

Garlick, Ben (2023) The Total Mountain: Nan Shepherd and the Virtual Qualities of Landscape. In: Hall, Jenny and Hall, Martin, (eds.) The Mountain and the Politics of Representation. Liverpool Studies in the Politics of Popular Culture . Liverpool University Press

Downloaded from: <https://ray.yorks.ac.uk/id/eprint/7436/>

The version presented here may differ from the published version or version of record. If you intend to cite from the work you are advised to consult the publisher's version:

<https://www.liverpooluniversitypress.co.uk/doi/book/10.3828/9781837645060>

Research at York St John (RaY) is an institutional repository. It supports the principles of open access by making the research outputs of the University available in digital form. Copyright of the items stored in RaY reside with the authors and/or other copyright owners. Users may access full text items free of charge, and may download a copy for private study or non-commercial research. For further reuse terms, see licence terms governing individual outputs. [Institutional Repositories Policy Statement](#)

RaY

Research at the University of York St John

For more information please contact RaY at
ray@yorks.ac.uk

The Total Mountain: Nan Shepherd and the Virtual Qualities of Landscape

Ben Garlick

York St John University

Abstract

The work of author Nan Shepherd explores the relationships between nature, culture, landscape, and body. Increasingly regarded as an important figure in early 20th-century Scottish literature for her poetry and fiction, Shepherd's work received renewed attention following the re-publication (in 2009) of her nonfiction treatise *The Living Mountain*, and its celebration by writers such as Robert MacFarlane. A meditation on place that draws upon experiences of the Cairngorm mountains in Scotland, Shepherd explores the different ways in which the environment and body meet, affording multiple 'ways in' to the plateau. This chapter develops her notion of 'the total mountain,' introduced within *The Living Mountain*, as a concept figuring the 'virtual' in an ontology and epistemology of landscape: always excessive and alive with potential.

Introduction: The Invitation of Landscape

"Certain books, [...] like certain landscapes, stay with us even when we have left them, changing not just our weathers but our climates." (MacFarlane, 2015: 12)

In his experimental novel-memoir *Here is where we meet* (2006), author John Berger traverses a series of haunted urban landscapes – Geneva, Lisbon, London, Krakow among others – animated by past relationships and encounters. Presenting places alive with the spectres of personal and shared histories, he demonstrates the capacity of literary writing to reflect and respond to the enticement of geography. He writes, "I love the landscape's invitation, wherever it may lead" (2006: 173). Thus, his novel exemplifies landscape as both a theoretical concept – in its concern with how environmental perception unfolds – and empirical subject – in its desire to attend to the material, lived character of place – with enduring, animating trans-disciplinary allure (Rose and Wylie, 2006). In meeting them, landscapes both draw us

into their capacious folds, and cast us outward towards other sites, situations, and times (see Rose, 2010).

Landscape – both a defined portion of the earth, and a question of how such environments are experienced within specific cultural contexts – has long been a staple of thinking in human geography, environmental history and anthropology; not to mention literature, art history and, increasingly, the interdisciplinary environmental humanities (e.g. Tsing, 2005; 2015; Reinert, 2014). A protean “shuttle”, the term weaves disparate works and approaches into a shared project concerned with the human-environment relationship (Matless, 2003). Serving as the primary inspiration and departure point for this chapter are recent discussions in cultural geographies approaching landscape through attention to its more-than-human, material, bodily and affective dimensions, mobilising practices of creative and literary writing in the process. Such interest in place writing place has stimulated expanded engagement with literary texts as part of a reenergised “literary geography” that goes beyond the analysis of works as solely *representations* of the environment, reflecting on the “geographical event” of their formation and reception; and the potential of literary engagements with place to capture their more-than-representational aspects (Hones, 2011).

This chapter discusses a celebrated piece of “mountain literature”: *The Living Mountain* by Nan Shepherd. In doing so, it elaborates Shepherd’s conceit of the “total mountain” as a working metaphor for the excessive nature of landscape. Notably, Shepherd’s work has not gone unexamined by geographers (see Carter, 2001; della Dora, 2016a; Hall, 2018; Hunt, 2019). Moreover, poet and literature scholar Samantha Walton (2020) has recently offered a detailed ecocritical analysis of Shepherd and her output, making clear just how much her writing resonates with current academic enthusiasms for the more-than-human, ecological though and ethical status of the environment amidst a current age of crisis. Such efforts are continued here, teasing out those aspects of Shepherd’s writing offering a means to articulate the ‘virtual’ qualities of the landscape-event, alive with the potential to be otherwise. Thus, through her writing, Shepherd provides what, after Brian Massumi (2002), are understood as vital “parables for the virtual” with regards landscape’s becoming, affects and materiality. The next section briefly elaborates thinking on landscape and ‘the virtual’ comprising the conceptual basis for this chapter. The chapter then introduces Nan Shepherd and the presence of landscape in her work, before turning specifically to *The Living Mountain* (hereafter, *TLM*). Finally, ‘the total mountain’ is examined as both an ontology and epistemology for engaging with (mountain) landscapes in geography, and beyond.

The Potential of Landscape

For geographer David Matless, landscape is a mobile concept, shifting “between paint and ground, people and rock, vegetable and animal, profit and emotion, the wistful and the earthed’ (2014: 6). Work on mountains in geography and cognate disciplines – “the first features to capture our attention in the landscape” (della Dora, 2016b: 147) – showcases such variety. As well as considering mountains as objects of power and representation (della Dora, 2016a), scholars have directed the insights of bodily, material, affective and decolonising ‘turns’ towards these environments (Hunt, 2019). Mountain landscapes, traditionally constructed as unpeopled ‘wildernesses’, are increasingly recast as lived spaces (Wall-Reinus et al, 2020) differently assembled via legal, scientific, bodily, and more-than-human practices (Vannini and Vannini, 2016). Works by Sarah Nettleton (2015), Hannah MacPherson (2008) and Jenny Hall (2018), among many others, examine how environments including the Scottish Highlands and Lake District are ‘brought to hand’ by different bodies (running or walking; able or partially sighted; male or female) engaging multiple activities. The practical, material business of mountain wayfinding has also been discussed (e.g. Lorimer and Lund, 2003), with recent work attending to the manner in which recent technological advancements mediate the ways such landscapes are seen and sensed by – and for – a range of individuals (see Smith et al, 2020; Stanley, 2020). Thus, as Veronica della Dora (2016a) emphasises, mountainous landscapes have long hosted knowledge-making acts, being imbricated into our perception and experience of space and time (see Cosgrove and della Dora, 2009). Collectively, then, such mountain scholarship showcases “a body-subject whose ambit is involvement and engagement rather than a detached gaze in which materiality stiffens into objectivity” (Anderson and Wylie, 2009: 324).

