

Natura: Environmental Aesthetics After Landscape

June 1-3, 2017

Völkerkundemuseum, Pelikanstrasse 40

Universität Zürich

Entangled with the interconnected logics of coloniality and modernity, the landscape idea has long been a vehicle for ordering human-nature relations. Yet at the same time, it has also constituted a utopian surface onto which to project a space-time 'beyond' modernity and capitalism. In what ways, we ask, have recent bio and eco-artistic turns moved on from the subject/object ontologies of the landscape-form? Latin America is not just any 'natural/historical site' from which to attempt a revisiting of some of these questions. Moving from botanical explorations of early modernity, through the legacies of mid-twentieth century landscape design, up to artistic experimental recordings of New World nature in the 1960s and 1970s and to present struggles for environmental rights and against the precarization of the living, the visual works and papers presented at this event attempt to push thinking past fixed landscape forms. The diverse contributions to this interdisciplinary encounter encompass analyses of architectural sites and artworks; ecocritical perspectives on literary texts; experimental place-making practices; and the creation of material and visual ecologies that recognise the agency of non-human worlds.

Program

1 June ***Völkerkundemuseum***

16:00 Opening Comments

16:15 Oliver Lubrich, *Humboldtian Landscapes*

17:30 Álvaro Fernández Bravo, *Paisajes precarios: provincia, pobreza y poéticas del despojo en algunas obras latinoamericanas contemporáneas*

19:00 Film screening, Q&A: Jorge Domínguez Dubuc & Lisa Blackmore, *Guasina* (2017)

2 June ***Völkerkundemuseum***

10:00 Emanuele Coccia, *The Life of the Plants, or the Impossibility of the Landscape*

11:00 Eduardo J. Oliveira, *Por uma fanerologia das imagens: Karl Blossfeldt e a pele do mundo*

12:00 *Lunch*

14.15 Jill H. Casid, *Necrolandscaping*

16.00 Video screening, Q&A: Ursula Biemann, *The Cosmopolitical Forest*

18.00 Film screening, Q&A: Javier Correa, *Solo las huellas descubren el mar* (2017)

3 June ***Völkerkundemuseum***

10:00 Dayron Carrillo Morell, *Sueños lacustres y visiones residuales del México moderno*

11:00 Lisa Blackmore, *Beyond the Fluvial Sublime: Some Scenes from the Orinoco*

12:00 *Lunch*

13:15 Jens Andermann, *Nach der Natur: Bio Art and Unspecific Lives*

14.30 Video screening, Q&A: Maria Thereza Alves, *De-bording the Environment*

16:00

Break

19:00

Cabaret Voltaire

Performance: Nuno Ramos, *Soap Opera*. Introduction by Eduardo Jorge de Oliveira

Information
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Screenings and Artist Presentations

Jorge Domínguez Dubuc & Lisa Blackmore

Guasina (Venezuela/Switzerland, 2017; Spanish, English)

Periodically engulfed by the rising waters of the Orinoco Delta, the island prison of Guasina has all but disappeared from public memory. This inhospitable piece of land, where political prisoners were sent during Venezuela's last military dictatorship in the 1950s, was once a byword for persecution and a symbol of resistance. Today the ex-jail has become all but lost amid tangled riverways, submerged in oblivion. Through a collage of personal testimonies and fragile documents, this film retraces routes to Guasina and around the Orinoco River, brining its landscapes to the surface again through botanical samples, rotting celluloid, and archival images.

Javier Correa

Solo las huellas descubren el mar (Chile, 84 min., Spanish, English subtitles)

1965, Tierra del Fuego, Patagonia, Chile. Nine men aboard a big Chevrolet jeep wait for the departure of a ferry that will take them across to the continent, where they will embark on a journey to Bolivia. Poets, architects, artists and intellectuals from Latin America and Europe. Tins of pain, notebooks, wire and metal sheets. This is *La Amereida*, a poetic and artistic voyage through the heartland of the American continent. A poem that speaks of America's destiny. It is Ciudad Abierta (Open City) amidst the dunes, in front of the Pacific Ocean. These are the voyages that an Architecture School carries out each year. It is a day of activities initiated sixty years hence. An adventure that flounders only to begin once again.

Ursula Biemann

The Cosmopolitical Forest

Based on comprehensive research, the artist elaborates in her video works the far-reaching territorial and climatic transformations due to the extraction and engineering of resources, drawing attention to the social and biological micro-dynamics at work in these massive physical encroachments. Her recent fieldwork has taken her to the Amazon and the Arctic region. Engaging with the political ecology of oil, ice and water, the artist interweaves vast cinematic landscapes with documentary footage, SF poetry and academic findings to narrate a changing planetary reality. Discussing her artistic practice in the projects *Deep Weather*, *Forest Law*, and *Subatlantic*, Biemann particularly raises questions regarding the entanglement of aesthetics, ecology and speculative thought.

