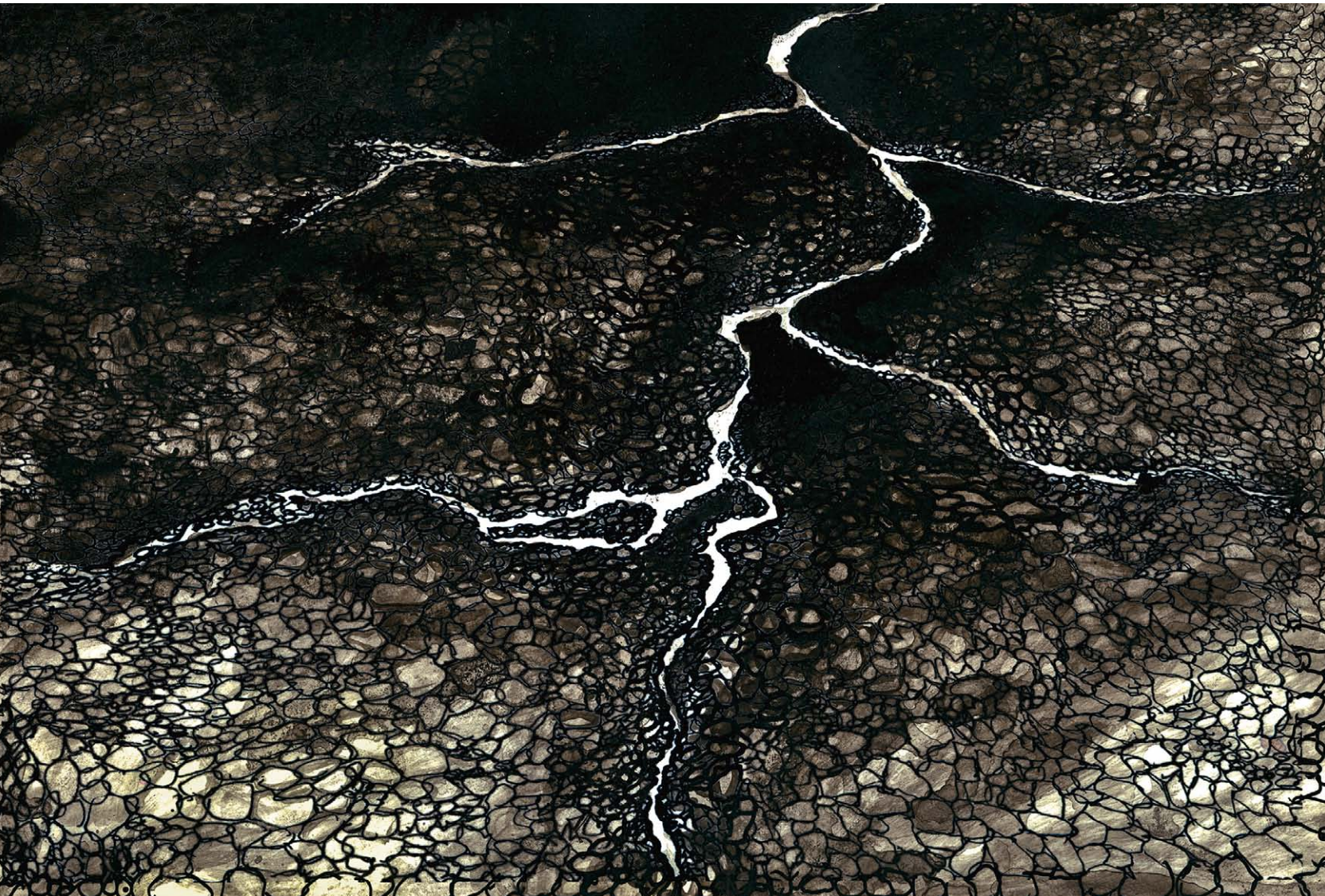


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JoLA

JOURNAL
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C.H.Z. Continuously Habitable Zones, page 51



JoLA was founded with support from the European Community
in the framework of the Socrates Programme in the context of the
LE:NOTRE Thematic Network Project in Landscape Architecture.

3-2016

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JOURNAL
of LANDSCAPE
ARCHITECTURE

4 Editorial

New grounds for landscape history

6 Elissa Rosenberg

Gilpin in the city: The Baltimore stream valley parks

UNDER THE SKY

20 Saskia de Wit

Sensory landscape experience: Stepping outside the visual landscape of the motorway in the Garden of Birds

THINKING EYE

32 Catherine Dereix Carrillo

The body as dust

46 Marc Treib

Landscape for a planet with two dwarf suns

THINKING EYE SELECTED SHORTS

60 Jon Hunt

Field: The spaces between

64 Katherine Jenkins

Nameless Field

68 Liska Chan

Braided Field

72 Jeroen De Waegemaeker, Maarten Van Acker, Eva Kerselaers, Elke Rogge

Shifting climate, reshaping urban landscapes:
Designing for drought in the Campine landscape

BOOK REVIEWS

A Landscape Manifesto &
Drawing and Reinventing Landscape
Review by David L. Hays

84

Beauty Redeemed:
Recycling Post-Industrial Landscapes
Review by Catharina Dyrssen

86

Episodic Urbanism:
The RMIT Urban Spaces Project 1996-2015
by Peter Elliott Architecture + Urban Design
Review by Julian Raxworthy

88

Subscription information

90

Landscape for a planet with two dwarf suns

Marc Treib University of California, Berkeley, USA

Abstract

C.H.Z. (Continually Habitable Zones) is an astrogeological term for planets that may be able to support life similar to that on earth. It is also the title of a 2011 film by French artist Philippe Parreno, created using a site designed, reshaped, and planted by Belgian landscape architect Bas Smets. Imagined as the product of a hyper-photosynthesis produced by the pair of dwarf suns, Smets cast the C.H.Z. landscape as dark, approaching black. This essay traces the planning and implementation of the site outside Porto, Portugal, the conception and making of the film, and what has happened to the site in the three years since filming. These are set against a broader discussion of landscape in relation to cinema.