This chapter draws from phenomenological, post-phenomenological and posthumanist work on landscape, foregrounding its materiality, embodiment, and more-than-human composition (see Wylie, 2006; Pries, 2018; Wylie and Webster, 2019; Garlick, 2019; Rush-Cooper, 2020). Increasingly, geographers and others conceptualise landscapes as unstable, emergent, changeable. Abiding in the tension between immersion and detachment, one is liable to get *lost* in the landscape, empirically and conceptually (Nancy, 2005). Post-phenomenology opens questions of subject’s and environment’s co-constitution via the specifics of encounter, highlighting the emergent qualities of perception and materiality (Rush-Cooper, 2020). As something sensed with (Wylie 2006), the actions of inhabitants call landscape forth in different ways as the “engine” of its being (Rose, 2002: 456-7) Therefore,

whilst “the world unfolds as landscape” (Wylie, 2007), it is never solidified, stable, nor a matter of harmonious dwelling (Wylie, 2012). As lively, more-than-human event-spaces (Garlick, 2019), landscapes – such as mountains – are brought to hand (Rose, 2002) in particular ways (and under particular conditions) – for example, as sites of conservation, heritage, leisure, aesthetic appreciation or practical living.

Thus, we encounter the landscape less as coherent, bounded spatial entity; more a “multiplicity of narratives and perceptions” (Lorimer and Wylie, 2010: 7). One of multiple states in flux, it names an untidy discontinuity realised in the specifics of entanglement between perception and materiality (Barad, 2010: 251). Echoing shifts towards thinking space topologically in geography – as a manifold, rather than in terms of Euclidean geometry – landscape becomes an entity that is “bent, stretched or rotated” into different expressions (Martin and Secor, 2014: 423-4). Thought this way, as “future-oriented, always open and ongoing” (Wylie, 2012: 376), discussions of landscape necessitate a reckoning with its ‘virtual’ dimensions. As Mitch Rose argues, “the source of landscape’s presence is excess”, it’s “overabundance,” continuously called forth as it is differently “put to task” (2002: 460-2). For Rose, a ‘labyrinth’ of practices conjoins the actualised structures of society and culture (termed ‘pyramids’, after George Bataille) – that (materially and conceptually) explain, organise, represent, and act within the world – and the plane of immanence or possibility (the ‘plateau’), that underlies all. The practices, or labyrinths, that we engage in, and trace, both manifest and sustain the constructions through which we live our lives out of the virtual domain of otherness, difference, and potential. Landscapes are therefore (re-)made through labyrinthine acts that conjure and sustain modes of encountering the world. The task of landscape interpretation becomes to examine how “it is both cared for and put to task,” following the threads of its actualisation into particular versions of itself (Rose, 2002: 463). This “movement from reading to tracing” (463) enables “analysis to roam” (465) amidst endless labyrinths, rather than seek “hidden order”:

“In this sense the only thing that the landscape ever is the practices that make it relevant. While it appears as a definable material space, its materiality is constituted by the totality of possible performances immanent within it [...] Thus, the interesting question for landscape is not what (i.e. what is it? what is its nature?) as much as what for (i.e. what is it used for?).” (Rose, 2002: 462-3, 465).

The question of the virtual is thus central to theorising landscape. Conceptualised here in the vein of Brian Massumi (2002), drawing on the work of Giles Deleuze (and Felix Guattari), the

virtual names the excessive, multiplicitous, and ever-emergent properties of existing relations, arrangements, and assemblages. Offering a means of thinking about the vitality of existence, Deleuze's thinking suggests that the way things – subjects, entities, spaces, collectives – are, how they exist or are experienced now, is only one possible 'actualisation' of multiple potential possibilities, constituting a plane of immanence that accompanies existence. Indeed, the virtual is "super empirical": "too large to fit into a perception since it envelops a multiplicity of potential variations' (Massumi, 2002: 16). It is simultaneously "real but abstract": the unrealised or not currently realised aspect to present existence. As Massumi puts it: "Actually existing, structured things live in and through that which escapes them" (2002: 35). Perception of the world's vitality arises from a cognisance of this escape. Actual states of affairs are but one, contingent resolution of the swirling dynamic agencies and relationships currently in play, or yet to emerge. In *Parables for the Virtual* (2002), Massumi elaborates by way of examples from popular culture, neuroscience, literature and everyday life, the affective qualities of human existence. His desire, as the title suggests, is to offer a series of empirical 'ways in' to its dynamic excess. Such qualities are, he argues, excised by 'static' modes of thinking that seek only to address a snapshot of social relations at a particular moment in time and proffer explanation with recourse to abstract structures and forces like 'the market', 'culture' or 'power'. For a world always in process, such 'freeze-frame' critique fails to engage the dynamic, unstable, vibrant differences and processes of becoming – otherwise characteristic of life's *liveliness*.

For geographers, the virtual proposes a conceptualisation of space as dynamic, lively, and topological. That is, spatial configurations become defined by the relationships between the entities and agencies that affect them, and liable to change and reconfigure. It matters less what a space *is* than *what it does*: what it enables, sustains, forecloses, or opens onto. For Massumi, the virtual is in itself "inaccessible to the senses". However, empirical encounters rendering moments of change, of difference, of becoming otherwise, can allow it to "fleetingly appear" and disrupt any sense of a singular perspective on the world (2002: 133). The matter of landscape, as we find it, is therefore always an empirical question, provocative and open to interrogation (Anderson and Wylie, 2009: 330-2). As I discuss below, Shepherd's work offers one way to conceptualise the mountain landscape on these terms. The Cairngorm landscape, as it appears through Shepherd's writing, is "super empirical": we only ever actualise, or experience, one part of it. The mountain plateau coheres as any number of possible landscapes, depending on the means, or by which subjects, it is encountered. *TLM* thus

provides a store of parables and place-portraits that facilitate a way into the virtual dimensions of landscape.

