

Field School on the Frame

Readings

include:

Ballard

Di Palma

Jackson

Lippard

McPhee

Mitchell

Odell

Smithson

Solnit

Stegner

Stilgoe

Watts

& others

shelter-in-place edition*



ARCH 580, 4 units, Summer 2020 Semester, *July 13–August 10*

How do we practice art and landscape fieldwork amidst COVID-19? Through a deep (& safe) immersion in the physical places that surround us, we will study and re-imagine how we read, sense, and share landscapes in this unusual time.

Our experiences and understandings of landscapes are shaped by “frames”—explicit and implicit; physical and metaphysical. Our bodies, the interpretive viewing device, the trail marker and sign, the museum, the reassurance of a GPS satellite locating you, Instagram—each can have a powerful hand in how we experience and know a landscape.

Through close-to-home field studies and practices of itineraries, interpretation, and intervention (adapted to current social distancing requirements), students will unearth and understand the frame’s role in

defining our embodied relations with our immediate environment, and gain fluency in its deployment in a COVID-19 world.

The class is open to and appropriate for all students in (or interested) the arts, architecture, or landscape generally.

Questions? Contact the instructors:

Alexander Robinson, Assc. Professor, USC Landscape Architecture + Urbanism Program, alexander.robinson@usc.edu

Aurora Tang, Program Manager, The Center for Land Use Interpretation; independent curator, aurora@clui.org

**If COVID-19 safety measures are relaxed by July, we will return to our regular syllabus and conduct a 10 day road trip across the American West! (July 15–24). Otherwise, field studies will be conducted individually—in each student’s local environment—and we will meet online.*

USC School of Architecture

Field School on the Frame (social distance edition)

Itineraries, Interpretation, and Intervention

University of Southern California School of Architecture

Architecture 580, 4 units, Summer 2020 Semester, July 13 – August 10

Instructor: Alexander Robinson, Associate Professor, School of Architecture,
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With: Aurora Tang, Center for Land Use Interpretation, independent curator
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A walkway in Echo Park, California, Photo by Alexander Robinson

The message [the landscape] conveys lies not in the object itself, but in its interpretation in cultural terms, in the cultural context through the prism of which we see the landscape and learn to understand it.

—Lucius Burckhardt, *Landscape Development and Structure of Society*

The investigation of a specific site is a matter of exacting concepts out of existing sense-data through direct perceptions...One does not impose, but rather expose the site... The unknown areas of sites can best be explored by artists.

—Robert Smithson, as quoted in *The Lure of the Local*, by Lucy Lippard

There is good reading on the land, first-hand reading, involving no symbols. The records are written in forests, in fencerows, in bogs, in playgrounds, in pastures, in gardens, in canyons, in tree rings. The records were made by sun and shade, by wind, rain, and fire, by time; and by animals. As we read what is written on the land, finding accounts of the past, predictions of the future, and comments on the present, we discover that there are many interwoven strands to each story, offering several possible interpretations.

—May Theilgaard Watts, *Reading the Landscape of America*

INTRODUCTION

Landscapes can be thought of as cultural inscriptions, that can be read to better understand our culture and society. Learning how to read this text, these landscapes, is critical for anyone who occupies them, and especially useful for landscape architects, architects, and artists working in the public sphere, and, of course, with landscapes specifically.

When we “read” the landscape, we inevitably do so through various “frames”—explicit and implicit; physical and metaphysical—that form and inform our experience of whatever landscape subject we encounter and explore. In addition to our own perceptual machinery and the given architecture of the landscape itself, these frames include human interventions and instruments that shape and can enhance our experience. For instance, the course of signed path in a National Park, and Instagram posts of a National Park, each have a powerful hand in how we experience and ultimately know a landscape. Both function as critical and often unrecognized frames for our embodied reading of the landscape.

Field School on the Frame, will focus on these anthropogenic frames broadly, with landscapes in each student’s neighborhood serving as their living subjects and the course’s secondary focus. The course will study and practice diverse modes of reading, sensing, and understanding a range of physical landscapes. Through the field study and practice of itineraries, interpretation, and intervention, students will unearth and understand the frame’s role in defining our embodied relations with our environment, and gain fluency in its deployment. Such skills are essential in nearly any outdoor art or architecture project. Students will also benefit from an expert, on-the-ground, informal survey of (often overlooked) landscapes in our community.

Though designed to appeal primarily to landscape architecture, architecture, and arts students, the class is open to and appropriate for all students in (or interested) the arts, or landscape generally. The course is taught by one teacher in landscape architecture and in consultation with one in fine arts.

