

Panel 12

IVSA Conference 2009

Appreciating the views: How we're looking at the social and visual landscape

Panel Title	
Landscape and place-identity	
Description	
<p>A country's landscape is often portrayed in film, photography, documentary, and personal photographs, videos or narratives in culturally normative ways where the real is frequently mixed with the imagined, creating the desirable. In this sense, identity is commonly produced and re-produced through landscapes and portrayals of experiences within moulded scenery.</p> <p>Intentional and unintentional choices produce the environment as it reflects and re-enforces mediated preconceived notions of place identity and the identity of individuals acting within these places. This session favours portrayals of place-identity to situate the individual, the narrator, or the audience, rather than emphasising ideology and nationalism.</p> <p>One could critically investigate such topics as the landscapes used to portray certain countries or places within them; or an individual's portrayal of their own placement or displacement within a certain country. This session also invites contributions that offer a critical discussion of placement and displacement of environments as they are reflected in and reinforced by socially encoded norms. The contributions may be based on film, photography, documentary, photographs, video ethnographies or narrative studies.</p>	
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Final Selected Papers

Name:	David Hughes, Auckland University of Technology,
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Paper Title	
Mythic images: of fingerprints and watermarks	
Description	
<p>This paper explores perceptions of identity construction and authenticity within the cinematic medium. The approach is informed by traditional visual connotative conventions of using landscape to contextualise and characterize human interaction. The dramatic filmmaker uses such devices to intrigue, engage, enable audiences to suspend senses of disbelief - an interaction which is a form of 'mutual complicity' in constructing narrative. This contrasts with the documentary maker who often begin with an existing narrative. They seek quite a different form of audience interaction - one founded on the credibility of the filmmaker's construct of events. By definition, the docudrama falls somewhere in-between. While all filmmaking practitioners will make claims of 'authenticity', according to Nichols (2001) each of these storytelling forms '...may convey truths if we decide they do.' Thus, the issue emerges – who determines the 'prevailing truth'?</p> <p>Specifically, this paper will focus on a New Zealand docudrama entitled 'Out of the Blue' (2006) and its identity marker representations, within a cinematic narrative, of the community of Aramoana. 'Out of the Blue,' is a re-enactment of New Zealand's deadliest mass murder in 1990. Other perspectives of community and landscape come from back-grounding articles and a newspaper travelogue, 'Spirit of peace at Aramoana' (2008). The proposed approach, through multimodal discourse analysis, is to examine the respective environmental representations as elements of frozen action (Norris 2004).</p> <p>The paper concludes, by drawing from the presented evidence, that such Goffmanian (1974) rekeyings are contributing elements to contemporary myth creation, where latter day moderators in attempting to imprint socio-cultural watermarks leave but deceptive fingerprints.</p>	

Name:	Wayne Barrar, Massey University, Wellington
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Paper Title	
Disrupted landscapes: imaging biosecurity	
Description	
<p>Landscapes are constantly changing as a result of such activities as extractive industry, food production and tourism, and this displacement has been reflected in the photographic output of contemporary photographers conceptually interested in the New Topographics movement since the mid 1970s. However, landscapes are also altered by the 'biological' – in particular the global movement of invasive species – whose effects may be less immediately visible.</p> <p>This paper outlines an extended photographic project visualising the interconnections between the post-colonial landscape of New Zealand and efforts to enforce biological borders through a burgeoning development of biosecurity practices.</p> <p>Despite a heavily promoted image as a country of 'clean green' vistas, much of the New Zealand environment is highly modified following several centuries of accidental and intentional introductions of landscape-changing organisms. The land that remains 'relatively native' is often subjected to continual monitoring, control and, increasingly, physical enclosure as 'mainland island reserves' or conservation lands.</p> <p>This photographic investigation documents the interactions between specific landscape case studies and the social desire to limit the loss of the indigenous or to return land to a measured idea of the natural. Specific examples include the landscape-altering realities of recent incursions by globalised pests such as Koi carp and the invasive algae Didymo. Reference will also be made to the conceptual extension of landscape into the laboratory through simulation, modelling and experimental research – fundamental processes in biosecurity interventions. These examples highlight the complex interconnections that can occur between personal freedom, commercial desires and biological realities in a no longer discrete landscape.</p>	