Maria Thereza Alves

De-bording the Environment

Seeds of Change is an ongoing investigation based on original research of ballast flora in several port cities of Europe. These germinated seeds potentially bear witnesses to a far more complex narrative of world history than is usually presented by orthodox accounts. *The Return of a Lake* is an investigation of the catastrophic desiccation of Lake Chalco, near Mexico City by a Spanish immigrant in 1908 which caused the collapse of the region's commerce, adversely affected the livelihood of 24 indigenous villages and towns. And continues to have adverse affects that still plague the region. In 2009, Alves began working with the Museo Comunitario del Valle de Xico who requested that this history

be made visible. *The Return of a Lake* questions the notion of “post-colonization” with an investigation of how colonial practices such as the ongoing appropriation of native people’s lands, culture and livelihood continue in place as a quotidian reality for indigenous communities.

Nuno Ramos

Monologo para um cachorro morto and Soap Opera

Soap Opera pivots on the question of animality. Preceded by *Monologo para um cachorro morto* (Monologue for a dead dog), Nuno Ramos mixes literary narrative and opera singing to combine the tragic destiny of dogs abandoned in a city like São Paulo with a local cultural tv soap-opera, in this case based on animals. Both works expose a metamorphosis of dogs in the context of daily life. Texts translated into German in collaboration with Looren, Marianne Gareis and the Romanisches Seminar students.

Presentations

Oliver Lubrich

Humboldtian Landscapes

How does the colonial experience affect European concepts of landscape? How does Alexander von Humboldt represent nature during and after his expedition to the Americas of 1799–1804? In his prose as well as his drawings, the traveller creates Humboldtian landscapes that correspond to his experimental practice of research and hybrid modes of writing. The talk will sketch five observations: (1) For Humboldt, landscape is an object of aesthetic appreciation and scientific precision. (2) Landscape poses a challenge to post-disciplinary interpretation. (3) It turns into an eco-system *avant la lettre*. (4) It becomes acoustic. (5) It generates the democratic vision of a public multi-media installation.

Álvaro Fernández Bravo

Paisajes precarios: provincia, pobreza y poéticas del despojo en algunas obras latinoamericanas contemporáneas

Este trabajo propone explorar entrelugares ubicados en zonas liminales donde lo urbano y lo rural se desdibujan. La indistinción entre ciudad y campo afecta también la noción de provincia como periferia y permite investigar la conexión de paisajes provincianos con marcos y problemas globales. La presentación hará foco en obras de poesía y cine latinoamericanos contemporáneos para analizar estos ejes, con énfasis en la representación de despojos, basura y pobreza en diálogo con poéticas que recuperan y se detienen en objetos, detritos, materia en descomposición e intersecciones donde la idea de naturaleza resulta resignificada. El trabajo se detendrá en obras de Daniel García Helder, Gian Paolo Minelli y Eduardo Coutinho, entre otros artistas contemporáneos.

Jens Andermann

Nach der Natur: Bio Art and Unspecific Lives

Whether in the medium of landscape or in Romantic/Gothic fantasies of robots and *automata*, relations between aesthetics, technology, and the living since the beginnings of industrial capitalism have almost invariably been predicated on classical notions of *imitatio vitae*: human genius (or *hybris*) could replicate, copy or counterfeit the ‘mechanics’ of Creation but –like the machine itself– only on the condition of its radical exteriority towards that which it sought to imitate. Hence, it is interesting to observe that the development of cybernetic notions of life itself as a machinic, and autopoetic, assemblage in the second half of the twentieth century occurred almost in parallel with novel forms of ‘ecological sculpture’ and ‘bio art’, including the work of Latin American artists such as Luis Fernando Benedit, Eduardo Kac, Mariana Zerbarini, Gilberto Esparza or Iván Henriques. Here I wish to draft a specifically postcolonial, ‘New World’ genealogy for these works, drawing out their implicit conversations with colonial repertoires of aesthetic surveying and evaluating the properties and productivity of living environments. At the same time, I wish to explore the mutual dynamics of ‘de-specification’ that takes place in many of these works, complicating their affiliation with a particular genre or discipline of art, science or technology in much the same way as the

living forms in and through which they are being deployed cease to adhere easily to any given species, inviting us into a thoroughly *post-natural* realm that is no longer necessarily monstrous or uncanny.

