

USC School of Cinematic Arts
IML 456 37449 Nature, Design and Media (v1.25.23)
Spring 2023
Thursday 10:00-12:50
SCI 206

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Office Hours: by appt in-person, or, Friday on Zoom

We are the land...
It is not a matter of being "close to nature" ...
the Earth is, in a very real sense, the same as our self (or selves).
-Paula Gunn Allen (1939-2008)

The well is within us, and if we dig deeply in the present moment, the water
will spring forth. Thich Nhat Hanh (b. 1926-2022)

All things are full of signs, and it is a wise man who can learn about one thing
from another. - Plotinus (205-270)

What I want in my life is compassion, a flow between myself and others
based on a mutual giving from the heart.
-Marshall Rosenberg, Ph.D. (1934-2015)

Now is emerging a fundamental change like green shoots coming through the
rubble of a dysfunctional civilization – as people acting in defense of life, wake
up to the grandeur of who they really are."
-Joanna Macy, Phd., environmental activist (b.1929)

I live my life in widening circles
That reach out across the world.
I may not complete this last one
But I give myself to it.

I circle around God, around the primordial tower.
I've been circling for thousands of years
And I still don't know: am I a falcon,
A storm, or a great song?
-Rainer Maria Rilke (1875-1926)
Book of Hours, 12

The earth sends us powerful messages at every turn of life about our relationships and responsibilities to ourselves, to each other, and all the numerous known, pragmatic, as well as unseen and ineffable interactions that surround our existence.

In this course, students will explore key existential questions through the creation of three media projects based on the stages of human development outlined in Ken Wilber's "A Theory of Everything" – the egocentric, ethnocentric & world-centric, as well as other environmental, political, and spiritual writings. Authors include: Jon Kabat-Zinn, Dr. Cornel West, and Bill McKibben. Students will work in film, design/graphics, interactive media, immersive media, sound design, performance, and/or installations

We will explore the impact of patterns of order (and disorder) in nature on digital media design, including the relationships among chaos, harmony, beauty, proportion, spirituality, holistic systems, and shaped experience. Students will explore key design fundamentals common in nature, including: divine proportion, the golden section, pentagons, ratios, triangles, spirals, synergy, calendars, music, and rhythm, and apply these forms to the creation of three digital projects.

Each student will create work using a variety of media platforms and methodologies including filmmaking, interactive media, text, visual arts, immersive experiences, and installations. Each project will begin with a personal sketchbook, an "Image Bank," of 25-40 of digital files (images, movies, observations, moments, etc.) that will help each student to define and narrow their response to each assignment.

Our Google Classroom is here: <https://classroom.google.com/u/0/c/NTQwNzAxNzMxMjI3>

We can also use this Google Drive:

https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1TdRIVhLxyHuFw6C8jssIfvAd4DGesrmQboVPq630Nh5j8FqT3Iy8msvyo47ND0mbHvKg5ID7?usp=share_link

In this creative process, each week, students will experience a honing of intent through consecutive iterations. Each of these three processes will culminate in final presentations according to the course outline.

The sequence of the three projects broadly follow the stages of human development from "me, to us, to all of us" –the egocentric, the ethnocentric, to the world-centric:

- 1) **The Inner Eye** –exploring the enrichment of private life,
- 2) **The Shared Experience** –facilitating engagement with others,
- 3) **The Trade** –examine an entity or entities larger than any of us

P1: The Inner Eye

This course starts with the self. (5 weeks) Who are you? What have been your experiences? How have they shaped you? Look closely inside with all the tools available, including Carl Jung's archetypes, psychological diagnosis, creative acts, talk therapy, and meditation.

Thich Nhat Han (b. 1926) tells us that: "The well is within us, and if we dig deeply in the present moment, the water will spring forth."

Heinrich Suso (1295-1366): "There is nothing pleasurable except what is in harmony with the utmost depths of our divine nature."

Ram Das (1931-2019) tells us that "Your ego is a set of thoughts that define you to the universe."

Carl Jung (1875-1961) tells us that: "We cannot change anything until we accept it. Condemnation does not liberate, it oppresses."

William Blake (1757-1827) wrote: "To see the world in a grain of sand / and Heaven in a Wild Flower / Hold infinity in the palm of your hand / and Eternity in a hour."

The fundamental shapes of nature are our guides in this research that began thousands of years ago (Phidias, Plato, Euclid, Fibonacci, etc) with the the Divine Proportion, the Golden Mean, sacred ratios, the shapes of spiraled shells, embryos, and plants, are echoed in human observations and creations in numbers, geometry, painting, music, architecture, sculpture, and art.

