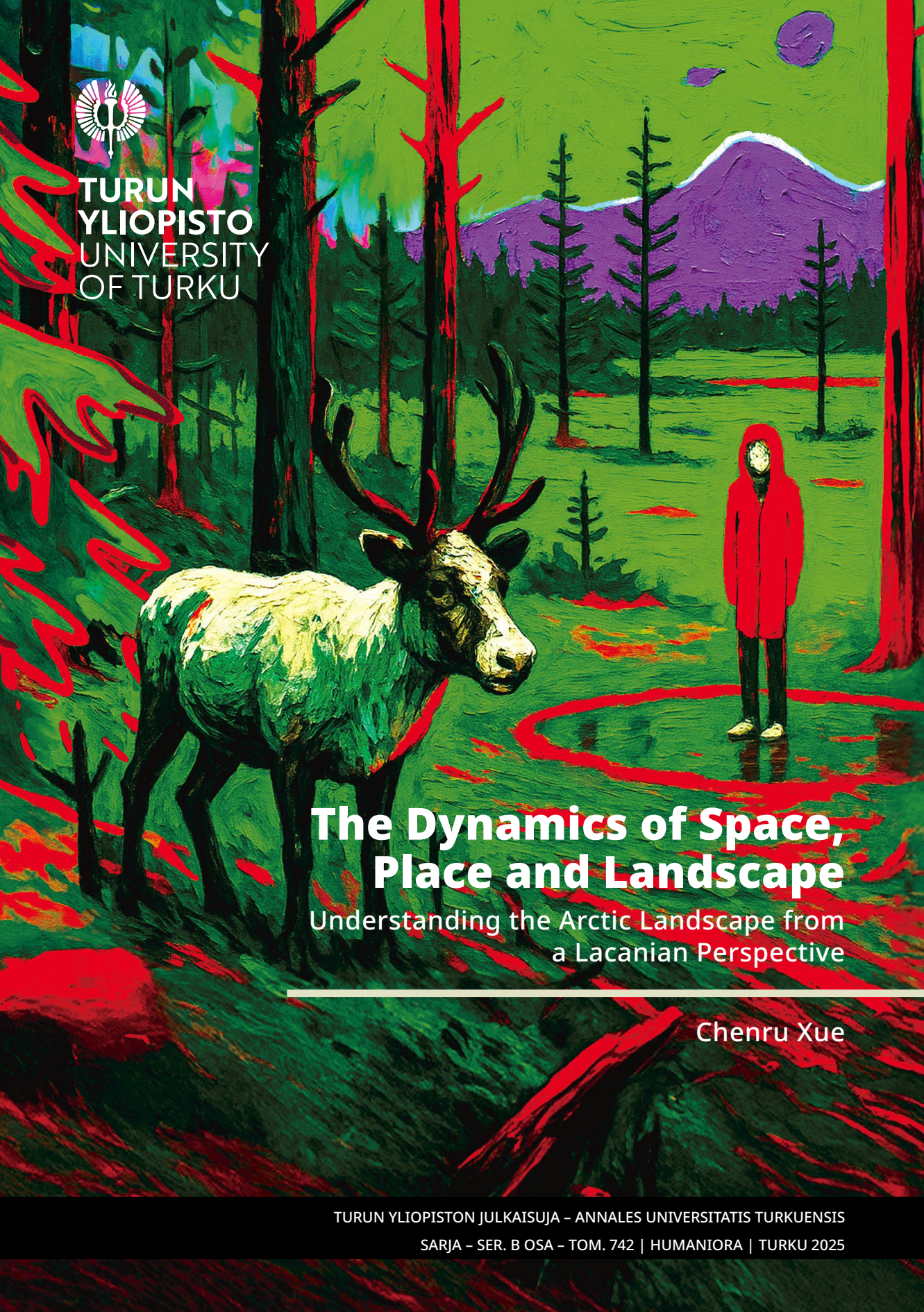

TURUN YLIOPISTO
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The Dynamics of Space, Place and Landscape

Understanding the Arctic Landscape from a Lacanian Perspective

Chenru Xue

TURUN YLIOPISTON JULKAISUJA – ANNALES UNIVERSITATIS TURKUENSIS
SARJA – SER. B OSA – TOM. 742 | HUMANIORA | TURKU 2025

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University of Turku

Faculty of Humanities
School of History, Culture and Art Studies
Landscape Studies
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ABSTRACT

In this dissertation, I investigate the dynamics of space, place, and landscape by reconceptualizing the Arctic landscape through a Lacanian perspective. Bringing W. J. T. Mitchell's triad of space–place–landscape into dialogue with Jacques Lacan's three Orders (the Symbolic, the Imaginary, and the Real), I analyze Arctic landscapes across multiple media, showing how visual and experiential practices reinforce and challenge cultural imaginaries of the region. In this framing, I revisit the concepts of "space," "place," and "landscape": space refers to the formal frameworks that organize a region—laws, maps, policies, and scientific models. Place means the situated, material, and felt dimension—what people do, sense, and remember, including what does not fit the frameworks of space. Landscape is the ongoing meeting point between the two: the images, narratives, and practices through which people perceive a region and orient their movements and actions within it. Through this framework, I examine how Lacan's theoretical model can provide new insights into the production of landscapes, and how this theoretical lens may extend or challenge existing approaches in both landscape studies and visual culture studies.

The dissertation is article-based and consists of four case studies: Chinese Arctic documentaries, anti-landscape in circumpolar environments, visitor experiences in a Finnish national park, and the reconstruction of Arctic imaginaries in video games. These diverse materials, spanning film, photography, ethnographic observation, and digital media, are analyzed through a mixed methodology, combining discourse analysis, iconographic interpretation, and semiological approaches. By combining theory-driven and empirically grounded approaches, I elaborate on the concept of landscape, reconsider the epistemological status of the Arctic in cultural production, and test the applicability of Lacanian categories beyond psychoanalysis. Methodological pluralism enables the dissertation to move from empirical cases to theoretical claims.

Theoretically, the thesis makes three claims. First, I argue that the divide between representational and more-than-representational approaches can be bridged by treating the Real as an operative dimension of place: a disruptive remainder that both anchors and unsettles symbolic orders. Second, I reframe landscape as an ongoing, sometimes spontaneous process in which Symbolic institutions (law, policy, media, science) and the Real's resistant traces continually reconfigure each other, while the Imaginary furnishes temporarily coherent images that steady the subject and mask

constitutive lack. Third, I show how this triadic dynamic clarifies the politics of Arctic visibility: who and what are made legible, how fantasies of wilderness and indigeneity travel, and where lived practice can interrupt or reframe dominant frames.

Taken together, these three claims are developed through the four case studies. Articles II and IV develop the first claim by showing how the Real can be understood as a dimension of place: anti-landscapes and digital gamescapes reveal what escapes symbolic control while opening new ways of engagement. Articles I and III substantiate the second claim, illustrating how landscape operates as a continual process in which symbolic institutions and material resistances interact, while the Imaginary provides transient coherence and orientation for the subject. Finally, across all four studies, the third claim is reflected in the analysis of visibility and mediation: they collectively demonstrate how visual and discursive formations construct the idea of the Arctic within global cultural imaginaries.

In conclusion, I argue that Arctic landscapes must be approached as open sites of negotiation, where local and global agencies interact to reconfigure identity, locality, and meaning-making. Recognizing the Real dimensions of landscape is therefore crucial for developing more reflexive and historically informed modes of environmental engagement in an era of accelerating ecological transformation.

KEYWORDS: Arctic landscape, Lacanian psychoanalysis, space–place–landscape, visual culture, non-representational theory, cultural geography, digital ethnography

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TIIVISTELMÄ

Tässä väitöskirjassa tutkin tilan, paikan ja maiseman dynamiikkaa käsitteellistämällä arktisen maiseman uudelleen lacanilaisesta näkökulmasta. Tuon W. J. T. Mitchellin kolmijaon (tila–paikka–maisema) vuoropuheluun Jacques Lacanin kolmen rekisterin (symbolinen, imaginaarinen ja reaalinen) kanssa ja analysoin arktisia maisemia eri medioissa. Näin osoitan, miten visuaaliset ja kokemukselliset käytännöt sekä vahvistavat että haastavat alueeseen liittyviä kulttuurisia mielikuvia. Tässä kehyksessä palaan käsitteisiin "tila", "paikka" ja "maisema". Tila viittaa muodollisiin kehyksiin, jotka jäsentävät aluetta – lakeihin, karttoihin, politiikkoihin ja tieteellisiin malleihin. Paikka tarkoittaa tilannesidonnaista, materiaalista ja koettua ulottuvuutta – sitä, mitä ihmiset tekevät, aistivat ja muistavat, myös sellaista, mikä ei sovi tilan kehyksiin. Maisema on näiden kahden jatkuva kohtaamispiste: kuvat, kertomukset ja käytännöt, joiden kautta ihmiset havaitsevat alueen ja suuntaavat liikkumisensa ja toimintansa sen sisällä. Tämän viitekehyksen kautta tarkastelen, miten Lacanin teoreettinen malli voi tarjota uusia näkökulmia maisemien muodostumiseen ja miten tämä teoreettinen linssi voi laajentaa tai haastaa vakiintuneita lähestymistapoja sekä maisemantutkimuksessa että visuaalisen kulttuurin tutkimuksessa.

Väitöskirja on artikkeliväitöskirja ja koostuu neljästä tapaustutkimuksesta: kiinalaisista arktisista dokumenttielokuvista, arktisista anti-maisemista, kävijäkokemuksista suomalaisessa kansallispuistossa sekä arktisten mielikuvien rakentumisesta videopeleissä. Nämä monimuotoiset aineistot, jotka kattavat elokuvan, valokuvan, etnografisen havainnoinnin ja digitaalisen median, analysoidaan monimenetelmällisesti yhdistäen diskurssianalyysiä, ikonografista tulkintaa ja semiologisia lähestymistapoja. Yhdistän teorialähtöisen ja empiirisesti ankkuroituja lähestymistapoja, ja tämän kautta syvennän maisemakäsitettä, arvioin uudelleen Arktiksen epistemologista asemaa kulttuurisissa käytännöissä sekä testaan lacanilaisten kategorioiden soveltuvuutta psykoanalyysin ulkopuolella. Menetelmällinen pluralismi antaa väitöskirjalle mahdollisuuden liikkua empiirisistä tapauksista teoreettisiin väittämiin.

Teoreettisesti esitän kolme väitettä. Ensinnäkin väitän, että representaatiolähtöisten ja enemmän kuin representaatiota painottavien lähestymistapojen välinen jako voidaan ylittää käsittelemällä reaalista paikan toiminnallisena ulottuvuutena: häiritsevänä jäännöksenä, joka sekä ankkuroi että horjuttaa symbolisia järjestyksiä. Toiseksi hahmotan maiseman jatkuvaksi, joskus spontaaniksi prosessiksi, jossa

symboliset instituutiot (laki, politiikka, media, tiede) ja reaalisen vastustavat jäljet muovaavat toisiaan uudelleen, samalla kun imaginaarinen tuottaa tilapäisesti koherentteja kuvia, jotka vakauttavat subjektia ja peittävät sen konstitutiivisen puutteen. Kolmanneksi osoitan, miten tämä kolmijakoinen dynamiikka selventää arktisen näkyvyyden politiikkaa: kuka ja mikä tehdään näkyväksi, miten erämaahan ja alkuperäisyyteen liittyvät fantasiat liikkuvat, sekä missä arkiset käytännöt voivat keskeyttää tai muotoilla uudelleen vallitsevia kehyksiä.

Tässä väitöskirjassa esitetyt kolme väitettä kehittyvät neljän tapaustutkimuksen kautta. Artikkeleissa II ja IV ensimmäistä väitettä syvennetään osoittamalla, miten reaalinen voidaan ymmärtää paikan ulottuvuutena: anti-maisemat ja digitaaliset pelimaisemat paljastavat sen, mikä pakenee symbolista hallintaa, ja avaavat samalla uusia tapoja kokea ja toimia. Artikkeleissa I ja III toista väitettä vahvistetaan havainnollistamalla, kuinka maisema toimii jatkuvana prosessina, jossa symboliset instituutiot ja materiaaliset vastavoimat ovat vuorovaikutuksessa keskenään, samalla kun imaginaarinen tarjoaa hetkellistä johdonmukaisuutta ja suuntaa subjektin kokemukselle. Lopuksi kaikissa neljässä tutkimuksessa kolmas väite näkyy näkyvyyden ja välittymisen analyysissa: ne osoittavat yhdessä, miten visuaaliset ja diskursiiviset rakenteet rakentavat arktisen käsitettä osana globaaleja kulttuurisia mielikuvia.

Päätelmänä väitän, että arktisia maisemia on tarkasteltava avoimina neuvottelun paikkoina, joissa paikalliset ja globaalit toimijat muokkaavat yhdessä identiteettiä, paikallisuutta ja merkityksenantoa. Katson, että reaalisen ulottuvuuksien tunnistaminen maisemassa on ratkaisevan tärkeää, jotta voidaan kehittää refleksiivisempiä ja historiallisesti tietoisempia tapoja ympäristösuhteen ymmärtämiseen aikakaudella, jota leimaa kiihtyvä ekologinen muutos.

ASIASANAT: Arktinen maisema, Lacanilainen psykoanalyysi, tila–paikka–maisema, visuaalinen kulttuuri, ei-esityksellinen teoria, kulttuurimaantiede, digitaalinen etnografia

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September 2025
Chenru Xue

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List of Original Publications

This dissertation is based on the following original publications, which are referred to in the text by their Roman numerals I–IV. Articles II, III, and IV are published in academic peer-reviewed publications, and Article I has been submitted for peer review. Please cite the original place of publication when referring to them.

I Xue, Chenru. "Arctic in Shanshui: Landscape of Chinese Arctic Documentaries." Submitted for peer review.

II Xue, Chenru. "The Anti-Landscapes of the Arctic: Understanding Circumpolar Sea–Land Relationships from a Lacanian Perspective." In *Understanding Marine Changes: Environmental Knowledge and Methods of Research*, edited by Savitri Jetoo, Jaana Kouri, and Silja Laine, 2023. 43–66. Cheltenham, UK: Edward Elgar Publishing Limited.

III Xue, Chenru. "Decoding Differences in Nature Park Visitors' Experience: The Case of Pyhä-Luosto National Park." *Tahiti*, 2024; 14 (1): 33–53. https://doi.org/10.23995/tht.142757.

IV Xue, Chenru. "Reconstructing Arctic as Gamescape: Historical Authenticity in Arctico and Never Alone." *WiderScreen*, 2024; 27 (1–2). https://widerscreen.fi/numerot/1-2-2024-widerscreen-27/strongreconstructing-arctic-as-gamescape-historical-authenticity-in-emarctico-emand-emnever-alone-em-strong/

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1 Introduction

In 2016, China Central Television produced and broadcast an eight-part documentary series, *Rediscovering the Arctic*, which examined the current state of the Arctic and China's relationship with the region from various perspectives, including strategy, economics, scientific research, environmental protection, shipping routes, and resources. Shortly after, in early 2018, China's State Council Information Office released the White Paper on *China's Arctic Policy* (2018), which outlined China's basic position on Arctic issues, its policy objectives, principles, and key policy proposals, positioning China as a "Near-Arctic State"—one of the closest countries to the Arctic Circle. At the time, my own imagination of the Arctic was still shaped by 19th and 20th century Western literature, as well as impressions left by films such as Robert J. Flaherty's *Nanook of the North* (1922). However, my brief experience in the Kiruna region of Sweden, combined with my academic training in visual culture studies, prompted me to critically reflect on the unexamined appropriation of the classical northern wilderness image in *Rediscovering the Arctic*. These visual representations in *Rediscovering the Arctic* were carefully constructed to convey a strong ideological stance, producing meanings that extend beyond the images themselves. Through their aesthetic and affective power, such images enter everyday perception, shaping how the Arctic is imagined and understood.

This starting point led me to initially focus my research on the representation of Arctic landscapes. While some earlier art historical approaches often treat images as self-contained visual texts, seeking stable, objective interpretation by analyzing formal elements such as composition, line, and color (see Wölfflin [1915] 1950; Bell 1914), contemporary studies of image representation view images as representational practices influenced by various factors within a visual field, resulting from social and cultural processes (see Bryson, Holly, and Moxey 1994; Mitchell 1986). This has led me to question the structural frameworks that determine the representation of landscapes. If we adopt Stuart Hall's (Hall 1997b, 20–21) view that image production is a process of conceptual encoding, then in studying landscape images, should we not move beyond a mere study of the synchronic interaction of elements within the visual field and also interrogate the concept being

signified—in this context, a material, continuously fragmented and reconstituted *place*?

