

USC School of Architecture

University of Southern California School of Architecture

Introduction to Landscape Architecture Design: Translations & Dialectics

Landscape Architecture 541A, 6 units, Fall 2020 Semester (COVID!)

Location	Zoom / Miro / Slack @ University of Southern California
Time	Wednesday & Friday, 1-5:50PM
Instructor	Alexander Robinson, Associate Professor
Contact Info	alexander.robinson@usc.edu Slack: Alexander Robinson
Virtual Office Hours	Tuesdays 4-5PM PST and by appointment

“To design is to devise courses of action aimed at changing existing situations into preferred ones.”

– *Herbert Simon*

“... we don't have to resolve these things. I want to live in a world where... there's an ambiguity between things, because that ambiguity allows us to have a conversation. When things are clear and defined, we forget.”

– *Walter Hood*

“Recognition of the drawing's power as a medium turns out, unexpectedly, to be recognition of the drawing's distinctness from and unlikeness to the thing that is represented, rather than its likeness to it...”

– *Robin Evans*

Course Introduction: Translations & Dialectics

This studio will teach the basics of landscape architecture design, from blank page to finished design drawings and models, through exploring the mechanics of drawing “translation”—a practice fundamental to architecture design practice.

“Translation” explains the peculiar creative mechanics of architecture; an artform that regularly operates at a distance from its subjects and products. Our final product as landscape architects—a set of drawings—must be “translated” by others into its final built form. While the premise of translation is of continuity and precision, with some inevitable changes along the way (such as observed linguistically in a game of “telephone”), we will learn how this seemingly earnest operation can underly a rigorous and imaginary design practice. We will focus on the intermediate translatory steps that occur in studio, prior to construction; such as how a bar napkin sketch becomes a finished design. Through a variety of exercises, translation will become the framework by which we master conventional drawing and design practices of landscape architecture. Translation will also help inform our important (and often fraught) relationship to source material and precedent.

This course will also introduce landscape architecture as dialectic—a design practice that crafts on-going dialogues between logics, identities, and processes. Good landscape architecture design welcomes tension and difficult conversation as much (or more) as harmony and order. Beyond aesthetics, dialectic landscapes can answer a social need for more inclusive public dialogue. A totalitarian self-contained logic might produce an interesting object, but it cannot create an intimate and open-ended landscape. This “dialectic” will become

a means to intervene on sites with complicated spatiotemporal legacies, critical identities, and on-going processes.

Finally, throughout the course students will engage in a focused practice of paying attention to landscapes through simple observation and walking. These personal observations will serve as reference and source material.

Learning Objectives

- Introduce basic ideas of landscape & landscape architecture
- Develop a dialectic and inclusive approach for landscape architecture
- Introduce design experimentation: experimenting with design techniques, methods, materials, (etc.) and crafting ideas through iteration
- Practice fieldwork: investigative on-site research and observation; interpretive visualization
- Master basic drawing types: site analysis, plan, section, & model
- Introduce case study analysis and related concepts
- Develop presentation and critique skills

Concurrent Enrollment

Arch 534 Landscape Construction: Topographic Design; Arch 539L Media for Landscape Architecture. Skills developed in these courses will be essential to this studio. Some assignments and work will be shared between these three classes.

Communication Tools: Zoom

Zoom is the primary platform by which we will conduct class. All meetings will be recorded and available on blackboard after class. All students are provided Zoom pro accounts. You are expected to attend synchronously (and attendance will be kept). If you are not in the PST time-zone you are expected to attend according to the following guideline:

From Provost letter 8.7.2020:

“Class Participation and Attendance in Synchronous Sessions

Remote learning, paired with the fact that USC students are spread across time zones, presents a number of challenges related to attendance and participation in synchronous class sessions.

In general, students should plan to attend every synchronous session for the classes in which they are enrolled, irrespective of when it occurs in their time zone.

However, faculty should only maintain normal attendance, participation, and assessment expectations for students when the class time falls within reasonable learning hours in the student’s time zone, defined as 7:00am to 10:00pm in the student’s time zone.”