Eduardo Jorge de Oliveira

Por uma fanerologia das imagens: Karl Blossfeldt e a pele do mundo

Ainda no final do século XIX, Karl Blossfeldt, futuro professor da Escola de Artes Decorativas de Berlim, decide fotografar detalhes da vida vegetal a fim de repertoriar os ornamentos e as estruturas do mundo natural para elaborar um dispositivo pedagógico destinado às aulas de escultura do seu antigo professor, Moritz Meurer. O resultado dessas formas de vida ampliadas produziu um atravessamento do moderno ou um efeito colateral à revelia da *Gestalt* por uma força inesperada da irrupção do primitivo, exprimindo, assim, o florescimento de detalhes vegetais que, ampliados em fotografia, formam uma pele do mundo.

Jill H. Casid

Necrolandscaping

To elaborate a contaminated ethics for negotiating the colonial Anthropocene situation of what I call death-in-life in the terrain of crisis ordinary, I turn to where my essay "Landscape in the Performative" left off with its thesis $n+1$. Here I insisted that there is no subjunctive or conditional formulation of landscape capable of reducing or even arresting the radical uncertainty of landscape's performative and periperformative powers in an era marked by contestation over the ethics and politics of order- and genus-defying hybrids that constitute entirely unprecedented and yet viable forms of life as well as of their production, including techniques beyond those of sexual reproduction in this profoundly undecided terrain of the open-ended if/then questions of the unfinished histories of colonial biopolitics. Refusing the fantasy that "landscape" is somehow over, this essay, instead, develops "staying with the trouble" in another sense by thinking with queer, trans* experiments in the art of dying as a way of living with and making something habitable out of tainted aesthetics and the compost of discarded forms. Necro-landscaping, I elaborate, offers an aesthetic tactics of landscape in the deformative that mines the de-forming, volatile, but also strangely resilient powers of the negative—from shame to dirt.

Dayron Carrillo Morell

Sueños lacustres y visiones residuales del México moderno

La inauguración del Cárcamo de Dolores en 1951 supuso el completamiento de los esfuerzos ingenieriles para solucionar el déficit de agua potable en la Ciudad de México. Acorde con esta intención, el edificio perpetúa simultáneamente la memoria de los obreros fallecidos durante la construcción del Acueducto del Lerma y el entorno lacustre de la antigua Tenochtitlán. La intervención artística de Diego Rivera proyecta a diferentes niveles las intersecciones entre las visiones de un archipiélago mítico y su reciclaje como un capital tecnológico asociado al impulso desarrollista de la nación moderna. Estas escenas acuáticas, concebidas originalmente para permanecer sumergidas en las aguas del río Lerma, conforman no obstante los vestigios de un paisaje residual, cuya reconstrucción escenográfica marca la trayectoria errática de la modernidad mexicana.

Lisa Blackmore

Beyond the Fluvial Sublime: Some Scenes from the Orinoco

This paper revisits records of transatlantic, neocolonial, and local routes through the Orinoco River and Delta, piecing together scenes that reveal its entanglement with historic and modern forms of prospecting, violence and dispossession. Established in the colonial imagination as the route to El Dorado, the Orinoco's riverways have long been conceived as an extractive frontier, full of untold organic and mineral bounties. As such, landscape depictions of this region have historically reflected both human bedazzlement at its natural environment and the technoscientific mindset that drives quests to harness it as a productive resource. Rather than assume the region's capture as a cohesive landscape scene as part of what we might term the fluvial sublime, I instead explore how the *longue durée* of human exploits on the Orinoco attest to frictive instances of

humanity-in-nature that unhinge pretensions to exploit and to dominate organic realms. Returning to images, botanical samples, sketches, and testimonies, I ask how they might elucidate what Jason Moore terms a “co-produced history” of the Orinoco, that recognises organic actants (water, mud, plants) role in shaping and reshaping historical geographies and public imaginations.

Emanuele Coccia

The Life of the Plants, or the Impossibility of the Landscape

The concept of landscape probably represents the last untouchable rest of humanism in contemporary culture: it feeds the illusion of harmony as the basis of coexistence in nature, of a possible fusion between the beauty and the goodness, of the capacity of the aesthetical judgement to grasp and produce this harmony. This illusion is based on the fact that the very idea of landscape is anthropocentric: it moves from the point of view (point de vue) of the human being observing the space instead of the 'point of life' (point de vie) of real vegetal or animal beings (humans included) living in the space. Choosing the point of life of plants, and mixing mixing results from contemporary biological and botanical research and insights from contemporary architecture and from the history of sciences and Western philosophy, my talk will try to show that observed from the point the view of the living being, the space never exists under the form of a *landscape*. Instead of that it structurates itself in the form of a metabolic continuum where there is no opposition between living beings and environment, between individuum and space: both are unified in a common breath, which is the substance and the form of what we call world.

