



Sim Chi Yin, *Mountain range surrounding the Nevada Test Site*, November 2017.

Landscape and American Culture

Course Details

ARCH 536: Landscape and American Culture

New Jersey Institute of Technology, Fall 2024

Prerequisites: ARCH 324: Landscape and Urbanism

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

Monday, 6p-9p

Faculty

James Coleman

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Office Hours: 12p-1p MTh (by appointment)

Course Description

Landscape and American Culture explores the numerous variables from which landscape conceptually, aesthetically, and representationally has emerged within the American cultural industry, and how that industry has continued to drive the perceptions of our environment to influence design decisions today. Geological vastness, cultural and biological diversity, and agricultural evolution have provided designers a multitude of challenges and

opportunities of which to account. Rather than narrowing the definition of these factors into the discipline of landscape architecture, this course considers design as an interrogation of the landscape and our utilization of it, and therefore the entirety of decisions within its use and ideation are considered the purview of designers. As such, the numerous dialectical delineations between landscape and cityscape, wilderness and civility, give way to a congregation of environmental relations whose qualities intersect with all aspects of our design processes and built environments.

The American landscape is rife with competing interests, inherent contradictions, and complex histories. The very concept of *Manifest Destiny* both mythologized the perception of the “sublime wilderness” and facilitated unsustainable agricultural techniques that resulted in irreparable damage to the land and its society. The three-century-long formative timeline of the United States offers a convenient correlation to the height of colonial epistemology, objectification of natural phenomena, and a history of the modern era’s industrialization culminating in its effects on the global climate. Simultaneously it provides the placeness of ancient mythologies and the placelessness of Hollywood sets, vast biological diversity and technological homogeneity, and possibly the testing ground of new humane solutions to growing ecological questions.

The course will interrogate contemporary principles and practices in landscape design through a series of case studies whose historical, cultural, and scientific stratifications will be forensically studied and cataloged to make evident their inherent design opportunities. The course will introduce students to contemporary thinkers and grassroot movements interested in landscape equity and sustainability. The role of designers, writers, scientists, artists and architects, and their respective ideations and interventions, will guide students to understand the cultural imagination of the American landscape.

Course Structure

Weekly Reading Response Assignments

Each week will require students to read selected texts and/or view selected media, then provide a response before the following in-class discussion. Specific requirements for reading responses will be found on the corresponding weekly assignment sheet and also the last slide of each lecture. In-class discussions will include a review of responses pertinent to the conversation and will be followed by lectures exploring a related topic in-depth.

Final Assignment

Students will be expected to produce a final project based on their own research that will include a 3000-word essay and a minimum of (2) images describing a designed intervention into an existing environment informed by the strategies learned in class. Further details of the final assignment will be provided in the assignment sheet.

Course Outcomes

This course will guide students to achieve the following competencies:

- Demonstrate an understanding of the social and cultural pressures that have informed landscape design in the United States.
- Respond critically and analytically to the positions of designers and theorists as delineated in their texts.
- Demonstrate an ability to synthesize information presented in lectures and texts with real-world conditions and solutions.
- Demonstrate an understanding of the American landscape in relation to labor and land use practices.
- Demonstrate an understanding of the American landscape and its influence on the perception of American culture, as well as how culture informs design decisions.
- Develop criteria to interrogate environmental design thinking relative to the challenges presented to and by the contemporary United States, and consider further application throughout the world.

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.

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 required to upload all graded work to Kepler in order to receive a passing grade.

To do so in Canvas, follow these instructions:

1. Go to [Modules];
2. Click on the Kepler link then "Load Kepler in a new window";
3. Click [Authorize];
4. Find this course and upload your files under the [Assignments] tab. These are listed the same way as they appear in the Canvas Assignments tab.

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.

In Class Participation: 30%
Weekly Reading Responses: 35%
Final Assignment: 35%

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

The NJSOA maintains that academic integrity and honesty are of paramount importance. Cheating and plagiarism will not be tolerated. The NJIT Honor Code will be upheld and any violations will be dealt with by the department or brought to the immediate attention of the Dean of Students. All students are responsible for upholding the integrity of NJIT by reporting any violation of academic integrity. The identity of a student filing a report will remain anonymous. All students are expected to adhere to the University Code on Academic Integrity (<https://www.njit.edu/dos/academic-integrity>) and to the Code of Student Conduct (<https://www.njit.edu/dos/policies/conductcode/index.php>). The HCAD Library has assembled excellent resources on using images, citing, and plagiarism: (<https://researchguides.njit.edu/c.php?g=671665&p=4727920>).

