

Approaching Landscape in the Classical Tradition: Panel Report

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Report composed by Chloe Bray.

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Approaching Landscape in the Classical Tradition

“Approaching Landscape in the Classical Tradition”, organised by Professor Jason König and Dr Dawn Hollis, was a three-day panel exploring the theories and methodologies underpinning the study of landscape within Classics and cognate fields. Speakers were invited to share their “tool-kits”, or the theories and methodologies originating in various disciplines which they use in their own approaches to landscape. The selected papers covered a variety of landscapes from chaotic forests to carefully constructed gardens, and spanned a range of periods from archaic Greece to the modern reception of classical landscapes. The collection of approaches included ideas from cognitive studies, phenomenology, post-phenomenology, eco-criticism, relational sociology, and critical theory. However, throughout these diverse subject matters and methodologies, common thematic threads were consistently apparent. The following report aims to serve as a working guide to the major areas of discussion and the potential they might offer to future research on landscape.

Landscape, Time, and Memory

In one form or another, the relationship between time, memory, and landscape played a role in each of the twenty papers delivered over the course of the panel. This was identified as an essential theme from the outset, with **Katharine Earnshaw’s** opening paper introducing some broad frameworks in landscape studies. Katharine addressed the abstract nature of landscape, where memory is among the layers of meaning attached to a concrete, physical, spatial existence. Recounting a conversation with a farmer whose grandfather remembered the planting of the trees at the edge of their land, she noted how the memory of landscape goes beyond lived experience to include the memory of previous generations. Such observations prompt engagement with the idea of space encapsulating time, not only in the sense of present time, but also and perhaps more potently past time. Katharine drew our attention to Virgil’s *Georgics* 3.322-228, in which the passing of a day is described in both spatial and temporal terms, to demonstrate the indivisibility these ideas.

This theme was carried over into **Andrew Fox’s** paper, “The Roman Trees Database and Seneca’s Trees”. Andrew commented on the understanding of trees as memorials to those who plant them, citing Seneca’s *Letters to Lucilius* 86.14 and Vergil’s *Georgics* 2.57-8, in which old men grow trees for the next generation. Trees as part of landscape therefore act as repositories of memory, linking the past, from the perspective of the future

generations who remember those who planted the trees, with the future, from the perspective of those who plant the trees with the knowledge or hope that they will be remembered. **Isabel Köster**, in her paper “How to Write a Roman Sacred Landscape”, identified a potential for myths associated with a landscape to perform a similar role. In the *Verrines*, Cicero cites “myths known from childhood” as a unifying feature of landscape, cementing the sacred status of a place by appealing to shared memories of its myth. Isabel addressed that way that this identifies sacred landscape as memorial and temporal both in the sense of the audience’s own lifetimes, where the Roman standard of sanctity is rooted in childhood learning, and in the sense of forming a link between the present landscape and the mythical past.

The role of narrative in linking past and present through acts of memory in a sacred landscape was also central to **Esther Eidinow’s** paper. Drawing on approaches from relational sociology, Esther discussed the networks of social meaning created by votives at sanctuaries and their associated narratives. Not only do such narratives connect the sanctuary to the narratives of its past, in stories of the sanctuary’s foundation or gifts given by famous historical figures, but they establish a pattern of interaction with and belief in the divine which creates the sanctity of the space.

Several papers in the panel dealt with the reception of classical landscapes, and these engaged directly with the role of memory. **Dawn Hollis** considered the application of reception theory to landscape, addressing the question of whether we can view landscape as something which is received as a text is received, despite the lack of a single author or creator of any landscape. Dawn suggested that the connection between past and present formed by landscape is something more than reception; she identified the temporal layers in Christopher Wordsworth’s imagination of one historical character remembering another historical character, all linked by the meaning of the landscape as they became part of its tradition. The significance of these acts of memory in the landscape was such that Wordsworth even created imagined traditions, considering what a famous artist might have painted if he had visited a certain location. **Jason König’s** paper also drew on the experiences of nineteenth century tourists, applying Della Dora’s conception of landscape as a spatial and visual “memory theatre” to a reconsideration of embodiment and memory in Pausanias.

