alone and having the need to call her partner to tell him about it) or by taking photographs that she could share with others later. We are able to discuss our experiences and understand one

another. Even if I do not notice the same things as the next person does not mean that I can't understand why she notices these things and what she found interesting about them. From Helga's words we can even see that this aspect – to share the experience – letting other people see what I see and getting the chance to see what they see, can be a very important part of the experience that many people have a strong need for.

Victoria also described very well how it both matters to get some time alone to focus on the experience, and to be able to share the experience with others. She and Eva have travelled quite a lot together and she described how they always went separately at first when they came to new places to have the chance to focus on and listen to nature, as she said. But then they found it equally important to come together again and share their experiences. Katrín also spoke of this: *“I need a certain privacy you know? Then I would just like to be alone, just looking, you know?... or, yes with someone, but just...not have to be talking all the time, you know?...just having the chance somehow to just...be silent...walk around...to examine and be charmed...”*. Helga also discussed this, that it was equally important to her to be alone and to share the experience.

The theme of communication and sharing was very characteristic of the *Seltún 2* observation. Through the whole time spent in *Seltún*, it happened again and again that one participant noticed something and pointed it to the others and then their attention went to that phenomena. In the glacial studies this theme appeared in a different way, some of the participants were pointing out things that they noticed to the person they came with and stayed close to, it was very common that two or three people came together and they seemed to share their experiences quite a lot. But of course the guide was first and foremost in the role of pointing out interesting phenomena to the participants in these cases. This is a very important part of the aesthetic experience of nature, if something captures one's attention one feels the need to point it out to the people around. It is also interesting that when one person points something out to the next one, they always agree: it never happened that the response was “no, I don't find that interesting”.

Another aspect of this sharing of experiences was that people responded differently to the front space and the inner space of *Seltún*, in the same way. The dark and eerie front space made people feel uneasy, they hurried through and were worried about someone getting hurt, especially when there were children in the group. The lively, bright-colored and sheltered inner space was very different, people would spend a long time in there, paying attention to all the details, touching and playing with the mud, and in all the groups someone mentioned how cozy it was in there – everyone was much more relaxed and happy. This was also characteristic of my own experiences – some places created an experience of mystery and eeriness:

deep sounds from the boiling mud, fast sounds from the boiling water and a steady loud noise and a deep sound where it boils the most. In the wall of mud there are also black, dark-grey and dark-brown colors. These pits are very eerie.

While other places created a feeling of coziness:

Its all so much more quiet here at the bottom of the gorge. Even though the stream is boiling hot, it flows so lively and quietly, the sound is sort of innocent, like a child.

From this we can see that the responses depend on the lay of the land – how its formal qualities are. Helga talked about this in her interview, she thought it was very important how the form of the environment was – she felt good in the sheltered, closed off brightly colored area with sounds, steam and warmth, but the open, cold and dark-grey area made her feel uncomfortable. She connected this with the idea that people feel good in certain types of landscapes where there are good chances of survival and fencing off enemies. She didn't know at the time that this idea has been articulated by Jay Appleton as the “prospect-refuge theory” (Appleton, 1975). This theory has been quite contested, and it is unlikely that it can explain all our landscape experiences, but at least it seems true that certain forms and phenomena in the landscape do affect how we feel when dwelling there. The feelings we have in a landscape is created in the intertwining with the landscapes formal qualities, they do not spring out from our “subjective” minds without any relation to the “objective” reality.

All this shows that this experience is not necessarily totally subjective and personal, rather it can be an experience that people share and it can be deepened when people communicate to each other what they are noticing and enjoying. As we have seen, the interviewees talked about this, they felt that this sharing of experiences was a necessary part of appreciating nature. Even if they felt the need for a certain amount of privacy and being able to focus alone and undisturbed on what they were perceiving, they also felt that even when they were alone, they would use the camera for communicating and sharing: pointing out the qualities that they noticed and were fascinated by to themselves, and later to others, via the photos taken of these qualities.

This result of the study is very interesting when considered from the perspective of the debate within environmental aesthetics about the possibility of the objectivity of aesthetic judgments. Brady has made this aspect of aesthetic experience the center of her argument for the inter-subjectivity of aesthetic judgments (Brady 2003). She bases her position on ideas of Kant and Sibley on

aesthetic communication but Kant shows with his discussion of the idea of *sensus communis* that communicability is inherent to the making of aesthetic judgments.

According to Kant's view judgments of taste claim subjective universal validity *a priori*, with no reference to empirical evidence of critics (Brady 2003, 194). For him, judgments of taste are based on *sensus communis*, a kind of common sense "constituted by the harmonious activity of the imagination and the understanding" (Brady 2003, 212). What he means by this is that a subjective universal validity is not measured by gathering votes empirically; rather it has to rely on the pre-conditions of the judgments, the use of the *sensus communis* in making the judgments. The three principles of *sensus communis*, thinking for oneself; thinking from the standpoint of others; and being consistent (Brady 2003, 212), mean that the subject who is making a judgment of taste has to be autonomous:

...it must rest on his own taste;...we demand that he judge for himself: he should not have to grope among other people's judgments by means of experience, to gain instruction in advance from whether they like or dislike that object; so we demand that he pronounce his judgment *a priori*, that he not make it [by way of] imitation (Brady 2003, 194-5).⁹¹

Kant claims that if the judgments of taste are made in this autonomous way, then our common faculties of the imagination and understanding are being used to gain "cognition in general" and that the use of these essential faculties, makes our judgments "universally communicable". Because we can assume that most other people have the same basic capacities for general cognition and perception, we can expect agreement from them.

But why do we expect agreement about our aesthetic judgments? Why do we have the need to communicate our aesthetic views of a landscape and share them with others? This is what puzzled Kant about aesthetic judgments – these are judgments that are based on a feeling and thus seem to be the most private and subjective but at the same time they are judgments that we on some level expect agreement on. As Brady rightly says: "In cases of being deeply moved or struck by something, it would not be odd to say that we would be surprised if others disagreed" (Brady 2003, 196). How is this possible? How can a judgment based on a private feeling become objective or at least inter-subjective? Kant found his answer in combining his ideas of *sensus communis* and disinterestedness. These two ideas support each other and explain this puzzle: when beauty captures us and the disinterested attitude is acquired, then we are put in the situation of being able to

⁹¹ Brady quotes Kant (1987, 145 ak. 282)

fulfill the three conditions of the *sensus communis*: to see things from the standpoint of everyone else, to think for ourselves and to think consistently. Being disinterested means leaving the desire to own, control and define the object according to one's own subjective, private conditions behind and instead dwell with the desire to let things be as they are and letting them influence our being. When we do this we are using the *sensus communis* as our criterion of judgment instead of basing it on our own private interests or *sensus privatus*.

As discussed in chapter one, a radical decentering of the self takes place in the experience of beauty, and as the self is removed from the center, we are able to use our "community sense" as Hannah Arendt calls Kant's *sensus communis* (Arendt 1982). It is not common sense in the traditional meaning of "a sense like our other senses – the same for everyone in his very privacy. By the Latin term Kant indicates that he means something different: an extra sense – like an extra mental capability – that fits us into a community" (Arendt 1982, 70). Arendt emphasizes the idea in Kant that communicability is inherent in the aesthetic judgment – the criterion of the judgment is its communicability (Arendt 1982, 69). Kant even went so far as to say that "the beautiful interests [us] only [when we are] in society" and that "[Man] is not contented with an object if he cannot feel satisfaction in it in common with others" (Arendt 1982, 67). This does ring true when we consider the urge that we have to share beauty or continue it in some manner.

This urge to share and continue beauty is rooted in the aesthetic desire that was discussed in chapter one. When beauty calls and captures our attention through the senses, it creates a desire for repetition and for sustaining and sharing beauty with others. This desire is manifested in the need to point the object of beauty out to the next person, to take a photo, draw a picture, make music, write a poem, or simply to stare or take in for a long time. We can share our judgments and expect the judgement to be valid to others because when we experience beauty we acquire the disinterested attitude. As discussed in chapter one, disinterestedness is not something that we *bring to* the experience of beauty *in order for* our judgments to be valid, rather the disinterested attitude is the *result* of the experience of beauty and that is *why* our judgments can be universally valid. Kant was not setting the rules for *how* to make aesthetic judgments universally valid, he was telling us *why* they are or can be universally valid. The disinterested attitude allows us to see the object of beauty for what it is, not in light of anything else – not in light of how we can use this object and value it as a means to some other end.

In this way we can see how aesthetic judgments can be regarded as "objective" because of their communicability – because when we experience beauty we make aesthetic judgments from the standpoint of everyone else, not from the standpoint of our individual private interests. This quest for universality may seem unrealistic

but Brady points out that Kant does not attempt to establish an *actual* agreement, but only to show what kind of conditions would make it possible. He thus describes aesthetic judgments as having subjective universality, which is different from objective universality but nonetheless allows us to demand agreement. Kant's aim is to justify the claims that we *do* make every day, the claims of having "a right to demand agreement, even if there is no guarantee of disinterested judgments. The warrant for such a demand is based on similar capacities, detachment from biases and awareness of how personal interests affect our judgments" (Brady 2003, 195).

Other theories of objective aesthetic judgments require much more than Brady demands but at the same time they narrow the scope of aesthetic appreciation. Allen Carlson argues that aesthetic judgments can be shown to be true or correct. Just as art theory, history and criticism can provide categories for art objects to fit correctly in, natural science can provide categories for making correct judgments about natural aesthetic objects. But as Brady and others have pointed out, Carlson relies on a very uncritical view of science that assumes that only science can give a correct picture of nature. By doing this, Carlson is not only requiring that everyone that has the necessary scientific knowledge can agree on objective aesthetic judgments, but he is also excluding other types of legitimate knowledge about the environment and the experiences of appreciators that do not have scientific knowledge (Brady 2003, 197). Brady argues that we need to use a range of sources for grounding our aesthetic appreciation, "perception, non-scientific knowledge, emotion, imagination" (Brady 2003, 197). By communicating our aesthetic judgments we are able to sort out "a range of acceptable interpretations according to their reasonableness and relevance rather than truth or falsity. Instead of a single correct interpretation, there may be a set of interpretations that make sense in respect of the aesthetic object" (Brady 2003, 197).

When two or more people are listening to the same music, contemplating the same work of art, or taking the same walk in nature, each of them makes their own judgments according to what they perceive and experience – this was the case in the study of experiences of glacial and geothermal landscapes, where different participants noticed different qualities in the landscape and pointed them out to each other. Different individuals focus on different aspects of what is perceived, and by describing their experiences to each other, trying to justify their aesthetic judgments to themselves and the others, their appreciation can be broadened and deepened.

If different individuals disagree in their judgment, the demand that they justify their reasons for making judgments makes them more aware of their own view. Having to explain and justify your opinion to others and contrasting it with different views makes you more aware of what your real opinion is and thus deepens your

appreciation. If different individuals agree on their different judgments, then it can only be said that their appreciation is broadened. If my friend notices something different than I have noticed in the environment or work of art, by communicating we can make each other aware of more aesthetic qualities than we would have been aware of separately. In Brady's words: "While aesthetic responses will have their individuality, they are sharable and communicable" (Brady 2003, 197). So the justifications we give for our aesthetic judgments are deemed acceptable on the basis of being reasonable and understandable instead of being true or false.

When we aim at making our aesthetic judgments reasonable and understandable to others we refer to how certain objective qualities affect our senses. As mentioned above it was striking how all the groups in *Seltún* responded in similar ways to the two very different spaces – the inner space and front space; how everyone responded in similar ways to the size of the glacier and how wonder was a feeling that characterized the experiences of all the different participants. Here it is useful to bring Böhme's theory of atmosphere that was discussed in chapter one back into the discussion. The results of this study of the aesthetic experiences of glacial and geothermal landscapes show how atmospheres can be created by objective physical features of a landscape and how they are then experienced by the perceiver. Both types of landscapes are characterized by an atmosphere of wonder and awe and the instances that created this feeling of wonder were directly connected to the perception of certain physical qualities; colors, forms, textures and sounds.

An example of this is how the size of the glacier affected all the participants – making them feel small. It was always when the participants confronted the biggest crevasses and the biggest moraines, or heard the loudest crack, that they felt this way, these physical qualities brought out certain feelings that were common to all the interviewees: feeling small, fear, respect and recognizing the glacier's dangerous power. This is an example of how certain physical qualities can create atmospheres that have "a tendency or urge toward a particular mood" (Böhme 2000, 15). Another example is how everyone responded in similar ways to the different physical qualities of the inner space and the front space in *Seltún*; while some physical qualities have a tendency to create a tense and eerie atmosphere, others have the tendency to create a cozy and relaxing atmosphere.

If Böhme is right in saying that aesthetic qualities emerge in the atmosphere that objective features help create by "modifying the sphere of their surroundings", and that this atmosphere then affects the perceiver, then the idea that certain physical features of the landscape are more likely to enchant the perceiver than others does not seem so far-fetched. This view suggests that there is a degree of objectivity in aesthetic valuing although the subjective side to it is acknowledged, as

Kant and Brady in her interpretation of the Kantian paradigm claim. It is the communicability and shareability of our individual aesthetic experiences and judgments that makes them able to claim objective standing. Although our aesthetic judgments are based on our individual experiences and colored by our outlooks and values, just like our judgments about our emotions are based on our individual feelings, they are indeed shareable and communicable. And since they are, they can be objectively discussed and justified, as any other judgments or deep rooted values at the basis of ecology or economics. Just like logical arguments, feelings, emotions and other individual experiences can be reasonable - we can have shareable, communicable and justifiable reasons for having certain emotions or making certain aesthetic judgments.

Indeed, as the results of the study show, we can discuss and share the reasons why we respond to certain landscapes in certain ways. As Böhme points out, talking about atmospheres and pointing to the physical features that create them is a part of our daily life. What Kant shows is that we are justified in doing this, in discussing our aesthetic judgments and expecting that other people can understand and even agree with our judgments. It is thus understandable why the same physical features created the same responses in the participants of the study, and how they were able to point to and agree on which features affected them the most.

2.3.7. Restorative Effects

In all the *Seltún* interviews the interviewees talked about how they thought that spending time in *Seltún* had some recuperating and restorative effects. Katrín felt restored after being there and she thought that this was a very pleasurable experience that she would definitely repeat. Helga and Victoria expressed the same feeling. Katrín used these words: “it is somehow nourishing to go to these kind of places...and it’s just somehow...yes just mentally...and bodily nourishing...” and Victoria agreed: “I think to see kind of places like that just relaxes me...maybe...it’s good just to be like that in the nature...” Some participants in the glacial studies expressed the same thoughts – the Belgian couple talked about how their “mind became calm” and how the “stress was floating away” because their minds were “busy experiencing”– and the German interviewee and the Austrian couple talked about how good it was to get away from everything human and experience a place that was untouched by humans, not created for someone, but rather with a value in itself.

These comments suggest that an aesthetic experience of nature can have a great positive effect on people’s feeling of well-being. They allow us to be kind of directed back to our senses in a world that is so full of stimuli in our daily lives that it can cause a degree of attention disorder or feeling scattered. Aesthetic experiences of

nature direct us back to the basics – to our senses - and this can have a positive effect on our ability to focus and calm our mind.⁹² The temporality of this experience is also remarkable, but such an experience allows for a sense of dwelling, of forgetting time in the sense of reflecting the past or planning the future, and just staying in the moment. This deserves to be mentioned here as one of the responses expressed by the participants but further discussion of this aspect will be continued in the next chapter where I will examine closer the meaning and value of the experiences that have been described here.

⁹² This aspect of experiences of nature has been studied extensively within environmental psychology. Kaplan & Kaplan (1989) have for example suggested that experiences of nature should be used to treat Attention deficiency disorder.

3. Meaning and Value of the Experience of Geothermal and Glacial Landscapes

Now that we have examined the main characteristics of the experiences of geothermal and glacial landscapes it is time to reflect on the meaning and value of such experiences. What type of knowledge do we gain from such experiences? How do they affect our ethical and metaphysical understanding of ourselves and our relation to the natural world, and how can they prove important for well-being, morality, society, policies and politics? What is the value of having the very possibility of obtaining these types of experiences? These are big questions and they are important, but these are the questions that have been neglected because they are dealing with a neglected part of human experience. Although these questions have not been neglected by artists, who have dealt with them in works that reflect on these experiences and values,⁹³ they have not been dealt with in decision-making because they cannot be answered “properly” in numbers and calculations that tell us their economic value.

This is evidenced by the fact that the only attempts to count for beauty in nature in the work on the Master Plan for Hydro and Geothermal Energy Resources in Iceland were in the evaluation done by Working group II, of the impacts of proposed power projects on tourism. Only when natural beauty starts hauling in money from the tourist’s pocket does it become worthy of mentioning in the Master Plan. Of course the aesthetic value of landscape should have had its place in the Master Plan within the work of Working group I which had the role of evaluating the impact of proposed power projects on *landscape*, geological formations, vegetation, animal-life, and monuments (Björnsson 2003). However, as was described in the preface, the work done on landscape for this part of the Master Plan was, in the end, limited to classification of the landscape types that characterize Iceland, their rarity and/or diversity, since there wasn’t enough funding to do both parts of the ILP project; the classification part, *and* the evaluation part.

As a result of this, the only place in the Master Plan for the experience of the beauty of Icelandic landscapes to be considered was found in the work of Working group II which had a very different role than Working group I; a role that required the group to focus on an impact that can indeed be measured in monetary terms. The Master Plan’s Working Group II had the role of evaluating the impact of

⁹³ The artist Rúri is a good example of an artist who reflects on the experience and value of Icelandic nature in her works. See for example her work *Archive – Endangered Waters* (Rúri 2013).

proposed power-projects on other “business” opportunities: tourism, outdoor activities, agriculture, fishing in rivers and lakes, and hunting, and so the focus of this group was understandably aimed at measuring the impact of proposed power-projects on an economic scale.

The effort made by Working Group II thus includes an attempt to account for the value of experiencing natural beauty by trying to subsume it under categories of objects that are considered to be valuable for tourism (Björnsson 2011, 90-93). Thus one of the categories that was counted in the part that dealt with the impact on tourism and outdoor activities was the value of *upplifun* (experience). In a report on the methodology of the working group, the methods of how the different objects that are to be measured and calculated are described (Sæþórsdóttir & Ólafsson 2008). Each object is given a number for how much it weighs in the final evaluation/calculation, which includes all the different weighing factors that are considered to have an impact on the value of tourism and outdoor activities. In this final calculation *upplifun* weighs the most or 0,5, but the other 0,5 is divided between possibilities for entertainment activities-0,1; current infrastructure (access, accommodation)-0,1; current use (users, patterns of use and travel behavior)-0,2; and future worth-0,1 (Sæþórsdóttir & Ólafsson 2008, 22).

Upplifun, or experience, has three categories of objects: physical characteristics A, physical characteristics B, and *hughrif* (impression, which literally translates as effect on the mind). Physical characteristics A include the sub-categories of how natural or manmade the area is, how large or expansive it is, how majestic or diverse the landscape is and how rare or unique the area is (Sæþórsdóttir & Ólafsson 2008, 18). This is perhaps a fair description of the main characteristics that influence how we experience nature, but what is missing here is the whole picture of the background of the judgments that lie behind these categories. These judgments are 1) that the naturalness of the area matters to the tourist. This is based on surveys on tourist views (Sæþórsdóttir 2009), which is a commonly accepted ground for basing judgments on, so here the background of the judgment is quite clear; 2) that vast expanses such as lava fields or black sands that are characteristic of Iceland but rare elsewhere create a certain effect on the mind – the report does not expand on what this effect involves or why it is important⁹⁴; 3) that it is more interesting for tourists to travel in landscapes that are majestic or diverse, and 4) that unique and rare areas are more interesting for tourists (Sæþórsdóttir & Ólafsson 2008, 18) – the report does not expand on why this is either.

⁹⁴ This is something this thesis can provide answers to and thus complement the work that has been done by Working group II.

The category of physical characteristics A can be described as attempting to involve the intertwining of subject and object – in all these subcategories it is claimed that certain physical characteristics tend to have certain effects on the subject’s mind, but what is missing is a deeper understanding of how and why these effects are created and what the importance of the meaning and value they create is for human well-being. This is an example of how there are always so called “subjective” judgments behind the standards and methods that are aiming for objectivity (Harding 1991). If these judgments are left unexamined when we are dealing with the value of experiencing nature in terms of *upplifun* we are barely scratching the surface of the meaning and value that is there.

The second category; physical characteristics B, focuses mainly on listing objective physical phenomena that are either in the area or not – so it focuses more on the objective factors. The reasons why these phenomena are considered to impact the experience of nature are left untold, but they are all likely to be known tourist attractions. The sub-categories here are: Geothermal area, activity and pools; signs of volcanic activity, craters and lava; colors; wildlife; diversity; mountains and glaciers; lakes, rivers and waterfalls; canyons and ravines; and whether the area is already on the Natural Monuments Registry (*Náttúruminjasrá*) (Sæþórsdóttir & Ólafsson 2008, 18-19).⁹⁵ Again, what is missing here are the judgments that are behind the categories; why have *these* objects or landscape qualities become tourist attractions and why are they important parts of the experience of Icelandic landscapes?

The third category that is taken into account under *upplifun* or experience is *hugbrif* (impression, i.e. effects on the mind), where subjective values based on impressions were evaluated. This is where the aesthetic aspect of the experience comes to the fore: through the sub-categories of *hugbrif*. The sub-categories involved evaluating how *beautiful and majestic* the land was; whether the land had reached its *limits for receiving more tourists*; and *awe, holiness and image* of the landscape. According to the report, awe, holiness and image are important tourist attractions, and this is why the evaluation included these sub-categories, but grades were given only to areas that undoubtedly inspired these (the volcano Hekla is taken as an example of this, a place that inspires awe and is an important symbol for Iceland’s image) (Sæþórsdóttir & Ólafsson 2008, 19). As before, the report does not expand very much on how exactly the beauty or majesty of the land, or the holiness, awe and image were evaluated. But as the final discussion of the report describes, the evaluation is expert-based.

⁹⁵ The authors comment in a footnote that this last sub-category (whether the area was already on the Natural Monuments Registry) should perhaps have been in the category of *hugbrif* (effects on the mind).

However, this expert-based approach is not described as being the best possible method, rather it seems to have been the only available possibility in the short timespan that the evaluation was to take place in. The process of the evaluation is described thus:

The lack of data on tourism in specific areas of the country, such as basic data on the number of tourists, their attitudes and reasons for visiting, restricted the work of the group. The working group thus often had to build the evaluation on their own knowledge and experience. In the process of the expert-based evaluation it would have been best if each group member would have evaluated the area according to the object-categories and then the group would compare their results. This was tried but the time that was allotted to the work proved to be too short for such work. Thus the working method was that the group went over each area together and agreed on the grades given to each object. An undeniable risk follows from this method that someone in the group creates pressure on following a certain policy or viewpoint. The group discussed this problem and agreed to be conscious of this danger and try their best to minimize it. The group thinks they succeeded in doing so, although it is of course difficult to evaluate such things. The methodology which is based on evaluating many independent objects for each area also reduces the danger of the evaluation becoming subjective rather than objective and mostly stops the general attitude of those who do the evaluation from obscuring the results. There were people in the group that knew the country, as well as tourism and outdoor activities there very well. It varied a little how many in the group knew each area and in some areas the knowledge was restricted. Then experts were asked to advice. Also the group went on three tours around areas that the group thought they had to examine more closely, two organized by the group, and one organized by the Master Plan Committee. In all these cases guides that knew the area and the conditions there were hired. These tours were very valuable and there would have needed to be more of them (Sæþórsdóttir & Ólafsson 2008, 32, my translation).

This shows that the working group did not necessarily think that the expert-based approach they used was the best method, but rather that more information is needed and this was the best they could do in the short time they had to work on the evaluation. What we have here is then the first attempt to develop a methodology for assessing the value of aesthetic experiences of nature in Iceland. This however, is only done in the context of assessing its impact on tourism and outdoor activities as part of the economic system, but not in the context of assessing more directly its impact on the value of the landscape itself and how it is perceived and evaluated by the public in other terms than economic. This fact

restricts the approach to begin with just by trying to put a numeric value on aesthetic experience only as a factor that impacts the tourism and outdoors activity industries. But what also restricts this approach is, as the authors of the report point out, the lack of data on the views and attitudes of the different groups that seek out the experience of Icelandic natural landscapes.

