Emile Durkheim, a significant social theorist of the last century, observed that in the process of a society informing itself of its environment, it produces environment as an image of itself.¹ That is all well and good, but what happens when a society’s image of the environment shifts so much that the earlier and later versions are irreconcilable? Such was the case I faced in Central Hunza during my dissertation research (1993–1995). The objective of this anthropological investigation was to explore the relationship between changing landscape and shifting knowledge.

For this purpose, I used photographs of landscape and cultural activities from the 1930s to visually interpret cultural changes which occurred in the following sixty years, up to the 1990s. The late Colonel David Lorimer, a former British colonial political agent, took plenty of photographs during his linguistic re-

Fig. 57. Baltit fort and fields (D. Lorimer, 1934–1935).

Fig. 58. Baltit fort and bazaar (J. Flowerday, 1999).
search in the area in the mid 1930s. Based on his work, I later produced an exhibition called *Hunza in Treble Vision: 1930s and 1990s* (2000-2001). Old photographs taken by Lorimer were displayed alongside new photographs I took at the same sites in the 1990s. A set of two contrasting photographs — presented as single and double vision, respectively, highlighted the diminished importance of early sites. I affixed a third photograph to each pair, to document changes in culture, and arranged these sets, which I called ‘treble vision’, thematically, to draw attention to shifts in socio-political power, economy, environment and the rise of the nation-state.

In the discussion below, which builds upon this earlier work, I will focus in greater detail on residents’ understanding of the earlier and later times. There were marked disparities between people, most especially by age. My investigation of the relationship between changing landscape and shifting knowledge throws light on a process of cultural change internalised in reconstructing the ‘self’. The notion of ‘self’ was not an arbitrary creation, but dependent on changing conditions of which it was a part.

Consider the two visions as two periods. Lorimer’s photographs of landscape and cultural activities from the 1930s stand in stark contrast to corresponding images from the twenty-first century. Lorimer’s 1930s photographs captured a perspective of Hunza from the colonial period (1892-1947) at a time when local hereditary rule and its subsistence economy still bore semblance to life before the arrival of British rule — minus, of course, organised activities of defence and offence. He made 238 glass lantern-slides and a cata-
logue from photographs he took during fifteen month’s residence in Central Hunza (1934-1935) as a civilian scholar. The slides and catalogue read like an intelligence report – accounting for landscape, local rule, architecture, economy, crafts, daily activities and festival celebrations.

This extraordinary resource resulted from equally unusual circumstances. In the 1930s Lorimer was among a privileged few non-local persons with access to Hunza. As a former political agent of the British Indian Army stationed at the Gilgit agency (1920-1924) which oversaw Hunza, he had clearance from British officials to reside in Hunza as a civilian for the purpose of research. Based on his first-hand knowledge of the local community from political agent annual visits, he also had approval from the ruler to reside there. Indeed, his return to Hunza was not surprising. As a political agent, he used much of his free time, hobby-fashion, documenting Burushaski, an unwritten language used by Gilgit Scouts (militiamen) from Hunza, which, to the puzzle of linguists, was unrelated to a complex of great languages converging in this part of Central Asia.

By the time Lorimer returned to Hunza as a civilian scholar he had a three-volume study of *The Burushaski Language* in press (1935, 1935, 1938) and the support of a Leverhulme Fellowship to advance his study of Burushaski by documenting its use in everyday life. Lorimer’s lantern-slides paralleled this linguistic research but, regrettably, he died (1962) before publishing his written results. The slides and catalogue were among the few items he completed.

In Lorimer’s visual account, colonial presence appeared in the background in the shape of bridges and in the construction of the Imperial road from Srinagar. The foreground highlighted people’s daily lives and portrayed Hunza as an isolate – much like its language. It was a pre-industrial society dependent on subsistence agriculture locked away in a maze of mountains, unknown to the rest of mankind until the arrival of the British. In Lorimer’s view the people of Hunza were heroes not for their accomplishment of great feats but for their endurance in living under extreme conditions of mountain desert.