This doctoral dissertation explores the Arctic landscape and its dynamic relationship with place and space. In this research, I employ a broad geographical definition of the Arctic—the region above the Arctic Circle—as a foundational point of reference. While this definition offers a tangible spatial limitation, my primary focus remains on the culturally constructed Arctic landscape, whose symbolic and experiential boundaries extend beyond any fixed cartographic or climatic criteria. My research not only focuses on the representational aspects of Arctic landscapes but, more importantly, examines how landscapes shape the experiences and practices of subjects within them. It also considers how subjects can navigate discourses and landscapes to engage with the non-representational aspects of place. To achieve this, I draw on research materials across different media. I am also inspired by the psychoanalytic theorist Jacques Lacan's triadic theory, as well as art historian and visual culture scholar W.J.T. Mitchell's theoretical structure of space–place–landscape. By examining Arctic landscapes across these media, alongside the bodily and practical activities of subjects within them, I aim to redefine the concept of landscape through the lens of Lacan and Mitchell.

1.1 Background and aim of the study

The Arctic region is not only a crucial part of the Earth's climate system but also a significant intersection of geopolitics, resource development, environmental conservation, and indigenous cultures. As global warming accelerates ice cap melting, the Arctic is undergoing unprecedented transformations that have far-reaching impacts on global climate, sea level rise, biodiversity, and both regional and global political-economic dynamics. Under the conditions of globalization, Arctic landscapes are often reimagined as symbols of cultural and political boundaries, particularly within the narratives of climate change and environmental crises (Bravo 2009). However, there is a persistent geographical divide in the understanding of the Arctic landscape. On the one hand, environmental changes directly affect the local communities' ways of life, with industries, population shifts, and tourism continuously reshaping the landscapes of the Arctic (Larsen and Hemmersam 2016, 4). These transformations result from the interplay between natural environments and human practices, closely tied to emerging local events. On the other hand, in non-Arctic regions, romanticized and exoticized myths about the Arctic continue to circulate. These outdated narratives and their accompanying visual productions often obscure more immediate and tangible local challenges.

Furthermore, these narratives and landscape images are often reproduced unintentionally, through the unreflective adoption of established representational

conventions. For example, while recent cultural products have begun to address Arctic issues, their presentation still carries strong Orientalist—or more specifically, Borealist[1]—undertones. Additionally, the development of Arctic tourism has also deliberately reinforced these fantasies (Loftsdóttir 2015; Viken 2017). During fieldwork conducted in the Lapland region, I was informed by local tour guides and tourism practitioners that, prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, Chinese visitors constituted one of the largest groups of international tourists in Rovaniemi. At the same time, promotional images circulated on Chinese social media often portrayed Lapland in highly romanticized terms, as an idealized Arctic landscape or a fairy-tale destination. This visual imaginary contrasts sharply with the more pragmatic framings in governmental and scientific representations of the region.

While conducting fieldwork in Lapland, I observed that neither the Sámi communities nor Finnish domestic tourists typically refer to the northern region as the "Arctic." Instead, the term "Lapland" is more commonly used in everyday speech. By contrast, international visitors, especially those from non-Arctic regions, are more likely to emphasize the "Arctic" in their descriptions and reflections. This linguistic distinction suggests that the term "Arctic" often imposes an external, representational, and power-laden perspective, intertwined with issues of territory, sovereignty, and indigenous rights, as knowledge production about the Arctic is often described and defined by non-Arctic regions (Körber, MacKenzie, and Stenport 2017). While recent scholarship has turned to non-representational, phenomenological, or affective approaches to studying the Arctic, it remains essential to recognize that any invocation of the term "Arctic" engages with pre-existing discursive formations shaped by geopolitical and epistemic authority.

Previous scholarship has identified a persistent gap between the production of Arctic knowledge and the mass dissemination of Arctic imagery (e.g., Jakobsson 2009; Kaganovsky, MacKenzie, and Stenport 2019; MacKenzie and Stenport 2015; Sörlin 2016). However, these studies often fail to analyze in depth the specific connections between representation and local practices in the Arctic and fall short of fully discussing how power structures concretely shape Arctic locality. Additionally, existing studies tend to remain methodologically circumscribed, drawing predominantly on frameworks and tools internal to their respective disciplines. To address this limitation, I propose an interdisciplinary approach capable of integrating

[1] As Edward Said famously argued, *Orientalism* is a form of epistemological framing of the "Other" (Said 1978). *Borealism* similarly operates as a specific mode of representation directed toward the North. It exoticizes and fetishizes northern regions, particularly the Arctic, as distant and romanticized Others, catering to idealized imaginaries of "the North" while obscuring its complex social and lived realities.

perspectives across fields, in order to more effectively engage with the complexities of Arctic landscapes.

The greatest challenge lies in bridging the gap between local practices and the representational images produced and disseminated from afar. Southern imaginations of the Arctic illustrate that image dissemination in the Internet era has not significantly enhanced our understanding of a place. While the Arctic undoubtedly holds an important position in global issues, embodied knowledge of Arctic life and practice is limited due to obstacles such as geography and climate—Arctic travel remains a relatively luxurious pursuit, and firsthand local experiences are alien for most southern inhabitants. This predicament suggests the need to approach the Arctic, conceived as a power-structured space, as a potential theoretical starting point. A framework that integrates the interactions between place, landscape, and discourse can illuminate the complexity of Arctic realities while critically exposing external perspectives that are rigid, reductive, or misleading.

Thus, this research draws upon an interdisciplinary theoretical framework, combining visual culture studies, cultural geography, and Lacanian psychoanalytic theory, the latter focusing particularly on the interaction of "the Symbolic," "the Imaginary," and "the Real." The aim is to redefine landscape within this framework while examining the multi-layered representations of the Arctic and their impact on subject experiences and practices. The main objective of this research is to examine how the Arctic is experienced and represented across different cultures and media, and how Arctic landscapes can be seen as a spontaneous interactive process of various forces. Specifically, this study analyzes representations of the Arctic in modern visual media and practices—including documentaries, news photography, national parks, and video games—to understand the cultural, discursive, and ideological motivations behind these representations.

1.2 Research questions

The research question of this study is: **How can Lacan's triadic model of the Symbolic, the Imaginary, and the Real help us to reconceptualize the notion of landscape, thereby offering a deeper understanding of the dynamic processes that shape place, space, and landscape in the Arctic?** I have divided this research question into three more specific ones:

Q1: Within Mitchell–Lacan's theoretical framework, how can we understand *place* as the Lacanian Real in landscape studies?

Q2: How are Arctic landscapes constructed as visual objects in different media to serve ideological or discursive purposes?

Q3: How do power relations shape Arctic landscapes, and how does Lacan's triadic model clarify the subject's capacity to negotiate or contest these power-related contexts?

Besides addressing different aspects of the overall research question, these sub-questions also engage with the ongoing discussions in human geography between representational and non-representational approaches, which have acquired increasing traction in recent decades (see Lorimer 2005; Thrift 2007; Waterton 2018; Harvey 2025). Specifically, these discussions concern how to understand the topological relationships between humans, space, place, and landscape, focusing on the interaction between the material entities of geographical space (as emphasized in non-representational theory) and their cultural, discursive and symbolic meanings (as emphasized in representational theory). In some strands of anglophonic cultural geography, representational approaches have traditionally underscored how places and spaces are depicted and understood culturally, often through visual regimes, narrative forms, or cultural imaginaries (see Cosgrove and Daniels [1988] 2013; Duncan & Ley 1993). By contrast, non-representational perspectives and the more recent more-than-representational approaches shift attention toward embodied practices, affective experiences, and performative engagements with landscape. These approaches emphasize that beyond the signs or images, meaning also emerges through movement, sensation, and material interaction (Lorimer 2005; Anderson & Harrison 2012).

Lacan's theory, emphasizing the interaction between the Symbolic, the Imaginary, and the Real, offers a means to transcend the division between the represented and the non-represented. From this perspective, cultural representation and material practice are not opposed but mutually constitutive. Through Lacan's theory, researchers can explore the psychological and symbolic dynamics linking individuals and social structures. With Lacan's and Mitchell's theories, I argue that representational studies must first acknowledge the unrepresentable aspects of place—what Lacan terms "the Real," a heterogeneous domain that holds the potential to disrupt the illusion of symbolic coherence. Landscape, on the other hand, is the outcome of the interplay between the Symbolic and the Real, where landscapes emerge as what Mitchell calls a "dynamic medium" (Mitchell 1994a, 2).

From the perspective of both Lacan's and Mitchell's theories, the research questions represent a progressive deepening of this study. The first question addresses the dimension of the Real, exploring how the materiality of place, which cannot be fully captured by the symbolic space (e.g., urban planning, architectural design), can become a driver of new landscape formation. The second question follows a more traditional approach to visual culture studies and representation theory, analyzing how the meanings of Arctic landscape images are produced

through the deconstruction of visuality. In Lacanian terms, this question examines how the Symbolic Order produces imaginary illusions for the viewing subject through the manipulation of the act of viewing. The third question examines how different the Symbolic Orders and power structures influence the practical experiences of subjects.

1.3 Articles and the structure of the dissertation

This PhD dissertation comprises a thematic introduction and four research articles. Two of these have been published in peer-reviewed journals, one as a peer-reviewed book chapter, and one is currently under review. Here, I will briefly introduce these articles and discuss the overall structure of the dissertation.

Article I, "Arctic in Shanshui: Landscape of Chinese Arctic Documentaries," employs methods from the field of visual culture studies to examine the Arctic landscape imagery in two Chinese documentaries—*Rediscovering the Arctic* (2016) and *The Light Chaser* (2020). This article argues that the Arctic landscape is portrayed as a metaphor for China's distinctive stance in Arctic governance, signaling China's effort to establish a unique role among Arctic stakeholders. The visual regime of Shanshui provides a highly recognizable aesthetic, while the underlying discourse grants ideological legitimacy to China's participation in Arctic affairs, simultaneously evoking nostalgia and patriotic sentiment among the domestic audiences.

Article II, "The Anti-landscapes of the Arctic: Understanding Circumpolar Sea-Land Relationships from a Lacanian Perspective," explores how, both materially and symbolically, the Arctic transforms from landscape to anti-landscape, shaping the Arctic into a contradictory space. This article analyzes the two forms of Arctic anti-landscapes in relation to industrialism and Arctic exploration, and uncovers the potential for fostering maritime and terrestrial sustainability in the Arctic region. By introducing W.J.T. Mitchell's and Lacan's theories, I propose a framework for understanding the spatial triad of space–place–landscape within Lacanian theory and discuss two types of anti-landscapes: representational anti-landscapes and lost landscapes.

In Article III, "Decoding Differences in Nature Park Visitors' Experience: The Case of Pyhä-Luosto National Park," I examine how diverse groups of visitors experience Arctic landscapes through distinct cultural lenses, exploring how these differences reflect broader social, cultural dynamics and power structures. I found that international visitors' experiences are likely influenced by institutional technologies, relying on the park's signage and facilities, and demonstrating a stronger preference for the idealized imaginations of the Arctic. Domestic visitors, on the other hand, were influenced not only by the physical environment but also by

broader narratives and collective memories tied to Finnish landscapes and identity. Their interest lies more in the regional characteristics of Lapland than in stereotypical Arctic imagery.

Article IV, "Reconstructing Arctic as Gamescape: Historical Authenticity in *Arctico* and *Never Alone*," compares the temporal and spatial constructions of Arctic landscapes in two video games: *Arctico* (2022) and *Never Alone* (2014). Through a comparative analysis, I examine how these games construct historical authenticity in Arctic landscapes. By adopting the concept of *gamescape*, I explore how representational elements (myth, history, culture, rhetoric) and non-representational elements (memory, experience, emotion) together shape the spatio-temporal practices within games. Using non-representational theory, this research complements the analysis of historical authenticity in video games, emphasizing the interrelationship between representation and digital practice, and how imagery and emotional experiences co-construct historical authenticity.

This introductory chapter aims to familiarize the reader with the core theories, concepts, methods, arguments, and conclusions of the dissertation. Chapter 2 presents the theoretical background, briefly reviewing the mainstream theories in human geography and visual culture studies that have studied landscape since the cultural turn, and proposes a new theoretical framework. This framework brings W.J.T. Mitchell's space–place–landscape triad into dialogue with Lacanian psychoanalysis to explore how Arctic landscapes acquire meaning through dialectical interactions. Chapter 3 discusses the research design, including the empirical material and the methodology. Chapter 4 presents the key findings of this dissertation and examines how these findings relate both to previous studies on Arctic landscapes and to research on the interrelations of landscape, place, and space. I emphasize how the results support incorporating Lacanian theory into human geography while reframing landscape as a fluid, interactive process rather than a static representation. Finally, Chapter 5 synthesizes the central arguments, evaluates the strengths and limitations of the research, and situates its relevance within visual culture studies, non-representational theory, and new cultural geography. It concludes by outlining potential directions for future research.

2 Theoretical Framework

This research is situated at the intersection of the fields of visual culture and landscape studies. Beginning in the 1970s and 1980s, the broader social sciences experienced what came to be known as the "cultural turn," which placed greater emphasis on cultural themes and interpretations, and to some extent blurred traditional disciplinary boundaries and steered scholarly focus towards cultural topics (see Chaney 1994; Bonnell, Biernacki, and Hunt 1999). In geography, a discipline traditionally considered a science with overlaps in the social sciences, some strands increasingly intertwined with cultural studies, taking cues from the developments of cultural perspectives in sociology, anthropology, and political science (Barnett 1998, 380; Daniels and Cosgrove 1993, 57). Along with this trend, visuality emerged as one of the focal points in the study of landscapes (Howard et al. 2013; see also Mirzoeff 2011, 2014; Mitchell 1994a; Bal 2008). Cultural geographer Denis Cosgrove treated landscape as "a way of seeing" (Cosgrove 1985, 46), echoing John Berger's popularization of the term, which was originally grounded in Raymond Williams' reflections. This conceptualization underscores the interpretative act of viewing, implying that landscapes are not merely natural or given, but are always seen through a particular lens—cultural, historical, or ideological. In the following decades, the social constructivist theories (see Berger & Luckmann 1966), which view reality as continuously produced through symbolic practices and everyday social interactions, along with a focus on visuality, emerged as a prevailing framework in the studies of landscape (Mitchell 1994a; Cosgrove [1984] 1998).

Visual cultural methods have enriched theoretical and methodological insights for landscape studies (e.g., Cosgrove and Daniels [1988] 2013; Daniels 2004; Harris and Ruggles 2007). Visual culture studies approaches landscapes as texts to be read, imbuing them with meanings that extend beyond their physical attributes. Duncan and Duncan (1988), for instance, argue that landscapes function as structured symbolic systems, encoding cultural values and ideological assumptions that demand critical interpretation. Through the lens of visual culture studies, landscapes are seen as constructed through representations in art, media, literature, and the collective imagination. This analytical perspective recognizes that landscapes are

imbued with power and ideology, serving as canvases onto which societal values, historical narratives, and political ambitions are projected.

On the other hand, while phenomenological approaches to landscape studies trace back to earlier influential works—such as those by Yi-Fu Tuan ([1974] 1990) and Edward Relph (1976)—these perspectives experienced a notable resurgence in the mid-1990s. The phenomenological perspective focuses on the memory, emotions, and embodied experiences in landscapes—in other words, it explores the ongoing interactions between the reflective subjectivity and the world. For example, Christopher Tilley's work (1994) on the phenomenology of landscape embodies this perspective, focusing on the deconstruction of the inherent opposition between humans and the natural world in the representation and conceptualization of landscapes, and offered a perceptual perspective on how landscapes actively participate in the formation of memories and social identities. In the following decades, scholars like John Wylie (2018) and Nigel Thrift (2007) have developed post-phenomenological views. Wylie likens phenomenology to a "ghost" in landscape studies that "refuses ever completely to go away, or be wholly exorcized from landscape studies" (Wylie 2018, 130), due to the material characteristics of landscapes. In cultural geography, these approaches are termed by Nigel Thrift (2007) as "non-representational theories," which criticized the representational approaches for privileging the visual and neglecting the materiality of experiences.

Nevertheless, the visuality of landscape, along with its intertwined cultural, political and economic contexts, continues to present numerous areas worthy of exploration and study. Many scholars of non-representational theories today (e.g., Lorimer 2005; Waterton 2014) realized the importance of these areas, preferring to redefine the non-representational theories as "more-than-representational theories," and attempt to discuss phenomenological issues such as emotions and experiences under the premise of acknowledging the cultural, historical, and other social constructions of landscapes, thereby reconciling representation with the not-represented. However, although these studies have attempted to break the binary opposition between representation and non-representation from different perspectives, they have not formed a holistic theoretical framework for a deeper discussion on the unconscious structures that influence representations and experiences beyond conscious affective and discursive practices.

