

Review

## International Conference on Landscape and Cinema

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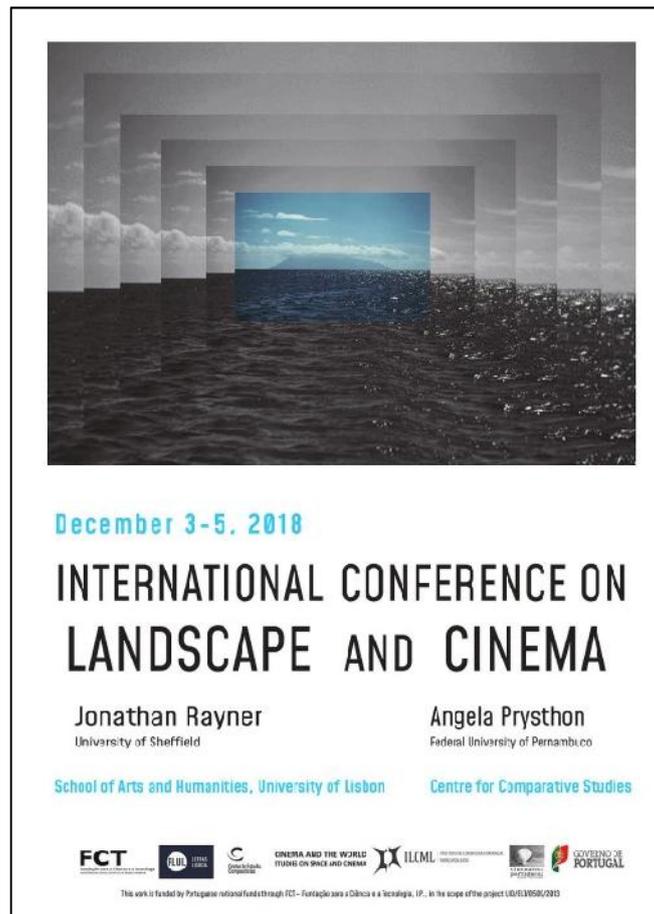


Figure 1: *International Conference on Landscape and Cinema 2018*. School of Arts and Humanities, University of Lisbon, Portugal. December 3-5, 2018.

On December 3–5, 2018, the ‘International Conference on Landscape and Cinema’, fostered by the ‘Cinema and the World’ cluster at the ‘THELEME – Interart and Intermedia Studies’ research group of the Centre for Comparative Studies (CEC), was held at the School of Arts and Humanities, University of Lisbon. The organising team — Elisabete Marques (Instituto de Literatura Comparada Margarida Losa, Universidade do Porto), Susana Mouzinho (Ifilnova-FCSH, Universidade Nova de Lisboa), Filipa Rosário (CEC, Universidade de

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Lisboa), Raquel Schefer (CEC, Universidade de Lisboa / Faculty of Arts, University of the Western Cape) and Ricardo Vieira Lisboa (Independent Researcher) — sought to promote the discussion around the all-encompassing presence of landscape in film.

As presented by Rosário and Villarrea Álvarez, the possibilities for signification in filmic landscaped are as varied as its vantage points: they might be psychological and allegorical, political and cultural, nationalistic, or ecocritical. (2017, 57) Operating within this expanded framework of landscape, the ‘International Conference on Landscape and Cinema’ illuminated such diversity with the panels put forward. If, on the one hand, the nationalistic reading of landscape could be found in ‘Cinematic Lisbon’ and ‘Paisagem Brasileira’, it was also explored with ‘Territories’. In the first, there were discussions on the filming of 1980s Lisbon as a background for exiled and outcast characters, expanded to a study on the representation of the capital in subsequent decades, and a more focused reading on Edgar Pêra’s *Lisbon Revisited* (2014). In ‘Paisagem Brasileira’ the Amazonian landscape took centre stage in Alfeu França’s revisiting of Flávio de Carvalho’s expedition to the region in 1958, with *The White Goddess* (2013), while the Siberian tundra was evoked in ‘Territories’ with a study on Sakha cinema. An approach to the ecocritical line of landscape studies was found in ‘Ecologias’ with reflections on the anthropocene, but also in the ‘Non-fiction Film’ panel with the radioactive landscapes of Fukushima. In ‘Dispositifs’ and ‘Maps and Sound’ the spatial properties of landscape were expanded to include the virtual landscape of data visualisation, the imagined plane of landscape in animation film, the dark space of outer space landscape and the cinematic landscape conjured by the black screen, and soundscape as landscape.

