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Co-creating Nature: Photography, Improvisation and the Poetics of Making

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Title: Co-creating Nature: Photography, Improvisation and the Poetics of Making

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Abstract:

This presentation looks at tourism nature photography as a creative and sensual activity. Based on collection of photographs gathered from tourists in 2011 in the Strandir region in north west Iceland I will demonstrate how photographing nature is a more-than-human practice in which nature has a full agency.

Much has been written about tourist photography not the least since John Urry theorised about the tourist gaze in the early 1990s which has much been criticised, especially in the light of the performance turn in tourism studies. Larsen (2005) for example pointed out that tourist photography is not just about the gazing tourist but also about social relations which is partly directed and staged by the surrounding landscape. Garlick (2002), on the other hand, demonstrated how as photographing tourists we become ‘concerned with the artistic production of ourselves.’ What is indicated is that photography as a practise is relational, complex and sensual and cannot be reduced to the Seeing Eye capturing selected snaps of the surroundings. However, whilst emphasising the tourist as a creative being the surrounding landscape has been left out as a stage with props rather having an affective agency in the process.

In this presentation I will address the complex more-than-human relations that emerge when that photographs that were collected in Strandir are scrutinised. I argue that the act of photographing, as a performative practice, is improvisational and co-creative in which the material surroundings have a direct and active agency. As Edwards (1997) has pointed out, photography communicates ‘not through the realist paradigm but through lyrical expressiveness,’ and, thus, it may be argued that tourist photography is a creative practice of making as it weaves together the sensing self and the vital surroundings in the moving moment that the photograph captures.