In other words, we will expect you to follow these guidelines for attendance—even if you miss much of the class—or you will be marked absent.

[Zoom information for students](#)

Synchronous Session Recording Notice

All synchronous Zoom sessions will be recorded and provided to all students as soon as possible. They will be posted on blackboard.

Zoom Etiquette

In general, questions of appropriate Zoom etiquette can be answered by considering what would be appropriate in a normal classroom setting.

For example, while attending studio on Zoom please keep your camera on time as much as you would normally be visible, were we meeting in person. Your camera on substitutes for your physical attendance. In other words, it should always be on unless you need to “leave” the classroom for a bathroom break or similar excused absence. If you do not feel comfortable keeping your camera on, please discuss this with me prior to the class session.

From Provost letter 8.7.2020:

"Camera Policy

Acknowledging that class dynamics are substantially compromised without the ability to see the people in class, faculty can set an expectation that students have their cameras on during synchronous online sessions. However, some students may be facing challenging situations, such as internet connectivity, illness, or home environments that make this difficult or impossible. To alleviate these concerns, faculty can encourage students to use virtual backgrounds, which will eliminate most privacy concerns, and earphones or headsets to improve audio quality. While faculty are at liberty to create a “camera-on” policy in their class, they should communicate that accommodations are available to students who contact them directly with reasonable requests.

Zoom also offers some unique features not available in a typical classroom. Feel free to use these as you see appropriate. For example, the Zoom emoticons and chat board are acceptable ways to communicate.

Finally, when you are in studio and not in a group pin-up, lecture, etc., feel free to use all communication tools to converse with your fellow students.

Sharing of course materials outside of the learning environment

USC has a policy that prohibits sharing of any live and recorded course content outside of the learning environment (this also applies to the communication tools listed below).

SCampus Section 11.12(B)

Distribution or use of notes or recordings based on university classes or lectures without the express permission of the instructor for purposes other than individual or group study is a violation of the USC Student Conduct Code. This includes, but is not limited to, providing materials for distribution by services publishing class notes. This restriction on unauthorized use also applies to all information, which had been distributed to students or in any way had been displayed for use in relationship to the class, whether obtained in class, via email, on the Internet or via any other media. (See Section C.1 Class Notes Policy).

Communication Tools: Other

USC Blackboard will be the official source for major announcements, the syllabus, assignment sheets, and readings.

[Blackboard help for students](#)

Miro will be our digital pin up space. You will be invited to a board and this will make you a member. TIP: the standalone Miro application may be faster than the web application.

Slack is an important communication tool You should regularly check the assigned class channel . Official announcements, assignment clarifications, scheduling changes, relevant links, and more will be communicated via Slack. Some assignments will employ Slack specifically. You may directly message the instructor on Slack. The platform will also be used as a semi-formal group chat space.. You will be automatically added to the Slack channel dedicated to your class.

Google Maps (my maps) will be used to upload GPX files to share explorations. Various phone apps let you record your GPS track and download them (e.g. Gaia). Students may opt out of sharing their location for these exercises if they feel uncomfortable.

Software, Tools, and Resources

Students will be required to use the **Adobe Creative Suite** (Photoshop, Illustrator, and InDesign) and the latest version of **Rhino** (Windows recommended)

Students are expected to have obtained the equipment required by the “Arch 439 Landscape Architecture Foundation Workshop.” If you did not take the workshop, please contact me before the start of class.

Furthermore, students are expected to have obtained a computer as per the recommendations distributed to all incoming students.

USC technology rental program

We realize that attending classes online and completing coursework remotely requires access to technology that not all students possess. If you need resources to successfully participate in your classes, such as a laptop or internet hotspot, you may be eligible for the university’s equipment rental program. To apply, please [submit an application](#). The Student Basic Needs team will contact all applicants in early August and distribute equipment to eligible applicants prior to the start of the fall semester.

[Software available to USC Campus](#)

Lynda Software Tutorials (USC provided)

<https://itservices.usc.edu/lynda/>

Exercises and Deliverables

Each exercise will be described in more detail in assignment sheets posted on blackboard, alongside associated readings.

