

‘Wish you were here’: Contemporary Views of the Outer Hebrides

Introduction

In August 2016, the Transocean Winner oil-drilling platform escaped its tugboat’s moorings while being transported in the North Atlantic, and ran aground on the rocky western coast of the Isle of Lewis (BBC 2016). I too had ended up on the shores of the island for one of my many week-long visits. I had heard of the oil rig’s predicament and thought that this was as good as any opportunity to come and have a look at it. After a brief hike over sloping fields, I reached the saddle of the headland north of where the rig was located. Across from me, stretched a deep azure water with granite cliff side edges topped with grassed moorlands. At the far end, precariously sat the bright orange drilling structure, its large cylindrical legs exposed and haphazardly resting on the rocky shore (Figure 1). At the base of this *Daliesque* view, a tugboat was moored to the base of the rig, waiting to transport people onto the platform. Out at sea, a large naval ship maintained a silent vigil of the scene.

This view brought about a particular collision of elements, between the rugged coastline and the structure now resting upon its headland. It showed in a microcosm the landscapes that I was trying to understand where dichotomies live in tension (Wylie 2007) with each other. The idealised images of the Outer Hebrides include wind swept beaches, isolated peat covered moors, and craggy cliff tops abounding with wildlife and proclaimed as ‘Britain’s own wilderness’ (*The Economist* 17 September 1966 in Macdonald 1998). These images are reproduced in tourist postcards and websites to entice visitors to visit and explore, maintaining a particular view on the landscape (Maclean 2014). These existing ways of seeing the Western Isles (and to an extent the Scottish Highlands) omit the complexities of its making. A Romantic gaze (Urry and Larsen 2011) is cast upon the islands where aesthetic perspective of sublime and picturesque maintain authority, formulating a dominant narrative of the region.

This article argues for a rethinking of the Outer Hebrides landscape through its multiplicities (Wylie 2007; Barnett 2013) by seeking the ‘minor histories’ (Benjamin 1974; Deleuze and Guattari 1987) of the region. This is done through a visual method of postcard making and illustration where its traditional tourist gaze is reversed to understand contemporary perceptions of Hebridean identity. Thereby, challenging the notion of illustration not just as promoter of a particular view, but as ethnographer and critical tourist. This article positions itself in articulating a different way of seeing the islands, where the everyday issues of infrastructure, isolation, and detachment are key to its residents. Therefore, what is needed is not just the presentation of one ‘way of seeing’ (Berger 1972), but of allowing different perceptions of seeing the landscape to emerge through the idea of minor histories. Furthermore, it places the reflective researcher/practitioner as a foil to the minor histories, which provides a visual reflection-in/on-action of the research. In this sense, the project entertains the landscape’s spectacle, its work, and subversion, yet maintaining a critical eye on the politics and social issues of the region.

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This article presents the postcards through a constellation (Benjamin 1950; Polsky 2005; Friesen 2016) or a collection of images in dialogue with the landscape. These are explored against the dominant Romantic perceptions and contemporary aesthetic representations of the sublime. First, it covers the way that landscapes are theorised in its multiple perspectives along with a review of the external perceptions of the Outer Hebrides through its history. The focus turns towards the use of drawing and its place within the image making of the islands, and thus as the tool of inquiry. The article is then structured into three sections where the narratives of the postcards are presented, with explorations on the Romantic, aesthetic and postcard histories of the view. These are analysed by the exploration of the term minor histories and the constellation where the landscape is seen as a multiple and relational one. As part of the image constellation are the author’s illustrations providing a reflective commentary to the collection. The article concludes with reflections of the project and the implications of thinking differently about these islands.

Seeing the Hebridean Landscape

A landscape is understood to be many things, from the concept of humans inhabiting an environment (Sauer 1963), to representations of the politics of identity, power and race (Cosgrove and Daniels 1988). A landscape can also take on a more embodied and dwelled perspective (Merleau-Ponty 1962; Ingold 1993) or it can be performed and practiced (Thrift 2007; Wylie 2012). A good definition of landscape is what Wylie (2007) calls a ‘creative tension’ where the landscape is held within four pairings: proximity and distance, observing and inhabiting, eye and land, and culture and nature; they ‘animate the landscape concept making it cogent and productive’ (Wylie 2007: 214). This means that a landscape is not just a particular form or encounter, but has many interpretations and manifestations. Thinking the landscape through its multiplicities (Barnett 2013) opens the scene to understanding it as the relationships of different views and ideas, thereby, enabling it to include the dominant and subordinate narratives of the region. This article looks at these representations of the social, political and economic issues that are prevalent within the islands today. This is similar to the landscape work of new cultural geography (Meinig 1979; Cosgrove and Daniels 1988) as well as, contemporary reflections of place (Dovey 2016) and sound (Prior 2017) where the concepts of understanding multiple views could best be used to think about landscapes. In this sense, landscapes do not just describe, but can be setup as ways of seeing different landscapes in its illustrations.

