

COPING WITH THE LANDSCAPE:  
AN AESTHETIC ANALYSIS OF THE INTERMEDIATE ZONE

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## ABSTRACT

Numerous studies have been conducted into the aesthetics of landscape, both through objects (sculptures and installations) and through pictorial devices (painting, printmaking, photography, etc.). The fact being that, as long as the horizon line is interrupted these studies by artists will continue in hope of understanding and changing their own reality. Aligning with the history of the photographic land survey, the emphasis of this work is to direct the reading of landscapes towards an aesthetic analysis of the modern mobile landscape. Considering the accumulation of capital as the driving force of the aesthetic change in the landscape, this analysis will focus on the geography of the highest concentration of visible indicators, the intermediate zone. Within this transitional space, as is similarly true with ecological systems, the highest concentration for diversity has the ability to manifest at the edges of converging zones, due to the overlapping of multiple systems in one geographic locality. Accumulation of indicators, both those failing in the system and those entering the system will be present. Recognizing that this survey considers the use and misuse of utilitarian objects and architecture as a method of evaluating time, purpose, and relative availability to the general population, it will present an argument for the intentional denial of the legibility for this landscape, leading to a further lack of understanding within the general population. This result will further lead to the alienation of the population from its landscape.

## INTRODUCTION

As a child, I remember asking my father about his travels in the Marine Corp. More often than not, he would reply “It always seems to rain when I go to a country”, or as he would joke, “I cure droughts when I travel”. Until studying the politics around the landscape, I never understood fully what he was saying. Recently, I put the connections together that my father almost always traveled to the arid desert, where rainy seasons are becoming increasingly rare. As a Marine, he traveled to areas considered to be of interest to national security. If there is drought, there is war. That explanation is simple and links the politics of global economy with that of climate change. People take up arms to feed their families. Protection of those close to us is a feature that transcends culture. It unites my father with the impoverished people he encountered during his countless deployments to what is classified as the third world. My father didn’t join the Marines to bring an end to conflicts, nor to protect our rights within the United States. He joined the Corp to feed his family. He worked to prevent the spread of drought at home.

Consider the link between economics and the environment, or how the growth of capital shapes the land. Analyzing the crossover of these fields reveals how the turbulent fear of drought manifests at home. On the edge of the occupied landscape is the intermediate zone, that space that is ignored and left for undesirables. Within this place an authentic fear of the contemporary landscape grows, a fear that leads men and women like my father to fend off the drought. But the drought touches closer to home than we admit.

## THE INTERMEDIATE ZONE

Landscape is derived from the word *landschap*, Frisian for shoveled earth.<sup>1</sup> Long before it was associated with beautiful pristine views of mountains and rivers, landscape stood to describe the built environment, places which have been shaped for the occupation of the land. They revealed intimately, a portrait of the peoples who live upon them, to include their political ambitions. But beyond the taxonomy of land, the landscape serves to illustrate the metaphorical truth behind the culture which prescribed the view, and the society which views it. The pivotal analysis of the land is broken down into the geographical, autobiographical, and metaphorical.<sup>2</sup>

By changing between these perspectives, land-use contradictions are revealed between those who occupy it and those who frame it. This paper will analyze the aesthetics of the Intermediate Zone, the area between prescribed views of domestic space and infrastructure space, placing emphasis on the ubiquitous qualities of localities, the political climate that governs land issues, and the metaphors within the iconography of the landscape.<sup>3</sup> These three perspectives are imperative to the Intermediate Zone and only through interrogation of these perspectives can the zone reveal the contradictions and truths within the landscape.

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<sup>1</sup> John R Stilgoe, *What is Landscape?* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2015), 2

<sup>2</sup> Robert Adams. *Beauty in Photography: Essays in Defense of Traditional Values*. (New York, NY: Aperture, 2009), 14.

<sup>3</sup> In Iampolski's essay, the term Intermediate Zone is used to define a geographic distance from the subject of an image to its proximity to of the view. Mikhail Iampolski, "Givenesse Without The Given," Alexander Gronky, , Accessed April 1, 2018, <http://www.alexandergronsky.com/text-pastoral>.



Underpinning this analysis of the Intermediate Zone is the precedent set by J.B. Jackson's three major phases of landscape that define the philosophies of the landscape throughout recent human history.<sup>4</sup> Jackson's first phase begins with the medieval landscape, a period when people were attached to land around their home, the specific geography of that land creating their identity and way of life. In this stage, the land was cared for with an understanding of the need to hold back nature and to live in a state of continuity with the immanent, opposing forces on the land. During the medieval phase people appeared to live at relative balance with their surrounding lands, despite being all too aware of the dangers of a metaphoric draught in the land. But during Jackson's next major phase in landscape, the notions of living in balance were trumped by the overwhelming need to domesticate nature.