A note on writing landscape

Much work on landscape in cultural geographies has been concerned with the question of how to write and represent, as much as theorise, it (Merriman et al, 2008). As Sean Pries notes: “As a concept, landscape is an attempt to distil phenomenological experience and embodied knowledge into stories that, at their best, successfully analyse and contextualise a slice of the earth.” (2018: 2). Small stories can conjure the ‘spirit of place’ whilst also offering ways into larger ontological and epistemic debates (Lorimer, 2019). The challenge of the more-than-representational prompts experiments with new forms of writing, and reflections on how the ‘unrepresentable’ dimensions of existence have been encountered within literature (see Kneale, 2011). Kathleen Stewart, in her efforts to trace regional landscapes in terms of their ‘ordinary affects’ characterises writing as “an energetics of what happens and also a carapace of spent and living forms”, the expending “writerly effort” can free up space for the “non-obvious” by way of “descriptive detour or lyrical evocation” (Stewart, 2013: 284)

Thus, amidst recent disciplinary turns, geographers have taken ever more seriously the potential of literary expression (Sharp, 2000). Literary works, especially recent examples of place or nature writing, showcase alternative approaches for thinking, and conveying, the landscape (Wylie, 2012). Here, language is mobilised as a domain of connection, practice, materiality, and affect, as well as representation, performing worldly arrangements into being as much as reflecting them (Daya, 2019). As Hayden Lorimer recently notes, “Asking how place-stories work, why we tell them and what we might yet make them do is to press an ancient currency of cultural exchange into renewed service, where shared environmental challenges are more effectively addressed and affectively articulated” (2019: 333).

There is also political dimension to the matter of landscape’s articulation, as writer Robert MacFarlane has championed. “Language deficit leads to attention deficit” with the consequence that “fungibility has replaced particularity” (MacFarlane, 2015: 24-25), undermining the relations of intimacy that lead to acts of care. Relatedly, common critiques of scholarship in the affective, neovitalist vein – much of which informs this paper – take aim at its often obfuscatory, inaccessible or dense character. As Robbins and Marks write, “the complexity in writing assemblage geographies can invite sloppiness” (2010: 192). A turn to the literary is proposed by many to both enliven, and make tangible, the significance of landscape in scholarly discussion. Work within geography’s “telling turn” advocates the

power of “the written word” in animating the significance of place (Lorimer and Parr, 2014: 543). Contemporary cultural geography writing increasingly seeks to affect and conjure emotion; create a sense of immersion; mobilise description as a mode of conceptualisation, rather than in support of it; present experimental or open-ended accounts; and gather words into an evocation of geo-poetics. The well-crafted story or narrative, figured as “a question, or a generator of questions,” manifests critical space between theoretical “rhetoric” and the “reality” of specific geographies (Daniels and Lorimer, 2012: 5). Experimenting with parables, fables, and other archetypal narrative forms (as well as genres such as poetry – e.g. Eshun & Madge, 2016). In light of such efforts, the chapter turns to consider Nan Shepherd’s writing as a vital resource for theorising landscape and its virtual qualities.

Nan Shepherd’s Landscapes

Anna “Nan” Shepherd (1893-1981) was born and lived most of her days in Cults – then a small village on the outskirts of Aberdeen. Much of her adult life was spent working at a teacher training college in the city, as well as exploring the mountains of her native region. As a writer, she published three novels, a collection of poetry, and several critical and creative essays, reviews, and commentaries of various lengths (see Shepherd and Peacock, 2018) as well as editing *The Aberdeen University Review*.

Early in her writing career, Shepherd emerged as part of the Scottish modernist literary scene, alongside contemporaries Lewis Grassie Gibbon and Neil Gunn. She presented a rich, materialist, unromantic account of Aberdeenshire living in contrast to the clichéd accounts of ‘kailyard’ life (Peacock, 2015). Her first novel, *The Quarry Wood* (pub. 1928), told the story of Martha Ironside, a young farmer’s daughter living at the edge of Aberdeen, who attends university, suffers unrequited love and domestic strife, before ultimately finding fulfilment in a teaching career and the care of an adopted son. Her subsequent two novels, *The Weatherhouse* (1930) and *A Pass in Grampians* (1933), likewise centred upon strong, active female protagonists. Meanwhile, Shepherd’s attention to landscape shifted in altitude: first to the foothills, and the fictional community of Fetter Rothnie; then further upward, to the more remote croft of Boggiewalls. Each text offered a different perspective onto her beloved Aberdeenshire’s landscapes, and the communities, relationships and tensions that animated them. Following these novels, Shepherd published a book of poetry, *In the Cairngorms*, in 1934. Though she would write *TLM* – her mountain “prose poem” (MacFarlane, 2011: xiv) and love-letter to the highlands of Deeside and Speyside that she had explored and walked in so often

– in the latter years of the second world war (though not published until 1977), in later life she seemed unwilling – or unable – to write much else beyond shorter essays and reviews.