Taking this into account, I aim to utilize a theoretical framework that could locate within the visual cultural context, acknowledging the powerful role that visual representation plays in shaping our understanding of and relationship to landscape while also recognizing the richness of emotions and experiences beyond representations in landscape. W. J. T. Mitchell (2002) proposed that instead of delegating the issues of place, space, and landscape to separate fields such as phenomenology, historical materialism, and cultural geography, it would be more

effective to view them as a dialectical triad, thereby resisting the temptation of dualism. Mitchell further explained that this inspiration comes from Henri Lefebvre's theory of the production of space and Jacques Lacan's three-Order theory. After examining the theoretical toolbox of visual culture studies, I realized that Lacan's psychoanalytic theory still holds the potential to be reactivated today. Therefore, I attempt to re-examine how place, space, and landscape interact and transform as a topological structure, based on a Lacanian way of thinking.

The sections in the chapter ahead will dissect Arctic imagery by employing the dual frameworks of landscape studies and visual culture studies. To begin with, I reviewed the existing research on Arctic landscapes and discussed the need to develop new theoretical approaches. After it, I position landscape research within the framework of visual cultural theories, examining the theories related to the interplay between imagery and the societal construction of space and power. Following this, I review the existing research concerning non-representational approaches. By discussing the strengths and weaknesses of both approaches to landscape studies and considering the unique characteristics of the Arctic region, I establish my own theoretical framework. Drawing on W.J.T. Mitchell's triadic concept of space–place–landscape and Lacan's psychoanalytic theory of the three Orders, this framework seeks to redefine the concept of landscape through their combined lens.

2.1 The Imperative of a novel approach for Arctic Imagery Analysis

The Arctic has frequently been conceptualized as a symbol imbued with cultural, political, and ideological meanings. Its representations in media, art, and literature extend beyond physical characteristics, projecting narratives that range from untouched wilderness and pristine nature to a battleground for climate change and geopolitical contestation. Recent developments—including human-induced climate change, indigenous rights movements, nature conservation efforts, the expansion of tourism, and accelerated resource extraction (Körber, MacKenzie, and Anna Westerståhl 2017)—have further diversified these projections and the discourses surrounding them.

Previous research has examined representations of the North and their role in shaping identities and ideas about the region. For example, Sverrir Jakobsson's edited volume *Images of the North: Histories–Identities–Ideas* (2009) discusses how history, cultural identity, ideology, and politics have each played a role in the historical imagination and conceptualization of the Nordic region. Sverker Sörlin (2016) argues for replacing the term "Arctic" with the more geographically specific concept of "North." His analysis traces the influence of scientific narratives and

geopolitical interests on the perception and governance of northern regions, the impact of geographical boundaries and environmental conditions on Nordic cultures, and the representation of the Arctic in popular media and literature.

Visual media scholars such as MacKenzie and Stenport (2015, 2019) have focused on Arctic images represented through film, television programs, documentaries, and other media. They emphasize that understanding the cultural and historical complexities of the Arctic cannot be separated from representational analysis, as the Arctic is an integral part of global representational exchange systems (MacKenzie and Stenport 2015, 2–3). Media has played a crucial role in shaping perceptions of the Arctic, as these visual products have facilitated the construction and reflection of Arctic identities while also mirroring the complex sociopolitical and environmental dynamics of the region (Kaganovsky, MacKenzie, and Stenport 2019).

In addition to representational studies, there are numerous interdisciplinary approaches that examine Arctic landscapes and environments. For instance, Larsen and Hemmersam (2016, 5–6) highlight that changing the widespread image of the Arctic as vast, pristine, and sublime requires moving beyond the aesthetic of grandeur derived from the Romantic painting tradition. They argue for abandoning the idea of landscape as merely a mode of viewing and focusing instead on the processes of landscape production. Körber, MacKenzie, and Stenport (2017) argue that dismantling homogeneous conceptions of the Arctic requires addressing the often-overlooked intersections between environmentalism, sustainability, indigenous epistemologies, representational practices, decolonization strategies, and governance, as the Arctic is inherently diverse, contested, and involves a wide array of actors and agents.

These studies underscore the importance of focusing on landscape practices in the Arctic, and scholars have become increasingly aware of how the differences between internal and external perspectives on place and landscape influence understandings of the Arctic region in a globalized context.

While the Arctic is a physical space with distinct environmental characteristics, its meaning and significance are shaped through cultural and historical representations. Politically, the Arctic is often defined as the areas above the Arctic Circle. In practice, however, a small group of states—known as the Arctic Five (A5), comprising the United States, Canada, Russia, Norway, and Denmark—have asserted control over the region through legal, discursive, and symbolic strategies. By reducing the Arctic to a site of sovereign management and resource governance, these powers consolidate their influence while marginalizing the voices of indigenous peoples and non-Arctic actors (Dodds and Woon 2019).

Culturally, indigenous territories are often situated within broader Arctic discourses, yet for the people who live there, the region's meaning cannot be reduced

to externally imposed categories or state-centered narratives. As Divya Tolia-Kelly (2006) reminds us, spatial imaginaries should not be understood solely through visual regimes and state-centered narratives, but also through embodied, emotional, and racialized experiences of place. Recognizing the Arctic as a politically constructed space thus requires attending both to its discursive production and to the lived, contested experiences of those who inhabit it and lay claim to it.

In this context, it becomes especially important to recognize the ongoing relevance of representational analysis. While non-representational approaches emphasize sensory perception, affect, and embodied experience—aspects that are indeed crucial to understanding landscape in general and Arctic space in particular—representation still plays a vital role. The Arctic is extensively mediated through political discourse, scientific models, visual media, and cultural narratives. These representations are currently still shaping the policy, governance, as well as the lived experience. A purely affective or experiential approach risks overlooking how such representational regimes continue to structure epistemologies, social practices, and power relations.

Therefore, rather than approaching representation and non-representation as parallel dimensions, this study begins from the representational regimes that shape our understanding of the Arctic—those embedded in political discourse, visual media, scientific mapping, and cultural imaginaries—and investigates how, within and through these regimes, embodied experiences, affective intensities, and material interactions unfold. This trajectory differs fundamentally from more-than-representational approaches, which typically emerge from non-representational theory and subsequently reincorporate elements of representation as a corrective or extension (see Lorimer 2005; Waterton 2018). In contrast, my analysis treats representation not as a secondary addition, but as a foundational and structuring force that conditions the very field within which non-representational processes operate and become meaningful.

The appropriation of Lacan's theoretical framework does not mean that this study is grounded in a psychoanalytic perspective. In this study, Lacan's theory of the three Orders is regarded as a heuristic construct, guiding the exploration of how the idea of the Arctic, as well as the Arctic landscape as a representation, is produced within the interaction of all manner of processes, objects, events, and meanings. Therefore, the focus of my research is not to map space, place, and landscape onto the Symbolic, the Real, and the Imaginary, thereby establishing an inflexible and static framework. Rather, it is to discuss how each of these elements interacts with one another and how subjects are created within this topological flux. It is a system where the Symbolic Order is both challenged and reinforced, where the Imaginary reshapes perceptions of the Real, and where the Real imposes limits on the Symbolic and the Imaginary.

Several theoretical concepts are drawn from their original disciplinary frameworks and redeployed within new analytical contexts. As Mieke Bal (2002) argues, when a concept travels between contexts, it is resemanticized in the new field of use, acquiring new connotations while shedding or reframing earlier ones. In this research, key psychoanalytic concepts such as Lacan's "the Imaginary," "the Symbolic" and "the Real" are not applied in their clinical sense, but recontextualized within the study of landscape representation to interrogate how subjectivity and spatial meaning are constructed. The three Orders provide a lens through which the multifaceted and dynamic nature of the Arctic can be interpreted.

2.2 Landscape Perception Through the Lens of Visual Culture Studies

The origin of the word "landscape" can be traced to the early thirteenth century, with variations like *lantscap* or *landschap* in the Dutch language, referring to a land region or environment[2]. When it was introduced into English in the late 16th and early 17th centuries, it emphasized "scenery" instead of land or territory (Antrop 2018, 1), and visual characters became an important aspect of landscape. Meanwhile, landscape painting defined the "proper" perception of landscape, incorporating "nature" into the legitimation of modernity, which claims "a unified, natural language epitomized by landscape painting" (Mitchell 1994b, 11–13). In this sense, landscape—including images and their discursive constructions—is a medium between culture and nature, which can continuously encode and reshape to express meanings.

From the social constructivist perspective, the concept of landscape is closely related to modernity. As Cosgrove (2006, 51) noted, the history of the "landscape idea" is "a characteristically modern way of encountering and representing the external world." This characteristic was gradually established in social and environmental practices such as landscape painting, landscape design, and planning and architecture. Meanwhile, social constructivist theorists have often emphasized the ideological dimensions of landscape (Mitchell 1994b; Cosgrove [1984] 1998). As Mitchell (1994b) argues, landscapes can be used as tools for asserting power, shaping national identities, and reinforcing cultural norms. Even in the context of privatized memories and experiences of landscape or a sense of belonging to place, the influence of ideology on emotions remains evident. Patriotic sentiment or the experience of the sublime, for instance, can be imbued with ideological undertones.

[2] There are multifaceted alterations of the Dutch origin of this word, with various interpretations like "region, district, province, countryside" and so forth. In general, it refers to an identifiable area of land.

Recognizing the politicization of landscapes, this study considers the underlying power structures and the sociopolitical contexts that shape landscape representations.

Landscape painting—as well as other media such as photography, film, digital media, and virtual landscapes, which Mitchell (1994a, 2) describes as the "subtext" of traditional motionless landscape images—consistently carries specific visual formations. These include the position of the viewing subject, the relation between subject and object, and the technologies and methods of seeing with their associated effects.

Mitchell's formulation suggests that to study landscape as a way of seeing is, in effect, to analyze how vision itself is culturally constituted. The way of seeing is formed within an interactive field composed of numerous functional elements, where various activities and processes exist, making it impossible to attribute a causal relationship to certain participants at specific positions in the network. For example, the development of perspective in Renaissance landscape painting not only shaped artistic conventions but also reflected broader cultural shifts towards individualism and scientific rationality. This knowledge about "seeing" emerges from a network of interactions between these factors, making it difficult to isolate causal relationships or attribute agency to specific participants or elements. Accordingly, this study conceptualizes the production of landscape, whether textual or visual, as the result of multiple interacting factors rather than a linear relation of power or causality. Situating the analysis within Mitchell's conception of landscapes as cultural constructs shaped by visual practices and sociopolitical contexts, this study examines how meaning is produced in landscape through multifaceted interactions.

In the field of visual culture, the study of landscape emphasizes the sociopolitical, historical, and cultural dimensions of landscape representations. Visual culture studies, when taking landscape as its subject, mainly discusses the technology and media of landscape representation, the semiological study of landscape images and visual symbols, the phenomenological study of visual experience, the cultural production of landscapes, the sociological study of the interaction between viewers or tourists and the landscape, and most importantly, the study of how landscape produces the position of subject, as well as the construction of the relationship between subject and object. Key contributions include Irit Rogoff's (2000) interrogation of how geographic knowledge is shaped by visual cultural regimes, challenging the supposed objectivity of spatial representation and emphasizing the affective and political conditions of viewing. Gillian Rose (1993) similarly critiques dominant scopic regimes by revealing how vision, space, and subjectivity are structured through gendered and racialized positionalities. Bruno Latour's work on visualization technologies (1986) highlights how spatial realities are actively constructed through representational practices, such as maps, diagrams, and scientific imagery, which produce authority through visibility. In summary, from

the perspective of visual culture studies, the focus is on studying the *visuality* of landscape.

In this dissertation, the term *visuality* is used in the more specific sense articulated by scholars such as Nicholas Mirzoeff (1999) and Martin Jay (1993, [1988] 2017). Visuality refers to the historically and culturally constructed systems of visual practices and scopic regimes that determine what is made visible, how it is framed, and how subjects relate to images and space through practices of seeing. Visuality involves power, discipline, and epistemology. It is concerned with how vision is structured by institutions, technologies, ideologies and so forth, and how it contributes to subject formation and spatial experience.

Discussions on visuality, particularly from the social constructivist viewpoint, often incorporate an ontological assumption that power relations are embedded within cultural constructions and are projected onto landscapes and visual images (Cosgrove [1984] 1998; Rose 2016; Mitchell 2005). Put simply, visuality is the system or mechanism that determines what is brought into or hidden from view, and how it is framed within our field of vision. The former refers to the presentation and display of objects, while the latter emphasizes the production of the subject's position—for instance, stimulating the subject's desire to look, constructing the subject's identification with the meaning of the object and its representation, and satisfying the subject's pursuit of pleasure. The dual nature of visuality as both revealing and constructing landscapes becomes a vital component in understanding the perception and representation of landscape. However, this study departs from the tradition of social constructivism because that perspective carries certain limitations. Viewing landscapes as representations means they are presupposed to be imbued with ideological meanings that shape subjects' perceptions and social realities, and overlooks what is outside or beyond symbolization and representation. Importantly, while ideology seeks to encompass and structure reality through representations, a dimension always persists that limits this structuring effort. Ideology might attempt to colonize this dimension by introducing new symbols or narratives to make sense of what is initially beyond representation, yet aspects of experience remain irreducible, resisting complete subsumption within processes of symbolization. This resistance manifests as disruptions, gaps, or moments of failure in the seamless ideological narrative.

On the other hand, this study aligns with visual culture scholarship that critiques the dominance of vision. Despite its emphasis on visuality and the politics of vision, visual culture studies recognizes the broader multisensory character of experience, such as hearing, taste, touch, and smell. An important part of visual culture studies is the critique of ocularcentrism (Jay 1988; Dikovitskaya 2005; Mirzoeff 2014). In sociocultural practices and the production of landscape images, the visual aspects still carry the tint of power operations, with the subject in the position of viewing

being considered dominant and controlling. This operation of power is embedded in the spatial configuration of relations between people and objects, and in the production of viewed objects in cultural products. Such power operations targeted at space reconfiguration are manifested in landscapes. The task of visual culture studies is to deconstruct this operation of power, revealing how the privileging of the visual is presented as a natural or inevitable fact that forms the basis for establishing social value orders, and how it influences the subject's epistemology and social practices.

Visual culture studies center on visuality as one of the key mechanisms of meaning production. Consequently, the objects of study in this field often take the form of images. However, the representations of image are not merely symbolic operations. They always perform a certain productive function—producing meaning, as well as producing the subjects who receive the meanings. It functions as "the social mediation of the real world through ever-present processes of signification" (Woodward, Dixon, and Jones 2009, 403). The process of representation is a sociocultural practice related to a certain ideology, a production and exchange of meaning among members of a society or community (Hall 1997a, 2). More importantly, meaning is open and fluid, formed under the interaction of different heterogeneous elements, such as social institutions, visual traditions, image conventions, the contexts of production and consumption of texts, and audience differences, rather than just a singular process where pre-existing meaning is encoded into visual symbols. In the study of landscape as representations, it is thus essential to consider that landscape is continuously reinterpreted and recontextualized, linking with broader cultural narratives and practices. This also coincides with W.J.T. Mitchell's proposal of turning the word "landscape" from a noun into a verb—leading to the discussion of what landscape *does* and how it "works as a cultural practice" (Mitchell 1994a, 1).

Overall, the traditional visual cultural approach brings a wealth of theoretical tools to landscape studies. However, two limitations can be identified. First, as non-representational theorists argue, the emphasis on visuality and critiques of visual centrism risk marginalizing the multisensory dimensions of landscape experience. Second, reducing landscapes to visual objects studied primarily through power relations risks overlooking their material characteristics and spatial complexity, both of which are integral to the production of meaning.

2.3 Non-representational theories

Behind the privilege of the visual, there is often a social apparatus for summoning, guiding, and disciplining individual viewing, confining the production of meaning within specific representational dimensions of discourse and social structures (Anderson and Harrison 2010, 2). However, the bodily experiences of a place—

sensuous, corporeal, lived experiences—cannot be fully represented by landscape images. In the process of being visualized, these experiences inevitably lose something in representations (Carolan 2008, 412). These critiques and reflections on visual centrism triggered a methodological innovation in cultural geography.

Among the earliest of such critiques, Olwig (1996), for instance, argued that the visualist tradition in Anglophone landscape studies, especially its focus on aesthetic representation and perspectival seeing, risks detaching landscape from its historical roots in law, custom, and communal governance. As he demonstrates, early usages of the term "landscape" in Nordic and Germanic contexts, such as the Danish *landskab* or Old Norse *landskapr*, referred not to scenic views but to juridical and political entities: bounded territories defined by social norms and legal codes. In this understanding, landscape functioned as a normative spatial ordering of land, people, and rights—an institutional framework through which collective identity and spatial authority were structured.