From this internal and external research and observations in this class, we will create in multi-disciplinary environments: including photographs, sculpture, performance, installation, interactive media, cinema, immersive experiences, animation, and text.

P2: The Shared Experience

We then move to explore our relationships and interactions with other sentient beings, be they human, animal, plant, machine or cyborg. (5 weeks).

Where do I begin & end?

Crowd-sourced poetry, music, installations, and other creations which embody the possibilities of synergy, especially interactivity, immersion, creative improvisation and collaboration. We explore the ways in which two entities create a third (as in reproduction), and as in film montage theory and practice. Where are the outer boundaries of the self? the adjacency of same or difference?

Empathy –and conflict– are central to the shared experience; their definitions and practice distinct from sympathy or support. Brene Brown’s popular writings have brought empathy to our culture in an accessible way, so that we can identify, and hopefully practice empathy in a pure form. Her guidelines employ: perspective taking, staying out of judgement, recognizing emotion in others, and communicating that recognition.

Marina Abramovic’s (b. Serbia 1946) work engages these questions with intimate face-to-face encounters.

Aaron Koblin’s (b. 1982) crowd-sourced art puts us in the web of the creation of the art that we view; a layered experience.

P3: The Trade

Finally, we move to our relationship with larger entities, systems, sets of beliefs, or communities greater than a handful of humans (5 weeks). The solitary act of planting a garden or window box puts us in touch with systems of seed storage, propagation, composting, water supply, sunlight – all systems and issues that connect us to the earth (and probably the universe) in deep, inescapable, and essential ways.

Every action we take is a trade, a type of barter with something/someone/some entity larger than ourselves, our household, and our community. It is likely to involve carbon-based transportation, the food-supply chain, association with others, human migrations, housing, work, spirituality, and/or the natural and human-made environment. We may buy organic foods at the market, but how much fuel did it take to bring those foods to market? How much profit is made in the middle? Or we may buy an organic cotton shirt, but who made it? At what wage? We may buy a network app to view media, but how much gets back to the creators? How much of a trade is acceptable? Who creates & defines these trades? Can they be changed? Re-negotiated?

Most disturbingly, there is a trend to weaponize nature as a deterrent to human migrations, to prevent humans from seeking higher ground. And we have seen a tendency to view global health and national borders as sources of alienation and dysfunction – or blame.

Permaculture, co-housing, farmers' markets, holistic medicine, and "Adbusters," among many other groups, have emerged as alternatives that "do no harm," and contribute to the long term public good.

Gratitude for the privileges we share is a valuable process that can take us out of the present and move forward without interference. Timber Hawkeye (b. 1977) reminds us that "Gratitude has a way of turning what we have into enough."

Despite the array of groups and organizations working on global warming, we are still missing a key element: the movement. Along with the hard work of not-for-profit lobbyists, environmental lawyers, green economists, sustainability-minded engineers, and forward-thinking entrepreneurs, it's going to take the inspired political involvement of millions of Americans to get our country on track to solving this problem.
–Bill McKibben

Statements of Intent ("SI's") are due for each of the three projects on this schedule:

P1: January 26

P2: February 23

P3: March 30

SI's must be rooted in the foundational DRIVE readings provided according to the class schedule. See form at end of syllabus for a sample. SI's should be uploaded to the course DRIVE, along with your "Image Bank" by 9am on these dates.

Image Banks are the first media prototypes of each project. They are visual resources (links, photographs, or other media) that provide the visual foundation for each of your three projects. They should be uploaded to the course Wiki according to the assignment schedule.

Students are encouraged to use their own equipment for this course, including smartphones, tablets, and laptops and low-cost, or free, software including the Adobe Creative Cloud, SketchUp, FCP, or iMovie. Access is also available through MA+P.

To use SCA labs: log into the workstations in the SCI computer labs, the default username is your USC email username, and the default password is your 10-digit USC ID number. Once you enter this information, you will be prompted to choose a new password. (Returning students can use their login information from last semester.)

If you are having problems logging in to the wiki, or the labs, please contact Dave Lopez at dlopez@cinema.usc.edu.

We have access to SCA Production numbers and equipment including: Canon XC15; Litepanels Lykos + Bi-Color LED Flight Kit; Switti LED Video Light that are available for weekly checkouts.

Office Hours are arranged with Frasconi by appointment and are preferred on Friday. I suggest that we have at least one meeting outside of class during the semester.

Safety is our highest priority during production. Hazardous Shooting Conditions forms and procedures are required IN ADVANCE for any hazardous shooting conditions, especially scenes involving: vehicles, weapons, violence (real, impending or implied), weapons, water, sand, electricity, minors, animals. Please contact us well in advance if you have any questions about how to shoot anything safely. Due to current COVID-19 conditions in LA County, all projects must be vetted by faculty.