The political possibilities of landscape were not overlooked in this conference, with the ‘Politics’ panel including a view on the destructive effects of development in the city of Rio de Janeiro through the films *HU Enigma* (Pedro Urano and Joana Traub Cseko, 2011), *Chronicle of the Demolition* (Eduardo Ades, 2017), *Tropical Curse* (Luisa Marques and Darks Miranda, 2016), and *ExPerimetral* (Daniel Santos, 2016), the post-May 68 disillusioned landscape of the Zanzibar group, and the political implications of natural resource extraction in Ursula Biemann’s *Black Sea Files* (2005). A panel was also devoted to colonial and post-colonial landscapes, in addition to Angela Prysthon’s keynote on the subject.

Prysthon (Professor of Film Studies at the Federal University of Pernambuco, Brazil) presented ‘Colonial Spectra. Landscape, Desolation and Power in Contemporary Latin American Cinema’. Engaging a number of recent films, including *Jauja* (Lisandro Alonso, 2014) and *Zama* (Lucrecia Martel, 2017), Prysthon sought to make explicit the link between the landscapes figured in these period films and a colonial spectre found in pictorial and literary traditions. The researcher emphasised the view of landscape as a “crystallization of a way of looking, of a way of circumscribing a territory and establishing a kind of dominion over it”, presenting the hypothesis that the

landscape in these films directly affects their forms of perception and composition of space. (Prysthon 2018, 8)

Turning his attention to the Australian landscape, Jonathan Rayner's keynote (Reader in Film Studies at the University of Sheffield, UK), 'Natural/National Landscapes: Australia's Cinematic Sublime' explored notions of Gothic, Sublime and Post-Apocalyptic Landscape. Taking as his case study the Mad Max film franchise (1979–2015), Rayner, too, drew parallels to pictorial representations of the Australian landscape, particularly those of the nineteenth century. Using the theoretical framework of the Gothic in landscape, the researcher explored how the desolate — and at times inhospitable — Australian desert has been systematically called forth in representations of the country, thus coming to form a kind of Australian cinematic identity. The inhospitality of landscape was also a theme that was explored in the 'Art Works' section of the Conference, in which young filmmakers presented their work. Janaina Wagner's *Werewolf* (2016), was particularly unsettling by the stillness of a deactivated iron-mining field in Minas Gerais, Brazil. A mountain destroyed by man and filmed by drone.

In addition to the films presented in the above-mentioned section, the Conference partnered with Cinemateca Portuguesa for its closing session, 'Landscape as Event – Encounter: Larry Gottheim and Sérgio Taborda', to exhibit the works of two filmmakers drawn to the subject. Here, a short overview of Gottheim's long career as a key filmmaker in American avant-garde and experimental film was on view, with three films spanning over 40 years. Beginning with *Corn* (1970), a quiet yet moving experimental short, in which the space of our daily lives — the kitchen — and tasks — cooking — take the position of a meditative 'landscape', and ending with *Chants and Dances for Hand* (1991-2016), a film in which Haitian voodoo ceremonies intertwine with political uprisings and family footage. Made especially for the event, the session also featured a filmed conversation between Gottheim and Sérgio Taborda, and Taborda's *Sequência 15-16* (2016-2017). As part of his Sequence series, being developed since 2001, *Sequência 15-16* forms an experimental, non-narrative, diary of the artist and filmmaker's meanderings through the urban landscape.

The tradition of landscape studies in painting as a foundation to a study of landscape in film was recurrent in the conference, particularly in the keynote addresses, however, considerations on how the digital might shape future branches of this field emerged in a number of papers, notably in the 'Dispositifs' and 'Maps and Sound' sections. Although one might look at this turn as an inevitable consequence of the period we now live in, what the conference made explicit was that expanded notions of the field have been continuous. Some might consider that in the broadness of topics discussed there might have been a lack of focus on a defining notion of landscape studies, but, as we have seen, the extension of the field is part of its strength. In embracing theoretical examinations but also creating spaces for young and seasoned filmmakers to exhibit their works, the

'International Conference on Landscape and Cinema' fostered a debate on notions of landscape in film, promoting expanded views on a subject that is present, even if not analysed, in every moving image project.

## REFERENCES

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