LANDSCAPE AND FILM

EDITED BY

MARTIN LEFEBVRE

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Martin Lefebvre

introduction

Martin Lefebvre

It is well known that one of the first wonders the cinema offered its viewers was that of images of the natural world in movement. Early spectators enjoyed the sights of crashing waves and tree leaves rustling in the wind. Not surprisingly, travel films quickly became popular—the famous "Hale's Tours of the World," for instance, is testimony to this interest for sightseeing that the cinema was catering to in its early years. Cinema, of course, developed at a time when our relation to space was undergoing important changes: nineteenth century colonialism; the development of ethnography in the context of Darwinism; the emergence of a traveling leisure class and of tourism (the word comes from the *Grand Tour* young European aristocrats were expected to take during their formative years); new and faster means of locomotion; and the "discovery" and aesthetic appreciation of novel locations such as mountainous terrains, ocean shorelines, etc.

Travel films were certainly a way for the less wealthy classes to see what otherwise was only accessible to them in still form through painting or photography. While the appeal for sightseeing is certainly understandable, one interesting aspect is the way it precedes the grand scale development and domination of narrative cinema. In fact, it is almost as if the *décor* had been set first and the cinema was simply waiting for the players to arrive and turn it into the setting for some unfolding drama. And in this respect, the cinema was inverting the process often regarded as the one giving birth to landscape in Western art: the slow emancipation of space from the demands of eventhood and narrative. But this is less paradoxical when we consider that cinematic landscapes came on the scene of "visuality" at the end of a century that saw the landscape genre flourish in an unprecedented degree in painting.

It is obvious that landscape as such is not a *genre* in the dominant cinema, as it is in still visual media; the institution of cinema prefers generic categories that revolve around narrative. Of course, specific landscapes (or cityscapes) may belong to the iconography of various genres, such as Westerns, road movies, and gangster and science fiction films. As such, they often appear to be somewhat peripheral material; after all, the telling of a story always requires a setting of some sort. This apparently peripheral role is perhaps what led Sergei Eisenstein, in the final section of his *Nonin-*

different Nature, to compare film landscapes with film music. Indeed, for the great Soviet filmmaker and theorist, both film landscape and film music share the ability to express, in cinematic form (i.e., on the image track or the soundtrack), what is otherwise inexpressible. In short, landscape was to silent film what music is to sound film: "landscape is a complex bearer of the possibilities of a plastic interpretation of emotions."[1]

But if landscape can fulfil this function, according to Eisenstein, it is because—like music—it is "the freest element of film, the least burdened with servile, narrative tasks, and the most flexible in conveying moods, emotional states, and spiritual experiences" (Eisenstein 1987, 217). Part of the value of this definition lies in how it throws into relief landscape's conflictual or tense relationship with narrative. And within the overall context offered by Eisenstein's film theory, this aligns landscape with a host of other conceptions that also challenge narrative's empire over all aspects of a film, of which the best known is undoubtedly the concept of "attraction." Though clearly distinct in strict Eisensteinian parlance and belonging to different phases of his theoretical output, both landscape and attraction nonetheless share important traits. In effect, both pertain to Eisenstein's interest in representing (on film) and inducing (in spectators) emotional states and both imply a certain freedom or autonomy from narrative. Of course, for landscape to fulfil the function Eisenstein conceived for it, it must obviously distinguish itself from mere background space or subservient setting where action and events take place. Eisenstein's own answer to this question was what he called the "musicality" of the emotional landscape, the key example for this being the "fog" sequence from his own *Battleship Potemkin* (1925), which, as early as 1929, he had likened to musical composition with his notion of "tonal montage."[2]

I mention Eisenstein in introducing this volume on landscape and film not because the essays found here directly address his films or theories, but because, in a sense, most of them start from the general understanding that the kinds of issues raised by landscape imply something like the tension between it and narrative found in the Soviet director's discussion of the matter. In other words, the authors of this volume agree that in investigating landscape in film one is considering an object that amounts to much more than the mere spatial background that necessarily accompanies the depiction of actions and events. The actual nature of that object which, in fiction films, lies in excess of its narrative function as setting, and which can also be found in other regimes of filmmaking (early cinema's "system of attractions," experimental cinema, and "home movies"), constitutes the real subject matter of this collection. How, then, are landscapes etched into films? What sort of role do they play? How do they relate to the still landscapes of the pictorial tradition and notions such as the picturesque or the sublime? What is their ideological or symbolic function?

Landscape is a multifaceted and pluridisciplinary spatial object whose meanings and representations extend from real-life environments to art. It is "practiced" or studied by, among others, architects (landscape architecture), artists (painting, "land art"), art historians, writers and literary critics, geographers, historians, urban planners, ecologists and environmentalists, and, of course, filmmakers and film scholars. Furthermore, it is relevant in aesthetics as well as in economic and political debates over land development and exploitation, tourism, and national identity and sovereignty. Yet despite all this attention, and perhaps because it is so widely spread among different knowledge formations and disciplines, landscape remains notoriously difficult to define, having apparently no single set of fixed criteria outside of its spatial nature. For instance, J. B. Jackson (the founding editor of *Landscape* magazine whose pioneering work on ordinary landscapes beginning in the 1950s—influenced in part by the French movement of *géographie humaine*—inspired a whole generation of American cultural geographers to "read" landscapes) admitted as much when he wrote

> For more than 25 years I have been trying to understand and explain that aspect of the environment that I call the landscape. I have written about it, lectured about it, travelled widely to find out about it; and yet I must admit that the concept continues to elude me. Perhaps one reason for this is that I persist in seeing it not as a scenic or ecological entity but as a political or cultural entity, changing in the course of history.[3]

Cultural geographers insist that landscapes do not exist independently of human investment toward space, which is one way of distinguishing them from the idea of "nature." For nature is that which we usually conceive of as existing independently from us, whereas it is our (real and imaginary) interaction with nature and the environment that produces the landscape. In other words, should humans and all things human disappear from the face of the earth tomorrow, nature as we conceive of it would likely continue to exist (and even possibly thrive!), which is more than we could say for landscapes. This much is obvious, in fact, when we consider the emergence of landscape painting in the West during the late Renaissance.

The first autonomous landscape paintings in Europe were produced during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries at the hands of artists such as El Greco, Joachim Patinir, Albrecht Altdorfer, Annibale Carracci, Jan Joseph van Goyen, Jacob von Ruisdael, and Claude Lorrain. These works were produced after centuries of using nature as a backdrop to paintings. Like most historians of landscape painting, the philosopher Edward S. Casey observes that

> It is a remarkable fact that what we now call routinely "landscape painting" was unknown in the ancient world of the West. Nothing like the broad vistas, the commodious scenes that we consider to be the sine qua non of landscape painting, is to be found in the art of earlier times. At the most, this art included a schematic landscape vista that served as a literal background for the myth or story that was the subject matter and the primary focus of the scene.[4]

But why this change of attitude from artists after centuries of representing the natural environment as a mere place-setting and not, as the "primary focus," or the Argument of a work? There can be no simple answer to this question, which has haunted art historians at least since Ruskin.[5] For instance, one would surely wish to consider factors that concern art, such as changes in its social function during the Renaissance, or the rise of the modern persona of the Artist and of artistic individuality through style, or again the development of linear perspective. But several other factors would also need to be taken into account that affected the European sensibility toward the natural world during that period. Thus, for instance, the translation into the vernacular tongues of works by Theocritus, Ovid, Virgil, Pliny, and Horace participated in a revival of pastoral literature—from Boccaccio to Milton. But the development of landscape painting also benefited from a more favourable philosophical and religious context. While the Church had long been suspicious of the contemplation of earthly, sensual, things,[6] Renaissance Humanists began (at the peril of their lives!) developing the idea that God was in everything—including nature. Moreover, in the Northern countries, Reformation iconoclasm led artists, who could no longer find religious commissions, to adopt secular subject matters.

Of course, the Renaissance was also a time of great scientific discoveries (heliocentrism), social changes (development of capitalism and, with it, new forms of land management and changing relations between city and country), and travel (discovery of the New World; establishment of new commercial routes to the Orient and to Africa; improvements in topography and cartography) that profoundly transformed European conceptions and experience of space and environment. When we conceive of the emergence of landscape painting in the West as related to all these changes we are obviously committing ourselves to the idea that landscape, as Malcolm Andrews puts it, "is already an artifice before it has become the subject of a work of art."[7] But this is not to say that landscape art is a simple mirror reflection of that artifice, for art is a place where the "artifice of landscape" develops and transforms itself, a place where human beings not only recognize their investment in space but also redefine it.