In a similar vein, **Jeremy Brown** addressed the role of maps for early modern tourists and explorers as mnemonic devices, in which the landscape of early modern Calabria was made familiar by the inclusion of locations from classical myth and literature. **Estelle Strazdins** continued this theme; her paper established how Pausanias’ opinion of which

sites in Greece were “worthy of memory” (3.11.1) influenced nineteenth century travellers’ experience of Greece to the extent that contemporary local knowledge was subordinated to Pausanias’ account. The difficulties in locating the cave of Pan also demonstrate the changing explanation of the natural world via myth over time, and the consistent authority of accounts which connect the present with the classical past in the imagination of certain travellers. Drawing on the themes of these papers, in the general discussion it was suggested that in some landscapes, a significant moment in time can overcome the present landscape, so that, to take an example from **Josie Rae’s** paper, “*Et in Arcadia Ego: (Re)establishing the Complexity of Pastoral Landscapes*”, Flanders will always be conceived of as a battlefield, despite its peaceful present.

As part of the discussion following papers, it was also observed that a certain tension exists in the imagination of landscape as something which is fixed, solid, and static, and as something which is fluid and dynamic. Temporal interest in landscape often focuses on the permanence of geographic features, such as a mountain from which a traveller can enjoy the same view of other mountains and plains as an ancient traveller would have experienced. However, engagements with time are also encouraged by the dynamism of changing landscapes; **Jeremy Brown** noted the fascination which early modern travellers recorded in accounts of volcanic landscapes, and **James Calvin Taylor** discussed how the speed at which the Maeander river changed its surrounding landscape prompted writers to consider it an active, benevolent force.

Landscape and Social Consensus

Closely related to the issue of memory and time in landscape is the creation of landscape by social consensus, which might take the form of shared memories or knowledge. This was particularly central to **Isabel Köster’s** paper, which established that elements such as associated myths, festivals, ritual activity, established boundaries, and the imagined occupation of a deity were among the socially agreed attributes of a sacred space in Roman religion. This consensus was established to the extent that the absence of such attributes was sufficient to indicate that a space was not sacred by Roman standards; by omitting these attributes, Caesar in the *Gallic War* 6 was able to dismiss the existence of sacred space in Gaul. In that way, Isabel showed that a lack of sacred landscape can communicate how the boundaries of the Roman world were conceived.

Eris Williams Reed addressed how the attribution of sanctity to a location might vary in different locations; her paper “Ecology and Religious life in the Roman Near East: Methodologies, Applications and Future Direction” considered the Efqa spring at

Palmyra, which can be considered sacred as the abode of the deity Yarhibol despite the lack of any identified temples nearby. **Rebecca Batty** also noted the necessity of a shared conception of landscape in the understanding of river similes. Through the lens of postphenomenology, which puts a greater focus on the autonomy of objects and landscape, Rebecca discussed the importance of an experience *with* and not *of* landscape, concluding that rivers were imagined as forces with their own agency against which humans are often powerless.

The idea that a shared knowledge of the meaning landscapes can assist in the interpretation of texts agreed with **Julia Doroszewska's** examination of liminal landscapes in Apuleius' *Metamorphoses*. Julia identified marshes, mills, and suburbs as marginal spaces which reflected the situation or social status of the characters occupying them. Similarly, **Ben Felderhof** discussed the jungle in nineteenth century literature as an inheritance of classical and medieval connections between the forest and disorder. Drawing on Aristotle's use of the word *hyle*, which could also mean "forest", to denote disordered matter, the other-world forests of Virgil's *Aeneid*, and the medieval connection between forests and moral danger, Ben concluded that the jungle became a place where characters could explore the dilemmas of the western culture in which they were written.

The importance of landscape as a creation of social realities was carried into **Esther Eidinow's** paper; her application of relational sociology drew partly on the work of Harrison White, who observes the generation of identity in interactions, exchanges, and narratives between people. Developing this concept, Esther showed that the stories attached to votive offerings at sanctuaries created sacred space by the establishment of networks of meaning which commemorate exchange, relationships between people and gods, and the institutions of belief. The votives therefore create the shared understanding of the sacred landscape.