For Roderick Watson, “It is difficult not to make connections between Shepherd’s personal history and some aspects of the lives of her characters”. Her work depicts strong female protagonists who “have learned to strike a balance between challenging and accepting the roles allocated to them by society” (Watson, 1997: 416). Shepherd’s particular ‘bio-geography’ (after Lorimer, 2015) reveals a life spent involved with place, and a relationship with the environment shaped through engagements with the thinking of Buddhism, Taoism and Zen philosophy as much as the Scottish literary scene, as revealed by the traces that comprise her archive (MacFarlane, 2015; Peacock, 2015; Walton, 2020). Across her work is an attention to the empirical specificity and material metaphysics of landscape, manifest as meditations on the seasons, flora and fauna, and the transmutation of perception. Her places of Aberdeenshire are not static backgrounds, but dynamic worlds amidst which characters live, love, labour and explore their corporeal capacities. She was, as Gillian Carter observes, first and foremost concerned with mapping a lived (and lively) *geography*:

“In all Shepherd’s work, the regional landscape is an important feature, so important, in fact, that the title of each of her books is named for a place, and not a person or event. This would suggest the narrative arrangement of her work is spatial rather than temporal, and that the individual is not, in fact, central, but exists as part of a place and part of a community.” (2001: 29)

Indeed, Shepherd’s writing offers “metaphysical insight into [...] the puzzle of being”, exceeding social commentary to muse upon the material: “air, light, water, darkness and stone” (Watson, 1997: 426). A consistent feature of much of her prose and poetry – which she considered “the purest of art forms” (MacFarlane, 2011: xi) – is the transformative effects of encountering the excessive qualities of matter. Her world is “a universe of livingness” (Walton, 2020: 21). In *The Quarry Wood* (Shepherd, 2018), the protagonist Martha, after a fractious childhood encounter with foster-sister Dussie, is taken to observe the “Merry Dancers” of the northern lights by her father, reorienting her perspective and sense of scale with regards self and world. Both *The Weatherhouse* (Shepherd, 2017), and Shepherd’s short story ‘Descent from the Cross’ (in Shepherd and Peacock, 2018), present individuals who, in the wake of wartime experience of war, achieve the realization that their personal trauma has opened them onto being affected in altogether different ways by once familiar landscapes. As Watson remarks, *The Weatherhouse*, the novel consistently “evokes the unknowability of

things” (1997: 427); both with regards our relations to other people, but also in terms of our relation to the world around us. Such examples reveal Shepherd’s characters inhabiting, and interrogating, surroundings composed of solid earth and rock; turbulent skies and winds; streams and rivers. Her texts are thus alive, and excessive, with elemental force (Anderson and Wylie, 2009).

One of Shepherd’s most well-known modern-day advocates, Robert MacFarlane (2015), sees her writing as a vital resource for “rewilding” our landscape lexicon. Alongside figures such as J.A. Baker, Jaquetta Hawkes and Tim Robinson, Shepherd, MacFarlane argues, inspire different ways to capture and commune with landscape. Her writing deploys “precision of utterance as both a form of lyricism and a species of attention” (MacFarlane, 2015: 11); inculcating an expanded way of seeing the Cairngorms. MacFarlane views *TLM* as an exemplar, foregrounding the promise of a careful place attention. Shepherd was, he argues, “a localist of the best kind”; a crucial touchstone for the contemporary geographical “portraiture” characteristic of much new nature writing (Lorimer, 2019). Across her output, the landscapes of her native Aberdeenshire are called forth to propose a relational, emergent ontology of the body-in-landscape by way of an “intense empiricism” figured as “the first step to immanence.” (MacFarlane, 2015: 66).

Therefore, from her novels to the non-fiction, yet poetic, geographical writing of *TLM*, Shepherd demonstrates an enduring consideration of the excessive qualities of landscape. There is a consistent effort to write the ways in which landscapes can *become different, be otherwise*, change and transform, and coalesce in a variety of ways and as part of a variety of experiences. The remainder of the chapter emphasises the ways in which Shepherd’s work offers geographers (and others) an ontological and epistemological route to reckon with the virtual dimension of landscape amidst wider (re)turns to storying the character of place. As elaborated below, these concerns are arguably most succinctly conveyed via her concept of *the total mountain*.

The Total Mountain

Written in the early 1940s, but not published until 1977, when Shepherd rediscovered the manuscript in a drawer of her home, *TLM* can be read as the realisation of a geographical project implicit throughout her earlier writing. Finding herself, at last, wandering the upland slopes, high tops, and deep recesses of the Cairngorm plateau, Shepherd’s attention to landscape and their material immanence – expressed in the lowland rural surroundings of Aberdeen, the upland environs of Fetter Roath, the highland setting of Boggiewalls croft,

and lyrically through her poetry – is given space for full expression in a text that combines intense empirical attentiveness, personal reflection, and a kind of transcendental existentialism.

The book comprises her effort to render the Cairngorm plateau from multiple different angles. Each of its twelve chapters – with titles such as ‘Water’, ‘Air and Light’, ‘Life: The Plants’, ‘The Senses’, ‘Sleep’ – exist as almost self-contained meditations on the corporeal and elemental qualities of place. This is a text that is “exhilaratingly materialist, and almost animist [...] both a geo-poetic quest into place, and philosophical enquiry into the nature of knowledge”. Its “parochial” precision treats the Cairngorm plateau as an “aperture” opening onto broader questions, rather than a focal object that gathers her concerns into narrow coherence (MacFarlane, 2015: 62). At the same time, as MacFarlane emphasises, the chapters do not present their subject(s) as “distinct facets” of the Cairngorm landscape, separate to each other. *TLM* is “a transverse descriptive weave – the prose equivalent of a dwarf juniper forest”. Its form performs Shepherd’s “central proposition”: “that the world will not fall into divisible realms [...] but is instead an unmappable mesh of interrelations.” (2011: xxiv-xxv). As Walton writes, *TLM*’s form and content emphasise that “the lives and elements described in the chapters cannot be easily disentangled” (2020: 78).

It is apt that Shepherd talks of the Cairngorms in terms of a ‘plateau’, rather than it as a collection of individual glens and summits, or even a collection of definable ridges or ranges. Although written several decades before, this term evokes the neovitalism of Giles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, and their text *A Thousand Plateaus*. Composed not of chapters but ‘plateaus’, each exists – after Gregory Bateson – as “a continuous, self-vibrating region of intensities whose development avoids any orientation toward a culmination point or external end” (2013: 23). For Deleuze and Guattari, writing through the plateau offers a way “to attain the multiple” and hold onto the virtual qualities of their subject matter:

“A plateau is always in the middle, not at the beginning or end. A rhizome is made of plateaus [...] Each plateau can be read starting anywhere and can be related to any other plateau.” (2013: 22-23)

