

## Landscape, Time, Media, Conventions, Blue Mountains.

**Nicole Porter (MLArch)**

PhD Candidate, University of Melbourne

“Contemplating the bush or whatever, that happens in the bush. This is the front row of the drive-in, you know, and there's nothing wrong with that...”<sup>1</sup>

“A lot of that experience is identifying with being there on the day, hanging there off that cliff ... you know, that's intrinsic, and wonderful...”<sup>2</sup>

The way we produce our material culture—our parks and roads and movies—is derived from and in turn shapes our relationships with the physical environment. I call all of this activity *landscape*<sup>3</sup>



Is there a single conventionalised way we produce our material culture, common to park-makers and moviemakers? Alexander Wilson rightly asserts that landscape is a cultural image that we actively construct through various media. This paper compares *how* landscape architects and filmmakers produce landscape representations by considering one element they have in common; temporality. To do this, Echo Point—a historic lookout in the Blue Mountains (NSW) recently redesigned by Tract Consultants—and *The Edge*—a film screened several times daily at a nearby large format cinema—will be discussed.

'Time-altering devices'<sup>4</sup> or techniques are employed by landscape architects and filmmakers to manipulate duration, order, tempo, frequency and rhythm. Landscape architects use design strategies to regulate and direct the movements of visitors. Filmmakers use mise-en-scene and cinematography to 'control not only *what* we look at but also *when* we look at it'<sup>5</sup>. Both use narrative devices and structure to implicitly convey a desired sense of time in the landscapes they produce.

What are the effects of these landscape architectural and cinematic conventions upon landscape experience? It will be argued that the landscape representations being compared here are derived from and in turn shape a world where time-poor visitors expect as much landscape as possible in the least amount of time. Landscape designers / producers manipulate time to condense landscape history and variety into short, convenient experiences. Repeated and recognisable conventions are an efficient means of doing so. As the two opening quotes above demonstrate, distinctions between landscape design and film blur as each responds to the same cultural context with similar compositional devices: A landscape architect designs a site whose experience resembles that of a drive-in, whilst a filmmaker uses all the technological means and temporal effects available to create a sense of landscape immediacy via cinematic representation.

Recent theory has called upon landscape designers to produce 'landscape projects [that] critically intervene in cultural habit and convention'<sup>6</sup>. The professions own conventions can contribute to, as well as intervene in, cultural habits, and so it must therefore operate from a position of cross-media awareness if it is to challenge broader patterns of cultural production and consumption.

## Temporality and Technique

Landscapes, be they built artefacts or representations on film, are temporal; we experience them through time. The overall impression of any given landscape will be the result of a combination of spatial, visual and aural components, all of which are time-bound. Movement through space, as experienced personally or recreated on screen, takes place in time. Visually, motifs such as colour or form may be repeated during the time it takes to fully look over a site, or watch a film. Sounds, by their nature, possess duration. Even sitting to contemplate a framed view of an apparently static and silent landscape scene involves the movement of our eyes around various visual points of interest and the duration of its silence. The temporal elements common to designed landscapes and film are identified in table 1.



<b>Temporal element</b>	<b>Description</b>
Duration (story)	Overall scope / range that is alluded to in landscape
Duration (plot)	Condensing and reducing story to a selection of key moments, which are present to a greater or lesser extent.
Duration (screen / visit)	Overall 'real time' spent per space / scene, or within landscape as a whole
Order	Chronological sequence Experiential sequence (i.e. progression, building expectation)
Pace	Speed of movement Acceleration / deceleration / regularity of flows
Frequency	Repetition of motifs for constancy or emphasis Recontextualisation (old + new)
Rhythm	Combined effect of duration + order + pace + frequency Composite patterns or sequences of movement

Table 1: Summary of temporal elements common to designed landscapes and film

Through their composition of spatial, visual and aural aspects of landscapes, filmmakers and landscape architects compose these temporal elements. This raises two related questions—how do they do so, and to what effect? Some designers of built space, such as Bernard Tschumi and former scriptwriter Rem Koolhaas, have made explicit references to cinematic techniques in their work as a means of composing sequences, events and movement<sup>7</sup>. Even where designers do not intentionally script their landscapes like filmmakers do, their work remains analogous insofar it makes use of conventional techniques which affect the temporal qualities identified above.

Design techniques and devices are not neutral tools, since any (design) language carries its own associations and ability to impart meaning. When expressing or creating landscape characteristics or effects, designers and filmmakers choose particular techniques and conventions to convey the meanings they desire. This is acknowledged by landscape theorists and film theorists, who have both used the concept of narrative to describe the interrelationship between the content of a story *and the way that story is told*<sup>8</sup>. However, to say that technique is itself meaningful does not suggest that it always has predictable and consistent effects. The manipulation of temporal elements will have different consequences depending upon their context. With this specificity in mind, the following comparative case study will explore examples of the techniques and devices at work across two media in the Blue Mountains.

