

ARCH 583-102: Earthwork: Geoaesthetics and Ecology

New Jersey Institute of Technology, Spring 2024

Special Topic Elective Seminar

3 credits, 3 contact hours per week, meets once per week

Monday, 6:00p-9:00p

Faculty

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Office Hours: Monday, 12:00p-1:00p

Course Description

*"The poet thinks with his poem, in that lies his thought, and that in itself is the profundity.
The thought is Paterson, to be discovered there."*

A statement by William Carlos Williams about the poem Paterson, May 31, 1951.

It was artist Robert Smithson's quixotic excursion through Passaic, New Jersey that led him to the question: "Has Passaic replaced Rome as The Eternal City?" Passaic was emblematic of the New Jersey landscape of the time: quickly expanding suburban development, decrepit industrial remnants, vast highway systems, and isolated natures. Having been born there in 1938, there was arguably no place with which Smithson was more familiar or nostalgic, yet his account reads simultaneously like that of a Piranesi-eque landscape of ancient ruins and an alien planet. It was this stark abstraction, informed by urban histories, that enabled the disfigurement of his city as it existed in his own mind. The result was the transformation of Passaic into something material and plastic. By redefining explicit use through fantastical language and creative procedures, Smithson deconstructed the urban syntax and opened it up to interpretation and intervention. The resulting essay and photographs became an authoritative text of the then emerging land art movement and an account of Smithson's conceptual approach within it.

Earthwork: Geoaesthetics and Ecology examines the history and practice of land art that arose out of New Jersey in the late 1960's, its disruptive tendencies within the art world, its influence on architectural thinking, its adoption of environmentalism, and its evolution into contemporary geoaesthetics. The course considers Smithson's text as a point of departure from previous aesthetic practices, through which the use of the Earth, its detritus, and time as material aided in articulating coexisting changes in social, technological, and environmental orders. Through the analysis of relevant texts by Smithson and other artists and theorists from the past century, the course characterizes a history of land art theory and aesthetics centered around the perception and production of our environments, while also exploring contemporary artistic and architectural practices that address the challenges of perception of the Earth and its ecologies within the current climate crisis.

The setting of the course in the city of Newark offers students a unique opportunity to engage with the same urban and suburban fabrics artists did sixty years ago while addressing fundamental architectural and environmental questions posed throughout the course. Students will be asked to conceptually map a portion of the city, develop their own artistic methods based on precedents learned in lecture, and produce an artwork of their own.

Weekly Reading Assignments

Weekly assigned readings will explore the context of land art through the lenses of art and architectural theorists, historians, and the artists themselves. Readings will also explore the introduction of new technological systems, their impact on computer-based spatial reasoning and data collection, and their role in changing the land art discourse. Students are required to complete the readings and provide a response before the beginning of class the following week. Responses should demonstrate a close reading and analysis of the text, a clear understanding of major themes, the application of language and processes, and an ability to synthesize information from multiple texts into a coherent thesis and inquiry. The minimum length of responses will be noted within individual assignments. Responses to the previous week's assigned readings will be used to structure an in-class discussion of the material, during which each student is expected to provide vocal and consistent participation. Additionally, each week two students will be chosen to provide an image or a series of images along with (5) questions which will be posed to the class for discussion. Students may schedule an appropriate day within the questionnaire schedule.

Semester Project

A semester-long project will be divided into three sections:

Phase I: Site Selection and Mapping

The course will begin with an exercise that asks students to “map” a selected site in or around Newark, New Jersey. Students will be expected to employ, elaborate, and challenge methods and techniques learned through readings and lectures pertaining to land artists. Mapping will require students to research and develop a conceptual approach to existing social, historical, and ecological contexts of the city, graphically or physically represent that position, and interrogate the relationships of site, drawing, and object. Map proposals will be reviewed in class and discussions will include mapping and representational strategies. Each student is expected to present their “map” to the class at the midterm review. Students may refer to the assignment for further details.

Phase II: Nonsite Intervention

The second phase of the project will focus on the fabrication and installation of an artifact associated with the midterm mapping assignment. The project will be an intervention (sculpture, installation, or site work) through which a viewer or participant might interact with the information or perspective established in the earlier mapping assignment. Specific locations will be determined by the student and instructor as project proposals take shape. Students may refer to the assignment for further details.

Phase III: Documentation

In the final weeks of the semester, students will document their nonsite intervention, or produce the data collected throughout their intervention, and present this information to the class. Students may refer to the assignment for further details.

Course Outcomes

This course will guide students to achieve the following competencies:

- Demonstrate an understanding of the social and cultural pressures from which influential art movements like minimalism, conceptualism, and land art developed.