Working Group II did the best they could do with the limited resources of data they had and within the limited scope they were meant to focus on: the scope of possible impacts the proposed power-projects could have on the economic value an area has for the tourism and recreational industries. The aim was thus to get an idea of what it might cost these industries if a certain landscape would be impacted by a proposed power-project in such a way that it would influence the experience of the “customers” of these industries. But this is not enough. Working group II, with the limited focus on possible economic impacts on industry, should not have been the only group dealing with the experience of the beauty of Icelandic landscapes in the Master Plan. It is sad to think that the value that is arguably the most important value that people find in Icelandic nature; the value of *upplifun*, would not have been considered at all in the Master Plan if it would not have been considered by Working group II.

What is lacking in the Master Plan is the aspect of the aesthetic experience of nature that has to do with people’s relation to the landscapes that they dwell in as both inhabitants and travelers, and the value and meaning *they* find in their experiences of being in these landscapes. This aspect includes some of the same factors as the tourism aspect does but it also includes more than that – it includes the real depth and importance of beauty as a common human experience and value. And this is the aspect that has been neglected in environmental decision-making in Iceland. What I will argue in this chapter is that the view that everything that has value can be subsumed under calculations and impacts on the economy is misleading and that such a view can restrict our way of relating to and finding value and meaning in the world. In other words, I argue that it is necessary to account for values that go beyond the economic scale of evaluating landscape.

The economic scale of evaluating landscape is based on numbers and calculation and since the value of aesthetic experiences is seen as being inherently subjective and relative, it does not fit into this scale that demands strict objectivity. This is one of the major reasons for the contemporary displacement of beauty and aesthetic value in landscape assessments. The displacement of beauty consists in viewing it as inherently subjective and relative. Subsequently this state of matters has rendered the questions introduced at the beginning of this chapter irrelevant. Is there any purpose in asking what is the meaning and value of aesthetic experiences, what type of knowledge we gain from them or how they affect our ethical and

metaphysical understanding of ourselves and our relation to the world if these questions can only be answered from the perspective of the individual?

However, as we have seen, the notions of beauty and the aesthetic can be understood from a different perspective that acknowledges the relational character of the experiences these concepts are meant to describe, and emphasizes that the meaning and value of beauty emerges from the intertwining of subject and object. So if we want to attempt to answer the questions above it is this intertwining that needs to be examined. In this chapter I will thus take a closer look at the results of the qualitative studies discussed in the previous chapter and reflect on what kind of meaning and value can be found in the experiences described there.

This type of first person perspective – examining the intertwining of *this* subject with *this* object – can be seen as being “merely a personal experience”. However, this experience is at the core of the intense conflict of interests that has risen in Iceland (and many other places in the world) in the past decades as it is at the core of the deep ethical and personal relation to natural and cultural environments that drives large segments of the public to oppose the industrial and political forces that want to deliver evermore and faster growth, jobs and development. There is a conflict of values here and this conflict needs to be discussed and reflected upon. I argue that one important source of this conflict lies in the displacement of beauty and the values derived from it, and that the experience of beauty in all its forms is an experience that is an important part of what it means to be human. As we will see in this chapter it plays an important role in our well-being and our ability to relate to the other and reflect on our place in the world.

Such a notion of beauty is quite broad and requires an analysis of the different meanings associated with it in descriptions of landscape, as well as its connection to concepts traditionally associated with experiences of landscape. The broadness of this concept of beauty consists in its openness as it delineates preconditions of experiencing something as beautiful. The concept does in other words not generate a list of categories that can be set as “standards” of beauty for assessment. However, this “merely personal” first person perspective experience is a source of important human values that need to be accounted for. In this way, the voices of all the different stakeholders in the conflict (whose range should be as broad as possible) can be heard and not only those expert voices that speak in numbers.

When travelling in a bus through the Icelandic highland (on *Fjallabaksleið nyrðri*) for the first time in 2007 and being so lucky to be travelling with two environmental aestheticians, we discussed what would be the “appropriate” aesthetic category to describe the landscape we enjoyed through the window. Beauty seemed too weak, the sublime too strong but the word wonderment seemed to come closest to fit. And indeed, as I travelled more through Icelandic landscapes and examined other

people's experiences of geothermal and glacial landscapes it became clear that wonder plays a central role in these experiences. However, beauty and the sublime were both up for discussion on that bus ride so there must have been some elements of beauty and sublimity felt there as well. It seems to me that these three concepts, or the experiences they are meant to describe, cannot be so neatly separated as often is assumed. Wonder is often a part of beauty and it can be a step on the way to experiencing the sublime. Thus I will start with looking at the experience of wonder and how it can be interpreted in light of the theory of beauty that was discussed in chapter one, and then I will go on to examine closer the experience of the sublime and the role of wonder and the metaphysical imagination in creating it. Wonder, beauty and the sublime are all key elements in the experiences of geothermal and glacial landscapes but as I will discuss it is especially the embodied aspect of these experiences that leads to the transformative effect that they can have on our attitude towards nature and our understanding of ourselves as part of nature. Finally I will discuss the value of the kind of pre-discursive knowledge that these experiences can generate and the importance of aesthetic education in this context.

To be able to understand the value and meaning of these experiences, we first need to examine them closer and reflect on the insights and knowledge we can gain from them. If we want to go further than only scratching the surface of the value of experiences of Icelandic landscapes and reducing it to economic value we must take a deeper and closer look at what is involved in the experience or *upplifun* of these landscapes. We must look behind the categories of value and ask why *these* chosen objects or qualities are valuable.

3.1. Wonder and Beauty

We have seen how the core theme of the experiences described by the participants in the qualitative study can be summed up in the gasping "*wow!*" that represents the feeling of wonder. The concept of wonder thus plays a central role in the aesthetic experience of extreme landscapes (and in many other aesthetic experiences) as it is the trigger that ignites the metaphysical imagination that can lead to the feeling of the sublime. As mentioned in the previous chapter, wonder has many things in common with the aesthetic; Hepburn pointed out that both have to do with "unusually concentrated, rapt experience" and that they often do converge, although not in all cases (Hepburn 1984, 147).

I will argue here that in the case of experiencing wonder in geothermal and glacial landscapes (and in other extreme landscapes), wonder and the aesthetic experience of beauty do overlap and that this strong feeling of wondrous beauty is

the key to unlocking the feeling of the sublime or what I would like to refer to as *agjefegurð* – the experience where beauty and the sublime become one.

There has always been a strong relation between beauty and the sublime, even though the relation has more often been in the form of contrast, some authors have tried to move beyond the sharp distinction between the two concepts. Schiller for example treated the sublime as continuous with the beautiful and construed it as “energetic beauty” to intensify the functional interdependence and integration of the beautiful and the sublime (Barnouw 1980). As was discussed in chapter one, Bonnie Mann and Galen A. Johnson also aim to bridge the gap between beauty and the sublime. While Mann focuses mainly on the sublime and Johnson on beauty in relation to art, I will focus on *agjefegurð* in the experience of nature where beauty and the sublime become one, and the role that metaphysical imagination and the feeling of wonder can play in creating this union.

The first point of overlap; where wonder and beauty meet, is the focus on the sensuous. According to the phenomenological idea of beauty discussed in chapter one, the moment of beauty begins in sense perception, and thus the aesthetic perception that is exemplified in beauty is a direct and immediate relation we have with the world. The aesthetic moment of beauty begins when our sensuous perception; our “rapt attentiveness”, is drawn towards the sensuous surface of the object of beauty (in the case of events or actions that are beautiful it is the sensuous “surface” of the atmosphere created by it)⁹⁶.

This occurred repeatedly as the participants of the study walked through the geothermal or glacial landscapes; light-blue ice and water running down the glacier, bright-yellow sulfur, patterns of endlessly various colors, the sound and smell of steam and boiling mud, the overwhelming size and form of the moulin – all these sensuous qualities captured their attention and urged them to dwell in the moment; sustain, repeat or share the moment by communicating it verbally or through photographing. This aesthetic moment of attention to the senses was a response to both beauty and ugliness – the stinky grey geothermal mud that the participants found “disgusting” received attention just as the beautiful colors in other parts of the geothermal area. The sensuous qualities also urged them to explore other aspects of the sensuous surface that had called for their attention by for example seeing, touching and smelling something they had heard. This dwelling on the sensuous that is the starting point of the aesthetic moment of beauty (or ugliness), was also the starting point of the feeling of wonder that the participants expressed. Both thus start when something captures one’s attention, something beautiful, ugly or unusual;

⁹⁶ I use the words sensuous surface for smell, hearing and atmosphere as well as for surfaces that can be seen and touched.

something that stands out and draws in the senses. If what is perceived is very unusual, something one has not seen a million times like the rose or the rainbow, then the feeling of wonder arises with a certain excitement and curiosity that is not always characteristic of beauty.

The feeling of wonder thus extends the rapt attentiveness to the senses characteristic of beauty so that the attention to the senses becomes even more heightened and the imagination starts “wondering” about what lies behind the qualities perceived. As Carson points out, the route towards the feeling of wonder lies through the channels of sensory impression (Carson 1998); and as Hepburn shows, even when curiosity and knowledge come into play the true feeling of wonder is not destroyed for it is always directed first and foremost at the sensory qualities themselves but not at the causal explanation of them (Hepburn 1984).

In chapter one, I discussed how the concept of the aesthetic that builds on a relational understanding of beauty is connected with the phenomenological method. As Berleant has pointed out, and Merleau-Ponty before him, the aesthetic and the phenomenological share the emphasis on “bracketing” pre-conceived ideas and knowledge and the emphasis on direct and immediate sensory perception. The feeling of wonder also shares both these elements – wonder is not only directed at sensory qualities, it also involves seeing things “as if for the first time” or imagining to know that one can never see them again, as Carson recommends. Seeing things as if for the first time means leaving one’s pre-conceived ideas and knowledge behind to focus on seeing things as they are themselves, not in light of anything else – “letting-them-be”. As we have seen in chapter one, the experience of beauty is characterized by an aesthetic desire that involves opening oneself up towards the object as it is. This is the disinterested attitude that is the result of one’s senses being captured by beauty – one is urged to dwell in the sensuous moment and this allows one to clear the mind of one’s own self-interest for a moment and see things as they are, not in light of anything else. The part of the experience of wonder that involves “seeing things as if for the first time” thus shares the “bracketing” of one’s pre-conceived ideas and self-interest with the phenomenological method and the aesthetic moment, and this is the result of the primacy of perception that these frames of experience also share.

But are wonder and beauty then just one and the same thing? They do share some key characteristics and are often intertwined. But as Hepburn pointed out, wonder is not always aesthetic, sometimes it is more related to the religious or metaphysical; and the aesthetic is not always wondering (Hepburn 1984, 147). However, one might say that there is a scale of experiences of beauty – beauty is a very broad kind of experience, as Johnson pointed out, it can be on the scale from being “close to perception itself [...] free of any longings or demands other than the

simple “again”” to being extended to feelings of “joy and rapture” and “turbulence and sorrow” (Johnson 2009, 216-17). Beauty in its simplest form, the dwelling moment of the “simple again” provides a starting point – the focus on the senses – which then sometimes extends to overlap with the feeling of wonder and the sublime. At one point of the scale wonder overlaps with beauty when it is extended to feelings of “joy and rapture” and at another point beauty overlaps with the sublime when more difficult feelings arise. Since beauty has always been at the center of aesthetics this must suggest that this concept has been used to describe what is at the heart of any (positive) aesthetic experience, the “simple again” focus on the senses that allows one to open up to the other in a unique way, is the starting point that can then extend into more complex variants of aesthetic experience.

Aesthetic experiences come in many variants – they have different qualities or layers that can be described in terms of wonder, the sublime, joy, serenity, and even ugliness and terror are part of the aesthetic scale. In her paper “The Sublime, Ugliness and “Terrible Beauty” in Icelandic Landscapes” Brady describes such a scale:

We can position beauty, the sublime and ugliness along a scale of positive and negative aesthetic value. On the positive side of the scale are varieties of beauty (including “terrible beauty”), with sublimity somewhere in the middle, and varieties of ugliness lying on the negative side (Brady 2010, 130).

On the positive side are experiences that are pleasurable while the negative side can create unpleasurable responses such as dislike, repulsion, disgust, discomfort, and aversion. But as Brady points out, in some cases the negative can expand or fall into the positive because

[...] ugly things engage us through closer attention as opposed to the senses and imagination being overwhelmed. As such, interest, curiosity and even excitement may be part of some responses to ugliness. Odd-looking creatures – for instance, the aye-aye, a lemur living in Madagascar – are good examples of this. Where strong interest turns into fascination, and the overall feeling is more positive than negative, it is not ugliness we find, but something falling into another aesthetic or neighboring response, such as wonder or enchantment (Brady 2010, 130).

Another good example of this are the responses of some of the participants in the study to the thick dark-grey geothermal mud springs in the front area of *Selún*. The initial repulsion (also evoked by the distinct smell of sulfur in the fumes) quickly turned into interest, fascination and wonder. Thus we might say that wonder

is an aesthetic response that can overlap with both beauty and ugliness – it is an extension of a positive or negative aesthetic moment where we pay close attention to the object’s sensory qualities which are so unusual to us (or we have made them unusual to us by imagining we have never perceived them before) that we become interested, curious, fascinated and struck by wonder.

At the heart of all these qualities are the focus on the sensuous and the effects that different objects and environments have on our senses, our feelings, and our being in the world. As Berleant points out, the aesthetic is at the core of all our experiences of the world, we are always engaging our senses wherever we are and whether or not we are fully aware of it all the time (Berleant 2010). The moments when we are aware and we give focused attention to our sensory perception are the moments that we find the need to share or repeat and label as beautiful, sublime, wondrous or ugly. So yes, the feeling of wonder often overlaps with beauty or ugliness when our attention is drawn towards sensuous qualities that are unusual or rare. Aesthetic experiences have many layers and (in a positive aesthetic experience) beauty is the first layer – the “simple again” – and then depending on the situation and the physical qualities of the object of beauty a layer of wonder, with its curiosity and excitement, is automatically added when the object of beauty is very unusual to us or rare. However, as Carson describes so well, we *can* feel wonder at everything if we develop and nurture our sense of wonder, it doesn’t have to come automatically as it so often does with children who are actually “seeing things for the first time”(Carson 1998).

But I argue that in experiencing extreme natural environments like the glacial and geothermal landscapes in Iceland, the element of wonder is added automatically to the experience of beauty (or ugliness) as the forms, phenomena and the atmospheres created by them are so rare and different from most people’s everyday environments that the feeling of wonder comes as easily as for children experiencing the world for the first time. The Icelandic landscapes that are characterized by active volcanoes, calderas, vast lava fields, black sand deserts, hot springs, boiling mud, geysers, glaciers and waterfalls are very rare and not a part of many people’s everyday environments that are more often characterized by built and familiar environments; towns, cities, rural landscapes, woodlands, coasts, fields and parks. This is the case in Iceland as in most of Europe and N-America; most of the population in Iceland, although surrounded by mountains and the ocean, does not have these extreme landscapes of geothermal, glacial and volcanic activity listed above surrounding their everyday environments up close and personal. Even if remnants of them such as lava rock can be found in many back-gardens, and distant views of glaciers or volcanoes can be seen through many living room windows, most people have to go for a drive or a long walk out of town to be able to enter

these landscapes physically and dwell in them.⁹⁷ Thus the feeling of wonder comes easily, there is not much need for Carson's advice to imagine seeing things for the first time when one is confronted with a rare and unusual phenomenon that is out of the ordinary.

So what we have found then is that wonder overlaps with beauty in the "rapt attentiveness" of the senses as well as in the aesthetic desire to let things be and appreciate them for what they are. Wonder can be a positive aesthetic desire; it is an experience where you come to the object with a clean slate, focus only on perception and in that way you open yourself up for seeing that object for what it really is. Instead of desiring to know the object in a way that allows us to possess and control the object, wonder and beauty make us desire only to let things be and let them speak to us and influence us.

Where does the value in this type of experience lie? I will argue that the value of experiencing beauty, wonder or the sublime in nature lies first and foremost in the influence it can have on our relations to each other, the natural world, and the environments or landscapes we dwell in. These aesthetic experiences are capable of transforming or influencing our attitudes towards the world as they give us the opportunity to reflect on our relations from a different perspective. Before we examine this aspect more closely I will now take a closer look at the experience of the sublime and the role of metaphysical imagination and wonder in creating it.

3.2. The Sublime and Otherness

As we have seen in chapter one, the re-thinking of the concept of beauty calls for a new idea of the sublime and the relation between these two concepts. The sublime has often been linked with the masculine, and in the widespread understanding of the sublime that can be traced to Burke and early Kant, what might be called the masculinist aspect of the experience is emphasized at the cost of another aspect that characterizes the sublime. The sublime experience is generally described as including two elementary components that are quite contradictory, as Christopher Hitt describes:

[T]he contradiction of the sublime is that it has tended to include *both* humbling fear *and* ennobling validation for the perceiving subject. Ever since the eighteenth century, critics and readers alike have generally paid more attention to the latter than to the former (Hitt 1999, 606).

⁹⁷ Examples do exist of hot springs or other geothermal phenomena surfacing in people's backyards, like happened in the town of Hveragerði after a big earthquake in May 2008. However, this is not a common event.

This emphasis on the part of the experience of the sublime that involves conquering nature with reason results in the masculinist understanding of the sublime that Mann has criticized and was discussed in chapter one. Mann connects the masculinist understanding of the sublime; the understanding that emphasizes man's superiority over nature, with the Western attitude to nature that has led to an ecological crisis. She suggests that we need to distance our way of thinking from the ideals of the masculinist sublime and rediscover the sublime from a feminist perspective (Mann 2006).

Hitt also criticizes the emphasis on what Mann calls the masculinist sublime and the neglect of the other elementary part of the sublime that has more to do with "humbling fear" than "ennobling validation". Both Mann and Hitt argue that this part of the sublime provides the opportunity of an experience that affects our understanding of our relation to nature, and to the other more generally, in a totally different way than the masculinist understanding of the sublime experience accounts for. Instead of reason revealing to us our superiority over nature, our perception of nature in the sublime moment reveals to us our vulnerability against and dependence on nature's great forces.

These accounts of the sublime experience are useful for describing and understanding the experiences of glacial and geothermal landscapes that were characterized by the sublime. The participants described how the landscape made them "feel small" and powerless, it made them feel afraid but respect in the same time – a sort of "humbling fear" – but they never described a feeling of being superior to nature or feeling able to master the great force they were experiencing through their reason. Thus I agree with Hitt and Mann in claiming that the sublime experience should be re-visited in a modern context in light of today's experiences.

According to Hitt, since the scientific revolution of the seventeenth century Western civilization has responded to the recognition of vulnerability found in the sublime experience with "dogged resistance":

The unfathomable otherness of nature unnerves us, and the idea that we are somehow part of this alien entity shocks us. Hence we device ways to circumvent, deny, escape, or overcome it. Such efforts, indeed, constitute the story of the conventional sublime – a story which describes the validation of the individual through an act of transcendence in which the external world is domesticated, conquered, or erased. [...] As Weiskel comments, the Kantian sublime "implies the conversion of the outer world into a symbol for the mind's relation

to itself" (RS 85) ⁹⁸. Nature is reduced to a "mere nothing," to use Kant's phrase, leaving only the self in all its glory (Hitt 1999, 611).

The conventional interpretation of the sublime can thus be seen as a part of the Western culture's denial of its powerlessness against nature. But would it then be better to just get rid of the sublime, since it results in such a dangerous attitude that depends on "an experience of hyperbolic alienation, a sense of the inexorable otherness of nature" (Hitt 1999, 612)? Hitt asks if the sublime is worth the risk? His answer is yes, because an interpretation of the sublime that emphasizes the role of "humbling fear" helps us to gain an attitude that is opposite to the dangerous, alienating attitude of the masculinist sublime.

Hitt points out that this side to the experience of the sublime has always been included, although it has not been in the spotlight:

But humility before nature has consistently been an elementary part of the natural sublime. Kant writes that in experiencing the sublime we perceive "our faculty of resistance as insignificantly small in comparison with [nature's] might,"⁹⁹ recalling Burke's statement that "we shrink into the minuteness of our own nature, and are, in a manner, annihilated" (PE 68)¹⁰⁰. Kant adds that "the irresistibility of the might of nature forces upon us the recognition of our physical helplessness as beings of nature" (CJ 111).¹⁰¹ Part of the sublime experience, in other words, is the realization that we are mortal creatures, "beings of nature" whose lives are entirely dependent on forces greater than we are (Hitt 1999, 606-7).

The route Hitt takes to rethink the sublime is built around the idea that the sublime can be seen as an experience that has three basic components: the experience begins with the perception of an object or phenomenon which the imagination cannot grasp, the second stage is a result of this limitation of the imagination, and involves a kind of gap between perception and conception – the mind is unable to grasp or apprehend what is perceived. The third step is when this gap is closed with the emergence of reason, which in the common interpretation of the Kantian account, reveals to us our superiority and control over nature outside and within the self.¹⁰² The second stage is linked with the "humbling fear", the moment of being

⁹⁸ Hitt quotes Weiskel (1976, 85).

⁹⁹ Hitt quotes Kant (1790/1992, 390).

¹⁰⁰ Hitt quotes Burke (1759/1986, 66).

¹⁰¹ Hitt quotes Kant, I. (1790/1992, 111).

¹⁰² Brady (2013) has argued for a more nuanced interpretation of the Kantian sublime as being an other-regarding experience of being "in relation to both our natural inclinations, as part of human nature, and external natural phenomena" (Brady 2013, 87), rather than being a self-regarding experience of superiority and control.

overwhelmed by nature's forces, while the third stage is linked with the conquering of nature with reason. For Hitt it is important to keep this structure of the concept, for "[o]therwise we are doing nothing more than putting an old word on an entirely new idea" (Hitt 1999, 609). So what he does is to re-interpret the third stage by acknowledging that the radical otherness of nature does play an important role, but at the same time proposing a radically different account of the experience of otherness, an account that emphasizes the intertwining of subject and object, rather than their separation.

A major factor in this type of experience of otherness are the changes that have occurred in people's conceptions of nature (Árnason 2005, Karlsdóttir 2010). In earlier centuries, nature was something we feared for it was conceived as dangerous and something that we should strive to control. In the 20th century nature as our natural environmental basis became vulnerable and more like an entity that we have a responsibility to take care of. So added to the notion of vulnerability is the idea that nature needs protection from the forces of instrumentalization and exploitation, and that we need to take care of it. In recent years though, the idea of nature as unpredictable and dangerous is resurfacing as a reaction to the realization in the wake of natural disasters of tsunamis, floods and hurricanes, that humans have become a powerful enough force to cause devastating changes and destruction to natural systems. So the sublime has now a human factor to it insofar the human activity on earth is becoming a geological force as depicted with the term "Anthropocene". The power of nature as an external force depicted with the Kantian notion of the dynamical and mathematical sublime was thus based on a distinction of the human- and the non-human forces that can no longer be upheld.

The idea of the Anthropocene can be seen as an anthropocentric overstatement that the earth is powerless against the destructive force of humans. In my view, referring to the Anthropocene is an acknowledgement that human beings have indeed become a force that can influence the earth's systems, but it does not have to imply that human beings are the only force or the most important force that shapes the earth, only that we have become a force among many other much stronger forces, and that we should therefore be careful in our actions that are now interacting with unpredictable forces that we have no control over. The concept of the Anthropocene is for me a wake up call, urging us to remember that we are after all a part of and dependent on nature; human beings have always been interacting with the natural forces of the earth, but now we are doing so on a greater scale than ever before.