Photographs I made in the 1990s paralleled Lorimer’s work by updating his record of landscape, rule, architecture, economy, crafts, daily activities and festival celebrations. In the 1990s, Hunza existed as a political subdivision of the Gilgit district, one of five districts in the Northern Areas under the protectorship of Pakistan – a burgeoning industrial nation-state.

Following the construction of the Karakoram Highway, landscape was cut through by roads carrying lorries loaded with goods from China and seasonal produce from Hunza, by local, public and private vans...
transporting commuters and resident travellers here and there, and by coach loads of tourists (especially before the events of 11 September 2003). Electric lines and satellite dishes occurred above eye level, while pipes carrying water traced concealed subterranean paths. Architecture revealed a range of external influences, bearing materials unknown and unavailable in the earlier period. Every village had at least one bazaar area, schools, clinics and institutional structures established by the state of Pakistan, as well as non-governmental development projects. In the 1990s, these were common features.

The two periods were not only incomparable, but those living in the first half of the nineteenth century could not have predicted what their society would look like and how people would think seventy years later. And residents living in the twenty-first century could not abbreviate their present condition to the earlier time... though they knew at some level that the two periods were interconnected.

Bear in mind the two contrasting images of the environment. The first belonged to the early decades of the twentieth century. At that time political rule was an inheritable right fixed in a genealogy longer than England’s House of Windsor. Those most successful in leading the traditions of that Hunza society were men with social positions vested in landed tenure. From rulers to commoners, all depended on agriculture, tree cultivation and herding. People ate what they produced, which concurrently internalised activities of faith, practices of marriage and daily routine. These practices intimately attached them to a common political centre and economy. Life was reproduction. The environment was an active image of the recreation of land, people, animals and spirits that assured the future of it all.

By contrast, the second image belonged to the twenty-first century. There were no official heritable rulers. Public administrators were locally elected officials or civil servants appointed by the state of Pakistan. Landed resources that formerly provided the primary source of sustenance gave way to cash crops, which, like other pursuits, generated capital to support a bazaar economy. Fields could not produce the goods a bazaar could bear. Life under these new conditions was united with service institutions — like banks, schools, hospitals and government offices — and linked to technologically determined communication systems of elec-
tricity, piped water, computers, satellite dishes and thoroughfares. Tourism was the strongest industry. Occupations varied considerably, as did people’s individual prospects.

In the space between these two images – the one based on Lorimer’s 1930s photographs and the other on my efforts in the 1990s – a daily diminishing number of people lived through the disparity... that is, those who knew the difference. They were elders who helped metamorphose one society into the other. Most, however, were no longer influential in the social scheme of things. Leaders of the rising society were younger and groomed through their experience; they had a different perception of environment. Landscape changed. Cultural practices shifted. As earlier images fragmented, hopes arose for a future that was unlike the past.

This situation encouraged me to consider Durkheim’s perspective in a new way. The time lapse of sixty/seventy years was invaluable for probing people’s altering images in a changing environment. Understanding how this happened was not Durkheims’s primary concern, but he provided an important observation about newness. He observed that the mind could not create a new idea out of nothing. Should we discover an entirely new being without analogue in the rest of the world, it would be impossible for the mind to grasp; it could only be represented in terms of something else that the mind already knew:2

Though newness, by virtue of being new, appears to us as different, it is integral to what is known. The beauty of this notion is that it makes sense of people’s different images over time and provides a way of
seeing how it works. Two constructions with examples are offered to demonstrate this thesis:

Construction one

The first construction – *then and now* – is a difference that is relative to the speaker. The difference is not age alone. Old and young speak from experience and correspondingly contemplate the environment of the twenty-first century from self-knowledge. The real difference is the variable conditions that inform their knowledge and reflect self-identity. Whereas details of narratives given by older people bore distinguishing characteristics of earlier conditions internalised in their self-identity, such details were absent in younger people’s accounts. Younger people did not know themselves through a hereditary autocrat and they had no interest in titles that had no power and, thus, no effect on their lives. They spoke of their grandparents’ time from a position of *opus operandi*, thus situating their identity in a state system of recent conditions.