Difficulty in pinning down the entity that we call "landscape" can be traced back to the term's origin. The word itself only entered into the English lexicon in the seventeenth century as "landskip" (or sometimes "landtskip") and was borrowed either from the Middle Dutch "*landschap*" or "*landscap*," the Flemish "*lantskip*," or the German "*landschaft*." Old English equivalents to the German suffix "*-shaft*" include "-scipe" (the modern form of which is "-ship"), which was related to "gesceap" or "gescape" and to Middle English words in the family of the verb "ishapen," all of which mean to give *form* or *shape* (in the sense of creating something). Of course, the current suffix "-ship" may be understood to carry part of that meaning if one is ready to concede that a noun like "friendship," in denoting a state or a condition of being, also stands for the *form* of the relation that unites people who are friends. But what sort of "form" is implied by the "*landschap*" or "land-shape"?

There is something that happens when, say, hiking in some wildlife reserve or looking down from the window of a airplane or even driving on some stretch of highway, we look at the natural environment *as if* it were framed.[8] This purely mental activity can also be reproduced—even more forcefully so—by looking through a camera's *viewfinder*. The term itself betrays the process involved: that of finding a view by creating or shaping it through the framing.[9] What happens in such circumstances can be understood as the construction (or replication) of a form: suddenly the view becomes organized, it "holds" together as a whole, there is either balance or imbalance in the composition, etc. It can now become a landscape. Form now reigns where previously there stood only the "formlessness" of pure (spatial) continuity. The origins of that frame and of its shaping powers are lost to us today as we cannot extirpate ourselves from some 500 years of Western landscape imagery. The form of landscape is thus first of all the form of a view, of a particular gaze that requires a frame. With that frame nature turns into culture, land into landscape. But though it may be foundational for the emergence of landscape—and especially for landscape art—geographers and other landscape scholars often remind us that the view itself cannot be divorced from other experiential aspects that accompany it. It follows that the form of a landscape also corresponds to the form of our experience of it, with the latter including representations of the different personal, cultural, and social functions it can associate to or serve.

Thus it is, for instance, that the historian Simon Schama, in *Landscape and Memory*, has worked at unearthing the various mythical sediments that layer and *frame* our interaction with landscapes. Schama's argument is that "landscapes are culture before they are nature; constructs of the imagination projected onto wood and water and rock"[10] and that furthermore these often ancient constructs, whose origins are sometimes forgotten, continue nonetheless to haunt our interactions with and representa-

tions of land as landscapes. Others, such as geographers Denis Cosgrove and Jay Appleton, have opted for Marxist and anthropological perspectives, respectively. Cosgrove sees landscape as an "ideological concept" that "represents a way in which certain classes of people have signified themselves and their world through their imagined relationships with nature, and through which they have underlined and communicated their own social role and that of others with respect to external nature."[11] As for Appleton, he has argued that what usually stands as the preferred forms of landscape in art are really views of space that offer strategic or tactical advantage as prospect ("unimpeded opportunity to see") or refuge ("an opportunity to hide"), thus relating aesthetic forms to spatial forms expressing group survival.[12] Whether we agree with the various perspectives offered by these (and many other) landscape scholars, all of them have followed J. B. Jackson's call to study landscape as something anchored in human life.

Now, there can be no doubt that film contributes to this "anchorage" of landscape in human life and participates in the process of "imaginative projection" discussed by Schama, all the while being haunted as well by layers of past landscape projections. Nowhere is this more obvious perhaps than in those landscapes that have become such an integral part of the iconography of Western films. When I travel through that part of Navajo land that straddles Utah and Arizona known as Monument Valley, I cannot but help think of Hollywood Westerns, especially John Ford's films. My own "framing" of the land, the photos I take, are all "contaminated" by my experience and memory of these films, of what that stretch of land has come to stand for symbolically. The cinema has thus dramatically transformed the experience that we have of that land—and in this regard, readers will not be surprised to find that several essays in this volume refer to the Western and to Ford's Monument Valley. But this, as mentioned earlier, is only the most obvious case of cinematic projection onto landscape.

In presenting what he regards as three "symbolic landscapes" in America (the New England Village; Main Street of Middle America; and California Suburbia), geographer Donald W. Meinig hinted at the importance of film when considering how "actual landscapes become symbolic landscapes."

> For the past 60 years the cinema has been widely assumed to have had a powerful impact on popular attitudes toward many things. It has displayed an enormous range of landscapes to millions of people, and within those myriad scenes there have been some which were obviously meant to convey settings representative of some concept of the ordinary good and happy life in America. An efficient beginning for an investigation of these would be a study of the character of the outdoor sets which the major motion-picture

> companies maintained on their lots during the peak of the Hollywood era circa 1920s–1950s. One suspects, for example, that "small town America" was filmed time and again on essentially the same set in which the facades of an idealized "typical" Main Street, church, and a few residences had been created. A logical extension of such an inquiry would be an inventory of the actual towns which were used for on-location filming of similar kinds of shows.[13]

And yet, film scholars have been slow in responding to invitations such as Meinig's or, more recently, that of W. J. T. Mitchell, whose revisionist approach to landscape as a "dynamic medium" acting out on the political stage of identity formation is, he tells us, greatly influenced by the existence of *moving* cinematic landscapes—as opposed to the motionless landscapes of still media.[14] As a result, the present volume is, at the time of writing these lines, the first English language collection devoted to this topic.[15]

The aim of this book is twofold. First, it seeks to offer the reader a series of views of cinematic landscapes produced from varying perspectives. As a result, *auteur* studies and textual analyses will be seen standing next to regional or national approaches to landscape; historical research on early cinema landscapes next to generic studies; narrative next to non-narrative forms; formal considerations over *mise-en-scène* next to ideological considerations regarding the national landscape; and so on. The goal, however, is not to produce a complete or integrative overview of the issues raised by landscape with regard to the different sites of interests of the discipline of film studies—something no single collection of essays could presumably ever hope to achieve—but to offer instead a group of variegated intellectual "*vedute*" in order to underscore the vastness of the terrain that needs to be represented. Second, and in a related vein, the goal is also to showcase views taken from both sides of the Atlantic by selecting authors whose works represent the different film studies traditions of North America and Europe as well as other disciplines concerned with landscape representation (art history, literature, geography), and whose interests, in some instances, take them well beyond the borders of either Western or narrative filmmaking.

An outline of the various sections of the volume and of each essay's main arguments should make clear the adopted trajectory for the book and provide readers with a map to help them navigate through the various issues and points of view that find expression in the thirteen chapters that follow. The essays have been divided into four sections. These, however, should not be conceived as air-tight and readers will most likely find several overlaps between chapters in the different sections.

The first section, Space, Setting, Landscape, takes up the issue of the representation of space on film by way of comparisons with two other

artistic media, the stage (theatre or opera) and painting. Jacques Aumont's "The Invention of Place: Danièle Huillet and Jean-Marie Straub's *Moses and Aaron*" investigates the cinematic adaptation of Arnold Schoenberg's opera by the two avant-garde filmmakers. Devoid of clear stage directions, Schoenberg's libretto locates the narrative in nondescript biblical locations (the Burning Bush, Mount Sinai, the Desert) that suggest abstract metaphysical space more than real physical space. And indeed, Aumont observes that most stage productions of the opera have avoided attempts at rendering a "realist" space, adopting instead a more symbolic representation. With a film adaptation, however, the opposite might seem tempting, as it was with Joseph Losey's *Don Giovanni* or Francesco Rosi's *Carmen,* both of which opted for a Hollywood-like strategy of spatial realism in their choice and screen treatment of locations. Aumont shows that nothing could be further from Straub's and Huillet's intention in choosing to set the first two acts of *Moses and Aaron* in the amphitheatre at Alba Fucens, situated near Rome and dating back to the first century. The intricacies of the *mise-en-scène*, camera framing, and editing of this space, with its architecture and surrounding landscape, are painstakingly examined by Aumont's textual analysis of a film that avoids classical cinema's procedures for constructing filmic space. In the process, we discover how much a film can gain in complexity from the use of an historically and culturally layered *real* landscape, such as the ancient amphitheatre of Alba Fucens. With the help of the *mise-en-scène*—"the human figures of the drama, costume, postures, and gestures"—the landscape comes to evoke what Aumont calls an implicit "underground reservoir" of meaning, memory, history, and death—a process he sees as an authorial signature in most of the works of Straub and Huillet. In the end, Aumont argues that film can be made to expressively reveal the subsoil of a landscape and project it symbolically onto the narrative by allowing "the spectator to engage in the mental—and affective—work of gaining access to the film's location, at once as a substratum of the filming and as an imaginary framework for the drama."

