

Panel 14

IVSA Conference 2009

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

Panel Title	
Texts of place: reading landscape as visual narrative characterisation	
Description	
<p>Depicting the landscape environments their narratives take place in has always offered authors an opportunity to add something to the broader understandings they wanted their readers to appreciate, usually as suggestive dimensions of the predicaments of their central characters. Romantic writers particularly made a specialism of this, as in the bleak elemental qualities of the moors in <i>Wuthering Heights</i>, or the oppressive confined darkness of the Castle of Otrano. The later medium of film, which owes so much to legacies of the romantic period anyway in its visualizing of the emotionally centered story – one of the reasons why so many nineteenth century novels get filmed of course – does so more subliminally through the combination of features like camera position, length of shot, colour, location choice, and all the aspects of art direction that a director can choose to apply. This adds up to a powerful tool for effectively stereotyping the visual dimensions of certain kinds of landscape as implicitly carrying externally transferrable meanings, from the darkly threatening cityscapes of Film Noir to the pure pastoral innocence of the Lord of the Rings' Shire. While certain moments in film history have acknowledged their use of visual backgrounds as thematic signifiers fairly openly – the war scarred worlds of the Italian neo-realists for example illustrating how enduring their heroes had to be – the current dominance of realist modes often ideologically hides the consistency of this dimension behind the attention we're supposed to give to the dynamic thrust of the main person-centered narratives.</p> <p>Currently, investigative commentators like Pat Brereton or Jonathan Bate have started to re-define approaches to the examination of literary and film texts by choosing to focus particularly on these collective meanings, and to engage with them as a means to indexically map the acceptance or popularity of the kinds of values certain selectively portrayed 'backgrounds' can be articulated to represent. Additionally, we now also have the emergence of 'location tourism', where it is often explicitly the ideological dimensions of place created by certain films' selective depictions which are being packaged in holiday destination promotions - Baz Luhrmann's recent work for the Australian tourist board being a clear case in point.</p> <p>This panel invites contributions from those who are considering or investigating the depicted landscape aspects of film or literary texts in ways of this kind. As well as those considering such approaches from methodological viewpoints, both individual 'single text' and broader 'thematically linked' case studies are welcome.</p>	
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Final Selected Papers

Name:	Keiran Li, University of Sheffield UK & Hongzheng Li, Jinpingmei Literature Research Institution of Xuzhou
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Paper Title	Revealing Jin-ping-mei's visual narrative characterisations: methodologies for deciphering a remarkable 16th century literary landscape
Description	<p>Depicting the landscape environments their narratives take place in has always offered authors an opportunity to add something to the broader understandings they wanted their readers to appreciate, sometimes rendering the atmosphere in which the story is set, or perhaps giving clues of the deeper layer of meaning and codes which the author was not able to write openly due to the strict censorship and persecution of his time. The novel of 'Golden Vase Plum' (Jin-ping-mei) was written in late 16th century Ming China and, according to our historic and geographical evidence based research, actively uses the characterization of some remarkable landscape environments to tell the reader a real and more deeply layered story than its person-based narrative surface implies. This famous and controversial novel has been highly praised by many scholars in the last 400 years, and has also been prohibited from publication many times. However it has been praised as 'the best novel in Chinese history', and 'the most mysterious one'. It is a controversial work full of grand narrations, but also strangely many obvious plagiarisms from other contemporary popular novels. The author of this novel is anonymous, though research since the 17th century has suggested more than ten possibilities. The exact time and place of writing is also an unresolved focus which has drawn the attention of many.</p> <p>In more than 20 years of research we have investigated the characterization of the landscape environments in the novel's narration from many directions, making full comparisons with the real historic geographical landmarks, and especially paying much attention to the slight changes of landscape description in those 'strange' obvious plagiarizing paragraphs. Narratives of social events and the historic social dimension were also analysed and compared with historic records. These methodologies eventually led us to detect a further consistent dimension hidden behind the surface of the narration, revealing that the author has indeed signed his name inside the text in a special and unique way, and also recorded his own concise biography in the novel as though for a supporting character. Significantly, it is when the attention we're supposed to give to the environment-centered narratives is not led astray by the interesting person-centered narratives that the deeper layer of the novel emerges.</p>

Name:	Richard Williams, Rutgers University, New Jersey
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Paper Title

The photographic narrative in Roberto Bolano's novel Distant Star

Roberto Bolano's highly acclaimed novel, *Distant Star*, is filled with references to photographs. For this project I have extracted all 46 references to photographs from Bolano's one hundred and forty-seven page work. I make use of the extracted images in order to interrogate them independently of the dominant textual narrative of the novel. I view this case as the beginning of work on what I call the "implicit knowledge" role of photographs in enhancing the gravity of modern novels.