### The Blue Mountains: Echo Point and *The Edge*

The Blue Mountains are an extensive area of sandstone plateaus, dramatic escarpments, eucalypt-dominated forests and gorges located approximately 1.5 hours' drive west of Sydney. Due to their proximity to the city, their spectacular topography, and the desirability of fresh mountain air<sup>9</sup>, the mountains have been a popular tourism destination for over a century. A legacy of landscape representations—written histories, tourist spots, photographs, literature, artworks and advertisements—continue to imbue the landscape with meaning. Katoomba, a small town located along the major traffic corridor across the mountains, derives the majority of its income from the local and international tourists who come to experience the Blue Mountains National Park that



surround it. It is in Katoomba that two recent landscape representations—the redeveloped Echo Point and The Edge Cinema—provide custom-built windows onto the adjacent wilderness.

Echo Point (fig 1) is a public space sited on the boundary of the National Park where the Katoomba township overlooks the Jamison Valley. It best known as a vantage point for taking in the view of an iconic geological feature known as the Three Sisters. Echo Point consists of various lookout terraces, a visitor information centre (VIC) and associated infrastructure. The lookout area itself, along with two adjacent municipal parks and the adjoining streetscape, recently underwent a significant redevelopment designed by Tract Consultants (project leader George Gallagher). The landscape revitalisation was awarded the AILA National Award of Excellence in Design in 2004, as well as the IFLA Eastern Region President's Award in 2005.

The Edge Cinema (fig 2), located within Katoomba along the Great Western Highway, is a giant screen cinema designed to screen *The Edge Movie*. *The Edge* was written, directed and produced by Australian filmmaker John Weiley (Heliograph Productions) and shot on large format Maxvision film. The movie is a combination of history documentary, nature documentary and adventure story. It describes geomorphology, vegetation, aboriginal occupation, European exploration, settlement and conservation within the Blue Mountains landscape in 38 minutes. The film cost \$2m to produce; since 1995 it has been screened several times daily and has grossed over \$10m in ticket sales.

Blue Mountains National Park is controlled by the New South Wales National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS). The involvement of the NPWS in both projects demonstrates how built landscape modification and film are means by which perceptions of the National Park are managed. Though not the client for either project, the NPWS was involved in the development of content and approvals for both Echo Point and *The Edge*<sup>10</sup>. Like National Parks organisations elsewhere<sup>11</sup>, the NPWS take an active role in managing the experience **and** the image of properties under



Figure 1 Plan of Echo Point  
(Image courtesy of Tract Consultants)

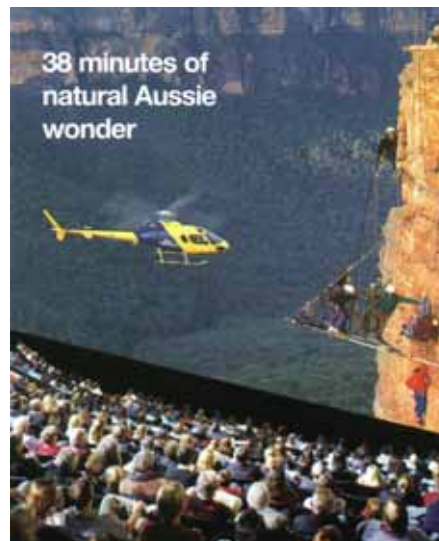


Figure 2 Promotional image from The Edge Cinema brochure 2005  
(Image courtesy of Edge Cinema)



its control. Echo Point and *The Edge*, in conjunction with publications, walking trails, campsites and so on, play their part in providing 'something for everyone' by employing 'a variety of media' to undertake the 'critical activity' of interpretation<sup>12</sup>.

Echo Point and *The Edge* are constructions **about** the wilderness that has been the catalyst for their development. At Echo Point, several design devices provide a setting for reflection upon the view of the Jamison Valley and upon the cultural context of that view over time. *The Edge* is exceptional<sup>13</sup> in its portrayal of landscape, not just as a background setting for action but as a foregrounded character in its own right. By studying these two cases, it is possible to compare how different media are used to narrate the same subject.

### Duration: from millions of years to minutes

There are three types of duration operating within any landscape narrative—story, plot and screen (or visit) duration.

**Story duration** consists of the temporal range of events pertinent to the narrative, whether these are shown or not<sup>14</sup>. The landscape story evoked at Echo Point ranges across an enormous span of time, from its geological beginnings—as expressed through the stylistic use of sandstone—through to the present conservation status of the National Park and its ongoing tourism activity. To be precise, Echo Point story duration spans from 248 million years ago to today, as reflected by the earliest time noted on a 'Landform' interpretive panel and by the current day-to-day narratives continuing to be added to the site through use.

The landscape story told by *The Edge* is similarly extensive in duration. A slow tilt-up shot rises from a close-up view of ancient rock to take in the expansive vegetated plateaus beyond, accompanied by voice over narration informing us that 'This is the old world.' The earliest exact date is alluded to when we are shown a canyon that is described as revealing 'the world as it was 90 million years ago'. From there, the film's story projects into an unknown future, with narrative statements and ominous music alerting us to the uncertain future of the Wollemi pine, a rare and ancient plant species discovered in 1994 within the Greater Blue Mountains World Heritage Area (GBMWA)<sup>15</sup>.



Figure 3: Echo Point, interpretive sandstone figures (Photograph by author)



Figure 4: Echo Point, view of Sorensen Wall and Darley Park terrace above (Photograph by author)



Echo Point and *The Edge* are landscape stories of daunting scope, so how are such stories conveyed? The concept of plot duration allows us to explain how story time can be compressed. **Plot duration** refers to the events actually present in the landscape representation itself. Obviously knowing and accommodating all the events occurring over millions of years of landscape history into a single project is an impossible task. Narrative plot consists of the moments selected from amongst all those possibilities and represented in the landscape composition. The visitor or audience member must then piece together these fragments to make sense of the overall story being told.