The Neoclassical phase begins Jackson's second major movement. Pivotal to the cultural changes at the time, the notion that man has mastery over the land circumvented former struggles with local geography, allowing for profit and luxury to overshadow the need for solidarity with the dirt that encompasses human activity. Throughout this phase, a wave of erection reshapes the land.<sup>5</sup> Turning once quiet pastoral lands into proud domesticated capitals for progress. Influenced by changing philosophies of beauty, economics, and ethics, the lands' subjugation to the human species had begun. Forests were cultivated for aesthetics and convenience instead of the geographically specific resources such as flora and fauna. This step begins the ideological separation of humans

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<sup>4</sup> Paul Shephard, *The Cultivated Wilderness Or, What Is Landscape* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1997), 13-15

<sup>5</sup> Erection refers to the rising need for larger constructions reshaping the built environment via a hyper-masculine form.

from the land. People no longer live at balance with the land, but instead live to govern it. The fragile stability, now subject to humanity, represents a dangerous change in the understanding of how the landscape was read. It allows for land to become to an abstract, removed from the politics of the self. It begins to justify nature as a commodity, in the service of man.

The Neoclassical landscape revived by the Renaissance and destroyed, after five centuries of fertile inquiry into what the ideal looked like, by the howitzers of World War I.<sup>6</sup>

The howitzer, with its 22 million rounds delivered on the western front alone, acknowledges the long term global changes that came with the newly developed military complex, fatal efficiency. The advancements within the military industrial complex spilled over, influencing how corporations considered the movement of commodities. To be competitive in the world market during the post-war era, companies had to be able to move vast amounts of material over large spans at the lowest cost. This begins the third phase of Jackson's landscapes: a mobile, temporary landscape. Within this landscape, a growing inquisition into the frequency at which objects can be transported over vast distances led the way for progress. It is within this period the zone becomes triumphant in delineating the lines in the land, by segregating purposes of the land based on the needs of capital over the needs of local communities, habitats, or wildlife.

Capital becomes the driving force in this phase of the landscape. It separates the boundary lines traditionally established by nations and redraws them under the guidance and interests of global trade. Capital growth changed the rules of fighting the war: to

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<sup>6</sup> Paul Shephard, *The Cultivated Wilderness Or, What Is Landscape* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1997), 15

consume and move endlessly, in the name of progress. The outcomes of this growth produced a balance based not in the categorization of human to non-human – (as was the norm in previous phases of landscape) but instead on the endless accumulation of resources. This includes both the land and those that occupy it as a raw material to be monetized. By altering the acquisition of resources from the local occupants of the land to those which can (through economic advantage) negotiate for their share of the resources, the land began its shift toward an encompassing human-altered horizon – which began in the neo-classical phase and was mastered in the mobile phase.

The need for land to accommodate the shift toward a mobile landscape came in multiple forms. Most would be familiar with the American suburb, as it appears in pop culture as a forlorn landscape of banal beauty and unoriginal architecture. Other examples include the growth of businesses parks, shopping malls, and strip malls in their ugly and ordinary designs serving no human need except endless expansion.<sup>7</sup> Significantly neglected is the less iconic infrastructure space, the space that supports the rapid growth of the suburbs, malls, resorts and offices. Infrastructure space is the glue that holds the new mobile landscape together. We see its adhesive qualities when we connect its physical existence to a distinct American culture shift. The interstate system was developed after the world wars to help facilitate the movement of material across the nation. This system of infrastructure bridges a hundred-mile daily commute for residents of a suburb in Fredericksburg, VA that are employed in government offices at the

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<sup>7</sup> Ordinary is a derivative from the decorated shed. Implying that the structures are subject to symbolism, propaganda and inconsistency. Robert Venturi, Denise Scott Brown, and Steven Izenour, *Learning from Las Vegas: The Forgotten Symbolism of Architectural Form* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2000), 102.

Pentagon in Arlington, VA. These workers would previously have lived in the beltway of the District of Columbia, but can now live cheaply in the suburbs and commute to their place of business. This interconnectivity allows the economic gains of their employment to spread over a wider geographic footprint than the local economy within which the wages were acquired.