In the second chapter, "Between Setting and Landscape in the Cinema," I examine "landscape" in film as a spatial *predicate* distinct from "setting" or "territory." All three terms are understood as different ways we have developed for representing space to ourselves: as the location for some unfolding action (setting); as a space of aesthetic contemplation and spectacle (landscape); and as a *lived* space that we possess—or would like to possess (territory). The essay seeks mostly to distinguish landscape from setting in the context of narrative cinema and on the grounds of the Western art of landscape painting. Drawing from works as diverse as Laura Mulvey's famous "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema" essay[16] or Tom Gunning and André Gaudreault's equally well-known description of a "system of monstrative attractions" at work in early cinema,[17] I

argue that we need to distinguish, *within* what Gunning and Gaudreault have called the "system of narrative cinema," between "narrative" and "spectacular" modes of spectatorship. I then try to show how landscape relates to the second of these modes and how it relies on a certain type of gaze whose earliest manifestations seem to be traceable to the Renaissance. Through this gaze natural space finally emancipated itself from its role as mere narrative setting in Western painting. This historically constructed gaze may be active in filmmakers and in film spectators as well. This idea leads to distinguishing between "two paradigms that define the poles of an interpretive spectrum: in one case, the spectator imputes to the film (or to its director) the intention to present a landscape…in the other, the spectator must assume the he/she is the source of the cinematic landscape." The proposition is then fleshed out by considering examples from both interpretive paradigms.

The volume's second section, entitled National Landscapes and Cultural Identities and Traditions, is concerned with the function film landscapes play in identity formation either by way of ideology or their connection to national traditions in the fine arts and cultural matters at large.

As indicated by the titles of the first two chapters in this section, Jean Mottet's "Toward a Genealogy of the American Landscape: Notes on Landscapes in D. W. Griffith (1908–1912)" and Maurizia Natali's "The Course of the Empire: Sublime Landscapes in the American Cinema," both authors attend to American film landscapes. Jean Mottet's contribution concerns Griffith's work during his days at Biograph, which he sees as being an important source in the development of American cinema's use of landscape imagery at a time when the new medium was attempting to create and share its vision of America and its worldview. Situating Griffith within what was already an established tradition toward nature in American philosophy (Emerson, Thoreau, Crevecoeur) and fine arts (the Hudson River School, the American Impressionists, Winslow Homer), Mottet examines three Griffithian landscapes: the ideal country homestead, the seashore, and the West.

The first of these landscapes is set in the mythical tradition of the pastoral into which Americans introduced new sets of concerns as they sought to provide themselves with their own sense of national identity. The second, the ocean shoreline, argues Mottet, offers a different view of Griffith's approach to landscape, one closer in spirit to the paintings of Winslow Homer after his return to America. "One gets the impression," writes Mottet, "that, in Griffith's work, the sea encourages a rupture with ordinary experience in favor of a more spiritual quest." Finally, Mottet considers Griffith's representation of America's Southwestern landscape. Although none of the filmmaker's early work can properly be considered to fall into the generic category of the western, Mottet demonstrates that in those films which are set in the Southwest, Griffith abandoned his usual

landscape references (from painting and literature) and instead adopted a new approach that showcased several "primitive functions" of the soon to be classical Western film landscape. More specifically, by referring to the work of Jay Appleton, Mottet shows that, combined with the use of long shots, Griffith's use of the age-old distinction between prospect and refuge in a narrative context of embattled space constitutes the cornerstone of what will become the American Western's use of landscape.

In "The Course of the Empire: Sublime Landscapes in the American Cinema," Maurizia Natali also considers the key role played by American painters of the nineteenth century in the depiction of a national landscape expressing the political ambitions of the young nation. The trajectory Natali charts goes from Hudson River School founder Thomas Cole's *The Course of Empire*—a series of five canvases, first exhibited in 1836, showing the transformations undergone by a single landscape over the "course of empire": from the *Savage State*, to the *Pastoral or Arcadian State*, the *Consummation of Empire*, *Destruction*, and *Desolation*—to the live television images of the destruction and ruins of the World Trade Center following the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001. Between these two sets of images, Natali places 100 years of American cinematic landscapes which she considers as forming an immense "wall of screens" or theatre of memory addressed to the world.

According to Natali, what unites these American landscapes—those of nineteenth century painters such as Cole and Frederic Church, of Hollywood movies, and the ruins of 9/11—are ideological and iconological scenarios (*pathos formulae* to use Aby Warburg's term) having to do with "sublime imperial fantasies," i.e., with "*the primary U.S. fantasy* of being (or behaving as) an Empire":

> like *pathos formulae*, Hollywood's dramatic "figures in the landscape" are iconological and political compositions that display uncanny likenesses, survivals and returns from past U.S. history and ideology. Film landscapes are never purely narrative backgrounds nor simply distracting spectacular settings. They bear the traces of political projects and ideological messages. They press onto viewers' senses, memories, and fears and become part of their memory, carrying the subliminal strength of a past, even archaic, worldview ready to come back as future progress. Like the footprints left on the surface of the moon by U.S. astronauts, Hollywood landscapes bear the footprints of the United States' recurrent manifest destiny.

Natali concludes her essay with a survey of Hollywood's own "Course of Empire" from E. S. Porter's *The Great Train Robbery* to Roland Emmerich's *The Day After Tomorrow*.

In "Asphalt Nomadism: The New Desert in Arab Independent Cinema," Laura U. Marks examines the "desert" landscapes of contemporary Arabic independent films. The desert, of course, has long been an important part of life in the Middle East, around which nomadic and sedentary cultures have had to "position" themselves. And though the desert is first of all a *real* space—a space that, Marks's claims, has been increasingly left behind by Arabs in past decades—it is also a *figural* space, a space that exists relationally with regards to what Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari call "the smooth and the striated." Of course, as Marks observes, there is no such thing as a purely smooth space: "Once you explore it [smooth space], it springs into complex life on scales both micro and macro." At best, the desert as perfectly smooth is an "outsider's fantasy." And yet, *relatively* speaking, there is an important part of smoothness in the desert. Marks's understanding of the desert is further characterized by the *mu'allaqat*, the odes of pre-Islamic nomads. Accordingly, the desert, as concept, shares with the odes a number of properties: "nomadic, nonteleological, self-organized, embodied, and concrete." But as Islam made more converts in the Middle East, it affected the nomadic life of the desert. "Monotheism," writes Marks, "cannot tolerate nomads."

Islam, however, is only one of the factors that bears on sedentarisation in the Middle East. Another one is oil. And in that regard, one of the ironies that underpins Marks's analysis of contemporary independent Arabic road movies is the bond that exists in the Middle East between the desert and the road. Indeed, both spaces come to mirror each other—literally, i.e., as inverted images—through their connection to oil: the desert being the place where oil is found and produced, and the asphalt road—made from petroleum—the place where it is consumed. This inversion carries over to the structural relation between smooth and striated spaces. For as Marks notes, oil exploitation in the Middle East is the "final" and "decisive" striation of the desert whereby the "Arab world was incorporated into the global economy at expense of place." Oil exacerbated the pressure on nomadic populations to accept a sedentary lifestyle: "Some Bedouins," writes Marks, "got airconditioned cars and became sedentary and fat; others simply became immiserated." And yet, perversely, it is on the roads built for those very machines for which oil is extracted—the Land Cruisers and Maximas of films such as Abdallah al Junaibi's *When?*, Joana Hadjithomas' and Khalil Joriege's *Rounds*, Rehab Omar Ateeq's *The Car or the Wife*, or Hani el Shibani's *A Warm Winter Night*—that the new asphalt nomadism of independent films emerges.