The idea of otherness as part of the sublime is in wake of recent developments in our understanding of nature not merely an external otherness, but an otherness within ourselves as natural beings and as part of nature. Hitt nevertheless

emphasizes the difficulty in overcoming the feeling of otherness that the sublime holds, because even if we “should, as a rule, strive to recognize our kinship with nature” it is his belief

that we will never be able fully to realize this ideal – not as long as there are mountains that tower over us, oceans that separate us, hurricanes that could kill us. On an even more basic level, as long as there is an “I,” there will always be an “other”. Even if we could change this situation, it seems to me unconscionable that we might want to neutralize completely nature’s “sublime” otherness (Hitt 1999, 612).

The experience of nature’s “sublime otherness” is thus an integral part of what it is to be a human part of nature, there is no escaping it and we do not need to overcome this feeling of otherness like many critics of the conventional masculinist sublime have claimed. However, we need to revise our understanding of the meaning of this experience, and Hitt does this by showing that instead of the third stage in the sublime experience involving the discovery of the superiority of reason that by its power is able to nullify nature, it rather involves the discovery of nature that by *its* power nullifies reason.

In short Hitt argues that when reason is nullified by nature’s power we get a sense of nature’s otherness that is quite different from the idea of otherness that leads to separation and control over nature. After the second stage of the sublime experience; when the mind is unable to grasp what is perceived – the senses are overwhelmed, we do not go into a third stage that involves reason conquering nature, rather the third stage is characterized by dwelling in the moment of the second stage and escaping reason for a moment. Through this moment of escaping reason, we can gain a different understanding of our relation with the world. According to Hitt, we gain an outlook on our relation with nature that is able to escape the binary opposition of human and nature, subject and object.

To describe this outlook Hitt refers to Neil Evernden’s view that goes against both of the two general conceptions that Western culture has had of nature: “nature-as-object” and “nature-as-self”. Evernden does not view nature as a separated other that humans have control over, and he does not view nature as an extended self that humans are a part of. In this way Evernden’s thought is in line with my aim to move beyond the ideologies of anthropocentrism which treats „nature as object“ and non-anthropocentrism which treats „nature as self“. Rather, the outlook Evernden suggests:

would decenter the subject and "liberate" nature, leaving it outside the domain of mind - neither as an object nor as a "wider self" but as a

mysterious, alien "divine chaos" (SC 120). This move would involve seeing nature independent of any conceptual categories, to take seriously Merleau-Ponty's adage: "To return to things themselves is to return to that world which precedes knowledge" (SC 110)" (Hitt 1999, 613).¹⁰³

So the key to re-interpreting the experience of nature's sublime otherness lies in emphasizing the moment of the sublime experience where reason is nullified and nature is seen as it is, independent of any conceptual categories. This type of experience of otherness is radically different from the otherness that is overcome and controlled by reason. According to Evernden it is an instance of

what Rudolf Otto called the "wholly other": "that which is quite beyond the sphere of the usual, the intelligible, and the familiar, which therefore falls quite outside the limits of the "canny," and is contrasted with it, filling the mind with blank wonder and astonishment (SC 117)" (Hitt 1999, 613).¹⁰⁴

The sublime experience of otherness that is based on dwelling in the second stage of "humbling fear" rather than entering the third stage of "the conquering subject", involves an extreme case of aesthetic desire where one is not only fascinated or astonished at wondrous beauty, but rather totally overwhelmed by the grandness and power of what one is suddenly confronted with. This does not mean that one is overwhelmed by fear, but rather overwhelmed by a physical awareness of the force and magnitude that is perceived.

We can see that this is where elements of the experiences of beauty and wonder overlap with the sublime experience. As we have seen, both wonder and beauty are characterized by exactly this; seeing things as if for the first time, focusing on the sensuous while the mind takes a break, and thus opening up towards the other to see it for what it is, independent of anything else. Beauty, wonder and the sublime all involve an aesthetic desire that allows one to open up to the other in this unique way.

But where lies then the difference between these experiences? As discussed above, aesthetic experiences have many different layers or elements, and beauty, wonder and the sublime represent different points of the aesthetic scale from the positive to the negative. On the positive end there is beauty, the first layer – the "simple again" – and on the negative end there is ugliness. Both beauty and ugliness can lead to the layer of wonder being added, when the sensory qualities that have drawn our attention are so unusual and rare that we become interested, curious,

¹⁰³ Hitt quotes Evernden (1992, 120 and 110).

¹⁰⁴ Hitt quotes Evernden (1992, 117).

fascinated and struck by wonder. But when does the sublime element come into the picture? According to Brady, the sublime lies somewhere in the middle of the aesthetic scale, as it is characterized by “pleasure mixed with fear” – it has both positive and negative aspects. In the qualitative study, the feeling of the sublime seemed to emerge when the participants perceived something of extreme power or size and these qualities awakened their imagination. As we have seen, beauty and wonder share the characteristics of focusing on the sensuous and seeing things as if for the first time – letting them be as they are. This experience happens when a sensuous surface grabs one’s attention – one tends to the object with “rapt attentiveness”.

The difference between the experiences of wonder and beauty and that of the sublime is a difference of scale – the sublime comes into the picture when one’s attention is not only grabbed or directed gently by wondrous beauty, rather one’s attention is totally overwhelmed in a sudden and dizzying manner by the size and/or power of the phenomenon one is confronted with. The sublime, like wonder and beauty is characterized by “rapt attentiveness” and letting the other be, and thus it influences the way we reflect on our relations to the other. While beauty helps us experience our relation to the other in a pleasing way, the sublime throws us into this relation in a more dramatic manner. So beauty and the sublime are both characterized by a focus on the sensuous and a unique relation to the other, the difference lies in the force of the sublime that not only captures one’s senses but overwhelms the whole body and throws one into an acute physical awareness of one’s relation to and dependence on nature’s great forces. The sublime can thus be understood as still another layer of the aesthetic experience, a layer that is added when overwhelming force or magnitude comes into play.¹⁰⁵

This overwhelming force or magnitude is not only experienced when facing non-human natural forces. People are now realizing how the human race can become such an overwhelming force of destruction and this brings another layer of

¹⁰⁵ In her paper “Contemporary Environmental Aesthetics and the Neglect of the Sublime” Sandra Shapshay (2013) argues that the experience of what she calls “the thick” sublime can have a place within Carlson’s natural environmental model of environmental aesthetics. In her account the experience of the thick sublime is compatible with scientific knowledge and thus an “appropriate” aesthetic response in, first, those environments “which our best science does not wholly “demystify” (unlike the case of the rainbow) or those for which scientific understanding is liable to increase our wonder and awe (such as the night sky)”. Second, those environments “which are rightly perceived to be physically threatening kinds of places” and third, “those environments which are spatially and/or temporally vast” (Shapshay 2013, 197). I agree with Shapshay that these are the types of natural landscapes that are most likely to call for the aesthetic response of the sublime. However, I find that Carlson’s natural environmental model is too narrow, and that in order to understand the experience of the sublime and the effect that great size and power in nature have on us, one must go deeper than relating it to scientific knowledge. Although scientific knowledge is able to deepen or expand the experience of the sublime in some cases, it is not a necessary pre-condition for the experience to occur.

the sublime experience as we imagine the earth without humans, after we have destroyed the natural world. Reflecting on our fascination with imagining the world without us, Strand suggests:

There's a word for all this: sublime. The artistic term describes the awe we feel for things larger than ourselves. In the past, the natural world was sublime: mountains, waterfalls, the ocean, and the stars gave people a sense of insignificance in relation to the vast universe. But we have lost the faculty to be so diminished. We move mountains and harness rivers. We have unleashed the power of the atom, unraveled the secrets of our genome, and unbalanced the planet's climate. What on this puny rock could be bigger than we are? Yet our seeming omnipotence does not satisfy us. We still yearn to see the natural world as supreme, but to do it we have to exterminate ourselves (Strand 2011).

This account of the sublime feeling that is awakened by our own destructive powers can be connected to discussions of the “technological sublime” (Nye 1996). This term has been used to describe the sublime feeling that is awakened by the powers to create and build on the same scale as nature was only able to do in the past and by the powers to control nature that technological innovation has brought on. I will not focus on this aspect of the sublime especially here, however it is important to note that the possible differences between experiencing the sublime when confronted with non-human or human forces of nature are not differences of content but of form. In both cases we are experiencing something that can cause us to imagine the real scale of things and our own vulnerability and small place in this large scale. Imagining the effects that the human race can have as a whole is in the end imagining the effects of a huge natural force – the distinction between humans and nature seems obsolete when the context is the earth as a whole.

The experience of overwhelming force or magnitude does not always have to be a direct perception of the phenomenon's size or power. Sometimes wonder and the curiosity and imagination that come with it lead to the experience. An example of this was described in chapter two, where I described the experience of sitting in a small geothermal area that did not show much of its power on the surface, and the experience of overwhelming power and magnitude arose when I became curious and started imagining how that area had been created and how it evolved. In this case it was not the direct perception of grandness or power that led to the experience of the sublime, rather it was the imagination of the power and magnitude that could not be seen directly that led to the experience.

The role played by the imagination can thus be seen as a link between wonder and the sublime; an experience that starts with wonder – focusing on the sensuous

and seeing things as if for the first time, full of curiosity – can easily change into the experience of the sublime when the imagination is awakened and the image of the overwhelming magnitude and force that lies behind what is perceived takes over. Hepburn has also pointed to a relationship between wonder and the sublime as he suggests that wonder plays the role of transforming the experience of threatening phenomena or situation into an aesthetic and pleasurable experience: “sublimity is essentially concerned with transformation of the merely threatening and daunting into what is aesthetically manageable, even contemplated with joy: and this achieved through the agency of wonder” (Hepburn 1984, 151).

So we can see that there is a close connection between wonder and the sublime as there is a close connection between wonder and beauty, and beauty and the sublime. Wonder can arise out of moments of beauty or ugliness when that which is perceived seems very rare and unusual in one’s eyes. The sublime can arise out of moments of beauty, ugliness, and wonder when the overwhelming magnitude and power of what is perceived is either imagined or directly perceived. Thus through a trip along the aesthetic scale, one and the same experience can include all of these aesthetic qualities; when beauty becomes powerful, majestic or mysterious through the feeling of wonder, it overlaps with the sublime with the help of the imagination.¹⁰⁶

These are the qualities that are most characteristic for the experience of glacial and geothermal landscapes in Iceland and arguably these are also qualities that characterize experiences of many extreme natural landscapes in general. Extreme landscapes are landscapes that can be contrasted with the more common and usual rural landscapes, woodlands, parks and valleys. As Brady has pointed out, experiences of these more common types of landscape have been much more discussed within environmental aesthetics than other more “difficult” aesthetic experiences:

On the whole, debates in natural environmental aesthetics focus on positive aesthetic value and tend to neglect more difficult forms of aesthetic engagement. In contrast to the easy beauty of rural landscapes, woodlands and gentle valleys, many landscapes – vast plains and deserts, high seas, extreme weather conditions, and so on – evoke a diverse range of feelings and emotions, from anxiety and aversion to awe and fascination, where we are drawn out of our more comfortable ways of being (Brady 2010, 125).

¹⁰⁶ Of course the sublime does not always have beauty, wonder or ugliness as a starting point; some experiences are just sublime from the start. However, my emphasis here is on how these different variants of aesthetic experience are often overlapping and thus connected rather than being separated and thought of as contrasts.

The fact is though, that these extreme landscapes that present experiences of what Brady calls “difficult aesthetic appreciation” are more likely to expand and enrich our aesthetic experiences of landscape than the more easy and positive appreciation of for example rural landscapes or woodlands. By “difficult” she is referring to “aesthetic responses which involve feelings of unease, discomfort, something being unresolved or somehow unfitted to our capacities, as well as experiences which take unusual effort or are challenging in some way” (Brady 2010, 125). The difficult appreciation of for example glaciers, geothermal areas, volcanoes, black sand deserts and lava can, according to Brady, “offer insight into some of our uneasy relationships with nature and reflect ways in which we find meaning and value in extraordinary places” (Brady 2010, 125).

Another factor that is added in experiences of the “difficult” landscapes in Iceland is the weather conditions. The weather can change very rapidly and one always has to expect having bad weather rather than counting on good weather conditions. This can magnify the experience of good weather as it is experienced as rather unique to be “so lucky” to be able to enjoy good weather conditions. The experience of bad weather can also be magnified by the feeling of having accomplished something and related to the landscape in a special manner – demanding conditions where one has to overcome hindrances can offer insight into important aspects of our relationship with nature (Ólafsdóttir 2007; 2008, 64-65).

The aesthetic experiences of glacial and geothermal landscapes are an example of the difficult appreciation that Brady refers to. Even though the responses of the participants were often characterized by joy and excitement as the feeling of wonder overtook them and that this was a positive feeling, it was also a difficult experience in the sense that it both left people with the feeling of “something being unresolved” as their curiosity was awakened more and more, and that it often led to the uneasy feeling of the sublime when wonder, curiosity and the confrontation with phenomena of enormous magnitude and force caused the imagination to expand and try to capture this overwhelming phenomenon. This feeling of the sublime made the participants feel small, it made them feel fear, and respect for the phenomenon they were experiencing and this was a difficult and a pleasurable experience. Where does the pleasure arise from? What is the importance and value of this type of experience and most importantly, where does its value come from? These are the questions I will be dealing with in the next part of this chapter.

3.3. Meaning and Value

In this thesis, I have put forward a phenomenological and relational understanding of landscape, beauty and the aesthetic. This understanding is based on a certain

understanding of the human being as a relational being. What I will discuss now is how this type of relational understanding of the human being can influence the way we think about values.

An understanding of the relational self has many different aspects. For Kierkegaard (1989) for example, the self is defined by a process of relating to and understanding itself. This process involves our reflecting on ourselves and our place in the world, forming an identity and looking for meaning and purpose. Another aspect of the relational self that Levinas (1969) and Beauvoir (1948/1976) emphasized focuses on the relation between self and other – how we see and are seen by the other and how this relation affects our ethical behavior. The third aspect involves the relation between self and environment, both cultural and natural environment.

The self-environment relation is multilayered. The focus in eco-centric environmental ethics has been on environment as nature of which humans as bodies are a part of within an interdependent system. In landscape studies environment is understood in terms of landscape – our relation to the landscape involves both the perceptual and aesthetic experience of the land but also our experience of being in the land and giving meaning to it through our actions (Massey 2005; Herrington 2009). Yet another layer of the self-environment relation concerns the technological aspect of our relation to the environment (from pacemakers to transport systems) that affects our attitude to the natural and cultural systems of which we are part (Haraway 1991).

The self-environment relation that I am focusing on here is the relation created through our aesthetic perception of nature, but this relation is not distinct from the above mentioned aspects of the self-environment relation, rather it converges with these aspects. The relation created through our aesthetic perception can involve a type of self-understanding, both in terms of reflecting on oneself like Kierkegaard and of reflecting on the self in relation to human and non-human others; individual others and the surrounding other that the environment is. For many, experiences of extreme natural landscapes also have spiritual dimensions that I will not discuss as such here, but rather as metaphysical experiences. What is most important here is that all these aspects of our relational being play an important role in how we find value in the world.

I have already touched on the topic of value through my discussions of landscape and beauty where I argued that the traditional separation between subject and object, and thus subjective and objective valuing, is misleading, and has led to serious neglect of natural beauty in landscape assessment. The aesthetic experiences I discussed in chapter two reveal how aesthetic meaning and value is generated in the in-between sphere that both subject and object play a role in shaping.

Understanding the human being as an embodied relational being that is of the same flesh as the body of the world, means understanding value in different terms than the traditional subject-object dichotomy can account for.

Environmental values have commonly been understood in terms of being either intrinsic or instrumental. Both these ways of framing values rely on an object or a phenomenon having some qualities that can be observed objectively that make them either valuable in themselves or valuable for humans as a means to some end. Thus non-anthropocentric environmental ethicists have emphasized that we should pay more attention to and acknowledge the intrinsic value nature has apart from any human considerations, and they have pointed to many different qualities that make natural beings, objects or processes intrinsically valuable. For example, according to a biocentric view, all living beings are intrinsically valuable as teleological centers of life or as beings capable of feeling pleasure and pain; or according to an ecocentric view all parts of an ecosystem are intrinsically valuable as important contributors to the health of the whole. In the same way, those who hold an anthropocentric view point towards some qualities nature has that makes it intrinsically or instrumentally valuable to humans – for example the qualities that makes nature capable of providing different ecosystem services for humans.

These typical accounts of environmental values both see the source of value as being “in the object” – preserving these values thus means protecting the objects that have the qualities that have been acknowledged as being either intrinsically or instrumentally valuable. But recently new perspectives on the discussion of the source of environmental value have been developed. This development is another consequence of the rethinking of the subject – object relationship that has occurred in many different corners of philosophy and other disciplines. If a clear-cut distinction cannot be made between subject and object then it seems obvious that the accounts of value that place its source predominantly in the object or predominantly in the subject are missing something.

So how are we to think about environmental values without getting caught in the subject-object dichotomy? One way that has been suggested is to think of environmental values in terms of a “value-space”, emphasizing relationality, fluidity and embodiment instead of separation and dichotomy (Brady & Phemister 2012, x). This “value-space” is conceived “as a space in which values move back and forth between environment and humans” (Brady & Phemister 2012, ix) and thus this way of thinking about values makes it possible to go beyond the traditional boundaries between self and environment. In the context of the understanding of landscape, beauty and the aesthetic I have emphasized here with reference to the concepts of flesh and atmosphere, this is the most productive way to think about values since it acknowledges and explains how the aesthetic value of landscape emerges from the

relations that are formed in the embodied and situated aesthetic experience of landscape.

But how is it possible to transfer this type of thinking about value into the discussion of nature conservation that seems to be centered on the traditional way of understanding value in terms of intrinsically valuable objects? Nature conservation is usually thought of as having the aim to protect nature from being harmed in one way or another, but as Simon P. James suggests, “nature conservation can also involve efforts to safeguard the various meanings nature has for us” (James 2012, 31).

The approach to nature conservation that has become prevalent in Iceland is an object-centered approach that involves listing and measuring nature’s objects that are categorized as valuable in some manner or the other, usually from an ecological perspective (Karlsdóttir 2010, 174). International agreements are made about what has value, for example certain species or types of habitat, and then these agreements are used as standards for conservation in the countries that have signed the agreements. The focus in the national laws on nature conservation has also been on listing valuable objects, in the form of species, habitats, geological phenomena, that should be conserved.

But what would it mean to change this approach and aim to conserve nature’s meanings instead of its objects, and why is there a need to change it? One of the reasons why this change is needed is because this approach is restricting our possibilities of relating to nature and to ourselves by narrowing our view of nature until we see it only as a product to sell, consume, measure, put a price on, own and control. We see nature only as a provider of “ecosystem services” that we use. This is a technological, calculative frame of thought that is of course useful for many things, but what we are risking is that this becomes the ruling frame of thought that drives out other possibilities of relating to the world (Norgaard 2010).

James expands this thought by referring to Heidegger’s writings on technology and *Gelassenheit* that he translates as “releasement” – but we have referred to as “letting-be” in our discussion here in relation to the concept of beauty. For Heidegger, the term technology refers to “the way entities reveal themselves to us *as* entities”, it is a “way of revealing” (James 2012, 33).¹⁰⁷ Technology is the manner in which things reveal themselves to us in the modern world as “standing-reserve” (*Bestand*) or ready to be used: “To say that the present era is dominated by technology, in this sense, is therefore to say that nowadays entities tend to reveal themselves to us as mere resources, as things to be used and nothing more” (James 2012, 33).

¹⁰⁷ James quotes Heidegger (1996, 318).

This technological revealing of the world has for a long time been increasing because gradually this way of revealing the world marginalizes or excludes other ways of revealing it. We can see the problem of taking the aesthetic value of nature seriously in environmental decision-making as being one part of this story: the way of revealing nature as a “standing reserve” has driven out the other ways of revealing it because they do not fit into the calculative mode of thinking that is inherent in the technologized view of the world. As more and more aspects of the world come to be understood in terms of a “standing reserve” those aspects of it that resist being revealed in this way tend to be pushed to the side and ignored.

The aesthetic value of nature is an aspect of the world that resists being revealed as a standing reserve as it involves an experience and relation that cannot be reduced to instrumental utility. As the technological way of revealing has increasingly started to dominate nature conservation, which “we are told, is about the proper *management* of natural *resources* [...] about assessing the economic value of natural *capital*, or of ecosystem *services* or *functions*” (James 2012, 34), there is less and less room for attending to those values that represent our relations to the world that are not based on our use of things to promote our material well-being. What Heidegger recommends as a way out of this situation is that we “can cultivate [...] a “releasement towards things” which will enable us to “let things be”” (James 2012, 35).

In other words, as we have seen, we can nourish and nurture our sense of beauty, and in that way we can open ourselves up to the various meanings things can have for us when we stop seeing them only as a “standing reserve”, waiting to be used. As was discussed previously in this chapter and in chapter one, Heidegger’s “letting-be” is one of the important aspects of the experience of beauty, and so we can say that “cultivating a releasement towards things” can be seen as cultivating our sense of beauty and wonder – our ability to see things for what they are without any reference to our own self-interest.

But how can this approach be incorporated into the aims of nature conservation? For James, “letting-be” is itself a special kind of conservation – it is the conservation of all the other meanings that we are in danger of losing if we see things only as a standing reserve (James 2012, 36). This type of conservation is not about acknowledging nature’s non-instrumental value, in fact, James suggests that it is “better to think of it as a conservation of meaning” rather than focusing on intrinsic values because “for one thing, talk of values can easily be framed in calculative terms. It is all too easy to think of moral and aesthetic value on the model of economic value” (James 2012, 36). This rings true. The most common measure that has increasingly been used to account for environmental values is money. Everything is turned into a monetary value through the methods of cost-

benefit analysis and contingent valuation where “ecosystem services” are measured according to how much someone is willing to pay for them.

To put this in context, this is why the only part of the Icelandic government’s Master Plan for Hydro and Geothermal Energy Resources where values related to beauty were being included was the part that dealt with nature as a resource for tourism. As was discussed at the beginning of this chapter, one of the categories that were included in this part was the value of *upplifun* (experience) which included *hugbrif* (impression) where subjective values based on effects on the mind were evaluated (Björnsson 2011, 90-93). The only way we are ready to take beauty seriously is when it has been recognized as a product we can sell – we can only see it as a “standing reserve” and are in danger of losing the various and deep meanings natural beauty can have for us.

In the Icelandic debate on environmental issues, nature conservationists have been encouraged to use this language of the economic value of tourism. In the despair of not being heard, they try to hold on to whatever it is that can help them argue for the protection of the land. But this is not enough. Even though it is possible to sell beauty, and selling it successfully might be very important to the economy, this is not the main reason why we need to acknowledge and take into account the aesthetic value of nature in decision-making. The reason lies in the meaningful relations that we (inhabitants and tourists) have with nature through our aesthetic encounters with it – these encounters provide us with a way to conserve nature’s meanings as they give us the opportunity to open ourselves up towards things as they are in themselves without reference to our own goals and interests.

Framing the aesthetic value of nature only in terms of people’s willingness to pay for enjoying it as tourists, is a part of the tendency to put monetary value on everything. This is considered to be the best way to compare different things and values and weigh them up against each other – monetary value allows us to measure different things on the same scale. But this tendency neglects the fact that the most valuable things in life cannot be measured in terms of money. This has become evident when people make so-called “protest-bids” or simply refuse to answer when they are asked to answer how much they would be willing to pay for keeping a specific natural environment intact. The reason why people react in this way is because putting a price on our relations to nature feels similar to putting a price on our relations to each other. How can one put a price on friendship or love?

The danger that lies in this tendency to see everything in terms of monetary value is that we lose the ability to appreciate the diversity of things. Monetary value puts everything under the same hat and thus it wipes out all differences. The only question asked is “what does it cost?” and all the other qualities and characteristics fall into the background. Thus this approach kind of dulls our senses so that we

become unable to pay attention to the qualities of things and to admire and appreciate them. Our ability to feel wonder in aesthetic experiences of nature thus provide a way to counter this tendency in our society to reduce all things and experiences to monetary value (Norgaard 2010, Kosoy & Carbera 2010, Chan et al. 2012) The aesthetic encounters we have with nature, and are characterized by wonder, beauty and the sublime, allow us to conserve the different meanings and values nature can have for us. Being open towards having such encounters expands the possibilities of finding meaning instead of narrowing the possibilities down to only one. But what is the best way to achieve the conservation of nature's meanings? How can openness towards aesthetic encounters be encouraged?