At Echo Point, plot is communicated through the content and style of interpretive materials. Aspects of the plot since human settlement, and following European settlement in particular, are communicated through interpretive signs featuring factual details of ‘Muggadah Dreaming’ (Aboriginal living culture), ‘World Heritage’ (conservation) and ‘White Settlement’ (exploration, industry and tourism). In addition, six interpretive sandstone figures lead in a curve from the bus set-down zone to the main lookout; each is engraved with quotations describing the landscape view from a particular historical perspective (fig 3). These represent individual plot moments from 1815–1997, with the intervening years left for us to fill in. The poetic, Haiku-like inscriptions act as a kind of shorthand, capturing changing perceptions of the landscape over several generations. When describing the selection of the quotations, George Gallagher explained that Tract had an ‘overwhelming’ amount of material, and that the ‘process of reduction was very important’ when translating that history into a limited set of statements<sup>16</sup>.

In conjunction with these factual and poetic interpretive materials, individual site elements act like characters in a plot by representing or reinterpreting elements of the site’s history. A number of existing artefacts are retained on site, for example the Queen Victoria Lookout and grotto structures. New features such as the ‘Sorensen Wall’<sup>17</sup>—a reinterpretation of the work of Paul Sorensen during the 1920’s–1960’s—make reference to the recent history of the region (fig 4).

Metaphor, montage, historical association and voiceover narration are some of the devices used to develop plot in *The Edge*. Faced with the problem of conveying the immense geological age of the landscape, Weiley designed a specific sequence (fig 5) to metaphorically condense millions of years into one scene:

We follow a stream high up on top of the escarpment and then we fall off the cliff down a thousand meters and find ourselves in a sort of primeval temperate rainforest environment of ferns and *Dicksonia* and the camera is kind of snaking through there in what I hope is a



Figure 5: *The Edge* stills: falling off cliff / dissolve / rainforest below (Images courtesy of Edge Cinema)



sort of dinosaurian slither, as you kind of go back and back and back, and you keep going down and down. I was using the metaphor of going down as going back into the past<sup>18</sup>

A number of montage sequences perform similar story time compression. A montage of five time lapse shots near the beginning of the film (each an individual example of extreme compression of time) depict the wilderness at dawn, through rising cloud, during rain, receding mist, and finally full sun, thus showing an entire seasonal cycle, or implying the dawn of the landscape itself. When telling of European settlement, a sequence featuring a compiled montage of historic footage from the early 1900's dissolves into new footage of the same landscape, thus linking past and present. Like the interpretive panels and sandstone inscriptions featured at Echo Point, much of *The Edge* consists of communicating the age of the landscape and reviewing how perceptions of it have changed over time.

Just as the Sorensen wall at Echo Point is a contemporary element with historical associations, *The Edge* makes use of contemporary action to evoke associations with the past. In one of the most dramatic scenes of the film, a triumphant, high adrenaline rock-climbing ascent to the peak of a jagged cliff complete with helicopter circling below and overhead is linked (via a sound bridge) to the elation of the first recognised Europeans to cross the mountains in 1813.

**Screen or visit duration** is 'real time'; the lived time spent visiting Echo Point, or the actual running time of *The Edge* movie. This determines the amount of time available in which to include plot material.

Overall visit time at Echo Point, along with the amount of time spent in different areas, is dependant to a large extent upon the actions of the individual experiencing the site. As Potteiger and Purinton suggest, such time 'is rarely controlled by the designer, for visitors may choose to pause or pass by selected parts of the landscape at their own pace'<sup>19</sup>. According to pre-redevelopment estimates, individual travellers (who account for around three quarters of visitors) spent up to 70 minutes at Echo Point, whereas the remaining coach travellers had an average length of stay of just 17 minutes<sup>20</sup>. Tract's design response is one that accommodates this range of visit duration, making use of several functional and symbolic cues to guide visitors without 'corralling people [...] like Brown's cows'<sup>21</sup> along a forced route or duration. Gallagher accepted the existing visitation pattern as being indicative of lookout experience expectations:

Thousands and thousands of people flowing through there in a very short period, they haven't come to linger. They're not going to linger [...] We don't necessarily slow them down to sell them something or to stay longer<sup>22</sup>

For travellers having a short stopover, Tract has simplified the bus set-down arrangements and improved way finding and circulation to promote efficient circulation throughout. The interpretive sign strategy is one of minimalisation, ensuring quick transfer of essential information, whilst in-depth information is made available at the on site VIC for those wanting to know more.

Cues that encourage visitors to linger if they wish include seating, a range of parking options and the provision of various spaces away from the main attraction. Seating at Echo Point is generous, of varying size, and positioned to encourage individuals or clusters of people to gravitate in pockets of space near the edges of terraces. As part of the traffic enhancements around Echo Point, vehicular parking has been organised into bays with a variety of time limits (drop-off zones, 2 hour zones and 8 hour zones), allowing visitors to select the time restriction that accommodates their

requirements. Simplified pathways linking the main lookout to existing NPWS walking trails, as well as reconfigured pedestrian access to nearby Lilianfels Park, offer ‘an escape from the more active point area’<sup>23</sup> and give those with the time an increased range of settings in which to spend it.