Bas Smets / Philippe Parreno / cinematic landscape /
Continuously Habitable Zones / *Ophiopogon planiscapus*
'Nigrescens'

In his classic 1949 study *Landscape into Art*, Sir Kenneth Clark traced the evolution of landscape painting from its sole use as a background setting into the independent tableau centred on depictions of terrain, water, and vegetation. [1] Although first appreciated primarily as works of art, in time these canvases also served as models for the making of actual landscapes. By the eighteenth century, the paintings of Claude Lorrain, Gaspard Pousin, and Jacob Ruysdael, among others, provided inspiration and aspiration, if not necessarily the precise designs, for estate landscapes throughout England and other European countries (Figs. 1 & 2). In these panels the three-dimensional aspects of a landscape, actual or imagined, were compressed into two dimensions, with multisensual experiences restricted to those of the eye alone. With historical landscape painting, cinema shares a similar process of transcription, as actual places become settings for fictional actions. French artist Philippe Parreno, who created the film *C.H.Z.*, *Continuously Habitable Zones*, noted that: '[Through film] the landscape becomes an art object that exists simultaneously in two worlds: the 2+1 dimensional world of a moving image and the 3+1 dimensional world of our physical reality.' [2] What then of a landscape created specifically for—and only for—its capture and transformation in film, a landscape to serve as the film's protagonist? This was the task facing the Belgian landscape architect Bas Smets in his collaboration on the production of Parreno's 14-minute film *C.H.Z.*, which premiered in 2012. [3]

Smets and Parreno's chance meeting in a jazz bar in Brussels some years ago led to an evening-long discussion of land and landscape. Drawing on the writings of French philosopher Alain Roger, Smets distinguished between the terrain of production without aesthetic regard (land) and land



NATIONAL GALLERY, LONDON

Figure 1 Claude Lorrain,
Landscape with Aeneas at Delos, 1672.
(National Gallery, London)



MARC TREIB

Figure 2 West Wycombe, Buckinghamshire, England, 1735-1785; 1794

appreciated for values beyond practical return (landscape). [4] Roger's distinction parallels, or perhaps even draws upon, Immanuel Kant's notion that only when an object is viewed with sufficient detachment can it be regarded as a work of art. Parreno was intrigued by the ideas offered by the Belgian landscape architect and invited Smets to collaborate on a film that would somehow involve landscape, although any precise ideas about the scenario or its setting were lacking at that time. Having produced one film, *Boy from Mars* (2003, a collaboration with architect François Roche), in

which architecture was erected solely for filming, Parreno's chance meeting with Smets steered him towards creating a work with landscape as its protagonist. [5] In an interview with curator Hans Ulrich Obrist, Parreno stated that he wanted to demonstrate that film can create life. [6] Jointly funded by the Daimler Art Collection in Stuttgart, which owns a substantial art collection, and the Beyeler Foundation in Basel, the team began work on what would become *C.H.Z.* [7]



COURTESY ESTHER SCHIPPER GALLERY, BERLIN

Figure 3 Philippe Parreno, *C.H.Z. Continuously Habitable Zones*, 2012. Film still: A planet with two dwarf suns

The term ‘continuously habitable zones’ was coined by scientists at the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) to describe astral bodies beyond our galaxy whose conditions appear similar to those on earth—that is to say, those with the potential for supporting life similar to ours. For many years the agency sought exactly parallel conditions: a planet of the earth’s mass served by a single sun of a size similar to our own. Over time, however, the NASA scientists extended their thinking to include a planet supported by two small suns, a shift in thinking that considerably expanded the potential of discovery. [8] This idea of a planet with two dwarf suns became the generating force behind the conception of *C.H.Z.* and the landscape prepared for its filming.

For Bas Smets, who was charged with conceiving the landscape for the production, the notion of two suns suggested a heightened process of photosynthesis, a process that propagated black plants growing under a mysterious light. [9] Reflecting this idea, the video would be dark, at times barely visible to the audience, even when viewed under ideal viewing conditions. At the team’s disposal for filming were five pieces of land in Germany and Portugal. In Stuttgart, Mercedes-Benz offered disused worker’s allotments; in addition, two prominent Portuguese art collectors offered the use of a semi-forested and uninhabited 10-hectare parcel of land adjacent to their own house and garden. In the end logistics, production costs, and the time needed to secure permissions in Germany precluded filming in two countries and caused the team to settle on the site provided by the collectors in Vila Nova de Famalicão, not far from Porto.

The planet contrived and projected in *C.H.Z.* presents gloomy and perplexing terrain, lacking colour and black in ambience, populated by black minerals and black vegetation under the muted light of twin suns (Fig. 3). In this work the landscape makes the film and the film makes the land-

scape. Philippe Parreno described the project in this way: ‘This is both a film and a garden. We are dealing with a cinematographic landscape. A garden is designed out of various selected pieces of land within a territory that appears as one unified space.’ [10] The extraplanetary landscape, in fact, truly exists as a reality only upon the screen, composed of five distinct landscape zones cohered through the magic of cinema. As a work of science fiction, *C.H.Z.* silently narrates the topography of a myth, of a place that perhaps could be, but is as yet unknown. This is science fiction: where science (the reality of the existing Portuguese environment and Bas Smets’s reformation of it) plus fiction (an artistic vision of life on another planet with appropriate conditions, yet located in another galaxy) yields science fiction as a work of art.