Consider Mama Zaibo’s comments during one of our interview sessions. Now in her seventies, she sensed the strangeness of her own recollections. She was looking through an album I made from 175 of Lorimer’s photographs of Hunza from 1934-1935. I was listening to her recital of ‘commonplace’ descriptions – the bygone local ruler-ship, the spiritual animation of the land, the communion of economic and personal activities – when she paused and reflected: “Only people who have experienced such things can trust such things as true. Otherwise, such things sound very strange”.

Mama Zaibo was not referring to extraordinary events, to such things as inexplicable musical refrains from mountain desert. Nor was she thinking about strange creatures of great or small proportions living in boulders, or others that came to eat the dead. Mama Zaibo was referring to the ordinary events of her own life. The photographs opened a tangle of thoughts that were no longer irrefutable on the landscape of the twenty-first century or that were incontestable in her mind.

In daze-like attention her eyes lifted from an image of a *serai*-like structure (an enclosure that housed pack animals and people) photographed by Lorimer and she began speaking of her first experience of buying something from a bazaar. She was just a young girl, possibly seven or eight years old when she was sent almost five miles to buy salt for her household. “I was sent to Mr Ayub and Mr Dawar’s shop to buy salt with one heavy rupee. I got ten *seers* (nearly 10 kg) of salt for only one rupee; and I brought it home. This salt lasted for more than two years.”

Fig. 68. Mama Zaibo.

Fig. 69. Bibi and granddaughter.

Fig. 70. Mr Noor.
Details of her narrative make it accountable to the conditions of which she was a part. It could not belong to any other time than when the brothers – Mr Ayub and Mr Dawar – had their shop, which then was one of a few places selling goods brought in from outside the local settlements of Hunza and Nagir. Where else could Mama Zaibo look than in vacant space? Residents dismantled the brothers’ shop almost forty years ago, building in its place a garage. No trace of their shop was left; and in the 1990s, elaborate markets were commonplace in every village.

Mama Zaibo’s narrative was further distinguished by a silver rupee and by salt. The silver rupee, issued by the British Indian Government, fell into disuse after Partition (1947). Current transactions were carried out in currency issued by the Government of Pakistan. Though coined rupees existed in the 1990s, none were silver or large and none of the old coins were presently in popular circulation.

Commercial salt likewise was unique. In Mama Zaibo’s youth, when women and girls had some free time they might walk five or more miles to known locations where they collected salty tasting earth. They carried basket-loads home on their backs, which they siphoned with water through a chutkas (a specially constructed basket) to use for cooking. Rulers and noble families enjoyed rock salt brought from distant valleys; otherwise salt was rare and none was iodised. Indeed, commercial salt was generally not available to the public until the 1950s, an event concurrent with the construction of the first jeep-worthy road from the large trade-town of Gilgit, sixty-five miles away. Even then it took three days to cover the distance.

Mama Zaibo’s grandchildren, by contrast, knew only commercial salt, which they purchased locally at their convenience in small half-kilo packets. Trade and the growth of bazaars made salt mundane and ordinary. It was a common condiment of cooking, a favoured complement to milk tea and among other things a cure for common health ailments. At the turn of the twenty-first century medical opinion suggested that a consequence of the surfeit of salt was high blood pressure and related health problems. The rising position was not getting salt, but rather knowing how to reduce its intake.

Without knowing this background, Mama Zaibo’s narrative appeared senseless to those who did not know the earlier time when salt was rare – incongruent images that made her self-conscious. Not everyone knew,
and generally younger people did not care to know, the difference of when there was a single bazaar, when people used silver rupees, or, indeed, when salt was not processed and iodised.