*The Edge*, as the promotional literature proclaims, is ‘38 minutes of natural Aussie wonder’ (see fig 2). This screen duration is standard for large screen features, for as Weiley explains:

That’s dictated by the operators [who] want to say ‘shows on the hour’ and they want 10 minutes to empty the theatre and ten minutes to fill it, so that’s your hour<sup>24</sup>

Within this duration, the film can be divided into acts and segments according to plot arrangement (refer Table 2).

<b>Act No.</b>	<b>ACT DESCRIPTION</b>	<b>Act length Min/sec</b>	<b>Seg. No.</b>	<b>SEGMENT DESCRIPTION</b>	<b>Seg. Length Min/sec</b>
1	Introduction	2:25	C	Credit (dedication)	00:21
			1	Intro. to Wollemi Pine	01:24
			2	Titles	00:27
2	Landscape history	13:57	3	Evolution / spirituality	03:07
			4	Conservation and wilderness	05:49
			5	Exploration and settlement	04:41
3	Contemporary landscape understanding	14:26	6	Wildlife icons / ecology	02:38
			7	Descent into canyon / time	04:13
			8	Cave sequence	03:11
			9	Wollemi Pine	04:24
4	Summary / conclusion	4:59	10	Landscape today and tomorrow	04:02
			E	End credits	00:57

Table 2—*The Edge* segmentation

This segmentation shows how the film is structured into fairly consistent segment lengths (excepting the shorter introductory / credit segments), and that it is symmetrically balanced between introduction (short) and background history (long)/ contemporary discovery (long) and conclusion (short).

At a more detailed level, we may consider the duration of individual scenes, and the duration of shots within those scenes. *The Edge* varies in scene and shot duration, which imparts a subtle sense of acceleration, deceleration and contrast throughout. For example, the wildlife scene featuring close-ups of wombats and wallabies has a constant stream of 6–10 second shots. By comparison, within the final segment a series of lengthy (20–30 sec.) time-lapse images of extreme long-shot landscape views, followed by a floating helicopter shot that lasts over a minute, give the audience time to look around the frame—to sit and contemplate each view a moment or two longer. In total, the film is composed of less than 160 individual shots, relatively few compared to the average feature film<sup>25</sup>. These lengthy shots, combined with a regularity of overall structure, lend a slow steadiness to the landscape representation, contrasting the occasionally busy foreground action. This gives the audience a complete range of landscape experiences in one.



## Order: Sequencing History And Experience

Landscape narratives determine the order of elements in terms of historical chronology and experiential sequence.

At Echo Point, order has been utilised to form sequential narrative development. Tract's 'Sequential Experience' diagram (fig 6) illustrates how a typical visitor may encounter the landscape in a progressive manner, moving through approach areas → arrival → entry → build-up → climax. The 2004 AILA jury commended the spatial effect of 'gradually revealing [the view of The Three Sisters] as the visitor progresses through the openness of the lookout structure'<sup>26</sup>. This is analogous to a 'goal-oriented' plot pattern in film, where a search or investigation is undertaken<sup>27</sup>. Notably, Tract's diagram makes allowances for variations within the typical sequence by including 'alternative experiences'.

Placement of the interpretive sandstone figures serves to illustrate how order can be significant at a detail level (see fig 3). The sandstone has quotations inscribed on one side only, and as such they address people approaching from a specific direction, that being from the road heading toward the lookout drum. In so doing, the figures imply the direction that one should travel in, without explicit arrows or directional restrictions on movement.

*The Edge* is structured along the lines of the most common narrative convention—the change in knowledge<sup>28</sup>. Events are ordered so that we are given a glimpse of the newly found, but as yet not-revealed Wollemi pine, and are then led on a journey of landscape discovery toward it. We move through a series of landscape themes, each one bringing us closer to the climactic unveiling of the only known grove of Wollemi pines in existence. This is also characteristic of the goal-oriented pattern of narrative development evident in Echo Point.

At a detail level, the order of shots within each scene influences how the plot develops and how scenes relate to each other. For example, an editing convention used regularly to produce smooth transitions throughout *The Edge* is that of slow dissolves between visually matched frames (see fig 5). By selectively ordering the sequence of shots and how they flow from one to the next,



Figure 6: Echo Point, Sequential Experience Diagram (Image courtesy of Tract Consultants)

the filmmaker produces a seamless journey through the landscape that is not dissimilar to the gravitational effect of Echo Point.

*The Edge* does not follow a strictly linear chronological order of past—present—future, but instead varies this slightly by setting the introduction in the present before going back to the more distant historical themes and working forward from there. Order is thus used to build expectation and suspense by giving the audience a glimpse of what is to follow. The modern abseiling / historical exploration sequence arrangement is an example where chronology of past/present is reversed momentarily within the overall chronological structure. Although they may not possess the agency to 'pass by' scenes or experientially reorder them as visitors to a built landscape can, film audiences must still actively piece together and chronologically reorder the cinematic moments they are provided with.

### Pace and movement: from still to thrill

Pace or tempo refers to the sense of landscape speed or stasis over time, as determined by movement and its acceleration, deceleration, regularity or absence.