The cinematic landscape

Historically, documentary films sought to capture the landscape and its people as they were. Early films such as Robert J. Flaherty’s *Nanook of the North* (1922) portrayed the harsh Arctic environment of the Inuit with enviable accuracy. Documentary filmmakers may attempt to record existing phenomena as truthfully as possible, but in their filming of selective places, people, and actions—paired with the montage that follows filming—they nonetheless produce worlds rarely congruent with those of their subjects. [11] Using the landscape as the setting for cinema dates nearly as far back as the birth of the motion picture itself. It would be impossible, for example, to conceive of the Western movie free of the buttes, mesas, and expansive desert lands of the American Southwest, in particular those of Utah’s Monument Valley that provided the setting for films by John Ford and other directors (Fig. 4). In these films the thrilling landscapes of buttes and mesas intensified the drama of the plot, perhaps by depicting an expanse

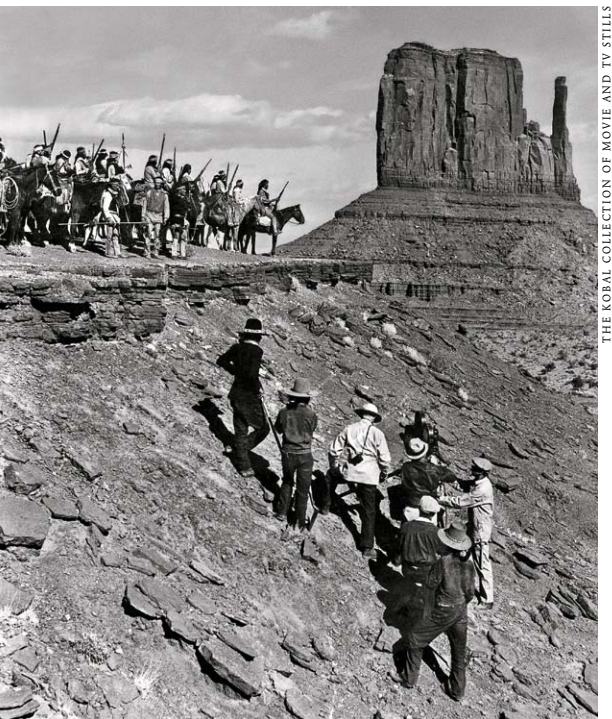


Figure 4 John Ford filming *Stagecoach* in Monument Valley, Utah, circa 1938



Figure 5 Vivian Leigh (as Scarlet O'Hara) in front of Tara plantation, *Gone with the Wind*, circa 1938. Landscape designed by Florence Yoch

of dry terrain traversed only with difficulty or used as a concealed base for bad guys dressed in black. These were locations appropriated rather than designed, however. Here landscape served as stage and backdrop, much in the same role that landscapes had played in Western painting until the fifteenth century. Naturally, when the script demanded it, and the existing conditions were deemed inappropriate, natural landscapes could be treated in an unnatural way. In filming the 1938 classic version of *The Adventures of Robin Hood*, starring Errol Flynn and Olivia de Havilland, the parched California summer landscapes were spray-painted green to resemble the verdant Sherwood Forest, the supposed English setting for the heroic tale. More abstract were landscapes for films shot on a sound stage where the entire scene was designed, constructed, and recorded indoors. In days of old, when audiences were not yet accustomed to hyper-realism or high-definition television, painted flats and mats, and artificial greenery sufficed. But as audiences became more sophisticated, and the technology at the disposal of cineastes was more advanced, the degree of realism increased to meet the demands of the audience.

Among the prominent American landscape architects to work in the movie industry was Florence Yoch (1890–1972), who designed landscapes for half a dozen films, including the plantation and countryside settings for the majestic 1939 production of *Gone with the Wind*, starring Clark Gable and Vivian Leigh (Fig. 5). [12] Since the mythical plantation Tara was itself a major character in the story, its house and grounds became critical elements of the movie. Most of the filming was done indoors, however, and the sets representing landscape were constructed. Tara itself was supposed to have been located in Georgia, but was actually built on a studio lot in western Los Angeles. [13] As was its landscape. Admittedly, the interior of the Tara plantation house appears in the film more frequently than the

yards and gardens that surround it, but the landscape—a mix of synthetic and living materials—nonetheless played a key, if supporting, role.

The intergalactic landscape of *C.H.Z.* increased the prominence of the landscape from the Academy-Award category of ‘supporting actor’ to that of ‘lead actor in a drama’. Here the actual, if peculiar, forms of ebony topography and vegetation captured and transformed by the moving camera play the film’s principal roles. As in a landscape documentary—Pare Lorentz’s 1936 classic *The Plow That Broke the Plains*, for example—the land in *C.H.Z.* serves as the central protagonist. Documentaries aspire to explain by employing a lucid narrative; *C.H.Z.*, in contrast, intrigues and mystifies by being obscure. This differs from the way in which landscape settings are often portrayed in science-fiction films. In early cinema, landscapes were treated as fantastic constructions based on the deserts of the American Southwest. In more recent years, however, directors have relied on a certain distanced familiarity, like Ridley Scott’s portrayal of a future Los Angeles in *Blade Runner* (1982), where the urban fabric projects forward what already exists today, adding only intensified electrographics and abundant rain. In *Stalker* (1979), Andrei Tarkovsky depicted a Zone whose derelict landscapes recall those that may lie in the viewer’s own experience, as does the farm landscape in the same director’s *Solaris* (1972). [14] The rupture between the use of a true, if at times modified, landscape as subject and its virtual representation results from the advent of computer-generated imagery—consider *The Matrix* (directed by the Wachowski Brothers, 1999) or *The Martian* (directed by Ridley Scott, 2015)—that stands independently of any known reality. The *C.H.Z.* project follows neither manner in toto, however; it relies on the camera, of course, but its imagery begins in our world and only through postproduction becomes a work of art and a new planet.