Part 1: Translations & Dialectics – 6 weeks

Practice translations between the mediums and techniques of landscape architecture design tools to generate content and form from form and site. You will also practice basic skills of form making, drawing, and modeling.

Part 2: Campus Dialectics – 6 weeks

Adapt source material logic to a site. Craft an intervention identify and place it in dialogue with an existing campus condition.

Case Study: Drawings and Model (~ 2 weeks)

Campus Project: Drawings and Model (~ 4 weeks)

Class Methodology

Pin-Ups

The class will predominantly consist of group pin-up reviews. You will be expected to pin up all the work

due/you want to discuss before class starts! Any work that is not ready (and “pinned” in Miro) will not be discussed and considered late. You will sign up prior to class in Miro.

Carefully “pin up” your drawings.

You are generally required to participate in the in-class pin-up reviews (synchronously or asynchronously) as assigned.

Lectures & Workshops

There will be semi-regular lectures / workshops to introduce topics and demo assignments.

Look and Listens

You will conduct regular field work in the form of “Look and Listens”, modeled on the practice of the artist James Benning. Following your site visits, you will post an update on Slack, as specified by the instructor.

Studio Instruction Time

Following pin-ups, presentations, and class discussions you are expected to stay “in” studio (with necessary for bathroom / coffee, etc. breaks) and work until the end of class-time. Please consider whether your question can easily be answered by your peers prior to consulting a professor. You are expected to be collegial with your classmates and support each other!

Final and Mid Reviews

Outside reviewers will come to discuss and evaluate your work at mid and final reviews. All students must be pinned up 30 minutes prior to the scheduled start time to participate in the review (and not be penalized). The entire class must be present during the course of the review. Students will be assigned to create notes of each other's reviews. Presentation durations will be specified.

Readings

There will be semi-regular readings associated with class assignments. A student may be assigned to present each reading for a discussion. This will entail a 3-5 minute statement including the following: summary of big ideas, personal response, and question for the class to simulate discussion.

Model Photography

All models must be photographed by the standards and instructions presented in class. In general, this means that models must be naturally lit (outside) with a naturally lit solid color background (white be default). The background of model photographs should not be “photoshopped” out.

Schedule

(subject to change)

Week	Class	Date	Day	Topic & Assignments
1	0	8.24.2020	Monday	Syllabus
	1	8.26.2020	Wednesday	Translations (Week 1)
	2	8.28.2020	Friday	Translations
2	3	9.2.2020	Wednesday	Translations (Week 2)
	4	9.4.2020	Friday	Translations
3	5	9.9.2020	Wednesday	Translation & Dialectics (Week 1)

	6	9.11.2020	Friday	Translation & Dialectics
4	7	9.16.2020	Wednesday	Translation & Dialectics (Week 2)
	8	9.18.2020	Friday	Translation & Dialectics
5	9	9.23.2020	Wednesday	Translation & Dialectics (Week 3)
	10	9.25.2020	Friday	Translation & Dialectics
6	11	9.30.2020	Wednesday	Translation & Dialectics (Week 4)
	12	10.2.2020	Friday	Translation & Dialectics
7	13	10.7.2020	Wednesday	Mid Review
	14	10.9.2020	Friday	Case Study (Week 1)
8	15	10.14.2020	Wednesday	Case Study
	16	10.16.2020	Friday	Case Study (Week 2)
9	17	10.21.2020	Wednesday	Case Study
	18	10.23.2020	Friday	Campus Dialectic (Week 1)
10	19	10.28.2020	Wednesday	Campus Dialectic
	20	10.30.2020	Friday	Campus Dialectic (Week 2)
11	21	11.4.2020	Wednesday	Campus Dialectic
	22	11.6.2020	Friday	Campus Dialectic (Week 3)
12	23	11.11.2020	Wednesday	Campus Dialectic
	24	11.13.2020	Friday	Campus Dialectic (Week 4)
13	25	11.18.2020	Wednesday	Campus Dialectic
	26	11.20.2020	Friday	Campus Dialectic (Week 4.5)
		11.30-12.4		Final Review (Exact date/time TBD)

Bibliography

See assignment sheets.