Permits: Check with the Student Production Office for the latest rules about shooting in L.A. Many locations do not allow filmmakers; many require permits or fees. In most cases if you are going to be visible by the public (on or off campus), you will need a permit. Many permits are free but are time-consuming. PRODUCTION HANDBOOK AND SAFETY GUIDELINES are available at <https://scacommunity.usc.edu/index.cfm> . If you have trouble accessing SCA Community, please advise Frasconi.

ABSENCE POLICY MA+P classes depend on group work and in-class critique, which makes attendance crucial. You are expected to be present for every scheduled class session. If you must miss a class, please be sure to get any notes and assignments from a classmate so you do not fall behind.

There is no distinction between excused and unexcused absences. Tardiness or leaving class early for (0 to 15 minutes) will be considered 1/2 an absence. Missing more than 30

minutes of a class is considered an absence. After your second absence, each additional absence will lower your final grade by 5%.

Please note that the grading policy makes it nearly impossible to pass the course should you miss more than three classes in a semester. If you anticipate attendance issues, please notify your professor immediately.

Grade breakdown: Grading will be based upon student growth during the semester. It is required that all deadlines on the calendar are met.

15%: evidence of synergy among discussions, critiques and class Wiki readings/viewings during in-class discussions and in Project 1-3 assignments

25% Project 1 Statements of Intent, Image Bank, Prototype, and Final Project

25% Project 2 Statements of Intent, Image Bank, Prototype, and Final Projects

25% Project 3 Statement of Intent, Image Bank, Prototype, and Final Project

10%: Overall Class Participation

Incomplete Grade (IN) - Grades of incomplete (IN) are given when a student cannot complete the course requirements as a result of a documented illness or an emergency occurring after the twelfth week of the semester.

GRADING SCALE

Course final grades will be determined using the following scale:

A 95-100 A- 90-94 B+ 87-89 B 83-86 B- 80-82 C+ 77-79 C 73-76

MINIMUM PASSING GRADE FOR MEDIA ARTS + PRACTICE MAJORS

C- 70-72

D+ 67-69

D 63-66

D- 60-62

MINIMUM PASSING GRADE FOR USC: 59 and below

COURSE OUTLINE:

1. January 12 –Course overview, introductions, sample work
 - a. **Assignment #1:** readings #1 on Drive: Dowrick, Louf, Hale, Doczi, Hemenway, Das, Bayda, Kabat-Zinn, and Haskell
 2. January 19–Project 1 faculty lecture, demonstration, discussion;
 - a. first assigned readings due;
 - b. MA+P Staff: Stacy Patterson & Dave Lopez.
 - c. **Assignment #2:** create Project 1 (see P1 description on page #2) Statement of Intent & Image Bank; to be viewed and discussed at next class
 3. January 26 –Project 1 SI Due “Image Bank” presentations, discussion
 - a. **Assignment #3:** create first prototype of P1 according to description on p 2
 4. Feb 2–Project 1 View and discuss first prototype of P1
 - a. **Assignment #4:** final P1 due next week
 5. Feb 9–Project 1 final presentations and in-class discussion
 - a. **Assignment #5:** readings #2 on transmedia artists
 6. Feb 16 –Project 2 faculty lecture
 - a. **Assignment #6:** create Project 2 Statement of Intent & Image Bank to be viewed and discussed at next class
 7. Feb 23–Project 2 SI Due “Image Bank” presentations, discussion
 - a. **Assignment #7:** create first prototype of P2 according to description on p 2
 8. March 2 – Project 2 View and discuss first prototype of P2
 - a. **Assignment #8:** final P2 due next week
 9. March 9 – Project 2 final presentations and in-class discussion
Assignments: readings/viewings: Ehrenreich; global warming; sustainability; permaculture; tiny houses; Film: The Island President; NYRB
- USC SPRING RECESS NO CLASSES MARCH 13-17
10. March 23– Project 3 faculty lecture
 - i. **Assignment #9:** create Project 3 (see P3 description on page #2) Statement of Intent & Image Bank to be viewed and discussed at next class
 11. March 30–Project 3 SI DUE “Image Bank” presentations, discussion
Assignment: create first prototype of P3 according to description on p 2

12. April 6–**Assignment #10**: View and discuss first prototype of P3 Assignment:
2nd prototype due next week

13. April 13– View and discuss 2nd prototype P3

14. April 20-Transmedia: Theory & Practice meet the Public: presentation and discussion

Assignment #11: Final P3 due next week

15. April 27-Project 3 final presentations and in-class discussion Assignment:
prepare final

FINAL ASSIGNED BY UNIVERSITY: Tuesday, May 9, 8-10am

Note: Can be rescheduled with collective agreement

FINAL –in a spoken and visual presentation, relate the chronology of your Projects 1-3 (SI's, Image banks, prototypes & final work) to the DRIVE readings, faculty lectures, and in-class discussions

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Doczi, Gyorgy. *The Power of Limits: Proportional Harmonies in Nature, Art & Architecture*. Shambhala (2005).