The aesthetics of infrastructure developed exponentially throughout this phase, concealing the hyper-visibility of the major contributors that pacified the land. Two fundamental contributions to business philosophy lead the charge. First, standardization spreads as a popular form of simplifying production and providing stability to the transportation industry. The standard unit becomes the symbol for the human-altered landscape through mass movement of goods and resources. Second, the average product life-cycle shortens to accommodate continuous consumption, an act that symbolizes the motto of the capitalist economy for continuous expansion. By creating a unit that is produced, consumed and replaced over a faster cycle, a company is able to embrace the philosophy of this phase of landscape: continuous expansion. Any hopes of maintaining the beauty developed through the neoclassical landscape will be buried under the pavement needed to support the weight of cargo containers.

The storage container becomes a hyper-visible vessel for the invisible accumulation of capital, becoming synonymous with global trade. As an icon it represents the movement of material throughout the landscape.

Midstream, a muddy estuary near a port, forgotten space, out of sight, out of mind. Upstream, the hinterland, the greedy continent. Downstream, other

ports, great harbor cities, oceans, 100,000 invisible ships, one and a half million invisible seafarers, binding the world together through trade.<sup>8</sup>

The question of the mobile landscape and its effects on the aesthetics of the contemporary landscape exists not at sea but at singular points on the land and the horizon line. It is revealed by shifting the view to encounter multiple perspectives of the land within a singular locality. A grouping of these fragmentary views serves to highlight and acknowledge the landscape as contradiction, evidence that a place can be nothing less than the sum of its parts.

Inherently, the Intermediate Zone will be filled with contradictions, both political and metaphorical. Unpacking the iconography inside the contradictions reveals tragic and humble metaphors warrant of an extended contemplation. These subjects warrant no bother to most, but speak frankly about the conditions which bind the occupants of land to the global politics surrounding the rising fear of a metaphorical drought. Drought serves as a metaphor for both the actual environmental consequences of misusing lands, and the undefinable fear of an “other”, which is too often manifested inside unseen and neglected spaces. The Intermediate Zone is “other”, it is an unnamable neglected space which reveals the appalling clinicality of the quotidian landscape.<sup>9</sup>

Look inward from the edge of a zone, and see the accumulation of Jackson’s phases, a savage landscape turned to arcadia transitioning through consumption to become an empire before falling to desolation.<sup>10</sup> The Intermediate Zone sets the stage for

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<sup>8</sup> *The Forgotten Space*, Dir. Allen Seklua and Noel Burch, prod. Frank Van Reemst and Joost Verheij (Doc.Eye Film, 2010), DVD.

<sup>9</sup> “other” refers to the ethics subjected upon all non-human objects.

<sup>10</sup> The movement of landscape from savage to arcadia before desolation follows a series of paintings by Thomas Cole, depicted within his *Course of Empire*.

another phase of the landscape, one which is built out of fear, for the objects it has created, for the terrifying influence those objects have, and for their unpredictable effects over the people that encounter them.<sup>11</sup> The zone provides a path through fear, through the traditional order of encounters with the land. It removes the fear, by showing you the view from the “other”.

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<sup>11</sup> The fear of objects is in reference to Timothy Morton’s Hyperobject, see “A Quake in Being” Timothy Morton, *Hyperobjects: Philosophy and Ecology after the End of the World* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2014).

## A LANDSCAPE OF UBIQUITOUS LOCALITIES

Land differs from landscape in that land is the actual stuff that fits between a person's toes, and the landscape is the grander totality of the ethics that govern that land.<sup>12</sup> This essential point underpins any aesthetic analysis of representations of the land because the thing that is being analyzed is not the land, it is the landscape, or the accumulation of values that have shaped a physical place to be what it is. This is often not what is pictured but how the subject of the picture came to be. The issue within landscape as a genre, is how the aesthetics of land developed into the contemporary landscape. To resolve this, the ubiquitous nature of the quotidian landscape will be scrutinized both in the localities of land which have been standardized over the last century and the aesthetics that have developed within the medium of photography to discuss the issue of the changing landscape.

Before considering the mediums influence in the genre of landscape, consider the use of standardization as a method of production serving industry to transform physical objects to act as contagions for spreading a ubiquitous aesthetic over a vast horizon throughout the last century. Two icons prominently stand to be blamed for the infectious spread of standardization methods. Both are vital in that they focus on one of the greatest factors in modern business, the movement of products to consumers and the movement of resources for processing. The first, is the standard pallet, or ISO 6780:2003(E), which has given an easy means to move the production of goods to virtually any location however inappropriate it may be for the local economy. The second is the shipping container, a

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<sup>12</sup> Liz Wells, *Land Matters: Landscape Photography, Culture and Identity* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2011), 1.

glorified box that conceals the actual movement of goods within the landscape, offering instead an architectural façade or Trojan horse brought about by the needs of exponential growth.<sup>13</sup> These mediators lead a culture of mass mobility, prioritizing profits without consideration of the cultural or geologic impacts to land.