Grading, spatial form and layout guide movement at Echo Point in an understated manner. A level change of 6 metres from the Echo Point Drive entry down to the main lookout is smoothed out to a consistent gradient of approximately 1:20, with the effect of being drawn 'down by gravity to the drum'<sup>29</sup>. This flow is accentuated by the area's undulating balustrade edge that counteracts any tendency toward a linear funnel of movement. A regulated tempo within the main plaza is further reinforced by evenly spaced signage.

Echo Point was redesigned to accommodate extreme fluctuations in visitor numbers, and the resulting landscape varies in tempo according to the time of day. During the early morning, when the occasional visitor traverses Echo Point, the stillness of the view takes centre stage (fig 7). By midday, the flow of tour busses and crowds of people increase the volume and pace of activity (fig 8). At this peak time it is foreground movement that catches the eye, whilst landscape performs the Classical theatrical role of scenery<sup>30</sup>.

'Movies' produce the illusion of movement through the projection of 24 frames per second. Types of camera movement, editing, and activity within shots are some of the means by which the pace of this illusory movement is controlled. A variety of camera movements occur throughout *The Edge*, ranging from fixed frame extreme long-shots resembling Picturesque landscape paintings (fig 9) through to 'dinosaurian slithers' and tracking shots that take us over the precipice of



Figure 7: Echo Point, early morning view  
(Photograph by author)



Figure 8: Echo Point, midday view  
(Photograph by author)



Figure 9: *The Edge* still: fixed frame long shot of Blue Mountains wilderness (Images courtesy of Edge Cinema)



waterfalls and flying through valleys (see fig 5). *The Edge* tempo accelerates and decelerates between landscape stills and thrills. From the crafting of each shot through to the structure of the film as a whole, an inbuilt variety of landscape tempo is constructed to make our hearts race... and then rest.

Camera movement is particularly useful when creating a sense of depth and progression. Helicopter fly-throughs make our stomachs flutter as if we are flying into the valleys ourselves. Slow pan shots (rotating the camera on a vertical axis to give the impression of panoramic, horizontal scanning) are used to take in the immense landscape and 'create an arc of expectation and fulfilment'<sup>31</sup>. These techniques are particularly suited to large screen formats, where the audience's visual field is entirely filled and thus no edges of the frame are perceived. The intended effect is 'the illusion of actually participating in the film'<sup>32</sup>, feeling as if we are moving when the camera moves.

### Frequency: repetition and recontextualisation

Frequency or repetition can add emphasis and lend consistency to landscape compositions. Importantly, repetitions can 'recontextualise old information'<sup>33</sup>.

At Echo Point, retaining existing site features whilst reconfiguring and adding new ones has altered the meaning of those retained elements. The most striking recontextualisation of this kind involves the existing Queen Victoria Lookout. As visitors make their way to the drum area of the new lookout, they could be forgiven for believing they were approaching the cliff edge. As they reach this 'climax' and brace themselves for a view of the vertiginous depths, they will discover, perhaps anti-climactically, that a small, undramatic historic lookout sits a few metres below them instead (fig 10). The Queen Victoria Lookout becomes a landscape object to ponder in its own right, the hangover of an age when Royals visited the colonies and surveyed their empire. Having more than one lookout at Echo Point does not enhance the viewing opportunities of the iconic Three Sisters much, but it adds a depth of landscape interpretation that would be missing if the earlier lookout were not retained.

The repetition of material and spatial motifs throughout Echo Point add landscape consistency and historical emphasis. The Sorensen wall demonstrates how a locally recognisable historical motif can be adapted to suit its contemporary context. The curve of this wall is echoed at a smaller scale in the undulating forms of the new lookout balustrades. At a site scale, the aforementioned use of sandstone as paving / wall / interpretive device renders this material a dominant motif. Such repetitions unify the site, working in unison to achieve a consistent, and therefore more convincing and 'complete', narrative.

Conceptual and technical motifs repeated throughout *The Edge* likewise reinforce key themes and recontextualise information as the film progresses. The repetition of a curious helicopter blindfold shot serves to indicate the 'change in knowledge' that has taken place over the course of the film. In the introductory sequence, the blindfolded film crew is pictured in a helicopter en-route to the secret location of the Wollemi pine. At the start of the film we are metaphorically blind to the complexities, mysteries and beauty of the landscape, but after 27 minutes of screen time and millions of years of story time we are back in the helicopter and our blindfolds are removed—we have 'learned to see'<sup>34</sup>. An editing technique that is repeated throughout the film is the use of camera positions that move successively closer to their subject. For example, the Wollemi discovery



sequence follows a forward movement pattern of extreme long shot → long shot → medium shot → close up → extreme close up (fig 11), further accentuating the sense of mystery and revelation.

## Rhythm: temporal effects combined

Rhythm is the combined effect of the duration, order, pace and frequency of landscape narrative devices. Landscape designers can control temporal devices in unison to create rhythms that are continuous, or which are accentuated by gradual or abrupt change.

These operate across multiple scales, from individual shots and design details through to entire narrative structures.