Catherine Russell's "The Inhabited View: Landscape in the Films of David Rimmer" explores the work of the celebrated Canadian

experimental filmmaker. Russell situates Rimmer's "structural" films in the context of political and philosophical debates in Canadian aesthetics in such a way as to challenge accepted ideas regarding the notion of nationalist art practice. English Canadian writers such as George Grant, Northrop Frye, Harold Innis, Marshall McLuhan, Margaret Atwood, and Gaile McGregor have all attempted to define the Canadian national character with regards to how Canadians interact with nature and technology, either in real life or in the imaginary worlds of fiction and art. Most often, the goal is to distinguish Canadian identity from American identity. In that context, a critical idiom has arisen which sees landscape art as a representation of alienation toward and recoil from nature and thus as an outgrowth of what Northrop Frye has called the "garrison mentality"[18]: a view of nature and of the Northern Frontier as so oppressive, threatening, and alien that it requires being kept at bay by the building of fortified walls and mental garrisons. Gaile McGregor has called this the "Wacousta Syndrome" in reference to Major John Richardson's 1832 novel *Wacousta*.[19] Russell offers close study of several films by Rimmer, examining framing and composition, in order to contest the claim that his work is exemplary of McGregor's Wacousta Syndrome. Indeed, through structural cinema's foregrounding of off-screen space—the space occupied by the filmmaker—the films suggest instead an "inhabited" or "domesticated" view of the Canadian landscape. The natural world of *Canadian Pacific I* and *II* and *Landscape*, writes Russell, "far from being 'monstrous'…it becomes a home for the eye, a restful and welcoming sight that reaches forward to the vanishing points of perspective, completing a structure of representation that includes and is predicated on the viewing subject-position." Landscape, here, is not so much "nature" (the wild and threatening fantasy screen of so many Canadian cultural critics), but a cultural production in its own right.

In the process, Russell critiques McGregor's work for mimicking "the worst features of the American mythology it aims to counter." She then goes on to propose a less totalizing, and more "local" and historical, context to investigate the films of Rimmer by considering his involvement in the Vancouver artistic community. The point of this critique is to dispute the notion that one can look at landscape or art through a totalizing nationalistic gaze and to offer instead a more ecological perspective that considers the specific geo-historical context of production as well as the specificity of the medium used. As shown by the example of Zacharius Kunuk's Inuit-produced feature *Atanarjuat*, Russell argues that one's uninhabitable landscape can easily be integrated into another's "visual culture of everyday life."

The move toward a more local understanding of landscape is echoed in Heather Nicholson's consideration of amateur filmmakers' landscape imagery—a popular subject matter for nonprofessional filmmakers

since the beginning of hobby cinematography during the 1920s. In "Sites of Meaning: Gallipoli and other Mediterranean Landscapes in Amateur Films (c. 1928–1960)," Nicholson investigates some of the reasons that led amateur filmmakers to include landscape imagery in their "home movies" and how this practice allowed for the formation and circulation of landscape meanings. More specifically she examines the footage produced by a retired British army officer, Lt. Colonel James Fitzwilliam O'Grady, who had served during World War I and fought the Turks at Gallipoli, on the western shore of the Dardanelles. Almost 20 years later, in 1934, O'Grady returned to the battlefields of the Dardanelles armed this time with a 16 mm camera. Nicholson explains how the resulting film, *Gallipoli Revisited, 1934. A Pilgrimage Cruise*, "documents on 16 mm black and white silent film stock with intertitles a commemorative tour of the different battlefield sites and war memorials associated with the Gallipoli campaign." Nicholson observes that the landscapes included in home movies and nonprofessional travel films generally participate in deliberate "memorializing acts" that "approximate the diaries, notebooks, and image making of earlier commentators." As such, home movies, much like nonprofessional photography, can help us better understand how individuals and families "mediate, negotiate, and circulate specific identities in public spaces." Thus, because of O'Grady's own personal connection to the sites where he had fought, been wounded, and lost many of his comrades in arms, his "filmic framing of landscape features," Nicholson notes, "convey a poignancy that is associated with his own acts of remembrance."

In "The Presence (and Absence) of Landscape in Silent East Asian Films," Peter Rist investigates the use of exterior locations in Chinese, Korean, and Japanese silent cinema and questions the possible ties that exist among them and the Asian scroll landscape painting tradition. The chapter begins by briefly outlining the history, period styles, and aesthetic principles of Oriental landscape painting, lamenting in passing how poorly Asian art is represented in Western art history textbooks. Rist points out the importance this pictorial tradition has given to the ability of artists to use landscape for evoking mood and atmosphere, and for producing what Alexander Soper calls "animation through spirit consonance." Moving on to film, Rist observes that "during the silent film era…there was very little aesthetic use made of the landscape and even less in the way of allusion to landscape painting." Rather, exterior locations tended mostly to be used as settings for narrative action and special effects. There were nonetheless important exceptions to the rule, as Rist points out. These were films where landscape shots were used poetically and pictorially instead of simply serving the narrative.

Whereas Eisenstein saw Asian scroll landscapes as an early form of pictorial representation that was to eventually evolve into cinematic mon-

tage,[20] Rist is more concerned with connecting *horizontal scrolls* to the figure of the lateral moving camera and with examining how the moods the latter create compare with the feel of Asian landscape paintings. Indeed, Rist shows how, in the absence of direct references to the landscape tradition, formal features such as camera movements and parallel editing of shots with a landscape component managed nonetheless to capture some of the basic principles of Oriental landscape painting in the way they pertain to "resonant visual and emotional correspondences." After an overview of the use of landscape imagery in the work of many of the most important Asian filmmakers of the silent period, including Ozu Yasujiro and Mizoguchi Kenji, Rist concludes by turning to the relatively little-known silent films of Japanese director Shimizu Hiroshi, whom he considers to be "East Asia's first truly original 'landscape' filmmaker" and "the first important director of 'road movies' in world cinema history."

The penultimate section of this volume, Early Film Landscapes, is devoted to landscape in early cinema. In some sense, this was perhaps the golden age of cinematic landscapes, the age of the "cinema of attractions" and of non-narrative "landscape" genres such as "scenics" and travel films. But if travel films were popular, how did the notion of a "moving landscape," a notion so different from the fixed-point views long associated with the picturesque in painting and even photography, ever come to be naturalized in visual media? What are its sources? In their chapter, "From Flatland to Vernacular Relativity: The Genesis of Early English Screenscapes," David B. Clarke and Marcus A. Doel investigate the origins of this transformation by way of some of the various devices produced for the capture and exhibition of images that accompanied the new regime of vision introduced by the nineteenth century. This new regime was marked by what the authors portray as a "democratization of spectatorship" in that it challenged the fixed centrality of classical perspective through mobility and depth and eventually "transformed the picturesque notion of landscape." Clarke and Doel examine how the ground for this transformation which culminated with the arrival of film was laid by pre-cinematic apparatuses such as the panorama, the diorama, and the stereograph. But this process of transformation in visual culture culminating with the cinema did not always progress smoothly. Indeed, Clarke and Doel's essay also documents some of the tensions that accompanied it and that were responsible, in their view, for the failure of the British film industry in the early years of filmmaking. British directors, they claim, simply succumbed to a pre-cinematic conception of the picturesque under the weight of a landscape art tradition deeply connected to English national identity.

In "Landscape and Archive: Trips Around the World as Early Film Topic (1896–1914)," Antonio Costa reminds us of the importance of the "trip around the world" theme in the first two decades of the cinema,

that is, from the moment the Lumière brothers sent out their operators to capture moving images from the four corners of the globe. The theme itself, the interest it managed to arouse in early film viewers, must be conceived in the context of the new culture of time and space that was ushered in by the nineteenth century and which fully expressed itself in such events as the Paris World Fair of 1900 or the Pan-American Exposition of Buffalo the following year, both of which prominently featured film exhibits and world travel themes. Throughout the essay, Costa discusses the Lumière catalogue (the world's first archive to include moving images of landscapes) as well as other films and projects concerned with showing views taken from around the world. These principally include a film by documentary pioneer Luca Comerio, *Dal Polo all'Equatore* (*From the Pole to the Equator*), that was rediscovered during the mid-1980s through the work of Italian avant-garde filmmakers Yervant Gianikian and Angela Ricci Lucchi; Albert Khan's fantastic "Archives de la planète" project which used film along with world gardens to document and even "reproduce a…scale model of the unceasing process of transformation, of the evolution of life, from the infinitely small to the infinitely big"; and Marcel Fabre's 1914 adaptation of Albert Robida's famous novel *Voyages très extraordinaires de Saturnin Farandoul dans les 5 ou 6 parties du monde et dans tous les pays connus et même inconnus de M. Jules Verne* (*Saturnin Farandoul's Most Extraordinary Trips in the 5 or 6 Parts of the World and in All the Known and Even Unknown Countries of Mr. Jules Verne*), a spoof of the Vernian novel which, adapted to the screen, parodies early cinema's trip around the world *topos* and its "implications in terms of adventure, knowledge, and conquest." All of these productions and projects offer variations on the same theme, which Costa describes. But the heart of the matter, writes Costa in his conclusion, is really to illustrate "that there is no single or unique landscape-function in early cinema, instead, various functions are distributed along several paths."

The final section, Landscape *Auteurs*, takes a look at the work of three directors who have made landscape a key part of their *oeuvre*: Peter Greenaway, Anthony Mann, and Michelangelo Antonioni.