Artificial Intelligence

This course acknowledges that artificial intelligence has an evolving and expanding role in the designer's and academic's repertoire. Any use of artificial intelligence for the purpose of creating or developing *imagery* must be conducted transparently. Imagery created through AI is, for the purpose of this course, considered equivalent to imagery found through a search engine, and if integrated into written assignments, presentations, or other altered imagery, should be cited with its generating model and prompt. The use of artificial intelligence alone does not constitute sufficient independent and individual consideration or expression of the material by a student to warrant a passing grade. *The use of artificial intelligence for text in a written assignment is strictly prohibited.* If a written assignment is submitted and artificial intelligence is determined to have been used without clearance by the instructor, the written assignment will be considered plagiarized and be subject to the same standards as described in the *Academic Integrity* section above.

Attendance and Tardiness

Students are expected to attend every class meeting within the designated class time and notify instructors prior to missing or being late for a class and provide cause for nonattendance. The instructor reserves the right to request a student provide verifiable documentation for absences from the Office of the Dean of Students (DOS). The DOS allows students to explain absences by filing an online Student Absence Excuse Request form related to the absences within 14 days. By doing so, a student can ask for accommodation. Once the absence has been

verified, the DOS will communicate with the instructor. Accepted reasons for absence include bereavement, medical concerns, military activity, legal obligations, or university-sponsored events. Additional DOS information outlined here: <https://www.njit.edu/dos/student-excuses>. Students are expected to make up missed work through their own coordination and scheduling. Unexcused absences may affect related grades including in-class participation.

Course Schedule

The following reading assignments represent *required* readings and media only. Additional *optional* readings and media will be listed at the end of each lecture and will be available via the course Google Drive folder. Aspects of this schedule and its corresponding assignments are subject to change.

Week 01 [Monday, Sept 09]

- Week 01 Lecture: *Prelude: Geological (in)Formation*
- Week 01 Reading Assignment assigned:
 - Daston, Lorraine, and Peter Galison. *Objectivity*. New York: Zone Books, 2010. p63-82.

Week 02 [Monday, Sept 16]

- In-class discussion of Week 01 Reading Assignment material and responses.
- Week 02 Lecture: *Imaginative Landscapes*
- Week 02 Reading Assignment assigned:
 - Greer, Allan. *Property and Dispossession*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018. p271-310.

Week 03 [Monday, Sept 23]

- In-class discussion of Week 02 Reading Assignment material and responses.
- Week 03 Lecture: *Assembling a Mythology*
- Week 03 Reading Assignment assigned:
 - Holleman, Hannah. "The First Global Environmental Problem," In *Dust Bowls of Empires: Imperialism, Environmental Politics, and the Injustice of "Green" Capitalism*. New Haven, Yale University Press, 2018. p38-54.

Week 04 [Monday, Sept 30]

- In-class discussion of Week 03 Reading Assignment material and responses.
- Week 04 Lecture: *Abuse of the Land*
- Week 04 Reading Assignment assigned
 - Smithson, Robert. "Frederick Law Olmsted and the Dialectical Landscape." In *Robert Smithson: The Collected Writings*, edited by Jack Flam, p157-171. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996.

Week 05 [Monday, Oct 07]

- In-class discussion of Week 04 Reading Assignment material and responses.
- Week 05 Lecture: *Industrialized Farming and Federal Intervention*
- Week 05 Reading Assignment assigned
 - Iturbe, Elisa. "Architecture and the Death of Carbon Modernity." In *Log 47*, edited by Cynthia Davidson and Elisa Iturbe, p10-23. New York, Anyone Corporation, 2019.

Week 06 [Monday, Oct 14]

- In-class discussion of Week 05 Reading Assignment material and responses.
- Week 06 Lecture: *The Modernist Landscape*
- Week 06 Reading Assignment assigned

- Ponte, Alessandra. "The House of Light and Entropy: Inhabiting the American Desert." In *Architecture Words 11: The House of Light and Entropy*, edited by Brett Steele, p66-96. London: Architectural Association London, 2014.

Week 07 [Monday, Oct 21]

- In-class discussion of Week 06 Reading Assignment material and responses.
- Week 07 Reading: *Atomic Deserts*
- Week 07 Reading Assignment assigned
 - Borman, F. Herbert, Diana Balmori, Gordon T. Geballe. "*Redesigning the American Lawn: A Search for Environmental Harmony*," p90-114. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001.

Week 08 [Monday, Oct 28]

- In-class discussion of Week 07 Reading Assignment material and responses.
- Week 08 Lecture: *Artificial Turfs*
- Week 08 Reading Assignment assigned
 - House Resolution 109: *Recognizing the duty of the Federal Government to create a Green New Deal*. February 7, 2019.
 - Video: Grounding the Green New Deal: Design, Policy and Advocacy (Vimeo)

Week 09 [Monday, Nov 04]

- In-class discussion of Week 08 Reading Assignment material and responses.
- Week 09 Lecture: *The Green New Deal*
- No reading assignment due to final projects.

Week 10 [Monday, Nov 11]

- **In-class presentations of final projects**
- No reading assignment due to final projects.