Thus, the chapters of *TLM*, like those of *A Thousand Plateaus*, fit together “like a set of split rings” that can be combined in multiple ways, each retaining “its own climate, its own tone or timbre” appropriate to the particular “modes of individuation” (Deleuze, 1995: 25-26) that characterise different becomings of the Cairngorms-as-landscape. They also serve to mobilise, in literary form, Shepherd central ontology of landscape. The text produces a “multiplex

effect” as she refuses any single perspective, in favour of a kaleidoscopic multiplying of version of the mountain (MacFarlane, 2015: 69). Hers is an “ecological vision” of the Cairngorms, rendered from multiple, situated perspectives – an approach likewise taken in her previous poetry collection named for the massif (Walton, 2020). Those aspects of the region which she has experienced are but a minute part of an ever-excessive whole. In recalling days spent hiking through the Lairig Ghru, the pass connecting Braemar and Aviemore; efforts to locate the source of rivers amidst rocks and moss; the taste of blaeberrries and the cool water of mountain burns; the sounds of animal life such as dotterel, rutting stags and ptarmigan; the weathered visage and hardy corporeality of the mountain “characters” she has come to know on Deeside or Speyside; or even – in later life – the ways in which humans continue to find new ways into the plateau via the development of tourism, skiing and infrastructure; Shepherd animates a landscape that continuously escapes her.

Shepherd consciously seeks to decentre any notion of a single, authoritative, scientific way of seeing space as a domain of measurement and control, instead emphasising the multiplicity of experience and aesthetic encounters as of more importance than practices of listing or ordering the environment (Carter, 2001). The mountains that she knows so well are unknowable in their entirety in part because each excursion allows her to better realise the capacities of herself as “paramount [...] essential body” (Shepherd, 2011: 106); but also, because the plateau is host to “life in so many guises” (p.74), and matter in so many forms. She concludes: “Knowing another is endless [...] the thing to know grows with the knowing” (p.108). In capturing this fundamental excessiveness of the mountain, Shepherd arrives at the conclusion of her text at the concept of ‘the total mountain’:

‘So there I lie on the plateau, under me the central core of fire from which was thrust this grumbling grinding mass of plutonic rock, over me blue air, and between the fire of the rock and the fire of the sun, scree, soil and water, moss, grass, flower and tree, insect bird and beast, wind rain and snow – *the total mountain*. Slowly I have found my way in. If I had other senses, there are other things I should know. [...] There must be many exciting properties of matter that we cannot know because we have no way to know them.’ (p.105 – my emph.)

As MacFarlane cautions, the ‘total’ of ‘the total mountain’ is “distinct from the ‘total’ of ‘totalising’ or ‘totalitarian’” but “total insofar as it exceeds the possibility of our capacity to ever know it entirely” (2011: xxvi). Thus, the text of *TLM* elaborates a way of appreciating landscape in its virtuality. It is a philosophical work that understands landscape as a matter of “circumstances rather than essences” (Deleuze, 1995: 32), diagrammed through its

intersecting chapters – each capturing a different ‘way in’ through the capacities of the body, learning to be affected anew. The sensing body-in-landscape is manifest here as “a space of productive indeterminacy, in which sensing and sensed, point of view and landscape, pass into and through each other, substitute and exchange, coil and recoil [...in] a productive process of questioning and provocation” (Anderson and Wylie, 2009: 325). In this sense, the total mountain – or total landscape – is an aporetic entity, like Tim Robinson’s “good step” (Wylie, 2012). One can never grasp this whole, but its excessiveness proves inspirational, invitational; incitement and incentive to continue to explore, the engine of mountain feyness.

The Total Mountain as Epistemology for Landscape

Shepherd’s concept of *the total mountain* crystallises the idea that the landscape is a multifaceted event space, actualised through the intersection of bodies, affects and materialities; never exhausted, always with more to give. One might refer to the *total landscape* as the entirety of one’s surroundings – its immanent potential – available, and unavailable; both present and absent, ready to be called forth like the mysterious blue peak glimpsed in the heat haze of a day on the high tops (p.2). In turn, Shepherd’s ontology proposes a way of *knowing* landscape as an open-ended and uncertain project. It is therefore worth considering the ways in which Shepherd’s ‘total mountain’ is offered not merely to understanding the mountain landscape, but as a lure to engage with and know the mountain differently.

For Massumi, parables of the virtual do epistemological, and ultimately political, work in rendering discernible the excess of actualised existence. As he writes:

‘Concepts of the virtual [...] are important only to the extent to which they contribute to a pragmatic understanding of emergence, to the extent to which then enable triggerings of change (induce the new). It is the edge of the virtual, where it leaks into actual, that counts. For that seeping edge is where potential, actually, is found.’ (Massumi, 2002: 43)

The total mountain is a provocation to seek alternative encounters beyond the familiar or privileged. Shepherd is, by her own admission, “compelled by the massif’s excesses, its unmappable surplus” (MacFarlane, 2015: 71). *TLM* is “a text which moves beyond habitual means of charting the world and unsettles habitual ways of perceiving a landscape” (Carter, 2001: 28). Shepherd’s text expresses a desire, and lifetime project, to know the mountain by way of a slow, accumulated, exploratory project: “the knowledge that is a process of living” (Shepherd, 2011: 1). At the same time, she is explicit about the futile, necessarily partial nature of this project: “one never quite knows the mountain, nor one’s self in relation to it” (*ibid*). Its “elemental” character is neither “governable” nor containable – always excessive. Indeed, the

experience of affective joy and exhilaration that Shepherd terms “feyness” (p.6-7) – a state of desire to seek out and engage with the mountain landscape, to indulge in its ‘invitation’ – appears conditional on this undetermined character.

Shepherd champions a slower, more open-ended passage across the plateau, one that descends into its recesses – such as her beloved Loch Avon – and pauses to savour its sensory milieu, rather than marching ahead with the object of “bagging” peaks. Likewise, those tourists, landowners and sporting tenants who drive land rovers or ride “funiculars” to reach “the startling view, the horrid pinnacle” (p.15) miss too much. Not adverse to the company of good hill companions, she savours the opportunity to meditate on the landscape in (relative) silence, bemoaning the “talking tribe” of walkers, whose inane conversation distracts from the environment. She gives similar short shrift to the scientists and surveyors who record species or sound lochs. Such work, for her, “serves no purpose” (p.67) when it comes to really knowing the land in terms of the encounters it affords.