Throughout its history, the Western Isles have been encountered through a detached outside perspective (Lorimer 1999; Maclean 2014) where the landscape is something to be viewed like a painting, based upon the eye and what is present ‘out there’. The notion of the Hebrides being a wilderness is not a new idea, it has developed over many centuries, evolving within a binary between the mainland perspective and the ‘periphery’ of the islands. Countless peoples have encountered its shores maintaining a strong mix of perspectives, most of them external to the islands (Cunliffe 2001; Maclean 2014). Historically, the Hebrides were home for a collection of Gaelic speaking peoples whose cultural influence spread across from Galicia to the Isle of Lewis (Moffat 2001). Over time, various cultures encountered, traded and

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intermarried with the Gaelic speaking communities on the islands, including the Viking raiders who, from the eleventh to the thirteenth century, conquered and settled amongst the existing islanders. Throughout late mediaeval and early modern period the regional clans formed tenuous alliances with each other and amongst the mainland clans. The eventual subjugation of the region, by the Anglo-Scots, reached its height with the Battle of Culloden and the subsequent eighteenth and nineteenth century Highland Clearances (Richards 2007). These external forces brought about a perception that Highlanders were unruly, lawless, and in need of control from more ‘civilised’ lowland peoples (Morisson 2012). Today these landscapes maintain that external perspective allowing for only particular ways of experiencing it. In the next section, I explore a new approach through postcard making as a way to counter these external viewpoints.

Postcard Makings

This project was an initial part of a larger participatory research programme in developing creative industries within social and economic circles of the Outer Hebrides. It required an understanding to not only outside narratives, but the research group’s preconceived notions of the islands. As noted, the region has been a place where different people engaged in ‘innovation’ and improvements (Hutchinson 2015) and our cohort would be no different, if we did not first understand contemporary concerns, before undergoing further work. It is important to challenge these existing preconceptions, since they can perpetually maintain a way of development that biases towards these Romanticised images.

Postcards in context

The picture postcard was developed in the late nineteenth century as a way to not only promote the use of postal service, but to provide a quick and efficient way of sharing a message. The loss of the envelope and the introduction of printed franking allowed for the postcard’s use to increase over the course of the late nineteenth century. The postcard image allowed for the promulgation of Romantic ideals to the mass of newly formed travellers that the opened railroads and shipping lanes of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century allowed in Britain (Rogan 2008). As the ‘Golden Age’ of postcard use developed in the early twentieth century, the Highlands and the Islands would also develop an image as places to visit, ponder and play in. The increase in visitation brought people to the ‘periphery’ of Scotland whose postcards portrayed a relaxing atmosphere, as was the case of Rothesay and the Isle of Skye for Glasgow (Figure 2).

According to Rogan (2008), postcards can be categorised into four areas: aesthetics, souvenir, collectible, and communication. These four themes are not mutually exclusive and many cards would be used for the fact that they were beautiful, cheap, and easily available to everyone. Markwick (2001: 417) states that the postcard ‘serves both as a personal memento of the experience and as a means of extending it to other potential tourists as recipients’, this means that postcards are a useful measure of not only understanding the experience of the participant but can generate collective transactions of space. Current work with postcards

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provide grounding in its cultural implications (Prebensen 2007; Yüksel and Akgül 2007) and an alternative to standard narrative reflections in developing a visual ethnography.

Drawing and visual ethnography

Visual ethnography (Pink 2009) has developed overtime to encompass a variety of approaches from photo-elicitation (Mannay 2010) to video use (Schembri 2009). Its reflexive and collaborative nature is deemed a useful approach to existing ethnographic methods. Amongst those approaches, drawing as a visual ethnographic method is an important point in studying landscapes and people (Mitchell et. al 2011). Berger states ‘To draw is to look...the act of drawing refuses the processes of disappearances and proposes the simultaneity of a multitude of moments’ (Berger 2005:71). Drawing is an intimate connection between what one sees and what one is thinking—it is knowledge creating—it is embodied. Historically, drawing could be considered the realm of the artist (Taussig 2009), yet Ruskin did not want to teach artists, Ruskin wanted ‘to teach you to see’ (Hewison 1996: 33) through drawing. Furthermore, drawing, as Taussig (2011) has described, represents not only the happenings in the world but also the mind's action upon the paper.

Using drawing as a method for data collection has been used by Galileo in recording the phases of the moon and his discovery of Saturn (Tufte 2006). The fields of archaeology and architecture use drawing to capture what photographs cannot (Craddock 1994). In the natural sciences, drawings are common to record physical processes onto handmade maps, usually being turned into ‘proper’ illustrations (Ainsworth et al. 2011). Rose (2012) explored the use of drawing in health studies of children where drawings are used to explain when speaking or writing is inappropriate or not applicable. Used as a journalistic and interpretive tool the act of drawing is a key part of an immersive part of landscape representations. Azevedo and Ramos (2016) warn though of a desire to jump onto the ‘drawing as ethnography’ bandwagon and be critical of the limitations that drawing can have within the collection of data. It should be used in conjunction with other forms of textual and verbal communication. Therefore, drawing in conjunction with narrative collection are useful tools in which to understand the world, it gives your eyes, brain and hand a way to communicate with each other to reflect upon what is seen rather than just accept what you receive through the eyes. In this case, the use of drawing for postcard making encourages a reflective and thoughtful approach to the question of the landscape.