The following short vignette, which also concerns salt, demonstrates one reaction by younger people. It was a cold wintry afternoon as we huddled around the embers of a fire earlier stoked for tea. Mr Niat Shah, a man in his mid-thirties, our host, looked through the album of Lorimer’s photographs. As he turned the page to a photograph of a basket sitting at the door of a house, I asked, “What is a chutkus?” He hesitated, then replied: “In olden times we used the chutkus for baru (buckwheat) uh... no. It was used for making breads. We used that one for baur, (the container that held bread-making equipment).” He paused and then added: “Also shepherds used the chutkus. The chutkus is that pot used for storing milk. That is called the chutkus.” When another man in the group told him the chutkus was used for making salt, he replied: “Then, I don’t know how to make salt from the chutkus. I never saw it used in my time.”

At the turn of the twenty-first century, information about the chutkus was fragmented, displaced by the occurrence of commercial salt. The growth of bazaars and suppliers, concurrent with new generations of people, made salt ordinary. Young people born under recent conditions assumed that salt was available and incorporated that expectation in their normal identity of life in Hunza.

The difference of now and then and then again was relative — but critically anchored by those social conditions to which newness belonged. Mama Zaibo could trace the change in her lifetime; Niat Shah could not. Accordingly, newness, by virtue of being new, appeared as different though it was integral to what was known. Though this supports Durkheim’s observation, it also points out that knowledge was discrete — not universal. That is, not everyone knew salt in a single way. Knowledge passed discretely through generations of people born into altering conditions over time. Mama Zaibo’s generation interconnected a time of the past — when people used water collected from salty tasting earth — with the present circumstance of buying pre-packaged iodised salt from a local shop.

**Construction two**

The second construction, which I offer with respect to changing perceptions of environment, concerns people’s ways of manifesting the discreteness of knowledge. Furthermore, it implicates this process in social power. The focus is recognising the other. As noted above, few of those who were young in the 1930s were currently leaders in the society of the twenty-first century. Rather those born under altered conditions of economy and political order were the rising leaders — seers and broadcasters — of change. Otherness took a twist in this setting.
Inside the social scheme of the 1930s otherness was played out between rulers, an elite body of supporters, the ordinary folk and a small group of bondsmen. Narratives given in response to Lorimer’s photographs by older people commonly depicted the other as members of these social groups in reference to their own social position. The labyrinth of details given by them intertwined landscape with their self-identity.

In contrast, some younger people used social demarcations from the earlier social scheme in another way. One comment I heard several times was: “Ha! They were the elites, but now they are ordinary, just like the rest of us!” Younger people shared no comparable status with the old economy or system of rule. Theirs was a market economy run by private and public administrators. The elite were no longer men of landed tenure. Current public leaders were businessmen and state bureaucrats.

So, how was this difference played out? In the following interview situation Bibi, an older resident in her seventies, myself and two male companions in their twenties were sitting together in a courtyard whose outside door opened to a public path. The door was ajar and Bibi sat comfortably cracking peach kernels with a three-year-old granddaughter sitting in her lap – glancing from time to time at the album of Lorimer’s photographs. She was saying: “When we work from the hands, work hard, then we can get some property and some other things...” [At that moment some girls walked by, looked in at this lady cracking peach kernels and started to laugh, saying:] “Look! Look! She is cracking peach kernels!” [They walked away laughing and Bibi became agitated, then annoyed, and retorted:] “You are laughing at me but this is honest work [respectable] work. You don’t know!” [You don’t know any better; you are ignorant!].

A companion who had accompanied me for translation explained: “The young girls now prefer to buy oil in the bazaar even if their mothers press pure oil from the peach or apricot kernels.” How different this was from the earlier period when peach and apricot kernels were treasured for so many diverse purposes. This oil was valued for massaging an aching body, treating a cold or sick stomach, caring for hair and skin cosmetically, accenting food dishes and, when used in a specially constructed lamp, for lighting a house.
A little later when I purposefully drew Bibi’s attention to the *chutkus*, she turned to my companion and scolded: “Don’t ask this question. [She was referring to me and continued:] She’s really having a laugh at us.” When my companion told her that I had asked about this device from others, Bibi quipped: “If she asked before, then what’s the difference? [That is, what is the difference between the other people and me? They’re saying something different or I’m saying something different. If she’s asked before, why is she asking me? It’s the same process.]” What lay behind Bibi’s reaction was sensing a social divide. Though she sat in the sanctuary of her own residence, outsiders [here young resident girls and a foreign woman researcher] challenged her inner worth and intelligence.

