

CFP: Global Cinema Studies in Landscape Allegory

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Call for Papers

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Subject Fields:

Film and Film History, Art, Art History & Visual Studies, Environmental History / Studies, Popular Culture Studies, Race / Ethnic Studies

Call for Submissions: *Global Cinema Studies in Landscape Allegory* (Lexington Books, 2023)

Editor: David Melbye, author of *Landscape Allegory in Cinema: From Wilderness to Wasteland* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), "Psychological Landscape Films: Narrative and Stylistic Approaches," *Aniki*, Vol. 4, No. 1 (2017), and "Modernist Embodiment: Sisyphean Landscape Allegory in Cinema," *Screen Bodies*, Volume 6, Issue 1 (2021).

As a scholar of the cinematic arts, a perpetual interest of mine has been the possibility for natural settings, by way of audiovisual screen technology, to transcend a mere indication of place. As soon as the motion picture apparatus frames any terrain, that partition of landscape is no longer a "space" but a "place" of significance because human intervention has made it so. Even if the camera pans slowly across a vast and infinite wasteland or seascape, this is nevertheless a mere "survey" of something much vaster and ultimately imperceptible. Typically in narrative cinema, framed landscapes are establishing shots for the imminent presence of animated figures—characters who, in their progression through framed space and time, establish a logical sequence of places, even if that sequence is nonlinear. The history of narrative filmmaking reveals the steady evolution of a universal syntax for both emulating our normal spatiotemporal experience and totally redefining its parameters at the same time. Most of these conventions of cinematic storytelling, as such, were already fixtures of the entertainment industry in the early decades of the last century. This persistent syntax of moving images is inherently *denotative*. That is, any such film, by way of integrating *mise-en-scène*, cinematography, editing, and sound design, assembles a comprehensible universe of spatiotemporal relations we perceive as realistic, even if these relations are unreal, as in science fiction and fantasy contexts.

Conversely, what can be understood as inherently "avant-garde" in the cinematic

arts is any audiovisual attempt at the *connotative*. The forthcoming edited volume will serve to address the narrative and stylistic approaches to imbuing natural settings in audiovisual media with a psychological dimension, or, in other words, cinematically mobilizing landscapes to function beyond their usual function as a backdrop—and the cultural contexts for this aesthetic impulse. “Narrative” indicates that certain storylines, according to their psychological elements, configure characters within given natural settings differently than conventional modes of storytelling. “Stylistic” indicates that such approaches to visual representation tend toward a character-centered, subjectivized point of view, as opposed to more observational and/or objective means of cinematic depiction. Ultimately, then, both a certain *kind* of story and the *manner* in which this story is presented determines when a given film should be deemed a “landscape allegory.” This is not to imply contributors should embrace my own approaches to this topic. Rather, I seek to present an array of viewpoints on a global spectrum of cultural contexts—toward a productive forum for insights other media scholars may embark from. My own research, for example, has pursued transnational patterns of modernist critique by way of “Sisyphean” allegories. But you may identify other landscape allegories and *their* contexts.

Disclaimer: I confess I have thus far greeted edited volumes with suspicion, especially as they pretend to be authoritative “guides” or “companions” to a given topic. For me, they are more typically an arbitrary room of voices, achieving only the semblance of dialogue by way of editors’ attempts to compartmentalize them into coherent blocks toward a cohesive entirety. I will not pretend to transcend such illusions, but I am at least narrowing my employment of the persistently nebulous term “landscape” and to a more precise context for its consideration. Even the semblance of a “global” perspective will be only that. (I would, however, like to organize a Zoom discussion with the volume’s contributors, to share ideas and suggestions concerning everyone’s proposals in advance of pursuing my function as editor.)

Here, at least, are some tentative parameters for submission:

- 1) “Natural settings” should not include cityscapes or other manufactured spaces, even if similar arguments for allegorical function are applicable. (The latter deserve their own volumes!)
- 2) I resist inclusion of documentaries, even though an example like Herzog’s *Grizzly Man* is arguably both narrative in its intention and a psychological landscape film as

such.

- 3) Analyses should move beyond a single motion picture or film/media maker.
- 4) Analyses attempting to characterize a “national cinema” accordingly should at least exercise caution in reducing nationhood to a single ethnic group, as in Han people for “China.”
- 5) Multimedia analyses are encouraged (when essential to your argument).
- 6) Interdisciplinary analyses are also encouraged, particularly in terms of multisensorial and/or neuroscientific research. (But let’s not force it.)

For earnest consideration, please submit a 500-word abstract for your proposed chapter as well as a brief bio to: dwmelbye@gmail.com.

For any/all queries, I may be reached at the above email address.

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