Exploring this further, consider the simple forty-eight inch by forty-inch standard wooden pallet. This object, with its utilitarian purpose, is not a revolutionary step forward, it is in the way in which post-war era industries choose to use the pallet that demonstrates progress. Prior to the war, most industries had some form of skid or pallet, upon which merchandise was organized and shipped to a consumer. The products were unloaded from the pallet, reorganized, and palletized before shipping again to another final consumer. This method was inefficient – and led to a large amount of wasted resources, both in raw material and labor. As increasing the speed by which products moved toward the war became more important, a more efficient method of transporting goods was devised. A move to share uniform skids forced the hand of manufacturing to conform to a singular design. In doing this, the standard pallet was born, a uniform foundation that provided the support structure needed to transport a vast quantity of consumables over large distances.

Unique factors in the use of pallets by industries following the war sustained the use of the uniform pallet as a global unit of measure. The concept of a pallet pool, whereby a group of similar industries share a vast number of pallets rotating them

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<sup>13</sup> *The Forgotten Space*, Dir. Allen Seklua and Noel Burch, prod. Frank Van Reemst and Joost Verheij (Doc.Eye Film, 2010), DVD.



between distributors, warehouses, producers, and various entities involved with the transportation of goods, developed and is implemented virtually unanimously. The act of doing this increased efficiency in many industries allowing for lower cost goods, a wider variety of products available to consumers over a larger geographic area, and, at least initially, the basis for a more sustainable business model.

The principle design of standard pallets allows for a wide tolerance with the manufacturing of each unit. Waste lumber, or lumber with measurements that have many variations within a set board foot for commercial use, becomes the prime material for the production in pallets. The design simply needs the outside dimensions to be under forty-eight by forty inches, accessible by fork lift on two sides – but nothing restricts the variations on a single board used in assembling the pallet. This again recuses cost to the manufacturer while also lowering the environmental impacts of production by using irregular lumber. The need to farm trees for the express purpose of manufacturing pallets reduces and moves toward a more sustainable model.

The contradiction, however, lies in the proposal of sustainable models within an economic system that strives to accumulate infinitely. The only sustainable model, or model that could be maintained indefinitely, would be one which lacked exponential growth, looking not to expand but to rest contingent with opposing forces. The clever lie is that progress in pursuit of sustainability is a noble and endearing endeavor. Progress cannot be had without the suffering and the turnover of the old methodologies. Combine this with an economic policy for exponential growth and the need to maintain that growth

indefinitely, and one of the most polarizing acts of propaganda is unleashed. The Trojan horse that businesses are acting in the name of sustainability.

The evidence for the lie doesn't come in open pit mines, or red rivers of petrochemical waste – it comes closer to home. In backyard house parties, and weekend bon fires, in the form of burning pallets for fuel in fires. This is one of many physical contradictions within sustainable practice. The community burn culture of gathering around left-over pallets, to burn for the enjoyment of fire, song, and community, might be one of the most tragic signifiers of our time. Following the narrative of pallet pooling would suggest that the redistribution to save cost and environmental impact has little concern for exponential growth, rather that the waste of pallets is the staple of economic expansion.

As corporations move toward a model of sustainable practices where they look for methods of lowering costs and inefficiencies, the impact on local economies and the environment should be reduced. Why then, with mediators as influential as the cargo containers or pallets, does the environment under the influence of sustainable practice become scarred? The answer is in the need for mobility. The need for architecture to be nothing more than a glorified box.<sup>14</sup> To have the ability to be repurposed as the use of a geography changes, as the needs change. To build not for one's children but only for the life of the average worker. Build to suit the needs of today, and tomorrow we will do the same. A ubiquitous landscape with no defining features or distractions becomes the common answer, for growth. Consider *South Corner*, *Riccar America Company*,

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<sup>14</sup> Robert Venturi, Denise Scott Brown, and Steven Izenour, *Learning from Las Vegas: The Forgotten Symbolism of Architectural Form* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2000), 128-131

*Pullman, Costa Mesa* from Lewis Baltz's body of work *The New Industrial Parks*, later re-photographed by Catherine Opie. The unheroic banal architecture gives no sign of use or purpose, it exists to fit the purposes of the present moment. Nearly 30 years later when photographed by Opie, little has changed. The site still stands as a claim to the ubiquitous nature of the mobile landscape.