Following this trajectory, some cultural geographers have chosen the phenomenological path, beginning to focus on all human senses—especially the non-visual senses. Scholars like Nigel Thrift (1996, 2) believe that the process of generating meaning is an affective, relational process, rooted in actions and interactions within a network of relationships. From the individuals' level, as Brennan (2004) noted, an individual's desires are often fluid and uncertain. This flowing, unexpressed desire often intertwines with emotional expression, thought, and language.

The problem faced by social constructivism is, if meaning is produced by representations and symbols, can meanings and values still arise from actions and phenomena? In non-representational theories, the creation of meaning and significance emerges through actions and interactions, as opposed to attributing it to an additional layer like discourse and ideology (Anderson and Harrison 2010, 2). Non-representational theory initially suggested that actions are influenced more by physical and environmental factors, like affordances and habits, than by willpower or cognition. This viewpoint sees human actions as constantly evolving through interactions with their surroundings. Actions are not a one-directional process but a relational phenomenon, continuously adapting through feedback mechanisms like proprioception. Bodies are perceived as relational entities, ecologically and ethologically intertwined with their environment, rather than separated from an external, inert world (Anderson and Harrison 2012, 7–8).

Nevertheless, the premise that non-representational theory can explain meaning primarily through embodied immediacy has been contested. Critics argue that focusing solely on the experience and emotions as a fundamental aspect of human existence limits the scope of what can be explored within the domain of geography (McCormack 2006; Anderson and Harrison 2006). The cultural, social, geographical

and historical factors still play a crucial role in shaping how landscapes are perceived and experienced, how meanings are assigned, and how bodily mobility practices (Cresswell, 2006, 59). Overemphasizing embodied immediacy may risk depoliticizing landscape engagement by overlooking how experiential practices are prefigured by institutional structures and sociohistorical power dynamics (Harvey 2015). Thus, in recent trends of non-representational theories, this view has been expanded to embrace some of the social constructivist ideas, reflecting a shift towards understanding the interplay between affective relationality and cognitive processes—a direction commonly referred to as "more-than-representational" approaches. These discussions acknowledge that human experiences and social realities are co-produced through both embodied practices and engagements with textuality and cognition, where physical, environmental, and cognitive-textual factors collectively contribute to the production of meaning and social space.

Illustrating this trajectory, Margaret Wetherell (2012, 2020) introduced the theory of *affective practice*, which integrates the study of emotions with the analysis of discursive practices, emphasizing the importance of language and social context in forming emotional experiences and challenging the traditional dichotomy between cognition and affect. Sara Ahmed (2014) highlights how emotions are vital to the formation of social norms, identities, and power relations. Similarly, Tim Ingold also challenged conventional distinctions between nature and culture, and between the human and non-human. He argues that living is a continuous unfolding, an ongoing process of engaging with the world, in which humans and their environments are continually shaping one another (Ingold 2000, 2011). He emphasizes movement, embodiment, and materiality as fundamental to this relational process.

It is noteworthy that non-representational and more-than-representational styles of thinking, as emphasized by Anderson and Harrison (2010), cannot be equated with anti-representation. Rather, to some non-representation theorists (e.g., Dewsbury 2000; Dirksmeier and Helbrecht 2008; Gregson and Rose 2000; Nash 2000), representations are seen as performances. In this sense, representation becomes the result of practice instead of a direct reflection of a priori ideas.

From my perspective, while the study of representation through performativity theory holds rich potential, this focus on specific individuals or groups can sometimes introduce a certain degree of bias, specifically overlooking the impact of their identities and the underlying social and power structures. This risk has been reinforced in some phenomenological and non-representational approaches, where the emphasis on embodied immediacy and subjective presence can result in the implicit universalization of a particular kind of experiencing subject. The diversity of lived experience—especially as shaped by race, gender, and historical location—is often overlooked, giving rise to a supposedly neutral but in fact culturally specific self—a solipsistic self, as Harvey (2015) criticized—rooted in liberal, Western

imaginaries (see Brück 2005; Tolia-Kelly 2006, 2010). Such frameworks may inadvertently marginalize alternative positionalities by foregrounding affective experience at the expense of interrogating the social and political structures that shape and constrain it.

Furthermore, as non-representational theory's methodological reflections emphasize, when researchers convey findings on embodiment and emotions through language, the involvement of representation and symbols becomes inevitable (Waterton 2018). In response, the non-representational scholars attempt to incorporate a more diverse and differentiated sensory experience of landscapes in their methodology, employing experimental writing, field notes, ethnographic methods, and modern techniques like audio and video recordings. These participatory practices reconceptualize research as a form of performance, thereby making the generating and interpreting of research evidence more experimental and flexible (Latham 2003). However, while this notion avoids direct discussion of the unrepresentable, it has touched on an ontologically significant aspect, namely, what Jacques Lacan terms "the Real." I believe that non-representational theories' focus on senses beyond the visual has not truly engaged with the unrepresentable—such engagement, from empirical and methodological perspectives, must inevitably be incomplete. Yet, acknowledging it and incorporating it into the theoretical framework can overcome the above-mentioned theories' limitations in understanding the complex processes of subjectivity and desire that are central to the formation of embodiment and emotions.

Therefore, a comprehensive study of landscapes necessitates the consideration of the unrepresentable as ontological substance, and integrates the affective and representational aspects—although sometimes in mutual tension. It is also necessary to acknowledge the complex interplay between these aspects in shaping human experiences of the natural world. After reviewing theoretical tools in visual culture studies, I noted that Lacan's theory of the three Orders could be adapted for landscape studies. This triadic conceptual structure breaks away from the traditional binary of representation and meaning, acknowledging the existence of a dimension—"the Real"—that cannot be fully grasped by representational systems.

Lacan's conceptualization of the split subject can serve to bring representational theories—now heavily influenced by post-structuralism—and non-representational theories into conversation. Both strands of thought position the subject as "weak" or decentered—post-structuralism sees the individual as largely shaped by discourse and ideology, while non-representational theory foregrounds affective and embodied processes that exceed cognitive intentionality. In Lacan's framework, the subject is similarly decentered and incomplete, emerging at the intersection of the three Orders (the Symbolic, the Imaginary and the Real). From a Lacanian perspective, the subject is always mediated by symbolic structures and haunted by the unreachable Real. This

idea to some extent resonates with post-structuralist critiques of an autonomous, rational subject while also echoing the non-representational emphasis on the pre-cognitive, affective forces that shape embodied actions. The recognition of the existence of the Real acknowledges the idea that no representation—whether linguistic, visual, or embodied—can capture the fullness of lived reality. Thus, Lacan's way of thinking provides an approach to understand how discourse and embodied practices simultaneously enable and limit the production of meaning.

2.4 Synthesizing Mitchell–Lacan Theoretical Lens for Visual Analysis

Psychoanalytic theory, particularly the works of Sigmund Freud and Jacques Lacan, has been widely applied in the fields of visual culture studies and film studies since the mid-1970s (e.g., Mulvey 1975; Metz [1977] 1990; Davidson and Doane 1993). This approach primarily discusses issues of subjectivity and the unconscious. From a psychoanalytic perspective, subjectivity is disciplined by specific visualities, and its position is often constructed and produced by particular visual regimes. The unconscious, however, signifies primary forces that elude formal systems of connotation or mythological coding. Inspired by the appropriation of psychoanalytic theory in visual culture studies, this study examines how Lacan's theory of the three Orders can be applied to the analysis of landscapes.

Following W.J.T. Mitchell's (2002) proposition to conceptualize space, landscape, and place as a holistic category, subsequent studies (e.g., Ogborn and Withers 2004; Falci 2009; Gilhuly and Worman 2014) have incorporated landscape into the dialectical opposition of space and place, a tension addressed by both phenomenology and historical materialism. Mitchell defines *place* as "a specific site," *space* as a "location activated by actions, activities, narratives, and symbols," and *landscape* as "a site regarded as an image and scenery" (2002, x). It is important to note, however, that Mitchell's conceptualization of landscape as primarily a visual construct reflects an Anglophone perspective, and does not necessarily capture the broader connotations associated with the term in many European languages. Within Mitchell's framework, then, landscape remains a representation, an object of observation.

Rather than providing a theoretical framework, it is more accurate to say that Mitchell offers a thought process to resist the temptation of dualism. For those seeking to concretize it into a more practical theoretical tool, Mitchell also provides two references: Lefebvre's spatial triad and Jacques Lacan's three Orders.

Lefebvre's spatial triad contains three interrelated aspects of space. The first is spatial practice, which refers to the physical production, organization, and use of space in everyday life. This includes commuting patterns, construction work,

agricultural practices and so forth, encompassing the locations and spatial arrangements that sustain and reproduce social structures within specific social formations. The second aspect, representations of space, refers to the conceptual and symbolic frameworks through which space is planned, represented and imagined by experts like urban planners, architects, and policymakers. These frameworks impose order and structure on the built environment. The third aspect, representational spaces, involves the direct, lived space that is imbued with symbolic and emotional meanings. These meanings are often expressed through cultural and artistic practices, rituals, or subversive acts that challenge dominant spatial orders. These three aspects are respectively defined as "perceived, conceived and lived" space, and correspond to social space, mental space, and physical space (Lefebvre [1974] 1991). The history of the production of space, as Lefebvre emphasized, is about the history of the passage between modes of production. The latter must lead to the revolution of social space, from which process we can find the history of social space. Thus, for Lefebvre, space is not a product of concepts, but a product of politics and economics. Spatial practice is the space containing social relations, which is thus political rather than natural.

Lefebvre's idea contains the assumption that the dominant spatial representations are always shaped intentionally. The representation is the product of politics, society, and ideology. Lefebvre consistently anchors his analysis in the context of social production and reproduction, using them as benchmarks to differentiate various social spaces. This historical materialist approach, however, does not seamlessly align with the Arctic's current situation. Geographically defining the Arctic (north of the Arctic Circle) poses challenges in characterizing it solely in terms of a single, monolithic "society." It can obscure the nuanced interactions among multiple indigenous communities, settler populations, and transnational interests operating within the region. As with other diverse and historically layered contexts, when studying the Arctic through a societal lens, the breadth and variety of its social formations call for carefully adapted analytical frameworks. Applying Lefebvre's model without attending to these interwoven local, national, and international dimensions risks overlooking the region's distinctive heterogeneity and diverse characteristics.

On the other hand, Lacan's triadic theory also endeavors to transcend binary conceptual frameworks. Crucially, Lacan conceptualizes his theory as a topological structure capable of continuous transformation. Consequently, this triadic model should not be regarded as an essentialist entity. The triadic theory functions as a dynamic interpretive framework, adapting fluidly to the mechanisms of the unconscious. Its applicability is context-specific, highlighting its effectiveness in particular instances rather than being universal.

The applicability of Lacan's triadic framework becomes evident when each of its dimensions is related to Mitchell's tripartite structure of space, place, and landscape. The first is *space* as the Symbolic. Mitchell (2002) draws a comparison between Lacan's "the Symbolic Order" and Lefebvre's "representations of space," viewing it as a space of laws, prohibitions, rules, and control. It offers a more precise delineation for the "space" within the tripartite structure, suggesting that space is abstract, belonging to the realm of ideas, discourse, and power.

Lacan similarly defines the Symbolic Order, envisaging it as the domain where language and societal norms are predominant. It is a structural force, a superego directive or decree. More importantly, it exerts influence on the subject in the form of symbols. Symbolic identification, such as identifying with societal mandates, roles, or tasks, is mediated through language or the structure of signification. This process acts as a mediator among subjects, allowing them to find their place within the Symbolic Order. However, being in this position does not equate to a complete subject, but rather to an alienated, divided subject, because symbolic identification always entails a barring or omission of some parts of the subject's self-experience. In Lacan's sense, the position of subjectivity in the realm of the Symbolic is automatically determined by the structure and function of language (Lacan [1966] 2006, 231). The subject's expression of experience is completed through chains of signification, yet the signification "is implicitly lacking allowing for changes in the chain of signifiers" (Wardle 2016, 5). There is always a part of meaning that escapes the chain of signification and cannot be fully expressed.

Within the constituent articles of this dissertation, analyses of the Symbolic primarily engage with the concepts of ideology and discourse. In contemporary social theory, these two concepts are sometimes used interchangeably, and at other times, they are opposed due to representing different theoretical traditions. Generally, when discussing ideology, we often cannot avoid the Marxist theoretical tradition, which views ideology as a form of "false consciousness," often used in opposition to "objective" knowledge (Van Dijk 2006, 739). The popular interpretation of ideology in the Lacanian sense also tends to follow this definition to some extent. For instance, Louis Althusser ([1970] 2001), drawing on Lacanian theory, argues that ideology interpellates subjects, thereby enabling the structural reproduction of capitalist relations of production through the state apparatus. Žižek (1989, 1997) emphasizes that ideology fundamentally naturalizes certain worldviews, concealing the contingency of social construction—it creates illusions, covering up the fundamental inconsistencies and absences in the Symbolic Order. These interpretations of Lacanian theory have emerged as one of the prominent currents in contemporary Lacanian studies. In contrast, Michel Foucault problematizes the concept of ideology and broadens the analysis of power and discourse beyond narrowly political or oppressive frameworks. Foucault

([1976] 2020) considers power to be dynamic and operating on the microlevel, spreading in the web of meanings and relationships between people, groups, and things, and directly affecting the production of knowledge and the formation of discourse. From Foucault's perspective, ideology should not be seen as an oppressive representation and a false system of ideas but as a normalized system of knowledge/power.

Building on these discussions, this research engages with both the concepts of ideology and discourse, though their applications differ. Ideology is approached as a discursive mechanism of domination that exerts power and influence, with primary attention to mainstream ideologies related to state sovereignty. In combination with Lacanian theory, such ideologies are understood as unconscious beliefs and practices that sustain a particular social order and shape the formation of subjectivity. Additionally, Lacan ([1991] 2007) identified four fundamental discourses (Master's, University, Hysteric's, and Analyst's) that encapsulate different ways subjects and the Other—what Lacan refers to as the *big Other*—interact. The big Other can be understood as a manifestation of the Symbolic Order, including societal structures, norms, and overarching systems such as the law, God, or the state, which mediate relationships and regulate social interactions. Discourse, in Lacan's framework, is more about the specific positions subjects assume in relation to the Other and the types of knowledge and truth produced within those positions (Lacan [1991] 2007; Fink 1997; Žižek 2006). It is about how power and knowledge circulate in specific social configurations. Based on this, when I utilize the notion of discourse in my research, I focus more on discussing the formal structures of language that define specific social bonds and the production of knowledge.

While Lacan's concept of the Symbolic originally functioned as the domain of law, language, and the paternal function that mediates the subject's entry into culture, in this study, its role shifts toward the operation of landscape as a discursive structure of sovereignty and normativity. This migration displaces the concept from the psychoanalytic register of individual subject formation to a cultural-political order, where it operates as a spatial regime of ordering and exclusion.

In my view, the most significant idea in Lacan's theory lies between the contradiction of the endlessly fluid desire and the Lacanian concept of the "subject"—a symbolic position within the Symbolic Order. It is under the severance of the Symbolic Order that the subject becomes a divided subject, as there is always a part of desire that cannot be accepted or realized within the Symbolic Order. The accepted and symbolized part, which Lacan ([1966] 2006, 80) deems as a "function of misrecognition," is a subjectivity that is "subjectified"—which is similar to Althusser's *subjected subject* (Althusser [1970] 2001).

How can spaces, which are planned, measured, surveilled, and controlled, encompass the material, sensory, and even private experiential place? The severance

of the subject by the Symbolic Order seems to foreshadow the inevitable separation between representation and experience, while according to Lacan, the subject cannot exist in any other state than as severed, as this division is what enables the subject to emerge within the Symbolic. This dynamic leads to the second concept in the triadic theory—the Real.

Another assumption made by Mitchell is to view *place* as the Lacanian Real—"the site of trauma or the historical event" (2002, xi). The Real possesses the attribute of trauma, but this is not entirely equivalent to the emotional response towards distressing events in the psychological and psychiatric sense. In Lacanian terms, "trauma" refers to an eruption of the Real "in the midst of what had been our reality," which "tears a hole in the very fabric of meaning" (Wright 2021, 239)—like the hole in a doughnut, it gives the doughnut its form, but this hole is not a part of the doughnut (Kay 2003). The existence of the Real represents the unknowability of being. That is, it has ontological significance but cannot be understood as the reality or object of the objective world, nor can it be understood in the sense of empirical reality. Instead, it can only be presented in the form of representation and effects, in an incomplete form. The unrepresented parts—Lacan appropriates Kant's concept of "the Thing-in-itself" (*Ding an sich*)[3] and calls it *Das Ding*—are the foundation on which representation is established, yet also mark the escape from objectification. *Das Ding* is excluded from the Symbolic, and it is absent for the subject. The subject, in the process of symbolization, is always in pursuit of an inevitably failing identity, because the inherent lack in the process of signification leads to a persistent and unfillable gap within the structure of subjectivity (Wardle 2016). This failure is the traumatic core of the Real—namely, the absence, scarcity, and loss of the original object.