The Frame & Landscape Architecture and Art

...it [A Web of White Gravel Paths Surrounding Water Storage Tanks, 1967] is a two-dimensional image to be viewed from the air and a three-dimensional thing to stand or walk on to view the airport on the ground. This ‘image/platform’ shuttles back and forth between these two functions, depending on one’s position in relation to it.

—Ann Reynolds, *Robert Smithson: Learning from New Jersey and Elsewhere*

Our experiences and understandings of landscapes are shaped by a variety of frames—the guided tour, the interpretive viewing device, the trail marker and sign, the museum or institution, the reassurance of a GPS satellite locating you, Instagram—each is a kind of frame. The frame focuses and informs our understanding of whatever is “inside” of it—even in the outdoors. In

landscapes, frames are both physical interventions that we encounter or navigate, or more abstract and portable conditioners, such as contrived itineraries, presented information, and technical practices of measurement. Such frames are often the central work of art, architecture, and landscape architecture practices. In most contemporary landscape projects*—and particularly in “natural” or cultural landscapes—the existing landscape condition is treated as a subject in and of itself, that art practices seek to frame (or, in some cases, be framed by). This practice of framing is often the purpose of our interventions and inevitably lies at the center of our practice. Furthermore, how we intervene is, of course, critically influenced by previous frames. The frame both is and precedes our interventions. Studying the frame teaches us both about the landscape subject itself, as well as how our interventions effect and become part of it.

Ground truth

Even among an unending proliferation of new modes of interfacing, sensing, and knowing landscapes, such as Google Earth and virtual reality, the embodied experience of *being there*, on the ground, remains the most critical. This, the shared space of the earth, is physically and metaphorically what unites us humans, so we begin our investigation into a landscape from the ground up. Onsite engagement, starting with the basic practice of extended critical observation through looking and listening, followed by observation enhanced by external tools, reveals physical and phenomenological qualities that cannot be fully grasped through other methodologies. The phrase *ground truth* is testament to this. It was first used to describe the field work necessary to calibrate remote satellite sensing to the ground “truth” that only a human—on the ground—could effectively ascertain. Remote and virtual modes of “experiencing” a landscape have not eroded the significance of the embodied outdoor experience; rather they have collaborated with it to change its value, meaning, and consequence.

It also happens that this experience remains a primary (if not the) concern of art, architecture, and landscape architecture. Advanced expertise in the embodied experience of being there and the consequences of such is fundamental and increasingly exclusive to these practices.

THE COURSE

This course engenders a multifaceted understanding of our relationship to landscape and includes:

1. an initial introduction into a range of modes of reading, sensing, and knowing physical landscapes in lecture and seminar formats, with opportunities for student discussion
2. an initial introduction into key examples of interpretations and interventions in the American West, including Land Art, engineering, industry, waste, and other land uses, in lecture and seminar formats, with opportunities for student discussion
3. once in the “field,” students learn about projects and places through a combination of on-site observation and exercises, lectures and presentations, and reflective writing
4. regular writing sessions for students to record their thoughts, observations, and experiences on-site
5. a final project will be required, informed by the time in the field, and adapted to individual student backgrounds and interests

“Travel”

The class will not travel this summer due to social distancing requirements. Instead, each students will find outdoor landscape sites and walks in their neighborhood that are safe to visit and occupy according to social distancing requirements.

Final Review

Final review attendance is mandatory.

Class & Travel Itinerary (subject to change):

Date	Time	Description
WEEK 1		
Mon, July 13	9:30AM–1PM	Meeting: introduction to course, "look and listen" on-site engagement activity (James Benning), AR lecture
Tue, July 14	9:30AM–1PM	Meeting: AT lecture/film program (CLUJ; JB Jackson), discussion
		***Readings
Wed, July 15	anytime	On-site engagement
Thurs, July 16	AM	On-site engagement
	3–5PM	Meeting: group check-in
WEEK 2		
Mon, July 20	anytime	On-site engagement
Tue, July 21	9:30AM–1PM	Meeting: AT lecture/film program (Land Art), discussion, present audio intros
		***Site Intro assignment due / ***Readings
Wed, July 22	10AM-1PM	Meeting: guest lecture, discussion
		***Readings
	anytime	On-site engagement
Thurs, July 23	AM	On-site engagement
	3–5PM	Meeting: group check-in
		***Script assignment draft due
WEEK 3		
Mon, July 27	anytime	On-site engagement (perform your own script)
Tue, July 28	9:30AM-1PM	Meeting: AR lecture/film program, discussion, present scripts
		***Script assignment due / ***Readings
Wed, July 29	10AM-1PM	Meeting : guest lecture, discussion
		***Readings

Date	Time	Description
	anytime	On-site engagement (perform your own script at another site, and submit any revisions)
Thurs, July 30	AM	On-site engagement (perform a classmate's script)
	3-5PM	Meeting: group check-in
WEEK 4		
Tue, Aug 4	9AM-5PM	Meeting: workshop with guest
Fri, Aug 7	9AM-1PM	Meeting: final project review
WEEK 5		
Mon, Aug 10		***Final submittals due

METHODOLOGIES

1. Field Exercises and Guided Itineraries

The class will participate in and conduct self-guided tours, field exercises, and site itineraries.