Rather than allowing the images to remain as mere text, however, I restore them to their rightful place as photographs. In some instances the restoration is easy, I need only locate a photograph. But in other instances Bolano's style causes difficulty for my rescue attempts such as when he initially describes a photograph as being that of one person but later raises doubts about that description by having other characters make different claims about who is in the photograph. But whether or not I am able to locate the specific photograph that Bolano describes, I make use of photographs that are socially consistent with those described in the novel.

Having established the linear progression of the photographs and then rescuing them from their textual lives in *Distant Star* I go beyond Bolano by giving substance to each photograph. I identify them by time, and place while also, when appropriate, exploring their socio-historical context. I then return my focus to the photograph narrative by closely exploring its role relative to the dominant textual narrative. It is through the latter discussion that I hope to demonstrate how the "implicit knowledge" that is embedded in the visual narrative enhances the gravity of the text.

Name:	Henrik Gustafsson, University of Skövde / Gothenburg University,
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Paper Title	
Terrestrial Cinema and non-anthropomorphic imagination	
Description	
<p>In the simplest definition, landscape emerges when the setting becomes the subject. Applied to the study of cinema, it would seem to facilitate a shift from plot, psychology and characterization toward aspects more rarely considered in mainstream film. However, the dominant approach to cinematic landscape has been to determine its meaning within the character-centered world of the film, encouraging reading strategies that address it as anthropomorphic projection and psychological externalization. A more recent focus draws from the longstanding scholarly interest in landscape as an ideologically susceptible form of image, aiming to uncover its hidden agenda. In both cases, it is a semiotic project of interpreting visual codes and conventions.</p> <p>This paper will instead discuss how landscape might involve a certain excess that resists the textual metaphor, and along with it practices of reading and decoding. For modernist and experimental filmmakers such as Antonioni and Michael Snow, the move away from logocentric narrativity has frequently been manifested as a preoccupation with the terrestrial. Through long takes, extended tracking shots and temps morte, landscape has been mobilized to break up a synthesized diegetic world governed by subjects' goals and desires, stripping the sites of their psychological and metaphysical resonances.</p> <p>Lately, an emphasis on topography, logistics and infrastructure has also emerged as a dominant trope to address national and political disintegration; whether China in <i>Still Life</i> (Jia Zhang-Ke, 2007); former Soviet in <i>D'Est</i> (Chantal Akerman, 1993); Poland in <i>Shoah</i> (Claude Lanzmann, 1985); Balkan in the films of Theo Angelopoulos; Hungary in the cinema of Bela Tarr; or Italy in <i>Gomorra</i> (Matteo Garrone, 2008). For all their differences, the emphasis on crude physical matter in these works initiates a non-anthropomorphic imagination that subverts emphatic identification, redemptive closure and final meaning.</p>	

Name:	Frances Pheasant-Kelly, University of Wolverhampton
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Paper Title	
Spaces of desire: liminality and abjection in 'Brokeback Mountain'	
Description	
<p>Brokeback Mountain (2005, director Ang Lee) tells the story of the relationship that develops between two men, Ennis Del Mar (Heath Ledger) and Jack Twist (Jake Gyllenhaal). While their first encounters take place against the backdrop of Brokeback Mountain, the film traces the ways that the men subsequently repress their feelings for each other in the homophobic small town environment to which they return; however, they continue their association, intermittently reuniting at Brokeback Mountain.</p> <p>Because this film centres on two cowboys and is partly set in the wilderness, much critical analysis centres upon its relation to the Western genre. Other critical studies examine representations of masculinity or homosexuality within the film. Often, attention focuses on the spaces of the film in relation to the binary oppositions commonly associated with the Western genre, such as that of civilisation and wilderness. Since the setting of Brokeback Mountain functions as metaphor for the homosexual relationship of the two protagonists, there is also considerable commentary on the association between the landscape and their sexuality. Because the nature of the mountain frequently appears primal in nature, there are obvious opportunities for psychoanalytical readings. Some studies implicate Kristeva's notion of abjection (1982) and abject spaces. For example, Todd (2009) examines abjection in relation to the inside/outside dialectic of the homosexual 'closet'. He also assigns Brokeback Mountain as abject because of its scenes of bodily transgression and violation. This paper extends these psychoanalytical readings and textually analyses Brokeback Mountain with reference to Kristeva's theory of abjection in relation to subjectivity rather than focusing on the visceral aspects of the abject body. It also draws upon Sibley's (1995) Geographies of Exclusion, through which it negotiates the indeterminate nature of domestic and small town space that the film presents.</p> <p>This article thus argues that the film visually and narratively prioritises certain spaces, and organises them in a dialectical relationship that reflects aspects of sexuality and its repression. This re-reading of abjection and abject spaces within the film therefore correlates sexuality with setting and explores the relationship between desire and spatiality.</p>	