Name:	Greg Smith, University of California, Rome Centre
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Paper Title	
Media and the appropriation of place in central Italy: a geosemiotic analysis	
Description	
<p>The paper discusses the activities of a local publisher of community fliers, and an Iraqi émigré filmmaker, in a community comprising some thirty townships in central Abruzzo. The actions of the publisher have aimed to furnish a local counterweight to national media portrayals of the Marsica, as the area is called; these actions are captured in a documentary directed by the filmmaker. The publisher has created a series of broadsheets over the years involving diverse citizens in representing various local community concerns. The film captures these activities in an ironic reflection on the role of media in the contemporary world. A central issue is the imageability of the territory, and the effort to counteract progressive citizen disempowerment. The aims of both initiatives, partly successful, regard bigger questions like accountability in public office.</p> <p>The analysis attempts to identify the geosemiotic strategies deployed by various image makers in representing the territory, starting with the images portrayed in the film. Key concepts are indexicality and modality, drawn from work published by Ron and Suzie Wong Scollon. Implied notions of place and the truth value of competing modes of portraying this historically remote territory are characterized through this analysis. We find on the one hand an historically established impersonal image of passive bucolic tranquility, on the other a struggle for control of the territory expressed through reference to critical landscape features and events. Urban sprawl, modern systems of distribution, dependence on national and global media, have transformed and impersonalized a system of spatial practice once predicated on a powerful element of citizen participation. This transformation of spatial practice is fully evident in the strategies used to situate meaning in space.</p>	
Special Technical Requirements:	

Name:	Geraldene Peters, Auckland University of Technology, New Zealand
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Paper Title	
Unsettled - Darcy Lange's Maori land project	
Description	
<p>The Maori Land Project (1978/82) is an unsettled bracket of work produced by New Zealand born video artist Darcy Lange (1946-2005). Unsettled for many reasons: the subject of land alienation and specters of neo-colonialism; modernist interruptions of indigenous time and space through Lange's experiences with the edit and the long take; Lange's travels across Aotearoa/New Zealand, Britain, North America, and The Netherlands in search of an institutional home for the project; the at-times uncomfortable proximity of the experimental space of video art and the political space of documentary; as well as the artist's struggle to reconcile tensions between a socialist humanism and an authorial individualism.</p> <p>Observations of people at work and occasionally at leisure in urban and rural landscapes was a key visual thematic in Lange's video art and the Maori Land Project is an extension of his internationally recognised corpus produced during the 70s in the UK, Spain and Aotearoa. In this latter body of work, tensions of settlement are evident through both the broken renderings of landscape (after Stephen Turner's notion of 'broken history') and the people of the land that structure Lange's video 'researches', and his alternate self-positioning (evident through Lange's letters and voiceover in the video material) as both distanced observer/ethnographer and intimate supporter of indigenous struggles for self-determination.</p> <p>This paper draws from an excavation of Lange's archives – his video recordings and extant letters – to locate The Maori Land Project as a reflection of Lange's fragmented subjectivity as pakeha (of European settler ancestry), peripatetic artist, and social activist. The artist's experience of moving through place (after Barbara Bender) is mediated through a kind of double displacement (after James Clifford) firstly, as a pakeha making a video about Maori experiences of land alienation in Aotearoa and secondly, attempting to give shape to indigenous and in this instance, bounded experiences of place, elsewhere (the Netherlands). These bounded experiences of place are articulated through the documentary imaging of monuments, tribal sites of significance and land, as well as the spoken reflections of Maori conveyed best through Lange's characteristic use of the long take and allegiance to a realist aesthetic. And the logic of double displacement – by contrast - is most evident through Lange's unfamiliar and reluctant encounters with montage. Following the recent work of Malin Wahlberg focusing on phenomenology and documentary time, I argue that the identity of the video artist, refracted through a double displacement evident in the architecture of the video work, constitutes an absence or a loss which although specific to the politics of cultural (artistic) and ethnic identity in Aotearoa/New Zealand at the historical conjuncture of the late 70s, holds resonance for present-day negotiations of local and transnational identity-formations.</p>	

Name:	Marie Volger, University of Florida
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Paper Title	
Venice – conserving a monumental ground	
Description	
<p>In Venice, images can be individually assembled to tell a story. It is through photography and the documentation executed by the everyday visitor that the narrative of the city is told. Each visitor composes their individual storyline as they progress throughout the city. Upon future visits, each scene can be rearranged based on previous interpretations, ultimately creating an additional narrative. Although Venice is a city with many historic structures, little recognition is given to the landscape and grounding of the island as a historic structure – a monumental site for future generations. This paper will study the evolving layers of the islands, constructing a process for understanding the individual islands as an assembled landscape. It is the narrator who determines the preconceived notions of the land, and the audience who shapes them into their own.</p> <p>Images are not solely dependent upon each other or their contexts, however together these images create the culture and story of the place. The identity of the islands becomes an architectural layering of structures; physically the urban fabric of Venice acts in much the same way. Initially the stories are constructed based on preconceived understandings of the place and its culture. By combining a diversity of layered histories – the people, the place, and the culture – this research reveals the vulnerabilities of the city, while unraveling the narrative of place. Revealing alters the perceptions based on facts from the narrators, influencing the real image seen by the audience. Shaping of the image that is Venice must be done through the use of both the physical layering of the ground and its literary assembly into a landscape – albeit, one that appears to be slowly disappearing.</p>	