In "A Walk Through Heterotopia: Peter Greenaway's Landscapes by Numbers," Bridget Elliott and Anthony Purdy step into the labyrinth—or, better yet, the hall of mirrors—of Peter Greenaway's cinema by way of an abandoned project for a television series entitled *Fear of Drowning* whose nine episodes were outlined by the filmmaker in a book he published in 1988, shortly after the release of *Drowning by Numbers*.[21] The episodes of increasing length were to act as a prequel of sorts to *Drowning by Numbers*. Landscape elements play an important role in Greenaway's description of the episodes and Elliott and Purdy recognize in them the influence of British Land Art. Following the trail of allusions, resonances, analogies, and rhymes that leads from *Fear of Drowning* to Greenaway's early films as well as the allusions, resonances, analogies, and rhymes that one finds

between them (for instance, the "H" of *A Walk Through H* and *H is for House*, or the recurring use of the number 92, etc.) Elliott and Purdy come to see the "heterotopian" nature of Greenaway's films, including *Drowning by Numbers*—the focus of the second part of the essay.

Moreover, for Elliott and Purdy, *Drowning by Numbers*' treatment of space, and of landscape in particular, can also be seen as a commentary of sorts on the similitudes and differences that exist between narrative cinema and painting. The film, they write, reveals narrative cinema's "limitations as a genre capable of adequately representing the complexities of landscape…the emphasis on the highly contrived nature of the landscape [being] a way of drawing the viewer's attention to the filmmaker's dilemma" in that regard. On the other hand, Greenaway's film continually quotes from paintings—including landscape paintings. But he does so in ways opposite to the classical narrative cinema's traditional approach to figure/ground relations with regards to natural settings. Particular attention is then given to Greenaway's treatment of a painting by William Holman Hunt which is seen to reverse "the typical Hollywood practice of making the landscape serve the narrative by situating it, authenticating it, and reflecting human emotions and psychological states." In the end, the authors claim that "Greenaway's approach to film and to landscape is… that of a painter" as well as that of a literary "allegorist." However, much will be lost, they argue, if one fails as well to recognize in the director's work the influence of Land Artists such as Richard Long.

The next chapter in this section, Tom Conley's "Landscape and Perception: On Anthony Mann," offers close readings of two of Mann's famous 1950s Westerns, *Winchester 73* and *The Man from Laramie*. Conley begins by considering a metaphor once used by Christian Metz to portray cinematic enunciation. In *L'énonciation impersonelle ou le site du film*, Metz argues that, unlike verbal language, the source of filmic discourse doesn't lie in real persons but in the (imaginary) space, or geography, of the "depersonalized" image (or *text*) where remains only a trace of the film's source or target.[22] The absence—*invisibility* or *lack*—of "persons" leads Metz to characterize this textual space as a "landscape." But what if we are to take this "landscape" metaphor literally as a way of investigating the "real" landscapes of the cinema? This is precisely what Conley sets out to do with the help of the concept of "perspectival object" borrowed from the work of French psychoanalyst Guy Rosolato.

As Conley points out, "for Rosolato, the task of psychoanalysis entails the exploration of our perception of the unknown." In some sense, the perspectival object is to the subject what the "vanishing point" is to painting: that which organizes the space and makes it visible while being absent from it, unknown to it. In film, argues Conley, the perspectival object appears in moments (or rather landscapes) when "speech becomes textual," and the image becomes "legible."

One example will suffice here to give readers a sense of Conley's landscape hermeneutic. Looking at *Winchester 73*, Conley notices how much the shape of the giant cactuses seen in the landscape resembles that of a repeating rifle with its barrel stuck into the earth: "We see a world of spiked and spurred gun-cactuses that proliferate the very enigma that inhabited the film since the inscription of the title on [a] hillside. 'Winchester 73s' are frozen everywhere in the landscape, but the hero, bent on finding the object of his quest, gallops forward, entirely blind to its presence." Such blindness is the counterpart to the hero's fetishistic relation to the prized rifle that the embattled brothers both seek to own. But since the cactuses also resemble "fossilized dejections," they also *make visible* the nature of the hero's drive and render more complex the relations that exist between the rifle and the landscape which are first made legible—quite literally so—through the credit sequence (the title of the film, which also happens to be the name of the rifle, is first seen written onto a hillside, espousing the hill's shape). "From the overlay of interpretations," writes Conley, "it can be deduced that the perspectival object, a point spotting the visibility and invisibility of what is known and unknown, is made manifest whenever the decor is both a landscape *and* a field of textual images which both the hero and spectator are impelled to decrypt." These are moments where the visual regime of a film may be referred to what Deleuze has called the "perception-image," a style of image that often characterizes long shots and *a fortiori* classical Western films, and where the "interval" between visibility and invisibility, or insight and blindness, comes to manifest itself. Conley uses these concepts to explore the "pictogrammatic" fields of Mann's two films, which he sees as foregrounding the cinema's ability to turn the image into a legible and language-like surface able to "address" viewer and character alike.

In the final chapter, "The Cinematic Void: Desert Iconographies in Michelangelo Antonioni's *Zabriskie Point*," Matthew Gandy takes a new look at the most overtly political—and often neglected—film by the famous Italian director. Because Antonioni's best known work is what Seymour Chatman has dubbed "the great tetralogy,"[23] he is often thought of as an exclusively urban filmmaker who uses city and industrial landscapes to give resonance to his critique of the emotional decay of modern life. Yet, in the 30-year period between *Del gente del Po* and *The Passenger*, Antonioni has often integrated natural landscape settings to his films. Gandy, in fact, observes that one "can trace a shift within Antonioni's films from the neorealist 'urban deserts' portrayed in earlier features such as *La notte* and *L'eclisse* toward a gradual engagement with real deserts as powerful metaphors for social and cultural redemption in *Zabriskie Point* and *The Passenger*."

Gandy is particularly interested in the way the desert is used in *Zabriskie Point* as the centrepiece of Antonioni's critique of American culture and of its landscapes of violence (university campus), consumption (the giant

billboards), and waste. But he is equally concerned with situating this critique within the discourses of modernity, and therefore with historicizing Antonioni's approach to landscape. Refuting recent claims according to which Antonioni's desert landscapes share important similarities with the early postmodernism of North American Land Art during the late 1960s, Gandy situates instead *Zabriskie Point*'s allegorical landscape squarely within the "high modernist" tradition as it integrates into the filmmaker's "largely teleological, dualistic, and hierarchical conception of modern culture." In such a context, Death Valley's desert appears as a "primitivist" and even Romantic denunciation of the film's modern, consumer capitalist culture. However, it also connects with certain forms of sublime high modernist abstraction in art: the desert's emptiness possibly suggesting the "empty canvases" of Abstract-Expressionist–inspired colour field painting, for instance. These various strands come together in what Gandy sees as the universalist conception of nature that the film manifests, a conception where "the perceived antinomy between nature and culture is never seriously challenged." The issue, however, is not to question whether this conception of nature is flawed or not (it is according to Gandy) but to situate it historically as a discursive artifact in relation to the discourses of modernity—something that has hardly been done with regards to Antonioni's work. Only then does it become possible to see Antonioni's desert as a "powerful tableau for the enactment of a particular form of cultural critique framed within the teleological discourses of modernist thought."

Part of my journey through cinematic landscapes ends here as that of new readers of these essays begins. I can only hope that their own travels through them will be as rewarding as mine have been. I equally hope that the map provided by these introductory notes will have been helpful to those interested in surveying the territory before them prior to directly moving into it—and being moved by it—at their own pace. Though natural settings in cinema have long been overlooked (the other side of the Eisensteinian comparison of film landscapes with film music is that both risk "invisibility"), they are far from being irrelevant with regards to the way we experience films, as illustrated by the various essays gathered here. Landscape connects film both to the world and to the various traditions and reasons for representing it. If anything, I hope that this volume will encourage others to further explore this highly complex relation. Finally, readers on both sides of the Atlantic will notice that the language used in essays written by American, British, and Canadian scholars has not been standardised and therefore reflects each collaborator's geographic point of origin.[24] Indeed it was felt that, rather than unify the text in this way, a volume devoted to landscape should be sensitive to geographic specificity. Now on to the sights!