The potency of such consensus is confirmed by the instances of nonconformity which various speakers addressed. **Ryan Warwick**, drawing on Foucault's concept of the heterotopia, a place which is "other", subverted, or disturbing, examined the depiction of social "others" in a landscape as a way of confirming identity. Ryan discussed the cyclopes as a social "other", as a race in the *Odyssey* who do not observe essential social practices, and showed how their depiction in sculptures in Roman gardens used a Greek image of barbarity to reflect on the ordered, civilised nature of the Roman dinner guests who dined beside them. However, the ambiguity in the language used to describe the space in which the cyclopes lived in the *Odyssey*, both in Greek and in Latin translations, presents the cyclops Polyphemus as a savage "other" but also as something remarkably

like the civilised humans to whom he is opposed. Ryan showed that like Foucault's heterotopias, the ancient garden was a landscape which could therefore both mirror and disturb the ideal conception of society.

Chloe Bray's paper, "Memorable Mountains: Embodiment and Perception in Euripides' *Bacchae*", considered similar disturbing results of the subversion of a landscape's meaning. Having discussed the intensely sensory nature of the mountains of the *Bacchae*, and the audience's understanding mountains as spaces where one must rely on sensory perception, Chloe considered the layers of discomfort which are added to the tragic climax by the sudden unintelligibility of the major characters' senses. **Eris Williams Reed** observed the environmental knowledge of the communities of the Jebel Arab Massif, demonstrated by inscriptions on rocks which reported camping at places where water could usually be found but also reported on times when usually expected water was withheld by the gods. In the following discussion, it was suggested that the latter reports reflected the anxiety caused by a rupture in seasonality, when a landscape was not performing as it usually should.

An understanding of how landscape *should* behave and reactions to it behaving otherwise were also apparent in **James Calvin Taylor's** paper, which compared the depiction of the river Maeander in Himerius and the Nile in Herodotus. James noted that Himerius drew on traditional ideas of landscape inherited from Hesiod to compare the seascape, associated with economic growth but moral decline, with the agricultural plains and pastureland, associated with a simpler, morally-superior stage of human existence, which were the result of progradation of the Maeander's delta. James also discussed Himerius' manipulation of the idea of a landscape's "natural" form; he depicted the construction of a canal as returning the river to its proper location. This resonated with aspects of **Josie Rae's** paper on pastoral landscapes in World War II poetry. The poets Josie discussed also manipulated a shared image of how pastoral landscape "should" operate in poetry, subverting common images in order to show the impossibility of pastoral ideals of peace and quiet prosperity. It therefore became clear throughout the course of the panel that, just as an absence of sacred space can inform us as to the shared conceptions of a present sacred landscape, the subversion of meaning in landscape can reveal a cultural consensus on what a landscape *should* mean.

| "Real" and Imagined Landscapes

A consideration of relationships between remembered landscapes, landscapes created by consensus, and the spatial, concrete "reality" of landscapes engages with the question of

how the “real” and the imagined interact as part of landscape. **Katharine Earnshaw’s** opening paper drew attention to the plurality of classics and its ability to bridge gaps between the imaginary, the real, and the text. This idea was continued in **Dawn Hollis’** consideration of landscape as something which is created by its “readers” and their imaginative engagement with classical texts. In this sense, the term “landscape” refers not only to the spatial, concrete environment, but to the co-existing stories, characters, memories, and experiences which are inseparably connected to physical space.

Jeremy Brown discussed the experience of travellers who find that the reality of a landscape does not match their classically-constructed expectation. Henry Swinburne, for example, was sufficiently disappointed in an island believed to be Ogygia, the mythical location of Odysseus’ stay with nymph Calypso, that he concluded that the idyllic parts of the island must have been covered by rising sea levels. To such travellers, it therefore seems that their imagined landscape remained more authoritative and powerful than the reality of what they encountered. As Jeremy showed, it was not until the eighteenth century that maps of Calabria began to dispense with mythical locations and rely completely on survey-based geographic information. **Estelle Strazdins** continued this idea in her discussion of Pausanias’ Greece, and the subordination of local knowledge to Pausanias’ accounts. In these situations, the aspects of landscape which might be termed “imagined” and “real” are intertwined to an extent that one seems to stand for the other, as the classical imagination becomes more “real” than what is conventionally understood to be spatial reality.

