

Technical Landscapes:
Aesthetics and the Environment in the History of Science and Art
Harvard University, April 6-8, 2017

Over the past century, land has become at once a technical and aesthetic object across art and science. On the one hand, scientific and technical programs have emerged—from the testing of atomic weapons in the American West to cobalt mining in the Congo—that occupy vast swaths of the planet. At the same time, new representational practices have emerged in contemporary art to critically engage land and its attendant politics by treating it as the site, theme, and medium of artistic inquiry.

The conference will address what Peter Galison calls “technical lands.” We are concerned with sites where global knowledge practices and aesthetic categories have converged to literally transform the physical geography of the land, where conventional terms like “nature,” “culture,” “value,” “capital,” “territory,” and “site” no longer exist as clearly delineated categories (indeed if they ever did). Technical landscapes constitute the meeting points of contested relations between history, knowledge, material practices, and environmental change. They have also figured as the subject and source for scholarly inquiries across a broad swath of disciplines. Examples include *waste-wildernesses* (Galison): places that, because of their contamination become, paradoxically, pristine; *critical landscapes* (Scott and Swenson): sites of aesthetic interventions that make visible the otherwise-concealed historical spatial politics inscribed in the land; “earthworks” of the ‘70s that reveal dialectics of impurity and containment (Jones); and *peri-capitalist spaces* (Tsing): locations within landscapes of capital where noncapitalist forms of life persist, a contestation to the narrative of globalization’s inevitable march to omnipotence and omnipresence.

The conference will include keynote addresses by **Peter Galison** (Harvard History of Science) with **Caroline Jones** (MIT History of Art and Architecture) and **Rebecca Uchill** (Mellon Postdoctoral Fellow at the MIT Center for Art, Science, and Technology). It will also feature a series of thematically linked events including a GPS-based interactive “sound walk” at the Harvard Arnold Arboretum by **Teri Rueb** (multi-media artist and professor, Department of Media Study, SUNY Buffalo), an evening reception and sound performance at the Waterworks Museum, and a presentation by Uchill and **Tania Bruguera** (performance artist and activist) that critically engages notions of place, politics, and “site-specificity.”

We welcome papers or creative presentations by current graduate students from across the social sciences and humanities that engage technical landscapes and related themes. At a moment when the monumental scale of anthropogenic environmental crises and their meaning for humanist modes of inquiry have been the subject of vigorous debate across a wide number of disciplines, we hope our conference can provide a space for new insights into the shifting relationships between humans, knowledge production, and the environment.

Please direct abstracts (not to exceed 300 words) and inquiries to tech.landscapes.conference@gmail.com by **December 14, 2016**. Please also include a brief c.v. or biography.

Conference organizers:

Leah Aronowsky (Harvard History of Science)

Brad Bolman (Harvard History of Science)

Walker Downey (MIT History, Theory, and Criticism of Architecture and Art)

This conference and related events are sponsored by the Mahindra Humanities Center at Harvard University, in cooperation with the Harvard History of Science Department and the Waterworks Museum.