notes

1. Sergei M. Eisenstein, *Nonindifferent Nature*, trans. Herbert Marshall (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 355; hereafter cited in text.
2. See "The Fourth Dimension in Cinema," in S. M. Eisenstein, *Selected Works. Vol. I, Writings*, 1922-34, ed. and trans. Richard Taylor (London: BFI, 1988), 181–194. This, of course, is not the only example of "musical landscape" in Eisenstein. Indeed, a stunning—though conceptually flawed—example can be found in his account of a scene from Alexander Nevsky in the essay entitled "Vertical Montage." There, Eisenstein argues that shots can be perceived in a linear and temporal fashion such that the shape of their "contents" can be transposed to music. The (failed) analogy works on the premise that the image will be "read"—or visually scanned—from left to right with the eyes following the contours of the bi-dimensional shapes in much the same way that one "reads" a musical score with the succession of notes forming a similar visual outline. The point that matters here is that Eisenstein chooses a portion of the film where landscape is dominant in the composition of the shots and where the "action" has come to a halt (this is the moment before the battle when everyone waits). See "Vertical Montage," in S. M. Eisenstein, *Selected Works. Vol. II, Towards a Theory of Montage*, eds. Michael Glenny and Richard Taylor, trans. Richard Taylor (London: BFI, 1991), 327–399. As Anne Nesbet recently observed, "Eisenstein reads the landscape as if it were a musical score; he reads the score as if it were a landscape. He discovers in this peculiarly synaesthetic landscape its essential 'gesture', its bones, the way music and landscape animate and inhabit each other." *Savage Junctures. Sergei Eisenstein and the Shape of Thinking* (London: I. B. Taurus, 2003), 177. Finally, Eisenstein's conception of the "emotional landscape" must be grasped in the context of his understanding of nature as "nonindifferent," as (already) dialectical, and in his attempt to use art as a way of insuring the communion of Man and Nature through an affect characterized as the subjective experience of the laws of nature. See S. M. Eisenstein's *Nonindifferent Nature*, as well as my essay "Eisenstein, Rhetoric and Imaginicity: Towards a Revolutionary Memoria," in *Screen* 41, no. 4 (Winter 2000): 349–368.
3. J. B. Jackson, "The Order of Landscape," in *The Interpretation of Ordinary Landscapes*, ed. D. W. Meinig (New York: Oxford University Press, 1979), 153.
4. Edward S. Casey, *Representing Place. Landscape Painting and Maps* (Minneapolis: Minnesota University Press, 2002), 3.
5. John Ruskin, *Modern Painters, Vol. III* (New York: E. P. Dutton & Co., 1906).
6. Kenneth Clark, *Landscape into Art* (London: John Murray, 1976), cites Petrarch's self-reproach for having taken pleasure at contemplating the view from atop a mountain after he had feasted his eyes for a few minutes on the distant prospect of the Alps, the Mediterranean, and the Rhône at his feet, it occurred to him to open at random his copy of St. Augustine's *Confessions*. His eyes fell upon the following passage: "And men go about to wonder at the heights of the mountains, and the mighty waves of the sea, and the wide sweep of rivers, and the circuit of the ocean, and the revolution of the stars, but themselves they consider not." "I was abashed, and asking my brother (who was anxious to hear more) not to annoy me, I closed the book, angry with myself that I should still be admiring earthly things, who might long ago have learned from even

the pagan philosophers that nothing is wonderful but the soul, which when great itself, finds nothing great outside itself. Then, in truth, I was satisfied that I had seen enough of the mountain; I turned my inward eye upon myself, and from that time not a syllable fell from my lips until we reached the bottom again." (10)

7. Malcolm Andrews, *Landscape and Western Art* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 1.
8. Of course, both the airplane's window and the car's windshield already offer us a framed view.
9. Before the invention of photographic cameras, the Claude glass (or mirror), named in honour of the seventeenth century painter Claude Lorrain, offered eighteenth century painters and landscape sightseers a tool for framing a unified and picturesque visual field. The glass consisted of a darkened convex mirror that would frame a view in a way that approximated the effect of a Claude landscape painting. The reflected image would reduce the field of vision to a manageable size—though still wide because of the mirror's curvature—while the tinting of the glass ensured that the various elements of the "composition" would be agreeably uniform in terms of color scheme, reproducing the desired effect. Interestingly, the Claude glass requires that sightseers turn their backs to the real landscape in order to enjoy the framed (or cultured) view offered by the mirror.
10. Simon Schama, *Landscape and Memory* (New York: Vintage, 1996), 61.
11. Denis E. Cosgrove, *Social Formation and Symbolic Landscapes*, Paperback ed. (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1998).
12. Jay Appleton, *The Experience of Landscape* (London: John Wiley, 1975), 73.
13. D. W. Meinig, "Symbolic Landscapes. Some Idealizations of American Communities," in The Interpretation of Ordinary Landscapes, op. cit., 175.
14. In the introduction to his *Landscape and Power* collection, Mitchell writes that "although [the] collection does not contain any essays on cinematic landscapes, it should be clear why moving images of landscape are, in a very real sense, the subtext for these revisionist accounts of traditional motionless landscape images in photography, painting, and other media." W. J. T. Mitchell, "Introduction," in *Landscape and Power,* ed. W. J. T. Mitchell (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 2.
15. There have been nonetheless several important and noteworthy English language contributions to the study of landscape and film. Worth mentioning here are Scott MacDonald, *The Garden in the Machine: A Field Guide to Independent Films about Place* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001); Bart Testa, *Spirit in the Landscape* (Toronto: Art Gallery of Toronto, 1989); P. Adams Sitney, "Landscape in the Cinema: the Rhythms of the World and the Camera," in *Landscape, Natural Beauty, and the Arts*, eds. Salim Kemal and Ivan Gaskel (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 103–126; Ian Christie, "Landscape and 'Location': Reading Filmic Space Historically," in *Rethinking History*, 4, no. 2 (2000): 165–174. Several publications on the topic also exist in French, including two collections edited by Jean Mottet: *Les paysages du cinéma* (Seyssel: Champ Vallon, 1999) and *L'arbre dans le paysage* (Seyssel: Champ Vallon, 2002). See also: Jean Mottet, *L'invention de la scène américaine. Cinéma et paysage* (Paris: l'Harmattan, 1998); Maurizia Natali, *L'image-paysage* (Paris: Presses universitaires de Vincennes, 1996);

Antonio Costa also edited an issue of *CINéMAS* devoted to film and landscape, "Le paysage au cinéma," *CINéMAS* 12, no. 1 (Automne 2001).

16. Laura Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," in *Visual and Other Pleasures* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1989), 14–26.
17. André Gaudreault and Tom Gunning, "Le cinéma des premiers temps: un défi à l'histoire du cinéma?", in *L'Histoire du cinéma: nouvelles approches*, eds. J. Aumont, A. Gaudreault, and M. Marie (Paris: Publications de la Sorbonne Nouvelle-Colloque de Cerisy, 1989), 49–63.
18. Northrop Frye, "Conclusion to a Literary History of Canada," in *The Bush Garden: Essays on the Canadian Imagination* (Toronto: House of Anansi Press, 1971).
19. Gaile McGregor, *The Wacousta Syndrome. Explorations in the Canadian Landscape* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1985). *Wacousta* is an historical novel, à la Fennimore Cooper, set during Chief Pontiac's rebellion in the 1760s.
20. Eisenstein (1987, op. cit., 243) writes

> The tradition of the picture scroll has largely been preserved for a long period in Japanese engraving, especially since this engraving is not limited at all by the edges of a single sheet, but very often consists of several sheets—diptychs and triptychs—that can exist completely separately, but the full picture of the mood and subject are produced only when they are placed next to each other. In this sense the montage method of cinematography, where, in the process of shooting, one stream of events is broken up into separate shots and by the will of the film editor is again collected into a whole montage sequence, repeats completely this stage of the general evolutionary course of the history of painting.

21. Peter Greenaway, *Fear of Drowning By Numbers | Règles du jeu* (Paris: Dis Voir, 1988).
22. Christian Metz, *L'énonciation impersonnelle ou le site du film* (Paris: Klincksieck, 1991), 34.
23. These are: *L'avventura, La notte, L'eclisse,* and *Deserto Rosso*. See Seymour Chatman, *Antonioni or the Surface of the World* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985).
24. All French language citations are translated by myself unless otherwise indicated; whenever English translations were available I have used and cited them; when existing translations were faulty I offered new translations.

the invention of place

danièle huillet and jean-marie straub's *moses and aaron*

one

jacques aumont

translated by kevin shelton and martin lefebvre

We know a great deal about the origins of this film, *Moses and Aaron*. The premise, like many other films by Straub and Huillet, remains a desire to confront the medium of film with a preexisting text that somehow resists it. Such as the text of *Othon*, by Pierre Corneille, which resisted being captured on film with its highly compact intrigue and the essentially foreign character of its seventeenth century language, Arnold Schoenberg's opera poses its own difficulties. It resists being captured on film by the density of its politico-theological debate, by the violence of its intrigues around power, not to mention its strange musical composition, with its technique of twelve tones that forces us to deal with a musical language we are not accustomed to hearing. In each case, the filmmakers' preoccupation was to superimpose a film script over the drama of the text—because film is not theatre—without, however, altering the nature of the drama specific to the text.

