

Department of American Literature and Culture
John Paul II Catholic University of Lublin, Poland

Polish Association for American Studies
Conference
PAAS 2012

Americascapes:
Americans in/and their diverse
sceneries

17-19 October 2012, Puławy n/Lublin, Poland

Call for Papers

Americascapes, or sceneries have emerged at the cusp of culture and environment as a result of the process of their interaction in the course of American history. The same space may be a site of competing scapes projected by conflicting majority narratives and minority counter-narratives. These constructs have been invested ideologically, ranging from the indigenous, Native American visions of home territory as cosmos through the promise of American dream that projected the new land as virginal and uninhabited, to its failure as a new Garden of

Eden. For Puritans America's promise was initially associated with the urban allegory of the city on a hill to be subsequently considered in terms of the Garden of Covenant surrounded with "howling wilderness," while, as Louis Simpson suggests, the South articulated its colonial experience in terms of the garden of chattel. The violent beginnings of the Republic found reflection in the menacing Gothic scenery of American landscapes in the works of Charles Brockden Brown. Maintaining that terror is not of Germany but of the soul, E. A. Poe pointed to the affinity between the external scenery and American Gothic mindscapes. Transcendentalists construed landscape as revealing moral order, while the sites of battles and calamities of the Civil War, which still attract thousands of tourists every year, have become, over years, the ground of conflicting representations and theatrical reenactments. The nineteenth century also saw dramatic transformation of the landscape that verged on ecological disaster due to the railway construction accompanied by mass buffalo shooting and economically driven destruction of American environment. Those transformations were concomitant with forcible relocation of Native Americans to reservations. Nostalgia for the disappearing wilderness has found its expression in the creation of urban parks such as Central Park. Even as the urban development gave rise to inherently American city-scapes, Charles Olson pointed out that Melville's Pacific, prefigured in the Plains, was also a figure of the American West; prairies and the seascapes thus form an allegorical continuum. Mid-twentieth century is marked by the construction of the highways and the development of the car industry whose crises in the late twentieth century contributed to the decaying industrial landscapes of the Rust Belt. Twentieth and twenty first centuries have seen a proliferation of internal and external landscapes, landscape simulacra such as amusement parks and virtual scapes generated in and for the sake of the movies and electronic media. On the other hand the interest in the materiality of embodiment as well as the development of women and queer studies contribute to the celebration of bodyscapes.

American public space may be viewed as an arena where values, ideas and interests constantly compete for our attention, time or action. Institutions and cultural tradition help us demarcate between almost indefinite claims made upon public space by a multitude of actors who wish to claim its piece for themselves or wish to share it with others. What emerges from these interactions is a devolution of American public space. No sphere of human activity is left intact: from A for architecture to Z for zoning. All emerging spaces are filled by political and social actors with their own interpretations of what is possible, what is right, what is necessary and what is useless. Thus, their words and actions define the meaning of the common good.

We are looking for contributions which will approach American politics and society as a compound space in which various actors (parties, groups, classes, movements, citizens) constantly (re)interpret and (re)construct American values and goals bringing tensions between the sacred and the secular domains and the private and public spheres. Some participants of these debates occupy parks, some quietly stroll down the corridors of Congress. Some communicate their claims via the media air space, others prefer to move door to door in local spaces. The organizers of this conference wish to capture this dynamics and diversity in American democracy today.

We hope to provide a forum for scholars in various disciplines ranging from literary history, history, sociology to political science and economics. You are invited to discuss, in English or Polish, questions and issues connected with (but not limited to) the following problems:

- American public space as a social, political and cultural phenomenon
- Reading city-scapes and their meaning
- History of urban parks (Olmstead's Central Park)
- Historical, Political and Environmental issues concerning National Parks
- Amusement parks & Disneyland
- America as a Garden
- The development of American suburbia
- American countryside and provincial America
- Landscapes of Southern trauma and memory
- The significance of wilderness in American culture
- Political and social tensions inherent in the dynamic landscapes of the American frontier
- Historical, Political, Social and Environmental issues concerning Indian Reservations
- Hybridity and borderland landscapes
- The significance of marine-, sea- and ocean-scapes in American literature and culture
- America as a techno-scape
- The relationship between internal and external scapes in American tradition
- American dreamscapes and mindscapes
- Bodyscapes
- Mediascapes
- Nineteenth-century American hybrid art: panoramas
- The significance of models and miniatures in American literature
- Celluloid skyline: cinematic representations of American city-scapes
- Representations of urban environment in comic books
- Virtual landscapes and their various uses in American culture
- Computer games and their scenery/landscapes
- Scenery archeology in contemporary American mass culture
- Foreign scenery as constructed and construed in American fiction and poetry
- Monuments in public space and the politicization of landscape
- Landscapes and mindscapes of minority experience
- mythicization of American space (the myth of Aztlan in the Southwest and California)

The deadline for submitting paper proposals is 31 July 2012. Panel proposals are welcome. The paper abstracts of 200-300 words, and in the case of panels 600-900 words, should be sent to the address: americascapes@gmail.com

For further information please consult the conference website: paas2012.pl