Art and literature play important roles in conserving nature's meanings by expressing aesthetically the various experiences and relationships that we can have with nature. James even goes so far as to argue that the conservation of nature's meanings is "best achieved through art and literature [...] by anyone who succeeds in bringing to light the nature that lies outside the ever-expanding domain of standing reserve" (James 2012, 37). But I would add that conserving nature's meanings also involves conserving people's possibility of having aesthetic experiences and finding meaning in them. Conserving nature's meanings should involve aesthetic education so that people can learn how to open oneself up to the experience of beauty, how to express and value their experiences.¹⁰⁸

The conservation of meaning thus involves celebrating and acknowledging the meaning that people find in their relationships with their surroundings when it comes to both education and decision-making. Conserving nature's meaning does thus not involve conserving some specific meaning nature is considered to have but rather it is about conserving the possibility of being able to have certain types of experiences. It is about being able to see usefulness in protecting land so that we can "use" it to find meaning in it and our relations with it that varies with time, place and situation.

Some nature conservationists in Iceland have taken up the term *verndarmýting* that could be translated as "protection utilization", to offer a counterpart to the term "orkunýting" or energy utilization, of a given area of land. This concept of *verndarmýting* is located within the discourse of utility and instrumentalisation, but is at the same time meant to point beyond it. The concept also entails a criticism of the fact that the categories in the Master Plan were divided into protection on the one hand, and utilization on the other, implying that if an area is protected it cannot be

¹⁰⁸ It is indeed becoming more and more evident how our senses are overstimulated in the age of multimedia so that children in schools have to be taught to get back to their senses. Aiding them in becoming aware of sight, colors, sounds, textures etc., is all part of an aesthetic education (Rotne & Rotne 2013, Kabat-Zinn 2006).

used (Ragnarsson 2012). By using the term *verndarnýting* these nature conservationists aim to emphasize that utility doesn't always have to be measured in money. We can benefit greatly from just enjoying protected nature although this benefit cannot be measured in money like the profits made from energy production. I will discuss these issues more thoroughly in the next chapter, but now I will turn back to the experiences of glacial and geothermal landscapes and reflect on how these experiences can be seen as examples of meaningful relations that provide us with a different understanding of ourselves in relation to nature.

3.4. Meaningful Relations

The meaning that is found in the type of experiences I have been describing is an important key to our self-understanding as human relational beings that are always already in an interdependent relation with the natural world. This self-understanding is now more vital for our well-being than it has ever been since we have entered the age of “Anthropocene” where the natural systems that support us are being threatened by our narrow view of nature as a standing reserve that can be controlled and manipulated.

Conserving the possibility of finding meaning in nature that goes beyond nature as a standing reserve thus has benefits for humans as it helps us move out of a relationship with nature that is threatening our survival. In his reflections on meaning-conservation James sheds light on how this type of conservation benefits both nature and humans:

One could respond to such questions by appealing to the indirect benefits meaning-conservation has for nature. So, for instance, one could argue that although nature, in many of its various manifestations, ought to be conserved, people will only be inclined to conserve it if they see it as bearing certain meanings. Alternatively, one could appeal to the direct benefits meaning-conservation has for human beings. For example, one could argue that nature's meanings ought to be conserved because it is difficult – if not impossible – to live a truly worthwhile life unless one is disposed to see certain meaning in the natural world (James 2012, 39).

I want to dwell first on this first appeal that “people will only be inclined to conserve [nature] if they see it as bearing certain meanings” and then I will comment on the second appeal later in this chapter. What I will argue is that the aesthetic experiences that I have been discussing here are transformative experiences that help us see nature “as bearing certain meanings” that are vital to our understanding of ourselves as human relational beings and as environmental selves. To reflect on the transformative aspect of these types of experiences I will discuss my ideas about

how we can find meaning and knowledge through the decentering of the self that takes place in the experience of beauty, the sublime and wonder with relation to the works of Páll Skúlason (2008) and Sigríður Þorgeirsdóttir (2010).

These two authors both reflect on experiences of nature and they share the belief that these experiences are important sources of knowledge about our place in nature. They both emphasize the ethical relevance of such knowledge and the importance of moving beyond the view of the human being as being separated from nature. With my project, I pick up a thread from their works by examining experiences of nature from the perspective of the metaphysical and spiritual aspects of these experiences. However, what I add to their approaches is an emphasis on the empirical notion of the aesthetic. Skúlason and Þorgeirsdóttir both refer to actual experiences of nature in their writings; Skúlason discusses a specific first encounter with the caldera Askja and Þorgeirsdóttir refers to experiences of hiking on a glacier and swimming in the ocean. By starting out from a qualitative research of people's experiences of certain glacial and geothermal landscapes, and not just from my own experience or experiences of nature in general, my aim is to illuminate such philosophical reflections by analyzing different experiences on the basis of the qualitative study. What I wanted to find out is if these philosophical descriptions of a "spiritual understanding of nature" (Skúlason 2008) or of "metaphysical experiences of nature" (Þorgeirsdóttir 2010) can be confirmed by and enriched with the experiences that the participants in my study shared with me.

The other emphasis that I would like to add is on the aesthetic aspect of these experiences. Even though both Skúlason and Þorgeirsdóttir mention the specific perceptual and embodied aspects of experiences of nature, they do not elaborate how these aspects can be understood through the aesthetic concepts of wonder, beauty and the sublime. An account of the metaphysical experience of nature that both Skúlason and Þorgeirsdóttir offer supports my description of aesthetic experiences in an important respect. My concept of aesthetic experience is not limited to sensing features of landscape such as color, texture, sound and so on. My concept of the aesthetic experience also has a metaphysical aspect insofar such an experience discloses a sense of relation, i.e. makes one experience a basic feature of our condition as embodied beings. There is a cognitive content to such experiences that refers to a profound sense of the "naturalness" of the subject as a spatio-temporal being. For that reason aesthetic experiences not only yield individual, subjective values, but also values that have to do with our condition as embodied beings. The broadness of the concept of beauty discussed above thus is revealed in the metaphysical dimensions of aesthetic experiences of glacial and geothermal landscapes discussed here.

My point of departure for understanding the aesthetic experience is “bottom-up” insofar as I begin by collecting data on aesthetic experiences and analyzing them. In opposition to my approach, Skúlason’s approach to experiences of wild nature can be termed as “top-down” insofar he argues in his paper “On the spiritual understanding of nature” that we need a spiritual understanding of nature to overcome the error that the present civilization has made by making the value of efficiency an ultimate value (Skúlason 2008). In a second step, he then describes how experiences of nature have a spiritual and metaphysical dimension. We are in his view becoming less able to have such experiences, but like James, Skúlason is inspired by Heidegger’s writings on the way the world is revealed to us through technology as a standing reserve. When we see the world only in terms of how it can be used, the value of efficiency becomes an ultimate value. When this occurs, we are in danger of losing the diversity of meanings nature can have for us and the diversity of relations that we can have with it. Our relations to nature become obscured in a way as they are narrowed down to only one type of relation, the relation we have with nature as a resource of material wealth.

For Skúlason, a spiritual understanding of nature is a precondition for developing more appropriate, i.e. less exploitative and less abusive relations to our fellow beings and to the natural environment as a whole. This spiritual understanding that he talks about is not found in “grandiose theory but rather in a humble way of reflecting upon our own experience and what others can tell us about their experience of the world.” (Skúlason 2008, 4). Thus he makes the experience of the caldera Askja the central focus of his reflections on a spiritual understanding of nature. In Skúlason’s description Askja evolves as a site of experience where we can escape the culture of efficiency that Skúlason claims is leading our present civilization astray:

One might say that the economic system of the world thrives on more and more efficiency in producing and distributing worldly goods among people. At the same time it is the same economic system which, according to many scientists, is by its efficient manner of using our earthly resources affecting the self-regulating system of Earth in ways that may lead to a disaster for all living beings, not only us humans that may be responsible for this (Skúlason 2008, 17).

The value of efficiency is leading us astray according to Skúlason because it ignores one of the basic facts of reality: wholeness. In other words, the meaning of wholeness is one of the meanings we are in danger of losing. Instead of seeing human actions in the context of the whole of the earth, the value of efficiency

promotes the notion that humans are separated from nature and that they should dominate it and make use of everything they encounter.

This idea of man's disposition towards nature as one of domination is closely related to the traditional notion of the subject as distant and sovereign, in control. This is the same notion of the subject that directs the traditional understanding of the concept of beauty. The notion of the distant subject promotes the idea that subject and object can be separated, and so can mind and body, nature and culture (Þorgeirsdóttir 2010, 15). So what Skúlason suggests is that the value of efficiency promotes distant and dominating relations to the world that are dangerous for us and the earth as a whole, and that we need a spiritual understanding to develop relations to the world that are more appropriate and can help us conserve the meaning and acknowledge the fact of wholeness. We need a different notion of the subject as being relational and a part of a whole, to be able to "see the unity and the diversity of all these connections and which of them are for the good and which of them are harmful not only for us, but also for all living beings and the earth itself as our home in the universe" (Skúlason 2008, 18).

But how can one simple experience, the experience of Askja, teach us how to develop appropriate relations to the world? Skúlason's approach is useful because he starts with a reflection on experience in general and the way in which it connects with reality – how can an individual experience become a source of knowledge about our place in the world? Skúlason refers to Hegel's understanding of all symbols or expressions of our experience as objects that owe their existence to our real encounters in the world as conscious beings: "we have to learn to approach and understand reality as the encounter of consciousness and the world" (Skúlason 2008, 10). The world is not simply full of objects and subjects that are separated, rather it is full of connections and relations between subjects and objects; it is the intertwining of subject and object through the flesh of the world that gives meaning to the world. In the encounter between consciousness and the world, in this case the experience of Askja, the physical reality of Askja, is the "sensory data and empirical material of the natural world" (Skúlason 2008, 7) by means of which we are filled with a certain emotion. So it is the intertwining of the objective and the subjective that creates the meaning of the experience and the knowledge and values that can be derived from it.

So now we shall turn to the question: What kind of knowledge and values can we derive from the aesthetic experiences of the sublime, wonder and beauty? The emotion that Askja filled Skúlason with, is characterized by a feeling of wholeness, of being a part of a larger whole, and he describes this emotion by referring to what Rudolf Otto calls the *numinous*. The numinous has two basic features: the first one is experiencing the world as totally beyond all comprehension: being struck dumb,

becoming pure awareness because you encounter the wholly other, you encounter otherness. “I discover myself separated from everything else, even from myself as a natural being” (Skúlason 2008, 13). The second feature, or second step of the experience is the discovery that “I am an earthling”, that my very existence consists of my relation to nature – that nature is the fundamental premise of one’s life (Skúlason 2008, 15).

This is an aspect of the decentering experience of beauty that I have described here, but I add an emphasis on the embodied aspect of this experience. The physical reality of Askja, “the sensory data and empirical material”, that fills one with a certain emotion is perceived through the body, with all its senses. The body is the flesh of the world; meaning is created in the intertwining of body and world through the flesh. The embodied aspect of the numinous is missing in Skúlason’s account and perhaps it is the relation between the numinous and the sublime that is really missing here. In the sublime, the embodied aspect of the experience of nature that the numinous refers to comes in through the ideas of the mathematical and the dynamical sublime. The size and power of nature are felt and experienced through the body’s senses and thus the embodied aspect of the experience of the sublime can be seen as the center of attention.

This embodied aspect can also be seen as a core aspect of the numinous. Otto divides the numinous into three components, *mysterium*, *tremendum* and *fascinans*. *Mysterium* involves the experience of the “wholly other” experienced with blank wonder. *Tremendum* provokes terror in the face of overwhelming power and might, and *fascinans* involves a kind of charm or attractiveness in spite of fear. This account has all the same components as the account of the sublime that has been discussed here. The sublime feeling often starts in wonder (*mysterium*), and then the imagination, power and size (*tremendum*) felt through the body cause an overwhelming feeling that leads to a certain type of decentering of the self (*fascinans*). There is a strong relation between the numinous and the sublime as Otto himself discusses:

As the element of dreadfulness is gradually overcome, the association and schematization with the sublime remains and maintains itself legitimately unto the highest forms of religious feeling: an indication that there is a hidden relationship and bond between the numinous and the sublime that is more than just a coincidental similarity (DH 82)(Gooch 2000, 123).¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁹ Gooch quotes Otto (1991, 82).

Perhaps the main difference between them is that while the numinous has been more closely related to religion, the sublime has been more related to ethics, as laid out in Kantian aesthetics of nature. But the core is the same: both concepts aim to describe a feeling that is created by an experience of an overwhelming power whether it is a natural or supernatural power.

What is important here is that the experience that Skúlason describes and refers to as the numinous shares the basic features of the experience of wonder, beauty, the sublime and the decentering of the self that I have described here in light of the results of the qualitative study. Þorgeirsdóttir describes these same features of experiences of nature as Skúlason in her account of the metaphysical experience of nature (Þorgeirsdóttir 2010). But her account provides the missing link of the body by making the embodiment of the experience more explicit. She argues that our embodied existence

provides an important link between nature and our capacity to reflect metaphysically about it. It is the body, as a sensory apparatus and as *embodied consciousness* that allows us to enter into conversation with ourselves as nature. It is also the body as the locus for the socio-historical context in which we are situated that makes us experience nature differently in different times and different places (Þorgeirsdóttir 2010, 15, my emphasis).

The term *embodied consciousness* is of key importance here as it provides a link to the understanding of the aesthetic that I have been arguing for.

The body as embodied consciousness has a central role in the aesthetic perception I have described. Aesthetic perception can be seen as an environmental, embodied, sensuous consciousness. It is not environmental consciousness as in being conscious about something in our thoughts or actions but rather the most basic part of our consciousness – our embodied consciousness – how we perceive things directly through our sensory organs and how the body situates us in the world and how this affects our experiences.

This has been referred to as the *environmental self* within phenomenological psychology, as the aspect of the self that is primary and lies at the basis of other forms of the self. This aspect of the self refers to how our primary perception holds information about the relations between the perceiver and the environment that is perceived (Zahavi 2012, Neisser 1988). Thus our embodied consciousness is primary to all our experiences, reflections, values. As Berleant points out, aesthetic perception – which is characterized by “rapt attentiveness” to our embodied sensuous consciousness – “may indeed stand as the touchstone of human values” (Berleant 2010, 30).

One of the core aspects of the idea of aesthetic perception and beauty I have been arguing for is the central role of embodied perception, or embodied consciousness. This is our most immediate perception - or consciousness, before we start to direct our perception in certain ways, in accordance with the ideas and goals that we have. This embodied point of view cannot be transcended, we cannot perceive anything without our body. It is the body as the flesh of the world, the site of perception, that gives us access to the world and makes things appear to us.

But what kind of knowledge of the world do we gain from this most immediate relation with the world? In Þorgeirsdóttir's account, metaphysical experiences of nature are embodied experiences that can help us gain knowledge of some important dimensions of our relation to nature and our place in it. The emphasis is not only on the *meta* but also the *physical* (Þorgeirsdóttir 2010, 20). We have an embodied consciousness, aesthetic perception, where all our attention is in the bodily senses – our most immediate bodily relation to the world, and when this embodied consciousness has an effect on our mental consciousness in the form of ideas or insights that we get from our aesthetic perception, we are having what Þorgeirsdóttir calls metaphysical experience. These insights or knowledge that we gain from metaphysical experiences of nature “cannot lay claim to scientific validation. It nevertheless yields important knowledge that has ethical relevance for our relation to the natural world and our place in it” (Þorgeirsdóttir 2010, 20). So the knowledge we gain from aesthetic perception is not knowledge of an object, like scientific knowledge that aims at finding the right category for each single object, rather it is knowledge of relations and connections between objects, subjects and their environment.

This type of knowledge is important when it comes to ethics, as the human relationship to the other, whether it is a human or non-human other, lies at the core of ethics. The above mentioned idea of an environmental self has changed the way we understand the human being as it expands the idea of the self to include its embeddedness and relation to the environment. This expanded idea of the self lies at the core of environmental ethical thought which emphasizes that the self in ethics cannot be understood independently from its relation to the environment. The environment has thus become a part of human ethics as the human being is understood as always dependent on her environment.

The experiences of glaciers and geothermal landscapes that have been discussed here are examples of the type of experiences that Skúlason and Þorgeirsdóttir reflect on; experiences that yield important knowledge about the human-nature relationship - knowledge that can be seen as having ethical relevance, as it brings our relation to and dependence on nature to the foreground. As the interviewees in the qualitative studies described, the bodily feeling of being small in comparison to the

overwhelming size of the glacier led them to feel a type of respect for the glacier. The experience made them see themselves in a larger context, and seeing oneself as inherently related and dependent on the whole that one is a part of is an important aspect of seeing oneself as having ethical obligations towards the others that are also a part of this wholeness.

It is interesting to note that Skúlason in his book on Askja emphasizes that the spiritual experience of nature is not limited to natural environments. He claims that experiences of a vibrant metropolitan city like Paris can also fill us with the same sense of awe, relationality and wholeness. The size of the city, the dynamics of the masses, has in my view much to do with the city as a kind of a body, and the embodied experience of such a city. My interviewees were similarly overwhelmed by the size and power of the glacier. The magnitude made the participants feel small, and it is this bodily feeling of smallness as well as the sense of how short-lived human life is on a geological scale that ignites the metaphysical imagination that allows one to see oneself in a larger context.

Skúlason also acknowledges the role of bodily perception in his account, even if he does not make it very explicit. When he describes the first step in the experience of the numinous he says that Askja/Nature imposes itself on us in such a way that “we lose touch with all ordinary reality; we are struck dumb and become pure awareness” (Skúlason 2008, 14). Becoming pure awareness is another way of saying that this experience is first and foremost embodied experience – it is when direct and immediate perception becomes the only focus.

This is when the aesthetic desire that was discussed in chapter one comes to the fore: the desire not to own, control, dominate, conceptualize and categorize from our own point of view of making use of everything we encounter, but the more positive desire to perceive only to perceive – it is a desire not to own the object of beauty, but to take part in beauty, continue it in some way through communication and sharing. Beauty attracts us, beauty is when our attention is captured by something so that we become pure awareness, it draws our consciousness towards it and creates a desire for repetition of the moment of beauty, and for preserving that beauty and sharing it with others.

The features of a metaphysical experience that open the possibility for the spiritual understanding and metaphysical experience of nature that Skúlason and Þorgeirsdóttir discuss is firstly sensing nature’s otherness: we experience it as beyond our comprehension – “Nature is and will remain other insofar it will never completely disclose itself” (Þorgeirsdóttir 2010:21) or as Skúlason puts it, we are struck dumb, become pure awareness and discover ourselves as separate from everything else – nature is the wholly other that is beyond us somehow. But at the same time the meaning of this experience becomes unveiled for us: feeling separate

from nature's unpredictable forces makes us at the same time realize that we are totally dependent upon these forces and always already intimately connected to them. We discover that our "very existence consists in connecting with nature" and that "the earth is the fundamental premise of one's life" (Skúlason 2008, 14). Thus we become aware of our own vulnerability – how small we are in the context of the whole of the earth, that we are temporal and finite beings that are a part of the never-ending cycle of life on earth.

But is this metaphysical experience of nature and the understanding that comes with it something that people actually experience? Or is it just philosophers who let their imagination run wild? As we have seen, the results of my research of the experience of glacial and geothermal landscapes correspond to these descriptions of the experience of nature. The two features that were most characteristic for the participant's responses was first to become pure awareness, to be struck by wonder – seeing things as if for the first time, all the focus going into sensuous perception – seeing the landscape as the wholly other, something beyond comprehension. The second feature was that the landscape made the participants feel small and this feeling made them feel a certain respect for nature and it made them see themselves in the context of the whole of the earth. So here we can see real examples of a common response to a powerful natural environment: like Þorgeirsdóttir and Skúlason, the participants in my research describe the experience as making them feel small and making them realize their own vulnerability in face of this big powerful force of nature, a force that they have no control over.

This experience is a reminder that human existence is small, temporal, and final in the face of a nature that is much bigger than us, has been there for a much longer time, and will be there long after we are gone. Yet, the human responsibility for this same environment is vast, possibly the greatest task human beings are faced with, insofar the destiny of our species is intertwined with the destiny of the environment and other living beings.

So we can see that the experiences described by the participants of my study can indeed be seen as examples of "metaphysical" experiences of nature that provide the possibility of a more "spiritual" understanding of our relationship with nature. But what is the importance of these experiences? According to Þorgeirsdóttir, the ethical implications of this type of experience are that when we sense the otherness and unpredictability of nature and subject ourselves to forces that are ungraspable, then we undermine the disposition of control and domination that has characterized Western attitudes towards nature. Like Skúlason says, we need these experiences of Askja (or its counterpart) because we need the spiritual understanding of nature to overcome the ideology of efficiency (characterized by control, domination and separation) that is putting the earth and ourselves in

danger. When we realize that we cannot know nature completely, that there are limits to our knowledge, then limits are also set to domination.

This shows that these experiences are very relevant to ethics. These experiences that are rooted in our most primitive form of environmental consciousness in the end influence our ethical consciousness towards nature. Skúlason speaks of a spiritual understanding of nature that springs from such experiences and for many people these kind of experiences can even lead to some form of religious understanding of nature, as the numinous did for Otto. But in my mind, our understanding of nature does not have to be framed as spiritual or religious for it to have ethical relevance. The knowledge and understanding of our relationship with nature that springs from sensing and experiencing oneself as a tiny part of a powerful whole can just as well be framed as a scientific or ecological understanding of nature as it can be framed as spiritual or religious. From the perspective of ecology, nature and humans are a part of one ecological whole. The core lesson that we can learn from our aesthetic and metaphysical experiences of nature is that we are a part of a natural environment that we have to be able to survive within.

Our embodied being does not only situate us in relation to nature, but it also situates us in relation to the society that we are a part of, the time and place and cultural conditions we are in. The global environmental challenges that we are facing right now thus influence the way we experience nature. Most of my foreign interviewees from the trips to the glaciers came from large cities in Europe, where there are no large expanses of uninhabited nature left. These people expressed a deep need to connect to nature in remote places that humans have not yet overcrowded with their presence, and they also expressed a certain type of responsibility to take care of these places - especially when the visibly rapid melting of the glaciers was perceived and discussed on the trips.

Thus the time and place that these people are situated in is affecting their experiences of being in nature. The fact that so many people live in crowded cities now has caused many to think about what they have lost. More and more discussion arises about the benefits of outdoor activities in nature for mental and physical health and more and more people seek to spend their free time enjoying nature. In this way, living in cities has made nature something special to go visit, like a museum, instead of it being a part of people's everyday reality like it used to be. Thus nature has also become a product to sell; in many places people have to pay admission to nature, just like when going to the museum, and in the Icelandic tourism business for example, nature is used as a marketing tool to promote and sell a product. Iceland is marketed and sold to tourists as a destination where one can experience uninhabited nature in exciting conditions. Super-Jeeps, specially equipped vehicles and modern safety equipment make it possible to travel safely to

places that were unreachable before. In this way technological and economic factors influence the way we can experience nature. Up to a point, trips to the highland and the glaciers are only accessible to those who can afford the vehicles or equipment needed, and so financial means affect who can enjoy such nature.