Due to the existence of the Real, the chain of meaning is always sliding, open, and malleable—with "an incessant sliding of the signified under the signifier" (Lacan [1966] 2006, 419). The Symbolic's symbolization of *Das Ding* leaves behind a residue, which becomes the source of the subject's desire. The subject is always trying to retroactively return to the original site of the event—a point in their psychic history where an encounter with the Real disrupted the coherence of their experience—to find the earlier state of the event in the differentiated signifiers. In

[3] Immanuel Kant's notion of the *Ding an sich* or "thing-in-itself" (Kant [1781] 2007): an unknowable reality that lies beyond the reach of human cognition. While Kant's *Ding an sich* denotes the ontological limit of empirical knowledge—that which cannot be accessed through intuition or concepts—Lacan re-appropriates this idea within psychoanalytic theory to mark the traumatic kernel of the Real, that which resists symbolization yet remains foundational to the structure of subjectivity.

this sense, "repetition" (*Wiederholen*)[4] refers to the subject's unconscious continual return to a certain impossibility, a return achieved through memory. Both repetition and retroaction are directed towards the Real, and the process of traumatic experience constantly pulling the subject back to the original scene of the event is the manifestation of the unconscious thinking of the subject trying to capture the Real.

For instance, the phenomenon of nostalgia for a place is often a retrospective construction that materializes in a temporally and spatially distinct context. In the discourse on the mnemonic attributes of a specific place, the structural modulation of memory by linguistic mechanisms invariably falls short of capturing the original sensory perceptions and psychological responses inherent to the moment being recalled. A place can be conceptualized as the Real when the totality of a place, as experienced in a specific moment, resists symbolization yet is integral to human experience.

In this study, the Lacanian Real is operated as a conceptual tool to engage with those aspects of landscape that resist full representation or narrativization. It is a way of thinking about the gaps between spatial practice and spatial meaning—moments when memory, sensation, or affect rupture the coherence imposed by visual or discursive orders. In this sense, place becomes more than a vessel for symbolic meaning. Place is where something always spills over the edges, refusing to be contained. This reformulation allows the Real to function as a generative force that animates the affective and unfinished dimensions of landscape experience.

Finally, within the three-Order triad, the Imaginary is directly related to the visual. Discussions on the Mirror Stage, which is a typical identification stage of the Imaginary, are of particular interest in visual culture studies (e.g., Mulvey 1975; Metz [1977] 1990). As previously mentioned, Lacan's theory of the three Orders, functioning as a topological structure, is interconnected. The mirror-like act of seeing is not only regulated by the Symbolic Order and punctuated by the traumatic core of the Real, but it also manifests different effects due to the structure of desire and object within certain visual regimes.

In Lacan's theory, the infant experiences the Mirror Stage when they recognize their own image in the mirror as a wholeness (Evans 1996, 6). This stage signifies the infant's entry into the Imaginary Order, a process that occurs before the subject's

[4] Repetition (*Wiederholen*) is a term Freud introduced in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* ([1920] 2015), which refers to the unconscious compulsion to return to a site of trauma or impossibility, driven by the subject's desire to integrate what resists symbolization. Rather than being a literal return, repetition in the Freudo-Lacanian sense is a structural return to the absence within the Symbolic: an attempt to rearticulate the encounter with the Real.

symbolic social determination, yet tempered by the Symbolic Order. However, Lacan emphasizes that this recognition is based on a misrecognition under a particular spatial construct, as the coherent and complete body is an alienated image (Lacan [1966] 2006, 76). It corresponds to the infant but is not the real infant. The image is merely a reflection seen from the outside. The infant associates itself with this reflection and begins to interpret others' actions as directed towards the "me" in the mirror. This step also defines the subject's relationship with other people or objects.

While the mirror bridges the infant's initial fragmented and chaotic sense of self, it also plants the seeds of alienation. This alienation perpetually generates a split between the ego and the subject in later life. In Lacan's later seminars, he focuses specifically and continuously on the role of the Imaginary, because it "shapes society as it once shaped the ego" (Tomšič and Zevnik 2016, 75). Unlike the Symbolic, which is structured around abstract symbols such as law, morals, and ethics, the Imaginary is centered on images. It invokes the narcissistic function of the viewer, linking individual egos together to form a universal sense of identity. For this reason, visual culture studies has often emphasized the Imaginary, as it offers a more concrete theoretical basis for the analysis of images.

Specifically, the subject constructs its identity of the self through misrecognition of images, granting the subject an ideal image of the "self," as well as the relationship with the world. However, the imaginative identification based on misrecognition only leads to alienation. The ideal image encompasses not only the narcissistic identification of the Imaginary but also the identification with the Other of the Symbolic. This dual identification is also enacted at the level of the gaze: the subject sees not only their mirror image but also perceives themselves through the eyes of the Other. Thus, the Imaginary is often mediated by the Symbolic. However, the persistent existence of the un-symbolizable residue of the Real acts as the cause of desire, leading the subject on an endless pursuit for wholeness. In this process, the Imaginary protects the subject from confronting the lack per se. They act as a veil, maintaining the identity of the subject through concealment, albeit in a distorted way.

In this sense, landscape has certain traits of the Imaginary. The continuous production of landscapes occurs because no landscape can ever fully represent a place, thereby making landscape a continuous activity of identification that aligns experiences and emotions throughout. The Imaginary operates as a cultural function that mediates how collective identity is anchored through visual means. In this framework, landscape functions as a mirror, reflecting and solidifying certain identifications while masking what resists symbolization. The Imaginary thus charges landscape with emotional force, presenting a unified image that allows subjects to temporarily sidestep the fundamental absence that lies at the center of spatial experience.

2.5 Decoding "the Real" and redefining landscape through Lacan's lens

One distinction between phenomenological and non-representational approaches to landscape studies, as I understand it, lies in their conceptualization of subjectivity: many phenomenologists are concerned with the subject's direct perception and experience of the world, emphasizing how landscapes and spaces are presented through the subject's sensory experience. But under what social, historical, cultural, and political influences is this perceiving subject produced? When a perceiving subject—often a scholar or an intellectual—interprets their own experiences using a specific language or expression, does this not merely represent an alternative form of authoritative narrative? In non-representational theory, the subject is often seen as a composite, co-constructed by space, materiality, emotion, and various other factors. This decentering of the subject aligns with Lacanian theory. In Lacan's framework, the subject is not a unified, autonomous individual but is constructed through language and the symbolic system. The subject can never fully grasp itself, as it remains in a state of division due to the constraints imposed by language and the Symbolic.

Accordingly, my understanding of *place* diverges from certain phenomenological approaches that associate concepts such as "home" or "dwelling" with a sense of belonging. From the perspective adopted here, such uncritical associations between place (or the landscape of a particular place) and belonging reflect the subject's pursuit of a fantasy of consistency. For example, Martin Heidegger ([1951] 2001, 147) conceives "dwelling" as the fundamental mode through which human existence relates to the world, while humanistic geographer Yi-Fu Tuan's notion of *topophilia* (Tuan [1974] 1990) emphasizes the affective bond between people and their environments, with landscape often serving as a central locus of attachment. However, I argue that, in Lacanian terms, the landscape is always marked by a fundamental fragmentation and cannot fully cohere with the subject's fantasies of unity and belonging. This is somewhat akin to John Wylie's (2016) discussion of "homeland"—"a homeland only comes to exist once there is exile and displacement" (413). Wylie argues that landscape should not be seen as a site of stable, essential attachment, or identity, as is often implied by the term "homeland." Instead, Wylie suggests that landscape is marked by "a kind of dislocation or distancing from itself" (2016, 415) rather than a fixed sense of belonging or origin. I argue that this "dislocation and distancing" of landscape is directly related to the Real, which signifies the unrepresentable and disruptive aspects of place.

In discussing the space–place–landscape triad, Mitchell (1994) places greater emphasis on the visual attributes of the landscape, while he specifically highlighted the spontaneity of the landscape, meaning that the landscape is not entirely

dominated by human will and that it exerts influence on the subject. Mitchell's perspective can be traced back to discussions of the concept of "emergence" in cultural studies. In the late 20th century, cultural studies and post-structuralism developed a new understanding of "emergence." For example, cultural theorist Raymond Williams emphasized emergent cultural forms that arose out of social changes. In *Culture and Society* ([1958] 1993), he discussed how new ideas, values, and cultural forms emerge in times of social upheaval, even before they are fully articulated or codified in mainstream discourse. This concept of emergence in cultural theory was related to the structure of feeling—a term Williams coined to describe the emotional and intellectual atmosphere that shapes cultural forms before they are fully developed. In cultural geography, Denis Cosgrove (1989) also mentioned that landscapes are not just passive physical spaces but are active, culturally constructed spaces that emerge through social, historical, and ideological processes. Additionally, human geographers such as Doreen Massey (Harrison, Massey, and Richards 2006; Massey 2005) and David Harvey (2004) have discussed the impact of social relations, economic forces, and other internal factors on spatial change, and have incorporated emergence to varying degrees.

Non-representational theory, as a set of approaches developed from Nigel Thrift's foundational work, has also shown us in recent years that process and practice are intrinsic to the landscape. Non-representational theory argues that human geography must consider the materiality of everyday life, emphasizing how landscapes and spaces are continuously created through embodied experiences and non-discursive practices. Emergence here becomes tied to how spatiality is produced through social practice and experience. These perspectives, in addition to being influenced by new materialism (see Bennett 2010; Coole and Frost 2010), are also inspired by Gilles Deleuze. In *A Thousand Plateaus* (Deleuze and Guattari [1980] 2007), Deleuze and Guattari describe *becoming* as a dynamic, open-ended process that is never fully determined by pre-existing structures. For Deleuze, *becoming* refers to processes of continuous transformation that never arrive at a final state of being but are always in flux. It emphasizes flux, change, and potentiality—where new forms and identities emerge from ongoing processes of transformation.

If interpreting in Lacanian terms, the continuously generated landscape can be seen not simply as a unified presentation dominated by the Symbolic, but the result of interactions between the Symbolic and the Real. This interplay contains elements of spontaneity. In contrast, the Real attribute of place lies in the fact that, as we come to know a place, we must also acknowledge its irretrievable history, memory, and experiences. This irretrievability and unknowability, as mentioned earlier, is what Mitchell refers to as "trauma" (Mitchell 2002, xi). From the perspective of the subject, we know for certain that these irretrievable elements exist or once existed, but we do not possess any language—understood here in its broadest sense, including

images, text, digital media, and other representational technologies—that can fully capture and reproduce them. As a result, the anxiety and sense of loss regarding this trauma continually drive us to revisit and reconstruct the landscape, giving rise to its ongoing spontaneity. This construction is not only a maintenance of the Symbolic Order but also an incomplete attempt at symbolization.

The dynamic nature of the landscape is an embodiment of the desire for unity and wholeness that is continuously confronted by the inherent fragmentation of the Real. This dynamic nature manifests in three stages: first, the landscape is viewed as a unified image, whose coherence is external and illusory. Second, through the intervention of language and symbols, the landscape is endowed with meaning and is intertwined with various emotional arousals. Finally, the Real quality of the place drives the landscape to continually generate itself, attempting to fill the void within the symbolic system.

The above process suffices to explain the origin of the spontaneity of landscapes, but we still have one final puzzle—what makes the Real so unspeakable? Here, I would like to offer an unorthodox hypothesis: the answer lies in the question itself—the Real is constantly changing and is the fundamental force driving the continuous generation of landscapes. The Real cannot be stabilized by meaning or identity, and it is an unpredictable, self-initiated shift or transformation, often occurring outside of conscious intention or control. It continually disrupts established norms, pushing the subject to confront new, emergent aspects of identity, social roles, or ideological systems. This precisely supports the idea that, rather than viewing it from the traditional Lacanian perspective of being primarily a limit or absence, we should see the Real as an active, dynamic force that perpetually transforms and generates new forms of subjectivity and experience. The Real, in this sense, is not static but always in the process of becoming, always emerging unpredictably and inducing spontaneous changes in the subject and their relationship to the world.

3 Research Materials and Methodology

Previous studies have provided in-depth analyses of Arctic imagery through various media, including film (MacKenzie and Stenport 2015), literary works (Jakobsson 2009), painting (Heuer 2019; Potter 2007), among others. In these studies, scholars tend to decode Arctic landscapes within the framework of a single representational medium. My aim is to move beyond this conventional single-medium perspective, as I am more interested in the homogenizing tendencies of Arctic imaginaries and the differing human-environment relations underlying them, rather than the contrasts between Arctic images and various Arctic discourses. During my research, I noticed that the diverse media portrayals of the Arctic—manifested through documentaries, video games, news imagery, and national parks—are not only visual constructs but also products of distinct representational practices. However, the questions of how the Arctic functions as a participatory space and how its landscape imagery emerges as a result of discourse and specific situational interactions remain underexplored.

Thus, I have selected Arctic landscapes across different media as my analytical materials. To address the diversity of these materials, I have adopted an integrated methodological approach. In the context of representational analysis, alongside traditional semiological and iconographic methods, I incorporate Lacan's theory of the three Orders to varying extent: examining the projection of symbolic space in landscape representation (Article I), the impact of discourse on perception and experience (Article III), and the interaction between representational landscapes and represented experiences (Article IV). Furthermore, I draw inspiration from non-representational analysis, using participant observation to engage in embodied experiences in both national parks and digital spaces, utilizing my own experience as a supplemental resource.

The following table outlines the various methods employed in my dissertation and the corresponding research objects.

Table 1. The empirical materials and corresponding methods employed in the four articles.

Methods	Data and empirical material	Article
Iconography	Chinese documentaries about the Arctic	I
Semiology (mythology)	Photographs	II
	Video games	IV
Participant observation	Google 360° street view map	II
	Pyhä-Luosto National Park	III
	Video games	IV
Word frequency analysis	Google reviews of Finnish national parks	III
Discourse analysis	Pyhä-Luosto National Park	III

3.1 Research material: a multimedia approach

This dissertation analyzes various aspects of Arctic landscapes through four distinct articles, each focusing on a different form of representation. These case studies reflect certain shared features of Arctic landscapes within both Arctic and non-Arctic cultural contexts, while also highlighting regional variations. The primary subjects of this research include Arctic-themed documentaries and video games, news images depicting the Arctic, national parks within the Arctic Circle, and certain Arctic regions considered as non-landscapes—areas lacking high aesthetic value and not intended for visual appreciation, such as residential zones. In addition to the multimedia landscapes, the study also examines related introductory texts, reviews, and audience feedback.

Initially, I aimed to limit my research materials to a specific medium or the context of a single country. However, as my research progressed, I realized that neither medium nor national context serves as the decisive factor in defining the production of Arctic imagery. Many cultural products related to the Arctic, produced in different countries and regions, often reflect a globalized concern and imagination. Among the empirical materials I selected, the documentaries and video games are purely cultural products, created by individuals from China, Nicaragua, and the United States. I also conducted fieldwork in Finland's national parks and explored the Murmansk region of Russia using a digital ethnographic approach via Google Street View.

Representational approaches are inevitable in researching Arctic landscapes. Globally, Arctic discourses exhibit cultural and regional variations. In the era of images, these discourses are concealed within visual objects in more subtle ways, influencing viewers through various visual machines and technologies. Therefore, in Article I and Article II, I chose images as the object of analysis, revealing how Arctic imagery is constructed, disseminated, and received within specific cultural contexts,

as well as the cultural and political motivations behind these images. In doing so, I questioned the mechanisms behind this image production: Why are certain areas of the Arctic transformed into landscapes while others are not? Beyond the fixed images of the Arctic, are the non-representational landscapes—the landscapes that are less likely to be represented in traditional visual media—more likely to serve as dynamic, practice-oriented spaces, containing the potential to break the homogenized image production? With these questions in mind, I turned my attention to the experiential and material dimensions of Arctic landscapes. In Article III and Article IV, I examined materials such as national parks and video games, treating landscapes not only as visual objects but also as experiential ones.