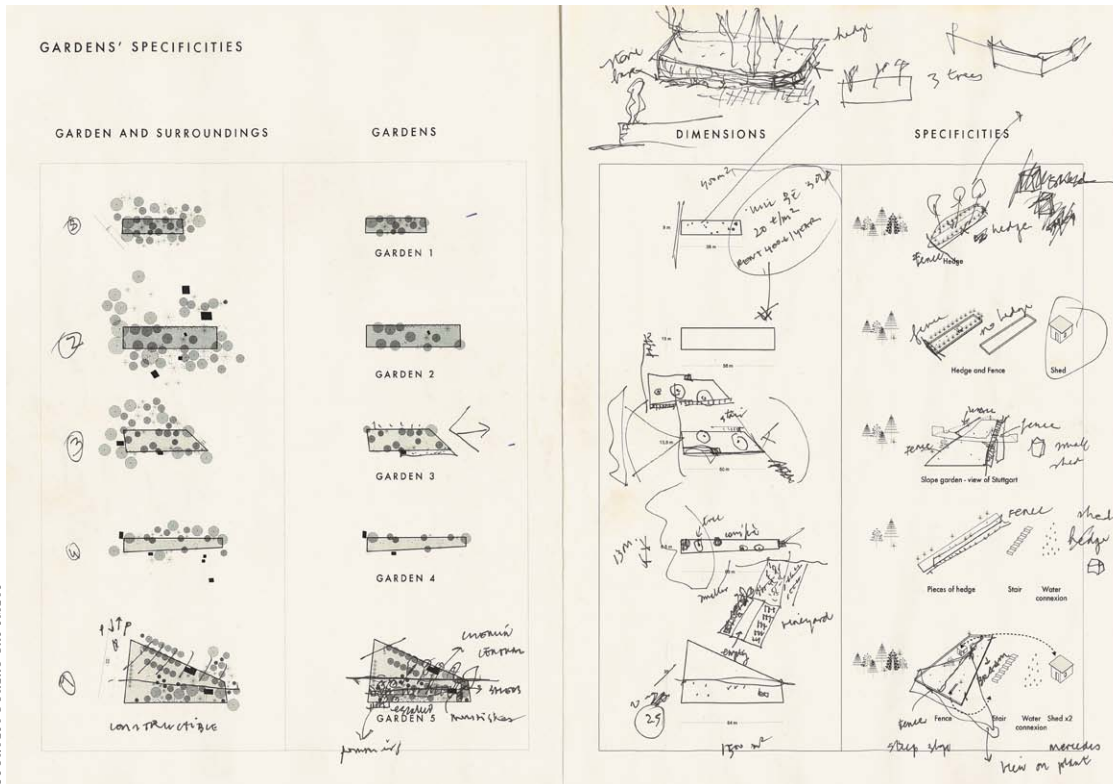


Figure 6 Bas Smets, Booklet presenting ideas for the C.H.Z. landscape, 2011

In cinema, the issue is not how landscapes stand in actuality, but how they appear on screen or monitor. Image trumps substance. The land is the clay by which the director and cinematographer model the image presented to the viewer. Lens and exposure, filters and focus, all affect the way in which the landscape is recorded and ultimately experienced by the viewer. In the end, the scene offered the audience becomes as virtual as a computer-generated image, despite its origin in a real place. The landscape for C.H.Z. was no different in this respect. Where it did differ was that its landscape had not existed until shortly before the moment of filming—although it may appear real and timeless. Parreno has likened this to the anamorphosis used in certain Renaissance paintings. [15] First appearing distorted or illegible, the image in these paintings achieves clarity only from one particular viewpoint or its reflection. The planetary landscape of C.H.Z. exists only from one viewpoint, that of the cinema.

A landscape for a planet with two dwarf suns

The landscape for C.H.Z., like the film itself, took form through an extended series of back-and-forth discussions. Bas Smets first listed archetypical earthly landscapes that might also exist on the unknown planet, considering the ‘landscape elements as actors’. Among them were hill, trench, slope, valley, river, wood. [16] His early scenario included these thoughts and places:

A burnt hill is accessed through the gateway.
 Eucalyptus trees stand on top of the hill . . .
 The path becomes a trench which turns into the hillside towards the trees.
 Black plants grow on the slopes of the trench . . .

Stone river beds lead to the bottom of the valley.
 Water trickles down these river beds.
 A main river collects the water at the bottom of the valley . . .
 A big hole is dug around the trees.
 The roots of the trees are exposed to the air. [17]

Certain features of the landscape listed in the scenario—all of which appear quite normal to us—disappeared during the development of the project, but many of them were retained and shaped the new landscape that ultimately possessed little sense of familiarity.

Discussions with Parreno about the features of the landscape and their effect on the concept of the art work continued over several months. Smets produced sketches and discussed them with Parreno; in response the artist executed his own ink drawings that elaborated on the original sketches and confirmed their forms and mood (Figs. 6, 7, & 8). The dialectical process between landscape architect and artist continued until a point of mutual satisfaction was established (Fig. 9). At that point the process of design became more detailed, and more focussed on the selection of minerals and plants. The site’s existing eucalyptus trees would be appropriated as a forest on the planet in another galaxy, transformed by the camera lens and adjusted exposure. The definition of the various astrogeographic zones, as well as their living and inert materials, were the work of the landscape architect, but a considerable part of the design was realized at the time of filming with the contributions of other team members. Set designer Jean Vincent Puzos served as production manager, and to him Smets assigns due credit for realizing the smaller-scale aspects of the design and for his understanding of how the landscape would be transformed when filmed.



COURTESY ESTHER SCHIPPER GALLERY, BERLIN

Figure 7 Philippe Parreno, Drawing of roots for C.H.Z. Continuously Habitable Zones, circa 2011



COURTESY ESTHER SCHIPPER GALLERY, BERLIN

Figure 8 Philippe Parreno, Drawing of the 'Inverted Topiary' for C.H.Z. Continuously Habitable Zones, circa 2011