Echo Point is characterised by rhythmic consistency—flowing gradients, undulating walls, evenly spaced features and regular visitation patterns of peaks and lulls. This rhythm enables Echo Point to subtly mediate between visitors and the National Park, not by appearing naturalistic or blending the suburb and the bush—it is a robust, clearly defined urban space—but by avoiding sudden contrasts in duration, order or movement. The designed landscape caters to those briefly flowing through and provides cues for longer reflection by others. Individual landscape features, forms and signage all work together to ‘quietly complement the level of interest in the expansive natural landscape’<sup>35</sup>. The Echo Point mediated landscape experience is one of seamless rhythmic regularity, where visitors can choose from a well-defined range of temporal possibilities.

*The Edge* is a film of extremes counterbalanced by underlying structural regularities. It moves between extreme close-up and all-encompassing panorama, stillness and time-lapse motion, on-screen landscape adventure and contemplative wonder at landscape details. Despite some abseiling and canyoning action scenes and the occasional emphatic jump cut between shots, the use of lengthy shot duration, slow dissolves between visually matched frames, slow camera movement and fixed camera shots throughout *The Edge* represent the wilderness landscape in a relatively slow and consistent rhythmic pattern. The *Edge* mediated landscape experience is one of seamless changes in rhythm, where audiences consume a well-controlled variety of temporal experiences.

## In short: summary of temporal case study comparison

In summarising, I wish to emphasise that the designers / producers of Echo Point and *The Edge* have composed with time in similar ways to achieve similar ends by:

- U Selecting extremely long **story duration**, featuring geological and human time / events
- U Making use of montage to condense story time into **plot time**, a device ‘classically employed’ where ‘lengthy periods or large-scale processes are to be shown’<sup>36</sup>
- U Accepting established conventions of short **screen/ visit duration** (i.e. long contemplative landscape experiences not intended)
- U **Ordering** landscape events to achieve goal-oriented plot development
- U Requiring audiences to actively reconstruct the chronology of events (**plot order**) but generally progressing from past—present
- U Constructing narrative structures, using **order** to gradually reveal and seamlessly link landscape moments
- U Creating temporal ebbs and flows (Echo Point daily / *The Edge* scene-by-scene)
- U Mediating **movement** through, or exploration of, landscape without noticeably taking control; the audience is to feel *they* are doing the exploring



- Ü **Repeating** forms or moments to recontextualise or indicate change over time
- Ü **Repeating** conceptual and technical motifs for emphasis and consistency / unity
- Ü Using devices in composite patterns and sequences to achieve **rhythmic** consistency and to emphasise particular landscape characteristics.

## Landscape products of their time

Why these temporal similarities between the main Blue Mountains lookout and its all-weather indoor counterpart? I suggest this is because they are both landscape products of their time—an age characterised by consumption and immediacy. Here we see landscape products designed to introduce wilderness to time-poor travellers in an information-rich culture. Echo Point and *The Edge* each respond to the existing culture of consumption by condensing the broader landscape into conveniently packaged metaphors and moments. Conventional devices are an efficient, non-verbal means of re-presenting the Blue Mountains in this context.

These landscapes act as summarised **introductions** to their mountainous subject. In a Plan of Management drafted for Blue Mountains City Council, the Echo Point 'Vision' is defined as 'An internationally recognised destination for providing a dramatic and enriching introduction to the Blue Mountains'<sup>37</sup>. *The Edge* is touted as 'the perfect introduction to the Blue Mountains'<sup>38</sup>. Both are characterised by literal and conceptual panning: each scans across a panoramic range of themes but does not zoom in beyond an introductory level. By manipulating screen time the filmmaker 'merges the most sensational action-packed minutes'<sup>39</sup> of a landscape investigation that actually took place over several months. Likewise, designing built environments for quick consumption involves seamlessly editing together selected landscape characteristics, cutting out or reducing anything too complex, and making sure a selected theme is consistently reinforced throughout.

In so doing, Echo Point and *The Edge* appeal to the same core **audience**. The Echo Point Plan of Management, which constituted the brief for Tract's work, identified the lookout's 'most appropriate target market' as being

"acquisitive" travellers who have limited time at the site, want to enjoy it quickly, and probably need a fair amount of guidance when they arrive, walk through and leave [...] including] people who may never set foot in the National Park<sup>40</sup>

Mirroring this sentiment, Weiley described the audience for *The Edge* thus:

the vast majority of people who see the film will never get more deeper into the environment of the Blue Mountains than the car park at the cinema. Or the railed off area at Echo Point<sup>41</sup>

Whether individual visitors actually fit this demographic model or not, they are nevertheless carefully and purposefully directed through landscape interpretations that assume no further engagement with the landscape is required.

With these conditions in mind, it would appear that the similarities between the Echo Point and *The Edge* owe more to their common cultural function than to any inherent temporal characteristics of each medium. Film scholar Derek Bouse' has explained that wildlife films rarely capture the long stillness of nature, '... not because they are incapable, as media technologies, of conveying these qualities, but because stillness and silence are incompatible with the social and economic functions of film [...] Film and television are about movement, action, and dynamism; nature is



Figure 10: Echo Point, view from new lookout drum with Queen Victoria Lookout in foreground and The Three Sisters beyond (Photograph by author)

generally not<sup>42</sup>. We can say the same of landscape architecture: As a medium it is not incapable of conveying stillness, but in the case of a mass tourist site like Echo Point the landscape function largely precludes it.