But educational factors also influence our possibility to enjoy nature. There has been a lot of discussion in Iceland (and other places) about how to bring sustainability studies into the school system. Teaching ecology and the influence that our consumption and waste production has on the ecological systems of which we are a part are probably the most common methods for teaching sustainability. However, educating people about the reasons why nature has to be conserved and we need to live sustainably is not enough. We also need to educate our senses. In today's consumer societies that are often so overcrowded with sensory stimuli from the environment and the media, there is a need to allow the senses to take a break from all this and be stimulated differently. This is why we need to put more focus on our aesthetic experiences in the society as a whole – not only our aesthetic experiences of nature but also of the built environments that we live in. The need to both protect the possibility of experiencing uninhabited nature and to make more “green” areas within the cities has been growing in recent years because people are realizing that something vital and important has been neglected and lost.¹¹⁰

This need for more focus on our sensuous relation to nature and on aesthetics came up before under similar circumstances – when aesthetics first became a popular subject in the 18th century. According to Pierre Hadot (2006), the interest in aesthetics in this time was connected to the development of people's attitudes towards nature. After the industrial and scientific revolutions had created a gap between man and nature, people felt the need to renew their relationship with nature. Both Humboldt and Baumgarten argued that in addition to rational truths there should also be room for aesthetic truths. According to Hadot, paying more attention to aesthetic perception meant acknowledging the emotional and aesthetic relationship that human beings have with nature and giving this relationship more importance (Hadot 2006, 213).

According to this explanation an aesthetic approach to nature is the precondition for a relationship to nature which is not based on our need to define and utilize natural resources. This need for renewing the human-nature relationship appeared again in the latter half of the 20th century with the increasing awareness of environmental problems and acknowledgment that something had gone wrong in

¹¹⁰ Of course there are also many urban dwellers who do not have the need to get out of the city, and even avoid doing so. However, there is certainly a very large number of people who do emphasize the need for unspoilt and green areas, and a growing number of studies that show the benefits of responding to this need (Kaplan & Kaplan 1989).

our relationship to nature. This idea did not resurface as the romantic idea that nature is a source for truth and creativity. At this point it rather seemed evident that there was a need to rethink the human-nature relationship, and this encouraged the development of environmental philosophy; environmental ethics, aesthetics and eco-phenomenology were developed with the aim of rethinking this relationship. These three disciplines come together in examining the aesthetic experience of nature and the influence it has on people's attitudes toward nature.

As I have discussed, the aesthetic experiences of wonder and beauty are closely related to the phenomenological method, in both cases the emphasis is on stepping back from pre-given ideas and knowledge and focusing on perception. The influence this experience can have on our attitude to nature is that instead of throwing our concepts and ideas over nature we become open towards letting nature influence us. It can thus be said that when we put our knowledge of nature and our needs for its resources in brackets, and focus on its perceptual and aesthetic qualities, we are actually using the method of phenomenology to examine how nature appears to us in our direct perception of it. This phenomenological, aesthetic experience brings our attention to our embodied being, it allows us to pay attention to the way we feel and sense ourselves as related to the other.

Focusing on perception and bracketing our knowledge and thoughts about how to define and utilize nature opens up a way to make our relationship with nature more ethical. Wonder, beauty, the sublime and an aesthetic approach help us to see nature as an independent reality that does not rely on man or his actions. Nature will survive humans no matter what, but man will not survive as a species unless nature is respected accordingly. When we respect the otherness and independence of nature, we acknowledge that nature is something that we can never know completely, and therefore it is not something we can control.

Aesthetic perception thus can help us rethink our relationship to nature; instead of seeing it only as a resource that we need to use and control, we learn to respect it as an independent reality that our mind can never capture completely and we can never learn how to control. When we experience ourselves as being small and powerless against this gigantic force that can destroy us in a second, we have to acknowledge our place within and up against nature. We see that nature has a power that we can never control; rather the opposite is true: this force controls us. This force is not only nature in the form of tsunamis, earthquakes and natural disasters. Something like nuclear power plants have become such a "force of nature" not only insofar nuclear waste is detrimental. Weather conditions or even just an airplane crash or terrorist attacks can turn nuclear reactors into a natural disaster of a gigantic scale.

So through experiences of nature, we realize the fact of relationality and this is the core of the ethical obligations they can evoke. As Þorgeirsdóttir says: “Metaphysical experience can be instrumental in making knowledge about our condition as natural beings “hit home” or become real to us, especially with regard to the ethical values that can be derived from them” (Þorgeirsdóttir 2010, 24). Knowledge can be read in books and taught in schools, but often this type of knowledge only “becomes real to us” when we experience it ourselves, “on our own skin”, through our own body, here and now. Standing on a melting glacier makes knowledge “hit home” in a very different way than reading news or whole books about global warming would do. Why do we not become aware of this in a similar way when flying with the airplane or driving with a gas guzzling SUV past the landscape? The distance that is created between the perceiver and the perceived in such experiences does not allow for the sensory immersion and bodily feeling of being there in the landscape. This embodied aspect is what triggers the metaphysical imagination in such a powerful way that it can transform our understanding of ourselves and our relations to nature. Of course, looking at a glacier through a car window can have a strong effect on people, but this effect will never be as powerful as when standing on the glacier.

However, other experiences of environments constructed by humans, like standing at a vast stinking dump site, can also be a very transformative experience that makes us aware of how all things are made from nature and yet thrown back at nature as garbage and pollutants that nature has a hard time re-integrating. My point here is that it is the experience of being there, in the landscape, whether it is a glacier or a huge dump site, which has the power to make knowledge about our relations to nature become real to us. Conserving the possibility of these experiences can thus be seen as an important part of conserving nature’s meanings because, as James points out, “bringing to light the nature that lies outside the ever-expanding domain of standing reserve” (James 2012, 37) is what needs to be done in order to conserve nature’s meanings.

But why ought we to conserve the possibility of finding various meanings in nature? Conserving nature’s meanings is vital to the conservation of nature itself as we need to be able to find meaning in nature different from the meaning of “standing reserve” to become ethically motivated to protect nature. However, since the 19th century it has become common to assume within philosophy that nature has no meaning, it just is. Schopenhauer for example discussed this in his philosophy of the living will that is the basic force of nature (Schopenhauer 1966). The meaning nature can have is created in the encounters we have with nature. When we encounter nature with the aim of utilizing it we find a different meaning in it than when we encounter it aesthetically and leave our frames of thoughts and

interests aside. We find a different meaning in our encounters with nature today than people did a 100 years ago. Every encounter is unique and the meaning we find in nature can change as quickly as the weather. The important thing here is that we need to be open to allowing nature to affect us and be open to finding many different meanings in nature. The best way to conserve the possibility of finding such meaning is through cultivating (for example through education) our sensibility for a variety of environments, be it glaciers or stinking dump sites.¹¹¹ If the knowledge about global environmental change is to “hit home” we need experiences as well as (and even more than) we need books full of scientific evidence.

As is now becoming increasingly clear, providing more and more scientific knowledge on global warming is not enough if we are to avert the current ecological crisis. This is acknowledged and emphasized in a report on the RESCUE (Responses to Environmental and Societal Challenges for our Unstable Earth) project that aimed to “help Europe address the societal and scientific challenges related to global environmental change” (European Science Foundation 2012). The challenges we are facing require that we reframe our way of thinking of them:

Humankind is facing unprecedented and accelerating global environmental change. So strong is the human influence on the Earth system that many scientists consider that the planet has entered a new geological age called the “Anthropocene” (the recent age of humans). Our understanding of the environmental aspects of global change has expanded markedly in recent years, but the societal and human aspects of the change have still to be fully explored. There is a need to re-frame global environmental change issues fundamentally as social and human challenges, rather than just environmental issues (Jäger 2011, 5).

Even though we have increased our understanding of the natural world and acknowledged scientifically our enormous influence on it, this understanding has not helped us change our behavior towards nature. For this to happen we need to understand the roles of culture, values and behavior – we need to transform our societies, and this “will require people to question deeply-held values and assumptions” (Jäger 2011, 6). And as a range of educational research fields have found, the way towards this type of questioning lies among other things through our experiences: “experiential processes encourage individuals to let go of past assumptions and question underlying beliefs” (Jäger 2011, 6). So the conservation of nature’s meaning by conserving the possibility of having the types of experiences I

¹¹¹ Slavoj Žižek (2009) talks about dump sites as a place to begin to reflect about our relations to the natural environment in Astra Taylor’s 2008 documentary *Examined Life*.

have discussed is crucial, for these experiences are the sources of the knowledge and understanding that we so desperately need to gain if we are to move towards more sustainability.

Enabling the possibility of finding various meanings in our encounters with nature also means conserving the possibility of sustaining meaningful relationships which are an important part of human well-being. According to Alan Holland's thoughts on the relation between a worthwhile life and meaningful relations: "... the living of worthwhile lives depends, among other things, on our ability to sustain meaningful relationships. It seems to me that the (logical) relation between the two terms is that of mutual implication – worthwhile lives entail meaningful relationships, and meaningful relationships entail worthwhile lives" (Holland 2004, 8). The concept of meaningful relations should be central to our thinking about environmental decision-making instead of the concepts of intrinsic or instrumental value. Both these types of framing environmental values are a part of the object-centered approach where the source of value is seen as being "in the object". Thus conservation based on this approach to environmental values only focuses on protecting objects that have intrinsically or instrumentally valuable qualities, but leaves the relationship between these objects, their environment, and the perceiving subject out of the picture.

Instead of isolating and separating objects from their environmental and historical context, conservation should rather focus on the relations that exist between objects and subjects, between past and future. In other words, conservation should be about "preserving the future *as a realization of the potential of the past* [...]. conservation is about *negotiating the transition from past to future in such a way as to secure the transfer of maximum significance*" (Holland & Rawles 1994, 45-46). Each place has a narrative that tells the history of events that have happened there and it is possible to imagine different future trajectories of a place narrative. For Holland, ethical environmental decision-making should be about choosing the most appropriate continuation of this narrative, and the most appropriate continuation is the one that retains the most significance. This is where the concept of a meaningful relation comes in because the significance of the place narrative depends on the meaningful relations that the narrative describes.

Meaningful relations can be understood in a very broad manner. According to Holland, "our intuitive paradigms for the notion of a meaningful relation are likely to be cultural – involving friendships, community and so forth" but he suggests that "[w]e need to extend [the concept of meaningful relation] to include both ecological and evolutionary relationships – in a word, we need to understand it as a truly "biocentric" concept" (Holland 2012, 10-11). To defend this move he reminds us that nature is a deeply historical concept and that

[n]atural, in the sense of biospherical, relationships, it can be argued, are a paradigm of meaningful relationships both on account of the (past) history invested in them and on account of the (future) history that they foreshadow. They encompass, for example, all those biotic relations that make evolution, speciation and biodiversity possible – the predator-prey relation, parasitism, symbiosis, mutualism, mimicry and a host more. It is for this reason that destruction of the natural world carries with it so much more than the destruction of our means of subsistence. Among the collateral damage is the destruction of meaning (Holland 2012, 11).

In this way, meaningful relations have three dimensions, the cultural, ecological and evolutionary dimensions, and *all* of these dimensions need to be taken into account when it comes to environmental decision-making. Approaching environmental decision-making in this way makes room for more frames of valuing than the object oriented approach allows for. If we think of environmental values, and values in general, in terms of meaningful relations rather than valuable objects we make room for acknowledging the “subjective” aspects that are at the core of our experiences from which meaningful relations spring.

If we want to conserve the possibility of having experiences of nature that allow for meaningful relations, these type of experiences need to be examined and taken into account in environmental decision-making. Holland’s approach to decision-making takes the idea of thinking differently about environmental values seriously. Instead of seeing the “value-space constituted by humans and their environments [...] as a collection of intrinsically valuable items” (Holland 2012, 3) he sees it as a space that is constituted of meaningful relations that have evolutionary, ecological and cultural dimensions (and sometimes all three). Instead of focusing on preserving values that have been isolated in certain valuable qualities (such as rarity) he suggests that we focus on the continuation of meaning.

This type of approach is much better equipped to acknowledge and incorporate the aesthetic value of landscape in decision-making since this type of value is exactly the type that cannot be isolated in some valuable qualities that can be pinned down once and for all. The aesthetic value of landscape emerges from the intertwining of the object’s physical qualities and the subject’s perception, it emerges from the meaningful relation that exists between humans and environments. In order to account for this type of value it is thus this relation that needs to be identified and examined. Our aesthetic perception of natural landscapes is not just one of many meaningful relations that we can have with nature, rather it is a fundamental relation that enables us to open our minds up to the many meaningful relations that exists both in nature and between humans and nature. An important part of living a worthwhile life is having meaningful relations and thus the possibility of having

experiences that reveal these relations to us is a fundamental contributor to human well-being.

Human beings are relational, natural beings and in order to understand ourselves as such we need to understand and embrace the diverse relations we have with the natural world. Conserving nature's meanings can thus be seen as a way to conserve the meaning of human life as it helps us understand what it really means being a human that is always already in relation to nature and the environment more generally. Having the possibility of forming meaningful relations is in the end about having the possibility of having experiences of nature that are characterized by an openness to receiving meaning rather than an urge to categorize what we perceive according to predetermined ideas and interests. It is when we pay attention to our direct perception of the other, whether it is a person or environment, that we open ourselves up to the various meanings that the other offers to us and this is where relations become meaningful.

What allows us to form meaningful relations is this freedom that aesthetic experience brings as it opens up the possibility of finding various meanings in nature and our relations with it rather than focusing only on the meaning nature has for us as a resource we can buy, sell and control. If the view that nature is first and foremost a provider of "services" continues to flourish in our approaches to the natural environment up to the point that nothing is left of relatively "unspoiled" large areas, we are not only restricting our own possibilities of forming meaningful relations and having worthwhile lives; we are also restricting the possibilities of future generations enormously. We are not only restricting both their possibilities of survival and of having the choice to decide how best to survive. We are also restricting their possibilities to form meaningful relations and have worthwhile lives, where the narrative of the past can be experienced and continued in a way that allows for the "transfer of maximum significance" from past relations to future.

But if the aesthetic value of landscape is understood in terms of meaningful relations, what kind of methods can be used in decision-making to identify and incorporate these relations? This is an urgent matter. Everywhere in the world people are protesting and fighting against large scale industrial invasions into their local landscapes. The only way to create peace about how our societies decide to make changes to landscapes is to allow these people to describe their relations to the landscape and take part in deciding what is the best trajectory for the continuing of its narrative from past to future. Finding practical solutions to how this can be done is urgent if we want stories like the Kárahnjúkar "battle" to remain in the past. People have learned how important their environment is to their well-being and are not willing anymore to accept payment and jobs in exchange for landscape quality. And they are not willing anymore to allow authorities to make decisions about

landscape development without consulting them first. So if authorities and developers want to reach some form of agreement in the society about future projects, they need to expand their knowledge and find ways to take people's relation with landscape into account in environmental decision-making. Exploring possible options and solutions in these matters will thus be the aim of the next chapter.

4. Aesthetic Value in Environmental Assessment and Policy

The original goal of this project was twofold, to gain an understanding of what landscape is and what its aesthetic meaning and value are, and to find ways to incorporate that meaning and value in environmental decision-making. Now that I have provided a phenomenological, relational understanding of landscape, beauty and the aesthetic and examined the meaning and value of aesthetic experiences of landscape types that characterize Iceland, it is time to turn to the second goal. There are many reasons why I choose to engage with this goal, but the main reason should be the most obvious: as I mentioned in chapter one, our understanding of the meaning and value of landscape directly affects the methods and approaches that we use to deal with it in decision-making. So in my mind, after having established a certain understanding of the aesthetic meaning and value of landscape, examining how this understanding can affect the ways in which we approach decision-making is a necessary next step in the process of knowledge-production I am engaging in.¹¹²

The reason why I started examining and trying to understand the concepts of beauty, landscape and the aesthetic was that I saw a need to address a certain problem I was noticing in the society I live in. The problem seemed to be rooted in these concepts and that is why they became the focus of attention. This problem has to do with *how* concepts are used and *which* concepts are used as a basis for our valuing of the world, and it has to do with how we are used to framing this process of valuing. As I discussed in the last chapter, it is not necessary to frame our valuing of the natural world in terms of intrinsic or instrumental values as has commonly been done in environmental ethics; it can also be framed in terms of meaningful relations.¹¹³ So if my goal has been to bring to light other forms of understanding

¹¹² In my opinion, the second goal of this project is a necessary continuation of the first goal. What is needed in philosophy and other academic fields is more work on how the theories that we create can be used and applied to practical issues. In other words: we need to close the gap that exists between academia and policy-making. This is especially relevant when we are dealing with environmental issues which tend to be very complex and multi-faceted and thus need to be dealt with in collaboration between policy-makers and scientists. And this has indeed often been the case with natural scientists and policy-makers who have collaborated to understand and deal with environmental issues such as global climate change. But this kind of collaboration has not been as common in the case of the humanities, even though a lot of work has been done within the environmental humanities in recent decades, this work has only to a small degree managed to cross the barriers that exist between policy-makers and academia.

¹¹³ Gabriel Malenfant suggests a third category of environmental values (in addition to instrumental and intrinsic values) that he calls inherent or experience value. This type of value is then further divided into heritage value and transformative value. Transformative value refers to how experiencing nature can “contribute to forming a kind of rational worldview hardly attainable otherwise” (Malenfant 2011,

the concepts of beauty, landscape and the aesthetic, and other forms of framing how we find value in the world, then it must be a necessary continuation to find out how these other forms of understanding and framing the issues at hand can contribute to solving the problem I started out with: the neglect of the aesthetic value of landscape in environmental decision-making in Iceland. So the juncture I was at when I decided to do the research for this chapter involves the question: How is it possible to incorporate the understanding of the aesthetic value and meaning of landscape I have put forward into the relevant decision-making processes?

At this juncture I decided to continue to approach matters phenomenologically and thus turn to the things themselves; I decided to start the search for answers in people's experiences, by conducting a focus-group study where I asked a group of people who could be called "landscape professionals" to reflect with me on the question of how to approach the values involved in aesthetic experiences of landscape in practice. The focus group method, which has been used mainly within the social sciences, is a method that allows the researcher to put a focus on a particular topic and on the perspectives of a particular group of people. The participants in such group interviews usually share a common experience or other aspects such as employment, education or age.

In this focus group study the participants shared the common experience of dealing with the landscape concept in their work. I contacted people in academia that I knew had been studying or dealing with the landscape concept in one way or another, and then I contacted the government institutions that have to do with nature conservation and evaluation and asked them to send a representative who had worked on issues related to landscape or environmental impact assessment. I received good responses and the group ended up consisting of nine people, six from academia and three from government institutions: The Icelandic National Planning Agency (Skipulagsstofnun), The Icelandic Institute of Natural History (Náttúrufræðistofnun) and The Environment Agency of Iceland (Umhverfisstofnun). There were two male participants and seven female.

This type of qualitative research method does not have the aim of obtaining one common conclusion from the group but rather to bring forth different opinions and experiences to shed light on the topic. The role of the interviewer is to open and facilitate the discussion and to make sure that everyone gets an equal chance to share their perspectives. The interviewer has to listen closely to the participants, interpret their reflections and ask questions that allow the discussion to flow in a

79). In the context of this type of value system, meaningful relations would fall into the category of transformative value.

fruitful way. The data that results from a focus group is created through the group dynamics and the communication that takes place in the interview. Thus the dynamics of the group are very important, the group has to be able to work together and listen to each other's views. In this way they can reflect on their own experiences in light of the others and new perspectives can be developed when different ideas come together. The aim of focus group studies vary, but often they are used to delve deeper into some themes that emerge from the results of other qualitative methods or to develop ideas for further research.

When the aim is to find practical methods for dealing with landscape and beauty in Iceland, I find that the most important thing should be to talk to the people who have knowledge of Icelandic landscapes and the meanings associated with them in local environmental issues. This is important since this project is meant to speak directly into a specific policy issue. The professionals who know how this policy issue has been dealt with in the Icelandic context up till now and have ideas and opinions about how they should be dealt with in the future are important sources of knowledge that I find vital to tap when starting to think about how to approach the issue of landscape and aesthetic value in practice. So, in order to be practical and hopefully even able to influence environmental decision-making in Iceland (perhaps I am being too ambitious, but what is the use of doing research like this if it is not meant to have an impact?), the best starting point is to seek knowledge from the different professionals that know the story of the issue I am dealing with in the Icelandic context.

The people I talked to were from different institutions and academic fields; (biologists, geographers, environmental scientists, anthropologists, landscape architects and artists), and they have worked with landscape in very different contexts. This method offers a possibility to generate interdisciplinary discussions on environmental issues; to get different ideas and perspectives on landscape together and to get different fields within academia to engage with each other as well as getting academia and the government institutions to share their knowledge. Such an interdisciplinary conversation is necessary when dealing with environmental issues - these are issues that are the subject of a large number of fields and disciplines that approach them from different perspectives. Conversations and intertwining of different perspectives must be necessary to create a more encompassing account of any environmental issue.

4.1. The Focus-Group

When the participants entered the meeting room I had booked at the University of Iceland in the spring of 2012, I offered them coffee and tried to make them feel

relaxed and welcome. My supervisor and a member of my PhD committee were there in the role of assistants; writing up a report from the meeting and making sure the recording device was working properly. It was quite easy to create a relaxed atmosphere since most of the participants knew each other beforehand and some of them knew me or my assistants as well (in a small place like Iceland, this is hard to avoid).

After everyone had arrived I explained to them briefly what the main topic of the meeting was and the general rules that we would follow (one person speaking at a time and raising hands to get to speak next). I had previously sent them an email where I explained that the main topic would be discussing ways to deal with the aesthetic, experiential and emotional value of landscape in decision-making. I began the discussion by asking them to introduce themselves and their background and then by asking them all to tell me how they understand the concepts of landscape and aesthetic value. After they all had responded to these initial questions the discussion flowed very naturally and it was easy to facilitate the discussion since the participants were eager to share their opinions and reflections on the topic. The participants listened to each other, asked each other questions and reflected together on the various issues that came up, and when it was needed I facilitated by giving everyone an opportunity to speak and by asking questions that allowed for expanding and continuing the discussion.

When I was preparing for the focus group I tried to minimize my expectations, but I have to admit that there was one thing I was expecting: a discussion of all the different methods that have been used in other countries to analyze landscape; I assumed that the participants would have some strong opinions about what would be the best method to deal with landscape and the aesthetic, experiential and emotional side of the concept. Would some of them argue that analyzing the objective physical features of landscape was enough while others would argue for more phenomenological approaches that involve studying the “subjective” experience of landscape? Or would they recommend a mixture of both of these approaches? Would they recommend basing the evaluation on photo-questionnaires or on in-depth interviews with people who dwell in the landscape or with other stakeholders?

But I soon realized that the discussion in the focus group was not leading to any of these questions, and the reason seemed to be that for these professionals who have an insight into how decision-making processes work in Iceland, these kind of questions are not what matter the most at this point. In a way, the participants took me one step back, because they suggested that before we can start finding concrete ways to identify and evaluate landscapes and the aesthetic values associated with them, society must understand and acknowledge the importance and meaning

of these values through an open conversation. So even though the focus group did not discuss concrete methods for evaluation, they did discuss methods for opening up such a conversation and they did discuss the problems that are standing in the way.

The main result of the focus group is that the type of method that we use for evaluating landscapes is not the most important issue at this point in time. Firstly, it is an important precondition to generate public discussions about landscape value and create a space for people to express themselves about the aesthetic experiences that this value is derived from, before getting to the point of conducting any large scale evaluation. Secondly, when it comes to evaluating landscapes and elaborating methods to do that, it is imperative not to narrow it down to only one method because landscape is conceptually and experientially multi-layered.

The following two themes predominated the discussion of the members in the focus group. Firstly, the problems with “the subjective” side of landscape, the reasons for why it has not been included yet in decision-making, and secondly, what measures need to be taken. Even if these landscape specialists did not suggest any specific methods, they did make recommendations about what such a method has to be able to include and capture. But before giving a more detailed account of these two major themes, it is important to understand how the participants in the group understand landscape and aesthetic value. I thus opened the discussion in the group by asking them how they understand these concepts.