Whilst some writers might harbour an ambition for “the total description of landscape” (Wylie, 2012: 366), Shepherd does not. For her, “haste can do nothing for these hills” (p.12). The compulsion to list birds or “bag” Munros, following a rigidly planned itinerary or route, is anathema to moments of discovery or joy emergent from walking “the unpath” (p.51). Hers is a concern with the “minor experiences” (Walton, 2020: 196) that accumulate into an understanding of regionality (see Stewart, 2013). She moves slowly, traversing familiar ground along new lines, spending time in favoured places, even sleeping on the hull. Shepherd conveys “a necessity to feel immersed, co-joined and an integral part of a mountain through wandering” (Hall, 2018: 154), seeking out and examining the fine-grained specifics of slopes, screes, and streams. She celebrates acts of playful, childlike engagement, as well as moments of exposure and openness. As Hall argues, “Her vulnerability is a space of play, [...revealing] a potentially different kind of feminine mountaineering practice.” (2018: 155). This is a politics of exploration and attunement that resists efforts to colonise or control the land around. Place-love is performed via acts of careful attention and an openness to surprise.

Such an epistemology of landscape is realised in startlingly simple ways. Practices such as half closing her eyes; looking at the world through her legs, upside down; or tilting her head this way and that. Such acts see her challenge “habitual vision” in ways that involve “adopting a childlike, playful view of the world” (Carter, 2001: 30-31). As she describes:

“The static things may be caught in the very act of becoming. By so simple a matter, too, as altering the position of one’s head, a different kind of world may be made to appear. [...] As I watch, it arches its back, and each layer of landscape bristles – though bristles is a word of too much commotion for it. Details are no longer part of a grouping in a picture of which I am the focal point, the focal point is everywhere. Nothing has reference to me, the looker. This is how the earth must see itself.” (Shepherd, 2011: 10-11)

TLM documents a variety of ways to “look creatively” (p.102), engaging the full sensory array. As della Dora has argued, contrasting Shepherd’s writing on mountain landscapes with the long history of ‘high places’ bound up with a revelatory gaze or ‘god trick’ (see also Cosgrove and della Dora, 2010), such an attention to the poetics of landscape asks us to look “*into and through*” the mountain as a *lens* onto alternative perspectives. Rather than a site actualising of “the modern dream of omniscience”, the mountain sojourn as a “creative act” plays host to “an infinite act of learning, an enriching but always unfolding process (della Dora, 2016a: 137-138).

Lying face down in the heather to look through the undergrowth. Peering over precipices into the depths of a corrie, falling asleep, and then waking to the full force of the mountain’s depth. Half closing the eyes to blur her vision. Taking the time to traces the diverse effects that the “weatherworld” (Ingold, 2015) can have on one’s surroundings: a smur of drizzle, or patch of snow, refracting sunshine; the heat haze conjuring a mysterious “blue peak” where no hill is known to exist. The “continuous creative act” of striving to see the mountain anew works to “widen the domain of being” (Shepherd, 2011: 102). In opening oneself onto the possibilities of landscape, one comes to better understand its potential store of encounters, and what the body might be made to do. As she writes:

“Such illusions, depending on how the eye is placed and used, drive home the truth that our habitual vision of things is not necessarily right: it is only one of an infinite number, and to glimpse an unfamiliar one, even for a moment, unmakes us, but steadies us again. It’s queer but invigorating. It will take a long time to get to the end of a world that behaves like this if I do no more than turn around on my side or my back. [...] How can I number the worlds to which the eye gives me entry?” (p.101)

More than the eyes are deployed to find new ways in. Shepherd uses all her bodily capacities to “thirl” herself to the mountain: “Each of the senses is a way in to what the mountain has to give” (p.97). In her discussion of silence (or its absence) Shepherd foregrounds its rarity and celebrates the ear as a means to attune to the multiple nonhuman presences, forces and

rhythms animating the landscape of the plateau (see Archer, 2018). Anticipating the arguments of more-than-representational scholarship, Shepherd encourages the use of taste, smell, and touch, not least because such sensations “mean nothing at all in words” (p.98) and are aspects of the landscape that can *only* be understood through direct experience. She frames touch as “the most intimate” way into the mountain; reflecting on the surface of the skin and body braced against the wind, the “infinity of pleasure” (p.102) available to the hands, the “small enchantment” (p.104) of a flower stem caught between the toes, and her time spent learning how to place each foot to walk barefoot across the heather.

Particularly intense experiences – such as plunging oneself into a cold mountain pool – are so intense that they “disintegrate the very self” in a moment of extreme sensation. After a moment, feeling lost, “life pours back” (p. 104) and Shepherd finds herself reterritorialized by the material impress of the landscape: “Flesh is not annihilated but fulfilled” (p.106). In this way, just as learning new skills of seeing landscape – via painting or drawing – can attune one to the materiality of the air or the light, so Shepherd’s experimenting with her own body is intended to open onto new experiences and appreciations of the plateau environment.

Collectively, then, *TLM* conveys both an account of the mountain landscape’s vitality, and Shepherds lived efforts to learn – or trigger – alternative ways of sensing, “and in so doing to be drawn out, drawn in” to landscape features, “to be aware of them anew” (Wylie and Webster, 2019: 38). For Jenny Hall, Shepherd thus reconfigures the landscape as “a polysensorial space in which to play” (2018: 156); wherein such play “enables a connectedness to journey into the unknown, formed of rock, air, human and the non-human” (2018: 160). In this spirit, cultural geographers and others might draw upon *the total mountain* as both ontology for landscape – simultaneously actual encounter and virtual potential – and an epistemological invitation to consider an alternative, slower knowing of landscape in creative, careful, and attentive ways.

Conclusion: Approaching the Total Landscape

For Deleuze, philosophy as a practical exercise is above all else concerned with acts of creative intervention “in the realm of concepts” (1995: 26). A concept, for Deleuze, is “full of critical, political force” and they operate best as “singularities [...] acting on the flows of everyday thought” (1995: 32) to make new connections, suggest new lines of approach, or challenge ossified patterns of discourse. Or, to quote Massumi:

“A concept is a brick. It can be used to build a courthouse of reason. Or it can be thrown through the window.” (1987: xi).