Postcard Workshop

Three workshops were held between April and October 2016 in the Western Isles: Uig, on the Isle of Lewis; Grimsaigh, on North Uist; and Cothrom in South Uist. Each workshop had a selection of people including elderly, young adults, and residents who are originally from the islands and those who had moved there. I chose a diverse base of people whose life histories would highlight the ‘counter-narratives’ inherent within, attuning to the minor histories that show the complexity and breadth of the landscape. The workshops were approximately two hours long held at an agreed space. After a brief introduction from myself,

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I developed a relaxed and informal foundation of what we would be doing. The main question I provided was asking the participants: How do you perceive your landscape? This question was intentionally left broad, as I wanted to get as many viewpoints and representations as possible. Various drawing utensils were supplied or participants were asked to bring whatever they wanted to make the cards (Figure 3). The only consistent element was the A6 card supplied by myself. After a period of drawing and chatting (workshops lasted two hours), the cards would be placed together and a brief description and reflection period would give the participants time to talk about their postcards. The following section explores these tools through a constellation of narratives and drawings, beginning with *weathered views*.

Weathered Views

Our first set of cards showcase a view from a house or what the participants perceive to be an important scene. These landscapes range from sunny skies to dark and stormy places. In these instances, the weather becomes particularly important with the image most drawn as a steel grey sky or dark and difficult seas, a changing feeling that counters the sunniness that usually gets portrayed in brochures. One participant explains:

‘Do you know, I can't tell you the amount of times we are apologising because of the weather, it's not our fault but it's an expectation that it's going to be beautiful colours and beautiful this, that and the other.’

There's a sense of frustration about what is expected and what happens regularly. The weather is unpredictable and even more so here on the islands. Her frustration in how to manage the expectations thus shares a desire to ‘truly’ show what the weather is like out on the islands. Another participant noted (Figure 4):

The other nice thing is that you see the weather coming...that is something really beautiful, when you see how it comes and how it goes. The three layers of clouds, they're moving in quite different directions because of different weather systems. We had a storm just two days ago, then suddenly, something is missing, suddenly at ten o'clock it was quiet just like that, it's really loud, you get used to it you miss it when it is suddenly gone.

The weather here merits more than of a wonder of its climate, they evoke a sensorial and affective feeling immediate to the landscape. These images suggest a connection to the historically Romantic ideals of the landscape with an insight towards the sublime, reinforcing the dominant aesthetic views of the region—in what is termed the Romantic gaze.

The Romantic gaze and the wild islands

Urry and Larsen (2011) describe the Romantic gaze as the individual view within the landscape taking in the entirety of what they see. This gaze is attributed to a need to commodify the object being seen not as the object, but the scene itself. This idea stems from

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landscape aesthetic viewpoints developed during the Enlightenment, which include the ideas of beauty, sublime, and picturesque. The sublime is a term used to describe a feeling, a psychological experience, or transcendental form (De Luca 1991). Kant considered the sublime the mere capacity of thinking which evidences a fault of mind transcending every standard of sense. Lyotard (1991:93) argues for the acknowledgement of the sublime as transcending the romanticism into modernism, as it is the only ‘artistic sensibility to symbolise’ modernism. Therefore, the sublime is a way of not only understanding those things that cause pain or find objectionable, but it is a way of surprising and challenging reality.

Under this idealisation, the sublime would be about the awe inspiring and the transcendence of the individual within nature. For example, paintings such as Richard Ansdell’s *Isle of Skye*, where shepherd and sheep form a dialogue between raw landscape and pastoral caretaker, (Figure 5) are royal depictions of Scotland’s ‘wilderness’ that provided an impetus to the ‘myth of the Highlands’ (Morisson 2012). MacDonald (1998, 2001) considers the sublime in understanding the ideas of St Kilda and as a whole challenging the ‘innocent’ accounts of travellers to the Outer Hebrides. The perception of the ‘oceanic sublime’ developed through these voyages including the Ossianic poems of Macpherson and early travelogues by Boswell, take on a transcendental approach to the islands. The visitors through these sublime voyages not only partook in enjoying their voyage to the islands, but also brought along with and back to the rest of the world, a particular view of the Western Isles. It is through this development of sublime wonder that a rich aesthetic developed around the islands and would carry into modernity through tourism.