4.1.1. What is Landscape?

Even though some participants hesitated to use the concept of beauty it seemed to me that when they were discussing landscape they were describing an experience of a certain type of relation to the land, and that type of experience is what I have been referring to as an aesthetic experience of beauty. When the value of this type of experience is mentioned (in the context of discussing further research that is needed) in the comments of Working group I in the report of the Master Plan for Hydro and Geothermal Energy Resources in Iceland (2nd phase), it is called the “aesthetic, experiential and emotional” value of landscape (*fagurfræðilegt, upplifunar- og tilfinningalegt gildi*) (Björnsson 2011, 73). These three aspects yield a clear and concise term. Even if I think that the category of the “aesthetic” is sufficient because it includes for me experiential and emotional aspects, this threefold term is more transparent insofar it explicitly denotes something broader than just the physical appearance of landscape, something that has to do with experience and emotion. Using only the Icelandic word for aesthetic; “fagurfræðilegt” – which literally means beautiful – might cause the misunderstanding that what is being discussed is a distant visual view and subjective judgment of the landscape since that is how

beauty is often understood in line with the common understanding of the word. Almost all of the participants hesitated to use the word beauty or aesthetic when talking about the “subjective” side of the landscape concept. The only participants that seemed to use the word beauty freely were Kristín, the only participant who had a background in the arts, and Sunna, who has focused somewhat on beauty in her work on landscape. The others either implicitly or explicitly expressed their hesitation to talk about landscape experiences in terms of beauty.

All of the participants agreed that the “subjective”, experiential side of landscape had to do with an emotional experience. They described it as an emotion that suddenly is evoked and cannot be controlled, something that has a strong effect, makes them fascinated and gives them an emotional certainty that something is beautiful. While the two above mentioned participants connected these emotions to beauty or the aesthetic, the others either did not use those concepts or they directly expressed their hesitation to do so:

[Sigrún:] ...but I'm not sure if that in itself is called aesthetic experiences or value or just positive emotions...I don't dare to go on to that [slippery/thin] ice...

[Guðrún:] I want to answer this from the perspective of landscape experience... aesthetic experiences of landscape, I would not necessarily...I would rather want just [to talk about] experience of landscape, not necessarily to limit it to the aesthetic...

However, when these same participants described what they did not want to refer to as an aesthetic experience of beauty, they in fact were describing the type of experience I have been discussing here. Guðrún, who did not want to limit the landscape experience to the aesthetic continued:

...it is a mental condition... sort of... it is sort of... all-surrounding... somehow... I have experienced it myself... but I have also seen... people... go into that condition...where they like... stop... and you can see how they are experiencing something that has a very strong effect on them... and they don't analyze it... just take it in somehow... and it is something that you know that these people are going to remember... they can perhaps sometime to some point reawake this emotion... so I... this is certainly... this is... veery... something that has a very strong effect... on one... [silence – laughter]

The idea of not wanting to “limit it to the aesthetic” suggests that Guðrún has in mind the narrow ideas of beauty and the aesthetic I have been trying to give a more differentiated and richer account of. Jón also pointed to this when he said that “*when we talk about landscape and aesthetic experience in the same words...then we fall into thinking that it is all about the visual experience...but I think it is of course much, much more than that*”. So

they both seem to think of the term aesthetic as a certain limitation because of the connotation that it has as being something visual and distant.

Such a connotation is a limitation because they see experiencing landscape as something much richer. Jón continued: “for me it is almost like an event, aesthetic experience is something that has almost a beginning and an end, you see...and something that has an effect on you...in various ways”. While their descriptions of the experience of landscape do not fit with the narrow interpretation of beauty, they do fit very well with the broader relational understanding of beauty I have been discussing. They describe it as an event or a condition that people go into where their attention is captured, and for a moment everything stops as they are affected by the landscape – they “don’t analyze it...just take it in somehow”. As we have seen these are the main characteristics of beauty. In this context beauty is an experience, or an event if you like, in which one’s attention is captured and the result is that one becomes capable of focusing on the thing itself without analyzing it.

The group’s response to Guðrún’s description of landscape experience quoted above was interesting. Everyone was silent for a moment and then they started laughing and giggling awkwardly as if the topic was making them feel uncomfortable in some way, like it was touching on something too personal. This can also be seen in Guðrún’s choice to talk about the experience of other people instead of her own experience, perhaps because that was too personal. This suggests that the experience of beauty described here is something that people are not used to putting into words and acknowledging as an important part of their lives. This is an experience that people seem to be quite shy about expressing, and this can perhaps be explained by the widespread displacement of beauty as something feminine, subjective, personal, emotional, unimportant and relative.

This discourse has influenced the environmental debate in Iceland considerably. In the Kárahnjúkar debate, for example, the aesthetic arguments of environmentalists were judged by their opponents as mere romantic, sentimental and artistic emotions. This kind of discourse has marginalised the aesthetic argument for the protection of nature so that today people might be afraid to emphasize the value of their aesthetic experiences since that might weaken their position – they know that this argument would cause many to judge them as unrealistic hippie-type artists and romantics. In a way, the aesthetic argument has been reduced to an economic argument about the value of the tourism industry, since today it is more likely to hear people argue for the monetary value of beautiful nature for tourism than it is to hear them argue for the value of beauty as a

meaningful relation that is an important part of their quality of life.¹¹⁴ As we will see, this relates to one of the main problems that the participants identified in the discussion. The participants seemed to see the alleged subjectivity of the aesthetic experience of landscape as a serious problem when it comes to including aesthetic values in decision-making, and perhaps this is also one reason why the participants hesitated to refer to landscape in terms of beauty and the aesthetic. To do so would in their minds amount to saying that the value of landscape is indeed subjective and un-measurable.

The participants all seemed to share the view that to understand landscape one needs to acknowledge that both the objective, physical features of the land, and the subjective experience of the person who is dwelling in the landscape, play important roles in creating its meaning and value. As mentioned above, they all referred to the experience of landscape in terms of an emotional effect, but at the same time they talked about how there is *“always something objective that starts these thoughts or positive emotions”*. They also agreed that this *“something objective”* is not necessarily only visual, it can be a smell, touch, sound – all the senses are included in an engagement with *“what surrounds you”*. The bottom line in their thoughts was that the experience of landscape *“depends on the visual and other senses and what surrounds you...but the human being must always be an important factor herself”* for it *“depends on where you are and how you feel with the landscape”*.

The participants articulate here the same idea I have been suggesting on the basis of Ritter’s definition of landscape as an environment perceived aesthetically (Ritter, 1989). Further more, they point out that we pay aesthetic attention to the environment by engaging our senses and opening up to be affected by it. Landscape is hence the term we use to describe our surrounding environment when we focus in this specific sense on the aesthetic perception of this environment. We do not call it landscape when we are grazing our horses for then we call it pasture, or when we build a dam because then we call it construction site. But when we leave such interests aside, and focus on how our perception and being is affected by our simply “taking in” what surrounds us, this is when we refer to our surroundings as landscape.

Thus landscape is a conceptual tool that is able to express our most immediate perception of the spatial and surrounding world, which can put a name to the intertwining of humans and the land that we experience when we focus on our aesthetic perception of the land. Even though some of the participants hesitated to

¹¹⁴ The importance of experiencing natural beauty for mental and physical health and thus quality of life has been shown by studies in psychology and sociology. See for example: Hartig, Mang, & Evans, (1991); Kaplan & Kaplan (1989); Kaplan & Talbot (1983).

use the concepts of beauty and the aesthetic, they were all referring to this relation between subject and object that I think is best explained through the relational interpretations of beauty and the aesthetic. But their hesitation is very understandable when we consider that these concepts have been portrayed in the Icelandic environmental debate as referring to mere subjective emotions that cannot be taken seriously. However, simply dropping these concepts is not helpful – rather we have to embrace their full meaning and broaden the discourse that has been limited to the narrow understanding of beauty and the aesthetic that is based on the subject-object divide. As we can see from this, the participants all acknowledge that the intertwining of subject and object is what created the meaning and value of landscape, but they know that for this to be acknowledged in the decision-making process, some conceptual problems and categorical divisions need to be overcome.

In order to examine this further I will now turn to the two main themes mentioned above, starting with a discussion of the problems identified by the participants.

4.1.2. The Problems

The biggest problems that the participants identified have to do with two different although related issues. On the one hand it is the issue that aesthetic value of landscape cannot be measured in the same clear manner as other values, such as biodiversity, and that it cannot be captured once and for all in one place or point in time since people value differently in different times and different cultures. This is the issue of the “subjectivity” of aesthetic value. On the other hand it is the issue that the systems that the society uses to base its environmental decision-making on are not able to capture and include these types of values. Obviously these problems are related; it is because of the alleged subjectivity of aesthetic values that they do not fit into the systems that we have which are not designed to deal with (or admit to be dealing with) “subjective” values.

As I mentioned in chapter one, even though the value of landscape and natural beauty is arguably one of the most important values that Icelandic natural environments contain, landscape has not played an important role in nature conservation in Iceland. Many unique landscapes of outstanding beauty do not have much biological or even geological importance according to international standards and conventions, so if the traditional standards for conservation, like biodiversity, are only used, there does not seem to be much worth conserving in Iceland.¹¹⁵ However, beauty and landscape did play a role in conservation in the middle of the

¹¹⁵ Some of such standards to be found in various conventions do indirectly refer to beauty in so far it is assumed that biodiversity, ecological soundness, rarity or exceptionality of a certain type of landscape is beautiful, but such assumptions remain hidden in the background.

20th century; in the old Natural Monuments Registry (*Náttúruminjasrá*) many places were protected because of special landscapes or beauty. This was before Icelandic authorities started signing international agreements on nature conservation, but with these agreements came the international measuring standards for biodiversity, endangered species and so on, along with the social demand that decisions about conservation would be grounded on objectively measured scientific data. Today no one working within the institutional decision-making process would even consider suggesting that a place should be protected simply because it is beautiful; since beauty cannot be measured by the same objective methods and standards as biodiversity, no one would take such a suggestion seriously (Waage & Benediktsson 2010, 10-11).

This is the problem that Husserl dealt with, when he criticized the European or Western scientific frame of mind for changing the world of perceived nature into a mathematical world, where everything that cannot be submitted under a scientific, objective calculation and is therefore “merely” subjective, must be eliminated and declared as worthless, inexact and insufficient. And this is the problem that I have been trying to deal with here through examining the concepts of landscape and beauty in the context of environmental decision-making in Iceland. The case of environmental decision-making in Iceland is a clear case of the Western scientific frame of mind creating problems by not being able to deal with and thus ignoring the qualitative dimensions of reality. These issues I have outlined above were all discussed in the focus group and these problems have been coming more and more to the surface after work on the Master Plan for Hydro and Geothermal Energy Resources and discussion on the possibility of Iceland signing the *European Landscape Convention (ELC)* was started. Considering this context, it is not surprising that the participants in the focus group study were very concerned about the alleged subjectivity of the aesthetic values of landscape and the problems with measuring this type of value within the current system.

One participant said that because people experience landscape differently one needs to have a broad group of people to be able to capture the value of the landscape, and that this was something that could clearly not be submitted to calculation by a computer. And this was emphasized a few times during the discussion: that we are dealing with something that cannot be measured like pollution or biodiversity, and that because of the nature of the values we are dealing with, it is dangerous to try to fit them into some value calculators because this would lead to reductionism.

The reason why it would be so difficult and dangerous to try to fit the aesthetic, experiential and emotional value of landscape into the calculative process of environmental decision-making is that evaluations of beauty change with time,

places and people. The participants recounted many stories that all had the same message: Different persons, different generations, different nations can have very different views of Icelandic landscape and its beauty. One story was of the participant and her great aunt finding meaning in the landscape of the family farm in totally different ways because of their different experiences of it; another of a grandma from Napoli who got terrified when sitting on a bus driving the highland road *Kjölur*; another of an Icelandic woman who could not stand the silence and calmness in *Djósárver* in the highlands; another of British volunteer workers who had to be sent back home after having freaked out in all the open space in *Skaftafell*; another of the young people living in 101 (downtown) *Reykjavík* who have lost their connection with the countryside and do not appreciate it as much as the generation before them. All these stories have the same message: even if many people enjoy experiencing Icelandic nature, there are always exceptions and differences, and this makes it very difficult to pin down what can be the value of experiencing Icelandic landscapes.

So this was identified as one of the main problems with the aesthetic, experiential, emotional value of landscape. The other main problem has to do with the systems that are not able to capture this value. One participant expressed this problem thus:

we are always telling stories of landscape...we tell stories of our experiences of landscape...I think the problem is that these systems that we have established around controlling this and that...including environmental impact assessment and all that...they are just not designed to deal with such things...they don't take stories into account...and I think this is a big issue...to...have respect for the stories and something that cannot be put in a box...

This points to the fact that when we are discussing the aesthetic, experiential, emotional value of landscape we refer to experiences; experiences that we tell stories of. If we want to capture this value we need to examine the experiences, the stories of individuals and societies. This is where the human and the landscape meet – the moment where the meaning and value of landscape is created. The problem is that the systems that we have are not designed to examine experiences, like one of the participants (from a government institution) pointed out, the professionals dealing with environmental impact assessments always have to cling to some objective standards:

There is a question how well the system... the system that we have today can handle this... I mean... today we have environmental impact assessment where... yes, people are trying to identify some kind of landscape areas... that is perhaps rather easy to do... yes here is this landscape area and so on... but with a very weak force

sometimes trying to say that this area has much or little value... then often just from the perspective of some objective standards: there are a lot of areas that are on... ee... are protected under the 37. article of the nature conservation law¹¹⁶... just having something that they can rely on directly... in a few cases you will talk to someone... but... but.... so... this methodology is is... like in its elementary stages really... but the advisors that work on environmental impact assessment sometimes ask: how is this best done and what should we do?"

It becomes evident here, that this problem is acknowledged but that the authorities of landscape planning are not yet ready to deal with the experience of landscape because the assessment criteria have to adhere to set objective standards. But how can this problem be addressed and dealt with? The suggestions that the participants made can be divided into five themes that I will discuss next.

4.1.3. Approaching the Problems

The theme of landscape narratives is the first theme I have already mentioned with reference to different stories of landscape. The importance of listening to and examining stories of the people who relate to the land when dealing with landscapes was both mentioned directly by some participants, but it also just came out in the fact that a lot of the discussion of landscape and its value in the group was characterized by storytelling. All the participants had stories of landscape experiences and relations, their own or other people's, that they used in the discussion to explain their viewpoints. So this seems to be the way we are used to talk about landscape – in terms of stories of experiences. But how can we listen to the stories and take them into account? And whose stories should we listen to? The participants all seemed to agree that the stories of people's relations and experiences of the landscape needed to be taken into account, but none of them wanted to suggest a specific method to do it. And this brings me to the next theme.

As I mentioned in the beginning, the participants took me one step back in indirectly suggesting that the most important thing is not finding the one and only right method to deal with the aesthetic, experiential and emotional value of landscapes in Iceland. They rather thought that this value would never be taken into

¹¹⁶ This article is under the chapter on Landscape protection in the Law on Nature Conservation from 1999 and is called "Special protection". According to the law text certain landscape types should fall under special protection and they should be left as undisturbed as possible. These landscape types are: a) craters, pseudo craters and lava fields; b) lakes and ponds, 1,000 m² or more; c) marshes and fens, 3 hectares or more; d) waterfalls, geysers and other hot springs, as well as sinters (sinter also has the name Geyserite and is a form of opaline silica) and travertines (travertine is a form of limestone deposited by mineral springs, especially hot springs) 100 m² in size and e) salt marshes and mudflats (Lög um náttúruvernd [Law on Nature Conservation] nr.37/1999).

the decision-making process (and thus requiring a method) unless there would be more awareness and discussion about landscape and its value in the society at large. So what needs to be done is to generate discussions in the society to make people more aware of the importance of landscape and its role in our quality of life. Like one participant said jokingly: “*everyone should be forced on a six day bike! - to raise people’s awareness*”. Some participants also suggested that appreciating landscape is something that we learn to do, and that just like the school curriculums state that children should learn how to “read” art, they should also state that they should learn how to “read” the land. If this would be emphasized more in the schools and upbringing then people would generally become more sensitive to their surroundings and learn how to appreciate the positive influence that a beautiful landscape has on us (and the negative influence of negative aesthetic qualities in a landscape).¹¹⁷

The third theme is related to this theme of awareness-raising; the theme of the *European Landscape Convention* which came up in the discussion a few times. Some of the participants emphasized that the convention was exactly the tool we need to be able to raise people’s awareness about landscape:

You [another participant] talked about the European Landscape Convention... I think that people think it is just a part of putting these things into a system... but that is wrong... it is really first and foremost meant to raise our awareness about our environment and landscape, there are no requirements that everything should be put into some system and measure and evaluate... it is just that we take it in... like be aware about this diversity and uniqueness... it is first and foremost about that and then having the freedom to work from that.

Another thing that was mentioned regarding the *ELC* is that it suggests that the grounding for any landscape evaluation should be defining landscape areas according to their physical features so the objective side to the landscape concept is always included. On top of that people’s perceptions and experiences need to be taken into account as well. This relates to another theme that came up very strongly in the discussion and that is that landscape is not something that can be dealt with through one method or approach, simply because landscape is a very multi-layered concept:

¹¹⁷ In fact, this is increasingly the goal of outdoor classes in schools and kindergartens. Such outdoor teaching ranges from increasing basic sensual awareness of children, their sense of materials (sand, soil, water, etc.), their sense of elements (wind, water, heat, cold, etc.), their awareness of other living beings, to their sense of space and environment and the intertwining of human activities and the natural environment. Some schools do indeed take their students on short and long hiking tours as part of the curriculum (Norðdahl & Óskarsdóttir 2010, Dillon et al. 2006, Ballantyne & Packer 2002, Bogner 1998) .

I think it's a combination of many factors... if you examine the landscape concept a bit then it is really a combination of many factors... from the perspective of natural sciences... it's the vegetation and all those things... and then it is also the cultural... and there we have the stories... the living, the development that has perhaps happened through the ages, and then we have the visual... and that can be texture and color... all those factors play their role and make up the landscape as a whole when you are walking down... then there is not just some one factor that influences you... it is everything... and we are... and then... we can also add, because we are in Iceland, the weather into this... and I think that... when we are evaluating landscape in some way then it relates to this influence but it is all of these factors that play their role... you can't take a single one out... that is a bit dangerous

As another participant pointed out it is “*probably never possible to find some one method...so it always has to be many different methods because of the nature of the concept*”. The multiple layers of landscape all have their important role in creating the experience, meaning and value of landscape, and they can certainly be discussed separately (e.g. the cultural value of landscape, the geological value of landscape ect.).

However, if we understand the landscape concept as first and foremost referring to the aesthetic perception of environment (Ritter 1989), then it follows that the core value of the landscape is aesthetic value. It is when we experience all the different layers of the landscape as one whole through aesthetic perception that we actually refer to the environment as landscape. The aesthetic is thus not just one aspect or one layer of the landscape concept, rather it is at the heart of the concept – the aesthetic perception of being there in the landscape, perceiving only to perceive, is the experience that ultimately creates the meaning and value of landscape. The value of landscape is thus in the end the “aesthetic, experiential and emotional” value of landscape.

The last theme is perhaps the most important lesson that can be learned from this discussion, and that is the theme of “*talking to people*”. If there was any sign of a method being proposed in the discussion it was the method of talking to people. “*The measurement has to be people, a broad group of people*” one of the participants said. While some of them emphasized that the local people living in the landscape should be talked to, others pointed out that it should be a broader group of people than that, especially considering the fact that the majority of Icelanders live in the Reykjavik area and are thus not a part of “the local people” in many places where decisions about nature conservation need to be taken. The conclusion has to be to talk to as many different groups of people as possible, and through their storytelling the whole picture of the landscape and its value would emerge, layer by layer. The stories we tell of our experiences of landscape are stories that describe how we perceive the landscape and interact with it, how we sense the atmosphere there and

what kind of feelings arise in response to it. In other words, these stories describe our aesthetic encounters with the environment, and this type of narration is a result of the urge we feel to communicate and share our aesthetic experiences. Even when a cultural or geological story is told, it is told with the aim of explaining how it affects one's aesthetic perception of the landscape.

Near the end of the discussion the role of a landscape expert was discussed after I mentioned that through the discussion they all seemed to emphasize the need to talk to people and none of them had mentioned that there needed to be some sort of landscape expertise involved in the evaluation of landscapes. One of the participants pointed out that *"it's a question of different types of knowledge whether it is... what can we call expert knowledge? I mean the farmer who walks over the land to collect his sheep, he is probably just as much of an expert as the artist or biologist or geologist or anthropologist"*, and in response to this another participant said: *"I mean, isn't the landscape expert the one who takes care of talking to everyone and call for... but it isn't his job to build this on his own knowledge... yes the one who collects the stories... isn't that the expert knowledge?"*

Perhaps this is precisely the point: the experts on evaluating the landscape are all the different groups of people who experience and relate to the landscape whether as inhabitants or visitors, and to be able to identify and understand the value of landscape we need to collect all the different stories of the landscape and combine them into an encompassing account. The many stories we tell about the landscape affect our aesthetic perception of it – the stories direct our attention to certain perceptual qualities and thus can enrich our aesthetic experiences (Heyd 2004). Landscapes in Iceland have many layers of stories to tell. First, there is the geological story that can be told by the geologists and perhaps also by the people who have experienced the influence of geological events like volcanic eruptions, melting glaciers and earthquakes. Secondly, there is the vegetation side of the story told by the biologist or the farmer. Thirdly, the archeological and anthropological stories of human settlement and development in the landscape; and finally the stories of the people who live and dwell in the land and relate to it through their different experiences, memories, stories, writings and literature.

The landscape expert is the one who can listen to and combine all these stories into an account of the landscape that describes which features and which stories play the most important role in creating its meaning and value. The authorities, along with the people who told the different stories, can then use such an account to reflect on future developments of the landscape. The spirit of the *European Landscape Convention* is that the public should take an active part in deciding the future of the landscape. A public debate should be instrumental in the decisions about what kind of changes continue the narrative of the landscape in an

appropriate way and are thus acceptable and which ones are unacceptable and not fitting into the landscape's story.¹¹⁸

This was the thrust of the practical ideas from the focus group on how to incorporate the aesthetic, experiential and emotional value of landscape into the decision-making process. Although the participants were hesitant to suggest concrete methods, they did share many useful suggestions on what needs to be done in order to be able to better deal with landscape and its complex value.

To sum up, what needs to be done is:

- To acknowledge that landscape is multi-layered and its different aspects cannot be reduced to only one of them.
- To talk to people, to include the public in the process of identifying, evaluating and planning the landscape.
- To make space for listening to stories.
- To raise awareness and increase education about landscape.
- And last but not least, to implement the *European Landscape Convention*.

This last suggestion is perhaps the most important one, because all the other suggestions are very much in line with the "General Principles of the Convention" (Council of Europe 2000).

4.1.4. *The European Landscape Convention*

The participants followed the line of the *European Landscape Convention* in their emphasis on how the landscape is multi-layered. According to the *Recommendations of the Committee of Ministers to Member States on the Guidelines for the Implementation of the ELC*, one of the general principles is to:

Recognize the fundamental role of knowledge: The identification, description and assessment of landscapes constitute the preliminary phase of any landscape policy. This involves an analysis of morphological, archeological, historical, cultural and natural characteristics and their interrelations, as well as an analysis of changes. The perception of landscape by the public should also be analyzed from the viewpoint of both its historical development and its recent significance (Council of Europe 2008, 3).

¹¹⁸ The nascent field of environmental humanities can in my view play an important role in collecting and analyzing narratives of landscape. Human values and experiences are already the subject of the environmental humanities and this is a field of study that needs to receive more attention when it comes to identifying and evaluating landscapes. Drawing up comprehensive pictures of human relations and experiences from reflecting on stories, concepts and ideas is the humanist scholar's expertise and I think this type of expertise should be used increasingly in environmental policy and decision-making.

As we have seen, this was one of the major concerns of the participants: all the different dimensions of the landscape need to be included in the “identification, description and assessment of landscapes”. The development of a method to assess or value landscape must not lead to reductionism.

Another general principle is to:

Make use of public participation: All action taken to define, implement and monitor landscape policies should be preceded and accompanied by procedures for participation by members of the public and other relevant stakeholders, with the aim of enabling them to play an active role in formulating, implementing and monitoring landscape quality objectives (Council of Europe 2008, 3).

The themes of “talking to people” and “listening to stories” of landscape experiences are obviously in line with this principle.