Having suggested how and why Echo Point and *The Edge* are temporally similar, I would like to conclude by discussing their possible effects and implications. What effects do temporal conventions like montage editing, repetition and the narrative sequentiality of landscape experience have upon the Blue Mountains landscape that their audiences encounter? One possibility is that they produce a conventionalised view of landscape, one where nature is mediated to implicitly conform to economic imperatives and the accepted, quickly recognised conventions of their respective media. Bouse' has argued that wildlife films are characterised by conventionalised formulae that conceal nature more than they reveal it, suggesting that 'repeated exposure to nature and wildlife through a shroud of cinematic conventions may help make us less, not more, sensitive to it'<sup>43</sup>.

When this 'shroud of cinematic conventions' is echoed by the use of similar conventions in the built environment itself, our subjective sensitivity to the complexities, the possibilities and the potential of that landscape is diminished even further. As media theorist Eric Louw has pointed out, the prevalence of 'meaning-producers'—intellectuals whose work involves creating meaning in a commercial context—has increased in recent decades, with the result that 'the meanings we are exposed to are less and less likely to be the outcome of chance and are ever-more likely to be the products of intellectuals who have been trained in particular coding processes, practices and worldviews'<sup>44</sup>.

This being said, there are two points I would like to make to qualify such a critique. Firstly, there are subtle exceptions to the norm at work in both cases, where conventions are resisted and challenged. Echo Point does provide cues to pause and reflect, through the use of seating options, longer car-parking restrictions and links to quieter adjacent parkland spaces. Marketing brochures and ads may feature the most spectacular and vertiginous images from *The Edge*, however within the film itself devices like long shots, slow camera movements and still frames lend to their subject a slowness that is missing from conventional action films.

Secondly, regardless of how professionals create or represent the landscape, the experiences of those who engage with it cannot be completely predetermined. Landscapes 'have their form and meanings made and shaped by the actions of both producers and consumers'<sup>45</sup>. In media and cultural studies<sup>46</sup>, the characterisation of cultural producers as an all-powerful force has generally been replaced by a focus upon the multiple ways in which semiotic content can be encoded (by producers) and decoded (by audiences) in a variety of contexts<sup>47</sup>. Each person will subjectively interpret the information they encounter and respond to it based on their own preferences and perceptions. Each will be aware, to a greater or lesser extent, of the many ways in which those perceptions are being professionally guided and directed by the work of others.



Even though we cannot predict or measure the effects of landscape constructs upon lived landscape experience with any certainty, it is nevertheless revealing to look at how and why these constructions are made. Designers can benefit from an understanding of existing temporal conventions, either by making use of familiar devices, or by taking Corner's stance and challenging them. By comparing the landscape artefacts and representations that are created in different media, it is possible to see which values and practices persist throughout contemporary culture, not just within our own profession. This broad consideration of 'the activity called landscape' is essential if landscape architecture is to respond, in an informed way, to the cultural context it functions within.

Conventions are important because they speak of our own approach to 'nature' and they affect how we interact with it. In this way, Echo Point truly lives up to its classically derived name. In Ovid's mythic tale 'Metamorphoses'<sup>48</sup>, Echo was a talkative forest nymph who incessantly chattered with the goddess Juno in an attempt to prevent her catching her husband lying with the other nymphs on the mountainside. Echo's ploy was found out, and her punishment was to be made mute, save for the ability to repeat the final words of others. She wasted away and her bones turned to stone, forever echoing the voices of those who call out to the mountains where she remains. Echo Point and *The Edge* embody the myth; when we call out to the mountains from Katoomba, we hear ourselves. Whether from cliff-edge seating or The Edge Cinema seating, we are hearing and seeing the same contemporary material culture, and the convenient version of conventionalised 'nature' that it creates, reflected back to us.

### Acknowledgements

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Figure 11: *The Edge* stills (x 6): Approaching Wollemi pine sequence  
(Images courtesy of Edge Cinema)

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## Interviews

George Gallagher, Project Leader, Tract Consultants Pty Ltd, Sydney, NSW. Interview conducted September 2005.

Geoff Luscombe, Regional Manager Blue Mountains, NSW Department Environment and Conservation (NPWS). Interview conducted September 2005.

John Weiley, Heliograph Productions, Byron Bay NSW. Interview conducted December 2005.