2. Lectures

The instructors and guests will present lectures.

3. Readings

Readings selected from the bibliography will be assigned.

4. Class Discussion

Class discussions will be conducted once or twice a week.

5. Logbook

Students will be required to keep a logbook.

6. Impression Media Sharing

Students will collectively share their impressions internally and on a group social media account.

7. Films

Films will be shared throughout the class, time allowing.

8. Workshop

Logistics allowing, we conduct an all-day workshop with an outside guest.

GENERAL ASSIGNMENTS

Required Readings & Discussion

All students are expected to read and discuss all required readings. Each student will be assigned two texts that they are responsible for summarizing and discussing.

Logbook

Students will be required to keep a logbook/journal with a minimum of one entry per day of on-site engagements. Site reports should include: site name, duration of visit, observations, method(s) of engagement, and supplemental materials (ie drawing, map, photo, video, audio—which can be uploaded and included with the final logbook submission). Reports must include a GPS track of your field work.

Site Script

Each students will prepare, present, and enact an experiential site script. Based on a reading or precedent work, students will develop an experiential “script” that nearly anyone could follow within a landscape common to the USA. The script should be suitable for a general audience. Students will submit a written version of the script, an accompanying written analysis, and an audio guide. Other students in the class will follow the audio guide script and report back.

Audio Site/Non-Site Introductions

Each student will prepare and record a three to five minute audio introduction to one site. The introductions will follow a specific approach to collating information about the site not readily accessible in person.

Frame Final Assignment

Building on their Site Introduction assignment, each student will develop a physical “frame” to facilitate an interpretative experience, for the current owner/caretaker—the client. This physical intervention will be informed by on and off-site research into the site, its current conditions, and the client’s needs. A revision (or more) of what the frame is now. In general the intervention will take the form of on-site tourist infrastructure, elements, or media (e.g. visitor center display, scenic overlook, or interpretive walking trail—though it may take many other physical forms as well; it is purposefully open-ended to accommodate different student backgrounds and interests). Project proposals must therefore be reviewed and pre-approved by the instructors to ensure appropriate academic integrity and workload.

All projects must include the following:

1. A brief text (250-500 words) describing the intervention, its approach, and intending outcome. Address this text to the client in a formal letter.
2. A representation of the existing frame(s) onsite—this can take any form, but should demonstrate a thorough understanding of the site, its owner/caretaker, its current conditions and needs, and ways it is experienced. Also consider, what is the *nonsite* of the site outside of itself? This may serve as a critique and/or celebration of the existing frame conditions.

Representation references (if needed):

Hockney’s “Joiners”, e.g. *Pearblossom Highway, 11th–18th April 1986* & *Seven Yorkshire Landscapes*

Lutsky & Burkholders’ drawings from “Curious Methods” <https://placesjournal.org/article/curious-methods/> (image grids, splices, collage, etc.)

Guy Debord *Derive* “Psychogeography” Maps

Mathur & Da Cunha drawings

Christo drawings (drawing over photographs, multiple formats)

Cezanne landscape drawings (selective illustration of site features)

Robert Smithson drawings (*Movie Treatment for Spiral Jetty*)

Annotated movie storyboard

A narrative description / a list / logbook (Hebdige)

etc.

3. A map identifying the location of the intervention in relation to the physical site, with accompanying itinerary, represented visually (on the map) and with a written description. Consider whether map is a communication device (to the general public) or for the purpose of presenting your proposal to the client.
4. Detailed representation/description of the intervention construction and materials (in any format). Must include critical dimensions.
5. Mock-up of communication materials that will be used to convey the intervention and site to visitors (e.g. any signs, placards, brochures, etc.). Copy requirements to be discussed with instructors.
6. Account of the experiential encounter—this can be a perspectival view, drawing, image, text, or another format.

The final assignment will be presented to the class in a final review and may be exhibited at a later time.

REQUIRED READINGS (subject to change)

Simon Barnes, "Birdwatchers, birders and twitchers." *The Meaning of Birds*, 2018, 262–279.