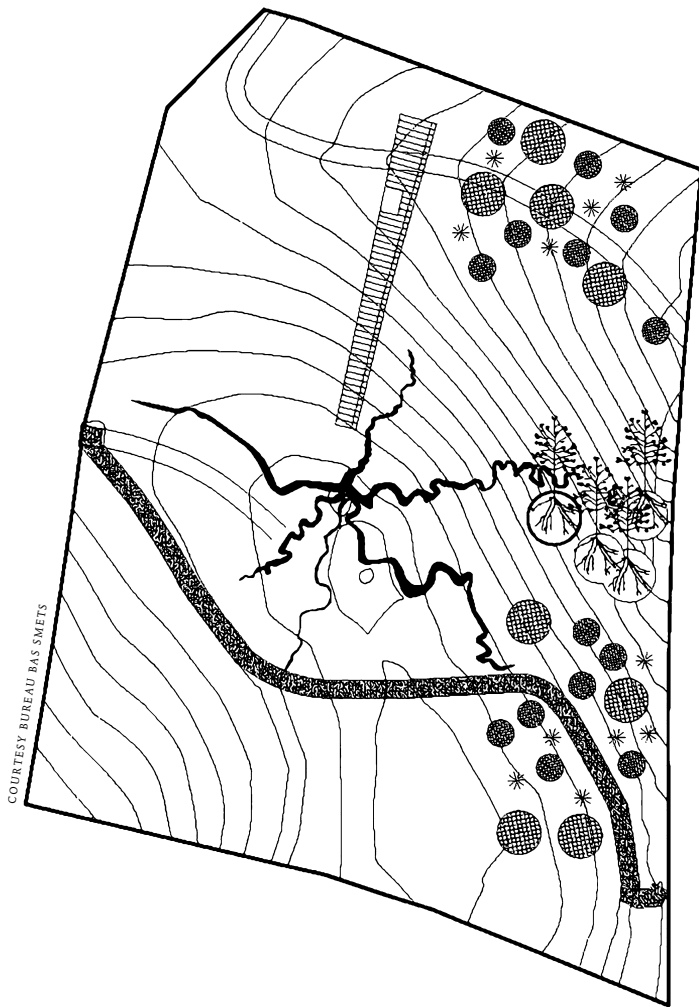


Figure 9 Bas Smets, Site plan for the C.H.Z. landscape, 2011



Figure 10 Filming: smoke diffuses the light in some areas of the site.



Figure 11 Black mondo grass (*Ophiopogon planiscapus* 'Nigrescens')

Production

Of the 10 hectares within the walled enclosure adjacent to the collectors' home, Smets and his team directly reworked only a 2-hectare segment. This section of the site had already been partially cleared of trees and shrubs before the project began, although no intended use had guided the removal operation. The film team completed the felling of the eucalyptus and pine, removed the shrubs and grasses, and burnt to the ground all remnants of the prior landscape—in the process charring to black the ground itself. As a result, the land was converted from an organic terrain of green, gold, and brown to one barren and homogeneously black.

The enactment begun with these controlled burns—undertaken with the municipal fire brigade standing by—and continued through the partial excavation of the ground and the deposit of stone imported to the site (Fig. 10). One area was carved in the form of a twisting watercourse within whose banks no water had ever, or would ever, flow. In another area, the slope was regraded into a series of terraces planted with black mondo grass (*Ophiopogon planiscapus* 'Nigrescens') (Fig. 11). Complementing these settings was a hollow excavated within the eucalyptus wood and dressed with roots

thereafter to appear as the void left by the upturned root ball of a massive tree. Throughout the cinematic zone, the ground plane was sheathed with slate, shale, and obsidian—stones all black in colour (Fig. 12). These reinforced the impression provided by the scorched land but yielded a sheen when light at low angles reflected from its surfaces. In places the sparkle derived from lining the creek bed with broken glass, energized by diamond dust tossed into the air at the time of filming, suggested the magic of fireflies or some mysterious sources of periodic light. Water? Ice? Crystals? Smets approached the commission—one based to a large degree on removal and destruction—as seriously as planting an ecologically based garden. The filmic landscape, in fact, represents its own coherent ecology, albeit one of an extraterrestrial nature.

With the art director and the artist, Bas Smets prepared what was in effect the raw material to be transfigured into a coherent landscape through its filming and subsequent editing. What first appeared as one thing became another of a quite different nature; what appeared in the film to be extraterrestrial was in fact very much of this earth. But in the film the land-



MARC TREIB, 2014

Figure 12 The stream

scape looked far different from its form as constructed. Through severe underexposure and filtering—a technique known in French cinema as *la nuit américaine*, or in English as ‘day for night’—the slate and smoky surfaces turned to absolute black, animated by the brilliant punctuations of light reflecting from fragments of glass on the ground or flakes of foam adrift in the air. [18] Editing completed the making of the new landscape in which new relationships between the five topographic loci became seamless in six linked scenes.

Filming

The preparation of the site for filming spanned two months; the actual shoot demanded only four active days in September 2011. During the time of filming Parreno, Smets, cinematographer Darius Khondji, and Nicholas Becker (who produced the sound) were the guests of the collectors, while the remainder of the crew resided in a hotel in Famalicão. Their residence on site afforded the continuous contact needed for resolving the details during the shaping of the site and its filming. Although the scenario and

the landscape design had been determined, the details of production were solved in the field, adjusted or augmented by the efforts of the art director’s understanding of how the landscapes might appear on film (Figs. 13 & 14). Although the tonal obscurity of *C.H.Z.* suggests that it was shot at night, as noted above, the landscape was filmed during the day using cinematic techniques to create the impression of a planet perpetually dark despite its two suns. After shooting, the film was shaped into its final form by the editor, Hervé Schneid. As a process, the landscape produced a film that produced a landscape.

The film

C.H.Z. runs 13 minutes 14 seconds, yet it conjures a sense of endless space enhanced by the flowing track of ‘the Digital Motion Arri Alexa camera mounted on a Scorpio Head on a big Technocrane’. [19] This feeling of extended duration derives to a large degree from the lack of references within a Euclidean space, the familiar geometric matrix by which we normally establish our position relative to other objects (Fig. 15). There are five



Figure 13 Filming: lights and reflectors



Figure 14 Filming: the roots of the 'inverted topiary'

sections to the film, each segment beginning and ending in complete darkness and linked to its successor across these darkened voids. The sparkling trail of the opening 'semen swarm', conjured by bits of foam tossed into the air, draws us into a world of stone and crevices, its tone mysterious, alien, and melancholy. [20] In time one sun, and then a second, appear as creamy white disks hovering above the horizon—all this occupying about one minute of cinema (Fig. 16, see also Fig. 3). Then follows a short take whose gaze shifts from skimming the planet's stony surface to penetrating its ground to exploring the world that lies below. Within that world lies a cylindrical space convoluted by protruding roots, a defined tube Parreno termed 'inverted topiary' (see Fig. 8). The trace of the watercourse then appears in the following segment, 'mineral river', its glass crystals sparkling in the

intense illumination of the floodlight, the resulting effect suggesting a liquid flow. In writing about the film, curator Nancy Specter described this land as looking 'wounded, burnt, exfoliated, as if some tragedy of epic proportions had transpired years before'. [21] Yes, but only when related to the earth of our own planet. Can we instead imagine a planet whose territory has always been black, eternally ebony, its black stones and crystal-line glass the norm rather than the product of some apocalypse that devastated the green planet we know? If so, fiction then becomes acceptable, even believable. The topography of this 'black desert' appears less stable in the 3-minute sequence that ensues, perhaps disturbed during filming by the force of the wind or rumblings deep within the soil. Or was it only the result of an unstable camera?