- Explore and replicate the practices of land artists and conceptual artists that developed in New Jersey.
- Respond critically and analytically to the positions of artists and theorists as delineated in their texts.
- Demonstrate an ability to synthesize historical texts with contemporary contexts and apply these results to real-world conditions in and around Newark, New Jersey.
- Demonstrate an understanding of land art in relation to local ecologies and land reclamation.
- Demonstrate an understanding of land art in relation to landscape and park design, infrastructure, and urbanism.
- Demonstrate an understanding of land art in relation to contemporary geoaesthetics.
- Develop criteria to challenge institutional space through artistic conceptualization, intervention, and installation.

Accreditation

The National Architectural Accrediting Board accredits NJIT's architecture program. The NAAB has Shared Values of the Discipline and the Profession that must be covered by any architectural curriculum to attain their approval. This course satisfies the following shared values:

Design: Architects design better, safer, more equitable, resilient, and sustainable built environments. Design thinking and integrated design solutions are hallmarks of architecture education, the discipline, and the profession.

Environmental Stewardship and Professional Responsibility: Architects are responsible for the impact of their work on the natural world and on public health, safety, and welfare. As professionals and designers of the built environment, we embrace these responsibilities and act ethically to accomplish them.

Knowledge and Innovation: Architects create and disseminate knowledge focused on design and the built environment in response to ever-changing conditions. New knowledge advances architecture as a cultural force, drives innovation, and prompts the continuous improvement of the discipline.

Leadership, Collaboration, and Community Engagement: Architects practice design as a collaborative, inclusive, creative, and empathetic enterprise with other disciplines, the communities we serve, and the clients for whom we work.

Lifelong Learning: Architects value educational breadth and depth, including a thorough understanding of the discipline's body of knowledge, histories and theories, and architecture's role in cultural, social, environmental, economic, and built contexts. The practice of architecture demands lifelong learning, which is a shared responsibility between academic and practice settings.

Learning and Teaching Culture

In addition to the overarching values and ethics of the university, the NJSoA is dedicated to optimism, diversity and solidarity, professional conduct, constructive evaluation and instruction, collaborative community, health and wellbeing, time management and school-life-work balance, respectful stewardship and space management, and well-rounded enrichment. The pedagogy of architecture and

design is as complex as it is rewarding, and as dynamically evolving as the people who learn and teach it. This understanding resides at the core of the NJIT Learning and Teaching Culture Policy:

<https://design.njit.edu/learning-and-teaching-culture-policy>

CANVAS

This course will use the learning management system CANVAS as the repository for some documents and for accessing KEPLER for archiving assignments. To access CANVAS, you must have a UCID account with NJIT.

Archiving on KEPLER:

Students are expected to upload copies of their assignments to the new KEPLER 5 system found under the KEPLER tab in CANVAS "Modules". CANVAS assignments folders are automatically ported to KEPLER, although students will need to initiate a separate KEPLER upload. The new KEPLER has an improved interface for easier batch uploading. Any file, regardless of file size, or type can be uploaded, although pdfs and jpegs are recommended to ensure viewability. KEPLER no longer has individual student folders. Rather, student work is now available for review in either "List View" organized by student or "Gallery View" with thumbnails of all work in an assignment folder viewable at once.

Archiving on Google Drive

Students are expected to upload copies of all assignments and reading responses to the provided and appropriate Google Drive folders within the timetable established in each assignment. Failure to do so on time may result in the failure of that assignment.

Grading Policy

Grading will reflect a combination of project discipline and execution, as well as in-class participation and engagement with reading material.

Attendance / In Class Participation: 20%

Weekly Reading Responses: 20%

Project *Phase I: Site Selection / Mapping*: 15%

Project *Phase II: Non-Site*: 30%

Project *Phase III: Documentation*: 15%

Grading Scale

A	Superior
B+	Excellent
B	Very Good
C+	Good
C	Acceptable
D	Minimum
F	Inadequate
AUD	Audit
I	Incomplete*
W	Withdrawal
S	Satisfactory
U	Unsatisfactory

*An incomplete may be given in rare instances to students who would normally have completed the coursework but who could not do so because of special circumstances. It is expected that coursework will be completed during the next regular semester. If this grade is not removed before final grades are due at the end of the next regular semester, a grade of F will be issued.

