

Landscape in Theory rationale

Landscape as a concept has taken on increasing interdisciplinary significance in the humanities, as a field of scholarly enquiry and form of practice in art, writing, performance and design. In academic and creative practice, landscape intersects with cognate concepts such as environment, place, space, site, habitat, territory and region in a complex field of meaning. In research beyond Anglophone culture, this field is further overlain by other terms and languages. Landscape has expanded as a concept, to include a range of places, urban, rural, and industrial, spectacular and overlooked, everyday and enchanting, lived in, worked on, moved through and looked at. Landscape is also framing enquiries on fundamental questions of identity and authority, including the relative powers of the human and non-human.

This symposium aims to increase multi-disciplinary dialogue and debate on landscape at a theoretical level. This presents challenges and opportunities. Much landscape research is at best lightly, or implicitly, theoretical and a significant tradition is anti-theoretical, grounding the concept in the local study of particular places, a tactic which might itself be subject to theoretical analysis. What theory means in and between disciplines, and how it relates to particular forms of practice and empirical evidence, can differ significantly; also the meaning of broad concepts such as textuality, spatiality, iconography and performativity can shift appreciably as they enter landscape study and with different deployments, not least for specific historical and geographical contexts. Again this could open up a promising area of enquiry, of how concepts travel through landscape scholarship and practice and are translated and adapted in the process.

The symposium will address fundamental questions of the place of theory within landscape interpretation and practice; moreover, as most contributors also work beyond landscape, it will also take a broader view, to consider the contribution of a landscape perspective to theory more generally and to consider the limits of landscape as a concept, that while landscape is good to think with, it may also be good to think against.