Such an observation was also apparent in **Elizabeth Minchin’s** plenary lecture. Drawing on cognitive studies on mental representations of the environment, Elizabeth addressed the scenes described on the shield of Achilles in the *Iliad*. She demonstrated that the information supplied, though fragmentary and lacking in spatial details, constructs a “cognitive assemblage”, a 3D version of Tversky’s “cognitive collage”, which allows the listener to vividly picture each scene. Furthermore, Elizabeth noted that Homer was more interested in depicting the wonder of the shield than in the detailed reality of its dimensions or the order and placement of the scenes he describes. Again, elements of what might usually be considered imaginary can be seen as more significant to the understanding of landscape than spatial reality. That is, the poet relied on his audiences’ capacity to supply generic elements of landscape from their own memory store.

Movement/Embodiment and Landscape

Katharine Earnshaw's introductory paper encouraged panellists to consider the spatialising effect of objects or people in landscape. Katharine showed a photo of a field surrounded by trees, in which a silhouetted child was crouching to take a photo of a butterfly. In the discussion following, several panellists commented on how the inclusion of the child, and the way that child was photographed directly engaging with the landscape, allowed the scene to be experienced more directly, as though a viewer could simultaneously view the landscape including the child and appreciate the landscape from the child's perspective. Various other papers developed this idea, and discussions addressed the blurring of subject and object in such an experience.

Elizabeth Minchin identified the figure of a "watcher" in the scenes on the shield of Achilles, such as personified constellations and the women who watch a marriage procession from their houses, who observe the landscape of their scene and the action within it. Such figures allow the listener to place themselves within the scene, and observe it from the watcher's perspective. However, Elizabeth demonstrated that this is not a static, singular experience; the description of movement within the scenes on the shield also invites the listener to experience the scene from the dynamic perspective of figures moving through the landscape. In the marriage procession, the listener does not only picture the scene from the perspective of the watcher, but from the perspective of the people in the procession, as their movement conjures images of houses, streets, and a vibrant town despite the lack of description of these features. Elizabeth supported this with studies from cognitive science, which have found that when we hear, read, or imagine movement we do not experience this as passive third parties, but that motor resonance responses in the cerebral cortex mimic the experience of movement. The inclusion of watching and moving figures in a landscape therefore allows listeners to experience imagined landscapes as active, dynamic participants.

Jason König noted the agreement between such an experience and the conclusions of his own paper, in which he drew attention to the appeals to corporeal experience in Pausanias. Jason noted that though Pausanias is conspicuously absent and disconnected from his own travel accounts, the use of a hodological perspective allows the reader to insert themselves into the account and experience the landscape as though they were travelling through it by Pausanias' route. While Pausanias presents a disembodied account of his own experience, the stories he relates frequently pose a bodily threat to their characters, allowing listeners to imagine the threat of violence to themselves and as a result experience the setting more intensely. Jason also addressed the attribution of

corporeal attributes to the landscape itself, as in examples where mythical characters have been turned into landscape features, guaranteeing the relationship between past and present.

Ben Pullan observed a similar personification of landscape in the pseudo-Virgilian *Aetna* poem. Taking approaches from two waves of ecocriticism, the first of which is self-aware in its celebration of nature and the second of which takes a more cynical stance, Ben discussed the attribution of senses to stone, and the depiction of mining as the torture and exploitation of the mountain. He noted that while such a corporeal understanding might initially seem to contribute to the poet's apparent aim of celebrating the untamed wildness of Aetna, it also ironically deprives its subject of its mystique, rendering the mountain intelligible by comparison to human organs. However, in the poem's ending with a mythical account of the sort which the poet had previously aimed to refute, Ben suggested that the aim of demystifying Aetna ultimately fails, presenting the impossibility of completely understanding nature and the fragility of the human world.