Yet another principle is to:

Promote awareness: Active public involvement means that specialized knowledge should be accessible to all, that is, it should be easily available, structured and presented in a way understandable even by non-specialists (Council of Europe 2008, 3).

This was also one of the major concerns of the participants as already mentioned. In order to make room for the value of landscape in decision-making we must first generate a discussion and awareness of landscape issues among the public. The suggestions made by the committee of ministers to promote awareness are for example:

publications, exhibitions, audiovisual means, simulations and shows by artists and photographers [...] television broadcasts [...] local awareness-raising experiences, such as guided visits to an area involving local people, elected representatives and experts or scientists (Council of Europe 2008, 12).

The convention also emphasizes more education in schools, stating that “landscape training should be strengthened so as to develop children’s sensitivity to questions which they are likely to experience when looking at the quality of their surroundings” (Council of Europe 2008, 13). As one of the participants put it, we should teach children to “read” the land just as we teach them to “read” art.

When all these suggestions have been implemented it is more likely that the stories of our experiences of relation to the landscape, the stories on which we base the aesthetic, experiential and emotional value that we attach to landscape, can be

heard. But as one of the participants pointed out in the discussion, in the end it is a political issue, what we do with landscape. Implementing the *ELC* can help us open up the conversation about landscape and aesthetic value that can make us better equipped to make the political decisions on how to manage or protect landscapes. Involving the public and raising awareness would result in better decisions.

The public in Iceland has already for the last years been demanding that they be involved in the decision-making process. Many small nature conservation groups have formed all over the country as their local landscapes are threatened by plans for energy production or road construction, and these groups are asking for more public participation. So the public has in a way already started to try to implement the *ELC* by telling their stories and asking to be heard, and now the authorities are finally joining the public on this issue since on the 29th of June 2012 the *ELC* was signed by Icelandic authorities.¹¹⁹ One way to increase the public participation in decisions regarding landscape is suggested by a narrative approach to environmental decision-making. This approach provides a possible way of “listening to stories” of meaningful relations rather than limiting the discussion to intrinsic or instrumental “objectively” based values.

In the next parts of this chapter I will delve deeper into these suggestions for action made by the focus group by examining methods and approaches that can shed light on how to further develop a concrete suggestion of how we might include

¹¹⁹ The *ELC* had been signed but had not yet been ratified when a new government came into power in 2013. Hopefully this government will continue with the next steps towards implementing the *ELC* and securing a place for acknowledging the value of landscape in environmental decision-making. The situation is however quite uncertain at the moment, since the new Laws on Nature Conservation that were accepted in parliament before the spring 2013 election, and were supposed to become effective from the 1st of April 2014, have been cancelled by the new government. The new Minister of Environment announced in September 2013 that he was going to cancel the new laws as a whole, but later agreed to rather postpone the commencement of the law until July 2015, and revise it in the meantime. The new law unchanged would have been in the spirit of continuing the work on the *ELC* as it includes as one of its protection goals to “protect landscapes that are unique or rare, or especially valuable because of their aesthetic and/or cultural value” [að varðveita landslag sem er sérstætt eða fágætt eða sérlega verðmætt vegna fagurfræðilegs og/eða menningarlegs gildis], as well as having a new article on landscape protection areas [landslagsverndarsvæði] that allows the protection of landscapes that: “a. are considered to be especially valuable because of their aesthetic and/or cultural value, b. are considered as unique or rare locally, nationally or globally, or c. holds a special status in the minds of the nation [a. þykir sérlega verðmætt vegna fagurfræðilegs og/eða menningarlegs gildis, b. talið er sérstætt eða fágætt á svæðis-, lands- eða heimsvísu eða, c. skipar mikilvægan sess í vitund þjóðarinnar] (Lög um náttúruvernd [Law on Nature Conservation] nr. 12/2013, my translation). Landscape is defined in the new law as “an area that people perceive as having certain characteristics that are created by the action and interaction of natural and/or human factors” [Svæði sem fólk skynjar að hafi ákveðin einkenni sem eru tilkomin vegna virkni eða samspils náttúrulegra og/eða mannlegra þátta] (Lög um náttúruvernd [Law on Nature Conservation] nr. 12/2013, my translation). However, as Waage (2013) has argued, this definition is lacking in that it does not take the Icelandic meaning of the term *landslag*, and its aesthetic connotations adequately into account.

the aesthetic value of landscape in environmental decision-making. I will start by elaborating the focus group's emphasis on storytelling and how the narrative of the intertwining of humans and the land can be incorporated into the decision-making process. The narrative approach to environmental decision-making that Alan Holland, Andrew Light and John O'Neill (2008) have argued for is useful in this context as they focus on expanding the approach to environmental values, that is limited to the itemizing approach, to include the meaningful relations between humans and the land that create the narrative of the landscape. This approach affirms the idea that environmental values cannot be reduced to objective qualities that can be measured and categorized.

One of the most important forms of environmental value is based on the meaningful relations people have with their environment, and these relations can be discussed and reflected upon, but they cannot be measured or categorized. In my view, meaningful relations with nature are the result of the type of relations I have been describing as the relation that is revealed in aesthetic experiences of landscape. These are relations that are based on a certain kind of love of nature and feeling connected to it. Meaningful relations are like relations of love and friendship, based on the deep aesthetic of "letting-be" and perceiving what/who one loves or relates to as an independent other. Finding beauty in the other in this deep and rich way which allows one to open up to the other, is thus a key to forming meaningful relationships. As Holland and O'Neill (1994) have pointed out, the idea of a meaningful relation is based on relationships of love and friendship – it is a relation that cannot be given a monetary value or be compensated for in any way. Whether the meaningful relations we have are with other people or with the environment, these are the relations that make up the narratives of our lives, and the narratives of the landscapes that we live in.

Understanding environmental values in terms of meaningful relations and narrative sheds light on how the narratives and stories that describe people's relations with the land should be central when it comes to environmental decision-making. In light of this approach I will finally reflect on examples of methods that can prove to be useful to uncover the meaning and value of landscape by shedding light on the meaningful relations that emerge through narratives of landscapes. However, the idea is not to suggest a list of methods that solves everything once and for all. As the members of the focus group emphasized, there can never be only one simple method that allows us to account for the value of landscape in assessment. But the methods that will be discussed here are good starting points for making room for people's stories of their relation with the landscape. This would provide a basis for a public deliberation on the value of these relations and what is the appropriate trajectory for continuing them. In my mind, this is the first thing that

needs to be done if the aesthetic value of landscape is to be incorporated into the decision-making process.

4.2. The Narrative Approach

With their emphasis on listening to stories of the human-landscape relation when it comes to identifying landscape meaning and value, the focus group participants point to the important role that stories play in our valuing of the environment. This is what Holland, Light and O’Neill (2008) have also pointed out, but they have made the concept of narrative central to their approach to environmental decision-making. In their view, history and narrative play important roles in our “evaluative responses to environments, beings and things around us” (Holland et al. 2008, 8).

The value that we find in our relations to the environment is based on the stories and narratives that connect the present with the past:

The constraint that the past places upon us is best understood as one founded in the significance of the narrative orders objects and places can have for us. We enter worlds that are rich with past histories, the narratives of lives and communities from which our own lives take significance. The problem is, or should be construed as, the problem of how best to continue the narrative; and the question we should ask is: what would make the most appropriate trajectory from what has gone before? The value in these situations which we should be seeking to uphold lies in the way that the constituent items and the places which they occupy are intertwined with and embody the life-history of the community of which they form a part (Holland & O’Neill, 1994, 4).

Holland et al. (2008) argue that many of the ethical theories that have been the basis of nature conservation, for example focusing on the intrinsic or instrumental value of nature, and “a number of the currently proposed goals of environmental policy, such as “sustainability” and “the maintenance of biodiversity”” are inadequate in their approach to nature conservation because they “fail to incorporate the dimensions of time and history” (Holland et al. 2008, 156).¹²⁰

¹²⁰ Holland et al. discuss how the concepts of biodiversity and sustainability are framed through the itemizing approach and argue that these concepts are more useful if we understand them from the perspective of narrative; biodiversity should be valued in a historical context, not as a list of valued features of the environment. Rather than being understood in terms of sustaining natural capital which limits our relation to nature to a relation based only on use of resources, sustainability should be understood in terms of sustaining life – a life that has a history and potentiality to develop: “To sustain the life of a community or land is not to preserve it, or to freeze it but to allow it to change and develop from a particular past into a future” (Holland et al. 2008, 201).

The main reason why these approaches fail to take time and history into account is that they are characterized by what Holland et al. refer to as the itemizing approach:

It is an approach that dominates much ecological and economic thinking about the environment. A list of goods is offered that correspond to different valued features of our environment, and increasing value is taken to be a question of maximizing one's score on different items on the list or at least of meeting some satisfactory score on each. We are conceived as having something like a scorecard, with valued kinds of objects and properties, valued goods and a score for the significance of each. Policy-making is then understood as the attempt to maintain, and where possible increase the total score, the total amount of value thus conceived (Holland et al. 2008, 167).

By approaching the natural environment as a list of separated objects, the itemizing approach neglects the relations between us and these objects, beings and environments. The relations that appear through the history and narrative of these phenomena are not acknowledged. Nature conservation should be approached through questions like "how is the narrative best continued?" and "which steps are appropriate continuations of what has preceded?" The value of what we aim to conserve does not lie in particular objects or phenomena, rather it lies in our relations with the landscape: "[the value lies in how] the constituent items and the places which they occupy are intertwined with and embody the life-history of the community of which they form a part" (Holland & O'Neill 1994, 4). According to this view, "time and history must enter our environmental valuations as constraints on our future decisions" (Holland & O'Neill 1994, 4).¹²¹

This idea reinforces the views expressed in the focus group, that the systems that we currently use to deal with environmental decision-making are too reductionistic. These systems are characterized by the itemizing approach where we have our list of valued goods and aim for the maximizing of total value by scoring

¹²¹ They refer to this narrative approach as "the old world approach" (in the context of Europe), as opposed to "the new world approach" (in the context of USA) that involves restoring nature to its "natural" state. As the "old world" is characterized more by cultural landscapes and the "new world" is characterized more by wilderness landscapes it seems that these two different "worlds" have to be approached differently when it comes to nature conservation. But Holland and O'Neill claim that the "new world" actually is more like the "old world" than we think. When we refer to wilderness in the "new world" we are ignoring the fact that indigenous peoples had considerable effect on the development of the land and thus we are silencing one of the narratives that the landscape holds. The question we are avoiding by referring to the wilderness concept is the question of which "natural state" we want to restore: "why choose that moment to freeze the landscape?" (Holland & O'Neill 1994, 11) It is possible to answer this question by saying that we want to restore nature to the state it was in before human beings started to influence it, but when all things are considered, there is no way of knowing what kind of "natural state" that would be.

high on the value scorecard. The complaint that the participants of the focus group had was that these systems are not able to include and account for the stories that reveal the meaning and value of the landscape. These stories and the values we find and express in them cannot be itemized. They cannot be put into a closed off category with a number on it that tells us how much value they have.

Conservation decisions should be based on narrative and history because that is where we find value both in natural and cultural landscapes. We find value in the story of the landscape, whether it is the story of human actions or the biological or geological story of the actions of natural forces; in the case of Iceland, the story of volcanic and glacial activities. The most important thing when aiming to reveal the meaning of landscape is how all these actions are related and intertwined; stories of human activities are at the same time stories of natural forces and vice versa. The natural landscape is the context in which the stories take place: “[T]he natural world, just like human culture, has a particular history which is a part of our history and part of our context, both explaining and giving significance to our lives” (Holland & O’Neill 1994, 14).

While the itemizing approach narrows down and neglects important ways in which we value environments and landscapes, the narrative approach is more inclusive as it takes into account the different stories that the landscape holds. There is room for the ecological, biological, geological stories that are told through science as well as the stories we tell of our aesthetic, perceptual, emotional and experiential relations to the land that cannot be accounted for in the itemizing approach. The narrative approach allows us to listen to stories and recognize values that cannot be measured quantitatively and have thus been pushed to the side, and this is why it is especially useful when it comes to dealing with the aesthetic value of landscape.

But how does this approach work in practice? How can we make decisions based on the narrative approach? One of the basic characteristics of this approach is that it reveals the complexity of environmental decision-making rather than concealing it. Thus Holland et al. do not give any clear criteria for what is an appropriate trajectory from what has gone before or what is the best way of continuing a narrative. The main reason for this is that they:

believe this to be a matter for reasoned debate and reflective judgment on the part of those who are involved in, or have studied, a given situation carefully and thought hard about it: it is a matter, in short, of deliberative judgment, not a matter of algorithmic calculation according to some formula that we, or others, have supplied (Holland et al. 2008, 157).

However, they do offer some guiding considerations. Firstly, one has to consider that the problems of conservation are not problems of change itself, but rather a problem of what kind of changes are appropriate. The narrative approach aims at finding out what kind of changes are appropriate to what has gone before instead of aiming at freezing history by preventing any changes. Secondly, one has to consider and acknowledge that “the same site might embody quite different narratives that sometimes point to different trajectories between which we must adjudicate” (Holland et al. 2008, 158). Many would say that this is a serious problem for their approach for it means that this approach is unable to tell us how to choose between different trajectories. But their point is that this is a problem for any approach to nature conservation. In the end, difficult decisions always have to be made. This is a problem that the narrative approach reveals, rather than trying to conceal it as the itemizing approach does: “It is not the task of analysis to make difficult problems appear easy, but to reveal difficult problems for what they are” (Holland et al. 2008, 158).

This is exactly what one of the focus group participants emphasized, namely that there is never a simple, clear yes or no answer that results from an environmental impact assessment, a decision always has to be made at the end. So what the narrative approach allows us to do is to admit and embrace the complexity of environmental decision-making. Decisions are always difficult to make and that is why they have to be made after a careful and collective deliberation.

What we have seen from all this is that finding a way to include the aesthetic value of landscape in environmental decision-making requires that we rethink the system that only allows quantitative measurable values, and widen its scope to include the qualitative stories and narratives that shape the meaning and value we find in landscape. Of course itemizing can be useful and should not be abandoned, but we must not limit our framing of thinking about value to the itemizing approach. The itemizing approach is itself based on certain values that exclude other values. In addition to having knowledge of all the different valued features of an environment that can score high on the value scorecard, we need to have knowledge of other aspects that cannot be counted and measured, but only told, shared and deliberated. In this line of thought I will now turn to discussing possible methods that can be used to facilitate the telling and sharing of stories that can help us articulate and deliberate the aesthetic meaning and value we find in landscape.

4.3. Methods

As was already discussed in chapter one, on the basis of different understandings of the landscape concept, many different methods of landscape assessment have been

developed that in most cases either fall into the so called “subjective” or “objective” camps. The approaches that lean towards the objective side of philosophical aesthetics are commonly referred to as “expert-approaches” while the approaches derived from the subjective side are referred to as “perception-based approaches” (Daniels 2001, 272-3). The underlying assumption of the expert approach is that “landscape quality can be determined by any competent inspection of the relevant features of the landscape (the aesthetic object)” (Daniels 2001, 272). The perception-based approach, on the other hand, typically applies “various survey-research and psychological scaling methods [...] to obtain quantitative measures of perceived landscape quality” (Daniels 2001, 273).

The problem with both of these approaches is that they focus too much on the visual, and even though the perception-based approach tries to give more voice to the public perception of landscape it is still an expert-led approach since the researcher shapes the research by choosing the photographs that the public is asked to evaluate or framing the situation in which the research takes place in another way.¹²² Thus these type of researcher-led approaches are problematic since they condition and bound the respondent’s feedback. So recently the most common approaches to landscape assessment have been challenged with a call for “more holistic and multi-functional approaches that draw on people’s experiences and interaction with local landscapes” (Scott et al. 2009, 398). In the following pages I will examine different methods of landscape assessment that all can be seen as a response to this call for more encompassing approaches.

The aesthetic, emotional and experiential value of landscape can be revealed through inclusive approaches that allow for an examination of the relation between humans and the land that emerges in actual aesthetic experiences of landscape. Finding ways for these experiences to be expressed and reflected upon is thus important. In her paper “There’s More to Landscape than Meets the Eye: Towards Inclusive Landscape Assessment in Resource and Environmental Management”, Susan Dakin (2003) discusses a research project where an experiment was made using a methodology in landscape assessment that is based on public participation. The aim of the method was to shed light on people’s experiences of the landscape that surrounds them.

With her approach Dakin adds a third kind of approach to the two kinds that have been most common in landscape assessments. The objective approach, which Dakin refers to as the “expert-based” approach, the subjective approach, which she refers to as the “experimental approach”, and finally she adds the third kind of

¹²² Examples of methods on the “subjective” side are photo questionnaires, virtual reality presentation with questionnaire, on-site questionnaire, Q-sort method with pre-selected images and participatory photographic techniques.

approach, the “experiential approach”. The experiential approach is different from the other two whereas it puts less emphasis on visual and objective qualities but rather aims to gain an understanding of the meaning of landscape by examining the relation between humans and the land in a comprehensive way.

According to this understanding, humans are not only distant viewers of the landscape but rather they take an active part in shaping the meaning of the landscape. Dakin describes her experiential approach thus:

In summary, an experiential approach can be seen to:

- Embrace a broad range of landscape value and meaning;
- Engender participant engagement with surroundings and acknowledge subjectivity;
- Accept modes of sensory experience in addition to vision;
- Capture an “insider” perspective, as different from an “outsider” perspective;
- Acknowledge the “taken-for-granted world” and ordinary, everyday landscapes: and
- Encourage a reflective stance for thinking about landscape, for analysis and for the act of assessing (Dakin 2003, 191).

Even though Dakin does not refer to the experiential approach as being aimed at capturing the aesthetic meaning and value of landscape, in my view, this is what her approach does capture. The features of the approach that she describes above can all be related to the aesthetic value of landscape that emerges from our relational encounters with the environment.¹²³

Dakin’s methodology firstly involves getting participants to photograph the landscape themselves, using the method of “self-directed photography”. This method overcomes the problem that often comes up in the more traditional subjective approach, where the researcher chooses the landscape photographs that the participants are then supposed to evaluate by giving grades to the pre-selected photos. The visual content of the photos that the participants took was not considered to be the most important factor when the data was analyzed, instead, participants were both interviewed about their choices, and asked to give more detailed descriptions of the landscape they chose to photograph through writing in a journal.

¹²³ As discussed in chapter one, it is common among those who study landscape to avoid the concepts of beauty or the aesthetic when they aim to explore how the meaning of landscape emerges from the interaction of humans and the land. Dakin is not an exception to this, so even if she is describing the same experiences of landscape that I am describing as aesthetic experiences, she does not refer to them as aesthetic because she is aiming to move beyond the visual, distant, “objective” approach to landscape that she relates to an aesthetic approach.

This method that consists of analyzing photographs, journals and interviews Dakin chooses to call “participant-directed landscape imaging” (Dakin 2003, 191). By using this method she was able to draw up a picture of three main themes that describe what it is that people value the most in the landscape that surrounds them and why the valued features are thought to be important:

Participants focused on three broad landscape themes:

- *Landscape elements*: These included environmental features, such as landforms, water bodies and life forms; ecological dimensions (e.g., habitat); ephemeral qualities and dynamic environmental conditions, such as seasonal changes, time of day or cloud; and human activity elements (e.g., land use and built artifacts).
- *Locales*: These denoted settings for action and social interaction, including ranching country, family places and recreational settings.
- *Landscape experiences*: These captured sensory and emotional experiences of environment. For example, journey – the idea of moving through a landscape – was important, and was often expressed in terms of other experiences or locales, such as home (Dakin 2003, 192-3).

There were various reasons why the participants felt that these aspects were important, for example because the landscape is characteristic of the area, it is unique, beautiful, part of our quality of life, relates us to the past and to nature etc. (Dakin 2003, 193).

One of Dakin’s results is that landscape is not something that we receive and register in a passive manner, rather it is something that we take an active part in creating (Dakin 2003, 193). Landscape has many different layers and people relate to it in various ways. The value and meaning found in landscape is not only based on its visual features, but also on how we feel in the landscape, how we perceive its past and whether it is ecologically healthy or not (Dakin 2003, 194). Landscapes can have many layers of meaning that we experience as a whole through our aesthetic perception of them.

This kind of approach to landscape assessment is needed in order to counter the traditional objective approach. The objective approach has been criticized for reductionism and over-simplifying the landscape assessment so that the actual meaning of the landscape is lost. But new approaches pay more attention to the human aspect and acknowledge that those who dwell in the landscape are the ones who create its meaning: “In the new paradigm, management goals, actions and

decisions result from participation and empowerment of local people – those who inhabit places and create meaning in landscapes” (Dakin 2003, 197).

Each landscape has many layers of meaning, of course the visual qualities create a certain meaning, but that is just the base layer. If we stop there we risk losing some deeper meaning that is more important to us. It is the invisible; stories and experiences of landscape, narratives of the actions and events that created the landscape, which holds this deeper meaning. This is why these stories have to be heard and understood in order to be able to make good decisions about landscape development. When we sit down to talk about the landscape we relate to and recognize the features that are most important to us, we are creating the meaning of the landscape. Thus, methods in landscape assessment should have the aim of creating a conversation with those who have formed a relation to the landscape. This can be done in many ways, one way is Dakin’s “participant-directed landscape imaging”; one could also imagine meetings where people would come together to share stories and have conversations about the meaning of the landscape.

Herbert W. Schroeder (2007) describes another interesting approach which consisted of surveys that were meant to give the landscape assessors an insight into the meaning and emotions that people related to certain places within the area that was to be assessed. In order to get a significant contribution from the public it was emphasized to get as many participants as possible, preferably people who felt they related to the landscape in some way. Schroeder used many ways to get participants, he put up ads, spoke to people who pointed out others to him etc.: “The respondents could be characterized as a self-selected sample of people who were interested enough in the topic of study to contact me and who felt strongly enough about at least one special place to take the time to write about it on the survey” (Schroeder 2007, 6). The survey consisted of getting people to describe places within the area that they thought of as being important, unique or especially memorable: “I instructed the respondents first to briefly describe each place they chose, and then to tell what the place meant to them by writing about their thoughts, feelings, memories, experiences, or anything else that came to mind in connection with it” (Schroeder 2007, 6). In other words, people were asked to describe their relation with the landscape that has been created through the aesthetic experience of beauty as it has been interpreted here. According to the relational understanding of beauty that I have been arguing for, experiences of beauty are experiences that create a certain type of relation between the perceiver and the perceived. This relation is what is being described when people discuss places that are important to them and the meaning they find in these places. In this way it is possible to draw up a picture of the meaning of the landscape by examining what it

is that connects people with places, what kind of stories, actions and emotions come up when people describe their relation to landscape.

Another interesting approach is the “walk and talk“ interview that has been developed within geography (Kusenbach 2003, Anderson 2004, Brown & Raymond 2007, Ingold 2008, Evans & Jones 2011). A useful method based on this approach is described by Scott et al. (2009). The method they describe consists of a series of “pre-planned respondent led tours” and was developed in response to the key weaknesses that are inherent in the traditional expert- and perception based approaches.

After choosing five groups of people who engage with the landscape on a professional or recreational basis, the researchers went with the respondents on a landscape tour that was planned by the respondents themselves. This allowed the researchers to pass “the framing, selecting and directing of the focus and remit to the participant, while the researcher “shadows” the participant’s experience” (Scott et al. 2009, 415). The research objectives that guided this approach with the aim of overcoming the weaknesses of the expert- and perception based approaches were:

- The experience of and interaction with the landscape is shared and captured in real time to address the focus on summary questionnaires and reductionism.
- The experience is captured at random without trying to distort or change an activity to fit in with the research project to address expert framing limitations.
- The experience should have occurred, as part of the respondents’ planned work/leisure activity without researcher intervention to address the way that research can force respondents into artificially created locations or situations.
- The experience is shaped by the participant, with the researcher only reacting to and probing into respondent’s comments and actions to address the issue of preset questions.
- Interaction with other publics, if relevant, is incorporated into the research to address the deficit in understanding how and why these interactions occur.
- Non-verbal reactions to landscape are noted by the researcher over the course of the experience to try and capture the range of different responses during landscape experiences (Scott et al. 2009, 401).