The Tourist gaze and contemporary Scottish spectacles

Tourism grew through the late nineteenth century as sublime oceanic journeys to the islands developed and inspired by the eighteenth-century writings. The proliferation of railroads and ferries ‘opened up’ the islands for any Central Belt traveller to enjoy a day trip (Durie 1997). These trips would influence the way the region would grow and promote itself to the outer world (Bhandari 2013). The collective tourist gaze brought about a dedicated industry of service that can be considered a ‘visual consumption of the Highlands’ (MacDonald 1998: 241). Today those early postcard images evolved into contemporary examples of the VisitScotland webpage or even at a tourist shop (Figure 6). The solitary figure, the sublime coastline, and rocky shores became a key component in representing the Scottish Highlands and Islands and carries on today (Blaikie 2001, Maclean 2014). The Romantic splendour and writings have become the dominant narrative and image that prevails in shops, websites and the imagination of visitors and residents. A way to counter this perception is to show new representations about the island landscape, which leads to the next series of images.

Everyday Life

The second type of cards approached a more reflective stance of the landscape. Here the

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cards reacted towards what a landscape was in their life. It could be a historical sense, a strong sense of belonging, or a feeling of homeliness. Many of these cards also reflected upon the labour and work that is done on the islands. It shows a strong significance placed on being productive, on working fields, tending to animals, repairing fences or simply acknowledging the passage of time.

The Glove

During one of the workshops, a bit of hesitation and quiet thought was common to expect, and for a few it was difficult to think of what to draw. As time passed at the workshop, one of the participants drew a simple orange coloured glove, similar to the ones that are normally worn by the fisherman on the boats off the coast of the islands. They explained (Figure 7):

Basically they just chuck them overboard when they are finished with them. They are so frequent, I've seen them, they've got textured fingers for easy grip. I remember seeing one and I took a photo of it, it had – the fingers were like that on the sand! A rude gesture, you know. But it's just an emblem, it's so common, it's like waving at you from...the sand.

Here the glove is symbolic of the fisherman and the labour encountered out at sea. Though not visible from land, you acknowledge the affective presence that the glove would have with the participant. Their ubiquitous nature and tattered patina evidences the actions at sea and its detritus on the shores.

Footballer

Another example of this type of reflection came from a young footballer. He was originally hesitant to draw, to what probably seemed like a ‘silly’ activity, but encouraged by the group to come and draw. He would state (like many others) that he ‘could not draw’. I had mentioned that it was ok, and that whatever he made was ok. I asked him what does the landscape mean to him? After some false starts and a long time staring at the page, he began to draw. He did not know, but what he drew expressed something differently. The image shows a set of mountains hills with a path leading to the top where two people (in his explanation him and his girlfriend) walk upon it. He enjoys his walks and actions on the hills of South Uist. (Figure 8)

In the foreground, are four objects: a JCB digger, two dogs, and a football. Each one is representative of his life; the football is his desire to play for a professional team. He has played on the shores since he has a boy, and had recently been to Glasgow to try-out for the semi-professional league, but had not been chosen. This then leads to the second image, the JCB. He works as a mechanic where he repairs not only large machinery but also runs the JCBs when needed. Finally, his dogs are examples of his world and his support. The four images thus showcase a landscape of desire, of uncertain futures, yet, a reliance on the way these worlds come together on the islands.

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Working spaces

In response to these views, where the everyday landscape is shared, I sought more of these ‘working’ landscapes. Along the single-track roads evidence of lobster traps, remnant quarries, and peat cuts reflected that laboured space, showcasing that the islands are more than Romantic views. In my illustrations, I chose a wind turbine as part of the larger windfarms across the Isle of Lewis is integral to developing renewable energy from the constant winds. Yet, controversy over placement, size and infrastructure limit its use at the moment. Similarly, the Uist Stone Quarry, though shutdown, is now home to a seaweed drying and processing facility. This facility carries on a historically significant industry of kelp processing for fertilisers, but as its use fell with the artificial fertilisers, the kelp industry faltered on the islands (Kohn 2002). According to Mitchell (2003: 245), landscapes are a ‘social product, made and remade’ by the people who live within it and the desire of other social actors to present it in their own view, therefore, a landscape is a social struggle between different actors who vie over the way that a landscape is produced and how it is represented. Today, the seaweed plant sees its product transformed into a valuable resource for twenty-first century development (Figure 9). In this sense, the working everyday images belies the Romantic dominant narrative.

Social Commentaries

The third postcard type focused on particular issues of the islands looking towards the ruinous, the overlooked, and forgotten. Many of these images would normally not make it onto a tourism campaigns, which included scenes of abandoned crofts or old military sites. Rather these images showcased thoughts on contemporary concerns of the lack of young people on the islands, the acceptance of intergenerational connections that are not present on the mainland, or the difficulties with dealing with the past.

Detached History

The historical references of the islands are incredibly complex and difficult to explore without bringing up contentious issues of forced evictions, politics and language. One of the participants, an island-born resident, explained their card (Figure 10):

Yes, I love archaeology and doing it, joining in, but then I think it's kind of [...], it becomes a Disneyworld kind of thing, your perceptions, you put in perceptions of [...] the past and then you are thinking maybe it wasn't like that, perceptions of class [...] – just what we perceive as reality.