*Figure 1 Lewis Baltz, South Corner, Riccar America Company, Pullman, Costa Mesa*

Photography has been a partner to the survey of land throughout the course of American history. Capturing images was a practical means to an end as congress needed to know what their country was made of. Alongside every major survey group, a team of photographers and artists were set out to document the American landscape. Throughout

the twentieth century photographers continued this tradition of documenting the land through changes brought out by industrialization and urbanization, both fundamental products of capital growth. Photographers took it upon themselves to show the consumption of land – for sake of progress and the goal of accumulating exponential growth. But in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century, photographers began to revisit the aesthetics and pictorial devices that era used to conduct the early land surveys. This began a type of land survey which has influenced the photographic medium over the last forty years, inspiring thousands of photographers to take up the call and again re-survey the land. This movement, which began as a single photography exhibition is called *New Topographics*.



*Figure 2 Robert Adams, Frame for a tract house, Colorado Springs, Colorado. 1969*

Marked by its abrupt banality and directness, *New Topographics* mirrored many rising trends in contemporary practices of the time. It focused on the human-altered landscape and the integration of human sprawl into natural systems. In the photograph, *Frame for a tract house, Colorado springs, 1969* by Robert Adams, the sign centered in the image references the organic evolution of nature paired with the developing suburban neighborhood to create a pivotal image in rationalizing *New Topographics* – where Adams gives a perspective of the landscape which is neither picturesque nor without beauty. By naming the thing that is at question, a beautiful proposition is given to the viewer to contemplate their role within the land; not their privilege to view the land, but their foot prints over it.

The fear brought out by the New Topographic aesthetic incorporates the banality with which the landscape has been altered.

## FEAR AND PLACE

Art has been used to pacify debatable issues for some time. It offers an escape from fact, a repose of things too polarized to agree upon. This is no different within art that represents the land. As a genre, it suffers the victimization of being nothing more than a contemplative hideaway from the politics which govern our landscape. In doing so, it removes the viewer from the issues all together, entertaining them through escapism. The advantage for art as a facilitator for politics is in the viability of radical arguments which need only be considerate of aesthetics as its grounds for discussion. It offers a mediator for facts, by only suggesting that a fact could exist.

Photography as a medium over the recent years has been a battle field for these debates – of land politics and of aesthetic politics regarding how lands should be pictured. Like any polarized issue, each side is nuanced with relatable arguments that counter each other. Using the Intermediate Zone as point of perspective, both the issues of land politics and the issues of aesthetic politics as it relates to photography will be examined.

The Intermediate Zone is a place which offers unbound stewardship to the land. Meaning that the perspective is not of landlord, nor of tenant. It offers the argument of the voyeur looking in.

Beginning with land issues, is it worth to note that the principle debate surrounding the land starts with ownership. Those who own land wish to develop it as they see fit, while those whom humbly reside upon it and utilize it wish to have a voice over its use. Bear Ears National Monument, a site set aside for public use during the

Obama administration, is now being privatized under the current Trump Administration as a move toward private land ownership. The outrage on all sides ranges from states' rights, environmental impacts, desecration of native histories, local financial stability, employment opportunities, and over-tourism, etc. In many ways the decision has become an ideological struggle about who owns and who controls land in the west.<sup>15</sup> Stand on either side of this debate, and the other side is not visible. Ideology works as a veil of silence, sequestering any counter point towards an opposing view.

There is nothing criminal in defending a side of the debate, though each side is made out to be one. From the viewpoint of an Intermediate Zone the debate looks frightening. Neither vantage point is willing to concede to the other – both are digging in for a long fight, blind to the actions being taken against one another in the name of outside organizers. The role of class hierarchies is perhaps the most frightening aspect of the debate. The poor farmer being told he will benefit from more land to farm while unaware of a wealthy international buyer waiting for the grounds to hit the open market. The locals on both sides of the issue are being used to fight a war they have no means of winning – this is the view of the unbound steward.

Conglomerate Corporations know how to profit in the age of mobility by moving without regards to the politics of the local. The land has already been divided into zones and standardized through architecture, aesthetics, and vernacular language to be ubiquitous, making it easy to move whole industries across a vast geographic area to

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<sup>15</sup> James Cook. "Bears Ears: Inside the Fight for Utah's Contested National Monuments." BBC News. December 04, 2017. Accessed April 1, 2018. <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-42222069>.

expand profits for global consumers. This leaves the locals victims to suffer the consequences of corporate wealth.