Academic Integrity

Academic Integrity is the cornerstone of higher education and is central to the ideals of this course and the university. Cheating is strictly prohibited and devalues the degree that you are working on. As a member of the NJIT community, it is your responsibility to protect your educational investment by knowing and following the academic code of integrity policy that is found at:

<http://www5.njit.edu/policies/sites/policies/files/academic-integrity-code.pdf>. Please note that it is the instructor's professional obligation and responsibility to report any academic misconduct to the Dean of Students Office. Any student found in violation of the code by cheating, plagiarizing or using any online software inappropriately will result in disciplinary action. This may include a failing grade of F, and/or suspension or dismissal from the university. If you have any questions about the code of Academic Integrity, please contact the Dean of Students Office at dos@njit.edu.

Attendance and Tardiness

Attendance is required for every meeting within the designated class time. An absence due to illness may be excused. By providing verifiable documentation through filing an online Student Absence Excuse Request form related to the absences, a student can ask for accommodation and that their absences not affect their grade. Once the absence has been verified, the DOS will communicate with the instructor. Nonetheless, the DOS only verifies documentation, and it remains the instructor's discretion to provide any accommodation and the student's responsibility to follow up with the instructor. Accepted reasons for absence include bereavement, medical concerns, military activity, legal obligations, or university-sponsored events. A single unexcused absence is grounds for the lowering of the semester grade or individual assignment grades up to one full letter grade (i.e. from B+ to C+) at the instructor's discretion. Multiple unexcused absences may result in a failing grade for the class. Students should notify the instructor via email prior to class regarding absences or tardies.

Course Schedule

*Subject to change

Week 01 [Jan 22]

- Lecture Week 01: *Abstract Geology*
- Reading Assignment Week 01 assigned
 - Carlson, Allen. "Nature, Aesthetic Judgment, and Objectivity" In *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, Autumn 1981, Vol. 40, No. 1, 15-27.
 - Lippard, Lucy R. and John Chandler. "The Dematerialization of Art." In *Conceptual Art: A Critical Anthology*, edited by Alexander Alberro and Blake Stimson, 46-50. Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1999.
 - Smithson, Robert. "Frederick Law Olmstead and The Dialectical Landscape (1973)." In *Robert Smithson: The Collected Writings*, edited by Jack Flam, 157-171. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996.

Week 02 [Jan 29]

- In-class discussion of Reading Assignment Week 01 material
- Lecture Week 02: *Modernization*
- Reading Assignment Week 02 assigned
 - Smithson, Robert and Allan Kaprow. "What Is A Museum? A Dialogue Between Allan Kaprow and Robert Smithson (1967)." In *Robert Smithson: The Collected Writings*, edited by Jack Flam, 43-51. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996.
 - Smithson, Robert. "A Tour of The Monuments of Passaic, New Jersey (1967)." In *Robert Smithson: The Collected Writings*, edited by Jack Flam, 68-74. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996.

Week 03 [Feb 5]

- In-class discussion of Reading Assignment Week 02 material
- Lecture Week 03: *Dematerialization*
- Reading Assignment Week 03 assigned
 - Jager, Nita, ed. *Earth Art*. Ithaca: Cornell University Office of Publications, 1967.
 - Krauss, Rosalind. "Sculpture in the Expanded Field." *October 8* (1979): 31–44.
 - Smithson, Robert. "A Sedimentation of the Mind: Earth Projects (1968)." In *Robert Smithson: The Collected Writings*, edited by Jack Flam, 100-113. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996.

Week 04 [Feb 12]

- In-class discussion of Reading Assignment Week 03 material
- Lecture Week 04: *The Expanded Field*
- Project *Phase I: Site Mapping* assigned [Due Feb 26]
- Reading Assignment Week 04 assigned
 - Kurgan, Laura. "You Are Here: Actually To Inhabit an Information System." In *Close Up at a Distance: Mapping, Technology and Politics*, 59-83. New York: Zone Books, 2013.
 - Ponte, Alessandra. "Maps and Territories." In *Architecture Words II: The House of Light and Entropy*, edited by Pamela Johnston, 169-221. London: The Architectural Association, 2014.
 - Smithson, Robert. "A Tour of The Monuments of Passaic, New Jersey (1967)." In *Robert Smithson: The Collected Writings*, edited by Jack Flam, 68-74. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996.

Week 05 [Feb 19]

- In-class discussion of Reading Assignment Week 04 material
- Lecture Week 05: *Mapping*

Week 06 [Feb 26]

Project Phase I: Site Mapping presentations

- Reading Assignment Week 06 assigned
 - Holt, Nancy. "Ecological Aspects of My Work (1993)." In *Nancy Holt / Inside Outside*, edited by Lisa Le Feuvre and Katarina Pierre, 197-201. New York: Monacelli, 2022.
 - Morris, Robert. "Notes on Art as/and Land Reclamation." In *October*, Vol 12 (Spring 1980.) Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1980. p87-102.