COURTESY ESTHER SCHIPPER GALLERY, BERLIN



Figure 15 Philippe Parreno, C.H.Z.
Continuously Habitable Zones, 2012.
Film still: swarms

COURTESY ESTHER SCHIPPER GALLERY, BERLIN



Figure 16 Philippe Parreno, C.H.Z.
Continuously Habitable Zones, 2012.
Film still: roots

COURTESY ESTHER SCHIPPER GALLERY, BERLIN



Figure 17 Philippe Parreno, C.H.Z.
Continuously Habitable Zones, 2012.
Film still: the sun rising (or setting)
over the terraces planted with black
mondo grass

Until this point in *C.H.Z.*, indications of vegetation have appeared as roots and the silhouette of a distant forest; the following sequence, ‘vegetal staircase’, introduces close-ups of the curving blades of black mondo grass arranged on terraces stepping upward towards a yellow rising or setting sun—the first introduction of a warm colour in a prominent position (Fig. 17). Its appearance contributes an optimistic note about parallel life, and in its geometry recalls the stepped pyramids of pre-Columbian civilizations like the Mayan. Whether suggestive of a sunrise or sunset, the warmth of the light contributes a note of optimism that counters the basic foreboding and gloom of what has gone before—and been heard—as the sound by Nicholas Becker effectively intensifies the visual imagery skilfully captured by the cinematographer. These are not the sounds of our normal natural or even human world, but those recorded using contact microphones buried within the earth—recording the sounds of the planet like an aural seismograph—or those captured within tree trunks that record the vibrations of arboreal movement and growth. The film closes with the increased presence of vegetation on the forest floor: all black in colour: ‘Mondo grass, hollyhocks, orchids, Platt’s Black, bugleweed, and kokubu.’ [22] Its yellow glow, perhaps a rising sun, literally offers a ray of hope. But why should we react in this way, when in that faraway world black itself might symbolize hope? Unlike its scorched and denuded counterpart outside Porto, perhaps the landscape in *C.H.Z.* is positively glazed with black minerals, fecund with hyper-photosynthetic plants, whose glow suggests some kind of fertility yet unknown. Perhaps there is no way by which we can read a world of black as other than melancholy, with its sombre colours and lack of illumination. ‘Melancholy is . . . the most legitimate of all the poetical tones,’ Edgar Allan Poe claimed in his essay explaining the origin of his celebrated poem ‘The Raven’. [23] In *C.H.Z.*, the sense of mystery and melancholy effectively conjures a cinema that absorbs its audience despite the absence of movement and life in this alien world. There is a haunting quality to *C.H.Z.* and a fascination derived from disorientation and unknowing. We remain engaged because we want to understand; yet the darkness of the images and the continued path of the lens preclude any comforting reading or understanding of the landscape. We sense and suppose rather than discern and comprehend. Portrayed is a mysterious landscape—on a planet with two dwarf suns.

Non-structure

The continuity without overt action or progression that qualifies *C.H.Z.* also marked the so-called ‘structuralist’ films of the 1960s, *Wavelength*, for example, by Canadian filmmaker Michael Snow. The film, dating from 1967, consists of a single take, a lone 45-minute zoom into the interior of a room. [24] At less than five points in the duration do figures enliven the scene and break the relentless intrusion of the lens. The movement in *C.H.Z.* occurs in segments, with the camera tracing the contour of the landscape; continuity derives from postproduction montage rather than the optical zoom of a stationery camera. But how does it achieve continuity?

In a musical work such as Maurice Ravel’s 1928 *Boléro*, the cadence of the snare drum replaces the more traditional stringed *basso ostinato*, structuring the progression of interpretations of the interwoven and constantly

repeated themes. In a related manner, the quartet of organists performing Steve Reich’s 1970 *Four Organs* progressively elongate the duration of the chords while a single percussionist maintains the rhythm by shaking a pair of maracas. [25] In contrast, while having a flow, *C.H.Z.* has no metric rhythm, and each segment ends in complete darkness. One can almost imagine the camera’s movement over the black slate and blackened terrain as a flow of lava—perhaps informed to some degree by structuralism but not truly structuralist in its acceptance of variation.

Parallels: cinema and landscape

The land and landscapes with which and in which we dwell are those of greens and russets, umbers and blues—should we include the sky and waters. A landscape of black strikes us as strange and eerie; black is not the colour of a living nature. Yet there has been an attraction to the colour black precisely because it rarely occurs naturally in living vegetation. The hybridization of the ‘black’ Queen of the Night tulip (in reality a dark purple or maroon), for example, appears to have been an almost perverse pursuit, a conscious rejection of the normal brilliance and visual joy characteristic of this member of the lily family. [26] The widespread popularity of the Queen of the Night hybrid suggests otherwise, however. While one part of its attraction may trace to contrariness, when mixed with other, more vivid colours, lively and effective chromatic palettes result.

Horticulturalists may have pursued the breeding of a black tulip as the very ‘other’ to those we normally appreciate. The landscape architect and artist propose a similar opposition to our normal condition in the black landscape for *C.H.Z.* Black is commonly regarded as the colour of things sinister and even death itself. Yet for Smets, in making the landscape for *C.H.Z.*, black symbolized hyper-fertility, a process of photosynthesis so intense that a vegetation beyond green resulted—that is to say, a green so dense it appears to be black. But how does that explain the widespread presence of the black minerals unaffected by photosynthesis? One can only hypothesize that at some point in the making of the film, the vegetation determined the colour range: darkness produces an inscrutability from its detachment from the norm.