She was not the only elder to sense distancing from younger people; and the young girls who laughed at Bibi were also not alone. Sometimes older members of the population referred collectively to young people as the Dalda generation, the generation who knew how to spend rupees (Pakistani currency), to get what they wanted but had no clue how to create anything with their own hands. The young people, according to some elders, were impractical and knew nothing. “They think oil comes from a can! They don’t know hard work and they don’t know how things work.”

In contrast, some young people similarly stereotyped older people as in the following story. The story goes: “Once there was a bride sitting next to the Shiri Dako [the ceremonial pillar in the traditional house]. She was shy. A neighbour came to offer her congratulations and brought with him some flour as a gift. The bride extended her arms, palms up, to receive the flour. When, however, she tried to accept the flour properly, she could not. She had stretched her arms either side of the pillar and so her hands and the flour were separated from her body by that pillar.”

“This was a problem. [My companions began to laugh.] So the senior man in the family called for a wise man. After some time he came. Then this wise man deliberated. Then after some more time he ordered two men to go to the roof of the house and another two men to dig the pillar out of the floor of the house [some more laughter]. After some hours the pillar was lifted and the bride got her flour. [And, now everyone was laughing and making comments such as,] How silly the old people are. They can’t think clearly to work out simple solutions.”

The joke was found throughout Pakistan. Dalda oil, too, was a product of Pakistan. Strikingly, both the old and young used metaphors from the larger State society of which they were a part, simultaneously demonstrating the contemporariness of old to young as well as the disparity between them.

*Otherness* was contemporary and expressed in changed social power. Elders no longer spoke with authority from conditions that created their other identity. They had no recourse to a *tham* (heritable ruler). And men of status with positions of power were not farmers. Rather, rising power was situated with younger people in a scheme based on different knowledge connected with global market patterns and a nation-state.

Thus, Durkheim provided an insight when he observed that a society projects an image of its environment as an image of itself, and he also opened a discussion of how images change. In the two constructions offered above, knowledge was held discretely. Not everyone had the same knowledge – a distinction most especially evidenced by age and self-identity. As conditions of economy and political power took
new form, the way people understood themselves also shifted. It did so through the ever-recurring appearance of young people who accepted as normal to their time what older people saw as newness. Thus people born at different times were carriers of the altering environment. They made newness normal, as part of themselves and their social identity.

This discussion captures only a small piece of a larger biological process in which older generations die out and younger people rise to redefine and transmit their knowledge of environment. Yet the nexus where altered knowledge begins is also critical. It would be a mistake on my part to leave the reader with the notion that older members of the population were filled with dissolution. Without sacrifices and efforts made by them to encourage their children and grandchildren to succeed in the expanding economy, the contrast of Now and Then might be another version of Then Again... Many young people knew this and several elders voiced this circumstance in the following excerpts from recent interviews.

“In the old time we led a very poor life. In this time we are thankful to God for all our Blessings. Now all my children are doing jobs [working for money].” (Api Zeebon of Ganish, 2004).

“By the grace of God now we have clean water, the streets are renovated due to cooperation with the Aga Khan Cultural Services Pakistan. We are extremely thankful to the AKCSP or else we would still be living with our animals.” (Dado Yaqub of Ganish, 2004)

“At that time there was great poverty. We only had resources from our house, nothing came from outside. (We depended only on what we made ourselves.) Now poverty is finished. We are eating and drinking well. We are living comfortably. That earlier time was not good. At this time it is nice. Now everything comes (is available to us). At that time, things were not good. That time was one of poverty, but now, by the grace of God, it is a good time.” (Dado Amir Hayat, Mominabad, 2004)

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2 See note 1.
4 See note 3.
5 See note 3.