Many scholars believe that national parks carry overt ideological aims (Grusin 2008; Marlowe, Bilmes, and Loomis 2020). While national parks are often associated with educational and scientific roles, they extend beyond these functions to engage deeply with the embodied experience of visitors. The ideological layer influences how visitors perceive and interact with these landscapes, raising questions about how their experiences might differ if shaped by alternative discourses: without their role in shaping national identity and ideology, how might visitors perceive and interact with national parks? Would their experiences be shaped by a new dominant discourse, reshaping the meaning of materiality and experience? While these questions may be easier to address through single case studies, my interest lies in exploring the topological relationships between landscape, experience, and dominant discourse. In my research, national parks are positioned within the dual dimensions of representation and experience, serving both as experiential spaces and objects of observation.

Video games, in comparison, invite players into specific experiences through the landscape. Whether in simulation games, where repeated construction processes transform landscapes, or platform games that accumulate similar yet differentiated experiences through trial and error, players engage with the game's landscapes beyond mere visual input, deriving meaning from embodied experiences rather than symbolic systems. These individual experiences, encompassing emotions, resist full linguistic capture, yet they often drive players toward completion and affect their experience of the game.

The evolution of my research interests, from representation to the exploration of Arctic landscapes and the human-environment relationships behind them, is reflected in the focus of my four articles. More importantly, I aim to examine how different elements within the space–place–landscape triad interact, how meaning is produced within this topological structure, and how viewers' gaze, knowledge, and experience are structured. The heterogeneous empirical materials form a deliberately composite research architecture, designed to investigate landscape as a complex, multi-layered process involving symbolic systems, embodied practices, and

mediated experiences. This approach allows for a comparative and relational understanding of how Arctic landscapes are both produced and inhabited across different cultural technologies. Through this relational structure, this study moves beyond traditional landscape analysis, offering a dynamic account of Arctic imaginaries and their performative unfolding in contemporary visual culture studies.

3.2 Research methodology: Decoding the represented and grabbing the unrepresented

In analyzing different empirical materials, I employed a variety of methods, primarily drawn from visual culture studies and complemented by insights from non-representational theory. Visual culture as a field has long privileged theoretical debates, which has resulted in a wide range of methodological practices rather than a single standardized approach (Rose 2012). Within this tradition, the four articles of the dissertation demonstrate different methodological emphases. This methodological plurality reflects both the diversity of research objects and the field's openness to multiple analytical strategies, and highlights the flexibility required for studying visuality across heterogeneous materials.

Moreover, in applying non-representational theory, I follow the lead of scholars such as Vannini (2015b), Dewsbury (2010) and Lorimer (2005), who advocate for ethnographic and auto-ethnographic methods that foreground embodiment, affect, and performativity. Vannini's edited volume provides multiple empirical illustrations of non-representational engagement, emphasizes the importance of participant observation of mundane practices, embodied performances, affective atmospheres, and "backgrounds" (Vannini 2015c, 9) or ambient milieus that often escape traditional analysis. Lorimer (2005), in contrast, argues that non-representational research is not only defined by the objects it studies but also by the modes of engagement it adopts, including the foregrounding embodied action, affective immediacy, and often writing itself as a methodological tool. In ethnographic-style non-representational work, researchers such as Gilge (2016) and Anderson & Harrison (2010) emphasize immersive, improvisational fieldwork that attends to lived bodies and their pre-cognitive encounters with place. Torrens (2024) identifies common methodological "traps" and offers practical instruments to retain analytical fidelity even while valuing sensory immediacy. These studies demonstrate how atmosphere, affect, and more-than-human interaction can be registered through creative, multi-modal forms of data collection beyond words and images. These methods help me trace how participants affectively resonate with landscapes. My use of participant observation in both physical and digital environments build upon these approaches to register how embodied sensation resists or supplements symbolic interpretation.

On the other hand, according to Nigel Thrift (2007, 3), non-representational theory emphasizes the "possibilities for politico-epistemic renewal" rather than the precision and validity typically sought in science. This suggests that non-representational theory encourages a break from the conservative tendencies of traditional social sciences, discarding the insistence on systematic research methods, and relinquishing control, prediction, and interpretation of objects and events, aiming instead to explore the potential of a new experimental genre (Vannini 2015c). While I fully embraced these attempts, which inject fresh vitality into cultural geography and mobilize rich methodological tools from other disciplines, I realized in practice that, as a researcher, I must reflect on the fact that methods such as interviews, participant observation, case studies, close reading, artistic interventions, or performances are often inescapably tied to language or other forms of representation when academically articulating experience, practice, and emotion. Non-representational theory regards these forms of representation as performative displays, seemingly aligning with Thrift's assertion that scientific precision is not the goal, while given the procedural demands of publication and academic dissemination, this leads to what can be described as a Lacanian dilemma in my work—the inevitable residue left when symbols (language) cut through experience. Thus, when gathering visitor reviews of national parks and player feedback from video games, I acknowledge that while these reviews partially reflect participants' experiences and practices, they do not equate to the experiences themselves and are further constrained by the medium and potential audience.

Moreover, when dealing with video games as my empirical materials, I approached the materials primarily as environments or gamescapes—the virtual landscapes that players explore and inhabit—rather than focusing on the broader disciplinary questions or theoretical frameworks of game studies, such as ludology, narrative structure, or player engagement mechanics. While I recognize game studies could certainly offer useful perspectives and methodologies (e.g., analyzing game design, rule systems, or player communities in more depth), my project was guided by questions rooted in cultural geography and visual culture studies: how landscapes (including those in digital form) are created, experienced, and imbued with meaning. Consequently, I chose to apply tools like participant observation and image analysis to understand these game spaces as culturally and visually constructed spaces.

In this dissertation, I primarily utilized iconography, semiological analysis, participant observation, and discourse analysis. Iconography and semiological methods were the main tools for processing images. The experience of using Google 360° Street View, fieldwork in Pyhä-Luosto National Park, and ethnographic methods in two video games were treated as different forms of participant observation. Additionally, in Article III, I applied quantitative methods, conducting keyword frequency analysis of Google Reviews in different languages for Pyhä-

Luosto National Park, alongside a discourse analysis to examine the institution, power dynamics, and discourse operation within the park.

Because the methodology for frequency and discourse analysis is discussed in detail in Article III, it is not elaborated separately here. However, it is important to situate this use of discourse analysis within broader methodological traditions in cultural geography and visual studies. In this dissertation, discourse analysis is employed as a theory-informed interpretive framework grounded in the Foucauldian tradition. Foucauldian discourse analysis is a mode of inquiry concerned with how language, imagery, and institutional practices collectively produce regimes of truth and subject positions, which traces how certain statements become authoritative while others are marginalized or excluded (see Foucault [1975] 1995, [1977] 2012; Stenson and Watt 1999; Sharp and Richardson 2001). In geography and cultural studies, this approach has been extended to visual and spatial discourses, focusing on how power operates not only through what is represented, but through what is systematically rendered invisible or unspeakable (Lees 2004; Khan and MacEachen 2021). My approach draws on this strand of Foucauldian-inspired methodology: I analyze landscape representations—such as park signage, exhibition panels, and visitor reviews—as discursive events embedded in power-laden spatial practices. I consider discourse as a system of meaning-making that links textual, visual, and spatial elements, and thereby constitutes subjects as certain kinds of viewers, residents, or tourists.

While my approach shares the attention to power and representation, it diverges by integrating Lacanian psychoanalytic theory, which frames discourse as both a symbolic structure and a mechanism of subject formation. Thus, my use of discourse analysis is interpretive and theory-driven, corresponding to the post-structuralist traditions that prioritize discursive effects over empirical regularity. I am interested in how the Symbolic Order, in Lacanian terms, interacts with these discursive forms to structure the subject's relation to place and visibility. This requires examining both the language of representation and the institutional mechanisms of circulation, such as park management logics, media platforms, or tourism infrastructures.

While the methodological choices in this dissertation are informed by the demands of the empirical material, they are also significantly shaped by the theoretical frameworks. In this sense, theory operates as a lens that guides interpretation from the outset. This is evident in the heuristic use of Lacan's triadic model to map the relationships between representation, affect, and subjectivity. Rather than testing theory against data in a positivist sense, the study adopts a hermeneutic approach in which theoretical concepts actively structure the research questions, the selection of materials, and the range of meanings considered possible. This deductive dimension is particularly visible in the analysis of visual landscape imagery, which attends both to iconographic content and to the structuring absences and symbolic ruptures revealed through a psychoanalytic lens.

The use of mixed methodologies in this dissertation is shaped by both the nature of the empirical material and the guiding theoretical frameworks. Different methods bring distinct epistemological assumptions about what constitutes valid knowledge and how meaning is produced: for instance, semiology and discourse analysis are grounded in interpretivist traditions, whereas frequency analysis reflects more positivist orientations. Rather than a limitation, this plurality enables a layered methodology in which different approaches illuminate complementary dimensions of the same object of study. Informed by a pragmatist orientation, this methodological strategy highlights flexibility while maintaining reflexivity in order to sustain conceptual coherence.

3.2.1 Iconography and Semiology

Iconography and semiology are sometimes regarded as closely related approaches to the analysis of visual materials. In this dissertation they are placed in dialogue to highlight both their shared features and the divergences that shape the methodological choices. Iconography is employed particularly in contexts where formal, compositional, and art-historical dimensions are central, whereas semiology is applied in cases where cultural signification and symbolic interpretation take precedence. By bringing these two methods into conversation, I aim to clarify their respective appropriateness for specific analytical contexts and demonstrates how their frameworks inform the overall approach to visual analysis.

Article I emphasizes iconography as the primary method of analysis, drawing on Denis Cosgrove's appropriation of the concept as "the theoretical and historical study of symbolic imagery" (Daniels and Cosgrove [1988] 2013, 1). Numerous art historians have also noted the parallels between Erwin Panofsky's iconological approach and semiology (e.g., Argan and West 1975; Bal and Bryson 1991; Liepe 2022).

Semiology, which has seen the emergence of various schools from Ferdinand de Saussure to Charles Sanders Peirce, and later Roland Barthes, offers an extensive set of conceptual tools. In visual culture studies, the dominant semiological approach often hinges on Saussure's dichotomy between the "signified" and the "signifier": the former refers to a concept or object, while the latter is the sound or image associated with it. However, in Saussure's model, there is no inherent connection between a signifier and its signified. Their relationship is generated within specific contexts, depending on the differences between symbols (Saussure [1916] 1993). Accordingly, meaning is stabilized through the image's origin, its contextual framing, and the sociocultural system within which it operates.

In *Mythologies*, Roland Barthes offers a framework that connects specific signs to broader systems of meaning, focusing on uncovering the ideological mechanisms

behind cultural symbols. He posits that everyday objects and images, such as advertisements or photography, often serve as vehicles for the transmission of societal values. These signs, though seemingly natural, are in fact carriers of cultural ideologies, transmitted and solidified through myth-making processes. Barthes' analysis operates on two levels: "denotation" and "connotation" (Barthes [1957] 1993)—denotation refers to the literal meaning of a sign, or "what is shown," while connotation explores its cultural and historical implications, "what it suggests" within a given sociocultural context. For instance, an image of a soldier may denote a man in uniform, while also connoting values such as bravery, patriotism, and sacrifice. The secondary signification transforms the original denotation by attaching broader societal values, which is where the "myth" lies. This process involves the intervention of ideology, in which symbols are re-encoded and assigned new meanings that often correspond with dominant ideological narratives. Barthes describes myth as a second-order sign system, where the original sign becomes a signifier, creating a meta-language (Barthes [1957] 1993).

Similarly, Panofsky's iconology, which shares a structural approach with Barthes' methodology, also employs a multi-level model for analysis. Panofsky interprets artworks through three layers of analysis: pre-iconographic description, iconographic analysis, and iconological interpretation. This methodology begins by identifying forms and objects (pre-iconographic description), then interpreting their cultural and historical significance (iconographic analysis), and finally exploring how these meanings reflect deeper cultural and philosophical themes (iconological interpretation) (Panofsky [1939] 1972). For example, an apple in a painting may be described pre-iconographically as a "red, round object," understood iconographically as the "forbidden fruit" in biblical narratives, and iconologically as a symbol of "temptation and original sin." In landscape studies, Stephen Daniels and Denis Cosgrove extend Panofsky's approach to landscapes, viewing them as symbolic representations shaped by historical, cultural, and social influences. They argue that the iconographic method is crucial for understanding landscape as a pictorial symbol, not just through formal descriptions but by uncovering deeper cultural meanings (Daniels and Cosgrove [1988] 2013).

According to Panofsky ([1939] 1972, 5–10), the distinction between iconography and iconology is that while iconography refers to the first two levels of analysis, identifying and categorizing visual motifs and their conventional meanings, iconology goes a step further, aiming to uncover the underlying cultural, philosophical, or worldview-related meanings embedded in the image. While Daniels and Cosgrove draw on Panofsky's method and refer to it as "iconography," their application of the term incorporates interpretive aims that correspond more accurately to Panofsky's notion of iconology. In their interdisciplinary adaptation,

"iconography" functions as a broader cultural analytic, one that reads landscapes as symbolic texts shaped by their historical, political, and social contexts.

Although both Panofsky's iconology and Barthes' mythology offer structured approaches for analyzing visual elements, there are distinct differences in their application. Both methods move beyond initial meanings to generate new signification by connecting the first-level meaning to broader textual sources. However, as Cosgrove and Daniels have demonstrated, while iconography can be used for ideological analysis, it is predominantly applied to painting. The pre-iconographic stage of iconography, for instance, involves not just the identification of visual elements but also compositional analysis, including the examination of line, color, perspective, and light—all elements that are characteristic of painting. Moreover, specific painting styles possess their own formal languages.

Given these distinctions, I apply both iconography (in Cosgrove and Daniels's sense) and semiology, as represented by Barthes' mythology, to different empirical materials. Article I employs iconography to examine how documentary filming techniques imitate the composition of traditional Chinese landscape scrolls, encompassing not only symbolic parallels but also formal aspects such as color, light, perspective, and viewing modes. By contrast, Article II, which analyzes news photography, and Article IV, which examines gamescapes in two video games, place greater emphasis on the cultural meanings of specific visual symbols, with less attention to formal elements more relevant to painting. Accordingly, these analyses adopt a semiological approach to investigate the cultural significance of images.

3.2.2 Participant observation

Over the past two centuries, there has been a growing engagement with the ethnographic tradition in both sociocultural geography and visual culture studies. Cultural geographers attribute this rise to the influence of non-representational theory (Vannini 2015a). Among these methods, participant observation—originally developed in ethnology and cultural anthropology—has been widely adopted by geographers to examine social interactions, behaviors, and cultural practices. It has been defined as drawing inferences from what people do, make, and use (Spradley 1980). In human geography, participant observation has broadened its scope to include interactions between people and their environments (Cook 2013). This approach helps uncover how human actions shape physical spaces and how these spaces, in turn, influence human behavior. Participant observation has thus been employed to investigate place-making, spatial practices, and human–environment interactions, such as the ways individuals engage with urban and rural spaces.

In non-representational research, ethnographic methods challenge traditional approaches that overemphasize language and symbolic expression by focusing on

everyday practices, emotions, and bodily movements. In non-representational theory, participant observation has been experimentally adapted to explore experiences and interactions that are difficult to fully capture through language. This method seeks to capture knowledge in action, examining how individuals interact with their environment and others through non-verbal means. Given the immediacy and fluidity emphasized in non-representational theory, researchers often immerse themselves in action to experience and understand individuals' sensations and emotions. Inspired by actor-network theory (Latour 2005), non-representational theory further broadens the role of participant observation in research. Actor-network theory posits that social relations are not solely driven by human actors. Non-human entities—such as technologies, objects, and symbols—also play active roles in shaping social networks. Within this framework, participant observation can be used to trace the interactions between human and non-human entities, examining how they jointly construct social reality.

In the study of Pyhä-Luosto National Park, the analysis combined spatial observation with a phenomenological participant-observation approach. Attention was first directed to the physical characteristics of the park, including trails, signage, visitor-center exhibits, and the spatial organization of key sites. Field notes documented elements such as trail markers, signage design, and recommendations provided by staff regarding visitor circulation. Building on this familiarity with the park's physical and managerial structures, participant observation with a phenomenological orientation was conducted, involving activities such as hiking, consulting staff, and attending on-site exhibitions. Observations focused on bodily perceptions, emotional responses, and sensory impressions, thereby examining how tourist experiences contribute to understandings of landscape and narrative. As a foreign visitor with limited knowledge of Finnish and Lapland's aesthetic traditions, reliance on staff guidance and official routes also revealed the underlying logic of park planning and management. These ethnographic materials supplemented the discourse analysis of exhibits, signboards, and visitor reviews in Article III. While the published article emphasizes the mixed-method findings, those findings were interpreted in relation to the on-site participant observation.