She explains how her history seems detached from her past, explaining it in relation to the work of archaeology. The lines on the right of page are the layers of history like the midden deposit at an archaeological site and the dark silhouette out of charcoal on the left represents the people of the islands. The gap between the two is the detachment of history with its people. She continues expressing the ideas of archaeology in terms of island culture:

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When archaeologists discuss certain things done in a certain way. You think some guy might have just gone out one day and said, 'Do you know what, I'm just going to carve this shape, for the hell of it', like we are doing just now and then they [the archaeologists] are studying it going, 'This is something new!' I know it's done as a science, studying the patterns or shards and little bits of ceramic and it dates it a certain year, I understand the value of that, but sometimes 'Och, let's just do this for a change!'

She realises that history and archaeology are part of making culture. In this sense, she wants to ‘get on with it’ as a way of carrying on with what the past has done and not worrying about it, too much. Her understanding that perhaps we read too much into things may just be how to deal with her past. She concludes her description:

When I do archaeology it's the layering, quite often you see it in the sand dunes, you always get a layer falling away [...] where all the rubbish has come, and you always get lines of shells and the burn remnants, but also when you actually draw that, it creates a sound. A kind of – in a way it's an additional message, but trying to get the message – it's always your perceptions.

Webs

Carrying forward the conversation, other participants described their thoughts on the role of island living, putting forward a unique quandary evident in many small close communities. She stated:

In the islands, it is not possible to be disconnected from the people around you. Relationships are a web, sometimes built over generations. Living in a remote place our relationships with each other are crucial to both our mental and physical survival on the island. Sometimes that web can feel restrictive, like a trap rather than a support; it is a relief to leave it for mainland anonymity occasionally.

These two images represent a social commentary and reflection on what is a common occurrence within the islands. The needs of a community are sometimes burdensome to the individual and its perhaps this detachment that is needed from everything, be it their own past or their own community.

Military spaces

These images brought about my own commentary and reflections of the military's presence on the islands. The two illustrations (Figure 11) are a fictionalised view of rockets ready for launching while the other shows the view of a radar station sitting on the hilltops of the islands with a croft in the foreground. Both images reflect upon the immediate presence of the military by the Royal Artillery Guided Weapons Range (known colloquially as the Rocket Range), the RAF radar heads, and the remnant Cold War era stations dotting the coasts. The presence of the military in the Outer Hebrides has a history through the first and second World Wars, but the artillery range has been a contentious and difficult site

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(Macdonald 2006, 2011). The development brought not only machinery, missiles, and new infrastructure, through roads and airfields, but further altered the island communities’ identity and makeup. Though through these contentions, the range continues to play a role in the ‘protection’ of the country, but more importantly in the development of contemporary island culture that defy the tranquil and Romantic perceptions of these islands. For myself, the installation took on a particularly ominous tone when approaching them, as their presence, common to the islander, sits uncomfortably with my own perceptions of not only the ‘wild’ landscape, but of military sites. The radar stations listening not only for missiles, but for other intruders in the day to day life of protecting Britain’s borders and waters. It is also a unique play on the fact that the islanders themselves keep surveillance of each other, as exemplified by the fact that my visits were immediately known by many of the people that I met.

Postcard Constellations

In the visual and narrative analysis of these images, multiple ‘pictures’ of the landscape are created, developed through a careful consideration of the participants’ landscape. A reflection of the cards showcase a broad understanding of what the word landscape is in the participants’ hands (Figure 12). I have shared the cards as fragments within three categories: First, imagery that describes a landscape ‘view’ as descriptors of a perceived physical space. These views align with many of the Romantic ideals of the region and of tourism campaigns, yet bring a sensibility of change through weather and climate. The second type showcases households and livelihood including fishing and crofting, where the everyday activities become entangled in the gaze. The third type, landscape is abstracted as social commentary, where personal observations of complex interactions are expressed in the image. It is the mixture of these narratives that are key to understanding the notions of community and place, allowing for the minor histories to be brought forward, and in developing a contemporary fragmentary constellation of the islands.

‘Minor Histories’ and the constellation

Approaching ‘the island’ as a cultural phenomenon is to enter into these consequences, a world so full of images, dichotomies, myths and metaphors, many of which are old and widespread’ (Ronström 2008: 16)

The Western Isles carry a collective memory and image of these windswept beaches, however, along with this image, though, are hidden narratives of defiance, struggle, and hardship. These stories include themes of loss and tragedy as in the sinking of the *HMY Iolaire* or of eventual expulsions from native lands as clearances brought dramatic changes to the islands. Stories of defiance through the Land Wars of the nineteenth century developed a culture of resistance (Devine 1994) or of indignation to external changes, as was the case with Leverburgh and his ill-fated whaling stations and fishing enterprises on Lewis and Harris (Hutchinson 2015). A contemporary example of these minor histories is *The Great Book of Gaelic* (Maclean and Dorgan 2002), a collected anthology of imagery and poetry

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created by islanders and artists. In its pages are examples of island struggles, everyday life commentary, and a clear showcase of Gaeldom in Scottish society. These stories are what Benjamin (1974) and Deleuze and Guattari (1987) would refer as part of the minor histories. Benjamin’s historical materialism countered the traditional understanding of history. In his *Theses on History*, he states, ‘the true image of the past flits by. That past can be seized only as an image which flashes up at the moment of its recognisability, and is never seen again’ (Benjamin 1974: 390). Thus, the image of history is not a long string of events but rather moments cast upon each other. As Polsky (2005: 86) states, ‘a minor history operates ... through series, pairings, repetitions and deviations of the appearance of ordinary locations. These happenings then are not linked but instead form a constellation of little drama’.