This method of the walking interview provides an opportunity to get a deep insight into the relations people have with the landscape, as Evans & Jones state: “Walking interviews have been demonstrated as a highly productive way of assessing a local

community's connections to their surrounding environment" (2011, 857). These connections emerge from our most immediate sensuous perception of the environment that I refer to as the aesthetic perception of landscape, and they are expressed in the stories that we tell about our experience of landscape.

The methods that have been described above share the emphasis on trying to move away from researcher led and visual approaches and thus provide useful tools for listening to the stories that different groups of people tell about their experience of landscape. The landscape concept is a very broad concept and therefore any landscape assessment needs to be broad as well. Formal visual features are one aspect that needs to be considered when assessing landscape, and people's experiences of the landscape are another. Dakin recommends that her "experiential method" should be used alongside other methods that focus more on the objective and aim to identify landscape areas and categorize them for example with reference to their visual sensitivity. The information that is gathered when the stories and experiences of those who relate to the landscape are told can help us define and categorize landscape areas: "For example, one criterion that results in an area being classified as visually sensitive is "regional or local topographical features valued by the public"" (Dakin 2003, 196).

As the participants in the focus group emphasized, reductionism must be avoided when it comes to landscape assessment, inclusiveness is the key term. There will never be only one method that is comprehensive enough to include all the different layers and aspects of landscape. The Icelandic Landscape Project (ILP) that was mentioned in the beginning of this thesis is an example of a good starting point to capture the base layer, the formal visual qualities of the landscape. But this kind of method has to be accompanied by a method that focuses more on people's experiences, like the methods described above.

An example of this kind of combination can be found in an experiment that was made in Scotland where the narrative and "Genius Loci" of the landscape play a central role (Colquhoun 1997). The "Genius Loci" as it is described here, refers to the intertwining of subject and object that occurs in the aesthetic perception of landscape. Böhme's account of atmosphere describes this as well, how the objective qualities of the environment call for a certain mood or atmosphere that the subject perceives. In the perception of the "Genius Loci" all the aspects of the landscape come together, including both its "objective" and "subjective" elements and how they become intertwined in experience.

The premise of the method that Colquhoun describes is that "landscape comes about through the stream of a complex interplay of past and future events" (Colquhoun 1997, 145) and that "this active expression in landscape was known in the past as the "Genius Loci"" (Colquhoun 1997, 145). The aim of the experiment

was to “develop a method of landscape assessment which would lead in a clear and conscious way to an experience of the Genius Loci” (Colquhoun 1997, 147), and to combine the usual analytical methods of landscape assessment with methods that provide the possibility of getting to know the landscape through experiencing its Genius Loci. These methods are based on the ideas of the Goethean method that teaches that there are three levels of looking at the world which Colquhoun then applies to landscape:

The physical level we experience as those facts such as trees, rocks, rivers, lakes and rainfall. The second, temporal level has more to do with the landscape as it changes through time and also as we “live into” the relationships between the parts. The third level becomes apparent only after working our way through the other two when the idea of the place, the Genius Loci, starts to speak to us. A fourth level of knowing on this journey would then be to put all these three levels together and out of a state of “becoming one with” the place we are able to develop an assessment or decisions leading to action (Colquhoun 1997, 150).

The experiment consisted of four steps and the people who participated were farmers, land-users and owners and “others who participate in the land as neighbors, users, or simply as concerned individuals” (Colquhoun 1997, 157). The beginning step was to see the landscape “as if for the first time”, becoming open to the first impression by walking in silence around the area and trying to be as open and aware as possible: “to look, listen, feel and generally open his or her soul to this first encounter” (Colquhoun 1997, 150). Afterwards the participants record their experiences, for example by making “mood maps” where a certain color that represents the inner mood of the area is given to each place. The second step consists of meeting the “is now” or physical level by recording as many details and facts about the physical phenomena of the place as possible. This includes for example soil type, geology, species diversity, colors, forms, sounds, smells etc. The third step is to study the temporal level of the place by asking the question: “how have our places come to be what they are today?” Here the central focus is on the narrative of the landscape; step by step the narrative emerges from gathered information from local people, old photographs, writings, place-names and other sources.

This is the stage in which the Genius Loci starts to emerge as the participants try to build imaginative pictures of the development of the landscape: “Slowly the whole place starts to become alive in its becoming [...] Once inserted into the stream of becoming of a place one’s imagination starts to flow quite naturally into the future. [...] slowly a sense begins to emerge of what is “right” for a place and

what is not” (Colquhoun 1997, 155). This third step thus leads to the fourth; meeting the *Genius Loci*, which consists of trying to capture or describe the effects of the “heart-felt getting to know” of a place that results from the former three steps of the method. The aesthetic is not just one aspect of this experience, but rather this “heart-felt getting to know” is as a whole, an aesthetic experience.

The starting point of this method, “to see as if for the first time”, asks the participants to focus on their senses, put their pre-conceived ideas and interests to the side and open up to the other’s meaning. In other words, they are asked to focus on their aesthetic perception of the land. But that is only the first step. Listing and accounting for all the objective, physical phenomena is also important, for that allows us to connect these physical features with the responses we have to them in our aesthetic, perceptual experiences. The final step which consists in putting together the narrative of the landscape, how it has become what it is, also puts the focus on the aesthetic as it has been interpreted here. Focusing on the aesthetic means focusing on immediate perception and it also means focusing on all the meaningful relations that exist in the landscape, between objects and beings, relations that appear through the narrative of the stream of events that have created the landscape.

Taking the aesthetic value of landscape into account can never be as simple as counting some objective features and putting a numeric value on it to calculate its worth. Taking the aesthetic value of landscape into account has to involve an experiential approach where immediate perception and stories of meaningful relations come into focus. Such an approach has to involve the people who participate in the landscape – the focus must remain on their experiences and stories. Of course people can disagree and have very different stories of how they perceive the landscape. One person might think that a certain landscape has “no special natural beauty” (as the former Minister of Industry) while another perceives it as beautiful or sublime. But the aim with these kinds of methods is not to find one common conclusion about the meaning and value of the landscape but rather to create a basis for deliberating and discussing the different meanings and values that are found in the landscape to be better equipped to make good and fair decisions about its future development. The landscape expert can never account for the whole meaning of landscape by making an inventory on his own; his/her work should rather consist in bringing together the stories of the real landscape experts, that are the people who relate to the landscape, whether they are local people or visitors.

The methods that have been described here all focus on revealing the meaning of landscape by giving voice to the stories of the meaningful relations people have with the landscape. But adding these kind of methods to the process of making the scorecard of values used to make decisions about environmental issues is not

enough for the aesthetic value of landscape to be included in decision-making. The system of decision-making has to change as well. Decisions about conservation, about the development of landscapes, should be made after a collective deliberation of those who are concerned, and a big part of this deliberation should involve using the type of methods I have described here. These methods allow us to get into a position where the atmosphere or Genius Loci of the landscape speaks out to those who are deliberating in a way that allows them to make good decisions that ensure the preservation of the future “as a realization of the potential of the past” and allow for a “transfer from past to future in such a way as to secure the transfer of significance” (Holland & Rawles 1994, 37).

So how would we go about valuing a landscape, for example the landscape of *Kjós*, the rural area where I am presently living? We could start from the ground up with gathering information about the formal physical features of the landscape and the ecological and geological stories of the area. Then we would look at the stories of land-use and habitation and finally we would get those who relate to the landscape in *Kjós*; the people who live there, visit or somehow relate to the land to help us shed light on the meaning of the landscape.

Kjós has been an agricultural area for as long as anyone remembers (since settlement). For at least 30 years summerhouse villages have spread in the area, tourism has been growing in the last years, but heavy industry is also a close neighbor in *Hvalfjörður* where a huge aluminium smelter was built in 1998 after the local people in *Kjós* had protested heavily against it. The families that have farmed the land have often lived there for many generations; the young generation today learns the stories and actions of the generations before them and through these stories and events the present generation relates to the landscape and to the past. Many people have had summerhouses in *Kjós* for decades, and the dwelling there contains many stories and actions that contribute to the meaning of the landscape. These stories and actions have also been shaped by the land. This is a type of landscape that calls for hiking, which accommodates fishing in the rivers and lakes, keeping horses and sheep, picking berries, bonfires, camping and outdoor life in general. Today, farmers combine their traditional farming with tourist services, offering accommodation, food, museums, hikes, horse riding, and storytelling is included at all levels. Thus new stories and events are created, the tourist gets to know the narrative that created the landscape while she creates her own story of relating to the landscape.

To be able to identify the value of the landscape of *Kjós* an insight is needed into the experiences of the landscape; the events and stories of all these different groups. This can be done by using the kind of methods I have described in this chapter. The people who relate to *Kjós* can be asked to take photos of their favorite

places or describe them and tell stories about them, or to participate in getting to know the Genius Loci of the place and collectively revealing the meaning of the landscape. Above all we need to use the imagination and be open to combining different methods. Landscape has many aspects and therefore the methods we use to reveal its meaning must be multi-layered if we want to capture this meaning by including all the features of the landscape, whether they are visible or invisible.

Conclusion

Beauty is a small flower growing out of a crack of a concrete road. Beauty is lying in the grass, listening to the river flow and the birds sing. Beauty is getting goose bumps while listening to a men's choir sing in an old fish factory. Beauty is being hypnotized by a grand waterfall. Beauty is feeling grateful for your loved ones. Beauty is a sparkle in the eye. Beauty is the endless white on the top of a glacier. Beauty is an old couple dancing on the porch. Beauty is the mountain mirrored in the calm fjord.

Beauty is the moment when your senses are captured, when your whole being is immersed in what you perceive so that something is revealed to you: the relations between yourself and the other. Beauty is the moment where the boundaries between the perceiver and the perceived disappear. Beauty felt in a natural landscape is an experience of relationality and as such it is an experience that is central to the human condition. An important part of knowing what it means to be a relational human being is thus knowing beauty.

But beauty is also the elephant in the room. In the context of environmental decision-making in Iceland, landscape beauty is a huge elephant sitting in the middle of the room. It is difficult for the people in the room to continue to ignore it, but they do not know what to do about it. The first thing that they obviously need to do is to dare to point at the elephant and ask who it is and what it is doing there. Taking this first step towards acknowledging landscape beauty therefore became the main goal of this thesis; pointing at beauty and giving it the place it deserves as a central element in how we understand and deal with natural landscapes in the context of environmental debates.

My approach towards this goal has been traditionally philosophical in terms of engaging in a conceptual clarification of the concepts of beauty, landscape and the aesthetic with reference to phenomenological environmental aesthetics and landscape studies. However, conceptual clarification is only a part of the methodology of this thesis. Rather than doubting, questioning and analyzing concepts and ideas, my approach is characterized by bringing together different ideas, experiences and concepts in order to deal with a practical issue that needs to be reflected upon to disclose new ways of approaching it. Thus a main characteristic of this project is that rather than analyzing one idea or concept through a detailed critical approach, the focus is on examining and reflecting on experiences, and tracing threads between a host of different ideas and concepts that are useful for

bringing out new approaches to the problem this work responds to. The focus is thus on the practical and empirical implications of aesthetic experiences of landscapes, and I hope this way of doing philosophy contributes to bringing philosophical thought into dialogue with the society in which it is situated, and with other disciplines that are dealing with our relation to landscape and environment from different perspectives.

Since I started studying philosophy I have always been seeking ways in which philosophical thought can be connected directly with the issues that people and societies are dealing with here and now. This started out as a response to the feeling I had during my first years of studying, that philosophy was somehow distant from the here and now. Philosophy came across as a discipline that did not have much to do with our lived experiences but rather with the thoughts and ideas of men that lived hundreds of years ago. Of course philosophy has everything to do with reality, but the feeling I had was that it was above the reality that I am living in here and now with other people. Philosophy seemed to reflect this reality from an imagined “god’s eye” perspective, rather than to reflect on it from the perspective of our actual experiences. I thus started to have the urge to reach up there and pull philosophy down to the ground.

This is why I became happy when I got to know the field of environmental philosophy; this seemed like a field that was indeed situated on the ground since it was dealing with issues that had undisputed relevance in a world that is confronted with an ecological crisis. However, as I started studying for an MA in environmental philosophy I soon realized that this field had most of the same symptoms as the traditional philosophy that I was trying to avoid; environmental philosophers seemed to have the same tendency to stay in the ivory tower, reflecting on concepts and ideas from a “god’s eye” perspective, and their philosophizing did not seem to have much impact on public debates (Light 2002, Rawles 1995). This is why I decided to write my MA thesis on the practice of environmental philosophy (Jóhannesdóttir 2006), reflecting on views within the pragmatist and Hellenistic traditions of philosophy where the importance of practicing philosophy in a way that is useful for society is emphasized (Light 2002, Norton 1995, Nussbaum 1994).

Rather than confining itself to a theoretical search for general rules that can be applied in every situation, practical philosophy (environmental ethics and applied environmental aesthetics are parts of that branch of philosophy) should be more concerned with particular cases, contributing to solving practical issues, and bringing philosophical insights into the public debate. The emphasis is thus both on using philosophical methods for dealing with particular practical problems and on finding

ways to make philosophical thought relevant and understandable to a larger audience with the goal of contributing to a good society.¹²⁴

Thus, in writing this thesis I have had these perspectives in mind: what is the most useful way in which I can contribute to discussions of landscape in environmental decision-making in Iceland? What form of philosophical work is needed in this context, for it to have practical impact? As mentioned above, conceptual clarification of the concepts that are at the root of the practical problem this work responds to is needed, and therefore I have engaged in the philosophical examination of the concepts of beauty, landscape and the aesthetic. However, clarifying these concepts needs more than philosophical reflection and analysis. It needs empirical approaches, in order to shed light on the actual experiences that the concepts of beauty, landscape and the aesthetic are meant to describe.¹²⁵ To truly understand what these concepts mean we need to reflect on these experiences and the effect they have on our understanding of ourselves as human beings.

What is revealed in such reflection is that the concepts of beauty, landscape and the aesthetic all refer to deep experiences of relationality. The experiences that have been examined here show that the aesthetic value of landscape reveals a far deeper and richer form of environmental value than assumed at the start of the journey that writing this thesis has been. It touches not simply on a pleasurable experience of a beautiful or attractive landscape (defined by having plenty of certain physical qualities like water, vegetation, mountains, colors, shapes and forms as was done in the categorizing part of the Icelandic Landscape Project (ILP)) on a nice and sunny summer's day (which were the conditions that were the standard for filling out the ILP's landscape check-list), but also on an experience of relating to nature in a unique way in extreme landscapes and various weathers.

The aesthetic experiences of geothermal and glacial landscapes reveal an experience of sublime beauty in nature that places the perceiver in a situation of being able to see herself in a different type of relationship with the landscape than the relationship that is built on viewing nature only in terms of "standing reserve". Not all aesthetic experiences of landscape are equally powerful in the way that they "throw" one into relation with the other that is perceived; the enormous size and power of the extreme landscapes that have been the focus of this thesis are the features that create this powerful experience of sublime beauty.

¹²⁴ As was discussed in the introduction this approach is situated within applied environmental aesthetics (Sepänmaa 2007; 2010, Muelder-Eaton 1989) as my goal is in this way to bring the theory of environmental aesthetics closer to the practice of assessing the value of landscape.

¹²⁵ Although my emphasis on the empirical is mainly inspired by phenomenological approaches and the concept of *Lebenswelt* or life world, it is also in line with the emerging field of experimental philosophy which makes use of empirical data to shed light on philosophical questions (Knobe & Nichols 2008).

However, all aesthetic experiences of landscapes or environments do hold the potential to draw the perceiver's attention to her immediate sensuous perception in a way that allows her to open up to perceiving only to perceive and leaving her pre-conceived ideas, interests and frames of thought aside. The aesthetic experience of seeing a small flower grow out of a concrete road crack can generate a feeling of sublime beauty just as the glacier can. In this way, extreme landscapes can serve as a magnifying glass for the less extreme. The moment of experiencing beauty, where one's perceptual attention is drawn towards the other, provides the possibility of experiencing through our embodied being our relation with the environment that we are always already inherently a part of. This is a form of self-knowledge that is urgently needed today. We have had the ecological understanding of the place of humans in nature for a long time, but this knowledge has not yet "hit home". For that to happen we need to have the possibility of a direct perceptual experience of being a part of nature's ecological system and that is where aesthetic, embodied experiences of natural landscapes play a key role.¹²⁶

These type of experiences are the experiential analogue to the ecological understanding of the environment (Berleant 2007) and they are also an experiential analogue to the understanding of the environmental, ecological¹²⁷ self. This new perspective on the self is one of the major contributions of the environmental sciences and humanities to a richer understanding of what it means to be a human being. As such it challenges the traditional Western philosophical ideas about the human self that have dominated our modes and systems of thinking for too long. The influential ethical ideas of the Kantian rationally autonomous self which makes autonomous decisions without any influence from the external environment, and of the human self as *homo economicus* which grounds decisions for action primarily on self-interest, both assume that the ethical self can thus stand independently from her biological and social environment. These ideas of the subject that have been characteristic of major trends within Western ethics are extended in environmental ethics and aesthetics as the relationality of the human subject is acknowledged. Experiences of standing in relation to the environment and to other living beings reveal an idea of the subject as an embodied, relational, environmental self that is not detached from but immersed in the environment.

¹²⁶ This is in line with Aldo Leopold's thought: "It is inconceivable to me that an ethical relation to land can exist without love, respect and admiration for land, and a high regard for its value. By value, I of course mean something far broader than mere economic value; I mean value in the philosophical sense" (Leopold 1949, 223). Aesthetic experiences of non-anthropogenic landscapes are experiences of beauty that generate love, respect and admiration. Such experiences play an important role in shaping our ethical relation to land.

¹²⁷ I am referring here to ecology in a broad way, including cultural ecology.

In this way, ideas of embodiment and environment have renewed philosophical thought by challenging the core ideas about what it means to be human. Being human is not characterized first and foremost by having a detached rational mind, but rather an engaged relational body that affects our rational approach to reality. There is no distinct separation of mind/body, reason/emotion, human/non-human, nature/culture, rather our emotional response to our embodied aesthetic perception informs our rational view of the world. Our traditional notions of “human” are being contested in a radical way in this context.¹²⁸

This philosophical understanding of the environmental or ecological self that is experienced in our aesthetic perception of landscape obviously has ethical implications. These implications go beyond reflections about whether beauty leads to duty, i.e. whether the aesthetic value of a landscape necessarily leads to a moral obligation to protect it (Rolston 2002, Carlson & Lintott 2008). The ethical implications that are most important here are the impact that the extended notion of the self that is revealed through the experience of beauty has on the way that we think about ourselves in relation to the world.

Providing more scientific books, information and evidence about global environmental change does not alone seem able to make us grasp the knowledge that we need to take to heart if we are to avert the ecological crisis we are facing. As our knowledge of the human influence on the natural world has increased we are realizing the enormous scale of this influence that has been described in terms of a new geological age, called the “Anthropocene”. However, this realization has not yet led to the dramatic changes that are needed in policy-making and in people’s behavior and attitudes towards nature. This is why issues regarding the global environmental change we are going through have to be re-framed as not only environmental, scientific challenges but as human and social challenges.

In order to deal with such challenges we need to understand the roles of culture, values and behavior in environmental change, we need to transform our societies and question deeply held values and assumptions about our place in the natural world. Reflecting on the experience of landscape beauty helps us question some of the most deeply held assumptions that we have about the self, and about the ways we find meaning and value in the world. This project is thus a part of the re-framing and re-thinking of the human subject as a relational being that is needed in order to face the challenges of global environmental change.

¹²⁸ As Rosi Braidotti argues we have entered a posthuman condition which “introduces a qualitative shift in our thinking about what exactly is the basic unit of common reference for our species, our polity and our relationship to the other inhabitants of this planet. This issue raises serious questions as to the very structures of our shared identity – as humans – amidst the complexity of contemporary science, politics and international relations (Braidotti 2013, 2). Thus we are in the process of “outgrowing” the traditional notions of “man” or “human”.

In a recent Icelandic research on children's understanding and views of nature, children were asked to take photographs of nature and write something about them. The photographs revealed their attention to the aesthetic qualities of nature and the words accompanying them portrayed a deep love for nature. The photos were for example of a sunset, with the words: "the beautiful sun, I get warmth in my heart"; of a small spring: "the sun is mirroring the water, the water is so clear"; of a flower: "I feel warmth in my heart when I see colorful flowers"; of a horse grazing: "I took this picture because it is so beautiful and natural". The children also showed a deep respect and care for nature and a willingness to protect it (Sigurgeirsdóttir 2011). The aim of this present work is to have impact, and I hope that the ideas discussed here will among other things encourage more teachers, parents, researchers, politicians and others to take these children's experiences of beauty in nature seriously in the future. Instead of them learning gradually as they get to know the society's systems of thought and conduct that these are "personal" and "subjective" experiences that they should keep to themselves and do not matter when it comes to decision-making, I hope that they learn that these experiences are an extremely important part of their quality of life and well-being, and that the bond that they feel with nature in such experiences is a bond that should not be marginalized but respected and cherished.

I know that aiming for such an impact is an ambitious goal; how can I make sure that the knowledge I have produced will actually have an impact on public debates and not just be left on the top of the shelf of the library where one or two likeminded philosophers will read it? The first step I have already taken, by doing a philosophically oriented, interdisciplinary research that aims at shedding light on and contributing to solving an issue that the society I'm living in is dealing with, rather than doing a philosophical analysis of all the possible meanings of one idea or concept (in line with accepted professional standards of the field) without applying it to real situations. In this way, I hope to have enlarged the audience to include not just everyone that is interested in a particular philosophical idea or concept, but everyone that is interested in a particular issue of environmental politics. The second step I can take to attempt to prevent this work from collecting dust on the library shelf is to write in a language that is understandable to a larger audience than most philosophical works sadly are, especially in times of increasing specialization of the field. This is the case with most, if not all, academic disciplines: each has developed its own professional language that is not easily accessible to academics within other disciplines and still less accessible to the general public that very seldom gets an insight into what goes on in the ivory tower of academia.

Since I knew from when I started my PhD studies that I had to write in English due to the academic context of writing a thesis for a PhD degree in philosophy, I

decided that I would also write an Icelandic version of the thesis. This is a necessary step in my mind, since this work is aimed directly at shedding light on a contemporary issue that is central in shaping the future of this country. This is a society that is presently developing both nature-based tourism on a massive scale, as well as engaged in environmental struggles about constructions of dams and geothermal energy plants. Both developments have severe effects on Icelandic landscapes. How are we to discuss these developments without a comprehensive account of landscapes and the concepts we use to articulate and frame the issues at hand? Writing the Icelandic version of this project will also bring the opportunity to find ways of expressing philosophical ideas in a way that reaches a wider audience than is usual for academic works.

However, worrying about the book on the library shelf and what language it is written in is not the only way to consider the possible impact of this work. There are many other steps I can take to make sure that this work can have impact on public debate. I can engage in a dialogue with as many different groups of people as possible and create opportunities for interactions between researchers and those involved in practical work on landscape as Sepänmaa has done in Finland;¹²⁹ I can write shorter works that are published outside academia; I can teach courses in as many places and at as many levels as possible; I can co-operate with people from different disciplines and fields of work to promote awareness and discussions of landscape and aesthetic value; and I can speak out and encourage others to speak out when landscapes and the beauty that we find in them is threatened by environmental decision-making that is based on a far too narrow view of environmental values.

This is in my view the role of the philosopher: spreading her ideas and knowledge as widely as possible and making use of philosophical reflection to contribute to public debates on practical issues that need to be addressed in the society she is living in. Providing a richer and more diversified understanding of beauty and the aesthetic value of Icelandic landscapes is my contribution to the public debate in Iceland at this point, and hopefully this contribution will free landscape beauty from its predicament as the elephant in the room of debates on the fate of a natural landscape or an environment.

¹²⁹ I am referring here to the series of international environmental aesthetics conferences in the years 1994-2009 that had the aim of building bridges between the theory and practice of environmental aesthetics (Sepänmaa 2007, 2010).

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