Ghyka, Matila. *The Geometry of Art and Life*. Dover, NY (1977).

Hanh, Thich Nhat. *Love Letter to the Earth*, Parallax. Berkeley (2013)

Hemenway, Priya. *Divine Proportion: Phi in Art, Nature and Science*. Sterling, NY (2005).

Lehner, Ernest and Johanna. *Folklore and Symbolism of Flowers, Plants and Trees*. Tudor, NY (1960).

MacDonald, Scott. *The Garden in the Machine: a field guide to independent films about place*. UC Press, (Berkeley & Los Angeles, 2001).

McKibben, Bill and Al Gore. *American Earth: Environmental Writing Since Thoreau*. Library of America (2008).

Wilber, Ken. *The Theory of Everything: An Integral Vision for Business, Politics, Science, and Spirituality*. Shambhala, Boston (2000).

WEBSITES:

P1 Alan Watts –The Dream of Life <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wU0PYcCsL6o>

Ken Wilber <http://www.kenwilber.com/home/landing/index.html>

Thich Nhat Hanh <http://plumvillage.org/>

P2 Exquisite Corpse <http://www.poets.org/viewmedia.php/prmMID/5619>

MOMA Exquisite Corpse <http://www.moma.org/visit/calendar/exhibitions/1256>

DeviantArt <http://theexquisitecorpse.deviantart.com/>

NYC Subway Poetry Project <https://www.pbs.org/video/subway-poetry-project-connects-nyers-1403907832/>

P3

Population: *Conceiving the Future* (NYRB, Sept 23, 2021)

<https://www.nybooks.com/articles/2021/09/23/climate-change-birth-conceiving-future/>

Environmental Law: <https://earthjustice.org/about>

Michael Telling: UBUNTU PARTY <https://www.ubuntucontributionism.org/what-is-ubuntu>

Art Installation: <http://jamesturrell.com/>

<https://www.pomona.edu/museum/collections/james-turrell-skyspace>

LA Sustainability Video <https://www.upworthy.com/see-how-one-couple-in-los-angeles-squeezes-an-entire-farm-into-a-small-city-home>

Documentary on birth & humanity: <http://microbirth.com/>

Human extinction / Nick Bostrom

<https://www.theatlantic.com/technology/archive/2012/03/were-underestimating-the-risk-of-human-extinction/253821/>

Nature Needs Us to Act Now:

<https://www.nationalgeographic.com/science/article/partner-content-nature-needs-us-to-act-now>

COVID-19

<https://www.sciencenews.org/article/coronavirus-covid-19-not-human-made-lab-genetic-analysis-nature>

ACADEMIC POLICIES

Land Acknowledgement Statement:

We acknowledge our presence on the traditional, ancestral and unceded territory of the Kizh and Chumash peoples. Please visit Native-Land.ca to learn more, and to discover the Original People of your home.

Disability “Acknowledgement”

In the spirit of disability culture, please feel free to stim, stretch, knit, doodle, move around, change seats, do yoga or do what feels right to your bodymind.

SCA Diversity and Inclusion Statement:

Diversity and Inclusion are foundational to the SCA community. We are committed to fostering a welcoming and supportive environment where students of all identities and backgrounds can flourish. The classroom should be a space for open discussion of ideas and self-expression; however, SCA will not tolerate verbal or written abuse, threats, harassment, intimidation or violence against person or property. If students are concerned about these matters in the classroom setting they are encouraged to contact their SCA Diversity and Inclusion Liaison, <http://cinema.usc.edu/about/diversity.cfm>; e-mail diversity@cinema.usc.edu. You can also report discrimination based on a protected class here <https://equity.usc.edu/harassment-or-discrimination/>

Course Content:

The required materials (readings, screenings, etc.) that are used in this course may, at times, depict or address potentially sensitive subject matter. Our discussions in class may also include these topics. The selection and presentation of these materials do not amount to an endorsement of the ideas expressed in them. If you have personal concerns about any of these materials, please discuss them with your professor so they may arrange appropriate alternatives if needed.