Week 11 [Monday, Nov 18]

- **In-class presentations of final projects**
- Week 11 Reading Assignment assigned
 - LeMenager, Stephanie. "Living with Fire (Hot Media)." In *Accumulation: The Art, Architecture, and Media of Climate Change*, edited by Nick Axel, Daniel A. Barber, Nikolaus Hirsch, and Anton Vidokle, p91-99. New York: e-flux Architecture, 2022.

Week 12 [Monday, Nov 25]

- In-class discussion of Week 11 Reading Assignment material and responses.
- Week 12 Lecture: *The Climate Landscape*
- No reading assignment due to final reviews.

Week 13 [Monday, Dec 02]

- Studio Final Reviews taking place prior to class.
- In-class discussion of project representation, by appointment.
- No reading assignment due to final reviews.

Week 14 [Monday, Dec 09]

- **Documentation of final project due**
- Week 14 Lecture: *The Future of American Landscape*

Bibliography

The following bibliography represents *required* reading material and heavily cited material only. Additional *optional* reading material and occasionally cited material may be found at the conclusion of each lecture, or in the complete course bibliography found in the course Google Drive folder. Aspects of this bibliography are subject to change. All required readings and optional reading will be provided via PDF. There is no need to purchase texts.

Aronoff, Kate, Alyssa Battistoni, Daniel Aldana Cohen, Thea Riofrancos. *A Planet to Win: Why We Need a Green New Deal*. London: Verso Books, 2019.

Borman, Herbert F., Diana Balmori, Gordon T. Geballe. *Redesigning the American Lawn: A Search for Environmental Harmony*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001.

Conzen, Michael P. *The Making of the American Landscape*. New York: Routledge, 2010.

Corner, James. *The Landscape Imagination: Collected Essays of James Corner 1990-2010*. New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 2014.

Daston, Lorraine and Peter Galison. *Objectivity*. New York: Zone Books, 2010.

Davis, Mike. *City of Quartz: Excavating the Future in Los Angeles*. London: Verso Books, 2018.

Downing, Andrew Jackson. *A Treatise on the Theory and Practice of Landscape Gardening*. New York: Wiley and Putnam, 1841.

Emerson, Ralph Waldo. *Nature and Selected Essays*. New York: Penguin Books, 1982.

Estes, Nick. *Our History is the Future: Standing Rock versus the Dakota Pipeline, and the Long Tradition of Indigenous Resistance*. London: Verso Books, 2019.

Fitzgerald, Deborah. *Every Farm a Factory: The Industrial Ideal in American Agriculture*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003.

Foucault, Michel. *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences*. New York: Vintage Books, 1994.

Greer, Allan. *Property and Dispossession: Natives, Empires and Land in Early Modern North America*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018.

Harvey, David. *Justice, Nature and the Geography of Difference*. Cambridge: Blackwell Publishers, 1996.

Holleman, Hannah. *Dust Bowls of Empire: Imperialism, Environmental Politics, and the Injustice of "Green" Capitalism*.

Iturbe, Elisa. "Architecture and the Death of Carbon Modernity." In *Log 47*, edited by Cynthia Davidson and Elisa Iturbe, p10-23. New York, Anyone Corporation, 2019.

Jackson, John Brinckerhoff. *Landscape in Sight: Looking at America*, edited by Helen Lefkowitz Horowitz. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997.

Knight, Frederick C. *Working the Diaspora: The Impact of African Labor on the Anglo-American World, 1650-1850*. New York: NYU Press, 2010.

LeMenager, Stephanie. "Living with Fire (Hot Media)." In *Accumulation: The Art, Architecture, and Media of Climate Change*, edited by Nick Axel, Daniel A. Barber, Nikolaus Hirsch, Anton Vidokle, p91-99. New York: e-flux Architecture, 2022.

Mauldin, Erin Stewart. *Unredeemed Land: An Environmental History of Civil War and Emancipation in the Cotton South*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2018.

Morton, Timothy. *Dark Ecology: For a Logic of Future Coexistence*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2018

Morton, Timothy. *Ecology Without Nature*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007.

Olmsted, Frederick Law. *Olmsted: Writings on Landscape, Culture, and Society*. Edited by Charles E. Beveridge. New York: The Library of America, 2015.

Pettifor, Ann. *The Case for the Green New Deal*. London: Verso Books, 2020.

Ponte, Alessandra. *Architecture Words 11: The House of Light and Entropy*, edited by Brett Steele. London: Architectural Association London, 2014.

Said, Edward W. *Orientalism*. New York: Vintage Books, 1994.

Smithson, Robert. *Robert Smithson: The Collected Writings*, edited by Jack Flam. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996.

The American Lawn. ed by George Teyssot. New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 1999.

Thoreau, Henry David. *Walden and Civil Disobedience*. New York: Penguin Books, 2017.

Worster, Donald. *Dust Bowl: The Southern Plains in the 1930s*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004.

Whitman, Walt. *Leaves of Grass: The Complete 1855 and 1891-92 Editions*. New York: Library of America, 2011.

Zapatka, Christian. *The American Landscape*. New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 1995.