This project shows that each card is not just a representation of a single idea but forms a collective of ideas and narratives each linked to the other. The postcards are examples of these minor histories, not as events unfolding, but rather striking moments in a fragmentary ‘image constellation’. These small ‘postcard dramas’ are in tension with the Romantic dominant narrative exposing a strain between those that visit and those that live there, yet, it is in the tensions that these constellations thrive. These fragments contain subversive moments of the past, though do not quite add up to a complete image are just as integral to its making as the dominant Romantic narrative. The landscape is developed through a careful consideration of what the participants’ landscape was in their head. Dark skies, rough weather, connected communities, and loss, are themes present within the imaginations and practices of the people who leave here. This new image constellation portrays the multiple perceptions of the landscape sitting alongside rather than subversive to the Romantic image.

Illustrations as critical tourist

As shown, I created a series of authorial illustrations inspired by the vintage travel posters and tourist picture postcards of railways and ferries of the early twentieth century. Taking cues from my participants’ observations, as well as my own, I sketched out moments of encounters that seemed everyday or at times out of place (to me) with the surrounding region. I developed a set of illustrations that reflected those scenes and my interpretations. Many of these images would not normally make it onto a tourism campaign but included scenes of radar stations standing silently in the background, abandoned quarries and ruined industrial sites. Developed first as light-hearted pastime, they became a reflection in and on action (Ramos 2004) as a critical tourist on the islands.

The images that came about looked at contemporary issues of industry, military, and infrastructure, where the ruinous, the overlooked, and forgotten are incorporated into the constellations of the Outer Hebrides, forming tensions with the existing tourist gaze. Taking the Romantic ideas of the picture postcard and travel poster I maintained a critical ‘eye’ in their use. The role of drawing and illustration, ‘is to examine, investigate, and seek to interpret, to reposition and recontextualize [*sic*] material for an audience to understand a message, instruction, and body of narrative or reference’ (Selby 2008: 120). My illustrations are an external point of view, and it could be argued that they fall into the same trap as many

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of the Romanticised postcards; however, it is this reflexive component of the visual ethnographer that provides a rigour to the approach (Schembri and Boyle 2013) and gives credence to these illustrations. Drawing and illustration are linked together with the finished artefact of my illustrations as extensions of the hand drawn postcards created by the participants. In the end, the authorial illustration form part of the new constellation of images showcasing another point of view in the multiple island landscape.

Final Reflections

Iain Crichton Smith (1986: 14), spoke in *Real People in a Real Place*, that islanders would be easy to be left behind ‘with his stories and unmaterialistic concerns’. He acknowledged thirty years ago that the collective sentiment towards the Outer Hebrides maintains an almost mythical status. This article has sought to challenge those myths through the fragmentary collection of stories, images and perceptions that are present in contemporary Hebridean society. It is neither trapped within a duality of wild untrammelled space, nor bucolic sublime coasts. These minor histories of identity, desired change, or detached history, form a new point in the contemporary constellation, representing how people understand their landscape. This new understanding shifts perspectives from the standard tourist gaze and towards those minor histories that constitute significant influences on the more overt and Romantic components of the islands. This new constellation is formed through images of a desire to leave the islands, of determination and of resiliency. It is thus these images that provide the backdrop for developing understanding of island cultures not as subservient to the tourist, nor as simple fishermen, but as modern citizens of a twenty-first century Scotland. The role of the postcard plays a key part in subverting the dominant narrative of the ‘wild’ landscape as it allows for these stories to be visualised which otherwise may be difficult to express. The minor histories presented here do not necessarily cover the newest ground, nor are they problems unique to these particular islands; however, it is in this ‘everydayness’ an exposition of isolation, immediateness, and surveillance that new pictures are painted about the islands. They are not just spaces of play, sublime wonder or unruly residents; rather it is the complex constellation of perceptions that generate the contemporary Hebridean landscape.

In this article, I chose to display one of many constellations that the Outer Hebrides contains, one where the islanders are given wider presence within the landscape and its own contemporary image. Much like the oil rig at the beginning, they sit In sharing these stories and acknowledging their presence alternative approaches to resolving their issues can be better understood. It is up to our desires and needs to change that perception, challenging how we perceive not only those islands off a larger island of Great Britain, but of our own pre-conceive notions of many regions in the world. It is towards this end that these images hope to provide new insights into an ongoing struggle of changing the expectations and understandings of these ‘peripheral’ places.