In addition to on-site fieldwork, two rounds of participant observation were conducted in digital spaces. As digital technologies increasingly permeate everyday life, online platforms have become significant arenas of interaction. This raises methodological questions about how observation can be adapted to virtual environments and how data generated within them can be interpreted. Following the widespread digitization prompted by the COVID-19 pandemic, participant observation in digital environments has become an increasingly important methodology in the humanities.

Digital fieldwork in the Murmansk region was likewise carried out during the COVID-19 pandemic, when on-site research was not feasible. In this case, Google Street View (GSV) served as an alternative field site. Using Google 360° Street View maps made it possible to obtain situated perspectives of locations and to capture landscapes as they appear to people moving through them, rather than as selectively depicted by subjective photographic techniques. This method facilitated exploration of the urban landscape of cities on the Kola Peninsula in a visual and dynamic manner, simulating a sense of physical presence by allowing navigation in multiple directions and from multiple vantage points. Moreover, it reduced potential biases associated with conventional photographic practices—such as framing, perspective, and lighting—that can distort the meaning of images.

While GSV has frequently been employed for environmental assessments (Rundle et al. 2011; Curtis et al. 2013), a smaller body of research has considered its experiential qualities. Gilge (2016), for instance, adopts a phenomenological approach to examine how digital landscapes are perceived and navigated. In this dissertation, GSV-based fieldwork is conceptualized as a form of digital participant observation, in which the environment is engaged through reflexive practices analogous to those used in on-site ethnography. Rather than treating GSV solely as a data source, the approach involves documenting impressions of spatiality, embodiment, and affect while virtually traversing digital streetscapes. In this way, ethnographic attentiveness is combined with the mediation of a virtual platform to approximate in-person field observation.

Another application of digital ethnography in this dissertation involves the analysis of game landscapes. More than twenty hours of gameplay in the two selected video games provided a direct engagement with the materiality and interactions of digital environments. This approach facilitated the examination of the fluidity, temporality, and embodiment of game spaces, offering insights into how game landscapes are constructed and experienced through players' actions and perceptions. Game experiences are not merely observational but entail emotional and practical involvement. However, as affect is an immediate force or intensity, it cannot be fully captured or analyzed in its pure form (Massumi 2002; Thrift 2007). To address this, the gameplay analysis was supplemented with livestreams recorded by other players, focusing on their in-game commentary and real-time reactions, as well as with player reviews. These additional materials provided further perspectives on how players emotionally connect with game spaces.

In sum, the methodological strategies adopted in this dissertation—ranging from iconography and semiology to discourse analysis and participant observation in both physical and digital contexts—enable a multi-layered examination of Arctic landscapes as representational and experiential formations.

4 Summary of the Results

This chapter brings together the central findings of the dissertation, addressing the overall research question through a synthesis of theoretical reflection and empirical analysis. The overall research question of this dissertation is: **How can Lacan's triadic model of the Symbolic, the Imaginary, and the Real help us to reconceptualize the notion of landscape, thereby offering a deeper understanding of the dynamic processes that shape place, space, and landscape in the Arctic?** To address this question, the analysis draws on Arctic-themed documentaries, video games, news images about the Arctic, national parks located within the Arctic Circle, and areas of the Arctic considered "anti-landscape." This chapter discusses the findings of the research, corresponding to the three sub-questions posed in the introduction: first, within Mitchell–Lacan's theoretical framework, how can we understand *place* as the Lacanian Real in landscape studies? Second, how are Arctic landscapes constructed as visual objects in different media to serve ideological or discursive purposes? And third, how do power relations shape Arctic landscapes, and how does Lacan's triadic model clarify the subject's capacity to negotiate or contest these power-related contexts?

Across the four articles, the Arctic landscape is approached as a shifting and relational construct, whose meaning emerges at the intersection of discourse, visuality, and embodied experience. The four articles each approach this notion from a different ontological angle: as symbolic projection in film, as ideological condensation in photographic media, as spatialized discourse in institutional design, and as performative affect in digital gamescapes. This variation reflects a methodological and theoretical choice to explore how landscapes are not only seen but also enacted, inhabited, and negotiated across different media and representational regimes.

The Arctic in this sense is a site of visual, affective, and epistemological interface where politics, fantasy, and subjectivity converge. It interpellates the subject as a particular kind of viewer, while simultaneously functioning as a reflective surface where our desires are projected. In this sense, the Arctic is gazing back at us. It carries a reciprocal visual function: it reflects what we impose upon it, meanwhile conditions how we are seen, positioned, and interpellated by its image. The Arctic

landscape is therefore understood here as a performative, material-discursive process, and the Arctic is examined through the multiple representational and experiential orders that structure its visibility and intelligibility.

While each study emphasizes how Arctic landscapes are shaped and practiced through different forms of representation, the dissertation as a whole conceptualizes the broader relationship between landscape, place, and space. A central aim of this work is to identify new approaches for theorizing this relationship, integrating conceptual resources that can be further developed and mobilized as analytical tools.

Building on these theoretical concerns, the first part of this chapter engages with the definition of the Real, considering the perspective that Lacan's theory of the three Orders may offer for cultural geography. This is followed by a comparative discussion of Arctic visual representations and the interpretation of power within this framework. Landscape, space, and place are here treated as forming a dialectical and topological relation, in which the interaction between any two elements necessarily involves the operation of the third.

4.1 Theoretical Contribution and Re-conceptualization of the Real

Lacan's notion of the Real has often been read as a traumatic or unassimilable core that evades full capture by language or representation. In landscape studies, this corresponds to critiques that focus exclusively on discourse or ideology and risk overlooking how the material environment and affective energies can challenge or exceed representational frameworks. Drawing on the findings from Article II and Article IV, I argue that the Real can be reinterpreted as a zone of potentiality and becoming, where ecological processes, bodily engagements, and emergent forces resist neat symbolic categorization.

When understood as an ideological representation, landscape often reflects specific human perceptions and imaginaries of the Arctic. Such images are continually reshaped by shifting discourses, mirroring both evolving human understandings of the region and the ideological struggles among competing powers. In Lacanian terms, the Symbolic is constituted by laws, structures, and codes that organize social reality. In the Arctic, these are manifested in political, industrial, and environmental policies that shape the region's conceptualization. However, the anti-landscape emerges as the inevitable counterpart when these discourses confront the material limits of the environment. The anti-landscape exposes the breakdown of these projections when the Symbolic cannot fully contain or regulate the environmental impacts of industrial activities. In this way, the Arctic anti-landscape becomes a space of contradiction, where the promises of industrial progress clash with the fragility of the ecosystem. Conversely, the Arctic anti-landscape also

manifests as a traumatic presence. The transformation of the Arctic landscape into an anti-landscape is both a form of physical degradation and a shift that reveals contradictions between human aspirations, industrial expansion, and environmental fragility. The non-representational nature of the anti-landscape illustrates that the changes in the landscape involve deeper material relations.

Inspired by W.J.T. Mitchell, the initial formulation of this theoretical framework approached Lacan through a perspective shaped by ideological critique, akin to that of Žižek or Gramsci. Subsequent engagement with discussions of the Real was strongly informed by non-representational theory. The objective here is not to see landscapes as pure illusions and then dispel the illusion to access the "reality" of place. Rather, the landscape—and the anti-landscape discussed in Article II—is not only the result of cultural representation nor solely the product of an individual's direct experience with material space, but a dynamic process of interaction between the two. From the discussion of Arctic anti-landscapes, the interaction between the Symbolic, the Imaginary, and the Real is deeply intertwined. The Symbolic attempts to control nature through laws, policies, and discourse, while the Real, through its material reality, disrupts this control, exposing the limits of industrial expansion and nature's resistance to full domination. In this triadic structure, the landscape functions as a critical element, embodying both symbolic projections and unrepresentable material realities.

While W.J.T. Mitchell critiques purely representational approaches and views landscape as an active medium through which power is articulated and contested, his analysis nonetheless remains closely engaged with the symbolic and representational aspects of landscapes, particularly its political instrumentalization. Lacan's triadic framework offers a means of mediating the tension between Mitchell's landscape theory and non-representational approaches. This mediation requires a reinterpretation of the Real in landscape studies.

The dual definition of anti-landscape in Article II reveals two aspects of the Real: on the one hand, the anti-landscape resists the Symbolic's attempts to represent it coherently. Thus, the anti-landscape is the Real in Lacanian terms—where symbolic structures collapse, and the material world cannot be easily assimilated into existing discourses. However, this breakdown does not merely result in a traumatic void. Instead, it reveals new possibilities for understanding how landscapes can be experienced and engaged with, beyond traditional symbolic representations. This dynamic opens up the Real as a space of potentiality, where new meanings, forms of engagement, and environmental practices can emerge. The unrepresentable materiality of the landscape, while resistant to symbolic control, becomes a site of becoming. On the other hand, as illustrated by the example of the lost landscape, the degradation of landscape is at once a traumatic event and a process of transformation. The landscape, through its material changes, becomes a site of new forces and

relations. The Real, then, leads to the breakdown of symbolic meaning, as well as the opening of new realities through material and affective interactions with the landscape.

Furthermore, the research demonstrates that the space–place–landscape triad is constantly in flux. Article IV extends this analysis by incorporating temporality, approaching the temporal–spatial landscape as a holistic entity. This discussion primarily unfolds through the exploration of historical authenticity. Game designers often use historical events, cultural myths, and similar material as raw material, selectively integrating them into the game's narrative. However, the narrative's authenticity does not necessarily imply the accurate reproduction of local historical facts. This echoes post-structuralist critiques of traditional historiography: history is not an objective reality but is constructed through language, discourse, and power relations, with its narratives inherently subjective. Since Lacan describes the Real as the Order which entirely resists symbolization, in terms of history, the Real would be those elements of the past that are omitted from historical records—events never documented, perspectives suppressed, experiences lost to time, and so forth. Post-structuralist historians underscore the presence of the Real by exposing the limits of historical narratives and the impossibility of fully capturing the past as it "truly" was. Fredric Jameson, drawing from Marxist materialism, more radically argues that the Real "is simply History itself" (Jameson 1977, 384).

Does this imply that, whether through text, image, or interactive media, the history of a place can never be apprehended directly, but only through symbols and imagination? Unfortunately, this seems to be what post-structuralism suggests. Yet, this critique of historical authenticity opens another avenue of understanding: if the factual history cannot be fully restored, can video games, as interactive media, provide an alternative path to approach authenticity through their unique temporal-spatial constructions and emotional experiences? This path, by engaging the player's senses, emotions, and imagination, enables them to obtain direct experiential practice in digital landscapes, producing a sense of presence that surpasses text and image. Therefore, Article IV engages with non-representational theory, focusing on digital materiality to examine how video games provide players with experiences that transcend representation and approach historical authenticity.

Since the early 21st century, scholars across various fields in the humanities have begun to examine the materiality of digital objects (Shep 2015; Hayles 2012; Kirschenbaum 2012). Hayles (2012) argues that to reconceptualize the instrumentality of materiality, it is necessary to distinguish between "physicality" and "materiality" (91). She views physicality as an ontologically independent entity, whereas materiality is an emergent property produced through engagement or "attention," identifying and isolating one or more specific physical attributes. In other words, materiality is not inherent to physical entities but arises from dynamic

interactions between human cognition and the physical world, generated by the processing and meaning-making of physicality. Johanna Drucker (2013), integrating insights from non-representational theory's focus on performativity, argues that digital media's materiality should not be viewed merely as a static physical presence but understood as performative, based on its functionality and interactivity. In this sense, performativity manifests across multiple levels of digital media, from underlying code to user interfaces and the interactive processes between users and media, collectively constituting the dynamic materiality of digital media.

All the studies above illustrate possibilities of alternative definitions of materiality. Although the digital medium's materiality is not equated with that of the physical world, attention to the performative and interactive dimensions of digital objects highlights a dynamic and multidimensional engagement with authenticity. Such engagement does not rely on the passive acceptance of pre-existing representations but generates a continuously evolving, open-ended process of meaning-making through interaction and practice with digital objects. In both video games analyzed in Article IV, digital landscapes offer a space for creating and exploring alternative historical narratives. The games foster emotional experiences that enable players to form emotional connections with the characters and stories within the game.

When the relationships between time and space are compressed into video games, it becomes easier to grasp the fluidity of a place. In geographical and cultural theory, the notion of place has been approached in a multitude of ways, ranging from regional geography's static view of place as a distinct geographical unit to humanistic geography's focus on the emotional and experiential connection to place, to Marxist geography's view of place as embedded within global capitalism, and later perspectives like non-representational theory and postcolonialism, which focus on how place is continually shaped through practices, power relations, and cultural encounters. These perspectives offer a multifaceted understanding of place as an evolving, multidimensional space deeply intertwined with social, economic, cultural, and material forces.

This dynamic and open nature of place is to some extent rooted in its characteristics of the Real in the Lacanian sense. The residue of a place that transcends the conceived space imparts dynamism and openness, allowing the meaning and practice of a place to remain continually generative and transformative. The Real, as ungraspable, includes a constantly shifting set of relations and forces that resist static definition. A place, in this view, is an assemblage of forces, material flows, social relations, and natural elements, all contributing to its unique yet ever-changing reality.

4.2 Comparative Perspectives on Visual Representation of Arctic Landscapes

By examining diverse media, this dissertation emphasizes how visual forms of representation shape perceptions of the Arctic. To discuss the interaction between conceptual space and landscape representation, this section introduces the second sub-question: How are Arctic landscapes constructed as visual objects in different media to serve ideological or discursive purposes? A primary observation is that each type of medium deploys distinct strategies for framing Arctic landscapes, often tied to its intended audience, production context, and underlying narrative agenda.

Arctic documentaries offer richer visual information and simultaneously engage the auditory senses. Themes such as climate change, scientific exploration, and indigenous life are often disseminated through such moving images (MacKenzie and Stenport 2015, 3). While these works can also be interpreted through non-representational approaches, viewing documentary content as "presenting" or "performing" (see Fendler 2014) rather than representing, the documentary form nonetheless carries an inherent expectation among audiences that it depicts "real life" and strives to do so without manipulation (Aufderheide 2007, 2). For instance, cinematographic techniques in Arctic documentaries, such as horizontal panning or lingering aerial shots, project an immersive sense of place and invite viewers to contemplate the vastness of the Arctic. These stylistic decisions reveal particular interpretive choices: they can romanticize the region as pristine wilderness, reinforce national or cultural identities, or emphasize ecological vulnerabilities.

Article I interprets the use of camera techniques as a form of visual technology aimed at ideological interpellation. Analysis of the main distribution platforms shows that these Chinese-produced documentaries primarily target domestic audiences, with Chinese viewers constituting the majority. From a semiological perspective, the visual signs represented in these films—snow-capped mountains, glaciers, sleds, and auroras—may appear similar to the Borealistic fantasies. However, through an iconographic approach, when we consider composition, lighting, color, and the visual technologies dictated by modernity, the landscape is not just a simple visual object but constructs specific visual relationships, positioning the viewer within the image's space. In this structure, the act of viewing is both an effect of the visual system and a manifestation of the subject's agency, as the viewer actively and invasively engages within it.

Through the Symbolic Order, the viewer's position is defined and structured by these visual technologies, connecting the viewer's imaginative desires for the Arctic with a collective sense of nostalgia, not for the real Arctic as a practical space but for the viewer's memory and cultural kinship. According to Lacan's theory, viewing is a desiring act, a process where the subject seeks and identifies an ideal referent to recognize and affirm their own identity. Accordingly, the act of viewing is

inseparable from the formation and negotiation of subjectivity. For Chinese audiences, the wilderness image of the Arctic carries an exotic tone, but the use of specific scopic regimes does not entirely otherize the Arctic landscape. Instead, it merges with established Chinese cultural imaginaries of idealized pure landscapes, evoking a romanticized vision that encourages both affective attachment and a desire for protection. Through this imaginative identification, the documentary integrates the theme of China's participation in Arctic affairs into a broader cultural framework.

By contrast, photographs illustrating environmental degradation, territorial claims, or geopolitical conflicts tend toward tighter framing and more urgent visual cues. In Article II, energy company Equinor strives to use images to portray a peaceful coexistence between the gas plant and its surrounding environment, while photographs from environmental NGO organizations often rely on stark contrasts—such as pollution, smoke, or industrial machinery—to highlight environmental impacts and political tensions. Where documentaries may allow for sustained visual narratives, photographs and news images are typically compressed into single frames, obliging viewers to interpret events quickly in conjunction with text-based reporting.

Besides the images of both media, national parks constitute another layer of landscape representation. In this context, park design structures the visitor's encounter with place. The interplay among on-site text panels, photographic displays, and mapped routes functions to orient visitors both physically and conceptually, directing attention to particular landmarks and framing their interpretation within predefined themes.