Landscape, as a concept, acts to gather works together – those with an interest in the meeting of people and places, and the relationship between perception and environment – as much as it diffracts and distributes a whole host of theoretical questions. It is at once a domain of representation and the unrepresentable; lively, corporeal possibilities and unsettled absence or dissonance; detached vantage and deep immersion. It is a series of tensions, drawing in, and casting outwards (Wylie, 2007; Rose, 2010). This chapter has aimed to show how Nan Shepherd’s celebrated text, *The Living Mountain*, offers and elaborates a concept of that which escapes us in attending to the landscape of the mountains, and beyond.

Shepherd, as an unashamed “localist”, demonstrates a way of attending to the specifics of landscape across her writing that takes the virtual qualities of the environmental encounter as a lure to continue to return, and explore, place anew. Her experiences reveal efforts to seek out alternative “angles of approach” amidst familiar surroundings, revealing the mountain as at once “a loved place, an ecological whole, a vast geologic entity and living landscape” (Walton, 2020: 26). Moreover, Shepherd’s text, as MacFarlane has strongly argued, showcases the promise of “word magic”: “the power that certain terms possess to enchant our relations with nature and place” (MacFarlane, 2015: 4). Learning a new vocabulary “opens prospects” and unsettles familiar landscapes. Equally, “There are experiences of landscape that will always resist articulation, and of which words offer only a remote echo” (2015: 6-10). For MacFarlane, linguistic precision – not as objective, scientific accounting but the expression of patient attention – is, following poet Marianne Moore, “best enabled by metaphor” (2015: 33). If we lack a precise, deep appreciation of landscape it is because we have eroded our metaphorical toolkit.

In sum, this chapter has sought to show how Shepherd’s notion of ‘the total mountain’ – perhaps elaborated into a concept for ‘the total landscape’ – offers both an ontological and epistemological framework for approaching landscape, slowly and with a desire to stray onto the “unpath”. *TLM*, understood as a work of theorising landscape, pre-empts more recent calls to embrace the ethical implications of becoming uncertain, becoming disorientated, acknowledging the unfathomable gulf between what is and what could be (Bissel and Gorman-Murray, 2019). The total landscape offers an invitation to follow, without disclosing as to where it might lead. It is a concept that embodies the fey impulse that sees so many ‘possessed’ by mountain places (della Dora, 2016a: 226), as much as it denies any possibility

of our possessing *them*. As Shepherd remarks, knowledge continues to grow, and there is much that will, always, remain beyond our sensory capacity. There are as many landscapes as there are combinations of bodies, matter, and affective forces. The total mountain as ontology for landscape challenges us to seek difference amidst environments that we may be tempted to see as repetitively familiar.

References

- Anderson, B. and Wylie, J. 2009. On geography and materiality. *Environment and planning A*. 41(2). pp. 318-335.
- Archer, A. 2018. The men on the mountainside: An ethnography of solitude, silence and sheep bells. *Journal of Rural Studies*. 64. 103-111.
- Berger, J. 2006. *Here is where we meet*. London: Bloomsbury.
- Bissell, D. and Gorman-Murray, A. 2019. Disoriented geographies: Undoing relations, encountering limits. *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*. 44(4): 707-720.
- Carter, G. 2001. 'Domestic Geography' and the Politics of Scottish Landscape in Nan Shepherd's *The Living Mountain*. *Gender, Place and Culture*. 8(1). pp. 25-36.
- Cosgrove, D. and della Dora, V. 2009. *High places: Cultural Geographies of Mountains, Ice and Science*. London: I.B. Taurus.
- Daniels, S. and Lorimer, H. 2012. Until the end of days: Narrating landscape and environment. *cultural geographies*. 19(1). pp. 3-9.
- Daya, S. 2019. Words and worlds: textual representation and new materialism. *cultural geographies*. 26(3). 361-377.
- Deleuze, G. 1995. *Negotiations, 1972-1990*. New York: Colombia University Press.
- Deleuze, G. and Guattari, F. 2013. *Capitalism and Schizophrenia Vol. 2: A thousand plateaus*. London: Bloomsbury.
- della Dora, V. 2016a. *Mountain: Nature and Culture*. London: Reaktion.
- della Dora, V. 2016b. *Landscape, Nature and the Sacred in Byzantium*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Eshun, G. and Madge, C. 2016. Poetic world-writing in a pluriversal world: a provocation to the creative (re)turn in geography. *Social & Cultural Geography*. 17(6). pp. 778-785.

- Garlick, B. 2019. Deceptive Landscapes: Ornithological Hide Work and the Perception of Ospreys on Speyside, 1957–1987. *GeoHumanities*. 5(1). pp. 215-236.
- Hall, J. 2018. Women mountaineers and affect: Fear, play and the unknown. In: Saul, H. and Waterton, E. Eds. *Affective Geographies of Transformation, Exploration and Adventure*. Abingdon: Routledge. pp. 147-163.
- Hones, S. 2011. Literary geography: the novel as a spatial event. In: Daniels, S., DeLyser, D., Entrikin, J.N. and Richardson, D. Eds. *Envisioning Landscapes: Making Worlds*. Abingdon: Routledge. pp. 279-287.
- Hunt, R. 2019. Historical geography, climbing and mountaineering: route setting for an inclusive future. *Geography Compass*, 13(4), p.e12423. pp. 1-9.
- Kneale, J. 2006. From beyond: H. P. Lovecraft and the place of horror. *cultural geographies*. 13(1). pp. 106-126.
- Lorimer, H. 2015. Standards of Beauty: Considering the Lives of W. A. Poucher. *GeoHumanities*. 1(1). pp. 51-79.
- Lorimer, H. 2019. Dear departed: Writing the lifeworlds of place. *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*. 44. pp. 331-345.
- Lorimer, H. and Lund, K. 2003. Performing facts: finding a way over Scotland's mountains. *The Sociological Review*. 51(2). pp. 130-144.
- Lorimer, H. and Parr, H. 2014. Excursions – telling stories and journeys. *cultural geographies*. 21(4): 543-547.
- Lorimer, H. and Wylie, J. 2010. LOOP (a geography). *Performance Research*. 15(4). pp. 6-13.
- MacFarlane, R. 2011. Introduction. In: Shepherd, N. 2011. *The Living Mountain*. Edinburgh: Cannongate: ix-xl.
- MacFarlane, R. 2015. *Landmarks*. London: Hamish Hamilton.
- MacPherson, H. 2008. "I don't know why they call it the Lake District they might as well call it the rock district!" The workings of humour and laughter in research with members of visually impaired walking groups. *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space*. 26(6). pp. 1080-1095.