Grading

Grading is made through a synthesis of the following: completion of assignments, instructor & outsider reviewers' assessment of work quality, effort, and participation in class.

Midterm Projects (35%)
Case Study Project (10%)
Final Review Project (35%)
Reading Summaries & Discussion (10%)
Participation (10%)

Grading Timeline

Assignment grading will occur after the mid review and after the final review.

Participation Grade

Participation grade will be determined based on the following criteria:

Does the student volunteer to ask questions or give constructive comments synchronously in class or via Miro? When participating synchronously does the student appear to be present and attentive? Does the student participate effectively in the required participation exercises.

Work Upload

Following mid and final reviews you will be required to upload all of your work. You will not receive your final grade until all your required work is uploaded. More instructions on this process will be distributed during the semester.

Absences & Late Attendance Policy

You may miss one week of class instruction (two classes) unexcused without penalty to your grade. Each class following will be a reduction 1/3 of a letter grade (e.g. B+ to B). Late attendance (with considerations of time zone, as per the Provost guidelines, above) will be tracked and seriously impact your participation grade.

Statement on Academic Conduct and Support Systems

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 Part B, Section 11, “Behavior Violating University Standards” policy.usc.edu/scampus-part-b. Other forms of academic dishonesty are equally unacceptable. See additional information in SCampus and university policies on scientific misconduct, policy.usc.edu/scientific-misconduct.

Support Systems:

Counseling and Mental Health - (213) 740-9355 – 24/7 on call
studenthealth.usc.edu/counseling

Free and confidential mental health treatment for students, including short-term psychotherapy, group counseling, stress fitness workshops, and crisis intervention.

National Suicide Prevention Lifeline - 1 (800) 273-8255 – 24/7 on call
suicidepreventionlifeline.org

Free and confidential emotional support to people in suicidal crisis or emotional distress 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

Relationship and Sexual Violence Prevention Services (RSVP) - (213) 740-9355(WELL), press “0” after hours – 24/7 on call

studenthealth.usc.edu/sexual-assault

Free and confidential therapy services, workshops, and training for situations related to gender-based harm.

Office of Equity and Diversity (OED) - (213) 740-5086 | Title IX – (213) 821-8298

equity.usc.edu, titleix.usc.edu

Information about how to get help or help someone affected by harassment or discrimination, rights of protected classes, reporting options, and additional resources for students, faculty, staff, visitors, and applicants.

Reporting Incidents of Bias or Harassment - (213) 740-5086 or (213) 821-8298

usc-advocate.symplicity.com/care_report

Avenue to report incidents of bias, hate crimes, and microaggressions to the Office of Equity and Diversity | Title IX for appropriate investigation, supportive measures, and response.

The Office of Disability Services and Programs - (213) 740-0776

dsp.usc.edu

Support and accommodations for students with disabilities. Services include assistance in providing readers/notetakers/interpreters, special accommodations for test taking needs, assistance with architectural barriers, assistive technology, and support for individual needs.

USC Campus Support and Intervention - (213) 821-4710

campussupport.usc.edu

Assists students and families in resolving complex personal, financial, and academic issues adversely affecting their success as a student.

Diversity at USC - (213) 740-2101

diversity.usc.edu

Information on events, programs and training, the Provost's Diversity and Inclusion Council, Diversity Liaisons for each academic school, chronology, participation, and various resources for students.

USC Emergency - UPC: (213) 740-4321, HSC: (323) 442-1000 – 24/7 on call

dps.usc.edu, emergency.usc.edu

Emergency assistance and avenue to report a crime. Latest updates regarding safety, including ways in which instruction will be continued if an officially declared emergency makes travel to campus infeasible.

USC Department of Public Safety - UPC: (213) 740-6000, HSC: (323) 442-120 – 24/7 on call

dps.usc.edu

Non-emergency assistance or information.