

USC School of Architecture

Field School on the Frame

Itineraries, Interpretation, and Intervention

University of Southern California School of Architecture

Architecture 580, 4 units, Summer 2022 Semester, May 23 – June 17

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Sun Tunnels, Nancy Holt, 1973-1976, Great Basin Desert, Utah. © Holt/Smithson Foundation and Dia Art Foundation. CLUI photo.

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, both the course of signed path in a National Park and Instagram posts of it 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 of the American West 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 in Utah, Nevada, and California. 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. Final enrollment is limited based on the number of vehicles and drivers.

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 American West

The landscape of the American West remains a rich, influential, and attractive subject of study and tourism. It is a powerful and mysterious land, imbued by complex issues, cultural interpretations, and mythologies. Topics for discussion include: Land Art, land ownership/acknowledgement, tourism, film, writing, mining and industry, wilderness, conservation, geology, time, site-specificity, scale, histories, and futures.

Sites may include:

Alabama Hills,
Bingham Copper Pit,
Bonneville Salt Flats,
Capitol Reef National Park,
Center for Land Use Interpretation Wendover/Wendover Air Base,
Double Negative by Michael Heizer,
Epicenter, Green River,

Goblin Valley State Park,
Golden Spike National Monument,
Great Salt Lake,
Hoover Dam,
Owens Lake,
Spiral Jetty by Robert Smithson,
Sun Tunnels by Nancy Holt.
(subject to change)

While the extremities of the American West provide a useful and alluring subject and setting to study and crystalize practices, the approaches covered in this course are not specific to any site or region; they can be applied to any landscape, urban or rural.

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

SCHEDULE

Preparation: 2 days, May 23 (online) and May 26 (half day)

Travel and field studies: 10 days, June 1 to 11

Post-reflective/Final Project: 2 days, June 15 (Pin Up) and June 17 (Final Review)

Final project submission: June 20th

Preparation

May 23 Meeting (mandatory on Zoom)—introductions

May 25 Meeting (mandatory in-person on campus) — assignment introductions, lecture, “Look and Listen” field exercise introduction, travel and gear prep

Travel

The class will travel for 10 days, throughout Utah, Nevada, and California. The class will travel in school-provided vehicles (large SUVs), driven by the instructors and possibly some students.

Lodging will vary between campgrounds, a motel, and a research station.

Students will be expected to have a tent, sleeping bag, sleeping pad, and appropriate clothing for early summer outdoor camping. Students need not have any experience camping previously, but must be willing to sleep in a tent and camp. It will be fun and we will alternate between camping and more traditional lodging!

All camping gear and personal items must fit within provided duffels. Students may bring one additional person item that can place on their lap or feet in the vehicle.

Food and other equipment will be coordinated prior to departure.

Time will be split between site visits, travel, lodging and meals, and reflection / work-time. The trip is fun, but also quite busy. You are required to participate and be present during most of the days and often parts of each evening.

The instructors will provide the following camping equipment (and more):

- A complete camp kitchen. This includes coolers, cooking, lighting, cleaning gear, and water jugs. Also a Dutch Oven!
- Small portable camp chairs for everyone for campfires and lectures.
- A goal zero portable battery for charging devices at camp.
- Two duffel bags (students are required to use) for each student to pack their personal and camping belongings. This makes packing and unpacking the vehicles much easier.
- A camp stereo and projection system
- First Aid Kit
- Shade / Rain Camp Structure

Please feel free to contact the instructors with any questions or concerns!

Costs

Some travel and trip costs are covered by the class's tuition. These include speaker fees, various admittance fees, and car rental & gas. Day to day food, lodging costs, and personal supplies/equipment are not covered by the class.

Expected student costs outside of food and other personal sundries are the following:

- **Motel in Salt Lake City: ~\$99-150 + additional fees** (could be shared with another student)
- **Daily food and water for a 10 day trip: Variable** (we will visit grocery stores and carry a camp kitchen). In some locations, optional dining (restaurant, cafe, etc.) will be offered.
- **Camping equipment: Minimum \$245 + plus tax** (if you don't have your own or cannot borrow any) Tent could be shared with another student. All camping and personal gear must fit within the two provided duffels. If this cost challenges your participation, please contact the instructors and they will try to work something out.

- Basic Tent @REI: \$90
<https://www.rei.com/product/168205/rei-co-op-groundbreaker-2-tent>

- Basic Sleeping Bag @REI: \$100
<https://www.rei.com/product/157770/rei-co-op-trailbreak-30-sleeping-bag-mens>
- Basic Sleeping Pad @REI: \$55
<https://www.rei.com/product/171682/therm-a-rest-trail-scout-sleeping-pad>

Final Review

Final review will be in person and attendance is mandatory.