Scripting, in this case, is not an exercise of *adaptation*, nor is it a narratological or compositional analysis. In classical theatre, the most obvious elements of scripting, from the very first reading of the text, are the entrances and exits indicated in the stage directions, often underscored in the text itself (e.g., "Leave!" "Here she is!"). In the filming of *Othon*, Straub and Huillet constantly make use of these natural dramatic articulations of the text, more often than not, by emphasizing them cinematically (for example, ensuring that the character remains invisible to the camera before suddenly appearing with a twist of the camera, or the reverse, by including the receding footsteps for a long time after the character has left the image). This technique is sometimes used in *Moses and Aaron*; at least once, when the Hebrews see the two brothers arrive from afar, they comment on their almost supernatural allure; and when finally the choir sings "See Aaron! See Moses! They have come at last!", the panoramic camera roams to show them, motionless in the middle of the set. And yet, the libretto by Schoenberg seldom uses this type of dramatic scripting; the transitions are rarely marked by an entrance or an exit. Moreover, the Schoenberg style is based on—and this is perhaps one of the few constants in the diversity of his works—the absence of clear scripting into parts, movements, or sections. The scripting, in the case of the film, therefore, needs to be ensured through other means.

In the filming of *Othon*, another technique was tried and developed: the use of a visually impressive location, at once dramatically practical (perhaps even capable of proposing its own unique solutions for *découpage* and *mise-en-scène*), and historically charged. In their treatment of the opera *Moses and Aaron*, Huillet and Straub underscored the work's segmentation by either introducing or uncovering a number of transitions by shifts in framing. However, if the film was able to maintain its own strength as a film, while confronted with that of the text of the opera, it is in large part due to the filmmakers' careful selection and use of location. The locations in the text by Schoenberg are only sketchy biblical locations. They act as a support for the primary episodes: the place of the revelation; the place where Moses meets Aaron; as well as places for the long public address for two voices before the people, for the encounter with God, for the pagan orgy, and, finally, for the punishment of Aaron. Even more than the purely theoretical palaces of Corneille's or Racine's emperors, these are symbolic locations, almost entirely coinciding with their specific names. It is therefore not at all surprising that practically every *mise-en-scène* of *Moses and Aaron* in the theatre retained only the first term of the specific names. The tension created between the abstract power of these names (the Burning Bush, Mount Sinai, the Desert) and their concrete configuration, which they must exhibit to effectively serve as a support for the drama, follows the emphasis suggested by the text and the music of an underscored *metaphysical abstraction*: no landscape, no geography. In the theatre, they are usually

rendered purely as symbolic spaces, almost as if they were being staged for Wagner.

Naturally, the setting for the film of this opera is confronted by a similar question, but with completely different means. Whatever scenic option is chosen, the film has a real difficulty escaping the possibility of the emphasis being placed at the other pole, that of documentary realism, where the apparently singular, concrete determinations of the locations become dominant. An adaptation in the Hollywood spirit would not have hesitated to multiply the sets and settings, preferably picturesque ones as was the case with Joseph Losey's *Don Giovanni* or Francesco Rosi's *Carmen* which, even though shot in Europe, were driven by the same interest in the spectacular. Straub and Huillet's remarkable solution is entirely different: manifestly dialectic, it neither renounces visibility, i.e., concrete, singular, and historical existing space, nor abstract symbolism. Indeed, for the first two acts of the opera—the part that was actually composed by Schoenberg, the third act never having been completed[1]—the filmmakers chose a striking and astonishing location: a Roman amphitheatre from the first century, situated in the middle of the Apennines, about 50 miles (80 kilometers) east of Rome (Figure 1.1).

There is little to add to the very precise and lucid comments made by the filmmakers about the choice of this location.[2] The decision to film everything in one location does however multiply the constraints (i.e., reduces the choice of possibilities). The location had to be practical: accommodate two characters as well as a whole chorus, a caravan of different animals as well as the imprecations of the prophet, not to mention the dance before the golden calf. Moreover, it had to be out of the way

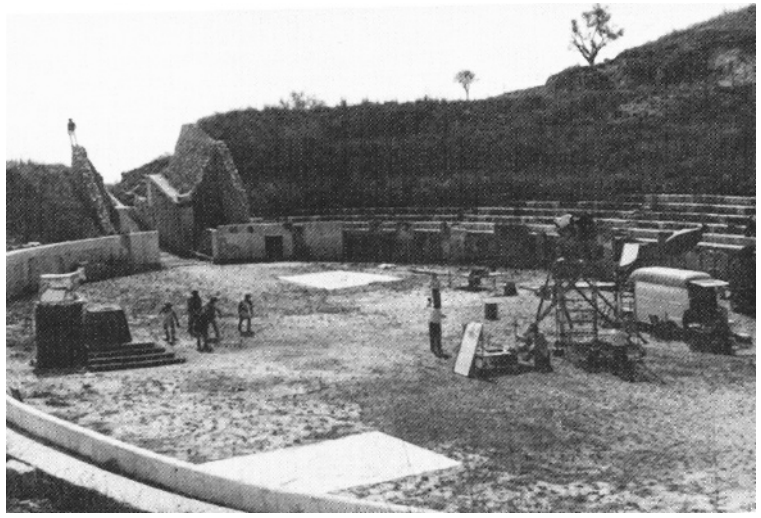

Figure 1.1

The amphitheatre of Alba Fucens. Production still.

of tourists and sheltered from onlookers, especially inopportune noises; it should be in a location with little threat of rain. It had to be historically and symbolically congruous: preferably an ancient site (and, given our relation to Antiquity, a monumental site). Its geography needed to be striking: it is a plateau. Finally, since it was to accommodate a representation of a semitheatrical nature, it should also have certain intrinsic visual and acoustic qualities, and more fundamentally, retain some trace of the work's origin in the theatre (not to mention in music). We know the solution for this multifaceted problem: everything except for the third act was filmed in the amphitheatre of Alba Fucens, close to the city of Avezzano, in the Abruzzi region.

This decision brought with it innumerable problems, both materially and intellectually, not to mention some very real headaches. But it surely manifests a desire not to forget the theatre, incarnated once and for all in the film's scenography. It is also, perhaps more indirectly, an effect of taking very seriously the documentary nature of what is called the *cinématographe*. If the latter is capable of rendering a location—and not simply, as in theatre, the constructing of a dramatic space or a functional substitute for it; but if the film is to exploit the vividness, the very *smell*[3] of a place—then it is necessary to find a setting whose strong visual and symbolic presence imposes itself as such, so that the filming can bring these concrete qualities to light.

There to be read in the amphitheatre of Alba Fucens are the layers of History. It was built in the year 40 of our calendar, just a few years after the death of the prophet Jesus, also known as Christ, under the brief rule of Caligula, marked, amongst other things, by the mad emperor's penchant for festivities and exotic religions. The choice of this site for framing a *biblical* action is, in itself, a powerful image that links together the Old and New Testaments, in much the same manner as the *figural* interpretation of the Bible proposed by the Church Fathers[4] (e.g., St. Augustine sees Moses as a *figura Christi*, and the Ministry of Aaron as an *umbra* and a *figura* of the eternal Ministry).[5] Such an amphitheatre, in a province of the Roman Empire, probably served for games (though its architecture does not seem to suggest this), but certainly for religious, civil, and sacrificial festivities. Caligula had reestablished the Egyptian cult of Isis, banned by Tiberius, and his immediate successor, Claudius, was the first to chase the Jews from Rome.[6] Of course, Moses and Aaron is a Jewish story, not a Christian or pagan narrative. Choosing this amphitheatre to stage it both contradicts the story and adds new elements to it: it lets Roman history and Christian history break into biblical history. Furthermore, innumerable similar amphitheatres have figured in numerous genre films such as ancient epics (with gladiators) and Christian epics (with lions); these have acquired a particular iconographic weight, which Alba Fucens implicitly evokes in our memory.