Butte, Montana is one of these localities that has fallen victim to the Conglomerate Corporation. Once a site of wealth and global importance for the copper that was extracted for the country's power lines and other utilities, the city will eternally live fending off the Silver Bow Creek and Butte Area super fund site. The burden of the site comes in the form of human extraction leaving a void in the earth, which left to its own nature will fill with acidic water, laced with heavy metals until it reaches the water table. Paired with the Silver Bow Creek, the dump site of smelting waste containing similar heavy metals which are unsuitable for human (and non-human) life, the city will bear the burden till long after it turns to ruin. Imagine the fear of drinking water that kills you, there's something biblical in that.

Fear of drought comes in multiple forms. Not necessarily a fear that there will be no rain, but a fear that water will no longer sustain human life. This happens naturally of course, selenium in parts of southern Wyoming keeps locals from using well water. But national and even global economic endeavors are increasingly leaving disasters for locals to clean up. Why then do locals keep cleaning them up and inviting non-locals to exploit them? Is this problem so invisible?

Photography, as a vernacular medium, makes a claim towards its ability to record truth, to present image as fact. This is of course false, as image is a pure propaganda regardless of its ability to represent reality. It is bound to semiotics, aesthetics, and, vitally, perspective. A documentary image only shows a selected vantage point which



captures photons of light bouncing off a surface. This is the only truth in photography. What photons bounce off of are arranged and curated to tell a narrative within the image. A narrative which is only true of a singular perspective. Suggesting that a Pseudo-Documentary aesthetic is more appropriate language for a straight photographic image, than the documentary aesthetic. The aesthetics of photography has the ability to sway truth, given the vantage point is understood.

The politics of a view of land is no different than the politics of land. It is broken down by ownership. Consider the dichotomy of two views, the aerial view of the land, versus the view of land from the ground. In the mid-nineteenth century with the advent of hot air balloon -the ability to soar above the city was now possible. Views of lands showing the division of farm land to township, rural to wilderness became more familiar. But only to certain classes. A ride in a hot air balloon was a spectacle that required an expendable income that could warrant a hefty luxury experience, or financing that justified flying above the sky line to capture an image. The view from above began its bourgeois history.

The view from the ground retained a vernacular quotidian truth. Perspectives from the common person showed the view not of the land owner, but of the tenant farmer. This is important in understanding the perspective which a photograph is arguing from. Edward Burtynsky is known for aerials of mines, oil fields, dams and large construction endeavors. Burtynsky's signature aesthetic rarely shows the view from the worker's perspective, but instead turns toward a spectacle of bourgeois enjoyment for the colossal endeavor being undertaken. The photographs become entertaining escapism rather than a

document of political discourse. His colorful aerials abstract the issues around land politics suggesting that the issues are far too complex to understand. From a bourgeois perspective, this becomes propaganda for land owners. Suggesting through the image that if only tenants could see the perspective from the land owner's vantage point, they would understand that the complexity of the politics.

The Intermediate Zone as a counter could never suggest such a claim. Images made within this zone are much more direct in their propaganda. The view is from the ground, from the space between the mine and the city, showing the content the politics as they are perceived by those whom are affected by them. This is a dangerous view, because it is not subject to distraction in the same way. This time the spectacle of enjoyment is removed. The remaining photograph is now subject to vernacular opinion un-adulterated by polarized views.

Vantage point is everything. It determines sides, arguments, fears, the very ground on which someone stands. To understand the politics around the land, or the aesthetics used as propaganda, first the counter argument must be understood. From one edge the other cannot be seen. Every view of the land is a fragmentary representation of an idea, not an infallible claim on truth. The Intermediate Zone offers no counter from the problems of truth. Just a simply view, or propaganda of a different flavor, looking back at one's self. The real fear of the landscape comes in looking back at where you just were in the land – to see what you thought was true and realize that what you are viewing now is no truer than what you saw before.

## THE NON-ICONIC LANDSCAPE

A landscape is never wholly about the dirt and soil. Neither is it about the holder or viewer of the soil. To a larger degree, the landscape stands as a metaphor to a greater accumulation of ideas beyond that which can be seen, encompassing the totality of fear, passion, and lust which societies are beholden to. Constructed through the icons which obstruct the horizon is a landscape of propaganda and distraction. To a degree, the most humbling view within the American Landscape may be that made by Terry Falke, *Mitchell Butte, Utah Border*, where the geographic spectacle is framed perfectly under the human-built shelter. The iconic nature of the untouched landscape is haloed by the ceiling in the same way a prophet would be haloed to signify their death within painting. While Evans may not be trying to signify the death of the landscape, he is to a degree suggesting it can never be as it was again. The human-altered space has redefined what the iconography of the land is and will be in the future.