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Figure 1: View of the Transocean Winner drilling platform in Dalmore Bay (Author 2016).



Figure 2: West Bay, Rothesay, The Philco Publishing Co. Series 2593, Posted 13 August 1913

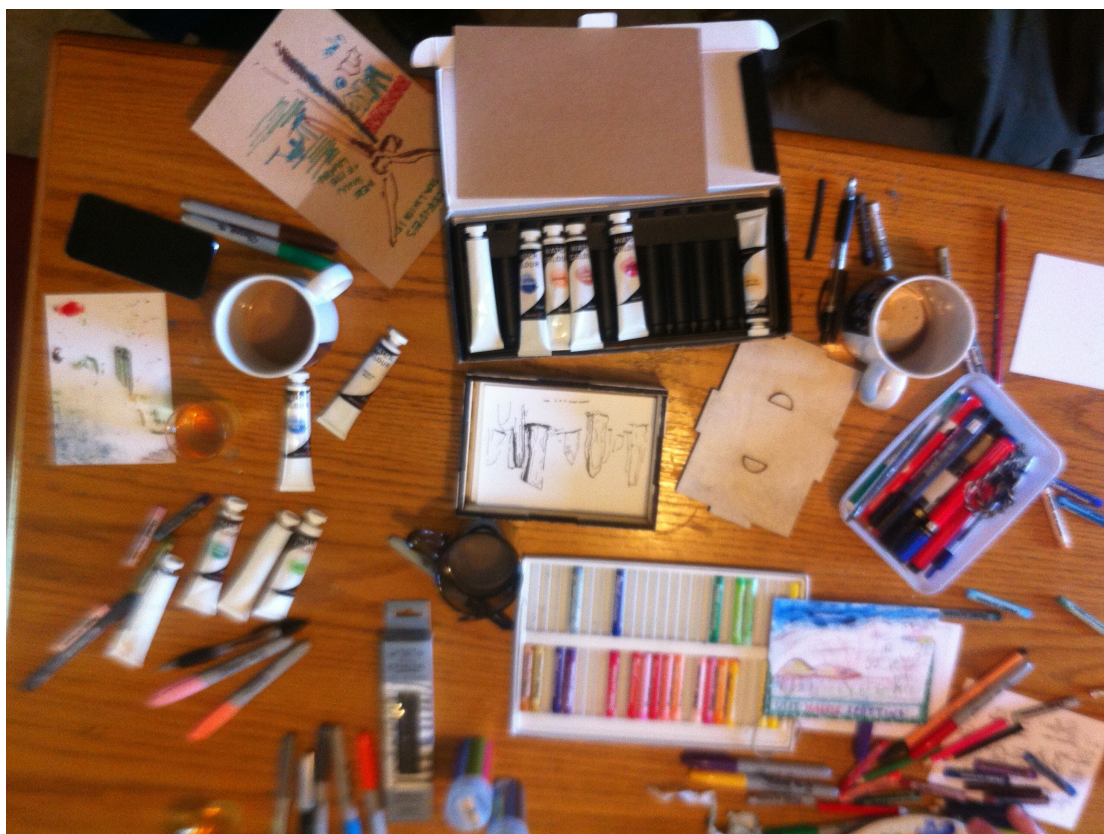


Figure 3: View of postcard making workshop (Author 2016)