This idea of an implicit evocation, of an underground reservoir (of meaning, of memory, of history, of death) whose task it is for the landscape to conjure, is an eminently recognizable one, for it constitutes within Straub and Huillet's cinema a quasi-authorial thematic trait.[7] In almost every one of their films, the landscapes are immense tombs, cenotaphs, or monuments to some anonymous martyrology. For instance, *Fortini Cani* has long panoramic shots of the villages of the Alpuan Alps, where some Oradour-like Nazi massacres took place. These shots are silent, only supported by the sentence that precedes them and which offers the key to understanding them. There is nothing in these shots, only beautiful, ancient, and austere homes; or again, in another village, brand new low-income housing (yet already showing their wear and tear), where children play and trucks roll by on the road in the distance (there is an irresistible feeling of war); and from time to time, a marble slab makes an appearance, *ex voto*. The Italian countryside, as the character of the second part (*De la nuée à la résistance*) finds out, is soaked in the blood of its partisans; while the *Dialogues* of the first part tell us that this countryside was, in a time before our own, in the time of myths, populated with gods and when men were once like the gods (*eritis sicut Dei*: another infraction, of Christianity into paganism this time). As well, we can think of the adaptation of Stéphane Mallarmé's *Coup de dés* situated in Père-Lachaise, in front of the Wall of the Federates; or again, of *Othon*, which begins with a shot of the opening of a cave where, during World War II, the Communists had hidden their weapons. Or even again, the landscapes of *Lothringen!* which exude their historical weight (the weight of massacres and exploitation) as they are seen through both long and medium shots.

But how can we come to know all that which the image can never sufficiently say? (After all, the flip-side of the image's strength and also its limit is that it can only show.) The most expedient way is to verbally state the necessary information: theories of facts (Marzabotto in *Fortini Cani*), or litanies of numbers (the commentaries of Engels about the French landscapes in *Trop tôt, trop tard!*). The most expressive is, perhaps, to create a filmic figure, where something from in and under the ground is brought to light. In the great confrontation scene between Galba and Camille, in act II of *Othon*, this chthonic subsoil manifests itself through an immense cavity that we see—a gaping hole in the background at the right behind Galba, in the shot where he appears for the first time. The inscription of the bodies of the "actors" or "models" into these locations needs to be taken literally; after all, each shot institutes a particular relationship between each of them and the site from which they either stand out or are embedded. Consequently, at the mysterious cave, opening beside Galba, which is made visible through a slight reframing of the image, we need to add, for example, the triple historical setting that delimits the space that Camille occupies (on the left, the baroque palaces; on the

right, antique stone walls in ruin; in the back and lower than her face, the carriages).

There is no voiceover in *Moses and Aaron* to tell us what haunts this location that we see: the implicit evocation is consummated, so to speak, by the fact that everything, from in and under the ground, is channelled through the human figures of the drama, in their costumes, postures, and gestures, as if they had just sprung up there, like flowers (like a Valerian marine cemetery, where "*le don de vivre est passé dans les fleurs*" [the gift of life is passed down in the flowers]). This is why such a location must be treated with care, if not a particular meticulousness—even if it is not a piece of nature that needs to be respected on principle or by devotion. In both, *Empedocles* and in *Antigone* as well, Straub and Huillet have pushed to the limit the art of walking on, without stepping on, a location so that it is not flattened or changed by the mere act of being filmed.[8] This extremely similar treatment of the amphitheatre of Alba Fucens, albeit far less fragile than the brush on the slopes of Etna, demonstrates that the approach is not just an obsession; nor is it inspired by some desire for cleanliness or even some moral desire ("ecological," as some commentators have smirked), but remains an aesthetic decision that is simultaneously a political decision. By refusing to leave any visible traces of their filming, Straub and Huillet enjoin themselves to not add any visible stratum, either to the history or the visibility, of their locations. Their locations are forever marked by having played host to a film—but this mark should never be conspicuous: it must become another subterranean mark, identical to the nature of all the other marks that each film evokes. The location should have been transformed, not in its appearance, but in its being (Figure 1.2).

Once this relationship of intimacy, of an essential connivance as it were, has been established with a location, the question of whether it

Figure 1.2

The amphitheatre of Alba Fucens. Production still.

can be considered an effective ground for the *mise-en-scène* as well needs to be addressed. The arena of Alba Fucens possesses properties common to all such amphitheatres that are remarkably useful: its form is hollow, focusing the drama more than enclosing it. It allows, without any artifice (beyond the one of its selection), framing the drama and preventing it from becoming dispersed. The oval shape of the arena is good, conjoining the rounded—which closes—and the elongated—that orients, providing a clean, marked axis. Everything is incessantly brought back to the ground, where the red dust covers the surface of the elliptic-shaped interior; on this, the barest imaginable background, the characters stand in draped clothing (a stylized antiquity) and seem to emerge from the soil. Alba Fucens is like the Monument Valley of this film, a way to make the bodies surge up from the setting or disappear into it, much like John Ford's Indians who seem to meld with the rock and sand.[9]

Logically, this location, presented with such a quiet insistence as real, infrangible, inalterable, and unadulterated, does not need to be constructed in the film according to the usual methods of spatial composition and suturing. Classical cinema, which seldom sets its dramas in real locations, but creates composite spaces by cheating on just about everything, needs to compensate by finding ways to guarantee the coherence of these imaginary spaces. This is the function of the match-cut: whether the chosen vector is the gaze or the dialogue, it always functions to suture the images in order to create the effect of continuity. Hollywood classicism—to which we owe so many popular epics—introduced yet another supplemental guarantee, that of the establishing or "master" shot. This is a wider shot providing a stable and large enough view of the entire setting at least once, so that each of the other shots that compose the scene may be referred to it as one its fragments. Freed by this double guarantee from the need to construct a truly coherent space, classical cinema is led to produce very abstract spaces that resemble those of literature: that which is given appears as certain (nothing unforeseen can emerge from such a space); that which is not given must be supplied by the spectator (who is invited to find it in the most immediately available of reservoirs, that of verisimilitude and of common places).

The work of framing and montage in *Moses and Aaron* takes us far away from these classical procedures. Not that there is nothing akin to match-cutting or establishing shots, but what requires "matching" is of a completely different nature. Each framing is clearly affirmed, more often than not by an element that marks it as distinct from classical norms such as centring, symmetry, and horizontality. Instead we find a de-centring of the characters which leaves little or not enough space on the side of the frame, the systematic use of high-angle framing (indicating a point of view that mimics no possible diegetic gaze), or all of a sudden a low-angle framing (shot 32, on Moses and Aaron, when leprosy appears[10]), faces in profile

(the most rare point of view, emphasized in the meeting between the two protagonists in the desert: left profile of Aaron in shot 13, right profile in shot 15, front view of Moses in between the two). Even when eye-line matches and general address codes are obvious from one shot to another, they are never constructed according to the rules of transparency; each framing continues, in part, to exist for itself as if disconnected from those that precede and follow it. Many shots in act I function like a "master shot";[11] they undoubtedly allow us to mentally reconstruct a geometry or a topology, but they do not naturalize these by making them immediate or transparent; it all seems to remain at the level of construction, and is continuously felt as such, especially due to the extreme abruptness of camera movements, more so with the film's last one, which only allows us, and with lightning speed, a brief glimpse of Moses and Aaron.

There lies a single purpose behind these various refusals of classicism: to avoid using the traditional means for representing "filmic" space (in the sense Eric Rohmer uses the term in his essay on F. W. Murnau [12]), to clearly and expressively forgo these means in order to allow the spectator to engage in the mental—and affective—work of gaining access to the film's location, at once as a substratum of the filming and as an imaginary framework for the drama.

When we set out to study the representation of space, it is because we wish to find some principles that account for the relations between man and his surroundings. When we try to define, for a given era, the notion of what a place is, we try to determine the conventional rule by which a certain understanding of space embodies itself in a system of thought and of representation.[13]

This distinction, put forward by Pierre Francastel, between space as a transhistorical category, which is always more or less considered in a Kantian spirit, and place as a profoundly historical form that relates to the imaginary and symbolizing accents of an age, is the ground for any description of *Moses and Aaron*. Basically, by segmenting and editing the film in such a jarring manner, the filmmakers move away from a naturalizing effect to underscore the fact that the scenography has a meaning of its own.

The first meaning, or first determination, as I mentioned earlier, is that of a subsoil: that which emerges and evokes lightly or heavily. The second, of a related nature, yet more frankly conventional and therefore easier to decipher, is metaphorical and affects the luminous and the atmospheric phenomena. In the middle of a lengthy shot of Moses hearing the voices attributing him his mission of prophecy and proselytism, and after about four minutes of a fixed frame on the neck of the singer, the camera is slightly raised and a pan begins that will take it almost full circle, only stopping as it comes to frame a mountain which lies behind Moses' head. Physically present in the landscape, this mountain has a remarkable