## Endnotes

- 1 G. Gallagher, (2005). Pers. comm. regarding Echo Point, made during interview with the author.
- 2 J. Weiley, (2005). Pers. comm. regarding *The Edge* movie, made during interview with the author.
- 3 A. Wilson, (1992). *The culture of nature: North American landscape from Disney to the Exxon Valdez*. Blackwell, Cambridge MA.: pp 13–14. For similar work see Mitchell (1994) and Cosgrove & Daniels (1988).
- 4 M. Potteiger & J. Purinton, (1998). *Landscape narratives: design practices for telling stories*. J. Wiley, New York: p 113.
- 5 D. Bordwell & K. Thompson, (2005) [1979]. *Film Art: An Introduction*. McGraw-Hill, New York: p 218.
- 6 J. Corner, (1999). 'Introduction—Recovering Landscape as a Critical Cultural Practice' in Corner, J. [ed]. *Recovering Landscape: Essays in contemporary landscape architecture*. Princeton Architectural Press, New York: p 4.
- 7 For example refer Potteiger & Purinton: pp 12–13.
- 8 See Potteiger & Purinton: p 26; Bordwell & Thompson: 50.
- 9 Visitation to the area has fluctuated as cultural tastes have changed. The popularity of the Blue Mountains as a tourist destination burgeoned in the late 1800's and reached its peak by the 1920's, however as beach culture evolved the appeal of the mountains declined. During the late 20<sup>th</sup> century the trend for eco-tourism brought with it a renewed interest in the mountain landscape (Global Tourism and Leisure Pty. Ltd. (2004). *Blue Mountains Regional Three Year Tourism Plan and Implementation program*. Blue Mountains Tourism Ltd. and Tourism NSW: p 2–3).
- 10 G. Luscombe, interview with the author (2005).
- 11 Potteiger and Purinton, when writing in a North American context, note 'The interpretation of sites is a common narrative objective of the National Park Service': p 22.
- 12 Charles Walsh Nature Tourism Services with Elanus Word and Image, (2002). *Greater Blue Mountains World Heritage Area Interpretation and Visitor Orientation Plan*. New South Wales National Parks and Wildlife Service, Hurstville, Sydney: p 15.
- 13 In the commercial realm of advertising, for example, Corbett has noted that 'the most pervasive use of the environment [is] when nature functions as a rhetorically useful backdrop or stage' in M. Meister & P. Japp [eds.] (2002). *EnviroPOP: studies in environmental rhetoric and popular culture*. Praeger Publishers, Westport CT.: p 142.

- 14 Bordwell & Thompson: p 372.
- 15 The Greater Blue Mountains (consisting of the Blue Mountains National Park and several others) were included on the World Heritage Register in November 2000. Weiley has commented that *The Edge* 'was part of a campaign to get the Blue Mountains registered' in this way. See Weiley, quoted in P. Thompson, (2004) *Profile: filmmaker John Weiley*. [transcript] [http://sunday.ninemsn.com.au/sunday/art\\_profiles/article\\_1529.asp?s=1](http://sunday.ninemsn.com.au/sunday/art_profiles/article_1529.asp?s=1) [accessed August 2005]
- 16 Gallagher, pers. comm.
- 17 Tract Consultants (December 2000a). *Design Report—Echo Point Revitalisation*. [Report prepared for Blue Mountains City Council]: p 6–9.
- 18 Weiley, pers. comm.
- 19 Potteiger & Purinton: p 114.
- 20 Manidis Roberts Consultants and Arterra Design (2000). *Plan of Management for Proposed Echo Point Crown Reserve*. Blue Mountains City Council, Katoomba: 5.
- 21 Gallagher, pers. comm.
- 22 Gallagher, pers. comm.
- 23 Tract, 2000a: p 4.
- 24 Weiley, pers. comm.
- 25 Bordwell & Thompson: p 327.
- 26 <http://www.aila.org.au/awards/awards-2004/comments.htm> [accessed January 2006].
- 27 Bordwell & Thompson: p 81.
- 28 Bordwell & Thompson: p 81.
- 29 Gallagher, pers. comm.
- 30 J. Gold & G. Revill (2004) identifies the Greek origins of scenery as follows: 'The spectacle provided by the early theatres was, in fact, the sight of the dramatically formed valley-and-plain landscape native to Greece. Built into hillsides, theatre was always held in the open so that a wide arc of distant landforms surrounded spectators. Indeed, this is the first example of the landscape acting literally as "scenery"' in *Representing the environment*. Routledge, New York: p 90.
- 31 Bordwell & Thompson: p 275.
- 32 C. Skinner (1996). *The Edge—The Movie*. OZ Arts, Wentworth Falls NSW: p 27.
- 33 Bordwell & Thompson: p76.
- 34 Weiley, quoted in Skinner: p 3.
- 35 <http://www.aila.org.au/awards/awards-2004/comments.htm> [accessed January 2006].
- 36 Bordwell & Thompson: p 332.
- 37 Manidis Roberts Consultants and Arterra Design: p 1.
- 38 The Edge Cinema promotional flyer, (2005).
- 39 Skinner: p 27.
- 40 Manidis Roberts Consultants and Arterra Design: p 25.
- 41 Weiley, pers. comm.
- 42 D. Bouse' (2000). *Wildlife Films*. University of Pennsylvania Press, Philadelphia: p 4.
- 43 Bouse': p 8.
- 44 E. Louw, (2001). *The media and cultural production*. Sage, London: p 15.
- 45 Gold & Revill: p 241.



- 46 For example see S. Hall [ed.] (1997). *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices*. Sage / The Open University, Milton Keynes.
- 47 In the case of the designed environment, decoding can be literally reinscribed into the landscape. Echo Point has become such a site for contested meaning: Stencilled graffiti of the word RAGE has been sprayed at various key locations around the site, disrupting the otherwise controlled seamlessness (see fig 10—Queen Victoria lookout pedestal). Unlike *The Edge*, Echo Point is a living record, an artefact that allows the interpretations and interactions of its audience to change its physical form, at least for as long as maintenance allows.
- 48 Ovid (c. 1AD). *Metamorphoses*. Translated by A.D. Melville, 1998 edition, Oxford University Press Oxford: pp 61–66.