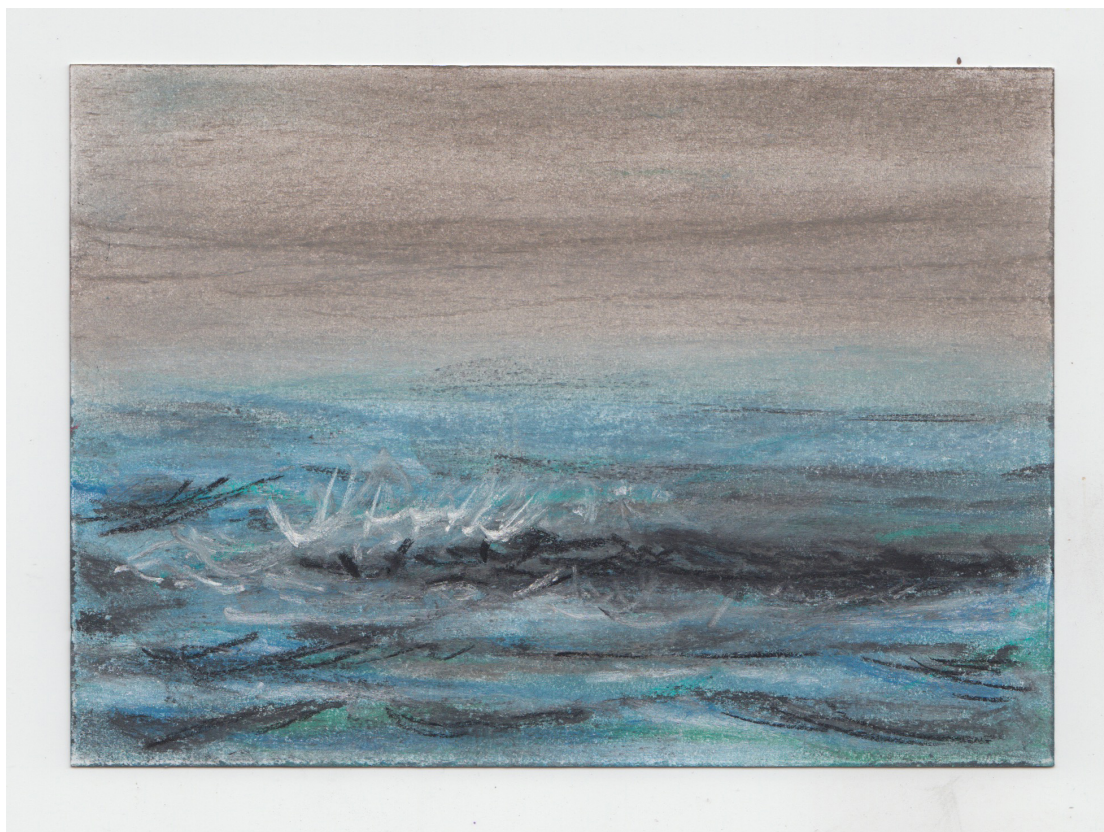


Figure 4: A weathered and dark sea postcard made by one of the participants (Author 2016)



Figure 5: *The Isle of Skye*, Richard Ansdell, oil on Canvas, 1856 (Sothebys)



Figure 6: A rack of postcards at local hotel in Stornoway (Author 2016)



Figure 7: A fisherman's glove (Author 2016)

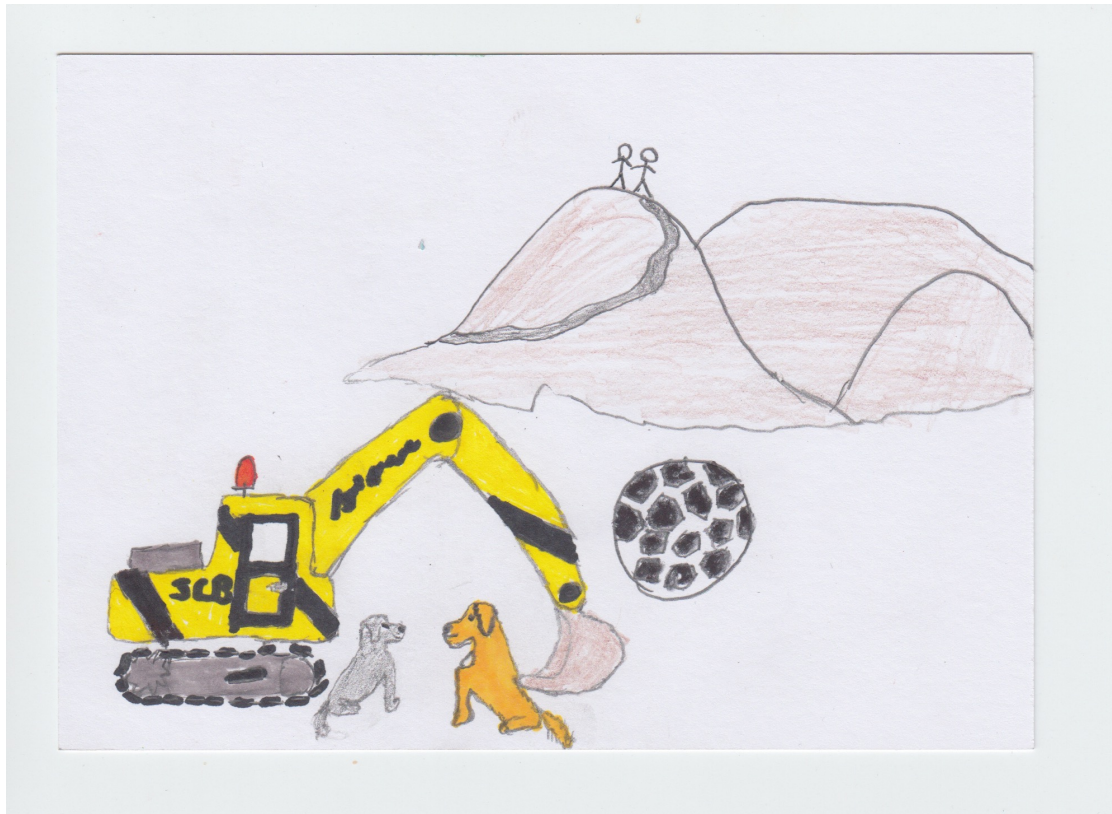


Figure 8: The JCB and dogs with the participant and his girlfriend in the background (Author 2016)



Figure 9: The landscape of production (Author 2016)



Figure 10: The example of detached history in the landscape (Author 2016)



Figure 11: The landscapes of surveillance and military in the islands



Figure 12: A selection of participant postcards (Author 2016)