Robert M. Bednar, "Being Here, Looking There." *Observation Points: The Visual Poetics of National Parks*, edited by Thomas Patin, 2012, 1-28.

Francesco Careri, *Walkscapes: Walking as an Aesthetic Practice*, 2017 (excerpt).

Margaret Crawford, "Blurring the Boundaries: Public Space and Private Life." *Everyday Urbanism* (expanded edition), edited by John Leighton Chase, Margaret Crawford, and John Kaliski, 2008, 22–35.

William Cronon, "The Trouble with Wilderness; or, Getting Back to the Wrong Nature." *Uncommon Ground: Rethinking the Human Place in Nature*, edited by William Cronon, 1995, 69-90.

Guy Debord, "Theory of the Dérive." *Situationist International Anthology*, edited by Ken Knabb, 1981, 62–66.

Vittoria Di Palma, "Zoom: Google Earth and Global Intimacy," 2009.

Dick Hebdige, "Reeling in Utah: The Travel Log Trilogy," *East of Borneo*, 2011.

Jenny Odell, *How to Do Nothing*, 2019 (excerpt).

John Brinckerhoff Jackson, *Landscape In Sight: Looking at America*, edited by Helen Lefkowitz Horowitz, 1997, 19–29, 68–77.

Miwon Kwon, *One Place After Another*, 2002, 85–110.

J. Drew Lanham, "Birding While Black," *Literary Hub*, 2016.

Lucy Lippard, *On the Beaten Track: Tourism, Art, and Place*, 1999 (excerpt), 2-11, 135-152.

Kevin Lynch, *The Image of the City*, 1960, 1–13.

Robert Smithson, *The Collected Writings*, edited by Jack Flam, 1996 (excerpt), 68-77, 157–171.

Rebecca Solnit, *Wanderlust: A History of Walking*, 2000 (excerpt).

John Stilgoe, *Outside Lies Magic: Regaining History and Awareness in Everyday Places*, 1998 (excerpt), 1-19.

SUGGESTED READINGS

Reyner Banham, *Scenes in America Deserta*, 1982.

Julia Bryan-Wilson, "Building a Marker of Nuclear Warning." *Monuments and Memory, Made and Unmade*, edited by Margaret Olin and Robert Nelson, 2003.

Lucius Burckhardt, *Why is Landscape Beautiful? The Science of Strollology*, edited by Markus Ritter and Margit Schmitz, 2015 (excerpt).

Lucius Burckhardt, *Lucius Burckhardt Writings: Rethinking Man-Made Environments. Politics, Landscape & Design*, edited by Jesko Fezer and Martin Schmitz, 2012.

The Center for Land Use Interpretation, *Overlook*, 2006.

James Corner, *Taking Measures: Across the American Landscape*, 1996.

Dennis Cosgrove, *Apollo's Eye: A Cartographic Genealogy of the Earth in the Western Imagination*, 2003.

Diedrich Diederichsen and Anselm Franke (eds.), *The Whole Earth California and the Disappearance of the Outside*, 2013.

Vittoria Di Palma, "Is Landscape Painting." *Landscape...? Essays on the Identity of Landscape*, edited by Gareth Doherty and Charles Waldheim, 2015.

William L. Fox, *Playa Works: The Myth of the Empty*, 2002.

William L. Fox, *The Void, the Sign, and the Grid*, 2000.

Christophe Girot, "Four Trace Concepts in Landscape Architecture." *Recovering Landscape: Essays in Contemporary Landscape Architecture*, edited by James Corner, 1999.

Martin Hogue, "The Site as Project," *Journal of Architectural Education*, 57:3, 2004, 54-61.

Nancy Holt, "Sun Tunnels," *Artforum*, 1977, 32-37.

John Brinckerhoff Jackson, *A Sense of Place, a Sense of Time*, 1994.

Katherine Jenkins, "Field exercises," *Journal of Landscape Architecture*, Volume 13, 2018.

Philipp Kaiser and Miwon Kwon (eds.), *Ends of the Earth: Land Art to 1974*, 2012.

Karl Kullmann, "The Satellites' Progeny: Digital Chorography in the Age of Drone Vision by," *Forty-Five*, February 2017.

Pamela M. Lee, *Chronophobia: On Time in the Art of the 1960s*, 2004.

Lucy Lippard, *Overlay: Contemporary Art and the Art of Prehistory*, 1983.

Hikmet Loe, *The Spiral Jetty Encyclo*, 2017.

Karen Lutsky and Sean Burkholder, "Curious Methods," *Places Journal*, May 2017.