Digital landscapes in video games, on the other hand, articulate a form of visuality characterized by interactivity. Players navigate virtual Arctic terrains that can compress historical episodes, imaginary elements, and speculative futures into a single gaming experience. While these environments are not literal documents of Arctic reality, they nonetheless shape popular conceptions by blending recognizable imagery (glaciers, tundra, auroras) with stylized aesthetics or narrative devices. Crucially, the interactive format gives players a role in co-constructing the experience, blurring the lines between passive observation and active engagement. The game's level design, graphical style, and programmed mechanics all contribute to how Arctic spaces are explored, granting a sense of agency that static images or linear films cannot replicate.

Above all, each medium frames the region through specific visual grammars and narrative objectives. It can be argued that the various visual technologies and machines today reshape the subject and their perceptual modes through visual mediation. Under the reorganization of the visual field through certain ideology or discourse, the representation of Arctic landscapes also participates in this cultural practice, shaping the subject's position, visual relationships, and power structures.

Yet, in Lacanian terms, the subject actively invests desire into these representations, so that landscapes serve also as dynamic spaces of identification, enabling viewers to negotiate their role within the visual objects.

4.3 The Embeddedness of Power in Landscape Experience

Power remains a central, unifying thread in this dissertation. Section 4.2 discussed how visual regimes and camera techniques position viewers in ways that reinforce specific ideological or discursive messages. This section extends the analysis by examining the subject's capacity to negotiate or contest such power-related contexts.

National parks, as examined here, operate both as representational and experiential spaces. They provide a space for visitors to experience nature directly through observation, interaction, and participation in various activities. At the same time, while national parks are intended to preserve rare, unique, or diverse natural and cultural features, claiming to maintain landscapes in their most authentic forms, they are also a social construction of nature and the environment. Greider and Garkovich (1994, 1) describe them as "symbolic environments created by human acts of conferring meaning to nature and the environment" that frame the environment "from a particular angle of vision and through a special filter of values and beliefs." Under this dual definition, visitors' experiences in national parks are shaped by both conceptual and material dimensions.

National parks interact with broader representational systems to govern the visibility and invisibility of landscapes within the park. Specifically, iconic images of places like the Arctic, Lapland, and Finnish national parks, disseminated through postcards, posters, magazines, and online platforms, precondition our understanding of the place. As visitors navigate the national park, their experiences are shaped by pre-existing discourses and representations, and as they recognize specific landscapes, they project their own fragmented bodily sensations onto the coherent landscape image, which is perceived as a coherent and autonomous entity. This interaction between the subject and the landscape is mediated by a symbolic framework that structures visual perception. According to Lacan, the subject is constituted through the intervention of the Symbolic Order, a process conducted through language, social practices, and cultural norms. Within the setting of national parks, the symbolic structure manifests in the normative representations of natural and cultural landscapes, as well as in the shaping of visitors' experiences through institutional technologies. Signage, pathways, and interpretive texts within the park are all technologies that shape visitor experience, conveying particular environmental and cultural values that guide visitor behavior and perception.

In the interpretive texts—including signage, brochures, and exhibition panels—within Pyhä-Luosto National Park, discourses about the Arctic, Finland, Lapland, and the Sámi people appear alternately. This allows for the fluidity of subject identification during the visit. As Lacan suggests, discourse splits the subject, but the subject in the presence of multiple discourses resists fixed identity. Individuals are not passive when encountering top-down power. Rather, as non-representational theory highlights, visitors engage physically, emotionally, and socially with landscapes, often reworking or resisting institutional visions as they move through the environment. Yet, travelers' bodily, affective responses can unsettle or challenge these official narratives. The power spaces of the Arctic constructed by institutions do not act on the subject's experience unidirectionally. The Symbolic Order, through language and social practices, mediates the interaction between individuals and places. It influences visitors' actions and perceptions, shaping their experiences to correspond to specific cultural and social expectations. However, the subject continually reconstructs their identity within these intersecting discourses. The material landscape pushes visitors to continually redefine themselves and their relationship to the environment as they encounter new meanings and emotional reactions.

In both Article I and Article III, power structures depend on the capacity to define and disseminate meanings about the Arctic. Drawing on Lacan's triadic model, I argue that the Symbolic Order of laws, policies, and institutional codes intermingles with the Imaginary identifications while continually clashing with or reworking the Real. This interplay illustrates that political power is simultaneously visible—as policy, national rhetoric, or cinematic framing—and diffuse, woven into the rhythms of everyday, lived encounters.

These findings suggest that attention to embodied action does not eclipse power. It rather uncovers additional modalities through which landscapes are negotiated and challenged. The tension between institutionally imposed design and personal agency exemplifies how non-representational elements (embodiment, sensory immersion, spontaneous affect) remain bound within broader discursive and material structures that shape collective possibilities. Power therefore operates along multiple axes: as an ideological system that defines "proper" ways to see and talk about a place, as a set of built or virtual infrastructures that choreograph action, and as a field of emergent relations where subjects can still renegotiate their positions through practice. It permeates every dimension of landscape experience rather than operating solely at the level of discourse.

4.4 Revisiting the Research Question: Epistemological and Social Reflections

Returning to the overall research question of this dissertation: How can Lacan's triadic model of the Symbolic, the Imaginary, and the Real help us to reconceptualize the notion of landscape, thereby offering a deeper understanding of the dynamic processes that shape place, space, and landscape in the Arctic? A return to Lacan's concept of the Real does not entail a passive acceptance of epistemological relativism, nor does it imply a cynical form of agnosticism that regards place as an ultimately unknowable entity. On the contrary, as demonstrated in Article II, the Real is approached as a zone of potentiality, where place-making unfolds outside the dominant Symbolic Order. It points to the generative potential of new modes of engagement—forms of interaction, memory, and materiality that exceed the representational.

Across the analysis of a wide range of media in Articles I, II, and IV, this dissertation illustrates how visual forms position the subject within specific regimes of desire and visibility, and shows how the Imaginary functions as a social interface, structuring how collectives identify with certain landscapes while excluding others. Yet even so, this dissertation does not assume that today's viewing subject is merely a passive recipient of information. In the digital era, where technologies such as virtual reality, artificial intelligence, and video games are evolving rapidly, viewers interact with representations in increasingly diverse ways—ways that inevitably produce more experientially specific and individualized aspects.

Rather than adopting a fully more-than-representational approach, I return to Lacan, on the premise that individual experience remains shaped—at varying levels—by knowledge, power, and social structures. As shown in Article III, embodied experience is always mediated. Even seemingly "spontaneous" or "natural" forms of engagement remain embedded in symbolic infrastructures and ideological formations. The subject's agency is therefore genuine, yet always structured and necessarily incomplete.

Meanwhile, this structuring process contains a temporal dimension. Several scholars have demonstrated that non-representational theory tends to privilege immediacy—the "here and now"—at the expense of situational and historical specificity (see Harvey 2015; Jones 2011; Jones & Garde-Hansen 2012). Place changes, and so do our experiences of it. Yet these two processes—environmental transformation and the evolution of affect—do not follow a simplistic causal logic. They move in parallel, occasionally intersecting, but always unfolding as distinct temporal trajectories.

In this sense, the use of "becoming" here does not amount to a wholesale embrace of Deleuzian thinking. Instead, foregrounding the Real highlights a specific epistemological temporality—one in which change involves not only the place itself

but also evolving modes of knowing and relating to it. Meaning emerges as an iterative relation between subject and site, and between symbolic projection and material resistance.

Thus, engaging with the Real as a theoretical dimension in landscape studies is not only about marking what cannot be symbolized but also means confronting the instability of knowledge. This iterative epistemological process directly influences the emotional bonds between subjects and places. One direction for future research, then, is to trace how these ruptures are registered—not only seen or spoken, but folded into lived experience. Before documenting affective or sensory responses to landscape, it is valuable for researchers to reflect on the prior memories, losses, narratives, or desires that shape perception of a scene. Such recollection can cultivate a deeper and more contextually grounded understanding of place—one that avoids solipsism, is less dependent on dominant political discourses or tourist imaginaries, and remains more closely rooted in personal history.

Finally, in a time when Arctic governance, environmental degradation, and resource extraction dominate public discourse, recognizing the Real as an analytical concept draws attention to what remains excluded and obscured in dominant spatial narratives. The broader social and cultural relevance of this study lies in its intervention into public and political discourses about the Arctic. At present, Arctic geopolitics has become a central concern in international relations and global environmental politics. Yet dominant representations of Arctic landscapes rarely engage with the psychic, affective, or material dimensions examined here. By analyzing how desire, fantasy, trauma, and resistance shape the visual and embodied production of Arctic space, this dissertation offers critical tools for reflection. It opens up the possibility of reimagining landscape—as an unfinished terrain of meaning and memory.

5 Reflection and Conclusion

This dissertation seeks to redefine landscape through Lacan's theory of the triadic Orders, using the Arctic landscape as case studies. The Arctic, as a transnational region (Sörlin 2016), has long been defined by different sovereign states while simultaneously being occupied by various scientific, political, economic, and social discourses, which determine the complexity of its imagery. Therefore, this study begins with a focus on representational analysis. Over the course of the research, however, it became evident that the more fundamental issue lies in understanding practices, feelings, and cognition within existing representational structures. While non-representational theory emphasizes embodied experience and affective engagement, it must also be recognized that the everyday material world presupposes a transcendental, fantasized spatial experience (Jameson 1977).

W.J.T. Mitchell offers new perspectives on how to understand the formation of landscapes and the interaction between landscape, place, and discursive space. Over the past two decades, the deepening of non-representational theory, particularly its renewed engagement with post-phenomenological thought, has made it necessary to re-examine the limitations of Mitchell's work. Within more traditional representational approaches, landscape has often been understood as a medium of cultural expression, whereas Mitchell reconceptualizes it as a dynamic cultural process that both reflects and constructs identities and power relations. Non-representational approaches redirect attention from representational concerns to embodied practices, affective dynamics, and material entanglements with landscape. This dissertation tries to reconcile these seemingly opposing perspectives by introducing Lacan's notion of the Real as a mediating concept.

In Lacanian psychoanalysis, the Real is the traumatic void that escapes symbolization, a limit condition that both enables and destabilizes subjectivity. Mitchell's adaptation situates the Real within the historical event or place as a site of rupture, underscoring how collective memory and cultural narratives fail to fully domesticate the disruptive residues of past trauma. While this perspective retains the emphasis on the Real as absence and unrepresentability, this research departs from both Lacan and Mitchell by framing the Real not solely as a negative void, but as a generative and transformative force. It is an emergent dimension of landscape that

continually reconfigures the relationship between subjects and place. Whereas in Lacan the Real imposes a traumatic lack, and in Mitchell it testifies to historical loss, in the framework of this research, it also carries a productive potential to animate new affective and epistemological engagements. By introducing this concept, the study suggests that landscapes exist in the interplay between representation and materiality, between the Symbolic that seeks to control and define them and the unrepresentable aspects that resist such control. This includes the subjective feelings and practices emphasized by non-representational theory, and a series of unintended changes produced in practical interactions, as well as the various interwoven forces, events, and relationships therein. In this sense, the generative potential of the Real indicates that neither representational nor non-representational approaches are the sole means of generating meaning in landscape studies.

The four independent studies collectively respond to three sub-questions. The first finding reframed *place* in light of Lacan's concept of the Real. The second examined a variety of media and showed that each deployed distinct visual strategies for shaping how Arctic landscapes are perceived and engaged with. Finally, the third explored how power permeates landscape experiences through both formalized controls and individual or collective agency.

The overarching research question has been addressed through further analysis of the four articles. By applying Lacan's triadic model, this research demonstrates that space, place, and landscape interact in the Arctic on multiple layers. The conceptual space as the Symbolic governs how landscapes are represented in visual, cultural, and political discourse. In the context of the Arctic, these representations are framed by geopolitical and industrial narratives that seek to control and exploit the region. The Imaginary involves the projections of Arctic imaginations, for instance, the romanticized perceptions of the Arctic as an unspoiled wilderness or a mystical place of exploration. These images mediate the fantasies about the region and are deeply embedded in cultural productions. The Real, in this context, emerges as a zone that resists representation, thus opening up a potentiality for becoming. The Arctic region exceeds the boundaries of symbolic and imaginary control, forcing us to confront its environmental fragility through forces such as climate change and industrial degradation, while simultaneously presenting itself as a space of potentiality, where the interplay between environmental forces and human interventions continuously shapes new realities.

Through the analysis of four articles, I develop a refined definition of space, place, and landscape, with particular focus on the latter two. In this framework, defining "landscape" first requires an understanding of "place." Place is a polysemous concept, bearing the meanings imposed by symbolic and signifying systems, while also containing elements that exceed those meanings. It is a field of unrepresentable materiality, history, and experience that constantly disrupts the

subject's understanding and interaction with the world. These interrelated factors compel the continuous reproduction and reconstruction of place, giving rise to the spontaneous landscape.

Thus, landscape is not a static, symbolized external image. Its generative nature seeks to fill the void within symbolic systems, mediating between symbolic structure and the layers of memory, history, and unrepresented experience. This positions landscape as a dynamic tension between space and place, rather than merely a fixed homeland or dwelling place.

This dissertation is theory-driven, seeking to discuss and develop existing theories and methods in landscape studies through representative case studies rather than collecting a large amount of material based on a single medium for inductive empirical analysis. Based on this approach, these independent studies break away from research perspectives confined to specific media, drawing on existing interdisciplinary theoretical resources to analyze different types of Arctic landscapes. While the analysis is primarily theoretical and does not include extensive firsthand empirical material, particularly from indigenous communities, this limitation also highlights avenues for future research. Incorporating ethnographic fieldwork or direct accounts from indigenous perspectives would enable a more situated and plural understanding of landscape engagement in the Arctic context in future studies. Likewise, further exploration of the Real and materiality, especially the tangible, sensory, and embodied dimensions of landscape could deepen insights into how people engage with and make meaning of the Arctic environment. These directions lie beyond the scope of the present study, but they point to productive ways in which its findings and framework can be extended.

This dissertation also has the potential of offering insights on how landscapes can be interpreted in the context of ecological crisis. The Lacanian Real emphasizes the material ruptures and resistances that symbolic representations cannot fully contain, which foregrounds the environmental consequences of extractive policies and industrial visuality, providing a critical framework to understand how seemingly "neutral" landscapes are greenwashed or embedded with violence and ecological breakdown. By highlighting how landscapes are shaped by memory, desire, and loss, the theory offered by this dissertation can be utilized to challenge the consumer-driven modes of viewing, and instead invites more reflexive, situated, and historically aware modes of engagement, which is particularly valuable in contexts involving indigenous memory and intergenerational trauma. As for the digital landscapes, future research could explore more practical applications of the space–place–landscape theory, focusing on digital experiences and material interactions in greater depth. Together, these findings offer a broader understanding of the cultural logics that shape how landscapes are visualized and narrated, and emotionally experienced across ecological, digital, and cultural contexts.

Declaration of the Use of AI Tools

In the process of composing my doctoral dissertation, I employed OpenAI's GPT-4, a large language model–based generative AI tool, as a form of augmented intelligence to support my thinking and writing processes. The AI was used strictly as an auxiliary tool for developing early outlines and brainstorming ideas, language editing (clarity, fluency, and tone), and suggesting ways to reorganize or rephrase text.

In accordance with the *Library Guide to Artificial Intelligence* of the University of Turku[1], I explicitly state that all final content, arguments, and conclusions are my own and have been critically reviewed, revised, and authored by me. No AI-generated content has been included verbatim in the final version of this dissertation without full human oversight, rewriting, and intellectual input. I have verified and cross-checked all information derived from the AI tool using credible scholarly sources, and I have not used AI to generate citations, bibliographies, or references.

Also, the *Library Guide to Artificial Intelligence: Responsible Use of AI* [2] requires researchers to avoid inputting "personal, sensitive or confidential information into AI tools" or inputting "copyrighted material into AI tools without permission from the copyright holder." In compliance with these principles, I have not input any copyrighted, confidential, or sensitive materials into the AI system, in line with data protection principles and the terms of use of such applications.

Any potential errors, omissions, or misinterpretations remain solely my responsibility. The use of GPT-4 was strictly auxiliary, intended to enhance the clarity and coherence of the writing, and does not diminish the intellectual contribution or scholarly rigor of this dissertation. If necessary, detailed prompts and interactions with the AI can be disclosed for transparency.

By including this declaration, I affirm that the dissertation upholds the principles of academic integrity, transparency, and responsible digital scholarship.

1 https://utuguides.fi/artificialintelligence
2 https://utuguides.fi/c.php?g=712454&p=5147018#s-lg-box-16135171

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