- Martin, L. and Secor, A. 2014. Towards a post-mathematical topology. *Progress in Human Geography*. 38(3). pp. 420-438.
- Massumi, B. 1987. Translators Foreword: Pleasures of Philosophy. In: Deleuze, G. and Guattari, F. 2013. *Capitalism and Schizophrenia Vol. 2: A thousand plateaus*. London: Bloomsbury. pp. ix-xv.
- Massumi, B. 2002. *Parables for the Virtual: Movement, Affect, Sensation*. Durham NC: Duke University Press.
- Matless, D. 2003. Introduction: Landscape. In: Anderson, K., Domosh, M., Pile, S. and Thrift, N. Eds. *Handbook of Cultural Geography*. London: SAGE. pp. 227-232.
- Matless, D. 2014. *In the Nature of Landscape: Cultural Geography on the Norfolk Broads*. Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell.
- Merriman, P., Revill, G., Cresswell, T., Lorimer, H., Matless, D., Rose, G. and Wylie, J. 2008. Landscape, mobility, practice. *Social & Cultural Geography*. 9(2). pp. 191-212.
- Nancy, J-L. 2005. Uncanny Landscape. In: Nancy, J-L. *Ground of the Image*, trans. Jeff Fort. New York: Fordham University Press. pp. 51-62.
- Nettleton, S. 2015. Fell-runners and walking walls: towards a sociology of living landscapes and aesthetic atmospheres as an alternative to a Lakeland picturesque. *British Journal of Sociology*. 66(4). pp. 759-778.
- Peacock, C. 2015. *Into the Mountain: A Life of Nan Shepherd*. Plymouth: Galileo.
- Pries, S. 2018. A geographer looks at the landscape, once more: Toward a posthumanist political ecology approach. *Geography Compass*. 2018e12401. pp. 1-12.
- Reinert, H. 2015. The Landscape Concept as Rupture: Extinction and Perspective in a Norwegian Fjord. In: Sooväli-Sepping, H., Reinert, H. and Miles-Watson, J. Eds. *Ruptured Landscapes: Landscape, Identity and Social Change*. Dordrecht: Springer. pp. 41-54).
- Robbins, P. and Marks, B. 2010. Assemblage Geographies. In: Smith, S., Pain, R., Marston, S. and Jones III, J.P. Eds. *The SAGE Handbook of Social Geographies*. London: SAGE. pp. 176-194.
- Rose, M. 2002. Landscape and labyrinths. *Geoforum*. 33(4). pp. 455-467.
- Rose, M. 2010. Back to back: a response to "Landscape, absence and the geographies of love". *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*. 35(1). pp. 141-144.

- Rose, M. and Wylie, J. 2006. Animating landscape. *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space*. 24. pp. 475-479.
- Rush-Cooper, N. 2020. Nuclear landscape: tourism, embodiment and exposure in the Chernobyl Zone. *cultural geographies*. 27(2). pp. 217-235.
- Sharp, J. 2000. Towards a critical analysis of fictive geographies. *Area*. 32(3). pp. 327-334.
- Shepherd, N. 2011 [1977]. *The Living Mountain*. Edinburgh, Canongate.
- Shepherd, N. 2017 [1930]. *The Weatherhouse*. Edinburgh: Canongate.
- Shepherd, N. 2018 [1928]. *The Quarry Wood*. Edinburgh: Canongate.
- Shepherd, N. and Peacock, C. 2018. *Wild Geese: A Collection of Nan Shepherd's Writing*. Cambridge: Galileo.
- Smith, T.A., Laurier, E., Reeves, S. and Dunkley, R.A. 2020. "Off the beaten map": navigating with digital maps on moorland. *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*. 45(1). pp. 223-240.
- Stanley, P. 2020. Unlikely hikers? Activism, *Instagram*, and the queer mobilities of fat hikers, women hiking alone, and hikers of colour. *Mobilities*. 15(2). pp. 241-256.
- Stewart, K. 2013. Regionality. *The Geographical Review*. 103(2). pp. 275-284.
- Tsing, A. 2005. *Friction: An Ethnography of Global Connection*. Oxford: Princeton University Press.
- Tsing, A. 2015. *The Mushroom at the End of the World*. Oxford: Princeton University Press.
- Watson, R. 1997. 'To know Being': Substance and Spirit in the Work of Nan Shepherd. In: Gifford, D. and McMillan, D. Eds. *A History of Scottish Woman's Writing*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press. pp. 416-427.
- Wall-Reinus, S., Prince, S. and Dahlberg, A. 2019. Everyday life in a magnificent landscape: Making sense of the nature/culture dichotomy in the mountains of Jämtland, Sweden. *Environment and Planning E: Nature and Space*. 2(1). pp. 3-22.
- Walton, S. 2020. *The Living World: Nan Shepherd and Environmental Thought*. London: Bloomsbury.

Wylie, J. 2006. Depths and folds: on landscape and the gazing subject. *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space*. 24(4). pp. 519-535.

Wylie, J. 2007. *Landscape*. Abingdon: Routeledge.

Wylie, J. 2012. Dwelling and displacement: Tim Robinson and the questions of landscape. *cultural geographies*. 19(3). pp. 365-383.

Wylie, J. and Webster, C. 2019. Eye-opener: Drawing landscape near and far. *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*. 44(1). pp. 32-47.

Vannini, P. and Vannini, A. 2016. *Wilderness*. Abingdon: Routeledge.