Class & Travel Itinerary (subject to change):

| Day | Date | Sites (Lead Instructor) | Lodging Type |
|--------|------|--|----------------------------------|
| Intro | 5/23 | Online - Zoom | N/A |
| Prep | 5/26 | USC Campus, Lecture & Field Workshop | N/A |
| 1 | 6/1 | Hoover Dam, Valley of Fire, <i>Double Negative</i> | Camp near Double Negative |
| 2 | 6/2 | Capitol Reef, Green River | Camp in Green River |
| 3 | 6/3 | Epicenter, Powell Museum, Goblin Valley | Camp at Goblin Valley |
| 4 | 6/4 | Bingham Pit, Great Salt Lake State Park | Motel near Salt Lake City |
| 5 | 6/5 | ATK Rockets, Golden Spike, <i>Spiral Jetty</i> | Camp near Spiral Jetty |
| 6 | 6/6 | <i>Sun Tunnels</i> , CLUI Wendover | Camp/Residence at CLUI Wendover |
| 7 | 6/7 | Wendover (tour area, work on projects) | Camp/Residence at CLUI Wendover |
| 8 | 6/8 | Wendover (work on projects) | Camp/Residence at CLUI Wendover |
| 9 | 6/9 | Tonopah Historic Mining Park, Alabama Hills | Camp at Alabama Hills |
| 10 | 6/10 | Owens Lake, CLUI Swansea | N/A |
| Post 1 | 6/15 | USC Campus | N/A |
| Post 2 | 6/17 | USC Campus (Final Review) | N/A |

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 and students will have to lead discussion for at least one text.

4. Class Discussion

Class discussions will be conducted regularly.

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

An outside guest will conduct a workshop.

GENERAL ASSIGNMENTS

Required Readings & Discussion

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

Logbook

Students will be required to keep a logbook with a minimum of one entry per day of on-site engagements.

Audio Introductions & Draft Frame Proposal

Each student will prepare and present an audio introduction to a site we will visit. They will accompany this with suggestions for site engagements. Following the visit they will make a draft proposal for a framing of the site and present this to the class (on the trip).

Frame Final Assignment

Building on the last assignment, each student will develop a “frame” to facilitate an interpretative experience, for the current owner/caretaker. This intervention will be informed by on and off-site research into the site, its current conditions, and the client’s needs.

All projects must include the following:

A final “frame” object, drawing(s), written work, and/or itinerary.

A nuanced (and appropriate) reading of the landscape subject, represented in various formats.

A brief text (250-500 words) summarizing approach and intended outcome.

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

GRADING

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

Active participation in class, 10%

Reading Discussion Leader & Reading Participation, 10%

Audio Introductions & Draft Frame Proposal, 20%

Logbook, 20%

Frame final assignment, 40%

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.
- Barnette Cadogan, "Walking While Black." *Literary Hub*, 2016.
- 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.
- Dick Hebdige, "Reeling in Utah: The Travel Log Trilogy," *East of Borneo*, 2011.
- Jenny Odell, *How to Do Nothing*, 2019, x-xxiii (Introduction), 3-29 (Chapter 1), 155-185 (Chapter 6).
- 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, "A Tour of the Monuments of Passaic, New Jersey" (1967). *The Collected Writings*, edited by Jack Flam, 1996, 68-77.
- Robert Smithson, "Frederick Law Olmsted and the Dialectical Landscape" (1973). *The Collected Writings*, edited by Jack Flam, 1996, 157–171.
- Rebecca Solnit, *Wanderlust: A History of Walking*, 2000, 3-29 (Chapter 1 & 2), 267-291 (Chapters 16 & 17).
- John Stilgoe, *Outside Lies Magic: Regaining History and Awareness in Everyday Places*, 1998, 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 Margin Schmitz, 2015 (excerpt).
- Lucius Burckhardt, *Lucius Burckhardt Writings: Rethinking Man-Made Environments. Politics, Landscape & Design*, edited by Jesko Fezer and Martin Schmitz, 2012.
- Francesco Careri, *Walkscapes: Walking as an Aesthetic Practice*, 2017.
- 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.
- Vittoria Di Palma, "Zoom: Google Earth and Global Intimacy." *Intimate Metropolis*, edited by Di Palma, Diana Periton, and Marina Lathouri, 2008, 239–270.
- William L. Fox, *Playa Works: The Myth of the Empty*, 2002.
- William L. Fox, *The Void, the Sign, and the Grid*, 2000.
- Christophe Girod, "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 Spira, *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.

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.