*Figure 3 Terry Falke Mitchell Butte, Utah Border, 1995*

More commonly found blanketing the quotidian landscape, human-altered spaces are never simply what they appear to be. Take a billboard, a simple banal surface to display information, which is used to direct the attention towards a source of enjoyment, or in the rare occasion social responsibility. Jennifer Bolande understands this quite well, in the installation for Desert X, the photograph reveals the view obstructed by the billboard itself. In doing this, revealing what is overlooked within the land by the billboard. Unfortunately, Bolande's installation fails to address the real problem in looking away from the landscape. The work, while trying to make the viewer see that they are eating from the trash can, in turn serves the very trash it is looking to avoid.<sup>16</sup> The trash can is a metaphor for the propaganda that is displayed on the board. To truly not eat the trash the viewer must look away and consider the space around it. In magic, this is the very slight of hand that makes the card tricks work. If the act is followed as prescribed the trick can never be revealed. Look at the ground and the truth will be told.

Bozeman, Montana is a wonderful town for eating the trash. Along Interstate 90 between Bozeman and Belgrade, sits a string of billboards. Looking up, drivers can read about the orchestra sponsored by First Interstate Bank or consider pulling off at the upcoming Adam and Eve store only a few exits away in Three Forks, but what they don't

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<sup>16</sup> *The Perverts Guide to Ideology*. By Slavoj Zizek. Directed by Sophie Fiennes. Produced by Martin Rosenbaum, James Wilson, and Katie Holly. Performed by Slavoj Zizek. UK/Ireland: Zeitgeist Films, 2013. DVD.

consider is the gravel pit below. A void created for the erection of the First Interstate Bank, or the Adam and Eve store, both boxes in service of capital first, human second.<sup>17</sup>

Banality may be the most shocking thing to encounter within iconography. Imagine a white sign that simply reads “buy this, not this”. It would be radical, perhaps on the offensive side. But the politics behind the iconic landscape is somewhat easier to imagine and to consider. It’s not hard to see why unused land is rented out for billboard space in order to make a few extra dollars advertising to the passersby. The heavy stuff is in the non-iconic space around it, below the billboard. This is the land which questions the notion of un-used and suggest that the real use of the land goes beyond the scope of the standard view. For the billboard, this is the gravel pit below, or the tracks in the snow suggesting a path to somewhere. In a way, it is an act of defiance, or contradiction towards the billboard itself which continues to suggest the proper trash to be consumed. Even within other Icons, such as the parking lots, this holds to be true.

Within a parking lot, time becomes a subject of all things. Impermanence encompasses the defining characteristics of the objects found over the asphalt. No object is meant to stay in the parking lot forever – cars drive away, trash blows across, containers rest between box stores, and melting snow recedes. The unifying factor of the parking lot, is the site as a ubiquitous landscape, destabilizing the rigidity of the objects which are found there. For a brief moment they are more than what they are, they become symbols of humanity, suggesting the ethics of the people that allowed for them to exist

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<sup>17</sup> The “Void” in reference to “Erection” is derived from Lucy Lippard. Lippard links the removal of gravel to the construction of cement towards. Lucy R. Lippard. *Undermining: A Wild Ride through Land Use, Politics, and Art in the Changing West*. New York: New Press, 2014.

within the space. Melting snow, while not placed intentionally in the parking lot by any human act, is piled away at the edges of the zone, to allow for efficiency in parking automobiles. Within this act is a claim that there are inefficiencies within this system of mobility. The design of parking lots for Daytona Beach, Florida fails to accommodate the needs of Bozeman, Montana, where snow fills the edges of the lots till mid-spring. Failure to create specific design is inherent within the ubiquitous landscape, but the tragedy within this space is not the unused parking spaces, it is the hyper-visible melting snow. It signifies the end of this state, snow surround the zone. Within this non-iconic landscape, it acts as the backdrop of the end of things as they are. The end of the temporal fluidity which defines the current built environment. The terror of watching snow melt away in the night-while the system sleeps leaves a great fear of things to come. It suggests the growing invisibility which the built environment lacks the imagination to understand. If the hyper-visible is ignored, how can the invisible have any chance at being understood?