Art curator Renate Wiehager opened her discussion of *C.H.Z.* by citing the Russian artist Kazimir Malevich’s epochal painting *Black Square* of 1915, which correlates to *C.H.Z.* in both colour and its implication of the sun. [27] Regarded as the terminal point of painting by some, to others it provided the gateway to a new freedom for painting. To Malevich, within his own world of Suprematism, the painting proposed an antithesis to everything illuminated by the sun—like the later landscape of *C.H.Z.* ‘The black square on the white field was the first form in which non-objective feeling came to be expressed,’ he wrote. ‘The square=feeling, the white field=the void beyond the feeling.’ [28] Given these associations with light and the sun, it comes as no surprise that the initial version of the *Black Square* appeared as part of the Malevich stage sets for the 1913 production of Vladimir Mayakovsky’s play *Victory Over the Sun*. The vegetation in *C.H.Z.* does not represent any rejection of the sun, however, but instead the enhanced production of two suns, that is, less a denial of sunlight than the effects of its doubling.

Figure 18 The site three years later;
the stream and the return of vegetation



MARC TREIB, 2014

Figure 19 The area of the 'inverted
topiary' three years after filming



MARC TREIB, 2014

Other artists, while not exactly following in Malevich's wake, have produced works either black or appearing so when viewed cursorily. Structured on the cross or geometrically composed of blocks, Ad Reinhardt's dark paintings first appear monochromatic and require time for the subtlety of their chroma to emerge. Time is also demanded for eye and mind to decipher installations by James Turrell, the light levels of which hover on the border of perception. There have also been efforts to create black landscapes on our own planet. Jenny Holzer created her 1989 *Black Garden* in Nordhorn, Germany, in response to a commission for a work of art accompanying the renovation of the city's war memorial. [29] In this project for a city near the German-Dutch border, Holzer equated black with war and death, and used plants of that colour to realize the project. The layout of the garden is unremarkable, a series of four concentric circular beds with black plants, intersected by straight paths forming a cross. In plan, *Black Garden* recalls medieval monastic gardens, or botanical gardens such as the seminal Orto botanico (founded in 1545) at Padua, but some writers have associated the resulting configuration as suggestive of a target or even 'the crosshairs of a long-range rifle'. [30] One may wonder whether it is possible, no matter the colour, to remove the inherent appeal of flowers—the tulip, for example—even one approaching black in hue. C.H.Z. heightens the presence of black by removing all traces of plants other than those that appear black, not by hybridizing, but through cinematic techniques. As today we are able to reduce or increase the saturation of colour images using programmes such as Photoshop, so too can the cinema renovate the tones of reality to create a new landscape and world.

Epilogue

After filming the settings constituting the 'black' landscape of C.H.Z., the artist, landscape architect and crew departed for their respective home cities. Postproduction proceeded in foreign lands, and the normal processes of Portuguese nature renewed and reactivated the site. The land was not left entirely to its own devices, however—it has been managed, if not carefully groomed, as the years have passed. Smets tells that the plot was ceded by the collector for Parreno's use for fifteen years and that there is an intention to produce two additional films during that time. [31] The collector's head gardener, who maintains the neighbouring designed landscape, controls the vegetation although it is allowed to grow. Smets visits periodically and reviews the state of the landscape and renews his ideas about it, verbally directing the management of the vegetation. Parreno, as well, continues to consider ideas for the site, and as part of an exhibition at Pilar Corrias Gallery in London in October 2014, he showed drawings—some in colour—drawn over drawings made for the landscape of C.H.Z. These remain at the level of evocation rather than depiction, however. [32] What the humans will do when they return to the site is as yet unknown.

On the site in Famalicão, three years after filming, nature, to a large degree, has had its way. [33] While traces of the excavated watercourse, root hole, and stepped terrace remain, the density of mondo grass has diminished and dirt, rain, and scrub vegetation have partially obscured the deposits of slate and glass (Fig. 18). Despite these processes of growth

and entropy, traces of the burning and lithic interventions remain. The self-seeding eucalyptus trees have already grown to a lofty 20 feet (6 m) and even the slower-growing *Pinus sylvestris* now approach several metres in height (Fig. 19). Shrubbery of various species peppers the site. What will be done to the land for any future filming has not been determined. The annual rainfall in the Porto region measures over 1200 mm (almost 50 inches). Surely, without management, this landscape on our own planet will be overrun by foliage and forest, but vegetation of vivid green rather than black in colour and mood.

Admittedly, designing a series of geographic fragments for a film purporting to represent the landscape of a far-distant planet is not a project that often enters the office of a landscape architect. The C.H.Z. commission, without question, was rare and elite. Yet despite its uniqueness, there are certain lessons that are applicable to practice on our own planet. For one, the film reminds us that the photographic frame, paired with the sequence, greatly conditions our perception of the landscape around us, a fact that should give pause to those who test landscape perception and evaluation using photography or video. In addition, C.H.Z. demonstrates the critical role of landscape in the creation of any life, whether our own or one in a far galaxy. And most of all, the film and its making suggest that no matter the originating mandate, the possibility remains for any seemingly pragmatic landscape to achieve the level of art, not just in its mediated capture and reformation, but in actuality.

CREDITS

Sponsor: Daimler Art Collection, Berlin/Stuttgart; Fondation Beyeler, Basel; with the support of Esther Schipper, Pilar Corrias, Paulo and Rosario Pimenta

Director: Philippe Parreno

Landscape Architect: Bas Smets (B.B.S.)

Art Director: Jean Vincent Puzos

Cinematographer: Darius Khondji

Sound Supervisor: Nicholas Becker

Film Editor: Hervé Schneid

Postproduction: Digimage, Montrouge

Visual effects: Thierry Delobel, Eclairlab, Paris.

NOTES

1 Kenneth Clark, *Landscape into Art* (London: John Murray, 1949), xix. Despite the author's belief that publishing lectures is a 'well-known form of literary suicide', the book transcribes and revises Clark's Slade Lectures presented at Oxford University in the preceding years.