- Carlson, Allen. "Contemporary Environmental Aesthetics and the Requirements of Environmentalism." In *Environmental Values* 19, 2010, 289-314.

Week 07 [Mar 4]

- In-class discussion of Reading Assignment Week 06 material
- Lecture Week 06: *Environmentalism*
- Project *Phase II: Non-Site* assigned [Due Apr 1]
- Reading Assignment Week 07 assigned
 - Tavares, Paulo. "In The Forest Ruins." In *Superhumanity: Design of the Self*, edited by Nick Axel, Beatriz Colomina, Nikolaus Hirsch, Anton Vidokle, and Mark Wigley, 293-303. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2018.

Week 08 [Mar 11]

No Class - Spring Break

Week 09 [Mar 18]

- In-class discussion of Reading Assignment Week 07 material
- Lecture Week 07: *Beyond Earth*
- Reading Assignment Week 09 assigned
 - Lippard, Lucy. *Undermining: A Wild Ride Through Land Use, Politics, and Art in the Changing West*, 123-139. New York: The New Press, 2014.
 - Carlson, Allen. "Contemporary Environmental Aesthetics and the Requirements of Environmentalism." In *Environmental Values* 19, 2010, 289-314.

Week 10 [Mar 25]

- In-class discussion of Reading Assignment Week 09 material
- Lecture Week 10: *Climate Migration*

Week 11 [Apr 1]

Project Phase II: Non-Site presentations

Week 12 [Apr 8]

- Lecture Week 12: *Extractivism*
- Project *Phase III: Documentation* assigned [Due Apr 29]
- Reading Assignment Week 12 assigned
 - Boettger, Suzaan. "Ways Of Saying: Rhetorical Strategies of Environmentalist Imaging." In *The Routledge Companion to Contemporary Art, Visual Culture, and Climate Change*, edited by T.J. Demos, Emily Eliza Scott, Subhankar Banerjee. New York: Routledge, 2021. p 252-262.
 - Yusoff, Kathryn. "Epochal Aesthetics: Affectual Infrastructures of the Anthropocene" In *Accumulation: The Art, Architecture, and Media of Climate Change*, edited by Nick Axel, Daniel A. Barber, Nikolaus Hirsch, Anton Vidokle. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2022. p13-25.

Week 13 [Apr 15]

- In-class discussion of Reading Assignment Week 12 material
- Lecture Week 11: *Challenging Documentation*

Week 14 [Apr 22]

- Project *Phase III: Documentation* individual meetings

Week 15 [Apr 29]

Project *Phase III: Documentation* presentations

Referenced Texts:

Alberro, Alexander, editor. *Conceptual Art: A Critical Anthology*. Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1999.

Axel, Nick, editor. *Accumulation: The Art, Architecture, and Media of Climate Change*. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2022.

Axel, Nick, editor. *Superhumanity: Design of the Self*. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2018.

Baum, Kelly, editor. *New Jersey as Non-Site*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2013.

Chan, Carson, Matthew Wagstaff, editors. *Emerging Ecologies: Architecture and the Rise of Environmentalism*. New York, NY: Museum of Modern Art, 2023.

Demos, T.J., editor. *The Routledge Companion to Contemporary Art, Visual Culture, and Climate Change*. New York, NY: Routledge, 2021.

Holt, Nancy. *Nancy Holt: Inside Outside*, edited by Lisa Le Feuvre and Katarina Pierre. New York, NY: Monacelli, 2022.

Judd, Donald. *Donald Judd: Complete Writings 1959-1975*. New York, NY: New York University Press, 1975.

Kaprow, Allan. *The Blurring of Art and Life*, edited by Jeff Kelley. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1996.

Krauss, Rosalind E.: *The Optical Unconscious*. Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1993.

Latour, Bruno. *Down to Earth: Politics in the New Climate Regime*. Medford, MA: Polity Press, 2021.

Lee, Pamela M. *Chronophobia: On Time in the Art of the 1960's*. Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2004.

Lippard, Lucy. *Six Years: The Dematerialization of the Art Object*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1973.

Lippard, Lucy. *Undermining: A Wild Ride Through Land Use, Politics, and Art in the Changing West*. New York, NY: The New Press, 2014.

Moure, Gloria. *Dan Graham: Works and Collected Writings*. Barcelona: Ediciones Poligrafa, 2009.

Reynolds, Ann. *Robert Smithson: Learning from New Jersey and Elsewhere*. Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2003.

Smithson, Robert. *Robert Smithson: The Collected Writings*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1996.

Ursprung, Philip. *Alan Kaprow, Robert Smithson and the Limits of Art*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2013.