Night functions as a metaphor for the unseen visibility. Within the darkness it is clearer what the Icons are. Each lit by the light intended to make us feel safe, while we don't occupy the land we have built. But the only authentic security we feel is in the dark, where the light bleeds from out Icons illuminating the forgotten spaces. These spaces feel true, un-propagated by capital. Neglecting these landscapes is the ultimate act of consuming garbage.

The Non-Iconic landscape lights the frequency of Intermediate Zones within the landscape. It is not as the film *Stalker* suggests a mythical place to pilgrimage to, but a

place in your own backyard – whether it be at the edge of the parking lot, alongside the river, beneath the overpass, at the edge of the lumber mill, or underneath the melting snow.<sup>18</sup> Understanding the non-iconic means looking at the phone booth and seeing not the rust, but the light illuminating the space around it.

Intermediate Zones are mediators for seeing. Methods of understanding one thing leads to another. A name for acts of looking from the edge of what we think we know. To question what is held to be true. They are Heterotopias, containing the objects, to include people, which need to be forgotten to continue the consumption of garbage needed to propitiate the growth of capital.

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<sup>18</sup> *Stalker*. Directed by Andrei Tarkovski. Screenplay by Boris and Arkady Strugatsky. Produced by Aleksandra Demidova. Mosfilm, 1979. DVD

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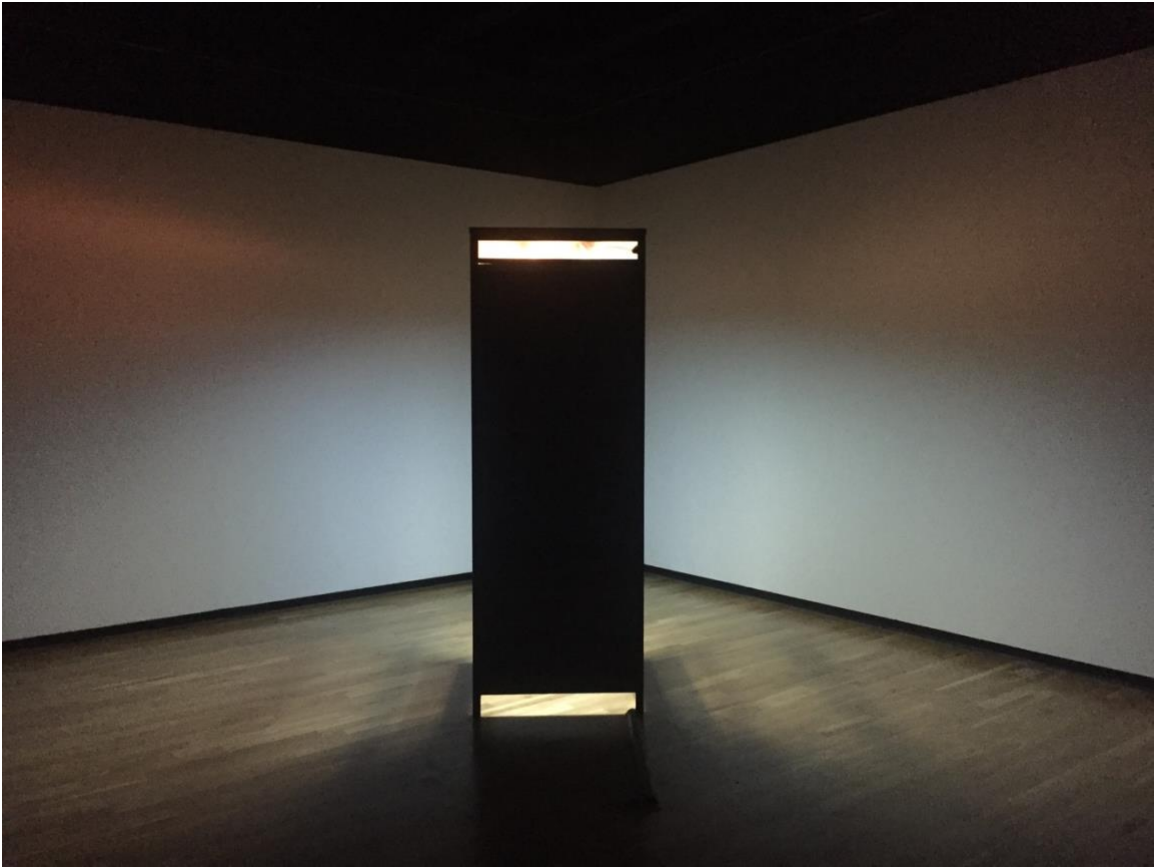


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