2 Philippe Parreno, in Karen Marta (ed.), *C.H.Z.* (Basel: Fondation Beyeler, and Bologna: Damiani, undated), unpaginated.

3 As the film begins and ends with black, and the starting and end points are debatable, the reports of its precise length vary from 12 to 14 minutes.

4 Alain Roger, *Court traité du paysage* (Paris: Gallimard, 1997).

5 While created for the film, the building enjoyed an extended life as the community centre for the artist Rirkrit Tiravanija's The Land project in Chiang Mai, Thailand.

6 Philippe Parreno, conversation with Hans Ulrich Obrist, Fondation Beyeler, Basel, 15 June 2012 on the occasion of Parreno's exhibition there. www.youtube.com/watch?v=xqSVYv1QfA, accessed 8 December 2014.

7 The commission began as part of a programme to sponsor art works in celebration of Mercedes-Benz's 125th anniversary. Renate Wiehager, 'Philippe Parreno, Continuously Habitable Zones: C.H.Z., 2011: A Cinematographic Landscape', undated, [website] www.yumpu.com/en/document/view/8856502/philippe-parreno-continuously-habitable-zones-daimler-art, accessed 14 December 2014.

8 A 2011 NASA report announced the possibility that some fifty planets beyond our solar system (exoplanets) might fall within the Continuously Habitable Zone. Ibid.

9 University of St Andrews scientist Jack O'Malley-James believes that 'an Earth-like planet with two or three suns would be black or grey in appearance.' Cited in *ibid.*

10 Philippe Parreno, quoted in *ibid.* There is a parallel here between the montage used in the making of the landscape, and that used in the making of the film.

11 The soviet filmmaker Sergei Eisenstein wrote one of the earliest essays on the use of montage (editing) and its role in creating cinema. 'Methods of Montage' (1929), in Jay Leyda (trans. and ed.), *Film Form, Film Sense* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1949), 72–83.

12 On Yoch's career inside and beyond the studio, see James J. Yoch, *Landscaping the American Dream: The Gardens and Film Sets of Florence Yoch, 1890–1972* (New York: Harry Abrams, 1989).

13 Tara's design was said to have been based on Boone Hall plantation, built in the eighteenth century outside Charleston, South Carolina.

14 For an extensive treatment of Tarkovsky's films (especially *Nostalgia*), see Juhani Pallasmaa, *The Architecture of Image: Existential Space in Cinema* (Helsinki: Rakennustieto, 2001), 63–92.

15 Parreno, conversation with Obrist. Anamorphosis twisted the conventions of linear perspective then being formulated by artists and architects such as Filippo Brunelleschi and Paolo Uccello.

16 Bas Smets, project description, BBS 2011.

17 Bas Smets, 'The elements that make up an imaginary garden identity', studio note, 1 May 2011.

18 Underexposure and/or the use of film for artificial light outdoors darkens the scene so that the distinction between light and shadow is all but obliterated; at times a blue filter is used to tint the scene to resemble the cool light of the moon, enhancing the effect. The noted French film director François Truffaut produced the film *La Nuit américaine* (distributed in America as *Day for Night*) in 1973, which centred on the making of a film and the techniques used.

19 Philippe Parreno, quoted in Weihager, *C.H.Z.*, *op. cit.*

20 These sections are listed in Marta, *C.H.Z.*, *op. cit.*

21 Nancy Spector, in *ibid.*

22 *Ibid.*

23 Edgar Allan Poe, 'The Philosophy of Composition', *Graham's Magazine*, April 1846: 163–167. See also Jacky Bowring, *A Field Guide to Melancholy* (Harpending, UK: Oldcastle Books, 2009).

24 Snow described his thinking behind the film as 'a summation of my nervous system, religious inklings and aesthetic ideas', [website] [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wavelength_\(1967_film\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wavelength_(1967_film)), accessed 22 November 2014.

25 Wikipedia describes the process of transformation in *Four Organs* as 'dissecting the chord by playing parts of it sequentially while the chord slowly increases in duration from a single 1/8 note at the beginning to 200 beats at the end', [website] http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Four_Organs, accessed 4 December 2014.

26 The black tulip is alternately known as the 'Queen of the Night', 'Ebony Queen', 'Black Hero', and 'The Black Parrot'.

27 Wiehager, *C.H.Z.*, *op. cit.*

28 Kazimir Malevich, *The Non-Objective World* (1926), translated by Howard Dearstyne (Chicago: Paul Theobald, 1959), 76.

29 The project was executed in collaboration with landscape artist Dee Johnson.

30 Valerie Smith, in Valerie Smith, Dominick Ammirati, and Jennifer Liese (eds.), *Down the Garden Path: The Artist's Garden after Modernism* (New York: Queens Museum, 2005), 28. Benches within the garden bore Holzer's inscriptions decrying war. While the intention to use black plants for their associations with war is understandable, the low foliage and the rigid geometric layout in some ways undermine the project's effect. Valerie Smith claims the garden contained 'forty-two varieties of black plants', but published photographs of the completed work suggest that the full plant list was not implemented. *Ibid.*

31 Parreno cited the time period as twenty years. See note 2.

32 The exhibition at the Pilar Corrias Gallery, which was shown from 14 October to 14 November 2014, was called 'With a Rhythmic Instinction to be Able to Travel Beyond the Existing Forces of Life'.

33 My visit to the site in Fimalicão with Bas Smets took place on 25 September 2014.

BIOGRAPHICAL NOTES

Marc Treib is Professor of Architecture Emeritus at the University of California, Berkeley, and a noted landscape and architectural historian and critic. He has published widely on modern and historical subjects in the United States, Japan, and Scandinavia. His most recent books are *Pietro Porcinai and the Landscape of Modern Italy* (co-edited with Luigi Latini; Routledge 2016) and *Austere Gardens* (ORO, 2016). His *Landscapes of Modern Architecture: Wright, Mies, Neutra, Aalto, Barragán* will be published by Yale University Press in the autumn.

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JoLA is published by the European Council of Landscape Architecture Schools (ECLAS)

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of LANDSCAPE
ARCHITECTURE

 **Routledge**
Taylor & Francis Group