This conclusion resonated with the findings of several other papers, including **Ryan Warwick's** demonstration that carefully cultivated and civilised gardens still reflected elements of unsettling "others", and **Rebecca Batty's** conclusion that rivers, as the subject rather than the object of the creation of landscape, present the impossibility of controlling nature. These papers suggest a consistent tension in the understanding of the human body as subject or object in landscape.

Chloe Bray's paper, in agreement with Elizabeth Minchin's observations on motor resonance and Jason König's identification of movement through landscape as an act of embodiment, addressed the dithyrambic features of Euripides' *Bacchae* and how these allowed the audience to experience the mountain settings more intensely. Having demonstrated the probability that many members of the audience would have participated in dithyrambic performance and would have had personal experience of mountains, Chloe drew on phenomenological theory to show that the evocation of energetic movement allowed the audience more immediate access to their own memories of mountain space. Chloe also drew attention to the importance of sensory experience to this process, in the dithyrambic sounds of song and music, the references to the smells of pine-torches and the tastes of wine and honey associated with Dionysos' worship, and in the highly sensory description of mountain scenes.

These elements, whether or not they were raised specifically in reference to phenomenology, were important to several other papers in the panel. Particularly closely

related was **Caleb Patrick Simone's** paper on mountain soundscapes. With reference to Deleuze's territorialisation and Murray Schafer's use of sound as form of culture, Caleb discussed the *aulos*, a reed instrument, as a soundscape linking the image on an Attic *Skyphos* of a maenad playing the *aulos* in a mountainous landscape with the musical accompaniments of the symposium in which the cup was used. **James Calvin Taylor** also addressed the importance of soundscapes in comparing two landscapes; Himerius subordinates the sounds of the sea, in the repetitive orders of a sailor, to the panpipes of a pastoral environment.

Maria Combatti's paper focussed on visuality, depicting the relationship between body and space in art and drama. Maria discussed the textures and luminosity of colour in the *Hippolytus*, and how references to the warmth of the sun blended the narrative space with the space of the theatre, aiding in the creation of a somatic landscape. In agreement with phenomenological theory, it was therefore clear that landscape is something which reader and viewer alike experience not from a passive, separate perspective, but as participants in the encompassing, embodied atmosphere of landscape. That such an experience is accessible in text further establishes the role of landscape as intensely remembered, to the extent that our own movement, emotion, and sensory perception can be easily triggered by effective descriptions of space.

Next Steps

It is clear that, far from providing a disparate set of conclusions, a variety of interdisciplinary approaches to landscape can identify consistent themes and questions for classics and its reception. That the same ideas were apparent from the perspectives of literary criticism, anthropology, geography, cognitive studies and more demonstrates the essential nature of the issues raised throughout the panel to the understanding of landscape. This report therefore intends to provide both the panellists and other interested parties with an introductory guide to discussions, and a source for further research and collaborations. The goals of the panel were primarily exploratory, and the areas identified can be taken up by future landscape panels and workshops as well as individual researchers.

In order to augment this report as a potential resource for "approaching landscapes", panellists have been asked to highlight their key primary sources, and to provide details for 3-5 pieces of theoretical literature most essential to their papers. This information, as well as contact details current to September 2018, are provided below.

Select Bibliography and Contact Details

Rebecca Batty, *Experiences with the landscape: Post-phenomenology, Rivers, and Romans*.

Contact: Rebecca.Batty@nottingham.ac.uk

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Chloe Bray, *Memorable Mountains: Embodiment and Perception in Euripides' Bacchae*

Contact: cfd@st-andrews.ac.uk

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Contact: jeremy.brown.2015@live.rhul.ac.uk.

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jamestaylor@fas.harvard.edu

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Contact: mc3339@columbia.edu

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Contact: K.M.Earnshaw@exeter.ac.uk

The website 'Cognitive Classics' has some useful material for those interested in pursuing a cognitive approach to landscape (www.cognitiveclassics.blogs.sas.ac.uk).

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Contact: esther.eidinow@bristol.ac.uk

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Contact: benfelderhof@hotmail.com

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Dawn Hollis, *The 'reception' of landscape? Christopher Wordsworth's Greece.*

Contact: dawn.hollis@st-andrews.ac.uk

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