Participants

Maria Thereza Alves is a Berlin-based Brazilian artist who also co-founded the Partido Verde of São Paulo, Brazil in 1988. Her research-driven practice problematises Western binaries between nature and culture, art and politics, or art and daily life. In 1978 she made an official presentation on the human rights abuses of the indigenous population of Brazil at the U.N. Human Rights Conference in Geneva. Recently Alves has participated in the 32nd Bienal de São Paulo and the Sharjah Biennale. She has had a solo exhibition at MUAC in Mexico City and a survey exhibition at CAAC in Seville. She participated in DOCUMENTA (13) with *The Return of a Lake*. Alves is the recipient of the Vera List Prize for Art and Politics 2016-2018. www.mariatherezaalves.org

Jens Andermann is Professor of Latin American and Luso Brazilian Studies at the University of Zurich, following appointments at Birkbeck, University of London, and (as visiting professor) at Columbia, Princeton, Duke, Buenos Aires and Rio de Janeiro, as well as an editor of the *Journal of Latin American Cultural Studies*. At Zurich, he co-founded the Latin American Center Zurich and directed the research project *Modernity and the Landscape in Latin America*. Forthcoming book: *Tierras en trance. Arte y naturaleza después del paisaje* (Santiago de Chile: Metales Pesados, 2017); other publications include: *New Argentine Cinema* (2011, 2015), *The Optic of the State* (2007, 2014), and *Mapas de poder* (2000). In the fall term of 2017, he will be joining New York University as Professor of Spanish and Portuguese.

Ursula Biemann is an artist, writer, and video essayist based in Zurich. Her artistic practice is strongly research oriented and involves fieldwork in remote locations where she investigates resource ecologies and climate change. Her video installations are exhibited worldwide in museums and at international art biennials in Liverpool, Shanghai, Sevilla, Istanbul, Montreal, Sharjah, Venice and Sao Paulo. She has published several books and is the co-founder of the international art and research platform World of Matter. Biemann studied at the School of Visual Arts and the Whitney ISP in New York. She received the Meret Oppenheim Swiss Grand Award for Art and an honorary degree of humanities from the Swedish University Umea. www.geobodies.org

Lisa Blackmore is a Postdoctoral Researcher on the project *Modernity and the Landscape in Latin America* at Universität Zürich. She is the author of *Spectacular Modernity: Dictatorship, Space, and Visuality in Venezuela, 1948–1958* (University of Pittsburgh Press, 2017), co-editor of *From Mall to Prison: El Helicoide's Downward Spiral* (Urban Research, 2017), and co-director with Jorge Domínguez Dubuc of the documentary films *Después de Trujillo* (2016) y *Guasina* (2017). Lisa worked as a curator of contemporary art in Caracas, and taught at the Universidad Simón Bolívar, the Universidad Central de Venezuela, and the University of Leeds, UK. In autumn 2017, she will join the University of Essex as Lecturer in Art History and Interdisciplinary Studies.

Dayron Carrillo Morell studied Art History at the University of Havana, and obtained his masters degree in Art History and Hispanic Studies at the University of Zurich. He is currently PhD. candidate at the University of Zurich, and research assistant on the project *Modernity and the Landscape in Latin America*, sponsored by the Swiss National Found (SNF). His investigation explores the dialogic relationships between the built environment and Mexican and Cuban architectural modernism. He is a contributor to the book *Beyond Tradition, Beyond Invention: Cosmic Technologies and Creativity in Contemporary Afro-Cuban Religion* (2015).

Emanuele Coccia is an Associate Professor at the École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales (EHESS) in Paris. He received his PhD in Florence and was formerly an Assistant Professor of History of Philosophy in Freiburg, Germany. His current research topics focus on the ontological status of images and their normative power, especially in fashion and advertising. Among his publications: *La trasparenza delle immagini. Averroè e l'averroismo* (Milan 2005, Spanish translation 2008), *La vie sensible* (2010) and *Le bien dans les choses* (2013). With Giorgio Agamben as a co-editor, he published an anthology on angels in Christian, Jewish, and Islamic contexts: *Angeli. Ebraismo Cristianesimo Islam* (2009).