Dean MacCannell, *The Tourist: A New Theory of the Leisure Class*, 1989.

Geoff Manaugh, *Landscape Futures: Instruments, Devices and Architectural Interventions*, 2013.

John May, "The Logic of the Managerial Surface," *Praxis 13: Eco-Logics*, 2014.

- Shannon Mattern, "Cloud and Field," *Places Journal*, August 2016.
- Shannon Mattern, "Infrastructural Tourism," *Places Journal*, July 2013.
- Jane McFadden, *Walter de Maria: Meaningless Work*, 2016.
- W. J. T. Mitchell (ed.), *Landscape and Power*, 1994.
- Laurie Olin, "Form, Meaning, and Expression in Landscape Architecture," 1988.
- Pauline Oliveros, *Deep Listening: A Composer's Sound Practice*, 2005.
- Thomas Patin (ed.), *Observation Points: The Visual Poetics of National Parks*, 2012.
- Barbara Pichler and Claudio Slanar (eds.), *James Benning*, 2007.
- Alexander Robinson, *The Spoils of Dust: Reinventing the Lake that Made Los Angeles*, 2018.
- James Rojas, "Latino urbanism in Los angeles." *Insurgent Public Space: Guerrilla Urbanism and the Remaking of Contemporary Cities*, edited by Jeffrey Hou, 2010, 36–44.
- Henrik Schultz, "Designing large-scale landscapes through walking," *Journal of Landscape Architecture*, 9:2, 2014, 6-15.
- Rebecca Solnit, *A Field Guide to Getting Lost*, 2005.
- Michael Sorkin, "See You in Disneyland." *Variations on a Theme Park: The New American City and the End of Public Space*, 1992, 205–232.
- Anne Whiston Spirn, *The Language of Landscape*, 2000.
- Freeman Tilden, *Interpreting Our Heritage*, 1957.
- Marc Treib, "Must Landscapes Mean?" *Landscape Journal*, 1995, 47-62.
- May Theilgaard Watts, *Reading the Landscape of America*, 1975.
- Lawrence Weschler, *Seeing is Forgetting the Name of the Thing One Sees: a Life of Contemporary Artist Robert Irwin*, 1982.
- Sabine Wilke, "How German is the American West?" *Observation Points: The Visual Poetics of National Parks*, edited by Thomas Patin, 2012, 100-118.
- Alena Williams (ed.), *Nancy Holt: Sightlines*, 2015.

GRADING

Final grade evaluations for this class will be based on the following breakdown:

Participation, 10%

Required Reading & Discussion, 10%

Audio Introduction/Timeline & Questions, 15%

Site Script. 10%

Logbook, 15%

Frame final assignment, 40%

OTHER INFORMATION

Academic Conduct

Plagiarism – presenting someone else's ideas as your own, either verbatim or recast in

your own words – is a serious academic offense with serious consequences. Please familiarize yourself with the discussion of plagiarism in *SCampus* in Section 11, *Behavior Violating University Standards* <https://scampus.usc.edu/1100-behavior-violating-university-standards-and-appropriate-sanctions>. Other forms of academic dishonesty are equally unacceptable. See additional information in *SCampus* and university policies on scientific misconduct, <http://policy.usc.edu/scientific-misconduct>.

Discrimination, sexual assault, and harassment are not tolerated by the university. You are encouraged to report any incidents to the *Office of Equity and Diversity* <http://equity.usc.edu> or to the *Department of Public Safety* <http://adminopsnet.usc.edu/department/department-public-safety>. This is important for the safety of the whole USC community. Another member of the university community – such as a friend, classmate, advisor, or faculty member – can help initiate the report, or can initiate the report on behalf of another person. *The Center for Women and Men* <http://www.usc.edu/student-affairs/cwm/> provides 24/7 confidential support, and the sexual assault resource center webpage <http://sarc.usc.edu> describes reporting options and other resources.

Support Systems

A number of USC's schools provide support for students who need help with scholarly writing. Check with your advisor or program staff to find out more. Students whose primary language is not English should check with the *American Language Institute* <http://dornsife.usc.edu/ali>, which sponsors courses and workshops specifically for international graduate students. *The Office of Disability Services and Programs* http://sait.usc.edu/academicsupport/centerprograms/dsp/home_index.html provides certification for students with disabilities and helps arrange the relevant accommodations. If an officially declared emergency makes travel to campus infeasible, *USC Emergency Information* <http://emergency.usc.edu> will provide safety and other updates, including ways in which instruction will be continued by means of blackboard, teleconferencing, and other technology.