Disruptive Student Behavior:

Behavior that persistently or grossly interferes with classroom activities is considered disruptive behavior and may be subject to disciplinary action. Such behavior inhibits other students' ability to learn and an instructor's ability to teach. A student responsible for disruptive behavior may be required to leave class pending discussion and resolution of the problem and may be reported to the Office of Student Judicial Affairs for disciplinary action.

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” <https://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, <http://policy.usc.edu/scientific-misconduct>.

Statement on Fair Use:

Fair use is a legal principle that defines certain limitations on the exclusive rights of copyright holders. MA+P projects are produced with fair use doctrines in mind using its four pillars: (1) the purpose and character of use, (2) the nature of the copyrighted work, (3) the amount and substantiality of the portion used in relation to the copyrighted work as a whole, and (4) the effect of the use upon the potential market for or value of the copyrighted work. Generally speaking, this means you must only use as much of a copyrighted work as is necessary to make your point, and you must cite your sources accordingly.

Citation Guidelines:

We assert that work produced in our classes is covered under the Doctrine of Fair Use. In order to make this claim, however, all projects must include academically appropriate citations in the form of a References section, which covers all sources, in order to receive a passing grade. The References section is either included in the project itself or as a separate document, as appropriate. For citation purposes, we follow *Kairos Journal of Rhetoric, Technology and Pedagogy* style guide; Kairos uses [APA format](#), which is slightly modified and whose general guidelines and specific examples may be found here: <http://kairos.technorhetoric.net/styleguide.html#apa>

Computer Code:

Computer code is often shared and reused. This is appropriate in a MA+P course unless otherwise directed by the assignment. If you do use code, you should attribute it. Please follow these protocols from MIT which call for placing a comment in one's code with a URL to the original source, a note if it was adapted, and the date of retrieval:

<https://integrity.mit.edu/handbook/writing-code>

Research

Need to do research but don't know where to start? Searching for a book, article, or data to support your argument? Not sure how to cite a source in your bibliography? Ask a librarian!

Research help is available:

- In person and by phone, chat and email at Ask a Librarian
- Through research guides and FAQs
- By contacting your subject librarian

Disruptive Student Behavior:

Behavior that persistently or grossly interferes with classroom activities is considered disruptive behavior and may be subject to disciplinary action. Such behavior inhibits other students' ability to learn and an instructor's ability to teach. A student responsible for disruptive behavior may be required to leave class pending discussion and resolution of the problem and may be reported to the Office of Student Judicial Affairs for disciplinary action.

Support Systems

Student Health Counseling Services - (213) 740-7711 – 24/7 on call

engemannshc.usc.edu/counseling

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

Student Health Leave Coordinator – 213-821-4710

Located in the USC Support and Advocacy office, the Health Leave Coordinator processes requests for health leaves of absence and advocates for students taking such leaves when needed.

<https://policy.usc.edu/student-health-leave-absence/>

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/Sexual Violence Prevention Services (RSVP): 213-740-4900; 24/7 on call

engemannshc.usc.edu/rsvp

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

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

equity.usc.edu, titleix.usc.edu

Information about how to get help or help a survivor of harassment or discrimination, rights of protected classes, reporting options, and additional resources for students, faculty, staff, visitors, and applicants. The university prohibits discrimination or harassment based on the following protected characteristics: race, color, national origin, ancestry, religion, sex, gender, gender identity, gender expression, sexual orientation, age, physical disability, medical condition, mental disability, marital status, pregnancy, veteran status, genetic information, and any other characteristic which may be specified in applicable laws and governmental regulations.

Bias Assessment Response and Support - (213) 740-2421

studentaffairs.usc.edu/bias-assessment-response-support

Avenue to report incidents of bias, hate crimes, and microaggressions for appropriate investigation 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 Support and Advocacy - (213) 821-4710

studentaffairs.usc.edu/sssa

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 Trojan Food Pantry

<https://campusactivities.usc.edu/trojan-food-pantry/>

Any currently enrolled USC student who does not have a dining hall meal plan or whose plan's swipes have been fully used and is experiencing a food emergency/food insecurity qualify for the services of the Trojan Food Pantry.

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.

PLEASE NOTE:

FOOD AND DRINKS (OTHER THAN WATER) ARE NOT PERMITTED IN ANY INSTRUCTIONAL SPACES IN THE CINEMATIC ARTS COMPLEX

NATURE, DESIGN & MEDIA Spring '23 STATEMENT OF INTENT (SI)

Name:

Project: P1, P2, P3 (circle)

Title:

Statement of Intent: (200 word max):

Nature Design elements/forms: (200 word max)

Digital media: (100 word max)