Jill H. Casid is Professor of Visual Studies at the University of Wisconsin-Madison where she founded and served as the first director of the Center for Visual Cultures. A historian, theorist, and practicing artist, she is the author of [Sowing Empire: Landscape and Colonization](#) and [Scenes of Projection: Recasting the Enlightenment Subject](#) and the edited collection [Art History in the Wake of the Global Turn](#). Her recent essays and articles have appeared in *Women and Performance*, *TDR*, the *Journal of Visual Culture*, *Migration and the Contemporary Mediterranean*, *The Philosophical Salon*, and *Architecture is All Over*. She is currently completing the two-book project *Form at the Edges of Life*.

Javier Correa is a documentary filmmaker whose work dwells on memory, urban space, art and science. In collaboration with different artists, he has participated in numerous exhibitions, installations and interventions, including the Bienal de Arte de São Paulo with Ciudad Abierta. In 2012 he completed his first feature-length film *A primera hora* and has also edited the documentary *Palabras Cruzadas*, on the artist Gordon Matta-Clark. Since 2015, he has participated in the Taller de Arte Abisal, with the Corporación Cultural Amereida. He is currently a member of Ciudad Abierta, where he develops collaborative curatorial and artistic projects such as the exhibition *La invención de un mar*, Museo Nacional de Bellas Artes, Santiago. *Amereida: solo las huellas descubren el mar* is his second feature-length film.

Jorge Domínguez Dubuc is a visual artist and filmmaker currently based in Switzerland. After studying art in Caracas, he obtained a Masters Degree in Fine Art from the Chelsea School of Art and Design in London. His practice, which spans installation, video, animation, and sculpture, creates quasi-real realities that disturb our relationship with landscape and our experience of the world. His video works are part of the Patricia Phelps de Cisneros Collection. His most recent feature-length documentary is *Después de Trujillo* (2016), and he has also made, directed and edited documentaries on varied topics, including contemporary informal architecture, traditional cultural expressions, as well as animated short films. www.jorge-dominguez-dubuc.com

Álvaro Fernández Bravo is an independent scholar at CONICET, Argentina. After studying literature at the Universidad de Buenos Aires, he obtained his masters and doctoral degrees at Princeton University, and carried out postdoctoral research at the Universidade Federal de Minas Gerais, Brazil. He has been a professor at Temple University, USA, numerous universities in Argentina and the Pontificia Universidad Católica de Río de Janeiro. From 2008-2013 he was director of the New York University Buenos Aires. He has published widely on film, literature and the culture industry. His most recent book is *El museo vacío: acumulación primitiva, patrimonio cultural e identidades colectivas, Argentina y Brasil, 1880-1945* (2016).

Eduardo Jorge de Oliveira is Assistant Professor of Literature, Arts and Media at the University of Zurich and member of the Lateinamerika Zentrum Zürich (LZZ) and the Zentrum Künste und Kulturtheorie (ZKK). His doctoral thesis was titled *Inventar uma pele para tudo: texturas da animalidade na literatura e nas artes visuais*, developed in conjunction with the department of philosophy at the Ecole Normale Supérieure (ENS) in Paris, and the department of literary theory and comparative literature at the Universidade Federal de Minas Geras (UFMG) in Brazil, under the supervision of Dominique Lestel and Maria Esther Maciel. He did his postdoctoral research with Giovanni Careri at the Ecole des Hautes Etudes en Sciences Sociales in Paris.

Oliver Lubrich is Professor of Comparative Literature at the University of Bern. Previously he was Professor of Rhetoric at Freie Universität Berlin and visiting professor at the University of Chicago, California State University, Tecnológico de Monterrey, Mexico, and Universidade de São Paulo, Brazil. His books include *Shakespeare's Self-Deconstruction* (2001) and *Post-Colonial Poetics* (2004, 200). He has edited several works of Alexander von Humboldt and is currently directing the complete edition of Humboldt's essays. His second research project documents testimonies from Nazi Germany and he works collaboratively with neuroscientists to study experimental rhetoric, and with primatologists and ethnologists to investigate *The Researcher's Affects*.

Nuno Ramos is a Brazilian artist whose work spans sculpture, filmmaking, composition, as well as poetry, novels, and journalism. As well as large scale installations, Nuno Ramos also produces outdoor works in which natural elements--the sea, rocks, soil, time--play an integral role. He lives and works in São Paulo. He has been participating in important exhibitions since 1983, including the 1985, 1989 and 1994 editions of the Bienal de São Paulo, and represented Brazil at the Biennale di Venezia in 1995. His distinctions include the Grand Award of the Barnett Newman Foundation in 2006 and the Prêmio Portugal Telecom de Literatura in 2009. In 2015, he was Distinguished Brazilian Writer in Residence at the University of California, Berkeley. www.nunoramos.com.br